



Tom Burr. Deep Purple. Braunschweig, Germany, 2000. All images courtesy Galerie Neu, Berlin.

GEORGE BAKER

I. Deep Purple

By no means of minor importance is the loss of efficient security surveillance. The placement of this wall across the plaza obscures the view of security personnel, who have no way of knowing what is taking place on the other side of the wall.¹

With these words, a vehement opponent called for the removal of what he otherwise described as a “rusted steel barrier,” Richard Serra’s controversial *Tilted Arc*. Installed in 1981 in Federal Plaza in Manhattan, Serra’s sculpture unleashed a twelve-foot-high ribbon of Cor-Ten steel that stretched for 120 feet across the site. By 1985, in the midst of the cultural backlash of the Reagan era, the General Services Administration, the governmental body that originally commissioned the work, began a smear campaign against it. At a hearing later that year, it was concluded that *Tilted Arc* should be “relocated” in order “to increase public use” of its site, despite the fact that a majority of public testimony was in favor of retaining the sculpture.

“To remove the work is to destroy the work.” With these words, Richard Serra explained that *Tilted Arc* could not be “relocated,” that this was a sculpture that was in fact site-specific. Site-specificity had been crucial to Serra’s project from the moment of its emergence in the late 1960s, in process-based works such as *Splashing* (1968), where molten lead was thrown into the corner between the wall and floor of an exhibition space: a sculpture that “cast” the institution of its display, fusing sculpture and site irrevocably. The challenge of this work was both

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1. Judge Edward D. Re, cited in Clara Weyergraf-Serra and Martha Buskirk, eds., *The Destruction of Tilted Arc: Documents* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1991), p. 28.

aesthetic and *political*—on the one hand, an assault upon the abstract placelessness of modernist sculpture and its traditional modes of apperception; on the other hand, a denial of the commodification of and conventional institutional frame for art. A decade later, Serra's definition of site-specificity had evolved toward the use of monumental forms no longer physically or literally bound to their sites. But they were still consciously formed in relation to their sites, as in the case of *Tilted Arc*, which, responding to issues of scale, architecture, and social function, proposed in fact that through this dialogue sculpture could intervene within and redefine a public space.

In 1989, *Tilted Arc* was removed and thus destroyed as an artistic form. It could not be and of course was not reconstructed. Until, that is, just over a decade later. For an exhibition in 2000 at the Kunstverein Braunschweig, American sculptor Tom Burr produced a re-creation of Serra's *Tilted Arc*. However, Burr's remake was reduced somewhat in scale and transformed in material and in color. Like the in-your-face titles of the Minimalist artist Tony Smith from the 1960s (i.e., *Die*), Burr called his piece *Deep Purple*, which among other things described the coloristic transformation that Burr had enacted upon Serra's work, painting the sculpture a uniform violet hue remarkable for being almost entirely absent from the history of sculptural production (and, it must be admitted, banned from or repressed within most painterly work as well). In distinct contrast to Serra's site-specificity, the work was also eminently portable, no longer a massive slab of Cor-Ten steel but a series of juxtaposed plywood planks, like a picket fence—or a police blockade, or a sound barrier, or the street-level wooden facades that mask urban construction sites—ready to be disassembled and transported at will. If, for Serra, to remove the work was to destroy the work, Burr now seemed to ask: What would it mean to remake it? What would it mean to re-create *Tilted Arc* as a work intentionally *designed* to be removed? Could *Tilted Arc* be resurrected as a form, but as a form that would stand against the very principles of the original work, in fact a form that would stand for that which originally caused the sculpture's demise, even its "death"?



Richard Serra. *Tilted Arc*. 1981. © 2007 Richard Serra/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Burr. An American Garden. 1993.

For more than ten years, Tom Burr has produced works engaged in some way with the question of site-specific art, with the notion that a critical artistic practice cannot be autonomous, but must emerge from a dialogue with the contexts of its production and display. In one of his earliest mature pieces, *An American Garden* (1993), Burr seemed to deploy Robert Smithson's idea of landscape displacement (via the latter's practice of the Non-Site) in a project that called for the transfer of a wooded area of New York City's Central Park known as the Ramble to a park in the Netherlands being used as an exhibition site. It is significant that Burr's project begins with such a reflection on the legacy of Smithson, given the deceased artist's complex if not contradictory role in the elaboration of site-specificity at the moment of its initial emergence. Indeed, critics would see in Burr's early proposals a rejection of historical models of site-specificity, with their focus on a literal or perceptual experience of a singular place, for a "mobile" or "functional" definition of space and place, one that sought to create relations between different sites and that would not by definition be tied to a single location.² And yet Burr's conceptions of both space and sculpture have always been more specific than such debates might imply. Crucial to *An American Garden* was the fact that Burr proposed not a literal displacement of part of Central Park to the Netherlands (and thus no literal appropriation of

2. See, for example, Miwon Kwon, "One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity," *October* 80 (Spring 1997), pp. 85–110; and James Meyer, "The Functional Site," *Documents* 7 (Fall 1996), pp. 20–29.

Smithson's strategies either), but a meticulous *reconstruction* of the appearance of the Ramble as it was originally designed by the architect Frederick Law Olmsted in 1858, replete with the requisite variety of newly planted vegetation, without any of the overgrowth and restructuring to which the Ramble has since been subjected. And the Ramble was also a quite specific portion of Central Park upon which to focus, adjacent to an institution of art (the Metropolitan Museum) and currently used by wildly disparate communities, ranging from dedicated bird-watchers to gay men in search of a site for cruising, illicit nude sunbathing, and public sex. Positioned in the Netherlands near a portion of the park similarly used for cruising, Burr's reconstructed and pristine garden threw into relief the difference between planned design and public use, focusing on a social space opened up by what Smithson might have called "de-architecture," but which Burr consistently refers to as "re-architecture," the alterations to which public space can be subjected through use.³

The dual principles of *re-construction* and *re-architecture* have since become Burr's model of avant-garde sculptural practice. These dual principles, one might observe, seem to bear some inherent connection—whether in the mode of continuance or rupture—with the dialectic to which almost the entirety of avant-garde sculpture in the last century has answered; namely, the contradiction between the *readymade* and the *constructed sculpture*, with their opposed strategies of appropriation or analytic self-reflection, cynical affirmation or utopian negation, the fusion of sculpture with the commodity or with architectural and social space. However, Burr's strategies complicate both sides of this divide: re-construction is not exactly simple appropriation, but implies a convergence of readymade and constructivist legacies; similarly, re-architecture seems resolutely anti-utopian, thinking of social space conversely in terms of the readymade and the issues of appropriation that follow from it.

For a 1995 group exhibition in Zurich titled *Change of Place (Platzwechsel)*, Burr again deployed Smithson's format of landscape displacement, but now to import into a museum space an overgrown portion of an adjacent park. While this gesture seemed at first even closer to Smithson's actual practice of the Non-Site, Burr's displacement entailed a theatrical reconstruction (like a stage or movie

3. Tom Burr, "Just Outside the Museum," *Kunst and Museums Journaal* no. 4 (1993), pp. 19–20. Earlier projects by Burr had investigated the dunes at Jones Beach near New York City and the wooded cruising areas in Prospect Park in Brooklyn; the concern with "re-architecture" emerged from these projects, wherein for example Burr attended to what he called the "desire lines" created in Prospect Park outside the parameters of Olmsted's park design by members of the public walking repeatedly off the given and accepted paths.

4. As with the Ramble, this queer usage was only one among many; in Zurich, for example, the park in question (the Platzspitz) had also been used in the 1970s for drug-related activities. Burr signaled this heterotopia of usages in the essay that accompanied his sculpture, which recounted the history of the Platzspitz in a text collage interspersed with appropriated dialogue from Andy Warhol's film *Trash* (1971), with its arch deployment of the social type of the junkie. See Tom Burr, "Trash," *Platzwechsel* (Zurich: Kunsthalle Zürich, 1995). *Platzwechsel* was an exhibition initiated and organized by the artist Christian Philipp Müller.

set) of this park's appearance in the 1970s—filled again with the representative vegetation as well as with rocks, soil, and discarded trash—when it, too, was used as a cruising ground, prior to a recent “cleanup” that eliminated such usage.⁴ Burr called his sculpture *Circa 1977* (1995), and the displacement that his reconstruction created was evidently temporal as well as spatial, a response to and perhaps commemoration of an historical loss of subcultural, queer space. (The ambivalence of the gesture centered on the fact that this temporal Non-Site or “memory diorama” did not so much turn the museum space around it into a now-vanished heterotopia, as it instead subjected the lost anarchic space to the museological frame and the aesthetic gaze, repeating in another guise the disciplinary cleanup of the park then in process.)

Burr's other projects of the nineties did not look back only to Smithson; in fact they posed a continuous dialogue between a veritable catalog of avant-garde forms from the recent past and the subcultural practices or queer re-architecture of that time, practices today linked mostly by their shared fate: to languish on the verge of historical eradication. And so, in a continual interplay between reconstruction and re-architecture, Burr would connect the melancholic photographic typologies of Bernd and Hilla Becher and the endangered architecture (and liminal social space) of public toilets in New York (*Unearthing the Public Restroom*, 1994); the mirrored cubes and plywood sculptures of Robert Morris and the disappearing environments of urban sex shops (*42nd Street Structures*, 1995); the



Burr: *Circa 1977*. 1995.

Minimalist forms of Tony Smith and the barren decor of a “back room” in a gay bar (*Black Box*, 1998); the outdoor pavilions of Dan Graham and the architectural type of the peep-show booth (*Private Property: Anti-Public Sculpture*, 1999).

Burr’s loose adaptation of previous avant-garde formats might itself be seen as a form of re-architecture, a turning of critical forms toward uses for which they were not originally designed. In this, Burr’s work displays a strong affiliation with the appropriation artists of the 1980s such as Sherrie Levine, embracing a project founded upon the principle of the copy. This shared terrain was only clarified by the creation of *Deep Purple*, a work that seems to herald a shift in



Sherrie Levine. Fountain (after Marcel Duchamp: A.P.). 1991. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 1992.

Burr’s practice, however, in terms of the directness of its appropriation of a specific work of art, and in the intensity with which it collides the opposed legacies of site-specific art (which privileges the unique, the local, the non-replicable) and appropriation art (which depends upon the reproduction, the photograph, the multiple). For the first time, Burr seemed to appropriate a work of art almost for its own sake. And yet given the principles of Burr’s project, this seeming deviation from his previous work has a stunning logical consistency. For like the public restrooms, and cruising grounds, and sex-shop designs, *Tilted Arc* could be directly confronted by Burr for *it was itself a form of re-architecture*, a sculpture that had redirected the design and use of public space.⁵ Creating a negative barrier within a public space previously constructed around the principles of universality and transparency (i.e., discipline and surveillance), Serra’s sculpture had in part been attacked for creating such a rift, for opening up social space to other uses—including queer uses—for which it had not been designed. Besides objecting to the sculpture’s interference with the way the plaza functioned, *Tilted Arc*’s detractors

5. Sex shops, one might assume, count as a form of re-architecture to the extent that Burr was interested in the reuse of the old theaters and commercial spaces of Times Square in New York as sex businesses, a refunctioning that made each architecture a kind of layered palimpsest of different historical surfaces and usages, quite distinct from the wholesale eradication of these spaces in the current gentrification (and Disney-fication) of areas like Times Square. Such re-architecture inspired at least two exhibitions at American Fine Arts, Co. in New York, *42nd Street Structures* in 1995 and *Stainless* in 1997, as well as a text published in this journal. See Tom Burr, “Sleazy City: *42nd Street Structures* and Some Qualities of Life,” *October* 85 (Summer 1998), pp. 91–105.

were prone to fantasizing about the life of Serra's sculpture at night, about the graffiti and public urination that it seemed to attract, attributing larger social problems to its form (infamously, a growth of the rat population and an increased danger of terrorist attack, with the sculpture presumably serving as a blast wall that could vent an explosive toward the offices of Federal Plaza).

Upon its first exhibition in Germany, *Deep Purple* was positioned by Burr in such a way as to exacerbate the functions for which *Tilted Arc* was originally vilified. Sited in order to create a pocket of empty space between the museum and a hedgerow that serves as a border between the museum and an adjacent public park, *Deep Purple* marked a switching point between nature and architecture, public space and private property, aesthetic display and covert use. In this, Burr might be said through his copy to bring the disruption of *Tilted Arc* back to life, spreading its long-banished effects promiscuously beyond the site for which it was originally intended (two years later, in its first re-installation, *Deep Purple* would create a similar pocket of empty or covert space within the underground "moat" at the Whitney Museum of American Art).

Of course, it was not the normal understanding of appropriation art in the 1980s that such works brought forms back to "life." Rather, works like those of Sherrie Levine were read as allegorical procedures, assaults upon the ideas of artistic originality and authorial masters, the melancholy ruins or mortification of what was quoted.⁶ To read *Deep Purple* as a similar assault upon the presumptions of *Tilted Arc* would be, at least in part, a mistake. Surely, Burr's gesture shared the ambivalence of his earlier projects like *Circa 1977*, as *Tilted Arc*'s disruption was subjected as well to the disciplinary effects of the museological gaze, imported like a fossilized specimen from public space back into the art institutions that Serra's work had originally sought to escape.⁷ And without doubt, Burr's work also overturns the monumentality of *Tilted Arc*, as well as the gendered, perhaps masculinist implications of its form: shrinking it in size, substituting organic wood for its industrial steel, warming its antiornamental rust to the decorative blush of purple paint. And yet Burr's purpose in so doing seems less deconstructive than archaeological, uncovering layers of allusion in Serra's otherwise antimetaphorical art.

For example: Burr's title performs in more registers than simply defining the literal or material appearance of the sculpture. It also deflates the industrial force of Serra's work through linking it to a "heavy metal" group of its era. We face something like a cheap pun, and yet the band Deep Purple's development,

6. Today, however, both Levine's work and our understanding of it seem to have shifted in ways linked to Burr's own project; see Sherrie Levine, "pathos: Trois Contes," *October* 101 (Summer 2002), pp. 84–95; and Howard Singerman, "Sherrie Levine's Art History," *October* 101 (Summer 2002), pp. 96–121.

7. To be more precise: In each instance of *Deep Purple*'s prior installation, in Braunschweig and at the Whitney Museum, the sculpture occupied a liminal space within the institution, on the border between the art institution and its surrounding public or urban space (the exterior garden at Braunschweig, the underground sculpture court visible from the street at the Whitney). Burr's Minimalism, one could say, has always been instead a work of "liminalism."

founded in the late sixties and climaxing in the eighties, does closely correspond with Serra's own. And this collision of Minimalism and mass culture—the industrial paradigm of sculpture and heavy metal of another sort—also reframes Serra's form. Its brute, abstract purity will now be linked, allusively, if not mockingly, to the excess implicit in the reference to the band, which was one of the precursors to what is today known as the “Goth” aesthetic, a subcultural scene devoted to dandyism and death, obsessed with a kitsch (or Camp?) version of the formerly sublime signs of aesthetic ugliness and horror.

However, *Deep Purple* has yet other meanings—ennobling rather than parodic ones—working to suggest perhaps that Burr wanted to uncover a level of depth, perhaps even of “deep” affect, within his chosen form. In an essay published on the occasion of the first exhibition of *Deep Purple*, Burr created an ambiguous montage of descriptive notes about Serra's sculpture with passages drawn from “The Masque of the Red Death,” a “gothic” tale by Edgar Allan Poe about a mysterious plague that attacks the blood of its victims.⁸ With these citations, Burr obliquely reminds his viewers that, beyond merely placing a decorative or gothic spin on the resolute black-and-white seriousness of Serra's aesthetic, the color purple has also been adopted by lesbian and gay political groups with mounting frequency in response to the crisis posed by AIDS.

Deep Purple thus seems to evoke two losses: one artistic (*Tilted Arc* and the crisis of site-specificity) and one social (AIDS and its devastation of both lives and queer social spaces). In doing so, Burr's work does not become a simple monument, a sculptural marker of that which once was, of that which is gone. Nor does it engage only the melancholy and the mourning that many critics attributed to earlier postmodern work, and to appropriation art in particular. The deeper significance of Burr's work was subsequently made clear in a 2002 exhibition at Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK) in Berlin devoted to recently deceased young artists and their surviving partners, where Burr created an installation of the work of Ull Hohn, a painter with whom he had once lived.⁹

Hohn died of AIDS. At NGBK, Burr encompassed Hohn's diminutive work with massive black sculptures. Each given the title *Container*, these were re-creations (again in wood) of the large, hollow, and thus framelike boxes that the Minimalist artist Donald Judd produced in Marfa, Texas, shortly before his own death—works that have since become an almost narcissistic, if not egomaniacal, monument to Judd himself, and the devotional objects of many an art-world pilgrimage. A student of Gerhard Richter's, Hohn created colorful landscapes and abstractions that glowed even more brightly against the funereal dark of Burr's forms. And yet these were looming sculptures that at times pressed so close to Hohn's paintings as to

8. This text has been republished as Tom Burr, “Edgar Allan Poe, DEEP PURPLE, and Haus Salve Hospes,” *October* 100 (Spring 2002), pp. 28–33.

9. *Partnerschaften: Unterbrochene Karrieren* (Berlin: Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, 2002). The artist partners involved were Ull Hohn and Tom Burr, Jochen Klein and Wolfgang Tillmans, and Matt. Ranger and Piotr Nathan.



Burr: Containers (1–3). 2001.

block them from view—a gesture heartbreaking in its vain attempt seemingly to “touch” another who is gone (but whose art remains), devastating in its almost violent enactment of the loss of the ability to “see” the other in this approach. Such might be one understanding of the strategy of appropriation in Burr’s work, an allegorization of the logic and the affect of his own project. However, this is an allegory not so distant from the one that Sigmund Freud had once sensed—while himself facing a moment of tragic personal loss—in the peculiarity of his infant grandson’s play habits that the psychoanalyst named the “Fort-Da” game.¹⁰

“O-o-o-o,” the baby vocalized, with “interest and satisfaction,” Freud noticed, upon throwing his toys on the ground. This baby, according to Freud, was a “good little boy,” who had, however, the occasional “disturbing habit of taking any small objects he could get hold of and throwing them away from him into a corner, under the bed, and so on, so that hunting for his toys and picking them up was

10. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), pp. 12–17. Although he had already been at work on this text in 1919 and one of its horizons was the public losses of World War I, Freud’s second daughter, Sophie (the mother of the child in question), died in January 1920 from the flu epidemic of the ‘teens.

often quite a business.”¹¹ Each time he threw these toys away, the same vocalization would punctuate the event. “O-o-o-o,” the baby exclaimed, which Freud and the child’s parents agreed could only mean “*fort*,” or the German word for “gone.” “I eventually realized,” Freud explained, “that it was a game and that the only use he made of any of his toys was to play ‘gone’ with them.”¹²

Freud read this infantile game as the repetition, in play, of a traumatic loss: the process of separation between mother and child that founds the self, but only at the moment that the Other withdraws, only at the cost of having the love object in fact become an object, differentiated from and removed from the self. In the face of the trauma of the mother’s withdrawal, the infant will now “stage” this disappearance or bereavement, again and again and again. It was a drama that Freud saw variously either as an attempt on the child’s part to master actively a trauma that had first been suffered passively; or to gird defensively against this trauma’s reoccurrence by paradoxically reenacting the loss masochistically; or even as a form of sadistic revenge upon the loved object for going away by (again masochistically) throwing away in turn one’s own beloved objects. In each scenario, the child compulsively repeats the original trauma in another guise.

If such a “staging” could be linked to the manner in which Burr treated Hohn’s work at NGBK, or to the way in which he positions appropriation—the repetition and usage of another’s work—more generally, the artist seemed at pains to foreground the connection in a New York installation the following year. In his last installation at the now-defunct American Fine Arts, Co. gallery, Burr seemed—at least in part—to react to two (further) horrible losses, to the recent and premature death of the gallery’s impresario, Colin de Land, and to the prior and similarly premature death of de Land’s partner, the artist and dealer Pat Hearn. Filled again with entirely black works as well as appropriations of Judd, Burr’s installation was entitled *Gone, Gone* (2003). Two identical black boxes à la Judd were surrounded by a series of identical black bar stools, as if the sculptures were in fact a functional object, in this case a bar (indeed, on top of one of the boxes rested a set of half-empty wine glasses and ashtrays reeking of cigarettes). Some of the black stools were thrown as if randomly against the walls and floor of the space, a condition shared by the other appropriated element in Burr’s scenario, a set of large-scale black vinyl “flowers”—the fusion of Andy Warhol’s color-drenched 1964 *Flower* series and Claes Oldenburg’s often monochromatic and over-sized soft sculptures—draped like a shroud over the “bar,” or cast upon the floor, or thrown against the wall, again and again and again.¹³ The “good little

11. Ibid., p. 13.

12. Ibid., p. 14.

13. Some of the flowers were suspended by wires from the ceiling and allowed to collapse to the floor, a presentational strategy that evoked the accoutrements of an S/M or leather bar as much as it confirmed Burr’s reflection on Freud’s “*fort-da*” story, which concentrated on one of the specific toys of the child, a wooden bobbin attached to a string, and the actions of the child as he cast the object away and then drew it back to him using this string.



Burr: *Gone*,
Gone. 2003.

boy,” you remember, “had an occasional disturbing habit of taking any small objects he could get hold of and throwing them away from him into a corner, under the bed, and so on,” and “as he did this [giving] vent to a loud, long-drawn out ‘o-o-o-o.’”¹⁴ *Gone, Gone* presented the viewer with another appropriation that was a reconstruction, a repetition that instead became a kind of artificial stage set (like Freud’s “staging”), but whether for a party or a funeral, a joyous memory or a memorial, it was hard to tell. Perhaps the lesson of *Gone, Gone* was that the two need to be thought together, as the work evoked ambivalence in its every gesture—a scene riven between anarchism and serial order, Pop art and Minimalism, denial and working-through, sadism and masochism, festivity and violence, innocent play and aggressive destruction.

From this perspective, *Deep Purple* looks very different. One of its potential readings would now be to see the appropriation of Serra’s *Tilted Arc* not as post-modern parody, but as a compulsive repetition of loss. In *Deep Purple*, a lost object, even a loved object, is made constantly to return and then disappear—“gone”—as the sculpture is installed and reassembled and then disassembled, again and again and again. Like the aftereffect of a trauma, *Deep Purple* testifies to a desire not simply to appropriate Serra’s work, but to master a loss that, however, cannot help but keep alive in this repetition the destruction and violence enacted upon *Tilted Arc* in the first place, or upon public art’s radical aspirations more generally, or upon (perhaps most importantly) alternative uses of public space. In this view, we do seem

14. Freud, p. 13.

to have ventured fully into the terrain of melancholia. And yet other readings are possible.

“*Da*,” the baby chirped, joyously. “There,” he says, confirming Freud’s suspicion that the child’s other vocalization had indeed meant “gone,” as he now plays with a toy attached to a string that he can do more than simply cast away (“*fort*”); he can also pull this toy back to himself (“*da*”) with endless enjoyment, a complete game of “disappearance and return.”¹⁵ So, too, was this latter dynamic enacted in Burr’s exhibition at NGBK, where the artist’s looming *Containers* not only pressed against and blocked Ull Hohn’s paintings from view; as one circumnavigated the interaction between the works, Burr’s hollowed-out sculptures at times visually framed Hohn’s images, throwing them into piercing focus, enlivening them aesthetically via an almost endless set of new visual arrangements and relations. This act of enframe-ment, however, seemed to offer in its literalness another psychic metaphor to the beholder. For to witness Hohn’s works glowing brightly as if completely encased within Burr’s minimal black frames was to experience spatially a kind of metaphor for what psychoanalysis would call either incorporation or introjection.¹⁶ And this metaphor, too, returns us to melancholia.

As Douglas Crimp has explored most productively in recent years in relation to the AIDS crisis, the melancholic, according to Freud, refuses to give up the lost object and reinvest in other objects via the normal work of mourning. Instead, in a potentially pathological move, the melancholic *identifies* with the lost object, introjecting it within the self. To introject the object that has withdrawn leads to the



Installation view of Ull Hohn's paintings, both Untitled (1986–87), framed by the interior of Burr's Container. 2001. Courtesy the estate of Ull Hohn and Galerie Neu, Berlin.

15. Ibid., p. 14.

16. Viewers of the NGBK exhibition seemed to sense and then reenact the literalness of the metaphor, as most documentation photographs of the installation reveal footprints on the interior of Burr's *Containers*, testifying to the entrance of viewers into Burr's hollow sculptures, their literal introjection within the work, the better to see (and identify with?) Hohn's introjected paintings.

aggressive self-violence of melancholia, as this introjection sets up a kind of hole or criticizing agency within the subject; it is a form, as Crimp explains, of self-abasement and self-abnegation. Thus Crimp utilizes the Freudian understanding of melancholia to discuss the recent rise of gay conservatism in the wake of the devastations of AIDS, the normalizing and self-destructive turn to a form of “moralism” that has followed from this initial loss. But Crimp insists that other effects beyond self-abasement may arise from melancholic introjection:

A certain melancholic disposition can also inform a useful political position. If mourning is achieved by severing attachments to the lost object and moving on, in melancholia there is a form of attachment to loss that can be politicizing. Maintaining an attachment to the lost object, the lost loved one, or in the case that I'm interested in, a lost gay sexual culture can be productive of an antimoralistic politics. I believe that the attachment to a culture of creative gay sex can actually produce a genuine responsibility, a responsibility that I call queer. This responsibility can be experienced in the exhilaration of sex itself and an unwillingness to acquiesce to conventional moralism as well as in the burden and ambivalence of sex during an epidemic of a deadly sexually transmitted disease. Not only is it something that is aware of the dangers of moralizing as a form of false resolution, but it also seeks to keep the wound open in order that we not forget that the culture of gay sex and the AIDS crisis are not over.¹⁷

Crimp's politicization of melancholia feels quite close to Burr's continual return to the disappearing re-architecture of queer forms of sociality. And yet beyond even this politicization, another dynamic overtakes the melancholic reading of Burr's sculpture.

As paradoxical as it might seem to say this, Burr shows us that melancholia can be not only political (as per Crimp); it can also be experienced as celebratory, if not joyous, in a way. For in the self-abnegation of the melancholic, there is a model for the destruction of the self that may be violent, even masochistic, but also potentially or at times utopian and radically open. To bring into oneself or to introject that which is irretrievably lost or destroyed: In Burr's work there is a kind of sympathy, as well as a focus on loss, that excessively opens up the radical implications of the loss of the self that melancholia often seems to embrace, but only in its weakest, or most negative, or even pathological forms (by overidentifying with the loss of the other). For staring at Hohn's work through the black frames of Burr's *Containers*—that themselves appropriated the narcissistic self-memorializing

17. Tina Takemoto, “The Melancholia of AIDS: Interview with Douglas Crimp,” *Art Journal* (Winter 2003), pp. 89–90. The other relevant texts by Crimp in this connection include his important 1989 essay “Mourning and Militancy,” and the other essays collected in *Melancholia and Moralism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).

of another artist, Donald Judd—was to witness an artistic practice of giving oneself over to the other, in every conceivable way. This giving over of the self, this form of self-abnegation, may be in the end what links the two otherwise opposed artistic strategies in Burr's work of site-specificity and appropriation art. Both of these strategies, no matter their conceptual opposition, determine their parameters in a parallel denial of self-referentiality and autonomy, in a celebration instead of external contingency and dependence on context or on history. This dependency *has psychic and subjective correspondences; it is in fact a model of subjectivity*, which Burr's practice reveals. For Burr's self-abnegation in the NGBK exhibition worked not as a self-memorial à la Judd; instead, it turned such narcissism around on itself, literally bringing Hohn's works and another's art into the condition of visibility.¹⁸ It was a self-denial that does not seem entirely too far, again, from the peculiar play habits of Freud's grandson.

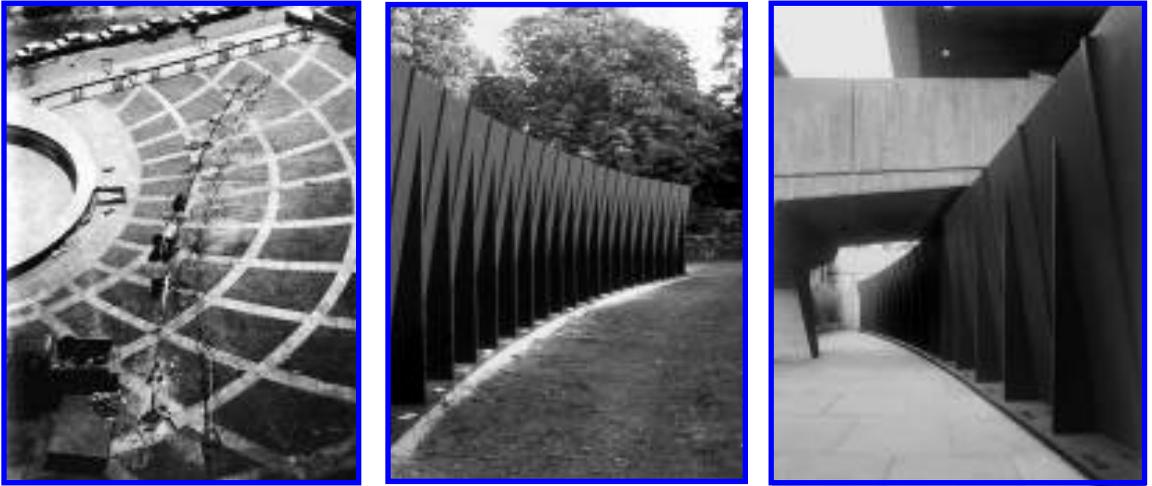
Upon witnessing this child's staging of the return of the lost object, the baby's triumphant exclamation of "*da*," Freud notices that his grandson imagines a self-abnegation similar to the denial of the self that we have been exploring. In an aside to his argument, Freud notes that once, upon the return of the child's mother from being absent, the child announced to her a variant of his own game that staged the disappearance not of the love object, but of the self:

One day the child's mother had been away for several hours and on her return was met with the words "Baby o-o-o-o!" which was at first incomprehensible. It soon turned out, however, that during this long period of solitude the child had found a method of making *himself* disappear. He had discovered his reflection in a full-length mirror which did not quite reach to the ground, so that by crouching down he could make his mirror-image "gone."¹⁹

A normative psychoanalytic reading of this passage would immediately proceed to connect Freud's observation to the dynamics of the mirror stage and of masochism, seeing this aside as an acknowledgment of the violence to the self to which the entire *fort-da* episode testifies. However, in the face of Burr's work, we might be able to attach other valences to such an action. For, remarkably, perhaps in this episode the child in question discovers not simply the traumatic logic of loss, but something like the essential work of love. The desire to make oneself disappear: This surely sounds on the surface like an account of a damaged subjectivity, a masochistic erasure. But such masochism makes space for the other. It is a form that we might understand as one of care, if not of love itself. It is clearly *not* a fantasy of revenge upon the other for withdrawing, nor a paranoiac enactment and thus belief that one's love objects will only and always disappear. Instead, it implies

18. For an account of the dynamics of what I mean by this emergence into visibility, see Kaja Silverman, *World Spectators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

19. Freud, p. 14.



Left: Federal plaza during removal of Serra's Tilted Arc. Center: Burr. Deep Purple. Braunschweig, Germany, 2000. Right: Burr. Deep Purple. Whitney Museum of American Art, 2002.

a more subtle kind of identification with the lost object, one that does not so much wish to *have* this object (for oneself, egotistically, the normative work of introjection), but rather to *be* the object that has been lost (for the other, a rather different labor of introjection that wishes to undergo disappearance and loss *in the place of the other*—a selfless and impossible act, as it were, of redemption and of care). Indeed, we can read Freud's tale (and Burr's artistic practice) as a *gift* of the self, a gesture that allows the loved object to appear—by submitting to it, mimetically; by disappearing before it, passionately, tenderly, empathetically, endlessly.²⁰

As each black, empty *Container* threw Hohn's paintings into a new and clearer focus, Burr revealed that the logic of his appropriation of past forms is a strategy of sharing, an effort to reframe another's work not only to memorialize it, but perhaps to enliven it, to bring it back to life. And so it is with *Deep Purple*. A product of Burr's dual concern with reconstruction and re-architecture, *Deep Purple* offers a new model of sculpture, one that transforms the very tradition of the monument. On the one hand, sculpture as the medium of replication, of the multiple, of the lost historical object; on the other hand, sculpture as a tool of disruption, of misuse,

20. On masochism as this kind of gift, see my essay on masochism and the Dada movement, "Long Live Daddy," *October* 105 (Summer 2003), pp. 37–72. There is an overlap between such queer practices of mimesis and the mimicry inherent in strategies of some postcolonial art as well; on which, see the beautiful and under-known essay by Miwon Kwon, "Postmortem Strategies," *Documents* 3 (Summer 1993), pp. 123–31. Leo Bersani's important work on masochism subtends my thoughts here, in works ranging from *The Freudian Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) to the more recent *Homos* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

one that reconfigures the given parameters of architecture and design: Burr's projects present us with a sculpture truly opened to both time and space, to history and the social environment. In the face of historical amnesia and political quietude, Burr reconfigures sculpture as a medium—perhaps *the* medium—of memory and transformation, an aesthetic of both resurrection and insurrection.

II. Complete Breakdown

Allegory is extravagant, an expenditure of surplus value; it is always in excess. Croce found it “monstrous” precisely because it encodes two contents within one form. Still, the allegorical supplement is not only an addition, but also a replacement. It takes the place of an earlier meaning, which is thereby either effaced or obscured.²¹

These words belong to Craig Owens. I place them here as a rejoinder (to myself): a reminder of the critical discourse out of which a project like Burr's would initially emerge, surely, but also a corrective to the incomplete picture of Burr's work explored thus far. For I have explored only half, one might say, of this project's import. This is a result, however, of the double-language in which Burr's sculpture speaks. Most critics to date have responded only to one or the other side of Burr's address.

We could start our corrective where we left off: with Burr's 2002 installation of Ull Hohn's paintings. It is of course incorrect to describe this installation as one of “sharing,” but then only attend to the manner in which Burr's “containers” framed and reframed Hohn's colorful paintings, recoding appropriation as a device potentially to enliven another's work. For of course there was a mournful emptiness to Burr's appropriation of Judd's hollow boxes, as if indeed they were so many models of an empty self or voided subjectivity, so many repetitions of bereavement or of loss. And yet as one circumnavigated the installation, there was also the opposite—but linked—experience of the manner in which Hohn's paintings *reframed Burr's appropriated Minimalism in turn*. The miniaturist whimsy of Hohn's work threw Burr's reduction of the scale of his source sculptures into relief; Hohn's arbitrary color and playfulness seeped into, even literally reflected off the surfaces of Burr's forms. The paintings were profoundly decorative, concerned at times with still-life objects like long-stemmed vases, at times with free-floating, sensuous arabesques.²² Their colors tended toward nostalgic yellows

21. Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism,” in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 64.

22. On Hohn's work, see the short text by Manfred Hermes, “Eine Geschichte komplexer Objekte von ziemlich sensueller Oberflächenqualität,” in *Ull Hohn: Off the Wall*, exh. cat. (Galerie Neu, Berlin, 2006).

and wistful sepias, warm reds and pinks, and sexy (of course) lavenders and purples. The paintings were antimonumental and playful, serial but hardly minimal, and their lesson was this: they welcomed Burr's forms as one with their own. Something like aesthetic opposites, here, were forced to meet. The enlivening worked both ways.

While we need to name the effect of this welcome on Burr's project, the double-movement of the Burr-Hohn installation points to the double structures that everywhere haunt Burr's sculpture, with increasing urgency in recent years. In addition to those we have already highlighted—Burr's dual adherence to the principles of reconstruction and re-architecture, or to the legacies of the readymade and the constructed sculpture, or to the split between appropriation and site-specific art—one key split gained focus around 1998. Burr had used photographs in his sculptural work prior to this moment, as a conceptual principle subtending the strategy of reconstruction, for example, or in text and photocollages that acted as preliminary sketches for sculptural projects—or even, rarely, as the sole mode of magazine projects such as *Unearthing the Public Restroom*. However, Burr's thinking about photography seemed to shift in the installation *Surface* in Berlin in 1998, where Burr pushed two key models of sculptural practice to something like their reciprocal limits, if not their breaking points. Here, among other elements, a stark wooden barrier carrying a mirrored surface on one of its two sides faced off against a group of Polaroid photographs accumulated serially into spatial grids. In this confrontation, sculpture became a reflective surface, suturing like a photograph the space and viewers around it; and photography became resolutely spatial, organized into the classic Minimalist display format of "one thing after another," and mapping as the images did the surrounding urban area of Berlin's Mitte, then in the midst of massive reconstruction. But we also face, in this confrontation, the two opposed models of sculpture that the medium had reached at



Burr: *Surface*. 1998.

the very apogee, if not the closing chapter, of its modernist development. On the one hand, sculpture as *phenomenological*: sculpture becomes a matter of physical alterations to its surrounding space or environment, dependent upon the viewer's bodily kinesis and perception. On the other hand, sculpture as *semiological*: sculpture becomes a matter of image and information, dependent on the reader's activity and constructive participation, in a long-under-recognized development that leads from the Pop sculpture of Warhol and Oldenburg to the photo-works of Ed Ruscha, Mel Bochner, Dan Graham, and Robert Smithson (the latter two key figures, not coincidentally, for Burr) to the language structures of Morris, Sol LeWitt, and Lawrence Weiner.²³

In the wake of the exhibition *Surface*, random accumulations and archival collections of spatially dispersed but also physically layered photographs—the so-called *Bulletin Board* structures—regularly appear alongside Burr's physical objects (*Black Bulletin Board*, *Brutalist Bulletin Board*, *Mammal Board*). It is as if from this point on, Burr returns to a moment in which sculpture split into two entirely opposed halves. However, it must be admitted that in the history of sculpture, the war between the phenomenological and the semiological is a battle for the most part concluded. It is a battle in which the semiological model of sculpture won out, seemingly to the detriment of the specific medium of sculpture altogether, as the inherent hybridity of the semiological or language structure voided the singularity and the physical object conventions of modernist sculpture in exchange for the postmodern turn to the picture, to representation, and to signs more generally. The early phase of postmodernism, to put it bluntly, was not a good moment for sculpture.²⁴ It has taken an entire generation for this situation to begin to change.



Burr. Detail from *Black Bulletin Board*. 1998.

23. Here, my terminology and narration depend upon the work on sculpture's history in the recent writings of Benjamin Buchloh. See, for example, "Skulptur: Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrungsarmut," in *White Cube/Black Box* (Vienna: EA-Generali Foundation, 1996). One of my first essays on Burr—which I am revising and in part repudiating here—was already a response to this essay by Buchloh; see my "Minimal Memory: Reflections on Damaged Sculpture," in *Sharawadgi*, ed. Christian Meyer and Mathias Poledna (Cologne: Verlag Walther König, 1999).

24. In retrospect, an essay like Rosalind Krauss's 1979 "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," which brought a semiological or structural model of analysis to bear on the transformation of the phenomenologically based sculptural practices of Post-Minimalism, reads as elegiac (as opposed to predictive), the swan song of a model of sculpture that was about to come, historically, to an end. Perhaps more radically,



Burr. Black Box. 1998.

In this light, Burr's potentially incoherent return to both the phenomenological and semiological models of sculpture reveals itself as a return to a moment of aesthetic crisis. Further, it seems like a self-consciously redemptive move, a salvage attempt on the medium of sculpture itself (in line with the larger concern with salvage and with mourning and with care that runs through Burr's entire project): a return to the specific moment in which sculpture succumbed to its historical dissolution. However, and crucially, this is a salvage attempt that denies ahead of time any notion of a singular existence for sculpture and its operations; in Burr's work, sculpture's strategies will always be double, even inherently contradictory, or better, *incongruent*, a matter of both the physical and the virtual, space and picture, object and image.²⁵

The year 1998 indeed witnessed the exacerbation of Burr's play with *incongruence*, in the double nature, or literal two-sidedness, of the sculptures that he began to create in the wake of this moment, as companions for his increased engagement with photography. I mean to point to a work like *Black Box* (1998), or to *Deep Purple* itself, or to a later piece like *The Oblong Box* (2001). In each of these

this classic account of postmodernism could be considered as participating in the history by which the semiological defeated the phenomenological model of sculpture itself. See Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), pp. 276–90.

25. Hal Foster develops in a different direction a strategy of "incongruence" in contemporary art in his recent text "This Funeral Is for the Wrong Corpse," in *Design and Crime (and Other Diatribes)* (London and New York: Verso, 2002). My use of the term will be clarified below.

works, the sculpture presents itself—on *one* of its sides—as Minimalist and abstract, a sculptural experience of something like a blockage, or a wall, or a barrier. And yet to step *around* the barrier of *Deep Purple* or *The Oblong Box*, to step *within* the area marked out by the serial or fragmented units constituting *Black Box*, was to exceed the experience of the sculpture as *object* and, instead, to begin to experience the work as *image*. It was to exceed the relationship to the sculpture as a *barrier* and, instead, to be, in each case, literally *introjected* within the work. And it was to step beyond the latent theatricality of the Minimalist object that had long ago enraged the modernist critic Michael Fried, only to witness Burr exacerbating this theatricality—revaluing, indeed, every single term of abuse that Fried had once heaped upon the Minimalist object (its literalness, or anthropomorphism, or seeming hollowness, or staginess)—in the literal, highly artificial, and staged evocations lurking *behind* each of Burr's works.²⁶ From this other side, *Deep Purple* was revealed as constructed like a studio prop, an artificial set. Held close to a nearby

26. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5 (June 1967) reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), pp. 116–47.



Burr: The Oblong Box, seen from behind. 2001.

architectural wall by metal brackets, *The Oblong Box* created the experience of a closet or a passageway, outfitted on its nether surface with shelving and punctuated by a bright red ashtray, like a meeting place in a bar or club. And the eviscerated, sliced-open cube of *Black Box* (whose title and exterior form otherwise appropriated the notoriously blank Tony Smith sculpture *Black Box* of 1962) admitted an interior that had been furnished with mirrors and shelves and ashtrays once again, evoking the social setting of the bar, or the more liminal site of the so-called back room, or the minimal accoutrements and blacked-out interior of a rock club—surely, at least, some kind of space leaning toward “rough trade.”

A biker bar as much as a gay bar perhaps: For *Black Box* actually functioned as a kind of viewing platform, from within and on top of which one perhaps did not literally enter the social space that it evoked in fantasy or as theatrical image; rather the work provided a vantage point from which the viewer could gaze, with the seeming detachment of the dandy, at yet more images, in this case the panoramic photo-accumulation hanging on a nearby wall of one of the first of Burr’s bulletin boards, *Black Bulletin Board* (1998).²⁷ And here, a collection of photographs layered black-and-white images of the Minimalist vocabulary and yet sinuous and mostly jet-black forms of Tony Smith alongside (and on top of, and beneath) stills from Kenneth Anger’s cult film, *Scorpio Rising* (1964), with its ironic rock-and-roll send-up of 1950s American values, its youthful James Dean rebel-types polishing and rubbing their “Christmas tree versions of motorcycles” (to paraphrase Anger), with its fetishization of the black leather uniforms of biker culture, and its exaggerated overtones of homoeroticism, violence, and brutality. The incongruence of the pairing, of Tony Smith and Kenneth Anger, of deadpan Minimalism and parodic exaggeration, gave way under these image-conditions to an overarching work of correspondence, as the accumulation sought out visual rhymes between black sculptures and black leather jackets, polished Minimalist surfaces and the gleam of the boys’ bikes, the play of light off crisp sculptural facets and the bathing of beautiful male bodies in shadow, serial sculptures and the repetitive phallic pool cues or metal stools of the biker bar, esoteric geometries and the arcane symbols (including the Nazi swastika) of the bikers—between one form of sexiness, or one form of violence, or one form of fetishization, and another. The result is a contagion of meaning, in the wake of which none of the former valences of the objects in question will remain.

Such has been the work of most of Burr’s bulletin board projects. In *Brutalist Bulletin Board* (2001), for example, various photographs of the corrugated, rough-hewn surfaces of that Minimalist variant of architecture known as Brutalism were

27. The rise in the 1990s of the notion of rethinking the “white cube” of the gallery space (for the exhibition of painting and sculpture) as a “black box” given over to cinema and image projection surely was part of the horizon of Burr’s appropriation of Smith’s title at this moment, and his ambivalent suspension of his work between the object conditions of sculpture and the image conditions of photography as much as psychic fantasy.

grouped with and compared to the seductive and idolized “character” of the rock star Jim Morrison of The Doors. In a series of photographs worthy of the fanzine, we are shown Morrison posing, and laughing, and vamping for the camera. We see the star pulling sensuously on a cigarette, or staring vapidly, his plump lips at times half-open in the notorious Morrison scowl, or simply in toothy, empty, perhaps slightly stupid abandon. And the implication of the collection is that the Brutalist architecture, presented here in fetishistic pieces and image fragments like the body parts of Morrison, is doing all of these things, too: it is a pose, a vamp, a scowl, a performance; it is empty, and vapid, and masculine, and seductive.

Incongruity, in such works, arises from a potentially jarring historical comparison of persons or objects that were simply contemporaries; it then gives way through such parallelism to a correspondence of exaggeration or excess. And here I want to cite Susan Sontag, from her breakthrough essay (also, like *Scorpio Rising*, from 1964) on “Camp.” For on the one hand, writes Sontag, “an important element of the Camp sensibility [is] the equivalence of all objects.”²⁸ But also,

the Camp sensibility is one that is alive to a double sense in which some things can be taken. . . . To camp is a mode of seduction—one which employs flamboyant mannerisms susceptible of a double interpretation; gestures full of duplicity, with a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsiders (281).

To associate Camp with Burr’s two-sided, potentially duplicitous sculptures and with his not-quite-dialectical cultural pairings (or, more accurately, homages) is to find language for the salvage impulse that I have been sensing in this work.²⁹ It is also to locate the drive behind the incongruity principle of this art, as much as its trappings of exaggeration and theatricality. The “essence of Camp,” writes Sontag, “is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration” (275). Camp “converts the serious into the frivolous” (276), and it is “a certain mode of aestheticism. It is *one* way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon” (277). Camp taste, Sontag asserts, has an affinity for “clothes, furniture, all the elements of visual décor,” and Camp art “is often decorative art, emphasizing texture, sensuous surface, and style at the expense of content” (278). Camp, it must be said, seems then to be involved in a direct reversal or travesty of the values of (modernist, high) art; instead of the medium-specific or “less is more” ideologies of

28. Susan Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp,’” in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Delta, 1967), p. 289. Hereafter cited by page number in the text.

29. Walter Benjamin once offered the pairing of two contrary cultural figures—Surrealist André Breton and Purist modernist Le Corbusier—as a “dialectical image” that would help to comprehend the cultural situation of the 1920s in France: “To encompass both Breton and Le Corbusier—that would mean drawing the spirit of contemporary France like a bow, with which knowledge shoots the moment in the heart.” See Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 459. Tony Smith and Kenneth Anger, Brutalism and Jim Morrison, Richard Serra and *Deep Purple*, Andy Warhol’s films and Robert Smithson’s Non-Sites, a sex-shop peep show and Dan Graham: these are comparisons of a different type, and with a different kind of ambition.



Burr. Brutalist Bulletin Board. 2001.

modernist reductionism (although “less is more” sounds like a slogan simply begging for its Camp revaluation), Camp entails “the love”—Sontag repeatedly stresses the amorous in her descriptions—“the love of the exaggerated, the ‘off,’ of things-being-what-they-are-not” (279). In fact, a kind of “modern dandyism,” as Sontag describes it, answering the problem of “how to be a dandy in the age of mass culture,” Camp simply “makes no distinction between the unique object and the mass-produced object. Camp taste transcends the nausea of the replica” (289). A gaze that then sees all objects and experiences as potentially involved in appropriation—and that is itself in the end a specific process of appropriation, doubling, or copying—Camp “sees everything in quotation marks. It’s not a lamp, but a ‘lamp’; not a woman, but a ‘woman.’ To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater” (280).

Two conditions seem to ripen objects to the state that Camp can descend upon them, reappropriating their forms for other usages. Both of these conditions point directly to Burr’s situation in terms of sculpture. First, there is the distance provided by *time*, the temporal in the sense of an inevitable lapse of attention, a fall into decay, a discrediting of the ambitions once invested in the cultural object. Thus Sontag:

So many of the objects prized by Camp taste are old-fashioned, out-of-date, *démodé*. It’s not a love of the old as such. It’s simply that the process of aging or deterioration provides the necessary detachment—or arouses a necessary sympathy. When the theme is important, and contemporary, the failure of a work of art may make us indignant. Time can change that. Time liberates the work of art from moral relevance, delivering it over to the Camp sensibility (285).

The temporal dissolution of the object into Camp then foregrounds another of its essential preconditions: the revaluation of *failure*, of a cultural ambition that in its time simply missed its mark, tragically or poignantly or extravagantly. This is of course one of the central experiences, in the last century, of the entire avant-garde project. Sontag again: “Thus, things are campy, not when they become

old—but when we become less involved in them, and can enjoy, instead of be frustrated by, the failure of the attempt” (285). Camp is marked, according to Sontag, by a “spirit of extravagance”—like “a woman walking around in a dress made of three million feathers” (283)—it is “the attempt to do something extraordinary” (284). With sympathetic detachment, Camp relishes the gap between “extraordinary” ambition and the tragic failure of such ambition; Camp thrives on transforming such losses into victories, but of a frivolous or enjoyable sort—it is a specific process of converting the painful into joy: “In naïve, or pure, Camp, the essential element is seriousness, a seriousness that fails. Of course, not all seriousness that fails can be redeemed as Camp. Only that which has the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve” (283). Camp, as a “theatricalization of experience,” is also a “sensibility of failed seriousness” (287).

We are now in a position to understand that one of Burr’s strategies is to treat the sculptural object—in the wake of its historical dissolution or tragic failure as an avant-garde project—as Camp. This is a vision that accepts, without shame, Marx’s prognosis that history always repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.³⁰ For here is a sculpture (to catalog some of Burr’s preferred materials) of chintzy aluminum foil, of gaudy reflective Mylar, of tawdry colored scrims placed over theatrical lights, of shoddy naked plywood, of icy, polished mirrors, and of trashy hardware-store paints. Here is a sculpture that treats the sculptural forms of the past as so many degraded, cast-off objects, or flashy, decrepit spaces, as so much potential excess and waste. And yet engaging, if not exacerbating, this degradation, Burr’s sculptures treat the failure of Minimalist forms as Camp, or begin to allow these forms to “Camp” in turn, a frivolity in which they were never formerly allowed to partake.

What, one might ask, does Burr’s Camp vision of sculpture do to Minimalism? My list is partial (as this project cannot be said to be concluded, and has only gained strength in Burr’s most recent works): Camp fixates on the Minimalist object’s surface. It makes Minimalism purple. Or it makes it shiny. Or, if it keeps the black-and-white neutrality, or retains the naked industrial material, it makes Minimalism all butch and sexy, often by comparing it, via photo-works, to icons of excessive masculinity like Jim Morrison. Camp might then value Minimalist surfaces as “superficial,” but it also invests these surfaces in depth: Camp likes Minimalism’s fakeness, revels in its extreme challenge to nature. Camp turns Minimalism into theater, into so many duplicitous stage sets ripe for the enactment of “drama.” Camp takes a Minimalist form and makes a bar of it, throws an imaginary party around it. Camp makes Minimalism festive. Camp turns Minimalism into objects of decor, into furniture or things to be used. Camp here means smoking a cigarette and snubbing it out dramatically in the rakish ashtray

30. Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” (1852), in the *Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), p. 594.



*Burr. Interior of
Black Box. 1998.*

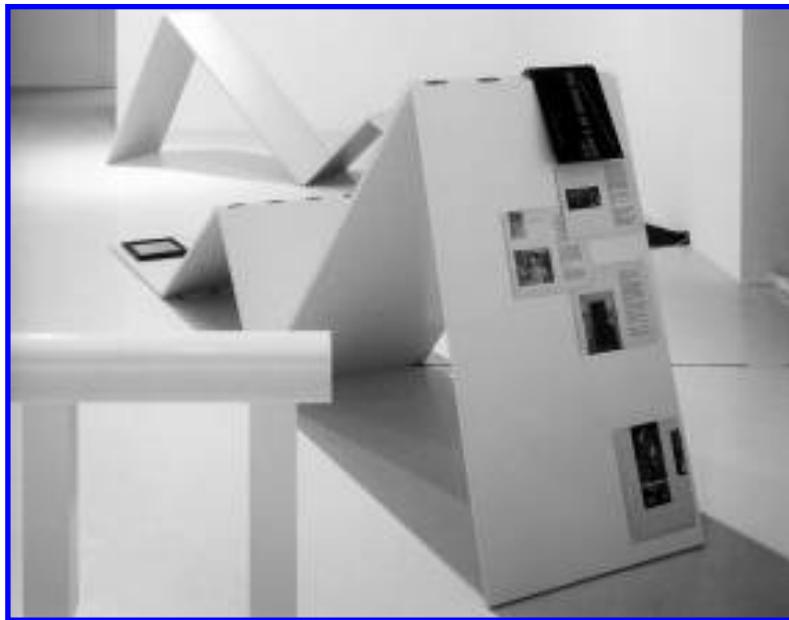
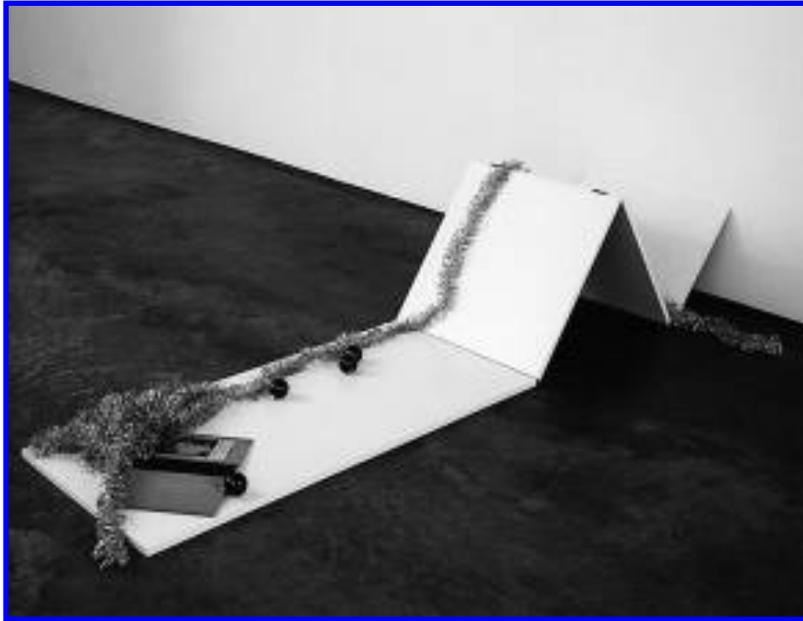
placed on top of a Minimalist form. Camp sees Minimalist geometries and refuses their abstraction, linking them instead to fashion, say, or to glamour—as when Burr’s *Deep Purple* took Serra’s “arc” and shrunk it, exhibiting it first in an exhibition called *Low Slung*, as if the form evoked a plunging waistline, the curvaceous splendor of a pair of low-rise pants, some new form of sartorial Minimalism. Sontag again: “Camp is the attempt to do something extraordinary. But extraordinary in the sense, often, of being special, glamorous. (The curved line, the extravagant gesture)” (284). Camp values Minimalism and the avant-garde more generally for their extremism, their naiveté, their artificiality and failures. It pays special attention to the moments when the Minimalist object was torn down or censored, or to Minimalist artists who were rejected (by their critics, by their peers—i.e., Tony Smith) or who died young (Robert Smithson).³¹ Camp focuses on the Minimalists who were macho, or sometimes phobic (Donald Judd), exposing

31. We could add Eva Hesse here, too, whose materials and morphologies seem to inform only one of Burr’s major sculptures, *Quartered* (2001), but whose sculptural operations—splitting and doubling and other more obsessive or violent object manipulations—resonate throughout Burr’s project, and with increasing frequency in recent works. For the most eloquent account of such sculptural operations, see Mignon Nixon, *Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005). It is clear to me from conversations with the artist that Nixon’s book has become extremely important to Burr’s recent practice.

them in the present to their worst fears; it likes Minimalism's most phobic critics as well, those who said the worst about its forms and its project (Michael Fried). Camp wears these slurs as points of pride. Camp removes Minimalism from its dominant place in the canon, or in our culture, and links it instead to subcultural authors, mass cultural characters, illicit desires and interdictions. On the other hand, Camp idolizes Minimalism, becoming a connoisseur of its forms, an ardent fan. And, above all else, Camp simply *adores* the fact that Minimalism, in perhaps one of its greatest failures, thought it could escape the condition of subjectivity altogether—Camp really thinks this is so *cute* (and so *sad*)—for Camp is nothing if not an extreme exacerbation of subjectivity, sensibility, taste.

Evidently, in one major respect, Burr's sculptural practice contradicts Sontag's classic tracing of the lineaments of Camp sensibility. Sontag wrote: "Objects, being objects, don't change when they are singled out by the Camp vision. Persons, however, respond. . . . Persons begin 'camping'" (283). However, it is not just Burr as an author who can be said to be "camping" in his sculptural practice; nor does his isolation of Minimalism as Camp simply induce its historical authors to begin to "camp" themselves (although this might indeed be happening today). Burr's theatricalization of Minimalism's latent theatricality allows sculptural objects, and not just people, to begin to "camp." This we might see in all of Burr's duplicitous structures, sculptures with incongruent sides and aesthetic effects, objects that present one side to the aesthetic gaze and reveal another, hidden aspect under closer inspection.

But witness as well that progression in Burr's art that began with works like *Black Box* and *Quartered* (2001), where the seriality of Minimalist form was turned around on the appropriated object in question, such as Tony Smith's original cube, splitting and fragmenting its former unity to create a serial object now opened up, as it were, from the inside out. The psychic valence of such seriality-as-fragmentation, or as splitting, or as quartering, seems clear, as it hands over the appropriated object to the work of what Melanie Klein might have called destruction and reparation. It is a sculptural operation shared by *Deep Purple* and its internal segmentation, which seems then to have led to Burr's subsequent creation of a series of sculptures as "folding screens"—sculptures made of serial fragments now, however, sutured together by flexible hinges (the work of reparation in the wake of destruction?). While such structures relate to actual folding screens (and to Camp) in their decorative address, their evident devotion to fashion, and their function as the defense (or literal production) of effects of privacy and secrecy, they also pushed forward Burr's long-standing concern with a sculpture that would be mobile instead of rooted to its site, in this case literally able not just to be moved, but to move and shift internally. Such structures in turn have blossomed, in the recent Berlin exhibition *Complete Breakdown* (2005), into hinged and moveable sculptures torn between acting as support surfaces for a series of readymade objects, like a nomadic shrine or a reliquary, and engaging in a literal "acting," as these hinged (and metaphorically "unhinged") objects seemed positioned to



Burr. Top: Christmas Collapse. 2005. Bottom: Installation view of Complete Breakdown at Galerie Neu, Berlin, 2005, with The Poet from the Waist Up. 2005.

move and to break and to tumble ever farther toward the ground, in some kind of structural process of collapse. In this, the sculptures echoed in the excessive modality of Camp the martyrology that could be gleaned from the dual homage that many works in this installation made to Jean Cocteau's film *The Blood of a Poet* (1930) and to the works and character of Truman Capote. (Other recent installations by Burr have celebrated, in turn, Jean Genet—*The Screens* [2003], or *Our Lady of the Flowers* [2004], or even the reference to Genet's *Querelle* in the early installation *Stainless* [1997]—producing in these works dealing with Cocteau, Capote, and Genet a kind of trinity of Camp sensibility, now clearly defined, traced, and celebrated.)³² Burr titled one of his new hinged works *Collapse* (2005), laying on it a bathrobe thrown down as if in midfaint, some straw fans, and scattered, first-edition copies of Capote's books *Music for Chameleons* and *Answered Prayers*. *Worn Out* (2005) cowered down and sought refuge beneath a tattered, frayed carpet on the gallery floor. *Worn (for Mr. Capote)* (2005) wedged itself into the corner between gallery wall and floor, and on it rested a Panama hat, necktie, and another straw fan. If such works evoked the reliquary of a modern-day martyr or saint, Burr's layering of clothes and other readymades onto the works seemed a return to the dynamics of mourning and memory, a new modality of Burr's sculptural acknowledgment of loss. And yet, in the linked modality of Camp, these accoutrements instead drew the sculptures inexorably toward fashion and the aesthetics of display. And they forced each sculpture into a close proximity with the coverings of the body, as if each sculpture, indeed, was a body, and these relics the theatrical props and literal costumes of a dramatic act (close to hysteria in its self-display). Here is what it might mean for an object to begin to "camp," as Burr's works encouraged Minimalism—and perhaps sculpture itself—to become a kind of pose, a form of staging, an act, or better, a *performative structure*.

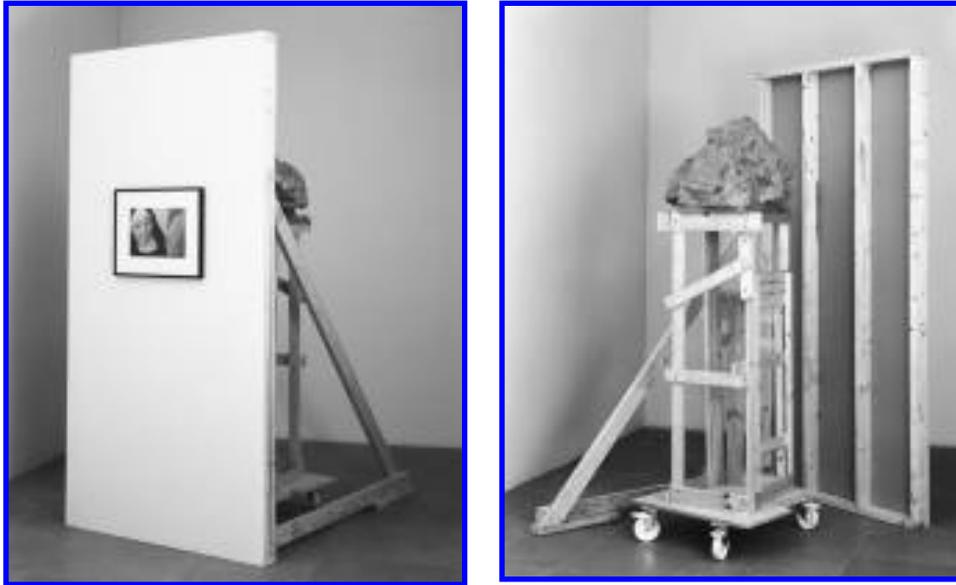
All of this may sound like the nightmare of the avant-garde, and perhaps it is, but it is something else as well. Camp is sincere about *certain* things. In this case, it is sincere about its love for the avant-garde. "Camp taste," Sontag concluded, "is a mode of enjoyment, of appreciation—not judgment. Camp is generous. It wants to enjoy. It only seems like malice, cynicism" (291). In fact, "Camp taste nourishes itself on the love that has gone into certain objects and personal styles" (292). It is "a kind of love, love for human nature. It relishes, rather than judges, the little triumphs and awkward intensities of 'character.' Camp taste identifies with what it is enjoying. People who share this sensibility are not laughing at the thing they label as 'a camp,' they're enjoying it. Camp is a tender feeling" (291–92).

32. Genet, however, occupies a complex relation to Camp in Sontag's account; see Sontag, p. 288: "Style is everything. Genet's ideas, for instance, are very Camp. Genet's statement that 'the only criterion of an act is its elegance' is virtually interchangeable, as a statement, with Wilde's 'in matters of great importance, the vital element is not sincerity, but style.' But what counts, finally, is the style in which ideas are held. . . . The Camp ideas in *Our Lady of the Flowers* are maintained too grimly, and the writing itself is too successfully elevated and serious, for Genet's books to be Camp." Whether Sontag is right or wrong, one wonders if much the same criticism could be applied to Burr's work in sculpture, too.

It is the absence of such love that keeps contemporary “Pop” artists like Jeff Koons from attaining the status of Camp, even when, say, Koons sculpts a massive work like *Puppy* (1992) out of colorful flowers. Such a work is less extravagant than cold and calculating; it is pure kitsch, which, as opposed to being tender, is always violent. And this is why, too, the cinematic/sculptural work today of Matthew Barney (like an opera by Richard Wagner) is not Camp, nor is the recent appearance by none other than Serra “playing a role” in one of Barney’s *Cremaster* films—even (perhaps especially) when in a notorious scene Serra slings hot Vaseline in a self-parody of his earlier Post-Minimalist Process work. The Serra-Barney performance is entirely too Oedipal, too rivalrous, to be tender. And it is too grim, too deadly serious to be Camp. However, Barney’s *Cremaster* project is in fact not only too Oedipal to be Camp, it is too murderous as well (which is of course linked to its Oedipal logic). Indeed, in my opinion, Barney’s work represents a violence more insidious, much more sinister, than mere kitsch. Serra flinging hot Vaseline: this might seem to evoke Camp, in its staginess, in its parody, but also, it must be said, in its evocation of sexuality (if not anality or onanism), its seeming eroticization or even queering of the materials that once qualified for Process art. But this specific kind of evocation runs throughout the entirety of the *Cremaster* cycle. For this is a work obsessed with turning all of the now-canonical signifiers of Camp sensibility, or even a distinctly queer sensibility—S/M, Art Deco, porn, Busby Berkeley musicals, feathers and boas and drag queens—into something like a new archaic mythology. Of course, myth—especially fraudulent myth—is not fun, nor is it frivolous; it is, instead, tragic (if not deeply tiresome). And this devotion to myth is why Barney’s work is not critical, nor distanced, nor (surely) ironic, nor light, nor playful—but Camp is. More distressingly, one might even claim that Barney’s work can only be read, in its strict fetishization of the entire panoply of Camp signification, as part of a much longer and deeper social *abhorrence* of the Camp sensibility. In the incessant, obsessional cataloging of every form of Camp experience in these films, we witness a chilling phobia, an increasingly desperate battle to eradicate the tender social challenge of Camp and of the queer, one that now needs to go so far as to appropriate back in turn Camp’s prior appropriations, Camp’s own signifiers, in an attempt to recoup them from the latter’s playful “corruption.” I will go so far as to say: *Cremaster* is the holocaust of the aesthetic that once produced *Flaming Creatures*.³³

And this violence also points to why artists such as Koons, or now Barney, seem to engage with sculpture in their work, only, ultimately, to render the medium desiccated, if not to destroy it altogether. (*Cremaster* is also the holocaust of the historical medium of sculpture.) Camp, on the other hand, seems pledged in the contemporary moment to the opposite goal. Camp today works to redeem sculpture. It is one of the great ironies of the history of avant-garde sculpture that

33. I refer to the film by Jack Smith of 1963.



Rachel Harrison. Sphinx. 2002.

its legacy might currently find its only hope for survival in precisely that aesthetic modality to which it was once opposed. But in the various convincing resurrections of sculptural strategies in contemporary art, the tender revision of Camp seems everywhere in evidence—whether we think of Burr and his Camp exaggeration of Minimalism, as much as his more recent elegies to cultural figures such as Genet, Capote, and Cocteau; or whether we look to Rachel Harrison and her similar foregrounding of the incongruity between sculpture and photography, decrepit object and spectacular image, artificial color and Hollywood celebrity (a pantheon for Harrison seemingly united by compassion and ranging in specific works from images of Liz Taylor and Michael Jackson, to Carroll O'Connor, Bo Derek, and Sister Wendy); or whether we think of Thomas Hirschhorn and his pathetic Princess Di altars and swooning monuments, his impassioned fan behavior before the heroic figures of the avant-garde, and his more recent celebration of a politicized “superficiality.”

In the face then of what today seems a contemporary sculpture of “refuse and refuge” (to borrow a term from Benjamin Buchloh), an aesthetic of salvage and survival, one is left wondering what to say in the face of Burr’s double language, the dual presence in his work of the seemingly incompatible operations of melancholia and of Camp.³⁴ One could make the argument that the Camp aspect

34. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Refuse and Refuge,” in *Gabriel Orozco*, exh. cat. (Kortrijk, Belgium: Kanaal Art Foundation, 1993).

of Burr's art is like all the other connections to queer culture in this work: a memory of the past, a literal *re-collection* of a space or a practice on the verge of disappearance. This would be to question whether Camp itself is still a viable reaction to the normalizing onslaught of mass culture in the present, a still-living force within queer culture, a strategy of resistance and defense with some purchase. However, if such is the case, I at least do not sense the melancholia that would go along with placing Camp in this position in Burr's work. Rather Camp seems a strategy only gaining momentum in Burr's practice, increasing its strength and its reach. Indeed, Camp seems for Burr the other side of melancholia, melancholia's other face, as it were, another linked reaction to the destruction of one's culture, and beliefs, and love objects, and identity. It is part and parcel of what Gregg Bordowitz might call the "queer structure of feeling" of Burr's work.³⁵

In fact, we might claim that this time the pairing is dialectical. Melancholia and Camp are two sides of the same dynamic, linked in Burr's work as the death drive and the pleasure principle were for Freud. On the one hand, Burr activates melancholia in the face of the massive losses facing queer forms of life since the onset of the AIDS crisis. And on the other, he mobilizes all of the resources of Camp revitalization in the face of the dissolution or the failure of the normative history of the avant-garde. Dialectically, Burr's work responds with something like the typical mode of avant-garde negativity (melancholic fixation) in the face of queer loss; conversely, it queers the failures of the avant-garde itself, the increasing historical eradication of its language of contestation, resurrecting this in the mode of Camp celebration. We may no longer wish to call such a strategy a conventional strategy of critique. It speaks instead in a forked tongue, a double language. Surely, it speaks critically, but with a different tone—one willing to undergo suffering and degradation for the other, perhaps; and one willing even to love this suffering and degradation, in order to redeem the decrepit waste of the sculptural past. But if melancholia and Camp are two sides of the same coin in Burr's work, a dialectical pairing, they can hardly be said to be opposed. They are, instead, inseparable. For melancholia and Camp have this in common: they are both modalities of love.

35. Gregg Bordowitz, "The AIDS Crisis Is Ridiculous," in *The AIDS Crisis Is Ridiculous and Other Writings, 1986–2003*, ed. James Meyer (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), p. 49.