Every act is political, and, whether one is conscious of it or not, the very fact of presenting one’s work/projects, does not escape this rule.

—Daniel Buren, 1969

To write an interpretive essay on the work of an artist who is also a prolific writer is inherently fraught with perils. Surely, any serious attempt to understand Daniel Buren’s visual work demands that it be read alongside the artist’s extensive writings in which he not only alerts us to where and how to look at his work but also locates the areas or registers where the meaning effects occur. Let us therefore enter into a dialogue with not only Buren’s visual practice but his critical and analytical writings as well, in order to try to specify the kinds of meaning that pass through and between those registers—to try to get below the surface of his statements.

For Buren, writing constitutes more than a mere explanation of his work a posteriori, which would minimize the interplay between the two coexisting forms—the literary and the visual. As he noted in 1973, “there is an interaction between the texts and the painting, . . . but it would be an absolute misinterpretation to forget which engenders the other: the process is from the work to the text,” even though “neither is a mirror reflecting the other indefinitely.” Instead, the text functions clearly to affirm (or confirm) “that which one is reluctant to admit: for example, the relationship between the economy, aesthetics, politics, power, ideology, criticism, and the artist and the work.” Buren thus employs critical writing to indicate that the visual alone cannot convey the totality of his artistic practice and that words are needed to elucidate that which is “not-yet-seen.”

The phrase “not-yet-seen” strongly suggests, while withholding any certitude, that what has hitherto been invisible will become visible in the future. Read from this perspective, Buren’s writings dramatically evoke a politics of transformation associated with (and, metaphorically at least, emerging from) the European upheavals of
the 1960s. These highly charged years amply demonstrated that a politics of subversion is often located at the nexus of work and text. For it is in the free but imperceptible space of exchange between art and writing that new meanings are developed, take form, and can best be determined. As Theodor Adorno, playing on the fluidity of the in/visible, observed in the late 1960s, “It is for this reason that art requires philosophy, which interprets it in order to say what it is unable to say, whereas art is only able to say it by not saying it.”

The combination of critical writing and an art that perpetually interrogates the conditions of its own existence forms the explosive character of Buren’s work.

Buren’s now more-than-four-decades-long career has shifted in a number of significant ways over the years. From the initial vertically striped paintings and posters of the 1960s, to the urban ballets of the 1970s, to the counter-architectural Cabanes éclatées (exploding cabins or pavilions) of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, Buren has consistently produced self-reflexively critical work. And a cognitive thread revealing commonalities, correspondences, and repetitions in his artistic production becomes apparent in his aesthetics of resistance.

Buren’s career includes several watershed moments. The first took place in 1965 when he made the decision to limit his artistic practice to painting only vertical stripes 8.7 centimeters wide (albeit on canvases or other supports of varying size). Another, equally important shift occurred in 1984, when the artist produced the initial Cabane éclatée for a show entitled Site in Situ, presented by the Konrad Fischer Gallery in Düsseldorf. The most striking feature of this sculptural construction was its transportability and mobility. Up until this point, Buren had argued for site specificity and the relatively ephemeral nature of his work, with any given piece lasting only as long as it was located at the initial and specific site of exhibition. This credo was summarized by Buren in the mid-1970s:
“A work taking into consideration the place in which it is shown exhibited, cannot be moved elsewhere and will have to disappear at the end of the exhibition.”7 He continued by explaining that because “every place radically imbues (formally, architecturally, sociologically, politically) with its meaning the object (work/creation) shown there, . . . the object presented and its place of display must dialectically imply one another.”8 But with the advent of the Cabanes éclatées Buren radically altered his site-specific practice and began to produce a body of work in which each piece could be reconstituted in an array of spaces and frames.

Though the first Cabane éclatée was exhibited in 1984, Buren dates the origins of this series to 1975 when a museum in Mönchengladbach commissioned him to produce a work for a specific room within the museum. Shortly before the opening of the exhibition, however, the museum decided to locate the work in another gallery. This presented a dilemma for Buren, who had already designed his installation according to the specific conditions of the initial room. Instead of redesigning the work, or creating an entirely new piece, he decided to remain faithful to the concept and form of the initial installation and to reconstitute its environment by building around it a model of the original exposition room, with its doorways, windows, and pictures hanging on the walls. The views and perspectival sightlines from inside the new sculptural installation exactly replicated those of the first version of the work, with the exception that the false windows and doors now created a distancing effect.

While adapting the Mönchengladbach project to the new conditions specified by the museum, the possibility arose of conceiving and producing sculptural installations that would draw on this forced experience with a new form—works characterized by an envelope-like perimeter specially built around a central core. This in turn led Buren to speculations on the relationship between windows and paintings in the galleries of museums, where paintings traditionally take the place of windows as rectangles that provide condensed views of a world external to the exhibition space. In the end, Buren inverted this phenomenon by displacing the museum’s windows in a manner parallel to the inversion of the architectural frame of the museum’s walls by the new sculptural pavilions. At this point, the central components of what would come to be referred to as the Cabanes éclatées had been established.

The form of the Cabanes éclatées evolved from the early Cabane éclatée, no. 2, first presented in Marseilles in September 1984, to more recent Cabanes éclatées such as the Cabane éclatée au tissu blanc et noir (2006) presented in Le Cateau-Cambresis, France. The first cabane was simple, consisting of a plywood construction over which was stretched canvas with blue and white vertical stripes.
Later variations took on the appearance of a kaleidoscope of mirrors, with colorful Plexiglas walls, illuminated areas, a sprinkling of trompe l’oeil, and in some instances even a galvanized metal frame (e.g., *La cabane éclatée galvanisée*, 2000). Always inventive, the number of *Cabanes éclatées* is now vast. But underlying all of them, a basic structure remains consistent, featuring an open architectural form that encourages the viewer to enter its domain.

In addition, works such as *Cabane éclatée, no. 2* have several supporting columns that divide the interior space and encourage the public to contemplate the installation from different angles and perspectives, both exterior and interior. What would traditionally have been hidden, placed on the interior of the sculpture—that is, the supporting plywood structure over which the painting of white and blue stripes is stretched—is here, like a garment worn inside out, exposed to the view of the spectator on the outside. From the exterior of the *cabane* as well, the organization of planes that constitute the structure is difficult for the viewer to discern. Once the viewer enters the installation, however, a reverse effect takes place, and the interior appears perspectively smooth and flawlessly sutured. This inversion of the traditional order of exterior/interior, or visible/hidden, is a further development of a strategy that Buren adopted early in his career—one that led him to proclaim that “the history of art (of forms) is the history of rectos [i.e., exteriors],” whereas the history of the verso/interior reality “remains to be made.” In a significant and highly revealing way, Buren’s pursuit of an art practice capable of revealing the unrevealeable, or telling the non-sayable—thereby presenting, in its actual production, two images in one—approximates the work of the Swiss filmmaker...
Jean-Luc Godard, who, like Buren in art, consistently launched attacks against the seamless illusion or verisimilitude and ensuing identification produced by the dominant forms of cinema. If Godard’s ambition was to create an alternative cinematic practice that would break through and expose the artificiality of the celluloid products, Buren’s work was intended to perform a similar type of distanciation in the context of modernist art.

This strategy has a violent dimension, however, traces of which are discernable throughout Buren’s work. But he sublimates this aspect of his practice within the boundaries of art. For instance, the very conception of the Cabanes éclatées is based on the principle of an explosion (éclatement) that effectively rips asunder, or bursts open, the constituent architectural elements of the art piece and suspends them in the framing architectural surround of the gallery or museum walls. As Buren has put it, “The cabanes produce a very simple architectural structure located within a pre-existent architecture in which they have been ‘exploded.’ The envelope and that which is enveloped are thus placed in total correspondence.” The envelope thus provides a structure within which a form can repeat while both the interior and the exterior sculptures simultaneously come together and explode.

Buren playfully expands this notion of repetition in a 1989 cabane whose punning title, Une enveloppe peut en cacher une autre (One envelope may conceal another), alludes to the type of warning commonly found at railroad crossings in France: “Un train peut en cacher un autre.” Une enveloppe peut en cacher une autre initially consisted of a large cabane constructed around the space of Geneva’s Rath Museum. Within the large cabane ten smaller cabanes were installed. This proliferation drew upon an integral component of Buren’s earlier work, in which his double art structures—often on/in separate sites and anticipating the mirroring effect of forms located at once within and without the museum—were an imperative.
feature of his critique of art and society.

The same fascination with the doubling process, and ultimately with repetition, led Buren to characterize the Cabanes éclatées as sites within sites, places within places (“des sites dans des sites, des lieux dans des lieux”). The interrelationship between the sites, or places, is complex, as the condition of each is transformed by their interaction. In order to explain the symbiotic relationship between interior and exterior—between the central core, the surrounding mobile elements, and the external casing or shell of the gallery space—Buren employs a biological metaphor: the surrounding space is likened to the thoracic cavity, and the contracting and expanding (exploding) elements to the operation of the respiratory organs. Accordingly, each part at once concurs with and transforms the others. This is one of the most visually striking aspects of walking through Buren’s sculptural installations. “When one discusses so-called mobile works (cabanes, site specific works and the like),” Buren writes, “one must not forget that, by definition, their site of installation is an integral component of their final visual form.”

As late as the mid-1980s, Buren was skeptical of the possibility of separating the actual site of exhibition—that is, the institutional frame—from the particular work. However, the codependence did not mean that the artwork had to be bound to the site where it was initially installed. Hence, the mobility of the work opened up as a possibility. With time that mobility came to form one of the fundamental characteristics of the Cabanes éclatées. Buren knew this. He referred to the mobility of the Cabanes as one of their most important characteristics. “Mobility” here must be understood not only as a feature of the metaphorically “exploding” work of art but also as a function of the permanently movable installation. Thus Buren returned to the specific (in situ) art form but problematized it to an even greater degree. What had initially motivated him when installing the first versions in Düsseldorf in 1983 was the desire to make something that could be reinstalled and, through each reinstallation and depending on elements such as the dimensions of the space, become an entirely new work.

The reconstitution of a core part of an art piece in a new locale re-creates the totality of the work, thus introducing the concept of regeneration. This process is similar to what happens in the theater, where the written text (the “play”) always remains the same but where each performance of that text differs depending on the particular style or manner of staging, as well as on variations in the composition of the audience. Thus, just as there may in principle be numerous renditions of Hamlet or Waiting for Godot, the same possibility holds true for any of the Cabanes éclatées.

The relationship between, on the one hand, performance arts
such as theater and ballet, and, on the other hand, the art of painting, has interested Buren for many years. This interest can be seen in his earlier attempts at “staging,” such as Act III (1973) where an orange-and-white-striped canvas was stretched across a stage, echoing his first Galerie Wide White Space installation in 1969. As in the theater, the underlying principle/code of the Cabanes éclatées is the repetition of a core structure in multiple environments. Although the basic parts of the structure remain constant, the core they form is inevitably transformed when relocated to a new environment. Perhaps not coincidentally, the French word for “repetition,” répétition, can also mean “theater rehearsal.” A similar coexistence and contrast between stability (text) and change (performance)—hence, repetition and difference—can be tracked back to Buren’s crucial decision to use only 8.7-centimeter-wide vertical stripes in his paintings and posters. When repeated in perpetuity, the stripes achieve a level of neutrality, approaching a degree zero of representation, as they become conduits of the changes that may follow from their interaction with their contextual or external frame.

In this regard, the Cabanes éclatées can be linked to the serial operation underlying much of Buren’s painterly practice. From 1969 to 1975, Buren presented a sequence of five exhibitions of striped material at the Galerie Wide White Space in Antwerp. The five exhibitions were essentially the same, with the only obvious variation being the different color of stripes in each show. However, because Buren’s work was installed at the same time as that of the work of other artists and because on several occasions architectural modifications had to be made to the exhibition space in order to accommodate the latter, the gallery space was substantially transformed over the years. Yet, over the course of the five exhibitions at Galerie Wide White Space, a number of developments became apparent. Each time the work of another artist was placed in the vicinity of one of Buren’s paintings, a slight though significant alteration—or difference—occurred as a result of the mutual interaction of the works. In addition, as a direct result of the process of repetition, Buren became increasingly sensitive to what he later called the “appearance of work as a means of questioning.” Finally, from year to similar (though different) year, the meaning of the initial gesture slowly but steadily eroded and was replaced by something else, something unplanned but as precious as found art; that is, the growth and accretion, from at least the third installation onward, of the role played by the memory of the first two (similar) exhibitions and by the expectation of reexperiencing the same (though differently colored) stripes.

Though by no means the first time Buren experimented with the multiple possibilities offered by serial arrangements, the five instal-
lations in Antwerp illustrate with considerable clarity Buren’s exploration of a fundamental concept that he would further develop with the *Cabanes éclatées*. The process of repetition, whether in the form of identical stripes on their supporting structures (e.g., canvas, paper, wood panels) or in the actual act of repeatedly installing the same (though different) work, has become a consistent strategy of Buren’s, one that has enabled him both to reveal and to produce difference. These ideas were, of course, symptomatic of the larger philosophical currents of the mid-1960s. In 1968 Gilles Deleuze published his theory on the relationship between the notions of difference and repetition, stressing their interdependence in the field of (art) representation. Buren could have articulated his methodological point of view as follows, though the words are Deleuze’s: “In simulacra, repetition already plays upon repetitions and difference already plays upon differences. Repetitions repeat themselves, while the differentiation differentiates itself. The task of life is to make all these repetitions coexist in a space in which difference is distributed.” Similar to Deleuze, for Buren art is inherently repetitive (rather than progressive) because, unlike the order of nature, it does not entail evolution. This epistemic framework becomes manifest in paintings characterized by a neutrality that completely cancels out the possibility of any claims for inherent meaning. Like Roland Barthes’s “degree zero of writing” (the point at which pure literature could successfully engage the struggle against traditional “littérature” and its presumptions of meaning and order), Buren’s stripped down visual language presents painting as a practice that takes meaning only from the particular site or context in which it appears—a dynamic that in the 1980s came to characterize the exploding architectural forms of the *Cabanes éclatées*.

At the heart of the internal structure of the *Cabanes éclatées* is the most elementary definition of a volumetric object; namely, a cube. That Buren adopts the cube as his primary building block is not fortuitous but in all probability directly related to the role of the cube as the quintessential form in minimal art in the 1960s. Indeed, the cube sums up much of what was at stake in minimal art. Placed on the floor, it at once systematically collapses distinctions between base and object, verticality and horizontality, and virtual and real space. Any orientation one may find in or give to a cube can be derived only from the specific characteristics of its surround-
ing environment. From this perspective, Buren’s choice of the cube as an ur-form is directly related to his early belief that an artwork draws its meaning from its exhibition context and hence must never be separated from that context, must always remain in situ. Insofar as the cube is also neutral in signification and located at the zero degree of representation, Buren’s decision to use this particular form can be linked to the motives that underscored his painterly practice.

But rather than venerate the cube as a primary form in the manner of the minimalists, Buren explodes it violently, ripping it apart. This violence is performed not only on the sculptural form but also on the particular environment within which that form is placed and which it in turn transforms. The conjunction of a number of different materials (e.g., plastic, Plexiglas, glass, wood, mirrors, iron, paper, fabric), simple shapes (i.e., vertical stripes), and changing colors opens up the work. The colors in particular dissolve the architectonic frame of the Cabanes as they link up with surrounding surfaces and objects. During a mid-1980s interview, Buren stated, “In Dusseldorf, I attempted to make a site that is, ultimately, a type of cabane for seeing, and which can be seen as a sculpture, with the entire assemblage literally sculpting the space.” Tellingly, Buren refers to his sculptural constructions not as “cubes éclatés” but with the less obvious nomenclature “cabanes éclatées.” His choice of this term might be directly related to his long-standing attempt to negotiate both art and architecture, or the architectural dimension of all art. Either way, his use of the cube is inextricably linked to his work with an equally basic architectural structure: the hut, or cabane.

Although many of the Cabanes éclatées feature cut-out or exploded shapes of various sizes (e.g., Cabane éclatée, no. 2), essentially they all employ basic forms of architecture. More than a critique of minimalism—simultaneously illustrating and blasting one of its basic principles—Buren’s Cabanes éclatées are also intended to rupture the habitual separation of interior and exterior spaces, including private and public spheres. Buren has long maintained that insofar as painting is inseparable from where it is installed, it is essentially architectural. But architecture defines the internal structure of a painting as well. In his 1975 “Notes on Work in Connection with the Places Where It Is Installed,” Buren writes,

We can speak of the internal architecture of a painting, or of any work of art. It can be said that the history of Modern
Art (in particular) is the history, recounted and repeated, of the internal architecture of the work, seen simultaneously as content and container. The history still to be made will take into consideration the place (the architecture) in which a work comes to rest (develops) as an integral part of the work in question and all the consequences such a link implies.\textsuperscript{34}

Yet if modern art is in essence architectural (a concept that fits the \textit{Cabanes éclatées}, which are not only composed but also constructed in the literal sense of the term), then any analysis of the \textit{Cabanes éclatées} has to grapple with the question of what happens when the obverse process—explosion, deconstruction—takes place? Jacques Derrida, the patron of “la déconstruction,” suggests that “to deconstruct the artefact named architecture is perhaps to think about it as an artefact, to rethink its artefacture and therefore its technique at the point where it remains uninhabitable”; that is, at the point where it is not a shelter.\textsuperscript{35} A cabane is normally supposed to provide a form of shelter. But Buren’s \textit{Cabanes éclatées} invert this process, turn the inside out, such that rather than providing a haven they instead expose and incorporate the exterior into the interior. The \textit{Cabanes éclatées} break the usual association of architecture with habitation, just as Buren’s earlier work broke the conventional association between painting and expression. With the \textit{Cabanes} Buren also deviates from the utilitarian idea of the hut, as a structure that provides shelter from the elements, to the ideal of a hut that shelters against the encroachment of urban life. Accordingly,
Buren’s *Cabanes éclatées* sublimate architecture’s traditional concern for the welfare of the body with a concern for the health of the mind, the latter of which requires its own meditative space.

Buren’s development of the ur-forms of cube and hut within the context of sculpture can also be seen as an outgrowth of his politics. In “Deconstruction and Art/The Art of Deconstruction,” the philosopher Andrew Benjamin traces “Descartes’ use of what could be called an architectural metaphor to (his need to) present his conception of how to envisage a radical new beginning in philosophy.”36 Similarly, Buren resorts to a theoretical architectural model in order to present his radical aesthetic theory because, as he claims, “theory and theory alone can make possible a revolutionary practice.”37 Descartes was drawn to architecture because it enabled him to better present new ideas while operating with a core structure whose very repetition remained unquestioned, an attraction that is uncannily echoed in Buren’s systematic employment of vertical stripes or cubes in ever-changing contexts and to ever-changing effects.38 In effect, for Buren the repeated presence of the core functions like a mirror, or foil, against which new ideas can be measured and differences perceived. As he once put it, “Deconstruction is not destruction but an attempt to produce another type of construction. . . . One deconstructs in order to know a situation. . . . Deconstruction is a type of research, of intelligence, whether it be intuitive or conscious, a questioning.”39 This stand is not only positive but remarkably optimistic. Indeed, a trace of utopianism is always found in Buren’s work and writings, and even the deconstructed and exploding *Cabanes éclatées* have the resonance of an architecture that is “as utopian as raising children” (utopique comme en bâtissent les enfants).40 This utopian perspective, more than anything else, animates the formal quality of Buren’s work.

While many of the *Cabanes éclatées* have been installed in the interior space of galleries or museums, some, such as *Cabane éclatée pour une fontaine* (1996), explode outward through a cut-out mirror marked with the familiar motif of alternating white and (in this particular case) ochre vertical stripes. The inclusion of mirrors in this and other *Cabanes éclatées* serves multiple goals. The mirrors create a reflecting or doubling effect, multiplying the internal and the external spaces and opening onto another reality. They also embed the surrounding exterior in the work. As a result the *Cabanes* produce a multiplicity of perspectives. From the outside, viewers see a virtual kaleidoscope of views of both the interior and exterior as they walk around the sculpture.
Standing inside, they behold an astonishing and tumultuous mingling of random patterns of reflections within mirrors and semitransparent walls. At the same time, spectators are given a view of the exterior envelope space of the Cabane that is reflected back onto the core of the sculpture. The multiplicity of parts, surfaces, and optical effects disorients viewers, prompting them to question the manner in which more conventional spaces of art manipulate the public and vision within the frame of a total impression. Buren has written of the power of a mirror that “integrates in its own being a different reality, foreign to its form.” “The mirror,” he writes, “as soon as it is used, renders more evident that any work is only a fragment of a larger ensemble.” For Buren, the work that we behold is only a fragment of a much greater totality and an indication that something else is always going on.

Although Buren’s artistic practice has from the beginning been characterized by an indexicality that motivates contemplation of the broader institutional and social context beyond the conventional frame of the work, the Cabanes éclatées push this strategy of displacement one step further. Rather than pointing elsewhere, the sculptural installations explode into their environment, as if a bomb had been tossed into the totality of the configuration. The politically explosive implications of the Cabanes éclatées should not be ignored. After all, the artist has on numerous occasions reflected upon the profound impact the writings of prominent leftist intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean-Luc Godard, and the situationists have had on his working method. More important, however, is the indirect influence of a certain milieu, or social environment, in postwar France, a time marked by the anticolonial wars in French Indochina and Algeria—a period that played a fundamental part in the intellectual formation of many in France from the 1940s to the 1960s. The wars in French Indochina and Algeria weighed heavily on Buren, as he has noted on several occasions: “Thus, the ways of thinking, the attitudes, reactions, etc., of people of my generation, even if they were not totally conscious of it, were to a certain extent influenced by the succession of colonial wars.”

But what effect might the postcolonial struggles and wars have had on Buren’s artistic practice? In a colonial system a dominant power maintains or extends control over a colonized people through a well-oiled oppressive mechanism. The similarity between this system and Buren’s description of the “system of the artworld” (which includes “museums, galleries, critics, collectors and also
the whole economic, political and cultural apparatus: namely the dominant ideological system which governs it”) is remarkable. Buren has repeatedly contended that the art world, museums in particular, is engaged in a process of disarticulating contradictions and producing a type of culture that will fit the dominant, quasi-colonial ideology.

Within the parameters of the art world, Buren’s artistic strategies function in a manner akin to those of the anticolonial struggle against the oppressive, dominant power of the occupying establishment. As such, Buren’s art practice is analogous to that which Deleuze and Félix Guattari observe in a discussion of what they refer to as “minor” literature. The cultural production that emerges in occupied countries, Deleuze and Guattari argue, is always political and takes a form that is essentially rhizomatic, that sinks its massive roots into the ground. The operating principle of Buren’s work, forming clusters that move through the space, is also rhizomatic and evokes the working methods of the guerrilla movements that enabled the Vietnamese and the Algerians to defeat the French colonialists with innovative and unorthodox strategies. “The action,” Buren writes of the strategies that underscore his work, “must proceed on to another level and in the first place break with the authorities, which in the last instance benefit the authorities only.” This idea of assault and escape, of hit-and-run tactics, of perpetually breaking with the authorities and moving on before they become stronger by repairing the rupture, best sums up the operation of the Cabanes éclatées.

Buren’s artistic strategy functions as a kind of guerrilla warfare against the dominant institutions of the art world. His work sabotages the usual game, “abolishing its rules by playing with them, and playing another game, on another or the same ground, as a dissident.” As viewers enter the astonishing realm of the Cabanes éclatées, where habitual perspectives are fundamentally challenged and reconfigured, they must readjust their relationship to the surrounding world. The Cabanes éclatées thus propose an alternative reality to that which exists—a reality based on critique and revolutionary practice. Toward the end of his short life, Frantz Fanon asked that his legacy be remembered as that of a person who always questioned. For Buren, whose work constantly poses them, questions alone are not enough. His aim is perpetually to challenge, to disturb, and just as quickly to move on before the system being problematized is reconfigured and able to assimilate even its most trenchant critique.

As installed at l’Institut d’art contemporain, Villeurbanne, December 1999.
Notes


5. In “Why Write?” Buren explains that “My writing shouldn’t obscure the fact that my main activity is tied to the ambition of making visible the ‘not-yet-seen’: the two activities can neither be isolated or confused” (4). The relationship between the visible and the invisible in Buren’s work is the theme of Jean-Francois Lyotard’s essay, “Making the Invisible Seen, or: Against Realism,” in Les couleurs / Les formes, 26–39. Lyotard proposes that the problem between what is visible and what remains obscured “can only be resolved if the visible and the invisible are not perfectly distinct entities; only if you suppose a mutual imbrication of the two. . . . If the visible, the invisible; if the invisible, the visible” (28).


9. Buren, “Critical Limits,” in 5 Texts, 48. Buren idiosyncratically uses the binary terms “recto” and “verso” to talk not about right and left but about front and back, interior and exterior, visible and invisible.

10. Buren has repeatedly acknowledged the importance of Godard for him. For example, he lists Godard among others: our “references were more to authors such as Leiris, Bataille, Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, Nietzsche, Beckett, the situationists, the New Wave, and above all Godard.” (Nos références étaient plutôt des auteurs comme Leiris, Bataille, Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, Nietzsche, Beckett, les situationnistes, la Nouvelle Vague et surtout Godard.) Daniel Buren, “Entrevue avec Anne Baldessari” (1987), in Les écrits, vol. 3, 206.


13. “Aside from the interior/exterior play within the same volume of space, I was interested in the movement and appearance of this open box which are always new from one space to the other, a little bit like a lung which as it breathes in and out occupies a greater or smaller space within the thorax.” (Outre le jeu intérieur/ extérieur dans un même volume, ce qui m’intéresse c’est que le mouvement et


15. Almost all of the Cabanes are mobile. The exceptions include La rencontre des sites (Nouvelle Biennale de Paris, XIIIème Biennale de Paris, March 1985); Une enveloppe peut en cacher une autre (Musée Rath, Geneva, March 1989); Cabane éclatée aux miroirs (Palais des Nations, Office des Nations Unies, Geneva, July 1995); Erscheinen, Scheinen, Verschwinden = Paraître, apparaître, disparaître. 7 Cabanes éclatées (Kunstsammlung Nordrhein Westfalen, Düsseldorf, June 1996); Refléter—Miroiter: Cabane éclatée pour une fontaine (Galerie d’art contemporain, Art Tower, Mito, Japan, August 1996); Diffuser—Concentrer: Blanche est la lumière. Cabane éclatée ou Le Rêve matinal d’un jeune homme (Galerie d’art contemporain, Art Tower, Mito, Japan, August 1996); Implosion ou la cabane aux quatre piliers (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nancy, France, June 1997); Cabane éclatée polychrome aux miroirs (Guggenheim Museum Soho, New York, October 1998); and Colour—Transparency: Cabane(s) éclatée(s) no. 26A and 26B (Portikus, Frankfurt, November 1998).

16. Buren states the Cabanes are “mobile and that mobility is, among others, one of their important characteristics, compared with the majority of my other works” (mobiles et dont [la mobilité] est d’ailleurs l’une des caractéristiques d’importance, comparée à la plupart de mes autres travaux). Salmon, “Entretien avec Daniel Buren,” 6.

17. A case in point is the Cabane éclatée, no. 2. First presented at l’ARCA in Marseilles in 1984, it was subsequently reconstituted for an exhibition at Le Nouveau Musée in Villeurbanne in 1986, and then at the Musée national d’art moderne, Centre national d’art et de culture Georges Pompidou, in Paris in 1987. Similarly, La cabane éclatée, no. 12 made its first appearance at the Lisson Gallery, London, in 1986; its second installation was at Le Nouveau Musée in Villeurbanne in 1986. As a matter of course, when a work can be, and indeed is, reinstalled, the work assumes a certain degree of permanence.

18. The participation of readers and spectators in the determination of meaning should not be underestimated.

19. Act III was staged at the New Theatre in January 1973, sponsored by John Weber. Act III marked the third time Buren had staged a performance. The other two were in Paris in 1967 and in Belgrade in 1972. For Buren, the stage epitomizes an art of spectacle: “The theatrical framework obviously reinforces the spectacular aspect inherent in all works of art the moment they are exhibited and thereby placed into action.” (Le cadre théâtre évidemment renforce le côté spectacle inhérent à toute œuvre d’art à partir du moment où elle s’expose et donc se met en scène.) Daniel Buren, Discordance/Cohérence (Utrecht: Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 1976), 29.

20. “The succession of vertical bands is also arranged methodically, always the same [x,y,x,y,x,y,x,y,x, etc.], thus creating no composition on the inside of
the surface area to be looked at, or, if you like, a minimum or zero or neutral composition.” Buren, “Beware,” 13.


22. Buren left the choice of particular color to the gallery’s director.

23. As he explains in regard to the final installation, “It is important to note that in order to meet the needs of the previous installation (by Bruce Nauman) certain internal modifications had been made. The interior architecture had been changed, therefore I had to modify my plans accordingly.” (A noter que pour les besoins de l’exposition précédente [Bruce Nauman] certaines modifications internes avaient été nécessaires. L’architecture intérieure ayant changée, mon propre travail s’en trouva par la même sensiblement modifié.) More generally, each year different economic and/or social forces were at work. As he described in 1976, in the last analysis “these five exhibitions are, in part, the history of the gallery” (ces 5 expositions sont, en partie, l’histoire de la galerie). Buren, Discordance/Cohérence, 44.

24. In the original, “apparition du travail comme moyen de questionnement et non comme trouvaille, mouvante et superficielle.” Buren, Discordance/Cohérence, 12.

25. “Accentuating the role of memory and knowledge in understanding the work in this delimited and familiar space, the third exhibition/installation eliminated the surprise occasioned by the second—a formal repetition of the first.” (Accentuation du rôle du souvenir et aussi de la connaissance dans la compréhension du travail dans cet espace défini et connu, cette troisième exposition annulant également l’effet de surprise occasionné par la seconde—répétition formelle de la première.) Buren, Discordance/Cohérence, 28.


27. Deleuze, xx.

28. “As soon as the visible shape is neutral, it is no longer evolutionary which means that a neutral shape can be followed by another identical or different neutral shape. . . . The concept of progress or perfectibility has been eliminated.” Daniel Buren, “Interview with Georges Boudaille” (1968), trans. Alexander Alberro, in Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 69.

29. “A repetition which is ever divergent and non-mechanical, used as a method, allows a systematic closing-off and, in the same moment that things are closed off (lest we should omit anything from our attempts at inquiry), they are cancelled out. Cancelled out through lack of importance.” Daniel Buren, “Beware,” 17.

30. An exploding cube, to be precise: “The Cabanes are to be exploded into the four corners of the surrounding environment. . . . It’s by their explosion into the surrounding space that they manifest their necessary character. . . . At the core, there is a cube.” (Les Cabanes devant être “explosées” aux quatre coins de l’environnement qui les reçoit. . . . C’est par leur éclatement sur l’espace environnant que ces-ci manifestent leur caractère nécessaire. A la base, il y a une cube.) Buren, “Entrevue avec Anne Baldessari,” 237.

31. “The constant that is always used is the alteration of white-color or white-transparency. That has remained the same for twenty years. But the difference in the color of the stripe indicates that the sign in question is extremely open.” (La seule chose toujours utilisée c’est l’alternance blanc-couleur, blanc-transparance. C’est immuable depuis vingt ans. Mais a couleur change, ca donne déjà une idée que le signe en question est extremement ouvert.) Daniel Buren, “Entretien avec Benoît Artaud” (1986), in Les écrits, vol. 3, 169.
32. Indeed, the colors in the *Cabanes éclatées* are so intense and the impression they make is so overwhelming that even Buren, usually articulate, stumbles when required to comment on his use of color. For instance, while recognizing the importance of color, he acknowledges how poorly understood it is by contemporary artists, including himself: “Color, according to me, is essential for my work. By definition, it is one of those rare elements that is completely inescapable and inexpressible.” (La couleur est, à ma falcon, essentielle à mon travail. Par définition elle en est l’un des rares éléments totalement incontournables et indécibles.) Salmon, “Entretien avec Daniel Buren,” 8.


38. “Descartes’ desire for the new involved a repetition of the architectonic within philosophy. It remained unquestioned and hence it was repeated.” Benjamin, “Deconstruction and Art/The Art of Deconstruction,” 41.


42. The fragmentary nature of Buren’s work can be traced back to his early installations in which “each individual piece is then nothing but a fragment of a (so-called) painting which moves through a given space.” Buren, *Discordance/Cohérence*, 50. In 1973, Buren even produced a series of three works entitled *Fragment 1*, *Fragment 2*, and *Fragment 3*. (The works were installed at the Mezzanine Gallery, Anna Leonwens Gallery, and exterior 6152 Coburg Road, all in Halifax, Nova Scotia, April 1973.)


45. The museum, Buren writes, “tends to unify and smooth over contradictions. It is the supermarket of culture. . . . [Museums] write History with much more assurance than any artwork could, by dispossessing it of its content for the benefit of its form.” Buren, *Reboundings*, 65.


