Sherrie Levine's Art History

Author(s): Howard Singerman

Source: *October*, Summer, 2002, Vol. 101 (Summer, 2002), pp. 96-121

Published by: The MIT Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/779195

Sherrie Levine's Art History

HOWARD SINGERMAN

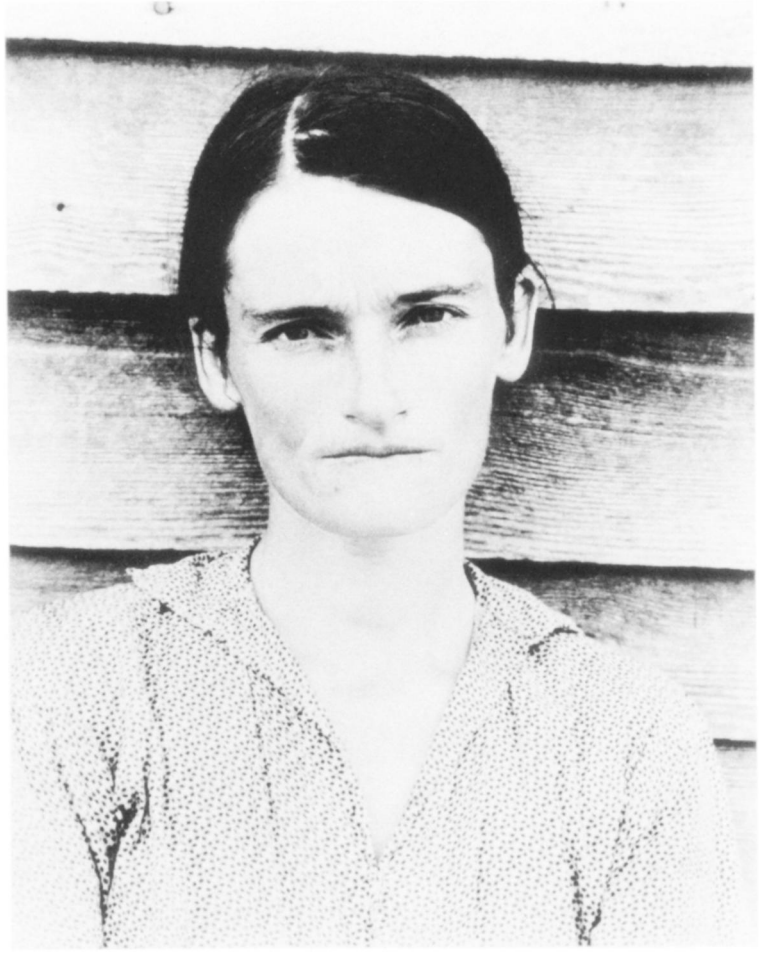
This essay began as many art-history essays do, as a slide lecture,[1] and I've taken the liberty of leaving in the text some of those signals that once pointed to the screen and now point mostly back to that origin. I've kept them in because the piece is in part about such lectures and the place of art history's object within them. At one point early on, I invoke Michael Baxandall's argument that for art history in this century, "the object is present or available—really, or in reproduction, or in memory"—and it is pointed to: Art-historical practice, written as well as spoken, is "ostensive" and "demonstrative."[2] The essay is also about Sherrie Levine; she is, as I'm sure others have already argued, a product of those lectures. Her work has long depended on the reproductions that have shaped modern art-historical practice and on the media in which reproduction, disciplinary practice, and pointing all take place: photography and language. Obviously, Levine's work is shaped by art history; it requires art history's discourse and images. I will argue that she works increasingly not only after art history, as its product, but also about it—as an art historian, or, better, a historiographer. I take her work in the pages that follow as a kind of—and a test of—historical representation, a recasting, sometimes literally, of the objects rendered by historical knowledge from the work of art.

I am not the first to take Sherrie Levine as an art historian; she was, as it happens, in residence as a scholar at the Getty Research Institute in 2000–01. And I am certainly not the first to take her as something other than an artist in the conventional sense. Writing in 1982 of an exhibition of six pictures after the paintings of Franz Marc, high-end reproductions of the German artist's works

1. This essay began as an informal presentation to a departmental faculty seminar at the University of Virginia, and took something like its present form as a lecture given at the Getty Research Institute in conjunction with an exhibition by Sherrie Levine and Joost van Oss of works after Gerrit Rietveld. I would like to take the opportunity to thank members of both audiences for their comments; I have tried to take their suggestions into account. I would particularly like to Sherrie Levine for her support of this rather long-term project, and Sande Cohen both for his specific comments on this paper, and for an ongoing discussion. This is for Sande.

2. Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 8–9.

OCTOBER 101, Summer 2002, pp. 96–121.



framed and mounted under glass, the late Craig Owens remarked that once again, as in all her work to that point—particularly her photographs after Walker Evans, Edward Weston, and Eliot Porter—Levine had "assumed the functions of the dealer, the curator, the critic—everything but the creative artist."[3] I borrow Owens's observation here not only to add "art historian" to his list, but also to let someone else speak first. Owens was one of Levine's best early critics, and I will turn at the end of this essay to his still fruitful two-part work "The Allegorical Impulse" to suggest, in Levine's case, both its accuracy and its prematurity. Here I want him to raise certain issues and terms I'd like to have on the table, to have already been spoken. It is difficult to start discussing Levine without invoking the basic statements and ideas that seem to begin any discussion of her work. Her work is, after all, about certain assumptions: it requires knowing too much from the outset—proper names and theoretical projects—even before one looks at it in any particular instance. It stands in difficult relation to beginnings, to origins and first instances; it relies on a certain reversal of before and after: the original work appears as an original, as a before, only when it has been called on to defend itself from its double—only after Levine's work has come after it.

One other thing Owens's quote might do—particularly that "everything but the creative artist"—is to recall that Levine's work was received from the outset with Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author"; in a statement from 1981, she herself used Barthes in unattributed paraphrase to situate her work: "the birth of the viewer must be at the cost of the painter."[4] First read as work against the "oeuvre," as one of the central figures for the author, for his organization and coherence, Levine now, some twenty years later, has a body of work of her own. Moreover, that work itself has a body: it is increasingly embodied, three-dimensional, sculptural. There are, this essay will argue, lessons to be learned from this thickening of Levine's work—of the material substance of the object, of the time of looking, of the name of the artist—things to be said about what continues from her oeuvre's earlier moment, and what differs from it. Some of those lessons—about method and pedagogy—are lessons for and about art history.

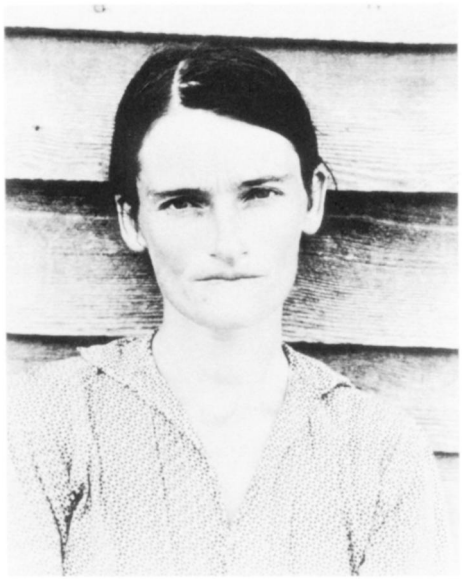
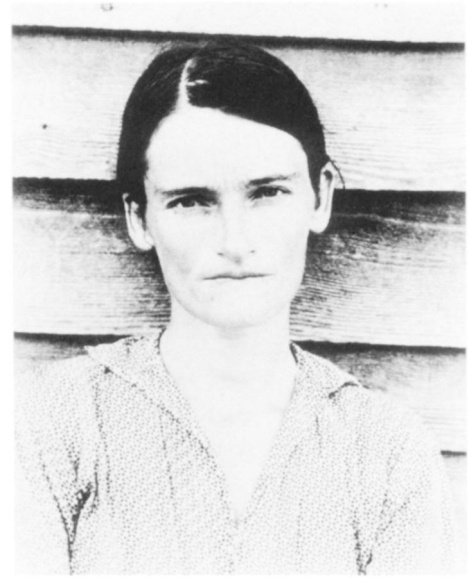
"This image is a photograph by Walker Evans, first entitled *Alabama Cotton Tenant Farmer's Wife,* usually called *Allie Mae Burroughs, Hale County, Alabama, 1936.*" One could take this sentence at face value as a philosophically normal, "constative" sentence, in the sense that is either true or false. In these pages the readers I imagine know what comes next: the statement is "false"—this is not Evans's photograph but Sherrie Levine's *After Walker Evans 4,* of 1981. It might be more difficult than that. Any number of commentators on Levine's work have linked it to the readymade, usually to the readymade in what one might call its weakest form. The

3. Craig Owens, "Sherrie Levine at A&M Artworks," *Art in America* 70, no. 6 (June 1982), p. 148.
4. See her "Five Comments" in Brian Wallis, ed., *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, and Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), pp. 92–93.

model is—and here I use Benjamin Buchloh's rather strong description—"Robert Rauschenberg's notorious act of speech-act aesthetics: 'This is a portrait of Iris Clert if I say so.'"[5] The statement "This is a Sherrie Levine," then, might also be read as a speech act, a performative: it enacts the condition, the contract or transformation, to which it refers. Its effective meaning is not so much locutionary—concerning the verifiable content of the statement—as it is illocutionary: it performs its work in "appropriate circumstances," in a context and for an audience that understands, or at least repeats and is organized by convention.[6] (As Abigail Solomon-Godeau has remarked, "outside of this specialized site, a Sherrie Levine could just as well be a . . . 'genuine' Walker Evans."[7]) The performative opens out language toward the event and its context; it is marked by its uniqueness, by its particular use "at a definite date and place."[8] But the speech act opens as well onto the repetitions and dividedness of the sign. If "the act of signature" (the crucial act of the artist) is a taking of responsibility—"the written equivalent of the explicitly performative utterance, 'I hereby'"[9]—it seems also the case that, as Derrida has argued both with and against J. L. Austin around the signature and its unique embeddedness in a particular moment, "In order to function, that is, in order to be legible, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production. It is its sameness which, in altering its identity and singularity, divides the seal."[10] Repeated, modeled, imitated, and bound by convention to the particular situation of its use, Derrida's description of the signature and Austin's of the speech act seem a fairly accurate description of Levine's work after Walker Evans, her signing and re(a)signing. But the sentences I started with—both the claim for Walker Evans, and the one for Sherrie Levine—were not hers, but mine.

Making this image a Sherrie Levine isn't a simple question of true or false—although, clearly, taking either one of those statements as true would already situate our interpretation. As Michael Baxandall has argued, the objects of art-historical explanation are not "pictures" but "pictures considered under descriptions," "under partially interpretive descriptions."[11] Levine's first lesson for

5. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art, 1962–1969: From an Aesthetics of Administration to a Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990), p. 126.
6. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 6 and passim.
7. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Living with Contradictions: Critical Practices in the Age of Supply-Side Aesthetics," in Carol Squiers, ed., *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), p. 62.
8. Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics,* trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971), p. 236.
9. This is Jonathan Culler, glossing Austin's argument on Derrida's behalf in *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 125. Austin's remarks on signature and "the 'hereby' formula" in *How to Do Things with Words* appear in Lecture V.
10. Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 328–29.
11. Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention,* pp. 1, 11.

art historians is that the description begins earlier than we might imagine: it begins, as it were, before the beginning, with the name of the author. My point is not that one or the other of the statements is false, or even that such statements are always false in the sense of that familiar art-historical complaint that the slide reproduction is always an inadequate representation of the work of art. Rather it is that the statement is already performing, it has already begun to do work, to tell differences; in some works, it might be the only difference we can tell. Such performances aren't, then, the peculiar act of the artist—Rauschenberg or Levine or Duchamp—but are part of the everyday conventions of the art-history classroom, where what we say is precisely, "This is a Sherrie Levine . . . ," or a Walker Evans or a Piero della Francesca. Art works are named and produced every day, brought into being as fact and made to answer to the constative. (And in response to Buchloh's argument that reducing the readymade to a "speech act" leaves out "its structural logic, its features as an industrially produced object of use and consumption, its seriality, and the dependence of its meaning on context,"[12] one could offer Emile Benveniste's comment that the performative "has existence only as an act of authority."[13] That should be particularly obvious in the vicinity of the classroom.)

Levine has remarked that she doesn't much like the idea of hanging her work with its "original," a Walker Evans on one side and the Sherrie Levine after it on the other, perhaps because, in Solomon-Godeau's words, such pairings reduce "difference to sameness (a shorthand description for the eventual fate of most, if not all, initially transgressive cultural practices)."[14] But on the screen or side-by-side on the page sameness seems unsettling, too. It's difficult to know what to do

12. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art, 1962–1969," p. 126.
13. Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, p. 236.
14. Solomon-Godeau, "Living with Contradictions," p. 69.

Left: Walker Evans. Alabama Cotton Tenant Farmer's Wife, Hale County, Alabama. *1936.*
Right: Sherrie Levine. After Walker Evans: 4. *1987.*

with such a juxtaposition, how to begin, as we usually would, by pointing out the interesting differences. As I noted with Baxandall at the outset, we teach in the presence of the object or its representatives, and our descriptions of it are not exhaustive, covering—as one might say Levine's are, of Evans—but ostensive and demonstrative: we are pointing to the object, and pointing out interesting things within it.[15] "Interesting" in front of images, particularly in front of the double slides that since Wölfflin have characterized the discipline, means "differentiating"; a pair of images like this should present itself, at least by the time of the midterm or the final, as a kind of subtraction problem, an implicit and directed ciphering out of sameness and difference. That difference is central not only to the discipline but also to the production of history or its effects, even when we work on only one picture at a time. At least this is what I take Stephen Bann to mean when he writes of the development of a new historical consciousness in nineteenth-century Europe, "reading and interpreting historical representations implies a capacity for specific discriminations and distinctions. . . . historical-mindedness developed through the establishment of differences."[16] What, then, are we to make of this repetition of the same as it flattens out, and flattens out differences, across the screen?

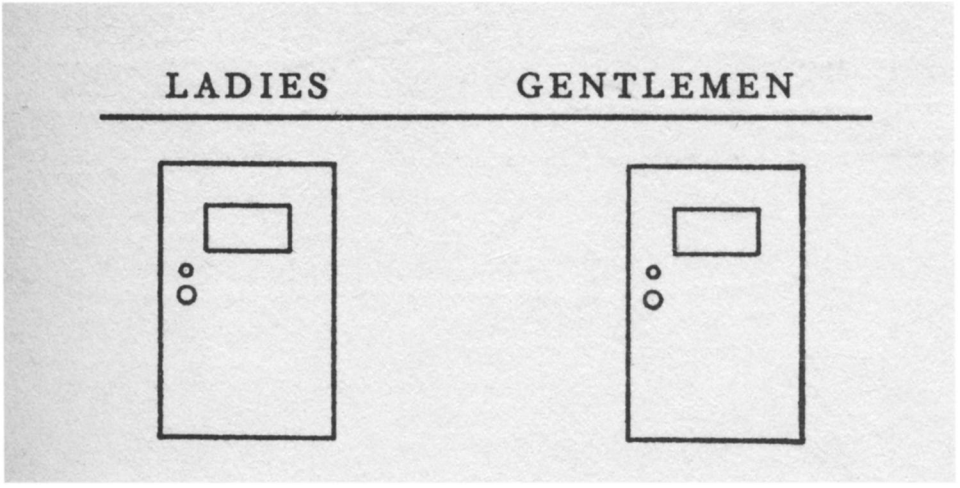
There is a difference between the two images, or it might be more accurate to say that there is a space between them that constitutes a difference belonging to neither of them. After Levine, I have come to think of that curious space between slides as a function, or the space of a function, into which one inserts the signs for greater or less than, addition or subtraction. If, in this particular equation, one wanted to name or to measure the space between the Evans and the Levine, one could say with Duchamp that it was *infra thin*. Levine herself has used the term, in a seminar at the Getty: "I am interested in that infra thin difference between what was decided on but does not make its way into the work, and what makes its way into the work but what was not decided on."[17] Levine's use of the term is different from mine, which is not surprising; for Duchamp infra thin "could only be understood from examples."[18] One way Duchamp used the term was to describe—and to introduce difference into—the undifferentiated series of mechanical production: "the difference/ (dimensional) between/ 2 mass produced objects/ . . . / is an infra thin. . . . In time the same object is not the/ same after a 1 second interval."[19] Dalia Judovitz glosses Duchamp's notes: "it seems that the

15. Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, pp. 8–9.
16. Stephen Bann, "History as Competence and Performance: Notes on the Ironic Museum," in Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner, eds., *A New Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 197, 200.
17. Sherrie Levine, seminar presentation, Getty Research Institute, typescript provided by the artist, May 18, 2001.
18. Molly Nesbit, "Last Words (Rilke, Wittgenstein) (Duchamp)," in Adrian Rifkin, ed., *About Michael Baxandall* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 87.
19. Marcel Duchamp, in Dalia Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 129.

reproduction, and hence, repetition of the object generates an infinitesimal difference. . . . By drawing the viewer's attention to the temporal dimension involved in the process of mass production, Duchamp inscribes a delay, an infra thin distance, into its principle of identity. . . . all reproduction involves a temporal dimension mediating the presence of the object."[20] Duchamp's infra thin might begin to move things along, to open up the flat surface of the screen to the difference that opens up the idea of history, but if Duchamp's concept does introduce a temporality or a sequence, it seems precisely not a history, but rather a sort of continuous and ongoing stopping of the historical in sheer repetition, in the "one thing after another" of the assembly line and, of course, of Donald Judd. And even this doesn't go on very long: Duchamp freezes the relation between one object and the next; it is not temporal difference that catches him up, but spatial, and then sexual, opposition. Writing further on the infra thin, he says, "separation has the 2 senses male and female."[21]

It seems Saussure lies in wait for Duchamp: at the level of the sign and of substitution—the two things with which Duchamp began—difference, however small, becomes opposition. "Although both the signified and the signifier are purely differential and negative when considered separately, their combination is a positive fact. . . .When we compare signs—positive terms—with each other, we can no longer speak of difference. . . . Between them there is only *opposition.*"[22] That opposition, Saussure makes clear, is a purely formal and systematic one, like the binary opposition between ones and zeros in the computer, between marked and unmarked terms, or between Walker Evans and not Walker Evans—which is the functional position of the image I've called "Sherrie Levine" in the pair Walker Evans and *After Walker Evans.* The opposition that language relies on, on which all of its meanings and choices are constructed—Saussure's "between them there is only opposition"—might be used to signify and to structure sexual difference as well. The marked and the unmarked, the one and zero, the this and not this: these have very long roots. You might recall another such comparison, another juxtaposition of the same that Lacan produces in the course of a long passage on the construction of meaning as such on binary opposition: the two identical doors that appear as if by magic under the signs, or rather the signifiers, "ladies" and "gentlemen." "By doubling a noun through the mere juxtaposition of two terms whose complementary meanings ought apparently to reinforce each other, a surprise is produced by an unexpected precipitation of an unexpected meaning."[23] From here it's easy to make meanings for Levine's work, layering over

20. Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp,* p. 129.
21. Duchamp, in Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp,* p. 130.
22. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics,* ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye in collaboration with Albert Riedlinger, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), pp. 120–21.
23. Jacques Lacan, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud," in *Écrits: A Selection,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), p. 151.



the initial opposition any number of others: male and female, the original and copy, the artist and "everything but the creative artist," as Owens put it, or before and after—an opposition I will come to. Indeed, insofar as Levine's work repeats the very engine of the generation of language, it is difficult to stop generating meaning from it, out of its small difference from, and absolute opposition to, the work it is at once just like and not. Unable to show its difference, to make it visible, it presents itself (if I can use that word) as a kind of "negative perception." I can show it here, but it shows us nothing. Rather, as Samuel Weber has written of the scene of castration, it is "*a crisis of phenomenality*"; one that inaugurates a world that "can no longer simply be *perceived*, but rather [must be] *read* and *interpreted*," that "refers itself indefinitely."[24] One can, under the sign of psychoanalysis—its doubled signs—not stop talking in relation to that absence.

I've worked for a while now to still the paired images of my comparison, to insist on their relationship as a spatial rather than a temporal one. I'd like to turn those tables slightly and to take the word "after" seriously. The word "after" in Levine's title points in a couple of different directions; let me avoid the obvious chronological meaning for a moment to take up the particular and local meaning—or usage—"after" might have for art historians: to imitate or copy, as in Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving after Raphael's *Judgment of Paris,* or Rubens's *Drawing after Leonardo's Cartoon for The Battle of Anghiari*, after Lorenzo Zacchia's engraving. Less slavishly, but still in the same mimetic realm, it can mean to work in accordance with, in the same manner or style, or, indexically, to have been directed or molded by—as in a bronze or plaster cast. Here, under this definition, something of the spatial or at least the material clings to "after," a materiality that is important to Levine's work after Brancusi, for example. The glass heads that comprise her *Newborn* are direct casts after the Brancusi *Newborn* in the Philadelphia Museum of Art's collection. Oddly enough, "after" in its temporal

24. Samuel Weber, "The Sideshow, or: Remarks on a Canny Moment," *MLN* 88 (December 1973), pp. 1119, 1112.

From Jacques Lacan, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud," in Écrits: A Selection, *trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), p. 151.*

or chronological sense turns out to be a much thinner, a much more punctual term; history in any thick sense—in the sense, for instance, that historians might speak of the "plenitude" of the past—is not what is figured, and perhaps not what is felt, in *After Walker Evans.* It's something more like what Andy Warhol offers, a simple "before" and "after."

The paired profiles of Warhol's 1962 *Before and After* do not conjure much of a middle. There is no development or duration, no influence or working through, not even (or perhaps especially not) a history. There are, quite simply, two moments: they could be any two moments or images, even the same image, set in opposition under the empty category "time." That is—and this is what I would want to say, too, about Levine's photographs after Walker Evans, or Edward Weston or Rodchenko—the relation between the two images is a formal or structural one; it is situated around a moment, a punctual division, perhaps infra thin. In this, Levine's photographs seem to demonstrate a certain kind of photographic effect, a timing that David Carroll has argued is specific to photography. Carroll's discussion of the cut and the temporality of the photograph suggests that the relation "before and after" that Levine operates is given in photographic practice, and his language certainly recalls Duchamp's—not only the artist's infra thin, but also the punctuality of the readymade, its "snapshot effect." The readymade is, Duchamp wrote, a "matter of timing . . . like a speech delivered on no matter what occasion but at *such and such*

Andy Warhol. Before and After, 3. *1962.*
© 2001: Whitney Museum of American Art.

an hour."[25] Here is Carroll: "The 'before' and 'after' inscribed within the space of the photo reveal that time is inscribed in any spatialization, that otherness disrupts identity, that no present is full and complete in itself but contains traces of the past and future within it.... To *read* a photograph is to produce a double series (at least) around it (before and after) and generating from it."[26] That double series, by the way, is reinscribed on the screen, and in the scene of art history teaching, whatever the juxtaposition: the twin slide projectors produce images side by side on the screen, images held substitutably one after another in the combinatoire of the carousel and the slide room.

Carroll's argument renders photography—each individual photograph—an implicit juxtaposition, always already part of a series that it engenders in its cut, a series that is at once both temporal and spatial, doubly articulated, as it were, but without thickness: a structural series. With it, one could argue that photography is the model for Levine's practice as well as the method or mode of it; in this, I follow Craig Owens, Douglas Crimp, and any number of writers who have situated photography—photography after Walter Benjamin—at the theoretical center of Levine's decentering project. If her work in and on photography has positioned it against the right of the author and the oeuvre, it has at the same time directed it toward the medium, toward the workings or logic of specific practices. Levine has, in fact, always been very careful about medium and its name. In her earliest works—the fashion magazine pages cut out in presidential profile, or the fine art plates mounted on railroad board—the word "collage" signified something quite particular: an edge between two things that needed to be acknowledged and read. It made clear the materiality of her practice and the particularity of her sources. I will argue in the coming pages that sculpture as a discipline and as a history of practice has been necessary to her work since 1990, her work after Man Ray and Duchamp, Brancusi, or Rietveld. I want to speak with Alex Potts's recent title about Sherrie Levine's "sculptural imagination," and to take her work of the past decade differently than I have the photographs. In their coherent, circumscribed objectness, and certainly in their media—bronze, glass, steel, aluminum—they are heir to what Potts refers to as "object-based" or "object-focused" sculpture, to modernist sculpture in its difference from both classical figurative sculpture and the nonspecific dispersals of installation or environment.[27] They refer to a history of modern sculpture biographically, of course: those coherent forms belong to someone else, to Brancusi or Duchamp. But if her recent work relies on the history of twentieth-century sculpture—on the kindness of strangers—we encounter it in the gallery as

25. Marcel Duchamp, in Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index, part 1," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), p. 206.
26. David Carroll, *The Subject in Question: The Languages of Theory and the Strategies of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 157.
27. Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 106, 3. On the distinction between object-focused sculpture and installation, and on the resistance of the sculptural object's facticity to image and consumption, see his introduction, "The Sculptural Imagination and the Viewing of Sculpture," pp. 1–23.

sculpture, a physical thing in our space that is experienced in relation to that physicality. The materiality, the weight and measure, the surfaces and aspects that frame and order that encounter in the room and in the round, are its own.

This last list is meant to slow things down, to be about the slowness of *things*; where the photographs have been marked for me in this essay by their punctuality and their thinness, by a temporality I have characterized as structural or relational, the sculptures figure a slower, fuller, I would say more historical time, or at least its effects. The physical scale of the work, the specific weight and density of the material that one "simultaneously knows, feels, and sees,"[28] the particularity of the surface: all of this slows the time of looking. The inscription of time, the inclusion or enfolding of the duration of seeing in the round, of assembling aspects—as well as the attempt to order or even overcome that duration in the immediacy of shape—have been central to the experience and thought of sculpture across the past century and a half: sculpture is cast or constructed from it, from our temporal relation to its three-dimensionality. I want to acknowledge this, to stress the work's materiality and even to suggest, although I am not clear on quite how far to press it, that the experience of the materiality of things carries in it an affective time that exceeds the structuring of space—a sense of time as such, of the sort that might be suggested by Benjamin's linking of experience and the potter's hands, or described by Bergson's durée.

There is a less fraught way for me to introduce a temporal thickness to the sculptures, to draw out the space between before and after, and to suggest for them a during, and that is by paying attention to the material choices Levine has made. She hasn't remade Rietveld exactly, or Duchamp or Brancusi, rather she has made them over—materially, physically—as something not quite themselves. Levine's choices and the "not quite" they install open up a space in the work, a space that usually runs along its surface, and is inhabited by other names. Each of the sculptures, in the very way that it signifies itself as sculpture, as part of that medium and its history in the modern period, has a second historical site figured on its surface and in its medium—what one might call a body double. Her cast bronze *Fountain* after Duchamp wears a highly polished surface that belongs to Brancusi; the writer Daniela Salvioni noticed his presence there early on: "Levine also elaborates on the question of the artist's signature . . . graft[ing] Brancusi's 'signature' surface onto Duchamp's form."[29] To recall briefly the signatures with which I began—marked both by their event and their repetition, their recognizability—it is difficult to know who is speaking here, who has signed for this urinal (as R. Mutt once signed for Duchamp), taken responsibility for its work. Rosalind Krauss, too, linked Brancusi and his resistant, depersonalized surfaces to the Duchamp of the readymades; her segue between the sculptors in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* is a quote from Sidney Geist, and signature—an odd sort of signature, one that signs

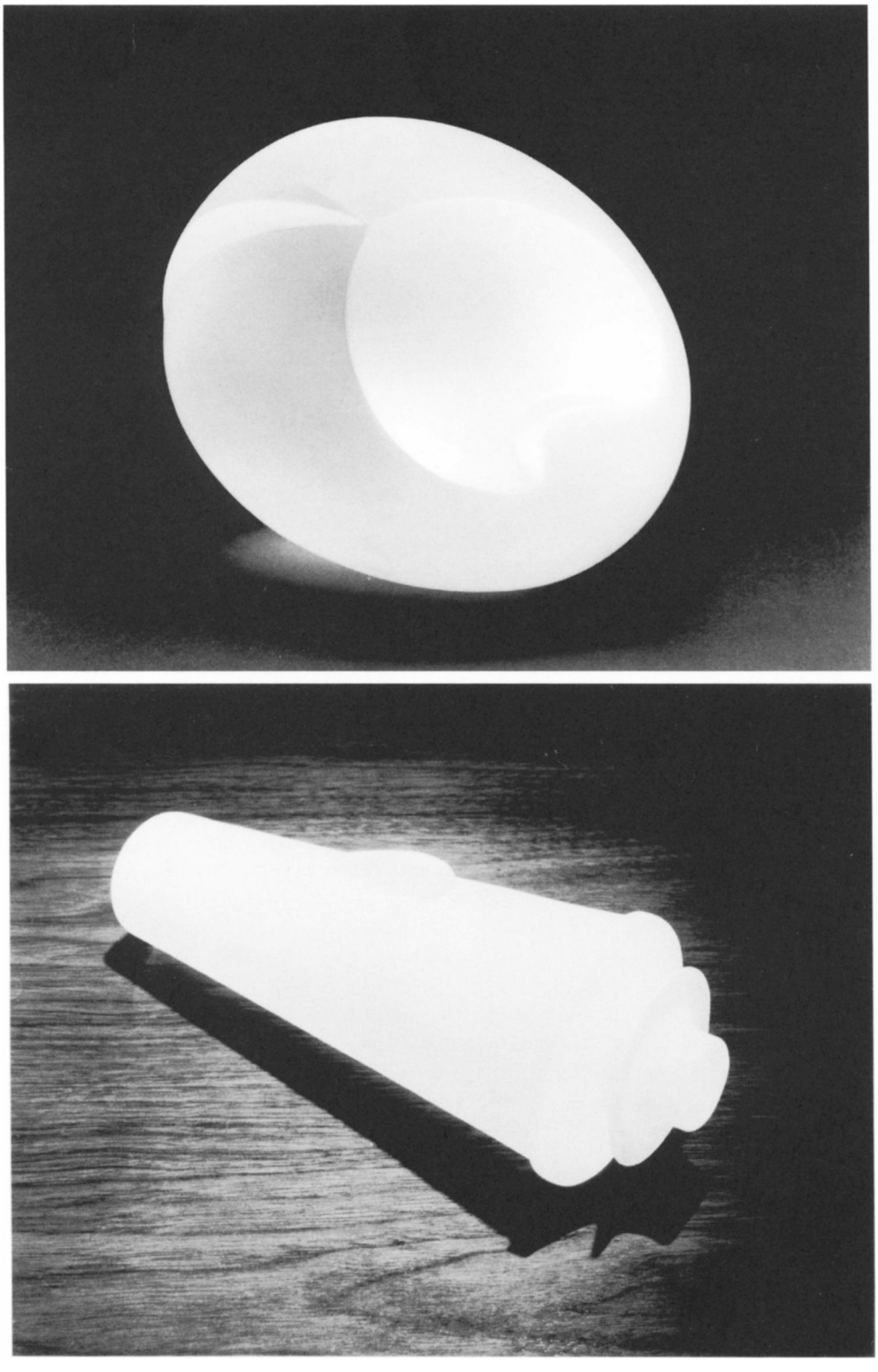
28. Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, p. 13.
29. Daniela Salvioni, "The Transgressions of Sherrie Levine," *Parkett* 32 (1992), p. 84.

Levine. Fountain: 5. *1997. Photo: Tom Powel. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery.*

anonymity—is again the issue. "The work of Brancusi, early and late, is styleless. I have observed that the sculptures often need each other, but they do not need the sculptor or his personality. The effacement of the self is known to art as the general sign of the classical artist; in Brancusi's case it is his signature."[30] The sculptures need each other: when Levine recast Brancusi's *Newborn* after the Philadelphia Museum's marble, Duchamp was its double and its medium. I take glass to be Duchamp's signature, after the *Large Glass,* of course, or the recipe he wrote out for casting the *Bachelors*—his nine "malic molds"—which Levine did in fact do, before *Newborn,* realizing them in "illuminating gas . . . a fog made of a thousand spangles of frosty gas"—or at least in frosted glass.[31]

Of course Brancusi and Duchamp had already been cast together historically around questions of originality and the copy, and of the work of art and the object of industrial design. They appear together in one of the founding anecdotes of modern art, at the 1912 Salon de la locomotion aérienne, where, with Fernand

30. Sidney Geist, in Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), p. 84.
31. Marcel Duchamp, *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (Marchand du Sel), Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 51, 53.



Top: Levine. Crystal Newborn. *1993. Photo: Kevin Noble. Bottom: Levine.* The Bachelor: Gendarme. *1989. Photo: Zindman/Fremont.*

Léger, they posed the relation of the industrial, of functionalist design, to the work of art: "Painting's washed up," Duchamp is recorded to have said. "Who'll do anything better than that propeller? Tell me, can you do that?"[32] Brancusi's reduced forms, his stainless steel and polished bronze, his "signature" surface as well as his signature absence, all might be read as Krauss, Thierry de Duve, and others have read them, as answers to that question—as might, reciprocally, Duchamp's readymades be. Duchamp and Brancusi are cast together again in a sequel to the air show, the 1927–28 trial of Brancusi's *Bird in Space*, a story as necessary for the image of a struggling modernism in America as that of the rejection of Duchamp's *Fountain* from the open-to-all-comers exhibition sponsored by the Society of Independent Artists in 1917. Duchamp, living in New York, was Brancusi's agent and public representative during the trial; with Edward Steichen, it was Duchamp who filed the initial complaint with the U.S. customs office over the work's seizure. At least in retrospect, in the afterward that Levine's art has always produced, the question the trial attempted to answer was whether one could tell their works apart: whether *Bird in Space* was, to quote from the defense brief, "the result of the artist's own creation . . . as distinguished from the productions of the manufacturer or mechanic,"[33] from the productions of the "ouvrier d'art," the title a younger Duchamp held as an apprentice engraver.

The case against *Bird in Space* was not that Brancusi's sculpture didn't look like a bird, although it was in part on that basis that the sculpture was seized: sculptures according to U.S. customs law were "reproductions by carving or casting, imitations of natural objects, chiefly the human form."[34] The bird's problem was not only its abstraction, but also its resemblance, first, to high design—to the sleek, aerodynamic, highly polished surfaces of functionalist design, to the propeller and those art deco *objets* finished in its image—and, then, of one Brancusi to another: according to the Tariff Act of 1922 there were to be "not more than two replicas or reproductions of the same."[35] Interviewed in Paris during the trial, the artist explained to a Brooklyn reporter that "my works, some of them, resemble each other so closely that the customs men think that all but one are reproductions of the others—bronze casts molded from some single original." But, he countered, "*I never make reproductions.* . . . There is no similarity whatever between them." Each "has been made under a new inspiration independent of the preceding ones. I could show . . . their subtle differences on some plaster casts."[36] Customs officials,

32. In Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, trans. Dana Polan with the author (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 110.
33. *Brancusi vs. United States: The Historic Trial, 1928*, preface by Margit Rowell, afterword by André Paleologue (Paris: Société nouvelle Adam Biro, 1999), pp. 72–73.
34. Ibid., 104.
35. Ibid., p. 99.
36. In Anna C. Chave, *Constantin Brancusi: Shifting the Bases of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 202–3.

the American public: part of Brancusi's audience could not tell the difference. They could not see the fine and subtle distinctions that Brancusi insisted on, dimensions changed an inch, or, in the case of the *Birds* of Steichen and Phillipe de Rothschild, a centimeter. Telling this difference amounts to telling the difference between the work of art and an *objet d'art,* between the artist and the designer, differences that Levine's work after Brancusi and his surface will press.

Brancusi could tell the difference, not just between *Birds,* but between categories. It is a difference inscribed not only in centimeters or in the measurable or material differences among the sixteen *Birds* or the four versions of the *Newborn,* but between the sleek, highly polished sculptures and their wooden bases. However much Brancusi's vertiginously reflective surfaces and his aerodynamically reduced forms banished differences, his conspicuously and unrepeatably hand-hewn bases insisted on them, on a list of differences: industrial vs. handcrafted, metal vs. wood, smooth vs. rough. Sidney Geist understood the crucial opposition that undergirded and structured that list of differences, that each difference pointed to and repeated: "regardless of their degree of elaboration, their beauty and aptness, they are not, as many claim, works of art but decorative objects. . . . [T]hey bespeak an area of choice or option precisely that of all designers and decorators."[37] Even through their handiwork—even through the artist's hand—they speak somehow of numbers, and of shopping. Had Brancusi lost in court, the sculpture *Bird in Space* would have been valued and assessed as Geist does the bases, alongside any number of other objects on a list that, for customs purposes, included: "table, household, kitchen, and hospital utensils, and hollow or flatware. . . . [and any other] articles or wares not specifically provided for . . . composed wholly or in chief value of iron, steel, lead, copper, brass, nickel, pewter, zinc, aluminum, or other metal . . . whether partly or wholly manufactured."[38] It would, that is, have been assessed and valued, and displayed, perhaps, in the same neighborhood as Duchamp's urinal, down the street from the J. L. Mott Iron Works, and its Fifth Avenue showroom. Writing in support of Richard Mutt's submission to the open exhibition in 1917, Beatrice Wood insisted that the *Fountain* was "not immoral. . . . It is a fixture you see everyday in plumbers' show windows."[39] It was, as Duchamp wrote in 1913, just after the air show and two years before his arrival in New York, a "question of shop windows. . . . The exigency of the shop window. . . . The shop window proof of the existence of the outside world."[40]

Duchamp's response to the shop window and Brancusi's to industrial design are not separate reactions but a single symmetrical, even symbiotic one. More

37. Geist, in Chave, *Constantin Brancusi,* pp. 224–25.
38. *Brancusi vs. United States,* p. 71.
39. Beatrice Wood, editorial, *The Blind Man,* no. 2 (May 1917), reprinted in William A. Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain:* Its History and Aesthetics in the Context of 1917," in *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century,* ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli and Francis M. Naumann (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), p. 76.
40. Duchamp, *Salt Seller,* p. 74.

effectively than the wooden or stone bases, Duchamp's readymades carve out the space for Brancusi's work to be seen as art. They are like the shop window "proof" of the interiority of the gallery and the art world against the exteriority of a world of mere goods, of products and commodities. The readymades insist on that separation; they at once rely on it and secure it. *Fountain* inoculated Brancusi against design, at once banishing and absorbing the mass-produced and industrially designed, and constructing as necessary, as obvious, perhaps, the crucial millimeters of difference Brancusi insisted on, between one *Bird* and another. Levine's *Newborn* revisits that difference; it relies on it, on both the singularity of Brancusi's sculptures *and* on their resemblance. Repeated and displayed one after another, perched not on the handmade wooden and stone bases that once supported their model and still fill Brancusi's now museum-preserved studio but on rows of baby-grand pianos, Levine's cast-glass *Newborns* cannot help but recall the customs officer's distinction, or his confusion, and still another place where Duchamp and Brancusi have been thrown together, in the collector's home, in, say, the Arensberg's Hollywood residence circa 1945.[41] The collector, it seems worth noting, is another of the roles that Craig Owens suggested Levine performs; he adds to his list, the list I started with, "the dealer, the collector, the museum" as

41. Levine included a photograph of the Arensbergs' Hollywood residence in the Philadelphia Museum of Art's catalog for *Newborn,* along with an image, taken from *Artnews,* of Brancusi's Prometheus installed atop a piano in the home of H. S. Ede (Ann Temkin, *Sherrie Levine: Newborn,* with a statement by the artist [Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1993], pp. 23, 31).

Fred R. Dapprich. Arensberg Home in Hollywood, California. *c. 1945. Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art.*

the "real agents of art world appropriation," in an art world that "restricts the artist to the manufacture of luxury goods."[42]

The customs office's distinction—its opposition—between works of art and design goods is not in the end the same kind of opposition, the sheer binarism, that structures Levine's photographs after Walker Evans. Rather, the distinction between art and design is a thicker one. Words that stand for slippery categories and involved arguments about complexly intertwined histories, art and design do not—as Brancusi's work makes clear, particularly under Levine's urging—divide cleanly. They are, one could say with terms borrowed from Nelson Goodman, dense and replete, except that Goodman's terms are meant precisely to characterize the pictorial in its difference from the articulation and disjointedness of verbal or written description. I take my particular adaptation of Goodman's language from the theorist and historiographer F. R. Ankersmit. Arguing against an understanding of historical writing as a merely metonymic collection of discrete and particular referential statements, Ankersmit extends Goodman's criteria for the pictorial sign to just such thickened terms, such "colligations" as I've tried to make art or design, and to the effect of history that the "historical text in its entirety" offers.[43] Rather than dismissing as naive history's long-standing appeals to a "picture" or "image" of the past, Ankersmit uses Goodman to trouble the relationship between the historian's visual metaphors and the questions of truth and reliability they are meant to answer, or to obviate. It is not, he argues, the past that is delivered up as a picture, but rather the "*integral* historical text" itself that works like a picture—that signifies like one—dense and replete, indissolvable.[44] He refers to this picture, the historical text's effect of totality, as its "narrative substance," a term he gives as well to the thick discursive substance that forms around and is stood for by specific terms and names—the Renaissance or the Industrial Revolution. "There are no 'things' that these names refer to and that are given to us in the way that tables or chairs are given to us. It is only thanks to *historical representation* that these 'identities' can come into being at all."[45] Even in the case of proper names, of Napoleon or Duchamp, our language does not point to an individual body, but to a historical role, and even more, to the arguments, assumptions, and interpretations that fill out that role; as Sande Cohen notes of Ankersmit's argument, "names are substantialized."[46] At the same time that he troubles their referentiality, Ankersmit insists

42. Owens, "Sherrie Levine at A&M Artworks," p. 148.
43. F. R. Ankersmit, "Statements, Texts and Pictures," in *New Philosophy of History*, p. 226. "Colligations" is a term I take, again after Ankersmit, from the historian W. H. Walsh; see Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983), pp. 99–100.
44. Ankersmit, "Statements, Texts and Pictures," p. 224.
45. Ankersmit, "Danto on Representation, Identity, and Indiscernibles," *History and Theory,* Theme Issue 37, *Danto and His Critics: Art History, Historiography, and After the End of Art,* ed. David Carrier (1998), p. 59. Ankersmit's discussion of "narrative substances" first appears in *Narrative Logic.*
46. Sande Cohen, *Passive Nihilism: Cultural Historiography and the Rhetorics of Scholarship* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), p. 23.

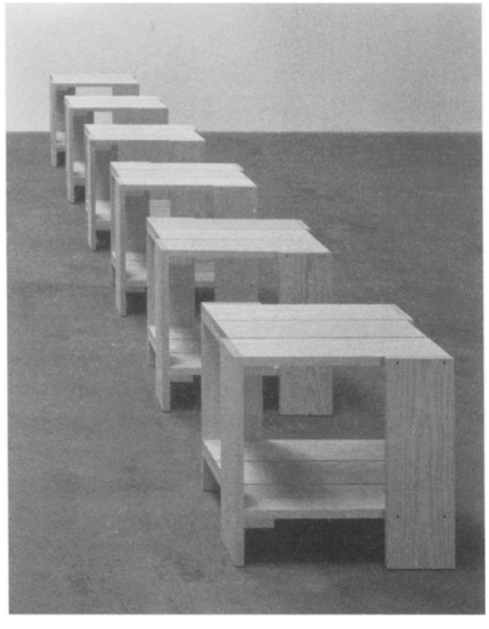
on the materiality, the substantiality, of narrative substances: "these 'images' and 'pictures'—narrative substances I shall call them—are *things*, not *concepts*."[47]

I like Ankersmit's term "narrative substances": in its appeal to visual-art practice, to both image or likeness and material, even sculptural presence, and to the name as at once a kind of thickened, sticky thing and a historical representation, it seems a good descriptor not just for art and design as I've used them, but also, and more important, for Levine's recent work. It suggests just how mixed her works are. They are formed from and projected over the bodies of other objects, objects that are, after her, made to carry and to stand as their own representation. "Narrative substances," too, it seems worth noting, resembles a couple of other models that have been situated in the vicinity of Levine's practice, other descriptions of objects as they are at once formed and doubled in representation: the object reconstructed in Barthes's structuralism, for example ("the simulacrum is intellect added to the object"), or the symptomatic object of psychoanalytic fetishism ("a fetish is a story masquerading as an object").[48] I also want to acknowledge Cohen's critique of Ankersmit, that his call for history as a picture works to preclude a broken or contested critical history, or even a critical reading, since the strongest, most "realistic" pictures rely on a doubled likeness—both a Goodmanian conventionality, a likeness to expected codes and previous representational practices, and an internal, mirroring coherence: "in the realistic historical work the form *resembles* the content."[49] In resorting to a Kantian matching of judgment and sense to find a "truth of the historical text as a whole which cannot be reduced to the truth of the separate descriptive sentences which make up the historical text," Ankersmit ends up assuming both that "pictures" (or what we mean by the word) are in a fairly simple way realist and that "a historical text is self-explanatory." One of the effects of championing history as a mode of representational painting, Cohen argues, is that "experimentation with forms of representation is kept away":[50] following his critique, one could take Levine's work as a particularly experimental form of historical representation.

I have spent some considerable time in the first quarter or so of the twentieth century reading Duchamp and Brancusi in relation to each other, according to a juxtaposition and a thesis Levine has set up. "I wanted to maximize the historical references,"[51] Levine wrote of her work after *Newborn*, and she has remarked in conversation that she began to make the sculptures because she wanted a presence in the gallery rather than an absence, an absence she linked to her photographs. If one of the critical effects of the photographs was to displace the creative

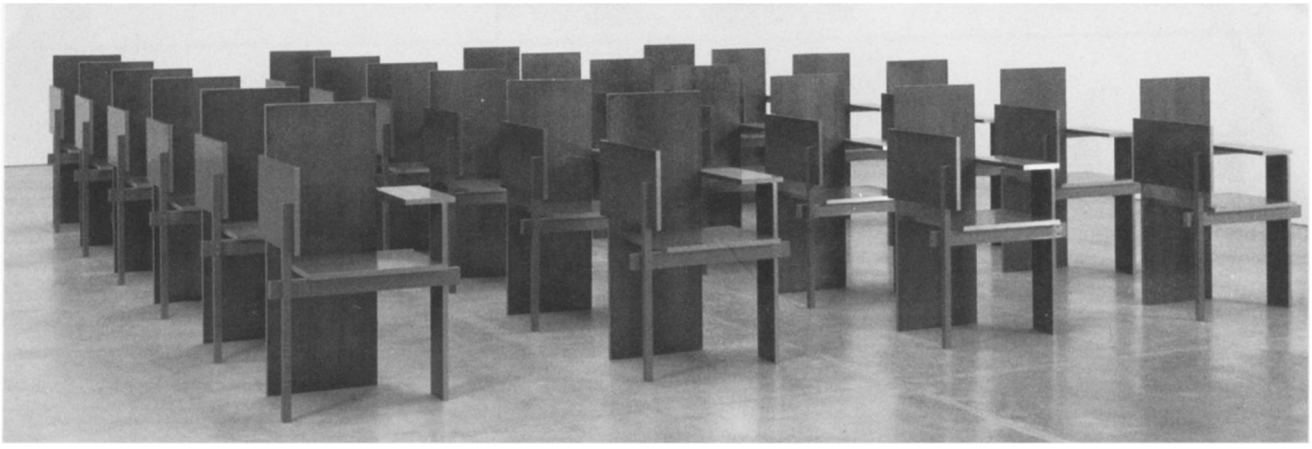
47. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*, p. 100.
48. Roland Barthes, "The Structuralist Activity," in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 215; and Robert Stoller, cited in Marjorie Garber, "Fetish Envy," *October* 54 (Fall 1990), p. 45.
49. Ankersmit, "Statements, Texts and Pictures," p. 233.
50. Cohen, *Passive Nihilism*, pp. 24, 25.
51. Sherrie Levine, "After Brancusi," in Temkin, *Sherrie Levine: Newborn*, p. 7.

artist, to register his (or his and her) absence, the effect of the sculptures, especially of her work after the Dutch designer and architect Gerrit Rietveld, is to fill the gallery. Certainly the sculptures are fuller, more materially there: they take up space, and with it, once again, time. The serial repetition implied by the photographs, constructed by them in absentia, is here made flesh or, better, steel, like the assembly line. But more than that, the gallery—in this image, Paula Cooper's gallery in 1999—seems to me crowded with presences, with the names and narrative substances of references and collaborators, as though they were aspects of the work, relations to it in the round: the historical or discursive counterparts of three-dimensional viewing. Certainly Rietveld was there in the gallery; these works are *about* Rietveld, in a way that the photographs after Evans were *not* about him. And in addition to Rietveld and to Duchamp, who is always there, there were Joost van Oss, with whom Levine rather more literally collaborated on the work, and his (and Rietveld's) fellow countryman, the late Jan Schoonhoven, whose ghostly white, gridded cardboard constructions had their first New York exhibition concurrently in Paula Cooper's front gallery. The impassive order and ranking of Rietveld's Berlin chairs and divan tables assembled in steel, twenty-four of each set on the grid, recalled most insistently Donald Judd. Levine and van Oss quite consciously remade Rietveld after Judd, in his materials—in steel at Paula Cooper and, more recently, in aluminum at the Getty—and cast him as Rietveld's double, or his first reader. Levine has long used Judd as a reader for Rietveld, since at the least the wooden crate tables of 1993, and Judd did, in fact, read Rietveld in a certain way. He began collecting the designer's furniture as early as 1967, and from at least the early 1970s produced his own furniture after Rietveld's crate tables and zigzag chairs. Judd's interest, his appropriation or elective affinity, underwrites Levine's allegorical project; like Duchamp and Brancusi, but differently, he and Rietveld are already paired. Particularly in the U.S., we tend to see Rietveld through Minimal art, through Judd, or in Levine's terms, "after" him. Reassembling them together, she has posed questions to both artists, about categories, about art and design, and about modernism and repetition.



Levine. Small Krate Table: 1–6. *1999. Photo: Tom Powel. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery.*

The juxtaposition of Duchamp and Brancusi opened out onto a



Levine/Joost van Oss. Untitled Sculpture III. *1999.*
Photo: Tom Powel. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery.

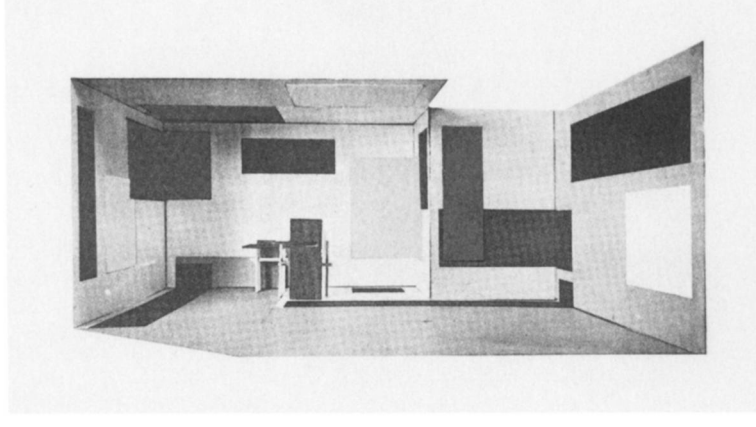
moment and a specific interaction. The history Levine plots with Rietveld and Judd is, in contrast, diachronic; it crosses the twentieth century, spanning from around 1923 (though Levine's sculpture will work to slow that beginning) to the mid-1960s, and, then, to the present. In a strong sense, the sculptures after Rietveld are historical objects: they are the objects that history interprets, objects under description, already constructed by and in response to interpretation, filled or supplemented by a kind of internal difference. In them, as in the works presented and explained by art history, "description and explanation penetrate each other." As Arthur Danto writes, "We do not explain events as such, but rather events under a certain description,"[52] and those descriptions have already begun to be explanations; they are mounted with and directed by some knowledge (some knowledge its actors did not have) of ramifications, of what will come after, of a direction for history. To read Rietveld after Judd, one could complain, is to make Judd seem the earlier artist's outcome, his effect, as if history had planned his coming, as though it were a straight line; this is the problem of making Rietveld or Schoonhoven a "proto-Minimalist," as though Minimalism were necessary and foreseen. Baxandall speaks to this misdirected idea of history in *Patterns of Intention* in a long excursus on "influence," a term, he argues, that imagines history, or writes it, the wrong way. "If one says that X influenced Y [in Baxandall's example, one would plug in Cézanne and Picasso; here one could use Rietveld and Judd], it does seem that one is saying that X did something to Y rather than that Y did something to X." But rather than billiard balls, he explains, the "arts are positional games and each time an artist is influenced" by earlier art—and here Baxandall means, assimilates, appropriates, refers to, revives, or parodies it; he provides a very long list—"the artist rewrites his art's history a little."[53] Increasingly, the artist attempts to rewrite art history as such, to quite consciously recast it—which is what I take Levine to mean by her closing remark to the Getty seminar: "I have the same relationship to van Gogh as Pierre Menard had to Miguel de Cervantes, that is to say, I have influenced him."

52. Arthur C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 250.
53. Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention,* pp. 59–60.

At the same time that we should be careful in this century-long history not to make Rietveld a Minimalist, to credit him anachronistically with causing, or worse, knowing what will follow, it is worth noting that his initial critics and apologists projected his work and his achievement forward. The pieces Levine has chosen are historical works in a more familiar sense, works that for earlier historians embodied Rietveld's importance—his becoming historical. Writing in 1948, in a book that begins with a caution about history being a mirror—"who peers into it sees his own image in the shape of events and developments"—Siegfried Giedion pushes Rietveld toward us.[54] The works of the late teens and early twenties were built, he writes, "as if no chair had ever been built," and from that beginning they stand as "real turning points and guides for the future. These Rietveldian pieces are manifestos. They guide the direction of an entire development."[55] Guides and manifestos, they plot out a future and, for Giedion, it is only against that future that they can be judged or seen, and only as singular objects, works of art rather than the objects of design. "No assembly line, no routineer can supply the fantasy they embody . . . as they make a fresh start possible."[56] Rietveld's beginnings assume their reproduction—the copies that will follow—only because they, and he, are originals. In some clear sense, Levine's copies continue and fulfill those orders—that fantasy—albeit oddly, and once again by redrawing, or restaging, the opposition of art and design.

Giedion is not alone in dreaming a future for Rietveld, a future curiously comprised of copies and followers in the name of originals. Writing in the 1930s, fellow designer and architect Mart Stam cast the imaginary reserve of Rietveld's work as thought or desire rather than fantasy. Rietveld, he wrote, "wants to arrive at an industrial product. He thinks of *metal*, of *fiberboard*."[57] But

54. Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 2.
55. Ibid., pp. 485, 487.
56. Ibid., p. 487.
57. Mart Stam, in Paul Overy, "From Icon to Prototype," in *The Complete Rietveld Furniture*, ed. Peter Vöge (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1993), p. 18.



Vilmos Huszar and Gerrit Rietveld. Color Composition for an Exhibition, Berlin. *1923. Illustrated in* L'Architecture Vivant, *1924.*

the red/blue chair, the Berlin chair and divan table, the zigzag chair, all of Rietveld's now-canonical works, were realized in wood, and, as Nancy Troy has argued, their origins are far from the punctual, singular moments his champions have described. Against Marijke Küper's late claim that the red/blue chair was "designed with an eye toward mass production," that "all the wood was of standardized sizes," Troy has noted that what marked the chair's beginnings was not a genesis break between nothing and "chair," and then between the original and its copies, but, as Levine has allowed us to see and to theorize around Brancusi's studio, the stuttering of versions: "there was no single, prototypical design, but instead many varied examples of [the] chair, each differing from the others either in dimensions, means of construction, or the range of colors applied."[58] Usually dated 1923, the Berlin chair, too, arrived in parts and versions, and, as befits Levine's use of it, in collaboration. It first appeared in miniature, as part of a maquette for an abstract interior exhibition room proposed by Rietveld and the architect and designer Vilmos Huszar and published in *L'Architecture Vivante* in the fall of 1924 under Huszar's name. "What each man contributed to the design is unclear," notes Rietveld's catalogue raisonné, "but Rietveld was certainly responsible for the furniture."[59] Even so, it is doubtful that a full-sized version of the chair was realized until 1925, and then, curiously enough, in double, as a kind of mirror of itself. While as a design it announced Rietveld's abandonment of rigid symmetry in favor of a new spatial dynamism (and De Stijl's, as well, as van Doesberg wrote in 1924: "The new architecture has put an end to monotonous repetition and to the rigid uniformity of two halves, the mirror image, symmetry"[60]), when the chair was produced for the Schroeder Haus in 1925, its symmetry was restored: there were both left- and right- handed versions. The Berlin maquette was right-handed, those of Levine and van Oss in steel—and in monotonous repetition—at Paula Cooper, left-handed, by way of complement, one might say, or supplement.

58. Nancy Troy, "Rietveld's Modernism," in *Craftsman and Visionary. Gerrit Rietveld: A Centenary Exhibition* (New York: Barry Friedman Ltd., 1988), p. 8.
59. Vöge, *Complete Rietveld Furniture*, p. 60. The table that appears alongside the Berlin chair in the Huszar maquette is not the one that runs alongside it in Levine and van Oss's Paula Cooper installation. The Berlin table was not realized until 1990, from plans derived from the maquette photographs; it has only existed as a copy without an original. Levine and van Oss chose Rietveld's 1923 Divan table, a work with, once again, two versions; the first for an interior designed by Huszar.
60. In Marijke Küper and Ida van Zijl, *Gerrit Th. Rietveld: The Complete Works, 1888–1964* (Utrecht: Centraal Museum, 1992), p. 92.

Levine/van Oss. untitled sculpture III. *1999.*
Photo: Tom Powel. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery.

Levine completes Rietveld; she fulfills his vision after Küper or his fantasy after Giedion or his thought after Stam. With Judd as her medium, she provides the metal and the repetition, and the present that will be (or maybe will have been) the future that Rietveld and his commentators envisioned. They make his work come true in the terms and desires of modern design, in metal and mass-production, but only as sculpture. In a certain, less fraught way, Rietveld's commentators had already performed that misrecognition. The architectural critic Martin Filler, in an essay obviously indebted to Giedion's, states things as clearly as possible: "it is as a piece of sculpture that the Red/Blue chair interests us," and that beginning with the red/blue chair in 1918 through the Berlin chair and divan table, "three pieces that undoubtedly rank among the most original and most important art of this century," Rietveld's project was essentially sculptural: "sculpture that is furniture and furniture that is sculpture."[61] Filler's disciplinary conflation absorbs the category "furniture" and leaves the category "art"—as sculpture—whole and untroubled. Judd's work, and then Levine's, in contrast, depend on keeping sculpture and furniture apart, of separating the work of art from, as Clement Greenberg put it in his critique of Minimal sculpture, "the realm of Good Design."[62] Judd insisted on their separation as a way of declaring that the work of art was to be seen intentionally, interestedly, "specifically": "The art of a chair is not its resemblance to art, but is partly its reasonableness, usefulness and scale as a chair. . . . The art of art is partly the assertion of someone's interest regardless of other considerations. A work of art exists as itself; a chair exists as a chair itself. And the idea of a chair isn't a chair."[63] (The difference written in this last sentence is that, for Judd, the work of art has no category in which or as which it exists, while the chair requires one.) Levine's work after Judd and Rietveld has maintained that separation as a way to trouble one category with the other in the same work, to divide the work against itself as she multiplies it and its appearances and its references.

More to the point than Filler, then, might be a stuttering and oddly tensed 1919 statement by Theo van Doesberg that he and Giedion both cite. Rietveld's furniture works—his "abstract-real artifacts of future interiors"—promise not the apotheosis of furniture as art but the disappearance of a certain kind of sculpture: "Through its new form, this furniture gives a new answer to the question of what place sculpture will have in the new interior."[64] The place of sculpture in the interior

61. Martin Filler, "The Furniture of Gerrit Rietveld: Manifestoes for a New Revolution," in *De Stijl: 1917–1931. Visions of Utopia*, ed. Mildred Friedman (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1982), pp. 132, 126, 135.

62. Clement Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture," in *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1951–1969*, vol. 4 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 254.

63. Donald Judd, "It's Hard to Find a Good Lamp," in *Donald Judd Furniture Retropective*, exhibition organized by Piet de Jonge, Iny Schleedoorn, and Frederike Huygen (Rotterdam: Museum Boymans van Beuningen, 1993), p. 7.

64. Theo van Doesberg, "Aanteekeningen bij een leunstoel van Rietveld," *De Stijl* 2, no. 11 (1919), is cited twice in Filler's "Furniture of Gerrit Rietveld," pp. 127 and 135. The first translation is uncredit-

was, of course, part of Judd's interest in 1965, in "Specific Objects": "anything in three dimensions [could] be any shape, and [could] have any relation to the wall, floor, ceiling, room, rooms, or exterior, or none at all."[65] It turns out that that last, "none at all," is no longer a choice; the new interior that Rietveld and van Doesberg promised turns out to be just the "vaguely modern" commercial space that Duchamp's readymade emptied out, that allows us to see the Brancusis as separate, autonomous, one at a time. By 1984, that space was, for Judd, far from empty or neutral; it had its own architectural limits and its own institutional project. The separation of art and commerce it had once announced, the separation that would parse Duchamp and Brancusi, that would elevate Rietveld to the status—and more, to the "mystery" and "spontaneity" of Cézanne and Pollock (these are Filler's comparisons and his words)—was no longer operable, or rather its workings were no longer invisible. Judd feels capital in the space itself:

> Almost all art for 30 years now has been shown in white plasterboard galleries, vaguely derived from modern architecture. Again this is an unconsidered convention, one which was not demanded by artists. It's a particular appearance, not a fact of nature, and affects the work. This is art seen in a commercial situation, not as it should be seen. The lighting is always bad, created by spotlights so that the work will look precious, the saleable jewel. My guess is that this appearance began in the exhibitions of the Museum of Modern Art and was adopted by the galleries and spread by the later museums.[66]

That is why, Alex Potts points out, glossing this quote, Judd went to Marfa. The utopian future Giedion imagined for Rietveld, cast in the designer's own image; the future Filler held out for him as an artist outside time: these have not come to pass. Inside the modern spaces of museum and gallery and showroom, Rietveld is delivered up to the practice of art history as a name, however substantialized, part of a series: the story of art history as a narrative of becoming in which each proper name becomes a historical site, a position, arranged one after another, before and after.

I began this paper some time ago stressing the punctuality, the thin structural time of Sherrie Levine's photographs. And I have through these past pages contrasted that thinness with her sculptural works of the past decade, and with what I have sought to characterize as their thickness—a thickness I have read as duration, as a sense of the fullness of history, or of its effect. I have tried as well to link Levine's sculpture to a kind of art-historical practice. Both the photographs with which I began and the sculptures speak what one could call after Paul de Man

---

ed, the second is Giedion's from *Mechanization Takes Command*, p. 485. The first refers to "(abstract-real) images," the second, and much more temporally ambiguous one, to "abstract real artifacts."

65. Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," in *Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, and New York: New York University Press, 1975), p. 184.

66. Judd, in Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, p. 308.

the "rhetoric of temporality." But they employ different figures. It turns out, reading de Man and a body of Levine's work that he would never have the opportunity to see, that the works that Owens described as "allegorical" in 1980 might not have been. He was not wrong, only too early; I would take the mode of the photographs as ironic—in a quite specific sense. "Allegory and irony are," de Man writes, "linked by their common discovery of a truly temporal predicament," by an "unreachable anteriority," but there is a difference between them.[67] A "synchronic structure," irony is, in de Man's words, "essentially the mode of the present" as it refuses the past.[68] Levine's photographs after Walker Evans may have taken on the structural possibility of history, the structural form of temporality, but the relation of before and after is not yet the relation of past and present. They do not narrate or fill a past, but rather block it, ruin it in a sense that is not quite yet allegorical. One could say that what they picture, what they stand as, is the not-past, the "not" to a past that is rendered needy, the binary opposite of its usurpation. That is part of the criticality of Levine's photographs, the present on which they insist—and part of their irony. "Irony," de Man concludes, "divides the flow of temporal experience into a past that is pure mystification and a future that can be harassed forever by a relapse into the inauthentic."[69] Allegory, in contrast, is marked, like the sculptures, by thickness and memory, and by what de Man calls "prefigurative duration," a past that could know or at least somehow be connected with the future. Against the instantaneousness of irony, for allegory "time is the originary constitutive category"; it appears, he writes, "in the tendency of language toward narrative, the spreading out along the axis of an imaginary time in order to give duration to what is, in fact, simultaneous within the subject"—or within the sculpture.[70]

De Man closes his comparison of irony and allegory—"two faces of the same fundamental experience of time"—with the following caution: "one is tempted to play them off against each other and to attach value judgments to each, as if one were intrinsically superior to the other. . . . The dialectical play between the two modes, as well as their common interplay . . . make up what is called literary history."[71] And perhaps art history. Let me avoid making my own judgments, but to close by suggesting a synopsis, one I used with friends as I was writing. If one takes Levine as an art historian, one could imagine the photographs as though they were written for *October*, particularly as it worked at the intersection of art criticism and a new art-historical practice in the early 1980s, and the sculptures, later in the decade, as submissions to *Representations*.[72] No journal seemed at the time so

67. Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays on the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed., rev. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 222.
68. Ibid., p. 226.
69. Ibid., p. 222.
70. Ibid., pp. 226, 207, 225.
71. Ibid., p. 226.
72. These dates and venues are meant to distinguish what appear to me as specific theoretical and methodological commitments: *October* in the early 1980s was marked by a kind of "presentism," and a

committed to the punctual rupture of present and past, or to its clarity, as did *October*; the present figured in and as theoretical knowledge was pitted precisely against the mythification of the past and the pitfalls of the future. It looked out, as Rosalind Krauss wrote in "The Originality of the Avant-Garde," from a "new perspective." "From this perspective we can see that modernism and the avant-garde are functions of what we could call a discourse of originality."[73] *Representations*, on the other hand, insisted on the thickness of the past, on an otherness given in its distance that needed to be protected by and figured—or maybe allegorized—in the historian's own writing, by the thickness of description and the anecdote. The value of the anecdote, and of the work of literature constructed after it, is that it is object-like. At once an opening onto history and an almost palpably physical knot of it, it stands like a stone—or a work of sculpture—in the way of an ending or a synopsis. It resists not through its internal coherence—that's the newness of the new historicism—but through, on the one hand, its obdurateness, and on the other its imbrication in the material thickness of culture—or at least in a text thickened with description and citation. It turns out, at the end, that my own presentation, with its appeals to Austin and Derrida at the beginning, and to Beatrice Wood and Siegfried Giedion and the U.S. customs service at the end, has mimicked just the distinction, and the before and after, that I have spent these pages describing.

---

practice that seems, at least from here, to have been primarily critical rather than interpretive. Its theoretical and reading practices were also more polyglot and less fully or carefully formed than they would become; since the mid 1980s, *October* has been a more recognizably academic journal: its objects are more "art historical," increasingly drawn from investigations in and around Dada and Surrealism, and its method increasingly indebted to theories of the subject and of the subject of history. The "before and after" of its first poststructuralist investigations of postmodernism is replaced, one could say, by Lacan's L schema and Freud's *nachträglichkeit* as diagrammatic theories of history in its non-punctuality. Certainly Levine's work could be described in such terms, as well: see my "Seeing Sherrie Levine" in *October* in 1994. *Representations* was never not recognizable as a serious academic journal; established around a methodological project as a position within the disciplinary field of literary interpretation, its commitments have always been those of interpretation rather than criticism, which is one way to think a temporal difference between allegory and irony, or the material difference between Levine's sculpture and her photographic practice.

73. Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), p. 162.