

# from outside to inside:

where is  
my object  
now?

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## From Outside to Inside: Where is My Object Now?

The couch held its own internal qualities, qualities inherent to its identity. In this case, the identity was a posture of new money. Most likely it was built locally, in Cairo or one or another of the sprawling bedroom communities along the Nile. It was built with a Victorian aesthetic in mind, but instead of being Victorian, in the end the couch embodied an exotic idea of the Victorian age, the desire to capture Europe and the extravagances of its wealth.<sup>1</sup> Physically the thing seemed much too large for the central wall it occupied in the living room, and its upholstery defied any intuitive reasoning for design in the desert. The green velveteen, faded into a mustard-brown, recalled the deep royal color it once was, not a sign of wealth, but an imitation of a distant idea, passed down through images of wealth abroad.

I sat on the couch, which came with the apartment I had just rented. The couch was stiff; it held its log shape and didn't give in to the weight of my body. I could tell that it was quite old, because the dry mustard-green velveteen fabric was starting to tear at the edging, revealing a deep vibrant color, which had once held the surface and was no more. The stale smell of sweat and dust clung to the seat and the back cushion where I sat. It made me wonder what life the couch had lived. Who had it been with and what role had it played in this place, or other places, before? The couch could be moved, could be rearranged to fit in various living rooms, in various people's homes. While a shift in its physical context might change the meaning that the couch brought to bear on any given place, the effect that it brought to bear on its location would be the same.

I sat on this couch, in this new place, which was actually an old place, but one I hadn't known before. The apartment came fully furnished, but the furniture brought me down. So much so that I piled most of it in a corner, preferring the open space of the wood floor showcasing the television that never worked. As for the couch, I tried to sit on it a few times, tried to smack the dust and sand from its belly, tried even to cover it with a crisp new sheet. But in the end, I turned it on its side, letting the fragile carved-wood legs poke out, like the bruised stiff legs of a little corgi dog. In the end, I turned it on its side and it stood so tall that it drew your eye up, paying homage to the high arched ceiling that had sold me on the place when I first saw it. At this point the couch lost its function as "couch" and began to function as a different type of sign. When people came over, the couch was usually the first thing they commented on, in a curious manner. My answer varied for a time and then settled into the resigned phrase, "It's a sculpture I made." While this didn't end the questioning, it did shift the way the couch was viewed and subsequently the questions asked and answered took on a different tone.

While initially the reference to Marcel DuChamp’s “Readymade” may come up, it seems tiresome to go in this direction. The fact is that any material (glue, pigment, thread) can be viewed as a readymade object, and this fact will only circle in on itself endlessly, like the dog who chases his tail. My attempt in giving this anecdote is to point to the sculpture and how in my claiming of it, in my efforts to shift its frame of reference (to stand it literally on its side), I assumed rights over this object. Its meaning was remade on my terms. Others who viewed the object had to recognize my presence within it.

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When turned on its side the couch revealed a patch of the floor, which, having been sheltered for so long, wasn’t bleached out by time, dirt, and sunshine as the rest of the floor had become. People didn’t walk on the patch of floor, nor did they try “using” the couch; it was clearly an active space, implicating the air it occupied and the patch of floor it had written a history with. In this manner, the couch marked the place where it had been, leaving a well-drawn rectangle to offset its newly discovered height. What this patch of bare hardwood allowed me to observe was the relationship of the sculpture to the field. The physical object “couch” was activating an area beyond its physical means. The sculpture therefore was now bigger than its body gave it credit for.

The couch sculpture was made by a momentary connection between the couch, the floor, and myself, the one who flipped it on its side. Sculpture can be thought of as an activated space, which holds the relationship between material objects, a maker, and a viewer. An object, subject, and site of context make up the scene, which composes the sculpture. The physical relationships that occur in real space as a result of the composition work to form a well-crafted sentence. Although we generally think about a structure supporting a form, sometimes the tables are turned, and the form can influence the structure; the adjective can alter the verb. This patchwork approach to thinking allows for objects to have the subjective fluidity afforded to most humans.

The essay presented here is concerned with the materiality of objects, the relationships with their makers, each other, their sites, and lastly a viewer. It moves between personal narrative and a formal investigation of certain artists’ trajectories in the context of psychoanalytical theory and a feminist response to that theory. The artists are Donald Judd, Robert Morris, and Jo Baer; three artists associated with minimalism in New York during the 1960s and 1970s. Specific works from their careers are examined to support a historical trajectory for Urs Fischer, a Swiss artist who began showing in the 1990s. This trajectory also provides a lens for viewing a young child at the playground and the backdrop for an

informal conversation between myself and artist Case Calkins regarding an object game we developed in the space of an empty warehouse. Accordingly, as a conversation, this text must allow for certain objects to pose as others, to assimilate with surroundings and to

engage in momentary scenarios as a subject. Throughout the essay the work of D. W. Winnicott, Melanie Klein, and Jessica Benjamin poses questions for transitory roles of subjects and objects within these art practices.

**The Qualities of The Relationship an Artist Has to Sculpture “Made by the Artist”**

Adapted by Shane Aslan Selzer from D. W. Winnicott’s “Summary of the Qualities in the Relationship Between an Infant and a Transitional Object”<sup>2</sup>

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The artist assumes rights over the object, and we agree to this assumption. Nevertheless, some abrogation of omnipotence is a feature from the start.</li> <li>2. The object is produced, manipulated, and thereby evidenced through these acts.</li> <li>3. The object must never change unless the artist changes it or orders it changed.</li> <li>4. The object must survive instinctual and analytical processes of loving, hating, and, if it be a feature, pure aggression.</li> <li>5. Yet the object must seem to the artist to communicate, have form, texture, and structure, or to do something that seems to show it has vitality or reality of its own.</li> <li>6. The object lies between being from “the inside” and being from “the outside.”</li> <li>7. The object’s fate is that it gradually becomes not so much forgotten as relegated to limbo. By this I mean that it loses meaning over time.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. This is because the transitional phenomena have become diffused, have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between “inner psychic reality” and “the external world as perceived by two persons in common,” that is to say, over the whole cultural field.</li> <li>8. Although the object does have symbolism, its point is actuality.             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. When symbolism is employed the artist is already clearly distinguishing between fantasy and fact, between inner objects and external objects, between primary creativity and perception.</li> <li>B. The sculptural object, according to my suggestion, gives room for the process of becoming able to accept difference and similarity.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
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In arguing that Winnicott’s adapted list may serve as a manifesto for an evolving relationship to sculpture, it must be noted that the nature of this relationship lies exclusively between the object and its maker and doesn’t address the complicated component of bringing the viewer into this field of activity. Winnicott argues for four steps in the relationship:

1. The subject relates to the object.
2. The subject destroys the object.
3. The object may survive destruction by the subject.
4. The object achieves value due to this survival, entering a cycle of simultaneous love and destruction with the subject; thus initiating the idea of fantasy. It is in step three that the component of the audience becomes relevant to this discussion.

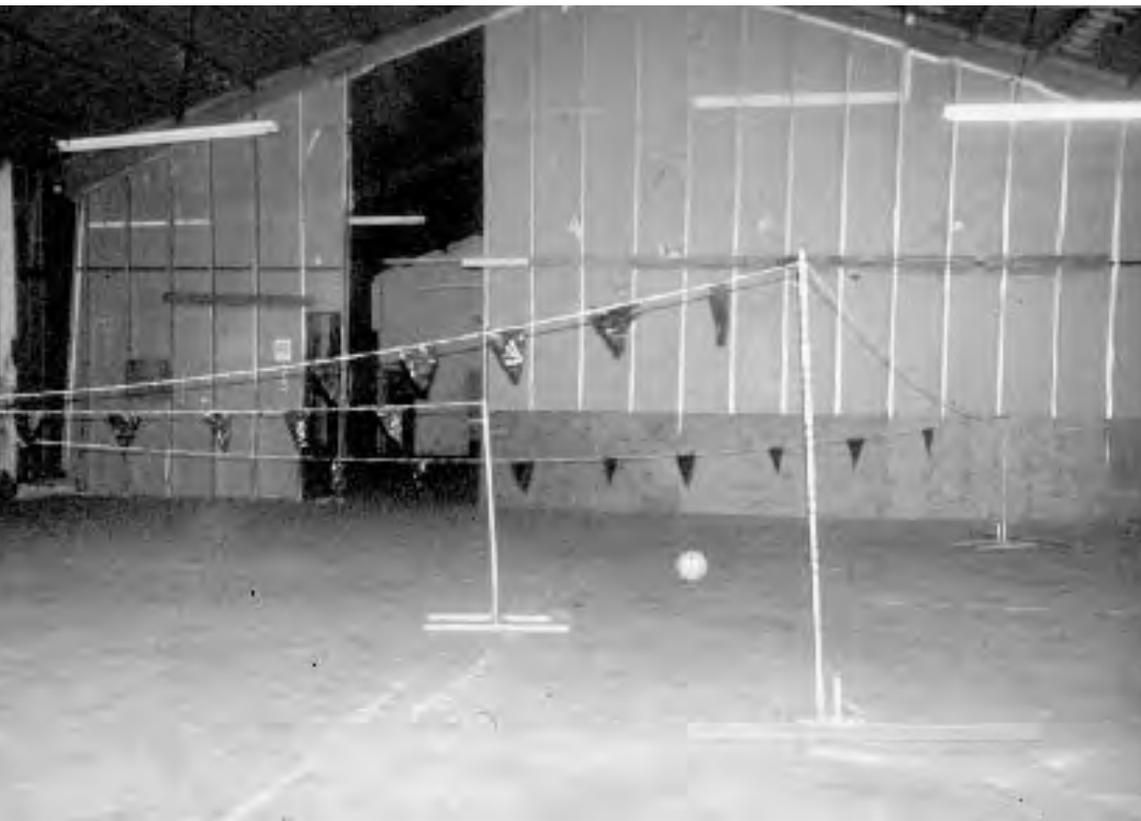


Figure 1 Warehouse Object.

The British psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott wrote extensively on children's play, developmental processes, and the child's relationship with others in the world. In 1971, he wrote a list of qualities of the relationship an infant has to the transitional "not me" object. He titled it "Summary of the Qualities of the Relationship Between an Infant and a Transitional [not me] Object."<sup>3</sup> The declarations of his list are integral to informing our understanding of the spatial objects our bodies have an intimate relationship to. It's a starting point, a place to look back to, one that we all share. But the list is also applicable for artists engaged in

a time-based studio practice, one that uses materials as a literal baseline for developing ideas. A time-based studio practice describes a working method in which an idea is allowed to be altered and negotiated through the manipulation of specific materials. Artists working this way are usually people whose work trajectories are difficult to pinpoint. For this reason, the term "play" continues to reemerge when thinking about their practices. Things are tried and tested, the studio is an experimental site, and the outcomes are determined within the process and material qualities of the things produced.

To put Winnicott's list into the service of a sculptural practice, I worked with a peer to explore the limits of the previous statements through direct action. Case Calkins is an artist who maintains an active sculptural studio practice. While his studio practice is in many ways similar to my own (a material practice that involves a lot of chance, object relations, integration, and exploration), the sculpture that each of us produces is always very different, defined by the differences in our own identities and carried through to the language of our objects. We decided to try to make an object together, which could be engaged in a collaborative play. It started with a long string of hot-green rubber bands Case had saved from the garbage pile. The rubber band line was strung around four poles made of broom handles stuck into aluminum stands. We brought the rubber bands into a warehouse, recently gutted and being

prepared for demolition. The idea was to use the rubber bands to activate a demarcated physical space and then to be able to move that space around a site (or field) (*Figure 1*). On the night of its inception, we used what was around us to fill out the structure of the game, knowing that the "dead space" of the available warehouse wouldn't be accessible for many more nights. We spoke little and worked quickly, moving poles alternately to keep the active space moving without dropping the band to the ground. This game became an example not only of the conditions of Winnicott's list but also of the potential for sculpture to be viewed in terms of action, a verb which has a real time component to its life span. It engaged the list through the terms of play, which is what the list depends on initially, and it allowed theory to be observed and argued through action in a set time and space.

PHOTO BY AUTHOR

#### 4. The object must survive instinctual and analytical processes of loving, hating, and, if it be a feature, pure aggression.

Where did these instinctual feelings live within an adult relationship? Could Winnicott's observations of an infant's earliest explorations beyond the space of its mother apply to and even inform an adult person who picked up a material and manipulated it into something else? At what point did the material begin to make meaning as an object through a different set of signs established by the person who picked it up? And where did object ultimately exist in relation to the adult person, the artist who made it?

These emotions Winnicott describes: loving, hating, and aggression all exist as action between the subject and the object. The evidence of action implies a real space between them, while the descriptive emotions contained within them imply a psychological space as well. Psychoanalyst and feminist theorist Jessica Benjamin recognizes this moment between as being essential for the subject's ability to accept the object as different and other, still bearing in mind its proximity to "I." She points to Winnicott's writings in the 1970s on the infant's transitional object. Winnicott brings to bear the idea that only through attempted destruction of and survival by the object does the self learn to accept the other. What Benjamin adds is the acknowledgment that through this process the other also becomes a subject.<sup>4</sup>

When testing Winnicott's theories on the relationship between the infant (as subject)

*The following conversation took place on September 16, 2003, several days after Shane Aslan Selzer (SAS) and Case Calkins (CC) played the Active-Field-Object-Game.*

**SAS:** I thought the game was about this idea of keeping a three-dimensional field active and then moving that field. The field had to be physically vacant, only defined by points and line.

**CC:** The points that the line connect to, when they entered the field did they deactivate it? Like those moments when one pole is in the center.

**SAS:** I didn't think so. I thought that those moments were interesting because it never became a circle.

**CC:** It had a spoke.

**SAS:** The spoke swung in and out but the field was always bigger than the actual object because of that spoke.

**CC:** I like that about the field. I wonder if, in terms of game, that could be judged or scored.

and the transitional object (as other) as they relate to the relationship between the sculpture (as object) and its maker (as subject), it's important to acknowledge how the terms subject, object, self, and other are being understood. Who is the subject? According to Freud the subject is determinedly male and by accordance, the other is female. But feminist critiques have pointed out that without the other, the subject is unable to define itself. The subject (as male) exists only in relation to the object.<sup>5</sup> If the object is female then it's never very far from being a subject to begin with, and the (male) subject's identity is always in a complementary and shifting relationship with its otherness. In discussing inanimate objects, gender categories can be broken into issues of power and gaze. When we recognize the power of the object to affect and be affected by the subject, then the subject is no longer able to claim the occupancy of an autonomous gaze.<sup>6</sup>

The paintings of Jo Baer, who worked among the Minimalists in New York during the late 1960s and the 1970s, attempt to pose a scenario in which two subjects occupy a single field. Using black and a single other color (often white or teal) contrasting in value, Baer defies the tendency for a viewer to read one as shape (active) and the other as field (passive) or background. Using the effects of pictorial flatness, Baer achieves a balance in which both colors stay active, thereby each occupying the role of a subject. The painting itself can be viewed as another subject within the field of the room. This fact is made clear by the dominant presence of shadow in her works. The shadow

**SAS:** Do you think it was important to the game that there be a scoring system?

**CC:** I think so, I think that games are more interesting with scoring systems because they keep some sort of rules. Something to play against, it makes it play.

**SAS:** Do the rules define play?

**CC:** It gives a structure for play.

**SAS:** It seems that the game has inherent and also applied rules. The inherent rules were ones such as: when the rubber band hit the ground, the field was deactivated. When the flags hit the ground, it was a reminder to me that we were simultaneously destroying and remaking the object. It was important for the structure to remain intact while we kept it moving physically across the space.

**CC:** I think that's true.

**SAS:** I think it could be changing more while it's moving.

**CC:** It could be more dynamic. I think eventually, through playing it enough, you could gain more control, you could really play with the active field inside.

**SAS:** Did you think that the qualities in the manifesto apply to the game or to the object produced through the game?

extends beyond the physical plane of the painting, lying outside of the painting's structure, but still inside of the painting's power within the room. It is this shadow that Jessica Benjamin refers to as the "Shadow of the Other," a space not clearly marked by the object or the subject, but definitively attached to both.

## 5. Yet the object must seem to the artist to communicate, have form, texture, and structure, or to do something that seems to show it has vitality or reality of its own.

The statement above implies that the static object is not so static after all. Through the process of identification and authorship, the inanimate object takes on animate qualities. But this recognition poses the problem that two subjects may coexist within a single field, a circumstance psychoanalysis is slow to acknowledge. Jessica Benjamin states, "Within the subject-object paradigm, in which there is always one subject, never two, it is necessary that whatever one side gains the other must lose."<sup>7</sup> To understand a contemporary relationship between an artist (as maker, and subject) and an object produced (as sculpture, and other) as being an intersubjective relationship, it is necessary to begin where the subject began, as an infant brought into the world. It is not only the infant and the object it chooses that form the limits of the relationship, it is also the context, the site, because each subject stands in relation to the space that surrounds it (the field). In 1830 Friedrich Froebel first hypothesized this through his pedagogical methods for



Figure 2 Froebel paper folding album, 1875.

early childhood. Froebel developed the very first kindergartens, where he drew on the child's ability to learn through action-touch, manipulation, reason, and intuition.<sup>8</sup> The twenty "gifts" he developed as learning tools were hands-on activities that built on each other progressively from solid forms to plane-line-point back to solid (3-D forms) (Figure 2).

Each gift was designed to embody and symbolize the realms of nature (life), knowledge (science), and beauty (art).<sup>9</sup> The first nine gifts were forms to manipulate in space and in relation to others, but they remained physically unaltered by the child's use. The later gifts were craftlike materials, paper for cutting and weaving, thread for sewing and drawing—these gifts emphasized the ability to know a material through a bodily interaction with its properties and therefore aided in developing fine motor skills, visual perception, and imagination. In these latter gifts, the material object was clearly subjected to destruction by the child. In the moment when the child destroyed the object, a potential for revival occurred. And in this revival lay the possibility for the object to become active, to become something beyond what the child knew it to be.

This process is integral to play, and Froebel understood this play to be the work of the child. He let intellectual curiosity fuel individual desire for learning, recognizing that this learning was done in a hands-on model that opposed the earlier models of memorization and reciting.<sup>10</sup> By activating the classroom as a community space for young children to live in society, he created a context for the relationship

**CC:** I think so. I was looking over it earlier.

**SAS:** Did it in a sense define the game?

**CC:** Well there's a lot to that.

**SAS:** What about loving, hating and aggression?

**CC:** I think it fits. The aggression is there. This game has a lot to do with fate, weathering the movement. When things fall down, it's an aggressive act. But by trying to keep it up, you can knock it down.

**SAS:** In moving the structure you're putting it at risk of destruction. If you left it alone it would be fine.

**CC:** But your love is what makes you keep moving it across the room. You keep risking its destruction to keep the structure active. That's super literal I guess, but it's really funny to think about.

**SAS:** It did show vitality and reality of its own. In the beginning I thought it was dependant upon us but in the end I saw that it wasn't.

**CC:** Well it was contextualized by us, we set it up, and we placed and moved it in the site.

**SAS:** We made it and could remake it or throw it away. But once it survived our making of it, then it could stand on its own, without us.

between children and materials to progress organically. Kindergarten (translated from German as the garden of children and the children's garden) as an organizational concept also marked the boundaries between the child's space and the other space beyond it. It was activated by the movements within it, and was constantly in a shifting relationship with the other mobile elements outside it.<sup>11</sup>

I witnessed an example of this spatial occurrence when I took a friend's son to the playground. Oliver (age two and a half) called the playground in Berkeley "Loud Train Park" because just beyond its perimeter, marked by a chain link fence, were train tracks. As loud trains approached, Oliver, cued by the sound, would stop what he was doing and head for the picnic table at the far end of the playground, closest to the tracks. Perched there, caught in a trance of speed, motion, and time, Oliver watched the train tumble past. Afterward he remained, suspended momentarily by the wake of the object that had been and was no more, the "real" world as it thundered by.

"It was a big one" he might remark, and often he would point "over there."

This issue of the boundary between what was here (inside) and what was there (outside) seemed important in understanding who and where he was in relation. The designated ground that was inside literally (inside the fence) also seemed to be inside metaphorically (inside the realm of play and fantasy). The area outside literally held the moving train and was clearly out of the range of play. Outside was



Figure 3 Wheels by Robert Morris.

CC: That structure, very literally, is the outside and inside of the structure in the game.

SAS: What's our relationship to it?

CC: We change that. So we have authority; since we have rights over the object we have the authority to change that space, to move it to activate it.

SAS: It also lies halfway between those points. We're producing it as it's existing. That process forms a continuum: produce—move—destroy—maintain.

CC: I think that's completely true. The game is only its true sculpture when it's being played. When it's put away, it's no longer that, it's

a big object, occupying space and speed and most pointedly, power. Oliver was pointing at the line between the two, determining what was situated in relation to what.

Where do these observations on child's play come into contact with contemporary artists' practices? How are the old discussions between subjects and objects resonating with sculpture practices today? And how can Winnicott's theories be customized to inform an artist's relationship to an object made?

## 6. The object lies between being from "the inside" and being from "the outside."

In 1961, the artist Robert Morris contributed the piece *Passageway* to a Fluxus event held by Yoko Ono. Although Morris is often associated with Minimalism, his participation in Fluxus events were a fluid shift for the context of his work. Made of plywood walls, the piece curved to form a passageway ending in a corner.<sup>12</sup> What it did as an object was

lost its form, lost its shape, it's something else, not the game, and it becomes forgotten—like any other game. Like old football games are forgotten, only the memory or residue lasts. That's the nature of games.

SAS: But it's particularly true in this game because it gets further away from the time and space of its making when it's not in actual use. Although use implies that the game is like a tool.

CC: Do you think this structure could be set up always? That changes the game a lot.

SAS: I don't know, because the game we played was very specific to that site and the time we played it in.

CC: Is it possibly two different sculptures in one? A sculpture and a game? If so, is the structure then like a prop or tool?

SAS: The physical components of the game compose the structure of the game. And that structure

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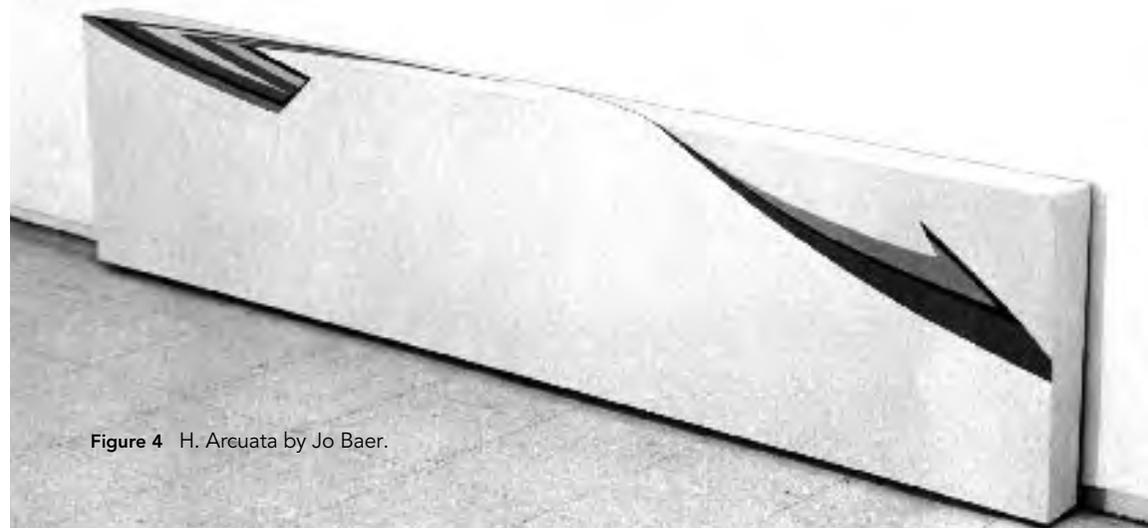


Figure 4 H. Arcuata by Jo Baer.

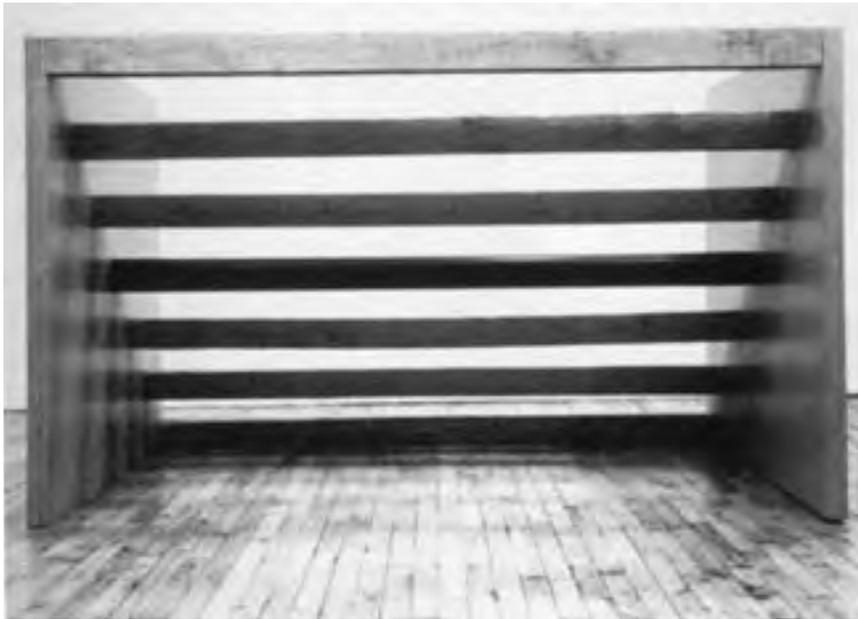


Figure 5 The Bleachers by Donald Judd.

PHOTO BY JOHN D. SCHIFF, COURTESY OF THE ESTATE OF DONALD JUDD

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to function as a site for movement to occur. The viewer moved through the space and was held within the object. The object was no longer clearly outside the self. Where did the object end and the subject begin? The Fluxus movement (which Ono was a critical part of) made an argument for flexibility and adaptation in the artist's mode of communication. What was exciting about this piece to artists working within the Fluxus movement was the idea that the object could also affect the subject. This made the vulnerability of the subject (as maker or viewer) more apparent and therefore more susceptible to the forces surrounding them.

could be separated out from the game and could be seen as a tool or as those elements necessary for the game to happen.

**CC:** It's true. It just got very confusing.

**SAS:** It did. I liked that the only viewer of the game was the camera. A fixed view. I think the game would be a lot different if other people had been there while we had played it, and there had been some separation between us and them, like the space of performance. I think that would be a different game.

While Morris's peer and rival Donald Judd wrote about the "Specific Object," which was to be gazed upon, beheld, and consequently thought of only in static terms, Morris went to the other extreme.<sup>13</sup> His earlier works were often relics of performance, props for the body and therefore never fulfilled until reconnected with the subject. In a group show at the Green Gallery in 1963, Morris showed *Wheels* (1962), which proved itself as an object with the capability of action.<sup>14</sup> This shift from sculpture as noun to sculpture as verb made an intentional link back to the body, both of the artist and the viewer (*Figure 3*).

Judd maintained the discrete autonomy of both the artist and the object, separate and complete, while Morris invaded the object with the presence of his physical body, pushing his own subjectness onto an object to the point where it became a prop for his body, a vessel incomplete without his body's manipulation of its very structure. Both artists wrestled with how to give power to the object without losing power for the subject. During this time, Judd and Morris's peer Jo Baer was making paintings that quietly injected an intersubjective position. Working clearly by hand, she articulated and redetermined the underlying structure of her paintings. In *H. Arcuata* (1971), she hangs the painting a half inch from the floor, painting a curved plane on the face and up over the side of the canvas (*Figure 4*). As the viewer gazes down upon the painting, the side becomes the face and the orientation shifts again, pointing out its own objectness while standing defiantly in the role of a subject.<sup>15</sup> It is difficult to know where the edge of the

**CC:** Do you think when people play chess on the street or on television versus playing in private, it is a different game?

**SAS:** I don't know that it's important for that game, the idea of spectatorship. I don't think it affects the inherent nature of the game.

**CC:** That's a weird thing about games in general. To some extent they're all about those who are inside, playing it. But at a certain point that spectacle becomes interesting to others to watch too.

**SAS:** It's the idea of what you could call a primary and secondary audience. A primary audience is the participants, they're forced to interact, to complete the game. But the secondary audience observes the action or sees some representation of that.

**CC:** In our case, the camera is a secondary audience, but it's not a person, so maybe that changes it. But then the tape produced by the camera is also watched by people.

**SAS:** The camera occupies a gaze. In this case the gaze is set by the primary audience. Us. (*Figure 6*)

painting lies. In fact a thin black painted line at the bottom edge becomes optically confused for a shadow. The paint slices across the plane and visually alters the space we perceive to be real. The title, meaning to bend like a bow, describes the action of the mark on the top and side of the canvas. It's a handmade mark maintaining a social order of geometric line and plane, while defiantly painting over and across the set order of her own subjective structure, the painted object.

### 3. The object must never change unless the artist changes it or orders it changed.

As simple as this realization appears, it has concerned discussions of modernism and subsequently postmodernism for decades. In 1964, Donald Judd began to employ the Bernstein Brothers to fabricate his object

I felt like, as we played the game—that object, which was really just random scraps of stuff, barely anything at all—it really started to take on its own force and character.

**CC:** Definitely. Materially, the rubber bands had a lot to do with that, because they're so elastic, you don't realize the force happening on the other end, so unlike a rope you don't know how hard you're pulling it.

**SAS:** Right, and the rubber band contains energy, it makes a tension occur and holds it but jiggles that energy back and forth along the line.

**CC:** I felt the same way, like it was a thing to be reckoned with, it really became a spatially complex object.

work.<sup>16</sup> Although he discussed the decision as being a formal one, it highlights his desire to maintain distance from the grasp of the object. His literalist attitude toward materials supported the reasoning that if he didn't physically "make" the object, it would become discrete, separate, and clearly outside of his own subjective identity. But this refusal to identify oneself in the object didn't keep the object itself from entering a dialogue of intersubjectivity, which Jessica Benjamin describes as one that "requires that each subject own and enjoy her or his own desire as well as the activity which realizes it."<sup>17</sup> In his solo show at the Green Gallery in the winter of 1963, Judd showed several discrete objects. Two of them have since been frequently nicknamed by viewers "The Bleachers" and "Record Cabinet," respectively, due to their formal resemblance of these familiar use-objects (*Figure 5*).<sup>18</sup> This nicknaming on the part of the viewer is an example of the propensity for the viewer to identify in the object his or her own subjective associations gathered through everyday social life. Judd's refusal to allow for sentimentality in his work is somewhat betrayed by the pet names given to these objects by their viewers.

**SAS:** The game was made with what we had around us. We didn't wait to play the game, we just decided to play it and then made the object and played—using broom handles, paint roller handles, the aluminum fence stands, and then the trash bag on the site, which was made into the flags.

**CC:** We needed the flags to be able to see it and so we made them on site, which was a great moment.

**SAS:** And then we used props. I think we should talk about the props. We decided that the props could be left behind. They weren't part of the sculpture.

**CC:** They did add to it though, they changed it in ways. They were used to weight something down. The props served a functional purpose.

### 2. The object is produced, manipulated, and thereby evidenced through these acts.

The dialogue surrounding literalism during Judd's career led him to divorce himself physically from the objects he produced. This separation allowed him to believe in the autonomy of the discrete objects for what they were formally. Today, the old rhetoric of literalism has been reconsidered in terms of relationalism. The object is



Figure 6 Warehouse Object.

no longer considered autonomous because the maker, site, and viewer are taken into account during its contextualization. Urs Fischer, born in Zurich, Switzerland, and working today in a variety of Western hubs (London, Berlin, Los Angeles), can be seen, not as an illustration of the point, but as a deepening of the question. Where is the object in relation to the subject? What ground does the subject hold?

Navigation of what's inside and what's outside is clearly evident in two of Urs Fischer's works from 2000. In *Heartburn*, the mirrored cube is the exterior or container for the rotting material held within. The mirrored outside of the cube is "inside" of the gallery. It has a relationship to the walls, other structures and people who are also "inside" in their position to the gallery as a physical relationship. The mirror is of course a reflective surface, allowing the illusionistic space of the object to extend far beyond its physical means. The surface brings the viewer into its domain, thereby visually uniting the viewer as subject and the cube as object. This proposition suggests that the object-subject relationship is a spatial consideration (*Figure 7*).

Robert Morris's cubes series of the 1960s are referenced in this work, but Morris's work doesn't pose the object in the position of being a potential subject, doesn't recognize that the inside can and will affect the outside. Urs Fischer's recognition of this active relationship gives the object authority



**Figure 7** Heartburn by Urs Fischer.

**SAS:** Like a nail to hang a painting on the wall. Like a crutch for the object, like scaffolding. They were able to be left behind. Those objects were two three-foot-long two by fours and a rusty paint bucket, which was quite heavy.

**CC:** I liked its weight, it was different from the other props, and I liked that there was one less prop than there were poles. Maybe this made it more vulnerable. Half the time, the props weren't really used.

**SAS:** It made you aware that the props didn't need to be used. Because each pole didn't have a prop, it didn't become like a hat for the sculpture. The prop didn't function as a pedestal. It was more like a tool, in a different way than the sculpture was a tool.



**Figure 8** Madame Fisscher by Urs Fischer.

to be subjective, organic, and affected by time. Fischer points to this lack in purist thought. Inside of his mirrored cube is rotting (mainly organic) material. The inside is "alive"—it has a life cycle and its decomposition will remind us physically of its presence as an active subject/object. The mirrored container could be spoken of as an autonomous object (as it is in the catalog essay), but the reflection of the space and the presence of the viewer within its frame weakens this argument.<sup>19</sup> The same might be said of the Morris piece, although the absence of an accessed interior space pushes the exterior into being a structure retaining a structure.

**CC:** It was different.

**SAS:** Ok, what about this idea of difference?

**CC:** The object is always different, but in its action, when it's being played, it's always similar.

**SAS:** In the process of learning to accept difference and similarity you must play. You figure that out by playing. You align and distinguish yourself in that space of play first.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GALERIE HAUSER & WIRTH & PRESENTHUBER, ZÜRICH, SWITZERLAND, 2000

Figure 9A Madame Fisscher.



Figure 9B Madame Fisscher.



Instead, *Heartburn* asks the viewer to question his or her position as both subject and object by allowing the other to have subjective qualities.

In *Madame Fisscher* (2000), Fischer transplanted his studio from London to Glarus, and showed it there as another type of cube where the structure of the outside was two by fours and backsides of gypsum board—drywall sheets, built to the same dimensions. The large cube held the room, otherwise occupied only by a large-tile floor and drop-panel-light ceiling. The presence of these grids was unavoidable to the eye (*Figure 8*).

**CC:** And within the object itself, if it was just static, not being played, I don't know if you can understand its difference when it's being played. You can't recognize in its static state the potential it has to be something else.

**SAS:** Did the object have symbolism?

**CC:** Yes, it symbolized game, that was our intent.

**SAS:** I think we wanted to make a three-dimensional space out of those elements and very soon thereafter, we wanted that space to be mobile.

The viewer was forced to deal with the exterior first, and therefore we will call this the outside, although in the truth of the viewer's perception, it may be called the inside and the outside may be where we travel to next. The structure itself could appear to be self-contained, shut off from its site, that which is looking outward. But in fact, it is aware of the conversation the sheets of drywall have with the site. Here, the structure is exposed, becoming facade, not only pointing to itself as structure and form but also pointing to the wall of the site as an inversed set of realities.

**CC:** And then came the symbol of game. That's interesting because it does reference known games, like golf. That's the thing about symbolism, it's there to be found by viewers but the point is always the thing itself, that's what we know and what we return to.

**SAS:** Are the game and sculpture the same thing?

**CC:** Well the sculpture is what it is, but since it also has the potential to be mobile, it's only its true self when it's being moved.

## 8B. The sculptural object . . . gives room for the process of becoming able to accept difference and similarity.

It is through the acknowledgment and understanding of difference that we come to define ourselves. Where are the possibilities for agency within this system of identification? At what moments in life do we come into the set system and figure out how to make it work for us? Between “us” and “them” a lot of things can happen. A lot of variables determine this relationship and establish the binary system that props it. When we approach things, beings in the world, a relationship is formed in the space between, in “the Shadow of the Other.”<sup>20</sup> Working within the field of psychoanalysis and also criticizing it from the position of feminist theory, Jessica Benjamin recognizes that in the process of learning to love ourselves and others we inevitably rely on boundaries to hem the blurry lines between us as “I” and the world as “other.”

Psychoanalysis observes only two major types of love: love of the self, and love of the other. Love of the self is labeled as identifiatory love; we see ourselves in things and bring them into the fold. The self engaged in identification approaches the other as a fantasy object, something to be had, possessed, and eventually consumed.<sup>21</sup> Love of others is seen as outside love,

**SAS:** Well it never really existed before it was in motion. Initially we set it up as a static object, but I didn’t really understand that object until we moved it around.

**CC:** Me either. You could feel how static it was. When you bounced a ball into it, that was evident. Why did the ball look so stupid? Because you’re throwing a ball at this static object. It’s a stupid relationship.

**SAS:** The object had no ability to contain the energy of the ball. The object was highlighted as being inanimate then. The ball passed by, because the ball was active and the sculpture was static.

**CC:** Suddenly when you started moving it around, then that sculpture became active.

**SAS:** And that’s when the ball became irrelevant. I never thought about the ball again.

**CC:** Yeah, there would be no way to play with the ball. We were the ball.

found in the recognition of difference and separation. In writings by Jacques Lacan, the subject (as identified through Freud) moves from identifiatory love to outside love in a linear process of development. In Melanie Klein’s writing, where object relations are based, the subject moves between positions more freely, articulating the conditions as they arise.<sup>22</sup>

“The Kleinian subject relates to its environment as a field of objects to be fused or split, possessed or destroyed, by means of fantasies of introjection, projection, and splitting that are produced by bodily drives.”<sup>23</sup> Feminist critiques of Lacan rely on Klein to form the intersubjective perspective. Intersubjectivity reaches into the space between the subject and the object, taking into account both types of love and the fluctuating nature of understanding and communicating.<sup>24</sup> The intersubjective perspective should be approached as a third perspective, one neither wholly separate and distanced from the object in the relationship nor entirely projected into and inside of the object. The conversation in psychoanalysis about a relationship between self and other has been reconsidered through the feminist lens of intersubjectivity.<sup>25</sup> Writing as recently as 1998, Jessica Benjamin argued that a balance between separation and connection must be maintained between the subject and the object.<sup>26</sup> The space of this balance is marked by the limits of the two types of love exchanged between a subject and its other.

**SAS:** It’d be extraneous.

**CC:** Baroque.

**SAS:** Ha. Okay, I wanted to go through Winnicott’s four-step process: (1) the subject relates to the object; (2) the subject destroys the object; (3) the object may survive destruction by the subject; and (4) the object achieves value due to this survival, entering a cycle of simultaneous love and destruction with the subject; thus initiating the idea of fantasy. It is in step three that the component of the audience becomes relevant for discussion.

Are we the subject in this instance?

**CC:** Yes.

**SAS:** When the object survives destruction, that’s the moment when it’s a game. That’s also the moment when there becomes a point to watching it.

**CC:** After the game is played that object becomes so much more than it was before.

**SAS:** The object has a history.

**CC:** In that sense you can use that history to have fantasy about future potential.

## 8. Although the object does have symbolism, its point is actuality.

When Urs Fischer transplanted his studio it became an object. The interior of the studio was also the exterior of the structure. The structure was one of protection, form, and context. These three elements are crucial to the practice. The studio in this instance was a place of play. Layered drawings on paper, small paintings, wall drawings, lists, all cluttered the walls. Evidence of work was abundant, work as it relates to time spent, to ideas about how we spend time. Objects and images related to each other in streams of consciousness. Pictorial thoughts became spatial and then returned to shadow and afterimages. Things seemed to be done out of necessity, out of availability and proximity. The hand was continuously evidenced, as was the figure—a life-size plaster model sat on a chair in the corner; he had a fat belly, broken-off arms, and a leg unformed, still contained in the plaster block (*Figures 9A and 9B*).

**SAS:** Because of the phrasing “a cycle of simultaneous love and destruction with the subject,” the object and the subject are loving and destroying, it makes the relationship go two ways, a cycle . . .

**CC:** It’s about love and destruction. It’s always destroyed when we move it.

**SAS:** It would be fine if we didn’t mess with it, but it wouldn’t be active, and we wouldn’t love it. So it would eventually cease to exist.

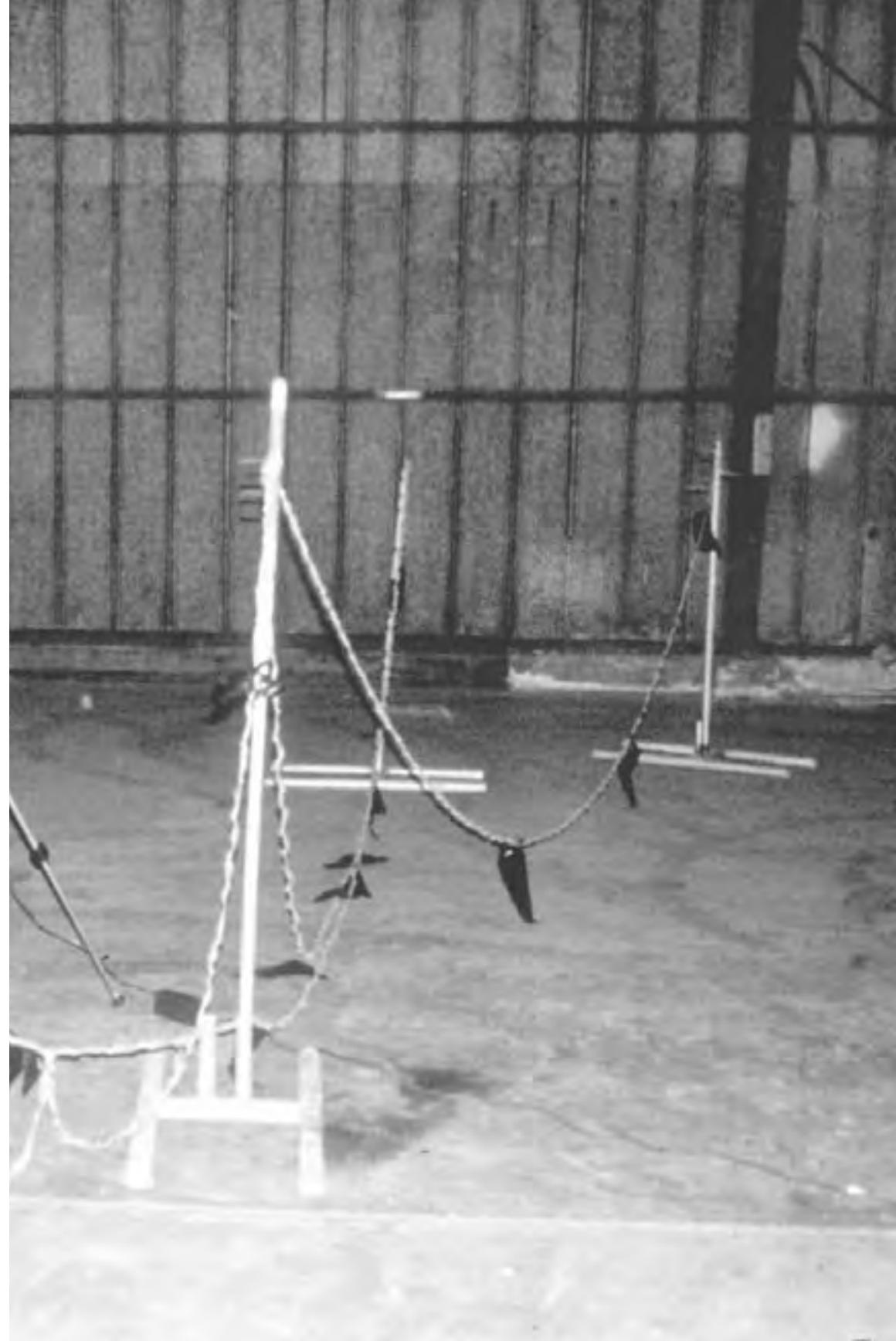
A bust rested on the table across from him. Another chair in the opposing corner, unoccupied, wore its garish floral design like the mark of a woman who doesn’t get out much and hasn’t updated her wardrobe as she’s updated her weight through the years, and slumped down like a thing which has been used beyond its desire to be objectified. The cushion was in backwards, allowing the viewer to see how the floral covering was tied on. Surface, not structure, appeared to be the job of the floral apron. But Fischer has keyed in to the faults in inanimate things. Faults allow for new things to open up, for new ends to be found. This is the stuff of life, chance and coincidence—momentary connections followed by dystopic failures.

4. The object achieves value due to this survival, entering a cycle of simultaneous love and destruction with the subject; thus initiating the idea of fantasy.

## Endnotes

- 1 This style was very common in upper-middle class homes of Cairo during my stay there in 1997–1998, and the weight of such style choices bore heavily on the comfort I found in these homes.
- 2 D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Routledge, 1971), p. 5.
- 3 D. W. Winnicott, pp. 5–6.
- 4 Jessica Benjamin, *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. xix.
- 5 Luce Irigaray, “Any Theory of the ‘Subject’ Has Always Been Appropriated by the ‘Masculine,’” in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 119.
- 6 Luce Irigaray, p.120.
- 7 Jessica Benjamin, p. 40.
- 8 Norman Brosterman, *Inventing Kindergarten* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), p. 20.
- 9 Norman Brosterman, p. 37.
- 10 Norman Brosterman, p. 31.
- 11 Michel De Certeau, “Spatial Stories,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 122.
- 12 James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 51.
- 13 James Meyer, p. 56.
- 14 James Meyer, p. 53.
- 15 Barbara Haskell, *Jo Baer* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1975).
- 16 James Meyer, p.56.
- 17 Jessica Benjamin, p. xvi.
- 18 James Meyer, p. 56.
- 19 Urs Fischer, *Time Waste* (Zurich: Kunsthaus Glarus, 2000), p. 11.
- 20 Jessica Benjamin, p. xii.
- 21 Jessica Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 8.
- 22 Mignon Nixon, “Bad Enough Mother” *October: The Second Decade, 1986-1996*, ed. Rosalind Krauss et al. (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology and October magazine, 1997), pp. 159–160.’
- 23 Mignon Nixon, p. 159.
- 24 Jessica Benjamin, p. xii.
- 25 Jessica Benjamin, p. xv.
- 26 Jessica Benjamin, p. xviii.

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## from outside to inside: where is my object now?

### About the Thesis Project

The following essay uses the British psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott's "Summary of the Qualities of the Relationship Between an Infant and a Transitional Object" as a lens for viewing the relationship between specific artists and the sculptural objects they produce. In the larger thesis, which is situated by the historical lineage of Minimalism in the United States, Arte Povera in Italy, and the Neoconcretes in Brazil, these artists are Urs Fischer, based in Berlin and Los Angeles; Mark Manders, based in Amsterdam; and Jewyo Rhii, based in Korea. The essay presented here concentrates on Urs Fischer (Zurich born), placed in the arc of Minimalism from 1960s America. The numbered list points of the essay form the skeleton for an argument that uses psychoanalytical theory to understand contemporary art practices, putting them in a trajectory of artists working with the problem of subject and object relations. A discussion, also stemming from Winnicott's list, reflects on the relevance of these theories in relation to a sculptural game, an action played to test the limits of the theory itself.



### About the Author

Shane Aslan Selzer is a visual artist and writer working in San Francisco. She is currently completing dual degrees at CCA, including an MFA in sculpture and MA in visual criticism. Since 2002, she has coordinated the Graduate Lecture Series for the college, cocurating the lectures and acting as a liaison between the Fine Arts and Visual Criticism programs. In 2004, she exhibited her sculptural work at Stephen Wirtz Gallery in San Francisco, and was selected for the 2003 Gen Arts *Emerge* show. In 2002 she was awarded the Murphy Fine Arts Fellowship for Sculpture and the California College of the Arts All College Honors Award for her writing.