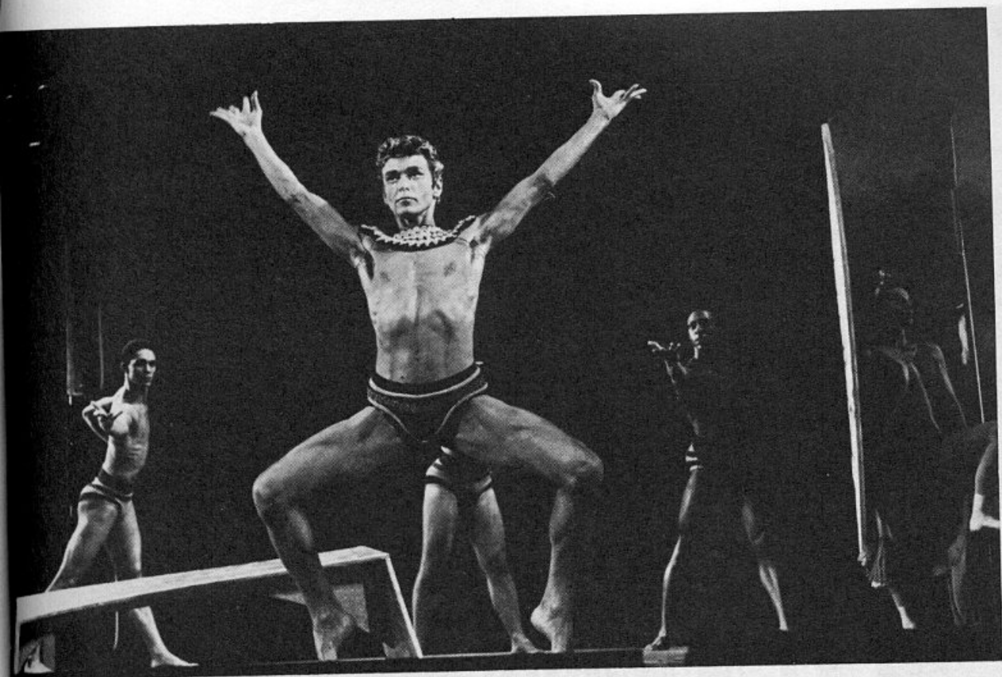
that pushes the plastic arts into the modality of theater. While it is through the concepts of "presentness and instantaneousness that modernist painting and sculpture defeat theatre."[5]

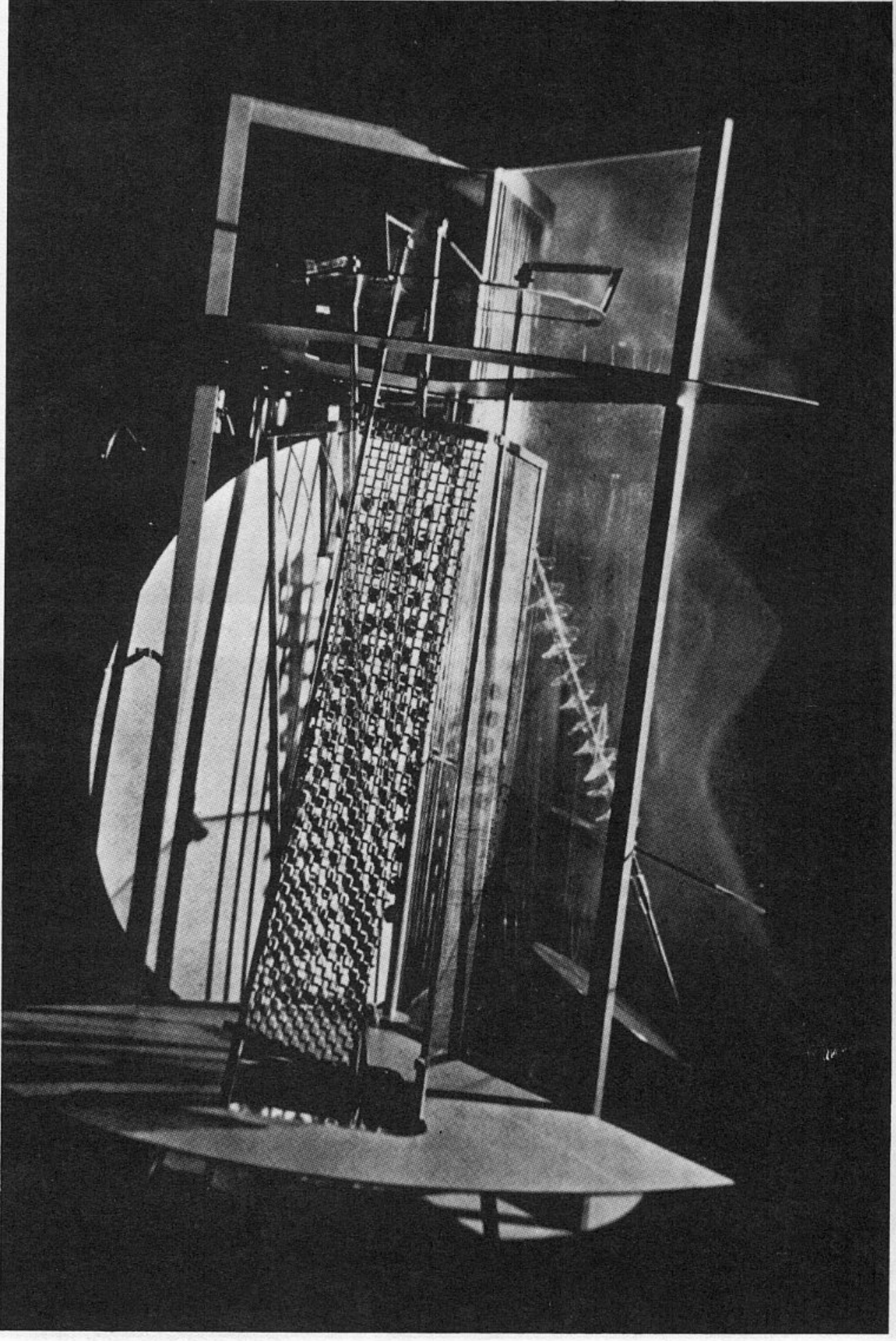
Now it is beyond question that a large number of postwar European and American sculptors became interested both in theater and in the extended experience of time which seemed part of the conventions of the stage. From this interest came some sculpture to be used as props in productions of dance or theater (fig. 151), some to function as surrogate performers, and some to act as the on-stage generators of scenic effects. And if not functioning in a specifically theatrical context, certain sculpture was intended to theatricalize the space in which it was exhibited—by projecting a changing play of lights around that space, or by using such devices as audio speakers or video monitors to connect separate parts of a space into an arena contrapuntally shaped by performance. In the event that the work did not attempt to transform the whole of its ambient space into a theatrical or dramatic context, it would often internalize a sense of theatricality—by projecting, as its *raison d'être*, a sense of itself as an actor, as an agent of movement. In this sense, the entire range of kinetic sculpture can be seen as tied to the concept of theatricality.

So theatricality is an umbrella term, under which one could place both kinetic and light-art, as well as environmental and tableau sculpture, along with the more explicit performance art, such as "happenings" or the stage properties Robert Rauschenberg constructed for the dances of Merce Cunningham. But, because theatricality has become a polemical term in the criticism of modern sculpture—a term of condemnation as in the essay by Fried, or of praise, in the mouths of the supporters of these various enterprises—we should try to unpack the notion of theatricality. For it is too dense and too confusing. It is rife with internal contradiction, with conflicting intentions and motives. The question is not whether certain artists have wanted to seize the space of the stage or exploit the dramatic time projected by real motion; the question is why they would have wanted to seize or use those things, and to what aesthetic ends?

151. ABOVE *Noguchi: Set for a production of* Phaedra, *1960. Choreography by Martha Graham. Collection, Martha Graham Company. (Photo: Martha Swope)*

152. BELOW *Alex Hay (1935–):* Grass Field, *1966. Performed by Alex Hay, Steve Paxton, and Robert Rauschenberg. (Photo, Peter Moore)*





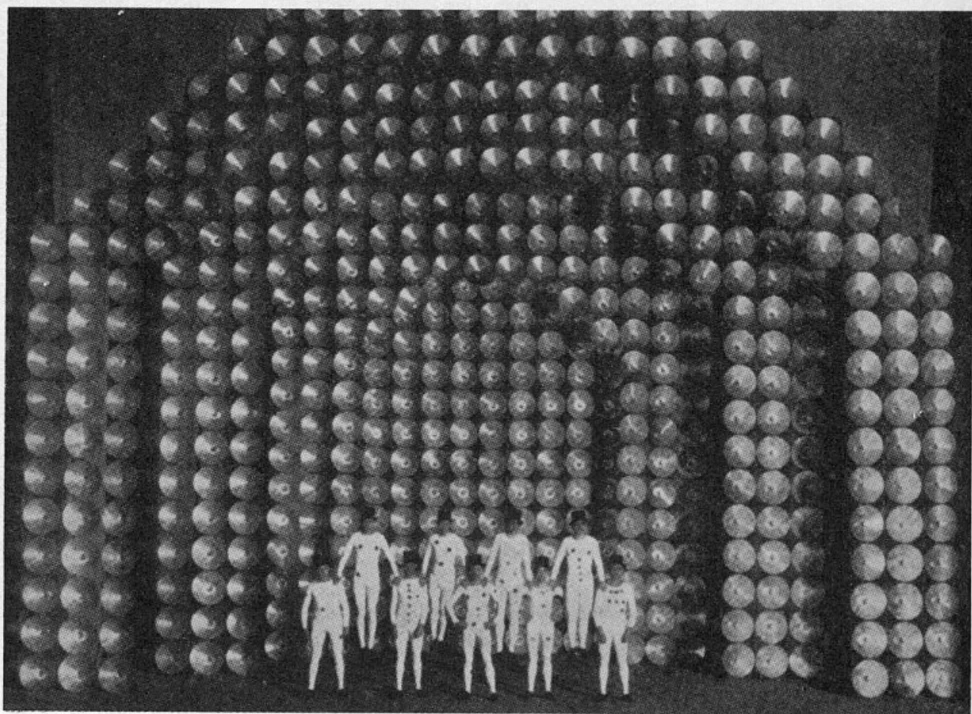
In sorting through this confusion, one might turn to some of the prefigurations of "theatrical" sculpture in the early part of this century, to the early history of light-art, for example, as it grew out of considerations about the space of the stage. Two examples come to mind: Moholy-Nagy's *Light Prop* (fig. 153), finished in 1930, was intended to function during a performance by operating as an on-stage projector, weaving around its turning center a widening fabric of patterned light and shadow. Picabia's set for *Relâche* (fig. 154), produced by the Ballets Suédois, was a drop curtain constructed of 370 spotlights, each backed by a metal reflector. At the beginning of the second act the audience was nearly blinded when that arsenal of light was switched on.

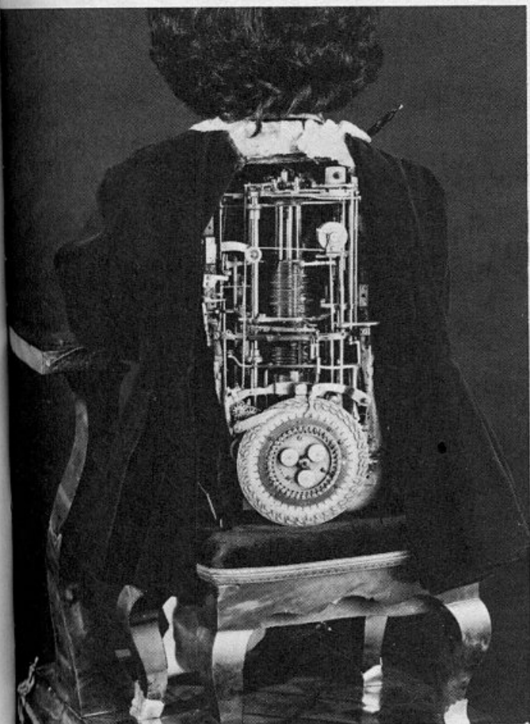
153. *Moholy-Nagy:* Light Prop for a Ballet, *model (also called* Light-Space Modulator*), 1923–30. Steel, plastics, and wood, 59½" (including base). Busch-Reisinger Museum of Germanic Culture, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. Gift of Sibyl Moholy-Nagy.*

Both artists created work expressly for the stage and thought about the function of this work as something fused with the unfolding temporal and dramatic events upon that stage; moreover, they both considered light as energy rather than static mass and therefore as a medium which is itself temporal. Thus we might be prompted to link together what they made. Because both the *Light Prop* and the décor for *Relâche* use the radiance of electric light to undermine the physicality of the object which is the source of that radiance, exploiting the fact that light projects away from its source and makes its way through space to rest at some distance from the object itself—a place shared by the spectator—we might be tempted to judge these works to have uncovered *in the same way* the formal possibilities of light as a medium for sculpture. But that would be wrong. Because the *Light Prop* is a surrogate person, an actor in technological disguise, and Picabia's bank of 370 spotlights is not.

In design, the *Light Prop* is an elaborate version of Gabo's *Column* (fig. 46). Its major structure depends on the conjunction of three vertical, transparent planes to create an apparent or virtual volume. Within the three resultant sections of this scaffolding, which rotates on a central axis, are various perforated disks and planes through which a play of light creates an environment of reflections and shadow. As the *Light Prop* turns, there are not one but two sets of external sheathings spun around the open skeleton of the revolving machine. The first is

that of the disks and wire-mesh planes, which pass in and out of view to become a changing but persistent skin completing the immediate cocoon of the work. The second is made from the projections thrown off by the *Prop* onto the walls of its stage, a shifting pattern that describes the volume of space in which the object sits, like a diaphanous enclosure maintained by the *Light Prop*'s energy and presence. Like a human figure, the *Light Prop* has an internal structure that affects its outward appearance, and, more crucially, an internal source of energy that allows it to move. And, like a human agent, the work is meant to affect its space through the gestures which it makes over a period of time. The fact that these gestures—the patterns of projected light and the shifting patterns that relate throughout its internal structure—change in time, and have a complex program, gives the object an even more human, because seemingly volitional, quality. Thus, no matter how abstract its forms and its function, the *Light Prop* is a kind of robot; the place it was meant to take on stage is that of a mechanical actor.



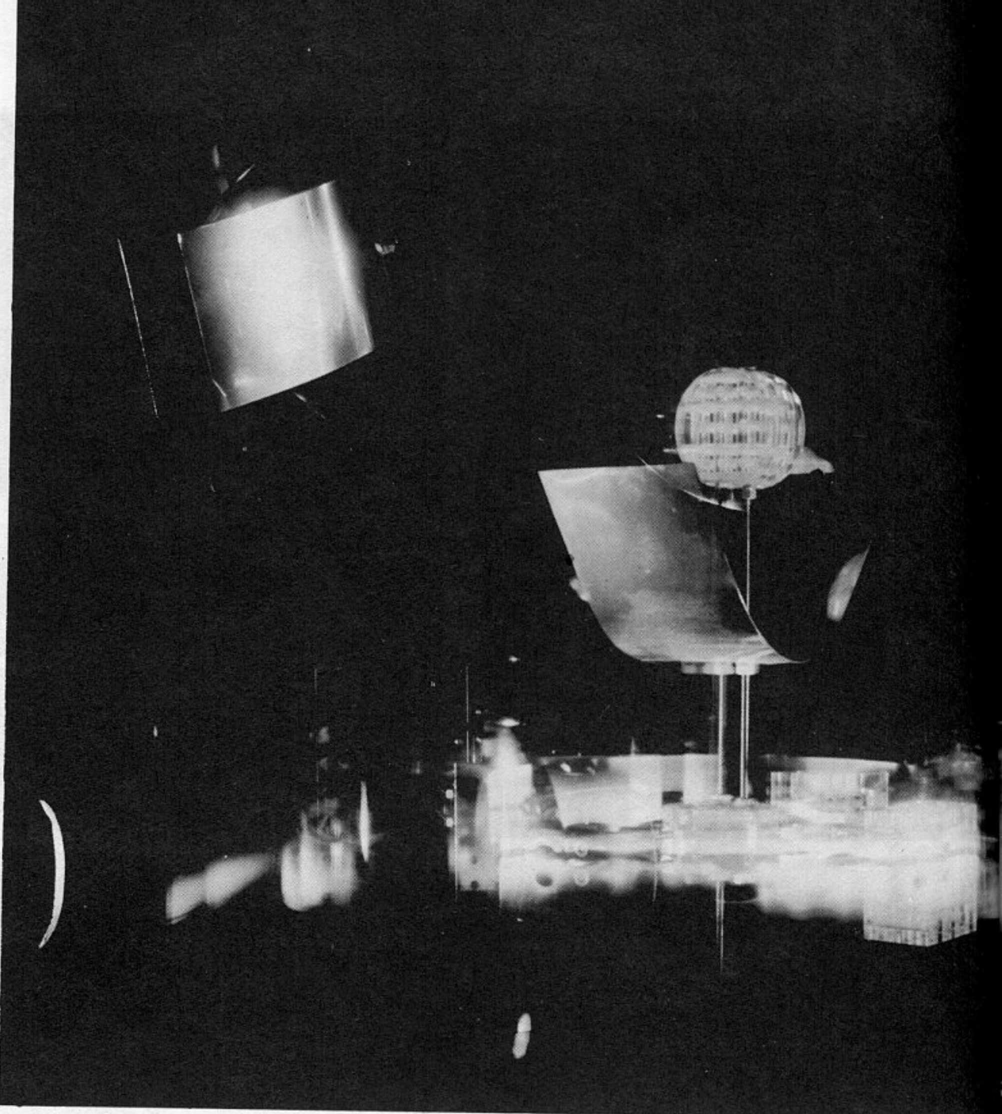


154. LEFT *Francis Picabia (1879–1953): Set for* Relâche, *1924. Cardboard stage model, 15½" x 20" x 8" Danse Museet, Stockholm. (Photo,* L'Amour de l'Art, *no. 12, December 1924)*

155a and **155b.** ABOVE *Pierre Jaquet-Droz, father (1721–90):* The Clerk *(two views), 1774. Mechanical doll. Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Neuchâtel.*

As such, the *Light Prop* has a patrimony that extends back several hundred years into the history of automatons. Behind it stands a far-reaching mimetic impulse, a passion to imitate not simply the look of the living creature but to reproduce as well its animation, its discourse with the passage of time. In his book *Beyond Modern Sculpture*, Jack Burnham argues that the most fundamental ambition of sculpture, since its beginnings, is the replication of life. If until very recently this ambition has had to limit itself, within the practice of the high arts, to the lifelike but static representation of human or animal figures, there have been in the minor or popular arts early attempts to break out of the limits of this immobility. The extremely intricate clockwork automata created in the eighteenth century by Vaucanson arose from and satisfied the need to perfect the appearance of lifelikeness in the mechanical creature (figs. 155a and 155b).

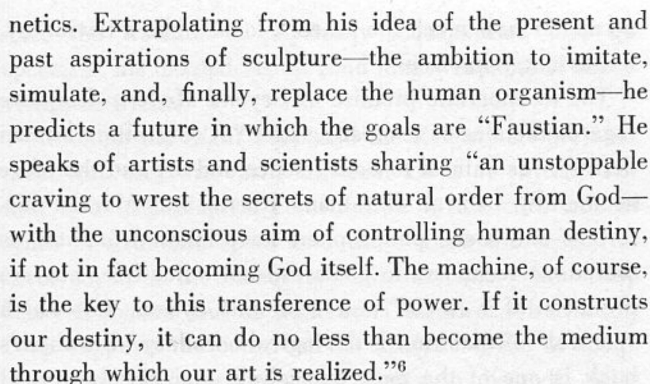
In describing this branch of "subsculpture," Burnam says, "The history of automata has always run close to



156. *Nicolas Schöffer (1912–):* Microtemps 16, *1966. Chrome-plated steel and Plexiglas, (Photo, Studio Yves Hervochon, courtesy of Nicolas Schöffer)*

that of technology."[5] And so Burnham sees the aspirations change in the creation of the robot as technology itself develops. If the robot still clothes the mechanized performance of certain functions in a shell that bears some resemblance to a human agent, there are other machines that simulate human activity for which this kind of resemblance is completely beside the point. For example, for computers, "nonanthropomorphic automata," the simulation of the living organism has been centered in the artificialization of intelligence.

Burnham's thesis is that sculpture's "distant goal" is to assimilate itself into the complex technology of cyber-



netics. Extrapolating from his idea of the present and past aspirations of sculpture—the ambition to imitate, simulate, and, finally, replace the human organism—he predicts a future in which the goals are "Faustian." He speaks of artists and scientists sharing "an unstoppable craving to wrest the secrets of natural order from God—with the unconscious aim of controlling human destiny, if not in fact becoming God itself. The machine, of course, is the key to this transference of power. If it constructs our destiny, it can do no less than become the medium through which our art is realized."[6]

But is sculpture fundamentally mimetic? Is it necessarily "about" the imitation, simulation, and nonbiological re-creation of life? And if it is not about that, what are we to think of Burnham's thesis?

Well, clearly, some sculpture has been about that, particularly the work that Burnham regards with most approbation. But much sculpture has not been about mimesis in any form. Of work that is more-or-less contemporary with *Light Prop*, we can point to Picasso's constructions (figs. 38, 39, 40), Duchamp's readymades (figs. 55, 56, 58), or Tatlin's tower (fig. 47) and say with certainty that they do not fit into Burnham's propositions about either the fundamental nature or the necessary goals of sculpture. And further, we can recall the analysis that Eisenstein made of sculpture through his film *October*, in which he pointed to the ideological role of all art. As a function of a given ideology, works of art project a particular picture of the world, or what it is like to be in the world; but "world" in this context is understood as being fundamentally different as viewed from different ideological vantages. And these vantages are themselves thoroughly structured or impregnated by systems of values, so that art is in this sense never morally neutral, but is involved, willfully or not, in upholding or maintaining those values, or—in certain extreme cases—challenging or subverting them. For Eisenstein, the golden automaton of the clockwork peacock was made in the service of an idealist position. Insofar as the peacock and Kerensky served as the images of one another, the bird symbolized a system of thought which the Russian Revolution viewed as its enemy. Eisenstein insisted that,

no matter how much the peacock looked like a trivial toy, it was not value-free.

The technocratic premise of *Beyond Modern Sculpture* regards the aim of re-creating life, "of controlling human destiny," as natural to both science and art and therefore as morally neutral. But many liberal and Marxist historians and social philosophers have labored to show us that these technocratic goals are not value-free, but are products of a social and economic system for which "control" of that kind is the logical corollary.[8] Burnham's book is one of the most extensively and closely argued presentations of sculpture made in the service of a mechanistic view of the world. But that view—far from being necessary—is precisely what much of contemporary sculpture (and art in general) wishes to overturn.

The set for *Relâche* is an example. When that quiescent and decorative arrangement of crystal globes suddenly, and without warning, unleashes thousands of watts upon an unsuspecting audience, it participates in the kind of terrorism that Antonin Artaud was to speak of in "A Theatre of Cruelty," when he said, "The theatre, like dreams, must be bloody and inhuman."[9] The two essential qualities housed in Picabia's wall of light are those of abruptness and attack. The first of these shatters the audience's assumption that the spectacle is proceeding along expected, conventional lines. Unlike *Light Prop's* performance, which unwinds rhythmically and without surprise, the move made by the *Relâche* décor is completely unprepared for, dramatically or narratively; it is unmotivated and gratuitous. It disrupts the spectator's idea that he is to be given some measure of control over the events on stage by knowing how to anticipate the direction the action will take. The conventional drama locates the spectator outside the staged event, looking on, ignored by the actors. This removal from the physical flow of action on stage affords the viewer a kind of external perspective which promotes his independent analytic stance. *Light Prop* supports that removal; the business it attends to is its own. But *Relâche* strikes out at the audience directly—absorbing it, focusing on it—by lighting it. So the audience is blinded even while it is illuminated, and that double function demonstrates that

once the watcher is physically incorporated into the spectacle, his dazzled vision is no longer capable of supervising its events.

Although the *Light Prop* and the *Relâche* set are both theatrical, they are vastly different kinds of objects. The first is a technological contribution to the conventional sense of dramatic space and time, while the second is involved in a movement to radicalize the relationship between theater and its audience. The mechanized *Light Prop* supports the constructivist analytic mode of sculpture, while *Relâche's* violence wishes to discredit those routines by which we think we understand the properties of objects.

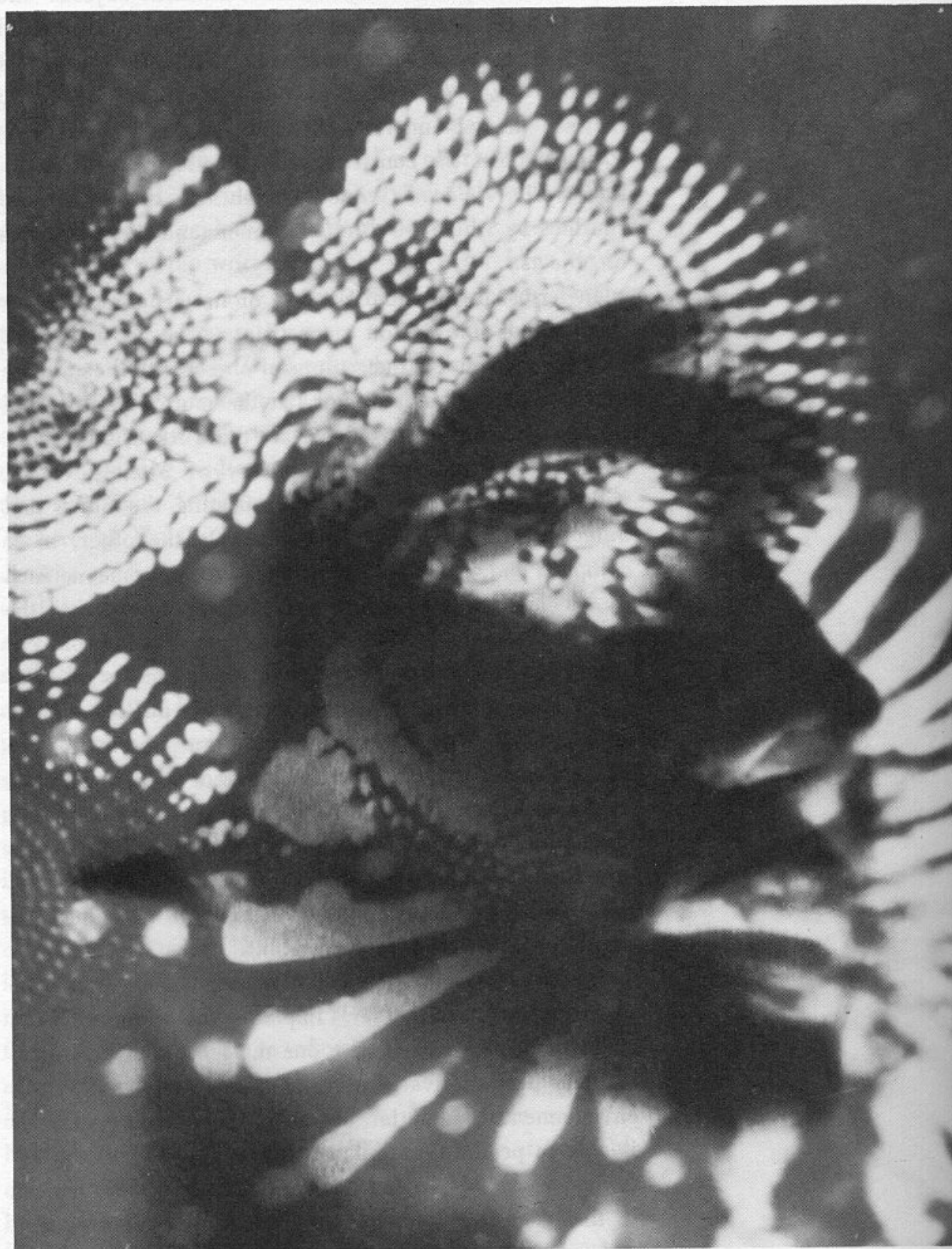
In terms of the sophistication of its technology, *Light Prop* stands midway on a spectrum of the artist's use of movement to endow the sculptural object with the animate qualities of the human actor. At the more primitive end of this spectrum one would locate the work of Alexander Calder, an American contemporary of Moholy-Nagy's, with its mechanical simplicity reflecting the naïve and humorous direction of its content. On the other, more complex, end, one would place the work of someone such as Nicolas Schöffer, whose use of computers makes the sculptural ensemble visibly responsive to its environment (fig. 156)—to the point where a piece such as *CYSP I* (cybernetic-spatiodynamic construction) utilizes control devices to allow the sculptural array to respond to changes in ambient sound and light. "Different colors make its blades turn rapidly or lie stationary, move the sculpture about the floor, turn sharp angles or stay still. Darkness and silence animate the sculpture, while brightness and noise make it still. Ambiguous stimuli . . . produce the unpredictability of an organism."[10]

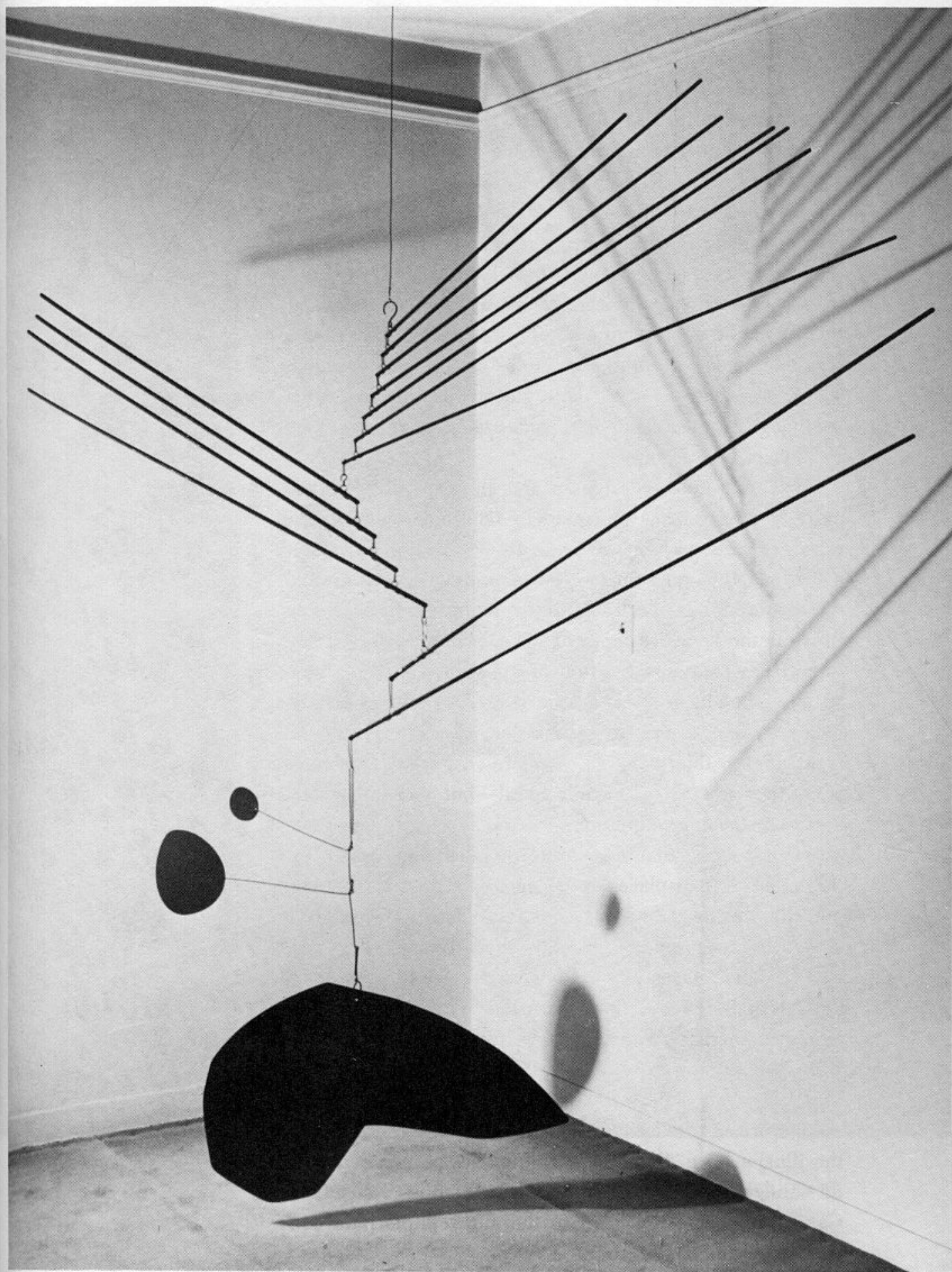
Schöffer (along with Jean Tinguely, Takis, and the new tendency sculptors)[11] implants the sculpture with sophisticated devices to give one the sense that its animation has been motivated by some aspect of the sculpture's environment. Using a far less elaborate technology, Calder is able to produce a similar animation.

Calder's mobiles (which were begun in 1932) achieve in their developed form an equilibrium delicate enough to be disturbed and set in motion by the wind, or by air

157. BELOW *Otto Piene (1928–):* Light Ballet from "Fireflowers," *1964. Light environment. Berlin, Studio Diogenes. (Photo, Manfred Tischer)*

158. RIGHT *Alexander Calder (1898–1976):* Thirteen Spines, *1940. Sheet steel, rods, wire, and aluminum, 84". Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne. (Photo, Herbert Matter)*

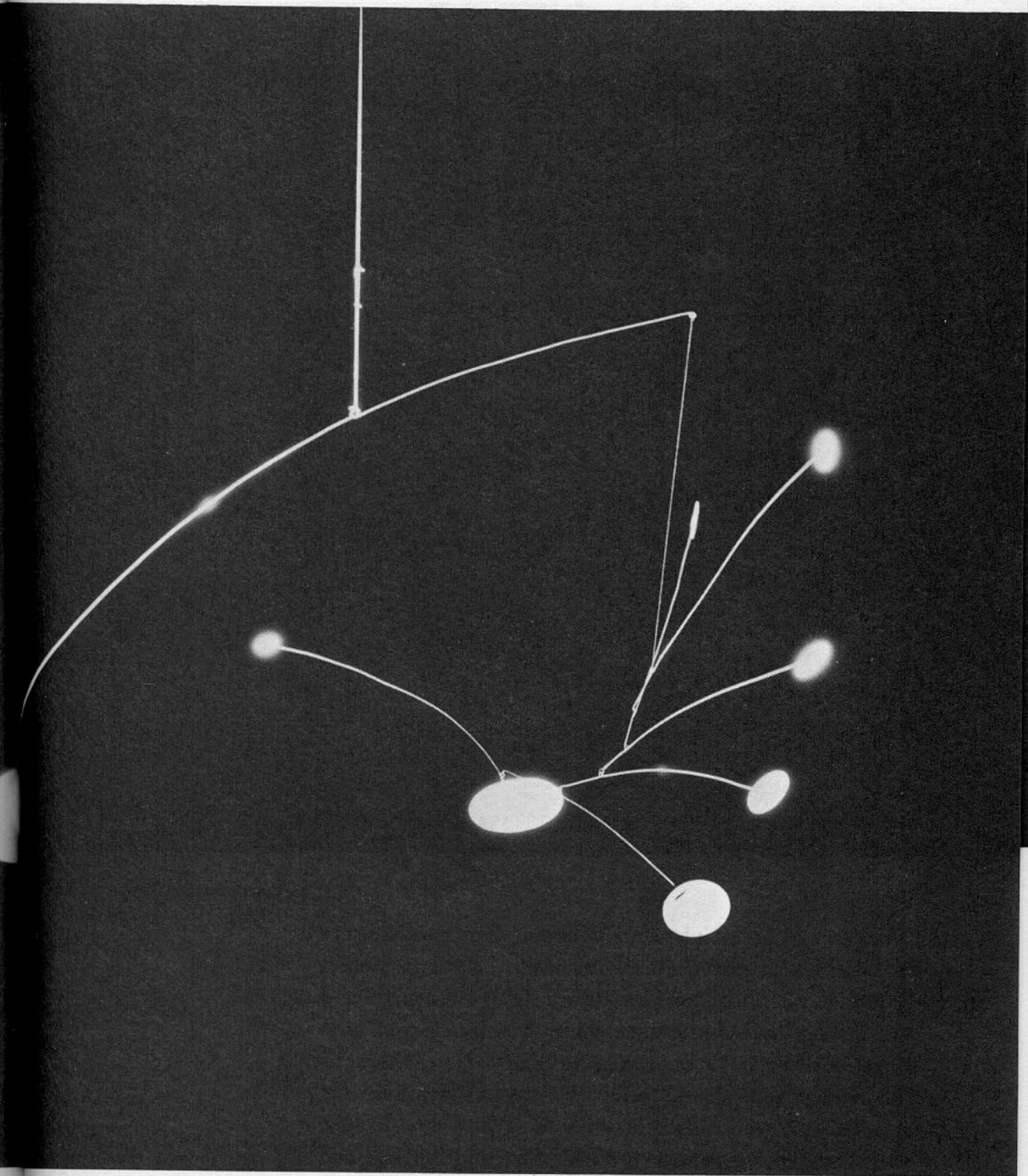




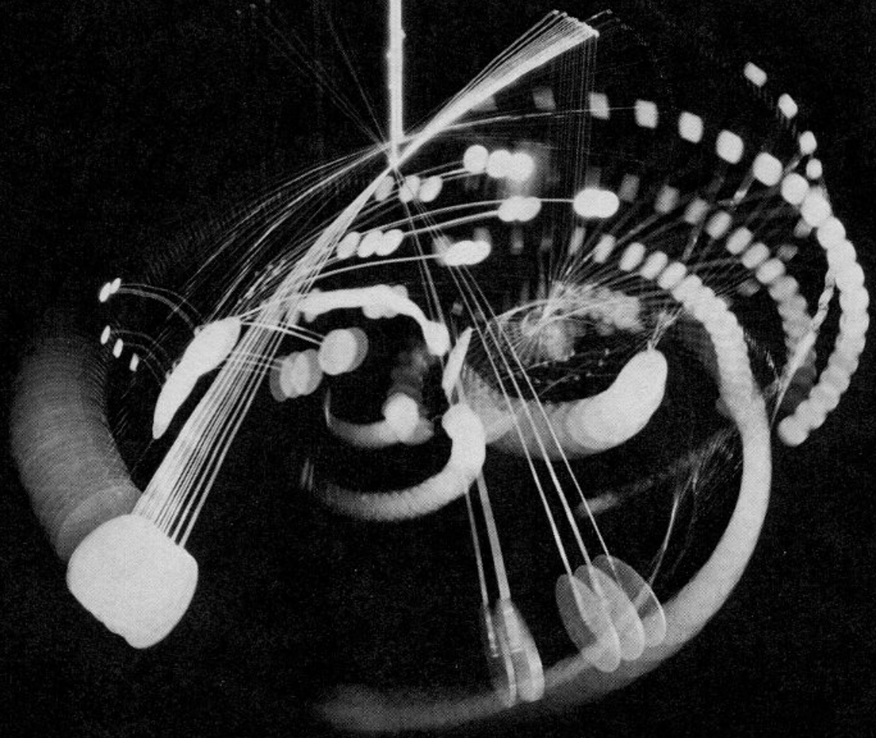
currents in the room in which they hang, or by the touch of one of their viewers. The filament-like backbone of their structure is composed of a cascade of wire cantilevers, attached at one point to the linear member above it and at another to the next lowest element of the chain (fig. 158). In calculating these double-point balances, Calder takes into consideration the weight of any given member—determined either by its actual length or by the additional leverage of a metal disk fixed to its free end—in order to achieve the set of counterbalances necessary to extend the construction to its full length. The viewer sees this extension of the mobile as a free reach through space, a breadth that is visibly due to its internal structural logic rather than to the natural displacement and rigidity of a solid mass.

Further, Calder's design insures the capability of any of these linear arms to rotate in relation to the others, once the entire chain is made to move. For Calder is concerned that once in motion—spinning slowly around their points of connection—these single vectors will conjure for the viewer a sense of virtual volume (figs. 159a, b, and c). That this creation of apparent volume is constructivist at its roots is acknowledged by Calder's statement, "When I use two circles of wire intersecting at right angles, this to me is a sphere . . . what I produce is not precisely what I have in mind—but a sort of sketch, a man-made approximation."[12] And it is this generated sense of volume that makes the mobiles a metaphor for the body as it displaces space, but it is a body sketched now by the linear pen of constructivism in terms of a striking transparency. Through that transparency they also become images of the body's response to gravity, of the internal source of its opposition in its determination to move. In that sense they have traveled some distance from the purism of Gabo's 1920 *Kinetic Construction* (fig. 160), an experiment in virtual volume created by the motorized oscillation of a single, flexible rod to create the illusion of a diaphanous column set perpendicular to its solid base. The path of Calder's mobiles leads from Gabo's abstract geometries to the anthropomorphic content of the body's intermittent action.

In that it is a description of aspects of the body, in

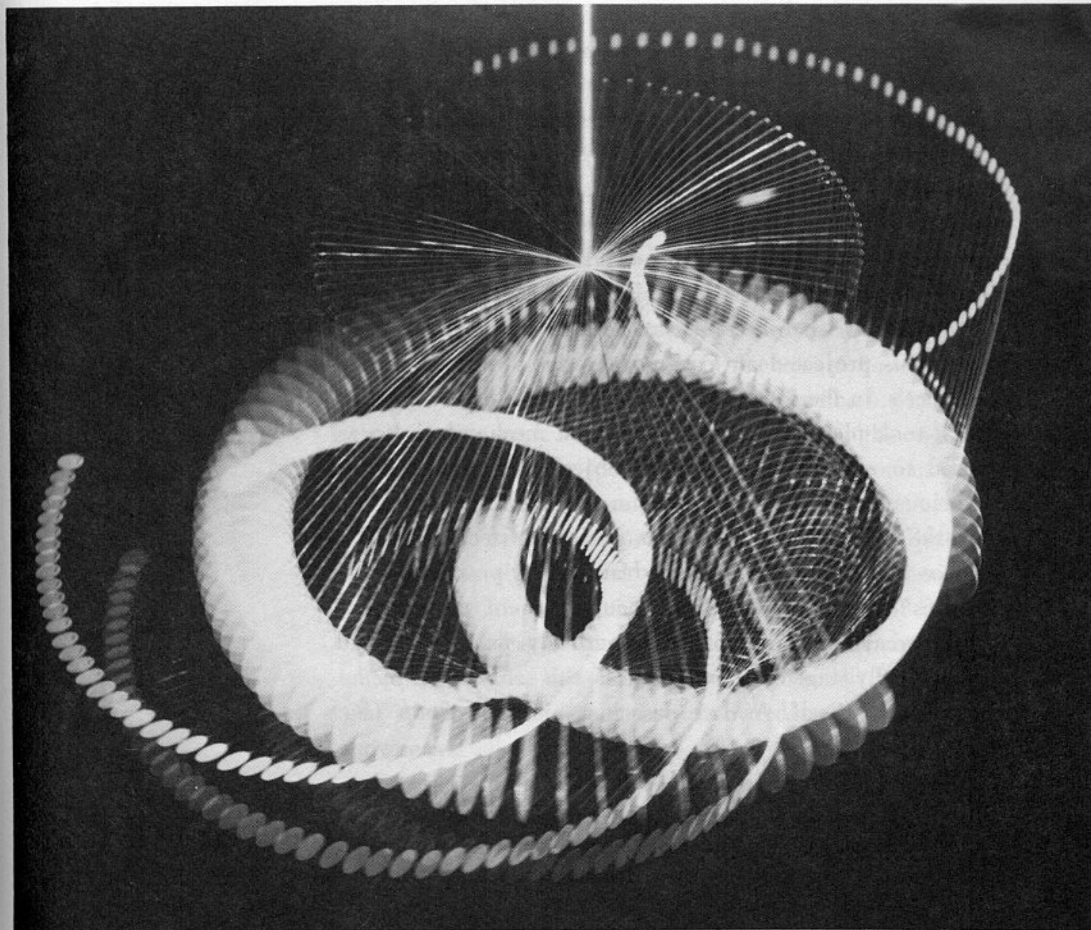


159a, ABOVE , **b** and **c,** OVER
Calder: Hanging Mobile *(three views), 1936. Aluminum, steel wire, 28" wide. Collection, Mrs. Merie Callery. (Photos, Herbert Matter)*



(Continued) **159 b** and **c.**
Calder: Hanging Mobile

that its motion is intermittent rather than mechanically continuous, in that one feels impelled to set it in motion in order for it to "perform" the role of filling out and inhabiting its own spatiality, the mobile locates its sculptural meaning as a kind of actor (fig. 161). Indeed its beginnings were in the little wire toys Calder built for his "circus" soon after arriving in Paris in 1927, the performances of which brought troops of artists and musicians to his room in Montparnasse. By the mid-1930s Martha Graham saw in the mobiles the innate drama of their performance and had several enlarged to function as "plastic interludes" during dance performances of her group. Also in the mid-1930s Calder designed a set for a



production of Eric Satie's *Socrate* when it was staged at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut. Calder's sculpture dramatizes its motion in the same sense as *Light Prop*, for it spins out its tale of achieved volume through a slowly unfolding temporal sequence, satisfying in its logic and predictability. The drama is heightened by the flexibility and change it projects as it responds to the vagaries of its motivating force, which only fixes that movement more securely as a metaphor for volitional activity. As usual, Duchamp performed the role of the subtlest of critics. Recalling the source of their collective title, Calder described Duchamp's first encounter with these objects: "I asked him what sort of a name I could

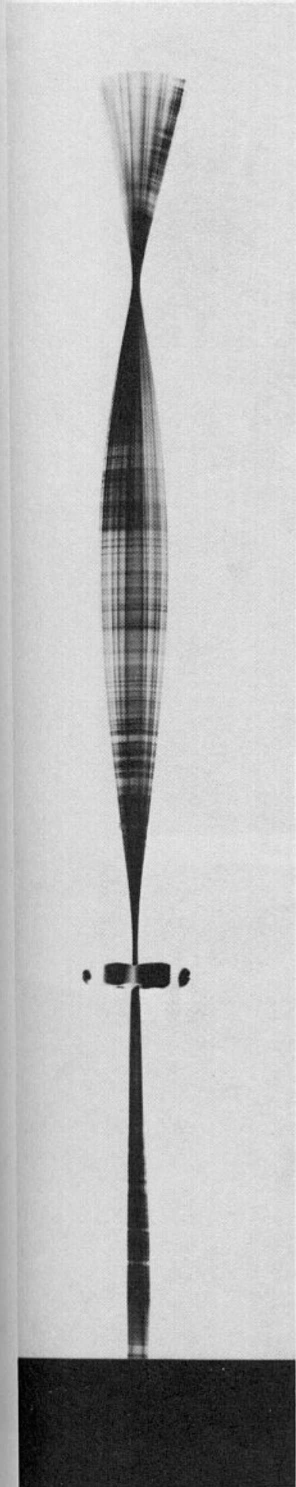
give these things and he at once produced 'mobile.' In addition to something that moves, in French it also means motive."[13]

But sculptors were to discover that no matter what the variation in the type of balance used, wind-driven objects tended to produce very similar types of rhythms and patterns of movement. Although George Rickey exploited the knife-edge fulcrum for his own kinetic work (fig. 162) and substituted plane geometry for the curvilinear vocabulary of the mobiles, the rotations and swings of these elements projected an expressive content very similar to Calder's. In the intensified production of kinetic sculpture that took place in the 1960s, internal mechanization was used to allow the performing object to locate itself at various points on the spectrum of emotion. Len Lye's work, for example, sometimes projects a feeling of violence and aggression as the dramatic by-product of the forms' snapping toward the boundaries of the volumes they weave through air. Automatically programed and specifically staged as performances, this sculpture is meant to "enact" itself. As Lye describes his 1963 *Loop* (fig. 163):

> *The Loop*, a twenty-two foot strip of polished steel, is formed into a band, which rests on its back on a magnetized bed. The action starts when the charged magnets pull the loop of steel downwards, and then release it suddenly. As it struggles to resume its natural shape, the steel band bounds upwards and lurches from end to end with simultaneous leaping and rocking motions, orbiting powerful reflections at the viewer and emitting fanciful musical tones which pulsate in rhythm with *The Loop*. Occasionally, as the boundless *Loop* reaches its greatest height, it strikes a suspended ball, causing it to emit a different yet harmonious musical note, and so it dances to a weird quavering composition of its own making.[14]

160. *Gabo:* Kinetic Construction, *1920. Metal rod with electric vibrator, 24¼". Tate Gallery, London.*

In opposition to Lye's exuberant mechanical calisthenics, one can think of Jean Tinguely's self-deprecating gestures expressed through sculptural objects that look like little more than animated junk. Yet these works, too, were thought of as actors in specific performances, the most celebrated of which was staged in 1960 in the garden of The Museum of Modern Art by a sculpture that was programed to self-destruct (fig. 164). Pol Bury's work exem-

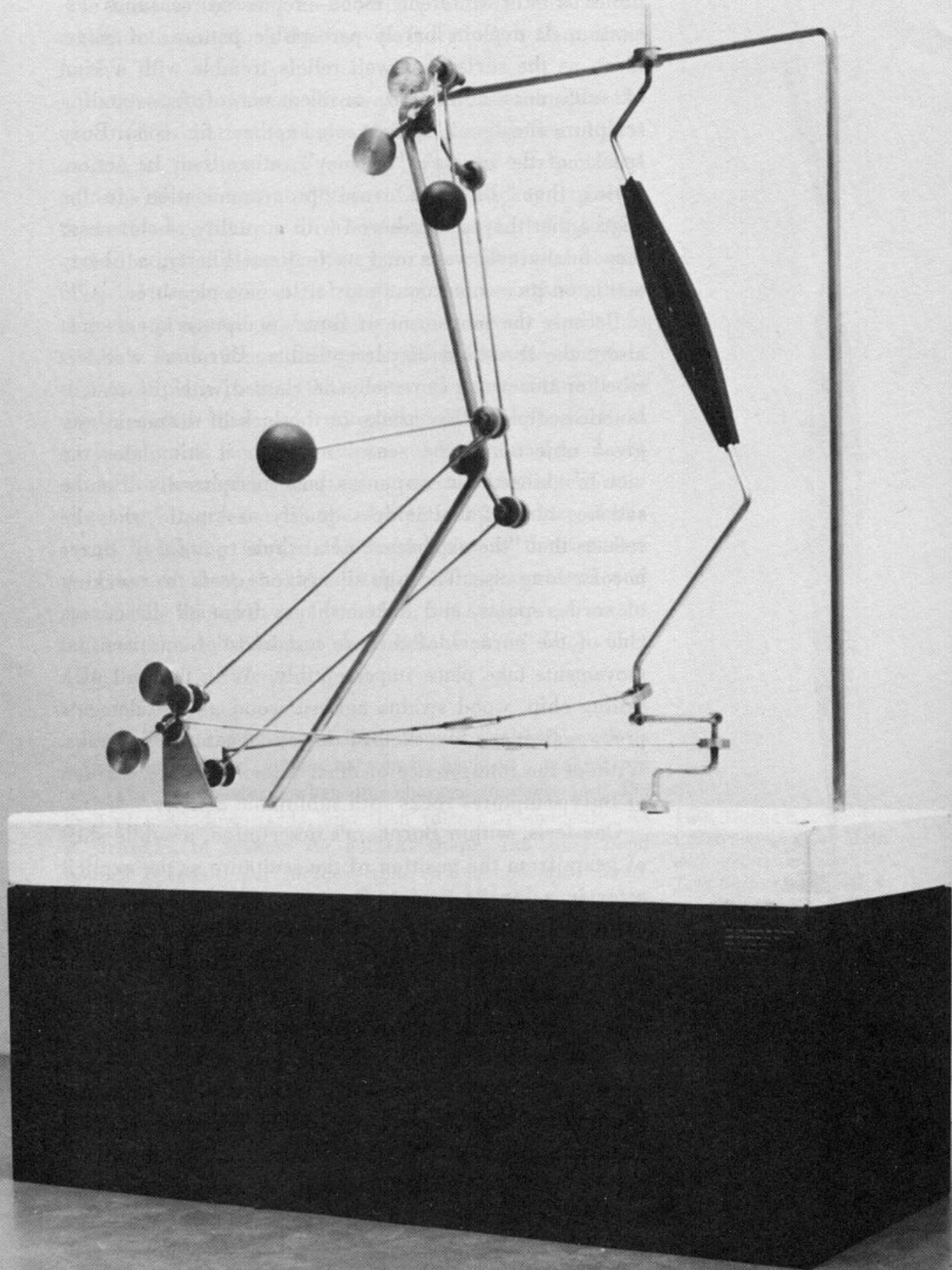


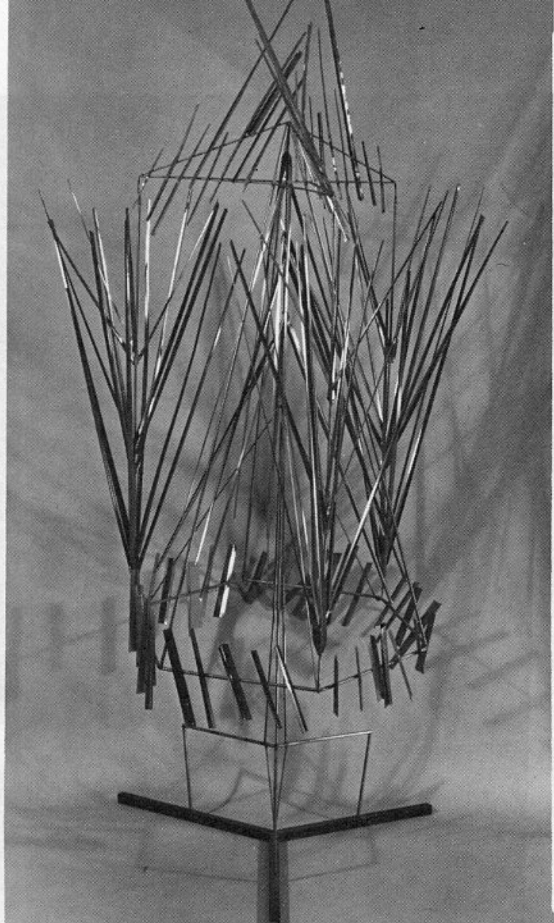
plifies a still different mood—repressed sensuous excitation. It exploits barely perceptible patterns of movement, as the surface of wall reliefs tremble with a kind of subliminal animation, or elements of free-standing sculpture slowly stir against one another (fig. 165). Bury speaks of the object's "journey" rather than its action, saying that "Journeys avoid 'programmization' in the degree that they are endowed with a quality of slowness; they finally achieve a real or fictional liberty, a liberty acting on its own account and for its own pleasure. . . ."[15]

Because the movement of Bury's sculpture hovers just above the threshold of perceptibility, Burnham wonders whether this work can really be classed with the rest of kinetic sculpture. He speaks of the lack of drama in any given object and the sense in which it stimulates the viewer's kinesthetic responses only peripherally. But he satisfies himself that it does qualify as kinetic when he reflects that "the experience of a whole roomful of Burys is something else. Through silence, one *feels* the creaking of cords, spools, and linked shapes from all directions. Out of the corners of the eye hundreds of multisensual movements take place imperceptibly. As in the hull of a sailing ship, wood strains against wood as the elements press against the live shell of doweled beams and planks. Without the interference of other human visitors, a room of Bury sculptures rocks with subliminal activity."[16]

One feels, within Burnham's description, a subtle shift of gears from the position of the sculpture as the explicit actor in a kinetic performance to a position of another kind. In this latter stage a roomful of Burys contrives a very special environment of sensuous alertness, one that theatricalizes the room to the point where it is the *viewer* who is the actor in question. The drama of motion is one that the spectator completes or bestows on the assembled work, his participation enacting in large scale or explicit gesture the "subliminal activity" which the work suggests. The sculpture makes the viewer complicit with the direction of its "journey" through time; in being its audience, he becomes, automatically, its performer.

In this sense, one can think of tableau sculpture—such as the work of George Segal (fig. 167) or Edward Kienholz—as theatrical, although no internal mechanization impels the sculptured actors to "perform" in time. It is,

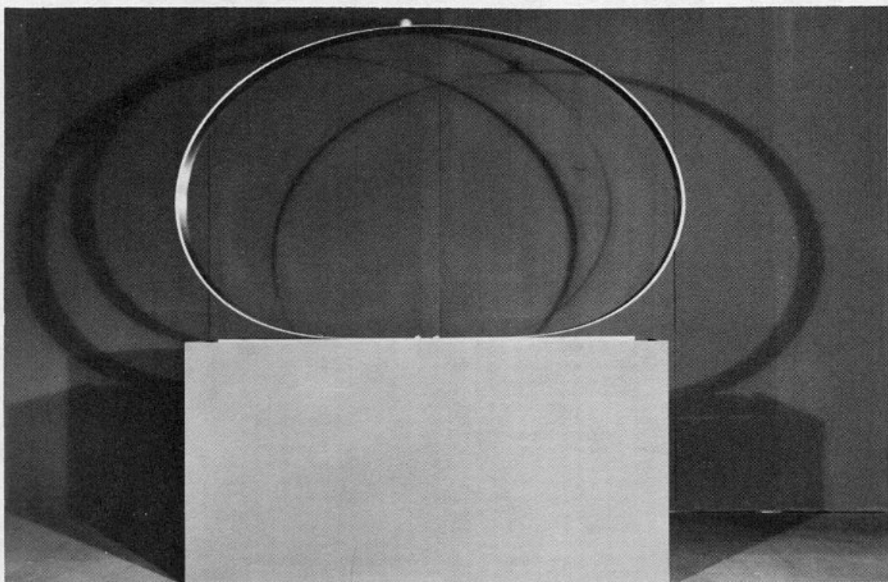


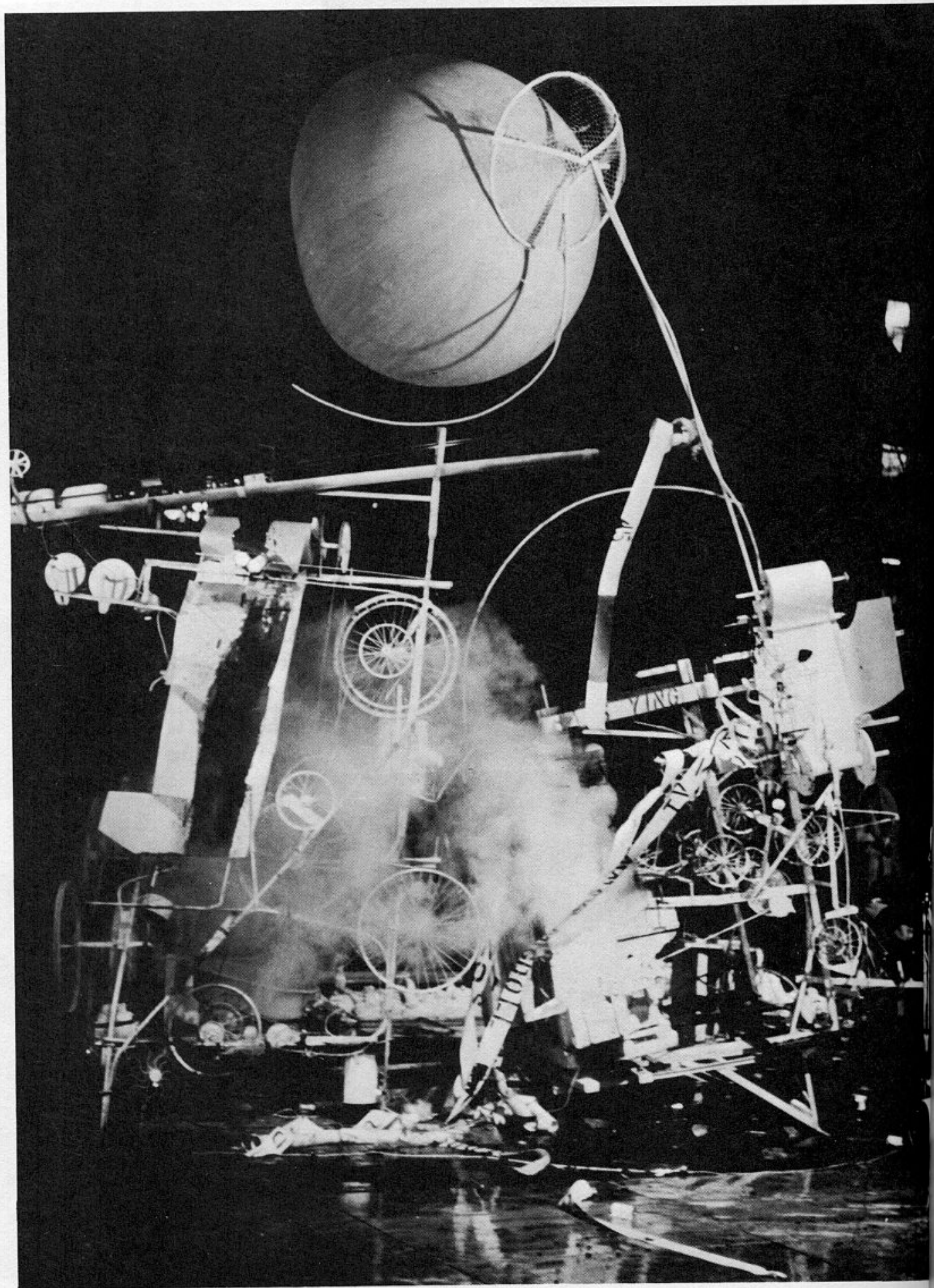


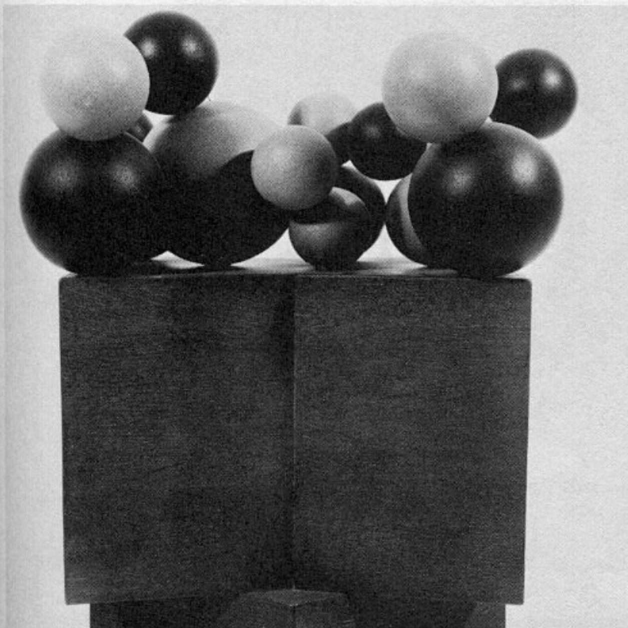
161. LEFT *Calder: The* Bicycle, *1968. Wood, wire, pipe metal, 52". Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist.*

162. ABOVE *George Rickey (1907–):* Homage to Bernini, *1958. Stainless steel, 68½" x 36" x 36". Collection of The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Patrick McGinnis. (Photo, Geoffrey Clements)*

163. BELOW *Len Lye (1901–):* The Loop, *1963. Stainless steel, 60" x 6". Courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago.*



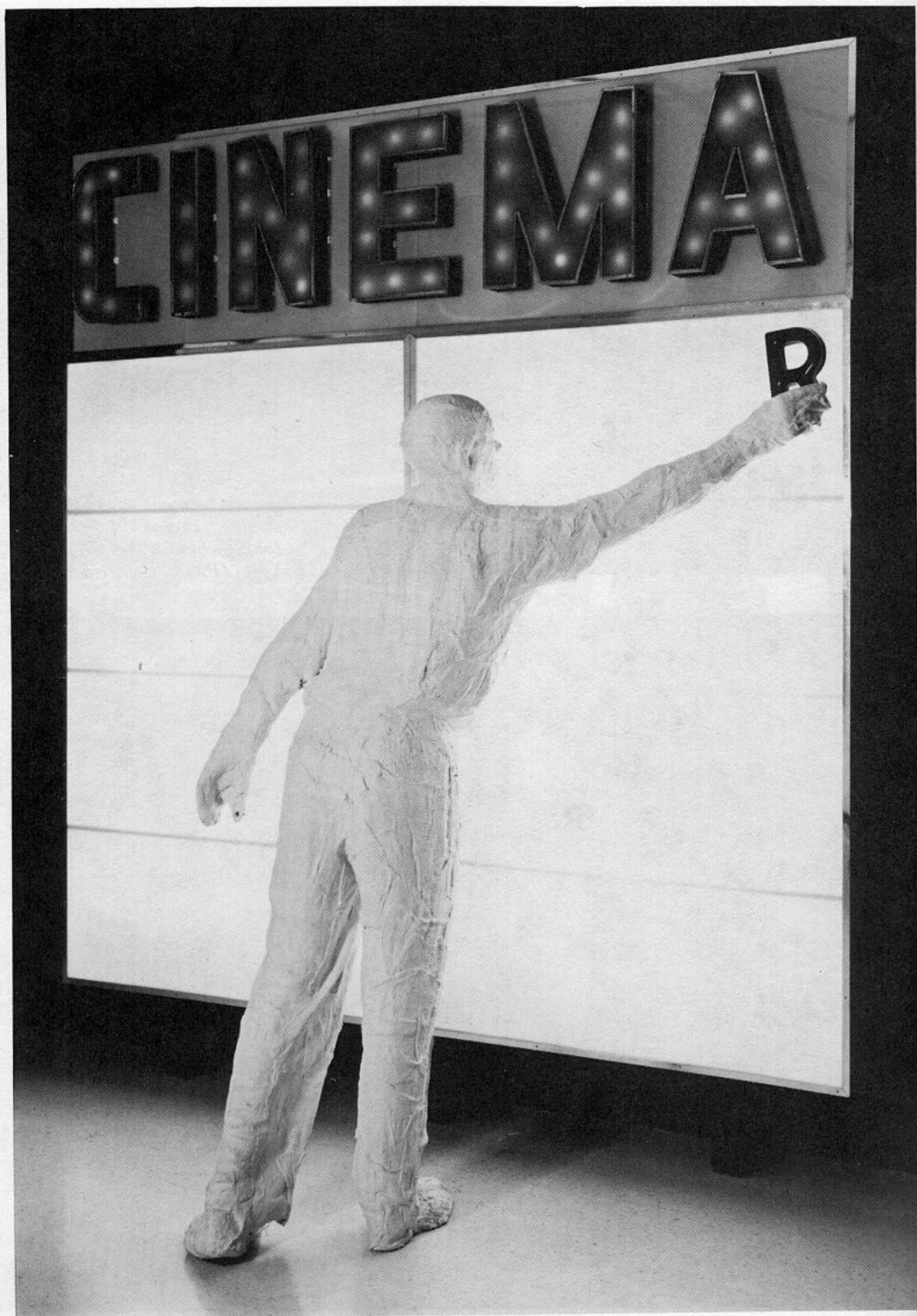




164. OPPOSITE PAGE *Jean Tinguely (1925–):* Homage to New York *(self-constructing, self-destroying), March 7, 1960. Museum of Modern Art, New York. (Photo, David Gahr)*

165. ABOVE *Pol Bury (1918–):* 18 Superimposed Balls, *1967. Wood, 19½" x 15⅝" x 25⅝". Collection Mr. and Mrs. Chapin Riley, Worcester, Mass. (Photo, Lefebre Gallery)*

166. BELOW *Hans Haacke, (1936–):* Condensation Cube, *1963–65. Acrylic plastic, water, climate in area of display, 11¾" x 11¾" x 11¾". John Weber Gallery, New York. (Photo, Hans Haacke)*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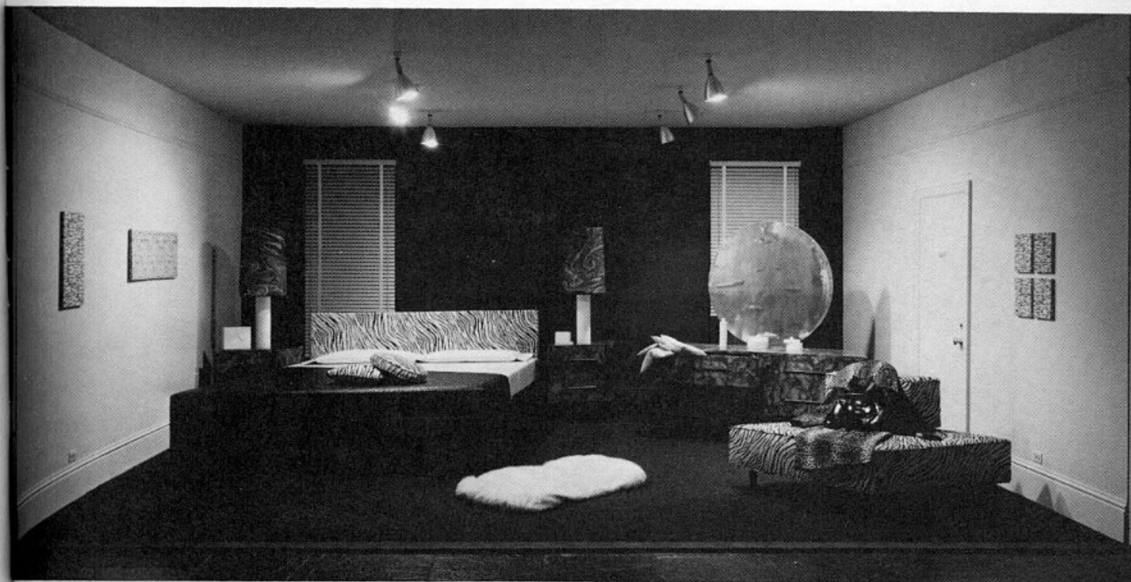
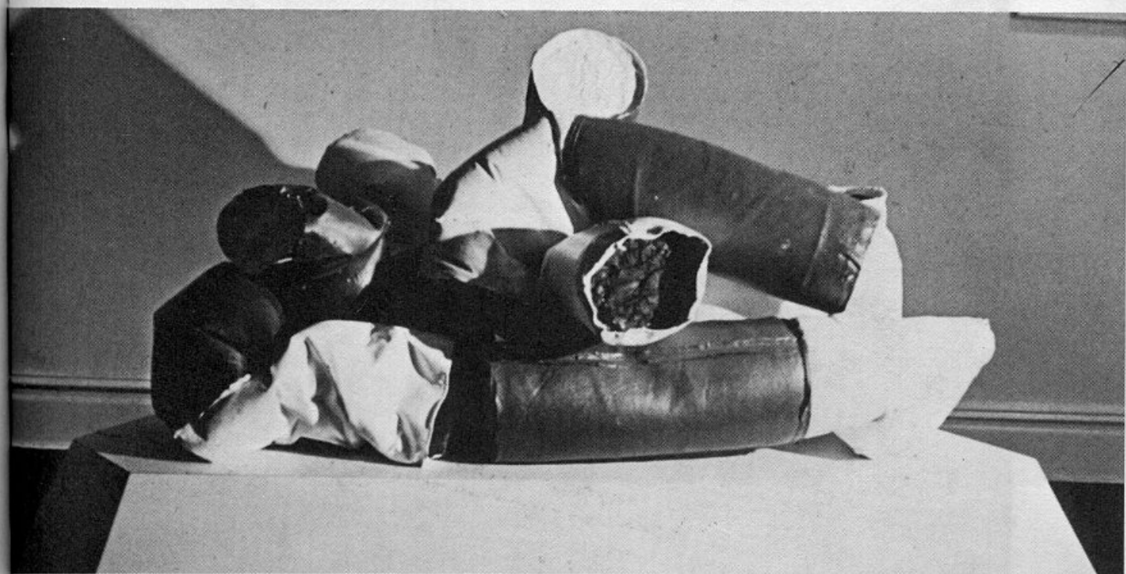




167. LEFT *George Segal (1924–):* Cinema, *1963. Plaster statue, illuminated Plexiglas and metal, 118" x 96" x 39". Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, N.Y. Gift of Seymour H. Knox. (Photo, Sherwin Greenberg, McGranahan and May, Inc.)*

168. TOP *Claes Oldenburg (1929–):* Bedroom Ensemble, *1963. Mixed media, 204" x 252". National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. (Photo, Geoffrey Clements)*

169. BOTTOM *Oldenburg:* Giant Fag Ends, *1967. Canvas, urethane foam, and wood, 52" x 96" x 96". Collection of The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Gift of the Friends of The Whitney Museum of American Art. (Photo, Geoffrey Clements)*

rather, the viewer's movement as he walks around the sculptural diorama, or takes time to interpret the narrative meaning of the various details of the tableau, that endows these works with dramatic time. The use of actual bathtubs or theater marquees or hospital beds on which plaster manikins are placed heightens the sense of continuity between the viewer's world and the ambience of the work. The sculpture of Claes Oldenburg also organizes itself into environments or tableaux and has recourse as well to imagery drawn from the unsterilized realm of popular culture. It traffics in "suites" of bedroom furniture (fig. 168), or toilets and telephones, or hamburgers and french fries, or cigarette butts.

But what are we to think of a cigarette butt that is over four feet long (fig. 169), or a toilet made of canvas stuffed with kapock (fig. 170)—constructed like an elaborate, exhausted pillow? These objects, staged like lugubrious obstructions in our space, do theatricalize their environment, do render us participants or actors in the drama of their presentation. But actors of what sort—and in a drama of what kind?

The two major formal devices Oldenburg uses to transform the ordinary object are the strategies of gigantism and/or softness. They are obstructions in the viewer's space because they have become colossal variants on their natural scale, and because they promote a sense of interaction in which the viewer is a participant, their mass being construed in terms that suggest his own body—pliant and soft, like flesh. The viewer is then forced into two simultaneous admissions: "They are *my* things—the objects I *use* everyday"; and "I resemble them."

Surrealism (particularly in painting) resorted to violent dislocations in scale in order to open a cleft in the continuous ground plane of reality, and Oldenburg's sense of scale obviously stands in relation to that source. Yet his terms are different and the balance between audience and object subtly shifted. Breton saw the dislocations in the external world as objective confirmations of some part of the author's self—his unconscious needs, his desires. The surrealist encounter was conceived of as a kind of proof that objects could be shaped by that aspect of the self. Objects were manifestations, then, of the self as it

170. *Oldenburg:* "Ghost" Toilet, *1966. Painted canvas filled with Kapok, wood, 51" x 33" x 28". Collection, Albert A. List Family, Connecticut. (Photo, Geoffrey Clements)*

projected outward.[17] They were the realization of the Tzara prediction about the poem that "it will resemble you," where "you" is understood as the author. But the viewer's reaction to Oldenburg's work transposes these terms to, "I resemble them," where the "I" is the spectator and "they" are the banal objects that fill his space. With that reversal comes a realization that cuts much more deeply into an a priorist view of the self, by which the self is thought to be structured, in its most basic sense, prior to experience.

In discussing Rodin we talked about an alternative to that notion.[18] We spoke of a view by which the knowledge of some of the most private reaches of the self could be thought of as having been learned from the behavior of others—from their gestures of pain, for example, or of love. We spoke of Rodin's conversion of the source of *significance* of the gesture, transferring its meaning from the center of the figure to its skin, rendering it, if one can speak in this way, profoundly superficial. One feels a certain terror if one thinks of the self as constructed *in* experience rather than prior to it. Terror because some notions of control have to be given up, because some certainties about the source or functions of knowledge have to be shifted or restructured. Yet the optimism in Rodin's work stems from the fact that, after all, the experience shaping the gestures is still human. With Oldenburg the tone becomes sardonic and the intellectual surgery more radical, because the image of influence on the self is made up of objects.

Though softened and veiled by irony, the relationship Oldenburg's work has with its audience is one of attack. The softness of the sculptures undermines the conventions of rational structure, and its associations for the viewer strike at his assumptions that he is the conceptual agent of the temporal unfolding of the event. When Picabia turned the spotlights on the audience of *Relâche*, his act of incorporation was simultaneously an act of terrorism. If Oldenburg's work is theatrical, it is so in the sense of *Relâche* rather than in the terms of conventional theater, whether those terms are realized by the movement of Moholy-Nagy's *Light Prop* or the static nature of the sculptural tableau.

171. *Oldenburg:* The Store, *1961. Environment. New York. (Photo, Robert R. McElvoy)*

The link between Oldenburg's work and the notions of a "theatre of cruelty" was forged in the late 1950s and early 1960s through the sculptor's participation in the theatrical manifestation of "happenings."[19] Happenings were dramatic events staged for the most part in New York by artists and their friends, who performed in lofts, galleries, or, as in Oldenburg's case, storefronts (fig. 171). As Susan Sontag has pointed out, three typical features of the happening connect it to Artaud's notion of theater: "first, its supra-personal or impersonal treatment of persons; second, its emphasis on spectacle and sound, and disregard for the word; and third, its professed aim to assault the audience."[20] In describing this last aspect Sontag writes:

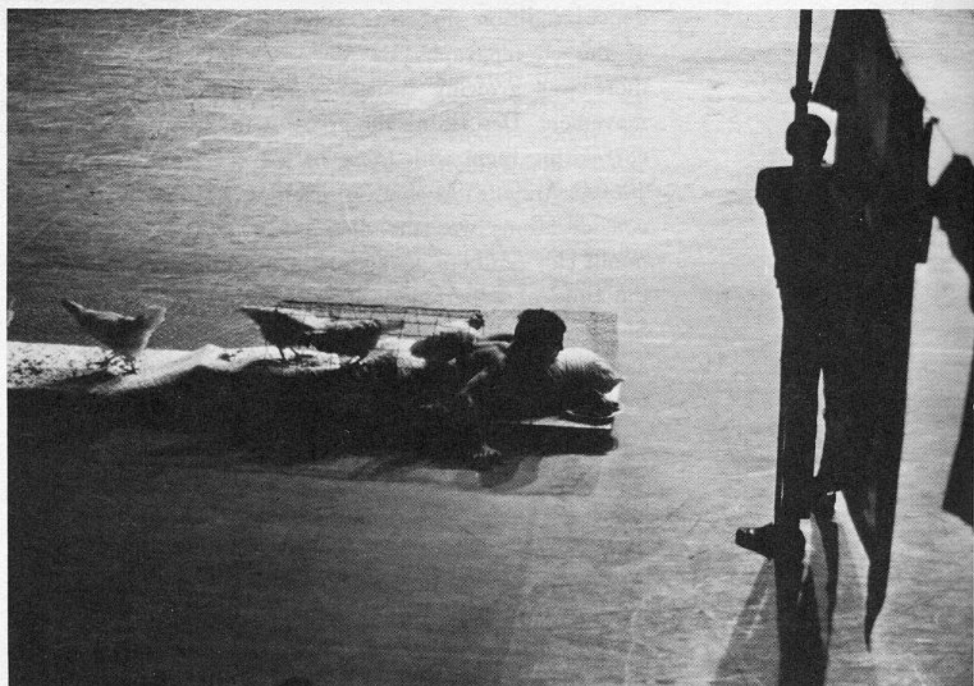
> Perhaps the most striking feature of the happening is its treatment (this is the only word for it) of the audience. The performers may sprinkle water on the audience, or fling pennies or sneeze-producing detergent powder at it. Someone may be making near-deafening noises on an oil drum, or waving an acetylene torch in the direction of the spectators. Several radios may be playing simultaneously. The audience may be made to stand uncomfortably in a crowded room, or fight for space to stand on boards laid in a few inches of water. There is no attempt to cater to the audience's desire to see everything. In fact this is often deliberately frustrated, by performing some of the events in semi-darkness or by having events go on in different rooms simultaneously. In Allan Kaprow's *A Spring Happening*, presented in March 1961, at the Reuben Gallery, the spectators were confined inside a long boxlike structure resembling a cattle car; peepholes had been bored in the wooden wall of this enclosure through which the spectators could strain to see the events taking place outside; when the *Happening* was over, the walls collapsed, and the spectators were driven out by someone operating a power lawnmower.[21]

If the attack with the lawnmower in *A Spring Happening* signaled the end of the event, many happenings gave their audiences no such clues as to when they were over. Lacking any kind of narrative or dramatic arc, and lacking suspense or structure, they often left their audiences standing and waiting for some time after they were in fact ended. "The Happening operates by creating an asymmetrical network of surprises, without climax or

consummation; this is the alogic of dreams rather than the logic of most art. Dreams have no sense of time; neither do the Happenings. Lacking a plot and continuous rational discourse, they have no past."[22] And this withholding of a sense of structure is, if sublimated, as much an attack on the audience as the physical menace of the power mower.

Another aspect of the happening, "its supra-personal or impersonal treatment of persons," is clearly important to Oldenburg's sculptural thinking. In the happenings, performers were often shrouded in burlap sacks or wrapped in paper to resemble objects; or they were rendered inanimate props (fig. 173);[23] or acted upon as though they were depersonalized instruments—lifted, thrown, pushed, stroked. "Another way in which people are employed is in the discovery or the impassioned repetitive use of materials for their sensuous properties rather than their conventional uses: dropping pieces of bread into a bucket of water, setting a table for a meal, rolling a huge paper-screen hoop along the floor, hanging up laundry."[24]

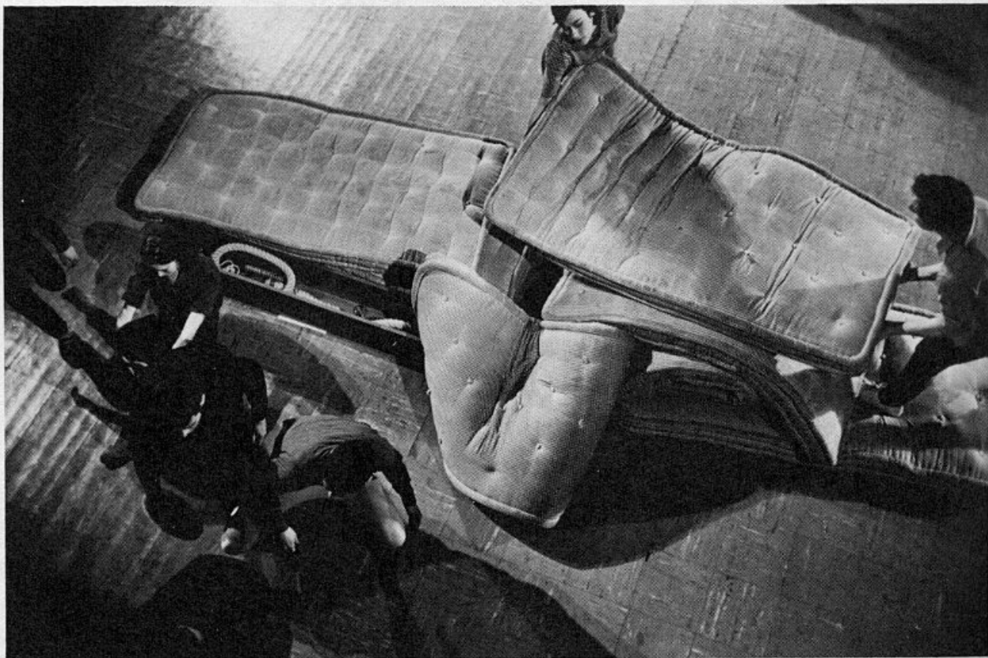
In this last respect, happenings joined themselves to a dance tradition that was simultaneously developing out of the choreography of Merce Cunningham, in which there was growing insistence on the objectification of movement. Describing the goals of the "new dance," and correlating them with those of the sculpture of the mid-1960s, Annette Michelson declares, "Central to those considerations was the distinction between a time one might call synthetic as against a time that is operational, the time of experience, of our actions in the world."[25] She goes on to say that the common aim of the dancers associated with the Judson Theatre[26] "was the establishment of a radically new economy of movement. This required a systematic critique of the rhetoric, conventions, the esthetic hierarchies imposed by traditional or classical dance forms. That rhetoric was, in fact, reversed, destroyed, in what came to be known as the dance of 'ordinary language' and of 'task performance.'" The tasks that constituted the fabric of this dance—like moving mattresses or carrying bricks or following the rules of a game—serve a double strategy: to exchange



172. ABOVE LEFT *Allan Kaprow (1927–   ):* A Service for the Dead *(1), 1962. Happening. New York. (Photo, Robert R. McElvoy)*

173. BELOW LEFT *Robert Rauschenberg (1925–   ):* Linoleum, *performed at the "New Festival," April 26, 1966, Washington, D.C. (Photo, Peter Moore)*

174. ABOVE *Rauschenberg:* Pelican, *May 25, 1965. (Photo, Peter Moore)*



illusionism for real-time[27] and to de-psychologize the performer.[28]

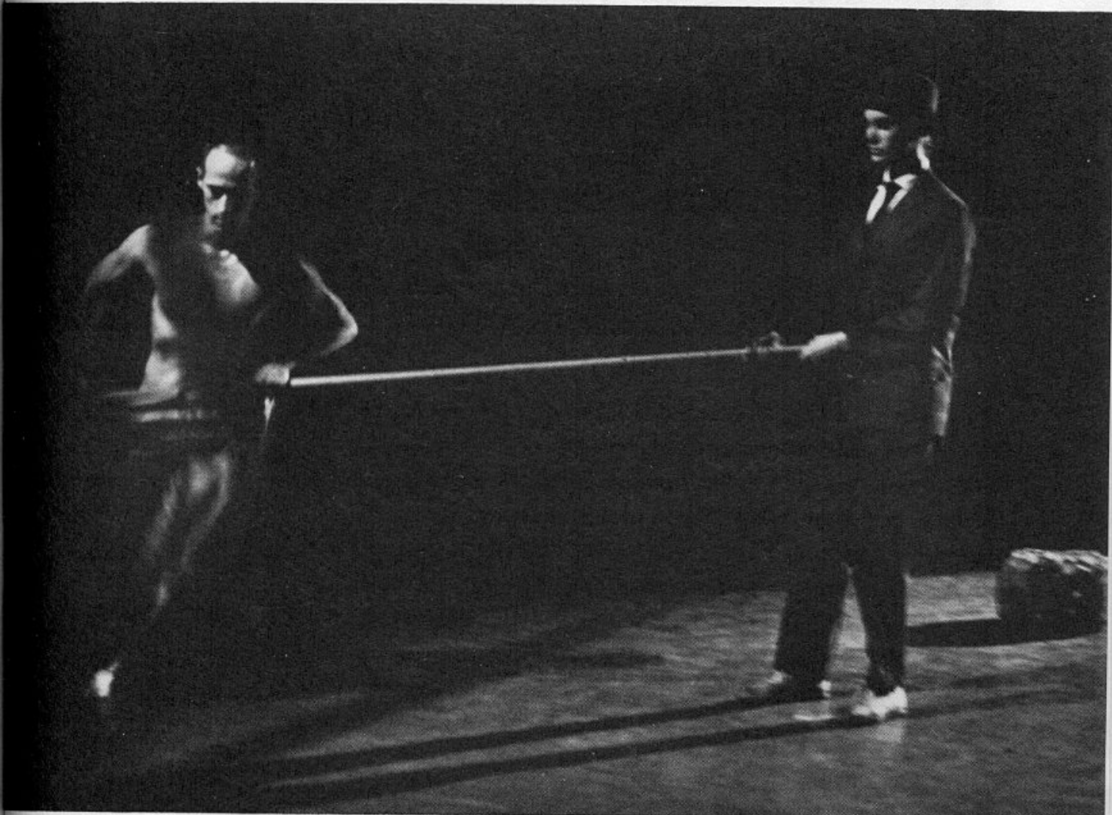
In writing about her own work, Yvonne Rainer insisted on the parallels between the sensibility of the new dance and that of minimalist sculpture (fig. 175).[29] And, indeed, just as Oldenburg's work began to flourish in the theatrical ambience of the happening, a concern with performance in the context of the new dance shaped some of the initiating attitudes in the work of Robert Morris. As described at the beginning of this chapter, Morris was allocated seven minutes for a stage performance with the Judson Living Theatre in 1961. The "performer" he chose and constructed was a hollow column which appeared alone on the stage. Standing vertical for three and a half minutes, the column was then made to topple, where it rested, horizontal, for the remaining amount of time.

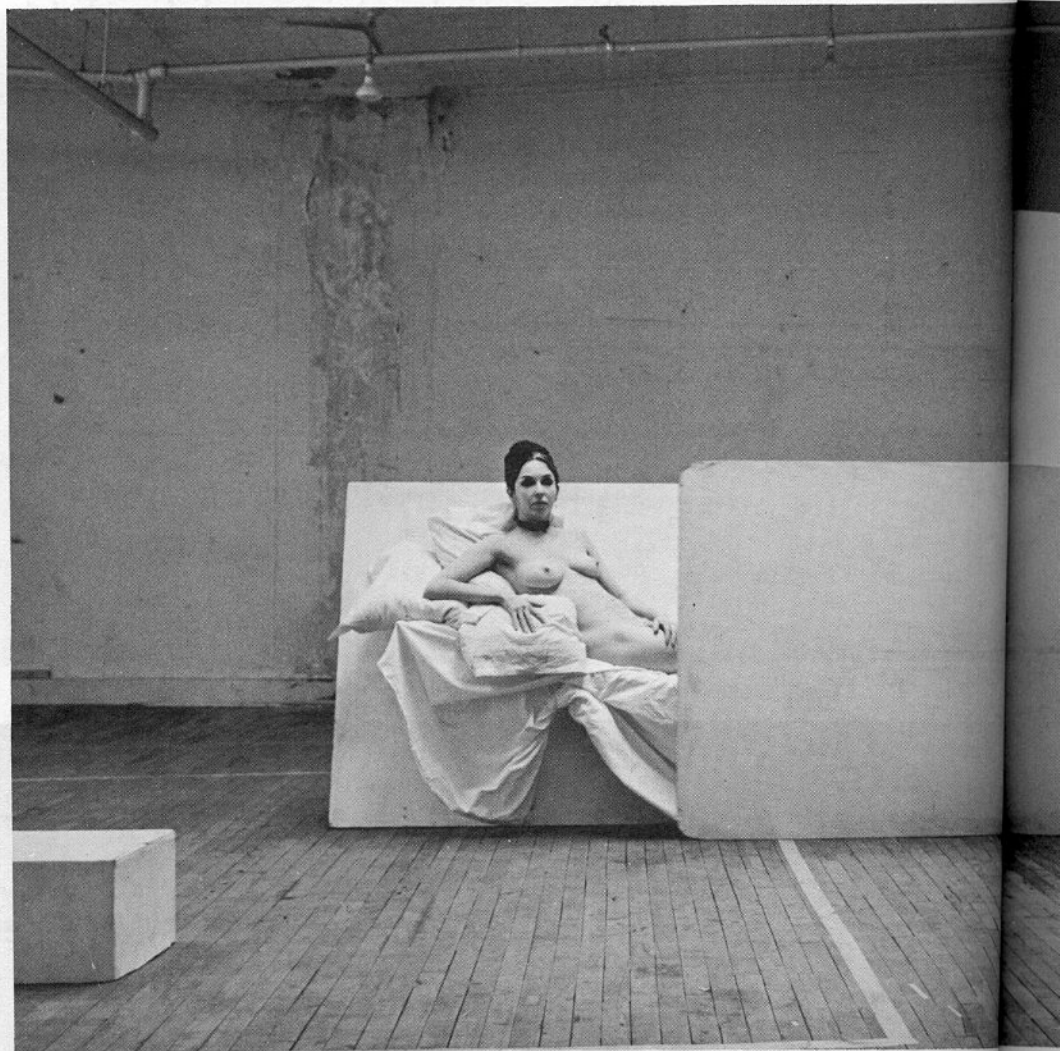
The column was a basis for much of Morris's subsequent thinking about sculpture. But one is struck by the parallels between it and the work of Oldenburg—no matter how differently shaped. In being an actor, it is

anthropomorphized—made into a kind of model of the self—at the same time that, being an object, it is made completely inexpressive or deadpan.[30] And, like the soft toilet, it strikes out at the viewer's conventional assumptions about how his experience is formed. The column does this with stunning simplicity. For its only "action" within the course of the performance is to change its position. It falls. In so doing it changes from an upright object to one that is prone. Our normal assumptions about this "action" is that it changes nothing, or that it changes nothing essential about the object. The object persists through time and space as *the same*. Indeed, Morris's later work, which exploits this kind of variation of position undergone by the same shape (fig. 198), has been described in terms of the very theories of knowledge that the column wishes to defy. The works have been described as being like "a child's manipulation of forms, as though they were huge building blocks. The urge to alter, to see many possibilities inherent in a single shape,

175. LEFT *Yvonne Rainer (1934–):* Parts of Some Sextets, *March 24, 1965, Judson Church, New York. (Photo, Peter Moore)*

176. BELOW *Morris:* Waterman Switch, *1965. Robert Morris, left; Lucinda Childs, right. (Photo, Peter Moore)*

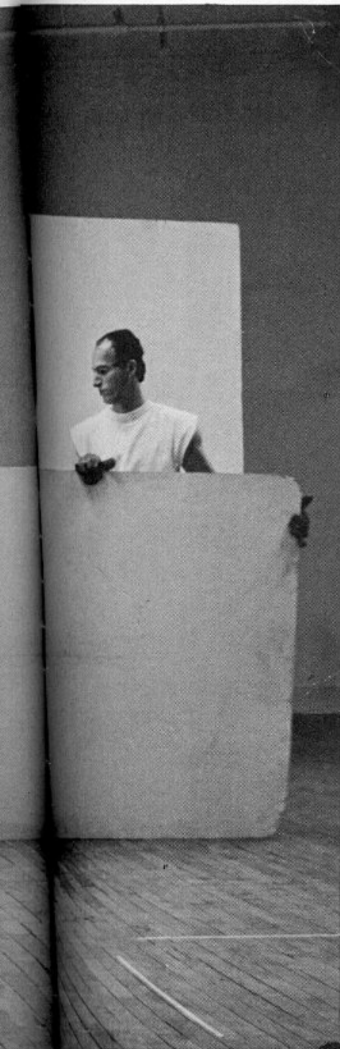




is typical of a child's syncretistic vision, whereby learning of one specific form can be transferred to any variation of that form."[31] But the reason the above description seems inadequate is that it does not fit one's actual experience of the column.

177. *Morris:* Site, *1963. Performed by Carolee Schneeman and Robert Morris. (Photo, Hans Namuth)*

Upright, the column seems light and thin, its erectness unburdened by the downward pressure of weight. It seems fluid, linear, and without mass. But in a prone position, the column changes *in kind.* It appears massive, constricted and heavy; it seems to be *about* weight. The



import of the column is, then, not that it is the same throughout "any variation of that form," but that it is different. And this difference strikes at the heart of the idea that the meaning of a shape is to be found in its abstractness, or separability, in its detachment from an actual situation, in the possibility that we can transfer it intact from one place and orientation to another. Merleau-Ponty, in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, attacks just this notion of abstractable aspects of the senses, when he talks about the way color, for example, *signifies*:

> This red patch which I see on the carpet is red only in virtue of a shadow which lies across it, its quality is apparent only in relation to the play of light upon it, and hence as an element in a spatial configuration. Moreover the colour can be said to be there only if it occupies an area of a certain size, too small an area not being describable in these terms. Finally this red would literally not be the same if it were not the "woolly red" of a carpet.[32]

It is only on a color chart that the red of the rug and the red of the wall could be thought to be the same red. And then, on the color chart—or rather, *for* the color chart—the very concept of redness signifies something else.

To see the column as the same, despite its change in positions, is to imagine that one's knowledge of space leaps over the specifics of one's perspective, that space itself is laid out before one as an ideal grid. We explain space in terms of this grid, rationalizing the way its parallel arms seem to converge in depth, by thinking that we are badly placed to see the whole of the grid. We attempt to clarify this apparent contradiction by imagining ourselves suspended above the grid in order to correct the "distortions" of our perspective, and to recapture the absoluteness of its total parallelism. But the meaning of depth is nowhere to be found in this suspension. "When I look at a road which sweeps before me towards the horizon," Merleau-Ponty cautions, "I must not say either that the sides of the road are given to me as convergent or that they are given to me as parallel: They are *parallel in depth*. The perspective appearance is not posited, but neither is the parallelism. *I am engrossed in the road itself*, and I cling to it through its virtual distortion, and

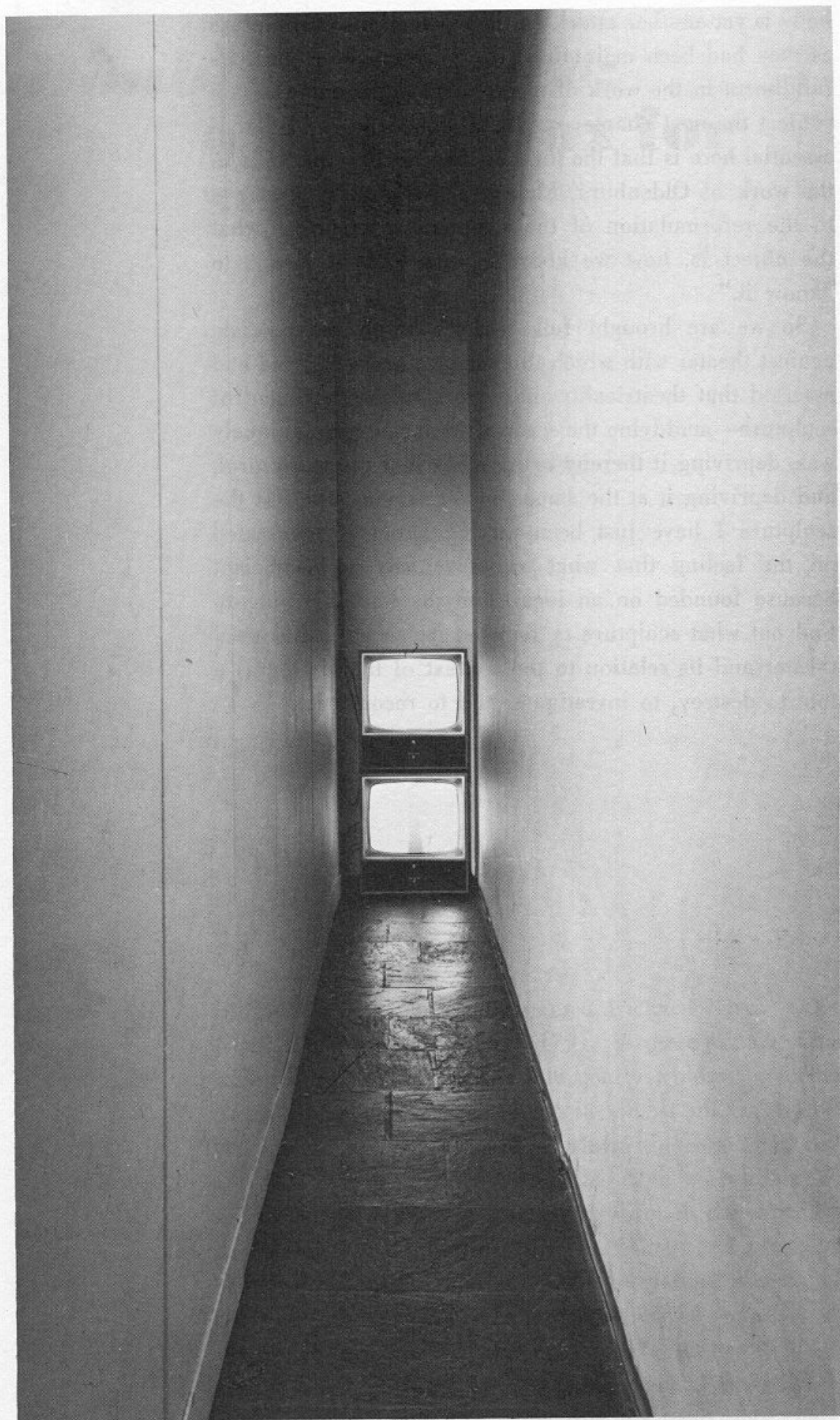
depth is this intention itself which posits neither the perspective projection of the road, nor the 'real' road."[33]

The notion of the axiomatic coordinates, which allows one to think of oneself as capable of reconstituting the object, from all around itself, regardless of one's own position, or its, is a notion that wants to forget that meaning arises only from *this* position, and *this* perspective; and that one has no knowledge of these things beforehand. The column insists that only phantoms appear to "the syncretic vision"; but *its* meaning is specific and is a function of lived time.

Two things are important. One is that this sculptural attack on a classical explanation of how things are known has precedents in the work of Rodin and Brancusi—which means not that it is dependent upon them but merely that it is continuous with a deep and serious vein in the tradition of modern sculpture. The second is that it was the very dependency of theater on a variable situation that was able to put pressure on and disrupt the conventions of classicism lodged so deeply within their twentieth-century variants, in futurism, constructivism, and their technological extensions. By the mid-1960s it was clear that theatricality and performance could produce an operational divide between the sculptural object and the preconceptions about knowledge that the viewer might have about both it and himself.

Bruce Nauman's Wilder Gallery Installation (1970), for example, puts pressure on the viewer's notion of *himself* as "axiomatically coordinated"—as stable and unchanging in and for himself. The installation is a pair of long narrow corridors through which the viewer moves (fig. 178). High on the wall at one end of one corridor is a video camera while at the floor at the far end is a monitor relaying the immediate image the camera intercepts. This is of course the image of the viewer as he advances down the corridor toward the video screen. But the image of himself toward which the viewer walks is an image of his back; and as he comes over closer to his own reflection, the picture of "himself" recedes. The nearer he comes, the smaller it gets, since he is resolutely moving away from the camera that is the image's source. This sense of a moving center within the viewer's own

178. *Bruce Nauman (1941–):* Corridor, *1968–70. Live taped video corridor, 204" x 480" x 36" (variable). Collection, Dr. Giuseppe Ponza. (Photo, Rudolph Burckhardt)*



body is yet another attack on the conventions of sculpture as they had been maintained throughout the century. Its fulfillment in the work of a whole range of sculptors is a subject the next chapter will take up. But the fact that is essential here is that the kind of theatricality one finds in the work of Oldenburg, Morris, and Nauman is central to the reformulation of the sculptural enterprise: what the object is, how we know it, and what it means to "know it."

So we are brought full circle back to the polemic against theater with which this chapter opened. Fried had asserted that theatricality must work to the detriment of sculpture—muddying the sense of what sculpture uniquely was, depriving it thereby of meaning that was *sculptural*, and depriving it at the same time of seriousness. But the sculpture I have just been talking about is predicated on the feeling that what sculpture *was* is insufficient because founded on an idealist myth. And in trying to find out what sculpture *is*, or what it can be, it has used theater and its relation to the context of the viewer as a tool to destroy, to investigate, and to reconstruct.