

**RED AND BLACK BLACK AND RED**

**ROBERT MORRIS**



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# A FEW THOUGHTS ON BOMBS, TENNIS, FREE WILL, AGENCY REDUCTION, THE MUSEUM, DUST STORMS AND LABYRINTHS

by Robert Morris

**A)** For at least two decades I have refused to give talks, and when occasionally asked I have sent a document I have on file. So far it has worked to get me off the hook. Here it is:

UNAVAILABLE



Image A1

I do not want to talk about art I made half a century ago. Minimalism does not need to hear from me. I do not want to talk about art I made yesterday. Contemporary art is making enough noise without me. I do not want to be filmed in my studio pretending to be working. I do not want to participate in staged conversations about art—either mine or others past or present—which are labored and disguised performances. I do not want to be interviewed by curators, critics, art directors, theorists, aestheticians, aesthetes, professors, collectors, gallerists, culture mavens, journalists or art historians about my influences, favorite artists, despised artists, past artists, current artists, future artists (**Image A1**). A long time ago I got in the habit, never since broken, of writing down things instead of speaking. It is possible that I was led into art making because talking and being in the presence of another person were not requirements. I do not want to be asked my reasons for not having worked in just one style, or reasons for any of the art that got made (the reason being that there are no reasons in art). I do not want to answer questions about why I used plywood, felt, steam, dirt, grease, lead, wax, money, trees, photographs, electroencephalograms, hot and cold, lawyers, explosions, nudity, sound, language, or drew with my eyes closed. I do not want to tell anecdotes about my past, or stories about the people I have been close to. The people to whom I owe so much either knew it or never will because it is too late now. I do not want to document my starting points, turning points, high points, low points, good points, bad points, stopping points, lucky breaks, bad breaks,

breaking points, dead ends, breakthroughs or breakdowns. I do not want to talk about my methods, processes, near misses, flukes, mistakes, disappointments, setbacks, disasters, obsessions, lucky accidents, unlucky accidents, scars, insecurities, disabilities, phobias, fixations, or insomnias over posters I should never have made (**Image A2**). I do not want my portrait taken. Everybody uses everybody else for their own purposes, and I am happy to be just material for somebody else so long as I can exercise my right to remain silent, immobile, possibly armed, and at a distance of several miles.



Image A2

Nevertheless I find myself here and talking. What shall I talk about? First everything. Then fragments, questions, doubts, memories and more questions.

**(B) (Image B1)** Ever hear the expression “I have reached bed rock and my spade is turned”?

*Maybe, why?*

*What do you think it means?*

*Metaphors don't have meanings.*

*Really?*

*They just lead us to see one thing as another.*

*Hmm...*

*So where is this spade and rock leading you?*

*Not the rock or the spade, but the turning, the turning, after you hit the fucking rock.*

*OK, OK, the turning. Where is it leading you?*

*Something about going on without reasons.*

*You never have reasons anyway.*

*There's more.*

*Oh, no.*

*The way it goes is to begin with a qualification.*

*Let's hear it.*

*It goes; “I'm inclined to say,” and then you get to the rock and the spade.*

*Well, that changes everything.*



Image B1

**(A) (Image A3)** Everything in the universe is at the fundamental level, so far as we know, made up of particles in fields of forces. Although more recent



Image A3



Image A4

theoretical speculations about space-time involve holographic projections, the surfaces of black holes and infinitesimal vibrating strings, I will here draw on the earlier model of fields and particles (**Image A4**) for my metaphors. But from such speculations about physical existence, vanishingly evanescent as they are, how, asks John Searle, do we account for consciousness, free will, language, hatred, voting, money and the millions of other things that make up our lives? I think that I decided to come here and talk, but I also think I could have said no, that it was my choice. I take free will for granted. But I also think that above the quantum level where all is chance, at the macro level, every event has a necessary and sufficient cause. My belief is suspended in a contradiction between causality and free will. There is no solution. For some things there may be no answers. So much for everything. Now for the hard parts.



Image B2

*(B) What about the problem of evil?*

*Maybe it exists for reasons we can't comprehend.*

*You can say that about everything.*

*So, then you don't have a problem, do you?*

*Still, it's a gnawing feeling.*

*Say I find a package of food on the desert island and eat it all without sharing with the others (**Image B2**).*

*Selfish.*

*What if I'm starving? Just pursuing my self-interest.*

*And the consequence could be called evil?*

*Call it a byproduct. Anyway, you have to have a 'what the fuck' attitude if you are going to pursue your self-interest.*

*This attitude—call it WTF for short—seems to be spreading.*

*Thought it was part of the Constitution.*

*Isn't that a little twisted?*

*WTF.*

**(A)** If I live in a community that values self-interest, that encourages me to get ahead, to benefit myself in the most optimal ways, then very likely my desires and behavior will differ from how I would act in a community where benefiting the group is optimal. What is considered rational in the first instance would be judged selfish and irrational in the eyes of the

second community. What we chose to designate as rational belief and action is relative to the background model assumptions. It may be open to question whether the rational, in spite of what the philosophers would have us believe, is an inherently structural and transcendent feature of language and intentionality that marks us off from the animals, who, we should not forget, have also been observed not only calculating but even behaving in altruistic ways (**Image A5**). Consider the raven which not only spoke the word “Nevermore” but was seen making rudimentary tools. No, rationality will not save us from our doubts or our contradictions, let alone lend autonomy to consciousness or save us with its authority. However we define the rational we should not forget what Searle calls those background assumptions without which it could not lend the aid it does. We take for granted that when we speak to others our words will not have taken on completely different meanings from what they had yesterday, that continuity and causality are constants. All such assumptions are below the level of intentions and even representations, but without such presuppositions we could never even argue our disagreements, let alone try to remove the scare quotes from the term rational.

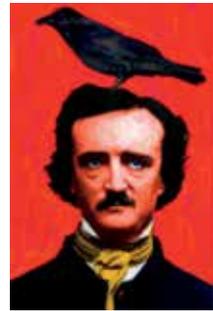


Image A5

*(B) (Image B3) I'd like a brain transplant.  
 Somebody else's brain in your body?  
 God forbid.  
 You want your brain put somewhere else?  
 Maybe in a vat (Image B4).  
 A brain in a vat?  
 Enough body already.  
 Think of all the bodily pleasures you would miss.  
 Not to mention all of the pains.  
 Isn't the whole idea ridiculously Cartesian?  
 Too many aches and pains these days.  
 These days you can get most everything replaced: knees, hips, kidneys...  
 So might as well trade it all in for a nice stainless steel tub.  
 I think you are talking high maintenance.  
 All the electronic crap they've got these days. Probably get what I needed  
 from Radio Shack for a few bucks.  
 And who would you get to talk to you?*



Image B3



Image B4

*You could visit now and then.*

*Think they would let you vote?*

*Not likely.*

*Yeah, you'd probably be declared an illegal alien.*

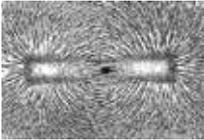


Image A6

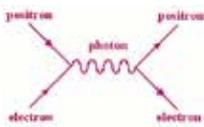


Image A7

**(A)** I would like to talk about fields. But what are fields? To a Quantum physicist everything is a field, or as one once said, "Don't look and it is all a field; look and it is a particle." As a child I was fascinated by magnetic fields (**Image A6**). The observable appearance of this field was manifested by the particles of iron filings arrayed in their curvilinear patterns between two magnetic poles (**Image A7**). What was the force, and how was it carried in constraining these particles to line up the way they did? It was not until I read Richard Feynman that I learned that the constraining force was carried by photons doing what bosons do, though even with Feynman's diagrams I do not grasp, or cannot imagine how the forces really work. And Feynman himself was always sensitive to the mysterious aspects of quantum mechanics. He once remarked of the paths of electrons: "Whatever is not explicitly forbidden is compulsory." Could we say that art in its most extended manifestations, that is, all art visible at a given time, together with everything said about it at any given moment in time is a force field? Let the art be the particles held in this unstable field by the social forces acting on these particles.



Image B5

**(B)** *I got pulled over today (Image B5).*

*No seat belt?*

*No, for blinking my lights.*

*Is that against the law?*

*The cop said I was breaking a rule.*

*What rule?*

*Something about warning other drivers about the speed trap.*

*Get a ticket?*

*No. Said I was a smart ass and being a Paul Revere (Image B6).*

*Paul Revering is against the law?*

*What if there were kidnappers who saw my lights blinking? I don't think it was a question. He was pissed.*



Image B6

*So you broke a rule not a law.  
Said he could run me in. Got all red in the face.  
Next time just break the law.  
Yeah, got to watch out about rules.  
But fuck the law, huh?  
Learn something every day.*

**(A) (Image A8)** Between the years of 1909-11 Analytic Cubism revolutionized painting by establishing a new form of spatial representation that, as T.J. Clark has pointed out, rejected salience or figure/ground distinctions. The shallow spaces, the flatness, the disposition for the lateral rather than depth can of course be traced to late Cezanne (**Image A9**). Surrealism introduced automatism followed by Duchamp's employment of chance procedures (**Image A10**) which John Cage (**Image A11**) built upon and extended into the indeterminate. And we are all aware of serial music's rules and Minimalism's repetitions. A strategy of agency reduction informs all of these. And I want to collect these strategies, together with their manifestations, the works themselves, into a kind of force field which at once sets limits for the activity and responds to reverberations within it. The works as particles if you will held in place by the tensions and energies of strategies of agency reduction affecting and influencing each other. The question of why this desire for doing less in the art making has worked its way across generations for the last century raises larger socio-cultural issues. But whatever can be said about art's strategies and internal dynamics over periods of time, the art itself is never separate from the culture at large. That is to say, art must always tell us what we are or it is ignored. Much has been said about the Modernity that was developing over the last century, and within which Modernism arose as a resistance to it. I only add Agency Reduction here as a kind of footnote.

**(B)** *I want to go fight for my country to preserve our way of life.  
The rich and the poor, the jobless and the homeless, and the right to say  
"motherfucker."  
I am patriotic (Image B7).  
Our militarized plutocracy, the security state and the criminals in  
the senate.*



Image A8



Image A9



Image A10



Image A11



Image B7



Image B8

*I want to go fight.  
I'm not stopping you.  
Bang Bang, Click, Click (Image B8)...  
I have fought for my country.  
How many did you kill?  
Fifteen, maybe sixteen.  
Not enough. Go back.  
Bang Bang, Click, Click...  
I fought again for my country.  
And?  
I lost a hand.  
Not enough. Go back.  
Bang Bang, Click, Click...  
I fought again for my country.  
And?  
I lost both legs and an eye.  
Now you're talking.*



Image A12



Image A13

**(A)** After instituting an evening devoted to Karaoke dancing at the Brooklyn Museum the director said, "Whatever else people come away with from their experience at the museum I want them first of all to have had a fun experience." Last spring I went to a Friday evening performance at the Museum of Modern Art in NYC. Friday evenings are free nights at the Museum and when I arrived a three-deep line stretched around the block awaiting admittance. The lobby was packed with hundreds of milling bodies. Sitting and leaning against a long wall were some 50 people, all under 30, each on a cell phone, each oblivious to the person wedged against him or her on either side (**Image A12**). Upstairs the galleries were jam packed with young people wandering, sometimes alone, sometimes in groups, most staring somewhat vacantly it seemed to me—anyway not focused so much on the art on the walls as on talking to their friends, rushing into adjacent galleries to meet other friends. Some stood rooted and slack-jawed with the ubiquitous cell phone against the ear. I entered one of the galleries taken up with an installation of a work of mine (**Image A13**). While I was there a young man darted in, photographed the wall label with his cell phone and darted out again. I did not notice that he even looked at what was filling the room.

*(B) I want to be famous.*

*Why?*

*I am tired of living in the ghetto and eating Big Macs (Image B9).*

*Cockroaches (Image B10) can get into big houses too.*

*How do I get famous?*

*Make a lot of noise and kill a lot of people before they catch you.*

*I thought I had to sing.*

*You can't sing.*

*I know.*

*Epistemology is not involved.*

*I want to live in a big house and eat Big Macs and die of an overdose.*

*Keep working at it.*



Image B9



Image B10

**(A) (Image A14)** Recall the musician Arnold Schoenberg who was a Modernist, in spite of denying it. "My work is not modern," he once said, "it is just played badly." Nevertheless his contribution to agency reduction by way of his rigid 12-tone compositional rules clearly establishes him as quintessentially a modernist artist, and an elitist one at that. "Art is not for all, if it is for all it is not art," he said. Such an attitude has no place in the cultural institution of the museum today. Some examples of so-called difficult modernist art may yet be found in museums, but the museum has become less a place to confront silent and remote visual art and ponder its modernist narratives of elevated cultural myths than a social space encouraging participation and interaction. And it is often a setting for performance, spectacle and entertainment.



Image A14

*(B) So what about ravens (Image B11)?*

*Are they all black?*

*Never seen a white one.*

*So if we say "All ravens are black," can we say "Anything which is not black is not a raven"?*

*Your logic is going off a cliff.*

*It gets more bulletproof every time you see a black raven.*

*I don't know, never counted, but I must have seen thousands.*

*And they are all black.*

*Right, all black.*



Image B11



Image B12



Image B13



Image B14



Image A15



Image A16

*Then we can say that a white handkerchief (Image B12) or a pale pine writing desk (Image B13) confirms that all ravens are black?*

*There you are, over the cliff.*

*No, just making ornithology easy.*

*Didn't the painter Barnett Newman once say "Aesthetics is to artists as ornithology is to the birds (Image B14)"?*

(A) SCATTER PIECE was installed at the AIC in early July (Image A15). This 1969 work consists of 100 pieces of various metals: steel, aluminum, zinc, lead, copper, brass and 100 pieces of black felt. The dimensions, number of bends and types of metal were determined by chance procedures. Simpler sets were generated by chance for the felt pieces. No criterion exists for how these 200 pieces are to be installed and shown. Indeterminacy is built into the work by the absence of specified criteria for arrangement, not to mention the near-impossibility of replacing 200 loose pieces twice in identical configurations. Richard Feynman, as we already noted, remarked that for the paths of the electron, "Whatever is not explicitly forbidden is compulsory." SCATTER PIECE is not science but the possibilities for how its components manifest themselves in space approach the infinite. If arrangements are neither specified nor prohibited, it seems that the very title "SCATTER PIECE" has influenced past installations (Image A16). Of the half dozen or more times the work has been installed the elements have been "scattered" in a single space. Yet all of the 200 elements could have been unscattered, piled in a corner on top of each other, or each piece could have been hidden somewhere in the building where the installation occurred, or the components could have been distributed across the country or the world, or should the work concentrate itself modestly in a single room the pieces might be rearranged every day, every hour, or continuously. Is affect left behind in a work that can be said to have no center? Or did I wish to escape affect by refusing to provide a resting state for the work? The work was originally shown in a room at the Leo Castelli Gallery in NYC in 1969 and then went into storage. When Leo Castelli died in 1999 the Gallery was reorganized and its storage cleaned out. At that time the pile of metal and felt constituting SCATTER PIECE was apparently judged to be scrap and thrown into a dumpster. Nobody considered the fact that SCATTER PIECE remained a work of art whether in an exhibition space or stacked up in a storage area, or resting randomly in a dumpster. Anyway

nobody asked me if it was still art as Art-in-Storage, much less art as Art-in-Dumpster. And whatever landfill (**Image A17**) the pieces now occupy, it is still art. But since nobody, including me could after '99 get their hands on the work it was remade (**Image A18**), reproduced exactly as before. Since the drawings for the sets existed there was no problem refabricating the pieces. So the work at AIC is a twin to that first one which most likely lies buried somewhere in New Jersey. In fact two SCATTER PIECEs exist, the first which is now underground and oxidizing, the felt pieces perhaps lining the burrow of who knows what creature. The elements of the first work, whatever their state and location, exist as a kind of shadow of the second, above ground work. Or should these vanished, scattered and buried, but presumably still existent elements, be regarded in more thanatoid terms as a kind of chthonic installation? I admit that the second SCATTER PIECE could be interpreted as a sort of imposter, a pretentious double, a fatuous wannabe. But the two go on reflecting each other, the second a kind of memory of the first. A kind of pathos rises from these two: the first perhaps a Gothic and decayed ghost of the second which could be regarded as even a manifestation of mourning for the first. And though I see the absurdity and futility of memorializing the lost and the dead I am reminded by these SCATTER PIECEs that every work I've ever made enacts the ritual of memory and mourning.



Image A17



Image A18

*(B) There is the evening star (Image B15).*

*I see it.*

*At dawn we can see the morning star, if it is a clear sky.*

*Right.*

*But they are both the same planet Venus. Right?*

*So they say.*

*But saying "morning star" isn't the same as saying "evening star."*

*Don't get funny with me.*

*But both are Venus.*

*Obviously.*

*Then why aren't you saying anything when you say Venus is Venus, but you are saying something when you say the morning star is the evening star?*

*You want me to say that sense and reference are not the same, don't you?*

*Just asking a question.*

*Next you will be bringing up Cary Grant and Archibald Leach.*



Image B15



Image A19

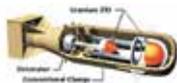


Image A20



Image A21



Image A22



Image A23

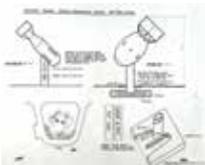


Image A24

(A) In 1981 I received a commission from the Navy Department for a sculpture to be placed outside a new administration building in Bay Pines, Florida, on the campus of the largest Veteran's Hospital in the country. I accepted the commission and proceeded to do research on the kinds of things placed outside military hospitals, veteran's administrations and other military buildings. I discovered that the grounds around such places were decorated with obsolete military equipment—canons and tanks and even airplanes, as well as a variety of patriotic bronzes of soldiers raising flags and carrying rifles with bayonets. I flew to the atomic weapons museum in Albuquerque, New Mexico, which houses the casings of many atomic weapons developed over the years (**Image A19**). I was concerned to see the display of the two atomic bomb casings dropped in WW 2. The uranium bomb dropped on Hiroshima was long and slender, reflecting the interior mechanism, a cylinder of metalized uranium and the long howitzer barrel that fired another slug of uranium into the cylinder causing the mass to fission (**Image A20**). This weapon was nicknamed "Little Boy" in honor of F.D.R.'s Scotty dog. The Plutonium bomb dropped on Nagasaki was called "Fat Man" (**Image A21**) in reference to either Sidney Greenstreet (**Image A22**), the rotund popular film actor of the '30s and '40s, or Winston Churchill (**Image A23**). Claims for both references have been made. The bomb casing was egg-shaped, 5-feet in diameter and over 11-feet long. The weapon consisted of a small hollow sphere of metalized Plutonium about the size of a softball weighing some 13 and ½ pounds surrounded by shaped charges of conventional explosive which when detonated imploded the sphere into a smaller mass that went super critical. Because of concerns with firing the outer shaped charges only the Plutonium device was tested in the desert at Alamogordo, New Mexico, in 1945. I was told by the museum curator that there were still many casings of these two weapons stored with the War Department since not all were used up in the trial drops that preceded the raids on Japan. I proposed to the Navy Department that two of these casings—the long thin one called "Little Boy" and the egg-shaped one called "Fat Man"—be secured from the War Department, placed outside the administration building and oriented at 45-degrees on their pedestals, suggestive of the first seconds after leaving the bomb bay doors (**Image A24**). I suggested that the casings and pedestals be painted the same beige color as the administration building. I reasoned that if Truman had been correct in claiming that the dropping of these weapons negated the invasion of Japan and saved thousands of American lives, then there were no doubt men in the Pay Pines facility who owed their lives to these

devices. The Navy Department wrote back telling me to stop work, that my commission was cancelled, and I would receive no money.

In the late '30s there was the occasional dust storm felt in Kansas City, Missouri (**Image A25**). The sky turned weirdly green and mother laid damp towels against the window sills and the bottoms of the outside doors. But still the fine dust somehow filtered in through unseen crevices, leaving a gray layer on all the horizontal surfaces. I remember touching this silky substance and rubbing it between my fingers. It reminded me of the dust from the wings of the big moths (**Image A26**) I sometimes caught flying around the front porch light on a warm evening. And I once caught a large, black June bug (**Image A27**) and tied a thread around one of its legs. It flew around above me at the end of the thread as I stared vacantly into the blackness of the hot summer evening listening to the cicadas. Sometimes I have the urge to speak to those long gone neighbors of my childhood. Hello, Jack Davenport, three houses up on Indiana Street (**Image A28, Image A29**). Feisty, brimming with energy, rambunctious, trouble maker at 10. Threw himself on a grenade in Korea on September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1951, for which he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor (**Image A30**). And all the rest of those I knew on Indiana Street in the Great Depression (**Image A31**). They were way down on the class ladder. Working class: near poor, but a neighborhood that knew and helped each other. I want to thank them all for their help, although none of them was aware they were helping me, and I could not say just how they helped. It is too subtle and mostly by example of how they persevered through the difficulty, with so little margin and so few options in such a difficult time. Listening to the silences I sometimes imagine I hear their voices.

*(B) So we can include "Every dog has its day" (**Image B16**), "Gentlemen prefer blondes" (**Image B17**), and "Nothing surprises him anymore"?*

*Maybe. If it really is true that every dog has its day.*

*Let's give dogs the benefit of the doubt.*

*Yeah, OK. But I know some guys who like redheads better than blondes (**Image B18**).*

*Well, we could say that what is true is that "Some gentlemen prefer blondes."*

*All right. You have to get "truth" in there no matter what, don't you?*



Image A25



Image A26



Image A27



Image A28



Image A29



Image A30



Image A31



Image B16



Image B17



Image B18

*You brought it up.*

*Brought up what?*

*Truth.*

*Yeah, so what? You're the one who is so hot about truth, not me.*

*Just want to get things straight.*

*Is that so? Well, think again about "Nothing surprises him anymore."*

*I'm thinking.*

*It is true of nothing.*

*Was I saying that?*

*You were saying "Here is an X" is true.*

*So?*

*But you can't say "An X is true of here".*



Image A32



Image A33



Image A34



Image A35

(A) Homo sapiens are restless, curious and never content. Their desires are inconsistent and conflicted, their history characterized by technological progress, an exponential consumption of resources and murderous relations with their own species (**Image A32**). Theirs is the only species that slaughters their own in vast numbers (**Image A33**). Against this is set their expanding knowledge, science, art and that increasingly ordered complexity termed progress. But could this evolution toward ever greater complexity of order and appetite for resources also be a path toward extinction of the species and its global habitat? Bertrand Russell once remarked that after human extinction peace would again reign among the trilobites (**Image A34**) and arthropods (**Image A35**). On the other hand attempted utopias have only led to the gulag. Leo Strauss' remark that "Good political systems do not exist; only ideas for such systems exist," lent some encouragement to isolating myself in my studio where my rage could be taken out on inert materials.

(B) *Let's say that all art seen before midnight, 1979, is wham art (**Image B19**).*

*This is probably going somewhere I don't want to go. But OK, before then it is all whammo, or whatever.*

*Just what was seen we'll call wham art.*

*So, get on with it.*

*And all art seen after midnight, 1979 is slam art.*

*You are screwing around here...*

*Well, generalizations just have to be confirmed by instances.*

*So?*

*Then we have to say that all art is slam art as well as wham art.*

*So you are saying there might have been a slam in there early on that was missed?*

*Induction is...*

*Let's just stick with reduction if you don't mind.*

**(A)** Tennis was once played on grass or clay by medium-sized participants with small wood-framed rackets (**Image A36**). The game was won by finesse of touch, quickness and placement. Subsequent technological development of the carbon-fiber racket frame and hard-court surfaces transformed the competition from a game of touch and skill to one of speed and power in which few under 6-feet in height can compete. And there appear ever more frequently in international tournaments players approaching 7-feet tall (**Image A37**). Jimmy Connors, a player of modest height who won five U.S. Open titles in the '70s, said: "After me it is goon tennis." Today athletics in general are dominated by the biggest and the strongest, delivering the fastest, the hardest, the longest, the most powerful and the loudest performances. All professional games are skewed toward the bludgeoning impact of spectacle. The same expectations are in place for culture. In art the spectacle of gigantic scale and over the top gestures aided by every available digital magnification staged in ever more gigantic spaces has become the expected. If the stunned "Wow! Awesome!" response is missing, forget it, and the suggestion of big money doing the heavy lifting authenticates the work. We know that the massive hangar for the old German airship Hindenburg (**Image A38**) no longer exists since Tom Krens, that global museum franchiser of inflated spaces, would have expropriated the hangar for an art space and filled it with giant, oversized works of art, glitzy performances, and motorcycles stuffed in any leftover corners (**Image A39**). Art as an unstable, underdetermined encounter demanding of the viewer that she approach with critical stealth terminating in somewhat distanced judgment has been nullified today in the assault of the spectacle of entertainment. Thus the viewer is driven into an ever more passive position where there is less and less possibility for her active participation as the one who by her critical judgment defines the work before her.



Image B19



Image A36



Image A37



Image A38



Image A39

Isn't this a little too Kantian? What about the Minimalist Donald Judd's remark that all an art work need do was be "interesting," whatever that is. But why even this judgment? Cage, at his Zen most, wanted to refuse judgment. One thing was equivalent to another. "There is just the right amount of pain in the world," he says somewhere. Good, bad, pain, no pain, noisy art, quiet art, bombastic, spectacular art, little, quiet as a mouse art—it makes no difference. Art as entertainment, art as distraction, art as therapy, art as décor, art as art-lite, or art as art-heavy, art as life, life as art, tattoos as art, knitting as art, food as art, swearing as art, tweeted art, joke art, boredom as art. Well, I would stop at crime as art, but do not want to speak for others. But then I had Ad Reinhardt for a teacher and he used to say that "Art is art and everything else is everything else." And he once said, "If everything is connected to everything else what's the use of saying it?"



Image B20



Image B21



Image A40



Image A41

*(B) We agree as to when it is raining or not raining.  
And as to whether either of us has been far from the face of the earth.  
I would say we agree about most of the ordinary things that happen.  
That leaves a lot to disagree about.  
Like whether your translation from the German is better than mine.  
Not to mention whether "x" is good or bad art.  
Interpretation can be a problem.  
Maybe less of one than judgment.  
Aren't they the same thing?  
Even if we speak different languages?  
Say a rabbit runs by (Image B20) and I point and say "ziggity zag" or  
whatever in the foreign language.  
Maybe you say "gavagai."  
Whatever. How do you know what I mean?  
How do I interpret it?  
Or how do you judge my statement?  
You pointed when you spoke.  
How do you know I'm not pointing to the rabbit's foot (Image B21)?  
I don't even understand you in English.*

**(A)** Duchamp claimed that he selected his readymades **(Image A40)** out of indifference toward the object. Is this believable? Is it possible to be indifferent

toward an object? Could boredom replace affect for an art object, and be desirable? Could art then arrive at a kind of zero position of total emptiness? John Cage said of his work 4' 33" of silence that in fact silence was not possible because some sounds were always there somewhere; there was always something to hear (**Image A41**). Those terms we come across in art discourse—emptiness, lack of affect, banality, the everyday, boredom, indifference, how do we unpack these? We would be here all night if we tried. Let's just ask, what is to be made of the progressive refusals art has made over the decades as we trace the progress of Agency Reduction? Has there been a secret teleology at work here? Does it end not at the ascetic renunciations of conceptual art and the banishment of the art object but go all the way down to the desire for total cessation and zero affect? Is the artist free of capitalistic complicity if he renounces not just the production of objects but engagement with the interesting? Has he reached Agency Reduction heaven if he can find a dialectical strategy which refuses creativity but stakes out signs marking a position of noisy denial?

In negotiating the form of the Maze there are multiple choices available (**Image A42**). In the Labyrinth there is but one way in and the same way out. The only choices are whether or not to enter, and whether to continue once within the passageways. Once the center is reached one's steps must be retraced to exit. Both Maze and Labyrinth are ancient forms, the origins of which are lost in the mists of time. The Maze was never of interest to me, but I began making drawings of Labyrinths in the early '60s (**Image A43**). The first one I built in 1974 (**Image A44**). This work was 35' in diameter, 8' high, and with 18" wide passageways. The walls were built of 2x4 studs and covered with smooth Masonite painted mat gray. This was a temporary installation. A work preliminary to this first Labyrinth was built in 1961. Titled *PASSAGEWAY*, it consisted of two 8' high walls which curved along two offset, converging 50' arcs of circles. The top was closed (**Image A45**, **Image A46**). One entered at the open end through a 4' wide doorway. Depending on one's girth one penetrated the space until one's body, being squeezed between the walls, could go no further. A permanent Labyrinth was constructed in Italy in 1981 in green and white marble (**Image A47**). This work was on a triangular plan with 2-meter high walls. The plan of a curving 7-passage Cretan Labyrinth was known to the early Greeks and appears on 5<sup>th</sup> century coins (**Image A48**), but no evidence exists of one ever having been built as a three-dimensional object. Images of Labyrinths of various kinds exist in early paintings, though again none seem to have existed as solid objects. I have made several other Labyrinths in



Image A42



Image A43



Image A44



Image A45



Image A46



Image A47



Image A48



Image A49



Image A50



Image A51



Image A52



Image A53



Image A54



Image A55



Image A56



Image A57



Image A58

wood. Recently I made some in fencing (**Image A49**) and two have been made in glass. I have yet to make one in felt, but can't wait to do so. From the exterior these Labyrinths, whether triangular (**Image A50**), circular (**Image A51**), or oval (**Image A52**), present strong gestalts, and from slightly above the form of the work's passageways can be clearly read. Once within the Labyrinth there are no clues as to one's position as one traverse the passageways. There is no sense as one walks the passageways that one is progressing to a center until after some time one rather abruptly comes to the end of the passageway.

I cannot predict what experiences people have in exploring these works—either what they take away from them in their perception of the whole of the work from the outside, or the disorienting journey through the interior passageways, where admittedly a kind of blindness prevails (**Image A53**, **Image A54**). Perhaps there is something of a dialectical experience between the clarity of form on the one hand and the absence of any perceived totality from within. For myself, I have always been acutely claustrophobic and the experience of traversing the narrow twisting passageways of my Labyrinths is oppressive in the extreme. I cannot say what metaphors these Labyrinths stir up in their oppositions between clarity and its absence, instantly perceived whole and confined, time consuming wandering. Sometimes I think these works emblematic of the opposition in my oeuvre between external immediacy and clarity on the one hand, and hidden internal chaos on the other. If my own subjective experience alternates between exhilaration and anxiety, doubt and dread, I cannot assume such bi-polar extremes are present in the experiences of others in confronting the work. And it is useless to speculate. The fact is a Labyrinth is an ancient form which I simply appropriated, a kind of readymade. What others make of these works I cannot know.

My friend, the dancer Simone Forti who is 79 and still performing (**Image A55**) emails me, "I have two ficus trees in my apartment. Both a bit taller than me (**Image A56**). Each night I stand near them for a moment to wish them good night. I feel guilty towards them, think they'd like me to just be there with them for a moment and stop all my thinking, but I can't manage it. I once watched a log that had just been thrown onto the bonfire (**Image A57**). A spider ran up its length (**Image A58**), avoiding the flames from below, then stopped short of the upper end. It realized."

**End**



## Checklist

**BREATHER, 2013**  
Felt, plywood, nylon rods, actuator  
Dimensions variable  
approximately 30 x 95 x 95 inches



**SPATS, 2013**  
Stained Atlantic Birch  
Two elements,  
each 66 x 72 x 22 inches



**RAZOR RED II, 2013**  
Felt, razor wire, aluminum poles  
96 x 120 x 18 inches



**FAT MAN, 2013**  
Stained Atlantic Birch  
144 x 60 x 60 inches



Image A2, Image B3, Image A13, Image A15, Image A16, Image A18, Image A24, Image A29,  
Image A44, Image A45, Image A46, Image A47, Image A49, Image A50, Image A51, Image A52,  
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