

# QUEER BEHAVIOR

Scott Burton and Performance Art

**DAVID J. GETSY**



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# INTRODUCTION

## Scott Burton's Queer Postminimalism

Late one night in the summer of 1971, Scott Burton rode his bicycle to Donald Judd's loft building on Spring Street in Manhattan and hurled a brick through one of its floor-to-ceiling windows. Burton's close friend Eduardo Costa called the act a "secret art," but for Burton it wasn't art. It was rage: "Me and the rock and Donald Judd's window was pure hatred."<sup>1</sup> Burton's postminimalism drew from that same anger, which was not directed solely at Judd but at Minimalism more broadly. He saw in artists like Judd and Carl Andre a profound hypocrisy between their rhetoric and their actions.<sup>2</sup> As Burton's friend Mac McGinnes recalled, "Scott's hostility was more towards the posturing of Donald Judd."<sup>3</sup> In particular, Judd's acquisition of an entire building in the gentrifying area known as SoHo was, for Burton, a symbol of excess and elitism.<sup>4</sup> "Scott had no tolerance for gentrification," as Costa explained it.<sup>5</sup> McGinnes agreed: Burton's visceral act was generated by the visibility of Judd "sitting there gloating in the midst of his own piece."<sup>6</sup> For Burton, the building was proof of the hollowness of Judd's claims to have rejected received traditions and to have leveled hierarchies. A few years before the window vandalism, Burton had written that Judd's sculpture was a "parody of rationality" and that "sometimes this work even seems to mock us."<sup>7</sup> Judd and others who had been grouped together (however reductively) as "Minimalists" had asserted cold rationality as equitable and open, but Burton saw it as authoritarian and closed.

The exclusiveness Burton disliked in many Minimalists was found not just in the dogma of their formal convictions but also in their performed masculine and heterosexual identities.<sup>8</sup> They had claimed to want to remove the presence of the artist, but in their work—and in their participation in the New York art world—they asserted their experience and their

perspective as universal. This left little room for women, artists of color, or openly lesbian or gay artists like Burton.<sup>9</sup> As many argued at the time and after, the neutrality and lack of historical indebtedness claimed by some Minimalists were often tied up in a rhetoric of power and masculinity.<sup>10</sup> Burton recognized this dominance for what it was, and he sought to undermine it. He turned to performance art; he made work that was explicitly about queer sexual cultures; and he lampooned the macho posturing of Minimalist artists like Andre. For Burton, what was needed after Minimalism was a departure from its exclusions, imposed universals, and hierarchies of gender and sexuality.

At the same time, Burton did not wholly reject the ideas that were associated with Minimalism and its moment. Since the mid-1960s he had been an art critic participating in debates about minimal art and its alternatives. When he started making art in 1969, he pursued central questions that Minimalism raised. He believed that art should embrace fully the radical idea that he saw as its greatest promise: that of the shift from the artist to viewer. He aligned himself with artists who sought to question the universal rather than coldly illustrate it, as he thought Judd did. These artists, who would soon be labeled “postminimalists,” included a contingent of important women artists (such as Lynda Benglis, Hannah Wilke, and Jackie Winsor) who similarly rejected Minimalism’s masculinist universalisms and sought to find a place for difference. Burton identified with this version of the postminimal and with their critical voices. Performance became a way to reconsider the relationship between artist and viewer and, more importantly, to thematize the queer experiences that informed his perspective (and that made him inadmissible in many circles of the New York art world).

It is easily forgotten how few openly lesbian or gay artists there were in the 1970s New York art world, despite the emergence of the gay liberation movement during the decade.<sup>11</sup> As Michael Auping (the curator of Burton’s final performance) reminded me in a conversation, “Scott’s dealing with gay issues was so radical in the 1970s.”<sup>12</sup> There were plenty of lesbian and gay artists in the New York art world, but few made work overtly *about* their queer experience, and even fewer were allowed to exhibit it in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>13</sup> Burton understood this terrain and made queer performances that infiltrated sanctioned spaces such as the Whitney and Guggenheim Museums. But he also increasingly made work that left no doubt about its queer themes, as when he exhibited a work in 1975 that fantasized about fisting artistic competitor and erstwhile Minimalist Robert Morris “up to the elbow,” as I discuss in chapter 4.

Burton advocated for lesbian and gay artists, and in the mid-1970s he

attempted to organize one of the first compendia of their history (see chapter 4). He drew support from other gay men in his circle of artists and critics, such as Costa, John Perreault, and Robert Pincus-Witten. Of equal importance, however, was the inspiration Burton drew from feminism and the seismic shift it was enacting in the 1970s New York art world. In a 1980 interview, Burton remarked about the conditions of the 1970s: “There are a number of gay dealers and curators and museum directors and a number of gay artists, but absolutely nothing equivalent in the art world—in relation to gay liberation—of the feminist movement which has had a tremendous impact on contemporary art. It changed everything, in the 1970s and all for the better. It was so healthy.”<sup>14</sup> His feminist friends such as Jane Kaufman, Marjorie Strider, Sylvia Sleigh, Wilke, and Linda Nochlin all provided models for how to value difference and critique structural inequities. At a moment when artists were not allowed to foreground queer experience or desire (or were not taken seriously if they did), Burton looked to (and supported) the work of feminism and its denunciation of exclusion. Consequently, his story offers a link between the art histories of feminism and those of gay male artists, often assumed to be unrelated. For Burton, both were allied in their fight against hierarchies and biases operative in the art world—and in society at large.

Burton saw promise in postminimalism—a term coined by Pincus-Witten—as an open project, initiated by temporality, the lived body, and above all the capacity for differences and variability. These elements resonated strongly with his own experiences in an art world that still expected and enforced the silence of gays and lesbians. Burton developed tactics of infiltration and confrontation as means to undermine the art world’s omissions, gendered hierarchies, and sexual normativities. More than that, he began to envision a utopian mode of artistic practice that would not just embrace differences among viewers but, more precisely, reject art’s elitism and be approachable across class lines. As he would write in 1974, he sought a new conception of art that would “relate to more than a small part of the rest of the people” and have a “vital relation to the energies—expressed or frustrated—of the whole culture. Only if we do so can we serve the better of those people and energies.”<sup>15</sup>

This book charts the untold story of Burton’s art in the 1970s. In the multiple practices he developed in this decade, his central concern was *behavior*. Burton sought to catalyze behaviors and the viewer’s self-awareness of them through performances, editorial projects, and objects. For him, behavior was inculcated; it had expectations, deeper meanings, and rules. It could also be subverted or hijacked, and he took his own queer experience as the starting point for understanding how to propose a mode of

resistance to the expectations of how we are told to behave. Burton pursued these ideas through multiple modes. Some of his performances went undercover to question accounts of the “normal,” while others would be bombastic and explicit about their queer themes. He created works that referenced fisting, dildos, and bathhouses even as he was making arch performances that taxed their viewers by withholding narrative and psychology. Concurrently, he began making sculptures of furniture that prioritized dissemblance, submission, and use.

My argument is that Burton’s art took his queer experiences as core resources. In particular, he looked to street cruising, exploring the ways in which coded communication could occur in public spaces underneath the gaze of the unwitting. The activity of cruising blurs class distinctions (however temporarily) and affords opportunities for new contacts, communities, and solidarities. Burton studied this activity seriously, and he turned to behavioral psychology and anthropological studies of nonverbal communication to better understand how acts and actors could have very different meanings to those who knew how to look. Ultimately, this research into cruising would be what he transposed from performance to sculpture as he began to make functional sculptures that were open to all, hiding in plain sight as benches, tables, and chairs. As I will argue throughout, any account of Burton’s work that denies the centrality of queer themes is not just impoverished—it has been duped by the camouflage that he wryly deployed. Those practices of infiltration *were* the content of his work, and he learned about their complexity from the tactics of survival and pleasure involved in navigating public streets queerly in the 1970s.

I believe the story of Burton’s first decade as an artist is important because it revises and expands our received histories of art of the 1970s, complicating accounts of Minimalism, postminimalism, performance art, and queer art. Burton modeled a distinct mode of performance in which queer experience was a key framework, and he did this in dialogue with sculpture theory and in contrast to other forms of performance art that privileged the artist-as-performer. He presented major performances at the Whitney, documenta, and the Guggenheim (which, in 1976, represented the museum’s most extensive commitment to live art with a six-week run of performances). Consequently, his works were among the more widely seen performance artworks of 1970s New York. Received histories have registered neither this visibility nor the queer content of much of Burton’s work in the decade. When Burton’s performances have been discussed, by and large the complexity of their durational and relational experiences have become reduced to single, static images that tell little about the events. One of the aims of this book is to redress this situation by recon-



structuring the history and themes of Burton's performance practice. Using firsthand accounts and oral history interviews with performers, attendees, and curators, I provide a more replete analysis of the experiences of these works and Burton's ambitions for them. However, this book is not strictly about the kinds of live art normally considered under the heading of "performance art," and I (like Burton) pursue the ways that performance can capaciously enfold sculptures, pictures, objects, spaces, and audiences into scenes of behavioral negotiation.

In the remainder of this introduction, I will lay out the foundations for Burton's work of the 1970s in six sections. First, I will provide a biographical account of Burton up to the 1970s. This detailed history is necessary because it has not been fully narrated elsewhere, and because his work of the 1970s is indebted to influences and networks that shaped him in the decades before he began making art in 1969. Second, I will briefly examine Burton's art criticism of the 1960s, focusing on its engagement with central debates around Minimalism and theatricality. Third, I discuss post-minimalism and the ways that it was employed by artists who embraced difference—as with Burton's alignment with women artists and feminism in these years. With these foundations established, I will then turn to what I see as the primary resource for his multivalent work of the 1970s—street cruising. The sexual, erotic, and social elements of cruising underwrote the central concerns for his artistic practice and its focus on behavior and public space. Fifth, I then turn to a discussion of my usage of "queer" in this book as a way to understand the range of Burton's performances and artworks, from the confrontational to the infiltrating. I conclude with a discussion of the ways in which Burton's queer work has become obscured from view in its reception.

Rather than an account of an artist making work *about* their identity, this book is about how Burton made work *from* his experience. His aim was not only to bring to light themes that had been excluded from cultural representation but also to develop from queer experience a more wide-ranging reevaluation of art's role and potential. Burton's significance lies in how he made work that cultivated its forms and priorities from queer content and queer methods with the ultimate aim of being demotic, approachable, and—he hoped—open to all.

### **Detours and Mentors: Burton's Path through the 1950s and 1960s**

Burton's artistic career started when he was thirty, in 1969, after being an art critic and a (less well received) playwright. His earlier life—and espe-

cially the years leading up to his turn to making art—are important to understanding why he came to performance and why he chose queer experience as its terrain. Both choices were based in his confrontation with bias and exclusion as a youth, his teenage tutelage by modernist artists and poets, and his education in important gay artistic and literary circles of 1960s New York.

Burton was born on 23 June 1939 in Greensboro, Alabama, and spent his youth in the town of Eutaw (at the time, population three thousand). His mother, Hortense Mobley Burton, had largely been on her own since Burton was an infant. He was born prematurely, undersized, and with many health problems, but he rebounded to become precocious, intense, and intelligent. When Burton was twelve, his mother decided to move closer to her brother, Radford Mobley, in Washington, DC, to give her son more opportunities.<sup>16</sup> Radford was a journalist and bureau chief for the Washington office of the Knight newspaper chain, and he supported the family in adapting to the capital.<sup>17</sup> Burton attended public school, while Hortense worked as a typist and later as an administrative assistant for the Democratic National Committee. They struggled throughout his teen years, but Hortense later worked her way to a job in the White House, where she ran the social correspondence department for First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy (and for her successor, Lady Bird Johnson, before leaving to work in the Division of Protocol at the State Department). Until her death in 1982, Hortense was a central person in Burton's life. The painter John Button, who was Burton's long-term partner throughout much of the 1960s, wrote: "Hortense always had the intelligence to sense that whatever strange mutations Scott went through, he was developing. She never complained about his weird contacts, or his homosexuality . . . which she is surely aware of. She only was concerned that he be successful."<sup>18</sup> In the same letter, Button remarked that Hortense's devotion was even more remarkable because of the young age at which Burton announced his sexuality: "Scott came-out at 12."

Despite Hortense's support, Burton's sexuality meant that he was often ostracized (including from the rest of his family). His youth was "intensely difficult," as he recalled, adding, "I had a very unhappy childhood."<sup>19</sup> Throughout his life he felt like an outsider. Being an only child to a single mother contributed to his sense of being different. His feelings of alienation would, as I will discuss, contribute to the loosely autobiographical references he laced throughout his performances and his early furniture sculptures.<sup>20</sup>

He also became sensitized to class differences as a child, and for him this was exemplified in design and furniture. He first encountered modern

design in the homes of his wealthier schoolmates in DC, and this fostered a deep awareness of how design signified.<sup>21</sup> Burton would go on to develop a vast knowledge of design history with a particular interest in the vernacular styles among modernism's roots. His later anti-elitist priorities for public art were grounded in his early experiences of how class determined the ways that people behaved with one another. He became cognizant of how the categorizations of class and sexuality were connoted and how those signals could be adopted and manipulated. He strove to remove traces of his Alabama upbringing from his accent, and he worked hard to advance his education. His lifelong interests in infiltration, dissemblance, and camouflage have their origins in his teenage years when he learned an array of survival tactics. Years later, Pincus-Witten would sum up Burton's motivations by telling me in an interview that a key thing to remember about Burton was that he had an "underdog complex."<sup>22</sup>

Burton's critical awareness of class stratification was interwoven with his rejection of the racism of his birthplace in the Deep South. His mother's choice to move away from rural Alabama came from a desire to distance her son from that milieu—even if they relocated to a still-segregated DC. When Burton was eighteen, he made his first trip back to Alabama after many years in order to attend his absent father's funeral. The homecoming ignited his memories of the South's unapologetic racism, and he wrote to his mentor, the painter Leon Berkowitz, "I feel very existentially guilty about something. The race problem—it is awful, really bad—and you can only feel this. I do not know any constructive step to take—can't put my feeling to use."<sup>23</sup> Burton, as an adult, would later remark, "In some way, of course, I'm a Southerner, but I don't identify with it. I hate it there. I hate the racist, classist society that it is."<sup>24</sup> However, Burton rarely addressed race directly in his work (with a few conflicted exceptions that I discuss later in the book), and he remained largely tacit on the topic. Like many in his circles, he generally left his own whiteness and its privileges uninterrogated, meaning that his antiracism, while sincere, was circumscribed by this limited view and failure of self-criticism. Nevertheless, from the accounts of Burton's attitudes I have heard from friends, his rejection of discrimination was deeply felt and consistent. For instance, in 1974, his friend Costa wrote a thesis entitled "Racial Conflict in Recent Poetry from the US: Analysis from a Third World Perspective" and singled out Burton in his prefatory remarks. Costa cited Burton as an example of an alternative view to prevailing racist attitudes in the United States: "As I talked with [Burton], I got the impression for the first time that there were North Americans opposed to racism and conscious of the interminable social illness that is the result of this kind of thinking."<sup>25</sup>

Burton began to develop his critical attitudes toward sexuality, race, gender, and class in his teen years. In response to the move to Washington and the new opportunities and demands it presented, Burton threw himself into the study of literature and art. He cultivated relationships with adults to mentor him, and he developed a sense of independence and precocious purpose. Of crucial importance during this time were Berkowitz and his wife, Ida Fox. Berkowitz was associated with the Washington Color School painters, and he would later be chair of the painting department at the Corcoran School of Art throughout the 1970s and 1980s; Fox was a poet. The couple offered Burton an introduction to contemporary conversations about art and literature. Together, Berkowitz and Fox had established the Washington Workshop Center for the Arts in 1945, and Fox was its director from 1947 to 1955. Until it closed in 1956, the center was a hub for Washington artists as well as a conduit for ideas and art from New York City. A loner, Burton had been spending time in the Phillips Collection and the National Gallery looking at modern art (in particular Paul Klee), and this interest in art prompted him to ask his mother if he could take classes at the center. His first class was with Morris Louis.<sup>26</sup> While he did not meet Berkowitz at that time, the painter later became Burton's high school art teacher.

Berkowitz and Fox became surrogate parents to Burton, with the blessing of Hortense. He spent much time with them. He began writing poetry with Fox's encouragement, and she and Burton regularly read each other's work. Fox was particularly interested in thinking about how poetry could evoke painting, and she wrote a series of poems in response to individual works of art (something the teenage Burton also undertook). Berkowitz was then allied with conversations around Abstract Expressionism (it would only be in the 1970s that he would develop the color field works that are considered characteristic). He provided firsthand accounts of the work of contemporary painters and introduced Burton to the artists and critics who came through DC.

Berkowitz also helped arrange for Burton to go to Provincetown, Massachusetts, to study painting with Hans Hofmann for three summers, starting in 1957. Provincetown was important for Burton; he found his independence there. While the town was not yet as openly a locus of gay visibility as it is now, it was already burgeoning as such. Burton recalled, "Hofmann was a very important teacher, and I was one of his last students. I learned something from Hofmann about art, but I learned a great deal more from Provincetown about life—and about art."<sup>27</sup>

Burton went to college in 1957, first attending Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont. Goddard was an experimental school based on the ideas

of John Dewey and was considered one of the most progressive colleges in the country at the time. The open curriculum at Goddard expanded his knowledge of literature. In particular, he sought out expressions of queer experience, and he devoured André Gide's writings.<sup>28</sup> Burton lasted only two years at Goddard; he found it too small. He returned to DC and took a few classes at George Washington University. He sent some poems to Lionel Trilling at Columbia University, who "insisted that Scott be admitted at once, and on scholarship," as Burton proudly recalled.<sup>29</sup> Before going to New York he spent one intensive summer in 1959 at the Harvard Summer School studying literature. Burton started at Columbia in the autumn of 1959, and he would graduate magna cum laude in 1962. There, he became close friends with his classmate Terrence McNally and, through him, Edward Albee, McNally's partner.<sup>30</sup>

This restless college period is also when Burton established his first important romantic partnership. When he was eighteen in 1957, he met the choreographer Jerome Robbins. (I have not been able to learn how they met.) Conscious of but not deterred by the twenty-one-year age difference, they cautiously embarked on a long-distance relationship. (Fig. 0.1 is a photograph of Burton taken by Robbins near the latter's home in Water Mill, Long Island.) They saw each other infrequently because of Robbins's many tours and the time he spent in Hollywood working on films.<sup>31</sup> However, by the summer of 1961 they were living together, if briefly. Burton's intense mentorships with older artists Fox, Berkowitz, and Hofmann, and now his relationship with Robbins all provided a framework through which he learned current ideas and also gained entrée into the social networks of art and literature. These relationships were ways for Burton to overcome what he saw as his humble beginnings and queer outsidership.

Burton's relationship with Robbins ended when, in the autumn of 1961, Burton met John Button, who would be his partner for the next seven years.<sup>32</sup> Button was a decade older than Burton and was close with Frank O'Hara and other members of the New York School of poets. Burton became a part of the circle that also included Alvin Novak, Virgil Thomson, and Joseph LeSueur.<sup>33</sup> Through Button, Burton would come to know Lincoln Kirstein, Edwin Denby, John Ashbery, Fairfield Porter, Alex Katz, Philip Pearlstein, Sylvia Sleigh, Robert Rosenblum, and many other artists and writers, some of whom became lifelong friends. Button himself had come from San Francisco, and he introduced Burton to the West Coast poets and artists, most notably (and contentiously) Jack Spicer.<sup>34</sup>

As Button's partner, Burton entered this world just as he was completing his undergraduate degree at Columbia. In a 1961 letter to his friend



**Figure 0.1.** Jerome Robbins, *Scott Burton Standing near the Dock at Jerome Robbins's Home in Water Mill, Long Island, 1961*. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. © The Robbins Rights Trust.

Gerald Fabian, Button described Burton, saying, “he is one of the famous beauties of New York, and fantastically bright too. . . . He is so thoughtful, loving, brilliant, young, full of the most sophisticated charm.” He also explained that Burton had just moved in and that “I guess we can’t rely on Jerry Robbins for an elaborate wedding gift though.”<sup>35</sup>

Some of Button’s peers viewed Burton with skepticism.<sup>36</sup> O’Hara’s friend and roommate, Joe LeSueur, remembered the young Burton as “pouty, pint-sized, urchinlike, boyishly attractive Scott” and commented on his “snotty arrogance.”<sup>37</sup> LeSueur’s dismissal of this southern, handsome, boyish-looking writer in his early twenties was shared by others who also sought to discount Burton. All this fueled Burton’s sense of not fitting in, and he began to suspect these circles for their elitism and cliquishness. At the same time, his partner, Button, had an uncompromising and open attitude toward being gay (more so than many of the poets), and this reinforced in Burton the importance of being out. (Button would eventually make, with Mario Dubsky, the ambitious murals for the headquarters of the Gay Activists Alliance headquarters in a decommissioned firehouse on Wooster Street.)

In the 1960s, Burton's ambition was to be a writer. "I spent almost ten years of my life in that detour," he would later recall.<sup>38</sup> After Columbia, he went on for a master's degree in English at New York University in 1963, supported by a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship to study dramatic literature. He wrote a number of plays and worked at various jobs, including at the bookstore at the Museum of Modern Art starting in 1963 and the museum's reception desk through to 1967.<sup>39</sup> He also worked as a reader for the notable New York literary agency Sterling Lord from 1964 to 1965. But his focus remained on writing plays, on topics from the conservation of landmarks to emotional struggles of high school students.<sup>40</sup> One of his main projects was a play titled *The Eagle and the Lamb*, based on the Ganymede myth. (He and Burton shared an enthusiasm for the story, evidenced by Burton's heroic portrait of Burton as Ganymede; fig. 0.2.) Few of these plays gained any traction, with the notable exception of his play *Saint George*, which Lincoln Kirstein commissioned for the Shakespeare Memorial Theater in Stratford, Connecticut, in 1964.<sup>41</sup>

Burton's major work of the mid-1960s was the libretto for an experimental ballet created for an Aaron Copland composition staged by the New York City Ballet in 1965. *Shadow'd Ground* was based on Copland's *Dance Panels* (composed in 1959 and revised in 1962). It premiered on 21 January 1965 with choreography by John Taras; Burton had a direct hand in the staging of the ballet. As he relayed in 1975, "I was hired to think up a story that could be danced; also I had to choose 140 images to be projected as décor for the thing. It was the first entrance of story without words into my life, and it changed everything."<sup>42</sup> Burton made the unorthodox suggestion that four screens be installed behind and above the dancers. Onto these screens were projected images such as church cemeteries, a stream with rowboats, a nineteenth-century portrait, and scenes of a relationship between a woman and man. Epitaphs (that Burton wrote) were also projected onto the screens. This multimedia staging of the ballet was not received well.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, this was the first manifestation of Burton's interest in successive still images—a practice that would return in the tableaux he used in his performance art of the 1970s.

Through his connections in the New York School, Burton began writing reviews for *ARTnews* in 1965. At this time, many poets populated the pages of *ARTnews* as critics, and O'Hara, Ashbery, and Barbara Guest were regular contributors.<sup>44</sup> At first he wrote unsigned capsule reviews for the magazine, but soon the editor, Thomas Hess, entrusted him with his first feature-length article, on Tony Smith.<sup>45</sup> Burton built his reputation as an art critic (and occasional curator) through the late 1960s. He wrote not just for *ARTnews* but for major exhibitions, including the introduction he contributed



**Figure 0.2.** John Button, *Scott as Ganymede*, 1961. Oil on canvas, 83.5 × 52 in. Collection of the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art. Gift of Alvin Novak. © The John Button Estate.

to the catalog for Harald Szeemann's exhibition *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* at the Kunsthalle Bern in 1969.<sup>46</sup> Rejecting the balkanization of the New York art world, Burton wrote about conceptual and minimal art while also curating exhibitions of realism and figurative painting.<sup>47</sup> By the early 1970s, he had secured a strong enough reputation as an art writer for his friend Sylvia Sleigh to include him alongside other art critics such as Lawrence Alloway and Carter Ratcliff in her important feminist painting *The Turkish Bath* (1973; fig. 0.3). In 1972, he became an assistant editor at *ARTnews*, then a senior editor for *Art in America* from 1974 to 1976.<sup>48</sup> While he did not write for *Art in America*, he helped steer the magazine's content during his tenure.<sup>49</sup>

In the late 1960s, however, he could not support himself through writ-



ing alone, and he had to work other jobs. In 1967, after leaving his post in the Museum of Modern Art lobby, he began teaching English literature at the School of Visual Arts, staying until 1972. He even coedited a textbook for art students.<sup>50</sup> He worked as a stage manager and, for a time, copy-edited pornographic fiction for a specialty publishing house.

Burton's financial precariousness was heightened in 1968 when Button ended their relationship. The catalyst was an affair Button had begun with Karl Bowen, an undergraduate at Cornell University (where Button had been teaching); Bowen was a nephew of gallerist Martha Jackson and heir to the Kellogg family fortune. The breakup with Button pushed Burton to cultivate new friendships through his art criticism. He became even more suspicious of the patrician presumptions of his earlier social circles, and his anti-elitist sentiments became galvanized. He began to make new connections with peers in the art world closer to his own age, including



**Figure 0.3.** Sylvia Sleigh, *The Turkish Bath*, 1973. Oil on canvas, 76 × 102 × 2 in. (193 × 259.1 × 5.1 cm). David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago. Purchase, Paul and Miriam Kirkley Fund for Acquisitions, 2000.104. Photograph © 2021, David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago.

Costa, Kaufman, Strider, Wilke, Steve Gianakos, John Perreault, Joe Brainard, Eva Hesse, Judith Shea, and Lucy Lippard.<sup>51</sup> Burton met his friend Mac McGinnes in 1968 when McGinnes was working as a preparator at Fischbach Gallery.<sup>52</sup> (He installed their mutual friend Hesse's show there, but his subsequent career was in theater.) In contrast with how LeSueur had described him a few years earlier, McGinnes noted, "Scott was never a pretentious person."<sup>53</sup> Now, without the more artistically conservative Button at his side, Burton also found new professional relationships with experimental poets and artists such as Bernadette Mayer, Hannah Weiner, and Vito Acconci.

The compulsion to make a new life on his own transformed Burton's outlook, and his shift to making art in 1969 resulted directly from the new horizons and liberties. Soon after Button broke it off with Burton, the former assuaged his guilt by explaining to his friend Fabian that it would be good for Burton: "But his problem is in finding his *own* life-style rather than having one thrust upon him by me or Jerry Robbins. He had a desire with *both* of us to swallow *whole our* style. *Now* he's on his *own*. This probably frightens him. But I feel sure that he *will* find a way. I just hope it doesn't prove too freakish."<sup>54</sup> "Freakish" was how Button referred to Burton's participation in leather and BDSM, which had grown after Burton became single. These communities would become important to his social and sexual life throughout the 1970s. In a letter from November 1968, Button remarked that "Scott, alas, has gone into a peculiar phase. He wears black leather—head to foot."<sup>55</sup> For all his adventurousness, the older Button was skeptical of the more open culture of sexuality emerging in late 1960s New York. He directed this judgment toward Burton's new life and "the whole cruising-mystique, and a certain allurements from being an art critic (every young artist is anxious to 'get-in-with' young critics)."<sup>56</sup>

Burton was also inspired by the major cultural shift marked by the Stonewall uprising, a two-night protest sparked by defiance to police harassment. Fueled by the new political movement, Burton came to adopt a more public, political, and often confrontational stance regarding what came to be known as "Gay Power," soon after Stonewall.<sup>57</sup> Burton was not at the explosive first evening of the Stonewall riots, but he and McGinnes witnessed its aftermath later that night. "There were these yellow school buses with 'riot squad' written on them," McGinnes recalled. They returned for the next night of protests, and he remembered that these events prompted them both to become politically active: "Everybody did. It was something you did."<sup>58</sup> Already out, Burton became more outspoken. As his friend Jane Kaufman recalled about its effect on him, "he did a lot of work for gay rights."<sup>59</sup>

Burton would emerge in the mid-1970s as one of the few conceptually oriented artists in New York doing work that was explicitly about queer themes. His increasing boldness had its roots in his decade-long immersion in—and later differentiation from—the more discreet gay artistic and literary circles of the 1960s.

### **“Far from the Kind of Art That Declines to Speak”: Burton Writing With and Against Minimalism and Theatricality**

The transitional years in Burton's life in the late 1960s coincided with his increasingly visible profile as an art critic. His attitudes about art were catholic in contrast to the border scuffles and dogmatism that characterized art criticism in the 1960s, and he sought to make connections between artists who had been placed in different camps. In the collection of Burton's writings from 1965 to 1975 that I edited, I went into detail about the terms of his art criticism; I will not recount that analysis here except to say that Burton was interested in emotive responses, in the shared temporality experienced by viewers and by art objects, and in the cultivation of viewers' particularities in their engagements.<sup>60</sup> One statement of Burton's is worth repeating here. In a February 1968 article on painter Ralph Humphrey, Burton praised artists such as Agnes Martin, Al Held, and Tony Smith (the latter being one of the major influences on his thinking) as “abstract allusionists,” saying that each, in their own way, was “dealing essentially in affect rather than idea.”<sup>61</sup> Burton argued that such emotional engagements with geometric abstraction were “fundamentally counter to the methodical cerebrations of, for example, Judd or Noland.”<sup>62</sup> Burton believed in work that opened itself to the “subjective,” and he saw such appeal to feelings and affects as making more room for viewers' differences.<sup>63</sup>

Burton developed these ideas through his writings on Tony Smith. He argued for Smith's importance, and he differentiated Smith's work from what was coming to be known as Minimalism. In 1967, for instance, he would argue that Smith's 1962 *Die* (which both presaged Minimalism and was taken up in the literature as one of its primary examples) should be understood as emotional in contradistinction to the “cerebrations” of the other artists with whom he was frequently grouped (fig. 0.4). Burton wrote in 1967, “*Die* has such a presence, is so Expressionist in its aggression—in the way it acts on its surroundings, including people—that *it seems far from the kind of art that declines to speak*. It demands and provokes affective response.”<sup>64</sup> In advocating for Smith's uniqueness, Burton came to have a deep knowledge of Minimalist ideas in addition to developing a critical



**Figure 0.4.** Tony Smith, *Die*, 1962 (fabricated 1968). Steel with oiled finish, 182.9 × 182.9 × 182.9 cm (72 × 72 × 72 in.). National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of the Collectors Committee 2003.77.1. © Estate of Tony Smith / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

view of some of the main protagonists. He focused more on writing about artists who complicated, chafed against, and extracted some of the tenets of what would come to be called “Minimalism.”

“Minimalism” here (and throughout this book) is used with precision to refer to the art-historical category that emerged in the 1960s to describe sculpture that relied on a radical suppression of representation. This abstraction was characterized by a compression of artworks’ formal dynamics to geometrically simple, singular units, either alone or nonhierarchically and serially related. It was immediately apparent that the category of Minimalism failed to adequately convey the divergences of its main protagonists such as Judd, Andre, Morris, and Sol LeWitt. Nevertheless, the term gained credence by the late 1960s.<sup>65</sup> A constellation of concepts and practices gathered around the term, giving it a life above and beyond the artworks taken as its illustrations. “Minimalism,” in my usage, should be understood not as a group identity but rather as an uneasy consensus about the effects of these artists’ tactics. It was the idea of Minimalism,

in other words, to which many postminimal artists would soon set themselves in relation.

One of the central concerns of many artists associated with Minimalism was the relationship of the artist to their objects. Systems, mathematical formulas, geometries, and serial repetition came to the fore, supplanting the traditional emphases on evidentiary marks of the artist's creation and on the privileging of the art object's uniqueness. Instead, artists embraced industrial materials, premade or fabricated components, and regularized units. The Minimalist object was seen as shifting emphasis from the artist as sole source of meaning to the situational encounter between the object and its viewer. One could say that Minimalism attempted to bore viewers into paying attention to the shared space of the gallery and to their own process of perceiving.<sup>66</sup> That is, viewers encountering such works in the gallery or museum were to find their own copresence with the object spatially and perceptually activated. As Hal Foster explained, the "fundamental reorientation that Minimalism inaugurates" lies in this emphasis on the viewer's relationship with the sculptural object in the space of the gallery: "With minimalism sculpture no longer stands apart, on a pedestal or as pure art, but is repositioned among objects and redefined in terms of place. In this transformation the viewer, refused the safe, sovereign space of formal art, is cast back on the here and now; and rather than scan the surface of a work for a topographical mapping of the properties of its medium, he or she is prompted to explore the perceptual consequences of a particular intervention in a given site."<sup>67</sup> It was this "prompting" that Burton would seize upon when developing his own artistic practice. This shift of emphasis from the autographic mark of the artist to the relational experience of the viewer was the promise of Minimalism for Burton: here were the seeds of a more open, demotic form of artistic practice. Burton would later explain, "Judd's work is an extension of the pure side of modernism. My work is also an extension of modernism but I want to take it into a less pure condition, a more social or behavioral condition that doesn't exist in a vacuum."<sup>68</sup>

Burton's writing about these topics also developed in direct response to Michael Fried's famous attack on Minimalism (and, in particular, on Smith) in the 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood."<sup>69</sup> Because of his work in theater and dance, Burton came to disagree with the critic's assault on Minimalism, which Fried derided as "theatrical."<sup>70</sup> It became Burton's aim to counter Fried's infamous claim that "the literal espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theater, and theater is now the negation of art."<sup>71</sup> By contrast, Burton valorized this term

of denigration used by Fried, turning theatricality into a positive trait. In the opening paragraph of a 1969 article on temporality and art, Burton included a retort to Fried: “The main inaccuracy of the ‘formalist’ criticism which calls much recent art ‘theatrical’ is in the conservative assumption that the adjective is pejorative.”<sup>72</sup>

Fried’s central claim was that literalism (his term for Minimalism) made sculpture reliant on the viewer’s encounter with it. For him, these sculptures performed “a kind of *stage* presence. It is a function not just of the obtrusiveness and, often, even aggressiveness of literalist work, but of the special complicity that that work extorts from the viewer.”<sup>73</sup> Such observations would later prove important to Burton, even though he ardently rejected Fried’s value judgments. He drew on Fried’s characterization of Minimalism’s combative aloofness even as he sought to argue against the writer’s assaults on theater and on Smith. As he wrote in 1967, “Fried is accurate in his perception but shaky in his judgment.”<sup>74</sup> Burton copied into his notes passages he wanted to combat, and he began to think about ways in which theater could, in fact, be a resource for developing a post-minimalist practice.

For Fried, the theatrical work was both dependent on and desirous of the viewer. He declared, “Someone has merely to enter the room in which a literalist work has been placed to *become* that beholder, that audience of one—almost as though the work in question has been *waiting for* him. And inasmuch as literalist work *depends on* the beholder, is *incomplete* without him, it *has* been [waiting for him]. And once he is in the room the work refuses, obstinately, to let him alone—which is to say, it refuses to stop confronting him, distancing him, isolating him.”<sup>75</sup> Fried’s characterization of the relationship between active and passive in this text is tortured and telling. For him, the active viewer is made subordinate to (and solicited by) the passive object that waits. The beholder, in Fried’s terms, is cast as an object of desire for the sculpture, the *raison d’être* of which is to produce a relation. In other words, in saying that Minimalist sculptures were theatrical because they were “waiting,” Fried cast them as needful and “incomplete.” Just as the actor requires an audience, Fried implied, the literalist object seeks the beholder’s attention. As he also said in that essay, “In fact, being distanced by such objects is not, I suggest, entirely unlike being distanced, or crowded, by the silent presence of another *person*; the experience of coming upon literalist objects unexpectedly—for example in somewhat darkened rooms—can be strongly, if momentarily, disquieting in just this way.”<sup>76</sup> This description of the loitering sculpture and the beholder who finds themselves the object of unwanted desire reads as a confrontation between solicitation and its demurral.<sup>77</sup> I find an analogy

for Fried's description of encountering a Minimalist sculpture that "refuses, obstinately, to let him alone" in the dynamics of loitering, cruising, and unwanted attention, and I believe Burton would have also perceived such connections (culminating in his own sculptures that wait to offer themselves to passersby). After all, Fried's account elides the theatrical with perversion, dissemblance, inauthenticity, artificiality, and attention seeking—all traits negatively associated with homosexuals at the time. Such an equation of the theater with homosexuality was common, and this stereotype widely circulated. It was a means to manage cultural phobias of homosexuals appearing "normal" and predatorily hiding in plain sight.<sup>78</sup>

As Christa Noel Robbins has discussed, such associations of theatricality with homosexuality (be it in the form of the cruiser or the actor) were constitutive of Fried's thinking around the issues of "Art and Objecthood."<sup>79</sup> In a letter to his editor, Philip Leider, Fried described an early draft of the essay as being a demonstration of how literalist art's "corrupt sensibility is *par excellence* faggot sensibility."<sup>80</sup> While this phrase never made it into the final text, Burton—like many generations of readers after him—registered the ways in which Fried's snide dismissal of theater and his declarations of the soliciting passivity of literalism echoed suspicions about queer cultures. Robbins has compellingly argued that "Fried understood minimalism's 'perversions' to arise out of its pandering address to individual viewers."<sup>81</sup> Fried's issue was precisely with the "perversion" of *seeing the same things differently*. As he warned in the essay, the danger lay in "the same [modernist] developments *seen differently*, that is, in theatrical terms, by a sensibility *already* theatrical, already (to say the worst) corrupted or perverted by theater."<sup>82</sup> Burton was one who saw differently.

Fried, I believe, came to the unlikely equation of Minimalism and "faggot sensibility" in reaction to the discussion of theatricality in Susan Sontag's watershed essay "Notes on Camp." It was first published in *Partisan Review* in 1964, becoming instantly notorious and one of the most widely read American essays of the decade. The essay was republished in Sontag's 1966 book *Against Interpretation*—which Fried targets in a lengthy negative footnote in "Art and Objecthood."<sup>83</sup> Sontag's essay detailed camp's willful inversions of high and low culture, arguing that "Camp is the consistently aesthetic experience of the world."<sup>84</sup> Literalism, with its refusal of the autonomy of the art object and its contiguity between sculptures and their settings, might also be considered a shift of aesthetic experience from the art object to the banality of everything surrounding it. As Sontag wrote of camp's reversals of attention: "One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious."<sup>85</sup> In his anti-Sontag footnote in "Art and Objecthood," Fried declared, "The truth is that the distinction between

the frivolous and the serious becomes more urgent, even absolute, every day.”<sup>86</sup> When Fried was trying to formulate his critique of this frivolous theatrical sensibility that perverted modernism, I believe he saw ammunition in Sontag’s discussion of camp sensibility as rooted in artificiality and dissemblance—and homosexuality. Her essay became scandalous and widely read in no small part because of her open discussion of homosexuality’s subversion of proper culture and her frank claim that the main proponents (and examples) of camp were homosexuals.<sup>87</sup> Underlying this connection was her emphasis on the queer experience (which she shared) of dissembling as normal—of “Being-as-Playing-a-Role.”<sup>88</sup> Anticipating Fried’s keyword, Sontag concluded that “Camp introduces a new standard: artifice as ideal, theatricality.”<sup>89</sup>

An equation between theatricality and homosexuality was seen by both Sontag and Fried—as well as Burton. He upheld this equation as central to his performance art and its terms. In his anger at Fried’s essay, Burton inverted its critique, seeing complexity and queer potential in theatricality and its opening up of new and variable relations between viewers and objects. As I discuss in the first chapter, Burton’s earliest performance art, his *Self-Works*, explored what it meant to “play a role” through artifice. A new direction was suggested to him by those aspects of Minimalism that were denigrated or ignored—theatricality, temporality, and difference. He was among those who saw Minimalism not as a path to follow but as the opening of a new conversation.

## The Difference Postminimalism Makes

Burton’s critical engagement with Minimalism in the late 1960s made him part of the artistic conversation about what Pincus-Witten would soon dub “postminimalism.”<sup>90</sup> An even more broadly defined term than the historically bound term “Minimalism,” postminimalism comprised a disparate group of artists who built on the potential of Minimalism’s address to the viewer and its reliance on geometric or serial forms. I pointedly use the term in the lowercase to indicate that it is an open-ended and ongoing set of explorations that, beginning in the late 1960s, expanded on key questions of Minimalism while rejecting that movement’s aspirations to rationality, neutrality, regularity, anonymity, and universality. Postminimalism took the form not just of sculpture, but also of a wide variety of practices including video, performance, fiber arts, language, conceptual operations, installation, and land art. Indeed, the blurring of the usefulness of medium as a criterion was characteristic. This move beyond modernist medium-



specificity was something promised by Minimalism's attempt to be "neither painting nor sculpture," but the result was generally de facto sculptural objects. Postminimalism fulfilled the promise of intermediality. Burton was an exemplar who hybridized sculpture, painting, and theater, fusing these elements into postminimalist performance.

Because of the cacophonous range of practices, priorities, and styles that fall under the idea of postminimalism, some historians have avoided this term.<sup>91</sup> By contrast, I see this heterogeneity as its strength. Postminimalism, as a provocation, extends well beyond the first half of the 1970s and is arguably of wider impact than its Minimalist forebear. Artists as distinct as Burton, Lynda Benglis, Mel Bochner, Rosemarie Castoro, Jackie Ferrara, Nancy Graves, Harmony Hammond, David Hammons, Maren Hassinger, Hesse, Barry Le Va, Rosemary Mayer, Ana Mendieta, Mary Miss, Kazuko Miyamoto, Morris, Ree Morton, Bruce Nauman, Senga Nengudi, Adrian Piper, Martin Puryear, Dorothea Rockburne, Alan Saret, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, Keith Sonnier, Michelle Stuart, Richard Tuttle, Wilke, and Jackie Winsor have all been considered in relation to postminimalism. Despite their divergent practices, artists considered postminimalist share some or all of the following traits: they question the belief that geometric and serial forms can be used neutrally; they are skeptical of the adequacy of such forms or systems as signs of the rational, the empirical, or universal; they are concerned with how viewers' encounters are activated viscerally and mnemonically and not just spatially; they embrace variation or error in the ad hoc systems they propose; they are attuned to the fact that viewers are different from one another. As Pincus-Witten would reflect, these artists sought to differentiate themselves from the "taciturn Calvinism of Minimalism."<sup>92</sup>

Almost as soon as a Minimalist movement began to congeal, artists began to debate its strictures and limitations. They began to use materials for their evocativeness, see geometries as pliable rather than rigid, and call for a bodily empathy with the viewer. Critics such as Lippard laid the groundwork, most notably through the watershed 1966 essay "Eccentric Abstraction" (based on an exhibition of the same name at Fischbach Gallery) and her follow-up essay "Eros Presumptive."<sup>93</sup> Lippard was soon joined by other critics such as Pincus-Witten, Emily Wasserman, Max Kozloff, the mercurial Robert Morris, and Burton. Inspired by Lippard's exhibition, Morris curated *Nine at Leo Castelli* in 1968 at the gallery's storage space on West 108th Street, and he included artists such as Serra, Hesse, Nauman, and Bill Bollinger. As Burton began making his own performances in 1969, he was concurrently writing his introduction to Szeemann's *When Attitudes Become Form*, the exhibition that helped to propel the reputations of Amer-

ican postminimal and conceptual artists.<sup>94</sup> Also in 1969, Burton wrote an assessment of two of the exhibitions in New York that further showcased this work: Marcia Tucker and James Monte's *Anti-illusion: Procedures/Materials* at the Whitney Museum and the Guggenheim's *Nine Young Artists*. Burton's essay "Time on Their Hands" focused on just a small number of the exhibited artists such as Serra, Nauman, Smith, Morris, and Bollinger to discuss how they staged time.<sup>95</sup>

However, it was the New York art world's response to Eva Hesse's death in 1970 that made it incumbent on critics to develop a new vocabulary around such work. This new critical approach was concretized in Linda Shearer's 1972 *Eva Hesse: A Memorial Exhibition* for the Guggenheim (in which Pincus-Witten contributed the essay that would go on to anchor his *Postminimalism* five years later: "Eva Hesse: More Light on the Transition from Post-minimalism into the Sublime") and, in 1976, Lippard's monograph on Hesse.<sup>96</sup> Lippard's 1973 collection *Six Years* also powerfully demonstrated the range of conceptual, performance, and postminimal activity of the period since her 1966 *Eccentric Abstraction* exhibition (up to 1972).<sup>97</sup> In addition, artists' magazines such as Bernadette Mayer and Vito Acconci's *o to 9* (1967–69) and Liza Béar and Willoughby Sharp's *Avant-lanche* (1970–76) proposed links between sculpture, poetry, performance, and conceptual art, fueling postminimalism's capaciousness. This flurry of exhibitions and writing in the late 1960s and early 1970s tried to capture the varied and divergent artistic responses to Minimalism's provocative aridness.<sup>98</sup>

When in 1977 Pincus-Witten decided to collect his essays from the previous decade under the title *Postminimalism*, he embraced this heterogeneity of practices. Not only did his collection include essays on artists like Hesse, Serra, Tuttle, Nauman, and Le Va; he also brought in stylistically disparate artists such as Burton, Benglis, LeWitt, Lucas Samaras, Acconci, and Ferrara. Performance, video, painting, and sculpture are all addressed in its pages. Pincus-Witten's 1976 essay on Burton is penultimate and the last single-artist treatment in the book. The book is notable for its inclusion of women artists as central (Hesse was, for him, definitional of postminimalism, and the only artist to receive two essays in the first edition was Benglis). Pincus-Witten wrote in the introduction, "The new style's relationship to the women's movement cannot be overly stressed; many of its formal attitudes and properties, not to mention its exemplars, derive from methods and substances that hitherto had been sexistically tagged as female or feminine, whether or not the work had been made by women."<sup>99</sup>

Burton found appealing this more open conversation that made space for questions of the personal, feminism, and sexuality—unlike Minimalism.<sup>100</sup> He and his postminimalist peers—each in their own way—saw the contradiction between, on the one hand, Minimalism's contingent, open address to the viewer coupled with the suppression of the autographic presence of the artist and, on the other, its jealous cultivation of signature styles, dehumanized fabrication, and presumptions of speaking neutrally through geometry, seriality, and industrial materials (fig. 0.5). While not all postminimalists were working from positions of marked or marginalized identities, many were. In a reflection on the term “postminimalism” written in 1990, Pincus-Witten reminded his readers that issues such as anti-form, the embrace of variation, and the emphasis on process and shared experience were all related to a general questioning in American culture of value, truth, stability, and universality. He remarked, “In their own day, these eccentric forms were enhanced by the social agitations and advancements made by hitherto grandly disenfranchised sectors of the community—blacks, gays, women.”<sup>101</sup>



**Figure 0.5.** Scott Burton, *Steel Furniture*, 1978/79, with Eva Hesse, *Aught*, 1968. Photograph in Scott Burton Papers, Museum of Modern Art Archives. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / licensed by SCALA / Art Resource.

Previously, in the discourse that had promulgated Minimalism's claims to neutrality, issues of difference or of the personal were disavowed but nevertheless operative. As Anna Chave has decisively argued, this was the case in the social circles of Minimalism's central artists and critics, as well.<sup>102</sup> Pincus-Witten, in the introduction to his book, described it as a "high formalist cult of impersonality" and decried the "closed formalist machine of judgment from which personal reference and biography were omitted. This occurred not only because the formalist critics imposed an apersonal, hermetic value system on their writing, but because the artists insisted on it as well."<sup>103</sup> Postminimalism, by contrast, valued what Minimalism tried to expunge—the personal. Burton, like many other artists associated with postminimalism, did not advocate for a return to the myth of the private self or believe in the absolute autonomy of artist but rather grappled with an understanding of the personal as embroiled in power dynamics, hierarchies, exclusions, and norms. As Pincus-Witten said to me in one of our first conversations, one of Burton's driving priorities was "marginalized empowerment."<sup>104</sup>

In drawing on his own experience as a resource, Burton was in line with his contemporaries who turned to performance out of a rejection of 1960s formalisms and abstractions. In a 1973 essay "Performance and Experience," Rosemary Mayer (herself a postminimalist and performance artist) argued, "Performance art has come full circle from the concerns of minimal painting and sculpture and reassessed the very real connection of art to life."<sup>105</sup> Burton's queer experiences (of heteronormativity, of homophobia, of self-monitoring, of cruising, of contact, etc.) provided him with key questions for his performance art that sought to recast relations, power dynamics, and possibilities.

When Burton started making his own performance works in 1969, he found himself among experimental poets, artists, and performers who sought to extend some of the frameworks of 1960s live art.<sup>106</sup> Well aware of the developments in dance and theater of the 1960s, he attended performances of the Judson Dance Theater and was familiar with the dance of Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, and Merce Cunningham. In his early years, he sometimes cited Rainer's work with everyday movement as a precedent for his own.<sup>107</sup> He knew the Happenings of Allan Kaprow, the performances of Gilbert & George, and the actions of Joseph Beuys, all of whom he named as touchstones of current performance art in his lectures.<sup>108</sup> One of his closest friends and collaborators of the late 1960s and early 1970s was Marjorie Strider, who helped educate him about performance. She taught for many years at the School of Visual Arts and had

an expansive knowledge of current developments.<sup>109</sup> Her own expertise was reinforced by her years of marriage to the writer Michael Kirby, who wrote about Happenings and was editor of *The Drama Review* starting in 1969, the year they divorced. (Kirby would include Burton's work in the journal in 1972.)<sup>110</sup> Burton also knew the productions of Richard Foreman and Robert Wilson, and he was attuned to the Theater of the Ridiculous, Charles Ludlam, and John Vaccaro—most directly through his friend McGinnes, who acted in Ridiculous-style plays.<sup>111</sup> He knew Jack Smith, attending the artist's famous late-night performances in 1970 and after.<sup>112</sup> These influences intermixed with Burton's familiarity with more established modes of drama and dance (based both in his experience as a playwright and librettist and in his friendships with Robbins, Kirstein, and Denby). By 1970, Burton had become an enthusiastic advocate for performance art; he even started a short-lived booking agency, the Association for Performances, in 1970 to promote it.<sup>113</sup>

In a 1973 lecture-performance at Oberlin College (that I discuss in detail in chapter 4), Burton presented a statement of principles about performance:

Performance art reevaluates the role of the artist in the culture, submitting him to the transaction with the viewer. No matter how self-referring, apparently remote, or even autistic the preoccupations of the performance artist become, his fundamental, definitive act is his initiation of direct transaction. Performance is structurally, then, an exoteric mode—and social, cultural, and political values are prominent in the historical genesis of the mode. Performance points beyond the competence of a specialized professional artistic class, beyond modernist self-criticism, to an art of situation, in which competence is extended to the viewer, in which the audience becomes the critics.<sup>114</sup>

In his view, performance art transcended medium-specificity and, more importantly, offered a more open and direct relationship to the “transaction with the viewer.” Burton saw performance's activation of the viewer's copresence and shared temporal experience as means to move beyond modernist self-referentiality, and in the same lecture he declared, “Performance art abandons the self-criticism of classic modernist art. The role of the viewer becomes a critical role, in contrast to [Clement] Greenberg's modernism.”<sup>115</sup> The critical role of the viewer as participant would increasingly become a focus in Burton's work. This aim to address viewers beyond



**Figure 0.6.** Scott Burton, detail of *Urban Plaza North*, 1985–88, part of the site-specific installation at the Equitable Center, Avenue of the Americas and Fifty-First / Fifty-Second Streets, New York, 1985–88. Photograph: David J. Getsy.

“a specialized artistic class” would, over the course of the 1970s, be transferred to his ideas about sculpture and public art (see fig. 0.6), as I discuss in chapter 5.

### **“An Art of Situation”: Street Cruising and Queer Performance**

Burton’s definition of performance as an “art of situation” in which “competence is extended to the viewer” had its primary example not in the galleries or lofts of SoHo but in the streets. Burton took street cruising as one of the richest examples of behavior, nonverbal communication, and transactional situations. I refer to “cruising” as the range of nuanced activities involving the scanning for and transmitting of covert signals of outlaw sexual desire (or interest) in public spaces. Often, these broadcasts were intended to be duplicitous enough to be mistaken for “innocent” or coinci-

dental. Cruising is a strategic inhabitation of streets and other public and semipublic spaces, and it comprises coded signs, furtive but intentional looks, proxemic negotiations, gestural prompts, sartorial cues, and a heightened awareness of the city's geographic and social delineations.

The term "cruising" is also applied to similar activities in semipublic places and designated zones (such as tearooms, parks, and rest stops). As with street cruising, the behavior at these sites involves threats of detection, the mimicking of normative behavioral rules, and covert signaling as a means to sexual contact. However, the rules, practices, and (more goal-oriented) outcomes differ owing to the group dynamics of cruisers in these semipublic zones. In distinction, my focus will be on the more paratelic and open-ended performances of cruising that occur in public streets, often under the gaze of unwitting passersby. The theater of behavior—both normative and subversive—involved in cruising such public, trafficked areas (such as the sidewalk) prompted Burton to think more broadly about social space, nonverbal communication, and the queer experiences thereof.

Street cruising's public performances of looking for and finding sex, sexual reciprocation, or mutual recognition of queer desiring were part of the experience of New York's streets, both day and night. As it had been throughout the twentieth century, cruising was an important aspect of queer urban life in Burton's time.<sup>116</sup> In cities like New York in the 1960s and 1970s, cruising became increasingly widespread, defiant, and sophisticated. The clustering of gay and lesbian communities in urban areas following the social upheaval of the Second World War facilitated the development of cruising zones. In New York City, areas like the derelict West Side piers, the parks (as with Riverside Park or the Ramble in Central Park), and then less inhabited downtown neighborhoods (such as the meatpacking district) came newly alive at night with widespread cruising of both the public and the semipublic varieties.<sup>117</sup> In a remarkable guide to the cruising areas of Manhattan published in 1967, Leo Skir extolled the possibilities of New York City: "Summer, spring, fall, and even part of winter is *cruising* time. New York is a polysexual, polytheistic, nature-loving cruising ground."<sup>118</sup> He explained the differences between cruising in Central Park and the Village, for instance telling readers where they could find "young men lacking plans and underpants" (at the three-way intersection of Greenwich Avenue, Sixth Avenue, and Eighth Street).<sup>119</sup>

Those men who cruised (in the 1970s or in its remaining forms) only sometimes identified as gay; plenty enjoy this activity without being defined by it.<sup>120</sup> While cruising was a common form of social activity for gay men in 1970s New York, not all one's tricks would align in that way. Overall,

cruising was far more prevalent among men, though not exclusively so. Lesbians, transwomen, and other queer women also cruised (in a variety of ways), but any street activity was overshadowed and limited by the very real dangers of navigating public spaces in which misogyny, sexism, and objectification of women were rife.<sup>121</sup> The streets were also a place where straight people looked, signaled, and beseeched for erotic connection, but such activities were largely socially sanctioned and permissible, with fewer of queer cruising's dangers of exposure, illegality, and potential violence.

Because of the proscriptions on and surveillance of non-heterosexual desire, queer forms of cruising are tied up with issues of dissemblance and behavioral monitoring (of both oneself and others) as means to avoid detection. It is also for this reason that cruising generally tended to be more active at night, but it was not limited to the dark. It could also be a daytime activity; any busy street had potential. While street cruising could and did lead to sex, sometimes the wink was enough.<sup>122</sup> Both pleasure and danger (and excitement and boredom) are possible outcomes. It was and remains a mode of resistant public performance for those whose desires, loves, gatherings, and communities were oppressed, surveilled, and outlawed.

The nonverbal signaling that constitutes cruising draws on the queer individual's lifetime of experience with the survival tactics of camouflage, masking, and dissemblance. That is, queer self-consciousness about behavior—and its redeployment as cruising—are derived from the daily navigation of homophobia, presumptive heterosexuality, gender normativity, insult, violence, and alienation.<sup>123</sup> In the 1970s, being on guard was a perpetual state for those with unsanctioned desires. The Danish sociologist Henning Bech usefully described this condition as “observedness” in his wide-ranging analysis of the genesis and typology of homosexual behavior in these decades. He defined it as follows: “One cannot be homosexual, therefore, without feeling potentially monitored. Certain other consequences for the homosexual follow on from this. He learns *vigilance*; his brain kits itself out with radar, which simultaneously records his actions and scans the surrounding terrain for hazards. . . . He learns to refine his contact actions, make them discreet, suggestive, silent, etc.”<sup>124</sup> This condition could be mined as a resource, and it provided the tools for the cruiser's subversive navigation of public streets, for survival tactics, and for the seditious creation of communities who shared those rogue desires. In short, observedness could be turned outward as a means of heightened visual attention to behaviors and social spaces.

Dissemblance—that is, the knowing performance of one manner to mask or distract from disparate intention—is the central tactic of cruising. The ability to dissemble is a product of observedness; it is used to facili-



tate (and protect) sexual signaling and queer contact. Cruising is a sophisticated performance in which dissemblance allows for both the navigation of dominant codes and the establishment of mutinous accords. This point was made in a 1978 book that sought to account for the emergence of an elaborate and widespread culture in 1970s New York: Edward William Delph's 1978 *The Silent Community: Public Homosexual Encounters*.<sup>125</sup> In his study, Delph provided a useful taxonomy, distinguishing between street cruising, semipublic cruising sites such as tearooms (termed "erotic oases"), and designated sexual marketplaces (such as bathhouses).<sup>126</sup> Delph's book detailed the elaborate nonverbal communications and behavioral signals deployed in these queer performances at different levels of publicness. Street cruising, he argued, took place under the eyes of the passerby and the crowd, giving pedestrian streets the potential to serve as "erotic arenas." In such public and populated zones, the visual attention to one's own and others' behaviors is paramount. He writes that the cruiser (whom he calls the "public eroticist")

becomes an observer, tailoring action in accordance with what he interprets as others' expectations of him in a particular role. Because of the threat of stigmatization, the public eroticist monitors identity and self-presentation to avoid detection. The nonthreatened normal does not share similar anxiety and is not alive to bracketing reality over this concern. . . . In order to maintain the status quo and the social stability in relationships with others, he consciously manipulates behavior, imagery, and self-presentations to conform to taken-for-granted ones.<sup>127</sup>

The pressure to regulate how one appeared and behaved came from multiple fronts—from public warnings of the dangers of homosexuality to bitter debates among homosexual activists about respectability.<sup>128</sup> In his study, Delph discussed both those who pass for straight and those more outwardly visible queer individuals who, through their gender presentation, dress, or mannerisms, overtly and defiantly signal themselves.<sup>129</sup> Whether camouflaged or flouting, cruisers navigate the stigmatization of those who break the rules—especially the opprobrium of looking for (or having) sex in public or semipublic spaces.<sup>130</sup> This holds true both inside and outside cities—from New York's derelict piers that became famous for their cruising activities to the rest stops or nature preserves accessible on interstates that cut through rural areas.<sup>131</sup>

In his book, Delph made clear that cruising in all its varieties was a highly self-conscious performance within and against the enforcing pro-

tocols of “normal” behavior. In this way, cruising both *hypostatizes* and *destabilizes* heteronormativity. By this I mean that it allows one to see the concrete workings of a discourse of compulsory heterosexuality; it does this through cruisers’ adept mimics of everyday public behaviors that are nonetheless the toolbox for seditious broadcasting of covert signals of queer desire, establishing what Delph called “the silent community.”

Identifying someone on the street for a furtive sexual encounter (or even the mutual acknowledgment that both desired one) was a lifesaving activity for those who had to hide themselves, their desires, and their loves. Seeing another who gives a look and then looking back at them could become simultaneously tense, thrilling, agonistic, and affirming. Bech described it as such: “even in the pure eye contacts, a *being-together* is established, an overstepping the border between one and the other, or at least playing with it.”<sup>132</sup> Ambiguity is the terrain of cruising, and the activity is fueled by the public disavowal of the possibility of queer desire.<sup>133</sup> Whether actively on the hunt or merely open to its chance on a stroll, those who cruise grow to be sophisticated in their navigation of possible cues, accidental signals, and purposeful scrutiny that otherwise appears oblivious or uninterested. The shared space of the street became riven with possibilities for private, coded, or colluding behavior through which queer individuals could recognize and engage one other. However, one should not equate all experiences of cruising because of the differential access to privilege and public spaces allowed to the cruiser because of their race, gender, class, ability, age, or even comportment. Nevertheless, for each individual, cruising is an active redeployment of their own particular experiences of observedness and a mining from them of resources for covert communication with others similarly searching.

Historically, cruising (especially street cruising) has had the potential to cut across class lines, and its practice can traverse (albeit only temporarily) some social, economic, and political borders. In his book *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, Samuel R. Delany argued that cruising in its varied forms was exemplary of the capacity for cross-class and interracial “contact”—those many, often ephemeral, sometimes repeated microrelationships (be they in the supermarket line, in the elevator, or at a cruising site) that the pedestrian urban fabric of the city makes possible.<sup>134</sup> “Such occurrences are central to my vision of the city at its healthiest,” he declared.<sup>135</sup> As I argue throughout this book, Burton came to develop an attitude toward public art that was demotic, anti-elitist, and approachable out of his sustained interest in the contact afforded by cruising, nonverbal communication, and other behaviors that worked beneath or against the normative rules of public spaces. In this sense, I see important sympathies between Burton’s

overall project and Delany's observation that "urban contact is often at its most spectacularly beneficial when it occurs between members of *different* communities. That is why I maintain that interclass contact is even more important than intraclass contact."<sup>136</sup> Cruising made that potentiality vivid and exciting, and it provided—for both Delany and Burton—a model for a more ethical inhabitation of public space. As José Esteban Muñoz would write in his analysis of Delany's writings on cruising and contact, "These glimpses and moments of contact have a decidedly utopian function that permits us to imagine and potentially make a queer world."<sup>137</sup>

Of course, cruising's pleasures and opportunities are not free from exclusions, frustrations, and dangers. Cruising can also be a stage for vicious deployment of bias, aggression, and objectification. While cruising sites may offer fleeting opportunities to traverse boundaries, it is also the case that race, gender, gender presentation, class, age, and ability are all inextricable from cruising. We should not simply romanticize cruising as patently subversive, simply pleasurable, or available equally to all. It could also be competitive, injurious, callous, and reinforcing of prejudice and structural inequities. Especially, the more concentrated group activity in erotic oases and in exclusionary sexual marketplaces (such as bathhouses) could be the scenes for discriminatory acts such as racial fetishism, racist dehumanization, brutal ageism, and other forms of abuse—just as much as they might also be the opportunity to contravene such discrimination and bias through forms of contact and intimacy. While the general practice of cruising must be understood for its defiance of the enforcement of heteronormativity and the illegality of queer desire, that resistant stance does not absolve cruisers for the ways that they treat each other. As Delany so thoroughly argued, cruising does afford more opportunities (and incentives) for interclass contact, but he acknowledged that it was by no means free from social hierarchies, biases, and power. It may suspend them or, at best, provide the foundation for challenging them. The defining literary accounts of cruising in this period are by writers of color (namely Delany and the novelist John Rechy), and in them one sees the ways in which cruising could transgress the stratifications of race and class as well as offer a ground against which such stratifications could be viewed more clearly and critically.

Delany observed, "Public sex situations are not Dionysian and uncontrolled but are rather some of the most highly socialized and conventionalized behavior human beings take part in."<sup>138</sup> Burton extrapolated from the practice of street cruising an attention to behavior and its power dynamics—most extensively in his series of *Behavior Tableaux* performances discussed in chapter 3. He thematized both intimacy and

aggression in his works, which do not offer a paean to cruising and only sometimes figure it directly. Rather, I argue that Burton distilled some of its social questions and lessons about behavior. The subtle and electric moments of accord, body language, and nonverbal communication in the midst of a busy street offered him a way to address both the complexities of behavior and the ways in which power and normativity delimited it.

As has been remarked to me over many years of interviewing his friends, Burton participated in cruising both in its elaborate nighttime locales and on daytime streets. He was fluent in its protocols, and he incorporated what he learned into his art. As he wrote to Costa in 1972, “I do not neglect to visit those places which fascinate me—and which would form such a good subject for another pornographic novel.”<sup>139</sup> His interest in cruising as a resource for his performance and sculpture deepened throughout the 1970s. For a concise illustration of this, I reproduce here one of Burton’s many notes and ideas for performances (see plate 1). In these ideas for an unrealized work on “the sensuous homosexual/male,” Burton not only cited cruising, fisting, BDSM, and other practices he would incorporate into his work of the 1970s; he also listed off cruising’s locations including subways, trucks, bars, and the baths.<sup>140</sup> These were the scenes for his queer experience and were formative for his interrogation of behavior and body language. I will examine the following statement more extensively later in the book, but it is also worth noting that, by 1980, Burton would boldly claim cruising as the source of his *Individual Behavior Tableaux* performances, saying, “I try to get the poses that I see in the bars, in baths and on the street corners that I frequent. I mean, my own personal experience has to come [into it]. Your work is nothing if its content isn’t your personal experience.”<sup>141</sup>

Cruising, for Burton, was not only about sexual potential; it was exemplary of the complexity of queer behavior in public. In this book, I argue that cruising serves as a synecdoche for the performances of observ- edness, negotiations of heteronormativity, nonverbal communications, proxemic negotiations, subversive codings, promiscuous accords, and utopian longings that constitute queer experiences and behaviors, in all their particularity. These queer performances, I believe, are the best foundation from which to understand Burton’s divergent and sophisticated artistic experimentation of the 1970s as well as his self-effacing, dissembling, often anonymous, and all-embracing public art of the 1980s. Indeed, Burton’s radical move of making sculpture that disappeared as public amenities came from a deep understanding of how queer possibility could hide in plain sight.

# HOT BROTHERS

the spongy homosexual (male)

I SEX.

incl arising

sex - main subject -  
~~cock sucking~~

fucking -

SM SEX. ligame sex fist fucking.

incl. <sup>fourways</sup>  
frucks  
bars  
baths

incl. slang. non sexual subjects

II STYLES.

types. anonymous interviews

styles Golden Boy off-rich + proms people - chic - middle class  
dancers, actors, gay ideal.

of h. artists. Jerry John B. turning Andy W

new h. Jim Fouratt. open - question of publicness  
from anonymity -  
drag queen.

straight world, dd h. alive

athletic, butch gay

dirty dd man

- SELF.

Plate 1. Scott Burton, notes for an unrealized performance (*Hot Brothers*), early 1970s. SBP II.16. © Estate of Scott Burton / Artists Rights Society; digital image © The Museum of Modern Art / licensed by SCALA / Art Resource.

## Queer Experiences

A note on my terminology is necessary at this point. My titular use of “queer” is targeted and intentional throughout this book, and readers will find it occupying the same pages as “gay.” “Gay,” a term used by Burton and his contemporaries, emerged as a political axis in the 1960s.<sup>142</sup> Initially, its positivity was intended to invert the derision directed at those with non-normative sexualities. While the original aim was for the term to be inclusive, “gay” has, since the 1970s, come primarily to connote men who had been assigned male at birth. It was this drift that propelled lesbians, bisexuals, trans people, and many others to augment or outright reject its narrowness. While Burton, too, came to be suspicious of the homonormativity of gay identity (as I will discuss in a moment), its 1970s usage is nevertheless an adequate way to describe how he identified.<sup>143</sup> Consequently, I will at times refer to Burton as a gay artist to signal him as “out” and to register his affiliation with the social and political movements of the 1970s that also took “gay” as their identifying label. Of course, there were many more forms of outlaw and queer desires, individuals, identities, and communities in the 1970s, and my usage of “gay” in this text does not presume to encompass those equally vital groupings and possibilities (which the term may have aspired to but never successfully included).

I also use the historically available term “queer.”<sup>144</sup> I do so strategically in relationship to its multiple connotations and varied uses in the twentieth century. The content of Burton’s work was invested in the day-to-day queer experiences of failing to inhabit the normal.<sup>145</sup> That is, the themes of his work were not invested in a singular identity category so much as in resistance to compulsory heterosexuality and the enforcement of normative behaviors.<sup>146</sup> His work examined the contours of behavior, agonism, normativity, disenfranchisement, and subversion that had been the condition of queer experience long before (and after) the popularity of “gay” as a positive nomination. In addition to being gay, Burton was, I would argue, also a *queer* artist in his aims and in his tactics.

By “queer,” I mean the dynamic matrix of positions that undermine, oppose, or exceed imposed norms of desire, love, and family as structured exclusively through heterosexual relations and binary genders. While sexual acts and sexual identity are core elements, a queer stance also calls into question relations, kinship, sociality, comportment, history, and the presumptions of “common” sense, “natural” conditions, and the denominator of the “normal.” There are many debates about the usage, current relevance, and genealogy of “queer,” which I will not rehearse here. Suffice

it to say that, in the late 1980s and 1990s in the United States, the insult “queer” was reclaimed, embraced, and debated by activists and theorists. The performative force of this insult was redirected in an act of defiance to the normal. Queer politics, in subsequent decades, have set themselves against mere inclusion, tolerance, new forms of normativity, and assimilationism. This political stance does not aim to erase difference into a new, more inclusive normal, but rather recognizes that there must be an ongoing questioning of how the normal is assumed, imposed, and policed. I deem “queer” positions as taking on (with various degrees of success) not just homophobic oppression and heterosexist exclusion but also forms of homonormativity that, too, seek to disallow difference and that reinforce patterns of presumed normalcy (which are, concomitantly, inextricable from racism, sexism, ableism, and classism).

I understand “queer” as primarily adjectival rather than fixed as a stable noun or verb, as I have argued elsewhere.<sup>147</sup> Because it is (always) relational, contingent, and contextual, I see “queer” as a more useful and wide-ranging historical term—one that accounts for acts of resistance to imposed norms in a wide range of historical contexts and inflected by positionality. In the previous section, I discussed how cruising involved not just gay men but others who also signaled unsanctioned desires on public streets, and this is one reason that I see it (as I believe Burton did) more expansively as a *queer* activity.

I draw on the longer historical reach of the adjective “queer” in this study of Burton’s performances and their themes. Throughout, I claim that Burton’s primary resource was his “queer experience”—the accumulated knowledge that arises from misalignment with and disorientation from compulsory heterosexuality. Queer experience comprises such behavioral dramas as being targeted by homophobia (both directly and implicitly), adapting to the condition of observedness, pursuing unsanctioned desires, self-monitoring, and the pleasures of locating sexual and emotional contact (and community) despite these challenges. The particularity of an individual’s queer experience is determined by context (geographic and historical) and the ways in which it intersects with race, gender, ability, class. That is, the conditions that produce queer experiences are common and repeated, but the negotiations and contexts of those conditions are not. Queer experience is not unitary. Rather, it has infinite variety (and striking disparities) in the ways that one meets the obstacles and potentials of misfitting to heteronormativity. Burton’s queer experiences were both individual and enmeshed in larger systems of legitimacy, privilege, and exclusion. His history was enabled by his whiteness and maleness and the access these traits granted (such as his education

and movement through the literary circles of the 1960s), but his particular queer experience also led him to challenge narrow categorizations and hierarchies, as with his opposition to discrimination based on race, gender, or class. In many interviews I conducted, these beliefs were often cited as an explanation for Burton's development of the demotic, anti-elitist, and utopian aims for his work.

Burton's increasing engagement with broader social questions (in particular, feminism) in the 1970s prompted a more critical stance toward gay identity over the course of the decade. He became alert to all that a stabilized understanding of "gay" excluded, especially as it became tied up with consumerism, elitism, and privilege. In a 1980 interview with the gay magazine the *Advocate*, he lamented the ways that—in the decade since Stonewall—many out gay artists seemed to rely solely on idealized homoerotic images marketed to a (homogeneous) gay male audience.<sup>148</sup> For him, this production of a gay iconography was merely a form of marketing to a circumscribed view of an elitist gay community defined only through same-gender desire, consumption, and its idealized sexual objects. He came to be skeptical of the reassertion of mainstream values and assimilationist aims to replicate heterosexual norms—what we would now term "homonormativity."<sup>149</sup> He had seen the radicalism of the early gay liberation movement dissipate into a politics of respectability and, more distasteful to him, a bourgeois sensibility that turned away from such other political issues as feminism.<sup>150</sup> Again, I see Burton as offering an alternative to this consumerism and its reification of a singular gay identity. By contrast, his work of the 1970s had drawn on experiences and images beyond a sole reliance on those that activated sexual desire (and its location in the sexual object). More broadly, his work of the 1970s looked to the queer experiences of behavior, contact, and relations.

In that 1980 *Advocate* interview, he found the need to propose an alternative to "gay" that would be more dynamic, inclusive, and expansive—in other words, how "queer" would be used a decade later. He offered the term "homocentric" as a counterpoint to what he saw as the normativity of "gay." In the interview, he explained, "'Homocentric' is something that is homosexually centered while 'gay' means Bloomingdale's, it means Castro Street, and it means good taste, linen-covered furniture and cork and blonde wood and shirts with alligators. Gay is homosexuality in the middle class. No one from the working class or bohemian culture is gay. We can be homosexual but we're not really gay."<sup>151</sup> Burton returned to "homosexual" as a more open and charged identity than "gay," and his call for a homocentric art was one that rejected such white middle-class values and consumerism. I will return to this term in the conclusion, but here it



is important to note that this statement came in the context of explaining his own work based in bathhouses and street cruising—exactly the kind of places spurned by the desexualizing and assimilationist politics of respectability. By contrast, Burton embraced cruising for its mixing of social classes and its flouting of the proper. In conjunction, he used his experiences of leather, fisting, and BDSM as a basis from which to interrogate the dynamics of active and passive as well as to explore self-abnegation as a means of opening work up to a wider range of audiences. Both in these sexual cultures and in the daily negotiations of being queer (that is, of being outlaw, targeted, insurgent, inassimilable, and intolerable), Burton extracted critical positions about the social and art's role in it. *The Advocate's* editors gave Burton's interview the subtitle "'Homocentric' Art as Moral Proposition."<sup>152</sup>

### In and Out of the 1970s: Following Burton's Queer Dissemblance

McGinnes would describe the Burton he met in 1969 as being "out as anybody I could imagine."<sup>153</sup> In 1980, Burton would look back on the 1970s and say, "The art world is very conservative and I know that there are circles of power closed to me because of my overt behavior."<sup>154</sup> Out of his own experience of alienation and from his own increasing impatience with the exclusions of the art world, Burton made works that undermined these views and offered alternatives to them.

But Burton's works only sometimes announce their queerness directly. If asked by an interviewer, he would often deny that his works had gay content or claim that it was unintentional—even in the same interviews when he discussed the sexual sources for his works. The themes of sexuality and queer experience recur throughout his notes, archives, and statements, but Burton rejected a narrow categorization of his work as "gay art." His aim was to speak more broadly, and he did so with lessons learned about behavior from queer experiences such as the negotiation of normativity, the practices of coding and dissemblance, and participation in the sexual cultures of New York City.

Strategically, Burton developed distinct modes of work for different kinds of audiences and institutions. In keeping with the ways in which Burton worked in parallel modes and with sometimes occluded connections and themes, I have divided this book into two sections. The first deals with the early experimental formulations of Burton's practice, and the second examines the parallel tracks of his work in the 1970s through three categories—his *Behavior Tableaux* made to infiltrate museums and

gallery spaces, his overt works that used sexual culture to confront stereotypes, and his development of a sculptural practice that transposed his work in performance to passive objects.

The first of these two sections deals with the years 1969 to 1971, when Burton was still developing the terms of his new artistic practice. Chapter 1 discusses the pivotal year of 1969, when Burton created his first works of performance art. Doing so within the context of the public and collaborative *Street Works* events in Manhattan, Burton chose to make works that either thematized dissemblance or were themselves invisible. I examine this early exploration of disguise and camouflaging within public space as a result of Burton's questioning of the authority of the artist. These works drew on his explorations of body language, of the signifying capacities of gestures and clothing, of cruising behaviors, and of nonverbal communication.

Chapter 2 examines Burton's earliest stage-based works as well as the sources for his theorization of behavior. I discuss the early works in which Burton employed other performers and started experimenting with the *tableau vivant* format. He also looked to feminist art and art history, and his early works evidence a sustained engagement with the ideal of feminism as a model for how gay liberation could remake the institutions of the art world. I also examine Burton's intense interest and extensive reading in the scientific literature on body language and nonverbal communication from the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was this research that provided Burton with the concepts and terminology that were fundamental to his subsequent work.

The second section examines the three parallel trajectories that emerged in Burton's work from the foundations laid during the experimental period discussed in the first section. From 1972 to 1980, Burton's most important and widely seen works of performance art were his *Behavior Tableaux*, the topic of chapter 3. Involving glacially paced movements of actors on sparse stages, these works were intended as demonstrations of nonverbal bodily languages and the power dynamics thereof. From the first work with five male-identified actors for the Whitney Museum in 1972 to the naked single-actor works he created from 1977 to 1980, Burton made it increasingly clear how his investigation into behavior was rooted in queer experience as basis for critique. I examine the evolution of these works and discuss the ways in which Burton developed a unique viewing situation that was intended to transfer queer affects between performers and viewers.

Concurrent with these conceptual performances, Burton developed a practice that was confrontational about queer experience and sexual practices. Chapter 4 examines a series of projects in which Burton attacked



Figure 0.7. Harry Roseman, *Scott Burton*, 4 August 1973. Photograph © Harry Roseman, 2022.

heteronormative masculinity and demanded a visible place for queer artists. This chapter begins with an analysis of Burton's 1973 *Lecture on Self*, in which he made himself an object of self-criticism by dividing his performance into two exaggerated and opposed characters through which he invited praise or scorn. I follow the subsequent history of one of these two, *Modern American Artist* (1973–75), with its caricature of the exaggerated masculinity that many straight Minimalist artists performed. I discuss how Burton engaged in debates about sex, gender, self-promotion, and artistic identity (in direct competition with artists such as Benglis and Morris) through this character. I also explain how Burton advocated for other artists, recounting the story of Burton's work on an unrealized anthology of lesbian and gay art history. These projects were soon followed by a truculent work about fisting that he dedicated to "homosexual liberation." Such activities ran alongside the layered and cerebral performance works he created for museums and galleries, leaving little doubt that the latter were, too, queerer than they first appeared.

Chapter 5 provides a history of Burton's early sculptures of furniture, a practice that was closely allied with the interests that underwrote his performance work—that is, urban camouflage, cruising, and dissemblance. The needfulness of a chair or other piece of furniture was, for him, related to the more open, democratic, and potentially sexualized capacities of shifting emphasis from artist to viewer. While Burton is often remem-

bered solely as a sculptor, an examination of his 1970s work shows a deep connection to histories of performance and design. Indeed, the awkward objects he made in the 1970s help illuminate the stakes of his more widely lauded public works of the 1980s.

This book argues that queer experience and sexuality are at the core of the development, sophistication, and impact of Burton's multifarious work of the 1970s. After almost two decades of thinking, archival research, and oral history interviews, I can see it no other way. I believe it is important to tell this story and to give voice to the rebellious, wry, and smart ways in which Burton built from the frustrations and pleasures of his individual experience. He used them as the raw material to envision a practice that challenged exclusion, embraced audiences, served viewers, resisted sexism, and affected behavior.

Burton, however, made a shift in the 1980s in order to infiltrate the networks of public art. He chose to focus on sculpture, and he deflected attention from his queer performances of the 1970s. His ultimate aim was to make public art that was demotic, approachable, and open to a wide range of viewers (even if they did not know his functional sculptures were art). To pursue this utopian aim, he recognized that his brashness of the 1970s had to be sacrificed in order to get public commissions. As his close friend Betsy Baker said in Burton's memorial service, "For some critics, the anarchic wild man of the early performance pieces sits somewhat uneasily next to the persuasive, even politically-adept public artist. Such contradictions seem to me to resolve themselves in light of a larger consistency that includes the strong component of erudition and the intense aestheticism that pervade even the craziest early works, and the convincing populism that is one of the driving forces behind all his public pieces."<sup>155</sup> Brenda Richardson, curator of his first retrospective in 1986, told me that Burton tried to keep his queer performance work of the 1970s out of the narrative of that exhibition, worrying that it would draw focus from his aim to be seen as a public artist. "He wanted the retrospective to focus on the artworks as sculptures and as civic amenities (so to speak), period," she recalled.<sup>156</sup> His 1980s works no longer celebrated sexual repertoires of cruising and fisting but rather sublimate these themes into an account of semi-anonymous useful sculptures that dissemble as street furniture open to all. This shift was also tied up with the AIDS crisis, and much of Burton's work of the 1980s was shadowed by his experience of living with HIV (from around 1983) until his death in 1989. He feared (rightly) that any knowledge of his HIV status would make receiving public art commissions impossible, but more importantly he devoted himself to making enduring and obdurately resilient public sculptures of furniture that offered care

and contact to passersby (even if they were seen as nothing more than a place to rest momentarily).

While a shift occurs around 1981 regarding Burton's volubility about queer themes, we should see it as neither a chasm nor a disavowal of the earlier work. The work before and after this time does look different, but it is my conviction that there are fundamental and consistent themes across Burton's artistic career. Burton's questions about public space, about the leveling of hierarchies, about sexual enfranchisement are answered differently by his individual works and modalities, but his priorities and principles remained resolute. One of the aims of this book is to demonstrate that—across the chronological range of his work—we understand Burton's multiplicity, code-switching, and dissemblance as components of a queer strategy for dealing with public space, public discourse, and the possibilities of behavior.

Such complexity, however, is unrecognized in the existing literature on Burton, and his work of the 1970s is often ignored, misunderstood, or barely mentioned. Even among friends and collaborators, Burton did not always express the depth and range of his queer commitments. As Nancy Princenthal recalled, "[Burton] was capable of great feats of indirection, of saying one thing—vehemently, eloquently, sometimes quite devastatingly—and meaning (or doing) another."<sup>157</sup> It became clear to me early on in my research that Burton was good at compartmentalizing his friendships and explanations. I have talked with friends, collaborators, ex-lovers, performers, curators, competitors, assistants, and fellow travelers—Burton made his mark on all of them. However, some lifelong friends had never heard of his queer performances involving dildos or were unaware that he worked for years on anthologizing lesbian and gay art in the mid-1970s. With other friends, however, Burton was forthcoming about his sexual life and priorities. For instance, Costa characterized Burton as a "warrior" in relation to sexuality and sexual politics.<sup>158</sup> Kaufman had many stories, remarking that Burton was very much "into all that. He was an extremely sexual being. He experimented a lot with S&M and the leather community."<sup>159</sup> The recollections that have been entrusted to me range from the sexy to the funny to the dramatic. It was a regular event in my interviews to be told, "you can't write this one down," followed by a story about Burton that was fabulous, salacious, uncompromising, or sensational. It was no secret to some (but not all) of his friends how much his participation in the cultures of cruising, leather, BDSM, and other queer socialities were fundamental to his ideas about art. Following on her earlier discussion of Burton's public reticence in the mid-1980s, Richardson made sure to remind me that, with a longer view, it was important to remember that "Scott [was] an assertively sexual being with a bent for hell-raising in art and life alike."<sup>160</sup>

An anecdote about Burton from Rosenblum is exemplary. He recalled an incident in which he invited Burton and his partner of the 1980s, Jon Erlitz (also known as “Chico”), to a posh beach club at Shelter Island: “Suddenly, in this time capsule of American beachside exclusivity and decorum, there appeared an S/M fantasy of nipple rings and tattoos, of which the most startling were the blue spider-webs in the shaved skin of both of Scott’s armpits, now fully exposed to the sun and to everybody else.”<sup>161</sup> Especially as he sought to engage in public art with its civic commissions, community forums, and government contracts, Burton appeared as a refined advocate for design, an ardent aesthete, or an organizer for public amenity. Always underneath, however, was the Burton of the 1970s—tattooed, queer, and infiltrating.

This book does not claim that Burton’s work (in all its variety) is *only* about sexuality. By contrast, my claim is that his work is rooted in—but also about much more than—queer experience, including (but not limited to) his sexual experience. It is only from this basis that we can fully understand how Burton sought to make public, approachable, and critical artworks that would be meaningful for all. I know there are more books to be written on Burton, and I hope they will be. His relationship to histories of design deserves its own full analysis, as does his deep identification with (and learned extensions of) avant-garde modernisms that sought more expansive audiences (especially with Tatlin, Rodchenko, Brancusi, and Rietveld). A more detailed history of Burton’s prodigious output of the 1980s is required, as is a sustained analysis of his contribution to the debates about new forms of public art emerging in the 1980s. The registration of the ongoing AIDS crisis in Burton’s work is also of great importance and, I think, central to any understanding of his public art (as well as his heavy and tenacious independent sculptures). Burton’s story is layered, and it intersects with many of the most important formations in postwar American art. It is my hope that this first history of his artistic practice of the 1970s will ground future discussions of his contributions. Any such accounts of Burton, however, must be made in both cognizance and embrace of the fundamental importance of queer experience for his work and thought. This is the main reason it is the present book, rather than any of the other possible ones, that I believe needs to come first.

# NOTES

## Introduction

1. Some months after the incident, Burton claimed that it was “unrelated to art or politics,” by which he meant that it was neither properly an artwork nor a political statement. Burton to Costa, 5 September 1971. This later qualification came in response to a letter from a 31 July 1971 letter in which Costa wrote, “I am telling everyone about that secret art work a friend of mine did, so that they can see how good the real new American art is and not get misleading information through official art publications about its degree of development.” Both letters in ECC.
2. For a discussion of the complexities of Minimalism’s political claims, see the chapters on Carl Andre and Robert Morris in Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). An illuminating account of the politics of Judd’s empiricism and of his interest in leveling hierarchies can be found in David Raskin, “Specific Opposition: Judd’s Art and Politics,” *Art History* 24, no. 5 (November 2001): 682–706. See also Robert Slifkin, “Donald Judd’s Credibility Gap,” *American Art* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 56–75; Dominic Rahtz, “Indifference of Material in the Work of Carl Andre and Robert Smithson,” *Oxford Art Journal* 35, no. 1 (March 2012): 31–51.
3. Telephone interview with Mac McGinnes, 29 April 2010.
4. Burton was not the only artist angry at Judd in the summer of 1971. See Andrew Wasserman, “Judd’s Space: A Marginal Absence in the Fight for SoHo Housing,” *Visual Resources* 31, nos. 3–4 (September–December 2015): 155–76.
5. Telephone interview with Eduardo Costa, 16 March 2010. In 1969, Burton had been among the twenty-four signatories (along with others such as Eva Hesse, Robert Indiana, and Michael Snow) of a letter to the editors of *Artforum* (Summer 1969, pp. 7–8) protesting the controversial plan for a Lower

Manhattan Expressway that would have fundamentally altered the Lower East Side, Little Italy, and South Village neighborhoods.

6. Telephone interview with Mac McGinnes, 29 April 2010.
7. CW 50.
8. On the centrality of such assertions of masculinity as supposedly neutral and performatively reasserted, see Amelia Jones, “Dis/playing the Phallus: Male Artists Perform Their Masculinities,” *Art History* 17, no. 4 (December 1994): 546–84; and Amelia Jones, *Body Art / Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). For a discussion of the heteronormativity of postwar art and the proscriptions on being visibly queer in it, see Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948–1963* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); and Jonathan D. Katz, “The Silent Camp: Queer Resistance and the Rise of Pop Art,” in *Visions of a Future: Art and Art History in Changing Contexts*, ed. Kornelia Imesch and Hans-Jörg Heusser (Zurich: Swiss Institute for Art Research, 2004), 147–58.
9. As Anna Chave has argued, “The erasure of artistic subjectivity that seemed such a radical prospect to certain male artists in the 1960s could hardly portend the same for their female contemporaries, for whom erasure was almost a given.” Anna C. Chave, “Minimalism and Biography,” *Art Bulletin* 82, no. 1 (March 2000): 154. While there were women artists associated with Minimalism (such as Anne Truitt, Jo Baer, Adrian Piper, Judy Chicago, and Mary Corse), their work was met with discrimination, and they experienced uphill battles to acceptance.
10. For example, Joseph Masheck, “Corn-Fed Egotism [Letter to the Editor],” *Studio International* 177, no. 911 (May 1969): 209–10; Karl Beveridge and Ian Burn, “Don Judd,” *Fox* 2 (1975): 129–42; Anna C. Chave, “Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power,” *Arts Magazine* 64, no. 5 (1990): 44–63. See also Lynn Zelevansky, *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994); Susan L. Stoops, ed., *More Than Minimal: Feminism and Abstraction in the '70s* (Waltham, MA: Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, 1996).
11. The writer John Preston declared in 1980, “The public has a view of the art world that sees an unbridled bohemia filled with free spirits doing, saying and depicting outrageously free things. . . . Here, certainly, must be one arena of life where gayness is truly liberated. *It's not true.*” John Preston, “The New York Galleries: Non-competitive Exposure,” *Alternate* 2, no. 12 (March/April 1980): 13 (emphasis added). See a similar assessment in Walter Weissman, “John Perreault: The Road to Art Criticism Starts with a Small Success in Poetry [Interview],” *Artworkers News*, April 1980, 18. More overt queer work was being done in New York’s underground theater and film scenes, notably Charles Ludlam’s Ridiculous Theater Company, Andy Warhol’s films, Jack Smith, Kenneth Anger, the Angels of Light, and the Hot Peaches. As well, a greater range of out artists in the 1970s worked in photography—a me-



dium that, at the time, had distinct historical trajectories and supporting institutions that were not always coextensive with the art world. Within the art world, silence about and nondisclosure of gay or lesbian identity were more common—indeed, they were modes of resistance to homophobia, as argued in Katz, “Silent Camp.”

12. Telephone interview with Michael Auping, 13 July 2017.
13. Gay-focused commercial galleries began to emerge in New York City in the second half of the 1970s, but they privileged figuration, photography, and erotica. See Preston, “New York Galleries.” Lesbian art production (nationally) was more robust in the 1970s, in part supported by the alternative institutions created out of the feminist movement. See discussion in Laura Cottingham, “Eating from the *Dinner Party* Plates and Other Myths, Metaphors, and Moments of Lesbian Enunciation in Feminism and Its Art Movement,” in *Seeing through the Seventies: Essays on Feminism and Art* (Amsterdam: G+B Arts, 2000), 133–59; Jennie Klein, “The Lesbian Art Project,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 14, nos. 2–3 (2010): 238–59; Tara Burk, “In Pursuit of the Unspeakable: *Heresies*’ ‘Lesbian Art and Artists’ Issue, 1977,” *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* 41, nos. 3–4 (Fall/Winter 2013): 63–78; Margo Hobbs Thompson, “D.I.Y. Identity Kit: The Great American Lesbian Art Show,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 14, nos. 2–3 (2010): 260–82. Also of crucial importance was Jill Johnston’s *Lesbian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).
14. DeCelle 10.
15. CW 244.
16. They moved some time in 1952. John Button explained, “[Hortense] moved to Washington, in the first place, because Scott had been tested for IQ and psychologically at the U. of Alabama when he was 12. The results showed that he was far above average in intelligence and very ‘different’ psychologically. Hortense, with unerring instinct, decided on the spot to get out of the small town and into a big city where Scott would have more opportunity. HOW RIGHT SHE WAS.” John Button to Gerald Fabian, 5 June 1966, JB/GF.
17. “Radford E. Mobley, 64, Dies, Retired Newsmen, Publicist,” *Washington Post* 1969, B6. Burton described him as “the hero of our family—my father was absent, so the man of the family was my mother’s brother, who was a journalist and writer and college poet.” Kachur I, 3. Burton attributed his interest in literature to his uncle’s influence.
18. John Button to Gerald Fabian, 5 June 1966, JB/GF.
19. Kachur I, 15.
20. For instance, Pincus-Witten remarked in 1976, “Burton now understands this fascination [with furniture] to be an evocation of his ‘longing for an ideal family life.’ He construed the reordering of the furniture in his room as ‘the re-living of one’s childhood in an ideal way.’” Robert Pincus-Witten, “Scott Burton: Conceptual Performance as Sculpture,” *Arts Magazine* 51, no. 1 (September 1976): 114.

21. See Burton's reminiscences in Gerald Marzorati, "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Furniture Maker," *Metropolitan Home* 15 (November 1983): 32.
22. Interview with Robert Pincus-Witten, 6 May 2005. Burton would say in 1987, "I do identify with the underdog." Kachur I, 61.
23. Scott Burton to Leon Berkowitz, dated "April 1957," Leon Berkowitz and Ida Fox Berkowitz Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
24. Kachur I, 2.
25. Eduardo Costa, "Racial Conflict in Recent Poetry from the US: Analysis from a Third World Perspective," 1974, research report submitted to Department of Philosophy and Literature, University of Buenos Aires, translated by Jen Hofer and John Pluecker and courtesy Patrick Greaney. Costa also wrote in the thesis, "To Scott Burton, who represents that portion of the white population of the US with which it is possible for a Latin American to sustain true friendship." Costa also recounted a story to me about Burton's time as a professor at the School of Visual Arts. During a public meeting at which there was a proposal to protest the deaths of American soldiers in the war on Vietnam, Burton asked if the deaths of the Vietnamese people should also be addressed by the protest—only to be silenced by the school's director, Silas Rhodes. This incident contributed to Burton being fired from SVA. Telephone interview with Eduardo Costa, 16 March 2010.
26. "It was way too sophisticated for me. The teaching was having people use big bedsheets because it was cheaper than canvas, and teaching them how to stain and pour paint on it. The man's name was Morris Louis. . . . I was terrified. I didn't go back to class. . . . I never went back. But then, indeed, I would get sheets of my mother's and stain. I could make very bad Morris Louises, Helen Frankenthalers at the age of fourteen or fifteen." Kachur I, 25.
27. Audio recording of March 1980 interview with Burton by Edward DeCelle, Edward Brooks DeCelle Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
28. "I have responded to GIDE. read IMMORALIST, CORYDON, NOW IF IT DIE, and soon STRAIT IS THE GATE." Scott Burton to Leon Berkowitz and Ida Fox, n.d. [Spring 1958], Leon Berkowitz and Ida Fox Berkowitz Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
29. John Button to Gerald Fabian, 5 June 1966, JB/GF.
30. Kachur I, 53. McNally and Burton regularly went to Fire Island together.
31. For example, Burton wrote in 1960, "If anybody can make W[est] S[ide] S[tory] into a movie, you are *them*. If anybody can make me miss them & think of them & love them, you are also *them*." Scott Burton to Jerome Robbins, 10 May 1960. By that autumn, it had become "All I have to say is that I love you and think about you and miss you—nothing has changed on my part except that I've about given up hope of ever seeing you again—except in my dreams, where you appeared last night, warm & close." Scott Burton to Jerome Robbins, 19 October 1960, Jerome Robbins Papers, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

32. As Button recalled, “We have never been apart since that time. He moved right in and Robbins was furious. There were several scenes with Scott and one with me.” John Button to Gerald Fabian, 5 June 1966, JB/GF.
33. On the social dynamics of the New York School much has but written, but see in particular Lytle Shaw, *Frank O’Hara: The Poetics of Coterie* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006); Maggie Nelson, *Women, the New York School, and Other True Abstractions* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007); Russell Ferguson, *In Memory of My Feelings: Frank O’Hara and American Art* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999).
34. See Lewis Ellingham and Kevin Killian, *Poet Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 231–35. See also John Button, “Some Memories,” 1980, *No Apologies*, no. 2 (May 1984): 28–31.
35. John Button to Gerald Fabian, 15 November 1961. By the mid-1960s, Button, Burton, and Robbins had begun to ease tensions. As Button wrote in 1966, “In fact, I have begun to be rather fond of the old thing [Robbins], in the same way I’m fond of Allen Ginsberg with all of his silliness.” John Button to Gerald Fabian, 5 June 1966, JB/GF.
36. For example, Bill Berkson. Burton: “Bill and I were rivals. We didn’t like each other at all.” Kachur I, 54.
37. Joe LeSueur, *Digressions on Some Poems by Frank O’Hara: A Memoir* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 133. See also John Perreault, “Scott Burton’s Escape from Language,” in *Scott Burton*, ed. Ana María Torres (Valencia: Institut Valencià d’Art Modern, 2004), 36–42.
38. John Romine, “Scott Burton [Interview],” *Upstart* 5 (May 1981): 7.
39. The curator Linda Shearer, who later brought *Behavior Tableaux* to the Guggenheim in 1976, recalled being an intern at the MoMA bookstore in 1963, where she first met Burton. She returned every summer to work at the bookstore while in college, and they became close friends. Burton eventually became the godfather to Shearer’s son. Telephone interview with Linda Shearer, 28 June 2017.
40. John Button to Gerald Fabian, 4 May 1965, JB/GF.
41. In a letter from the spring of 1963, Kirstein wrote of his early support, “[Your play] is full of charming ideas and delightful intellectual surprises, ingenious notions and a truly delicate sense of brainy fun; it is pretty in the best sense and in every way a lovely job. Whether or not it could be *played*, I just don’t know. Maybe if you played it, with Jason Robards, but maybe you never intended for it to be played. It is delicious to read and I am in your debt for letting me see it.” Lincoln Kirstein to Scott Burton, 5 May 1963, SBP I.9. By the end of 1963, however, Kirstein had commissioned Burton’s *Saint George* for the Shakespeare Memorial Theater, where he was a producer. Lincoln Kirstein to Scott Burton, 31 December 1964, SBP I.9.
42. In Edit deAk and Walter Robinson, “An Article on Scott Burton in the Form of a Resumé,” *Art-Rite* 8 (Winter 1975): 10.

43. Critic Allen Hughes remarked, “‘Shadow’d Ground’ is certainly big in some ways, and it attempts to be both revolutionary and thoughtful, but it fails in almost every way.” Allen Hughes, “Notes on New Ballets,” *New York Times*, 31 January 1965, X7. Button noted, “Scott’s ballet went very well, really. Especially considering that no one was actually in charge of it. . . . But it came off very well—despite the asinine critics. It wasn’t great, but it wasn’t bad.” John Button to Gerald Fabian, 15 February 1965, JB/GF.
44. See Carter Ratcliff’s comments in Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962–1974* (New York: Soho, 2003), 41.
45. Scott Burton, “Old Master at the New Frontier,” *ARTnews* 65, no. 8 (December 1966), 52–55, 68–70 (CW 35–44). Burton’s first full-length article, however, was on Anne Arnold and published in *Art and Literature* in 1965. CW 155–61.
46. CW 71–78.
47. Scott Burton, *Direct Representation: Robert Bechtle, Bruno Civitico, Yvonne Jacquette, Sylvia Mangold, John Moore; Five Younger Realists* (New York: Fischbach Gallery, 1969); and Scott Burton, *The Realist Revival* (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1972). Essays reprinted with commentary in CW 195–212.
48. SBP II.44 and IV.22.
49. Interview with Betsy Baker, 28 March 2019.
50. Dorothy Wolfberg, Scott Burton, and John Tarburton, eds., *Exploring the Arts: An Anthology of Basic Readings* (New York: Visual Arts, 1969).
51. Most of these are mentioned in Kachur I.
52. Interview with Mac McGinnes, 29 April 2010.
53. Mac McGinnes, telephone interview with the author, 29 April 2010.
54. Emphasis in the original. John Button to Gerald Fabian, n.d. [early November 1968], JB/GF.
55. John Button to Gerald Fabian, n.d. [early November 1968], JB/GF. Or, in a letter to Rosenblum from 1969, Button talked about a confrontation with Burton at “a new after-hours place called *Hades*. You wouldn’t believe it. It’s a leather & chain *dancing* bar.” John Button to Robert Rosenblum, 14 August 1969, Robert Rosenblum Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
56. John Button to Gerald Fabian, 15 November 1968, JB/GF.
57. “Gay Power” was both a political rallying cry and, at that time, the title of an activist magazine. On the pivotal role of *Gay Power* from 1970 to 1972, see Richard Meyer, “*Gay Power* circa 1970: Visual Strategies for Sexual Revolution,” *GLQ* 12, no. 3 (2006): 441–64.
58. Interviews with Mac McGinnes, 29 April 2010 and 2 November 2012.
59. Telephone interview with Jane Kaufman, 3 May 2010.
60. See David J. Getsy, “The Primacy of Sensibility: Scott Burton Writing on Art and Performance, 1965–1975,” CW 1–32.
61. CW 101.
62. CW 101.

63. In this way, Burton was also in accord with women artists who also sought to activate viewers' differences through spurs to memory. For related discussions, see Miguel de Baca, *Memory Work: Anne Truitt and Sculpture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); and Sarah Hamill, "'The Skin of the Earth': Mary Miss's *Untitled* 1973/75 and the Politics of Precarity," *Oxford Art Journal* 41, no. 2 (2018): 271–91.
64. CW 43, my emphasis. Such an understanding of *Die* (and of Minimalism) as promoting questions of difference and embodiment would be later argued in Amelia Jones, "Art History / Art Criticism: Performing Meaning," in *Performing the Body / Performing the Text*, ed. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (London: Routledge, 1999), 39–55.
65. Frances Colpitt has comprehensively analyzed how Minimalism coalesced as a primarily critical consensus around (and sometimes departing from) individual artists' and artist-critics' practices in Frances Colpitt, *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1990). See also the important account of the movement and its divergences in James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).
66. On boredom as a strategy in relation to Minimalism, see Frances Colpitt, "The Issue of Boredom: Is It Interesting?," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43, no. 4 (Summer 1985): 359–65.
67. Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," 1986, in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 38.
68. Burton in a 10 October 1979 interview partially transcribed in Michael Auping, *30 Years: Interviews and Outtakes* (Fort Worth, TX: Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 2007), 79.
69. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967): 12–23.
70. The literature on Fried's essay is vast, but a particularly insightful unpacking of Fried's "theatricality" in relation to the work of Stanley Cavell can be found in James Meyer, "The Writing of 'Art and Objecthood,'" in *Refracting Vision: Essays on the Writings of Michael Fried*, ed. Jill Beaulieu, Mary Roberts, and Toni Ross (Sydney: Power Institute, 2000), 61–96.
71. Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 15.
72. Scott Burton, "Time on Their Hands," *Art News* 68, no. 4 (Summer 1969): 40 (CW 79).
73. Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 16. I am indebted to conversations with James Meyer, who emphasized to me the importance of such passages.
74. CW 60.
75. Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 21, emphasis in the original. It should be noted that when "Art and Objecthood" was reprinted in Gregory Battcock, ed. *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), 140, the final words "waiting for him" were ultimately added to this sentence for clarity.
76. Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 16.
77. For further discussions on the psychodynamics of Fried's encounter/cruis-

ing scene, see Jones, *Body Art*, 111–13; Jennifer Doyle, *Sex Objects: Art and the Dialectics of Desire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 114–16; Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy, “Queer Formalisms: Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy in Conversation,” *Art Journal* 72, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 58–71; Hannah B. Higgins, “Reading Art and Objecthood While Thinking about Containers,” *nonsite.org* 25 (2018); and David J. Getsy, “Acts of Stillness: Statues, Performativity, and Passive Resistance,” *Criticism* 56, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 1–20.

78. For a discussion of the homophobia in writing about theater in the mid-1960s (and Fried’s echoing of it), see Stephen J. Bottoms, “The Efficacy/Effeminacy Braid: Unpacking the Performance Studies / Theatre Studies Dichotomy,” *Theatre Topics* 13, no. 2 (September 2003): 173–87. See also Jonas Barish, *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); David Savran, *A Queer Sort of Materialism: Recontextualizing American Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), and D. A. Miller, *Place for Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). In my previous book, I discussed another way in which theater had been used in Minimalist art as a sign for homosexuality (and its problematic relationship to visibility) in my discussion of Dan Flavin’s 1962 *Coran’s Broadway Flesh*, which the artist dedicated to “a young English homosexual who loved New York City” in a published statement. David J. Getsy, *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (London: Yale University Press, 2015), 212–27.
79. Christa Noel Robbins, “The Sensibility of Michael Fried,” *Criticism* 60, no. 4 (Fall 2018): 429–54.
80. Michael Fried to Philip Leider, 21 January 1967, Philip Leider Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. After this passage, Fried went on about the idea he wanted to include in the essay that became “Art and Objecthood”: “even if the faggots didn’t kill Kennedy (and I love this guy Garrison for insinuating they did) they ought to be kicked out of the arts and forced to go to work on Wall Street or something. *I would love to do it*” (my emphasis). Fried referred to the district attorney of New Orleans, Jim Garrison, who sought publicity by advancing a series of conspiracy theories about John F. Kennedy’s assassination, the first of which was that it was perpetrated by a group of thrill-seeking homosexuals.
81. Robbins, “Sensibility of Michael Fried,” 432.
82. Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 20, emphasis in the original. Later attempting to clarify his intentions, Fried reiterated how he saw theatricality as inauthentic and unnatural (his word is “monstrous”): “My critique of the literalist address to the viewer’s body was not that bodiliness as such had no place in art but rather that literalism theatricalized the body, put it endlessly on stage, made it uncanny or opaque to itself, hollowed it out, deadened its expressiveness, denied its finitude and in a sense its humanness, and so on. There is, I might have said, something vaguely *monstrous* about the body

- in literalism.” Michael Fried, “An Introduction to My Art Criticism,” in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 42, emphasis in the original. A strong critique of this and other aspects Fried’s rhetoric can be found in Amelia Jones, *In Between Subjects: A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 152–59.
83. “Notes on Camp” originally appeared in *Partisan Review* 31, no. 4 (Fall 1964), and was republished in 1966 as Susan Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp,’” in *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1966), 275–92. Fried remarked that Sontag’s essays in *Against Interpretation* “amount to perhaps the purest—certainly the most egregious—expression of what I have been calling theatrical sensibility in recent criticism.” Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 23n17. When Fried anthologized “Art and Objecthood” in his collected essays in 1998, the long footnote deriding Sontag’s *Against Interpretation* was deleted. See Fried, *Art and Objecthood*; the excised footnote would have appeared on p. 171.
84. Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp,’” 287.
85. Sontag, 288.
86. Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 23n17. Here, Fried was responding to the discussion of the frivolous in a long passage from Sontag’s “On Culture and the New Sensibility,” the essay immediately following (and building on) “Notes on ‘Camp.’”
87. Sontag noted, “The peculiar relation between Camp taste and homosexuality has to be explained. While it’s not true that Camp taste *is* homosexual taste, there is no doubt a peculiar affinity and overlap” (Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp,’” 290). Sontag’s essay became a sensation—even *Time* magazine did a story on it. On the reception of Sontag’s essay in the 1960s, see James Penner, “Gendering Susan Sontag’s Criticism in the 1960s: The New York Intellectuals, the Counter Culture, and the *Kulturkampf* over ‘The New Sensibility,’” *Women’s Studies* 37 (2008): 921–41; and Benjamin Moser, *Sontag: Her Life and Work* (New York: Ecco, 2019), 228–42.
88. Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp,’” 280. Moser makes this connection even clearer by reprinting the text of an unpublished draft for “Notes on Homosexuality” (1958), which was the foundation for “Notes on Camp.” See Moser, *Sontag*, 230–31.
89. Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp,’” 288.
90. Pincus-Witten would later recall, “sometimes—there are moments in which I think a single word grabs the zeitgeist.” Oral history interview with Robert Pincus-Witten by Francis Naumann, 23–24 March 2016, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
91. For a discussion of the complexities of postminimalism as a category, see Stephen Melville, “What Was Postminimalism?,” in *Art and Thought*, ed. Dana Arnold and Margaret Iverson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 158. Focusing on Hesse and Serra (and, quite problematically, dismissing Benglis

from serious consideration despite her fundamental role), Melville's essay hinges on the pressures the term "postminimalism" puts on a periodizing account of postwar history and its nomination of movements.

92. Robert Pincus-Witten, "Postminimalism," in *The New Sculpture 1965–1975: Between Geometry and Gesture*, ed. Richard Armstrong and Richard Marshall (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1990), 24.
93. Lucy Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," *Art International* 10, no. 9 (20 November 1966): 28, 34–40; Lucy Lippard, "Eros Presumptive," *Hudson Review* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1967): 91–99. See discussion in Getsy, *Abstract Bodies*, 13–17.
94. CW 71–78. For a useful discussion of the role of the body and performance in this watershed exhibition, see Jane Blocker, *What the Body Cost: Desire, History, and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 84–103.
95. CW 79–85.
96. Linda Shearer, ed., *Eva Hesse: A Memorial Exhibition* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1972); Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (New York: Da Capo, 1976).
97. Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973).
98. I have listed only a few of the key exhibitions of these years. For further, see Richard J. Williams, *After Modern Sculpture: Art in the United States and Europe, 1965–70* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). See also Richard Armstrong, "Between Geometry and Gesture," in Armstrong and Marshall, *New Sculpture 1965–1975*, 12–18.
99. Robert Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism* (New York: Out of London, 1977), 16. On the centrality of women artists to postminimalism, see Whitney Chadwick, "Balancing Acts: Reflections on Postminimalism and Gender in the 1970s," in Stoops, *More Than Minimal*, 14–25. See also Anna C. Chave, "Sculpture, Gender, and the Value of Labor," *American Art* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 26–30. For a discussion of another postminimalist who explored queer themes and experience, see the astute analysis of Harmony Hammond's abstract wall sculptures in Margo Hobbs Thompson, "'Lesbians Are Not Women': Feminine and Lesbian Sensibilities in Harmony Hammond's Late-1970s Sculpture," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 12, no. 4 (2008): 435–54.
100. As Foster later summarized it, "minimalism considers perception in phenomenological terms, as somehow before or outside history, language, sexuality, and power. In other words, it does not regard the subject as a sexed body positioned in the symbolic order any more than it regards the gallery or museum as an ideological apparatus." Foster, "Crux of Minimalism," 43.
101. Pincus-Witten, "Postminimalism," 25.
102. Chave, "Minimalism and Biography." Or, as Wayne Enstice noted of the reassertion of artistic authorship in Minimalism: "But the unsettling blankness of Minimalism dislodged the artist more completely from behind the craft of making art, to stress his executive presence." Wayne Enstice,



- “Performance Art’s Coming of Age,” in *The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock and Robert Nickas (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984), 144.
103. Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism*, 13–14. See also his publication of his critic’s journals (with commentary on postminimalism’s character) as Robert Pincus-Witten, “Naked Lunches,” *October* 3 (1977): 102–18. For a sympathetic account of Andre’s attempts at “absenting the self,” see Dominic Rahtz, “Literality and Absence of Self in the Work of Carl Andre,” *Oxford Art Journal* 27, no. 1 (2004): 61–78.
104. Interview with Robert Pincus-Witten, 6 May 2005.
105. Rosemary Mayer, “Performance and Experience,” *Arts Magazine* 47, no. 3 (December–January 1973): 36. On Mayer, see Gillian Sneed, “Pleasures and Possible Celebrations’: Rosemary Mayer’s Temporary Monuments, 1977–1982,” in *Temporary Monuments: Work by Rosemary Mayer, 1977–1982*, ed. Marie Warsh and Max Warsh (Chicago: Soberscove, 2018), 533.
106. There are far too many histories of performance in the 1960s to cite here, but I would point a group of studies initially written in the 1960s or 1970s: Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-modern Dance*, new ed. (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), originally published in 1973; Michael Kirby, *Art of Time: Essay on the Avant-Garde* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1969), 52–66; Lucy Lippard, “The Geography of Street Time: A Survey of Streetworks Downtown,” 1976, in *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984), 52–66; Stefan Brecht, *Queer Theatre, 1978* (London: Methuen, 1986); and RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979).
107. Burton cited Rainer in his letter explaining his *Lecture on Self* (Scott Burton to Athena Tacha, 24 January 1973, Allen Memorial Art Museum Curatorial Archives, Oberlin College). Rainer recalled seeing Burton occasionally at events in the 1960s, but the two were not in close contact. Conversation with Yvonne Rainer, 24 June 2015.
108. These three are among the foundations for performance that he discusses in detail in his 1973 *Lecture on Self*, CW 227–43.
109. Perreault even credited Strider with coining the term. “I invented the term Street Works (taking off of Earth Works) and artist Marjorie Strider eventually came up with Performances as a better term than Theater Works.” Perreault, “Scott Burton’s Escape,” 36. See also Jon Gams, “Interview with Marjorie Strider, April 5, 2003,” in *Dramatic Gestures: Marjorie Strider* (Lenox, MA: Hard Press Editions, 2004), 103.
110. Michael Kirby, “Introduction: Performance at the Limits of Performance,” *The Drama Review* 16, no. 1 (March 1972): 70–71.
111. “Mac has gone to Chicago to play a starring role as a woman,” Burton wrote to Costa on 2 February 1972, ECC. A drag version of Jack Kirkland’s Depression-era play *Tobacco Road* (1933), based on Erskine Caldwell’s 1932 book, was the reason for McGinnes’s move. The play was put on by the

Godzilla Rainbow Troupe, which Gary Tucker (who had previously worked with Ludlam) founded in 1971 in the Ridiculous style. McGinnes stayed in Chicago after the play closed and was one of the founders of Victory Gardens Theater in 1974.

112. For example: datebook entries for 3 October 1970 (SBP III.1) and 30 October 1974 (SBP III.3).
113. A promotional flier they created explained, “The Association for Performances is an organization founded to promote, present and preserve new forms of artists’ theatre, specifically those referred to as Performances.” SBP II.17.
114. CW 230.
115. CW 229.
116. See Mark Turner, *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003); Ben Gove, *Cruising Culture: Promiscuity, Desire and American Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); John Rechy, *Rushes* (New York: Grove, 1979); Dianne Chisolm, *Queer Constellations: Subcultural Space in the Wake of the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Joel Czarlinsky, “Sexual Culture,” in *Petit Mort: Recollections of a Queer Public*, ed. Joshua Lubin-Levy and Carlos Motta (New York: Forever and Today, 2011), 15–19; Scott Herring, *Queering the Underworld: Slumming, Literature, and the Undoing of Lesbian and Gay History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Jonathan Weinberg, *Pier Groups: Art and Sex along the New York Waterfront* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019); Fiona Anderson, *Cruising the Dead River: David Wojnarowicz and New York’s Ruined Waterfront* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); “‘Privacy Could Only Be Had in Public’: Forging a Gay World in the Streets,” in George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 179–205; Jennifer Moon, “Cruising John Rechy’s City of Night: Queer Subjectivity, Intimacy, and Counterpublicity,” *disclosure: A Journal of Social Theory* 15 (2006): 42–59; and “Ghosts of Public Sex: Utopian Longings, Queer Memories,” in José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 33–48. For further context, see also Patrick Moore, *Beyond Shame: Reclaiming the Abandoned History of Radical Gay Sexuality* (Boston: Beacon, 2004); and Pat Califia, “Public Sex,” 1982, in *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex* (San Francisco: Cleiss, 1994), 71–82.
117. This is attested to in many memoirs of the period. See, for instance, Samuel R. Delany, *The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village*, 1988 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); John Rechy, *The Sexual Outlaw: A Documentary* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1977); Edmund White, *City Boy: My Life in New York during the 1960s and*

- '70s (London: Bloomsbury, 2009); Felice Picano, *Nights at Rizzoli* (New York: OR Books, 2014); John Giorno, *You Got to Burn to Shine* (New York: High Risk Books / Serpent's Tail, 1994); Douglas Crimp, *Before Pictures* (Brooklyn, NY: Dancing Foxes, 2016). And of course there was the salacious and stereotyping novel by Gerald Walker, *Cruising* (London: W. H. Allen, 1971), the film adaptation of which by William Friedkin would in 1980 be a source of protests for the gay rights movement. See discussion in chapter 4.
118. Leo Skir, "The Gay World," in *The New York Spy*, ed. Alan Rinzler (New York: David White, 1967), 376. This remarkable pre-Stonewall text offered a detailed account of cruising and other aspects of gay life in New York City. However, Skir was at pains to equate homosexual and heterosexual activities in the city, claiming that gay subculture had "a definitive relation to universalist aims" (373). Consequently, when discussing cruising, he fabricated a comparison to the "New York girl" whose "aims and ethics are similar to those of homosexuals" as someone else who cruised the streets (377). Such rhetorical moves no doubt facilitated the publication of this instructional essay in this book for a general audience. According to Alan Rinzler, the book's editor, the book was intended both for New Yorkers and for those visiting the city. Rinzler had an interest in supporting a diverse view of the city, and *The New York Spy* included essays on Jewish New York, on immigrant communities, and on Harlem (by the acclaimed novelist Claude Brown). Telephone conversation with Alan Rinzler, 18 October 2019.
119. Skir, "Gay World," 381.
120. For instance, see the discussion in Samuel R. Delany, "Street Talk / Straight Talk," in *Shorter Views: Queer Thoughts and the Politics of the Paraliterary* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 41–57. The complexity (and variability) of sexual identities among those who cruise was also argued in Laud Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*, 1970, enlarged ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: AldineTransaction, 2006).
121. For other perspectives on cruising, see, for instance, Liz Rosenfeld, "My Kind of Cruising," in *Nobody Passes: Rejecting the Rules of Gender Conformity*, ed. Mattilda a.k.a. Matt Bernstein Sycamore (Emeryville, CA: Seal, 2006), 149–58; Liz Rosenfeld, "This Should Happen Here More Often: All My (w)Holes and All My Folds of Cruising," *Third Text* 35, no. 1 (2021): 25–36; Denise Bullock, "Lesbian Cruising: An Examination of the Concept and Methods," *Journal of Homosexuality* 47, no. 2 (2004): 1–31.
122. I should note that I am differentiating cruising from hustling, which involves the exchange of some form of currency for sex. The two have many overlaps, but their constituencies and practices are not identical. For a detailed history, see Barry Reay, *New York Hustlers: Masculinity and Sex in Modern America* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010). For a practical account, see John Preston, *Hustling: A Gentleman's Guide to the Fine Art of Homosexual Prostitution* (New York: Masquerade Books, 1994).

123. While many have made this observation, a particularly lucid account of this condition can be found in Didier Eribon, *Insult and the Making of Gay Self*, trans. Michael Lucey (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
124. Initially published in 1987, Bech's study offers a useful narrative of the complexities of gay experience in the 1970s and 1980s. While his focus is European, I have found his analysis to be in accord with (and perceptive of) the accounts of gay life offered in American literature of the 1970s and 1980s (and the epistolary archives on which the present study is based). The book was first translated in 1997 as Henning Bech, *When Men Meet: Homosexuality and Modernity*, trans. T. Mesquit and T. Davies, rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 99–100.
125. Edward William Delph, *The Silent Community: Public Homosexual Encounters* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1978).
126. Much of the foundational sociological literature on cruising focused on semipublic zones and what Delph called "erotic oases" (Delph, *Silent Community*), as with Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*. In addition to Delph, another 1978 study (of Toronto) also recognized the importance of these different levels of publicness: John Alan Lee, *Getting Sex: A New Approach; More Fun, Less Guilt* (Don Mills, Ontario: Musson, 1978). See also a later perspective in Gordon Brent Ingram, "'Open' Space as Strategic Queer Sites," in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*, ed. Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter (Seattle: Bay, 1997), 95–125.
127. Delph, *Silent Community*, 31.
128. For an analysis of the policing of behavior and comportment by homosexual men (and, in particular, of mannerisms deemed effeminate) in the decades in which Burton grew to be an adult, see Craig M. Loftin, "Unacceptable Mannerisms: Gender Anxieties, Homosexual Activism, and Swish in the United States, 1945–1965," *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 3 (2007): 577–96.
129. Delph, *Silent Community*, 28–30.
130. See Gavin Brown, "Sites of Public (Homo)Sex and the Carnavalesque Spaces of Reclaim the Streets," in *The Emancipatory City? Paradoxes and Possibilities*, ed. Loretta Lees (London: Sage, 2004), 99; Gayle Rubin, "Sites, Settlements, and Urban Sex: The Ethnography of Gay Communities in Urban North America," in *Archaeologies of Sexuality*, ed. Ellen Lewin and William Leap (New York: Routledge, 2000), 62–89; and Ingram, "'Open Space.'"
131. On the latter, see John Hollister, "A Highway Rest Area as a Socially Reproducible Site," in *Public Space / Gay Sex*, ed. William Leap (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 55–70.
132. Bech, *When Men Meet*, 113–14. Emphasis in the original.
133. See discussion in Philip Brian Harper, *Private Affairs: Critical Ventures in the Culture of Social Relations* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 82.
134. He wrote, "Very importantly, contact is also the intercourse—physical and conversational—that blooms in and as 'casual sex' in public rest rooms, sex

- movies, public parks, singles bars, and sex clubs, and on street corners with heavy hustling traffic." Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 123.
135. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 126. As Delany noted, "if every sexual encounter involves bringing someone back to your house, the general sexual activity in a city becomes anxiety-filled, class-bound, and choosy. This is precisely *why* public rest rooms, peep shows, sex movies, bars with grope rooms, and parks with enough greenery are necessary for a relaxed and friendly sexual atmosphere in a democratic metropolis" (127).
136. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 127.
137. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 55. Tim Dean has also expanded on Delany's foundational insights to argue that "cruising exemplifies a distinctive ethic of openness to alterity," and "ultimately, the ethics of cruising is an ethics of the stranger in modernity." Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 176 and 177. Alternative arguments about cruising and ethics can also be found in John Paul Ricco, *The Logic of the Lure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); and Brown, "Sites of Public (Homo)Sex."
138. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 158. See also the discussion in Gavin Brown, "Ceramics, Clothing and Other Bodies: Affective Geographies of Homoerotic Cruising Encounters," *Social and Cultural Geography* 9, no. 8 (January 2008): 915-32; Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, 185; Delph, *Silent Community*; Lee, *Getting Sex*; Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*.
139. Scott Burton to Eduardo Costa, 23 August 1972, ECC.
140. In this note from the mid-1970s titled *Hot Brothers*, Burton also offered a typology of the "styles of h[omosexuality]," citing examples such as "Golden Boy" J. J. [Mitchell] and "new h[omosexual]" Jim Fouratt, the gay rights activist. For artists, he proposed former partners Robbins and Button as well as Andy Warhol. Fittingly, he ended the page with "SELF."
141. Audio recording of March 1980 interview with Burton by Edward DeCelle, Edward Brooks DeCelle Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
142. The increasing publicness of this slang term by the late 1960s is indicated in one of the first books on US gay culture intended for a general readership: Robert Hoffman, *The Gay World: Male Homosexuality and the Social Creation of Evil*, 1968 (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), and in the useful 1967 account of New York's gay cultural geography with which it shares the title: Skir, "Gay World."
143. Burton also regularly called himself, defiantly, "homosexual," as was also in practice in the 1970s. "Homosexual" has been used to refer to a sexual identity (whereas "gay" often implies, wittingly or not, a shared culture and a move out of the closet). Among the reasons early activists rejected "homosexual" as a pejorative and pathologizing term was because it contained the word "sex." To avoid conjuring images of sex, terms such as "homophile" were used as alternatives until "gay" became the dominant term. After the

emergence of “gay,” however, “homosexual” remained in use. Later activists reclaimed this term in opposition to the desexualizations that terms such as “homophile” and “gay” enact. Consequently, the targeted use of “homosexual” (by Burton as well as by others in later decades) should be understood to be related to subsequent generations’ embrace of the insult “queer” as a rallying cry. This can help explain how, in recent years, some have returned to the outdated term “homosexual” as another confrontational self-nomination. Such moves happen in relation to the disapprobation of the term in public discourse. See the overview in Jeremy W. Peters, “The Decline and Fall of the ‘H’ Word,” *New York Times*, 21 March 2014, ST 10.

144. As Delany (born just three years after Burton) recalled about the late 1950s and early 1960s, the term “queer” was “the working-class term in general use back then.” Delany, “Coming/Out,” in *Shorter Views*, 80. See also the genealogy of queer as performative offered in E. Patrick Johnson, “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother,” in *Black Queer Studies*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 124–57.
145. For more on “failure” and its potential, see Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
146. The foundational articulation is Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 631–60.
147. See David J. Getsy, “Introduction: Queer Intolerability and Its Attachments,” in *Queer*, ed. David Getsy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 12–23; David J. Getsy, “Queer Relations,” *ASAP/Journal* 2, no. 2 (2017): 254–57; David J. Getsy, “Ten Queer Theses on Abstraction,” in *Queer Abstraction*, ed. Jared Ledesma (Des Moines, IA: Des Moines Art Center, 2019), 65–75; Doyle and Getsy, “Queer Formalisms.”
148. This 1980 interview was published in early 1981 as Edward DeCelle and Mark Thompson, “Conceptual Artist Scott Burton: ‘Homocentric’ Art as Moral Proposition,” *Advocate*, no. 310 (22 January 1981): T11. The published version was edited and abridged from the longer conversation, and in the remainder of the book I cite the edited transcript prepared by DeCelle or refer to untranscribed sections of the audio recording, both in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Costa recalled, “Scott was quite happy with [the interview]. Mostly because he talked to a gay paper at a time when he was not in need of press attention, perhaps his activism showing up.” Email from Eduardo Costa, 14 March 2010.
149. Lisa Duggan defined homonormativity as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.” Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon,

- 2003), 50. See also Lisa Duggan, "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism," in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 175–94; and, for an alternate and critical view of the term and its history, Susan Stryker, "Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity," *Radical History Review* 100 (Winter 2008): 45–57.
150. For a useful contemporary account of the resurgence of homophile assimilationism in US gay social movements of the mid-to-late 1970s, see Barry D. Adam, "A Social History of Gay Politics," in *Gay Men: The Sociology of Male Homosexuality*, ed. Martin P. Levine (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 285–300.
151. DeCelle 21.
152. DeCelle and Thompson, "Scott Burton," T7.
153. Interview with Mac McGinnes, 2 November 2012.
154. DeCelle 11.
155. Betsy Baker, memorial service speech, 1990, SBP IV.90.
156. Email from Brenda Richardson, 15 May 2012.
157. Nancy Princenthal, "Scott Burton: Chaise Longings," in *Scott Burton: Chaise Longings* (New York: Max Protetch Gallery, 1996), 3.
158. Telephone interview with Eduardo Costa, 16 March 2010.
159. Telephone interview with Jane Kaufman, 3 May 2010.
160. Email from Brenda Richardson, 15 May 2012.
161. Robert Rosenblum, "Scott Burton," in *Loss within Loss: Artists in the Age of AIDS*, ed. Edmund White (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 243. Burton enjoyed the disruption that Eritz would cause in art events. As Jane Rosenblum recalled, "A lot of it had to do with making everyone else uncomfortable. . . . Scott was a Southern gentleman with perfection in terms of manners. Jon was not." But she also recalled that, for Burton, "being with Jon was a political act." Telephone interview with Jane Rosenblum, 25 November 2019.

## Chapter One

1. Dorothy Wolfberg, Scott Burton, and John Tarburton, eds., *Exploring the Arts: An Anthology of Basic Readings* (New York: Visual Arts, 1969); and Scott Burton, "Notes on the New," in *When Attitudes Become Form*, ed. Harald Szeemann (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1969), n.p.
2. Scott Burton, *Direct Representation: Robert Bechtle, Bruno Civitico, Yvonne Jacquette, Sylvia Mangold, John Moore; Five Younger Realists* (New York: Fischbach Gallery, 1969).
3. For these and the above texts, see CW.
4. Kachur I, 65.

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