

# Postwar American Avant-Gardes

**Fall Semester 2014**

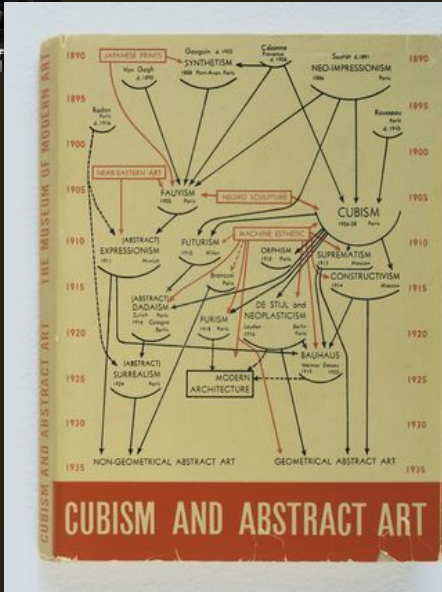
As Europe was beginning to recover from the devastation of a Second World War, the United States emerged as a global power asserting its role as a leading economic and political power. During the war, American industry expanded and continued to expand as in the wake of WWII America invaded South Korea, and established its influence in the postwar world through the ideological warfare with the Soviet Union known as the Cold War (a term used by George Orwell in 1945 in an article where he anticipated the outcome of WWII). The opposition between Soviet communism and Western capitalism grew as the United States aided substantially the reconstruction of Western European countries in the years 1947-8. The decade of the 1950s saw the consolidation of the Cold War propaganda that polarised East and West with both powers promoting and propagandising their technological, economic and scientific progress. As Soviet propaganda promoted the image of the progressive mass and was 'editing out' repression, the United States were promoting and exporting American consumerism, and materialism, editing out conformism and a repressive conservatism and anti-communist rage. The 1950s came to be known as the Eisenhower Era, Eisenhower who was the commander of the Allied forces in the War, served as president between 1953-1961.

American culture at the time was emerging from the Great Depression and artists were seeking ways out of Roosevelt's New Deal –programme designed to secure reform and employment including the WPA, the **Works Progress Administration** that employed artists in government-funded public projects. American art took the lead as artists who had begun to come of age in the late 1930s and early 1940s were looking for new forms and means of expression beyond the regionalism, the 'American scene' and the social realism that had dominated the 1930s.

Against the backdrop of a polarised political climate, nuclear armament and the red scare, the United States also emerged as a major player in the cultural field. The dialogue with Europe that informed the emergence of the first New York avant-garde and the shaping of a distinctly American modernism in the years of the First World War was resumed as European artists, writers and thinkers fled the European War and found refuge yet again in New York. Abstract Expressionism was the first American movement to gain international acclaim, and as New York's artistic establishments gained in authority in matters of art, New York emerged as the cultural centre that Paris had been before WWII.

The Museum of Modern Art in New York, a series of exhibitions introduced European modern art in America most influential among them, Cubism and Abstract Art and Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism, both organised by Alfred H. Barr, director of MOMA in 1936.

The Museum of Modern Art at 11 East 53rd Street, New York, designed by Philip Goodwin and Edward Durell Stone, photographed around the time of its opening in 1939. The Granger Collection, NYC

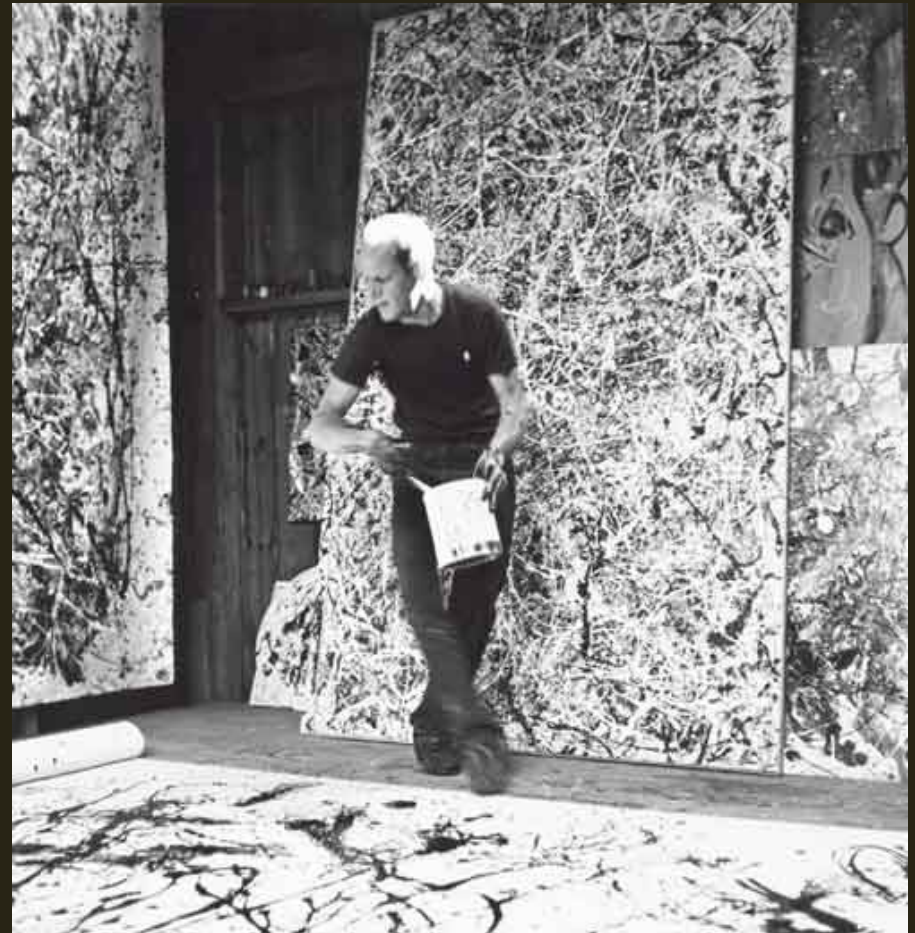


Thomas Hart Benton, The Arts of Life in America Arts of the City (1932)

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~asi/musi212/brandi/benton.html>



Jackson Pollock painting, Summer 1950, photograph by Hans Namuth  
<http://nga.gov.au/Pollock/action.htm>  
<http://www.tate.org.uk/liverpool/ima/rm4/resources/>



## Abstract Expressionism (excerpts from Oxford Art online)

Term applied to a movement in American painting that flourished in the 1940s and 1950s, sometimes referred to as the New York School or, very narrowly, as [ACTION PAINTING](#), although it was first coined in relation to the work of Vasily Kandinsky in 1929. The works of the generation of artists active in New York from the 1940s and regarded as Abstract Expressionists resist definition as a cohesive style...

They were linked by a concern with varying degrees of abstraction used to convey strong emotional or expressive content. ...

majority of Abstract Expressionists rejected critical labels and shared, if anything, only a common sense of moral purpose and alienation from American society. Abstract Expressionism has nonetheless been interpreted as an especially 'American' style because of its attention to the physical immediacy of paint; it has also been seen as a continuation of the Romantic tradition of the Sublime. It undeniably became the first American visual art to attain international status and influence.

...

The Surrealist technique [AUTOMATISM](#) again unlocked possibilities for incorporating immediacy with a vivid record of manual activity, and the impulses behind it, into the final work. Automatism had supposedly allowed Surrealists like Miró and Masson to paint without full conscious control and so essentially stimulated the discovery of unorthodox forms. In contrast, Abstract Expressionism elevated Automatist procedures into a means of reorganizing the entire composition....

This synthesis was unique at the time, but Abstract Expressionist painting in the late 1940s generally approached a threshold where restlessness and flux predominated. The composition dissolved into a seething field of fragments dispersed with almost equal intensity throughout the picture, hence the term 'all-over' was sometimes used to describe this tendency. A type of space evolved that was dense and unstable beyond even that of Analytical Cubism, as in de Kooning's *Painting* (1948; New York, MOMA). This probably owed something to the doubt-ridden anxieties of the post-war years and perhaps the pressures of fast-moving urban life.

Jackson Pollock became the iconic persona of Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s; Pollock grew up in the American West, and moved to New York in 1930 and studied with Thomas Hart Benton—regionalist painter employed on the WPA federal projects—at the Art Students League; Pollock earned a wage from the WPA too. His early work had regionalist influences; it was through contact with the paintings and the ideas of the Surrealists about automatism and the unconscious, and his interest in native American art that Pollock moved towards abstraction and the ‘drip’ paintings of the 1950s that made him famous (dripping paint straight from the can on a canvas lain on a floor instead of standing on an easel).

Through the uninterrupted flow of the drawing and later on through ‘dripping,’ Pollock assimilated Surrealist automatism into a style that came to be identified as distinctly American through its exploration of physical immediacy and a sense of moral and emotional urgency. The work in Pollock’s own work is a space where ‘energy and motion [are] made visible.’ Pollock suffered from alcoholism and died in a car accident in 1956.

Jackson Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*, 1950. Oil on canvas, 8' 9" x 17' 3" (266.7 x 525.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

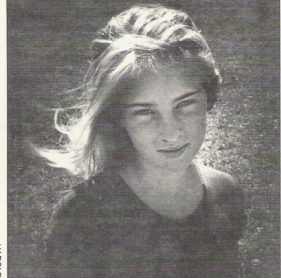
<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/57.92>

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~asi/musi212/margaret/pollock.html>





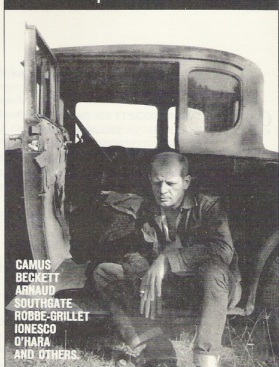
**EVERGREEN REVIEW** VOL. 1 NO. 1



SARTRE BECKETT SCHORER MICHAUX  
DODDS HAMBURGER PURDY FEINSTEIN

HAROLD FEINSTEIN

No. 3  
\$1.00 **EVERGREEN REVIEW**



CAMUS  
BECKETT  
ARNAUD  
SOUTHWATE  
ROBBE-GILLET  
IONESCO  
O'HARA  
AND OTHERS

HANS NAUMITZ

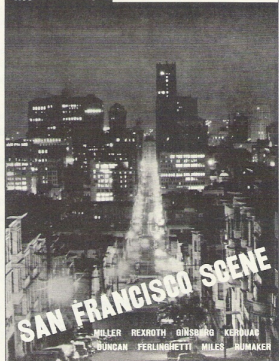
No. 4  
\$1.00 **EVERGREEN REVIEW**



OLSON  
GINSBERG  
TROCCHI  
DODDS  
IONESCO  
KEROUAC  
ADAMOV  
FERLINGHETTI  
AND OTHERS

ROBERT FRANK

No. 2  
\$1.00 **EVERGREEN REVIEW**

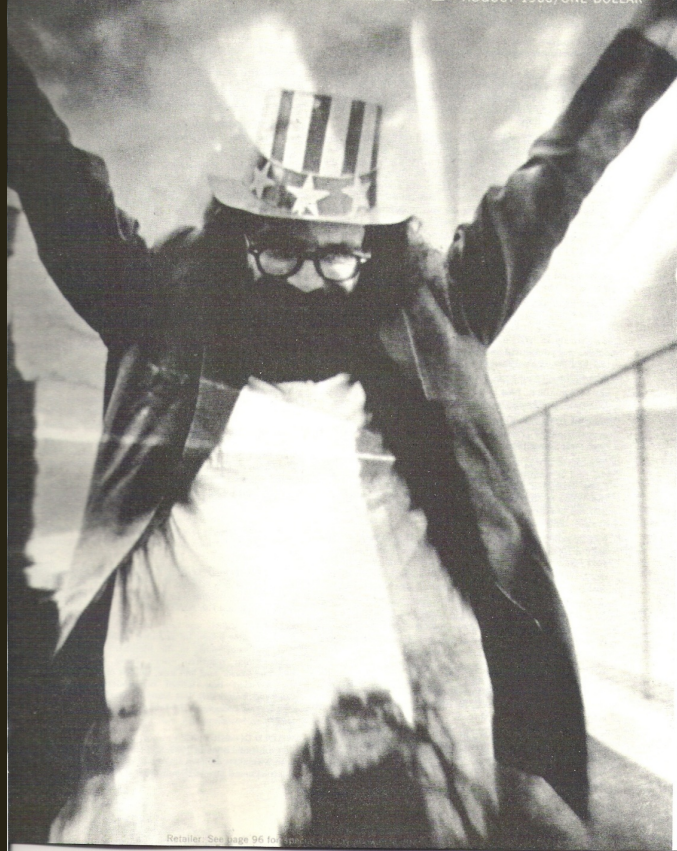


**SAN FRANCISCO SCENE**  
MILLER REXROTH GINSBERG KEROUAC  
JONCAN FERLINGHETTI MILES BUNAKER

FRED LYON

**EVERGREEN**

EVERGREEN REVIEW NO. 42  
AUGUST 1966/ONE DOLLAR



Recliner. See page 96 for tips.

Jasper Johns, Flag, 1954-55 (dated on reverse 1954). Encaustic, oil, and collage on fabric mounted on plywood, three panels, 42 1/4 x 60 5/8" (107.3 x 153.8 cm).

[http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object\\_id=78805](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=78805)



Robert Rauschenberg, *Erased De Kooning Drawing* 1953  
drawing | traces of ink and crayon on paper, mat, label, and gilded frame

Source: <http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/25846#ixzz2FDIS3WHn>  
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art



## Andy Warhol, Soup Cans 1982

[http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist\\_id=6246](http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=6246)  
[http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object\\_id=79809](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=79809)



Andy Warhol, *No Title* 1967

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/warhol-no-title-p07125>



The convulsive social and political events of the sixties were reflected everywhere in the arts of the time. From the radical sounds of electronic rock by such musicians as The Doors and Jimi Hendrix to countercultural films like *Easy Rider* and *Midnight Cowboy* and the political activism of the Bread and Puppet Theater, a shake-up of the old social order was evident. In the visual arts there was intense questioning of the modernist “canon,” and a simultaneous redefinition of boundaries. It was a revolutionary period in American art that in the years between 1966 and 1972, produced such fecund new forms and overlapping movements as Postminimalism, Earthworks, Conceptual art, Body art, Performance art and video. The climate of questioning and experimentation in the visual arts was intensified by new federal subsidies for the arts through the National Endowment for the arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Lisa Phillips, *The American Century: Art and Culture 1950-2000*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art (177)

Martin Luther King, Jr. (centre), with other civil rights supporters at the March on Washington, D.C., in August 1963.

UPI/Bettmann/Corbis



From a '70s Gay Liberation Front Poster  
(Used on the jacket cover of: Duberman, *Stonewall*, 1993.)





Allan Kaprow, *Household*, women licking jam off of a car, 1964.  
Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, CA



Joseph Kosuth, '*Titled (Art as Idea as Idea)*' [*Water*], 1966. Photostat, mounted on board, 48 x 48 inches (121.9 x 121.9 cm). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Gift, Leo Castelli, New York 73.2066. © 2012 Joseph Kosuth/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

[http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/show-full/piece/?search='Titled%20\(Art%20as%20Idea%20as%20Idea\)'%20%5BWater%5D&page=&f=Title&object=73.2066](http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/show-full/piece/?search='Titled%20(Art%20as%20Idea%20as%20Idea)'%20%5BWater%5D&page=&f=Title&object=73.2066)

**wa-tor** (wá'tèr), *n.* [AS. *water* = D. *water* = G. *wasser*, akin to Icel. *vatn*, Goth. *watō*, water, also to Gr. *ὕδωρ*, Skt. *udān*, water, L. *unda*, a wave, water; all from the same root as E. *wet*: cf. *hydra*, *otter*<sup>1</sup>, *undine*, and *wash*.] The liquid which in a more or less impure state constitutes rain, oceans, lakes, rivers, etc., and which in a pure state is a transparent, inodorous, tasteless liquid, a compound of hydrogen and oxygen, H<sub>2</sub>O, freezing at 32° F. or 0° C., and boiling at 212° F. or 100° C.; a special form or variety of this liquid, as rain, or (often in *pl.*) as the liquid ('mineral water') obtained from a mineral spring (as, "the *waters* of Aix-la-Chapelle").

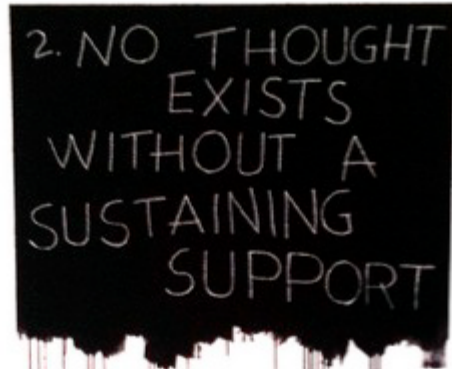
From Joseph Kosuth's *Titled (Art as Idea as Idea) (1966)* series; appeared in  
*the classifieds of newspapers*

**mean·ing** (mēn'īŋ), *n.* 1. what is meant; what is intended to be, or in fact is, signified, indicated, referred to, or understood: signification, purport, import, sense, or significance: as, the *meaning* of a word. 2. [Archaic], intention; purpose. *adj.* 1. that has meaning; significant; expressive.



Mel Bochner, Language: 1996-2006, 5 October 2006-7 January 2007. The Art Institute of Chicago

<http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=146998;type=101>



2. NO THOUGHT  
EXISTS  
WITHOUT A  
SUSTAINING  
SUPPORT



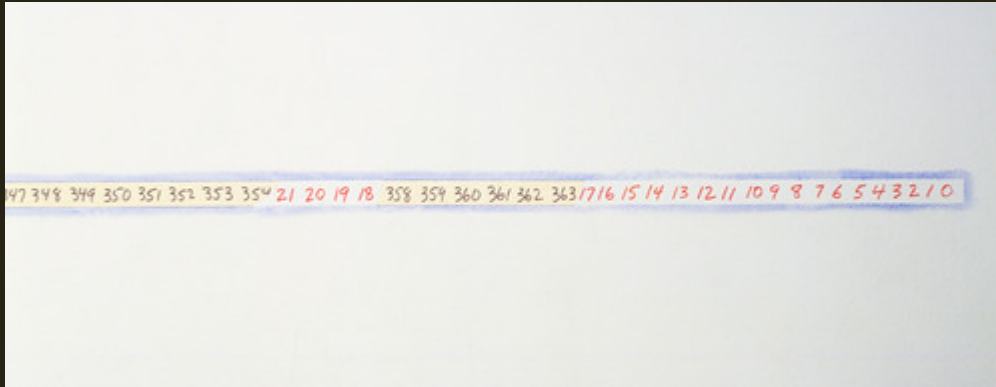
1. LANGUAGE  
IS NOT  
TRANSPARENT

Mel Bochner, *Measurement Room* (1969) The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Permanent Collection



Mel Bochner, *Measurement Room* (1969). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
Tape and Letraset

[http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object\\_id=79441](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=79441)



Vito Acconci. Following Piece. 1969.





## *Serial Project, I (ABCD)*

[Sol LeWitt](#) 1966. Baked enamel on steel units over baked enamel on aluminum, 20" x 13' 7" x 13' 7" (50.8 x 398.9 x 398.9 cm).

[http://www.moma.org/collection/browse\\_results.php?criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A3528&page\\_number=3&template\\_id=1&sort\\_order=1](http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A3528&page_number=3&template_id=1&sort_order=1)



Hans Haacke, Shapolsky et al. *Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971, scheduled for Haacke's first solo exhibition at the Guggenheim, New York.* The exhibition was cancelled because, as the Museum claimed 'art may have social and political consequences' not however 'by using political means to achieve political means'



226 E 3 St.  
Block 585 Lot 57  
24 x 105' 5 story walk-up old law tenement  
Owned by Harguel Realty Inc., 608 E 11 St. NYC  
Contracts signed by Harry J. Shapolsky, President ('65)  
Martin Shapolsky, President ('66)  
Acquired from John The Baptist Foundation  
c/o The Bank of New York, 48 Wall St. NYC  
for \$277,600.- (also 5 other properties)  
8-12-1965  
\$150,000.- mortgage (also on 5 other properties) at 6%  
interest as of 8-19-1963 due 8-19-1968  
held by The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board of  
The American Baptist Convention, 475 Riverside Dr. NYC  
Assessed land value \$7,000.- total \$40,000.- (1971)



214 E 3 St.  
Block 583 Lot 11  
5 story walk-up old law tenement  
Owned by Harguel Realty Inc., 608 E 11 St., NYC  
Contracts signed by Harry J. Shapolsky, President ('65)  
Martin Shapolsky, President ('66)  
Principal Harry J. Shapolsky (according to Real Estate  
Directory of Manhattan)  
Acquired 8-21-1965 from John The Baptist Foundation,  
c/o The Bank of New York, 48 Wall St., NYC,  
for \$257,600.- (also 7 other bldgs.)  
\$150,000.- mortgage at 6% interest, 8-19-1963, due  
8-19-1968, held by The Ministers and Missionaries  
Benefit Board of the American Baptist Convention,  
475 Riverside Drive, NYC (also on 7 other bldgs.)  
Assessed land value \$25,000.-, total \$75,000.- (includ-  
ing 212 and 216 E 3 St.) (1971)

*[T]o be a woman is to be an object of contempt, and the vagina, stamp of femaleness, is devalued. The woman artist, seeing herself as loathed, takes that very mark of her otherness and by asserting it as the hallmark of her iconography, establishes a vehicle by which to state the truth and beauty of her identity.*

Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, 1972 in , "Female Imagery," *Womanspace Journal* (1973), 14

[http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner\\_party/core\\_imagery.php#scroll](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/core_imagery.php#scroll)

Carolee Schneemann (American, b. 1939). *Interior Scroll*, 1975. Ilfachrome print. © Carolee Schneemann. Photograph by Anthony McCall

[http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner\\_party/view\\_interior\\_scroll.php](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/view_interior_scroll.php)



**Carolee Schneeman, *Interior Scroll* 1975 performance, photo Sally Dixon from *Carolee Schneeman: Imaging Her Erotics -- Essays, Interviews, Projects* (MIT)**



Judy Chicago (American, b. 1939). *The Dinner Party* (Mary Wollstonecraft and Sojourner Truth place settings), 1974–79. Mixed media: ceramic, porcelain, textile. Brooklyn Museum, Gift of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Foundation, 2002.10. © Judy Chicago. Photograph by Jook Leung Photography [http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner\\_party/place\\_settings/](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/place_settings/)



Judy Chicago (American, b. 1939). *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79. Ceramic, porcelain, textile, 576 x 576 in. (1463 x 1463 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Gift of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Foundation, 2002.10.

© Judy Chicago. Photo: © Aislinn Weidele for Polshek Partnership Architects

[http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/dinner\\_party/](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/dinner_party/)



Alma Lopez, Our Lady of Controversy (2001), first shown at Museum of International Folk Art in 2001

<http://articles.latimes.com/2001/may/27/entertainment/ca-2979>





- **Wanda Coleman the ISM (1983)**

- 

tired i count the ways in which it determines my life  
permeates everything. it's in the air  
lives next door to me in stares of neighbors  
meets me each day in the office. its music comes out  
the radio  
drives beside me in my car. strolls along with me  
down supermarket aisles  
it's on television  
and in the streets even when my walk is casual/  
undefined  
it's overhead flashing lights  
i find it in my mouth  
*when i would speak of other things*

# Σημείωμα Χρήσης Έργων Τρίτων

"Η δομή και οργάνωση της παρουσίασης, καθώς και το υπόλοιπο περιεχόμενο, αποτελούν πνευματική ιδιοκτησία της συγγραφέως και του Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών και διατίθενται με άδεια Creative Commons Αναφορά Μη Εμπορική Χρήση Παρόμοια Διανομή Έκδοση 4.0 ή μεταγενέστερη.

Οι φωτογραφίες που περιέχονται στην παρουσίαση αποτελούν πνευματική ιδιοκτησία τρίτων. Απαγορεύεται η αναπαραγωγή, αναδημοσίευση και διάθεσή τους στο κοινό με οποιονδήποτε τρόπο χωρίς τη λήψη άδειας από τους δικαιούχους. "