AGNES MARTIN

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with essays by

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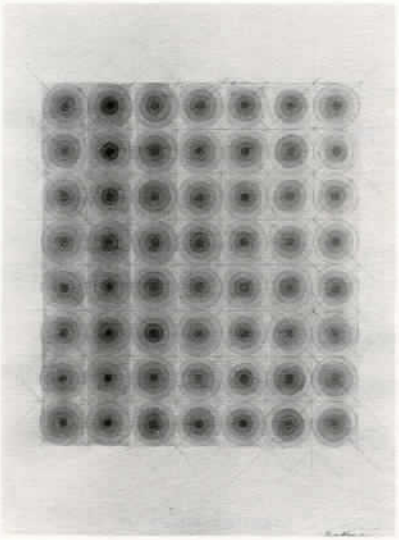
AGNES MARTIN: "HUMILITY, THE BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER . . . ALL OF HER WAYS ARE EMPTY"

Anna C. Chave

When I first made a grid I happened to be thinking of the innocence of trees and then this grid came into my mind and I thought it represented innocence, and I still do, and so I painted it and then I was satisfied. I thought, this is my vision.—Agnes Martin [1]

Fortunately for Agnes Martin, when she found her "vision," around 1960, it happened to be a vision perfectly typical of the mainstream of modernist abstraction. In implementing a compositional schema—the grid—that has been called virtually "emblematic of the modernist ambition within the visual arts" since the second decade of this century,[2] Martin effectively positioned herself in a succession that led from Piet Mondrian to Ad Reinhardt, along a golden line of painters. As she emerged in New York in the 1960s, moreover, Martin would find herself well situated on that vaunted line as a strategic link between two generations of geometric abstractionists, namely, such older or more established artists as Barnett Newman and Ad Reinhardt (Martin was born in 1912, Newman in 1905, Reinhardt in 1913) and such far younger artists as Carl Andre and Sol LeWitt (born in 1935 and 1928, respectively). Among the factors linking Martin to the Abstract Expressionist generation were her insistence that in order to be meaningful all art must have a theme; her concern with her art's spiritual valences; and the "all-over" character of her compositions. But the relatively austere and depersonalized aspect of Martin's graphlike images would help connect her also to a Minimalist sensibility and to a new generation of artists (including Frank Stella, Larry Poons, and Robert Smithson, as well as Andre and LeWitt) who often drew on graph paper or rendered some kind of grid in their art.

As this brief list of contemporaries indicates, the restricted geometric vocabulary that Martin made her own placed her in a context where she was conspicuous by virtue of her sex (though for a time, in the mid-1960s, her example helped inspire Eva Hesse [born 1936] to turn to graph paper and grids, which she often covered with circles). This may help account for the fact that, unlike the handful of other female artists who succeeded in attaining some prominence before the gains won by the feminist movement in the 1970s, Martin



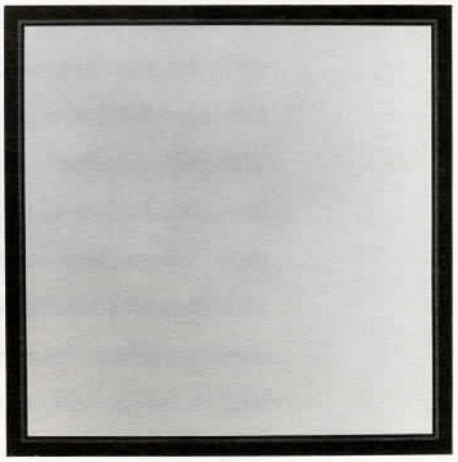
Eva Hesse
Untitled, 1966
Graphite, wash, and brush on paper, 11⅞ x 9⅛
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Fischbach

was hardly ever termed, and therefore marginalized as, a "woman artist." Nor would the burgeoning women's movement rush to enfold her as one of its own, as it did with other older female artists such as Alice Neel, Louise Bourgeois, or Georgia O'Keeffe (whose pioneerlike life—begun on the prairies and concluded at a longtime home in the New Mexico desert, with a period in Manhattan in between—might appear to have much in common with Martin's). The fact that it has taken until 1992 for a Martin retrospective to be seen in New York City, long after such exhibitions were accorded to almost all her contemporaries of a comparable stature, might be construed as evidence that Martin has been subject to some of the discrimination habitually visited on these and other artists of her gender. But the preponderance of the evidence unavoidably implies another, more anomalous story. Martin had reason to be well satisfied not only with her vision, but also with the reception of that vision: she never had to struggle for a dealer or for patrons; for the esteem of her peers; or for sensitive, considered critical responses to her art, whether in the United States or abroad. In fact, astonishingly enough for an artist who works in such an insistently spare and uningratiating idiom, in more than thirty years Martin's shows have practically never received a derogatory review.

Martin may have escaped some of the routine cruelties of the art press because she patiently waited until she was producing a mature body of work before she attempted to expose her art to the critics' gaze. She was already a woman in her mid-forties when, following a satisfactory encounter with Betty Parsons in New Mexico, she moved to New York to show on a regular basis (beginning in 1958) with the dealer who had made the careers of many of the artists she admired most, including Newman and Mark Rothko. Though she did not succeed in her subsequent bid to move to Leo Castelli (Parson's eventual successor as the leading avant-garde dealer in New York), Castelli admired her work enough to recommend it to Robert Elkon, in whose newly opened gallery she had a series of exhibitions between 1961 and 1969—shows that often sold out, even on the night of the opening.[3] From Elkon, Martin would move to the well-regarded, well-capitalized Pace Gallery, where she continues to show today as one of the few female artists in its stable. In her first decade of exhibiting, Martin's art garnered serious attention primarily

from female critics, including Dore Ashton, Barbara Rose, Lucy Lippard, Ann Wilson, and Jane Livingston; and it was female curators who gave her her first museum retrospective (Suzanne Delehanty, at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia in 1973) and, now, her first retrospective in New York—though none of these women were acting from explicitly feminist agendas. From the late 1960s onward, Martin attracted equal or more attention from such influential male writers as Max Kozloff and Lawrence Alloway. She also invariably drew favorable notices from the powerful *New York Times* critics.

Feminist art historians, too used to defending slighted female artists—belatedly giving voices to women long muzzled with bitter tales to tell—have seemingly felt unneeded in the case of Agnes Martin, who shaped a resoundingly successful artistic career on precisely her own rather exceptional and demanding terms. It follows that Martin was not included in the collections of interviews with women artists compiled by feminist critics; that she has generally been omitted from exhibitions that showcased women artists; and that she has received barely a nod in feminist art histories. Thus, in a recent survey of *Women, Art, and Society,* she rates only a passing mention as a woman who "adapted to this dominant [read: masculinist] language of formalist abstraction."[4] Martin has been tacitly viewed by some feminists as a kind of sellout, in other words, an artist who used a paradigmatically masculine vocabulary in order to pass as one of the boys, that is, as a mainstream modernist. Yet other gifted women who used a similar vocabulary—such as Charmion von Wiegand or, in the same period as Martin, Jo Baer—did not achieve a comparable stature to hers. So Martin's success may not simply be attributed to the conventional, conventionally masculine aspect of her visual idiom having, in effect, blinded critics to the fact of her sex.



Jo Baer
Stations of the Spectrum-Red
1967–69
Oil on canvas
Collection of the artist

We would do well to subject to interrogation, moreover, this notion that what is geometric, ergo putatively logical, systematic, and rigorous, is masculine, while what is organic or natural, improvised, personalized, or fluid is feminine—a line of thinking that can only prolong the insidious dichotomizing of the masculine and the feminine as they are stereotypically identified with culture and nature, the intellect and intuition respectively. Abstract forms have always been inscribed or imbued, by their makers and by their

interpreters, with traits of sexual difference, generally in ways that reinscribe this binary thinking, and so serve to limit and disempower women. But the case of Agnes Martin allows us to do something different: to consider a woman who played against type in articulating her vision by finding ways of using an orthodox language for some unorthodox purposes, or to counter-orthodox effect. Martin's work no doubt met with acceptance in part because of its continuity with a dominant, modernist visual language; but closer analysis reveals that her work revalued the conventional meanings of that language in subtle ways, or so I will argue. I suggest also that critics did indeed notice that Martin was female and that the positive attention they paid her was somewhat qualified by that awareness. What saved her from more serious forms of diminishment, it seems to me, is that the type of woman she was perceived or presumed to be, on the evidence of her art, conformed to a type of socially acceptable, "good woman": quiet, self-effacing, devout, and de-sexualized. In actuality, however, Martin managed to live a life that conformed in few significant respects to the acceptable and narrow roles assigned to women of her generation.

By avoiding public exposure and resisting the machinery of celebrity-making, Martin would manage to keep her unconventional private life as she wished it, principally in the shadows, whereas other successful female artists have been subject to ruthless objectification, as their physical appearance and their intimate lives have become inextricably tied to the public's fascination with their art (one thinks of O'Keeffe and Hesse, or of Frida Kahlo). For that matter, art made by women is generally expected to be extremely personalized, if not explicitly autobiographical—and some of the most interesting female artists have indeed created work in this vein: "It just seems to me that the 'personal' in art if really pushed is the most valued quality and what I want so much is to find it in and for myself," Eva Hesse, for one, declared.[5] Agnes Martin consistently held that "personal emotions and sentimentality are anti-art," however, and her work is determinedly impersonal, not only in its use of a standard schema, but also in her efforts to make her rendering of that schema—she always drew the lines of her grids, generally in graphite or colored pencil—as regularized and uninflected as possible.[6]

Critics sometimes termed Martin's art "rigorous," "penetrating," and "seminal," praising it with the same phallic language that they used to legitimate the work of other respected geometric abstractionists. But there are signs, even so, that Martin's geometry and her grids were perceived as some-

how different. In its association with abstract, mathematical modes of conceptualization, the grid is conventionally viewed as "a highly intellectual, geometric formulation that reflects the logical order of man's mind," not the putative illogic or intuitiveness of woman's mind.[7] And while a fellow adept of the grid such as Sol LeWitt was proclaiming himself a "conceptual" artist for whom "the idea becomes a machine that makes the art,"[8] Martin was insistent in her anti-intellectualism and in using some old-fashioned terms to describe what ought to guide artists in their work: "All human knowledge is useless in art work. Concepts, relationships, . . . deductions are distractions of mind that we wish to hold free for inspiration," she declared; and "Living by inspiration is living. Living by intellect—by comparisons, calculations, schemes, concepts, ideas is all a structure of pride, in which there is no beauty or happiness—no life. The intellectual life is in fact death."[9]

Unlike her Minimalist peers, Martin most definitely would have no "machine" and no one besides herself making her art. She saw herself instead as an inspired human being dedicated to "represent[ing] concretely our most subtle emotions"; thus she defined the object of painting. Like Hesse, then, Martin would distance herself from the theoretically informed art vaunted by the Minimalists, whose intellectual pretensions, manifest in their rhetoric and writings about their work, mirrored the (phal)logocentrism of the society. "It is commonly thought that everything that is can be put into words," Martin remarked. "But there is a wide range of emotional response that we make that cannot be put into words."[10] Martin's stress on the emotional content of her art accords with her affinity for the Abstract Expressionists; but their anxiety-driven and heroic ambitions (to render "tragedy, ecstasy, doom and so on") differed sharply from her humble aims, to pay close attention to our most muted or "wordless and silent" experiences.[11] And Martin's plain yet delicate technique, with its thin, controlled pencil lines drawn straight across a thin, even layer of pale or colorless paint, contrasts radically with the New York School painters' typically muscular and showy means. Rather than either declaiming her passions and fears (the "exhaustible" feelings, as she called them) or intellectualizing her practice, Martin used her interest in moral and spiritual teachings, especially those of Taoism and Buddhism, to develop an idea of art as a mode of developing awareness or heightening perception, and so as a vehicle of revelation for artist and viewers alike. While the Minimalist artists insisted on the autotelic character of the art object in all its material specificity ("My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen there *is* there. It

really is an object," as Stella put it[12]), for Martin art had a larger purpose, as an ontological and spiritual paradigm.

Many modernist painters, from Malevich and Mondrian to Newman, Reinhardt, and Alfred Jensen, have attributed a spiritual dimension to their geometries. But even in her status as yet another creator of visionary geometries, Martin was somewhat set apart. What separated her, in the first place, was her decision to physically remove herself from society into an almost hermitlike solitude. Discontented with the pressured life of the successful New York artist, Martin determined to give up painting and its worldly rewards. She left the city in 1967, initially for eighteen months of wandering (by truck) through the wilderness of the North and West, and then for a turn at creating geometries in another dimension: building, entirely by herself, as she tells it, a home and other structures with adobe bricks and logs atop a mesa in an exceedingly remote area of New Mexico.[13] There she lived without the most basic of modern conveniences (telephone, electricity, indoor plumbing), and there she began, after a four-year hiatus, to make art again—pictures only subtly different from those that had won her acclaim in New York. (On the invitation of the Parasol Press, Martin made a suite of prints in 1971; she did not return to painting until 1974, after a seven-year hiatus.)

Even before Martin left the city, several critics had remarked on the meditative aspect of her "squares with individual auras. . . radiant and positive," and of the grids which read almost as "maps, calculations of the spaciousness of the spirit."[14] But once she retreated to a life of contemplation in the desert, Martin attained a unique status among contemporary artists and a new reputation as the "ascetic high priestess of Minimalist painting" engaged in an advanced form of spiritual exercise.[15] To an awed Hilton Kramer, Martin's art, with its "heavenly light," was "almost a form of prayer."[16] But as her "mystical," "puritanical," and "devout" art (as it was variously called) gained in standing as the "visual epiphanies" or missives of a seer—that is, in its standing as a "folk-mystical," sacred artifact—it would lose something in its status as a genuine artifact of modernism, a movement predominantly associated with a deep-seated irreligiosity.

The extreme degree of Martin's engagement in her moral and spiritual quest—for truth and beauty, joy and serenity, humility and the concomitant defeat of the ego or pride—would distinguish her, then, from those with whom she otherwise had much in common. Without being religious in any orthodox, Western sense (though she made an occasional reference in her

writings to the Bible and concocted some fables about God and a boy named "Willie"), Martin was deeply affected by the Buddhist vision of an imprisoning wheel of life (emblematic of the natural cycles of birth and death) from which we must break free; and she was even more affected by the teachings of Taoism, with its nontheistic, nonritualistic emphasis on finding an exemplary mode of being. While she and Reinhardt had this latter interest in common, however, he retained a pragmatic detachment from Taoist ideas, avidly courting, for instance, the personal celebrity that Martin tended to resist. Declared the Taoist sage Chuang Tzu:

> Who can free himself. . .
>
> . . . from fame, . . .
>
> He will flow like Tao, unseen,
>
> He will go about like Life itself
>
> With no name and no home.
>
> Simple is he. . . He has no power.
>
> He. . . has no reputation. . .
>
> Such is the perfect man.[17]

Confessed Martin, "In my best moments I think 'life has passed me by' and I am content."[18] Further, while she shared with Newman an interest in something more Western in concept, namely, the experience of sublimity, his heroic notion that artists had best make "cathedrals. . . out of ourselves, out of our own feelings" would contrast dramatically with her modest ambition:

> If you can imagine that you're a rock
>
> all your troubles fall away. . .
>
> Sand is better
>
> you're so much smaller as a grain of sand.[19]

In other words, a kind of egolessness set Martin apart from her male peers, all of whom were keenly sensitive to their relative and fluctuating status in the public eye. And it cannot surprise us that this condition of egolessness would have come more readily to a woman, given that the merits of modesty and self-effacement have been specially instilled in females. In practice, Martin's egolessness was manifest not simply in her personal withdrawal from the spotlight of publicity, but in the way she chose and assiduously adhered to a standard schema for her compositions; in the way she subsumed the individuality of her touch in drawing the lines of her grids; and in the very faintness, or lack of assertiveness, that typified those lines. Some critics aptly noted how Martin's "confrontation with drawing involved an abandonment of

signature in favor of perfection, which is indeed anonymous," as Douglas Crimp phrased it; or how her pencil lines form, "paradoxically, a signature without an ego," as Holland Cotter observed, adding "it is hard to think of any other painting today that makes self-identity and self-abnegation so nearly one thing."[20] In a sense, then, in making an art that was effectually anonymous, Martin purposely assumed an anonymity that had been the unasked-for status of uncounted creative women before her. (And here we may be reminded of the poignant surmise of Virginia Woolf, that "Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman."[21])

Not self-effacement, but its opposite—self-assertion—has been the watchword of feminists for the past several decades, of course. And, from that perspective, Martin's hymns to humility have an anachronistic ring to them. "We cannot even imagine how to be humble," she proclaimed.

I can see humility
Delicate and white
It is satisfying
Just by itself. . .
I would rather think of humility than
anything else.
Humility, the beautiful daughter
She cannot do either right or wrong
She does not do anything
All of her ways are empty
Infinitely light and delicate
She treads an even path.
Sweet, smiling, uninterrupted, free.[22]

Instead of taking Martin's example as a kind of counter-model for feminists, however, we may ask whether contemporary feminist ideals have not borrowed too much, or too unilaterally, from those masculine models of comportment which privilege aggressiveness and self-aggrandizement. We might remind ourselves also that Martin's "infinitely light and delicate" touch, and her refusal of every accustomed, attention-getting, visual device, had an unexpected effect. Rather than being overlooked by critics, Martin's quiet technique caused them to look all the more thoroughly, just as we may be impelled to lean forward and concentrate more intensely when a speaker's voice is exceptionally soft. "It takes a long, long time to savor an Agnes Martin painting, and it's worth every minute of it," pronounced one critic, in an

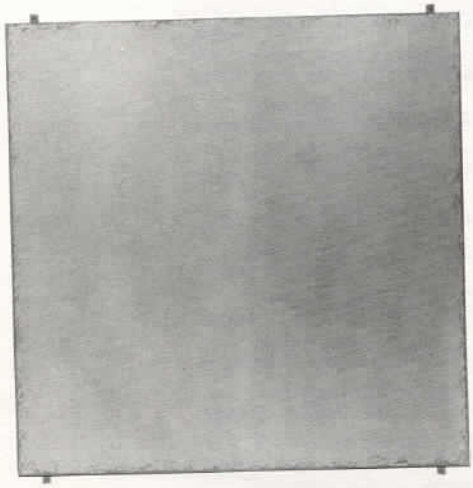
insight echoed by many others.[23] And critics chose their words with evident and unusual thoughtfulness in describing Martin's "whispered hints of muted color" and the "gently trembling. . . barely perceptible" lines that practically dissolved and vanished as a viewer stepped backwards, so that her paintings seemed to "exist on the threshhold of invisibility."[24] So suppressed or subtle were the traces of Martin's hand that there was a sense almost, as one critic put it, that "the painter has disappeared," a sense of encountering a blank canvas, a blank page—or one just lightly, evenly ruled off, where images, numbers, writing, calendar notations, or musical notes have yet to appear.[25]

There is, of course, a tradition associating the blank page with a kind of "beautiful daughter," namely, the pure, smooth, ivory-skinned, female virgin—a blank page that awaits the creative fluids of the phallic pen, fluids which will endow it, or rather her, with her only identity. And we may note that some critics (likely aware of Martin's perenially unmarried state) alluded to what they perceived as the desexualized aspect of her art, with its "pure and. . . pristine" surfaces, its "abstinent linear style," and its "colors often associated with innocence" (that is, whites and pastels).[26] But if we think of Martin as having purposely produced blank pages, pages that she in a sense declined to mark, then we may consider her art in light of the work of certain modern, female writers who have explicitly associated the blank page—a page that successfully eludes the phallic pen—with female creativity. Susan Gubar traces this formulation in an essay centering on Isak Dinesen's tale called "The Blank Page." That story focuses on the practice of hanging out the blood-stained sheets of newly deflowered princesses on a convent clothesline as testimony to the young women's innocence and, tacitly, as evidence of "their acquiescence as objects of exchange." In this context, then, the appearance of a blank sheet (the blank page of the story's title) becomes "radically subversive, the result of one woman's defiance which must have cost either her life or her honor. Not a sign of innocence or purity or passivity, this blank page is a mysterious but potent act of resistance."

The errant princess of Dinesen's tale "makes her statement by not writing what she is expected to write," Gubar observes; "Not to be written on is, in other words, the condition of new sorts of writing for women. . . . Women's creativity," from this perspective, "is prior to literacy."[28] It bears noting also, in light of this analysis, that the general viewing public has long vented expressions of anger at Martin's defiant withholding of a picture, of an image: her paintings have chronically and habitually been subject to being

written on, marked up and colored in by spectators when they appear in public contexts. "You know, people can't stand that those are all empty squares," Martin commented to an interviewer; "and the vandalism that happens, you wouldn't believe how many of my paintings have been destroyed. There are some people that just simply can't take my paintings. . . . They can't take those empty squares. The rectangles. They don't like emptiness."[29]

Though it notably antagonized some members of the general viewing public, critics were impressed by the "mood of absolute emptiness" that Martin's paintings evoked. "'Made up of nothing, they multiply that nothing,'" suggested one critic, citing Valéry's comment on the art of Berthe Morisot.[30] Of course it is not just women (Martin or Jo Baer) who have explored the possibilities of the blank canvas—one might think of Robert Ryman or of the white paintings of Robert Rauschenberg as well; and the blank page has served as an emblem also for the creative struggles of male authors. But the female artist's relation to this image of a void is different; and Gubar demonstrates how female writers have employed this trope in their own ways to "expose how woman has been defined symbolically in the patriarchy as a tabula rasa, a lack, a negation, an absence"—where that absence is associated not only with the supposedly missing penis, but also with the void of the womb. Gubar shows how certain female writers would come to turn that void, "the blank place, a female inner space," with all its "uniquely female powers of creativity," into a different kind of image, one that "represents readiness for inspiration and creation, the self conceived and dedicated to its own potential divinity." She traces a shift in the predominant metaphors for creativity from "the primacy of the pen to the primacy of the page," moreover, while arguing that "the substitution of the female divinity for the male god, the womb for the penis, as the model of creativity was so pronounced by the turn of the century that it posed a real problem for such male modernists as T.S. Eliot, Lawrence, and Joyce."[31]



Robert Ryman
Carrier, 1979
Oil on cotton with metal brackets, 81½ x 78
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Purchase, with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Painting and Sculpture Committee 80.40

Insofar as Martin's blank fields mapped with horizontal and vertical coordinates conjured a tabula rasa or original state of things, this was an attribute they had in common, up to a point, with the art of Barnett Newman (whom she counted an admirer of her work). In the wake of World War II, Newman had pictured himself and his peers having "to start from scratch as if

painting didn't exist," as he phrased it; "People were painting a beautiful world, [but] at that time we realized that the world wasn't beautiful. . . . We couldn't build on anything."[32] Newman composed his originary pictures (as he conceived them) of plain, often richly colored fields marked by one or more decisively rendered, vertical bands of contrasting hue, and gave them weighty titles like *Adam* and *Day One.* By contrast, Martin—with her lightly penciled grids on white (or partly pastel-tinted) fields—would frame her aims in an imagined, maternal perspective: "try to remember before you were born," she urged; "as it was in the beginning, there was no division and no separation."[33] While idealizing the precognitive state of the newborn, Martin argued for the adult's need to recapture the egolessness, innocence, and impressionability of that earliest stage of life. "Inspiration is most possible" in infancy, Martin believed; and she repeatedly described the adult's recovery of inspiration, in a metaphorical way, in terms of the mother's response to her newborn: "Let's say that you had a young baby, just born, and you wouldn't know what to do. . . . It could be an emergency. Well, then, it would come to you, everything you would have to do to look after this baby. See, that's inspiration."[34] (Martin could not test this dubious hypothesis for herself because, like numerous other successful women artists of her era, she remained childless.)

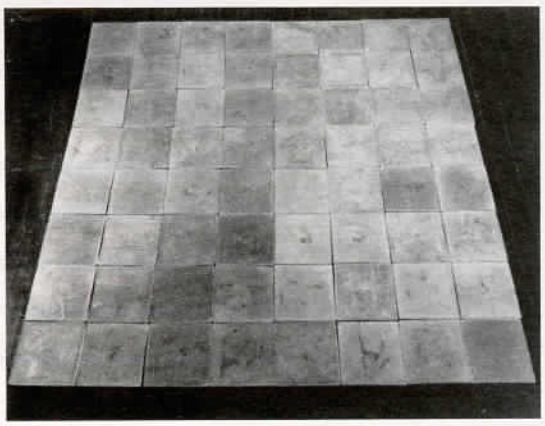
Martin also used the relation of mother and child in an analogical way to explore the concepts of authority and obedience. She considered that "our most troublesome anti-freedom concept is our belief in a transcendent supreme authority." And she believed that we must "see through leadership to its non-existence"; that we should abjure ideas of power generally, beginning by relinquishing any thought of having it ourselves. The mother-infant relationship served Martin as a paradigm of a condition of mutual authority and obedience, and so as evidence that "authority and obedience exist at the same time in each of us, that we are all in a state of obedient authority at all times, . . . a state of positive freedom" (though she especially valued "the reward of absolute obedience," such as the obedience of musicians to a conductor).[35] Martin stressed that feelings, not of empowerment, confidence, or authority, but of inadequacy and failure were the "natural state of mind for the artist."[36] The creative process, as she viewed it, was an arduous course of "working through disappointments and a growing recognition of failure to the point of defeat," because "defeated, exhausted, and helpless you will perhaps go a little bit further."[37]

Martin's way of undermining power in her art was, as one would expect, an abstract and metaphorical one. To begin with, there is the simple fact that the grid structure—which she (most exceptionally among artists engaged with the grid) made it an absolute rule never to interrupt, vary, or configure into any shape besides that of the square—is intrinsically "nonhierachic and nonrelational," that it "holds every part of the surface in perfect equilibrium," implying that nothing is any more or less important than anything else. Such an implication was perfectly in keeping with Martin's deeply radical worldview, her belief, as she put it, that "the wiggle of a worm [is] as important as the assassination of a president."[38] Nor can it surprise us that this insistence that power is a mirage, that we are all "impotent" and "ineffectual," and that we can only "surrender," to use more of Martin's terms, might be a position more convincing to a woman, with her greater experience of powerlessness or disenfranchisement. For that matter, an ingrained sense of a lack of agency, familiar to many women, may help account for Martin's profoundly apolitical and ahistorical views—views cultivated and maintained throughout a period of fervid politicial activism in the United States and elsewhere. (From this perspective, her American citizenship notwithstanding, we might see Martin's posture in light of Mircea Eliade's insight that historicist thinking was engendered and professed in "nations for which history has never been a continuous terror," that is, in societies with a mass of inhabitants who enjoyed some sense of agency, rather than feeling marked by the "'fatality of history.'"[39])

It was not merely in her use of the grid, but in the way she composed those grids, that Martin implemented her critique of power. In her pictures, as she explained in 1967, the "formats are square, but the grids never are absolutely square; they are rectangles, a little bit off the square, making a sort of contradiction, a dissonance. . . . When I cover the square surface with rectangles, it lightens the weight of the square, destroys its power."[40] Asked later to explain what the power of the square is, Martin replied: "you know what a square makes you feel like. . . it's more aggressive than a rectangle. . . . [W]hy do they call people squares when they don't like them?"[41] Pressed as to why she should want to destroy the square's power, she added, "Because it's aggressive. It's much softer when it's covered with rectangles. A rectangle is a soft experience. . . . [I]t's destroying a strong thing, so the result is a milder thing." This interest in showing how meekness may undo strength aligns Martin with Taoist (and certain Christian) teachings. "The best way to conduct oneself may be observed in the behavior of water," argued Lao Tzu.

Nothing is weaker than water;
Yet, for attacking what is hard and tough,
Nothing surpasses it, nothing equals it.
The principle, that what is weak overcomes what is strong,
And what is yielding conquers what is resistant,
Is know to everyone.[42]

Martin's interest in using rectangles and squares to visualize the defeat of aggression by mildness put her conspicuously at odds with her Minimalist peers, who often described their use of simple geometric forms in terms of a display of force and virility. While Martin was benignly averring that, "my painting is about impotence," Donald Judd was pronouncing, "the main things [in art] are alone and are more intense, clear and powerful."[43] Martin would appear to share more common ground, however, with another Minimalist sculptor, Carl Andre. A fellow adept of Lao Tzu, Andre regarded himself as "a person ever driving toward the greatest serenity I can achieve in any situation." His work, accordingly, "is entirely about units that I can handle. . . through zero motion and zero threat"; and he availed himself of the preset grids of graph paper for conceptualizing certain of his key, early works. Andre professed to be influenced in this way of thinking not only by Taoist doctrine, but by the example of Japanese temple gardens. He explained that he felt more attuned to Asian art in general than he did to Western art—and, for her part, Martin tended to invoke one or another kind of Chinese vase whenever she wanted to refer to an especially exemplary work of art.[44]



Carl Andre
64 Pieces of Lead, 1968
Lead, 64 x 64
Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

The Western art that Andre did feel a connection to included the work of artists who had been affected somehow by Asian art, such as Brancusi, Reinhardt, and Martin herself. Andre may have been influenced by Martin in composing his gridlike "plains"—large squares made up of multiple, 1-foot-square, metal plates—which he began in 1967. The term "plain" emphasized at once the planar aspect of these virtually two-dimensional sculptures and their geographic identity as low, flat places—though Andre thought of his sculpture also in terms of a "road," a road or a plain without any fixed vista, that would offer "an infinite point of view."[46] The sense of unending expansion offered by a vast, open plain had likewise been a vital inspiration for Martin in arriving at her characteristic image. A tale she told more than once

of how she came to make the grid pinpointed a moment at the end of a painting expedition in the mountains:

> I was coming out of the mountains, and. . . I came out on this plain, and I thought, Ah! What a relief! . . . I thought, This is for me! The expansiveness of it. I sort of surrendered. This plain. . . it was just like a straight line. It was a horizontal line. . . . Then, I found that the more I drew that line, the happier I got. First I thought it was just like the sea. . . then, I thought it was like singing! Well, I just went to town on this horizontal line. But I didn't like it without *any* verticals. . . .[47]

Or, on another occasion: "I think when you come out of the mountains and onto a plain it's a pretty exciting experience; and I guess it is expansion that is related to the grid. You know, the expansion of that experience. . . . It's about the infinite."[48]

In exalting the experience of the plains over that of the mountains, Martin inverted the standard order of high over low, the impressive over the humble—a reversal portended by a familiar passage of a chapter in Isaiah 40, to which she once referred:

> Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of Jehovah; make level in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the uneven shall be made level, and the rough places a plain: and the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.[49]

That the low may vanquish the high and mighty is suggested also by the Taoists, who use water as an exemplar of such an eventuality:

> Rivers and seas dominate the landscape,
> Because, by being good at seeking the lowest places,
> they fill and occupy and spread over everything.
> Likewise the intelligent man,

says the *Tao Teh King*. The same text explicitly associates the feminine with the softness and passivity of water, and notes how

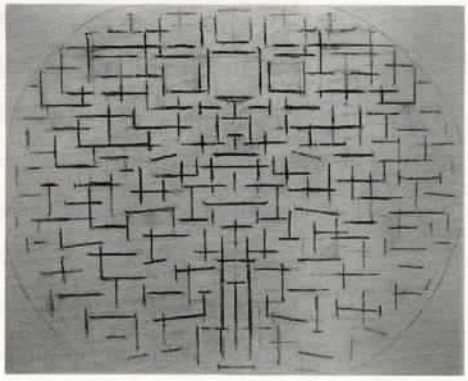
> hardness and toughness are allied with death,
> While softness and weakness are interrelated with life. . .
> Therefore it is better to be soft and weak than to be hard and tough.[50]

The Taoist sage Chuang Tzu also considered the behavior of water as a form of ontological model:

> Still water is like glass. . .
> It is a perfect level; . . .

If water is so clear, so level,
How much more the spirit of man?
The heart of the wise man is tranquil.
It is the mirror of heaven and earth
The glass of everything.
Emptiness, stillness, tranquillity, tastelessness,
Silence, non-action: . . .
This is perfect Tao. Wise men find here
Their resting place.
Resting, they are empty.
. . . stillness is joy.[51]

What Martin hoped to adduce through her art was just such a state of perfect restfulness; not a slackened, closed, or unconscious state (like sleep), but an expansive, meditative consciousness. And in trying to describe the liberatory condition she had in mind, the artist alluded to the behavior of water and our experience in watching it: "My paintings have neither object nor space nor line nor anything—no forms. They are. . . about formlessness, breaking down form. You wouldn't think of form by the ocean."[52] Here we may be reminded of the *Pier and Ocean* compositions of Mondrian; but those works employ a kind of dissipated grid, whereas Martin's paintings, by adhering strictly to a uniform grid pattern which they repeat across the entire (6-foot-square) field of a canvas, encourage the eye to participate in uninterrupted, nonselective, "'free and easy wandering,'" to use a phrase she borrowed from Chuang Tzu—an activity conducive (or so she hoped) to a "'holiday' state of mind."[53] Martin wanted people to experience her art through a "simple direct going into a field of vision as you would cross an empty beach to look at the ocean."[54] (As for Andre, he described having the revelation, while canoeing in New Hampshire in 1965, that his work ought to be "as level as water."[55])



Piet Mondrian
Pier and Ocean, 1914
Charcoal on paper, 20⅛ x 24⅞
Collection Haags
Gemeentemuseum-The Hague

Many critics marveled at finding the experience of looking at Martin's paintings unexpectedly similar to that of looking at nature. "We perceive a grid, but. . . we recognize a form of nature imagery," observed Lawrence Alloway; it followed that the artist's titles—which are generally pastoral in their references—"have a definite congruence to the artist's visual imagery."[56] To another critic, Martin's work suggested "inner landscapes. . . like a field

drifting. . . as if she worked on sky or water. . . [S]he makes use of the sensibility's way of perceiving nature."[57] For her part, Martin identified her aesthetic as of a "classical" and anti-natural order, and she fended off landscape readings of her work by pointing out both that there are no straight lines in nature and that she had begun painting grids in New York, not New Mexico. Yet it is unmistakable that the decision to pursue her art in the desert both before and after the decade she spent painting in the city (where she had come because Betty Parsons refused to exhibit her work unless she moved to New York) bespeaks not merely a yearning for freedom from worldly distractions, but also a positive desire for immersion in unspoiled surroundings of a preternatural beauty.

The common ground between Martin and Andre, which extends to the simple geometry and symmetry of their work, falls away eventually as the materials favored by the sculptor evoked metaphors less of nature than of industry. But even when Andre described the state of ultimate calm he hoped to achieve in his work—at the moment when he sounded most like Martin—he used an oddly aggressive phrasing: "this kind of calm has to be fierce calm, the calm of a kind of fierce attention, a fierce equilibrium."[58] That fierceness, as manifest in the cold and harsh character of the work of Andre, as well as that of other Minimalists, represented a difference of sensibility that Martin herself felt keenly, especially as she was sometimes counted by critics as one of the Minimalists. Martin had participated in an exhibition called "Ten" at the influential Dwan Gallery in 1966, along with Andre, Judd, Morris, Baer, Flavin, Smithson, Steiner, and Reinhardt (who helped to organize the show). But much as she admired the work of her fellow exhibitors, Martin explained that these other artists "want to minimalize *themselves* in favor of the ideal. Well, I just can't. The minimalists. . . don't even leave *themselves* there! They prefer being absolutely pure. . . . But I just can't."[59]

Critics repeatedly remarked on how Martin's grids, while they were as strictly measured and regular as she could make them, were nonetheless slightly and discernibly irregular. She had, after all, insisted on drawing her grids by hand, with only a straightedge to guide her, at a moment when the Minimalist painters were using masking tape and the Minimalist sculptors were having their work commercially fabricated so that there could be little question of discerning the artist's touch. Minimalist art may be seen as having at once spoken of and spoken to the putative "death of the subject" and the encroachment of the process of mechanization in modern society. "Mechani-

zation, standardization, overspecialization and parcellization of labor, which in the past determined only the realm of commodity production in actual industry, now penetrate into all sectors of social life. . . [into] recreation just as much as the organization of work," as Ernest Mandel describes it. "Late capitalism can therefore be described as the moment in which the last vestiges of Nature which survived on into classical capitalism are at length eliminated," Fredric Jameson adds.[60]

The relentlessly schematic quality and the relative sameness and colorlessness of Martin's art might appear to evince such pervasive standardization; but the hand-drawn aspect worked against that sense of regularization, as a mild yet stubborn assertion of a personal presence, the residual presence of a subject. At this moment when theoreticians were pronouncing the demise of the author—as well as of the "supreme philosophical Subject, the cogito" and the philosophical systems he engendered—Martin may be seen as representative of a once marginalized constituency which was newly claiming the prerogatives of subjectivity and of authorship.[61] By eschewing then-popular mechanical aids, such as squeegees and masking tape, which would have let her erase the trace of her hand, Martin made it evident that she was indeed speaking for herself, for her own quiet and self-contained, but distinctly unmechanical sensibility. (From 1973 onward, she cemented this impression by literally speaking for herself: giving occasional lectures and allowing her lectures and notes to be published.)

Critics continually wondered at the fact that Martin's art, while evoking ordinary graph paper, was somehow personal, sensitive, and hypnotic rather than mechanical, cold, and monotonous. While reason dictated that all her unending grid patterns ought to look more or less alike, it happened instead that her art "yields the most differentiated sensations," as one critic put it; or that "a remarkable variety results from the slightest variation of scale and the size of the negative area."[62] Here were simple graphs, the effect of which was poetic rather than mathematical. "There are no impersonal touches, no assembly line forms," marveled Hilton Kramer.[63] "One reaches for a tape measure, only to relinquish it, knowing that verification of that rationale will in no way account for the interest of the work," observed Annette Michelson.[64]

Numerous critics saw the design of Martin's grids as akin to textiles, the warp and woof structure of which may be woven either mechanically or by hand (with a more rude, manually propelled apparatus). Types of fabrics variously mentioned included veils, tissue, Indian sari silk, gray flannel, worn

corduroy, and Navajo rugs and blankets. And several critics cited another kind of weaving—that of the spider ("some dream spider of Pythagoras") spinning a silky, "gently trembling, fragile web."[65] Associating Martin's art with textiles was, of course, a way of feminizing and diminishing it as a form of "decorative" art (and the spider is also a negative trope for women). Yet there were meaningful insights in this association of Martin's work with fabric, as well as in the observation, made by many critics, of the attention her paintings called, by the very thinness and fineness of their execution, to the stuff of the fabric they were painted on. Fabric-making or weaving is an activity that has conventionally been regarded as women's work in the West and deemed less noble than the "fine" arts because of its functional telos; because of its relatively traditional or non-innovatory aspects; because of the repetitive nature of the task; and because of its dependence on machines with the pattern constrictions they impose. Indeed, those labors that have been designated women's work are characteristically repetitive, manual activities—and such is the work of Agnes Martin. (Returning to the tale of the unstained sheet on the clothesline, the princess' avoidance of bloodying the sheets emerges further, in Dinesen's account, as a tribute to the convent spin-sters who skillfully, patiently spun and wove the threads that formed those fine, linen sheets, though their efforts would never be recognized as artful, but only as mere "craft or service."[66])

Agnes Martin was no weaver, of course, but in a sense she confounded the values of weaving, at its plainest, finest, and most tasklike, with those of high art. On the one hand, viewers can apprehend at a glance the simple pattern that covers the field of a Martin canvas, virtually as one would see at a glance the whole of the pattern in a simple linen towel. But after that first instant, Martin's painting will give the viewer something more than the towel—a subtle sensation of the variabilities and nuances that stem from the fact that its pattern was not printed or woven but patiently, deliberately drawn by a person endowed with nearly unimaginable powers of concentration and a hair-trigger sensibility. So slight and so subtle are the stimuli these schematic paintings offer viewers that if they wish to continue to pay attention at all, they must pay attention on Martin's own, exacting terms—the terms of a woman who is forever attempting to draw a perfectly straight line in full awareness that she will never do so.

As it happens, there have always been viewers willing to meet Martin's terms. "The experience of her work. . . is prolonged, slow and perceptual, a

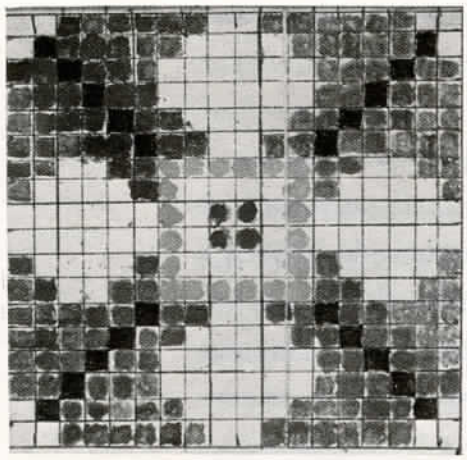
revelatory experience in time," noted one critic; "it is only through intense concentration that these elusive distinctions [in Martin's pictures] may be perceived," declared another; "barely perceptible, often approaching invisibility, [her art] heightened the demands made of the viewer's level of consciousness and receptivity," remarked a third.[67] (So subtle are the effects of Martin's paintings, in fact, that it has widely been considered that there is little or no point in trying to reproduce them, and this has also helped to bring viewers to her work on her own terms, rather than those of the media age.)

When Georgia O'Keeffe determined that she wanted to make people look more carefully than usual, she took a small, natural object of intrinsic appeal and rendered it unexpectedly, unnaturally out of scale: "in a way—nobody sees a flower—really—it is so small—we haven't time—and to see takes time. . .—So I said to myself—I'll paint what I see—what the flower is to me but I'll paint it big and they will be surprised into taking time to look at it—I will make even busy New Yorkers take time to see what I see of flowers."[68] Even more than O'Keeffe, Martin had confidence that people could be challenged into paying closer attention: "You see, people respond very, very far beyond what they think they can respond; you see, they respond to the least little thing. . . the tiniest little movement of a butterfly wing. . . . I mean, it really means something to them—to all of us."[69] Instead of depicting flowers or butterflies, however, Martin tried to depict, or rather to approximate and induce, objectless, nameless feelings, "the subtlest feelings that everyone has. . . feelings that people are hardly aware of having."[70] To describe those kinds of emotion that exceed spoken or written language, however, she (like O'Keeffe) invariably came back to our experience of nature. When she was queried, then, about why she had called a painting *Grey Geese Descending,* the artist explained, "we have certain feelings when birds descend. And that's what the painting is about. . . . descending feelings. They're beyond words."[71]

The feelings that Martin particularly wanted to convey were those of joy, especially the joy associated with a state of total serenity. "You can get in there and rest," the painter would exclaim when she specially relished one of her paintings; "the absolute trick in life is to find rest."[72] Nor was Martin the first to conceive of painting in this way. Henri Matisse's famous dream was of "an art of balance, of purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter. . . like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue." Matisse's armchairs were intended not for an audience of women, however, but rather "for the businessman as well as the man of letters," as

they were typically filled with indolent and voluptuous, nude or scantily clad, young women. Such are the standard, proffered pleasures, not only of Matisse's art, but of high culture and low in the visual regime of a patriarchal society where women function as objects of desire and objects of exchange among men. A question that has begun to be explored only lately is: what kinds of meaningful, non-exploitive pleasures exist for women in such a regime? What kinds of pleasures might women conceive or offer to one another—and to men?

When Agnes Martin conceived an art meant to induce a blissfully "untroubled mind," her methods were above all non-objectifying: "There's absolutely no hint of anything in this world, any object, in my painting, so that's such a nice rest," she explained.[74] Her notion of offering viewers a rest did not involve fantasies of sinking into overstuffed armchairs and gratifying the body's hungers, but rather a release from sensual cravings into a realm of mind and sensibility. In this aim, Martin's paintings have (as the artist knew) a loose kinship to some Tantric diagrams, that is, to images used as aids to certain types of yoga meditation. And for viewers who are versed in any of the Eastern systems of meditation that have, by now, infiltrated Western society, her pictures may have an added dimension or attraction. Many materialistic, goal-oriented, clock-bound Westerners have learned from those meditative practices something of another state of mind: a fluid, pacific, and expansive state of concentration, or a kind of full emptiness. One of the glories of the "daughter of humility" envisioned by Martin was, to reiterate, that "all of her ways are empty." And in this notion that a sensation of emptiness is not necessarily equivalent to one of lack, but may instead spell a positive, enjoyable, and potentially productive state, we again encounter an idea with more evident appeal to women, whose bodies' distinct spaces may engender just such feelings.



Tantric diagram, date unknown
Pen and gouache

"Once the grid appears" in modern art, "it seems quite resistant to change," Rosalind Krauss has argued; the grid is "a mode of repetition, the content of which is the conventional nature of art itself."[75] But Martin's grids compel us to pay attention to change as well as repetition or sameness. By the very minuteness of their differences, from one canvas to the next, and by their difference from the grids of other artists, they show that the "content" of all

grids is far from identical. Martin's delicate, empty, simple grids drawn patiently across square canvases uniformly scaled to the human body speak not of utopian social schemes, unlike the grids of, say, Mondrian; nor of eschatology, unlike the grids of Reinhardt; nor of mystical arcana, unlike the grids of Alfred Jensen; nor of a narrowly circumscribed phenomenology, unlike the grids of some of her Minimalist peers. None of these artists shared Martin's touching vision of a silent, beautiful, humble daughter whose ways were gloriously, innocently empty; and none of them conceived the purpose of their work as she did, at once as a form of mental relief and as an instrument of sensibility, a mode of sensitizing the viewer. The "wordless and silent" grids of Agnes Martin offer an effective refuge for cluttered minds and jangled nerves, inviting the viewer to slow down, to empty and so open the eye and the mind, to begin anew. If that is not everything we could ever want art to do for us, it is no small accomplishment either. For my part, the pleasure that Martin's art brings me—a pleasure qualitatively unlike that offered me by any other artist—is a sense at once somehow calming and stimulating: a profound sense of openness.

1. Suzan Campbell, "Interview with Agnes Martin," May 15, 1989, transcript, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., pp. 10–11.

2. Rosalind E. Krauss, "Grids," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1985), p. 9.

3. Campell, "Interview," p. 21.

4. Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), p. 309.

5. Diary note of 1964, cited in Anna C. Chave, "Eva Hesse: A 'Girl Being a Sculpture,'" in Helen A. Cooper, ed., *Eva Hesse: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1992), p. 111.

6. Agnes Martin, "Beauty Is the Mystery of Life," lecture delivered in April 1989 at the Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, published in facsimile in *Agnes Martin: Paintings and Drawings 1974–1990*, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1991), p. 16.

7. The phrase is Frank Kolbert's, cited in Hermann Kern, *Agnes Martin*, exh. cat. (Munich: Kunstraum München, 1973), p. 6.

8. Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (1967), in Alicia Legg, ed., *Sol LeWitt*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1978), p. 166.

9. Martin, "Beauty Is the Mystery of Life," p. 14; Agnes Martin, "The Current of the River of Life Moves Us," in *Kunst & Museumjournal* (Amsterdam), 2, no. 5 (1991), p. 25.

10. Martin, "Beauty Is the Mystery of Life," p. 15.

11. The first phrase is Mark Rothko's, cited in Selden Rodman, *Conversations with Artists* (New York: The Devin-Adair Co., 1957), p. 93; the second is from Agnes Martin, "The Still and Silent in Art," note of 1972, cited in Thomas McEvilley, "Grey Geese Descending: The Art of Agnes Martin," *Artforum*, 25 (Summer 1987), p. 99: "My interest is in experience that is wordless and silent, and in the fact that this experience can be expressed for me in art work which is also wordless and silent."

12. Quoted in Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd" (interview edited by Lucy R. Lippard), in Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimalist Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1968), p. 158.

13. Campbell, "Interview," pp. 18–19.

14. David Bourdon, "Art," *The Village Voice,* April 15, 1965, p. 15; and Ann Wilson, "Linear Webs," *Art & Artists,* 1 (October 1966), p. 47.

15. Kim Levin, "Agnes Martin's Gridlock," *The Village Voice,* December 10, 1980, p. 105.

16. Hilton Kramer, "An Art That's Almost Prayer," *The New York Times,* May 16, 1976, p. 23.

17. Thomas Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (1965; ed. New York: New Directions, 1969), p. 115. (Merton, a Trappist monk, was a close friend of Ad Reinhardt.)

18. From Agnes Martin's notes, given in 1972 to the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, published in Kern, *Agnes Martin,* p. 68.

19. Barnett Newman, "The Sublime Is Now," *Tiger's Eye,* no. 6 (December 15, 1948), pp. 51–53; Agnes Martin, as recounted by Ann Wilson, "The Untroubled Mind," in Susan Delehanty, ed., *Agnes Martin,* exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1973), p. 20.

20. Douglas Crimp, "New York Letter," *Art International,* 17 (April 1973), p. 57; Holland Cotter, "Agnes Martin at Pace," *Art in America,* 77 (April 1989), p. 257.

21. The passage continues: "It was a woman Edward Fitzgerald, I think, suggested who made the ballads and the folk-songs, crooning them to her children, beguiling her spinning with them, or the length of the winter's night"; Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1929), p. 53. The shortened phrase "Anonymous was a woman" became a feminist trope of the 1970s.

22. Martin's notes, in Kern, *Agnes Martin,* p. 70.

23. David Bourdon, "Art," *The Village Voice,* May 17, 1976, p. 111.

24. William Peterson, "Agnes Martin: 'The Islands,'" *Artspace,* 3 (Summer 1979), p. 37; Bourdon, "Art" (1965), p. 15.

25. Wilson, "Linear Webs," p. 46.

26. William Feaver, "Art: In Contrast," *The Observer,* March 6, 1977; Marjorie Welish, "Agnes Martin at Pace," *Art in America,* 66 (September–October 1978), p. 121; and Alan G. Artner, "Legendary Agnes Martin Strikes a First for Chicago," *Chicago Tribune,* October 5, 1980, Arts & Books section, pp. 26, 28.

27. Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," in Elaine Showalter, ed., *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), pp. 301, 305.

28. Ibid., p. 306. "Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap's desire for a radically new kind of art is brilliantly illustrated by the *Little Review* volume that consisted of sixty-four blank pages," Gubar, p. 308, notes by way of example.

29. Quoted in Kate Horsfield, "On Art and Artists: Agnes Martin '74," *Profile,* 1 (March 1981), pp. 6, 7; see also Campbell, "Interview," pp. 23–25.

30. Wilson, "Linear Webs," p. 46; Max Kozloff, "Art," *The Nation,* November 14, 1966, p. 525.

31. Gubar, "'The Blank Page,'" pp. 305–08.

32. Quoted in Emile de Antonio and Mitch Tuchman, *Painters Painting: A Candid History of the Modern Art Scene, 1940–1970* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), pp. 42–44.

33. Martin/Wilson, "The Untroubled Mind," p. 20.

34. Ibid., p. 17; Campbell, "Interview," p. 31.

35. Agnes Martin, "We Are in the Midst of Reality Responding with Joy," lecture delivered at Yale University, April 5, 1976, published in Stedelijk Museum, *Agnes Martin,* pp. 24, 23.

36. Agnes Martin, "On the Perfection Underlying Life," notes for a lecture at the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, February 14, 1973; ibid., p. 27.

37. Ibid., p. 28.

38. Amy Goldin, "Patterns, Grids, and Painting," *Artforum,* 14 (September 1975), p. 53; Rosalind Krauss and Marcia Tucker, "Perceptual Fields," in Sam Hunter, Rosalind Krauss, and Marcia Tucker, *Critical Perspectives in American Art,* exh. cat. (Amherst: Fine Arts Center Gallery, University of Massachusetts, 1976), p. 15; Martin/Wilson, "The Untroubled Mind," p. 24.

39. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return or Cosmos and History,* trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 152.

40. Quoted in Lucy R. Lippard, "Homage to the Square," *Art in America,* 55 (July–August 1967), p. 54.

41. Campbell, "Interview," pp. 27–28.

42. Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh King,* trans. Archie J. Bahm (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1958), pp. 16, 66–67.

43. Martin/Wilson, "The Untroubled Mind," p. 20; Donald Judd, "Specific Objects" (1965), in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings, 1959–1975* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1975), p. 187. Judd, p. 184, also argued that "A painting isn't an image. The shapes, the unity, projection, order and color are specific, aggressive and powerful." On this issue, see also Anna C. Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine,* 64 (January 1990), pp. 44–63.

44. For Andre, see Paul Cummings, *Artists in Their Own Words* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), pp. 186, 188; for Martin, see Horsfield, "On Art and Artists," p. 16, and Martin/Wilson, "The Untroubled Mind," p. 17.

45. Cummings, *Artists in Their Own Words,* pp. 180, 189.

46. David Bourdon, *Carl Andre: Sculpture, 1959–1977* (New York: Jaap Rietman, 1978), p. 16.

47. Quoted in John Gruen, "Agnes Martin: 'Everything, everything is about feeling. . . feeling and recognition,'" *Art News,* 75 (September 1976), p. 94.

48. Campbell, "Interview," p. 11.

49. Isaiah 40: 3–5. The part of this chapter Martin explicitly referred to (in Martin/Wilson, "The Untroubled Mind," pp. 19–20) was the following passage (40: 6–7): "All flesh is grass. . . surely the people is grass." Since, however, she related her discovery of the grid to her vision of a tree (see the opening quotation of the present essay), the following verses from the same chapter (40: 18–20) are also relevant: "To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? The image, a workman hath cast it, and the goldsmith overlayeth it. . . . He that is too impoverished for such an oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot."

50. Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh King,* pp. 59, 55, 65–66.

51. Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu,* p. 80.

52. Quoted in Wilson, "Linear Webs," p. 49.

53. Martin, "On the Perfection Underlying Life," p. 29.

54. Quoted in Wilson, "Linear Webs," p. 49.

55. Quoted in Bourdon, *Carl Andre,* p. 26.

56. Lawrence Alloway, "'Formlessness Breaking Down Form': The Paintings of Agnes Martin," *Studio International,* 185 (February 1973), p. 62. The British-born Alloway discerned a characteristically American trait in Martin's relation to nature; see Alloway, "Agnes Martin," *Artforum,* 11 (April 1973), p. 36.

57. Wilson, "Linear Webs," pp. 47–48.

58. Quoted in Cummings, *Artists in Their Own Words,* p. 189.

59. Quoted in Gruen, "Agnes Martin," p. 94.

60. Frederic Jameson, "Periodizing the Sixties," in Sohnya Sayres et al., eds., *The 60s, Without Apology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 207; ibid. for the passage from Ernest Mandel.

61. Ibid., p. 187. The 1960s was the period when, as Jameson, p. 181, phrased it, all "'natives' became human beings...those inner colonized of the first world—'minorities,' marginals, and women, fully as much as its external subjects and official 'natives,'" and so a moment of "the concomitant dismissal of the intermediaries (liberals, first world intellectuals) who hitherto claimed to talk in your name."

62. Kozloff, "Art," p. 525; Bourdon, "Art" (1965), p. 15.

63. Hilton Kramer, "An Intimist of the Grid," *The New York Times,* March 18, 1973, p. 23.

64. Annette Michelson, "Agnes Martin: Recent Paintings," *Artforum,* 5 (January 1967), p. 46.

65. Wilson, "Linear Webs," p. 47; Peterson, "Agnes Martin," p. 37.

66. Gubar, "'The Blank Page,'" p. 307.

67. Roberta Smith, "Reviews: Agnes Martin, Pace Gallery," *Artforum,* 13 (Summer 1975), p. 73; Nina Ffrench–Frazier, "New York: Agnes Martin," *Art International,* 23 (January–February 1980), p. 42; Peterson, "Agnes Martin," p. 37.

68. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), n.p. The image of the open spaces of the plain bears a metaphorical relation to the female body in O'Keeffe's art as well; and she, too, began painting the plains in an abstract way *(From the Plains I)* once she had left them for New York City; ibid.

69. Quoted in Horsfield, "On Art and Artists," p. 15.

70. Martin, quoted in McEvilley, "Grey Geese Descending," p. 99.

71. Campbell, "Interview," p. 12.

72. Martin/Wilson, "The Untroubled Mind," p. 17.

73. Henri Matisse, "Notes of a Painter" (1908), quoted in Jack D. Flam, *Matisse on Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1978), p. 38. Mark Stevens also invoked this passage in an analysis of Martin, but for quite a different purpose than that of the present context; Stevens, "An Art of Balance, Purity and Serenity," in Stedelijk Museum, *Agnes Martin,* p. 51.

74. Quoted in Stevens, "An Art of Balance," p. 50.

75. Krauss, "Grids," pp. 22, 19.