**Art Journal**

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcaj20

# Grave Matters: Positioning Carl Andre at Career's End

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Published online: 30 Apr 2015.



**To cite this article:** Anna C. Chave (2014) Grave Matters: Positioning Carl Andre at Career's End, Art Journal, 73:4, 5-21, DOI: 10.1080/00043249.2014.1016342

**To link to this article:** http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00043249.2014.1016342

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# Grave Matters: Positioning Carl Andre at Career's End

*This text was first presented on November 15, 2014, at a symposium sponsored by the Dia Art Foundation at Dia:Beacon in Beacon, New York. The foundation invited Anna C. Chave to speak in conjunction with the exhibition* Carl Andre: Sculpture as Place, 1958–2010. *Her text is presented here with minor changes.*

*The exhibition was on view at Dia:Beacon May 5, 2014–March 9, 2015. It is scheduled to travel to Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, May 7–October 12, 2015; Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, May 7–September 25, 2016; and Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, October 20, 2016–February 12, 2017.*

"I DONT WANT NO RETRO SPECTIVE" reads an iconic 1979 text painting by Ed Ruscha. Out of (possibly feigned) aversion to the limelight or out of apprehension at the prospect of having a career prematurely foreclosed, some minority of artists does refuse the crowning rite of the retrospective. Carl Andre numbered for a time among the recalcitrant, according to the *New York Times*, warning Dia curators: "I can't stop you from doing it, but don't expect me to do anything to help."[1] Given that Andre has officially retired from making art, there is no question of the present exercise being premature, however. And he cooperated with the staging of a retrospective in Europe in the mid-1990s, as well as prior such endeavors. So it is conceivable that this reluctance was more a defensive reflex on the part of an artist whose reputation in the United States has been fraught since his third wife fell from their thirty-fourth-floor New York apartment during an autumn night in 1985. That wife was of course the Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta, with whom he had a tumultuous relationship. And that event occasioned an ongoing "moratorium" against the artist, as James Meyer termed it in an *Artforum* review of the present show that speaks darkly of how Meyer's own efforts to initiate an exhibition were "suppressed," in one case with "Savonarola-like fervor."[2] A Calvin Tomkins *New Yorker* profile pointed, in preliminary publicity for the show, to some punishment that Andre has suffered at the hands of feminists, notably including a 1995 Guerrilla Girls poster that dubbed him "the O.J. of the art world."[3] And Holland Cotter's *New York Times* review speculates that Dia's show failed to find additional US venues on account of the cloud lingering over the artist here.[4] We may thus recognize in outline (at least in Meyer's and Tomkins's accounts) a paradoxical yet familiar maneuver whereby that archetypal figure of privilege, a straight white male, displaces a paradigmatically marginalized figure, namely a woman of color, from her evident position as a victim.

Feminists have lately been chided for victimizing Andre, then, while the advent of Dia's show has predictably sparked renewed feminist conversation regarding his and Mendieta's respective legacies. Some male critics have suggested that as Mendieta's posthumous reputation grows, ill-feeling toward the more celebrated Andre might accordingly subside; but the reverse may just as easily be imagined: the more we appreciate the full scope of Mendieta's contributions, the more we may lament having lost her. Aggressively refuting former Dia director Phillipe Vergne's wishful prediction that the Andre show would occasion no demonstrations, Christen Clifford and the No Wave Performance Task Force poured putrid chicken blood and guts at the entrance to Dia's Chelsea's offices in May 2014, in an act of protest loosely referencing an early work by Mendieta. Meantime, some blog entries by Mira Schor, who decried what she saw as Tomkins's pandering

following pages:
**Carl Andre, *Lament for the Children*, New York, 1976 (destroyed), remade Wolfsburg, 1996 (foreground),** concrete, 100-unit square, ea. 18 x 8 x 8 in. (45.7 x 20.3 x 20.3 cm), overall 18 in. x 36 ft. 8 in. x 36 ft. 8 in. (.46 x 11.8 x 11.8 m), installation view, Dia:Beacon, Riggio Galleries, Beacon, NY, 2014. Collection of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York (artwork © Carl Andre/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY; photograph by Bill Jacobson Studio, New York, provided by Dia:Beacon)

1. Carl Andre quoted in Randy Kennedy, "Minimalist Retrospective Gets a Master's Touch," *New York Times*, May 5, 2014, C1.
2. James Meyer, "Carl Andre/Dia:Beacon," *Artforum* 53, no. 1 (September 2014): 365.
3. Calvin Tomkins, "The Materialist: Carl Andre's Eminent Obscurity," *New Yorker*, December 5, 2011, 65. Tomkins's essay prominently mentions the Dia show, then planned for March 2013.
4. Holland Cotter, "A Stonehenge for the Modern Age," *New York Times*, May 30, 2014, C27.

portrayal of Andre, sparked a "Feminist Urgent Round Table" in New York.[5] That event revealed some disarray among feminists, however, which has been general from the start of this sordid matter, as is confirmed by Robert Katz's well-researched 1990 book concerning Andre's trial for the murder of Mendieta.

Many feminists—abhorring the prospect that Mendieta could remain defined by the role of victim—have been intent on downplaying that aspect of her legacy.[6] Complicating matters, too, is Andre's extensive history of personal involvement with art-world women. Of those who are said to have suffered abuse at his hands—the gallerist Angela Westwater, for one, has lately admitted enduring verbal but not physical abuse—no one would go on record at the time of the trial.[7] As for Andre's recent claims to being himself a feminist,[8] they cannot be dismissed as merely self-serving, for he occasionally positioned himself in related ways well before Mendieta's death, unusually so for a man of his generation. A longtime friendship with Lucy Lippard, the honorary dean of feminist art criticism, may help explain, for that matter, Andre's having underwritten printing costs for the first issue of the feminist magazine *Heresies* in 1977, or his appearance on a panel at the feminist gallery AIR in 1979 on the occasion of the first solo show of Mendieta, whom he first met that night.[9] Enlivening the intramural conversations, too, are the diverse views that feminists hold of Andre's art, which some may reject out of hand while others are deeply admiring. The latter view can entail resigned acknowledgment, however, of that "old story," as Schor succinctly put it, that "some very good art is made by some very awful people."[10] Even as they concede Andre's inarguable importance, some feminist art historians have declined to see Dia's show, a gesture that one wryly equated in conversation with me to boycotting Amazon (during its stand-off with Hachette publishers)—that is, a principled act of omission bound to go unremarked.

Finally and most glaringly, of course, there is the matter of the legal resolution of the murder trial—namely the judge's conclusion (in the absence of a jury, which Andre elected to forego) that the evidence did not satisfy him beyond a reasonable doubt that Andre was guilty. Regardless that it remains a fairly commonplace assumption among feminists that Andre murdered Mendieta, then, the justice system has irrevocably ruled otherwise—a blunt fact that all accounts of the artist that venture to mention the case must affirm. That the US justice system has tended historically to favor whites is a matter of record to which many of us—or perhaps I should specify many of us *white* people—are becoming increasingly sensitized. For some women of color in the art world, that fact—to which they needed no further sensitization—has all along loomed large in Andre's case. The African-American artist Howardena Pindell, for one, called the outcome "totally symbolic: your life isn't worth shit"; besides which, Pindell charged, "I know if Ana had been an Anglo and if Carl had been black, the art world would have lynched him."[11] Setting aside considerations for which Andre may not be held personally accountable, the question must be posed: why an acquitted man should have remained in the United States under the shadow of an incident that has not at all dogged him in Europe, where he has long had a significant presence. Broadly speaking, Europeans have proven more willing to compartmentalize the personal from the professional behavior of public figures. Thus, whereas the neo-Marxist Louis Althusser, for one, was spared trial in France for the murder of his wife, he continued to write and publish freely from the institution where he was confined—including an account of the murder, published posthu-

5. "Feminist Urgent Round Table: Ana Mendieta's Artistic Legacy and the Persistence of Patriarchy," panel organized and moderated by Katya Grokhovsky at Bruce High Quality Foundation University, New York, May 23, 2014, with Susan Bee, Kat Chamberlin, Christen Clifford, Lindsey Drury, Esther Neff, Mira Schor, Kat Griefen, Mary Beth Edelson, and Mary Sabbatino. A podcast is available at http://katyagrokhovsky.podomatic.com/entry/2014-05-26T14_33_45-07_00, as of January 15, 2015. My thanks go to Kathleen Wentrack for alerting me to this event. I owe thanks besides to William Taylor and to Lisa Saltzman for reading an initial draft of this essay.

6. Regarding feminists' complicated, at times self-defeating relation to the topic of victimhood, see Anna Chave, "'Normal Ills': On Embodiment, Victimization, and the Origins of Feminist Art," in *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, ed. Eric Rosenberg and Lisa Saltzman (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2006), 132–57.

7. Westwater quoted in Tomkins, 73. Regarding stories of Andre's at times abusive behavior toward women—stories that the district attorney's office could not succeed in substantiating, mostly owing to the reluctance of the principals to come forward or testify—see Robert Katz, *Naked by the Window: The Fatal Marriage of Carl Andre and Ana Mendieta* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1990), 159–60 (where he relates, for instance, an anecdote of Andre holding a bowl of pasta over Mendieta in a restaurant and threatening to smash it on her head); plus, Katz 213–14. According to Katz, based on an interview with Assistant District Attorney Elizabeth Lederer, who ultimately prosecuted the case, Lederer had hoped (in vain) "to sway one or two women, even the ex-lover of Carl's who had gone as far as coming to her office to be interviewed. She had arrived wearing dark glasses in the shadow of a big-brimmed hat, and in the end decided that she would not cooperate. She said, 'Ana is dead. I want to live.'" Ibid., 339.

8. For instance, in Barbara Rose, "Carl Andre," *Interview*, June 2013, at www.interviewmagazine.com/art/carl-andre/, as of January 29, 2015.

9. See Katz, 274, 272–73.

10. Mira Schor, "Still 'Naked by the Window,'" in "A Year of Positive Thinking" blog, May 5, 2014, at http://ayearofpositivethinking.com/2014/05/05/still-naked-by-the-window/, as of January 15, 2015.

11. Pindell quoted in Katz, 383.

12. See Louis Althusser, *L'Avenir dure longtemps* and *Les Faits*, 1992, translated as *The Future Lasts a Long Time* and *The Facts*, ed. Olivier Corpet and Yann Moulier Boutang, trans. Richard Veasey (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993).

13. Based on an interview, Katz related Judge Alvin Schlesinger's thinking about the trial verdict as follows: "Odd sort of person, Carl. He probably did it. Fifteen years was the least he would have to serve, if found guilty. Interesting case. Very close call." Katz, 370 and note, 417. In a televised documentary on the case, "Soho: The Art of Murder," a 1999 episode of the A&E series *City Confidential*, Schlesinger elaborated that "It was an extremely difficult decision and you do the very best you can as a judge, weighing everything and your total experience in trying to decide whether

mously, which raised hackles more for the fact that such autobiographical writing contravened his Marxist principles than for the admitted act of suffocation.[12]

That Andre has not been entirely accorded a post-trial presumption of innocence in his native land cannot be chalked up simply to our more moralizing ways, however. Rather, some extenuating circumstances of the case demand explanation. First off, it bears noting that the judge who presided over Andre's trial subsequently made the highly unusual choice to opine in conversation with a journalist that the artist "probably did it," explaining that the acquittal had been a close call made on the basis of the allowable evidence.[13] Second, some of the possibly incriminating evidence in the case could not in fact be introduced in the trial on account of some administrative bungling by the district attorney's office and the police, as is detailed by Katz.[14] In particular, the fact that forensic testing showed that there were no footprints on the window sill from which the barefoot Mendieta fell is the more damning a piece of evidence because nearly three-quarters of the petite artist's body would have been below the sill as she stood on the floor. She would have had to clamber onto the sill to exit the window deliberately, in other words; and yet, not only was there material evidence that she did not do so, but her family and close friends knew that she was so terrified of heights that she avoided even the routine opening of windows, whether or not in high-rise buildings.[15] Finally, no one who knew Mendieta—whose career was on an upswing in 1985—regarded her as being in the least suicidal.[16]

Andre's immediate account of what happened between himself and Mendieta, delivered to a 911 operator, was as follows: "My wife is an artist and I'm an artist, and we had a quarrel about the fact that I was more, uh, exposed to the public than she was and she went to the bedroom and I went after her and she went out of the window."[17] Andre has since been largely close-mouthed about the matter, and his friends seem generally not to have pressed him about it. But when his Italian dealer, Gian Enzo Sperone, did ask directly what had happened, not long after the fact, Andre reportedly responded: "It's impossible," and then added, "But I was drunk."[18] That he and Mendieta both drank a lot has become at times a focal point of this story, as at once an explanation for why the truth of the encounter is bound to remain elusive and as a kind of mitigating factor, inasmuch as diminished competence may serve as a form of legal excuse. It interests me, accordingly, that among the distinctive choices Dia made in positioning Andre for this major occasion is its exposition of three continuously running documentary videos, two of which (shot by the gallerist Virginia Dwan) portray the artist as an immoderate drinker. In *Carl Andre: A Video Portrait* of 1976, Andre drinks throughout an hour-plus conversation with an unseen and unnamed interlocutor, before appearing in the final frames lying flat on his back, as if passed out. And in *The Dinner*, a circa 1982 video of just under an hour, Andre consumes glass after glass of wine as he dominates the conversation at an inebriated-looking art-world social gathering that includes Susan Caldwell, Nancy Holt (Andre's main interlocutor), Doug Ohlson, and Angela Westwater, as well as Dwan. In his recent interviews with Tomkins and with his old friend Barbara Rose, Andre himself newly emphasizes his longtime identity as an insatiable drinker and habitué of bars.[19] Though both critics find him acute, on the whole, throughout exchanges involving protracted reliance on memory, he tells each point-blank that "my mind has been destroyed by alcohol."[20] Per his self-description, in other words, this is not a figure who may be held fully responsible for his own actions any longer, if he ever could be.

there is sufficient evidence to find guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, and that from a technical point of view, that's not such an easy thing to describe." This episode is no longer in circulation: my gratitude goes to James Ryan of A&E Networks for forwarding me a transcript of this program, and to Raquelin Mendieta (Ana Mendieta's sister, who was likewise interviewed for this episode), for providing me with a DVD.

14. See Katz, 19, 298, 305–6. That such slipshod work tends to occur in the United States more in situations where the victim is a person of color has lately been a subject of some study; see, for instance, Jill Leovy, *Ghettoside: A True Story of Murder in America* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2015).

15. Regarding Mendieta's having kept "a healthy distance from windows of any altitude," and having "never opened windows," see Katz, 116, 327. Regarding the evidentiary status and the positioning and measurements of the window in question (in Andre's apartment) relative to Mendieta's stature, plus further details of her "crippling" fear of heights, see ibid., 8, 61, 70–71, 128, 133, 247–48, 293, 317, 341. The artist Carolee Schneemann more recently recollected of Mendieta: "She made me change her light bulbs. She was afraid of heights. She would never go near the window." Schneemann quoted in Gillian Sneed, "The Case of Ana Mendieta," *Art in America*, "News," October 12, 2010, at www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/ana-mendieta/, as of January 29, 2015.

16. An assistant district attorney contacted "dozens of Ana's friends and acquaintances from Rome to Los Angeles, many of whom had no connection with one another. They agreed without exception that suicide was simply incompatible with her striving and coherent personality, drunk or sober." Katz, 116, and see ibid., 10, 128, 172, 183, 339–41.

17. The text of Andre's conversation with the 911 operator is quoted in full in Katz, 11–12. The statement cited here was made in response to the query: "What happened exactly?" Andre began his side of this conversation by stating, "My wife has committed suicide."

18. Sperone's account of his conversation with Andre is quoted in Katz, 191.

19. Among Andre's explicit remarks to Tomkins on this topic are the admission that "Partly I drank myself out of Kenyon" College in his youth, and that, as of the time of their conversation, "I've lost my mind. . . . It's a combination of alcohol and something else"; previously, "I could drink to the point of oblivion, without passing out," Andre claimed, in Tomkins, 67, 69, 70. Andre's 2013 *Interview* exchange with Rose, who bantered with him affectionately about his habitual drunkenness (e.g., "I thought you were witty when you were drunk"), contained, for instance, the admission that "I never drove a car in my life. Given my drinking habits in those days, I would have been dead a long time ago—stumbling out of a bar at 4 a.m. and getting into a car"; as a rule, Andre recalled, "I was hanging out and drinking as long as I could afford it, or as long as somebody else could afford it." Rose interview, at www.interviewmagazine.com/art/carl-andre/. In both the interview and Tomkins's profile, Andre describes

**Carl Andre, *Lever*, New York, 1966 (right),** firebrick, 137-unit header course, ea. 2½ x 8⅞ x 4½ in. (6.4 x 22.5 x 11.4 cm), overall 4½ x 29 ft. ½ in. x 8⅞ in. (11.4 cm x 8.85 m x 22.5 cm), installation view, Dia:Beacon, Riggio Galleries, Beacon, NY, 2014. Collection of National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (artwork © Carl Andre/ Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY; photograph by Bill Jacobson Studio, New York, provided by Dia:Beacon)

Another distinctive choice that Dia made in positioning Andre for its show is the new visibility it accords to a body of assemblage works by him—such as the sly *Dark Twist* (the name of a type of tobacco, which the artist displayed in its tin with a plastic tube added and the words "Dark Twist" inserted on a piece of paper), done in 1986, a year after Mendieta's death—and which the curators group under the rubric "Dada Forgeries." Andre's close friend Hollis Frampton described him in 1969 as having used that term to characterize an early body of eccentric work: "scores of objects, less witty than funny (in an enigmatically vulgar way)."[21] Andre only once exhibited work under the "Dada Forgeries" rubric, however, namely on the occasion of his first exhibition in New York City following his murder trial. That show, organized in 1988 by the gallerist Julian Pretto, featured a recent work called *Large Door* (a presumed pun on *L'Age d'Or*), which is reproduced in Dia's catalogue. The show's only reviewer, Alfred MacAdam, observed that the door in question was in fact a window, though it appears to be a wood-framed window screen, which is torn. Calling Andre's gesture an "exercise in catachresis, [that is,] the deliberate misnaming of an object," MacAdam posed the question: "When is a window a door?" His reply—"When Marcel Duchamp says it is"—then occasioned the mention of various iconic Duchamp works involving windows and doors. Seemingly the most germane of those works is the 1920 *Fresh Widow*, mistakenly called "Fresh Window" in MacAdam's review. French windows are doors of a kind, of course. And the window that Mendieta fell out of became a de facto door, which made Andre a "Fresh Widow"—or widower. MacAdam didn't explicitly mention Mendieta or the trial in his review of Andre's oddball come-back show, but he devoted a paragraph to philosophizing about death, pondering grandly whether it represents a "liberation or a burden" and whether "the death of others . . . grants us a postponement, a displacement to someone else of the inevitable." Finally, he benignly posed the question whether *Large Door* could be understood "outside the context of Carl Andre's biography."[22]

Andre is most celebrated, of course, not for quirky pseudo-Dadaist experiments, but as a founding father of Minimalism, which was long understood as epitomizing a depersonalized mode of art practice. That perception is in certain respects deceptive—or so I have argued elsewhere.[23] But some lip service continues to be paid (in the present catalogue by Vergne)[24] to the idea of Andre's art as reflexively excluding the biographical. Among the canonical Minimalists, however, Andre proved the most consistently, even obsessively autobiographical in how he framed and positioned his work. One doesn't need to be much of an Andre expert to be able to recite the oft-rehearsed anecdotes about his grandfather the bricklayer or about his sources in his hometown of Quincy, Massachusetts—its shipyards, its granite quarries—and so on. While he hasn't stressed it in the same way, his "Dada Forgeries" show could easily be construed as a pointed post-trial chapter to this same long-running autobiography. In labeling a fairly extensive body of Andre's works "Dada Forgeries" and foregrounding their recovery of that work, the Dia curators effectively hark back to the haunted Pretto show of that title. Vergne's catalogue essay refers to forgery, further, as an act entailing a "harmful and illicit dimension," and to forgers as akin to "great criminal masterminds" who test "our ethical certitudes," before asking about Andre a question similar to that broached in court decades ago, namely: "is he an outlaw?" There follows of course a reassuring reply: "An anarchist, at the most," allows Vergne.[25]

On the face of it—that is, judging by the three page numbers tallied in the

himself or is described as a longtime regular at artists' bars, such as the fabled Max's Kansas City, and that is likewise how he is portrayed in Katz's book, which, however, relates conflicting accounts as to whether Andre turned physically violent when drunk; see Katz, 148, 226–28. Katz further recounts, for instance, a story of Andre being "hauled off by the Seattle police and thrown into the drunk tank" in 1980 (Katz, 150).

20. Rose interview. For the exact phrase that Andre used with Tomkins, see the preceding note.

21. Hollis Frampton, "Letter to Enno Develing" (1969), in *Carl Andre: Sculptor 1996*, exh. cat. (Krefeld: Museen Haus Lange und Haus Esters and Wolfsburg Kunstmuseum, 1996), 61.

22. Alfred MacAdam, "Carl Andre," *Contemporanea*, November–December 1988, 112. The caption for the reproduction of *Large Door* in this review dated the work 1987 and gave the dimensions as 57 x 31 x 1 inches. Dia's catalogue, which reproduces *Large Door* on page 210, dates the work 1988, but provides no dimensions nor any whereabouts. Andre declined permission to reproduce an image of the work with the present text.

23. See Anna Chave, "Minimalism and Biography," *Art Bulletin* 82, no. 1 (March 2000): 149–63.

24. Phillipe Vergne, "Carl Andre and Alden Carr: The Sculptor, the Poet, and the Forger," in Vergne and Yasmil Raymond, *Carl Andre: Sculpture as Place, 1958–2010*, exh. cat., ed. Michelle Piranio and Jeremy Sigler (Dia: Beacon and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 231. Vergne, former director of the Dia Art Foundation, is the current director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Raymond is the curator of the Dia Art Foundation.

25. Vergne, 238.

index—Mendieta factors in Dia's catalogue only in passing. A biographical outline mentions the artists' meeting, then sketches in the ghastly close of their relationship, and that nearly covers it. Certain texts in the catalogue evince a preoccupation with the topic of death, however, which has not historically been a dominant thread in the Andre literature. Although longtime critical bias militates against attaching themes of any kind to Minimalist production, the essays by Vergne, by Dia curator Yasmil Raymond, and by commissioned author Arnauld Pierre all point to a thematic of death putatively underlying Andre's work. Raymond begins her essay—oddly, as I see it—by referring to the "unclear" "funerary role" of ancient Greek *kouros* and *kore* statues, before describing Andre's work as "infused with a politics of solemnity and intimacy typically reserved for monuments, graveyards, tombs, and shrines."[26] Vergne likewise argues for Andre's ongoing interest in "memorialization" and closes with a reference to a late photographic project described as a "melancholic meditation on presence and void . . . on what we memorialize and commemorate."[27] The photo Vergne illustrates by way of example is that of the balcony of Andre's apartment, replete with the railing that could have protected Mendieta had she exited the panes of glass leading here instead of the bedroom window. Further, a modest vase of roses that cast some spiky shadows oddly adorns the stark balcony in what might be perceived as a widower's belated, contrived gesture of commemoration.[28]

The formative period of Andre's career long precedes Mendieta's demise, of course, and there is a limited corpus of sculptures from those years that may be said somehow to reference death. Vergne's and Raymond's essays each mention a case in point, namely an ephemeral work called *Grave*, which he made of sand for a 1967 museum group show called *Monuments, Tombstones, and Trophies*, and *Lament for the Children*, first done at P.S.1 in 1976, and included in the Dia show.[29] Such works—as well as the *Stone Field Sculpture* that Andre installed in 1977 on a plot of land adjacent to a historic cemetery in Hartford—have occasioned elsewhere some germane critical commentary concerning their morbid overtones.[30] But the tenuous notion that death comprises a thematic through-line in Andre's art is one that finds its most insistent expression in the Dia catalogue. In constructing Andre as a figure preoccupied by death, Vergne and Raymond appear rather themselves to be so preoccupied; that is, they appear to be—reading between the lines—possibly haunted by Mendieta's harrowing end. A more equivocal account of Andre's putative commemorative intentions, to which Vergne's and Raymond's texts seem indebted, is a chapter called "Memorials" in Alistair Rider's 2011 monograph on Andre. Focusing especially on a work that Andre reportedly considers a kind of master key to his art[31]—his 1973 *Quincy Book*, which depicted, among other features, his hometown's monument-making industry, replete with a photo of his family tombstone—Rider posited a "latent affinity" for memorialization in Andre's project. "If Andre's works are at all memorial-like," he conjectured, "then they are so only in abstract: they are monuments dedicated to commemorating . . . their own presence"; and, he added, "If Andre's sculptures are memorials, then they are strange ones indeed."[32]

I am of course taking liberties by reading into Vergne's and Raymond's essays a kind of haunting by the specter of Mendieta, but in the text by Arnauld Pierre, her ghost is practically palpable. His essay's epigraph is a passage from a Surrealist poem by Louis Aragon, which proposes: "The most beautiful monument man can raise on a square . . . / Cannot compete with the splendid, chaotic heap / That is

26. Yasmil Raymond, "A Theory of Proximity," in *Carl Andre: Sculpture as Place*, 247.
27. Vergne, 232, 239.
28. This work is reproduced on page 238 of Dia's catalogue. Andre declined permission to reproduce an image of the work with the present text.
29. See Vergne, 232, and Raymond, 255.
30. See, for instance, David Bourdon, "A Redefinition of Sculpture" (1978), rep. *About Carl Andre: Critical Texts since 1965*, ed. Paula Feldman, Alistair Rider, and Karsten Schubert (London: Ridinghouse, 2006), 185–86, 192–93.
31. "'Carl says that if anyone wants to know about him, they should start with "The Quincy Book,"' says his present wife Melissa Kretschmer"; Tomkins, 66.
32. Alistair Rider, *Carl Andre: Things in Their Elements* (London: Phaidon, 2011), 224, 227.

following pages:
**Carl Andre, *Joint*, Putney, Vermont, 1968 (destroyed), remade Beacon, NY, 2014,** haybales, 183-unit row, ea. 24 x 24 x 36 in. (61 x 61 x 91.4 cm), overall 2 x 2 x 549 ft. (61 cm x 61 cm x 167.3 m), installation view, Dia:Beacon, Beacon, NY, 2014. Collection of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York (artwork © Carl Andre/ Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY; photograph by Bill Jacobson Studio, New York, provided by Dia:Beacon)



easy to produce with a church and dynamite." Then, under the heading "Déjà vu," Pierre commences his essay by conjuring a chilling image of Andre standing at his thirty-fourth-floor window witnessing an event wherein bodies plummeted from a skyscraper.[33] Ostensibly, Pierre is not revisiting the "chaotic heap" formed by Mendieta's body at the foot of Andre's residential skyscraper. Ostensibly, he is writing about the events of 9/11 in New York City, which the elderly artist reportedly witnessed from his Greenwich Village high-rise, and which Pierre tries, unconvincingly in my view, to conflate with the tenor of the era leading to the Minimalist movement. From his high-rise, Andre could not actually have seen the bodies falling from the World Trade Center on 9/11, but the far greater height of the twin towers and the notorious scale of the carnage that day serve implicitly to render Mendieta's fate a minor matter by comparison. Omitting the controversial photos of the bodies plunging from the twin towers, Pierre reproduces instead a 1983 French magazine spread comparing the shapes of the towers to some Alain Kirili sculptures. In addition, Pierre remarks the "particularly effective" "form" of the terrorist attacks, which may not be considered artworks in themselves, he cautions—just in case he may have confused anyone on that matter.[34] This peculiar, borderline-offensive essay concludes with a segment teasingly entitled "The Fall of Bodies," where again the falling body that comes automatically to mind in connection with Andre goes conspicuously unmentioned. Instead, striking a chord with Vergne and Raymond, Pierre enumerates the smattering of works by Andre that reference death and calls for an analysis of a "funereal and melancholy expression" said to be endemic in Minimalism generally. He invokes generic tomb sculptures—funerary slabs, sarcophagi, and so forth—for their putative resemblance to Andre's production in particular, but he withholds illustrations of such objects, which would likely serve only to undercut his point.[35]

Pierre proves less preoccupied with death at the center of his essay, where we find Andre graphically constructed instead as a "phallophobic," "antipriapic" artist, whose "refusal to erect monuments" and whose "detumescent columns incapable of erection"—such as the 1966 *Lever*—are said to represent a Bataillean "attack on verticality."[36] The essay's title, for that matter, is "'Broken Is the High Column': On *Lever* and a Few Other Gravitational Columns in the Art of the 1960s." It was Andre who first characterized *Lever* as priapic, suggesting that the horizontal lie of the sculpture represents the "engaged position" for the phallus, that is, "run[ning] along the earth."[37] The notion that Andre's radicality lies especially in his having lowered or "brought down" sculpture is advanced also in Dia's catalogue by Vergne and by Raymond;[38] and an essay on the "Fall of Sculpture" by Briony Fer argued back in 1996 that his oeuvre should accordingly be understood as antiphallic.[39] In the present context, however, Pierre's insistent reading of impotence into Andre's art seems to buttress other efforts to counter any lingering idea of the artist as ever representing a physical threat—including the aforementioned emphasis on the (not unrelated) image of a pathetically alcoholic figure who, in his own recent words, "couldn't fight my way out of a cookie jar."[40] To Pierre, moreover, it follows from his vision of an antiphallic Andre that the artist is presumed to constitute a "poor target" for my own 1990 analysis of the masculinist valences of the Minimalist enterprise. That analysis has oftentimes been caricatured as having caricatured Minimalism as phallic, pure and simple. My argument was instead, however, that Minimalism "can be seen as replicating"

33. Arnauld Pierre, "'Broken Is the High Column': On *Lever* and a Few Other Gravitational Columns in the Art of the 1960s," trans. Charles Penwarden, in *Carl Andre: Sculpture as Place*, 299.
34. Ibid., 300, emphasis in orig.
35. Ibid., 307–9.
36. Ibid., 301–2.
37. Andre quoted in David Bourdon, "The Razed Sites of Carl Andre: A Sculptor Laid Low by the Brancusi Syndrome" (1966), rep. in Feldman et al., *About Carl Andre*, 24.
38. Vergne, 231; Raymond, 247.
39. Briony Fer, "Carl Andre and the Fall of Sculpture" (1996), rep. in Feldman et al., *About Carl Andre*, 298–309.
40. Andre quoted in Tomkins, 70.

but also at times as "implicating" "'those systems of mediation which have (over) determined our history: Money, the Phallus, and the Concept as privileged operators of meaning'"[41] (that last being a line I cribbed from Alice Jardine). "This is authority represented as authority does not usually like to represent itself," I ventured (in characterizing a work by Robert Morris); "authority as authoritarian."[42]

Although Pierre confronts "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power" as if it were my final word on the movement, issued just yesterday, it was penned a quarter century ago, at a time when extending a feminist critique into the realm of abstract art seemed just conceivable, right around the moment when two key players in the Minimalist ambit were publically enduring their days in court—namely Andre and Richard Serra (over *Tilted Arc*). Inevitably, the essay reads now in some ways as a period piece. When the obvious question gets posed, however—whether there is aggressivity to be found in Andre's art or whether the allegations of aggressivity attach instead strictly to the man—surely the closest anyone has come to making the former case remains my 1990 essay. It argued that the Minimalists "effectually perpetrated violence through their work— violence against the conventions of art and against the viewer."[43] In addressing the masculinist hyperbole deployed by the Minimalist artists, my essay succumbed to some hyperbole of its own. But it has its subtleties, too, and it insisted on a distinction between artworks that could perpetrate actual violence, as Serra's earlier work at times did, versus art whose violence resides on another level, such as Andre's, which I described as effecting a form of "psychological aggression."[44] As for the more pointed issue of violence expressly against women, my essay addressed it in general terms or by indirection: if Minimalist art can be said to place viewers in the position of victim, then that position will resonate differently for those in different subject positions, I noted. With respect to Andre, however, others have pointed to some sadistic phrases in his writing, including an early poem that begins:

> The ways of love were
> sometime my revenge when
> I was wronged by something
> done or said & she stood
> naked by the window waiting
> to be struck perhaps where
> her white breasts were
> red. . . .[45]

Mindful of the fact that Mendieta was nearly nude when she fell from Andre's apartment, Robert Katz chose *Naked by the Window* as the title for his book on her death and Andre's subsequent trial.

It bears adding at this juncture that nothing that I or anyone else has ever said about Andre's work makes it sound nearly as threatening as it did in the description of his peer, the artist Eva Hesse, who observed of his metal planes that they were "the concentration camp for me. [T]hey were those showers that they put on the gas," even as she professed her sense of closeness to this work, which she said "does something to my insides."[46] At a panel discussion occasioned by a 2006 Jewish Museum show of Hesse's work, Andre announced that he wished specifically to respond to this remark. He proceeded to say that he understood Hesse's feeling because he had had a comparable sensation himself, namely when

41. Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts* 64, no. 5 (January 1990): 51.
42. Ibid., 57.
43. Ibid., 54.
44. Ibid., 57.
45. Carl Andre, "undated: early 1958," quoted in Vincent Katz, "Carl Andre's Lyric Heart," in *Carl Andre: Sculpture as Place*, 266.
46. Hesse quoted in Cindy Nemser, *Art Talk: Conversations with Twelve Women Artists* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 223.

following pages:
**Carl Andre, *144 Magnesium Square*, New York, 1969 (foreground),** 144-unit square, ea. ⅜ x 12 1/16 x 12 1/16 in. (1 x 30.6 x 30.6 cm), overall ⅜ x 12 ft. 1/16 in. x 12 ft. 1/16 in. (1 x 365.9 x 365.9 cm), installation view, Dia:Beacon, Riggio Galleries, Beacon, NY, 2014. Collection Tate (artwork © Carl Andre/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY; photograph by Bill Jacobson Studio, New York, provided by Dia:Beacon)

he worked at the outset of his career in Frank Stella's studio, right when Stella was formulating those famously liminal black paintings, which represent to some the true starting point for Minimalism. Andre had a hand in titling these paintings, proposing, for one, "Ponell Johnson," the name of an unsuccessful artist who murdered two women—a news item that reportedly fascinated both men at the time. Several of the eventual titles, such as for the 1958 *Arbeit Macht Frei*, referenced instead Nazi Germany, which had formed a distant backdrop to Stella's and Andre's Massachusetts childhoods within families of Christian descent. By comparing his experience of Stella's paintings with Hesse's experience of his sculpture, Andre was in a way equating his long-ago psychic struggles in a friend's studio to the mindset of a woman whose life was derailed by the Holocaust—in which she lost her entire extended family (not her nuclear family) to the gas chambers or the like—and who was, at the time she evoked this image of the camps, poised to die at roughly the same mid-thirties age as Mendieta later did, though of natural causes. Any sense of disproportion in that analogy seemed to be lost on Andre.[47]

As for the fascist titles of Stella's paintings, Andre was evidently not instrumental in choosing them. As a young artist especially, though, he shared with his friend Frampton a profound admiration for Ezra Pound—who of course had acted as a Fascist mouthpiece in Italy—without joining Frampton in forming the cult around the aged poet confined at a Washington DC mental hospital. I interject here the case of Pound, both because his name tends to arise when the question is broached whether an artist's more despicable impulses have meaningfully infiltrated his art, and because his name appears repeatedly in Dia's catalogue (with ten entries in the index), nominally just on account of its intensive attention to Andre's poetry. In Pound's case, convincing arguments have been made that his anti-Semitism permeated his work in ways both obvious and subtle. In my view no parallel argument can reasonably be made that an unhinged misogyny somehow underpins Andre's practice. Yet the gnawing suspicion that Andre got away with murder, whether literally so or in the vernacular sense of that phrase—a suspicion troubling not only a feminist fringe, remember, but also the male judge who presided over his trial—continues variously to affect how the artist is seen and treated: so I am proposing here. And to those who value Mendieta, that scenario must be, however marginally, better than all-out forgetting.

Returning to "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power": I happened to be interested in 1990 not only in Minimalist aggression toward the viewer, but also in the viewers' sometime aggression toward the work—which (as I have since learned) happens to be a leading target of vandals. And one of the things that specially impressed me about Dia's presentation of Andre's work is how defended he seemed to be there. I did not get to see Andre's re-creation of his signal outdoor work *Joint* on my initial visit, for instance, because I did not know that viewing it required an advance appointment—something no first-time visitor would know, presumably, which helps limit the audience for that isolated work to devotees intent on a return visit.[48] Practiced museum-goer though I am, I also got warned enough by guards in the galleries that I took to simply consulting them preemptively. I was warned about getting too close to the scatter work, for instance, and about walking on any of the metal planes, which appear utterly pristine. Andre got protected even from himself at Dia, in short, since he could not provide an experience that writers on his work have universally considered central to it—

47. Andre's verbatim response was as follows: "I do understand what she meant because I had had a concentration [sic] experience too with my work in 1958 and '59 when I met Frank Stella in New York and especially when Frank Stella started to do his black stripe paintings and I thought he was wacko when he was doing the black stripe paintings—starting them—and I thought I should get in touch with his parents in Massachusetts and maybe get him some help. But gradually as I watched Frank paint these paintings—and it hurts, it literally hurts, um. I think to make strong art you've got to do two extremely painful things. You have to destroy part of yourself because part of yourself is in your way. And you—you have to do an act of self-mutilation. But you also have to give birth to something. And the labor pains are doing it. So it's a double burden of pain. And, uh, I mean it happened to me. It happened to Eva. I think it happens to all artists who even attempt to make work out of the ordinary." The moderator, James Meyer, replied, after a pause: "But is that what she's saying Carl . . . ?," which prompted Andre to reiterate some of his remarks concerning the "ordeal" he and Hesse had putatively shared. My thanks to Nelly Silagy Benedek, director of education at the Jewish Museum, New York City, for providing me with a recording of the program in question, held on May 18, 2006.

48. At the November 2014 symposium, Manuel Ciraqui, a Dia curatorial associate, explained that because *Joint* was installed in the vicinity of a public works project (where pipes run through a ditch), the museum was obliged to oversee any visitors to the site, and that Dia could not afford to spare a guard to monitor the work continuously. But that explanation begged the question why the museum would invite Andre to install a work in such a location.

and one that counts among the most radical gestures of his cohort—namely that of treading on his metal planes. Reviewers of the Dia show have noted this prohibition (which is suspended only for the outsize *46 Roaring Forties*) with regret, while deducing that it must originate with the works' lenders. Logical an explanation as that is, I find that I am allowed to walk on the planes in public collections more often than not, so I wondered whether some alternative loans may have been available.[49] Regardless, the prohibition at Dia seems in keeping with an effort to position Andre as a figure who warrants protecting, including from his own most extreme impulses.

Dia seems to act to protect Andre also, in a way, by its omission or deferring of text and discourse. There are practically no wall labels in the show, for instance, and I, at least, had to hunt around for the handout that details what work lies where (a booklet that, incidentally, thanks the viewer for "respecting these delicate historical works"). I appreciate that labels can be a mixed blessing, at times distracting viewers from artworks. But I expect that what is entailed here is in part a precept long considered endemic in Minimalism—that of prizing an ideal of direct experience—and in part Andre's own emphasis on the preeminence of matter to his art. "Matter matters," is his longtime motto, and one that subtends an aversion to mediation: "I hate information; I want experience," he has insisted; experience is "the essence of my work."[50] Dia's handout guides visitors by citing Andre's directive that "Things have qualities. Perceive the qualities." And that lesson is underscored by numerous of the catalogue essays. Anne Rorimer and Brooke Holmes, for instance, both cite Andre's wish to "submit to the properties of my materials,"[51] while Rorimer notes, too, his admission of his "extremely modest and ever-declining physical strength" as an explanation for the typically moderate scale of his work, which serves besides to reinforce the conceit of a weak and submissive Andre.[52]

Also in a way deprivileging or deferring discourse is the unusual design of the show's catalogue, where, after a page that reads simply "Carl Andre," two hundred and twenty-two successive full pages of photographs lead off the publication, followed by a title page, a table of contents, and only about half as many (one hundred twelve) pages of brief illustrated essays, plus the back matter. A bias "against interpretation," in Susan Sontag's famous phrase, might even be discerned, not in the fact of the symposium convened by Dia, of course, but in its structure. All four invited speakers were initially meant to present on one day, in a more typical format allowing all involved to engage at once with one another; but we were finally divided over two days—divided, moreover, by gender, with the artist to be present only for the men's contributions—so as, I was told, to allow everyone more time to experience the art.[53] Such thinking may suit Andre partisans, and it aligns with the distinctive priorities of Dia's founders, I realize. But I wonder whether institutional anxiety over the prospect of a concentrated conversation regarding Andre's case could help explain the eventual, more dispersed arrangement.

Finally, and just as one would expect, Dia assembled an impressive exhibition, which largely honors Andre's concept of his vision. The artist eventually joined in the endeavor, moreover, aiding especially in the installation, which is compelling by any estimation. But in view of all the subtle and unsubtle efforts that Dia arguably made to protect Andre, I admit that I remain baffled by one glaring lapse, namely its failure to defend him from me. The occasion of an

49. In conversation at the symposium, Raymond confirmed that, while a majority of lenders did permit visitors to walk on the planes, a minority did not, occasioning a dilemma for the museum as to how to signal which works were inaccessible, ideally without having to post signage. A blanket prohibition was deemed the most efficacious response, with the exception made only for the *46 Roaring Forties* work owned by Andre. That decision placed a burden on museum guards to inform and direct visitors—numerous of whom would likely have known that the metal plane works are meant to be accessible. The same guards could presumably instead have deflected visitors from, say, a distinct grouping of inaccessible works; or those loans could even have been declined in view of the ample representation of metal plane works in the Dia show.

50. Andre, "Excerpt from 'Art and Reproduction'" (1975), in *Carl Andre, Cuts: Texts 1959–2004*, ed. James Meyer (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 38.

51. Andre quoted in Brooke Holmes, "Carl Andre's Atomism," in *Carl Andre: Sculpture as Place*, 276, and also in Anne Rorimer, "Ground Rules," 281.

52. Andre quoted in Rorimer, 281.

53. Lynda Morris and I spoke at Dia:Beacon on Saturday, November 15, 2014. Mark Godfrey and James Meyer spoke the following day. To my knowledge, Godfrey and Meyer did not attend the Saturday proceedings, nor did I attend the Sunday proceedings (nor was I asked whether I was available to attend); it follows that at no point did all the symposium speakers convene, officially or otherwise, as a foursome.

artist's full-career retrospective does not seem the ideal moment to conduct a feminist reckoning, and I debated whether to accept the invitation to speak. But the awful fact that Mendieta never got to see through her profoundly promising career and so to enjoy a comparable occasion remains ever salient to me, as it does to so many others. And when I recalled Robert Katz's description of the nearly impenetrable "wall of silence" that he found around Andre in the art world when he researched his book—he describes, for instance, the gallerist Paula Cooper, Andre, and others vowing in the aftermath of the trial that, in Katz's words, "no one among the participants would ever speak of the case again"[54]—it appeared that silence was the less honorable of the available options.

To enunciate feminist speech can seem a futile gesture, I admit. But lately the problems in the United States of persistent violence against women—in the military, on college campuses, in the NFL, and elsewhere—have become front-page news, a continuous topic of conversation even at the uppermost levels of policy making. The conversations and the legal implications that ensue often tend to be treacherous, of course. With rape, we return repeatedly to the "he said/she said" dilemma, which can prove just as tricky, legally speaking, as the "he said/she's dead" scenario represented by Andre's case, and alcohol often continues to complicate matters. No less tricky, and equally or more crucial than the ongoing legal and procedural conversations, however, are the potential conversations about our cultural imaginary and what might constitute salutary interventions in its make-up. Andre occasionally used profoundly misogynist speech, as when he wrote in 1978, for instance, that "Wood is the mother of matter. Like all women hacked and ravaged by men, she renews herself by giving, gives herself by renewing."[55] In his 2011 book, Rider notes mildly that the artist had absorbed commonplace Western assumptions concerning the feminine and passive identity of matter versus the masculine and active identity of form.[56] True enough. But Andre's demented notion that women thrive on being brutalized is likewise a cultural commonplace, and one that infects not only a masculine imaginary—though that is of course where such perverse notions are largely directed (nowadays through video games, say, which some feminists have lately taken on, and for which at least one has faced death threats). Given that the cultural imaginary is familiar ground for artists, Andre—that self-styled feminist fellow traveler—could have elected to deconstruct such insidious assumptions instead.

A recent global review of violence against women found that 30 percent report being physically or sexually assaulted by a partner—in a type of survey that is almost invariably said to involve massive underreporting. Margaret Chan, the head of the World Health Organization, calls it "a global health problem of epidemic proportions."[57] Fully 40 percent of women killed worldwide were slain by their partners. We are not just talking about the Taliban with such numbers, in short; we are also talking about ourselves. How do we explain such findings? How do we address them? Such are the questions that—I am starting to be encouraged—upcoming generations may be concerned to pursue.

54. Robert Katz, 337, 381.
55. Andre, "Wood," in *Carl Andre Wood*, exh. cat. (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 1978), rep. in *Carl Andre: Cuts*, 144.
56. See Rider, 28.
57. See Associated Press article, "One-Third of Women Assaulted by a Partner, Global Report Says," *New York Times*, June 21, 2013. The studies were conducted between 1983 and 2010.

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