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PROCESS AND REALITY IN RICHARD SERRA’S EARLY WORK

In contrasting Richard Serra’s early process work from the late 1960s with the large site-specific work he begun around 1970 with the making of *Shift*, Rosalind Krauss drew a distinction between actions associated with labour and acts of perception. The earlier process work consisted of an action on a particular material, the materiality of which was defined in terms of its “passivity.” This characterization was reinforced through a reference to a photograph by Gianfranco Gorgoni of Serra in the act of throwing molten lead during the making of *Splashing with Four Molds, To Eva Hesse*, from 1969, which for Krauss conveyed the impersonality of repetitive industrial work, especially since the work necessitated wearing a mask. The labour involved consisted in “a kind of work in which a task is given in relation to a set of materials, in which operations are fixed by matter…” In developing this distinction, Krauss compared the list of actions contained in Serra’s early *Verb List*, such as “to roll, to crease…,” etc., with the series of verbs contained in a later statement by Serra relating to the experience of *Shift*. This later set of verbs—“elevating, lowering, extending, foreshortening…,” etc.—were for Krauss “reflexive—modifying the subject in the process of modifying the object.” The shift in emphasis, associated with *Shift*, from labour to experience, was thus defined in terms of an overcoming of a separation between subject and object. The later work, from *Shift* onwards, depended on an embodied perception on the part of a self whose experience provided “the ground of continuity” that held the work together. The model for this experience was derived from Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*, which was invoked by Krauss throughout her text. For Krauss, the body, following Merleau-Ponty, functioned as the “preobjective ground of all experience of the relatedness of objects,” and so of the different elements of a work such as *Shift*. The “relatedness of objects,” which depended on what Merleau-Ponty referred to as their “inner horizon,” as if objects themselves had points of view, was thus determined by the prior horizon of the body. In this distinction between labour and experience, labour was defined as the absence of experience, since the subject of labour was seen as separated from its object.

A more recent essay by Benjamin Buchloh interpreted the work in similar terms, except that for him the body, the location of “subjective experience,” again construed in terms of labour, is present in Serra’s early process work only as the starting-point of its own fragmentation and reification in the capitalist society of the spectacle. On Serra’s film pieces from the same period, such as *Hands Scraping*, Buchloh writes that

…the processes recorded in these films closely follow the universal conditions of the invisible and alienated industrial laborer: unskilled, almost victimized, at the receiving end of mechanical processes operating outside of his own control, knuckled under by aleatory conditions, with limited access to the materials of production, and subject to chance, unable to control the operations necessary to bring about productive transformation.

Serra’s process pieces reveal such conditions of industrial labour through what Buchloh referred to as a “phenomenological tactility” that is at the same time subjected to its own negation. Such works suffer the condition of industrial work yet retain a subjective dimension. Where Krauss’s identification of the early work with labour depended on a separation from experience, Buchloh’s interpretation depends on the experience of the separation.

From the phenomenological standpoints adopted by the authors, with an Adornian inflection in the case of Buchloh, these are legitimate critical interpretations. However, when one actually reads the texts associated with Serra’s early process work, one cannot help but begin somewhere else. It is not that labour is the wrong register. In fact, at the level of ideology and identification, an artistic ‘workerism’ pervades the scene during the late 1960s. Labour certainly provided a model for art, or at least the grounds of a metaphor. It is rather that the texts that accompany the appearance of Serra’s early work invoke a conception of process whose terms may be incompatible with the way that labour is defined in the later intepretations.

There are two textual references in the contemporary discourse that destabilize the reliance of the later interpretations on a relationship between labour and the experiencing subject. In the first major article on his work by the critic Robert Pincus-Witten, ‘Richard Serra: Slow Information,’ published in *Artforum* in late 1969, it is Serra himself who provides some of the initial terms that may be used to interpret his early work. In this article, a distinction was drawn between the phenomenality of a particular work, its “purely visual aspects” as Pincus-Witten put it, and the temporal process of its production. This process was both anterior to the work, in the sequence of actions by the artist that comprised its making, and subsequent to it, in the “recreat[ion] [of] the acts leading to the piece” on the part of the viewer. The work itself thus constituted only a moment within a wider processual condition that flowed through it, encompassing the actions of both artist and viewer. In Pincus-Witten’s article, Serra explained this relationship between the work and its process with reference to the English philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, and in particular to a phrase that Serra quoted from Whitehead’s 1938 book *Modes of Thought*: “process and existence pre-suppose each other.” Around the same time, Serra drew on the same text to preface a section in his earliest statement, ‘Play it Again, Sam,’ first published in *Arts Magazine* in early 1970. This section, which was also concerned with the temporal process of production as informing the experience of the work, used as its epigraph another statement from Whitehead: “We experience more than we can analyse.” These two textual references have been entirely ignored in the subsequent critical discourse on Serra’s work. The reason for this is perhaps the highly counterintuitive definition of experience that characterizes Whitehead’s philosophy.

In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead’s main statement of his philosophy (first published in 1929), experience defines the relationships between all entities that comprise the universe. Experience in this sense is not located in consciousness or self, except to the extent that these categories depend on the prior condition of experience. For Whitehead, the world existed in a state of ceaseless processual becoming, in which things only existed as more or less enduring patterns of togetherness. It consisted in a “plurality of actual entities” which were “the final real things of which the world is made up.” But since this world was defined as process, the mode of existence of any actual entity was determined by how it came into existence rather than what it appeared to be. These entities were not material particularities or things in themselves, but rather emerged according to acts of experience—they consisted in “drops of experience,” as Whitehead put it. Such acts required a subject, but this was not a subject that existed prior to the act of experience but rather one that was constituted with it. Whatever unity this subject had was produced in each act of experience, and was unrepeatable, so that “no subject experiences twice.”

The meaning of the term ‘experience’ in Whitehead’s philosophy thus cannot easily be reconciled with its understanding in phenomenological terms. Experience was defined in terms of the process of the world at its most atomistic level, and so it cannot be located in embodied perception, or even sense-perception, but rather provided the conditions for these forms of relationship. According to Whitehead, experience at its most fundamental level was closer to “sense-reception,” consisting in relationships of ‘feeling’ (or what he called “prehensions”) between actual entities and between these entities and their worlds. There are two aspects of Whitehead’s thought foregrounded here: that experience defines existence as process, and that experience in this sense is prior to terms that would usually be presupposed in its definition, such as the subject. These two aspects can provisionally stand as a worldview that Serra himself invoked in relation to his early work.

When Process Art first appeared as a distinct movement in the late 1960s, one of the recurrent preoccupations of the discourse was its relationship to the pictorial image. The movement owes its initial theorization to an essay by Robert Morris titled ‘Anti Form,’ published in *Artforum* in April 1968. The ideas in this text subsequently provided the theme of the influential exhibition Morris organized in New York in December entitled ‘9 at Leo Castelli,’ which included works by Serra, William Bollinger, Eva Hesse, Bruce Nauman, and others. In ‘Anti Form,’ the central problem for Morris was how to reconcile process and form without presupposing some metaphysical notion of form that existed prior to process, a problem that for him had been most successfully resolved in paintings by Jackson Pollock and Morris Louis. “Their ‘optical’ forms,” Morris wrote, “resulted from dealing with the properties of fluidity and the conditions of a more or less absorptive ground. The forms and the order of their work were not *a priori* to the means.” In ‘Anti Form,’ Morris defined a similar approach to materials in sculpture in which form was not predetermined, where “random piling, loose stacking, hanging, give passing form to the material.”

This sense of a reversal of process and form was developed further in a subsequent text by Morris, ‘Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects,’ published in *Artforum* in early 1969. According to Morris, the Minimal art object, despite its attempted negation of pictorial illusion, was still subject to a mode of perception defined by the image. “Objects provided the imagistic ground out of which ’60s art was materialized. … Art of the ’60s was an art of depicting images. But depiction as a mode seems primitive because it involves implicitly asserting forms as being prior to substances.” The condition resulting from this emphasis on process was imagined, according to a term derived from the psychologist Anton Ehrenzweig, as a “dedifferentiated” visual field in which no figure stood out against a ground. The distribution of materials over the floor of the gallery, metaphors for what Morris described as the “heterogeneous, randomized distributions that characterize figureless sections of the world,” thus corresponded to the figureless materiality of the ‘ground.’ This condition can be seen, for example, in Morris’s own untitled work from 1968 in which he spread an amount of threadwaste and other materials on the floor of the Castelli gallery, or in the works by Bollinger, Serra, Barry Le Va and Robert Smithson that were used to illustrate the article. Although Morris suggested that this art began and worked with the processual condition of materials, he tended to subordinate the definition of this condition to the mode of perception it entailed. As he acknowledged in ‘Notes on Sculpture, Part 4,’ the dispersed arrangements of materials in recent process works continued to constitute a “general sort of image,” one that was, moreover, suggestive of the imagery of Pollock’s paintings. As one might expect from the author of the first ‘Notes on Sculpture,’ process, or rather its result, was defined in essentially phenomenal terms.

In his first published statement, ‘Play it Again, Sam,’ Serra directly responded to Morris’s ‘Notes on Sculpture, part 4,’ partly in order to distinguish his own understanding of process:

A recent problem with the lateral spread of materials, elements on the floor in the visual field, is the inability of this landscape mode to avoid arrangement *qua* figure ground: the pictorial convention. The rationale for this investigation is a plea for perceptual wholeness or a willingness to allow the definition of the place to control the priority of relationships.

[…]

One way of coming to terms with this problem is to reveal the fact of the operative rationale that allows the work to find its place. Lawrence Weiner and Carl Andre point out the polarities: Andre’s place, Weiner’s residue.

In this text, the “pictorial convention” provided the negative terms by which process was defined in phenomenal terms (as in the phrase “perceptual wholeness”). In contrast, the “operative rationale” of the work, the process or procedure that determined the forming of the materials, produced a sense of temporality that would necessarily be absent in the spatial character of the figure/ground relationship. Serra thus displaced the question of process from the phenomenality of its results to the temporality of the action.

Several of Serra’s works during the period from 1967 to 1969 were produced according to a relationship between a material and a mould, where the latter consisted in a separate material element that gave shape to a material which by contrast was determined according to this shaping. This relationship can be seen in works produced in 1967 and 1968 that used sheets of cast latex rubber, the corrugated or otherwise articulated surface of which registered the surfaces of the doors or roofing material that served as their moulds. In a photograph used to illustrate Howard Junker’s article ‘The New Art: It’s Way, Way Out,’ published in *Newsweek* in the summer of 1968, Serra is shown in his studio standing looking across one of these works, an *Untitled* piece from 1968. Serra was quoted in the article as saying: “You just can’t control physical properties with the imagination… It is symptomatic of the gestures of materials to take certain forms. And I want to show the results of actions taken—folding, rolling, cutting, or bending—not the illusion of those actions.” The phrase “gestures of materials” implies the capacity of materials to shape themselves according to their own properties, which is contrasted with the capability of the imagination to shape them. “Actions taken,” on the other hand, suggests the actions to which the materials were subjected, but which were similarly seen as not involving the imagination (they were not “illusions”). In the case of the *Untitled* rubber piece, and of several other related cast rubber works, the corrugated form was entirely dependent on the material that was moulded (the rubber) and the material that, as it were, performed the moulding (the corrugated metal). Although the mould itself was not part of the piece, it was necessarily a prior and constitutive element of it (as was Serra himself). A material that is moulded always requires an anterior term, the form that shapes it.

In the sequence of splashed lead pieces, from *Splashing* (1968) onwards, the shaping element became increasingly foregrounded in the work. In the case of *Splashing*, shown as part of ‘9 at Leo Castelli,’ it was initially seen in the terms of Morris’s ‘Anti Form’ article. As Philip Leider put it in his review of the exhibition, “…the material… has assumed no form other than the one entirely natural to its own fluid, formless properties.” But the dependence of the work on the floor and wall was also acknowledged. Whereas *Splashing* consisted in the “residue” of an action that had been completed, the later elaboration of the work installed in the 1969 exhibition ‘Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials’ at the Whitney Museum in New York, further established the nature of this action through repetition. In this later work, *Casting*, Serra removed a series of the residues of the process, laying the lengths of solidified lead in sequence away from the gallery wall in order to foreground the temporal nature of the action. As Robert Pincus-Witten pointed out in his 1969 article on Serra, the succession of actions that determined this work introduced another form of temporality into a work already defined by the temporal change of state from molten to solidified lead. But the sequence of removals also revealed a succession of acts of moulding according to the shape contained in the meeting of the wall and floor.

Towards the end of 1969, in the work that may be seen as the culmination of this series, *Splashing with Four Molds*, Serra included the lead sheets that functioned as the moulds in the piece. The sheets shaped the material in four different ways, according to whether the sheet was left flat or folded into 45 degree or 90 degree angles (the fourth mould consisting of two 90 degree angled sheets used together). These moulds were used over a number of weeks to produce *in situ* a set of variations of sequences of casts, a process documented in a series of black and white photographs by Gianfranco Gorgoni published in Gregoire Müller’s *The New Avant-Garde: Issues for the Art of the Seventies* (1972). In two of these photographs, taken from near the wall of the Castelli warehouse looking across the space, Serra is shown in the act of throwing molten lead from a ladle—in the first towards a lead sheet mould beyond the frame of the photograph, and in the other into a right-angled mould of about eighteen inches in height. (The first photograph was the one that Krauss had referred to in her characterization of Serra’s work in terms of industrial labour, and it was also used for the cover of the book.) It appears from the photographs that the solidified lead in the moulds was built up over several similar actions. The decision to incorporate the mould into *Splashing with Four Molds* may be seen as a literal acknowledgement of a principle informing Serra’s process pieces more generally, namely the necessarily temporal relationship between a mould and the material moulded. However, when this temporal relationship is put into these terms, it becomes difficult to say what determines what, since in this work the mould had the same materiality as the material it shaped whilst at the same time it is presented as an integral part of the work as a whole, and so appears as determined by the form of the work as a whole.

This difficulty in identifying what was shaped by what can seen as introducing undecidability into a long-standing philosophical figure of thought—hylomorphism. The hylomorphic schema assumes that form and matter are separable terms, and that matter is shaped by form. Form is the active principle that imposes shape on passive matter, which is indifferent or formless. An example of this separation can be read in Krauss’s interpretation of Serra’s process work as a metaphor for labour, where the materials that were subjected to actions such as “to roll, to crease…”, etc., were defined in terms of their “passivity.”

Whitehead’s critique of the constitutive subject that shapes the material of experience in his generalizing of experience to encompass all entities can be seen as one kind of critique of hylomorphism. But the question of the relationship between form and material in Serra’s early process pieces can be made more concrete by using some of the conceptual distinctions contained in Gilbert Simondon’s work, the main part of which was first published in 1964. Simondon’s philosophy is less cosmological in scope than Whitehead’s, but there are nevertheless clear affinities in their thought, which were first suggested in the 1960s by Deleuze. The same figure of thought can be seen at work in both philosophers, which consists in a shift in emphasis to process as a relation that produces the terms it relates—subject and object, form and material—instead of presupposing the prior existence of these terms.

The importance of Simondon’s work lies in its critique of an implicit assumption concerning individuation where this process was only considered from the point of view of the already formed individual, as if this individual were anterior to its own becoming in the sense of providing its forming principle. (This was an error effectively consisting in a “*reversed* ontogenesis,” as Simondon put it.) Any philosophical account of how individual entities come into existence that depended on a term that was itself an individual entity, whether atom or substance, could therefore not explain existence. Simondon reversed the privileging of the already formed individual by positing what he termed the “preindividual,” a prior reality consisting in potentiality, a state of being that, if it was not to be itself an individual, had to be defined as more than, or different from, itself. According to Simondon, the process by which individual entities came into existence was one of resolving the disparity, or asymmetry, inherent in this prior reality. One of the ways in which he reflected on the process of individuation was through a critique of philosophical explanations, from Aristotle to Kant, that depended on a relationship between form and matter. The problem with the form/matter distinction for Simondon was that it worked backwards from a particular idea of the already constituted entity to divide it into a matter and a form, terms which were held to exist as individuated before the process that brought them together. Simondon argued instead that the process itself should be seen as prior to any of the terms that it related and that any actually existing entity consisted only of a moment in this process.

An initial example that Simondon employed to illustrate the problem with considering form and matter as terms existing separately and prior to their relation was that of the shaping of a clay brick in a mould, a classical hylomorphic motif. As he pointed out, the relation between the mould as form and clay as matter was first prepared by other form/matter relations in both the mould and the clay, since each had to be made or altered from its natural state. The coming together of the mould and the clay, the form and the matter of the brick, was really the coming together of a series of prior actions, which were also a series of prior form/matter relations. The mould had to be constructed out of a material in a way that allowed for the release of the material being moulded and the clay itself had to be refined, that is, subjected to a process of interior shaping to provide it with the necessary consistency to be moulded. The form of the brick thus consisted only of a moment within a series of processes, actual and potential, that met within it. In Simondon’s critique, the terms form and matter effectively lose their separateness and become more or less interchangeable, so that there is no form that is not already materialized and no matter that does not already contain form. According to Deleuze and Guattari, in their later commentary on Simondon, matter should therefore not be defined in terms of a formless and passive homogeneity, anterior to and awaiting form, but in terms of an active heterogeneity, already containing “implicit forms” and consisting in events and affects, where the relationship between an action and a material meant following the materiality of the latter—in their words “connecting operations to a materiality, instead of imposing a form upon a matter.”

In Serra’s *Untitled* rubber cast piece, the corrugated roofing material that served as its mould may be seen to have imposed its form on the rubber. However, this prior material was itself formed according a process, which in Simondon’s terms necessarily involved a series of prior form/matter relations that defined its processual condition. More specifically, a corrugated form would be defined by Simondon as a *modulated* as opposed to a moulded form, since it was produced as a variation with respect to an already formed sheet metal. The modulated form was the more general case for Simondon, since it incorporated the sense of forming as a continuous material process. Form and material were always in a temporal state of modulation that continually produced each term of the relation. In modulation, “matter and form are made present as forces.” In the case of the clay moulded to form a brick, the clay is defined in terms of the immanent self-forming action of the material itself, with the mould able to act as a limit to this action through its own material properties. Any individuated entity, such as a brick, thus consisted in a coming together of material and form as forces, as a “capture of form,” or as Simondon also called it, an “operation.”

This shift, from moulding to modulation, from the distinction between form and matter to their interchangeability within any process of production, can serve as a general framework with which to interpret Serra’s early process work. It resonates with Serra’s own references to Whitehead, and is opposed to a conception of labour in which passive material is subject to active form. The sense of circularity in the relation between form and material also extended to the perception, or rather the reading, of Serra’s work, a topic that recurs in its contemporary reception. The definition of this reading tended to be opposed to the phenomenality of the work as it initially presented itself. For example, writing on *Splashing with Four Molds*, Philip Leider stated that “[o]ne “understands” the piece when one knows how to “go on,” that is, when the process by which its current state was arrived at becomes clear.” Similar remarks can be read in Pincus-Witten’s 1969 article on Serra, which discussed the way that *Casting*, in its repetition of a series of lead casts pulled away from the wall, allowed for the “sequential visual reconstructions of its making,” a reading process entailed by the work that Serra himself, quoted in the article, called “slow information.”

The work that best exemplifies the modulation of the making of the work with its reading is *Cutting Device: Base Plate Measure*, exhibited in Serra’s solo exhibition at the Castelli warehouse in late 1969. This work initially appeared to consist in a more or less random dispersal of materials similar in appearance to Morris’s untitled work using threadwaste (shown earlier) or to some of Barry Le Va’s ‘distribution’ pieces. However, as Leider wrote in his *Artforum* review of the exhibition, although the materials appeared dispersed they were in fact brought together according to the action to which they were all subjected, namely cutting or sawing. “The work is thus a process piece in a very elegant sense, for it delivers to us in an admirably straightforward way not only the process of its making, but also the information that the same process is also the solution to the problem dealt with in the work, *i.e*., the sawing plainly both *makes* the piece and is also that which unifies the various materials in the work.” There is a sense of circularity of cause and effect in this interpretation in which the form of the work, the arrangement of its materials, is also the form of the process that caused this arrangement.

*Cutting Device* consisted of a length of steel plate laid on the floor the width of which functioned as the measurement for the cutting of several other materials, including steel, wood, stone and rolled-up lead. Serra (helped by Philip Glass) laid the materials across the steel plate and cut them with a circular saw, producing two cuts in each material corresponding to the edge of the steel plate so that the part of the material that had the same width as the latter remained in place, whilst the other parts were pushed to one side in a more or less random way. The materials on the steel plate could therefore be seen as shaped according to a consistent width, so that this “base plate” effectively functioned as a mould within the work, whereas the ‘discarded’ parts of the materials appeared as unshaped, mere by-products of the operation, but which were nevertheless elements of the unity of the work. The action of sawing thus both introduced separations within the material elements and brought these elements together, producing a pattern of relations between the materials that depended on their determination by the process that related them.

The principle that Leider identified in *Cutting Device*, that the process both made and unified the work (a formulation probably arrived at through conversations with Serra), raised the question of what kind of unity was produced, since it is difficult to see the work as a formal unity in any conventional artistic sense. It did not depend on composition, nor did its unity depend, in this work, on the consistency of the material. For Serra, as he stated in ‘Play It Again, Sam,’ the process was oriented to the relations between elements rather than the formal unity of the work: “There is no general rule as to which formal properties suffice to determine the structure of a relation. I have chosen certain conditions (rules that I have made up) that reveal themselves in the logic of the procedure.”

The unity of the work thus depended on process, but it also depended on the process of reading the process, on the forming actions of the viewer. The temporal nature of this reading was pursued in its most theoretically suggestive way in the contemporary discourse by the artist Dan Graham, particularly in his essay ‘Subject Matter,’ self-published in 1969 in his book *End Moments*. In this text, Graham sought to distinguish the positioning of the viewer as an object, characteristic of Minimal Art, from later post-Minimal work by artists such as Bruce Nauman and Serra. This later work instead saw the viewer as a subject continuous, in terms of its mode of existence, with the action of the artist and the process of shaping or placing the materials of the work. Graham saw these elements—artist, work, viewer—as in a continual process of change that he called “in-formation” (with a hyphen). In the case of Nauman’s early latex rubber pieces from 1965-66, the materiality of the work was inseparable from the prior and continuing forces acting upon it, which were part of what Graham referred to as a “material environment continuum” that also encompassed the viewer’s reading of this materiality. There was thus, for Graham, a necessary correlation between the action of the artist in shaping the materials and the action of the viewer in reading this action. The meaning of the word “in-formation” was thus much closer to a temporal sense of forming, as a process taking place “*in fact*” as opposed to the conventional sense of information as the transmission of facts.

In discussing Serra’s process pieces, Graham interpreted them in similar terms, so that the action that produced the work *To Lift*, from 1968, in which Serra lifted one edge of a large sheet of thick rubber to produce a self-supporting form, was read by the viewer at the same time as their present encounter with the work, which were together seen as part of the same process. Referring to this work, Graham wrote: “A specific activity performed upon a specific material is available to the viewer as residue of an in-formation time (the stage of the process described in applying the verb action to the material). The viewer’s time-field is as much part of the process (reading) as is the artist’s former relation to the same material and the material’s process in the former time.” Thus, for Graham it was not that works of art consist of material that is formed, but rather that they consist in a material and form in process, a process of “in-formation” that continues in the process of reading the work. It is implicit in this formulation that the process of reading involved can never reach any form of totalization, but must remain in a state of continual change. Although there is no direct influence, there are certainly affinities between Graham’s use of the term “in-formation” and Simondon’s emphasis on “information” as one of the terms he employed to develop his theory of individuation as the process of taking on form.

Furthermore, Graham’s sense of ‘reading’ may be compared to Simondon’s extending of his account of individuation to encompass its own knowledge. For Simondon, knowing and thinking produced individual entities in the same way as that attributed to existence. The way that forms of knowing and thinking were seen to ‘follow’ their own materiality meant that the epistemological relation between subject and object took on the same kind of modulating interchangeability as that between form and material, since the process of individuation was essentially the same. Just as for Simondon the forming of a material depended on a prior series of form/matter relations, Serra’s work, according to Graham, depended on the relation of a past process of making to a present one of reading, with the residue of the former providing the material for the latter. When one considers a work such as *Cutting Device* according to a process that encompasses both its production and its reading, its material character becomes, as it were, dispersed in time, and its phenomenal appearance becomes only a moment within this extension of time. *Cutting Device* continually produces the sense of its own production. The phenomenality of the work is completely meaningless by itself, and is really only a kind of empty centre within a series of form/matter relations that continue both before and after it. Even in its photographic documentation, it continually produces the temporal circle of its production.

Dan Graham’s reading of Serra’s work is in many respects incompatible with the interpretations proposed by Krauss and Buchloh that see process in terms of labour, since it is not predicated on a separation of the process of production from experience, nor on a separation between form and material. Graham’s Simondon-like definition of “in-formation” is very similar to the concept of modulation as a continuous material forming. Serra clearly valued this reading, since he included Graham’s text in a selection of documents relating to his work published in the art magazine *Avalanche* in 1971. His own references to Whitehead can also be read as pointing in the same direction. The inversion that characterized Whitehead’s definition of experience, where the process of relation that defined experience preceded the terms that it had hitherto been thought to relate, such as subject and object, has definite affinities with Simondon’s critique of the relationship between form and matter, terms that were similarly assumed to exist prior to the entity that brought them together. In both cases there was a reversal, from process defined according to the terms of a relation to a process that produces the terms it relates.

As one might expect, Simondon’s critique of hylomorphism extended to conceptions of labour that define it as an action that “*imposes form on passive and indeterminate matter*.” One may be reminded here of certain formulations found in Marx, where labour sometimes appears to be defined in hylomorphic terms, as “form-giving fire,” to use the expression from the *Grundrisse*. The labour process in its simplest sense, as Marx outlined it in *Capital*, involved the forming of the material of nature. However, this action did not only go in one direction, since it was also determined by nature. The process of labour was, for Marx, “the necessary condition for effecting exchange of matter between man and Nature; it is the everlasting Nature-imposed condition of human existence.” At the same time, the labour process also had an intentional structure, in the sense that it was oriented to a use-value. As a result, Marx says, “The process disappears in the product… Labour has incorporated itself with its subject [i.e. Nature]: the former is materialised, the latter transformed.” The sense of the exchange of matter that defined the relationship to nature was therefore subordinated to the intentional structure of the labour process, which manifested itself in what Marx called the “close attention” of the worker. This intentional structure thus blinded the worker to the interiority of the process itself, the exchange of matter. In a similar formulation in *The Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, Simondon wrote that “the worker must keep his eyes fixed on the two terms to be joined together (such is the norm of work), not on the complex internal operation through which this joining is obtained.”

For Marx, of course, the definition of the labour process in its simplest sense constituted only the starting-point of its own negation in capitalism, in which labour comes to constitute the material for the process of capital, where capital is defined as form. From this arises the separation of the subject of labour from its object, and the definition of material in terms of its “passivity,” the general register according to which Krauss and Buchloh had identified Serra’s work with labour. Simondon, on the other hand, in his critique of hylomorphism, addressed the other side of this starting-point—the interiority of the process prior to the labour process, and indeed prior to its intentional structure. For Simondon, “The hylomorphic model corresponds to the knowledge of a man who remains outside the workshop and considers only what enters there and what is done there; to know the true hylomorphic relation, it is not enough even to penetrate inside the workshop and to work with the craftsman: one would need to penetrate inside the mould itself to follow the operation of the capture of form to the various levels of the dimensions of physical reality.” One could schematize the difference between these two views, as Muriel Combes has done, by saying that whereas for Marx labour is alienated due to exploitative relations of production, for Simondon there is alienation in the paradigm of labour itself, in its separation of form and material. One could construe this interpretation as a denial of the real conditions of labour in its social form, but it seems much closer to the more interiorized sense of process one finds in Serra’s work.