arts

MDPI

Article

In Defense of Interiority: Melvin Edwards' Early Work

Elise Archias

Department of Art History, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL 60607, USA; archias@uic.edu

Abstract: Melvin Edwards made his first abstract sculptures at the beginning of the contemporary period in the early 1960s, but the ways he held on formally to a modern notion of "interiority" in his *Lynch Fragments* series provide us with an underexamined aesthetic position in contemporary art. Edwards offered nuanced relationships between interior and exterior at a moment when concepts of "interiority" and "self" were under the most strain in contemporary art practice. If we consider this turn away from interiority—and toward surface, emptiness, system, and dematerialization—to be, in part, a symptom of the pressure exerted by the commodity form on art viewers' sensibilities after 1955, then the stakes of Edwards' choice not only to use found metal objects, but to compose them around an active rather than empty center, feel higher. By comparing the sculpture *Mojo for 1404* (1964) with the *Bichos* (1960–1965) of Lygia Clark, the distinctiveness of Edwards' project emerges even more strongly. Clark responded to the crisis of interiority with shiny metal sculptures whose interiors were constantly being flipped inside-out. By contrast, Edwards' art was motivated by the struggle for racial justice, and it persistently spoke its desire for grounded, scarred personhood in an aesthetic language that required viewers to recall their own interiority.

Keywords: sculpture; contemporary art; modernism; professional managerial class; neoliberalism; post-modernism; poststructuralism

Citation: Archias, Elise. 2023. In Defense of Interiority: Melvin Edwards' Early Work. *Arts* 12: 247. https://doi.org/10.3390/arts12060247

Academic Editors: Elyse Speaks and Susan Richmond

Received: 25 September 2023
Revised: 22 November 2023
Accepted: 27 November 2023
Published: 7 December 2023

1. Introduction

One of many reasons to attend to Melvin Edwards' sculpture from the 1960s lies in what it can tell us about the enormous shift in dominant ways of making and thinking about art that occurred not long after the beginning of his career. Edwards' work is recognizable as modernist and yet its nod to found objects and serial structure, as well as its cognizance of cultural difference and trauma, allow it to blend in fairly easily with contemporary art made since the 1960s.[1] Because of this combination, his work enables reflection not only on what changed in art, but on what the changes meant, and encourages questions as to whether Edwards' choices indicate additional views of what mattered in the late twentieth century than those that have been given the most attention by the art world and by art history.

Edwards was born in a working-class black neighborhood in Houston, Texas in 1937, and went to Los Angeles in 1955 for college at LA City College and then University of Southern California, eventually graduating with a degree in Art. His welded metal abstract constructions project connotations from both of these early stops on his midcentury class-climbing path. Turning to consider them alongside other artworks in the canon, we would have to situate them in the history of American sculpture that connects David Smith's hand-welded modernism to Donald Judd's minimalism, ordered to his specifications from local sheet metal specialists (MoMA 2020). But how, exactly? And where does Edwards fit in the story that tracks the changing status of figuration for black American artists as it plays out, for example, in Hale Woodruff's engagement with social realism in the 1930s, his own and others' turn to abstraction in the 1950s, followed by Jeff Donaldson's adamantly figurative art of Black Power in the 1960s?[2] Alternatively again, what relation to Edwards do later black American conceptual artists Adrian Piper and Lorraine O'Grady have, given

both rejected modernist modes of making, but at the same time held deep reservations about poststructuralism's deconstruction of the modern subject?

Teasing out the threads that weave Edwards into these different but interconnected narratives could easily fill three separate lectures in an art history course, but I will try at least to touch on and give some sense of the stakes involved for each in what follows. I will make a case for the importance of the professional managerial class (PMC) in understanding these stakes, for I believe the tastes and skills of the PMC have played a more crucial role in determining the aesthetics of contemporary art since the 1960s than art history usually acknowledges. Above all, their taste for taking realities that in the modern era were understood to derive at least in part from the felt dimensions of the embodied subject's interior—alienation, for example, or critique, or one's own humanity—and representing them as fully abstracted and commodifiable categories and systems at home in the exterior realm of culture (See Frank 1997).

Labels such as "modern" and "contemporary" for periods of artistic production have their limits, of course. There are many artists who made work between 1850 and 1960 for whom "modern" does little to characterize their main priorities. So too, there have been countless artists since the late twentieth century who did not care at all about minimalist or conceptualist strategies and their deconstructive implications for traditional modes of making—whether the tradition they chose to continue was oriented around a notion of self, the technical nuances of a craft, or a religious belief. Art history as a discipline has benefitted from the many revisionist histories that have sought to tell such artists' stories in their community's terms. For Edwards, however, working in Los Angeles and New York in the 1960s, the broadly sweeping categories are appropriate, both to how he thought about his own practice ("modern" from the start), and to the New York museum and gallery world he was engaged with during the period and in which he has been exhibited up until the present (Brensen 1993, p. 22). As I discuss further below, Edwards participated in the prominent discourses of his time by deploying some of the dominant formal languages that were available to him and to his audience. He was trained by older modernists in the 1950s, and he looked to New York in the 1960s, eventually moving there (Sims 1993, p. 12). He chose to become neither a minimalist sculptor, nor a Pop ironist, nor a conceptualist with a "dematerialized" aesthetic, nor to cultivate legible figures of Black Power in line with the Black Arts Movement, or black victimhood in line with more recent Afro-pessimist trends. These choices are significant, given his residence in (and then near) a highly visible platform for contemporary art on which such aesthetic modes were regularly displayed. However inadequate we may find the categories "modern" and "contemporary" to structure the dominant narrative of twentieth-century art history, Edwards is a part of that narrative because he chose to work with a model of modern art well aware of the many artists in his generation (and younger) who rejected it. Evidence of a conscious rejection of aspects of the modern model is a defining feature of "contemporary" art as I am using it here.

I further value "contemporary" as a periodizing category to distinguish art made during the neoliberal era of capitalism, lasting roughly from 1970 to 2020 and defined by a dramatic shift all over the world in the balance of wealth toward the top 1% and 0.1% of earners (Gerstle 2022, p. vii; Harvey 2005, pp. 16–19; World Inequality Lab 2018). Politically, as liberal democracy gave way in the neoliberal era to what Wendy Brown calls "market democracy," the "interval between economic life and political life" narrowed such that there was no longer a distinct "platform for critiques of . . . [capitalist] values and [market] distributions". Political life's "capacity to limit" the economic sphere's hold over daily life and its guiding principles was severely reduced (Brown 2015, p. 208). As a result, the neoliberal era had disastrous consequences for modern social democratic projects invested in notions of fairness and more equally distributed flourishing. Understanding how the contemporary art of this period relates to its historical context means considering whether the new aesthetic tendencies of the 1960s may have unwittingly, from the sidelined space of art to be sure, supported in some way the massive sociopolitical changes that began to alter the landscape of everyday life in the U.S. in the 1970s by figuring and affirming the denial

of the distinction between the abstract, quantitative requirement of the capitalist economic order for accumulation, and the embodied needs of a polity for both health and meaning. Ultimately, Edwards' aesthetic did not fall in line with these trends. His reliance on making conflicting relationships between abstraction and physicality a compelling feature of his form—and, furthermore, key to what carves out a space for art that is separate from market logics—aligns his work with notions of social form, of just relation, of negotiation between agonistic entities in the public sphere that were rooted in the previous era of modern thought (see Brown 2015).

2. Edwards' Early Work

In 1965, at the age of 28, Edwards had two exhibitions in southern California at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art and at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.[3] In the sculptures for these shows, Edwards welded disparate metal leftovers from the world of use, mostly small steel parts, in varied and ingenious ways around centers and hollows to form sculptures that sit somewhere in the triangulated space between bodily organs, car motors, and baroque gate ornaments. Their titles allude directly to particulars of black American and African history and cultural traditions—most famously the *Lynch Fragment* series begun in 1963. Thus the violent injustices against black people in the history of the modern era are never far from mind; but Edwards' stated aim to construct something "positive" out of his material makes itself consistently evident in the compact works' final compositional unity (Edwards 1982, p. 94).

For example, *Mojo for 1404* (1964) is a *Lynch Fragment* named after the address of a house Edwards lived in as a youth in Houston (Figure 1). In the fourteen-inch-high sculpture, we see a fusion of parts, some of which we easily recognize: a gear, a valve, the end of a pipe, maybe a railroad spike. Welded together in this way, their combined form is harder to identify. We could be convinced that the small static collection attached to the wall at eye-level might still serve some function, that levers might rotate when pulled, locks tighten, pressure release. The dull oily shine of its nearly monochrome surface does appear smoothed by repeated touching. And yet *Mojo for 1404* looks much more organic than the machines we are used to. Bodily allusions are present in the way Edwards has let the liquified steel from the welding process cool such that it looks like soft tissue in places. We might imagine we are examining the shoulder joint of a decorously armored, but mercilessly exposed machinic human. Following an alternative route of bodily associations (invited by the invocation of "mojo"), the central spike and valve might allude to male genitals, though strangely straight and firm for the direction they are pointed, and of course, how un-phallic for there to be two of them.

Like all of the *Lynch Fragments*, the sculpture conveys a sense of brokenness, mending and scarring, of intense muscular processes of melting, hammering and bending—thus of physical violence both endured and enacted. But there is, with these potentially threatening qualities, also the secure feeling of the welds, joints, and sutures—and the precision and patience required to get such qualitatively disparate objects to cohere. When such careful interleaving and gluing, filing and rubbing appear without any apparent representational purpose, they present themselves as metaphors for kinds of relationships, for any situation in which we have experienced two differently edged entities coming together, and the negotiations and accommodations that their holding fast requires.

Next, let us look at *Chaino* (1965) (Figure 2), shown in its final form in the LACMA exhibition. The title is meant to be a combination of the names of brothers Chino and Chano Pozo, the Cuban jazz musicians. Here, Edwards has given the organ made of sutured fragments that we saw in the *Lynch Fragments* a framing structure, a tapering metal container, not a box quite because *out* of its rectangular base, the four vertical edges slant in to form triangular planes at the ends. The triangles' apexes then lean in opposing directions, torquing the bar of metal that connects them along a diagonal. *Chaino's* frame is thus simultaneously grounded on the pedestal which raises it about three feet off the ground and tensely twisted. The stability it provides is a function of tension.

Figure 1. Melvin Edwards, *Mojo for 1404*, 1964, welded steel. Alexander Gray Associates.

Figure 2. Melvin Edwards, *Chaino*, 1965, welded steel. Williams College Museum of Art.

The single central form within the container in *Chaino* is shifted to one side, suspended from one spot on the frame and one spot on an additional, weaker-looking metal bar slanting downward from the top bar that seems to serve no other structural purpose. The central form is attached to these points by slender, inflexible rods that have required all manner of extension from chains, wires, and another flat metal oblong to reach it and hold it up. Again, we see the parts of the sculpture—with their associations to both industrial production and bondage or constraint—as separate *and* as hooked or welded together through considerable effort and ingenuity on the artist's part.

The central volume itself has both rounded contours and flat facets, and it is distinguished from the *Lynch Fragments* above all by the sense of its hollowness. The artist has made sure we will feel this hollowness by leaving cracks and openings in a few places. These fissures make clear to us that the plates that make up the thing's surface have empty space behind them—that they're thin, in other words, allowing us to read certain bulges as if punched out from the inside. However, we cannot see far into the dark crevices at all. We only have enough access to know the sculpture has a hidden interior, that its nuanced surface is a boundary *around* a space. It seems to be working to hold that space, as though the two are in a mutually dependent relationship, not an arbitrary one.

The central organ in *Chaino* is supported by the framing structure, but not comfortably—like "an insect caught in a spider's web," said one museum wall label in Columbus in 2016 (Craft and Cann 2016). The heavy bar hanging from the central volume by a thick chain seems both to anchor a form that would otherwise be dangling in the wind, and to drag it down, to slow it down. We would never say *Chaino* reminds us of a gymnast, in other words, jumping from one trapeze to another, because the welded heart has to drag that heavy burden along with it wherever it goes. Yet the framing also gives the work the qualities of a stage, a bounded, elevated space where something is meant to be beheld from a distance. The abstracted body-like form is hanged, no doubt like a lynched corpse, strange fruit, but also held in place, with a margin of space around it, suspended in time, as if something is being held up and held still for us to consider. As if the point is not just to remember the trauma or to express the suffering, but to give it a manageable size and get perspective on it—even to make a new vital organ out of it. Edwards has said of the *Lynch Fragments*, that they were "A scale that I can handle" (Brensen 1993, p. 23). He has also used the phrase "dealing with this": "I wanted to take the most oppressive encounter, if you will, symbolically, . . . I'm working in contradistinction to that. [. . .] I can do art for the sake of dealing with this" (Brensen and Edwards 2014). This manner of thought, in which a physical quality is understood through a term such as "handle" that has connotations of both physical and emotional labor, is on display in a larger work such as *Chaino* as well. Here, however, it is not that the size of the sculpture is keyed to the artist's body that contributes to this sense (*Chaino* is wider than Edwards' arm span), but the strong emphasis on "suspension". Suspension was a sculptural metaphor that Edwards engaged in many works and studies during these years (and after).[4] Suspension has literal connotations of violent hanging, but it is also the word people use in English, and the quality they seek, when they slow down to reflect and to take distance, as they attempt to give something a form, or express what they mean.[5]

Performance studies scholar Sampada Aranke has written about a suspended sculpture from 1966 by Edwards called *Cotton Hang-Up* (in the collection of the Studio Museum in Harlem), and about the *Lynch Fragments* (Aranke 2020, 2022). Her analyses, like mine and others', emphasize the works' cognizance of "racial terror," while, at the same time, find affirmations of vitality as well as other insightful theorizations alongside their allusions to damage (Aranke 2022, p. 78). In the *Lynch Fragments*, Aranke locates a hopeful "abundance of sensed possibilities" that for her is "decidedly a Black aesthetic endeavor" because the "sensorial modes of Black life" are inseparable from the "exceptional scope" of the "violences that often construct their meaning" (Aranke 2022, pp. 81, 78). In *Cotton Hang-Up*—which hangs from the ceiling and asks the viewer to adopt the head and neck positions of a hanged victim in order to look up at it—Aranke finds not only an embodied memory of

the history of lynching-as-spectacle, but also an injunction to the viewer "to account for her positionality," which I understand to mean the placement of one's identity on a matrix of options defined by experiences of victimhood and privilege since the colonial era (Aranke 2020, p. 71). The latter process in relation to *Cotton Hang-Up*, she explains, entails asking "thorny questions about the politics of looking, the responsibility of a museum or gallery to displays of violence, and the possibilities and limitations of abstraction or representation in accounting for minoritized histories" (Aranke 2020, p. 72). Such questions are often raised by educated liberal cosmopolitan professionals who aim to distinguish their work from the racist practices of predecessors (Peffer 2020; Reeves and Heath-Kelly 2020; Baker 2022; Penn Museum n.d.). Such rhetoric has, however, also been questioned from the left as a liberal form of "deference politics"—or, more harshly, a narcissistic expression of "guilt"—with little political efficacy outside of professional managerial class workplaces, and no effect at all on capitalist dynamics of exploitation that disproportionately affect people of color (Táíwò 2022, pp. 88–95; Bataller 2022).

Thus the "positives" centered on consciousness of a Black identity defined by violent oppression that Aranke derives from Edwards' work are quite different from the universalizing insights into relationships between qualitatively different concepts and physicalities that I find sustained engagement with the work obliges us to grapple with, as I tried to demonstrate in my visual analyses above (Edwards 1982, p. 94). I take such insights into suspension, negotiation, and boundary to be Edwards' contribution to a fundamental modern conversation about what the basis for unity will be in a modern society—what such unifying principles will feel like. Though I agree with Aranke that Edwards' approach makes "the violences that structure the world" a crucially felt part of his forms, I do not take "white supremacist desires" to be the source of violence that his work posits, but rather something even more wide-reaching, such as capitalist accumulation—a step further back from white supremacy in the causal chain of violence in the modern era (Aranke 2022, p. 81). As Edwards commented in 2015, "slavery would not have lasted one minute if it hadn't been profitable" (Nasher 2015). In this respect, Edwards' thought aligns more precisely with the "historically specific" view of racism articulated by leftist intellectuals such as Adolph Reed and, before him, Oliver Cox, who, "emphatically rejected primordialist notions of racial antipathy or ethnocentrism as explanations of racial stratification . . . [and] insisted that racism and race prejudice emerged from the class dynamics of capitalism and its colonial and imperial programs" (Reed 2000b, p. xi; see Cox [1948] 2000). In this understanding, Aranke's location of a twenty-first century professional-managerial-class value (the awareness of a "positionality" understood through "abstract, transhistorical" categories) in Edwards' 1960s work is a testament to the qualities of his aesthetic, mentioned at the start of this essay, that appear to blend in fairly easily with works of contemporary art (Reed 2000b, p. xi). However, I am trying to make more palpable not only the modernist formal choices in his work, but also the understanding of the world in history that motivates their meaning.

3. Edwards in the History of Late-Twentieth-Century Art

Edwards has situated himself in the history of North American post-1945 art in interviews over the years. He has explained, for example, what he "liked about the title Abstract Expressionism" for the mode of experimental making he embraced in the early 1960s. And he has distinguished himself from the "movements" he found when he arrived in New York from L.A. in 1967: minimalism, conceptual art, and the Black Arts Movement. Regarding minimalism, he has been brief, stating diplomatically and tersely that "people credited Carl [Andre] with a profundity to his thinking that I didn't feel was quite there" (Brensen and Edwards 2014). "In the world of conceptual work," he told another pair of interviewers, "the concept does the thinking for you . . . I understand . . . that very well. But much of it struck me as graduate school projects" (Diakhaté 2015, p. 114). Edwards has explained that for him, *all* art has a conceptual component; the concept and the physical manifestations are intertwined: "It was curious to me when the words 'conceptual art'

became common in the art world . . . It hadn't been there before to characterize and separate into parts what artists do and how they think. . . you can't make art without conceiving it first" (Potts 2015, p. 51). Regarding the insistence on recognizable figuration among Black Arts Movement artists such as Donaldson (whose disagreements with Edwards' "microcosmic" approach to public art are on record[6]), Edwards defended his choices: "I always felt that the person who said, 'Well, abstract art is not ours,' they were just uninformed. But some very important people, culturally important people, were saying things like that, and more in New York than anywhere else. When I got to New York, I was surprised at how backward a lot of people were. . .. I just felt free to do those things; I didn't feel limited. I felt that if it really comes out of me and not from anyplace else, then it's valid, and it's interesting" (Brensen and Edwards 2014).

Indeed, though he has been inspired by abstract art from all over the globe in the course of his career, Edwards has always remained adamantly committed to modernist abstraction, fully tied to the notion of an individual trying to express something particular, while at the same time partaking in the languages made available to them by their culture. "My notion of modern art," he told Michael Brensen in the early 1990s, "the experimental part, was about the idea of an individual, and everything starts with that individual, where he comes from, and what he knows" (Brensen 1993, p. 22). "I didn't see," he recalled of his younger self, "why there couldn't be some language and expression in the modern art world that was honestly about where I came from" (Getty Research Institute 2016). He favored sculpture, he said, because it provided "a more direct way to deal with an inner subject . . . [it] allowed me to put in . . . race and politics. It allowed me to think more literally . . . but have it come out in the work abstractly" (Brensen 1993, p. 21). In other words, abstraction has subject matter for Edwards, and materials can stand for qualities and relationships that are not identical to them.

Alex Potts has helpfully addressed the degree to which Edwards' formal choices in the 1960s "did steer clear of . . . Minimalism," even though he also "worked with partly preformed industrial materials". Potts points out the distinction between Edwards' "commitment to a hands-on process of fabrication," or "modern" mode of making, and "Minimalism's machine-made aesthetic". Edwards' *Lynch Fragments*, like David Smith's work, manifest a commitment to making visible the artist's many minute decisions, as well as a "more organic relationship between part and whole," without, however, resorting to the millennia-old structure of the standing human figure in the history of sculpture as Smith did in the *Tanktotems*, for example (Potts 2015, pp. 50–51). On the other hand, in common with Judd, Edwards's *Lynch Fragments* are made and displayed serially. He prefers that they be shown in sets of at least four, hanging on one wall at the same height (his height: about six feet), equidistant from each other (about three feet apart: half the width of his armspan). Yet, as the bodily-derived coordinates for his installation system underscore, Edwards does not give his aesthetic over to the look or conceptual framework of the mass-fabricated commodity as much as Judd does. Each *Lynch Fragment* takes on a unique set of formal problems, and none looks like it could be easily duplicated.

In distinguishing himself from 1960's artistic trends that emphasized surface and repetition over complex interrelationship and unity around a center, Edwards prefigures a related critique articulated by artists Adrian Piper and Lorraine O'Grady in the 1990s. They distanced themselves from the postmodernist critical *theory* then reigning in the contemporary art world and in the academy precisely because of its disempowering implications for marginalized categories of person. In a 1990 interview, Piper said, "I really think poststructuralism is a plot! It's the perfect ideology to promote if you want to co-opt women and people of color and deny them access to the potent tools of rationality and objectivity" (Berger and Piper 1990, p. 6). This passage from Piper was quoted three years later in a catalog essay for an exhibition curated in Irvine, California by artist Charles Gaines, who glossed Piper's main point succinctly: "The presence of a subject is essential for the implementation of political power" (Gaines 1993, p. 12). Gaines curated *The Theater of Refusal*, in part, to protest the ways postmodernist art criticism's emphasis on race—or what

I would call a racialized subject *position*—consistently placed black artists' work *outside* of the central conversations and concerns of their time. Nevertheless, Gaines ultimately rejects the modern notion of the subject in favor of a "deterritorialized minoritarian" "process," "constituted by the presence of many voices," which "eschews identity constructions" (Gaines 1993, pp. 14, 15). This new theory, influential on later scholarship such as Aranke's, unfortunately only veils questions of need and political leverage in a tapestry of multiplied "textual spaces," or positions, rather than addressing the theory of positionality as itself the problem (Gaines 1993, p. 19). As a lens through which to think about the practices of art or politics, "positionality" is too abstract and devoid of embodied principles that might serve as a basis for unity to accurately account for what is meaningful (or failing) in either.

Lorraine O'Grady, by contrast, fully rejected poststructuralism's death of the authorial subject and defended aspects of modernism in her 1992 article, "Olympia's Maid". She wrote:

> It is cruelly ironic, of course, that just as the need to establish our subjectivity in preface to theorizing our view of the world becomes most dire, the idea of subjectivity itself has become 'problematized.' [. . .] Because I am concerned with the reclamation of black female subjectivity, I am obliged to leave open the question of modernism's demise. For one thing, there seems no way around the fact that the method of reclaiming subjectivity precisely mirrors modernism's description of the artistic process. Whatever else it may require, it needs an act of will to project the inside onto the outside long enough to see and take possession of it. But, though this process may appear superficially *retardataire* to some, repossessing black female subjectivity will have unforeseen results both for action and for inquiry (O'Grady 1992).

We should note these artists' suspicions in the 1990s about poststructuralist intellectuals (often white and male) advocating for a dissolved subject with no interior (only layers of surface determined from the outside by culture and power), and therefore nothing authentic to say or to construct politically in the name of progress (now maligned as a myth).[7] The poststructuralists posited this model of subjectivity and politics just as women, blacks, and other historically marginalized categories of person were beginning to have more influence on both art and politics in the U.S. and in the decolonizing southern hemisphere.[8] Though in different ways, Piper and O'Grady assert such an understanding of subjectivity not to be in their individual interest as artists or in the broader political interests of black people, which both invoke in their diversity (not as a homogeneous or coherent population).[9] At the same time, they assume individuals belonging to minorities partake in universalizable practices, whether it is the positivist pursuit of "objectivity" for Piper, or what O'Grady, more of a romantic, calls "worldly agency" (O'Grady 1992, p. 16). O'Grady also asserts her view that postmodernism's return of western thought to the flattened "mind over body" imbalance of "classicism," after the "Romantics and the Surrealists" had already challenged that model, to be a disadvantage for the entire culture. "Why," she writes, "would I want to give up modernism's hard-won victories?" Citing a fundamental insight of modern art, she asserts, "Neither the body nor the psyche is all-nature or all-culture" (O'Grady 1992, pp. 8, 15, 16, 17).

I believe we should see the art of Sixties holdout modernists such as Edwards to have been rooted in a similar skepticism of postmodernist abstraction—the version of it manifest in his time in the new aesthetic tendencies of the Sixties. As I will discuss further below, the old model of the artist as a subject who "projects the inside onto the outside" had been rejected by pop, minimal, and conceptual artists at roughly the same time (or before) the first poststructuralist texts were published in France in the mid-1960s. Further, Edwards' work might be seen to offer grounds for a critique of the period withdrawal by the post-war Left from a constructive, unifying leftist politics along similar lines to the critique put forward by Reed (born in the 1940s like Gaines and Piper). For Reed, poststructuralism has a "tendency" to "emphasiz[e] the power of entrenched patterns of relations" and to "understate the space for meaningful human intervention in politics" (Reed 2000a, p. xiii). Though not a political organizer like Reed, Edwards has always

been attentive to the struggle for equal housing rights and marched in demonstrations in Los Angeles in the 1960s (Brensen 1993, p. 27). More importantly, Edwards' approach to making art, oriented toward "sustaining individual and group lives," as Joan Kee has written (Kee 2020, p. 73), has more in common materially with Reed's notion of "meaningful human intervention" than with a poststructuralist theoretical view of the world consisting primarily of "entrenched patterns".

O'Grady's eloquent account of the challenging but crucial process of projecting the particularity of a subjective interior outward into the public space of representation and power resonates strongly with Edwards' emphasis on an art practice that could encompass the individual, abstraction, and politics. Yet the two artists' aesthetics could hardly be more different. For example, a work such as O'Grady's photomontage *The Clearing: or Cortés and La Malinche, Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, N. and Me (diptych)* (1991) (Figure 3)—though distant from both Donald Judd and Jeff Donaldson—still appeals more to the 'period eye' of late-twentieth-century capitalism than an Edwards sculpture insofar as she relies on the seriality of photographic reproduction and the idea that meaning is produced on flat surfaces through coded images meant to be read and understood quickly. O'Grady offers her gender-conscious, critical reflection on the legacies of the colonial past in the format of a crisp, legible storyboard, its thoughtful asymmetry encouraging us to read both site and figures as staged signs standing for much larger historical phenomena. Compared with Edwards' welds, O'Grady's suturing of parts drawn from different sources, though in no way producing an illusionistic space, happens with virtually no material incident.

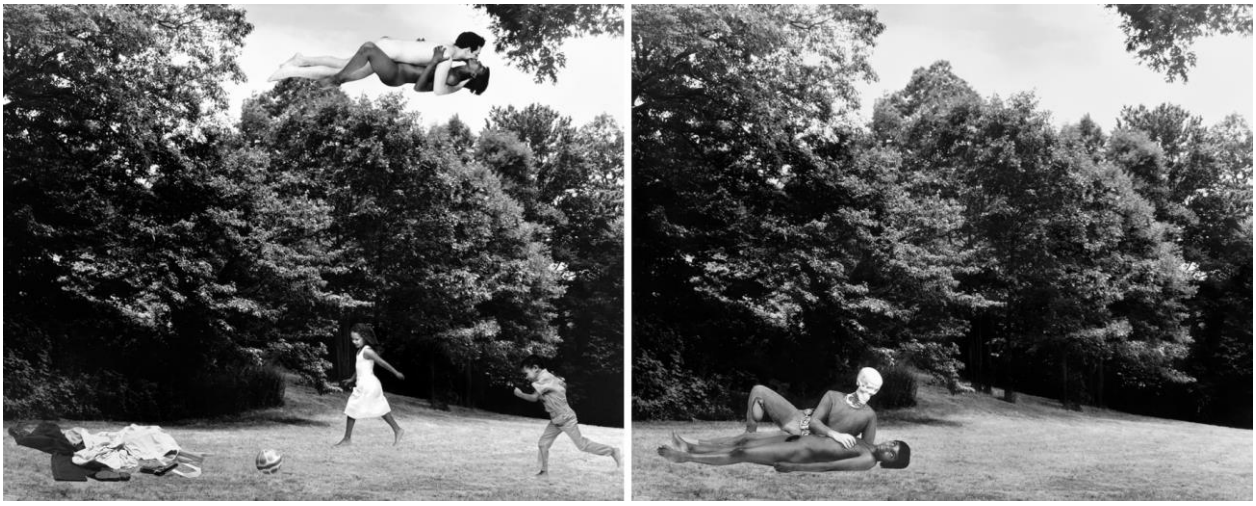

Figure 3. Lorraine O'Grady, *The Clearing: or Cortés and La Malinche, Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, N. and Me (diptych),* 1991, black and white photomontage. Alexander Gray Associates.

4. The Public Value of the Private Self

In order to continue to think about what Edwards' similarities to modern art and differences from contemporary art's aesthetics mean, we can turn to an art historical version of the story of late-twentieth-century cultural and political change. It comes from Blake Stimson's account of the shift in his book *Citizen Warhol* (2013). Stimson writes,

> What Warhol represents . . . is the collapse of the great modernist dream that the tension between inside and outside was itself the realm of truth. Modern art . . . was a proclamation about the public value of the private self, and its motto was still the Enlightenment's motto: 'Have courage to use your own understanding!', as Kant famously put it, have courage to give public expression to the antagonism between one's own internal experience and the world outside" (Stimson 2013, p. 186).

The collapse of this understanding of truth entails the erasure of the distinction and thus the antagonism between interior and exterior. Such a collapse goes hand-in-hand, in Stimson's account of the twentieth century, with the bourgeois citizen's final and total

relinquishment of responsibility for the construction of a just social order and embrace of the more passive role of consumer. In other words, we might understand the work of constructing a more just social order to be based on an "interior" feeling or value—a feeling about fairness, or, how we ourselves would want to be treated; whereas the good capitalist consumer takes deep within her the labels and packaging of advertising and spectacle and makes these the objects of her most deeply felt desires, as well as her primary language for representing them. In effectively agreeing to never have her desires be satisfactorily met, she will keep the new social unifier, the commodity form, going strong. Stimson does not venture to say whether art enables or is merely a symptom of that abdication of responsibility to the world and to oneself; what is important for him is that "Warhol gets it so right" and that "this is who we are as postmoderns, who we have become" (Stimson 2013, p. 187).

Stimson's conclusions about Warhol do not apply to every artist in the 1960s, though, and thus his interpretation suggests there may have been high stakes underlying any artist's choice to continue to make relationships between interior and exterior a compelling aspect of their art's forms. I do not think it is too simple to say that Judd accepted the collapse Stimson is talking about, whereas Edwards did not abandon "the tension between inside and outside" as a source of truth. Edwards' is an art, in other words, that still firmly believes in "the public value of the private self," with the contents of whatever private experiences are in play *abstracted* into a qualitative form, which is both more publicly and arguably more intimately sharable.

But what about other artworks from the post-1945 canon in which interior spaces play a formal and conceptual role? Do Lygia Clark's *Bichos* (1960–1965), Betye Saar's *Sambo's Banjo* (1971–1972), or Piper's *My Calling Card #1* (1986–1990) still manifest a belief in the public value of the private self? We know O'Grady believed in it, but if cultural exteriority is invoked in *The Clearing* by the violent historical subject matter and (as always) by the medium; while the artist's interiority is present in the thoughtful and surprising juxtapositions—does interior speak in a qualitatively different manner than the external constraints here? Not really. How in general might the question of whether interiority is in play, what it is *like*, and what is *happening to it* in the space and dynamics of an artwork inflect our interpretations of other works of art made since 1960? Stimson's version of the story could be used as a tool, not to condemn some works as bad and celebrate some as good, but to see how many artists who made work (or reached adulthood) in the 1960s and 1970s were grappling in some way with the problem of whether and how, at their historical juncture, individual particularity would appear in what Edwards referred to as "the experimental part" of their practice.

5. Lygia Clark's Ambivalent Interiority

Because it is formally the most similar to an Edwards *Lynch Fragment*—and I am concerned ultimately with what Edwards proposes concretely—let us briefly explore the Clark example: a metal work called *Caranguejo (Crab)* from her *Bicho* series, begun in the early 1960s and continued through the rest of the decade (Figure 4). As Megan Sullivan explains in her recent chapter on Clark, "interior spaces" were crucial to Clark's thinking about art throughout her career. The "inward experience" that "emerged . . . from the encounter" between viewer and work of art was understood as a refuge from "those systemic totalities with which the modern world had repeatedly threatened to asphyxiate the individual" (Sullivan 2022, pp. 163–64). At midcentury, Clark's particular experience of an invasive exterior world was tied to a Brazilian state and marketplace energetically keeping up with the global capitalist economy after centuries of colonization, only to be hurled in an anti-modern direction by the military coup of 1964.[10] In Clark's little creature—hinged, aluminum, aggressively pointy—shadowed crevices and bounded empty spaces are as much a part of what makes the work compelling as they are in Edwards' sculpture. We are invited to feel and consider the ways the differently shaped lightweight metal planes define and contain hollows and pockets, simultaneously like a body and an architect's maquette.

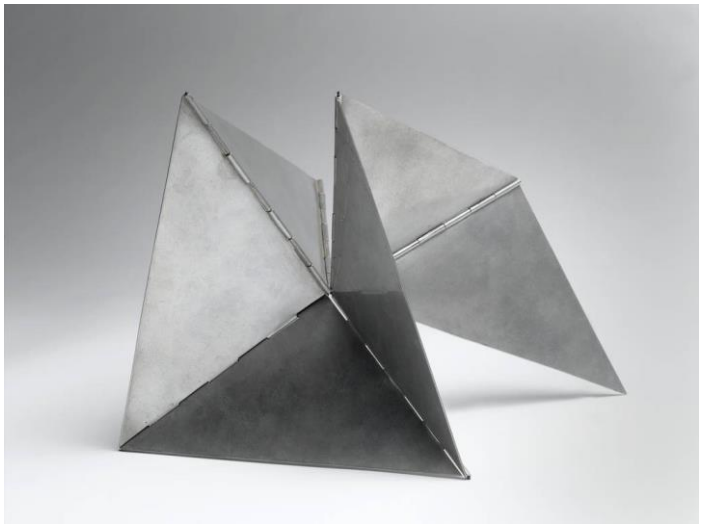

Figure 4. Clark, Lygia, *Caranguejo (Crab)*, from the *Bicho* series, 1960. Centre Pompidou.

What makes the *Bicho* crucially different from the *Lynch Fragment*—and from nearly all modern sculpture—is that it is famously meant to be manipulated by a participant viewer, and so what appears as its interior will inevitably be turned inside out in a later moment. The protected sanctuary is meant to be exposed, mercilessly, to the light, the surrounding atmosphere, and to the person outside, whose body will be reflected murkily in its burnished silver surface. In other words, the interior is profoundly unstable in Clark's work. For this reason, the *Bicho* might be said to give form to the feeling of the collapse that Stimson writes about from the perspective of someone who is suffering through it, torn, intent on making the old model of art and subjectivity compatible with the new reality dominated by the commodity form. Where Warhol makes artworks that celebrate their status as all surface, all exterior, Clark seems to want a sculpture made entirely of surfaces, and to have her interiority, too. To consider this formulation in reverse, she still constructs a form using the strange, purposeless, abstract language of modernist autonomous art, but then she lets her viewer handle it and flex its hinges like any appliance, or like the uncooperative sun visor in their car.

The *Bicho* poignantly shows the impossibility of Clark's ambivalent project, which is to say, of maintaining an interiority that is perpetually invaded and obliterated by external determining forces, rather than in relation to them across a boundary.[11] In turn, the *Bicho* also demonstrates how hard it is to make art without a strong distinction from what it is not. By dint of its particular language of abstraction, the *Bicho* succeeds in asserting itself as art; however, as an art, it cannot, for me, do much more than express how it feels to be constantly threatened by the collapse of value into commodification's terms in late twentieth-century capitalism. How, in other words, can she guarantee that we will consider the *Bicho* as a form with meaning when, due to its materials and invitation to be handled, we are so likely to only treat it as a gadget: to see what it does—effectively consuming it—and move on? If she does manage to engage our aesthetic attention, then she only barely does so, against all odds, and this could also be seen to express a midcentury pathos.

Like Clark, Edwards uses metal and works in series to make objects small enough to be held in two hands. Thus his sculpture also leans pretty far toward the look of the mass produced appliance, and as a result, we can recognize its aesthetic also as belonging to the 1960s. Nevertheless, the final form of a *Lynch Fragment* is much less betwixt and between than Clark's *Bicho*. Edwards' interiors stay inside, with some portion almost always remaining either shadowed or bounded. Relationships between interior and exterior are charged—tenuous or awkward, far from comfortable. But the sculptural language needs the separation between the two kinds of space to remain firm. Edwards shares this investment in boundary and what it surrounds or contains with peers such as Eva Hesse and Lee

Bontecou. The *ways* the relationships between them play out is key to the particularity of Edwards' 1960s abstraction (as it was to Hesse's and Bontecou's), and thus key to what in the work asserts itself as art, as very much coming from *him*, trying to use enough shared form and convention to be comprehensible to his audience.

6. Edwards vs. PMC Aesthetics

Though rarely invoked to make sense of contemporary art's aesthetics, questions of *class* have been admitted into analyses of modern art since the 1970s (see Clark 1973). David Smith's conscious incorporation of the working-class labor technique of welding is already an established part of art history's understanding of his work's meaning. Anne Wagner has allowed us to think of Smith's *Tanktotems* as monuments to what the modern project might have become if the political and economic power that factory workers in the U.S. and Europe saw briefly in the mid-twentieth century had not been crushed in the late twentieth century (Wagner 2011). Whether the benefits enjoyed by the PMC since that crushing have contributed to our not asking which class's tastes, values, and historical realities Judd's and other minimalist, conceptual, and pop art most gave form to is a question for another occasion (See Batty et al. 2019, p. 26). In hopes of at least opening up social class as a relevant historical condition for consideration by contemporary art studies, I would like to propose, in admittedly too-schematic of terms, that Judd's (and many other Sixties heavy hitters') aesthetics suited and quite brilliantly gave form to the emphasis on mental labor and management of others' labor that shaped the lives of the largely white PMC in this period. Judd's art downplays relationships between interiority and exteriority through an overarching impression of invulnerability in its perfectly smooth surfaces and through the inflexible systematicity of its one-thing-after-another structure. Such aesthetic qualities can be seen to correspond not only to the collapse between political and economic life, and between the negative sphere of felt critique and commodifiable abstraction in the neoliberal era (discussed above via Brown and Stimson), but also with the PMC's containment and management of their emotions in public in the name of a cool and clean professionalism.[12]

In my understanding of the latter values and tastes of the PMC in the 1960s and 1970s and how they dovetail with the former, I follow Barbara Ehrenreich, who defines this class less by their net worth (which can cover a huge range (see Batty et al. 2019, p. 26)), than by, firstly, their position in the economy (a position between "capital and labor " that often gives them authority over workers without the same expertise); and secondly, by their shared emphasis on the discipline, education, and professional credentials that are simultaneously a source of power and of vulnerability for them (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1977, pp. 15, 19; Ehrenreich 1989). The regulated systems the PMC have designed (going back at least as far as Frederick Taylor) for the smooth management of not only labor, but also cultural knowledge and public health, have made them indispensable enough to the capitalist ruling elite to assure them comfortable salaries. Nevertheless, the PMC's defining insecurity is due to the fact that their main source of financial stability, their professional skill, cannot be directly passed down to their children like the wealth of the ruling class, but only re-acquired through more disciplined mental labor and more credentials, which over the course of the twentieth century became increasingly competitive and expensive to attain (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1977; Ehrenreich 1989).

In the west in the 1960s, though, the PMC were enjoying a moment of cultural triumph and economic security (Hobsbawm 1994, pp. 264–66), so it makes sense, but is no less historically significant, that their taste largely determined the 'period eye' for western art at this moment. Here, I am, of course, citing Michael Baxandall, writing in 1972 about the ways Italian Renaissance art flattered the skills of its audience of "mercantile men," and am suggesting that art historians of the contemporary period might also take it as a given "that some perceptual skills are more relevant to any one picture [or work of art] than others" (Baxandall 1972, p. 34). The question again is whether some works of art affirmed the skills, culture, and self-understanding of PMC workers during the "rise" and "triumph" of the neoliberal order, and what sort of long-term political repercussions it might have had for

such aesthetics to be widely accepted as giving form to the values and priorities of *everyone* (Gerstle 2022, p. vii).

By contrast, Edwards' work, which we have established was different from Warhol's and the minimalists' in fundamental ways, might be better aligned with a subfaction of the educated middle class that was not unified or large enough to even have a proper label today, but which we could call a political Left, and which included Ehrenreich and, I propose, other artists and intellectuals who (like Edwards) were born into working class families, earned college degrees, became middle-class both economically and culturally, and yet still believed that those aspects of the old liberal modern project oriented toward constructing a society with more fairness and more shared public goods was the right direction to aim their labor.[13] The fact that many of these midcentury thinkers and cultural producers were women and black men—which is to say, people belonging to categories of person formerly denied the status of citizen and/or human by modern states—is a major reason to pause and take seriously the values they found and brought forward from older modern models of thought, in spite of the fact that their views and ways of working did not become dominant in U.S. culture after 1968.

In their landmark 1977 article on the PMC, Ehrenreich and, her husband at the time, John Ehrenreich, recommend the PMC remember as an ideal available to them "the historical alternative of a society in which mental and manual work are re-united to create whole people," rather than idealizing the "impersonal mode of discourse" cultivated in capitalist modern culture (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1977, p. 18; Ehrenreich 1989, p. 259). By 1989, Ehrenreich suggests this impersonality is enabling the PMC to assist the ruling elite insofar as the PMC manage and withdraw from their own feelings about the painful contradictions of their position in the capitalist economy and focus instead on their anxious "fear of falling" into what they perceive to be working class inferiority (Ehrenreich 1989).

Almost as if she has minimalist artists in mind, or as if channeling the spirit of Eva Hesse's own retort to her peers, Ehrenreich asks near the end of *Fear of Falling:* "Is there a way to 're-embody' the middle class's impersonal mode of discourse, so that it no longer serves to conceal the individual and variable speaker?" "For we may need to find ourselves in the language of abstraction, if we are ever to find the 'others' in the language of daily life. And finding the 'others'—not as aliens, not as projections of inner fear—is essential to the revival of middle-class conscience" (Ehrenreich 1989, p. 259).

I think we would do well to keep Ehrenreich's words in mind in interpreting the values that Edwards' approach to making conveys—in particular, her invocation of a kind of labor that is both manual and mental, and the idea that humans do best when we do the work to embody our abstractions. She and Edwards both remind us that abstractions designed without negotiating with bodily and other physical limitations usually cause suffering, and bodily or physical immediacy without a plan or a point often runs roughshod over anything that is unable to merge with the flow.

7. Conclusions

What sculptures such as *Mojo for 1404* and *Chaino* continue from the modern past, and what is also central to Edwards' response to the conditions of his moment, is the figuring of an *abstract embodiment*, a dialectical form that avoids direct resemblance or images, but draws on those modes of understanding that humans have thanks to their physical experience of other objects, substances, and qualities in a three-dimensional world. Beholding either sculpture involves tracking back and forth between the strange particularity of its abstract form and the recognition of bodily qualities or states: the potential for movement within stasis in *Mojo*, for example, or "suspending" something painful for a long moment in order not to feel overwhelmed in *Chaino*. Call such notions embodied *concepts* if you like, but art has always trucked in them and, in doing so, became a crucial site where modern subjects worked out and shared their understandings of the relationships between the material dimension and other fully abstract concepts. Both physicality and abstractions may be experienced as interior when felt as uniquely particular

to an individual subject, or as exterior, when encountered as part of the inhuman world or a culture that long pre-existed her. The negotiations between them can respect or cross the boundary between interior and exterior, but must be projected out into the social space of representation (which includes concretization) to take on meaning as art.

Such negotiations could mean everything in the end, if we were to let ourselves agree with the many modern thinkers who understood them to be the only certain universal across human practice; they are offered up repeatedly by modern art as if expected to be universally comprehensible.[14] It is to subjects who still understand themselves in this sense in the 1960s and after—as agents engaged in a practice that involves both constraint and individual expression, invented systems and a proximate world—that Edwards addresses his art. This modern notion of work gets lost if we see in *Chaino* or the *Lynch Fragments* only the trauma that is said to define a particular subject position. Contemporary art's entrenchment in the theoretical abstractions that are the hallmark of the PMC's "impersonal mode of discourse" has perhaps left its viewers out of practice with abstractions that require us to recognize vulnerability and structure simultaneously. Edwards' work asks us to check whatever tendencies prevent us from feeling anything but the suffering in an embodied abstraction—so that we do not miss the thought.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: Data sharing not applicable.

Acknowledgments: This essay benefitted from dialogue with audiences at Yale University in September 2022, the SECAC conference in Baltimore in November 2022, Emory University in April 2023, and the fellows at UIC's Institute for the Humanities in September 2023. With special thanks to Joanna Fiduccia, Jordan Troeller, Todd Cronan, and Blake Stimson.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 Michael Brensen has pointed to the synthesis of Fifties' aesthetics and Sixties' politics in Edwards' work, as well as the equal weight given to "African and American art and culture" See Brensen (1993), p. 33.

2 The 2017 exhibition and catalog *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* includes work by Edwards and Donaldson, and makes reference to Woodruff's figuration, providing a welcome opportunity to consider the art historical relationships between the three artists. See Godfrey and Whitley (2017).

3 *Sculpture by Melvin Edwards*, exhibition, 30 March–2 May 1965, Santa Barbara Museum of Art; Maurice Tuchman, curator, *Five Younger Los Angeles Artists*, exhibition, 1965, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

4 Other examples include the large corner work *Cotton Hang-Up* (1966) in the collection of the Studio Museum of Harlem and the three *Untitled Suspension Studies* lent for the 2015 retrospective by Alexander Gray Gallery. See Craft (2015), plates 16–18.

5 Another of Edwards' formal choices that has doubled, contradictory connotations is his use of chain as a material. He discusses its capacity to both constrain and join. See Diawara et al. (2012), p. 129.

6 See Baker (2022), p. 62. Edwards used the word "microcosmic" during a lecture to discuss the Smokehouse murals, attended by Jeff Donaldson; Baker's analysis refers to notes made by Donaldson during the lecture, which were subsequently quoted in Diakhaté (2015), p. 69.

7 Michel Foucault is the most obvious and influential proponent of this theory of subjectivity in the late twentieth century.

8 Anthropologist Faye Harrison observed in 1997 that "postmodernist literary experiments that essentially undermine the ontological status of the subject have risen in academic popularity when women and Third World theorists are challenging the universality and hegemony of Western and androcentric views" (Harrison 1997, p. 5). Linda Klinger voices a similar sentiment about women artists in 1991 (Klinger 1991).

9 Though Piper, Gaines, and O'Grady speak and write repeatedly about the fact of racism in history and as an ongoing problem, Piper moves away from any notion of a coherent black collectivity when she asserts "the concept of racial difference is nothing but a myth that obscures the real issue, of how best to distribute the limited resources we all have to share, so as to empower the disadvantaged" (Berger and Piper 1990, pp. 5–6). Though O'Grady writes of a generalized "black female subjectivity," she makes clear her knowledge of the many groups that might fall under such a broad heading when she refers to "African American folk" as distinct from "black artists and theorists," and "my upper-middle-class West Indian-American experience". Gaines, too, speaks directly against the "essentialist" notion that any element of black culture has a biological basis for its singularity rather than a cultural one. He further acknowledges class difference as it played out at the HBCU, Mississippi Valley State College,

where he first held a teaching position in 1967 (as when, for example, members of the all-black administration benefitted from maintaining racist practices in relation to white trustees) (Gaines 2020, pp. 62, 28).

[10] This anti-modern direction was of course still very much compatible with the advancing neoliberal order of the 1970s. See Schwarz (2012).

[11] For an understanding of the invasion of subjective interior space by harsh and abstracting forces that emphasize externality, and of this dynamic as a defining characteristic of modernity, see Marcuse ([1937] 2009), pp. 65–98; and Clark (2013).

[12] The PMC's emphasis on professionalism has gone hand-in-hand with the personalization of the political (a dimension of PMC aesthetics that I do not directly address in this paper for the sake of concision) See Liu (2020).

[13] When asked about social class, Edwards has said, "All I ever knew was people who were working class. Everybody was underpaid, and you just did what you had to do to have a job and take care of the family. I think, in a way, I just took it for granted". Later in the same interview, his explanation of his politics reveals the direct connection he felt between the struggle for black freedom and public goods: "If you were a black person watching TV in the United States in the '50s, you saw various freedom fighters, like Tom Mboya lobbying for Kenya's independence, and Jomo Kenyatta, who was jailed for anti-colonial Mau Mau activities. We had information enough to be aware that these were people whose efforts you should appreciate. And Fidel, in Cuba, fit that description, no question. My own politics leaned that way. I could never have been doctrinaire toward Communism or anything else, but the general social objectives of people having food, clothing, shelter, education, and a job—I just think everybody ought to have that. Otherwise, I don't know why anybody has a government, because all the other things they do . . . well, that's a whole other conversation" (Brensen and Edwards 2014).

[14] For an example of such modern thought, see Marcuse (1966).

References

Aranke, Sampada. 2020. Blackouts and Other Visual Escapes. *Art Journal* 74: 62–75. [CrossRef]

Aranke, Sampada. 2022. Functional Abstractions: Sensorial Afterlives of the Black Body. In *A Site of Struggle: American Art Against Anti-Black Violence*. Edited by Janet Dees. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 70–82.

Baker, Marissa. 2022. The Nation within The Black Arts Movement in Chicago. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, Chicago, IL, USA.

Bataller, Daniel Sánchez. 2022. "We Are the Exploiters": Santiago Sierra's Critical Realism. *Nonsite* 38: 28. Available online: https://nonsite.org/we-are-the-exploiters-santiago-sierras-critical-realism/ (accessed on 12 November 2023).

Batty, Michael, Jesse Bricker, Joseph Briggs, Elizabeth Holmquist, Susan McIntosh, Kevin Moore, Eric Nielsen, Sarah Reber, Molly Shatto, Kamila Sommer, and et al. 2019. *Introducing the Distributional Financial Accounts of the United States, Finance and Economics Discussion Series 2019–2017*; Washington, DC: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. Available online: https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/feds/introducing-the-distributional-financial-accounts-of-the-united-states.htm (accessed on 6 December 2023).

Baxandall, Michael. 1972. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Berger, Maurice, and Adrian Piper. 1990. The Critique of Pure Racism: An Interview with Adrian Piper. *Afterimage* 18: 5–9. [CrossRef]

Brensen, Michael. 1993. Lynch Fragments. In *Melvin Edwards Sculpture: A Thirty-Year Retrospective, 1963–1993*. New York: Neuberger Museum of Art, pp. 21–33.

Brensen, Michael, and Melvin Edwards. 2014. Melvin Edwards by Michael Brensen. BOMB, Oral History Project. Available online: https://www.bombmagazine.org/articles/melvin-edwards (accessed on 10 April 2023).

Brown, Wendy. 2015. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Brooklyn: Zone Books.

Clark, Timothy J. 1973. *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Clark, Timothy J. 2013. *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Cox, Oliver Cromwell. 2000. *Race: A Study in Social Dynamics*. New York: Monthly Review Press. First published 1948, as Chapters 16–25 of *Caste*, *Class*, & *Race*.

Craft, Catherine. 2015. *Melvin Edwards: Five Decades*. Dallas: Nasher Sculpture Center.

Craft, Catherine (curator), and Tyler Cann (coordinator). 2016. *Melvin Edwards: Five Decades*. Exhibition. Columbus: Columbus Museum of Art, February 12–May 8.

Diakhaté, Lydie. 2015. Melvin Edwards: The Poetics of the Blacksmith. *Wasafiri* 30: 64–74. [CrossRef]

Diawara, Manthia, Lydie Diakhaté, and Melvin Edwards. 2012. Melvin Edwards in Conversation with Manthia Diawara and Lydie Diakhaté. *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art* 30: 115–29.

Edwards, Melvin. 1982. Lynch Fragments. In *Free Spirits: Annals of the Insurgent Imagination*. Edited by Paul Buhle, Jayne Cortez, Philip Lamantia, Nancy Joyce Peters, Franklin Rosemont and Penelope Rosemont. San Francisco: City Lights Books, pp. 94–96.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. 1989. *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Ehrenreich, Barbara, and John Ehrenreich. 1977. The Professional Managerial Class. *Radical America* 11: 7–33.

Frank, Thomas. 1997. *The Conquest of Cool*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gaines, Charles. 1993. The Theater of Refusal: Black Art and Mainstream Criticism. In *The Theater of Refusal: Black Art and Mainstream Criticism*. Irvine: Fine Arts Gallery, University of California Irvine, pp. 12–21.

Gaines, Charles. 2020. *Charles Gaines: The Criticality and Aesthetics of the System*. Conducted by Bridget Cooks and Amanda Tewes in 2019. Berkeley: Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California. Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Trust.
Gerstle, Gary. 2022. *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order: America and the World in the Free Market Era*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
Getty Research Institute. 2016. Modern Art in Los Angeles: Melvin Edwards oral History Interview. Conducted July 16. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4iGA4YduIc (accessed on 3 July 2023).
Godfrey, Mark, and Zoé Whitley, eds. 2017. *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*. London: Tate Publishing.
Harrison, Faye Venetia, ed. 1997. *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further Toward an Anthropology for Liberation*. Arlington: Association of Black Anthropologists, American Anthropological Association.
Harvey, David. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Hobsbawm, Eric J. 1994. *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*. London: Abacus.
Kee, Joan. 2020. Corroborators in Arms: The Early Works of Melvin Edwards and Ron Miyashiro. *Oxford Art Journal* 43: 49–74. [CrossRef]
Klinger, Linda. 1991. Where's the Artist? Feminist Practice and Poststructural Theories of Authorship? *Art Journal* 50: 39–47. [CrossRef]
Liu, Catherine. 2020. *Virtue Hoarders: The Case against the Professional Managerial Class*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Marcuse, Herbert. 1966. The Historical Commitment to Philosophy. In *One-Dimensional Man*. Boston: Beacon Press, pp. 203–24.
Marcuse, Herbert. 2009. The Affirmative Character of Culture. In *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*. London: MayFly Books, pp. 65–98. Essay first published 1937. Anthology first published 1968.
Museum of Modern Art. 2020. Judd Exhibition Galleries. April 23. Available online: https://www.moma.org/magazine/articles/291 (accessed on 23 September 2023).
Nasher Sculpture Center. 2015. Abstract Art with a Message: Artist Melvin Edwards speaks with Curator Catherine Craft. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1uCgkxw8iMM&t=2420s (accessed on 10 November 2023).
O'Grady, Lorraine. 1992. Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity. Available online: https://lorraineogrady.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Lorraine-OGrady_Olympias-Maid-Reclaiming-Black-Female-Subjectivity1.pdf (accessed on 3 July 2023).
Peffer, John. 2020. How Do We Look? *Kronos* 46: 46–93. [CrossRef]
Penn Museum. n.d. Our Social Responsibility. Available online: https://pennmuseum.org/about/our-social-responsibility (accessed on 12 November 2023).
Potts, Alex. 2015. Melvin Edwards's Sculptural Intensity. In *Melvin Edwards: Five Decades*. Edited by Catherine Craft. Dallas: Nasher Sculpture Center, pp. 45–57.
Reed, Adolph, Jr. 2000a. *Class Notes: Posing as Politics and Other Thoughts on the American Scene*. New York: The New Press.
Reed, Adolph, Jr. 2000b. Introduction to Oliver C. Cox. In *Race: A Study in Social Dynamics*. Edited by Oliver Cromwell Cox. New York: Monthly Review Press, pp. ix–xvii.
Reeves, Audrey, and Charlotte Heath-Kelly. 2020. Introduction, Curating conflict: Political violence in museums, memorials, and exhibitions. *Critical Military Studies* 6: 243–53. [CrossRef]
Schwarz, Roberto. 2012. Translated by Nicholas Caistor. Political Iridescence: The Changing Hues of Caetano Veloso. *NLR* 75: 89–117.
Sims, Lowery Stokes. 1993. Melvin Edwards: An Artist's Life and Philosophy. In *Melvin Edwards Sculpture: A Thirty-Year Retrospective, 1963–1993*. New York: Neuberger Museum of Art, pp. 9–18.
Stimson, Blake. 2013. *Citizen Warhol*. Chicago and London: Reaktion Zone Books.
Sullivan, Megan. 2022. *Radical Form: Modernist Abstraction in South America*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Táíwò, Olúfémi. 2022. *Elite Capture: How the Powerful Took Over Identity Politics (and Everything Else)*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
Wagner, Anne M. 2011. David Smith: Heavy Metal. In *David Smith: Cubes and Anarchy*. Edited by Carol S. Eliel. Los Angeles: LA County Museum of Art and Del Monico Books, pp. 65–87.
World Inequality Lab. 2018. Figure 2.4.1a, Pre-Tax Income Shares of the Top 1% and Bottom 50% in the US, 1962–2014. World Inequality Report 2018, Part II. Available online: https://wir2018.wid.world/part-2.html (accessed on 22 May 2023).