

Jack
Goldstein

All
Day
Night
Sky

Alexander Dumbadze

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inadequate for Goldstein, for whom the lifting of an image or a thing was never an end. Art's ontology was not his question. He believed in art's efficacy.

Goldstein wanted to further his education and applied to the graduate program of Cal State Northridge, which required a portfolio of drawings. This made him nervous, though he now drew well. Fearing the worst, he borrowed some of Kosaka's drawings and passed them off as his own.³⁴ The deceit proved unnecessary in the end. Paul Brach, who rented studio space from Goldstein and had just joined the faculty of CalArts, described to him the school's new graduate program. Admission decisions had already been made, but Laddie John Dill declined his acceptance, which meant, as Goldstein recounted, "a spot was available; Paul asked me if I wanted it. I became a grad student at CalArts and that changed the course of my life."³⁵

Two

Students were scattered about the quad. Many were on the grass, sitting cross-legged. A few secured seats on the concrete benches. Some stood next to the buildings that enclosed the open space. Body language betrayed various degrees of engagement with the speech being given by Robert Corrigan, the president of CalArts. Heads were bowed, arms folded, legs hugged close to chests. The listeners seemed wary and hesitant, but not indifferent. It was CalArts' first day, and Corrigan's lectern was at a remove from his audience, a divide less imposed by the administration than manifested by the students, who did not want to seem too eager.

CalArts was the brainchild of Walt Disney, who late in life dreamed of creating a school for the arts that would in some alchemical way mix Black Mountain College with the California Institute of Technology. The school strove to be interdisciplinary both in spirit and in practice. The as-

pirations were utopic, and the newly hired administrators had to devise functional pedagogical and bureaucratic models that were in step with student culture at a time when university campuses around the country were rife with discontent. Corrigan, along with provost Herbert Blau and the various deans, established an art school that essentially had no fixed curriculum. Those initially invested in CalArts believed that a community of talented, motivated individuals could teach and inspire one another to greater things, and in a way, this happened, although not as administrators and trustees imagined. Villa Cabrini had become a hedonistic Elysium of intellectual experimentation, drug use, and sex, as naked frolicking took place in the public fountain, and students and faculty continually pushed the limits of institutionally sanctioned anti-institutionalism.¹

Baldessari joined CalArts at the behest of Paul Brach and Allan Kaprow. He was hired to teach painting, reluctantly, as he had not picked up a brush in five years. He lobbied Brach to offer classes in keeping with his Conceptual art practice, and what emerged was a course Baldessari called “Post-Studio,” a moniker he liked because “it seemed to be more broadly inclusive, that it would just sort of indicate people not daubing away at canvases or chipping away at stone . . .”² Class time was filled with looking at slides and the exhibition catalogs Baldessari brought back from his travels to New York and Europe. He wanted his students up to speed on the latest developments in the art world, and further facilitated this by regularly bringing in visiting artists. He often drove his students to shows around town, and sometimes invited them to throw a dart at a map of Los Angeles—wherever it stuck the group would spend the day, taking in the location, seeing what kind of art they could make out of the situation.³

The openness of CalArts and the fact that Goldstein did not have to be on campus very much meant he was still mostly in his studio. Yet his time was variegated and used creatively. During his first year, he worked as Nam June Paik’s assistant. Paik was new to Los Angeles and did not know how to drive. Goldstein was tasked with teaching him. When the

two drove together, all went well, but when Paik was left to his own devices, he promptly had an accident.⁴

Goldstein's career took shape alongside his education. Sculpture dominated his output. He made a series of work out of large sheets of white paper, sometimes folded back without a crease at a single corner, a wave-like swoop held in place by a nail.⁵ He presented these pieces in a group exhibition at the Long Beach Museum of Art in October 1970. The show was largely forgettable, but fortuitously Helene Winer attended. Winer had just moved back to Los Angeles from London, where she'd spent two years working at the Whitechapel Gallery and becoming interested in Conceptual art. Now in her first weeks as director of the Montgomery Art Center at Pomona College, she spent much of her time looking for locally based artists with whose concerns she was sympathetic. Goldstein's sculptures piqued her curiosity. They were different. "It was the aspect of a proposition," she reflected, "that first drew me to the work."⁶

Winer offered Goldstein a show at Pomona for January 1971—which was a problem because William Wegman was already on the books. Wegman inhabited different circles than Goldstein. Once a week he played pickup basketball with Bruce Nauman, Doug Wheeler, and some other artists. When Winer visited his studio in Long Beach, she was floored by his photographs and videos.⁷ The photographs often included himself and played with ideas of doubling and representation. An element of mordant absurdity suffuses the pictures, especially those that include taxidermic animals. The videos were consciously low-tech, rarely longer than a minute or two, and often involved either Wegman or anthropomorphized props playing out oddball scenarios. Wegman was aware of the idiosyncrasies of his practice, and it made little sense to him that Winer would give Goldstein a show at the same time. He did not know Goldstein, and despite the fact that the exhibitions would be separate—each with its own room, own announcement, and own catalog—he felt Goldstein was impinging on his moment.⁸

There were eight works in Goldstein's show. Five verged on the monumental: lengths of eight-by-eight-inch wood beams stacked one atop the other until they could no longer stand on their own. The tenuous-

ness of these columns, stabilized only by gravity, gave the exhibition a foreboding sense of doom. In one piece he stacked thirteen natural-state blocks with a fourteenth, painted black, on top; on the floor, next to the hulking form, was a single block painted white.

Goldstein's structures evoke comparison to a piece Allen Ruppersberg had made several months earlier, *Exhibit A* (1970), which was part of his solo presentation at the Pasadena Museum of Art—a show Goldstein would have seen.⁹ Like much of Ruppersberg's work from the time, *Exhibit A* exudes a humorous pathos. Two stacks of nine identical cardboard boxes form corresponding columns. On the left-hand column, Ruppersberg spray-painted, one letter per box, leaving the bottom two blank, the word "EXHIBIT"; on the other, "A" is scrawled on the uppermost box, the letter's downward strokes bleeding onto the box below. Things like scale, composition, even phenomenological concerns are beside the point. This is a work about what constitutes an art object in the wake of the readymade, a consideration of its essence and how meaning is construed. Goldstein asked different questions.

With the exception perhaps of Hirokazu Kosaka, no one knew Goldstein's work as well as Winer. Not long after their first meeting, the two started a relationship that was uniquely theirs. It varied in intensity and passion, and was marked by their ambition and desire to leave a mark on the art world. It was a mutually beneficial partnership, romantic as it was pragmatic.¹⁰ And it left a strong impression on Goldstein long after they separated, in part because Winer always listened to him. "She was the only one," he once said, "who understood and believed in my work."¹¹ His speech could be a fountain of energy, words flowing ceaselessly with no end or resolution in sight. Winer, in her brief catalog essay for his exhibition, ostensibly translated his ideas. Her prose is incisive. She stresses the material determinism of the sculptures and how they created "the very real presence of possible danger."¹²

The sculptures were self-contained, entities that reduced Goldstein's volition to that of necessity—to merely following the predetermined order established by the wood—for the height of each piece is predicated on the ability of the column to stand unaided. Goldstein's abdication of

choice made his oddly anthropomorphized forms the embodiment of his own predicament. The stacks were subject to forces beyond their control. Gravity held them in place but with no guarantee of permanence; they might fall. The instability placed viewers in a bind. Should they approach? How close and from what direction? Each and every person standing before one of the objects was thrust into a decision conditioned by the work's internal struggle with fate, one arranged by Goldstein, who himself had no way to alter the outcome. A strange passivity loomed: that of Goldstein, the sculptures, and the viewers, each rendered subject to the will of something or someone else.

Despite its verdant green lawns and beautiful gardens, Pomona, like Claremont and the rest of Greater Los Angeles, is in the desert, where temperatures fluctuate: warm, if not hot, during the day; cool, if not cold, at night. Untreated wood like that in Goldstein's sculptures responds to atmospheric variations. On nights when the temperature dropped significantly, the wood blocks contracted and the sculptures collapsed. The next morning Winer reassembled them.

A friend from Chouinard, Gary Krueger, photographed the work for the Pomona catalog. Another picture he took around this time includes himself, William Leavitt, and Goldstein. They are at a restaurant, probably in Hollywood. The camera is on the table, pointed slightly upward. The print shows Krueger in the left foreground, with Leavitt behind him and Goldstein seated across from Leavitt. In the immediate foreground, an overturned coffee cup sits atop its saucer, waiting to be used, looking like a derby hat. Caricatures of celebrities line the walls, mugging unwittingly for the camera. Krueger is manly and fit; his expression betrays the attention he gives to the camera, whose shutter release cable he most likely holds, out of view, in his right hand. He and Goldstein flash peace signs. Leavitt smiles shyly, slouches a bit, exuding kindness. Goldstein is also hunched, but his frame is rigid, the tension in his arms and back apparent even through the celluloid. His expression suggests an effort to pull back from the camera. He does not smile like the others. Thick

black hair comes down to his shoulders. Large, rectangular sunglasses obscure his eyes.

Melinda Turbell, writing about the Pomona show, connected Goldstein's pieces to the work of Richard Serra and Carl Andre. His sculptures, she observed, depended upon suspension, tension, and gravity, but it was the sense of fleetingness, of incipient disaster, that caught her attention: "Together with their very real potential for collapse, the fact that the pieces can be disassembled out of existence underscores the experiential aspect and ephemerality of both the art work and the art experience."¹³ This odd impermanence meant the quasi-monuments functioned like figures on a chessboard. They were not sculptures in the conventional sense, not even when considered in relation to Minimalist objects. They were muted performers—installed then removed, an argument presented then taken away.

Goldstein struggled to reconcile himself to sculpture. His peers moved in different directions, and when he read *Avalanche* despair overtook him. He felt he lurked on the fringes.¹⁴ Throughout these moments of insecurity, Kosaka was a constant. Goldstein's doubts subsided when he was with his friend, and the potential for artistic experimentation became a real possibility. The time they spent together was intense, and after a while a mutual influence emerged with the growing sense that one mirrored the other. Authorship, when they were alone in their studio, did not matter. Ideas were shared, reused, manipulated. The actions of one spurred those of the other. The flow extended beyond the workspace. Kosaka one day bought an old, white Chevy V-6 pickup truck. The following afternoon, Goldstein had one that was exactly the same.¹⁵

Kosaka pushed Goldstein toward performance. The transition was not easy, and even as he undertook it, Goldstein continued to produce sculptures. Rarely was a performance preannounced, and most took place without an audience. Kosaka was generally there. Winer was also sometimes around. Two interconnected themes predominated: the erasure of the self and the efficacy of the will. The first events happened at night, one on a busy thoroughfare, the other on a highway. In the for-

mer, Goldstein, dressed entirely in white, raced back and forth across the street, occasionally illuminated by passing cars; in the latter, again in white, he walked along the lane-divider, his presence sporadically announced by oncoming headlamps. Works such as these reduced Goldstein to a series of predetermined actions controlled by mechanisms outside his purview. He continued this line of thinking through much of 1971 and into 1972, as when, lying on his studio floor, he had himself bound with an electrical cord plugged into a nearby outlet. A lightbulb rested on his chest and a sensor placed close to his heart made the bulb flash with his pulse. In another, he and a friend were enclosed in separate coffins supported on sawhorses. Both wore sensors that monitored their hearts. Speakers in each box loudly broadcast the sound of the other person's heartbeat, as both tried to stay calm for as long as they could.

The specter of fatalism that imbued Goldstein's performances and sculptures was not unique to him. He was captivated with ideas of death and of the mystical, interests that were also on the minds of those close to him.¹⁶ Kosaka did a performance in which he ran through the woods trying to avoid the pursuit of a hunter and his dog. Ruppertsberg, fascinated with Harry Houdini and Raymond Roussel, made works that alluded to suicide and disappearance. Less obsessed with death but involved with similar issues was Bas Jan Ader, whose *Fall* films from 1970 and 1971 took up the problem of free will through a series of dramatic gestures. And Chris Burden, before a small audience on November 19, 1971, had himself shot in the arm in order to better understand the feeling of violence.

Kosaka's girlfriend, the artist Maggie Lowe, described the emotive aspects of Goldstein's performances in an article that appeared in *Jam and Butter*, a small publication she produced with Kosaka. "One cannot help feel the strong vibrations reverberating from [Goldstein's] body," she wrote—relating the experience to a different performance, *Five Hour Run* (1972), in which Kosaka jogged steadily from one end of a gallery to the other in an effort to purify the space and allow viewers, who experienced the work only after he finished and left the room, to inhale the art.¹⁷ Kosaka construed *Five Hour Run* upon Buddhist principles, ideas he shared with Goldstein and Wolfgang Stoerchle, Goldstein's friend

and teacher at CalArts. Stoerchle had left Germany when he was sixteen and arrived in Los Angeles a few years later on horseback, having traveled with his brother across wide swaths of North America. He joined CalArts as a professor of sculpture, and Goldstein was once his teaching assistant. Stoerchle's art was as much performative as it was sculptural, and marked by a physical brutishness. What he lacked in elegance he made up for in an attempt to understand non-Western systems of belief. Kosaka's informal teachings enthralled him more than they did Goldstein, but if Goldstein did not fully immerse himself in Buddhism, certain ideas nevertheless resonated with him, like Kosaka's disavowal of binary thinking and his constant emphasis on the void.¹⁸

Friends and acquaintances knew Goldstein took drugs. Kosaka would tell him to stop when he thought things were getting out of hand.¹⁹ Goldstein was not an addict, and in the early 1970s he did not actively seek out drugs, but if they were around, he had the propensity to indulge. Once, in August 1971, he and Winer traveled to London for his upcoming solo show at Nigel Greenwood Gallery. As they waited to check in for their flight, he took three sleeping pills when one would have been enough. Soon his muscles turned to jelly and he struggled to remain standing.²⁰

Los Angeles offered few exhibition options for emerging artists. The institutional structure was incomplete and undersupported compared to that of New York. The Pasadena Museum of Art filled the gap somewhat, and in spring 1971 the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, before then little engaged with contemporary art, organized *Twenty-four Young Los Angeles Artists*, a show Goldstein took part in, as did Ruppertsberg, who "exhibited" *Al's Grand Hotel*. The halcyon days of the 1960s and Ferus and Dwan galleries had dissolved, although stalwarts like Nicholas Wilder remained influential. For some of Goldstein's old Chouinard rivals and others associated with the Venice Beach scene, options appeared in New York, as galleries like Leo Castelli became enamored with work that seemed emblematic of the Southern California ethos. Goldstein and his friends oriented themselves toward local galleries like Eugenia Butler and Riko Mizuno, or Pomona's art center, or smaller spaces

in Europe. Nigel Greenwood gave Goldstein a platform, while Ader, Ruppertsberg, Leavitt, and Ger van Elk, Ader's old friend and an occasional resident in Los Angeles, all showed with Art & Project Gallery in Amsterdam.

Goldstein, hoping to build on momentum from his Pomona exhibition, initiated a group show that took place in his studio in April 1971. Called simply *Studio Show*, it was nominally organized by Winer and brought together Goldstein, Ader, Leavitt, Ruppertsberg, Stoerchle, Van Elk, and two others from Chouinard, Paul Drake and Stephen Sher. Ader presented an early version of the film *I'm Too Sad to Tell You*. Goldstein exhibited some sculptures. Kosaka declined to participate because he felt he was not an artist.²¹ For Goldstein and those who had not shown as widely as Ruppertsberg and Van Elk, the *Studio Show* was a statement of intent.

Later that year, Goldstein, Ruppertsberg, and Stoerchle were at Los Angeles International Airport, heading to New York. Ruppertsberg had already spent four months there, and Stoerchle wanted to test the waters for a possible move.²² Nervous energy abounded. Stoerchle slouched a bit, his left hand wedged into the back pocket of his jeans. Ruppertsberg and Goldstein cracked jokes, a big smile working its way across Goldstein's face. Baldessari had repeatedly told his students that they needed to go to New York if they wanted to achieve anything. In Goldstein's bag were sheets of slides. He planned to visit galleries and show them his work. Leo Castelli and Ileana Sonnabend were to be his first stops. There was a great deal of naïveté about the whole thing.²³

Baldessari once told Goldstein to lose his "fuck you" attitude.²⁴ Students respected Baldessari both because of his art and the way he treated them. He saw them as peers, not underlings, and encouraged them to explore things they thought not permissible. Ideas were bandied about, arguments ensued, and Baldessari never let them lose sight of what it took to become an artist. Goldstein was swept up by this energy, his own dreams of greatness fueled, in part, by Baldessari's high standards. Much of what Baldessari did was direct the students' curiosity and com-

petitive spirit. Whether they were undergraduate or graduate students did not matter. In the classroom he judged them by the sharpness of their minds and the vitality of their work. Goldstein often felt intimidated. It bothered him that he was the only one making sculpture, and he feared he was intellectually behind. Once he gave a ride to Nancy Chunn, an acquaintance from Chouinard who now worked at CalArts. As she and Goldstein made their way through traffic, she saw books strewn over the backseat of his car. She asked him about them, knowing full well that Chouinard hardly provided the best academic preparation. Goldstein responded evasively, but this was not unusual. She always found it hard to divine what he was thinking. Nonetheless, she sensed “that he felt overwhelmed by the intellectual abilities of a lot of the other students.”²⁵

CalArts was a particular experience not just because of its heady atmosphere. It was isolated, closer to the desert in spirit and reality than to the urban core of Los Angeles. For students who lived on campus, it was easy to feel they were cut off from the world.²⁶ The separation sharpened one’s focus, minimized distractions, and added to the mystique of being an artist in the west. Stoerchle embraced this strangeness and made a former Jehovah’s Witness meeting hall not far from campus his home and studio. Baldessari regularly used a roadside bar, visible from the hill where Goldstein did “Burial Piece,” for office hours.²⁷

Goldstein was not insensitive to the congruence of mind and land. He went with Kosaka to El Mirage Dry Lake, a barren spot in the Mojave Desert where his friend would go to meditate. The site is relatively isolated: Palmdale is thirty-five miles to the west (and CalArts, about eighty); Edwards Air Force Base, forty-five miles north and west; Victorville, about twenty miles to the east. Between these points, the aridness of the high desert makes it difficult to support much of anything. Scale and proportion are hard to judge in the vast emptiness. The lakebed is quite large. Its cracked, dry surface is often impressed with tire tracks left by speed enthusiasts who come out with souped-up motorcycles and hotrods for organized time trials. To the sides of the lake one sees small mounds of fine, granular sand shaped by the steady breeze that funnels between the surrounding mountains. In the winter the peaks are snow-capped, and their glistening surface enhances the disorientation. There

are a few, scattered Joshua trees, but creosote bushes cover the majority of the land. If dryness had a color, it would describe the tone and hue of this scrub.

In the fall semester of his second year, Goldstein taught an undergraduate sculpture course called “Temporary Structures.” The course’s directive was straightforward: do not add objects to the world; rearrange existing things.²⁸ Among the coterie of students: Matt Mullican, who had just started at CalArts; James Welling, a recent transfer from Carnegie Mellon; Dede Bayzk; and David Trout, later a bassist in the punk band the Weirdos. Mullican had grown up in Los Angeles and was familiar with the surrounding wilds. About a month into the semester, he suggested the class go to a dry lake and do some kind of earth art. Goldstein was keen on the idea and arranged a trip to El Mirage. Mullican and Welling rode with Goldstein in his pickup. The conversation flowed between them, the time passed quickly. When they arrived at the lakebed, Welling wanted to feel the rush of the air. He stood up in the truck’s cargo bed and held tight to the cabin as Goldstein sped across the compacted expanse of soil. Welling’s face grew distorted by the force of the wind, a startling sight that left Mullican and Goldstein dumbstruck.²⁹

The class came to the desert to make works not necessarily about the land. They’d brought shovels, dug some trenches. Trout buried carrots upside down. Mullican unspooled some yarn and, with Bayzk, went around to different areas of the lakebed, stretching out its length to get a sense of scale. Welling was far from everyone else, crouched low to the ground, taking photographs of small rocks. Goldstein drove out to check on him, leaning out of the driver’s side window to talk. For all the massiveness around Welling, it was the minuscule that absorbed him. He saw and sensed things vastly different from what he knew from his childhood in Connecticut. It was liberating to be out in the middle of nowhere, making art and thinking about its possibilities with no expectations and pressures.³⁰

Welling regularly saw Paul McMahon on CalArts’ campus.³¹ McMahon was an undergraduate at Pomona but was interested in what went on in Valencia. He was an artist of sorts, a writer at times, and the lead singer

of a band that included Chris Burden's brother. He hung around the gallery at Pomona because he was interested in Conceptual art, and had met Goldstein there during his show.³² In the spring of 1972 McMahon and Goldstein were both at a party in Claremont. McMahon had returned from a semester abroad in England. He had purchased several student exam notebooks while there and used them to record ideas for future artworks. He had been reading Yoko Ono's *Grapefruit* and was moved by how a single sentence could be the ground for something meaningful. Till then, Goldstein had mostly ignored McMahon, but McMahon thought he would appreciate the notebooks and pulled him aside at the party to show him. "Genius!" Goldstein exclaimed, after flipping through the pages for a while, and from then on he treated McMahon as a peer.³³

Goldstein's sculptural practice evolved throughout his final year at CalArts. The works grew more poetic, more akin in spirit to the performances he had been doing, until it no longer seemed viable to make things. His materials were standard mill-stock wood beams, which he and Kosaka hauled to the studio from a nearby lumberyard in their twin white pickup trucks. The beams varied in length, although Goldstein favored longer ones. The untitled works were composed like compact fugues. One, from 1971, comprises eighteen beams. The first rests on the studio floor; the other seventeen, laid each atop the last, fan upward and outward in a gentle, wavelike curve. Among the more dramatic pieces were complex spirals, held in a tenuous balance, evoking a functionless staircase, or a vortex that spins slowly at the bottom but gains speed at its top. On many occasions, Kosaka left Goldstein in their second-floor studio with a finished piece, only to find, on his return, something entirely different in its place. Goldstein made what his friends called "gravity" sculptures on the weekends. They were unstable and often collapsed with a thunderous thud. The business on the ground floor complained about the noise.³⁴

When Goldstein had a structure he liked, he asked Kosaka to photograph it. The resulting images, often the only evidence a particular sculpture had existed, functioned like the documentation Conceptual

and performance artists commonly rely on to substantiate impermanent or mutable work, and yet something more occurred in these pictures. They were not exhibited, nor did they serve as a two-dimensional substitute. Goldstein and Kosaka spent time with them, arranging eight-by-ten-inch black-and-white prints on a studio wall.³⁵ As a cluster, the pictures took on their own life. Individually, they became distinct as well. For Goldstein, it seems, the photograph had become, in some still ill-defined way, the work of art or, at least partially, a more perfect realization of the sculptures.

Goldstein never spoke publicly about these objects and their photographs, and by the time people might have cared about them he was on to other things. It did not help that Baldessari was indifferent to them, or so Goldstein believed.³⁶ The photographs offered a way out of the irreversible fate he assigned to his sculptures and his willful eradication of agency. Whether occasioned by the structural logic of wooden units or the timed patterns of traffic lights, Goldstein's passivity was by choice, a choice taken, in this case, at the expense of his sculptures, which could never transcend their material condition. The manner in which he acted with the photographs, the care he and Kosaka paid to their arrangement, even the choices about how the pictures were taken in the first place, all suggests Goldstein was searching for something that could capture the essence of the work or of his thought. He did not seem to care that the photograph was a record of unaccountable presence. An image, Goldstein implied, could be a thing in itself, and although a clear theory was not yet being articulated, he became more aware that representations possess as much power as things and have the potential to be unbounded in ways physical objects cannot.

The moment Goldstein started to manipulate and arrange the photographs of his sculptures in his studio, his relationship to his art changed. Much of this has to do with the bond between the ideas in his mind and the works of art that testify to his thought process. He began to see no real division between his thoughts and the representations that formed his art, a belief system that proffered a porousness between the mental

and the material, and in the end, privileged the mind over everything else.

In the ensuing years, he would attempt to articulate what must have been an intense way of seeing and thinking about the world. He advocated for a kind of mind-body split: as he said in 1977, “You can experience [art] in your head without having to experience it in your body,” or in 2001, “It’s the mind/body thing. Our bodies are mute and our minds aren’t. . . . The mind and the body are not in harmony.”³⁷ These comments isolated the conceptual aspect of his process, and eventually it would be only the idea itself that mattered. He worked, not always consciously, toward this point, but almost from the beginning he conceived of a flow between the mind and the world, between mental images and visceral images, something he summed up well: “I want to turn a thought into something tangible—an object—and then back to a thought.”³⁸ A conversation in continual translation, one that moves from the ideational to the material and back—this unresolvable, perhaps incommensurable aspiration utterly gripped Goldstein.

When Goldstein and Kosaka spoke about philosophy, usually in their studio, the late writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty were a frequent subject.³⁹ Merleau-Ponty worked toward a philosophy of being that was similar to how Goldstein experienced the world. In “The Intertwinning—The Chiasm,” the last completed chapter of his unfinished tome *The Visible and the Invisible*, and in the essay “The Eye and the Mind,” written a few years earlier, Merleau-Ponty locates the fundamental question of ontology in vision, in one’s ocular apprehension of things and entities in what he calls “the visible.” Sight, Merleau-Ponty contends in “The Eye and the Mind,” is indelibly linked to the body, to one’s movement within the visible: “Immersed in the visible by his body; itself visible, the see-er does not appropriate what he sees; he merely approaches it by looking, he opens onto the world.”⁴⁰ The Cartesian mind/body split is elided. Thought and feeling, here, are one, and made evident by the peculiar nature of selfhood: that one can simultaneously see and be seen, that one’s body is always a thing among a welter of things.

Merleau-Ponty was troubled with Descartes’s understanding of the

world. He found the physical separation of the mind from the corporeal inconceivable and was bemused by the thought of Descartes staring into a mirror, unsure whether the reflection was really himself. In no way is being, Merleau-Ponty maintains, an isolated product of the mind. It is in the optical apprehension of the encompassing world that one becomes entwined with nature.⁴¹ Each individual's experience is a constant coming into being through the encounter with other entities, whether things or people—being emanates and is there to be seen, absorbed, and acknowledged, a process that reverses itself (again and again) only to continue in the other direction.

The visual, what one sees and make sense of, is not something ethereal, as Merleau-Ponty makes clear in “The Intertwinning—The Chiasm,” but part of the world like any other thing. Vision comes forth from any kind of substance, and one's look envelops whatever is being seen. This interaction between the seer and the seen is not without mediation. One's body serves the role, and a particularity of existence is that each person is at once someone who sees and someone who is seen. The imbrication makes the process of living an act of rendering into thought what passes through the body.⁴² Merleau-Ponty calls the body's mediating role “flesh,” a nuanced term at once literal and metaphorical. Flesh is an element of being; it constitutes the fabric of existence, much as dark matter is a glue for space and time. It is a means to explain both the agency of a person and the agency of the other. It lets one know that each and every one is sentient and sensible, and the all-pervious quality of flesh means there is little boundary between one's thoughts and the world. Flesh unifies and connects, it incorporates individuals into the visual and brings the world into the person.⁴³

The model of the flesh, the way it stitches together individuals and the world and creates a connection from the sentient to the sensible and back through the visual, ostensibly through images, is analogous to Goldstein's practice, although his engagement with images led him to feel ever more disconnected from his body. Over the course of his career, he worked across media without a strong connection to any of them. Sculpture, performance, film, records, writing, and then later painting and more writing were means to communicate. The art-

works were aftereffects of a thought. If anything—and this is perhaps the strangest thing—Goldstein was the medium of his art, his body the very thing that mediated the images in his mind and those in the world. This was not something he acknowledged. Never was he interested in the blurring of art and life. He believed in the physical importance of objects because his art created a distance between himself and others. As he said to Morgan Fisher in 1977, “My work has always been very much involved with sculpture in the sense that it’s about defining something in space and time, very much about our relationship to it, our distance to *that* thing.”⁴⁴ What changed is that, starting in the early to mid-1970s, his art became more personal, getting at the undercurrent of emotions and feelings and sentiments and all that one experiences viscerally but struggles to communicate adequately in words.⁴⁵ From the moment he and Kosaka played with the photographs of his sculptures, from the time he began to transform his physical investigation into free will into something more conceptual, his art moved into a realm few, if any, of his peers dealt with and certainly an area art writing, both then and now, is ill-equipped to handle.

Goldstein’s excursion to New York with Ruppertsberg and Stoerchle was not for naught. Ivan Karp, the former director of Castelli Gallery, offered him an exhibition at his very Pop art-sounding O.K. Harris Gallery. The show ran December 9–30, 1972, and included the kinds of sculpture Goldstein had recently made in his studio and Kosaka had photographed. No pictures were exhibited, but there was a spiraling structure in the front room, and fragile compositions that leaned against the wall in the back. One commentator remarked, “[The spiral] is spaced very pleasingly and remains standing very mysteriously.”⁴⁶ Laurie Anderson was more incisive; the works, she wrote, not only induced “a Serra-like situation of apprehension, [but also] these pieces seem miraculous feats attributable to good engineering, natural forces and fate.”⁴⁷ She recognized the specter of determinism hovering over the installation. It did so less ominously than at Pomona or in the studio on South Figueroa. For whatever reason, Goldstein, as Anderson notes, strategically affixed nails in some of the sculptures to keep everything in place, a decision

that ran counter to the concerns he had struggled with over the past few years. His capitulation to demands extraneous to the logic of the artwork gave the show an atmosphere of compromise. In the following years, he expunged the exhibition from his resume.⁴⁸

Three

Just a few days before Christmas 1972, in the midst of his exhibition at O.K. Harris, Goldstein was in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the home of Paul McMahon. Goldstein sat upright in bed, fiddling with a piece of paper in his hands. He had just awakened from a nap. His usually well-coifed hair was mussed from sleep.

McMahon wanted to go to CalArts. He'd been accepted but did not receive a teaching assistantship, and the cost of attending was too much. He instead moved with his girlfriend to Cambridge, where he found an art scene both parochial and unfamiliar. He took a job as a gas station attendant and compressed forty hours of work into three days, leaving time for art making and other activities.¹ Not long after his arrival, he came across a community art center close to Harvard Square called Project, Inc. It specialized in after-school programs for kids and provided space for adults to explore ceramics and other creative activities. McMahon approached the center's director, Trintje Janssen, about the possibility of offering evening lectures on Conceptual art. There turned out to be no takers for the series but, undeterred, he made another proposal: "She would give me the keys when the Project closed at 6 PM on a Friday or Saturday and when she came in the next day the place would look the same."² In the intervening hours, McMahon organized one-night exhibitions. From November 1972 until July 1975, he entered the space with whoever was exhibiting. They would take down the children's art decorating the walls and install their show, quickly, before the 8:00 p.m. opening. "I never heard any complaints," McMahon recalls, "but there