BEHIND THE MIRROR: REREADING THEATRICALITY IN LUCIANO FABRO’S
ALLESTIMENTO TEATRALE

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

In the 1967 article "Art and Objecthood," the American art critic Michael Fried faults Minimalist sculpture for its inherent theatricality. Theatricality, as he defines it, results from the form's anthropomorphic scale and sense of hollowness that imply a presence, like that of a human body, inside the work. The dialogical relationship between the viewer and this interior presence becomes a spectacle. I intend to examine Fried's definition of theatricality alongside the work of the Arte Povera artist Luciano Fabro, who utilizes familiar Minimalist-like forms as containers for real human bodies. In a scantly documented performance piece Allestimento teatrale: cubo di specchi [Theatrical Staging: Mirror Cube], (1967/75), Fabro presents a theatrical performance with an audience seated around a large mirror cube listening to a monologue performed by an actor sealed inside the cube.

Since its inception in the late 1960s, the Italian Arte Povera movement has been described, among other things, as a critique of Minimalism. The group read Minimalist sculpture as a reflection of an alienating technological system of American capitalist production. As I argue, Fabro's construction of presence renders it an affectation, a manipulation of the public audience, and further that the reflection of the audience on the sides of the mirror cube allows for the formation of a collective subject. But what are the implications of such developments in a movement opposed to American influence and in the midst of the turbulent political environment of late 1960s and 1970s Italy?
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In 1967, the Italian art critic Germano Celant introduced the term *arte povera* to describe a range of radical artistic practices in late 1960s Italian art. Loosely based on the Polish experimental theater director Jerzy Gratowski's concept of 'poor theater,' Celant defined Arte Povera as an anti-technological movement based in neo-humanism, utilizing rustic or "poor" materials and following in the stead of a particularly Italian tradition of avant-garde art production. He curated two exhibitions, in 1967 and 1968, establishing the core group of twelve artists working in an "impoverished" idiom. In his 1967 manifesto, “Arte Povera Notes for a Guerilla War,” published in the Milan based journal *Flash Art,* Celant promoted an art that functions as “self-sufficient social gestures, or as formative, compositive, and anti-systematic liberations, intent upon the identification of the world and the human individual.”¹ This anti-systematic and human-centered position presents a dilemma to the artist, a choice between continuing to rely on the “system,” using "codified and artificial languages” in dialogue with existing structures of art production, the art market, and art institutions, which Celant identified with Pop, Op, and particularly Minimalist art, or the choice of poverty: of “free and individual self-development.”² He identified these three primarily American movements as “rich” and the alternative position as one of “poor” research, utilizing “poverty” in the sense of simplicity or immediacy and tangibility, which would lead to the unification of art and life, according to his utopian revolutionary rhetoric.

If, as Celant asserts, the impoverished Italian art served as a counterweight to American art, then the nature of the relationship between Arte Povera and Minimalism must be further

² Ibid.
examined. According to Giovanni Lista, Arte Povera “skirted” Minimalism and was the only movement in Europe capable of standing up to American art.\(^3\) This potential, as Lista defines it, derives from the group’s critique of post-war industrial and economic progress, and art that would appear to support it. Francesco Bonami describes Arte Povera and Minimalism as two types of modernist reformation, with the former favoring a more organic approach and the latter a more abstract one.\(^4\) The notable Italian art critic Tommaso Trini described the "newness of tradition" in Italian art, a recovery of history and craftsmanship in natural and industrial materials, as a contrast to Minimalism, which he states, "deliberately encouraged an art that could be readily labeled."\(^5\) Trini and the German art critic Harald Szeeman both see a similarity between Arte Povera and American artists working in "poor" materials, such as Anti-form, Process Art, Earthworks, and the post-Minimalist works of Robert Morris, which all moved in the same direction. In his 1969 book Arte Povera and his 1970 exhibition, “Conceptual Art – Arte Povera – Land Art,” Celant too emphasized a broader and more inclusive conception of Arte Povera more or less synonymous with these movements.

According to Benjamin Buchloh, the Arte Povera group's "misreading of American minimalist sculpture emphasized technology as its primary mode of production" rather than the form's presence and Gestalt effects, or the coalescence of parts.\(^6\) For Buchloh it seems that Celant's criticism proposes an oppositional relationship between art and technology. Following

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\(^4\) Francesco Bonami, "Now We Begin," Karen Jacobson, ed., Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962-1972, ex. cat. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2001), 112. Bonami notes in parentheses: "Donald Judd's criticism, for example, was never matched by that of any of the Arte Povera artists. Luciano Fabro's writings may be brilliant, but he never assumend the role of the critic, as Judd did, unconditionally."


this argument, the underlying assertion is that Arte Povera's reading of Minimalism, the prefabrication of Minimalist sculpture or the use of an industrial system of production, implicates the movement as an extension of an abusive, alienating, and technophilic economic system, namely American-style capitalism. This interpretation, according to Buchloh, resulted in Arte Povera's anti-technological position. The group's recovery of an artisanal aesthetic and a "retrieval of obsolescence," a juxtaposition of natural and industrial materials, were accompanied by emphasis on spontaneity that resisted commodification. Such resistance is evident in dramatic works such as Jannis Kounellis's Untitled (Twelve Horses), from 1969, in which he installed twelve live horses at the Galleria l'Attico in Rome. (Fig. 1) Or Mario Merz's igloos, composed of glass or stone and tree branches, recalling prehistoric or nomadic structures but incorporating texts from contemporary political and pop culture written in neon lights, as seen in Igloo di Giap (1968).² (Fig. 2)

If Arte Povera is to continue to be understood as a potential countermovement to Minimalism, then my task is to further examine Arte Povera works that engage Minimalism critically. Pressing upon the role of the viewer's encounter as an integral part of the work, I intend to place an established critique of Minimalism in dialogue with the works of the Arte Povera artist Luciano Fabro.

While Arte Povera pressed on the sociopolitical aspects of an art that was in many ways anti-modern, Minimalism highlighted the viewer's phenomenological experience of encountering highly simplified forms in space. Banishing the gestures and emotion of Abstract Expressionism, the Minimalists favored simple geometric forms, often repeated and stripped of all adornment. The notable American art critic Clement Greenberg wrote that Minimalist works might be read

² Mario Merz, Igloo di Giap (1968), neon text: "Se il nemico si concentra perde terreno, se si disperde perde forza," a quote from North Vietnamese military leader General Vo Nguyen Giap: "if the enemy masses his forces he loses ground, if he scatters he loses strength"
as art, "as almost anything is today - including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper." As art, "as almost anything is today - including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper." Indeed, the critiques of Minimalism have become a significant part of the movement's legacy, the single most important of these was written by the art critic Michael Fried. In his influential 1967 article, "Art and Objecthood," Fried faults Minimalism for its inherent theatricality, beholden to the circumstances in which the viewer encounters the work and the temporality of such an experience. He further condemns the effect of presence in Minimalist sculptures produced by hollowness and scale, which directly contributes to the theatricality of the relationship between the viewer and the work. Concerning the space within a form, Fried cites Robert Morris's *Untitled*, 1965-66, a large circular form made of fiberglass, composed of two semicircular halves placed slightly apart, fluorescent lights concealed within the hollow form, which emit light from the gaps between each half. (Fig. 3) The escape of light from within the form asserts its hollowness, an interior space, and some sort of body contained inside the form. In addition to the hollowness of the form, Fried traces the problem of presence within a work to a latent anthropomorphism in the scale of works such as Tony Smith's *Die*, 1962/68, a 500 pound six foot steel cube. (Fig. 4) According to Smith *Die* is neither a monument nor an object, however, as Fried asserts, the work "Smith was making might be something like a surrogate person - that is, a kind of statue." Minimalist forms are explicitly "biomorphic" because a human-sized hollow form retains a sense of privacy and corporeality.

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10 Fried, 123, "Presence can be conferred by size or by the look of non-art."
11 Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 43. "Minimalism does announce a new interest in the body - again, not in the form of an anthropomorphic image or in the suggestion of an illusionistic space of consciousness, but rather in the presence of its objects, unitary and symmetrical as they often are (as Fried saw), just like people."
12 Fried, 128.
Robert Morris describes the minimalist work as an object in a situation, one that includes the viewer. But According to Fried, theatricality is an effect of stage presence. Minimalist sculpture emphasizes its own physical relationship with the viewer, thereby transforming the situation into a spectacle. What would it mean to draw upon theatricality, to reread it in the works of Arte Povera, a movement that viewed itself as a critic of Minimalism?

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13 Fried, 153.
CHAPTER 2
ALLESTIMENTO TEATRALE

The sculptor and writer Luciano Fabro (Turin, 1936 – 2007) was already active in Milan when he participated in the group's first exhibition Arte Povera e Im Spazio, in 1967. Though he began as a painter, by the early sixties, Fabro was producing strikingly simple yet complex sculptures in steel, glass, and mirrors that challenged the viewer's perception of space. Many of his early works drew attention to the seams and construction of existing architectural spaces, playing with the conventions of Euclidian geometry and linear perspective, and framing and fragmenting fields of vision. Perhaps Fabro's most well known series, Italia (1968-75), re-imagines the iconic silhouette of the Italian nation cast or cut in diverse materials such as lead, gilt bronze, glass, fur, and mirrors, and often suspended or propped in unusual positions. Many of works in this series highlighted the ongoing political and economic problems in Italy, with titles that were a play on words, such as Italia d'oro (1971) referring to the superficial gold surface and the Italian verb *dorare*, which can be interpreted as both to gild and to cook until brown. (Fig. 5) The title of Italia di cartoccio (1970), an Italy shaped form composed of fabric-like folds of lead, recalls both the ornamental signature of an Egyptian pharaoh and the explosive potential of a paper cartridge filled with gunpowder. (Fig. 6)

His other well-known series, Piedi (1968-71), consist of colossal freestanding feet and legs. (Fig. 7) Clad in brightly colored silk, the legs extend down from the gallery ceiling to large playful zoomorphic feet made of marble, chrome, bronze, or Murano glass. With such sumptuous materials, Fabro's works hardly deserves the label 'poor art'. As Didier Semin notes,

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At the time of Fabro's death, in 2007, he was preparing an exhibition for the Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donna Regina (MADRE) in Naples. "Luciano Fabro - Didactica Magna Minima Moralia," curated by his daughter, Silvia Fabro, and Rudi Fuchs included early works such as *In Cubo* (see figure F) and *Mezzo specchiato*. 
while Fabro's oeuvre is perhaps the most confusing and difficult to assimilate within the Arte Povera group, his work presents a recovery of craftsmanship in a distinctly Italian tradition and used materials that no longer had a place in twentieth century art.\textsuperscript{15}

In the late sixties and early seventies, Fabro produced several large environmental sculptures that continued the research of his early works. \textit{In cubo} (1966), \textit{Concetto spaziale [Trigon]. Tautologia} (1967), and \textit{Allestimento teatrale: Cubo di specchi} (1967/75), each concern an architectural geometric form that encloses or conceals a space. The perception of space and presence within a form relates to the varying degrees of accessibility to its interior, drawing the viewer's attention to her own role within such a scenario, namely their relationship with the potential body that dwells within the form. A real body inside the form enters a physical dialogue with the viewer outside, thus literalizing the hollowness and presence that Fried criticized.

Fabro's \textit{Allestimento teatrale: Cubo di specchi} [Theatrical Staging: Mirror Cube] is an often-overlooked performance piece cum environmental sculpture, initially conceived in 1967 and later staged at the Bagno Borbonico in Pescara, in February 1975.\textsuperscript{16} (Fig. 8) Based on a theater-in-the-round, in \textit{Allestimento teatrale} Fabro incorporates a geometric form in a theatrical plan, concealing the space of the stage and creating a dialogue with the open space of the gallery. In a room, four banks of chairs are arranged in the style of an arena, encircling a large cube (2 m\textsuperscript{3}) faced with mirrors on the outside and inside. (Fig. 9, 10) Though the interior of the cube is lined with mirrors, this is not apparent to the viewer. One of the four side panels of the mirror cube slides open, allowing an individual to enter the interior of the cube, after which it is closed.

\textsuperscript{16} Luciano Fabro, \textit{Attaccappani} (Turin: Einaudi Letteratura, 1978), 28. “In 1967, the theater hall of Turin asked me to do something for their "Room of Columns." I designed this cube of mirrors but nothing came of it, but I used it in some way in In Cubo. The following year, the fourteenth Trienalle of Milan invited me to enter the exhibition "New Landscape" by ensuring "...the collaboration and effective contribution of some of the major Italian industries." Falling victim to the recession the theater depended on industrial recovery. There was everything: iron, plastic, concrete, wood ...but not even a shard of mirror. I then waited eight years. So what? After eight years I still had it, I had to do this \textit{Allestimento Teatrale} somewhere.” All translations by author unless otherwise noted.
for the performance. For the individual inside the cube, the cell-like room of mirrors creates an endless environment of obsessively repeated images receding toward the nebulous horizon that appears at the limits of the virtual environment. (Fig. 11, 12) Fabro has described the piece as follows:

The Mirror Cube... is a purely programmatic operation, and is actually enunciated like a stage set. Its analysis is of a problem in the theatre. It is this: when the actor is on stage it is as if he were in a cube of mirrors, for he does not see the spectators, who are in darkness, and, in fact, sees himself and has also trained himself in front of a mirror; when the spectator sees what is happening on stage he feels that he is on stage, living in the place of the actor [...]

Per Fabro's instructions, an audience is seated around the cube listening to a hired actor, enclosed within, who performs a monologue of his own choosing. Aided by a microphone, with an amplifier and speakers hidden on the roof of the sealed cube, the actor's spoken performance is broadcast to the collective audience. Due to the hermetic closure of the interior it seems that the actor has a far more limited perception of the audience than they do of him. As the audience listens to his performance they watch their own reflected images, and likewise, as the actor recites his monologue he is surrounded by his own reflected image multiplied ad infinitum.

The material of the mirror-paneled form interrupts the conventional theatrical arrangement of a spectacle on display for an audience, thus challenging the naturalized privilege of their direct view. According to Catherine Grenier, though Fabro's mirrored form does not

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17 Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Arte Povera (London: Phaidon, 1999), 100. This most thorough description of how the actor enters the cube. "A hollow cube, covered in mirror both inside and out, can be entered through a sliding door."
allow visual access to the interior, it concentrates the viewer's attention on the interior because the actor's voice asserts an interior presence.²⁰

The reflections on the surface of the cube enact a series of substitutions: for the audience seated around the exterior, their own image replaces the spectacle, rather appearing as the spectacle, while the actor's image, infinitely reproduced in the mirrors of the cube's interior, becomes his audience. Donning the vision of their counterpart, the external audience acquires the field of vision of the subject while the actor in the interior not only possesses the audience’s vision but his image is multiplied.

Cubes are familiar forms from Minimalist sculpture, as seen in works by Tony Smith, Robert Morris, Donald Judd, or Larry Bell. Luciano Fabro's *Allestimento teatrale* uses a form closely associated with Minimalist art, a mirrored cube, but repurposes it as a theater prop. He was interested in cubes as semi-architectural enclosures, for their adaptability as containers and fundamental geometric forms, and their engagement in a dialogue between surface and hollow interior.²¹ As Didier Semin notes, Fabro's almost ascetic simplicity masks a great complexity, and despite the reductive element his work insists upon the plurality of perception.²² A collection of cubes may produce a gestalt effect, and a cube on a scale between a monument and an object may create the impression of corporeal presence. However, what becomes apparent in Fabro's cubes is his literal placement of a body inside geometric forms, creating an all-together different dynamic between a viewer and the work. But this situation is nonetheless theatrical, just as Fried described. Unlike the suggestion of presence in Tony Smith's *Die* (1962) or Morris's hollow

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²² Semin, 24. Giovanni Lista (p. 28) claims that the aesthetic affinity between Fabro’s sculptural forms with those of Minimalism derives from the harmonious asceticism of Saint Francis of Assisi, who recommended "pure simplicity" to his fellow monks.
form, the mirror cube in Fabro's *Allestimento teatrale* acts as a container for a real body, which
the audience is made aware of by the actor's spoken performance. Rooted in the real physical
occupation of space outside and inside the form, Fabro's set-up actualizes the conditions of
theatricality that Fried claims are implicit in Minimalist sculpture. The mirror cube and the
mediation of the actor's voice then interrupt the theatrical relationship between the actor and
audience.

Much of the analysis of Fabro's work has appeared in brief catalogue entries, however,
art historian and critic Jacinto Lageira's article, "Luciano Fabro: le miroir des sens ou quelques
tautologies sur l'experience esthetique," explores Fabro's series of mirrored and architectural
works in greater detail. Lageira asserts that, for *In cubo* the viewer is integral to completing the
work by entering the cube. Occupation of the interior of the form creates multiple positions and
relations between spaces, invoking a dialogue between the position inside the work and outside
the work. *Allestimento teatrale* similarly addresses the problem of a hollow interior and a
dialogue between outside and inside. Now however, the interior is occupied by an actor who
performs for an audience outside. Prevented from viewing their would-be counterparts, the
audience and actor face their own respective mirror images and are presented with images of
themselves watching, listening, or speaking. The audience morphs into a spectacle and the actor's
own image is reproduced over and over again, enacting a type of visual distribution and his own
transformation into a spectator.

I intend to frame Fabro's work according to Fried's definition of theatricality. In addition
to the spectacle of their relationship with the cube's hollow interior, the viewers now listen to an
actor inside a form. Through an analysis of Fabro's environmental sculptures, which explore the

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possibility of a body physically occupying the interior of a form, I intend to further trace out the construction of a dialogue between outside and inside. Surrounded by mirrors, the actor's performance inside the cube suggests the idea of privately practicing facial expressions and dialogue. Despite his insulation, he is putatively performing for the audience outside. Yet the disruption of visual communication is compounded by the mediation of the actor's voice through a microphone and amplifier. In conjunction with an earlier performance piece by Fabro, I will argue that the notion of presence, which Fried asserts is necessary to establish a relationship between the viewer and the interior of the form, is established in Allestimento teatrale through representations. Because presence is indirectly established through representation, it opens the possibility that presence may be an affectation.

In Allestimento teatrale, the individual viewer must first identify her own mirror image in order to establish a connection with the representations of the surrounding environment and other audience members. I believe that theatricality involves not only transforming the relationship between viewer and work into a spectacle, for a duration, but that theatricality, a performance based in theater, implies a gathering of viewers, and thus the formation of a collective subject. Therefore, collectivity forms through the mirror image. Furthermore, I intend to analyze a set of questions that accompany the formation of collectivity. What are the relations amongst members of the audience? What is their relationship to the actor inside the cube? And what are the ramifications of rereading Fried's definition of theatricality with the formation of a collective subject in Fabro's Allestimento teatrale?
CHAPTER 3
OUTSIDE AND INSIDE

Once the actor is sealed inside the mirror cube for the performance of his monologue, his movement is contained and the audience outside may not enter. Each party is aware of the outside and inside; the former designated as a space for the audience and the latter a space for a performance. Outside and inside and the designation of separate spaces leads one to consider the boundaries and transition between each space. In *The Poetics of Space*, French philosopher Gaston Bachelard describes the dialectical relationship of outside and inside.

Outside and inside are both intimate - they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility. If there exists a border-line surface between such an inside and outside this surface is painful on both sides... Intimate space loses its clarity, while exterior space loses its void, void being the raw material of possibility of being.24

In contemplating the relationship between outside and inside, the initial draw of the inside passes, and the outside, the void, is activated. Activation, in this sense, the sudden awareness of the barrier between the two spaces that abuts the exterior, leads to the loss of the void as the space gradually solidifies, bounded, almost a Gestalt. If we consider the mirrored panels of *Allestimento teatrale* as the liminal surface, then the form becomes the contributing factor in the loss of the void of the outside. Because audience members are restricted to the outside then their understanding of the interior space becomes a matter of assessment, imagining the actor now inside an inaccessible space.

Fabro’s *In cubo* [In the Cube], 1966, a work he conceived at nearly the same time as *Allestimento teatrale*, is a large canvas cube in which an individual occupant may explore a contained space, while the exterior world is reduced to light and sound. (Fig. 13) Fabro describes *In cubo*,

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[As] made for a person about one meter seventy-five centimeters tall and with a similar arm span. The cover takes away from the height without creating an overhang. Being able to touch the sides by spreading one's arms reassures one of the right fit. Lifting the cover to get in creates a sense of penetration. The sounds that one hears inside and the floor beneath one's feet link one to the outside world. The rest is attention.25

Constructed with a lightweight wooden frame, metal joints, and sheathed in translucent canvas, *In Cubo* is a five-sided cube, with the sixth remaining open allowing the viewer to lift the cube and enter from beneath. The title is a pun playing on the Italian word *incubo*, an incubus, and immediately conjures the image of a nightmare or an evil spirit who lies on top of a sleeping victim. It is an image of constriction and oppression at odds with the cube's lightweight construction.

Designed according to the height and arm span of the artist, *In cubo* recalls the image of Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, or Giambattista Vico's aphorism that in the absence of familiar forms "man makes himself the measure of all things."26 (Fig. 14) Artists' use of their own bodies as a basic unit of measurement was already a familiar practice in the 1960s, as seen with Robert Morris's coffin-like *Box for Standing*, 1961. (Fig. 15) Morris's work is an open box, a frame that displays the occupant rather than allowing her to hide within an enclosed form. With Fabro's *In cubo*, by contrast, the viewer is invited to inhabit the form. Photographs of *In cubo* show an individual either already inside or in the process of lifting the cube and entering. Once inside the cube, the viewer is surrounded, enveloped by the form, in what is intended to be a "strictly personal" space with only light and noise permeating from the exterior world.27 The light, sound, and the floor, which is the still the same floor as the gallery, remind the viewer of the space they passed through before entering the cube, as well as the space to which they must

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27 Ibid.
inevitably return. In concentrating on the light and sound, elements from outside, the viewer is confronted with the relationship between spaces and the permeability of the hollow form. Having entered the cube, the viewer is left to contemplate the division of space and their body as the source of possibilities within a limited space.

Catherine Grenier argues that both In cubo and Allestimento teatrale concentrate on the other side, the space where the viewer is not. In each work, the viewer encounters the dynamic between spaces, outside and inside, but faces different levels of access to the interior and a different dynamic between the opposing spaces. Jacinto Lageira describes In cubo as a work that is only complete when it is physically occupied by the viewer. Therefore what differentiates In cubo from Minimalism is its instrumentality. It is an operational container. In cubo carves a space out of the gallery, recovering a degree of privacy within a public space and contains a solitary experience. The walls of the cube become a frontier between public and private space. Furthermore, in this piece, sound, light, the floor, and the process of entering the cube expose how close the public is to the private, suggests that perhaps they are not fully separable.

Fabro's In cubo presents the possible inversion of outside and inside. The viewer enters the cube only to find the phenomenological experience of the interior space relies on the osmosis of light and sound trickling into the cube from outside. The walls of In cubo reduce the exterior world to elements pressing through the two-dimensional surfaces of canvas. The exterior then becomes the space behind the canvas, an "inside" desperately attempting to permeate the canvas surface. Such a shift could translate to the virtual transposition of actor and audience in Allestimento teatrale, as the image of the audience is presented to it as the spectacle and the actor's image is multiplied as a new audience. This establishes a visual contiguity between real

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28 Grenier, 293.
space and the virtual space reflected in the mirror. Yet, the space behind each image remains the location of the audience and actor respectively.

*Concetto spaziale [Trigon]. Tautologia* [Spatial Concet [Trigon]. Tautology] (1967), which Fabro constructed for the international exhibition *Trigon'67*, in Graz, was the final work in Fabro's *Tautologia* series (1965-67), a diverse range of works exploring surfaces, layers, and repeated actions. *Concetto spaziale* is an architectural environment composed of two small rooms. (Fig. 16) An open doorway permits one to enter, and in this space the viewer finds a door into a second room. A large canvas blocks the door, confronting the viewer with the blank back of the canvas. Fabro's *Concetto spaziale* continues a mode of research of space based on Lucio Fontana's series of *Spatial Concepts*, monochrome canvases that the artist cut or punctured. From the cuts in the surface the space behind the canvas erupts into pictorial space. In Fabro's *Concetto spaziale*, the viewer finds herself having physically passed into the space behind the canvas but unable to return. The inaccessible room entices the viewer with an unseeable painting.

In *Concetto spaziale*, like Robert Morris's *Untitled* (1965-66), the glow from the interior intimates not only the hollowness of the form but energy, a life that dwells within. Neon lights are installed on the ceilings of both rooms, emitting a dim light through the gap at the bottom of the canvas-blocked doorway. Much like *In cubo*, light passes from one space to another and the viewer's knowledge of a contained space is further delimited. The geometric form itself enforces a division between outside and inside, the viewer and the hollow interior of the form. According to Bachelard, outside and inside enact a dialectic of division, a metaphor for opposition: positive and negative, yes and no, being and non-being.29 Through the imposition of an architectural opposition, the divisions creates interior and exterior spaces, but are these not also the conditions

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under which presence emerges? For Fried the anthropomorphic scale and hollowness of Minimalist sculptures suggest interiority, the internal presence of a body. Despite the fascination with the unseen and the unknown, the audience is prevented from entering the actor's space by a physical and visual barrier and the form further demarcates the assigned spaces of the audience and actor.

In Fabro's environmental sculptures, the structure of the form effectively creates an interior space through specific architectures. The walls of the mirror cube in *Allestimento teatrale*, for instance, physically and visually segregate an actor, and stage space, from an audience. The audience cannot see the actor but remain convinced that an actor dwells within the hollow form. The perception of the actor within depends not only on the audience members' awareness of the hollowness of the cube, a dialogue between outside and inside, but the fact that the form can actually be entered and that an actor is inside. The actor produces speech and this is the element that distinguishes the literal occupation involved in *Allestimento teatrale* from the hollowness of a Minimalist sculpture, described by Fried as merely suggesting a human occupant.
CHAPTER 4

VOICE

In Allestimento teatrale, the voice, produced by the actor inside the cube, draws the audience's attention to the person present within the form. In other words, the speech act enacts a performative operation. In How to Do Things With Words, the British philosopher J. L. Austin critiques philosophy's long held view that language is a transparent form of communication, mere statement of factual information. He identifies a new type of speech act, a performative utterance. More than a simple description or a statement of facts, for an utterance to be classified as performative it must do something. The speech act performs an action, for example the words "I do" in a marriage ceremony. "I do," when uttered at the appropriate time in the ceremony, completes or performs the act of wedding the couple. Austin gives other examples such as the naming of a ship, a bequest in a will, and a bet. Each of these utterances, as he notes, is not a description of an act but is the action itself. Naturally for the utterance to be true certain conditions must be met. In order for an utterance to be considered true, or "felicitous," it must be uttered fully, correctly, by the right person (or persons), in the appropriate context, and at the appropriate time.

Austin explicitly omits speech acts in the context of theatrical performances, plays, poetry, etc. However, it is possible that such theatrical speech acts can be performative in another sense; that is to say, to constitute or construct an effect. A speech act, such as a monologue, constructs an ontological presence. It declares, "I exist. I am here." With the possibility that at least one actual body occupies the mirror cube of Allestimento teatrale, the utterance performs an

31 Ibid.
act of creation. At first, a voice effectively producing a being seems to be a counterintuitive interpretation. As the voice emerges from the cube, the audience cannot see the actor yet they now believe an actor exists inside the mirror cube.

In a scantily-documented performance piece titled *Apparecchio alla morte* [Instrument of the Dead] (1969), Fabro creates a scenario in which presence is constructed for an audience. In a rented theater, an audience has taken their seats and the lights have just been dimmed when Fabro appears on stage and begins reciting a text by the notable 18th century Jesuit bishop, Saint Alphonsus Liguori. After reciting the text once, he begins again and this time, as he speaks, he slowly walks backwards, eventually disappearing behind the stage curtain. The audience continues to hear his voice repeating the text and believes he is simply speaking from behind the curtain. Fabro was in fact lip-synching to a recorded voice from the very beginning, and by this time he has secretly left the stage to join the audience in the darkened theater. As such, the audience sits in this darkened theater listening to a recorded voice of a performer who is doubly "not" present. The speaker's body has disappeared, but the voice continues speaking. Though oblivious to Fabro's absence from the stage, his act of deception sustains the audience's belief in his presence because he was visibly there speaking only a moment before. Saint Alphonsus Ligouri's text itself describes the inevitability of the body's death and decay. The speaker's body has disappeared but presence remains in its place.

Presence is distinct from being present. In discussing the characteristics of presence and absence, Henri Lefebvre notes, "Presence is encountered in the course of a scenario, which it

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32 Christov-Bakargiev, 100. Allestimento teatrale was restaged in 1994 at the Palazzo Fabroni in Pistoia. This time the artist himself read a text while sitting in the cube.
33 Lageira, 99.
34 Grenier, 292.
interrupts. It takes place in representations and overcomes them. Even in the theater.\textsuperscript{35} Presence is perceived and therefore occurs only in representation, and even the awareness of absence hinges on earlier perceptions of presence.\textsuperscript{36} If presence occurs in representations, potentially simulated or replicated, as in Fabro's \textit{Apparecchio alla morte}, then the speech act is one such representation. Presence is divided from the body, a point Fried likewise notes in his description of a key aspect of theatricality - the "apparent" hollowness of a work such as Tony Smiths \textit{Die} does not contain, but merely suggests a body. As Smith stated, "I didn't think of them [i.e. the sculptures he always made] as sculptures but as presences of a sort."\textsuperscript{37} Though Fabro has literally implanted a body in a minimalist form, presence becomes a matter of representation, rather than the actual entity (body) being present. The voice does not verify the presence of the actor within.

The Canadian philosopher and media theorist Marshall McLuhan described the ability of technology: "to extend our bodily postures and motions into new materials, by way of amplification, [and] a constant drive for more power... All manner of utensils are yielding to this bodily stress by means of extensions of the body."\textsuperscript{38} Isolated inside the mirror cube of \textit{Allestimento teatrale}, the actor has been withdrawn from the social world, while still attempting to communicate with the world outside. Presumably, the actor produces speech for the audience seated outside. However, the mirror cube divides the spectacle and spectator, leaving the actor dependent upon an amplifier to reach the audience. The audience does not hear the actor's voice directly, but through electronic mediation. The audience's reception of the vocal performance is undercut by the medium to the extent that the amplifier aids the concealment of the actor. Speech broadcast through amplifiers and speakers exposes the artificiality of presence, namely, the

\textsuperscript{35} Henri Lefebvre, \textit{La présence et l'absence: contribution à la théorie des représentations} (Paris: Casterman, 1980), 226.
\textsuperscript{36} Lefebvre, 225.
\textsuperscript{37} Fried, 129-130.
separation between the voice emanating from the technology and the actor who is in fact inside the mirror cube. Jacinto Lageira describes the voice emanating from the mirrored cube as the sole "transcendence," or perhaps the only thing that escapes the cube. With a microphone provided for the actor and with an amplifier and speakers hidden on the roof of the hermetic cube, in *Allestimento teatrale* the voice is filtered through the technology of a sound system, amplified and disseminated to the audience. Mediation erects a barrier in the line of communication, a disconnection between the actor's production of a speech act and the audible broadcast of a voice to the audience outside.

As Jacinto Lageira concludes: "This work only takes shape if the two parties – the actor and the public – participate in an exchange where each senses the presence of the other while contemplating himself/themselves, though each came to see the spectacle of the other." Mirror images of the audience and actor replace the anticipated view in the conventional structure of theater and the only indication of the actor's presence is his voice. Mirror images are likewise representations, distanced from the body supposedly present, and the relations established between the viewer and their reflected image, and, by proximity, their physical relations to other audience members construct a mediated social relationship. As a representation, the mirror image confronts the viewer with her own physical relationships to other bodies within the audience, presenting a group of spectators as a collective body.

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39 Lageira, 97.
CHAPTER 5

MIRRORS

Minimalists explored the possibilities of mirrors to reproduce images and forms automatically. Robert Morris's *Untitled* (1965-71), a set of four mirrored cubes creates both a gestalt form (the cross-shaped space between the four cubes), and a configuration that utilizes a play of mirrors to reproduce the image of a form over and over again. (Fig. 17) Larry Bell turned to reflective surfaces for his work *Untitled (Gold Box)* (1964), but here the shiny gold form rests on a stand at eye-level. (Fig. 18) When viewers approach the piece, they encounter their own reflections and potentially those of the other viewers. The reflection of a viewer and her surroundings, on the sides of Bell's gold box allows for a social interaction.

In *Allestimento teatrale*, an audience member is confronted with his or her own image and those of fellow spectators. As the actor begins his performance inside the cube, the audience members are perhaps uncertain about where to look. Is it a struggle to locate oneself in the midst of so many bodies? It may be particularly difficult for viewers in the back rows or those who must stand behind the crowd, relatively far away from the mirrors. But eventually, the viewer finds her image. Granted access to other audience members, to watch and monitor their behavior, watching one's neighbors is accompanied by an awareness of being watched. Suddenly discomforted by watching, and self-conscious of being watched, the viewer glances down, unable to endure the exposure. This suggests not the loss of individuality in a crowd but a confrontation with the privilege of anonymity provided by a crowd. Viewership is exposed.

Jacques Lacan describes the developmental stage when a young child first recognizes its own image reflected in a mirror. The mirror stage is defined as an instance of self-loss, a moment after birth but prior to the child's acquisition of language. Recognition occurs when the child
notices the correlation between its own bodily movements and those of the reflection in the mirror, as it attempts to gain mastery over motor skills. Yet, recognition is in fact misrecognition, as the child identifies itself with the imago (the image in the mirror), assuming a coherent visual identity. The result of this identification is the Ego, as part of the continuing process of partitioning the body, initially from its mother and from other bodies. The image "traps" the subject, forming the Ego. As Lacan notes, we must regard the formation of the ego as the "function of misrecognition." The establishment of a relationship between a being and its reality is therefore based on the identification with an external representation of the self. The reflection of a body constitutes an ideal conception of the self. The establishment of a relationship with reality prepares the infant to enter the symbolic order at the point of maturity, with cultural, physical, and social interactions, including access to language and the development of the Oedipus complex.

Identification with a mirror image is complicated by the artificiality of the external ideal and its physical displacement from the body. Mirror images, as representations of the body, are incomplete, though due to their apparent mimetic nature, form an ideal of the self. Identification with an image of an ideal self masks the image's location outside the body and the mirror's fragmentation of the body. Through "misrecognition," subjectivity emerges outside the body, allowing for the awareness of and identification with the Other and the subsequent entry into language.

Clearly the audience members seated around the mirrored cube in Fabro's Allestimento teatrale are not infants but adults who have developed the ability to communicate with language.

41 Ibid., 80.
42 Ibid., 78.
Nevertheless, the audience members face the mirrors. Fabro asserts that the mirror cube enacts a step-by-step operation in theater, that when the spectator watches the action on stage she imagines herself in place of the actor.\textsuperscript{44} In the mirror images on the cube's exterior, the transposition of spectator as the actor on stage is realized virtually, yet the spectator does not produce the speech act associated with the role of the actor. It would then follow that the voice is both the element that draws the spectator's attention to the cube as the container of the spectacle. The voice is also a reminder that the actor is inaccessible and the audience members are still outside the mirror cube. Perhaps though, the viewer projects the disembodied voice onto the images other individuals, a type of substitution for the unseen actor.

When the members of the audience watch one another and their eyes meet the visual interaction is indirect. Therefore, the mirror mediates interaction. If, according to Michael Fried, theatricality in Minimalist sculpture is rooted in the relationship between the viewer and work (a situation), which becomes the spectacle, then the mediated social interactions between spectators become the spectacle in Fabro's \textit{Allestimento teatrale}. The visual relations amongst the audience members, both in terms of the audience's cohesiveness as a collective body and as individuals, occur within the mirror. The mirror cube presents itself as the site of action and interaction. The mirrored cube is then both the site of visual interactions between audience members and one of the representations of that interaction, displaying a situation between subjects. In Dan Graham's \textit{Performer Audience Mirror} (1977), the audience looks at a mirror image on the wall behind the stage, where the performer stands. (Fig. 19) In this performance piece, the actor addresses the crowd in a way that is intended to equate the actor and the audience. The actor stands before the audience and may pause to look at each one of them individually. However as Graham states, "collectively they [the audience] all seem much more similar ... rather than individual, and they

\textsuperscript{44} Fabro, "Artist's statement," de Sanna, 120
all seem content. Likewise, within the mirrors of *Allestimento teatrale*, the external environment and the audience appear transposed as the *mise en scène*. In the mirror, the audience members find an image of themselves as a collective body.

On the mirrored panels of *Allestimento teatrale*, the reflections of the actor's body and the bodies of the audience members appear within the space that their counterparts would otherwise occupy. In Lacan's description of the mirror stage, the child's recognition of its reflection occurs within space as the initial identification with the body's image is supported by reflections of the surrounding environment, which includes other people. After recognizing herself in the mirror, the child looks at the adult caregiver who has placed them in front of the mirror, as if seeking validation. The child seeks individuals outside of herself in order to verify that identification with the image is correct, suggesting that identification is reinforced by the social. Watching other members in the audience verifies one's own presence as part of a social body. The recognition of oneself within the mirror is the beginning of social relationships. The identification of the Other, is therefore structured according to space and environment.

In *Allestimento teatrale*, mirrors operate differently for outside and inside, for a crowd and for an individual. A selection of Fabro’s early mirror works illustrates the actor's experience of the interior of the mirror cube. Early in his career, between 1963 and 1965, Fabro produced a series of works utilizing mirrors and panes of transparent glass that examined subjectivity by cutting or otherwise disrupting the surface of mirrors. One such piece, *Tondo e rettangolo* [Circle and Rectangle], from 1964, is a rectangular mirror with a circular cutout displayed next to the removed circular piece of mirror. (Fig. 20) It appears to be an exercise in subtraction, exploring the dynamics of positive and negative surfaces, resulting in the rupture of the mirror's reflected

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image and surface continuity. Reflected images juxtaposed with the environment beyond the piece, though readable, are fragmentary and incomplete.

*Mezzo specchiato mezzo trasparente* [Half Mirrored Half Transparent], from 1965, is a rectangular pane of glass held at eye level by an unobtrusive metal stand. *(Fig. 21)* The left half of the pane has been silvered, creating a mirrored surface, while the right half remains transparent. Though a continuous plane, as the viewer's gaze shifts from the mirror on the left to the transparent glass on the right, two separate views are framed. On the left the viewer and their environment are reflected, while on the right the edge and surface of the transparent glass frame the environment beyond. The juxtaposition of mirror and transparent glass creates multiple depths of field as well as a division between a disrupted view, returned by the mirror, and a continuous view mediated by glass.

*Tutto trasparente* [Fully Transparent], from 1965, a large rectangular pane of glass mounted on an easel-like metal stand is, as its title states, entirely transparent, but the visible edges of the glass and the glare of its surface assert its material presence. It is achromatic and yet its smooth continuity and rectangular shape recall monochromatic surfaces of certain Minimalist sculptures and paintings, as well as the slashed monochromes of Lucio Fontana. The glare and the edges of the glass pane reiterate the surface, mediation, and sculptural quality of an otherwise transparent piece of glass. *Tutto trasparente* resurrects the Renaissance concept of the painting as a window into another space, recalling Leon Battista Alberti's model of perspective with the viewer's sight lines originating at the apex of a triangle and passing through the plane of the canvas to the landscape. This model of perspective relies on a specifically located and embodied viewer, who is placed in a dialogue between real space and the virtual space of the image. Along with the mirror works, *Tutto trasparente* frames a vista, a view, but interrupts an existing view,
injecting a vertical plane into an existing space. The viewer vacillates between looking through and looking at the glass.

In *Tondo e rettangolo* and *Mezzo specchiato mezzo trasparente* the mirrored surfaces are disrupted, fragmented with a cut out of the center or a transition to transparent glass, thereby fragmenting the image of the viewers when they look at their reflections. The fragmentation of one's own reflected image disrupts what is already a fragmentation of the body produced within the mirror. Jacinto Lageira describes *Mezzo specchiato* as a crossing point in which viewers recognize their own reflection and catch themselves in the act of looking, at once soliciting vision and reflecting the act of seeing. In Fabro's mirror works the body is located within space and is related by context to its environment. When the viewer stands centered facing the seam between mirror and transparent glass, their image is fractured and the image of the self is revealed as incomplete.

Surrounded by mirrors, the actor's image is not reproduced once, or twice, but infinitely, in a succession of reflections and reflections of reflections. Through repetition the actor's image becomes conventional, standardized, almost a mass production. Is this a comment on an economic system, or the reproductive potential seen in the seriality of Minimalist works? Or does the presentation of so many reflections problematize the body's relationship to the image, like the fragmentation in Fabro's earlier works? What was a form of mediation and communication for the audience outside, the mirror is redefined as performing an operation, like a machine of mass production. It reproduces the actor as his own audience and generates fragmentation exponentially. The actor's experience inside the mirror cube is an individual

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47 The interior is reminiscent of pieces such as Getulio Alviani’s *Interrelazione cromospeculare* (1969) or Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Metrocubo* with mirrors reflecting other mirrors creating an endless chain of reflections.
performer encircled by his own reflected images, at once replacing the absent audience with a sea of bodies. Mirror images not only supplant the unseen audience, but also form an endless series of actors miming every nuance of his performance.

The actor and audience retain their established physical locations, though with exchanged visual fields. Within the mirror, actor and audience are replicated. *Allestimento teatrale*, like *Mezzo specchiato mezzo trasparente*, is a point of crossing in which the audience members identify with their reflection and are caught in the act of looking, but are also immediately alerted to the superficiality of the image by the actor's voice emanating from the mirror cube.

Lacan's model of subjectivity formation, as constituted by the identification of the self in a mirror image, occurs despite the fact that the image is not the self but a distant two-dimensional form. The Gestalt conceals the distance between the two. When audience members identify with the reflection in the mirror, they replace the would-be spectacle, and the same may be said of the actor. They become the spectacle, as does the relationship fostered by each side's confrontation with its own reflection, the narcissism, monitoring or being monitored by one's neighbors (for the audience), and the awareness that one is already being watched. But the primary image on the exterior panels of the mirror cube is of an audience, a collective body.
CHAPTER 6
THEATRICALITY

For the audience members in a theater, the visual and sonorous experience of a performance is inherently collective, experienced en masse. In the model of theatrical architecture formalized in ancient Greek amphitheatres, the ideal location for the audience's reception of the visual spectacle is legible in the rows of seats that radiate from the semicircular stage. The designation of separate spaces for the audience and actor invokes a series of physical experiences and relations. When the bodies of the audience members are packed together into the rows of an amphitheater they enter a spatial dialogue with the bodies of the actors on stage. As such, plurality of spectatorship is clearly enunciated in the architecture of theater from the beginning.

In Allestimento teatrale, the reflected images of audience and actor present before each, respectively, suggest a challenge or competition between anticipated views in the organizing architecture of theatre. In a 1977 interview with Fabro, Lisa Licitra Ponti remarked that it had been said of him "Fabro is theatre," to which the artist responded:

I wouldn't object to that. But I wouldn't like to be just theatre. ...There is one thing, though, that as an artist and not as a man of theatre, I always keep in mind: that there can only be one person, so that when I make "theatre" I have to maintain that one to one relationship which is typical of the work of art. In my "theatres" the spectator does not find an accomplice in his neighbor, but rather a competitor. It is always necessary to reach this form of personalization: as if I had done the picture for myself.48

Fabro's theatrical set-up is an inchoative environment, anticipating a theatrical performance and the presence of an audience and actor. Yet his discussion of theater focuses on the audience's experience and internal dynamics -- namely competition -- rather than the performance itself.

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Competition forms a contentious collectivity. Fabro’s description of audience members as competitors, like athletes jostling against one another in a race, evokes a collectivity that is more a brawling heterogeneity than a unified mass that the appellation audience would otherwise indicate. Therefore, collectivity is formed not merely by the visual presentation of the audience within the mirrored façades of the cube, the architecture of a theatrical set-up or the role of the audience as the addressee of a performer’s monologue, but from the potential social relations that each of these modalities produce. Based on Lacan’s mirror stage, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe describe the self-reflexive process of the formation of subjectivity as antagonism. From the beginning, the formation of subjectivity is challenged by the presence of the Other because “the presence of the Other prevents me from being totally myself.” The presence of the Other symbolizes the viewer’s own non-being, its pre-subjective state. If audience members are in competition rather than accomplices, then that competition is in progress throughout the performance. The performance defines the beginning and end of the competition. Assigning greater agency to the audience and simultaneously reinforcing and problematizing their collectivity, the audience is both watching and being watched. The singularity of the voice is contrasted by the apparent silence of the audience. In the cube’s interior, the actor’s multiple reflections mimic his every move and therefore assume the role of an apparent chorus of co-speakers, which in effect denies the singularity of the voice as the actor performs the monologue. The replacement of the audience with multiple reflections of the actor himself suggests, rather than an audience, a mimetic army of parodies who share the role of speaker.

Fabro's work presses upon this tension between a work that performs for an audience and the one-to-one relationship between a work of art and a viewer. If a work possesses the qualities

50 Laclau and Mouffe, 125, Referring to the Other, “Its objective being is a symbol of my non-being.”
of theater (theatricality), then the work is fraught, torn between a performance for an audience that is a unitary collective body with its own internal relations and a work of art that demands an exclusive relationship with the viewer and draws them into its own internal workings. Fabro is aware of the two possible relationships, as he describes his own work in his 1978 book *Attaccapanni*.

I locate my work between two artistic disciplines: tactile and visual art and visual and sonorous theater. In the first I am talking about the artist and the public and in the other the public and the actor. While the audience cannot interfere in the work of the artist, that is complete in itself, it interferes in the working trajectory of the artist. Similarly, the actor runs on the same line of the spectators. Both artist and the actor are reactive with the audience: even without indulging it, intend to initiate a dialogue, respond to sense and obtain relevant answers.51

Fabro's account of his work, caught somewhere between art and theater, presents a form of work that is not firmly located in either camp but is modeled on both. The artist and actor work and perform in order to initiate a dialogue with a viewer. Furthermore, his statement implies another objective and that is research, proposing hypotheses and "obtaining relevant answers." Perhaps research, particularly research into the formation of a collective subject, returns to Celant's idea of Arte Povera conducting "poor" research. Theatricality then becomes an experiment or tool of research.

As Michael Fried states, "The literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theater, and theater is now the negation of art."52 Minimalist sculpture is theatrical because it is concerned with the circumstances of the encounter between work and viewer. Robert Morris describes a Minimalist form as an object in a situation, one that

51 Fabro, *Attaccapanni*, 30. Italicized in the original text.
52 Fried, 153.
includes the viewer. In Fabro's work, the inclusion of the viewers is taken further, requiring that they interact with an inhabited form, altering the relationship between viewer and the work of art, clarifying that a human element is necessary to complete the work. The form no longer stands alone but becomes a prop with a utilitarian function to be manipulated and used in the course of a performance.

In his definition of theatricality, Fried does not describe theatricality as a relationship between a work and a collective body. Theatricality defines the relationship between viewer and the presence-laden form that ultimately becomes a theatrical "presence." In response to Fried, Hal Foster notes, "Minimalism does announce a new interest in the body - again, not in the form of an anthropomorphic image or in the suggestion of an illusionistic space of consciousness, but rather in the presence of its objects, unitary and symmetrical as they often are (as Fried saw), just like people." Understanding the work as a body, or a form containing a body, positions it in a social world that is filled with other people, particularly in a theatrical situation, because theater implies a mass audience.

Fabro's *Allestimento teatrale* positions the subject within an audience -- a collective social body -- whose members direct their gaze towards a form covered in mirrors. The audience members are confronted with a distant image of their own bodies visually collected with other bodies. In *Allestimento teatrale*, the internal relations of the collective audience are contentious and unstable, suggesting that the spectators' attention is not devoted solely to the performance behind the mirror but to their eye-to-eye connections with other audience members, physical proximity to one another, and desire to be the singular viewer of the performance.

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53 Ibid.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The period from 1967 when Fabro conceived of Allestimento teatrale to its execution in 1975 saw a wave of terrorism in Italy. Now known as the Years of Lead, this was the bloodiest period in Italian history since World War II, marked by a series of bombings, political violence in the streets, and assassinations, most notably that of Aldo Moro the leader of the Christian-Democrat party, in 1978. Within this context, Fabro's Italia series can be interpreted as an allusion to the superficiality of the post-war Italian economic miracle, the continuing disparity between north and south, and a nation on the verge of explosion. Yet Fabro was ambivalent about the protest movements of the 1960s, and shocked by the increasing violence of the student protests in 1968, including the anti-Vietnam demonstrations at the Milan Triennial and the Venice Biennale that year.55 Though Fabro expressed reservations about Arte Povera's political engagement, I believe that the representation of a collective to itself and the isolation of the speaker in Allestimento teatrale propose an indirect political intervention. By political I mean a critical position. Interpreting Fabro's work as a response to Minimalism locates it within the discourse of Arte Povera that is already portrayed as critical of American cultural and economic hegemony. But this interpretation alone undercuts the radicalism of utilizing a theatrical performance and simple geometric forms as means to understand the construction of presence and the formation of a collective subject.

In Allestimento teatrale, one finds a minimalist-type cube now occupied by a real body and surrounded by an audience, which has gathered for a performance. The audience has gathered under the pretense of viewing a performance. However, the actor is sequestered, out of

sight, raising the question of whether he must be physically present within the cube. As seen in Fabro's 1969 performance *Apparecchio alla morte*, the perception of presence relies not on the presence of a real body but on the manifestations of presence. Presence is established not through literally being present but through representation. In essence, the actor and the reception of the performance disengage. Expecting a real experience, the public is susceptible to manipulation.

Fabro's work presents a scenario in which the presence inside a geometric form corresponds to a literal body. The audience's position before a mirror, effectively representing them as a collective mass proposes a significant departure from Fried's description of theatricality. Previously, the hollowness of the form merely suggested the presence of a singular body. His explanation of theatricality does not account for more than one viewer; it is a one-to-one relationship or situation between a viewer and the form. But, as Fabro notes this is what the competing audience members of *Allestimento teatrale* are each striving for. The audience is heterogeneous and contentious, competitors rather than allies.\(^5^6\) Each of these viewers, as Fabro notes, desires an exclusive one-to-one relationship with the form. Competition among audience members does not deny their collectivity, or individuality, which marks the body against those around it. On the contrary, antagonism evokes a dialogical relationship, and like a conversation, antagonism draws individuals into a distinct association.

Viewed pessimistically, internal competition inhibits organized collective action by initiating a degree of instability. Despite its mass, the audience is crippled by the antagonistic relationships between audience members, each of whom compete for a one-to-one relationship with the work. Such an interpretation evokes a discordant mob that is largely reactive, incapable of independently or consciously mobilizing itself as a mass. Alternatively, the representation of the audience can also be read as exposing the inherent instability within the collective's internal

relations and thereby allowing for the possibility of future corrective action, as it is through representation that the audience is alerted to its own collectivity and the problems that lie within it.

Theater suggests the presentation of a spectacle before a collective audience limited by the duration of the performance. Presented with the mirror image, audience members find themselves accompanied by other individuals, who also watch and listen as the actor performs. Are they merely passive spectators? The potentiality of relations locates the mirror cube in a social field, as the site of potential relations between viewers. The image of the audience produced by the mirror forcibly collectivizes the audience as an entity. The representation of the audience gathered in the discrete space of the mirror clarifies and solidifies the audience's collectivity. A mirror in effect re-contextualizes the real forms it reflects, as seen in Michelangelo Pistoletto's mirror painting *Vietnam* (1965). (Fig. 22) Fabro's *Allestimento teatrale* removes the actor from view, betraying his real occupation of the hollow mirror cube, and simultaneously proposes and destabilizes the collectivity of an audience, which appears strikingly resonant with a contemporary climate of uncertainty and paranoia.
CHAPTER 8

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CHAPTER 9

FIGURES

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