LUCINDA DEVLIN

A MODERN ARTIST FOR THE POST-MODERNIST WORLD

Art is always about the "subject", never the "object".
Always the "subject".

INTRODUCTION

Lucinda Devlin is an artist with an extraordinary relevance for recent debates on contemporary art and culture. Her career began in the mid-1970's, in the aftermath of 'Modernism', and spans the ensuing 'post-modernist' period, still influential today. Although these cultural trends have been endlessly discussed, it might be worth briefly defining 'Post-Modernism' as a debate over issues of social value, conducted in tandem with the on-going coverage of television and mass media. The central aesthetic concept of Post-Modernism is that contemporary art consists of a manipulation of styles in the service of a sociological view of the world. Post-Modernism has proscribed, or somehow invalidated, the proposition that art can invent or renew our immediate visual awareness. It can be argued that Post-Modernism is not seriously concerned with aesthetic issues and should be defined as an 'an-aesthetically' based view of the world. Nevertheless, Post-Modernism clearly has had a powerful attraction for the contemporary art world and has provided a reassuring framework of aspiration for many artists.

Lucinda Devlin's photographs resonate on two distinctly different levels in this debate. On one level, she embraces the preoccupations of her contemporaries and forcefully engages with the themes and subject matter of the post-modernist period. Her principal subject matter is the semi-familiar, every-day environment, as in the banal interiors of *Pleasure Ground*, ranging from tanning salons and gyms to marginally more exotic fantasy motels, clubs and sex shops. These environments all bear a trace of tawdriness, offset by aspirations of fantasy. They are scenes of voyeurism and inhibited theatricality where one senses that issues of ordinary identity are at stake.[1] In

[1] An interesting recent exhibition of the Marieluise Hessel Collection at Bard College, entitled *Wrestle,* of major contemporary artists working against the background of, and in contrast to, the prevailing Post-modernist ideology, focuses on this central theme of identity in contemporary art. Its curator, Tom Eccles, wrote in the catalogue: "Time and again, as one leafs through the many pages of the collection catalogue, the question of the self, of art as a barometer of our identity or identities, comes to the fore. There is a constant and restless inquisitiveness, a drive to encounter what might clumsily be called "otherness" with all its concomitant totems and taboos". Tom Eccles, *Wrestle: Marieluise Hessel Collection* (Bard College: Hessel Museum, 2006), p.133.

all of this, we feel the influence of the post-modernist mind-set. Furthermore, the underlying themes of pleasure and pain, so dear to the post-modernist sensibility, pervade all of Devlin's work. In this respect, with the *The Omega Suites,* the series which won her international celebrity, or perhaps rather notoriety, Devlin has identified the ultimate post-modernist theme: the American preoccupation with institutionalized death.

However, conversely, Devlin's intention seems very far removed from the aesthetic outlook of Post-Modernism. A view that people are ultimately the product of social forces, to the point that death can be ordered and sanitized by a society seeking retribution for barbarous acts, is a bleak outlook on existence. It encourages the commercial exploitation of sensation and the numbing addiction of its overload. It pursues explicit and sensationalist subject matter for the sake of shock. Where there is no initiative of original thought, and the notion of sociological determinism precludes it, passive obedience will set in and a nihilistic cynicism will prevail. Ironically, none of this outlook is to be found in Devlin's photographs. Devlin consistently disappoints our post-modernist expectations. She provides none of the visual narcotics that the post-modernist sensibility has come to expect. There are no lewd acts, no prosthetics of exhibitionism, in her photographs. There is no human exploitation. In fact, there are no visible human beings there at all. Instead, Devlin brings a passionate inquisitiveness to bear on these interiors and invites her viewers to join her in the discovery of what their reality reveals.

The key to Lucinda Devlin's photographs lies in the apparent absence of the human subject. We are left to ask what these photographs are about. Are these simply spaces where people have momentarily stepped out? Their careful composition testifies to an ambition to tell the whole story and not one bereft of the central protagonist. Do they belong to a genre of objective, architectural photography? The places she selects have no obvious architectural or historical interest. These are pictures of ordinary interiors in which human space is explored. With the human subject of Devlin's photographs absent, background moves to the foreground of our attention. At this point, the realization begins to dawn that people are everywhere, invisibly, present in Devlin's photographs and that, first and foremost, these are photographs about an 'abstract' human subject.

In Lucinda Devlin's photographs, one discovers a second level of intellectual inquiry, quite different from the apathy of post-modernist attitudes, where she sets up an active space for introspection and reflection. Her photographs are vital adventures of discovery based on sympathetic involvement with the human subject and faith

in the viewer's capacity to understand subjective value. She believes that, given the chance, her viewer will engage with the subject. To better realize how these complex photographs function, the themes of space, background and an abstract human presence must be explored both in the context of the history of photography and also of the broader aesthetic and intellectual history of modern and contemporary art.

PART I

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC CANON

Lucinda Devlin is thoroughly versed in the formal and thematic language of the history of photography. A full appreciation of her work needs to take this dimension into account. However, widely exhibited as her images have been, and admired as they are by international specialists and the public, they have not yet been given serious consideration against this aesthetic background.

Devlin cites four key figures who have been important influences on her work: Eugene Atget, August Sander, Walker Evans and Diane Arbus. There may be others who have interested her, and who feed into this tradition, but these are the four names that she has given. Looking at this group of extraordinary photographers, it should not come as a surprise that they constitute the inner core of what could be considered the canon of modern fine art photography, as mapped out by John Szarkowski, the pioneering curator of the Museum of Modern Art's Photography Department. It is not a coincidence that Devlin should mention these four names, nor is it hubris on her part. Again, Devlin is an artist who has always measured her work against the evolving aesthetic language of photography's history. This selection of influences signals her ambition and the serious purpose she brings to the making of photographs. Devlin only bears witness to her intention. The truth lies in the comparison of images.

When one looks at Devlin's photographs, the question is: do her images take on depth and complexity of vision through a dialogue with the work of her august predecessors? The answer from the findings of this study is a resounding, Yes.

Eugene Atget –

Perhaps the excitement that we feel when looking at Atget's photographs comes from the awareness that we are witnessing the birth of a new art form. These are images of a city, Paris, made by a solitary individual whose most immediate motivation was presumably commercial. Yet, in Atget's knack for establishing formal comparisons between images, and in his habit of returning to locations to make new images at different times and under different conditions, much as did his great contemporary Cezanne, we see the photographer gradually become aware that he is inventing a new visual language. The key to Atget's creative vision would appear to be a belief that close observation translates into formal order in the camera frame. Above all, his vision resides in a faith that reality will not let him down. As a result, his historical portrait of Paris, carries the past experience and culture of the city across time and into the living present.

The example provided by Atget is of central importance for Devlin. There is an obvious parallel between their two bodies of work: in Atget's case, scenes of architecture and nature in the urban context, most often without the human figure; in Devlin's, scenes of interiors, more systematically devoid of the human figure. However, the connection between Atget and Devlin can most interestingly be established on formal grounds. The close observation and formal intelligence which go into the composition of Atget's images are rediscovered and explored in Devlin's photographs.

Above all, the most important and fundamental issue is that of belief. Both artists innately trust that the physical world is rich in meaning for the human mind and that art has the power to convey that experience.

August Sander –

Sander presents a second approach to this new enterprise of photography as a fine art form. It is interesting to compare and contrast the two ventures of Atget and Sander. Atget's subject is a culture, that of his native France, whereas Sander's is a portrait of the German people, not, incidentally, a national portrait, which no doubt is what displeased the Nazis about his work. Also, Atget's project developed organically out of the daily rote of location photography, while Sander's work was conceptually thought out in advance. For Devlin, as an American photographer, like her predecessor Walker Evans, the opportunity to study the diverse interpretations of these two great Northern European cultures through such creative minds, provides a broad and inspiring frame of reference for her work. In addition, Sander takes on greater resonance when one considers Devlin's career in Germany and her series *Water Rites*, on the theme of German public baths.

At first glance, if one thinks of Devlin as a photographer of interiors, the connection with Sander's portrait project *People in the Twentieth Century,* may seem surprising. However, the relationship between Sander and Devlin is, in fact, much closer than might initially be imagined. Devlin's connection with Sander runs deep and requires us to revise our understanding of her work. Sander photographed the human subject and set out to compile a systematic portfolio of social types, setting each subject in the context of his trade or function. *Young Farmers* stands against the background of a country road, while a *Savings Bank Cashier* stands in front of an early computing machine. Each portrait is acutely drawn to reveal complex individual psychology. Sander is known to have been skeptical about modern progress and these portraits betray a tension between human subject and social reality. Devlin's photographs can be deduced directly from this model. Devlin shares a similar conceptual approach and an equally ambivalent view of her social context. In her case, however, the human subject is, apparently, absent. If, as it is here being proposed, the human subject is the focus of Devlin's photograph, why does she take it out? Through looking at Sander, Devlin discovers how the psychological tension of the portrait can not only be preserved, but can actually be heightened through removing the human subject from the photograph. Instead of presenting a portrait, cut out against a background, Devlin creates an image that is suffused with invisible human presence.

Walker Evans -

"For in the immediate world, everything is to be discerned, for him who can discern it..."

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, James Agee & Walker Evans

Devlin always cites Walker Evans as the principal formative influence on her work. Evans was a keen student of Atget and Sander, and is also, of course, the lynch-pin for Szarkowski's photographic canon. It is not surprising that Devlin should feel such a kinship with Evans, considering their shared American background and appreciation for these earlier masters. Of particular importance for Devlin, is Evans' interest in vernacular subject-matter. Clearly Devlin's work can be seen as a continuation of what Evans termed, 'the documentary style."

Evans had been vastly influenced by Atget, taking up the same salient points of interest which give his work the dimension of art: close observation; the distillation of form into images that remain fresh and hold the eye; the discovery and pursuit of a broader subject beyond the isolated photograph. It is entirely possible that Devlin first discovered these qualities in Evans, before gaining first-hand knowledge of the French photographer. Evans adds a more active involvement with the human subject, favoring direct frontal positioning of the camera and a minimum

psychological barrier between viewer and image. Devlin follows these interests, to the point that many observations made by leading Evans scholars, such as Lincoln Kirstein's identification of a 'moral implication'[2] in Evans' work and Jeff Rosenheim's remark that Evans focuses on a "vernacular idiom of the neglected and commonplace,"[3] can equally be made of her work.

However, there is another key issue connected to Evans, and taken up by Devlin, which is of the greatest importance for the whole question of an emergent photographic aesthetic, namely its potential relationship with literature. Evans had started out with the ambition of becoming a writer. He had gone to live in Paris in 1926 with this intention. The writer he most admired and wanted to emulate at the time was Flaubert. It was not until another four years had passed, and after he had discovered Atget, that he turned to photography. Furthermore, Evans' great breakthrough, which ultimately makes him the esteemed artist he is today,
is inextricably bound up with the photo-text project commissioned by Fortune Magazine and ultimately expanded into the book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, written by James Agee. Two remarks need to be made in light of Evans' literary interest in Flaubert. First, apart from being a creative literary genius of the highest order, Flaubert, as he reveals in his correspondence, like Cezanne, thought profoundly about the challenge of the new aesthetic of modern art that had been emerging over the long course of the nineteenth century. Secondly, fine art criticism has largely insisted on a complete separation of art and literature, with incalculable and unresolved implications.

It is fascinating to consider that photography may have been forced to develop a modern visual aesthetic, separate from painting and sculpture, because of this link to literature and its proscription by art criticism. If such is the case, we might ask what this photographic aesthetic consists of? Consider Flaubert's statement that: "there is no such thing as beautiful thought without beautiful form, nor vice versa,"[4] and compare it with the comment by John Szarkowski: "Form is perhaps the point of art. … In this peculiar art, form and subject are defined simultaneously."[5] The peculiar art that Szarkoski is referring to is, of course, photography. When we look at a photograph by Walker Evans, we understand that there is a sub-text, turning form into content and content back into form, so that the image has meaning. A photograph by Walker Evans is always talking to us. The same must be said for Devlin's

---

[2] Cited in "The Cruel Radiance of What Is," Jeff Rosenheim, *Walker Evans* (New York :Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000) p.59

[3] Ibid. p.59

[4] Flaubert, *Correspondence, Vol. 1* (Pléade, Gallimard), pp.350-51.

[5] John Szarkowski, *William Eggelston's Guide* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1976), p. 7

photographs. The inherent narrative of Devlin's images allows her to make photographs which carry the story of people who are not actually visible in the image.

Diane Arbus –

Arbus specialists all, with reason, focus on her original and extraordinary relationship to her subjects. It is perhaps worth stating the obvious in regard to Arbus, namely that she was a woman. Devlin and Arbus share that identity which, inevitably, is a determinant in the work that they do. Not that femininity should be taken, in either case, to stand for an explicit agenda. Perhaps for both, it represents more of an interrogation. It is also interesting that both artists work with a 2¼ inch camera, in square format, with wide-angle lens (at least, in Arbus's case, when she was using a Rollieflex), without cropping the image. One can ask why Devlin would adopt an approach that Arbus uses for psychological purposes when she is ostensibly photographing interiors. This shared interest in technique may alert us to how Arbus and Devlin are interested in exploring analogous thematic lines of aesthetic inquiry.

Sandra Phillips has written with insight and sensitivity about the implications of this technical approach for Arbus.[6] Previous to 1958/59, we are told, Arbus had cropped her image in order to extract her subject from the mass of information available to her by photographing with a light, flexible hand-held camera. As Phillips explains to us, the more cumbersome 2¼ in. camera does not permit this. Its image must be realized with the complicity of the subject and, if it is to be presented without the selective process permitted by cropping, then the quality of intimacy, for which Arbus is justly famous, must be captured in the moment when the shutter is released. The enduring power and fascination of Arbus' photographs derives from the nervous tension, springing from this intense engagement with the subject, which her process requires. In order to capture this intensity, Arbus had to enter into the drama of her subjects, getting to know them as much as possible in advance. She would spend significant time with them, entering into the narrative of their lives, as a preparation for the moment when she would catch their personal story with her camera. It is this drama which led Szarkowski, in the catalogue to his epochal *New Documents* exhibition, to make the claim that Arbus, along with Friedlander and Winogrand, had effected a "shift" in Evans' documentary style.

---

[6] Sandra Phillips, *Diane Arbus: Revelations* (New York: Random House, 2003), pp. 59-60

The relevance of these considerations for our appreciation of Devlin's photographs becomes acute when we recognize that her images are about human subjects who are absent or 'abstracted'. Devlin employs an Arbus-like urgency and concentration, together with a similar attention to detail, in order to capture her invisible subject. Above all, the same involvement with narrative, driven by curiosity and interrogation to reveal what cannot be seen, must be brought to bear. Phillips' remark, that Arbus' use of the 2 ¼ in. camera with wide-angle lens, "served to emphasize the psychological component of the subject and its imagined quality" can with equal justice be applied to Devlin, as can her further remark that "understanding of the productive tension between empathy and critical distance in her work represents almost a theoretical gloss on the nature of photography itself."[7] For both Arbus and Devlin, this approach at some level becomes a process of interior reflection which is ultimately a search for self-knowledge.

PART II

THE AESTHETICS OF MODERN ART

Even to this day, consideration of the relationship between photography and modern art, notably painting, has been taken up to a great extent with the issue of whether the medium of photography qualifies as a fine art. This preoccupation, fundamentally a quest for cultural legitimacy, amounts to a curious inferiority complex, since it can equally be argued, and has been, that photography introduced new aesthetic elements which were in turn taken up by modern painting. Surely photography should be credited with fostering the outlook behind Baudelaire's clarion call for an art of modern life, to replace the historical and mythological subjects of academic painting. Similarly, the development of improvisational points of view and the use of cropping as elements of composition, employed to such effect by Manet among others, can be seen as providing inspiration for Cubism and ultimately offering an early impetus for Abstraction.

The issue has never seriously been whether photography qualifies as a fine art. What is perhaps true, however, is that initially photography constituted a separate tradition, establishing something of a parallel trajectory alongside painting. As a result, it has been assumed that the major innovations of Cubism, Fauvism and Abstraction, the

---

[7] *Ibid.*

revolutions of line and color, were exclusive to painting and photographers did not need to apply. This point is illustrated if one places side by side a photograph by Atget and an analytic cubist painting by Picasso or Braque, conceivably made at the same time. If the Cubists represent modernity, then apparently Atget is working out of a very traditional aesthetic; if Atget presents a modern vision, then the Cubists have plunged into incoherence. On the other hand, perhaps a whole new aesthetic, embracing both Atget and the Cubists, was born in the transition between the 19th and 20th centuries.

Conversely, another related issue is to see how an artist could in time begin to feel a common aesthetic language between painting and photography. It may not be quite possible to say that this was fully the case for Walker Evans or Diane Arbus. Is it possible to say that it is now the case for Cindy Sherman, Andreas Gursky, Jeff Wall, or Richard Prince? Many influential commentators would answer that it is. This study argues that such a case can certainly be made for Lucinda Devlin, for precise reasons which need to be explored.

In order to consider this proposition, one has to first decide what the great early movements of modern art, Cubism, Fauvism and Abstraction, signify. As previously suggested some elements of photographic technique fed back into modern painting. Looking further, it may be generally acknowledged that the outcome for painting somehow resulted in a collapse of the representational model, just at the moment when photography seemed to assure its enduring presence. There is a wonderful, paradoxical, passage in John Szarkowski's book on Atget, in which he describes the advent of photography. Szarkowski writes that the invention of photography represents a late eighteenth century conceptual endeavor to solve "the problem of how chemistry might marry the geometry of optics and the energy of light." He goes on to say "Once that abstract problem was solved, photography was quickly snatched from the hands of the philosophers, and delivered into the hands of the entrepreneurs."[8] It might be helpful to think again of photography, and all art, as a powerful force of abstraction from reality, and put these questions of aesthetics back in a philosophical context. What does it mean to say that painting would no longer represent the outside world? Does this amount to an abandonment of, or separation, or alienation, from the physical world, or again an idealization, or inversely an embrace of the chthonic, or sublimation, or a synthesis of reality?

It seems clear, at least, that the Cubists, under the impetus of the new dynamic of modern life, were intent on dislocating form and content. Cubism is an art of the modern city, its architecture, its mechanization, and its

---

[8] John Szarkowski, *Atget* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2000), p. 13

habits, which have disrupted continuity with nature. The privileged subject of a Cubist painting is the Parisian café scene, with the newspaper, disseminating information and opinion about current affairs, at its center. This dislocation was effected by a new organization of the canvas, based on horizontal and vertical axes, reducing emphasis on renaissance perspective. Fauvism, launched by Derain and Matisse, in the little fishing village of Collioure in the South of France, is still primarily an art of landscape. However, Fauvism also, based on the discovery of how color released light, effects a powerful dislocation of natural vision. Both Fauvism and Cubism may be taken as a celebration of a new vision, constructed along channels of energy. However, the practitioners of this new vision, led by Matisse and Picasso, were always dubious of taking art into what might be called 'pure abstraction.' The abstracting tendencies of Fauvism and Cubism can hardly be ignored and are clearly pursued by Matisse's simplifying impetus, which leads to the late cut-outs and, ultimately, to the Vence Chapel, and by Picasso through his deformation of human representation. Yet neither artist takes the final step into this notion of abstraction. They felt they would be abandoning the real world. The question is, can there be another notion of abstract art?

It seems that photography, an art form supposedly forever grounded in some fateful manner in natural representation, might provide one. It is fascinating to see, for example, how Devlin's use of the square format view-finder and wide-angle lens creates a tension which evokes Cubist construction, based on vertical and horizontal axes. Furthermore, her practices of frontal positioning and advancing of viewpoint recall the celebrated spacial flattening-out of Cubism. It is also fascinating to see how color is an essential ingredient in her vision and, paradoxically, tempts the eye to conceptually probe spatial depth.[9] Overall, Devlin's images create effects where line bends in the viewer's eye, evoking a tension in the image, and color tends to dissolve outline.

The whole issue of how modern art has seemed to be leading inexorably towards abstraction and what that might mean for its role as mediator between the human subject and the world, together with periodic reactionary returns to 'representation' that we have seen in contemporary art, remains contentious. However, for Devlin it may be that, at a moment in her creative imagination, she came to understand that she could 'abstract' the human figure

---

[9] John Szarkowski has emphasized in his catalogue *William Eggelston's Guide*, how color threw photography into a state of upheaval. He writes: "For the photographer who demanded formal rigor from his pictures, color was an enormous complication of a problem already cruelly difficult. And not merely a complication, for the new medium meant that the syntax the photographer learned---the pattern of his educated intuitions—was perhaps worse than useless, for it lead him to the discovery of black-and-white photographs." John Szarkowski, *William Eggelston's Guide* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1976), p. 8

from her photograph without abandoning it. If this is the case, then different aesthetic strands of inquiry may be seen to coalesce. First of all, as mentioned above, there is Evans' understanding, via Flaubert, of how a photograph can contain narrative. Then, there is the discovery, first through formal innovation in painting, and also through the "abstract problem", alluded to by Szarkowski, "of how chemistry might marry the geometry of optics and the energy of light," that content in art can be conveyed along lines of energy rather than outline and perspective. Photography addresses these issues with a mechanism which turns a positive image into a negative and then back into a positive. What Devlin may have done is to allow this mechanism based in the play of positive and negative to determine her creative composition. The removal, or 'abstraction', of the human subject in her image would then become a negative presence rather than an absence. It may be, therefore, that Devlin is interested in what the camera does not see, or how the camera can reveal what is not seen. The human subject remains, but becomes a negative 'abstracted' subject, and so the possibility of a new, 'open' subject is introduced in the mind of the viewer. If this is true, then Devlin may have freed photography, once and for all, from the notion that it looks out onto a 'real' world, and have introduced an altogether more complex apprehension of lived experience.

A considerable distance has been traveled from the great movements of formal innovation of early twentieth century painting to the current photographs of an artist like Lucinda Devlin. It is possible to retrace the aesthetic thought that connects them, but an important link would be missing if we did not turn our attention to the intervening generation of American Abstract Expressionist painters who occupied center stage in the art world at mid-century. Devlin's birth in 1947 coincides with the break-through of Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko into their mature work. Do they have anything to add to the story that is being developed here? In fact, the affinities and parallels between the ideas that they developed with such originality, and in the face of such determined opposition from their contemporaries, and those that, hopefully, are emerging from this discussion of Lucinda Devlin's work, are so extraordinary that they cannot be overlooked.

The Abstract Expressionist endeavor begins as a crisis of representation. Rothko addressed the issue in his 1958 Pratt Institute lecture: "I belong to a generation that was preoccupied with the human figure and I studied it. It was with utmost reluctance that
I found that it did not meet my needs. Whosoever used it, mutilated it. No one could paint the figure as it was and feel that he could produce something that could express the world. I refused to mutilate and had to find another way of expression."[10] In a famous interview with Emile de Antonio two months before his death, Newman, looking

[10] Mark Rothko, Pratt Institute lecture, October 27, 1958

back, made the following statement: "About twenty five years ago for me painting was dead. Painting was dead in the sense that the situation, the world situation, was such that the whole enterprise as it was being practiced by myself and by my colleagues seemed to be a dead enterprise … I felt the issue in those years was: what can a painter do? The problem of the subject became very clear to me as the crucial thing in painting. Not the technique, not the plasticity, not the look, not the surface: none of these things meant that much. The issue for me – for all the fellows, for Pollock, for Gottlieb – was: what are we going to paint?"[11] Newman is here explicitly rejecting the 'formalist' school of criticism developed by Fry and Bell in England and later adapted by Greenberg in the United States. With this problem in mind, a group of artists, including Newman and Rothko, formed a school in 1948 with the rather inelegant name of 'The Subjects of the Artist.' The way forward, it transpired, was to be into abstraction, but not an abstraction which was separate from the real world. The Abstract Expressionist artists addressed themselves to the question of content in abstraction and vehemently rejected the efforts of formalist critics to avoid the issue. They were categorical on the matter, with Rothko declaring "My art is not abstract; it lives and breathes."[12] Abstraction did not eliminate the subject. The figure disappeared in order to be re-presented more forcefully in abstract form.

The Abstract Expressionists also insisted that art was intimately related to thought and language. As early as 1944 Newman had written: "The art of the future will, it seems, be an art that is … capable of expressing the most abstruse philosophical thought,"[13] and Rothko asserted that "Painting certainly is a result of thinking. It causes thinking. It, therefore, can certainly be a form, or means, of thinking, a means of philosophic thought."[14] This insistence that visual art is a form of thinking raises the question of its relationship to language and literature. Once again, Newman is unequivocal. He declared, "The empty canvas is a grammatical object – a predicate. I am the subject who paints it. The process of painting is the verb. The finished painting is the entire sentence, and that's what I am involved in. Those who emphasize the world of objects and insist that an object can be art, it seems to me, in the end make man himself an object."[15] In his 1965 interview with David Sylvester, Newman further

---

[11] Interview with Emile de Antonio 1970, from *Barnett Newman, Selected Writings and Interviews*, (University of California Press, 1992)

[12] James Breslin, *Mark Rothko* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 276

[13] Barnett Newman, On Modern Art: Inquiry and Confirmation, 1944, from *Barnett Newman, Selected Writings and Interviews*, (University of California Press, 1992)

[14] James Breslin, *Mark Rothko* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 260

[15] Barnett Newman, Interview with Lane Slate, 1963, from *Barnett Newman, Selected Writings and Interviews*, (University of California Press, 1992)

states that: “my work moves from the ‘making’ … to the ‘saying’.”[16] It will be noted that these fundamental elements in the overview of Abstract Expressionism recall the thinking of Flaubert, whose ideas had been taken up by Walker Evans and John Szarkowski:
the inextricable bond between form and content; the relationship of art with philosophy and literature.

The Abstract Expressionist painters came up with a whole range of pictorial innovations to meet the challenge which they felt was facing them. First of all, there is the concept of the all-over canvas and an understanding of how the work of art can be organized along lines of energy rather than perspective, so spectacularly demonstrated in Pollock’s technique. Then, there
is the issue of experimentation with figure/ground and positive/negative relations,[17] dramatically embodied in Rothko’s painting.
Then there is new and original thinking about the role and effect of color.[18] Further, there is the issue of ‘scale’, as distinct from size, so central to Newman’s art, and the related notion of ‘measure’, talked about by Rothko.[19] All of

---

[16] Barnett Newman, Interview with David Sylvester, 1965, from *Barnett Newman, Selected Writings and Interviews*, (University of California Press, 1992)

[17] “(…) the age-old problem of painting what’s positive, what’s negative, how does it play out, how is it acted, in the tensions that are developed between figure and background …” Conversation with Dan Rice, Rothko’s assistant, in *Rothko: The Murals 1958-59*, (Pace Gallery, catalogue, 1997)

[18] Newman had this to say on color: “The thing about color that is important is that the color has to be created by the artist. (…) color is something that an artist creates himself by the things he wants that color to do (…) It seems to me that one has to go beyond the sensations of colors to make color”. Interview with Andrew Hudson, 1966, from *Barnett Newman, Selected Writings and Interviews*, (University of California Press, 1992). Rothko is on record stating some very surprising and paradoxical ideas about color which completely contradict the popular notion of the artist as the master of chromatic beauty. He spoke of “no-color paintings” or of “taking the color out.” Conversation with Dan Rice from *Rothko: The Murals 1958-59*, (Pace Gallery, catalogue, 1997).

[19] Newman returned on a number of occasions in his writing to the question of scale: “size is not enough (…) The real problem lies in the painter’s sense of scale”. In ‘The Case for ‘Exporting’ Nation’s Avant-Garde Art”, interview with Andrew Hudson, 1966 from *Barnett Newman, Selected Writings and Interviews*, (University of California Press, 1992). On his recorded visit to the Louvre, he constantly evaluates the paintings he is viewing in terms of scale. In front of Ucello’s Battle he declares “It is beyond the problem of size. It looks big. The content and the form are inseparable. That’s scale.” In front of Gerricault’s Raft of the Medusa: “Fantastic! The scale is marvelous. You feel the immensity of the event rather than the size of the canvas. Great! Wild painting! The space does engulf one.” ‘Through the Louvre with Barnett Newman’ by Pierre Schneider, Artnews 1969, from *Barnett Newman, Selected Writings and Interviews*, (University of California Press, 1992). Talking about the invention of his signature ‘zip’ in the breakthrough painting ‘Onement’, Newman states “I was emptying the canvas by assuming the thing empty, and suddenly in this particular painting, ‘Onement’, I realized that I had filled the surface. (…) That stroke made the thing come to life for me. I feel that my zip does not divide my paintings. I feel it does the exact opposite. It does not cut the

these issues are to be found in Devlin's work. Every element of information in her photographs, be it the swing doors in the foreground and fluorescent tubes in the background of the cabin's recess of *Figure Spa Sun Booth, Dewitt, NY. 1979*, or the lamp fixtures in the foreground and stage curtain in the background of *Black Poodle Club, Nashville TN. 1979*, has equal value in an all-over abstract field of energy and light, conducted by saturated color. Spatial ambiguity is created. Composition motivated by 'content', not size, achieves 'human scale'. With the human figure absent from the scene that is being photographed, the background steps forward in a play of positive and negative to become the apparent subject of the image.

Again, the catalyst for Devlin, as for the Abstract Expressionists, is the decision to take the human subject out of the picture. Once that decision is made, the question becomes, how does one put the human experience of being alive back into art? The key discovery is that a subject can occupy the visual space of a painting, or a photograph, without being visibly present. Devlin realizes that this idea, contrary to what might have been expected, is perfectly suited to the photographic medium. When Devlin takes up this idea, she establishes common ground with the central tradition of modern aesthetic thought and situates her practice of photography firmly in the context of fine art.

PART III

CONTEMPORARY ART – THE BODY AS MEASURE

---

format in half or in whatever parts, but it does the exact opposite: it unites the thing (…) In the end size does not count. Whether the easel painting is small or large, it's not the issue. Size doesn't count. It's scale that counts. It is human scale that counts, and the only way you can achieve human scale is by content". Interview with Emilio de Antonio, 1970, from *Barnett Newman, Selected Writings and Interviews*, (University of California Press, 1992)

As for Rothko, he stated that his paintings "are involved with the scale of human feelings, the human drama, as much of it as I can express". Peter Selz has written on Rothko that: "Holding tenaciously to humanist values, he paints pictures which are in fact related to man's scale and his measure. But whereas in Renaissance painting, man was the measure of space, in Rothko's painting space, i.e. the picture, is the measure of man … But to repeat, they also measure the spectator, gauge him." Mark Rothko, A Retrospective 1945-60, Whitechapel Art Gallery 1961, quoted in James Breslin, *Mark Rothko* (University of Chicago Press, 1998). To the question put by Duncan Phillips "Am I right that in your approach to your work, color means more to you than any other element?" Rothko replied "No, not color but measure. It's all a study in proportion." *Ibid*. p.469.

Art historians have focused on how a new generation of artists in the 1960's broke from the past of Abstract Expressionism and European modern art. It is enough to read the formulations of Donald Judd, the most strident advocate of this position, to understand the vehemence of this polemic in the art world of the time. The Abstract Expressionists were pilloried for their metaphysical aspirations and, above all, for what was taken to be their preoccupation with 'self-expression'. With hindsight, we can see that deeply felt issues of identity and differing definitions of 'the subject' were at stake. Less attention has been paid to the continuity between Abstract Expressionism and the post-war, New York-based, avant-garde of such artists as Bruce Nauman and Robert Smithson. Yet Nauman's preoccupation with the body as measure of knowledge comes directly from Abstract Expressionism, and in particular is an extension of Pollock's painting technique, and Smithson's speculative thinking recalls Newman's writings. Given the failure to make these connections, the question of how a contemporary artist such as
Lucinda Devlin relates to the issues of identity and 'the subject', and the place she occupies in contemporary art, may need some
further elucidation.

Nauman and Smithson are widely acknowledged and admired for breaking the hold of painting and opening fine art to new and innovative media: earthworks, performance and video. Nauman famously stated that he finally broke with Frank Stella because:
"It became clear that he was just going to be a painter. And I was interested in what art can be, not just what painting can be."[20] Behind this outlook, lies Duchamp's famous put-down of painting as merely 'retinal' art, as opposed to an art that deals with ideas. What, then, can possibly justify the mention of a photographer, supposedly of interiors, such as Lucinda Devlin, in connection with these iconic figures and the major stakes of contemporary art? As in the earlier cases of Devlin's relationship to the great nineteenth and twentieth century photographers Atget, Sander, Evans and Arbus, and to the emerging aesthetic of modern art in Cubism, Fauvism and Abstract Expressionism, a closer look at Devlin's photographs reveals singular parallels and connections with the concerns of contemporary art in general and the work of Nauman and Smithson in particular.

[20] Cited in Neal Benezra "Surveying Nauman," *Bruce Nauman* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center ,1993), p.16

New demands were made of art in the 1960's with the advent of our present consumer society and the notion that everything, including art, is a commodity. Art would have to be intelligible to a broader public of collectors and museum goers. It would have to acknowledge a new artificial 'neo-surrealistic' environment, based on information and commercial promotion, disseminated by television and mass media. Pop art, with its reference to the artifacts of everyday life, and Minimalism, with its more abstract emulation of industrial production models, grew out of this new situation. At the same time, a profound malaise and a deep personal anxiety seem to accompany these models and have found expression in contemporary art. Warhol's dark side of electric chairs and car crashes provides a foretaste. Nauman and Smithson raised these issues in very forceful ways and have seen their reputation with successive generations of younger artists grow. Lucinda Devlin's photographs situate themselves at the nexus of these symbiotic Pop/Minimal and Process/Performance tendencies of contemporary art.

The America that is focused on production and wealth, self-promotion and success, has enclosed artists within horizons that they have had increasing difficulty in seeing beyond. Notably, acceptance of the myths of consumerism, with their fascination for the immediate and superficial appearance of things, has alienated artists from the intellectual concerns and metaphysical vision of modern art, and notably from the Abstract Expressionists who preceded them and who remain, ironically, the founding fathers of contemporary American art. Though quick to take issue with their predecessors, such avatars of contemporary art as Nauman and Smithson have protested this impoverishment of their artistic prerogative. Devlin, too, has embraced this protest and made it central to her work.

The social divide between affluence and modest middle-class standards is one level at which a conflict of vision emerges in contemporary American art. The view of Pop and Minimalist art towards commodity-based American culture was essentially one of complaisance, if not complicity. Judd's polemics were designed to make a place for his own work in the art world, and Warhol's later career as a socialite proves beyond any doubt that he was more than willing to identify with established value. In contrast, Smithson laid out an alternative, dissident position in his art and writings which critically rejected the tenets of American culture and evoked the social origins and political views of the Abstract Expressionists. If his immediate target was the 'formalist' painting that Clement Greenberg was promoting at the time, his broader objective was to overturn the credibility of a value system which denied or obscured whatever was incompatible with its self image of commercial prosperity. Smithson's imagination led him back to his childhood of Passaic, Rutherford, and Clifton, New Jersey, in order to study the landscapes of waste and industrial decay that the glamorous façade of industrial society ignored and rejected.

Devlin has traveled a similar road. Her photographs are of the contemporary, everyday, urban environment that we all inhabit. However, Devlin does not frequent the world of America's big cities and affluent suburbs with their economies of scale and the wealth that is channeled through them. Hers is not a vision of the American Dream, promoted by advertising and the television networks. The 'Pleasure Ground' photographs have been taken for the most part in smaller, slower, often economically disadvantaged or over-looked towns such as Mount Pocono, Pennsylvania, or Syracuse and Dewitt, New York. Her photographs may be drawn from the society of Pop culture, but, rather than focusing on its glamour, they throw light on the banality of ordinary lives. It is a blue-collar world, hardly prosperous and certainly not upwardly mobile, based less on aspiration and more on limited resources and hard reality. Devlin's photographs of small towns in up-state New York, and elsewhere, offer a close parallel with Smithson's New Jersey. Both artists make similar use of the contemporary environment to express skepticism of the American Dream.

Devlin shares with both Nauman and Smithson an inquiry into how language functions in visual art. When one reads the very active critical debate in the 1960's, in Artforum and other journals, one sees that the central issue was about the relationship, or lack thereof, between art and language. The 'formalist' critics of the day, advocates of a decorative abstraction in painting, asserted that the visual arts were devoid of language, that painting should be rigorously defined in terms belonging to its medium of line and color. Everything else was 'theater'. Smithson, on the other hand, argued strenuously that art and language could not be divided from each other. In this, we see Smithson in accord with the outlook of the Abstract Expressionists of the previous generation, who had always protested against the formalist interpretation of their work. However, this interest in language, literature and thought also allies Nauman and Smithson with the Walker Evans documentary and narrative tradition of fine art photography, mentored by Flaubert, that Devlin represents today. For Nauman and Smithson, the literary reference had become Beckett, and for Nauman after 1980, such authors as V.S. Naipaul and Jacobo Timerman.[21] Under the influence of their accounts of state oppression and terrorism, Nauman's thinking takes on explicitly political concerns. In this connection, Devlin's sinister series *The Omega Suites*, which also, as previously stated, evokes Warhol's electric chair and car crash images, links to the torture chairs suspended in Nauman's sculptures.

Devlin, like Nauman and Smithson, is interested in the dichotomy of object and subject. Both Nauman and Smithson placed this concern at the center of their work and, in so doing, they were looking directly back to

---

[21] See Neal Benezra "Surveying Nauman," from *Bruce Nauman* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center ,1993), p.37

Abstract Expressionism. There is a particular closeness in Smithson's ideas and way of thinking to Newman on this issue. Newman argued that most people confused genuine 'subject matter' in art with what Meyer Shapiro, the great Columbia University academic who was an important reference for the Abstract Expressionists, had called 'object matter'. Newman stated: "It is the 'object matter' that most people want to see in a painting. That is what, for them, makes the painting seem full." And again, as cited earlier, he stated "Those who emphasize the world of objects and insist that an object can be art, it seems to me, in the end make man himself an object."[22] Donald Judd, of course, was the defrocked evangelist of objecthood. Smithson, however, in his critique of Minimalist art, declared: "my work has always been an attempt to get away from objects," and elsewhere: "Objects are phantoms of the mind, as false as angels."[23] Smithson contemptuously summed all this up, in a moment of exasperation, when he declared: "I'm sick of positivists."[24] It is in the context of this thinking that Devlin's fundamental gesture of removing the human subject from her image
must be situated. To say that there are no people in Devlin's photographs, because none are visible, is to turn the human subject
into an object.

Hopefully, enough has been stated to make the case that Devlin's photographs concern themselves with the key issues in contemporary art, as those issues have been framed by such artists as Warhol, Judd, Nauman and Smithson. It can be seen in the subject matter of her photographs, in their exploration of the visual and verbal, and in how they address the philosophical questions surrounding object and subject that everywhere haunt contemporary art production. These considerations reveal Devlin to be a leading protagonist of contemporary fine art. Yet, we still have not got to what makes her photographs so significant in this contemporary art context. That will only be grasped when we consider how these photographs actually function.

When Jackson Pollock took his canvas off the wall and placed it on the floor of his studio, turning from the vertical to the hori-zontal axis and projecting the physical presence of his body into painting, something shifted in the symbolic order of art. This act

---

[22] *Barnett Newman, Selected Writings and Interviews*, (University of California Press, 1992),

[23] Fragments of an Interview with Patsy Norvell, 1969 from ed. Jack Flam, *Robert Smithson the Collected Writings* (Documents of Contemporary Art: University of California Press, 1979), p.195

[24] *Ibid.*

of Pollock's prepared the way for Nauman and Smithson to step out into the real world with their art.[25] Nauman took his own body as the point of departure for his art and his studio as the space for his inquiry. He adopted sensation and physical experience as the human subject's basic instruments for receiving knowledge of the outside world. Nauman has spoken of how contemporary dance, and specifically conversations with Meredith Monk in San Francisco in 1968, encouraged him to cultivate body awareness and to engage his surroundings.[26] From this came the idea of creating experimental environments and using mundane physical activities as learning opportunities. In turn, this led to closely supervised viewer participation and consideration of issues of social constraint and abuse. Paul Schimmel has put forward the notion in connection with Nauman's art that:
"W*e* become the subjects of his sculpture."[27]

A close consideration of Devlin's photographs reveals striking parallels. Nauman's studio becomes, in Devlin's hands, a series of everyday interiors. These interiors are all dedicated to various, designated, physical activities. In the absence of the human subject, their contents and the actual spaces themselves are made to tell the story of what takes place there and how it shapes the participants of the experience. Devlin's photographic technique, using a square format and proximity of viewpoint, simultaneously compresses the image and creates the illusion of inviting, perhaps forcing, the spectator's involvement. In front of Devlin's photographs, viewers have recounted time and again the strange and disturbing experience of being drawn into their often cramped and uncomfortable spaces. As the viewer's eye explores the image, he or she begins to feel that actual sensations of pressure, even discomfort, are being brought to bear on the mind. As in Pollock, and in sharp contrast to the usual experience of looking at two-dimensional art on a wall, viewers of Devlin's photographs feel their bodies in play. In this manner, Devlin subtly conveys, using still photographic images, the same sense of an unfolding performance that Nauman achieves with video. Starting out with mundane scenes such as the interior of an RV or a beauty salon, Devlin's attention moves towards marginality, deviance and perversion, with edgier material on the commercialization of sex and the ethics of medicine and the law. It amounts to an inventory of the management of Desire, Disease, and Death. We immediately think of the *The Omega Suites*, but we should also look at *Corporal Arenas* and even, surprisingly, *Water Rites*. Devlin's images may initially strike the viewer as innocuous enough, especially given the

---

[25] For another look at these issues, see Carter Ratcliff, *Hantaï in America*, (ed. Paul Rodgers 9/W Gallery, 2006).
New York, 2006) in which the writer explores Simon Hantaï's invention of the 'folding method' as a response to Jackson Pollock and as an exploration of issues that elsewhere were taken up by Bruce Nauman and Robert Smithson.
[26] Neal Benezra "Surveying Nauman," in *Bruce Nauman* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center ,1993), p.16
[27] Paul Schimmel, "Pay Attention," in *Bruce Nauman* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center ,1993), p.80

quantity of explicit shock material that vies for attention on the contemporary art scene. However, any sense of complacency should be quickly dispelled when the viewer wakes up to a realization that he or she is perhaps being invited to become the subject of vivisection or execution. Finally, the true cultural impact of these photographs is grasped only when we acknowledge that we have become inured to these practices, to the point that we no longer know whether they
enable or alienate us. If, as Nauman and Devlin concur, we are what we do, should we not have a better understanding
of the implications?

Turning now to Smithson, the key to his thinking is to be found in what he called "the back and forth thing."[28] By this he meant a notion of art, as in his 'Non-sites,' that is based on the dialectic between a fixed identity and a horizon on which consciousness is dispersed and then brought back to its starting point. Smithson stated: "There is a dialectic between inner and outer, closed and open, center and peripheral (…) Existence becomes a doubtful thing."[29] Smithson, like Nauman, is positing a dynamic art of physical experience that actively engages the viewer. Rather than seeing the human subject 'objectivised' in representational outline, as in pre-modern art, or literally in three dimension as in Minimalist sculpture, it becomes mobile, autonomous, atomized. An exactly analogous process is at work in Devlin's photographs. By removing the visible human subject from her image, she sets up a dynamic where the background sweeps forward and the human 'locus' is blown outward to the periphery and then brought back in the mind of the viewer. Standing in front of Devlin photographs, viewers realize that they are the real subject of the image and that they have been embarked on an adventure in which they do not remain wholly themselves.

Smithson had a particular affinity with the spiral. This interest is prefigured in the 'Man of Sorrows' drawings of 1960, is carried over to the 'Gyrostasis' of 1968, and, of course, finds its ultimate expression in the 'Spiral Jetty', of 1971. What Smithson liked about the spiral form was that it bent the viewer's perceptions.[30] To experience the

---

[28] 'Earth' 1969, from ed. Jack Flam, *Robert Smithson the Collected Writings.* (Documents of Contemporary Art: University of California Press, 1979), p. 178

[29] Fragments of an Interview with Patsy Norvell, 1969 from ed. Jack Flam, *Robert Smithson the Collected Writings*. (Documents of Contemporary Art: University of California Press, 1979), pp.192-193

[30] This Smithson-style bending of perception and its attendant awareness of surrounding space continues to play a key role in Richard Serra's sculpture.

'Spiral Jetty' one has to imagine walking out onto its rugged surface and feel one's body turning in its coils with the elements of sky and earth tilting around one. Smithson spoke about the physical sensation of anxiety, and even nausea, that was provoked by being on the jetty. Again, this experience of vision being bent by the elements, so dramatically demonstrated at the 'Spiral Jetty', is to be found in the subtle visual nuance, no less powerful once discovered, of Devlin's photographs.

Devlin has also remarked that making her photographs requires a whole series of steps into an often alien world. She speaks of having to overcome strong temperamental aversion in confronting this task. These photographs awaken and challenge the oppressive immediacy of the real world. First of all, she has to identify suitable locations, involving places that in the normal course of events she would never visit. Then she has to confront the task of obtaining the necessary permission for the shoot, often dealing with hostile bureaucracies. In the case of the *The Omega Suites*, for example, it involved making the case for visiting the scene of functioning execution facilities and enduring the skepticism and disapproval of prison authorities. She has not been able to get the necessary authorization to visit an execution facility since 1998, when the death sentence began to be a focus of renewed public and policy interest and her work began to gain notoriety. Then, of course, she has to undertake the location shoot, be it a prison environment, or a fantasy motel where, she has remarked semi-humorously, that she has spent some of the more unpleasant nights of her life. The physical making of Devlin's photographs, therefore, involves a psychological anxiety of confronting the unknown that can be compared to Smithson's encounters with the natural elements.

The parallels between Smithson and Devlin do not stop here. The closer one looks, the more one realizes that the two artists are exploring similar experience. A number of further interests and concerns voiced by Smithson in his writings can be seen at work in Devlin's photographs. Foremost among these, is the issue of limits or boundaries. Smithson declared "I think the major issue now in art is what are the boundaries."[31] Smithson, of course, was involved in the effort to extend boundaries by going out to the 'site.' However, it is essential to an understanding of his thought to realize that the 'Non-Site' art works, which are the product of these expeditions, require a return to the gallery space where they were to be shown. The art experience had to be framed inside limits. "All legitimate art deals with limits. Fraudulent art feels that it has no limits. The trick is to locate those exclusive limits.

---

[31] "Smithson's Non-Site/Sites (1969)", from ed. Jack Flan *Robert Smithson the Collected Writings,*(Documents of Contemporary Art: University of California Press, 1979), p 175

You are always running against those limits, but somehow they never show themselves."[32] When we look closely at Devlin's photographs, we realize that they are also, above all, a study in limits. The question is*, What do we see?* or, *What is not seen*?

This issue of limits and boundaries that both artists share is amplified by a concern with time and 'timelessness.' Smithson and Devlin are each dealing with the problem of how meaning seems to be both contained inside and outside time. Smithson has in mind geological time, which, it is true, dwarfs the fragile structures of Devlin's ephemeral interiors, although it should be remarked that one of her series is entitled *Subterranea*. However, Devlin, in her own way, treats time as expansively as does Smithson. At first, in response to the question framed above of *What do we see?* in a Devlin photograph, the answer, given that the human 'subject' is absent and, therefore, 'suspended' in parentheses, is perhaps, little. The banality of Devlin's interiors imposes a paralyzing limit on the mind, trapping it in the 'here and now' of the scene. The artist must then employ intellectual intelligence and all her technical skill with composition and color in order to make a work of art. She does so by probing the physical absence and the social vacuity of her interiors in an effort to open up a space outside time where a new 'subject' can be encountered. In some profound manner, the subject of Devlin's photographs 'ignores' time.

It is interesting, when establishing these parallels between the work of Robert Smithson, the sculptor of earth works, and Lucinda Devlin, the photographer of interiors, to realize that Smithson himself was deeply involved in photography and thought of art and the world in terms of the camera frame. He stated: "I don't think you can escape the primacy of the rectangle. I always see myself thrown back to the rectangle." And again, "Photographs are the most extreme contraction, because they reduce everything down. That fascinates me."[33] In other words, the act of taking a photograph is analogous in Smithson's mind with his dialectic of the "back and forth thing." Smithson himself did not try to make art with photography, using it only to document his sculpture. Devlin, on the other hand, has taken up that challenge. What Devlin has achieved with photography is to take the emphasis on real experience that Nauman and Smithson explored in three dimensional space and put it back on the wall.
Only, Devlin would no doubt qualify Smithson's statements about the primacy of the rectangle by remarking that what interests her is the square!

---

[32] Fragments of an Interview with Patsy Norvell 1969 from ed. Jack Flan *Robert Smithson the Collected Writings..* (Documents of Contemporary Art: University of California Press, 1979), p. 195
[33] *Ibid* p.193

For over thirty years, Lucinda Devlin has been making fine art photographs that represent a major contribution to innovative contemporary aesthetic thought. In keeping with the great tradition of modern art, along with Newman, Pollock and Rothko, and Nauman and Smithson, and also along with Evans and the modern tradition of fine art photography, Devlin understands that these are crucial stakes for the future of contemporary art. With her photographs, Lucinda Devlin has cast a vote against the 'objectification' of art and life and is campaigning for the survival of subjective experience.