

# Serial Imagery

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*As nature becomes more abstract, a relation is more clearly felt. The new painting has clearly shown this. And that is why it has come to the point of expressing nothing but relations.*

—Piet Mondrian

*Abstract art or non-pictorial art is as old as this century, and though more specialized than previous art, is clearer and more complete, and like all modern thought and knowledge, more demanding in its grasp of relations.*

—Ad Reinhardt

**SERIAL IMAGERY IS A TYPE** of repeated form or structure shared equally by each work in a group of related works made by one artist. To paint in series, however, is not necessarily to be serial. Neither the number of works nor the similarity of theme in a given group determines whether a painting or sculpture is serial. Rather, seriality is identified by a particular interrelationship, rigorously consistent, of structure and syntax: serial structures are produced by a single indivisible process that links the internal structure of a work to that of other works within a differentiated whole. While a series may have any number of works, it must, as a precondition of seriality, have at least two. Thus a uniquely conceived painting or sculpture *cannot* be serial.

There are no boundaries implicit to serial imagery; its structures can be likened to continuums or constellations. Though often painted in sets, that is, in a limited number that satisfy a given condition, serial images are nevertheless capable of infinite expansion. There is no limit to the quantity of works in a series other than what is determined by the artist.<sup>1</sup> Once established, a series may be kept open and added to periodically in the future. The question of the number of works in any given series is relative to the artist's intentions and working procedures, and may involve a variety of approaches (as will be later discussed). Serial imagery furthermore ignores the rational sequence of time. Series can be cut off at any point (*cf.* Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis, Frank Stella, Ellsworth Kelly); re-entered later (Stella); or continued and extended indefinitely (Josef Albers).

Central to serial imagery is the concept of *macro-structure*—that which is apprehended in terms of relational order and of continuity, but not in terms of distance, number or magnitude. The following example will make this relationship clearer. If the number one is combined with a comma and given the status of a self-contained unit (representing a single painting), and repeated thus,

1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,

all the units are interchangeable. The units are presented lineally and without hierarchy of order; each unit is similar and each is of equal importance. In the same manner, the macro-structure of a series is self-evident irrespective of the number of works in the series.

Equally essential to serial form is the *consistency* of the postulates, that is, that no two contradictory propositions can be deduced from any collocation of units. Hence, if the units are positioned irregularly,

1,1,1, 1, 1, 1,1, 1, 1,1,

the rhythms may vary but the macro-structure in each sub-group is identical to that of the whole.<sup>2</sup> Thus the macro-structure is not dependent on interval or distance; each unit remains interchangeable and has the same rank as the others, without disturbing the continuity of the macro-structure. This interchangeability of the units and their lack of hierarchical order is more clearly revealed if the units are arranged symmetrically, as follows:

1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,  
1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,  
1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,  
1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,  
1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,  
1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,  
1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,  
1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,  
1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,  
1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,

Such an arrangement, which can be read up and down, diagonally, or back and forth in any direction, demonstrates (if only by analogy) the inherent capacity of serial structures to interact and to reinforce, by juxtaposition, each other's presence and qualities. Meaning is enhanced and the artist's intentions can be more fully decoded when the individual serial work is seen within the context of its set. In earlier or non-serial art, the notion of a masterpiece—of one painting into which is compressed a supreme artistic achievement—is implicit. However, with serial imagery the masterpiece concept is abandoned. Consequently each work within a series is of equal value; it is part of a whole; its qualities are significantly more emphatic when seen in context than when seen in isolation.

The foregoing is not to say that a serial painting or sculpture lacks autonomy. Each single work in a series must be complete in itself and therefore *may* be shown in isolation. Furthermore, in some series the appearance of the paintings, if they are exhibited as a set, will be affected by the sequence in which they are hung. This is especially true in the work of Albers (though the degree and type of change that takes place varies from artist to artist). Albers is so precise in his handling of color—itself a highly *imprecise* material—that the emphasis and tonality of his paintings are subject to considerable variation according to their juxtaposition.

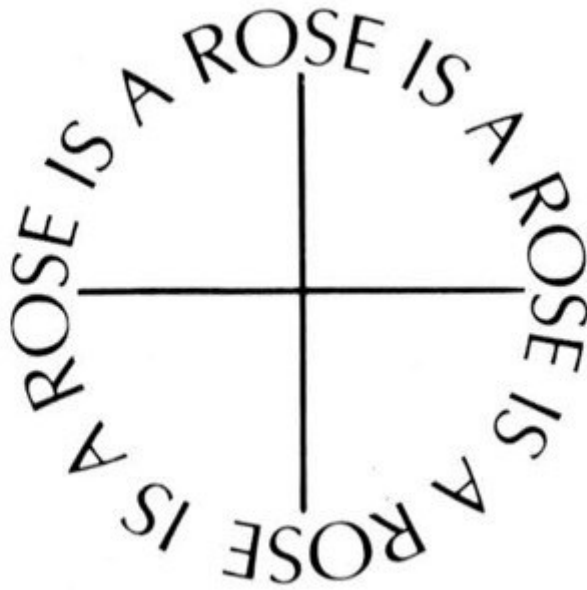
In mathematics there seems to be at least four possible serial forms. Referring to the Dedekind-Cantor theory of variables, Edward V. Huntington states:

*With regard to the existence of first and last elements, all series may be divided into four groups: 1) those that have neither a first nor a last element; 2) those that have a first element, but no last; 3) those that have a last element, but no first; and 4) those that have both a first and a last.*<sup>3</sup>

The implications of definitions 1) and 4) may be illustrated with Gertrude Stein's strikingly serial poem: "Rose is a rose, is a rose."<sup>4</sup> As Miss Stein relates in her autobiography,<sup>5</sup> she made a monogram of the poem, which she used on her notepaper:



In this form the poem has a first and a last member, whether it is written in a line or designed as an emblem, and would fall under definition 4) above. Yet in discussing the poem Miss Stein either deliberately or inadvertently misquotes herself and renders the poem “. . . a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.”<sup>6</sup> If “is” is added to either end of this revised form, and the poem recast as an emblem, the parameters of the structure are sufficiently altered to make the difference critical; the poem then conforms to definition 1) and in its duration becomes similar in structure to a continuum—that is, non-linear. (It is also perfectly symmetrical in the disposition of its parts, having seven members in each quadrant.)<sup>7</sup>



All contemporary usage of serial imagery, whether in painting or sculpture, is without either first or last members. Obviously, at one point there had to be a beginning—the first painting or sculpture made—but its identity becomes subsumed within the, whole, within the macro-structure. The same principle applies to the last member. At any given point in time one work in a series stands last in order of execution, but its sequential identity is irrelevant and in fact is lost immediately on the work's completion. The basic structure of serial imagery, then, can be likened to a pack of cards in which every card is the Ace of Spades; all cards are of equal value and all imprinted with the same emblem, which may or may not vary in size, color or position.

Setting the question of Albers aside for the time being, it can be said that the first use of serial imagery in recent painting is shared by two artists, Ad Reinhardt and Yves Klein. Klein's serial painting (begun about 1957) is marked by the systematic use of one canvas size and one grainy textured color. The similarity of color together with the low textural level of organically clustered paint grain, while it slowed down scan, was insufficient to defeat an inherent tendency towards inert uniformity. Reinhardt's use of serial imagery, on the other hand, though also basically entropic as an enterprise, is more important for a number of reasons. Reinhardt's serial usage predates that of Klein, and unlike the overtly systematic look of Albers' art, Reinhardt's serial forms imply *the use of a structure whose order is inherent but concealed*. In various paintings (as far back as 1955) Reinhardt employed as a structural principle a series of symmetrically positioned forms that repeated the framing edge. At times he united four square canvases to form a larger square. This modular division of the overall format was further reiterated by the horizontal and vertical squares symmetrically placed within each segment. His early systematic use of symmetry served to purge his painting of an outdated rhetoric, which he campaigned against equally in his systematically reiterated writings.

Reinhardt clearly is a key figure in the evolution of serial imagery in the United States, as Klein was not. If, apart from the inherent entropic tendency of his painting, any deficiency could be isolated it would be his manner of paint application, which never sufficiently deactivated the internal time-flow of the structure. His method of facture, consisting of a layer-upon-layer application of flat paint over a preexistent image, left traces of a “local” time track. In his last works, however, the black overlay of paint fused more into a one-to-one relationship with his structure. As the paintings got blacker they became more and more neutral. The formal importance of Reinhardt’s painting therefore resides in its quality of indeterminateness, its neutral emptiness. This indeterminate quality would not be remarkable in itself if it were not allied to an emphasis on symmetry and macro-structure: that which raises no claim to stand for the work in its own right, but which controls the development of the individual paintings within a series. What Reinhardt set into motion was the idea of a network of choices and limitations which were pre-formed but not logically apparent on the surface of the picture or within the whole series. Until now it has always been assumed that Reinhardt was only repeating one painting rather than painting a series. On the other hand Reinhardt’s work also proved that once the hierarchical links are solved and ironed out it becomes increasingly difficult to achieve contrast, that is, to give each painting a positive identity without reasserting rank or becoming overbearingly redundant. Nevertheless, his painting was a forceful step in the serial direction and of great importance to a later generation.

It was Frank Stella who made the first moves to exploit serial depositions of a higher order. In the manner of Reinhardt, Stella (in his first series, in 1959) also employed black, but with a linear element tracking across the picture plane. These lines were formed by leaving ragged edges of unpainted ground between the abutting areas of black. Stella reversed Reinhardt’s process of paint application; instead of making an image and then painting over it, allowing it to bleed through, Stella obliterated most of the ground and left the unpainted parts to form the image. In this way he obtained a greater fusion of image and facture, without leaving a time-trace. By varying the linear image he asserted the individual identity of each painting within the overall system.

It is important to note that the organization of Stella’s paintings begins at the center, and spreads outward by his use of various kinds of symmetry. Rather than echoing the rectilinear shape of the canvas within the field, as Reinhardt had done, Stella asserted the thickness of the stretcher bar as a modular element that controlled interval-width between the lines in the internal structure of the painting. However, instead of imposing the framing edge as the unifying structural principle, Stella took the basic module and extended it outside the framing edge by 1) making the stretcher bar equal in thickness to the internal module, and 2) repeating the ground color with the unpainted portion of canvas that covered the stretcher bar. It is only coincidental to his system that the internal modulations and the stretcher thicknesses are the same. In this manner Stella was able to employ a wide variety of images that have no one-to-one relationship with the horizontal and vertical elements of the framing edge; the vectors of his internal imagery are consequently disparate and energetic. (This structural process involves an absolutely different syntax from that arising from Synthetic Cubism, which systematically reiterates and plays against the internal boundaries of the framing edge.)

It is useful to return to Gertrude Stein’s poem “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose” in order to amplify Stella’s moves. To Miss Stein nouns were of great importance. In systematically repeating the noun “rose” she took advantage of its innate capacity to evoke many levels of meaning and image. The subject of her poem might very likely have been Francis Rose, a minor Surrealist painter with whom she was extremely friendly. As the poem was read it

might have conjured up a succession of images something like this: Rose (Francis) is a rose (flower) is a rose (color) is a rose (perfume) is a rose (gem) is a rose (compass card), etc. In Reinhardt's serial imagery the threshold of difference between each painting is so low as to finally deny difference, though it is true that each painting occupies a different space. Stella, on the other hand, created a unique identity for each painting by using a simple, bilaterally symmetrical network of images, which, in effect, were variants of the same image. In this way he preserved an absence of hierarchy; each image was equal in rank. Each image at the same time asserted its own identity with its own evocative potential, so to speak, in the manner of Miss Stein's rose. Moreover, Stella's paintings can be positioned in random order; the time-flow is non-sequential.

Although Piet Mondrian's art employs systematic elements of equal value that are interchangeable, they contain an obvious linear time sequence and a first and last number. This is apparent because his facture becomes more refined in time and each painting is self-consciously dated on the front. In this sense Albers' art is nearer to Stella's; the duration between Albers' paintings is compressed, and the time-flow more nearly reversible. Music, poetry and dance, by the very nature of their form, can only flow forward in time. It is impossible to play music, to read poetry or to dance backwards. In one form or another Claude Monet, Alexei Jawlensky, Marcel Duchamp, Mondrian, Albers, Klein and Reinhardt have all proved in their serial investigations that it was possible to make time relative and to reverse its flow. But it was Stella, who was soon to be joined by Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis, Andy Warhol, Larry Bell and, somewhat later, Ellsworth Kelly, who began a sophisticated dialogue involving the non-sequential possibilities of serial forms that rapidly led to a new plateau of achievement.

Inherent to the earlier use of serial imagery is a lack of extension or progression; whatever the quality of Mondrian's and Albers' achievement, their art reaches a plateau and stays there. Obviously they become more adept in time at using their system, but their art nevertheless remains circumscribed by a non-expanding esthetic. They refine rather than explore the system further. Part of Stella's remarkable achievement was his discovery that the inherent non-atavistic tendency of serial art—the inability of the artist to regress to a more primitive spatial notion so long as his system was maintained—could be accelerated and made to leap forward rapidly. Stella began exploring the nature of serial imagery vertically as well as horizontally by altering the parameters within each successive series. Every series of Stella's is distinctly different from every other series. The parameters of each series are not only varied but often reinforced in complexity. For instance, within one series Stella may repeat the same shape in different colors while, at the same time, progressively altering the initial shape. Stella discovered that the permutations—the typical, possible distributions, which are strategically central to serial order—can be varied at will. That there are no limiting rules to this strategy is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's remark: "Language is a 'game' the rules of which we have to make up as we go along."<sup>8</sup>

Stella's moves towards a discrete quantification of the parameters was first marked by a realization (in the black series) of well-defined and clearly distinguished *units*, articulating themselves by means of reciprocal effect, each one limiting and defining the nature of its fellows. Thus a situation of cross-incidence and cross-reference, of reciprocal relativity and multi-polarity became his most essential means. And in order to judge the fruitfulness of each new step within a particular series it became necessary for Stella to anticipate the entire route ahead.

Noland and Louis, who soon joined Stella in the serial enterprise, have a more romantic outlook; such pre-plotting is clearly antithetical to their esthetic. To be sure, serial imagery, though systematic, does permit unknown variables. As Anton Ehrenzweig has observed, the artist obviously “cannot anticipate *all* the possible moves that are open according to the rules which [he is] still making up,” but he “*can* handle ‘open’ structures with blurred frontiers which will be drawn with proper precision only in the unknowable future” (my italics).<sup>9</sup> Both Louis and Noland are much older artists than Stella, and their painting habits were formed by the esthetic of an earlier generation. It is to their credit that once they entered the serial dialogue they performed brilliantly, though often with perceptible hesitancy because of their disinclination to plot and anticipate their primary moves. After Noland’s first extraordinary series of *Targets* (which were done in 1960–62 and are among the finest explorations of serial imagery), his hesitation and wavering became apparent; yet in the later *Chevron* series and others that were to follow he reasserted his serial direction with great clarity and extraordinary verve.

Stella’s earliest investigations involved shape; in contrast, Noland’s earliest concern was color. As the ensuing dialogue developed, Stella and Noland were to exchange interests—Noland later exploiting shape as well as color and Stella adding color to his explorations. Louis’s central focus was on color throughout. These artists, as well as Bell (in sculpture), were to discover that serial imagery directly attacks all conscious means of ordering the macro-structure; the internal order can become random, providing the parameters of the macro-structure are systematically maintained. Louis discovered this in his pouring technique, and was then able to paint without envisioning the complete field. Provided Louis could delineate in advance where he was to pour the color, and could maintain the same family of color and similar intervals within each distinct series, it was not necessary for him to view the whole potential field; each area of the painting could be added to, part by part.

Given the overriding control asserted through the macro-structure and the drive to create an individual identity for each discrete unit, a corollary of the serial process would then be the development of an infra-structure that surfaces and magnifies buried qualities. Stella, for example, in his second series, as a final necessity brought about by the logic of the internal configuration, began to notch out the shapes of his canvas; this idea was made possible by the reciprocity of the parts to the macro-structure, which in its topology lies outside the boundaries, or apart from the boundaries, of the framing edge. Stella’s intention it would seem was not to create objects or to objectify his canvas as much as to make the individual work’s presence within a series *resonate*, to give each unit more visual energy, thereby reversing the entropic process; in other words, to give each painting a supra-identity.<sup>10</sup> John Cage has used a similar procedure in musical performances: in order to give clarity and brilliance to the sound emitted by a particular instrument, he removes it from the ensemble and places it within or at some point on the perimeter of the audience, where it waits its turn to be heard in the prescribed sequence of play.

It must be remembered that in serial imagery the exhibition space becomes a component. Only when paintings of a series are exhibited together in a gallery space do the parameters built into the paintings and their reciprocal quality begin to operate. By permitting the paintings to bite into the wall space, and the wall space to bite into the shaped canvas, Stella added another reciprocal parameter to his system; he emphasized the space by forcing it and the painting to become attached. Moreover, when his shaped paintings are strung on the walls, the walls act like sound boxes echoing the interior shape and amplifying the exterior shape. The intervals between paintings, as the intervals in music, become positive elements. The

more eccentric the overall shape of the canvas the greater the contrast between interior and exterior forms (as, for example, in Stella's 1966 series of highly idiosyncratic shaped canvases with contrapuntally shaped colors). Stella not only orchestrates the color and the shape so they simultaneously assert and deny one another; but when these paintings are strung along a wall the intervening spaces intensify the differences between canvases. (Noland's attenuated diamond shapes also set up a series of highly repetitive and assertive external diagonal rhythms when exhibited adjacent to one another.)<sup>11</sup> In addition to resonating the individual unit within the series and extending its identity, Stella's art tests both the structural parameters of serial imagery and the extent to which they can be stretched.

Too little in recent criticism has been written on the nature of color as it is experienced in the work of Stella, Noland and Louis, other than to note its *optical* quality. All our experience of color, of course, is optical; yet Albers for one—perhaps more than any other artist over the last twenty years—has set out to render our perception of color more precise, specifically by focusing on a limited range of particular colors. He has in a sense blatantly revealed the purity of color as an optical phenomenon; he has magnified the tensions color is capable of inciting in the eye, and he has made the viewer sensitive to color as a purely perceptual experience. His single-minded, haunting enterprise has been to lock color and structure into an absolute, one-to-one relationship. Color to Albers has never been a decorative element. No artist in recent times has rendered more precisely than he, or permuted so intensely, the possible range of color experience, without denying its subjective or psychological overtones. It should be added that while Albers has always insisted that his approach to color is intuitional, that fact has for the most part been ignored.

Central to serial imagery, as has been previously stated, is the controlling influence of the macrostructure, within which (provided the parameters are systematically observed) a high degree of randomness in the use of infra-forms is possible. Applying this principle to the use of color in serial forms, it is necessary for an artist only to maintain the same family of colors in order to proceed with an extraordinary degree of freedom—a freedom, moreover, that has not previously been possible. The moment Louis, to take one example, began a systematic use of serial imagery the whole nature of his color enterprise changed. In his series of *Stripe* paintings the effect of pouring the different but adjacent stripes of color onto the unsized ground was to give these vertical elements a lateral displacement in time and space. In other words, by pouring only once rather than several times to form each single stripe within a typical cluster, Louis left no record of the flow of time. An additional effect of pouring one stripe adjacent to another and letting the stain spread from one to another was to induce a homogenized surface. The stain acted somewhat in the manner of mortar, which fills in to give brickwork a monolithic appearance despite visual evidence of the brickwork's modular origins. This method enabled Louis not only to achieve what Albers had practiced for years, but to bring added complexity and randomness to the process.

On the other hand, turning to the *Target* paintings by Kenneth Noland, it is evident that the most crucial parameter of Noland's macro-structure is the *center* of the painting rather than the framing edge. Noland's color structure depends on the most rigid and absolute use of symmetry. In most of the clear-edged *Target* paintings it is of no consequence whether the top is marked; the paintings may be hung any side up without altering the appearance of the image. Noland's use of a jig of some kind to rush in the forms ensures the rigidity of his symmetry and its lack of perceivable variations. Presumably by choice, Noland varies the interval and distance between the concentric rings of colors. However, once he has set up his system he could probably position the color more randomly if he wished.



The result of this system of control by a macro-structure in the work of Louis, Noland and Stella is that for the first time color can be fully orchestrated. The intervals, cadence and textures of the colors begin to assert themselves in a form similar to music, with the individual colors vibrating and resonating. In Louis's *Stripe* paintings the colors virtually form visual chords. And unlike music, color need not be read forward (linearly) but can be scanned from any point in any direction, allowing the rhythms as perceived by the eye to vary to an extraordinary extent. As a result color in these paintings takes on a role it has never been permitted to assume in all the long history of art.

Within the development of serial imagery Andy Warhol's art proves to be highly idiosyncratic. Warhol was to take the inherent entropic tendency of the earlier phase of seriality and (like Beckett and Genet, two outstanding figures in recent literature whose life style Warhol in various ways so remarkably echoes) turn it into a positive factor. Perhaps no single image in the second half of the 20th century is so daring in concept and so beautiful in its appearance as Warhol's helium-filled series of floating aluminum pillows, which change position and relationship to one another with the slightest breath of air. In their form they represent the most perfect visual analogy of a continuum the human mind has conceived: identical, manufactured objects remorselessly stamped out by a machine, which when filled with gas and clustered within a space, become more organic in their relationships than the interweaving strands of a Pollock painting.

Larry Bell is the only sculptor of consequence to emerge in the sixties who deploys serial imagery. Originally a painter, Bell has a presence and youthfulness that betoken still another aspect of serial forms. It has been shown that serial imagery is concerned not with the notion of masterpiece, but of process. Process implies progression or advance within a steady rhythm—in other words, continuity and productivity. Process is not a closed system arising out of a unique esthetic; it is not concealed in highly charged psychological factors. Process is a system that can be decoded and adapted to any personal use. Once a process is understood, an artist can enter into the dialogue at any point. It is choice of "realm" that is important and not uniqueness of "subjects." Hence Bell's crucial act was that he decoded the serial system and made his own entry into the process, while working out of Los Angeles and without ever having been to New York or knowing any of the other artists concerned. More than any art in the past, the dialogue of seriality is taking place in public; it is a gallery and not a studio art.

From the critical viewpoint, the employment of serial imagery raises a number of issues. Serial forms reveal very easily the complexity of the artist's decisions and the nature of his enterprise as a whole. Once several artists use a similar system or process they substantiate each other, both to the audience and to themselves. Each artist, of course, is engaged in an endeavor to make the best art of his time; but the dialogue is so public and the system so flexible that the rate of each artist's response is greatly accelerated. Furthermore, the more eccentric any work within a given series is, the more easy it would seem for the critic to judge it; however, due to the extreme mutuality and interdependence of each painting in a series, judgments as to the quality of any one painting are difficult, if not pointless. How is one to decide which Mondrian is *the* masterpiece? It is impossible to discuss at any meaningful level the relative importance of any one of his paintings over another. Judgments of this nature have to be foregone. In Mondrian's mature work it is necessary to deal instead with the nature of his informing *structure*: how is it more clear in his later art and less clear in his earlier art? Indeed, except for Mondrian's last works there is *no* inherent system of progression in his art. Moreover, one cannot say which Monet *Cathedral*, which serial Reinhardt, which black Stella, which Noland *Target*, which Warhol *Campbell Soup Can*, which serial Kelly or which

of the later Bell boxes is best. Such a judgment is meaningless; at best it does no more than exercise a dubious connoisseurship.<sup>12</sup> The crucial factor is, again, the choice of realm, the way each painting fits within the chosen structure: that is, whether the postulates of each painting are consistent with the others and in such a way that no two contradictory propositions can be deduced within a series. Thus criticism must address itself to the largest entity. The task of the critic is not to say which work is good or bad or best; his task is to say what is there and what is the nature of the experience. Only then, if he wishes, can the critic venture an opinion of its value. In fact, simply to describe this experience is in some way to evaluate it.

Central to the work of all the serial artists is the endeavor that has marked art since earliest times: the attempt to describe with the structure of art our perception of the space we inhabit. This undertaking informs all art, whether music, poetry, painting or sculpture; each generation of artists refines, explores, augments or completely restructures our intellectual, psychological and perceptual awareness of the human spatial domain. In modern art there are two mainstreams of this evolution, one via Monet, the other via Cézanne and the Cubists.<sup>13</sup> Both dealt with simultaneity in two different ways. Monet's serial enterprise (as has already been pointed out) structured simultaneity by the use of a macro-structure, and can be spatially likened to a continuum. The Cubists, on the other hand, dealt with notions of simultaneity within the framework of one painting. Their structure and its topology can be likened to a Moebius Strip, which has no top or bottom, no inside or outside; all are interchangeable within a common framework. It took Cubism to assert Cézanne's notions, but Monet's were fully formed at the outset and were reiterated time after time in his art from 1891 onwards. Monet was painting serially through the years of Cubism. Yet it was not until nearly eighty years after the *Cathedral* series that we see Monet's discoveries begin to be realized by other artists'. Josef Albers, who was born three years before Monet's first advanced serial venture began, is the living link between Monet and the new painters. It is to be hoped Albers' art will now be more clearly recognized for its potency.

There are sufficient indications in the emergence of serial imagery over the past decade in the United States that the rhythms attendant upon the serial style ritually celebrate, if only obliquely or subliminally, overtones of American life. In various ways serial imagery reveals a local color that identifies the ambience of its origin. Serial imagery is particularly fitted to reflect its contemporary environment, because of the open and unplanned nature of its internal dialogue; its highly systematic yet flexible process of production, its high degree of specialization, and its narrow, deep focus upon a single issue. Its redundancy is a positive act that continuously affirms the power and continuity of the creative process. Taken together, the approaches of the artists mentioned above in no small measure evoke the underlying control-systems central to an advanced, "free enterprise," technological society. Esthetically, of course, the paintings are no better or worse for our recognition of this quality.

—[\*John Coplans\*](#)

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## NOTES

1. The number of paintings, for instance, in Albers' series *Homage to the Square* is not known; it is an endless series to which he continuously adds. In comparison, all of Stella's black series are known; it is a closed series delimited by a set number. Until Stella had exhausted for himself the possible variations within this series, however, the numerical

boundary was not fixed. Noland's *Target* series was similarly not preconditioned by a known quantity in advance. On the other hand, Stella's series of eccentric geometric paintings of 1966 were preplanned, the quantities having been fixed at the outset and then adhered to.

2. Interestingly enough, the logic of syntax common to Western languages does not permit the cataloging of simultaneously important entities in a non-hierarchical order. In Western usage ideas or objects are invariably enumerated in ordinal sequence: 1), 2), 3), etc. The Chinese, on the other hand, prefix equally important items 1), 1), 1), etc.

3. Huntington, *Continuum*, p. 12. This definition, incidentally, is quite contrary to that set forth by Mel Bochner in his article, "The Serial Attitude," *Artforum*, December, 1967, pp. 28–33. Bochner's definition reads: "*Series*—a set of sequentially ordered elements, each relating to the preceding in a specifiable way by the logical condition of a finite progression, i.e., there is a first and last member, every member except the first has a single immediate predecessor from which it is derived and every member except the last a single immediate successor." From the illustrations accompanying the article, and from this definition, it is obvious Mr. Bochner confuses modular forms with serial structures. He evidently is unaware of the Dedekind-Cantor theory, which is central to the mathematical concept of serial forms.

4. The poem as set forth here was originally one line of a longer and more complex poem, "Sacred Emily," from Gertrude Stein, *Geography and Plays*, Four Seas Press, (Boston, 1922).

5. Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Literary Guild (New York, 1933), p. 169.

6. *Ibid.*

7. In fact Miss Stein does consciously play with the form of this poem, giving it three different beginnings and, hence, three different structures. She introduces it with "rose," "a rose," and "is a rose" all in the same passage. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

8. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell (Oxford, 1963), par. 83.

9. Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*, University of California (Berkeley, 1967), p. 42.

10. Ellsworth Kelly had also much earlier struck upon this idea, but his was more a process of dismounting the canvas from the wall by making parts step out onto the floor and into the observer's space. In his case it was to lead to the development of a number of remarkable sculptures.

11. Noland's use of shape, however, is very minimal, especially in the exercise of contrapuntal effects. He attaches his canvases to the wall space and leaves it at that. Shape has become a different issue in his latest horizontal striped paintings.

12. Ezra Pound's comment is highly appropriate: "I reject the term connoisseurship, for 'connoisseurship' is so associated in our minds with a desire for acquisition. The person possessed of connoisseurship is so apt to want to buy the rare at one price and sell it at another. I do not believe that a person with this spirit has ever *seen* a work of art." Ezra Pound, "The Serious Artist," *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*.

13. Mondrian and Albers draw upon both traditions.