Between 1967 and 1969, I painted and exhibited several monochromes in an attempt to define what was possible as a painting. Anything was possible in a painting, but not much was possible as a painting. I wanted these paintings to be autonomous works that could exist primarily "in and for themselves," as an objectification of pure presence, and as such could embody the abstract ideal of art as an object of reflection and judgement, as something in addition to, and more compelling than, whatever else it might possibly signify. Yet as much as I originally conceived of an art of being rather than representation, it also seemed to me that this was not enough. The possibility of a self-referential autonomy was more of a mirage than a real achievement. If the work was to refer to a totality, it had to be more and other than itself. Then as now, it seemed that the world is much too compelling to bypass for an abstract ideality that only reifies its own presence. Some relation to representation of the world was necessary, and this demanded a technical solution outside of the existing state of painting.

Therefore in late 1969, I abandoned these monochromes to construct a number of photographic works of the cityscape. These photographs not only made reference to specific subjects, but also gave an indexical trace or imprint of reality as a general phenomenon, and thus as a subject for reflection; to think the world through an image of the world. In these early photographic works, I sought specifically to construct visual analogues between the organization of the city as an economy of motion, and the geometry of abstract painting, so that the image could be an ideal referent and a material objectivity.
at the same time. The innately pictorial power of photography allowed it to function linguistically when structured as a series. Therefore, like a number of other conceptual artists at this time, my shift to photographic technique was inspired by its potential to transcend modernist aesthetics and open up a critical relationship to representation through what I called a "literature of images." Through the use of the photograph I saw the opportunity to create a link between the intellectual, literary and idealistic biases of the purest forms of conceptual art and an engagement with the real world. That is, through the economy of art, and through the technical language and rhetorical power of photography, I could reflect on the general economy and its limits, and this "political" dimension of the photographic could simultaneously critique the limits of aesthetic judgement and what is possible as a work of art. In this sense, I think of my work as remaining unreservedly modernist, and as such, my work is constructed out of the recognition of a "crisis of representation."

In part, at least, it was this crisis that led me to a reconsideration of the monochrome and its place in the history of the crisis in painting. Throughout my work in the 1970s, the monochrome remained as a latent theme developed only within the photographic subject, often as a Mallarméan metaphor of "silence." During this period the support surface of the white wall of the gallery or the white page of the book had displaced the support of primed canvas of painting. But since about 1980, when I grounded my photographic practice and its "speech of the world" upon the ideal field of the monochrome, the historical function and the fetish value of this ideal was both refused and reified. Painting became secularized.

Throughout its history, modernist technique had bound itself to the repudiation of the pictorial. When painting finally had to abandon diegesis to the narrative feature film at the inception of Cubism, the accompanying convulsions of technique and the collapse of pictorial space caused its artistic ideal to be perpetuated in a polemical drive that consequently inhabited those spaces outside the frame of the picture. The function of painting had to respond to this condition by shifting away from mimesis and pictorialism. Painting thus claimed the future by deconstructing the "natural condition" of the picture as an illusionistic simulacrum of the world and by withdrawing the authority of its ideal from the language of the given. Yet in the flow of history, of the determinant condition of the total economy, the function of pictorial representation came to be transferred from the domain of art, with its exclusive ends, to that of mass media, which, through the techniques of cinema, television and photography, still reign as the authoritative model of reality. The avant-garde could only confront this dominance with a symbolic negation at the margins of the culture of the superstructure.

The recuperation of the monochrome in my work at this stage is not so much a desire to return to the emblem of an unachievable ideality as to reground photography within the problematic of painting and return it to the question of limits. Having now secured the legitimacy of photographic practice within the regime of art, is it not necessary to confront it also with the unresolved question of modernity: what is the basis of its authority? Does not the photographic stand in relation to the endgame of postmodernism as the monochrome stands in relation to the endgame of modernism? This question remains the same as that which initiated my work in 1967, and has confounded the modernist project since the beginning of this century: what is possible as a painting? And in its larger sense: what is possible to think through art? The response to these questions, of course, can only be ultimately given in the work itself.
