An Object Rejoins the Flow of Time, Is Time
For Robert Smithson art does not involve a wild destratification, but what we might call the development and maintenance of a “strategic zone,” a space of experimentation between the strata and the outside (in fact a place in which one might encounter the outside).

For Smithson art is the name for this encounter in which an object rejoins the flow of time it was always already a part of (but had been extracted from). Indeed all these objects and practices, these new monuments, might be located on that “seeping edge” between the actual and the virtual, which we might rephrase here as the coexistence of the pure past (and future) with the present, or simply a seeing of the object as object, and a seeing of the object in process, as duration.

Simon Sullivan, Geophilosophy
Any process implies a system, but not all systems imply process. What is systematic about art that reduces the arbitrary comes out as information, revealing an ends-means hookup. That is, there is about the work a particular kind of systematizing that process can imply. Common to the art in question is that it searches for a definite sort of system that is made part of the work. Insofar as the system is revealed, it is revealed as information rather than esthetics. Here is the issue stated so long ago by Duchamp: art making has to be based on terms other than those of the arbitrary, formalistic, tasteful arrangements of static forms. This was a plea as well to break the hermeticism of “fine art” and to let in the world on terms other than image depiction.

The two modes of systematizing employed by American art over the last half century have been briefly sketched. The materials/process approach tends to predominate now. American art, unlike American thought, has occasionally had a strong idealist bias, but the a priori has so far proved unnerving and uncomfortable tools for the American artist. To pursue a more material route was, in the late 1940s, to be up against the formalism of Cubism. Pollock was the first to beat his way out of this. But all art degenerates into formalism, as Pollock himself found out. The crisis of the formalistic is periodic and perpetual, and for art to renew itself, it must go outside itself, stop playing with the given forms and methods, and find a new way of making.

Robert Morris, *Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making*, pp. 83–84

So it is not an object there, distinct from us, perfect without us — those would be the objects of Donald Judd. For Robert Morris, there are no objects without space, without perception, without interaction. In fact, place, space, form and their perception — our interaction with them — become the work of art. This clearly leads to art as a relation, and we can sense the move to relational aesthetics.

We get this in a very different way with Robert Smithson with his dialectical conception of site and non-site, of here and there, both held simultaneously, even in the absence of the one. Here and there, in relational aesthetics becomes you and me, between you and me. And all that is me, all that is you and all that figures you and figures me (all our cultural values “inscribed” on our body, in its learned perceptions). If Smithson gives a sweeping sense of entropy and time, the grandeur (really indifference) of non-human time, a deep sense of a material and atmospheric planet, a Gaia and cosmos, practitioners of relational aesthetics (using this term very openly) seemed interested, thoroughly or narrowly (not in a pejorative sense), in human relations, of sense-making, knowledge systems, social interactions, the limits and scope of human to human (or human to machine) relations.
"The originality of the group General Idea, formed in the early seventies, was to work with social formatting: corporations, television, magazines, advertising, fiction. 'In my view,' Philippe Parreno says, 'they were the first to think of the exhibition not in terms of forms or objects but of formats. Formats of representation, of reading the world. The question that my work raises might be the following: what are the tools that allow one to understand the world?'"