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Everywhere There Are Starting Points
What Deleuze and Guattari say in the following about philosophy can indeed be said for art:

Those who do not renew the image of thought are not philosophers but functionaries who, enjoying a ready-made thought, are not even conscious of the problem and are unaware even of the efforts of those they claim to take as their models.

There is no more a privileged form than there is a privileged starting point. Everywhere there are starting points, intersections and junctions that enable us to learn something new . . .

Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*

Human society is structured by narratives, immaterial scenarios, which are more or less claimed as such and are translated by lifestyles, relationships to work or leisure, institutions, and ideologies… Why not use art to look at the world, rather than stare sullenly at the forms it presents?

Nicolas Bourriaud, *Post Production*

I like this very much: using art to look at the world, as forms which project possible scenarios and which can imply the creation of new scenarios.
And yet following *In What Language to Come* I have immersed myself in more and more tactile sensate work turning on questions of form, space, volume, and tactility. Like the cinema of the early ’60s to the mid ’70s, the 1965–70 art of the same period is immensely rich.

I do not say this nostalgically. Minimalism, conceptualism, process art, performance, three-dimensional objects, etc., everything before the Pictures Generation (that’s me) has now, for me, become most interesting.

Wittgenstein and Beckett infuse this period. What is expressivity and where opens up radically at this time. The body, space, the object; the relation to the audience, to society, to politics; indeed, the whole conception of what an artwork is or should be, a face up to a mass-production society, hoping to drag a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces which are at work.

All of this seems to be dogmatically as well as symptomatically worked out reading *Continuous Project Altered Daily* by Robert Morris—this and a great many artists’ essays. This a very articulate generation (Robert Irwin, Hockney, Nauman, Andre, Kosuth, Smithson, Judd, LeWitt, Weiner, Matta-Clark; the post-Rothko Reinhardt generation, each of them cogent, lucid writers).

Whereas in grad school I was reading French theorists which greatly informed Relational Aesthetics, here the artists above articulate themselves lucidly outside a theoretical frame (cultural studies, post-colonial studies, queer studies, feminist studies, all excellent), but most certainly within a philosophical frame, if we can distinguish the two. Perhaps the difference between analytic and continental philosophy. Whereas the ’70s was a time of play and experimentation across categories, this play had to give way to the realpolitik of very real positions where more and more voices, opinions and positions had to come to the table. And so from the ’80s on, positions hardened. And necessarily so.
So much contemporary art is *propositional*, setting out to prove or illustrate $x$, $y$, or $z$. On the other hand it is product, as critics have said of a good deal of zombie formalism:

Works of art remain afloat on a sea of words. Those refractory facts, art works, are launched into the treacherous currents of language with its sudden undertows, backwaters, and shifting mainstreams. Works will sink out of sight, cause ripples or even occasional tidal waves. But this trackless, navigational nightmare is not without direction. For below, silently at work, is that force that waits for no man: the tidal pull toward judgment that assigns to works a certain coefficient of power measured in terms of cold cash and those slippery verbal chips to be redeemed for a piece of history.

*(Robert Morris)*

This is not to say there is not critique: take Matta-Clark whose oeuvre appears to be motivated by an endless critique of the status quo, critique of the separation between genres, critique of production methods, critique of hierarchies leading onto a critique of institutions. But not identity, not subject nor gender positions, not yet anyway.

An art that refuses to stand up functionally on its own becomes a sign of what Robert Smithson (1966: 304) calls “a dialectics of entropic change.”

Perhaps my investigation of light, objects, form, space is without critique as I had been taught and is more properly in the realm of discovery, a material discovery, a sensate discovery of my sense of touch and tactility. I have, on
more than a few occasions, become self-conscious of the looking back, though I never looked backed until I was there to find, and realize this, yes this is what was the urgency of a time now gone. I then allowed myself to think of it as being a kind of Pin Ups, the seventh studio album by David Bowie containing cover versions of songs,

(“These songs are among my favourites from the ‘64–67 period of London”, DB)


I would not say I am doing cover versions of this work. But it is a great period from which to more deeply understand contemporary art’s repertoire.

Been reading much on the tragic and Zen, on mourning and humor.


Too argue for or against Ad Reinhardt’s pronouncement:

Art is art. Everything else is everything else.

You can choose an active or passive nihism, to endure, but perhaps in a zen sense one can be. This doesn’t mean passive resignation—not at all—because to be is to let yourself be.

Where once

turning modernist forms against the ideologies that saw them emerge—the modern ideologies of emancipation, of the sublime—as well as against the art world and its beliefs’ would be meaningful

... to reveal the invisible structures of the ideological apparatus; to deconstruct systems of representation that revolve around a definition of art as visual information that destroys entertainment

(pace Bourriard) I don’t see this critique as viable nor do I see viable the notion of the construction of new myths that invoke a people-yet-to-come.

Art is also a social practice in that it is a conversation. Art is also a social practice in that it is a conversation: a conversation with all the materials of this world, all its formats and discourses, people and cultures, time future and time past.

Though I live in New York City and do see a good deal of work, the social component and social discourse around it is mostly through shows and reading. The world of art, not unlike show business is a business, not only for dealers and curators but also for academics and artists, and necessarily so, a business on the hustle, working it, eager to catch the next new thing or enter into a bigger market.

Here, like a photograph, from a dear, dear friend:
as always lovely to hear from you and I have been getting the texts etc
just been mad busy... way too much going on always constantly hard to pause
keep up concentrate breathe
art fairs travel visits more art fairs travel exhibitions but sooo little in the way of
art think about it really engaged with what its supposed to be do
just worried how to keep it moving keep it paying our crazy rents expenses
production tuition’s mortagages utilities dinner
love it that you can immerse yourself in the bowels of it
like wittgenstein and beckett
like smithson, judd, lewitt, weiner, matta-clark
not like the like generation
everything on my side is very surface... foregrounded by $
makes art very small... like everything else (rheinhardt)
love you too
Be well in sweden! lets plan for some down time this summer
and your next moves

HUGZ M

BTW- This is a show we did at the gallery of young artist Lin Ke... It inspired me to
write a bit and theres my article at the end of this epic PDF... I hadn’t wrote in a
while and had little time to get this out so it’s quite disjointed but maybe you have
some time to read it - there should be footnotes on it but somehow it’s lost sign of
the times