The Event of Art

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Forms and Objects: An Inventory of Effects
Form, not surfaces, not form factors as in industrial design, not formats, but volume, mass, perhaps even ideal forms. What might this be? And what of Morphologies, Geologies, Topographies? Not the exhibition as a script, as notional, as instructions, as Eternal Sunshine, as instructing bodies of architecture, as formatting, no, forms in side forms, things, stuff, space, forms, monoliths, objects.

object
figure
space
bodies
objecthood

just what kind of object what kind of material material itself
what does this itself mean?
vitrine, shrine, monolith, serial structure
tactility and shapes
shaping light, shaping material
shaping the viewer
“display” to distinguished from a putative tradition or genre of “installation” ala hirschhorn

I want to see this stone column in the glass vitrine window of the Meier building.
So different these two shapes. I think of both of them as forms, not quite objects.

These two are objects, and while the one on the left, a Razor scooter with various masses on top of it, is very narrative, so the one on the right is equally narrative. Interesting how form becomes an object becomes a narrative.
Let’s take a step back away from three-dimensional objects, forms, mass, volume, bodies in space, spaces, space and presence itself (James Turrell and Robert Irwin) and return for a moment to regimes of writing, representation and images, and, from there, objects, light, embodiment, space and exhibition specificity.

With every new release of work, there needs to be a rallying cry, a name, a signifier, around which the work can retrospectively be given agency, can be introduced to the world so that it can be understood. It can’t simply be a multiplicity, it must have a point of critique, a point of being, a set of problems that it is weighing in on. It must, like everything, be an argument.

I ask myself, what is the space that I can open, that can be found. One that has intrigued me in reading the essays of Robert Morris along with interviews with Thomas Hirschhorn is the space of the body. Being between and within one’s body and social bodies, between the dance of life, being present to it and the hard facts on the ground in the Gramscian sense of bodies and politics. How space shapes and disciplines the body. How software does that, how software disembodies the body, estranges it from the full amplitude of its movements of its sensate body, time reduced, focused, narrowed into screen time. How the interaction with the you that is played back to you from the data collected on you, constructs you. How by class, by money, by state power, by global circuits and ideology, we are shaped and marked and how art as display can, in Hirschhorn’s sense, bring us to closer to knowing, enduring, how in Morris’s sense things be things, not simply anesthetized things, which we call art, but how in reference to the space opened by Robert Morris we can talk about the expanded field of art that brings us, present, to ourselves and life.

There is something between the two of them. But how to name it? Perhaps it is not to rally at all, not to cry, but more akin to a philosophy held dear by Ad Reinhardt, art as the liberation from the self, and from the shifting flux of the everyday world.

I prefer the "and . . . and . . . and" model to the banality of duality.

(Carsten Holler)

For now let’s have a look at my inventory of effects. A list or enumeration of various tropes and visual strategies that I return to see in this a name might appear as way in.
1. Seeing as writing, writing to see

writing on images to see them, writing, drawing, coloring, as seeing, to see with the hand, to touch is to see, to feel is sight (hence the uncanniness of mechanical seeing, even of search, such algorithms, don’t see with feeling, don’t read with context, with biography)

i keep playing with a stylus drawing over photographs, photographs or images of things on the computer screen, that i then make color lines on them or rephotograph them with color over lays. the selection of images is what i come upon. i suppose these have been of different types, thinking about it.

here is a list
- the iPhone or photo apps see versions of an image, they see imaging, there is no image in front of these cameras.
- tape recorders (i am always interested in memory devices, even distributed ones, like a blockchain)
- art works (aa of later bas jan ader, sol lewitt, broodthaers, i return to these figures again and again)
- news images (so often are invisible to see, even the most dramatic or compelling photographs. to see them i draw onto top of them, so as to touch them, these images include refugee camps, natural disasters, california fires, et..)

why do they attract me
- i am always interested in recording devices, in apps or overlays of visual instrumentation
- i am interested in instructions
- interested in broodthaers use of the figure to demark and delineate the surface of of screen space, the screen as a surface, he gets this from Mallard.
- the screen as surveillance
- the optics of seeing

the plastic overlay on screen and the drawing and double exposure
- again image reading image, warhol as a designer does this most beautifully and succinctly using mass media and iconic images and representation them through select color application. the underlying image we know, but see again with this process. this is the nature of the uncanny, you know it but you don’t.
sometimes it’s just the line of the drawing that I like, the colors.
other times I think there has to be something more. It’s as if I am doodling, just making doodles.

there is something in the technique I like - but have yet to realize. maybe it’s because in the end, it’s a small image on Instagram. and there they are - just another image - and they can’t be seen. I so much want to print some these very big, scan than print.

there is something between photography and drawing, imaging and illustrating, seeing with a pen, seeing as writing
- plastic on top of photos
- writing on top of photos
- plastic in front of white gloves
- plastic on photographs, abu gray, hurricanes, Jan van Adler.
- with writing on phone
- writing on photographs, why, what photos, what to show
through the writing, what does it enhance, displace, see specifically

Broodthaers’s genius, following Mallarme, to see the page, the surface of the page, as a series of figures, or rather spaces designated rhetorically as figures, turining language and images into scenes and territories within demarcated shape.
PLEASE
DON'T
LEAVE ME
It’s only with the filter that I can see: this is why Warhol’s treatment of images outlast the underlying originals. As if saying: now, you can see this picture.

Seeing the apparatus of seeing, the imaging tool set that images.

Many of the sheer fabric works with zippers I place over earlier works, like this large water color. There is something about concealment, wrapping, covering, obscuring that make us desire to see more.

Under the veil, obscuring what is seen at the same time bringing touch to sight.
Light sensitive, gravity sensitive, opacity and transparency, sheer and opaque, the sensate of touch brought to illumination.

2. Writing on the surface of the Earth

If writing, even writing with a camera, is producing a kind of writing on a surface, writing that is surface, writing or marking that gives forth a sign to another sign, language, making language, letters just another material or a material only, a surface only, a thing amongst things, then Mylar, reflectively is a form and a surface that continually pleats, both itself and the displacement of what it mirrors in its environment. Shaped to the body or taken up by wind or movement, Mylar, with its underlying mirror surface, is always itself a something else. This itself and something else is what we so often forget about. We forget that words on paper, are on paper and are letter forms, makings or the striking of a keyword of Helvetica, this becomes invisible to us as we simply get on with the reading of the words. There is no paper, no letters. Of course when we see languages we don’t read, we don’t understand, we again see letter forms or characters as in Chinese or Japanese. As things, materials, objects, ideas become invisible to us, we want to see them again, as for the first time. The fabric pieces, the Mylar, the plastic overlays, help me see anew.

During the summer I took square-meter sheets of Mylar, gold and silver, along with plastic underside. I had my two children wear the Mylar and walk into and along the shore of the bay. The Mylar in a photograph becomes fixed and very sculptural in appearance. The image is flat but it alludes to dimension. Sculpture is that thing itself. But what kind of thing? and why?
I took smaller plastic sheets onto trains, looking out the window and photographing along the ride.

Here is a list of these photos:

- Mylar reflections of water and light
- kids wearing the Mylar, seeing its folds
- Mylar in front of shed with floating balls
- plastic in front of ocean
- plastic on train passing industrial suburban sites
- plastic passing trees

In all of these the filter is in front of the camera, it’s not post production. we see and read the world through our cultural filters, our technical instruments and again here i am interested in the seeing of seeing. there is also a sense of the artifice of man’s instruments, the hazard of them, the hazard of the human endeavor, the sense of it as a dead end, as terminal, as sick, as alien, as estranged. now i don’t think one will really get that in these pictures, these photographs, but i certainly had that feeling, that on the other side of my vision, of me, of us, of this, on the other side of this plastic all this human made stuff, this boardwalk, these small groups of people, here and here, and these crowds, crowding, and this hot concrete, this shop, and this noisy shop, and stores and more shops and blocks of stores and cars and phones and people, all of it, this train depot, this desolate suburb, this teeming city, all of it, gone, already gone, and this light, and wind and rain and sea and clouds, just going on, on and on and on, and the whole human endeavor having become a stranger to itself, alluding itself, running and running and filling itself up, on this and that, and more of this and more of that, and more, and more and more, behind that plastic, behind that door of time, that sheet of time, gone, windswept, ruined, already ruined, so far away, me dissociated from it, from them, from me, from us, from all of it, a cloud passing like a shadow.
Here I want to specifically situate space, the sun, sky and atmosphere as if under a bubble, the human bubble of populations and knowledge. More than relating artwork to a location, to a site specificity, I want to locate the site as specific, I want to see the specificity of this place, this earth, this planet, this ocean and these two people holding up a filter to it. We then are the work of art situated by our planet. A radically different idea.
a body inhabiting a reflective surface
the surface reflection resulting in inversions of sky, land, earth, heaven... left, right, etc. silver and gold foil shape to make form
the body and its armor
the shaping body
the body, agile form, making new forms, transitory forms
Mylar gives me this uncanny feeling of The Matrix or being in a Philip K Dick novel. What is reflected in the Mylar, in the silver and gold, is a presence there and not there, there but not there. It’s as if I can walk into this other world. At the same time it suggests I am in the world of Mylar. The sea and sky is that world. I can’t pierce it.

“Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan” (1969). The mirrors reflected and refracted the surrounding environs, displacing the solidity of the landscape and shattering its forms. Part Earthwork and part image, the displacements contemplate temporality; while the mirror records the passage of time, its photograph suspends time.

Smithson began making the Mirror Displacement series shortly after his Site/Non-Site works. He described the difference between the two kinds of work:

In other Non-sites, the container was rigid, the material amorphous. In this case, the container is amorphous, the mirror is the rigid thing.

As in the Site series, Smithson was preoccupied with the way material, or another site, might be represented; might the materials in the Displacement be thought to “mirror” their presence elsewhere?
4. Sculpture consists almost exclusively of form but what of drawing and line

Whilst drawing and painting consists of the elements of line, colour, texture, space, scale, and format as well as form, sculpture consists almost exclusively of form. Now I begin to look more closely at what the sculptor is doing, how she or he takes on this extraordinary expanse of form, or what is considered form. Mirrors and cameras each displace one plane of reality and place it on another. It is all at once: the camera absorbing light, and the mirror refracting light. Drawing on the other hand is built up, line by line.
Clearer distinctions between sculpture’s essentially tactile nature and the optical sensibilities involved in painting need to be made. For unlike paintings, which are always lit in an optimum way, sculpture undergoes changes by the incidence of light.

(Robert Morris)

I buy more materials: plastic, fabric, Mylar, and latex. I want to find more dimensionality, more depth in the works, more crunchiness — so more layering.

Surveying the Meier building, I could see one corner where the two high ceiling windows meet at an inset angle where I could hang light scrims in such a way as to make a vitrine, something like 6 feet wide × 2 feet deep × 10 feet high.

I put four of the lollipops or my Pierre Hermé infinities up in the studio between two pieces of string suspended across the room, hanging the sheets perpendicular to each other so they form a rectangular transparent vitrine suspended in air.

Now for the first time there was an enclosed space. There was volume, mass. An inside and an outside.
The inside of this space, this plastic fabric scrim now a virtue, gives space an interiority, creates an enclosure, and has dimension itself. This was form. Not an image, not simply an object but form. Not quite a solid form but a form that inhabits space in the round. The interior, is what, air.

6. I begin to investigate, form, solidity, sculpture, three dimensional objects, softness
A friend of mine told me about Haus Rucker and their work with pneumatics. Pressurized air making solid what it soft or collapsable.

I have this desire to place things, objects in my soft vitrines, in this enclosed case, in space not as space or mass or void or volume, but vitrine as theater for an object in the round. In these soft vitrines the top and bottom are open—perhaps it’s more like a shaft, with out top, without bottom. Nevertheless this enclosure, this depth, this void, this vacuum, this walled-in space, in its emptiness calls to me to be filled. I suppose I just don’t know what it is in and of itself.

Yes, this “in and of itself” I so wanted now stares me down. It stands defiant, without me, inconsiderate of me, content alone. This may be why we long for narrative, because it tells us what it is, it is without enigma, as narrative reveals in human terms, whereas form, is, form simply is.
I think I’m having a hard time saying that there is something, either of the figure, or narrative, or story that I can locate in the work. Something that was very much in the films, not so much in the photographs, but yes in the Chatroulette series and others, in the history pictures and Eternal Sunshine show at the Minsheng.

I don’t think it’s a matter of saying something, but rather of looking at something. The difference in looking at something is that something is already there. I simply need to present it for it to be seen. It’s uncanny, this that is. Saying something is more like constructing, illustrating, building—but aren’t I already constructing and building with all these fabric and plastic works? Then it must be the figure, the missing figure and why the Gilbert Garcin photographs captured me immediately. And yet at the same time why the Smithson has such pull when there is no figure, there is no hand to see. Of course there is Smithson’s figure of time and it “summons forth a new earth, (not necessarily) a new people.” In fact, it is a world without people. It is an earth on the other side of the Anthropocene. Smithson accelerates time forward, meaning that he slows down time. He gives us slow time. He posits time as a crevice, each little thing having its own time, each everything alone in time, taking up space that is time, time indifferent, time that kills you, time indifferent to you and me. A world without you and me. Whereas the Garcin photographs, pleasing and playful, put you and me on centerstage.

So Smithson and form, and David Hockney and images, or, more precisely, depiction. Hockney will always remind us at how we delight in seeing images, images of others, images of the natural. There is always this social or human, if not sentimental, feeling in Hockney that affirms the body, social bodies, friendships, the human project, the human being’s perception distinct from technologies. His argument against photography is that it does not capture the complexity of seeing and perception that humans possess. Humans don’t look with a fixity that cameras do: they build up an image by looking about, here and there at something, the eye continually moving closer, then further. Looking at, let’s say, another face, up close, moving from the eyes, the eye lids, perhaps a freckle on the nose, oh the nose, the tip of it, the lips, lips, the nape of the neck, hair falling on the neck, then away from this face to the light on the wall, back at the face, the eye lashes, the colored flecks in the eye, the skin, never quite the whole of it. Human perception is complex, round if you like, here and there, never all at once, never straight on and fixed, never seeing like a lens, never seeing the seeing of photographs.

For Hockney the hand is seeing when it draws, building up the image, one
mark after another, looking and looking again. He wants the same thing in photography. Not to see all at once, as in releasing the shutter and there it is, the whole of it, but to see in duration, in an accumulation of time. He found this in his photo collages. Smithson, early on, says in various interviews that he got rid of all that, all that human literary mythic longing redemptive stuff. Recall the early Smithson drawings are of the stigmata of Christ and though he got rid of all the literary and mythic, he would say that the form of the spiral embodies the mythological idea of death, blood, wine, red . . . quotations from literature, science, and art, but refusing a never-again achievable unity.

The world is broken for Smithson, as it is for J. G. Ballard, never to be righted. He becomes interested in evoking geologic time. Like Rothko, he tires of such “self-expression.” He tires of the human hubris of commanding and commandeering the world. No. No. No. He says. This, this that you call world, sure, why not, go on, but seriously.
Objecthood, the object condition

“Art” and “objecthood” were essentially two opposing forces. The literalists (Judd and Morris) were guilty of creating what Fried called “objecthood.” In “art,” the objects employed to construct the work were autonomous entities, disconnected from the surrounding world. In “objecthood” – roughly defined as the antithesis of, or objection to, art – the objects worked together to form one large object, but achieved nothing more than emphasizing that the result was, in the end, just an object.

In his 1967 essay “Art and Objecthood”, Fried posited that Minimalism (what he referred to as “literalism”) was compromising the quality of art because such technique was too literal in its meaning, too theatrical, and ultimately an impure practice. In the essay he wrote, “…the literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theatre; and theatre is now the negation of art.”

Fried objected to the work of Minimalist sculptors like Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt and Dan Flavin, because of their clear love for the fundamental materiality of the work, which resulted in an interactive experience for the viewer. This was, according to Fried, a form of mixed media, in which art and theater commingled to the point where the work ceased to be art, and ultimately was revealed to be merely an object. This “theatricality” in Minimalist sculpture, Fried believed, relegated the work of the literalists to the realm of “anti-art.” Such installations, as they eventually became, failed to achieve purity because they failed to properly distinguish between the art and the object.

(Justin Wolf, http://www.theartstory.org/critic-fried-michael.htm)

I was to be in Manhattan for an appointment in the morning and planned to go to Mood Fabric after to look at felt, which I did. There are various thicknesses of felt up to 4 millimeters. Felt is wool and/or a combination of acrylic. Taking out a grey roll, amongst hundreds, running my hands over it, and looking at its weight, its color next to varied deep blacks, looking and sensing wool and felt and its foldings, it had no pull for me, no allure. Most of the top floor of the shop is comprised of varied wools and cashmere. But in one corner, next to the neoprene, there were various rolls of pleather. From the electric sea green, orange, hot pink, watermelon, bubblegum, the colors and crinkly finishes were irresistible. Many of them from Marc Jacobs’s new line of women’s handbags and raincoats.

These materials are not transparent, not at all, but the finishes make them seem more like fiberglass or something polished. Once I lined up the rolls of colors and textures I liked, I sensed that I could not drape them, I would not, I would form them into vitrines, but ones you could not look in to. Just in case, I
bought netted material thinking I would mix and match the two, so there was
this play between opacity and transparency.

Once at home, I put them up on the string lines in the studio. Each vitrine
with four sides, each a different color, a different surface. Immediately there
was something there, something floating, something intriguing, colorful and
volumetric. Volume and mass are entirely new to me, though the work \textit{In What
Language to Come} had certainly dimension, not quite three-dimensional but a
kind of thin volume. Here there is mass and volume, objecthood.

Now I had four of these vitrines, two transparent and two opaque, up in
the middle of the studio, hovering in space. The two closed ones were sort of
like soft Donald Judd or more Mike Kelley. Formally, this was something new
and not a representation. But what are they exactly? What is the argument they
make? What do they say? If seeing, my seeing has always been a way of reading
the world, taking up its signs. Here was a presence, a kind of enigma, a kind of
soft Stonehenge.

This thingness, this object condition, this objecthood, puts me in relation to
it and me, as this thing apart, and this thing apart, this thingness there is quite
interesting in a world of virtual things. This literal object, this non-art thing that
Fried criticized, is to me precisely the thing or experience of art, not necessarily
the object of art but the experience. This confounds and unnerves me.

Without a figure inside, these vitrines become a solid, became a thing, a
presence, and as a thing, its presence has or suggests—what exactly? There is
something to abstract things that relate to our sensuous being, to our sensuous
memory. Not in terms of remembering, but we relate to them as things in this
world, things of this world.

And what is this I ask myself. I think it is as Merleau-Ponty elucidates which
is us

\begin{quote}
physically moving our bodies through space and perceiving our own body before
us which is how we establish and differentiate the world.
\end{quote}

\hspace{1cm} \text{[Tony Gibart, http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/objecthood.htm]}

In this sense, Fried reads this rightly in the sense of such objects being
theatre, us being actively beheld as much as beholding.

Now I don’t know what to do exactly with these. I certainly don’t want to
fill them up with air, to stitch them together. Or do I?
There is always a pull in me for theatre, narrative, unfolding in time — this I think is what interest me in layering, continually reshaping these pieces, folding this way and that. And this everything that Michael Fried argues against.

Later that night, in the dark looking from the middle room into the room of vitrines and the two large vertical windows, I watched the shifting colored light of the crosswalk side pulse red, then remain, then pulse again, again, and go to white. The lighting made the glove in the front lollipop vitrine seem to float like a hologram.

I could immediately see a set piece, a tableau, of two suggested tall rectangular frames (windows) or simply two colored scrim fabric pieces hanging, tall, apart from each other, with a video projection in the background, a video projection of:

¶ street with crosswalk off to the side — see time-lapse video
¶ trees, landscape in the day time
¶ alien landscape

With each of these background videos playing, vitrines and solid shapes float and hover in the foreground. The whole things is a kind of cinema-objecthood.

The vitrines can go from being sort of shrouds in darkness with objects floating inside to full-on lighting of shapes.

Somewhere between a tableau, a set, a narrative of objects and moving image, and something more stripped-down, an atmosphere, an ambience.
So what to do now? For Meier there can be no video in relation to the vitrines and scrims. But there is so much natural light and windowspace that behind the high window space, with glass box after glass box, there is already a sense from the outside of looking into a vitrine. A set sectioned off by a series of rectangular apertures.

Install then not simply as objects but as an ensemble.
10. Ah, the body itself as object, as mass, as weight, collapsing, folding, finding its limit

Fabric is a kind of body, like the human body that can be shape, whose weight in time moves it about, this way and that way. Perhaps that’s why we are drawn to fabrics and at the same time feel a discomfort, that they can be art, because they are so very vulnerable, can fall apart so easily.
The beauty here is that we are one with the object, plinth and along side with, commingling with, a true assemblage, a sculpture machine.

11. Everything that exists in Space also exists in Time

Yves Klein’s day in Paris as a work of art is less an exuberant gesture than the presentation of an event that is impossible to perceive completely. Mere perception becomes a metaphor for cognition. The conceptual, categorical ambiguities of
the new art stand in sharp contrast to its direct occupation of space or specific
demonstration of physical laws.

The most fundamental law of nature is that everything that exists in space
also exists in time; artists today work with that knowledge in unforeseen ways. A
Bill Bollinger rope piece does not change from day to day; indeed, its fixedness,
its tension as it stretches between two anchoring bolts, is its very point. But
what happens to it when it is disassembled? Does it still exist? If so, does it
exist as rope, as potential art, or as art? Its installation is made synonymous
with its existence, whereas a painting or fixed-form sculpture, no matter how
radical its aesthetic, does not literally cease to be when it is in storage. The
ontological instability of the Bollinger piece introduces, on the psychological
plane, an experience of anxiety about being, which has been the chief subject of
philosophy since Descartes. Consciousness as proof of existence is translated in
esthetic terms: conception as method of creation. . . .

What is happening to form is what happened to order when it was subjected
to chance by Duchamp, Arp, and others; it proves capable of apparently infinite
extension. (It is significant that several of the new artists use flexible or extendable
materials like rubber. The interaction between time and material also determines
the artists’ continuing interest in “common,” “non-art” materials—cloth, plastic, dirt
and organic matter, industrial flocking.

These things are mutable, perishable, sensitive to manipulation to a degree
that more usual materials like stone and wood are not. Several years ago
Rauschenberg said: “I try to act in the gap between art and life,” for that gap
continues to narrow. Art has been veritably invaded by life, if life means flux,
change, chance, time, unpredictability.

Sometimes the only difference between the two is sheer consciousness, the
awareness that what seemed to be a stain on the wall is in fact a work of art. Or
a trench in the snow, or a pile of scraps, or a hole in the wall, or a hole in the
desert. After all, if a de Kooning painting is the record of a series of acts, why not
act directly upon the world by cutting a three-mile-long swath in the snow, as Denis
Oppenheim has done? (Robert Smithson has developed the dialectic between site
and work of art to a high degree of wit and complexity. Smithson’s “non-sites,”
consisting of photographs, maps, and piles of rocks or dirt in his handsome bins,
document his particular version of industrial archaeology for the gallery audience.
Both his direct use of the landscape and his system of documentation implicate him
centredly in the new directions of art.)

(Harald Szeeman, *Live in your Head When Attitudes Become Form*)
12. The vitrine is akin to putting things in quotation marks

Perhaps the vitrine is akin to putting things in quotation marks. It sets off an irony. It is there and not there. It is safely there, at a remove. Indeed, it is theatre. This is, I think, quite different when used by the artists of the ’60s and ’70s and when used by those of the ’80s and ’90s.

The vitrine via Hirst to evoke invisible elements such as germs, heat, scents and sounds. Beuys used them to house his own relics.

- the symbolic life of the container form
- the reliquary and its sacred and ritual status (ritual as opposed to happening)
- the vitrine and its liberating disenchantment with the religious vision and in presenting a scientific and consumer
- the empty container of the dehumanized commodity
- disaffiliated negation
cultivating an experience of desire and anxiety for its beholder exciting a sense of movement from one side of its glass boundary to the other enclosure cocoon coffin

Inside letter forms, the body surrounded by language. An invisible vitrine.
13. Topological space

-a dynamical theory of physical phenomena
-topology, the science of properties of spaces and figures that remain unchanged under continuous deformation
-differential or topological manifold
-all processes are structured, and that the structure of the realm of those structures, the virtual, can itself by explicated
A more rigorously analytical reading of the history of modernist sculpture would have to acknowledge that most of its seemingly eternal paradigms, which had been valid to some extent in late nineteenth-century sculpture (i.e., the representation of individual, anthropomorphic, wholistic bodies in space, made of inert but lasting, if not eternal, matter and imbued with illusionary moments of spurious life), had been definitely abolished by 1913. Tatlin’s corner-counter relief and his subsequent Monument for the Third International and Duchamp’s “ready-mades,” both springing off the height of Synthetic Cubism, constitute since then the extremes of an axis on which sculpture has been resting ever since (knowingly or not): the dialectics of sculpture between functioning as a model for the aesthetic production of reality (e.g., architecture and design) or serving as a model investigating and contemplating the reality of aesthetic production (the ready-made, the allegory). Or, more precisely: architecture on the one hand and epistemological model on the other are the two poles toward which relevant sculpture since then has tended to develop, each implying the eventual dissolution of its own discourse as sculpture.

This ambiguous transition of the discipline had been sensed as early as 1903 by the conservative poet Rilke in his Rodin study, but of course his sense was conveyed in a tone of deploration and lament as the withering artistic category was indicative of vanishing privileges and esoteric experiences, which he perceived as being incorporated in the wholistic, autonomous art object:

Sculpture was a separate thing, as was the easel picture, but it did not require a wall like the picture. It did not even need a roof. It was an object that could exist for itself alone, and it was well to give it entirely the character of a complete thing about which one could walk, and which one could look at from all sides. And yet it had to distinguish itself somehow from other things, the ordinary things which everyone could touch.

The threshold between symbolic space and actual space, the ambiguous shift between functional object and aesthetic object, demonstrates the lines between which Michael Asher’s works operate with increasingly analytical precision, deconstructing our notions of the sculptural as though they would want to prove that sculpture as a category has lost its material and historical legitimacy.

(Benjamin Buchloh, Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture)
Symposium on Space and Time


Topography is a branch of geography concerned with the natural and constructed features on the surface of land, such as mountains, lakes, roads, and buildings. Topology is a branch of mathematics concerned with the distortion of shapes

(https://plus.maths.org/content/dividing-walls-topology-and-topography-i)
The work ranging ambiguously across the literal, mythic and metaphorical of both a psychic and material topology and topography

It took artists of the minimal and post-minimal generation like Carl Andre and Richard Serra in the mid- and late 1960s to literally “decompose” these mythified construction techniques, materials, and production procedures. The aesthetic shock and subsequent relief that their work might have caused originally resulted precisely from the deconstruction of sculpture, the perseverance of singularized, particular elements, clarification of the constituent forces within the sculptural construct, and the transparence of the production procedures evident in their work. It is symptomatic in this context that Serra referred to the technique of welding as “stitching”.

(Lucina Ward, *Soft Sculpture*)

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(Benjamin Buchloh, *Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture*)
Raymond Williams starts from the premise that like all made objects, art objects are materially produced within a society. However, art objects become reified under formalism, such as Greenberg and Bell’s. The rhetoric of art theory claims these objects are distinct from other objects because their production is defined by the “medium” in which they are constituted. William tries to reveal the attempt to partition off art objects from other produced objects as a response by the middle class to the alienation of labor. Therefore, there is nothing intrinsic in the object or in the experience of it that distinguishes it from the other objects produced in society. Rather it is a set of social practices that define and declare the object art.

15. Persistent Over Permanent Forms

Sculpture in general is an incurably alert production, stressing fixity, endurance, and power—all that man himself cannot maintain except in intermittent defiance of gravity. On the other hand, a soft sculpture, in various propositions, might suggest fatigue, deterioration or inertia. It mimes a kind of surrender to the natural condition that pulls bodies down.

(Max Kozloff, “The Poetics of Softness”)

Eva Hesse, Robert Rauschenberg, and Joseph Beuys emphasize persistent over permanent forms—producing works with a certain unfixed quality, or which incorporate the memory of other forms.

It seems a truism at this point that the static, portable, indoor art object can do no more than carry a decorative load that becomes increasingly uninteresting. One waits for the next season’s polished metal boxes, stretched tie dyes, and elegantly applied liquitex references to Art Deco with about as much anticipation as one reserves for the look of next year’s Oldsmobile-Ford probably has a better idea. At least a couple of routes move away from this studio- and factory-generated commodity art.

This does not mean that process is not very much part of the work. It is, but it is located within the one who participates in the experience of this art. That is, one is thrown back onto one’s awareness of such things as the duration of acclimation to a dark room (to take Bell, for example) during which a certain piece of specific visual information gradually becomes sensate. A certain duration of time is necessary for the experience of much designated outdoor art.

(Robert Morris, Continuous Project Altered Daily)

16. Objecthood in Instagram

For artists such as Donald Judd, Carl Andre and others, however, the modular nature of industrial forms—scaled for ease of use and portability by the average worker—frequently meant that the dimensions of resultant works of art, or the negative spaces between components, retained a proportional relationship to the viewer’s body.
I imagine the above made by Gratz Industries (formerly Treitel-Gratz). Yes.

Archive Collection

Gratz Industries is proud to have worked with the following designers, architects, and sculptors: Joseph Pilates, Mies Van der Rohe, Donald Deskey, Raymond Loewy, Marcel Breuer, Isamu Noguchi, Alexander Liberman, I.M. Pei, Richard Meier, Philip Johnson, Massimo Vignelli, Hugh Hardy, Donald Judd, Walter De Maria, Forrest Myers, Nicos Zographos, Sol LeWitt, Robert Indiana, Barnett Newman, Liam Gillick, John Portman, Maya Lin, Dakota Jackson, Robert Rauschenberg, Santiago Calatrava, Deborah Berke, Diane Lewis, William Katavolos, Ross Littell and Douglas Kelly.
If it’s not soft its stuffed, but what is soft, what is stuff, what is stuffed?

Multiformal or non-rigid art

Forms that are persistent rather than rigid or permanent, and objects that are soft to the touch or evoke the visceral qualities of the body.

It is still ‘minimal’ in its actual presence; note the avoidance of mass in Sandback’s string pieces, the flimsiness of Sonnier’s hanging fabrics, the reluctance to delineate volume clearly in Saret’s crumpled balls of wire fencing. Much of the new work looks vulnerable, not only spatially insubstantial, but dominated also by the effects of time.

Though non-rigid art may at times refer to the weight and degrees of energy of the human body, it is not ‘humanist’ because the viewer so often feels excluded, deprived of some states or parts of the work. Robert Morris essay “anti-form” “object-type” art.

To Robert Morris the uncontrollable forces of nature are embodied in the law of gravity, which dominates his drooping, spasmically curling lengths of felt. More than method, process becomes product itself when, as in Morris’s heroic and helpless cloth pieces, the work itself can be altered. Unlike an Andre floor piece, any change in a Morris work may be noticeable, though only to someone who has seen the piece in an earlier state. Memory is essential to comprehension in this case.
18. Situated in Space

The object of art, art as a world of objects: sounds rather strange. But for the most part, that’s what it is, a world of things, of stuff. It was important for a time for this stuff to put on and perform the space it was in. To read, to re-read its space of exhibition.

A work of art is situated in space. But it will not do to say it simply exists in space: a work of art treats space according to its own needs, defines space and even creates such space as may be necessary to it.

(Henri Focillon, The Life Forms of Art)
19. To Take Hold of the World

The work (which is what?) of art as spatially and situationally specific, institutionally specific, knowing that it knows where it is.

As the renown Swiss curator Harald Szeemann said in his essay for the groundbreaking exhibit *When Attitudes Become Forms*:

Pieces as situationally specific as any architectural or relief sculpture was ever meant to be, but by a very novel and simple means.

Today there is an awareness and desire for something more, a desire to turn upside down this idea. I desire and want to situate real space, geography, geology, social space from the virtual world we now live in, the networked world that has totally envelope us and make it physical again and let it situate me. I want to take hold of the real physical world and behold it. As Marshal McLuhan told us almost fifty years ago, with satellites surrounding the planet, the earth has become an artwork. In his sense there is nothing natural here as we have come to program the whole of it. Or so we think. Hence the age of the Anthropocene.

Just as today we want to reclaim discussion or put on the performative of social discourse and politics, of feminist and ecological concerns, inside the art world, inside the white cube, we also want to take possession, take site/sight of the physical world and not make out of it art to use art to see it as something of its own.

20. The Expanded or Morphogentic Field

From the moment of Fluxus and Pop (e.g. Claes Oldenburg, Allan Kaprow, and Robert Whitman) in the late Fifties and early Sixties to figures such as Michael Asher and Dan Graham at the end of that decade, approaches to sculpture asked specific questions about its sites and situations in the remnants of the former public sphere. Yet these artists were not merely involved in a critique of the discourses of exhibitions and the museum institution, but they actually contemplated the collective conditions governing the experience of objects and spaces under the visual regimes of late capitalism.

(Benjamin Buchloh)

The redefinition of sculpture described above consisted not only in debunking the modernist notion of the sculpture as an autonomous object in space, but also insisting on sculpture’s engagement of a specific site as newly fundamental to its meaning.

Rosalind Krauss would name this new condition “sculpture in the expanded field” in a highly influential essay of the same name.
Robert Smithson books are placed on the library floor between the stacks, a minimalist momentary monument.

Mylar placed on the ground in front of an outdoor shed, I continually throw up balls to capture their movement, to freeze them in time. I draw a circle on the photography.

Site and recording.
21. Form, Recordings, and Erasure

The particulars of history fall away in the obsolescence of their formats. Formats are a kind of OS, an operating system. They engender form.
22. “Non-Places”

Staging the objects, the things, the various media—drawing, photography, sound installation and sculpture—so that they not only spill out across multiple rooms and windows of the GAP gallery, but also suggest varied narratives.

How can the work find its conceptual coordinates in, and responds to, newer conditions of space as defined by experiences of transience and circulation rather than a stable constellation of unique places—a condition which anthropologist Marc Augé has termed “non-places,” a category of space that is not “relational, or historical, or concerned with identity.” Neither universal and homogenous nor localized and specific, non-places are a product of the late 20th century whose divestment of uniqueness or locational value (Augé identifies transit centers or large retail outlets as examples) has come to characterize the contemporary global landscape to a significant degree.

Is the Meier building indeed this kind of non-place?

The Modernist idea of space as abstract and continuous, as well as the postmodernist idea of spatial context as specific and differential.

Today’s exhibitions are all pre-visualized, like a pop-up store or a new boutique. They are carefully planned and the space of exhibition rendered virtually in a perfectly measured model, as well as the works to be placed in the space. A team then comes in and installs according to plan.
There is a certain hazard or spontaneity in my studio. Where one work ends and another begins I am not so sure. Often they commingle, contaminate each other. One is taken apart to become another or to join with another.

Then there are numerous photographs not printed. So there is the world of things as images moved around on the model or computer space of the page, and then there are physical or material things, this world of objects, forms, fabric pieces, paintings and so on. It’s the condition we live in, an augmented reality, or parallel reality. It was what I was saying above about the Mylar, this displacement or overlay within, on the top of, alongside the actual. In this sense, Smithton’s notion of site and non-site and bringing them together was
prescient of our time. Only the displacement is quite actual, like code stored on a server somewhere, and it is where we spend a great deal of our time. We might say that the displaced has taken up even taken over the physical.

In the above photographs, I want to displace the recording of the actual, distance it.

In any event, all these objects, all these things, must be gathered up, produced and fabricated for exhibition. Art then is for sure a material encounter of and with the world. It’s sensate, blocks of sensation.

Most works of art are discrete, they are to be complete unto themselves. the variability I want then, might be thought of as an ensemble of possibilities, a set of possible configurations, of varied stagings. In this way the set of underlying constitutive elements remains but they can be figured and staged in varied ways. In this way they are iterative, notational.

I continue with a dematerialization of the art object, art as action or art as idea. Art as how to engage and read the world, take it up. Art as complex, but simply event. How, then, do I consider objects? Objects as situations as events.

See, for example, Lucy Lippard’s 1968 essay “The Dematerialization of Art,” in which Lippard argues for the real possibility of the “object’s becoming wholly obsolete.” The critic argues that the art object was understood by the moment of the late 1960s as merely the product of a conceptual process (if indeed an object persisted at all as part of an artist’s work), and furthermore insisted that the process itself was of primary value to the artist.

[Nicholas Machida, Site Insecurities: Thomas Hirschhorn’s Skulptur-Sortier-Station (1997 and on)]
22. The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths

Whatever an artist does in her or his studio qualifies as art.

...Nauman was encouraged by support from regional artists and cohorts like California Funk artist William T. Wiley. Nauman is quoted as saying “Wiley was the strongest influence I had. It was in being rigorous, being honest with yourself—trying to be clear—taking a moral position.” Lewallen states: “Wiley was inspiring, always open and receptive to unorthodox ideas, and carried no preconceptions. His work has always been a by-product of his life (the synchronicity of art and life is shared by many artists in the region), and anything and everything was potential content.”

An inclination toward free exploration of ideas and forms.

*The True Artist Helps the World By Revealing Mystic Truths* (1967), a neon sculpture that writes the text of the title in glowing blue cursive, and *Failure to Levitate in the Studio* (1966), a black and white double-exposure of Nauman’s body slumped on the floor between two chairs, present opposing questions. The works ask: Is the artist meant to transcend and suspend disbelief and reveal mystic truths? Or is the artist’s function practice and process and the possibilities of failure? Through the
Accepting contradiction and exploration as a methodology, Nauman invents experiments that produce an open questioning, never building a defense before work is made. Today, I rarely experience art that admits vulnerability by acknowledging failure, the unknown and its own process. Nauman’s approach values investigative thought and his process reminds us as artists to find the space to explore ideas beyond premeditation and against external pressures. He embraces the mental freedom that is integral to any thoughtful art practice.

(Wendy Mason, “The Overlooked and the In-Between,” http://x-traonline.org/article/the-overlooked-and-the-in-between/)

24. Space

The show or exhibition or objects and space
The idea of a non-installation art would be something of an oxymoron. Insomuch as a structural change has occurred, it has been most clear-cut at the level of critical and theoretical paradigms. The move to installation certainly has not resulted in a complete dissolution of the sculptural object, nor of the distinctive structures of response elicited by a traditional sculpture. Rather it has entailed a progressive abandonment of the assumption prevalent in much nineteenth- and twentieth-century sculptural aesthetics that the authentic art object has to be completely self-sufficient, its significance unaffected by the circumstances of its display. This view is succinctly summed up in a comment by the theorist of cubism, Daniel-Henri Kahnweiler, in an essay called “The Essence of Sculpture,” published in 1919, to the effect that a sculpture must exist as “the object pure and simple, detached from everything surrounding it”.

The underlying processes common to both object- and installation-orientated work have to do with the nature of the encounter being staged between viewer and work and the resulting interplay operating at a phenomenological level between focused and dispersed apprehension. At the same time, such processes also play out a larger sociocultural dynamic of dispersal and binding, or dissolution and reification, that is the common condition of the object as commodity or quasi-commodity in modern culture.

Perhaps the most striking structural reversal effected by the move to installation has been the substitution of a centring object or quasi-figure by an empty space which the viewer can enter or imagine doing so.

(Alex Potts, “Installation and Sculpture”)
25. Everything Is Material for Art

The images above from the installation Not Just a Recording was staged in a duplication office, designed as a kind of mystery of disappearance. The entire space was surveilled by a camera and played back on a monitor, presenting the viewer as if being inside a recording in a work about recording, doubling, dispersal and duplication.

This clearly had a narrative inflection. It infers a story, both about technology, with Xerox machines, typewriters, cameras, monitors, tape recorders, screens and a protagonist, set in an office room and bathroom.

As well the black and white image above that, a reworking of Le Eclisse from Antonioni, The Spaces of Love: a narrative about narrative.

It is one thing to say something is abstract: “Abstraction is a language unto itself, it is itself its own narrative.” There is no signification but itself. One might claim, in this sense, that it it pure and of and for itself. This is a rather old conversation with today’s painterly abstraction called zombie formalism:

There is no such thing as a good painting about nothing.

(Motherwell & Gottlieb)

There is no such thing as a good painting about something.

(Ad Reinhardt)
Art didn’t need to be anything else.

Oscar Wilde prefaches his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, with a reflection on art, the artist, and the utility of both. After careful scrutiny, he concludes: “All art is quite useless” (Wilde 4). In this one sentence, Wilde encapsulates the complete principles of the Aesthetic Movement popular in Victorian England. That is to say, real art takes no part in molding the social or moral identities of society, nor should it. Art should be beautiful and pleasure its observer, but to imply further-reaching influence would be a mistake. The explosion of aesthetic philosophy in fin-de-siècle English society, as exemplified by Oscar Wilde, was not confined to merely art, however. Rather, the proponents of this philosophy extended it to life itself. Here, aestheticism advocated whatever behavior was likely to maximize the beauty and happiness in one’s life, in the tradition of hedonism. To the aesthete, the ideal life mimics art; it is beautiful, but quite useless beyond its beauty, concerned only with the individual living it. Influences on others, if existent, are trivial at best.

(Patrick Duggan, “The Conflict Between Aestheticism and Morality in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*”)

*Stuart Morgan:* Your work is based on a critique, first of art, then of other disciplines: philosophy, anthropology, psychoanalysis...

*Joseph Kosuth:* What is the nature of making art? If it is not simply about fashioning forms and colours, then it has to do with the production of meaning. My practice is based on that assumption. If you begin there you realize that potentially everything is material for art, because at some point it has to have an aspect of concretion and must be framed in relation to people’s lives. It does not need to illustrate or work with that, but it does need to have a connection to the community which produced it.

*SM:* So art is about the making of meaning.

*JK:* Yes, and that involves not only the assertion of meaning but also its cancellation, since one kind of meaning needs to be produced through cancellation or denial or erasure of a group of meanings..... What I learned from Ad Reinhardt was that he painted black paintings but he also taught, wrote texts about his works, drew cartoons, took part in panel discussions... His practice included an enormous production of meaning about what art was. You can’t separate the paintings from the rest. It’s the same with Judd and his writings. What we have now is a struggle over the meaning of art, between what I have called primary and secondary texts in relation to production.

(https://frieze.com/article/art-idea-idea)
These are living entities these are, these are really really painted paintings and they’re here to be looked at that is what they’re for I mean Reinhart’s insistence that art was just art it didn’t need to be anything else was an insistence on art’s own self-sufficiency which is something we don’t hear much now you know art for art’s sake is an aesthetic ideological idea is one and that’s worth debating but in Reinhardt’s version of it it is not Oscar Wilde it is not art versus utility in the sort of 19th century way it is simply the declaration that a complete art experience can be had and that a complete art experience is all you need to have it doesn’t need to have an alibi a subtext another reason for being and what he did with these paintings was to demonstrate by example how many different ways one could do that.

(A talk by Robert Storr)
This is not to say that a work of art need not include an alibi, or, more precisely, be about an alibi, or deconstruct one. The alibi is a narrative, albeit a supposed false one, or in the case of the work of art, a need for the heavy lifting to be done by something outside itself.

Gerhard Richter moves easily between, let’s say, narrative painting and abstract painting. Each are different registers for him. Each has its own mood, its own experiential properties, its own real, if you like.

As to narrative, am I confusing this with representation and not understanding it as an encounter of sense? That sensation has its own narrative. And do I mean by narrative legibility, a determined sense, even if open? What if what is in front of me is an openness that exceeds my ability to narrativize or summarize? Constructing an image of thought beyond representation such that said image exceeds, or has more meaning. Intuitions then can be recovered discursively.

Smithson, like Don Judd, Robert Morris, and others, took the break with representation to its most extreme edge, in Judd’s case expunging any reference to anything outside of the object. Smithson’s practice was also located “beyond” representation in this sense, although it also had a mythic quality to it. Indeed, as we shall see, a certain notion of narrative, albeit a kind of posthuman geological narrative, is present throughout his work.

As Smithson also remarks in his essay on “Donald Judd”: With Judd there is no confusion between the anthropomorphic and the abstract. This makes for an increased consciousness of structure, which retains a remote distance from the organic. The “unconscious” has no place in his art. His crystalline state of mind is far removed from the organic floods of “action painting”. He translates his concepts into artifices of fact, without any illusionistic representations.

(Simon Sullivan, in Robert Smithson, The Collected Writings, p. 5.)

And this narrative: isn’t it always a reading itself? A being? An inhabitation? A taking up? A going with? An image of thought? An immanence? That is already there without representation; rather, a presentation itself. I think this is my fear, my apprehension: a desire to say something, with something already said. when it comes to this new work.
Wherein is my narrative, my body, my being, my history, in the work, that is a continual concern—from a desire for the minimalism and emptiness, the quiet of the spatial environments that I saw on the Setouchi Islands for the Triennial. This quiet, and at other times desiring more excitation, more color, more flux and flow. This other desire to present a body, not so much a figure, not so much biography, but bodies, social bodies.

At other times I feel this is without body, without being, without history, but of course it’s not. The fabric adds a very different material note than plastic. Fabric is more sensual, sensuous, warmer, tactile.
A painting, however, is still a relatively private, individual activity, and its freest, most abstract form is not concerned with communicating specific information or subject matter. Because it is universal, unhistorical, and independent of everyday existence doesn’t mean it doesn’t have any meaning. Some people think that if a painting doesn’t have a subject, or isn’t a picture, than it doesn’t have a meaning. This just isn’t true.

After Cezanne began to separate subject matter from color structure, the theme of the cubist, abstract tradition that followed is creation itself—creation of things, images, that didn’t exist before they come into being. Ad Reinhardt

The “Modern” is said to begin in 1880 when Cézanne exiled himself in Aix to solve the great riddle of how to strip knowing from seeing—how to paint perception.

(Jeanne Willette, Paul Cézanne)
Reinhardt’s commitment and clarity is formidable. I think of his sense of timelessness and contrast it with Robert Smithson’s sense of entropy. Both of them rejecting historical time. Political time in sense. Reinhardt’s rejection of the mix of poets, musicians and artists is for that very reason, their time is embodied, full of celebrity, appetite, decay and death.

Then the whole mixture, the number of poets and musicians and writers mixed up with art. Disreputable. Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg. I’m against the mixture of all the arts, against the mixture of art and life, you know, everyday life.

Timelessness: a common usage of this term is associated with universality. To be specific, some kind of aesthetical value that transcends all cultural contexts. One art critic said, for instance,

A masterpiece (of art) expresses what is universal, timeless, and meaningful for all people.
27. This Way and That, and Then That Again

Life forms, the discrete and the ensemble, the variegated and variable. How to present and archive that which is not fixed and always forming, but at a limit?

When artists begin to think of the space of exhibition, the site-specificity of the space where their work will show (perhaps better said “inhabit”), the space then becomes activated, activated by the work in relation to the space. As an ensemble of sense impressions, the work shows or sets off the space, and the whole of it becomes one sense-impression. Of course, it has many moments, many passages, discrete objects and things modeled by light, set off in space, near and far to each other, the persons that will encounter them or live with them.

The new works have taken on form, shape, and volume. Not only are there the ambient light or fabric sculptures, scrims, and tube pieces, but also now volumetric works. Works that hang from the ceiling with string hover above the floor, or on the floor, against bookshelves, against the light of large windows, set on the wall, or serialized as in the same, or almost same object repeated. These objects take on different appearances at times with the ambient light, and others florescent or LED light. lighting and light being part of the consideration and activation of the works.

Many of the works themselves change and permute, being shaped this way or that. All of it begging the question: what is the shape of a work, when its very form is to be shaped, this way, and that, and then again that? Works can be shaped and layered with other works. It is work built on an ontology of shaping, a shaping that then becomes a table, an ensemble of sense. Just as our bodies, our human form, can take on different shapes, the work is also always at a limit.

As a ensemble of materials, of forms and fabrics, passing in and through language, broken out as letters, language that envelopes us, that inhabits us, word statements on Mylar and free floating letters on clear plastic shaped as a form, forms like sand castles, light through mesh, through patient bags, Latex as flesh, tubes as esophagi...
If, as William Empson explains, a keyword is a “compacted doctrine,” a form that compresses multiple, often divergent, meanings, then life form may be considered to embody a “capacious doctrine,” a term with a constitutive incompleteness, ready for use in working out fresh problems.

But form also immediately points to matters of classification and representation. These two notions of form—as emergent with embodiment and as a tool of classification—coil around each other in nineteenth-century discussions about how an organism’s morphology might be affected by its surrounding environment and about how this might in turn guide possible classificatory schemes. This dual sense of form, as we will see, shapes deductive, inductive, and abductive approaches to the question of how life takes form.

(Alan Durant & Colin MacCabe, *Compacted Doctrines: William Empson and the Meanings of Words*)
The forms of art precisely providing “solutions” to “problems” of space, time-perception and memory (that is, specifically human problems).

For Deleuze, following Bergson, this gets to the very heart of philosophy’s role: to think beyond the human (beyond representation). We might say then that the camera, and in fact all “visualising” technologies, continue Bergson’s intuitive method “outside” of philosophy. We might also say that the actualisations these technologies perform and produce are specifically non-human, or machinic modes of consciousness.

(Simon Sullivan)

28. Hounds and Poodles

There are no essential forms, yet there are fields.

At least forms that are transcendental archetypes. There are morphogenetic fields but no essentialism, as in ideal forms that stand out or apart or above the imminent and material world.

I don’t think abstraction is about essentialism. In its reductionism it is not an aim to get to something pure as in essential as much as it is the elimination of what is considered unnecessary, distracting. It is a very different kind of work then figuration within which was held the beginnings of abstraction. Like painting, sculpture went through a systematic interrogation of its raison d’être, its forms and materials. In both, it lead to the body, embodied perception and to the institution of the museum, its spaces and authority. Where as the poets, musicians, dancers, and technologists (Billy Kluver, EAT) brought an expansion of life, energy, and formats to the then more narrow field of the visual arts, retaining the mystic and literary, we might say the abstractionist or purist (including Reinhardt, Rothko, and Robert Irwin) bring work towards an event of presence.

The later presence is a kind of presence unto itself, whereas the non-abstractionists record their presence in their work. Hence you have Abstract Expressionism. The record of an expression, an expressive abstraction. And once you let go of the abstraction, you have expression as being, art as life. I think we will always have these two modalities and a mix of these tendencies going on.

Francis Bacon always emphasized in his work that he wanted to “assault the nervous system” with the “rawness of the image,” to deliver a “visual shock” and that his work was devoid of narrative, insisting that he had “no story to tell”.

In Giles Deleuze’s favorite example, the wasp and orchid create a “becoming” or symbiotic emergent unit.

Morphogenetic fields are not fixed forever, but evolve. The fields of Afghan hounds and poodles have become different from those of their common ancestors, wolves.

In his magnum opus Difference and Repetition, Deleuze tries to develop a metaphysics adequate to contemporary mathematics and science—a metaphysics in which the concept of multiplicity replaces that of substance, event replaces essence and virtuality replaces possibility.

The positive name for that genetic condition is the virtual, which Deleuze adopts from the following Bergsonian argument. The notion of the possible, Bergson holds in Creative Evolution, is derived from a false problem that confuses the “more” with the “less” and ignores differences in kind; there is not less but more in the idea of the possible than in the real, just as there is more in the idea of nonbeing than in that of being, or more in the idea of disorder than in that of order. When we think of the possible as somehow “pre-existing” the real, we think of the real, then we add to it the negation of its existence, and then we project the “image” of the possible into the past. We then reverse the procedure and think of the real as something more than possible, that is, as the possible with existence added to it. We then say that the possible has been “realized” in the real. By contrast, Deleuze will reject the notion of the possible in favor of that of the virtual. Rather than awaiting realization, the virtual is fully real; what happens in genesis is that the virtual is actualized.

On this score, Deleuze often likes to cite Jorge Luis Borges’s famous story, “The Garden of the Forking Paths,” in which such a virtual world is described in the labyrinthine book of a Chinese philosopher named Ts’ui Pên: “In all fiction, when a man is faced with alternatives, he chooses one at the expense of others. In the almost unfathomable Ts’ui Pên, he chooses—simultaneously—all of them... In Ts’ui Pên’s work, all the possible solutions occur, each one being the point of departure for other bifurcations.”