The Ecstatic, the Quiet as Form
In Postproduction, I try to show that artists’ intuitive relationship with art history is now going beyond what we call “the art of appropriation,” which naturally infers an ideology of ownership, and moving toward a culture of the use of forms, a culture of constant activity of signs based on a collective ideal: sharing. The Museum like the City itself constitute a catalog of forms, postures, and images for artists – collective equipment that everyone is in a position to use, not in order to be subjected to their authority but as tools to probe the contemporary world. There is (fertile) static on the borders between consumption and production that can be perceived well beyond the borders of art. When artists find material in objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market, the work of art takes on a script-like value: “when screenplays become form,” in a sense.

(Nicolas Bourriaud, Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World)

I do like Bourriaud’s appropriation of Hollywood forms and Silicon Valley’s platforms and programming, yet I am not so certain that human relations in such formats indeed open up and come to reprogram the world. I’ve become interested not in the screenplay but in the silent movie, the vastness of silence, the long durée — events that occur nearly imperceptibly over a long period, the time of the long-term structures of social reality, was privileged over the time of events (“dust” for Braudel). Not the cultural script of immediacy, but a different kind of ecstatic time. Not world time, but the ecstatic, the quiet as form. I am reminded of Smithson’s sense of time, and interest not the in the mythic but in entropy. In that sense, it’s not ecstatic but more of a minerality, a geologic time, time that’s not a script. At the very least, a very different kind of play.

The works of many of these artists celebrate what Flavin calls “inactive history” or what the physicist calls “entropy” or “energy-drain.” They bring to mind the Ice Age rather than the Golden Age, and would most likely confirm Vladimir Nabokov’s observation that, “The future is but the obsolete in reverse.” In a rather round-about way, many of the artists have provided a visible analog for the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which extrapolates the range of entropy by telling us energy is more easily lost than obtained, and that in the ultimate future the whole universe will burn out and be transformed into an all-encompassing sameness.

(Robert Smithson, “Entropy And The New Monuments”)
The screenplay as form comes from that period of reading the world, the ’80s and ’90s mode of critical reading, undoing the purported seamlessness of the world and its constitutive narratives, finding the cracks and fissures, the contractions and openings. A penetrating point into this is post-colonial studies, asking who speaks, who has power, who has agency. Such thoughts seem always with me, but at a very oblique angle. Because as I express above, in search of autobiography, my biography has been an undoing, where “time as decay or biological evolution is eliminated becoming a series of motionless intervals.”
This kind of time has little or no space; it is stationary and without movement, it is going nowhere, it is anti-Newtonian, as well as being instant, and is against the wheels of the time-clock. Flavin makes “instant-monuments”; parts for “Monument 7 for V. Tatlin” were purchased at the Radar Fluorescent Company. The “instant” makes Flavin’s work a part of time rather than space. Time becomes a place minus motion. If time is a place, then innumerable places are possible. Flavin turns gallery-space into gallery time. Time breaks down into many times. Rather than saying, “What time is it?” we should say, “Where is the time?”

(Robert Smithson, “Entropy And The New Monuments”)
Between monument and ornament. Between immanence and transcendence. Between.

These two images, the one above a work of Yvonne Rainer and the below of Mary Wigman give a good sense of my feelings here.

Though we may be done with the past, the past is not done with us.

Instead of causing us to remember the past like the old monuments, the new monuments seem to cause us to forget the future. Instead of being made of natural materials, such as marble, granite, or other kinds of rock, the new monuments are made of artificial materials, plastic, chrome and electric light. They are not built for the ages but against the ages. They are involved in a systematic reduction of time down to fractions of seconds, rather than in representing the long spaces of centuries. Both past and future are placed into an objective present. This kind of time has little or no space in it; it is stationary and without movement, it is going nowhere, it is anti-Newtonian, as well as being instant, and it is against the wheels of the time-clock ... [The] destruction of classical time and space is based on an entirely new notion of the structure of matter.

(Robert Smithson, “Entropy And The New Monuments”)

This “new” image of time is then one in which the past is coextensive with the present, which itself is coextensive with the future.

And yet, or simultaneously, Smithson’s description where time as decay or biological evolution is eliminated — canceling out the notion of weight, and reverse the orientation of matter within the solid-state of inorganic time... This reduction of time all but annihilates the value of the notion of “action” in art.

In this I am very much interested in the tragic.