31 READINGS ON ART, ACTIVISM & PARTICIPATION
(IN THE MONTH OF JANUARY)

01 I think a good way to define an “institution” is to outline the fact that most of its efforts go to the direction of a self-certification of the institution itself. Therefore its activities will be, to a large extent, a “celebration,” a continuous effort to give an image of success, of richness, of effectiveness, of power. It is obvious that any critical position will be seen as a menace; and, as I am convinced that the artists position is basically a critical one, there will be an inevitable contradiction between the artist and the institution.

02 Some people have to believe that the world of political and social catastrophe is completely outside their control in order to justify their indiff erence to it.

03 Community is made of interruption of singularities... community is not the work of singular beings, nor can it claim them as its works. This interpretation of community as being intrinsically inerpetative and fragmentary helps in understanding the essential relationship between institutional art projects, functions, or fail to function in practice, especially when they are to be controlled by institutions.

04 Ultimately the argument made is that the aesthetic economic interests behind the privatizing of public space are eager to use this new form of “Community-based art” as a symbol of inclusiveness and democracy, while avoiding the expense of supporting egalitarianism in actual practice.

05 Joseph Beuys’s famous dictum that “every man is an artist,” which is often criticized for its demagogical content, conceals in fact a desire for the reconciliation of art and work...

06 ...art audiences are composed not of universal “citizens of art” but of specific subjects of class and race.

07 In its most radical sense (going back to the root of the word), activism is a recognition of the way in which only change in the direction of your hopes and aspirations when you act to bring about its transformation, not by waiting for someone else to do it for you. When activism is outlawed, when it can not even be thought, this is an implicit legitimization of its opposite. Passivity becomes its corresponding reality.

08 Where modernist critique works by constantly “undermining” something – a strategy that in the end reduces the very concept of critique to a ritual – anticiptic retains critical in the original sense of the word by entering a territory and opening it, by asking new questions and investigating unseen connections. In its origins modernist critique was (also) like that, but a century of ritualization has rendered its form unusable at present.

09 I had indeed found the enemy: it was me.

10 Public art participates in the production of a spatial distinction, one a city’s uniqueness, which in turn is intimately engaged in the process of economic reorganization of recourses and power as they are played out through the re-hierarchization of space in the social structure of the cities.

11 As I read it, disappearance seems to be a very logical radical option for our time, not at all a disaster or death for the radical project.

12 All that once was directly lived has become mere representation.

13 Anything that calls attention to and interests the viewer in this physicality is a deterrent to our understanding of the idea and is used as an expressive device. The conceptual artist would want to ameliorate this emphasis on materiality as much as possible or to use it in a paradoxical way (to convert it into an idea).

14 Other categories of people have had their freedom of movement limited, but limitations based on race, class, religion, ethnic identity, and sexual orientation are variable and compared to those placed on women, which have profoundly shaped the identity of both genders over the millennia in most parts of the world.

15 ...programs like the National Endowment for the Arts were established upon what Williams described as the paternalistic model of communication. The underlying presumption here is that the lives of the general public, thus far deprived of exposure to high culture, would benefit from the presence of great art in the spaces of everyday life, and that the government, with the aid of art experts, can function to provide such educational and elevating experiences to its people.

16 An opposition is required that is free of all illusion but also of all defeats, for through its mere existence defeatism betrays the possibility of freedom to the status quo.

17 Public art works that are audience-generated and audience responsive appear to the established art world to be necessarily un-sophisticated. It seems the mainstream equates the audience’s involvement in and comprehension of the work of art (particularly of those on the margins of society) with a limitation of the artworks status as avant-garde or contemporary, and assumes a lessoning of its applicability and appropriateness to other audiences beyond the specific and local, especially the art world audience.

18 In the course of redeﬁning her own domestic role, she caught the meaning of art as action, art as gesture, art as circumstance within an appointed system or any designated structure.

19 Anti-technologies entail refusing the principle of documentation. Documentation is the main way to archive hegemonic cultural memory. Documentation is the liberal form of social consensus, ironiically making fun of the conservative term ‘masterpiece.’ Documentation is today’s whiny form of recognition, begging for critical revisionism. Don’t document and exchange information but think!

20 Can the ratiﬁed conditions of display and reception in the contemporary art world really provide a platform for the exploration of political alternatives? Can art be a credible space in which to foreground this potentially revolutionary coalition between the “progressive” part of the symbolic class?

21 The quality of the relationships in ‘relational aesthetics’ are never examined or called into question... all relations that permit dialogue are automatically assumed to be democratic or good.

22 Without antagonism there is only the imposed consensus of the authoritarian order — a total suppression of debate and discussion, which is incomical to discussion.

23 This, then, is our fetch now: that the dream of collectivism realise itself as neither the strategic vision of some future ideal, of a revised modernism, nor as the mobile, culture-jamming, more-mediated-than-thou counter-hegemony of collectivism after modernism, but instead as Marx’s self-realisation of human nature constituted by taking charge of social being here and now. This means neither picturing social form, nor doing battle in the realm of representation but instead engaging with social life as production, engaging with social life itself as the medium of expression.

24 ...we can see this in many more obvious examples in recent ‘socially-engaged’ or relational art practices of how the mere calling on the category of art and the artist automatically deems an activity radical... by effectively resorting to a modernist notion of art as a separate autonomous sphere, with an inherently transformative capacity, a discourse of relational art elides the relationship between art and the political.

25 What inevitably accompanies this shift in emphasis toward the transformation of the viewer is the shift toward radical education. That is to say, once we begin to discuss the role of aesthetics as it applies to a relationship of pedagogy, then it makes sense to look into the theoretical foundations of schools of thought that have been researching this for a long time.

26 There is a visible effort to belong through mark-making, regardless of the origins of the mark-maker.

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28 The heroic avant-garde artist of yesterday will become the scab of tomorrow.

29 What happens when art crops up in the everyday, not to aestheticise it, but to inform it? When art appears not in terms of its specific ends (artwork) but in terms of its specific means (competence)? Well, for one thing, it has an exceedingly low coefficient of artistic visibility: something is seen, but not as art – for without the validating framework of the artwork, art cannot be recognized as such, which is one reason why it is from time to time useful to retroreterritorialize it in an art-specific space through documentation.

30 We were feeding into the commercial system and accepting the role of being overdetermined by our alternative status. We were waiting for people to come and see what we were doing rather than taking ideas and production to the streets and other places, rather than taking our own question to heart, “who is culture for and where should it be seen.”

31 It is obvious that artists too must be conscious of persons, the rights of persons and the influence of concentrations of power and thus must be concerned with politics. It is obvious that nothing can be more important than to concern oneself with this exactly. That also artists must first and foremost be concerned with creating consciousness about this, and with trying to organize in as small concentrations of power as possible.