

Interview between Robert Smithson, Stig Brøgger and Erik Thygesen

Date: 1969

Location: New York City

Duration: 63 minutes

TRANSCRIPTION

- S1 00:03 **Erik Thygesen :** Why would, say, Michael Fried be opposed to it, talking about dadaism—all his theatrical ideas and all of that. I mean, dada is theater, right?
- S2 00:17 **Robert Smithson:**
Yes. Well, he's opposed to theater for what he considers to be theater, which I think is basically a false issue. In other words, he feels that a lot of the work, especially what was called minimal work, was essentially theatrical involved with durational time, which he considered to be theatrical. And I think it's basically an invalid assessment of a lot of the work that's been going on. And that's me. I think one of the main reasons for trying to discredit some of the work is that there's a lot of heavy investment in painting and sculpture in terms of a kind of established category. Interior decoration, you might say. And there's an attempt to—there's been an attempt to try to squelch any kind of original thinking, and any kind of alternative is dismissed as not being art. But I know now that Michael Fried has sort of lost wind. I mean, he can't write now. He isn't writing anything now, and he's sort of in a cul-de-sac, and he's sort of burnt himself out.
- S2 02:07 He was very sort of almost religiously, fanatically against a lot of this work. He wouldn't even pay any attention. But I just think that his rationale has broken down, and he's now doing researches into the iconography of Manet sort of withdrawing into scholarship. But I do think that, in a sense, the kind of criticism that he writes is directed toward a particular kind of audience that tends to take away any kind of power the artist might have. I feel that my writing is really writing by an artist for other artists. I'm not interested in sort of educating the bourgeois into art. I don't think that that's really necessary. I think that it's necessary that artists converse among themselves, and I don't see why it has to be justified to a group that basically is a class that really just doesn't have any interest anyway.
- S1 03:50 **ET:** Doesn't this class finance a lot of these ventures? Or let's put it more broad—I mean, a lot of these ventures that you and others have been going into, especially with the Earth project and ecological art altogether, these are not really sales objects but how are they financed? [crosstalk]—



- S2 04:13 **RS:** Well, in very fugitive ways. I mean, the patronage is either through institutions or through private patronage where the patron, in a sense, shares the ideology of the artist. They work fairly close. The gallery I'm with—the woman who runs the gallery is very much involved in the work and, in a sense, is committed to it. I don't think that it's really a matter of simply attacking all money values. I just think that the wrong—I mean, that there is one kind of money value that is sort of directed toward maintaining painting and sculpture as a value per se. Then there is an alternative value, which I think artists should be more in control of. I mean, I don't think that artists should just sort of allow themselves to become impoverished. I mean, I think they're entitled to make money you know or, in some way, to get some kind of benefit.
- S2 05:53 Most of them don't actually. I mean, because, in a sense, a lot of the thinking is original so that it doesn't have any old convention to fall back on. And so there is that difficulty, but I think it's just that the kind of value that—I mean, there are two kinds of value, I would say. And that the value of the interior decorating group that's sort of headed by Clement Greenberg—where paintings are just sort of put in to living rooms as backdrops—that kind of value, I just don't find very interesting. But if the artist can get the backing of some industrial firm or something like that, that just means that the artist is getting more power in that particular area to sort of infiltrate and—
- S1 07:02 **ET:** Isn't there an implicit censorship also in this... [inaudible]?
- S2 07:06 **RS:** No.
- S1 07:06 **ET:** No. I'm not thinking about artist work. [crosstalk]—
- S2 07:08 **RS:** Because they don't know what you're doing really. A lot of them—
- S1 07:10 **ET:** I'm thinking about new artists maybe with new ideas or something like that.
- S2 07:13 **RS:** Yeah. A lot of the support just comes from people. I mean, outside support comes from people who are looking for some alternative. They're looking for something else.
- S1 07:30 **ET:** In order to attract the attention of these institutions and stuff like that, don't you have to have come from a gallery background? Don't you have to have made it in the gallery?
- S2 07:39 **RS:** I don't think so now. I think it was necessary. I think the gallery system now is under a great deal of pressure. I know that my next show won't be in a gallery. And I think ever since the—like in my early articles, I always directed the attention elsewhere, outside, and into other areas of investigation. I think you could put on a show anywhere now. And the artists, let's say, maybe five years





ago had to, in a sense, operate through the gallery system. But I think with the writing and the art, this has been altered. And it's a better chance now for people to do things on their own, without middlemen.

- S3 08:34 **Stig Brøgger:** Yes. But what about the new people? I think you have been brought up in the old system maybe? You have qualified yourself through the galleries in the beginning.
- S2 08:47 **RS:** Well—that's true to a certain extent with some of my earlier work. But that enabled me to use that as a kind of stepping stone to expand. I mean, you have to—I mean, let's say in the '50s and in the '40's, it was absolutely intolerable here. I mean, there was nothing. There was no support or any kind of interest at all and it's sort of been like a gradual—it's been like a gradual fight to create a climate, make things known, and distribute the information. But now I think that there's a context and more things can be done out of that. I don't think it's ever perfect. I mean, I always think there's a degree of corruption around...I mean, I don't think it will ever be, nothing will ever be pure. But I do think that artists have more of an opportunity now to work outside of the sort of museum-gallery context.
- S1 10:10 **ET:** Yeah. The alternative is that you go out in the field or into this pit and then in places like—or you place some mirrors in places in Mexico, which is very humble, at least, from the outset. It reflects a very humble attitude to art and something like that. But then you still maintain the galleries, so to speak, because then you'll see magazines as the gallery. Do you understand what I mean?
- S2 10:43 **RS:** Yeah. Well—
- S1 10:43 **ET:** You still have the middleman.
- S2 10:44 **RS:**—you have to distribute the awareness or the consciousness. I mean, I don't think that you can withdraw into a kind of private, hermetic cocoon. I do think that magazines and all forms of information media have been very helpful. In a sense, the avant-garde itself has become very reactionary in that it's trying to maintain, as I said before, a value system that's completely out of step with all the different media. I think the artists all have, in a sense, used the media to transmit their—
- S3 11:31 **SB:** Are you using other media like film?
- S2 11:33 **RS:** Yeah. Film and magazines, anything to make this particular kind of consciousness known, and photography and everything, travel just to sort of





broaden up the whole spectrum. But I do think now that the museums and the galleries just can't support a lot of kind of work because there's a certain kind of setting. The white walls of the gallery and the museum, like the show up at the Metropolitan now is like a real—it's just a clearinghouse kind of place for what I would call interior decoration, it really is that. And yet, they still try to maintain a value for this. I mean, within it, there are certain artists who have made contributions, but somehow, the installation mitigates against that.

S1 13:06 **ET:** And by leaving the gallery and the museum and going out in the street or the desert, you are, to a certain degree, questioning this value system. Of course, you're questioning the gallery value system. But at the same time, when now you put your mirrors on the cover of Artforum, are you then questioning your own social role as an artist in society at the same time? Don't you still maintain the old conception of the artist? Are you questioning its social role? Do you understand what I mean?

S2 13:47 **RS:** Yeah. I think that the social role—I think the idea of the artist as sort of a beaten down garret type person who is waiting to be discovered or who is completely living outside the world—I think that it's important for the artist to get into that area and, as I say, just use every possible mode of communication to make his ideas known.

S1 14:24 **ET:** But now you're talking about ideas and consciousness [inaudible].

S2 14:27 **RS:** Of the social thing?

S1 14:29 **ET:** Yeah. But you're talking about ideas more than you actually are talking about works. That seems very interesting.

S2 14:43 **RS:** Well—

S1 14:43 **ET:** You're talking about spreading consciousness instead of [crosstalk].

S2 14:45 **RS:** Yeah, a context. You need a kind of context for the works. In other words, a kind of almost theoretical basis for the work in order to...and I think, in a sense, that's one reason why I write. Otherwise, there's a kind of—there's no context for the response. So that it's just helped by writing. The writing, in a sense, reinforces the value of this particular kind of work.

S1 15:25 **ET:** Yeah. But you used the word ideas and concepts instead of work. You spread ideas, you don't spread reproductions, for example, which was the usual way of doing it, having critics write about reproductions. There must be some social consequences in this also of a - what you call it? Demythologization of the artist.





- S2 16:00 **RS:** Yeah.
- S1 16:01 **ET:** In other words, by spreading reproductions, you are spreading a finished product. By spreading ideas, you are just spreading, well, ideas, which are not finished products.
- S2 16:11 **RS:** Yeah. Well, they are too.
- S1 16:13 **ET:** Do you consider this—I mean, do you consider the spreading of ideas to just kind of cues to some kind of, "Everybody's an artist," or something like that?
- S2 16:23 **RS:** No. I think that I have an attitude toward language, for instance, where I consider language not so much as literature or characterization, but mainly, writing to me is a—words and language is a kind of material just like steel and mirrors. It's a different quality of material. But at the same time, I treat it the same way. I'm not writing out of a sense of authorship. It's just more a matter of liberating the language and getting it out of that kind of idealistic notion that, I think, most reactionary criticism has, that somehow, language is like something that will disappear in the phases of work.
- S2 17:37 I don't think that's true. I think language has its own weight. I mean, in a sense, I did compare writing to the ground, the material of the ground, so that by treating language as material, another kind of material, you avoid that kind of idealistic notion that language is some kind of invisible instrument that just throws a spotlight on the art and disappears. I don't think, I mean, writing just sort of lays there. You don't really discover the work. You sort of cover it. It's sort of like another blanket.
- S1 18:33 **ET:** So your writings are fictional pieces, not instruction manuals.
- S2 18:39 **RS:** No. They're not meant to communicate, or I'm not [crosstalk]—
- S1 18:45 **ET:** They're a fiction piece.
- S2 18:46 **RS:** They're fiction in the true sense that there's no attempt to, well, justify in terms of so-called reality because, let's say, the reality that we live under today doesn't seem to be the reality I'm interested in. I mean, in a sense, by declaring writing fiction, it seems closer to a kind of...I mean, it's just words on paper. You have to sort of be conscious of that. It's not like something else. It's just what it is, writing on a paper. It's words, and it's not the material. It's not the material thing in terms of the work.
- S2 19:58 But it's a different kind of work. But it's still a material, but a different kind of material. I think that's an important thing because a lot of the views are all—they'll look at—a critic, like a kind of reactionary critic, will look at a work and





then give you some kind of ideal rendering of it in writing. And that really isn't the response that he had, it's a kind of made-up response that doesn't really interest me somehow.

Any other questions?

- S1 20:56 **ET:** Oh, yes. Now we go in a different direction. Now, we've been through a lot of galleries these last three weeks. And also, we've been picking up a lot of these, more or less, underground newspapers that very much have a visual style. They are, as far as we can see, part of what is happening in the visual arts right now in America. Seems to be two directions, both of them claiming to be very realistic in visual arts, an ecological direction and an atrocity direction.
- S2 21:47 **RS:** Atrocity?
- S1 21:47 **ET:** Atrocity direction. A grotesque, isn't that what it is? It's a grotesque direction, but it's—
- S2 21:53 **RS:** You went to the Whitney?
- S1 21:55 **ET:** I did see the Whitney also, but we've been picking up all these papers also. And it isn't just the Whitney. It's also the papers and the kind of artwork that is done on—well, what is done in the street more or less. But it seems to be these two directions, both of them claiming to be very realistic and, at least, have their basis in a lot of real realistic circumstances and all of that. They seem to be working very much on their own. That is, at least, in two big groups. And there doesn't seem to be very much interaction between these groups. Now, in your entropy essay, you were actually working with some kind of interaction. You were writing about the minimalist people, some of whom have gone off in this ecological direction, which seems a reasonable direction. But at the same time, you're writing about Paul Thek, and you're writing about Samaras and all of that. Would you comment on this? Is this a reasonable observation that there are these two directions right now? And is it reasonable that there isn't any contact? And then why isn't there, you think?
- S2 23:20 **RS:** Well, in the case of, let's say, Samaras and Paul Thek, I think that that represents a particular kind of involvement that, in a sense, I was simply recognizing it in that article as such. I don't necessarily favor that particular view, although I took it into account. I would say that with most of that kind of atrocity stuff, there's a good deal of sentimentality. I do think some of the earlier Paul Thek's and some of Samaras's things sort of evade that sentimentality. But for the most part, I think that that kind of sort of involvement like paintings of Vietnam, women holding mutilated children, and things like that—I haven't seen any. I haven't really seen any really effective





works along that line and I think it tends to be more—it's like a very hot kind of area.

- S1 25:19 **ET:** Well, they can be done in a more subtle level. Kienholz is subtle, but it's [crosstalk] in a different direction.
- S2 25:24 **RS:** Kienholz is a fairly good practitioner of that school. But at the same time, I just don't feel that it escapes a certain—it seems sentimental to me.
- S1 25:51 **ET:** Yes. But would you recognize that there are these two ways of [crosstalk]?
- S2 25:53 **RS:** I would say that it's not a major—I think it's always around. I think it's kind of a— it's a type of consciousness. It's a kind of consciousness that, I think, like the awareness of torture or something like that, is an area of consciousness that seems to me on a lower level than, let us say, if we could use that ecological term. I think that's more liberative.
- S3 26:27 **SB:** In terms of dual [inaudible] anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic?
- S2 26:35 **RS:** Yeah. And I think it tends mainly to be humanistic in a bad way, a kind of mortal and sensational kind of—
- S3 26:48 **SB:** [inaudible].
- S2 26:52 **RS:** Yeah. It's—
- S1 26:53 **ET:** Wait. I don't know if it's true what you're saying. I mean, the grotesque kind of thing and the political satire and so on and so on has always been around, but especially this atrocity dimension that it has right now. And also, you have been interested, of course, in William Burroughs, a lot of people are interested in him. You haven't put him down or anything like that. You have, more or less, used him to back up some of your own points of view. He's a perfect example of the atrocity [crosstalk].
- S2 27:24 **RS:** Well, with him, he seems to be able to handle it. I mean, this is—
- S1 27:29 **ET:** It isn't just because he does it with words and the others do it with pictures?
- S2 27:33 **RS:** Yeah. I do think it's a matter of medium somehow, how convincing it is. And I think within that medium, he manages to make it valid to a certain degree. I mean, these are all things that—I think in my article, in the entropy article, I spoke of a crystalline type of awareness and an organic kind of awareness, and I simply recognized that there are these two states. And I do think that the organic tends to be handled usually rather poorly. And I think it often gets sensational and just doesn't come off quite right. You know what I'm saying? As he says, it's anthropomorphic, and there's not a very high degree of abstraction.





It's what I would call hot as opposed to cool. So then I realize it's there, but I can't say that I'm overwhelmingly interested in it.

- S1 29:11 **ET:** The interesting thing about the Whitney—one of the interesting things about the Whitney was they had also drawn in, what's his name? Crump, the cartoonist, which is recognizing that a lot of—I don't know if it's new or, at least, what is being done right now in graphics and stuff like that that started in the underground newspapers. Have you been following that development? Or do you think it's very interesting? Do you think it's very significant or important what's going on there, not what is done in writing but what is done in layout and all of that? Do you think it has any or will have any major role?
- S2 30:01 **RS:** I can't say I really have a taste for it. It doesn't really interest me. It seems to be more an area of folk art or a kind of rustic grassroots folk art. And I would say that a lot of this kind of stuff tends to be folk art, including Kienholz. He's probably one of the best people working in that area. But by and large, I don't really find them working with really tough issues in terms of art. I don't have an anti-art attitude. I mean, a lot of it does seem to be—I don't know—a kind of folksy surrealism or something that just seems rather retrograde.
- [silence]
- S2 32:14 **RS:** It's like, leftover surrealist attitudes that really aren't that pertinent like Abbie Hoffman or something like that. It seems to be in the area with Timothy Leary and all this kind of stuff. I find it's more a matter of sociology and less a matter of art. It's—
- S1 32:45 **ET:** It's also politics.
- S2 32:47 **RS:** Politics, but at the same time, I do think good art has a political element in it that doesn't necessarily—
- S1 32:59 **ET:** But to go on, and after the atrocity-grotesque, the ecological art is also—as far as I can see to a very large extent political art. And doesn't the atrocity direction and the ecological direction really pull in the same direction?
- S2 33:20 **RS:** I don't think so because I think that the ecological art is just less sentimental and it's dealing more with making and structuring and different kinds of processes that seem to be more pertinent and tougher in terms of the repercussions. It's cooler and more in control of itself. And I think in terms of the political implications, they're not sort of blatant self-pitying cries in the wilderness, which I think a lot of—
- S1 34:15 **ET:** The ecological art is liberal art, whereas the grotesques are anarchists?





- S2 34:23 **RS:** Well, that might be one way of putting it. I just think that the—
- S1 34:32 **ET:** Putting it another way, the ecological art is working within the framework of the present society, whereas the atrocity-grotesque is—
- S2 34:40 **RS:** Yeah. I think—
- S1 34:41 **ET:**—going outside of the framework.
- S2 34:42 **RS:** —that's a good way to look at it. I don't think that they're really raising issues that can change anything. I think it's a kind of ineffectual thing. And in a sense, the things that they're indulging in—I mean, they seem to derive a morbid pleasure from the things they're supposed to be attacking.
- S1 35:23 **ET:** Well, you always feel a certain kind of fascination for the things that you feel repulsion for at the same time. That's a common experience.
- S2 35:31 **RS:** Yeah. But by and large, I would say that I don't think that they're changing the political situation. In fact, the way they can be accommodated into the Whitney means that it's essentially very easy to accommodate and—
- S1 35:59 **ET:** Well, the ecological—or some of the ecologists are sitting on the show at the Museum of Modern Art right now.
- S2 36:07 **RS:** Well, that's mainly documentation. And a lot of that work, I'm not really that impressed by. I think [crosstalk]—
- S1 36:18 **ET:** Do you mean Hutchinson and?
- S2 36:20 **RS:** And Oppenheim.
- S1 36:22 **ET:** Oppenheim, yeah.
- S2 36:23 **RS:** I think they both do some interesting things, but I can't really say, I haven't seen it. But essentially, what they're presenting there is documentation. But, I mean, the museum had to deal with the fact that they did go elsewhere to do their pieces. So then in a sense, it was expanded, the attitude of the museum, so that they were sort of forced into dealing with the work, not only in terms of the information but in terms of contending with the sites. So then in that respect, I think their work is more interesting to me than the stuff at the Whitney. I don't know. I mean, there's a possibility that somebody could do something with it, and I feel that maybe, here and there, there are some things that I don't consider too major or important enough to have a really strong effect on things. And I think that a lot of the Earth works and land work is more





directly contending with expanding the whole artistic situation. So that it's really how I feel about that.

S1 38:22 **ET:** Yeah.

S2 38:24 **RS:** Run out?

S1 38:25 **SB:** I don't know. No, it's still moving. Don't worry. [inaudible].

ET: Now, a lot of the people—some of the people involved in this ecological thing are former minimalists. Some of them are. Now, this minimal thing seems to be very apolitical and a purely esthetic thing or experience or whatever you'd call it. How did this change come about?

S2 39:01 **RS:** Well, I think perhaps it seems that way, but I think the earlier formulations along those lines helped to break down a lot of the restrictive measures. It might not seem so at first glance. But I do think that in terms of investigating and questioning the whole meaning of canvas and stretcher bars and the usual sculptural techniques, that this really forces a whole new reevaluation of, let's say, rather rigid bourgeois categories. So I would say that on the language level, I think that when language changes, then you have a political breakthrough. And I think that a lot of the early minimalists—the term, by the way, was coined by Richard Wollheim and was just sort of picked up by the press. But most of the artists had all individual views.

S2 40:34 Some of them tended to get static. But I think the dialectic between the rigid structures and the—the crystalline structures and the more disintegrated antiform type work is quite consistent. I think this has had a very strong—I mean, it depends what you consider politics. I think the politics that are imposed on us, the different kinds of political thinking that's imposed on us, like, let's say, to protest Nixon in terms of something—protest Nixon in terms of Nixon's reality is sort of playing right into his hands. I think a lot of the strength of these artists is refusal to submit to the categories of given politics so that it's even more stronger and more...I don't think it's apolitical, though some might say so. I think that it's changed the value of art [crosstalk].

S1 42:05 **ET:** But, I mean, the question was, of course, also—this might be a bit infamous—But isn't a lot of the so-called ecological art mainly esthetic?

S2 42:20 **RS:** No. Well, let's say, here you get into an area of esthetic.

S1 42:24 [crosstalk]—

S2 42:25 **RS:** Esthetic means, in a sense, just a formal appreciation. [crosstalk]—

S1 42:33 **ET:** That's right, yeah. Let me just—



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- S2 42:35 **RS:** —a purist.
- S1 42:36 **ET:** —yeah, be more explicit. Now, your Fort-Worth-Dallas project, it's very easy to see that this project has political implications, whereas your mirrors in Mexico may not have the same direct political implications.
- S2 42:54 **RS:** Well, I was trespassing in Mexico. And the fact is that the works themselves were dismantled. It was a complete dismantling. And yet, the whole procedure, in a sense, was very important because it was, in a sense, dealing with a kind of perception that would normally not be dealt with, a kind of breaking—a perceptual entropy, you might say, where I'm dealing with a kind of collapsing perception and stabilizing that, where I'm dealing with absences rather than presences. And in a sense, the fact that there's no collectible item there makes it another kind of work. The Dallas thing is involved with a different kind of thing also that...
- S2 44:09 But, let's say, the work in the Yucatan is mainly involved with how things are made and doing them. But all these things contribute toward the realization of pieces that would actually necessitate the actual land purchase. So I would say that the radical artists now are demanding their own land. And I do have a piece that I'm going to do off the coast of Vancouver, which will be an island, which—the island has to be—I mean, the land has to be part of the piece so that the whole piece will be an island covered with broken glass. And this, in a sense, will test the commitment and force the galleries to deal with not just putting an object in somebody's garden but actually getting real estate and, in a sense, actually only land, not just objects, so that the artist—I envision a land boom. In other words, artists can use wasteland or deserts or tundras, areas that normally would be unusable. And in a sense—
- S1 45:33 **ET:** A lot of people have done that. I mean, there's a great difference between an island covered with broken glass and, say, Drop City, which is also a piece of unused land, used for kind of a family—
- S2 45:50 **RS:** Well, that's living.
- S1 45:51 **ET:** That's living [crosstalk].
- S2 45:51 **RS:** That's life. Yeah. I would say that I don't want to—I don't want to confuse—I do think as soon as you start getting into living situations, that you're really evading your problems of art. And I did think that—
- S1 46:13 **ET:** You don't feel [crosstalk].
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- S2 46:14 **RS:** Not so much an esthetic. It's not an esthetic thing that I'm arguing for here, but there's a moral implication, but not a morality imposed, a morality that's determined by the artist, not by some other group or something.
- S1 46:40 **SB:** What's the moral implication?
- S2 46:42 **RS:** Well, I would just say that the artists have been exploited and they haven't gotten their fair shake. That's the moral, that it's just not an even distribution of wealth there, I'd say. So it becomes an economic attack, not necessarily putting a particular class like the workers or something like that because I find that most of the workers in the United States are sort of very mean capitalists, and the labor unions are pretty corrupt. So there has to be a different kind of—I don't think they think in terms of a kind of 19th century Marxism. I'm more in favor of a kind of Marxism like, let's say, Levi-Strauss with [inaudible], that kind of thing, sort of not all accepting of science and technology and mechanism as an ultimate value so that the moral thing would be getting through all that shilly-shally of technology and into a more fundamental, more elemental, primitive kind of condition.
- S1 48:17 **ET:** But you wouldn't yourself be involved with setting up conditions or, with your artistic luggage and all of that, going to an experiment with living?
- S2 48:30 **RS:** Well, I mean, I'm living here so that—
- S1 48:36 **ET:** Yeah. [inaudible] I was thinking about—
- S2 48:38 **RS:** The whole idea of Rauschenberg's, I think, it's kind of sticky.
- S1 48:43 **ET:** I don't know that.
- S2 48:44 **RS:** Well, Rauschenberg says that his work is functioning between art and life really. And there's a tendency for art to go completely over into life and so that it mitigates itself. If you just accept life as it is now with all these horrible systems and political realities [crosstalk]—
- S1 49:09 **ET:** Yeah. But take another experiment like Charlotte Moorman's Wards Island thing, which is both an experiment with living and an artistic thing.
- S2 49:22 **RS:** Yeah, that's fine. I'm quite in favor of any way people want to live, in communes or things like that. That's a different thing, and they do integrate to a certain degree. But I think that in order to bring focus on to the art, I just think that there's too much using art as a stepping stone and like therapy to get integrated into life. I don't favor that kind of turning art into a restaurant kind of thing. Levi-Strauss speaks of the timeless attitude of primitive, which I think is more fascinating, more—richer. It's more liberating than to have to submit to,
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let's say, the everyday time of what's just given to you. They're just sort of—but I think socially, that all of these communes, in fact, do have a certain primitive kind of basis, a tribal basis, which is interesting, a kind of totemic kinship, which, I think, comes out of kind of the art. The more potent the art is, the more it'll have its influence on life. But I don't think it's the other way around. I think it's—the artist has to maintain the art and the life sort of unfolds as the art. But if you give up the art and just say, "Well, I'm only interested in life and—"

- S1 51:16 **ET:** No. The reason I ask is that several of the former [inaudible] Danish minimalists have, this summer and this fall, been involved in two projects. One of them was a big field out in the country. This was where they were for 10 days. Stig participated in it. And some of them built small houses or teepee kind of things. And at the same time, they were working as a—
- S2 51:56 **RS:** I think that's fine.
- S1 51:56 **ET:** —artistic cooperative
- S2 52:01 **RS:** It's fine. I mean, I have no—
- S1 52:02 **ET:** [crosstalk].
- S2 52:05 **RS:** It's just I do think that— I mean, I'm interested in that too. I'd like to, for my next show, have a quarry, and I'd like to build a kind of dwelling on that—around that quarry. That way, in a sense, attract people to do a visit, that kind of thing and get more physically involved. But in terms of something like—some of the communes don't seem that imaginative to me, or they don't seem that intriguing to me.
- S1 52:41 **SB:** No. That's fine.
- S2 52:41 **RS:** I think it's a matter of quality or a certain amount of—I think it can be very—it can work out. And as I say, I think it would be more like a kind of tribal kind of thing eventually.
- S1 53:07 **ET:** And so the political aspect of this ecological art are—
- S2 53:17 **RS:** Very basic kind of [crosstalk].
- S1 53:18 **ET:** Yeah, utopian. Utopian.
- S2 53:21 **RS:** I don't know. I mean, in a sense, it's true, a kind of nowhere area. But I think that—
- S1 53:37 **ET:** This is not a value judgment. It's just trying to define it.





- S2 53:42 **RS:** Yeah. But I think that in a sense—but it's sort of making the utopia very physical. I mean, in a sense, it's dealing with down-to-earth properties. And there's no reason why these nowhere areas can't stimulate and—
- S1 54:05 **ET or SB:** Utopia...it's a great feeling isn't it?
- S2 54:09 **RS:** I guess. I guess so.
- S4 54:12 **Nancy Holt:** Hey Bob, where is your [inaudible]? [inaudible].
- S2 54:15 **RS:** Oh, it's over there. I do think that's a fascinating area because also, I'm sort of interested in a kind of animal-type perception that sort of comes into it. And there you get into a kind of tribal situation where you're actually seeing things through the eyes of animals and developing another kind of sense that will bring you closer into a kind of community situation. I think, in a sense, that's been slowly developing among the artists. I think the artists are developing a kind of kinship, where before, they were sort of isolated and afraid of exchanging ideas.
- S1 55:16 **ET:** Well, yeah, they've been isolated as individuals, and now they may not be as isolated. But aren't they still very much isolated in groups?
- S2 55:25 **RS:** Yeah. They're still isolated in groups because—
- S1 55:28 **ET:** But there doesn't seem to be any interaction, say, between the grotesques and the ecological [crosstalk].
- S2 55:33 **RS:** Well, I mean, I know Paul Thek and—
- S1 55:36 **ET:** Okay. Well, there's another kind of interaction that doesn't seem to take place here that we have experienced. That is the interaction between the strictly politically—what you call it? Like the—what you call the Yippies here.
- S2 55:53 **RS:** Well, you have things like the Artists Coalition, in a sense, Carl Andre.
- S1 55:59 **ET:** Which seems to be a ridiculous [inaudible].
- S2 56:01 **RS:** Yeah. And it just doesn't work. I mean, it's based, I think, on an outmoded idea of the work here, the idea of the worker as a class to identify with. And I just can't identify with that.
- S1 56:16 **ET:** No. But isn't it just really an isolation problem. I mean—
- S2 56:21 **RS:** Yeah. It's still a certain amount of alienation in groups. But you see it in tribal situations. In primitive situations, you have some tribes like the Hawaiians [crosstalk].





S1 56:37 [crosstalk].

S2 56:37 **RS:** I don't think that it can be the ultimate. I don't know what it is. And there seems to be a certain almost flaw in human behavior that prevents people from completely cooperating.

S1 56:55 **ET:** Well, that's true enough. But you know, all over Western Europe, you have a general movement called—so they're called the Extra-Parliamentary Opposition, which means just people working politically but outside the political system that is the parties and the interest organizations and all of that. Now, in France and Germany and Scandinavia, a lot of writers and artists and so on have been very much involved with this Extra-Parliamentary Opposition. There have been members who have been involved in street fights, and they have sacrificed some of their—a lot of their time where they should have been making fine art. And instead, they've been making street art and stuff like that. Whereas here, it seems only to be those theater groups like Guerrilla Theater and all of that. And it seems very strange that people who, say, make these grotesque—people who make these ecological things, that they do not take what would seem a very reasonable step into these utopian political movements.

S2 58:11 **RS:** Although, as I say, I do think there are vast political implications in the work itself. There's no extra.

S1 58:17 **ET:** Yeah. But—

S2 58:18 **RS:** There's nothing extra and nowhere to—

S1 58:19 **ET:** No[inadaudible]. It's extra because it's outside of parliamentary procedures and all of that. But, I mean, you're not a member of—I mean, this isn't a speech in congress. This is a [inaudible]. And, I mean, there's a vast difference. The strange thing is that—I mean, this is the isolation problem, that it seems that very few do work in several directions and in several lines of—I mean, these lines run very parallel really.

S3 58:53 **SB:** Several languages.

S1 58:54 **ET:** Several languages, okay, at the same time.

S2 59:00 **RS:** Well, I mean, there are lots of protest groups and things like that. But as I say, they seem to be the other side of the existing political coin. And like most artists, they're always giving words to fight the government's position in Vietnam.

S1 59:26 **ET:** But that's the easy way out. I mean—





S2 59:30 **RS:** Yeah. That's what I'm saying, that it doesn't seem to add up to anything. I mean, the only way I can—I'm just one person. The only way I can really feel that I can change certain attitudes is through writing. I think in, let's say, the revolutionary-type films like Godard makes—I mean, they have political implications, but—

S1
01:00:01 **ET:** Godard was out in the street at the same time.

S2
01:00:04 **RS:** Yeah. I mean, we're all going out into the street or into foreign territories or remote places and dealing with situations there. For instance, I was asked to be in the São Paulo Bienale's [inaudible] art and technology thing. And they weren't interested in me going down to Brazil and doing my things in Brazil with Brazilian environment. So it was like they wanted to show the technological might. So by attacking technology as a value system, I think it's a kind of political position that artists take. I mean, I don't think you simply have to go out throwing rocks at the UN or something. I think it can be more effective infiltrating into corporations and things like that where the real power is and really practically. If it's not practical, what good is it? I mean, if you really don't—

S1
01:01:14 **ET:** Yeah. But couldn't you speak two or three languages at the same time?

S2
01:01:20 **RS:** What do you mean? Do the street works and—I mean, I don't understand. Speak three languages.

S1
01:01:31 **ET:** No. I mean, one language would be, okay, to—no. Let's try something else. Right. You have a room. Morris has a room. Into this room, he—this room he changes by putting this triangular thing in the corner. By putting this triangular figure in the corner of that room, this triangular corner constitutes a break in the language of this room, in the ordinary language of this room. Now, the same kind of break of language, which political activity is, you would accomplish by—well, you could do it by throwing rocks, but you could do it also actually, yeah, by—I mean, this kind of thing is a militant thing. It's a militant thing to put the triangle thing in the corner. But you could be militant also— you don't have to be a member of the motherfuckers or the weathermen, but still you have in New York such a wide spectrum of this kind of groups that would be reasonable parallel languages to break into and break.

S2
01:03:03 **RS:** To break into and?





S1
01:03:04

ET: A language to break into and in which to constitute language breaks. Do you understand?

S2
01:03:12

RS: Yeah.

S1
01:03:16

ET: And also, I mean, very few artists work just in one line. You do sculpture. You write essays. You do films. You do maybe even television stuff and stuff like that. You would do the same thing in all these parallels languages?

S2
01:03:36

RS: Yeah. Well, I have no quarrel with that. It's just that.

