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Contemporary Art Already Operates Like a Feed

Abstract: This essay argues that contemporary art has structurally converged with the organizational logic of the algorithmic feed. The claim is architectural rather than stylistic. The contemporary art field—its institutions, exhibitions, discourse, and evaluative mechanisms—now operates through non-terminating circulation, procedural management, identity indexing, and visibility sorting rather than through dialectical judgment and conclusion. Dialectical interruption is no longer possible.

This is not a cultural lament. It is a structural diagnosis.

Civilizational Shift: From Sequence to Feed

Print culture was organized around sequence. Argument unfolded linearly across pages. Memory stabilized meaning. A claim led to a counterclaim. A chapter closed. A book ended. Conclusions arrived in recognizable form. Termination was possible because the structure of the medium allowed arguments to end. The last page was a structural fact.

Television reorganized this condition through flow. The discrete program yielded to continuous transmission, becoming secondary to the stream. Flow dissolved the natural stopping point. The viewer remained inside ongoing transmission. The algorithm formalized and automated what television began.

The algorithmic feed is not a platform. It is an architectural condition: non-terminating sequence, algorithmic ranking, continuous update, no shared horizon, sorting rather than conclusion. It produces streams rather than arguments, personalized sequence rather than common order. It establishes no perimeter. It produces no final page. It does not argue; it circulates.

Between 1966 and 1972, dematerialization relocated art from object to language. The artwork yielded to proposition. Sculpture moved from matter to statement. Construction became linguistic. What had been resolved within the work now required discursive resolution.

In 1968, Lawrence Weiner declared that "the piece need not be built," severing sculpture from material execution. The work could exist as statement alone. When execution is optional, legitimacy depends on articulation. What is not materially resolved must be discursively stabilized; articulation becomes structural necessity, not supplement.

Unlike Duchamp's readymade, which relocated form, Weiner's declaration rendered execution optional. The work survives as statement rather than object. Formal resolution ceases to govern; naming, intention, contract, and asserted reality govern instead. Authority shifts accordingly: from composition to proposition.

In 1969, Harald Szeemann's *When Attitudes Become Form* formalized the exhibition as conceptual field rather than object display. Curatorial authorship expanded. The work and its discursive apparatus became structurally inseparable.

When visual art relocated to language, its authority shifted. What was once visually articulated became extractable, reproducible, and indexable. Stated work reproduces; reproducible work circulates; circulated work stabilizes position.

Language can be copied, ranked, captioned, and sorted. Once language became algorithmically sortable, feed architecture became art's structural habitat.

The apparent instability of the feed should not be confused with structural indeterminacy. The surface is volatile; the substrate is rigid. Algorithmic circulation depends on strict protocols, deterministic computation, timestamp sequencing, database order, and tokenized information. Computation does not operate on images or meanings. It operates on characters, tokens, and indexed data. Language is native to this environment because it is already discretized. Form must be translated into language or tokens to circulate.

As mechanized computation takes command, what can be discretized circulates; what cannot be discretized loses structural authority. The weakening of form

alongside the disappearance of cultural termination is not an anomaly. It is the structural subordination of visual resolution to tokenized circulation.

What began in 1969 as the expansion of form to include attitude becomes, under computational conditions, the weakening of formal resolution itself.

Structural Convergence: The Field Mirrors the Feed

This is not aesthetic resemblance. It is organizational convergence.

Modern dialectical art operated through negation, risk, perimeter, termination, and judgment. A work confronted another work. A position displaced another position. Judgment carried consequence. Something could be excluded. The field had edges. Revolt required an adversary.

Contemporary institutional logic operates differently. It privileges process over decision, review panels over verdicts, statements over conclusions, mediation over termination, circulation over resolution. The biennial rotates. The art fair refreshes. Panels convene and adjourn without verdict. Nothing is expelled. Everything is indexed.

Benjamin Buchloh diagnosed the erasure of evaluative criteria. This essay diagnoses the architecture that rendered that erasure inevitable.

When dialectical interruption weakens, management fills.

As the object weakens, language expands. The press release no longer promotes the work; it justifies it. Wall text no longer supplements; it stabilizes. The curatorial thesis is no longer after-the-fact interpretation; it supplies the framework that renders the work legitimate.

The work does not stand independently of its explanation; it requires explanation for stabilization. Without framing, it cannot secure institutional position within circulation. Where formal resolution weakens, language compensates. Justification replaces internal resolution.

This justification now takes recognizable institutional forms: the press release, the wall label, the artist statement, the catalogue essay, the recorded interview, the curatorial thesis, and the identity or trauma narrative that precedes the work and determines its reception. These do not merely accompany the work; they prevent exclusion and prevent termination.

Meaning is secured through framing rather than produced through formal necessity. Evaluation becomes administration.

Identity functions as index; political alignment functions as sorting mechanism.

The exhibition is no longer structured like an argument; it is structured like a scroll—continuous, sequential, non-terminating. Works appear without dialectical escalation. No work expels another. No gesture forecloses a horizon. The sequence continues by design.

The Terminal Claim: Sorting Replaces Judgment

Judgment is durable evaluation with the possibility of termination. Termination is the capacity of a system to produce an outcome that is durable and exclusionary—after which not everything remains possible. It establishes perimeter. It creates loss. It produces consequence.

A verdict terminates. A canon terminates. An excommunication terminates. Sorting does not.

Sorting manages visibility without terminating exclusion. It ranks. It updates. It redistributes attention. It reorganizes sequence without closing it.

Under feed architecture, panels function as moderation rather than adjudication. Statements serve as updates rather than verdicts. Scandal becomes an engagement spike rather than rupture. Cancellation redistributes attention rather than concluding it. Deplatforming redistributes attention; it does not terminate.

Nothing ends. Everything circulates.

Dialectical interruption requires exclusion. It requires that negation carry consequence. It requires that something be lost and remain lost.

Under feed conditions, exclusion disappears. Justification expands. Negation becomes content. Critique becomes style. Opposition becomes branding. The anti-aesthetic becomes spectacle. Even gestures that seek to disrupt are absorbed into circulation. The critique of the feed is the feed's most reliable product.

Termination disappears. Nothing is decided. Judgment collapses into sorting.

Contemporary art does not fail because it is shallow. It fails because it cannot conclude.

The feed does not argue; it circulates.

The feed did not conquer art. Art was structurally prepared for the feed.

If art operates like a feed, it cannot interrupt. It can only update.

Stop.

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