I can't say how it begins, but I know that I am right in the middle of it. Of what? Something, anything. A conversation, an idea, a sentence, a project, a love story. I think to myself that it's hard not to be in the middle of it. Isn't what living a life is? Finding yourself entangled in it? You don't remember in detail how it all began. How can you? It is intricate. It is all a little messy. Other people are involved. Other voices and stories overlap with yours. You keep opening doors, sharing these stories. Life swirls. You can't stop it. You know that it's going somewhere, but can't tell exactly where, or how long it will take. You just have to let it run its course. But, how do you master the art of letting things run their course when people are scared of what cannot be controlled? How do you convince people that your let-it-run-its-course art project is worth their attention (and money) when it's not the kind of stuff that could be captured in a single JPEG, and therefore look good on the pages of an art magazine? There's too much going on, around you, in your life, in your head. You can't, for the life of it, box it in.

And why would you? Content spills from your pock-ets, and that should be a good thing. After all, marketing “artistic content” is what cultural institutions compete over today. So one would expect them to take an interest.Ironically, however, the last thing a strained marketer would have the nerves to do is develop content with you. Markets are fast. Caring for content, on the contrary, takes time. A lifetime potentially. It's a form of affective labor. By listening to someone else's stories, getting involved with their art, we slowly become entangled in their life, sharing the intensity and burden of it all. It's how these relations are forged that give art a life. Otherwise, art is like a telephone that rings, with no one on the line. Sound absurd? Still, it's the new norm, in the arts, as in society at large: the pressure is on to maintain a state of excitation that has everybody's ears ringing, 24/7, even though no one actually made a call and no one was home to pick up.

Life electricity must flow through the communications grid at all times to keep it up and running. This “juice” is provided—by professionals and amateurs alike—loading the net nonstop, for free, with bit-sized parts of themselves. But this is not content. It's isolated information: what you had for lunch today or who you dated yesterday, unrelated data, readied processed at the speed of a thumb-scroll. Content, on the contrary, takes shape when experiences become related, interwoven and condensed over longer periods of time. This process develops in exchanges with people whom you trust, yet equally in a medium in which you confide. To let art run its course as life takes its turns. In this sense, what would it mean to find ways of sustaining the relationship to one's own practice for long enough to permit experiences to accumulate within that practice? And then to metabolize these experiences into content?

In societies of advanced Capitalism today, however, it's as if we were being tested in a social experiment. How far can we flatten out our metabolism and professionalize life? Is it possible to go past the point where we can ceaslessly feed the world with unrelated information, and thereby stop relating to anything or anyone? By this point, everyone will play his or her part, professionally, yet be permanently out to lunch. If the sense of alienation caused by the sheer absence of relations— and hence meaningful content—registers, it is in the ‘private’ sphere, traditionally reserved for making sense of life, i.e., the place you drive home to, wondering what the hell the day was about. In privacy, the overall sense of un-relatedness thickens into a formless mess of feelings. Toxic, when left to molder.

Informal

Already in the 1970s, Italian feminist and dropout art critic Carla Lonzi had forcefully addressed the way the professionalization of artistic practices had left no room for the cultivation of meaningful relationships. She fought against the mythic notion of the artist as a man who pursues his art in solitude, only enters into social ties (grudgingly) if they promise to be instrumental for his career. By contrast, she understood relationships as existentially transformative, mutually so. Such transformation, however, Lonzi argued, were only possible via a collective endeavor. This is why, among Italian feminists, she initiated a practice she called Autocoscienza (taking consciousness-raising into one's own hands): Women would meet in groups and, by sharing experiences from their lives, aid each other in finding ways to articulate a collective consciousness. Lonzi dedicated herself to forging transformative relations with people close to her and published records of these exchanges. In the spirit of Autocoscienza, she wrote Taci, anzi Parla: Diario di una Femminista (Shut up. Or rather, speak: A Feminist’s diary). It is a diary she created of more than 1,300 pages, comprised of reflections and conversations, collected from 1972 to ’76. In the book Lonzi makes no attempt to reconcile conflicts and contradictions, neither does she struggle to appear likeable. She trusts the reader to handle the articulation of her life as a contribution to the mutual effort of creating consciousness differently.

The struggle against the socially imposed di-vide between “public” and “private” hence coincides with the effort to renegotiate the relation between “art” and “life.” The question, here as it was there, is: how to be in the middle of it, in the middle of the storm? When Lee Lozano's stormy life leaked into her work, her practice expanded beyond the sanctioned, dominant art world. Her dropout piece (which began in 1970) was the culmination of her practice and the beginning of Lozano’s LifeArt metamorphosis. For many, dropout piece, which saw the artist's withdrawal from the art world, is Lozano’s farewell to art and ultimately to life. While dropout entailed Lozano’s disappearance from the art world’s radar, she never stopped making art. Eventually Lee Lozano dropped most of the letters...
along this line of thought, concise form equals political resolve. A man of revolutionary intent doesn’t mess about: he takes his firm stance, states his case, and so on. The more he knows about the economy of means and content and the importance of precision in this case is not an end in itself. Rather, it comes into play when the nuances of a relationship to, and something put on the table. What counts as content then is how deeply you think your thoughts. What counts as successful work, as it turns out, is that it gives you the means to translate. Collage, cut-up and assemblage have become a common way of picking up life’s fragments. When you make your move(s), this works. This is a strategy of how far you allow things to travel into the realm of the cringe-worthy, and when to button up the work. Yet, to do so, in fact, is to oppose the reduction of classic avant-gardism: Take a position, clarify your strategy, make your point, radicalize! What can be done and what cannot. Such violations of constraints are vital for new forms to emerge. In this case, is not about turning one’s own life into an artwork, nor art into a lifestyle. Where life and art overlap, practices emerge that challenge the boundar-ies between that which is said and that which can’t. Based, in her essay “Barf Manifesto,” Dodie Bellamy advocates for a form of writing that is “messy, irregular, but strategically calculated positions.”