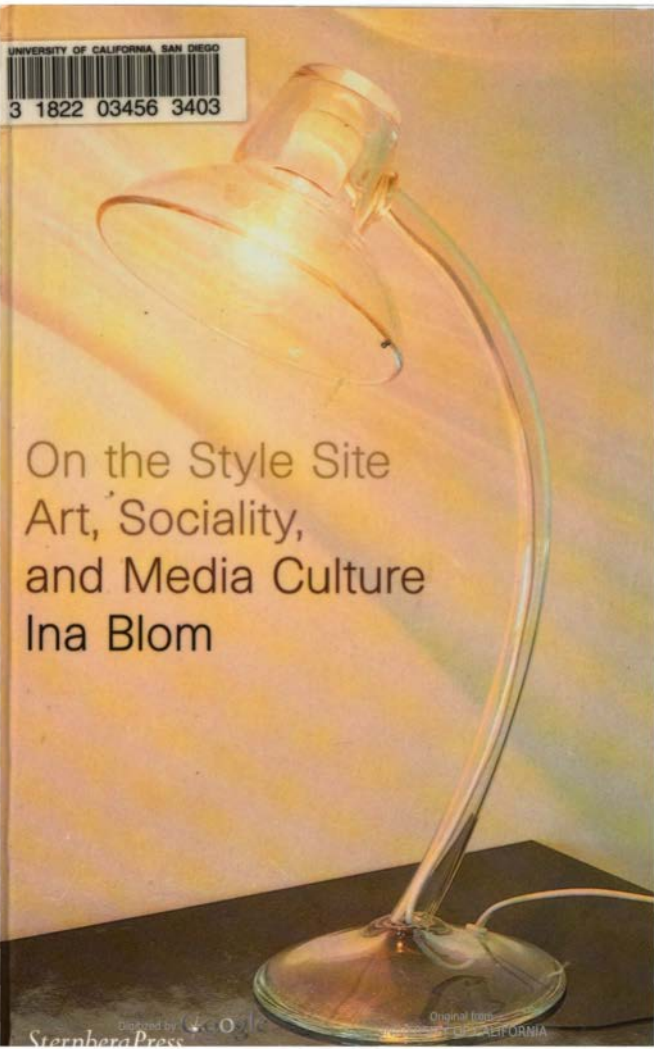



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On the Style Site
Art, Sociality,
and Media Culture
Ina Blom

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and Media Culture
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Preface

This is a project that takes place at the intersection between art history and art criticism. On the one hand it engages with debates generated within the context of so-called new art history: the critique of the term *style* and the type of interpretive frameworks that made style into a master concept for art historical research. On the other hand it is grounded in a practice of art criticism operating alongside a form of contemporary art that also seems to have little use for a term like style—an art whose key strategies are situational, performative, and site-specific rather than formal, more focused on the interface between art and social collectives than on individual authorship or artistic “schools.”

Coming from both fields, identifying with the critical approaches described above, I was nevertheless struck by what I perceived to be a blind spot in these approaches. Faced with the post-Conceptual practices of the 1990s, I became increasingly aware of our apparent inability to articulate what was taking place in a type of artistic performance that brought forth, in complex and often oblique ways, the social dynamics of increasingly styled or aestheticized life worlds, i.e. life worlds that were fundamentally informed by the specific competences and forms of knowledge developed within aesthetic practices. And what interested me were the many works that engaged with this situation in a “deep” way. The lifestyle worlds were not just evoked through ironic or pastiche-like representations of the typical imagery of a late capitalist consumer culture whose “logic” was said to herald the end of art. Rather, such work seemed to align itself, in an intimate yet open-ended and non-conclusive way, with the very processes or mechanisms of the social machineries that produce the types of subjectivity constituting these life worlds: the mechanisms of aesthetic machines, perceptual machines, media machines. In this book, I have tried to describe such work as a type of aesthetic action that brings out the contemporary “question of style” itself as a *social site*. They are, in short, performances on the style site.

Quite a large number of artists and artworks are mentioned in the text; only a handful, which I found particularly compelling or suggestive, is treated to in-depth analysis. The point of the book is not, however, to

present a more or less comprehensive list of artists and works that would comply with the “style site” heading. And I do not presume to present anything like a global theory of these works or a history of these artistic positions. Rather, my aim has been to propose a theoretical and critical approach inspired by some of the things one may learn from recent works of art—to investigate how their specific “form of thinking” may inform art critical and art historical writing.

In the work with this project, I have been grateful for the help and contributions of a number of people. I have learned a lot from conversations with Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Tobias Rehberger, Philippe Parreno, Olafur Eliasson, Liam Gillick, Alexander Györfi, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Gerwald Rockenschaub, as well as from my previous interviews and exchanges with Nam June Paik, Dick Higgins, and La Monte Young. I hope I have been able to act on at least some of the very useful advice from my critical readers: Alexander Alberro, Trond Lundemo, Claire Bishop, Simon Critchley, George Baker, Eivind Røssaak, Arne Melberg, and Lars Bang Larsen. I have also benefited greatly from exchanges with colleagues and students associated with two interdisciplinary research projects at the University of Oslo: *Aesthetics at Work* and *Media Aesthetics*. They have functioned as the sounding board for a number of early elaborations of the topics presented in this book. Thanks to grants given within the framework of these projects I have also been able to find the time to finish my writing. And, finally, I am indebted to the sharp readings of my editor, Caroline Schneider, whose support has been unwavering from the word go.

Ina Blom

May 2007

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Chapter One

The Style Site: Another Question of Style?

I

This book takes its cue from simple observation. During the last thirty years or so, the term *style* has all but disappeared from art critical or art historical terminology. For new art history it was an increasingly problematic term, associated with the taxonomist and historicist concerns of “old” art history, and fixated on the figure of the great artist; influential art historians even went so far as to recommend its banishment. For contemporary art criticism the term was irrelevant. Faced with neo-avant-garde movements that undermined the traditional idea of the artwork, as well as “aesthetics” itself, new critical paradigms had to be invented. As a focus on intervention in social reality—an art of actions and events—replaced a preoccupation with visual style and shape, the politics of social sites replaced the language of forms. Curator Dan Cameron’s description of the work of activist art duo Superflex is exemplary. As he put it, Superflex banished “all considerations of style and genre in favor of an unfettered engagement with content itself.”⁰¹

As an assessment of the preeminence of social and political strategizing in the work of Superflex, this was no doubt true. But Cameron’s statement bypassed the aesthetic environment created by Superflex as a framework for their social activism. The no-style aesthetics of simple typewritten sheets or do-it-yourself fanzine designs, associated with both activist culture and conceptual art, are gone. Whether they invent cheap energy solutions for low-income areas of the world or create platforms for online-community broadcasting in locales as disparate as Liverpool, Leipzig, and Bangkok, Superflex wrap their activities in glossy, high-profile packaging, the design of which is marked by emphatic color-coding (black, white, and orange), by a proliferation of logos and brand names (*Supergas*, *Supersauna*, *Supercity*, *Superchannel*, *Supermusic*, *Supercopy*, etc.), and by a strategic use of clothing and furniture. In short, they create a consistent design world similar to that of a big corporation. (*Fig. 1.1–1.2*) In this case, design not only functions as a way of profiling Superflex’s projects in the

sphere of politics and economics: for Superflex's visual profiling is also over the top, a notch or two more insistent than that of most corporations. In this way, it frames a liminal "art-space" in which the specific contents of each project may be evaluated or reassessed, a space of political imagination that moves to a different temporality and along different criteria of success and failure than do Superflex's operations in the spheres of business and politics proper.

The emphasis on visual style is not something peculiar to Superflex's way of working. While style has all but disappeared from art historical and art critical discourse, artistic practice since the 1960s has increasingly focused on the stylistics of the life-environment, i.e., the manner in which everyday life is formed, designed, and stylized. This focus on style, which has become more pointed since the early 1990s, moves beyond a general anthropological interest in the ways human beings form and shape their visual environments. It intervenes, more precisely, in a specific historical and cultural situation in which design and style issues have taken on an unprecedented significance—both in relation to economic "production," in the traditional sense, and in relation to ideas about changes in the concept of production itself—changes brought on by the so-called information economy or attention economy. A new critique of political economy takes into account the fact that production may now be understood as a production of subjectivity. This concept differentiates itself from Karl Marx's concept of "living work"—the notion that since work encompasses the subjectivity of the workers, a specifically proletarian subjectivity will be produced. The subjectivity at work in today's attention economy is, rather, an "open" subjectivity, one that is always about to be made. For value is now generated from the "life-time" or "attention time" of anyone—including pensioners, children, and the unemployed—not only from the work hours of the classical proletariat.⁰²

In such production of subjectivity, phenomena that were (rightly or wrongly) associated with the purely aesthetic or perceptual domain—the domain supposedly exempt from economic calculation and political strategizing—play a key role. The "immaterial" values or forms of competence that, according to Torstein Veblen, once served to demonstrate a class-specific distance from productive life are now quite explicitly count-

ed as economically and politically essential.⁰³ Popular books like Virginia Postrel's *The Substance of Style* or B. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore's *The Experience Economy* inform us how the rise of aesthetic value is remaking commerce, culture, and consciousness. Differences in style, not in quality, account for the market positions of products, just as stylistics emerge as the expressive realm in which the subtle differentiations of class and gender identities are articulated within supposedly egalitarian societies. Such phenomena attest to what Wolfgang Iser refers to as an "aestheticization of common culture" that makes the aesthetics of the modern art object just a part of a totality of many different but overlapping approaches to the aesthetic.⁰⁴

In many ways, the critical and art historical migrations away from the term *style* can be seen as a first step toward finding a way of handling the modern migration of style, that is, its displacement from the sphere of art into its current significance in the sphere of common culture. The aim of this book is to operate in extension of this displacement, all the while testing the ground for a different way of relating to the style issues within art historical and art critical writing. For an engagement with the aesthetics and politics of the "new style works" cannot just take over the stylistic terminologies of art history, as if it were simply a matter of reinvigorating a neglected discourse, returning to the proper concerns of art history. The "question of style," which appears again and again in modern art history, and demarcates questions of the identity of the work of art, its relation to individual creators, social collectives, and historical context, cannot properly account for what takes place in artistic activities that intervene in or operate alongside the style politics of contemporary culture. For these are not works that simply *have* a style, in one sense or another. It is probably more precise to say that they work *on* the contemporary "question of style" itself. In the classical dichotomies of style and substance, form and content, and sign and reference, style *was* the substance, content, and reference of these works.

But to put it this way is to inscribe the works in the framework of understanding that they have helped displace: the formal framework of artworks as opposed to the strategic framework of art actions or art events.

For this reason, I want to suggest that style, here, is not primarily evoked or referred to as an attribute of artworks but as a *social site*, and, furthermore, that the works to be discussed in this context should be seen as interventions in—or operations on—what we may now call *the style site*. They should, in other words, be placed within the framework of the general concept of site-specificity that has informed analyses of post-1960s art, and particularly within the more recent discourse that attempts to free the concept from too limited associations with the ideas of geographical location or predefined social identity.⁰⁵ The style site is, perhaps above all, treated as a mediatic site and is associated with the global information networks of contemporary capitalism, with all the difficulties this entails for concepts such as “place” or “context.”

In order to explore these operations on the style site, my strategy has been to closely examine the rather limited body of work that first challenged me to develop a different approach to the style question. This text will therefore not provide any overview of the different artistic engagements with the stylistics of the life-world since the 1960s. Instead, it will discuss—almost as a test case—a series of works that provide pointed articulations of the connections between style and lifestyle, media and information networks, and contemporary production. These works were all produced after 1990 and, in the critical language of the period, they tended to be described under headings such as “relational aesthetics,” “neo-Conceptual art,” “social work,” etc. I will not discuss the general accuracy, meaning, or relevance of these different terms, each of which have their own particular histories and discursive contexts, but rather will try to open up the works once more through the optics of style.

One observation could, however, be made. Relational aesthetics, neo-Conceptualism, and the idea of social- or community-oriented work reflect a general return, during the 1990s, to the more radical ends of the life/art aesthetics of the 1960s neo-avant-garde movements, as well as to the critical interaction between aesthetic, economic, and social production that was first articulated in the context of Constructivism and related tendencies in the historical avant-garde movements. What seemed new to the 1990s was a pointed consciousness of the parallels between the

changed status of the commodity and the artwork alike. Just as the standard interpretation of the commodity as a “thing” had to be modified by the fact that a key product of contemporary informational or immaterial economy would seem to be affects, feelings, sensitivities, and communications—in short, social relations—the artwork or art event could equally be understood as a social space rather than an object—a producer of social relations. In many cases, this fact was very literally understood in terms of the idea of the artwork as an actual gathering of people engaging in various forms of collaborative or interactive situations. The relaxed, open-ended, and unstaged nature of many of these gatherings was underscored by the hip design surroundings in which they often took place, as if the old avant-garde idea of collective creation had mutated into a mellow, party-like lounge aesthetic, represented by the metaphor of “hanging out” rather than by the metaphor of “work.”

However, the production of social relations may be understood in less literal ways once one pays closer attention to the manner in which these art situations bring out or activate the intersection between media frameworks and lifestyle issues. Craig Saper’s concept of *sociopoetics* works well as a general framework for understanding the essentially strategic logic of these works: If a work primarily focuses on transformations in a social situation or on the distribution machinery of a social apparatus, it makes more sense to speak of it as a sociopoetic experiment than to speak of it as an artwork existing *in* a social context.⁰⁶ This term simply indicates what is generally meant when a contemporary work of art stages itself as “social” in one sense or another. To say something more specific about the artistic operations on the style site, a whole series of other considerations, both theoretical and historical, is needed.

The first would obviously be a discussion of *style* itself—or, more precisely, an assessment of what ideas or moments in the more recent discussions of the concept of style may contribute to a description of the style site. The idea here is obviously not to try to launch a new general theory of style that will supplant or challenge other theories. What is primary is the historical and aesthetic specificity of the style site, and the need to account for this specificity. However, accounting for the style site could perhaps also have

a wider methodological ramification in the sense that it may expand the idea of the *range* of issues or set of relations that the art historical question of style will have to grapple with today. A first brief suggestion that style may be understood as a *site* appears in the introduction to a recent essay in which Andrew Benjamin discusses Walter Benjamin's interest in Jugendstil and in the politics of fashion.⁰⁷ The key issue here is how style is associated with the notion of appearance and how appearance in turn relates to processes of recognition and identification. The question of style then has to be thought in relation to the forms of social identity that arise from processes of recognition. It is this relation—the interaction between appearance, recognition, and social identity—that should be understood as a site. To call it a site, in this context, means to recognize that such a relation constitutes a historical complex that, in Andrew Benjamin's Freudian terms, will have to be “worked through,” so that whatever is repressed or closed down in this complex may be opened to new determinations.

For style, which is at once associated with predetermined appearance (what Meyer Shapiro calls “constant form”) and with the continual and “superficial” changes of fashion, seems to function as a closure or repression of the possibility of the unforeseen appearance or the disruptive event.⁰⁸ To Walter Benjamin, style represses the crisis or trauma of modernity itself, the crisis of an historical event that shakes the foundations of the great truths of collective (or national) identity and historical continuity. Take the example of fashion: its never-ending changes in style camouflage the fact that a particular social order remains unchanged. Fashion isolates and neutralizes change, reduces it to a question of “the ruffle of a dress,” all in the interests of a bourgeoisie that wants to prevent change. But precisely because style is the locus of repression, it is also the place for the undoing of this repression. Fashion may suppress the untimely or interruptive event, but even so it cannot help pointing to the critical question of the temporality of appearance, the possibility of unforeseen appearances and unaccounted-for events. It has, as Walter Benjamin puts it, “a sense of time.”⁰⁹

Jugendstil, likewise, exists as the locus where the crisis of modernity makes itself felt. Its innovative drive responds to Heinrich Hübsch's anxious 1828 question: “In what style ought we to build?” This question

marked a break with Johann Winckelmann's notion of a continuous relation to the past. For Winckelmann, there was no real "question" of style; style would simply be given by a sensible adaptation of the regulatory ideas of antiquity. Jugendstil was the first modern style, i.e. a style that marked the difficult identity of the Modern. It would give modernity a recognizable "face," a determinable form and shape, and in this way suppress its fundamental crisis. Yet Jugendstil was at the same time too idiosyncratic, too subjective, to give identity to anything or to function as a symbol in the public arena. It could not evoke the historical inevitability of social collectives the way the styles of antiquity could, and so, like fashion, it marked the crisis of appearance that it also served to repress. This is why, to Walter Benjamin, Jugendstil is a stylizing style: not just a style among others but a style that opens up the very question of style, and the crisis marked by that question.¹⁰ It is this type of opening that turns style into a historical and political *site*. As it handles the difficult issue of the way appearances—including unforeseen appearances—can possibly relate to the formation of new identities, it stands out as a place in which the politics of modernity itself are negotiated. The "question" of the style site is simply how social collectives will be grounded in a modernity that has cut ties with the era of tradition.

The style site I try to evoke or make productive in this context is obviously different from the one suggested by Benjamin. It does not refer to the historical context of Jugendstil, or to the early experiences of rapid fashion changes as a social force that must be accounted for. The term *style* is here, rather, grafted onto the idea of site-specificity in late twentieth-century art, i.e. the idea that much contemporary art, rather than giving new forms to eternal themes like love and death, handles or negotiates social complexes in their historical, contextual, and locational specificity. But since site-specific work is often concretely and explicitly engaged in issues relating to collective formations, such as issues of social identity or community, one can also see how significant moments from Benjamin's proposal may be relevant. To the extent that the style works that interest me can be understood as forms of site-specific "social" or "relational" work, their handling of the contextual or locational dimensions of style issues also implies that

they open questions concerning the contemporary construction of social identities or collectivities. The style site works contribute to a rethinking of contemporary sociality based on the historically new position assigned to style and design issues, and to the general aesthetic phenomena present in everyday culture. The critical question of the relation between appearance, recognition, and social identity is no less relevant to this situation, even if it may have to be thought in relation to the contemporary information economy and to the dynamics of Western postwar democracies, beyond the issues of Socialist mass mobilization that formed the immediate political horizon of Benjamin's thinking. If the contemporary works open up the relation between appearance and identity, they may then also counter the tendency in some social- or community-oriented works to treat the social itself as a given, i.e. as a set of preformed identities and institutions whose problems and practices artistic activity can simply access, bring out, and comment upon.

It is Benjamin's idea of *Jugendstil* as a stylizing style—an anxiously self-reflexive stylistic operation that opens up the precarious social and political dimensions of the question of style itself—that can be seen to have certain parallels with contemporary artistic practice. The main similarity is the way this particular stylistic operation *externalizes* the stylistic concerns that art history and art criticism mainly relegate to the “inner boundaries” of the work of art. As long as they are seen as traits *in* and *of* artworks, stylistic phenomena primarily come across as preformed appearances, i.e. as symbols that function as independent proof or testimony of the factual existence of individual or collective identity or will to form, or of the factual existence of historical periods and lines of influence. But if, in 1828, the question of style was a crisis question that concerned the very grounding of modern European identity, one could perhaps say that modern art history has devoted itself to pacifying that crisis—mainly by naturalizing the question of style as a question that pertains to the discipline of art history and to its internal theoretical and methodological concerns. Simply claiming that a term like “style” is of little use to new art history does not necessarily diminish this pacifying tendency. Svetlana Alpers may well be correct in her claim that stylistic analysis tends to be too normative, too biased in the way it grounds art history in the ideals of the Italian

Renaissance, and should therefore be supplanted by other approaches.¹¹ And George Kubler may have an equally good point when he claims that stylistic terms, used by art historians as characters in a generational novel, construct artificial historical continuities and should therefore be limited, if used at all, to strictly synchronic analyses.¹² Such critiques gain additional theoretical force from texts that deconstruct the binary schemas that tend to inform stylistic analysis and that continually oppose substance to style, reality to fiction, original to copy, singular to general, norm to deviation, signifier to signified, and so on. (The most influential texts here are Jacques Derrida's writing on Friedrich Nietzsche's styles and Roland Barthes's description of style as a citational procedure.)¹³

Yet, for all their force, these critiques still mainly concern the relevance or lack of relevance of the term *style* for the understanding of artworks and their specific social and historical contexts. They do not concern themselves with the *question* of style itself as a site that marks *the changing historical conditions for the very formation of social identities*. The contemporary works that will be discussed in this book could then be understood to externalize the question of style in a manner that has no real precedent or model in art historical discourse—but that may potentially come to inform this discourse. To put this externalizing operation a bit crudely, one could say that it draws attention away from the art-historical concern with preformed identities and focuses instead on the contemporary political, economic, and cultural conditions for the production of subjectivity. In this way, it constitutes a performative engagement with the particular significance of aesthetics in contemporary society.

It is primarily in this specific sense that the new style site works can be understood to be connected to the idea of “styles of being” or to the general lifestyle issues in contemporary culture. There are aspects of recent art historical style debates that address these issues in significant ways. But what is initially striking is that, face-to-face with a consumer-oriented pop culture and the many stylistically oriented subcultures that evolve around different types of consumption patterns, a number of critics insist that a distinction must be made between “true” artistic style and “superficial” stylization. This is one of the key points of Susan Sontag's 1965 es-

say “On Style.”¹⁴ Where Meyer Shapiro’s 1953 essay “Style” discusses all the different meanings and uses of the term, modestly concluding that a theory of style “adequate to psychological and historical problems has yet to be created,” Sontag simply asserts that stylized works (including the hyper-stylization of Art Nouveau—the sourcebook of much pop culture) can never be of the very greatest kind, since they lack harmoniousness and demonstrate an ambivalence toward their subject matter. Style proper is here unambiguously associated with the self-evident and inexplicable autonomy of artworks and qualified, along the lines of the argument found in Barthes’s *Writing Degree Zero*, as a crude and non-communicational form grounded in the depths of an author’s personal and secret mythology.¹⁵

Interestingly, Dick Hebdige, writing on the subcultural politics of style, reproduces the same distinction but in an inverted form. Initially, he treats what others would no doubt refer to as stylization or “brushed on stylistics” as style proper: A number of the qualities Sontag associated with great artworks are here projected onto punk culture’s chaotic and often outright contradictory use of stylistic signifiers. Punk style is viewed as an obtuse, impenetrable, and non-communicational form that destroys the codes of dominant culture. It is part of a radical individuating strategy, an attempt to escape identification precisely in becoming visible. But despite the obvious similarities with modernist art aesthetics, Hebdige asserts that subcultural style must be sharply distinguished from art: as a purely contextual strategy, it should not be confused with the timelessness and autonomy of artworks.¹⁶

The fact that both Hebdige and Sontag attempt to place the question of style on one side or the other of the art/common culture divide unwittingly attests to the problematic question of style issues in contemporary culture and the deeply political nature of the question of preformed versus unforeseen appearances. Sontag’s negative description of the disharmony of Jugendstil’s hyper-stylization and its ambivalent relation to its subject matter could hardly be more apposite: it is precisely this ambivalence or “lack of faith” that returns in Hebdige’s account of how punk style handles “experienced contradictions in the ruling ideology.” (Does the punk use of the swastika really signify Nazi sympathies or is it part of a provocative attempt to empty cultural symbols of meaning?) Once artis-

tic practice explicitly identifies itself as a site-specific operation no more eternal and no less contextual than punk politics, the attempts to create a principled distinction between art style and the politics of style in common culture becomes irrelevant. What remains relevant is the politics of appearance and the attempt by various agents—inside and outside the art system—to engage in such politics. More important (given that the idea of “timeless art” has now been bracketed) is the special significance of temporal issues within these politics.

Some recent discussions of style provide theoretical tools that may facilitate an understanding of these politics, even if they primarily concern themselves with the style of artworks in general. The majority of the discussions in the 1979 anthology *The Concept of Style* are marked by the decreasing centrality of the term to the study of art.¹⁷ George Kubler and Richard Wollheim launch strongly reductive theories of style, while Kendall L. Walton, no doubt influenced by the recent influx of “process art” and “art actions,” argues that the processes of art, i.e. an artwork’s mode of “appearance,” is as valid an object of study as the finished objects of art and must therefore inform the understanding of style as a conceptual tool. However, in this book, as well as in a related but more fleshed-out article in *Critical Inquiry*, Berel Lang presents a more compelling version of the relationship between style and appearance, since he is less interested in the relatively banal fact that styles may also be attributes of actions, than how questions of appearance necessarily relate to questions of recognition. To see style as a norm, frequency or regularity does not really offer an account of style, he writes. Rather, it isolates symptoms of what such accounts ought to account for, namely “the immediacy of recognition and understanding that even a glimpse of a drawing or a line of poetry—*like the look of a face*—may convey” (italics mine).¹⁸ Following this notion, he proposes:

The vocabulary of stylistics is a vocabulary of human, even physiognomic expression, and ... that the phenomenon of style—i.e. what stylistic categories categorize—is made possible by a conceptual protocol of “repetition” which confirms style as a mode of

personification and an end in itself rather than, as has often been held to be the case, an instrumentality supposed to act on behalf of some other purpose.¹⁹

Lang's primary purpose is to raise the question of the function of stylistic analysis: the idea of function serves as a mediating link between, on the one hand, the appearance of style and the discourse about it and, on the other hand, the final question of how style is possible. To this end he thinks of the various functions of stylistic analysis in terms of grammatical categories: style as a noun serves classificatory projects (in naming schools, periods, groups, individual artists, etc.), while adverbial analysis of style focuses on the "how," or the "means" by which the object that exhibits a stylistic imprint is articulated. Based on a long and historically dominant rhetorical tradition, style is seen here as an instrument through which another, more general process is realized: a type of common-sense analogy is established between artworks and ordinary actions such as walking (one can walk across a room in different ways). To the extent that stylistic analysis often ends at this adverbial level, it does not actually deal with the *appearance* of style, which, Lang claims, can only be done by thinking of style in transitive or verbal terms, as a form of being in itself. One may, of course, still describe the generic appearances of style in terms of norm, deviance, coherence, and so on, but now these definitions are shown to be relatively trivial: they only become meaningful in terms of an external framework or source which establishes their significance as symbolic *for* someone. To see style as a form of being, in fact, as a person, opens up the question of style to the space of intersubjective or symbolic—and ultimately political—relations. Lang's notion of style as a form of being therefore has important aspects in common with Benjamin's focus on the politics of appearances; what matters now is when, for whom, and under what conditions stylistic appearances manage to function as symbols.

But if the appearance of style should be associated with the concept of personhood, then the key question is, of course, what constitutes personhood, and, even more importantly, how the concept of "person" can be connected with the mimetic and repetitive impulses that are so often attrib-

uted to art and to stylistic instances in general. Here, Lang evokes Søren Kierkegaard's description of the way repetition informs human existence itself. The key idea here is that recollection or repetition of the past occurs as a forward movement, so that past existence is always part of a process of becoming. Such an idea prevents rapid conclusions that style-as-person should be understood in terms of replete identity and fully formed patterns of behavior.²⁰ The appearance of style, and the encounter with this appearance is rather the *reassertion* of a beginning in an open prospect. It is not a question of repeating a finished pattern, some kind of fully formed source, but a question of projecting forward something that will be a pattern only retrospectively. The repetition associated with style is not a finished *product* of a person's vision, but an open-ended articulation of the person or vision itself. And this articulation is not just something that can be "seen," but rather something one sees *by way of*: this is its intersubjective dimension.

II

The passages above present a general theoretical framework for discussing the style site that is evoked in recent art. It makes it possible to understand how operations on this site displace the stylistic concerns of much art history, as well as how they invigorate the topic of the politics of appearance. What remains to be done then, is to outline the more specific issues and forms of politics that inform the contemporary style site. The new hyper-emphasis on style and design — on aesthetics in general — in recent works indicates a new twist on the understanding of the construction of social identities, and on the way style plays into it. It is no longer a question of trying to give a face to the advent of modernity — as in the style site demarcated by Jugendstil — nor a question of whether or not style asserts a sense of an unbroken link with tradition and thus with the collective formations that are based on this sense of tradition (the idea of territory, of history in the singular, of the nation state, etc.). What is most immediately striking about the new style world is the way in which its discourse concerns the production of subjectivities along the lines of difference or diversity, the seductive way in which it suggests that each and every person has the ac-

tual freedom to shape his or her life environment at will, to become whoever he or she wants to become; in short, to realize his or her fantasies through sensual expression. Virginia Postrel has a point when she discusses the new “endless-choice” style world (the world in which even toilet brushes come in a vast array of styles) in terms of substance and authenticity. This type of authenticity is not based on existing definitions of truth or understood in terms of the impersonal authority of purity, tradition, or history: it is, rather, the authenticity of self-expression, which is essentially a question of matching form and desire. In Postrel’s view, the new style-based authenticity pays tribute to the heterogeneity of human aesthetic expression as well as to the liberating powers of capitalism.

But the discourse of dispersed or distributed authenticity could be equally well understood as an effect of a new type of power formation that bases itself on self-creation or self-disciplining to a much greater extent than in previous regimes. When Gilles Deleuze described the crisis of the great institutions or disciplines (school, family, the military, the factory) as the first step toward a society in which control seems to manifest itself everywhere, he notably defined this new form of control as a displacement of the “molding” function of the disciplines—their ability to form minds and bodies according to a more or less precise set of specifications. In contrast, the contemporary forming of minds and bodies should rather be understood as a “modulating” activity that instills in subjects a desire for perpetual training and perpetual mobility; in short, for continual self-forming.²¹ As has often been noted, this desire seems to function in tandem with the need for a highly flexible global workforce, as well as for the creation of expanding markets. The desire for self-forming may then be discussed in light of the fact that the exploitation of human resources by capital seems to work more and more from the inside out, harnessing the forces of perceptions, languages, affects, and desires, rather than harnessing or making use of working bodies in the traditional sense. While needs are finite, desire is not: the “infinity” of desire is what guarantees market expansion.

The widespread tendency to treat style as an existential issue could, in other words, be associated with certain tendencies within contemporary capi-

talism as well as with the anti-disciplinarian tendencies that found particularly forceful expressions in the avant-garde art cultures of the twentieth century. The art-related discourses of self-determination, change, and interdisciplinarity produced in this context now mark common culture. Paradoxically enough, the apparently style-less “event art” that rose to prominence after 1960—an art focused on the uncontrollable “becoming” of life forces, rather than on predetermined aesthetic genres or formats—could be seen as the artistic corollary to the new ways of “living style.” For what emerges in the intimate association between style and being is the idea that appearance is not only a matter of fitting into preformed categories and responding to expectations, but also a matter of idiosyncratic becoming. What matters are creative openings and the idea of possibility, not proper frameworks and constraints. (This does not mean that people no longer adapt to or invent constraints, or dress and behave in accordance with class, age, gender, and profession. What matters is the intolerance of the absolutes of the old categorical constraints and how this intolerance seems to find particularly forceful expression in questions of appearance.)

It can therefore be argued that the question of style is one of the regulatory mechanisms in the contemporary politics of life—the form of power that was explored in the late writings of Michel Foucault and in which the real object of politics is no longer the judicial body of law and contract but the living body of the population.²² Today, so-called biopower is not just a matter of taking care of health issues on a large scale, but of encouraging continual self-fashioning or self-creation. However, it would be more precise to say that the shift in the ontology of political theory that was initiated with the notion of biopower has some explanatory force when it comes to accounting for the operations of the style site works. For this is a political theory that starts with the body and its potential, and regards the political subject as an ethical subject rather than a subject of law; here, the aesthetic dimensions of existence clearly also take on a new political centrality. This type of power analysis does not then depart from the dynamics of institutions, but from the far less predictable dynamics of forces, or “freedoms,” of subjects. As a result, power must now be understood as a play of infinitesimal, mobile, reversible, and strategic relations.²³ Berel Lang’s theory of

style may, in fact, be transposed onto this new political ontology, since this theory insists on starting with the creative or projective forces of the subject and the subject's relations to others. The "deviations" or "constant forms" of style that attest to established social formations, regularities, codes, and institutions are framed and take on interest only through this more fundamental concern.

However, Foucault's description of the contemporary form of life politics also shows how the contemporary style site opens onto a different question of style than the one posed by Jugendstil. Jugendstil marked the severed link with tradition, the supplanting of the old lawful collectivities with the new mass bodies of modernity, and tried, in vain, to give one face, style, or constant form to these bodies. In contrast, the contemporary question of style seems to turn upon both the regulatory/controlling functions of style in contemporary body politics and the types of freedoms or alternatives that can be imagined in response to a dispersed and anti-authoritarian form of regulation. The new style works thus seem to explore, to intervene in, and to play off of interrelations of forces that constitute the style site: to bring out—in their experiential and bodily dimensions—the strategic complexities of "living style."

This account of the new relation between art and style allows for a slight remapping of the history of recent art: It makes visible a certain ambivalence or rift between the artistic handling of institutional issues and the sustained preoccupation with life issues in modern art. In many ways, the art of the twentieth-century avant-gardes could be understood as a shift towards a "life production," parallel to the one found in modern politics. Numerous (and otherwise different) artistic discourses seem united in their general obsession with contingency and "reality," as well as with the idea of operating beyond the disciplinary confines of artistic genres and formats. And these impulses have produced a veritable displacement of institutions and disciplines as the center of aesthetic attention and artistic work, as seen in the much-discussed "crises" of the museum and the academy, of painting, of the identity of the artist, and so on.

Yet within this larger scenario, there still seems to be a certain difference or tension between this general displacement of institutions

and the sustained artistic practice of “institutional critique.” For key tendencies in post-1960s art production keep the institutions firmly in view and use them, in fact, as the point of departure for investigating or intervening in the social field of art itself. In practices like “concept art” and “context art,” institutional critique often emerges as an updated and politicized form of aesthetic self-reflexivity. It uses journalistic and sociological formats and discourses to explore the economic, political, and ideological frameworks of art institutions (as well as of other institutional or disciplinary frameworks); or it deploys mimetic and performative strategies in order to make visible the forms of behavior or types of habitus that are produced within them.²⁴

In fact, over the years, institutional critique has evolved into something like a default position from which to perform “critical art.” This again has direct implications for the evaluation of a lot of the work on the style site that seems less directly engaged with the “problems” of painting (or not painting), the “role” of the artist, and the “state” of the museum. This difference may attest to the real theoretical and methodological rupture that exists between approaches that take the institution as their point of departure, and those that depart from the far less “stable” points of view of bodies, or subjects. Because of this rupture, and because of the morally and politically dominant position of institutional critique, the works on the style site often fall outside the radar of artistic “criticality.” From the point of view of institutional critique, they seem too steeped in the world of fashion and design, too fascinated by spectacular surfaces and mediatic surrounds—in short, too divorced from the traditionally austere “spirit” of critique, epitomized by the informational formats of Conceptual art. But to bring out the dispersed and heterogeneous modulation of existence, to explore, in its extensive or qualitative dimensions, aspects of the environment in which such modulation is possible, necessarily comes across as a far more vague, diverse, and open-ended operation than the ones that often characterize institution-critical work. Lacking a singular stable focus or object of attention, they are more difficult to define in terms of critique, intervention, or demythologizing.

It therefore often happens that, in a well-meaning attempt to invent a critical agenda for such work in the more traditional sense of the

term, many critics prefer to discuss them in terms of the concern with rules and transgressions, constraints and freedoms characteristic of disciplinary discourse. The many style site works that move close to the fields of architecture and design are, for instance, typically said to question the boundaries between design and visual art or between art and architecture, as if such disciplinary boundary issues were the only possible preoccupation of critical art. But it is, of course, just as likely that these works evoke the stylistics of art and design from the point of view of the subjects and bodies that are encouraged to “live” style—and for whom the complex relations of style constitute a life-world, a “productive” environment in every sense of the word.

This perspective receives added emphasis from some of the more surprising findings during the research that led up to this book. My own attempt to question style in contemporary art initially took off from the more obvious or visible impact of elements from the worlds of design, fashion, and architecture within so-called neo-Conceptual art: the imminent signifiers of the new centrality of style issues. However, closer contact with the works showed that these style elements were repeatedly and systematically inscribed in larger mediatic set-ups or environments, and were often closely associated with media productions of various kinds. As work after work created an *explicit* association between stylistics and media environments, mapping one onto the other and creating an assemblage of elements seen nowhere else, the style site increasingly presented itself as a mediatic site. This means that the question of the relation between appearance, recognition, and social identity would, more specifically, be a question of how such relations are constituted in the contemporary media environments. The style site as media site directed attention to the intimate connections between bodies and media or the role of media in the modulation of subjects and the construction of new forms of collectivity.

From this perspective it is perhaps less surprising that the medium that seems particularly central to these works is television. Television inevitably evokes the everyday integration of bodies in media circuits. Changing the private sphere like no other medium before it, it has given global events and global capital an unprecedented presence in the lives

of individuals and, in the process, has changed behavioral patterns, the use of private time, the nature of collective experiences, and the way in which politics are made. Its peculiar force derives from its staging of perpetual liveness, and its ability to keep minds and bodies connected to real-time processes is only refined and reinforced by the contemporary digital technologies and information networks. The style site works also evoke media productions connected to the worlds of publishing, radio, film, music, advertising, and the computer industry, but it is as if the reality of television and real-time processing provides a general framework, shorthand for “contemporary media production,” that ultimately integrates all media.

This is obviously not the first artistic engagement with the medium of television: the history of video art in particular traces a long and intensive interchange between artistic and aesthetic concerns and televisual technologies, formats, modes of perception, and modes of social control. But the style site works do not simply evoke the presence of television through a focus on TV screens or projections, as is without exception the case in video art. In the style site works, television hardly figures as an artistic medium at all. The genre of video art is displaced, along with the dominant focus on television as a producer of ideological messages or specific categories of images. In fact, television is not even really approached as a medium in the more general sense of the word, i.e. as a communicational platform of some sort; it is more precisely seen as a general framework of social and economic production that fundamentally informs contemporary living. Television thus tends to appear only indirectly, or within a wider grid of relations: it is, so to speak, mediated through the perspective of the bodies that inhabit the contemporary style environment.

The style site works then seem to explore and deepen the idea, suggested in the early televisual research of Nam June Paik, that television is above all a producer of time—a time machine or creator of events. Television time is not just something you “watch,” but something you *live*, and the ability of TV to capture or exploit life-time should therefore be accounted for in economic terms. This perspective returns in the work of philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato, who sees video and television as paradigmatic technologies of a post-Fordian mode of production geared

toward a more intimate type of time-capture than the older exploitation of work time. Free time, the “creative,” and, in principle, limitless time of cognitive operations is now a key source of value production. Television and video are here not primarily approached as technologies but rather as *social machines* that function in the middle of the general human capacity to sense and to remember, relating in particular to the type of subjectivation processes that involve intellectual and aesthetic work.²⁵ This perspective is possible once the purely technical functioning of video technologies is seen in light of its social function (technologies do not appear in a social vacuum). The real-time signal flow that is a fundamental feature of video technology indicates that a medium like TV is not primarily an image or communication medium, but a *time* medium, one that replicates and works alongside the temporal processes of human consciousness.²⁶ This is why time media or the so-called time crystallization machines function as key machines in the attention economy—alongside the instrument of style, which, as we have seen, is also a time machine of sorts, deployed in the intensified quest for subjective becoming. This is the general background against which the style site works integrate the complexes of stylized living with the real-time processing of video and digital technologies. Together, “style” and “the televisual” constitute a particularly resonant assemblage, one that frames a production of sociality that must necessarily be understood in aesthetic terms, and that may be meaningfully explored with aesthetic or artistic “methodologies.” As the style site works conjure this social site, they explore its constraints as well as its potential freedoms in detail, and often from surprising angles.

In the following text, the connection between style and television holds particular centrality. Two chapters are devoted to this theme, its theoretical implications and its empirical manifestations. The point of departure here is the phenomenon of lamps in contemporary art—“design” lamps that evoke stylized environments in general but, more particularly, the contemporary informational or “televisual” environment. These works continually evoke real-time processing as a social framework. However, it is important to emphasize that I see the surprising abundance of lamp works as an articulation that is symptomatic of a shared concern, not as a

new form or genre in art. This means that the lamp works are singled out as an example, a way into a theme, not as an artistic phenomenon that is primarily significant in itself. The wider artistic and aesthetic context in which the lamp works appear is just as important. Preceding the chapters on the lamps, I therefore outline historical precedents: as a form of socio-poetic actions, artworks that explicitly understand themselves as operations in and on “the social,” the style site works should be seen in extension of the Constructivist traditions in modern art, and their reappearance in the wide range of practices to which the term *Conceptual art* refers. This is why I try to give a rudimentary outline of how issues related to life-production and life-stylistics inform these traditions, despite their well-known revolt against artistic style in the more traditional sense, and their invention of a number of highly influential anti-visual and anti-spectacular artistic strategies.

In extension of this theme, and following the lamp/television chapters, I try to show how such style issues are at the core of a number of recent works that are framed as social, relational, or participatory artworks. By evoking the idea of the specific aesthetic methodologies of these works, I argue that they suggest other conceptions of “the social” than the ones that inform standard art-critical accounts focused on the practices of site-specificity and institution critique. For this reason, they should also be evaluated through a different set of terms than those used in discussions of the types of community-oriented or activist artworks in which “the social” primarily emerges as a general field of problem-solving. This is, in other words, where the discussion of the style site and its particular handling of issues related to social identities, communities, or collectivities is tested against other ideas of site-specificity in contemporary art.

In the final chapter, the idea of the style site is evoked in relation to a particular type of community formation. There, I take a closer look at how a number of recent artworks engage with or intervene in one specific social site—an aesthetically oriented community or collectivity that is directly related to the global media and entertainment industries. This site is known as “rock.” Rock music can be approached as a style site in the sense that it is a cultural practice in which the relationship between appearance, recognition, and social identity is understood to be critical, un-

resolved, and continually up for questioning. Arguably one of the monumental forms within the contemporary aestheticization of the life-world, rock is a site where social differentiation and capitalist interests literally walk hand-in-hand, all in the name of self-creation or self-determination. The question is, then, how to understand or account for the collective formations produced in and through rock since it constitutes a social/aesthetic practice that permeates common culture at the same time as it continually produces new social surfaces. As the style site works access rock, they temporarily silence or displace its purely aural expressions in order to better engage with its far more wide-ranging mediatic and aesthetic productions of social space.

⁰¹ Dan Cameron, "Into Africa," 1998, www.superflex.dk.

⁰² Maurizio Lazzarato, *Videophilosophie. Zeitwahrnehmung im Postfordismus* (Berlin: b_books, 2002), 129–156.

⁰³ Torstein Veblen, *Den Arbeidsfrie Klasse*, translated by Per A. Hartun (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1976), 64–65.

⁰⁴ Wolfgang Iser, "Das Ästhetische – Eine Schlüsselkategorie unserer Zeit?" in Iser (ed.), *Die Aktualität des Ästhetischen* (Munich: Fink, 1993), 13–48.

⁰⁵ The key reference here is Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

⁰⁶ Craig Saper, *Networked Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). Some of the key points in this book can be read in dialogue with Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 1998).

⁰⁷ Andrew Benjamin, *Style and Time. Essays on the Politics of Appearance* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006).

⁰⁸ Meyer Shapiro, "Style," in *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, Society* (New York: George Braziller, 1994), 51–102.

⁰⁹ Andrew Benjamin, op.cit., 5–38.

¹⁰ Op.cit., 39–62.

¹¹ Svetlana Alpers, "Style Is What You Make It: The Visual Arts Once Again," in Berel Lang (ed.), *The Concept of Style* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 137–162.

¹² George Kubler, "Toward a Reductive Theory of Visual Style," in Berel Lang (ed.), *The Concept of Style* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 163–173.

¹³ See Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles/Éperons. Les Styles de Nietzsche*, translated by Barbara Harlow (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979) and Roland Barthes, "Le style et son image," in *Le Bruissement de la langue* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984), 141–152.

¹⁴ Susan Sontag, "On Style," in *A Susan Sontag Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 137–158.

¹⁵ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977).

¹⁶ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).

¹⁷ Berel Lang (ed.), *The Concept of Style* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

¹⁸ Berel Lang, "Style as Instrument, Style as Person," in *Critical Inquiry* 4, No. 4 (Summer, 1978), 716.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Here Lang both evokes and establishes a distance to Buffon's notion that "style is the man himself": "I do not maintain, then, in Buffon's words, as he distinguishes between the individual manners of style and the determinate stuff of style's content, that 'the style is the man himself' but differently and in the

end contradictorily, that style also *represents* the assertion of contents—and thus *most certainly* the man himself." (Ibid.)

²¹ Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," in *October* 59 (1992), 3–7.

²² Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–76*, translated by David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), particularly pp. 239–272.

²³ Maurizio Lazzarato, "From Biopower to Biopolitics," <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcbiopolitics.htm>.

²⁴ Key examples here would be the art practices of, respectively, Hans Haacke and Andrea Fraser.

²⁵ The concept of social machines was launched in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (London: Athlone Press, 1984). The key point in this work is that desire does not come from lack (as in the Freudian understanding), but is a productive force, a desiring machine. The idea of desire as a productive machine forms the basis of a new ontology where everything is seen in machinic or productive terms, i.e. in terms of the will to become. Desiring machines are then always part of larger social machines and social machines cannot be thought without the desiring machines that inhabit them.

²⁶ Maurizio Lazzarato, op. cit.

Chapter Two

Traces of a Style Discourse: The Constructivist Legacy

I

Despite the fact that the style site works are often (somewhat loosely) labeled “neo-Conceptualist,” they initially seem to have little in common with the “classic” Conceptual works of the 1960s and 1970s. Conceptual art took great care to distance itself from any association with issues of style, and, by the same token, it also avoided an engagement with those perspectives and relations that many contemporary works place in the foreground—notably, the deep complicity between artistic style and a style-driven economic culture, or between “artistic” or “creative” lifestyles and aestheticization processes. Conceptualism performed a negation of art through a purging of any remnant of the traditional “aesthetic content” of art. The effect was that art took on the guise of “styleless” information. Through this strategy, a space was cleared for several different anti-aesthetic approaches: a tautological contemplation of the concept of art *as* a mere concept; a quasi-machinic production of effects beyond the control of artistic taste and intention; and interventionist strategies that could appropriate journalistic, scientific, or administrative formats in order to reflect the social and political relations of the art system itself (its conventions of framing and placement, its public and economic alliances, and its modes of communication). This radical separation of art and style had its historical antecedents in Dada’s debunking of the Romantic focus on artistic genius and, perhaps even more influentially, in the use-oriented and factographic approaches of Russian Constructivism and Productivism. In the Constructivist context, the critique of style touched upon both painterly/formalist orientations and capitalist commodity styling. For instance, Aleksandr Rodchenko’s design for a Soviet Worker’s Club, presented at the Paris Exposition in 1925, was critiqued for having too close an association with the International Style in architecture and design and the capitalist logic that was seen as intrinsic to this style.⁰¹

The general lesson for the 1960s avant-garde was that critical and socially oriented art practices must avoid any preoccupation with issues of style. And, by all appearances, it was a lesson well learned. Howard Slater’s

recent defense of the continued relevance of Conceptualism's strategies of dematerialization attests to the centrality of this notion:

... by seeking to establish a degree zero of the creativity demands of the first order discourse of modernism, the qualitative competencies of form and style can be jettisoned in favor of a renewable and more inclusive cultural work in the social field.⁰²

What unites the discourses of the different avant-garde art movements is their critical and strategic attention to the relation between art and social/economic production: such attention is impossible if old-style aesthetic concerns continue to take center stage. The rhetoric of anti-aesthetic vigilance runs through Constructivism and Conceptualism alike, establishing the image of an unbroken lineage of critical art practice. But any similarities between these two movements also seem undercut by the profound differences between them. Benjamin Buchloh underscores the significance of these differences when he states that while Minimal art may have appeared to reproduce the morphological traits of Constructivist artworks, Conceptual art may have appeared to share the practices and procedures of the Constructivist program. The argument is that such similarities are mere surface effects: Conceptual art—informed by an acute sense of discursive and institutional limitations as well as by skepticism toward political master narratives of all sorts—could not in any way reproduce the overarching utopianism of Constructivism.⁰³ Their respective ways of relating to production must therefore be described with emphasis on contextual differences, rather than on apparent similarities.

Constructivism, and particularly its Productivist wing, took its cue from an industrial production that was now supposed to be harnessed for the creation of Socialist objects and relations: in Soviet society, art would take the lead in this reorientation of industrial production. Conceptual art, in Buchloh's reading, responded not to the (imagined) needs of a newly empowered working class, but rather to the sensibilities of a new administrative class that had come into prominence in the years after the Second World War; in this fact reside both its critical potential and its point of failure. What Buchloh named the "aesthetics of administration"—

expressed through a peculiar taste for schemas, diagrams, lists, and tables of all sorts—was basically a mimicry of the instrumentalist and positivist logic of late capitalism. The auto-critical practices of the new administrative class and its preferred type of philosophy (logical positivism) could now be used to cleanse art of all residues of representation, style, and individuality as well as of bodily and imaginary experience, physical substance, and spaces of memory. In its better moments, however, the aesthetics of administration served as a critique of the very institutions and productive relations that produced them at the same time as they cancelled the logic of production and consumption that still informed Pop Art and Minimalism.⁰⁴

In relation to this schema, the recent style site works seem to reopen precisely that access to visual representation, to individual and collective memory, and to the bodily and the imaginary that Conceptualism had barred—in short, to a whole range of experiences that fall under the general heading of lifestyle. For this reason, it has been easy to see neo-Conceptualism as a facile return to a Pop logic of production and consumption: in fact, the commodity culture of 1960s Pop Art is continually evoked in discussions of recent art. However, a different type of reading could see the style site works as a form of art that caters to the sensibilities—esthetic as well as critical—of a generation whose minds and bodies are wired to the media situations, environments, and networks of “immaterial production,” to an extent that no generation before them has ever been—including the Situationist artists and critics who first theorized this form of production through the concept of the spectacle. In fact, as several critics have pointed out, the very idea of such an intimate, incorporated, or cognitively engaged relation to production calls for a modification of the very idea of the spectacle itself. While the spectacle tends to be imagined as a form of theatrical representation that can be viewed (and challenged) as if from the outside, it can now be understood as a much more internalized operation, i.e. as a form of disciplining of our senses that takes place by means of the new media machines that play such a central role in our daily lives.⁰⁵ In this sense, the strategic or critical operations of these types of works can be seen to take place alongside the shift in the ontology of

political theory that was initiated by Foucault's concept of biopolitics. Just as the new object of political theory is the changing status and conception of the subject, the new critical object of neo-Conceptual art practices is not institutions or ideologies (of art), but the type of subject positions that emerge with the new emphasis on aesthetic modes of living and with the change in the concepts of artistic or aesthetic work and production that is initiated with this new focus on the subject. For these works evoke precisely that generalization of aesthetic productivity—the endless creativity of life-styling and the optimization of personal experience—that seems to be a key feature of the new culture of the spectacle. With their continued staging of the “disappearance” of the modern work of art as well as the exceptional figure of the modern artist, they evoke the culture of mobile, interactive, and “democratically” distributed creativity that presents itself as a fundamental liberation from the old disciplinarian and authoritarian constraints, but that is also the concrete manifestation of new and more intimate modes of control.

But as the practical manifestations of this new form of control seem to multiply in everyday culture, it becomes increasingly difficult not to see how avant-garde art throughout the twentieth century has been an arena for the development, promotion, and legitimization of the key elements at work in the new technologies of distributed aesthetic sensitivity and creativity. Confusing disciplinary boundaries, undermining institutional authorities, modeling forms of interactivity and idealizing nomadic forms of mobility have arguably been common denominators of the historical avant-gardes and the various artistic movements that have appeared in their wake. The promotion of these concepts has certainly been the point of departure for their most widely acknowledged point of contact with common culture. The artistic avant-garde could then be seen as one locus where the manifestations of this new culture of control are made visible as *forms*. Such forms may have all the appeal of models—for new ways of fusing work and life—or ideals. In this sense they are well integrated with both discourse and practice. But they can also take on all the absurdity and strangeness that may come with making abruptly visible that which is otherwise too self-evident to be remarkable.

II

Such a framework of analysis, brought into focus in a more forceful way by recent works, might then call for a reassessment of certain aspects of avant-garde practice on a more general level. At the very least, it could open up the question of whether a somewhat different mapping of the relation between Constructivism, Conceptualism, and neo-Conceptualist practices might be possible—a mapping that continues to take the differences as well as the similarities of these artistic movements or tendencies into account. In what follows, I will attempt to suggest the outlines for such a mapping, in which the overarching attention to the relation between art and production turns on the issues of style, lifestyle, and self-styling. Even if a certain concept of style is eradicated from artistic discourse, a concern with style-related issues appears in the margins of that discourse, on a different level of articulation. This “other” level of stylistic articulation could be seen to appear in conjunction with that moment in the history of capitalism during which the whole of the social is increasingly invested in production. What such a statement means is that the significant raw materials of production are no longer primarily or solely pre-existing entities, such as material substances, data, and images. Instead, it is subjectivity that emerges as both the raw material of production and the product of production—a fact that complicates the very distinction between production and consumption underpinning Buchloh’s analysis of the way in which a specific type of object-oriented art seemed to reproduce the social dynamic of the classic commodity form.

There is no doubt that the dominant productive framework of Soviet Constructivism was that of traditional industrialism. For a few brief years, Constructivism served as the official art form for a society that had yet to become industrialized and that could hardly be said to have a commodity economy, in the Western European sense of the word; its main challenge was still that of mass-producing goods for a huge population. Yet, a series of recent studies of key texts and discussions surrounding Constructivism in the Soviet context does, in fact, complicate habitual ideas about the Constructivist concept of the production of Socialist objects. These texts demonstrate concerns with the bodily and affective dimension of production as well as with immaterial and informational processes—con-

cerns that are usually mainly identified with the post-industrial scenario. What must also be taken into account here is the presence of International Constructivism, a movement that had numerous points of connection with Soviet Constructivism but that operated in a social context in which automatization had long been the order of the day, and in which the link between automatization and an emergent media reality—an informational world—became increasingly apparent.

Adjacent to these more recent perspectives on Constructivism, newer studies of Conceptual art, most notably Alexander Alberro's *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, also identify the formal features and modes of circulation typical of this artistic moment with the deeper logic of informatization and the new economies of aesthetic value.⁰⁶ This type of analysis provides an alternative to Buchloh's predominant emphasis on Conceptualism as an effect of the positivist instrumentality of late capitalism: there are other and probably just as deeply rooted aspects of late capitalism that may have provided a productive framework for both artistic desire and critical intervention.⁰⁷

What I would add to the newer research perspectives mentioned here is the presence, both in Constructivism and Conceptualism, of what seems like an emphatic attention to the forms and effects of the production of subjectivity. Here, the figure of the artist (arguably an exemplary figure in the new creativity economy) comes under investigation: he or she becomes the object of intensive self-observation and self-registration in which artistic subjectivity no longer seems to arise as if "from within" but rather emerges as an effect of particular types of aesthetic and mediatic technologies. This particular type of reflection on the very figure of the artist could be seen as a tentative and rudimentary way of giving form to the intangible processes of subjectivity production, in fact, making visible the way in which aesthetic creativity is connected with the creation of the self. An avant-garde art that continually produces a form of artistic self-reflexivity that moves along explicitly biographical trajectories might perhaps be read in light of Foucault's notion of the "technologies of the self"—the set of ethical rules and advice concerning the proper care of the self produced in the context of pagan and early Christian society and singled out not least because of its ability to acquire contemporary meaning. As

Paul Veyne puts it, an ancient notion of a style of existence is here, so to speak, transposed onto a modern autonomy discourse. Taking itself as a work to be accomplished, the self seems to have become an “artist of itself”: sustained by an ethics separated from both tradition and reason, it strives to enjoy a type of autonomy that modernity cannot do without.⁰⁸

This idea of a transposition of the theme of self-care onto contemporary culture may be of some relevance to the Conceptualist “aesthetics of administration.” For Foucault associated the shift toward an ethics of self-care in the Hellenistic world with the relative freedoms and uncertainties of a new administrative regimen in which the rules of the old aristocratic hierarchies no longer applied to the same degree as before, so that each civil servant had to create his own role to a greater extent.⁰⁹ In relation to Conceptualism, however, the question is how to interpret the relation between a new form of control or government and an art of self-observation that is framed in administrative and legalistic languages and formats. One possible response may be outlined based on Felix Guattari’s description of the role of the great collective machineries, such as the media and the digital networks, or, for our example, art. In contrast to Louis Althusser’s notion of ideological state apparatuses, these machineries are not seen as frameworks that secure the reproduction of ideology but rather as frameworks that reproduce the mediums of production and productive relations.¹⁰ The emergence of a strangely technocratic preoccupation with the artistic self in avant-garde art may, in other words, be related to the new centrality of subjectivity within modern economy and government. The “administrative” framing of the self in or through art is thus a reproduction of this productive relation itself. Such an analysis does not go against the idea that in this type of art production the traditional artist-subject is generally negated or displaced. On the contrary: production of subjectivity involves not an entrenchment or stabilization of subjectivity but rather an opening of the question of possible subject positions and formations (what Deleuze and Guattari would call a “deterritorialization” of the subject).

What becomes important here is not only the fact that Conceptual art seems to reject sensualist aesthetics by miming legalistic or administrative procedures, but—more precisely—what *type* of objects and relations

these legalistic procedures could be seen to handle or “protect.” Contrary to what one would expect, a possible answer to this question is already indicated within the Constructivist context. In an interesting essay, Maria Gough shows how the Constructivist fixation on the production of objects is challenged by a preoccupation with intangible or immaterial production—a fact that, in her words, provides a more complex understanding of the Constructivists’ attempts to create material foundations for their future endeavors.¹¹ Art historian Nikolai Tarabukin, one of the chief theoreticians of Productivism, launches this challenge in his 1923 tract *From Easel to Machine*. In this work, he produces a creative misreading of Oswald Spengler’s pessimistic analysis of the intangibility and incorporeality of modern Western civilization and its machine-driven economy—a misreading that plays off of Spengler’s key concepts while completely bypassing the anti-Marxist cultural critique that informs Spengler’s writing. For Tarabukin, the idea of an intangible or immaterial production is positively associated with non-objectivity—a Constructivist term that was used to denote various forms of artistic abstraction but in Tarabukin’s interpretation, denotes the death of art itself and the introduction of the notion of a general creativity. Implicit in the idea of a non-objectivist death of art is the notion of the death of the object and object-oriented production in general. The new immaterial economy produces not objects but relations—social relations. This argumentative leap is made possible as Tarabukin associates the energy and wiring of electricity with human affective forces and networked relations. While the world of the classical economy was divided into material and form, the world of the modern economy is divided into power and mass: “The concept of form is theorized as a completely impersonal and incorporeal center of force whose influence radiates out to infinity.” In this new economy, “the peasant, craftsman and merchant who operate with specific objects or goods lose all significance before the three figures which the machine itself has nurtured; these figures are the entrepreneur, the engineer and the factory worker, who handle money, thought and energy.”¹² Such a line of argument forms the basis for a direct critique of Vladimir Tatlin’s stated dedication to the production of “useful saucepans”: the role of the Constructivist in production is not to create utilitar-

ian objects but to lay bare the very processes of production, to *be an engineer of production itself*.

The main tendency in Gough's analysis is corroborated by the work of Christina Kiaer, who has investigated the idea of the Socialist object as it emerges in the work of Alexandr Rodchenko and Boris Arvatov. Rodchenko and Arvatov both nurture the idea of the object as a coworker or comrade that functions in close relation to the human body.¹³ In fact, a fantasy of a transparent relay between the consciousness of the maker and the consciousness of the object becomes a point of departure for a homology between object and body that gives a new spin on the idea of utilitarianism. This analysis becomes possible once one pays attention to the way in which Constructivist objects are informed by the workings of desire: there is a decidedly uncanny aspect to the idea of an object that actually doubles the human body. The idea of the uncanny aspect of objects is already present in Marx's definition of commodity fetishism, since the commodity promotes material or thing-like relations between persons, while creating personal or social relations between things. As Kiaer shows, the Constructivists play off of the way in which the system of exchange seems to invert social relations; for instead of trying to restore the lost relations between producers, utopia is imagined as existing in the relations between newly active things. The very fact that the commodity is able to stand in for the human body, in the sense that it works in deep complicity with the desires and imaginations of this body, is also what makes it possible to exploit it for Socialist ends.

The uncanny version of the Socialist object is the figure of the automaton that works to align human subjects with Socialist, industrialist modernization. But, as Kiaer argues, its embodied dimensions also mark out a space for a potential humanizing of the products of industrial culture, bringing those products into the human field of desire. This last perspective is particularly explicit in Arvatov's article "Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing," which argues that production is a source of human creativity that will come into its own once a true Socialist culture is in place. While this might sound like another version of the Soviet cultural worker's idea of the factory workbench as a model for all human activity, Arvatov's perspective is more complex since his idea of everyday life is informed by

the notion of a spiritually meaningful existence: Everyday life itself has transformative capacities in that the very handling of everyday objects is the point of departure for the realization of human consciousness. Socialist objects are injected with an activity and flexibility that Arvatov identifies with the values promoted by the Western technical intelligentsia, in contrast to what he calls the passive display objects of bourgeois culture. This perspective would have certain points in common with more recent cultural theories of “resistant consumption,” were it not for the fact that Arvatov does not see creative consumption as a form of resistance but rather as the everyday site of self-realization. Technological utopianism fundamentally informs this vision: the idea of electricity changes the idea of the nature of the thing and makes possible a cybernetic vision of human beings connected by electrical impulses (a vision that perhaps only came into its own with today’s Internet and the Socialist and utopian ideals that inform the discourse of many of its promoters).

III

Significant in these new interpretations of the Socialist object is the way in which they point to an erasure of the distinction between production and consumption and an emphasis on production as a production of subjectivity. Maurizio Lazzarato, among others, describes a new cycle of productivity in quite similar terms: the commodity transforms its consumer by creating a social relationship that consists of innovation, production, and consumption. The ideological and cultural environment of the consumer is actually recreated and enlarged in the act of consumption.¹⁴ Any critique of contemporary capitalism and its cultural effects needs to take this creative and expressive manifestation into account, rather than remain within the framework of ideology critique and critique of the commodity *form*. The recent research on Soviet Constructivism reveals that a fissure within the Constructivists’ own understanding of production emerged around precisely these issues.

But what is particularly interesting in a discussion of the possible continuities between Constructivism and Conceptualism is the way in which this particular understanding of the commodity/object is explicitly

related to legal issues. A former law student, Tarabukin quotes Spengler on the implication of an immaterial economy for legal thinking: as forces and their manifestations take the place of personality and the object, the new economy will cause a break with Roman law.¹⁵ Tarabukin relates this shift in legal thinking to artistic processes, or more precisely, to an art that will from now on both “lay open” and “engineer” the immaterial production of thoughts, affects, and relations. Certain aspects of Constructivist practice suggest that production may, in fact, be engineered precisely through the forms and concepts of legal practice. Such legal forms and concepts are invoked in order to both demonstrate and engender a shift in artistic production—a shift away from the type of focus that traces everything back to the artistic personality and its object/products and toward the less predictable effects of a distributed creativity informed by a logic of transformation and becoming.

This use of legal or quasi-legal forms and concepts is primarily found within the wider framework of International Constructivism, and, in particular, in the rich exchanges between Dada and Constructivism that took place in Berlin in the years after 1920.¹⁶ However, given the multiple points of contact between International and Soviet Constructivism—not least due to the activities of El Lissitzky, who traveled extensively in Western Europe and maintained a wide network of contacts—one can at least suggest that such work contributed to the general field of possibilities within which the Productivist artists would have to define their activity. And, more importantly, they contributed to the general field of avant-garde production that formed part of the discursive framework for later Conceptualist practices. The legal concepts put into play here are, most notably, those of copyright and authenticity, and the legal form deployed is that of the signature. Signature issues appear in many guises throughout avant-garde art production, but within the Dadaist-Constructivist context a particular relation is set up between engineering, subjectivity-production, and the artistic signature: this relation could, in fact, be seen as a key organizing principle in the work of Raoul Hausmann and László Moholy-Nagy.¹⁷

Through a series of striking analogies, the signature is here repeatedly presented as a machine—a technology that produces or engen-

ders artistic subjectivity in unpredictable ways. It is, in other words, no longer just a special function within a system (and logic) of representation—a system that constitutes a legal guarantee of the way in which original artistic subjectivity has managed to confer special value on an object. In this confrontation between legal forms and concepts and new technologies of production and reproduction, law is made to function differently, along the lines indicated by Spengler and Tarabukin. When the personal signature is no longer simply or primarily seen as the *sign* of original subjectivity but as a subset of a particular productive and distributive *technology* (in this case, the technology of writing), attention shifts to the possible products of this particular technology and to the dynamics of production itself. As Derrida pointed out in numerous reflections on writing and technology, writing may guarantee and encircle, but it also distributes, spreads out, and inserts itself into ever-new situations.¹⁸ But what is singular about the way in which both Hausmann and Moholy-Nagy explore and exploit this shift in legal thinking is the fact that it is their *own* artistic signatures and their own biographical subjects (and authorial rights and duties) that are, so to speak, put into production. The signature-machine is, in other words, not simply imagined as an abstract principle, but put to work on a concrete existential terrain.

The association between the signature-machine and personal biography is related to the way in which both Hausmann and Moholy-Nagy defined their roles as artists: like the Soviet Constructivists, they presented themselves as artist-engineers, i.e. as a type of creative producers who identify their activity with machinic production. A photomontage self-portrait of Hausmann shows him with a machine part in place of his head: the machinic reality is not the Other of human or artistic subjectivity, and neither is the machine a piece of dead matter that always needs to be animated by the motive force of a human intelligence that is exterior to it. Engineering has traditionally been understood as application rather than creation, and this application is associated with the non-human realm of the machine and the material—categories that have traditionally held little philosophical interest. But this account of the machine and its activity comes up against a fundamental problem when, as Alistair Welchmann puts it, it

seems to presuppose the constitution of its own products: the objects of a long material history are projected backward as the origin of that which, in fact, produces them.¹⁹ In a more properly “machinic” way of thinking, it is rather the generative capacities of engineering that take on interest. Here, the machinic realm may be understood as the mechanism through which the world continually produces itself, through processes of concretization, individuation, and differentiation. Hausmann, who actually claimed to be an *Ingenieur der Weltemanationen* (an engineer of the emanation of the world itself), seems to intuit a similar form of machinic thinking when, in texts and manifests, he criticized a dynamic conception of the machine, i.e. a cause-and-effect conception focused on pushing buttons and moving rods rather than understanding the machine in terms of a generative movement from the interior. In his work, engineering is described as a “compression” that creates “the possible” or “the new.”²⁰

However, a new conception of the relation between art and production emerges when this type of machinic thinking is applied to living biographical subjects framed, formed, and projected into public life by means of the artistic signature. If the generative capacities of the machine can generally be defined as auto-production (the operation of material on itself), the signature-machine basically administers artistic self-production or the production of artistic subjectivity. It is this view of artistic activity as a form of self-production that is made visible, when, in the works of Hausmann and Moholy-Nagy, the signature no longer only resides discreetly at the lower right corner of images or in the surrounding framework of artistic productions, but also, at the same time, invades the very body of images and works. This strange and apparently superfluous practice makes the signature teeter ambivalently between the two traditional “uses” of its guarantee of unique artistic presence: on the one hand, the formalist mode of use that locates artistic subjectivity “in” the style of work and, on the other hand, the historicist mode of use that locates artistic subjectivity “outside” of the work, in historical context.

The most obvious effect of this ambivalence of placement is that it is the very creation, function, and position of artistic subjectivity itself that becomes the troublesome center of attention. And, by the same token, attention is drawn to a whole series of issues that become critical once the

legal system is confronted with an immaterial economy where forces and relations increasingly take the place of the “personality and the object,” i.e. issues of identity and anonymity, originality and plagiarism, and authorship and its resignation. Hausmann and Moholy-Nagy both literally confused or supplanted artistic form and subject matter with a continual writing of their own names. Quoting Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, Louis Kaplan describes how, in one of Moholy-Nagy’s typographical paintings—the so-called *Yellow Disc*—the name “Moholy” is spelled out in letters so that they “are composed into a Constructivist entity.” The motif of the painting is nothing but this complex anagram of a name on a flat painted background. The “yellow disc” is simply the color that fills the center of the “o” in “Moholy.”²¹

Like Hausmann’s typographical poems of the same period, which consist of apparently random letters printed large on poster-like sheets, *Yellow Disc* defies both a painterly/visual object status and the idea of simple verbal communication. These are works that slip and slide between seeing and hearing, between visual and verbal signals, and where, most importantly, the visual complication of verbal communication produces a purely sonic or aural surplus value.²² With this sonic surplus, the signature machine perpetually produces a new and different “Moholy.” A somewhat similar production takes place in a photomontage by Hausmann entitled *Synthetisches Cino der Malerei*, where a circular photographic cutout of the artist’s open mouth is mounted inside a big “o” (cutouts of his eyes float along the rim of the “o”). On a purely visual level the mouth may mime the shape of the “o,” but the sound that would come out of a mouth in this position could in fact only be that of a pronounced “a.” Between the verbal and the visual, the image produces a continual sliding between “a” and “o,” similar to the sliding that occurs between the “a” and “o” in the name Raoul. This particular reading is supported by a number of other collages that are even more explicit in connecting the “a-o” sliding with the name Raoul. Such works contribute to the general tendency, in Hausmann’s photomontages, to cut up and circulate not only the letters of his name and photographic cutouts of his body, but also bits and pieces of his other works and writings, as well as numerous autobiographical references.

What is perhaps most significant about these works is the way in which the personal signature is systematically associated with the “immaterial” world of signals and “becoming” effects, rather than with logic of cause and effect and the identity of solid objects. In his work with the photogram—photographic images made without a camera—Moholy-Nagy placed great emphasis on the fact that he works not only with shadows cast by solid objects, but with “light effects themselves, e.g. lenses, liquids, crystals, and so on.”²³ In fact, both Hausmann and Moholy-Nagy explicitly associated the hand of the artist (the signature touch) with this fugitive realm of light effects. The photogram brought out the nonrepresentational potential of photography; since it did not seem to reproduce the spatial continuities of the known visible world, photography or “light-writing” could be understood to produce a new, unseen world. It is therefore of some significance that Moholy-Nagy made his own hand the object of photograms and photographs—an example, perhaps, of his desire to explore all of life under the principle he called production/reproduction, which focuses on the productive or generative potential of reproductive technologies. Artistic subjectivity is thus seen as an effect of media production. For his part, Hausmann invented the *Optophon*, a machine designed to transform light signals into sound signals and vice versa. With such ideas of signal transformation in mind, he fantasized about an artist’s “touch” that would transcend the “superficially understood tactilism” of the Futurists (the hands-on approach to the known material world) and cut through time and space, reaching “all the way to the stars.”²⁴

IV

Produced at a remove from the intensive ideological debates of the Soviet Constructivists and their Institute of Artistic Culture (an organization that concerned itself with working out a theoretical approach to art in a Communist society), the Constructivist/Dadaist signature works do not seem to engage too explicitly in the struggle over the precise meaning and function of “Socialist objects” and “commodities.”²⁵ However, there is no doubt that they touch on some of the issues that came up in the course of these debates: the complex issues of the immaterial or uncontrollable aspects of

a production that has, among other things, the capacity to create new subjectivities and new social life. As parts of the larger Constructivist framework, the signature works might contribute to the reevaluation of the Constructivist concept of production outlined by Gough and Kiaer.

But in the context of a larger history of avant-garde art they could also be seen to mark a common ground between Constructivist intuitions of immaterial production and the emergence of a similar theme within the Conceptualist practices of the 1960s and 1970s. As mentioned earlier, the use of legal/administrative forms and concepts may be key elements in the definition of such a common ground. For within the wider range of works and strategies now defined as Conceptual, such formats are repeatedly used in operations of self-surveillance and self-registration, which have significant points in common with the earlier signature works. These are issues pertaining to the place, role, and presence of artistic subjectivity. While the cool informational or administrative formats effectively prohibit a projection of artistic subjectivity into the work as well as any conventional use of terms such as *work* or *artist*, the fact remains that concrete and factual traces of the artist's body or presence come into focus in entirely new ways. Vito Acconci's *Following Piece*—a meticulous listing of the public activities of an urban dweller who lets himself be carried along by the activities of others during one October day in 1969—has been described by Alexander Alberro as an example of a work that integrates the decentering of the artist into formal and constitutive elements, while incorporating the artist's body into the work. This point could perhaps be given a stronger emphasis: it would seem that it is *precisely* the use of impersonal, bureaucratic procedures and formats that occasions this emphasis on the concrete body of the artist. As general notions of artistic subjectivity are displaced as the origin of work, the artist's body seems to emerge as a highly specific "material" instance. Yet, for all its tangible specificity, this artist-body also seems increasingly fictional, non-localizable, and virtual—an object of intensive strategies of documentation, mapping, and publication that never seems able to really "meet with" the object in question.

This effect is perhaps most remarkable in the type of work that explicitly and systematically inscribes artistic presence in the formats of adminis-

tration and informatization. A case in point is the early 1960s work of Ben Vautier, one of the first artists to entirely conflate painting with signature writing, and to place this writing in a flatly informational realm where the personal signature itself appears to be interchangeable with various impersonal or formalized types of writing. To this end, Vautier chose a form of handwriting that evoked at once French school norm handwriting and professional sign writing. Such writing, used in a long series of works that seem completely devoid of any “artistic” or “visual” qualities, was, however, used to signify or advertise the body of the artist in its most specific, non-sublimated, abject state. It advertised the raw personal affects of this artist-body, particularly those related to the habitual anxieties and intimate concerns of artistic career-building, such as feelings of jealousy, ambition, pride, having a nervous breakdown, being cunning, etc. The following are typical writings, each sentence filling the surface of a work: *L’angoisse ça existe. Peint pour la gloire. Je suis paresseux et jaloux. Je reste inquiet et dans le doute.* (*Fear is real. Painted for fame. I am lazy and jealous. I am anxious and filled with doubt*).²⁶

Where a psychoanalytically oriented theorist of the abject like Julia Kristeva focused on how personal affects could be translated into aesthetic effects, contained within the (signed) framework of a personal visual or poetic language, Vautier’s work seems to turn the very logic of this psychological/aesthetic scenario inside out.²⁷ In his work, the legal/administrative format of signature-writing does not guarantee the presence of artistic subjectivity *in* the work, but seems instead to produce, publicize, and distribute an uncontrollable, uncontainable (and therefore also embarrassing) outflow of such subjectivity, in the form of raw, “unaesthetic” affects. Here, artistic subjectivity or affect is not simply that which produces works of art. Rather, works of art (or, more precisely, the long material, institutional, and social history of the “working” of art) are seen as producers of artistic subjectivity—a subjectivity whose proper placement, identity, and presence could no longer be determined in institutional terms since all of a sudden it seemed to be “all over the place.”

A different but structurally similar case is the work of On Kawara, whose meticulous record-keeping of the regular occurrences of his own life (the time he gets up in the morning, the places he goes during the day, and

the people he meets) generates parallel questions concerning the proper place of artistic subjectivity. Here, artistic communication (through painting, postcards, and telegraphic messages) is conflated with deadpan, diaristic registration, compulsively executed on the day of the event itself—the administrative formats automatically “clocking in” the simple presence of the artist-body. The mechanical and non-sensual qualities of these works make them seem devoid of the artist’s touch. In fact, a series of photographs documenting their production is notorious for the absence of any image of Kawara’s hands at work. But, as Kathryn Chiong has noted, a phantom body haunts the work—the phantom of that person who has, after all, at some point been there, made, touched, and created, but who refuses any clear identification with a series of works whose status as art is therefore also left open. This again occasions reflections on similarities between Kawara’s autobiographical strategies and notions of the self as originally divided: subjectivity is not left out of these works, but its circumscription *in* any determinable place and time (*in* a work of art or *in* art historical context, for instance) simply does not happen.

As sensible and relevant as this analysis may be, Kawara’s dialectic of self-absence and self-recording may be read outside the psychoanalytic register evoked by Chiong. In the works of Vautier and Kawara (and many others), self-regulation or self-surveillance seem to emerge as *form*, primarily because this intensive attention to the self is consistently cut off from specific psychological or biographical contents that could be associated with the artist-subjects in question. One could, in fact, suggest that these works give a visible form to the type of self-controlling impulse or conduct that seems to be an important aspect of the contemporary production of subjectivity—a type of control that differentiates itself from the type of surveillance conducted by external agents. Self-surveillance does not just indicate that individuals make their actions correspond to the real or imagined values of relevant others; It also indicates individuals’ attention to their actions and thoughts when constituting themselves as subjects of their conduct. Self-surveillance is then a way of problematizing not only what one is, but also, more crucially, what one might become: a type of behavior essential to a society that values individualized creativity and responsibility in a historically unprecedented way.²⁸

The works of Vautier and Kawara manifest the tricky play of control over artistic selves that are almost too present, too embodied, and too concrete, but at the same time also uncontrollable, unattainable, and virtual. (Chiong describes how issues of control and lack of control are given an almost erotic quality in Kawara's obsessive registration of his daily actions.) But what makes these artists' self-surveillance forms so striking, as opposed to, say, ordinary diary entries, is precisely the way in which they put legal/administrative formats into play. For these formats evoke the instruments of a different surveillance regime, notably that of "disciplines" and "institutions": the schemas and clocks used to register and keep track of the movements of people (Kawara's work evokes the practice of clocking in at work) or the signatures and stamps that guarantee the validity of objects, genres, and institutions (the artwork, the artist, the art museum, etc.). In the work of Vautier and Kawara, the bureaucratic formats find themselves *displaced* from the private sphere—displaced, that is, to a context in which they are plainly absurd. These types of control instruments have, after all, scant relation to the often playful, intimate, leisure-oriented, and aesthetic practices through which contemporary self-control is actually effectuated.

What these works make visible is, then, not only the new regime of self-control/self-production but, more precisely, the shift between one type of power formation and another, between discipline and control. They testify, in short, to the ambivalent implication of the avant-garde in both formations. The disciplinary regime structures avant-garde work and avant-garde desire in terms of a politics of liberation and institutional critique. But the terms by which these politics of liberation are both imagined and enacted (interactivity, indeterminacy, becoming) are at the same time profoundly allied with the practices and values of the society of individualized control. The life/art dialectic of avant-garde works cannot, therefore be fully understood or discussed in terms of a politics of disciplines and institutions—a politics whose main question to aesthetic practice is in what way or to what extent it either affirms or deconstructs particular institutional forms and ideologies. This ambivalence could, I believe, be located at the site named "Minimal art" and discussed in terms of Hal Foster's notion

of the “crux of Minimalism.” The crux of Minimalism resides, according to Foster, at the intersection between its two contradictory achievements: Minimalism was at once the apogee of Modernist formalism and a critique of the very foundations of this Modernism and its institutional corollaries. It complicated the purity of conception with the contingency of perception, evoking not just the autonomy of forms or logical structures but also the presence of bodies in a particular space and time. What is at stake in Minimalism is, then, the nature of meaning and the status of the subject. This is also why, according to Foster, Minimalism opens toward a neo-avant-garde that explores the contextual conditions of art, particularly the subject positions evoked in (or excluded from) Modernism. Minimalism ultimately initiates the artistic practice of institutional critique.²⁹

The style site works, however, propose an alternative legacy of Minimalism, one that departs from the relation to the self that is initiated as the Minimalist cubes throw the viewer back to his or her own perceptual situation. Modifying Foster’s scenario, I would then suggest that the crux of Minimalism arises at the intersection between two different sets of relations, each of which has its own purchase on the life/art dialectic of the avant-garde. While one set of relations revolves around the issues of forms, genres, and institutions, the other revolves around the constraints and freedoms of perceiving bodies and the creation of life-worlds. It is this last set of issues that is reworked as a number of style site works explore this creation of life-worlds as a new type of productive relation. This perspective comes into focus as Minimalism here often makes a reappearance as an environmental style, as if indistinguishable from its counterpart in the world of design and fashion. Minimalism may have dismantled artistic form (or shown its complicity with the commodity form), but its turn to the site, context, or environment of specific bodies is now seen in terms of its complicity with the productivity of the lifestyle environment. This is, of course, a residual discourse of Minimalism that is normally suppressed in the strict distinction between the concerns of Minimal art and minimalist design. But its importance becomes clearer once one evokes the wider Minimalist discourse of the 1960s, a discourse that includes not only the cubes of Robert Morris or the serial objects of Donald Judd, but also the far more specific modulations of subjective percep-

tion triggered by the immersive sound/light environments of La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela. It is worth noting, in this context, that the most famous of these environments is titled *Dream House*.³⁰

The arguments above attempt to trace the intermittent emergence of the style site issues across moments of avant-garde production that are as remarkable for their differences as for their similarities. As a consequence, the recent style site works may be discussed in terms of a Constructivist legacy that takes a general interest—at once critical and affirmative—in the connection between art and production. This again means that the contemporary obsession with style issues is not in itself an indication of a fundamental division or shift in the politics of avant-garde practice. Rather, one could say that if lifestyle issues take center stage in recent neo-Conceptual work, it primarily attests to the fact that the “power of style” is today more deeply entrenched, more diversified, and more widely distributed, affecting the daily lives of many. The next two chapters discuss the complexities of a style site that is conjured when a large number of works investigate perception in the context of the contemporary home environment.

⁰¹ Christina Kiaer recounts this critique, made by Iakov Turgendkhol'd, in “Rodchenko in Paris,” in *October* 75 (Winter 1996), 6–7.

⁰² Howard Slater, “The Spoiled Ideals of Lost Situations,” 2000, www.infopool.org.uk, and as *Infopool Pamphlet* #2, 2000.

⁰³ Benjamin Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” in *October* 55 (Winter 1990), 141–142.

⁰⁴ Buchloh, *op. cit.*, 105–143.

⁰⁵ Such a critique can be found in, for instance, Maurizio Lazzarato, *Videophilosophie. Zeitwahrnehmung im Postfordismus* (Berlin: b_books, 2002), 113–127.

⁰⁶ Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

⁰⁷ From the point of view of a more Bourdieu-inspired social analysis, it is also doubtful whether the post-war middle class in general could be said to assume aesthetic identity in tautology and the aesthetics of administration. The question is whether this radically work-like and anti-sensualist aesthetics would have distinguishing force for anybody but a very small segment within that class, notably the small intellectual segment made up of professionals within the field of art production, who can use this “anti-aesthetic” to set themselves apart from the more conservative artistic tastes of the administrative and economical segments of the middle class. The more specific desires and points of view elaborated in the Conceptualist works can then not simply be seen as the effects of the need for class identification on a general level. This opens the very determination of Conceptualism's administrative and legalistic formats to different interpretations.

⁰⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self. The History of Sexuality, Volume 3* (New York: Vintage Books,

- 1988). Paul Veyne, quoted in Arnold I. Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the History of Ethics and Ancient Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 119–120.
- ⁰⁸ Foucault, op. cit., 81–95.
- ¹⁰ This point is discussed in Lazzarato, op. cit., 129–156. The relevant text by Guattari is *La Révolution Moléculaire* (Paris: 10–18, 1977).
- ¹¹ Maria Gough, "Tarabukin, Spengler and the Art of Production," in *October* 93 (Summer 2000), 85.
- ¹² Tarabukin's quotations of Spengler, quoted by Gough, op. cit., 101. One of the most telling effects of Tarabukin's misreading appears as he, quoting the Russian translation of Spengler, replaces Spengler's "the concept of the firm" (der Begriff der Firma) with "the concept of form."
- ¹³ Christina Kiaer, "Rodchenko in Paris," in *October* 75 (1996), 3–35 and "Boris Arvatov's Socialist Objects," *October* 81 (1997), 105–118.
- ¹⁴ Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor." In Paul Virilio and Michael Hardt, *Radical Thought in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Here Lazzarato follows Foucault's critique of Marxist theory where all the expressive machineries are reduced to ideologies – an economist framework of explanation that divorces the visible and the sayable from the concept of production and productive relations.
- ¹⁵ Tarabukin/Spengler, quoted by Gough, op. cit., 101.
- ¹⁶ The Dada-Constructivism exchange is neglected in the more Paris/Zurich-oriented accounts of Dada, i.e. histories of Dada centered on the activities of Tristan Tzara and his immediate networks, but is described in the exhibition catalogue *Dada-Constructivism: The Janus Face of the Twenties* (London: Annely Juda Fine Arts, 1984).
- ¹⁷ On signature effects in Moholy-Nagy, see Louis Kaplan, *László Moholy-Nagy: Biographical Writings* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995). On signature effects in Raoul Hausmann, see Ina Blom, *The Cut Through Time: A Version of the Dada/Neo-Dada Repetition* (Oslo, University of Oslo: Acta Humaniora, 1999).
- ¹⁸ This general principle of writing takes on a more acute aspect in the case of signature writing, which is generally taken as the exemplary guarantee of the fact that writing always signifies a presence or objective reality that exists prior to writing itself. Derrida shows that the signature only works or effectuates its guarantees beyond the confines of such presence. See, for instance, "Signature, Event, Context," in *Margins of Philosophy* (New York: The Harvester Press, 1982), 307–330.
- ¹⁹ Alistair Welchman, "Machinic Thinking," in Keith Ansell Pearson (ed.), *Deleuze and Philosophy: The Difference Engineer* (London: Routledge, 1997), 211–232.
- ²⁰ Hausmann, "Sieg, Triumph, Tabak mit Bohnen" and "Presentismus: Gegen den Puffkeismus des deutschen Seele," in Raoul Hausmann, *Sieg Triumph Tabak mit Bohnen. Texte bis 1933, Band II*, Michael Erhoff (ed.) (Munich: Edition text + kritik, 1982). Hausmann called himself an "Ingenieur der Weltemanationen" in a 1922 manuscript reproduced in Eva Züchner (ed.), *Scharfrichter der Bürgerlichen Seele. Raoul Hausmann in Berlin, 1900–1933* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 1998), 176.
- ²¹ Kaplan, op. cit., 87.
- ²² This sonic surplus was exploited as Hausmann's typographical poem FMSBW became the point of departure for Kurt Schwitters's *Ursonate*, which plays off the tension between the graphemic and the phonemic in Hausmann's printed poster. (The *Ursonate* famously starts out with the sound "fümmsböwö.")
- ²³ Kaplan, op. cit., 50.
- ²⁴ Blom, op. cit., 201–232.
- ²⁵ Camilla Gray has described this intense climate of debate in *The Russian Experiment in Art, 1863–1922* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996).
- ²⁶ Vautier was also notorious for advertising such affects in poster formats, as artistic events apparently about to take place. A 1962 poster, printed in bold black on red, invites you to take part in a *Crise et Dépression Nerveuse le ... à ... heures, Galerie d'Art Total, 32, Rue Tondutti de L'Escarène, Nice, France*. (*Crisis and Nervous Depression on ... at ...*) Another poster from the same year announces a *Crise et Dépression chez Ben et Annie le ... à ... heures*. Through such work his signature writing is explicitly

associated with typical publicity formats.

²⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

²⁸ Paulo Vaz and Fernanda Bruno, "Types of Self-Surveillance: From Abnormality to Individuals at Risk," in *Surveillance and Society* 1, No. 3 (2003), 272–291.

²⁹ Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 35–71.

³⁰ *Dream House* is less a musical composition than a *site*—an environment bathed in magenta light in which endlessly sustained computer-generated sinus tone intervals will be experienced differently depending on a number of physical and psycho-acoustic parameters, including one's movement around the room. In this work, musical time cannot be separated from mundane time. The work has been running for years on end at 275 Church Street, New York, NY.

Chapter Three

Lamps, Television, and Biopolitics: A Theoretical and Historical Framework

I

In the 1990s, museum and gallery spaces turned into informal hangouts. As a visitor, you would spend time in environments shaped as lounges, bars, community centers, and mini-libraries. You were invited to eat, drink, participate in discussions and generally socialize on and around platforms and partitions designed for that specific purpose. You were aware of the significance of this shift: No longer a place for presentations and spectatorship, for pedagogy or show, these gallery spaces presented themselves as facsimiles of ordinary spaces of existence, spaces in which you would “be” rather than “see.”

In principle, this was nothing new. With the performative turn in twentieth-century art, gallery visitors had increasingly been modeled as participants rather than viewers, activated in relation to various types of aesthetic or situational surroundings. What *was* new was the distinct sense of domesticity that informed the new gallery environments, fueled by the use of various design signifiers or furniture-like arrangements that indicated “spending time” freely, that is, spending your “free time.” The liberation from the work-like duty of following the formatted duration of a work of art was explicitly associated with the spaces of private and semi-private life.

In these spaces you would again and again come across an object that was at once almost too designed, too stylish, or too fashion-oriented, yet also almost too comfortingly familiar: a lamp. Not a sophisticated orchestration of light effects, as in the installations of James Turrell, but a lamp in the most everyday sense of the word—the piece of furniture that lights up homes and offices, public buildings and streets, the utilitarian object that is also a marker of personal taste as well as of changing fashions. Sometimes this lamp was an elaborate chandelier, at other times a futuristic design object. Occasionally, it was an office-like ceiling fixture, sometimes the kind of anonymous living-room floor lamp you would hardly notice.

At other times, it was just a lightbulb. It could be suspended or it could lie on the floor. Most of the time, you encountered it in actual physical spaces such as exhibition rooms and installations. But once noticed, the lamp phenomenon also tended to turn up in films and videos and even, at times, in paintings.

A memorial tour of lamps put on display in recent art exhibitions might include encounters with the following: Cerith Wyn Evans' five gigantic crystal chandeliers at London's White Cube Gallery, each one giving off a flashing light signal. At least five or six examples of Jorge Pardo's seemingly endless series of outlandish pendant lamps, each an exquisite example of the kind of biomorphic shapes that are characteristic of contemporary computer design. The equally biomorphic floor lamps that Pardo produced and exhibited in collaboration with Philippe Parreno: scattered on the floor in a dark and otherwise empty gallery room, they looked like strange glowing sea creatures stranded on the beach at nighttime. Also, Parreno's ghostly glass recreation of an Arne Jacobsen lamp, which for some reason bears no resemblance to the original; as well as Simon Starling's surprisingly accurate yet cheap remakes of the famous Poul Henningsen pendant lamps, made from discarded wok covers and metal bowls. There would be two lamps that Slaven Tolj brought from a church in his native Dubrovnik and installed high up near the ceiling of the Kulturbahnhof in Kassel during *documenta X*. And, of course, the many and entirely unspectacular bedside lamps and floor lamps that contributed to just the right kind of "personal" atmosphere in Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's exhibited living spaces, as well as the equally unspectacular street lamps that formed such an important part of her outdoor arrangements.

In a more corporate-style register, there would be Martin Boyce's web-like fluorescent tube ceiling light formations, Pierre Huyghe's grid-shaped ceiling lights that double as an Atari-game, as well as Piotr Uklanski's flashing grid of multicolored floor lighting in the Passerby bar in New York. (The last two examples evoke one of the latest trends in architectural lighting, notably the tendency to use light units as building blocks.) There would also be Angela Bulloch's walls of differently colored light cubes of

constantly changing colors and patterns: giant pixelated structures whose messages—visual or verbal—can only be decoded at a much higher level of resolution. Then there would be architectural or spatial works that evoke lamp functions in a more indirect sense, as when Tobias Rehberger turned a Münster University building into a giant lamp that lit up the bar he had created on the terrace outside; or when Olafur Eliasson had mass audiences sit down to gaze at a giant lamp-powered “sun” in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern, as if faced with the spectacle of a sunset on an artificial beach. (Fig. 3.1 – 3.11)

And, last but not least, there would be Martin Creed’s Turner Prize-winning decision to simply let the lights go on and off in an empty gallery space, as if in a realization of George Brecht’s *Three Lamp Events*. (Fig. 3.12) The instruction for Brecht’s early 1960s work published in *Water Yam*—a small boxed edition comprised of a heap of tiny cards that indicate possible events taking place with or without the conscious intervention of artists or performers—reads as follows:

on. off.
lamp
*off. on.*⁰¹

The form of presentation could hardly have been more low-key, the artistic framing hardly more vague. Hence Brecht’s work came to belong to a more or less neglected body of Fluxus-related ephemera generally associated with an attempt to “erase the boundaries between art and life.” It was only within the context of a late 1990s “lamp discourse” that a work like this came to be received as an artistic statement of the weightiest kind.

This strange obsession with lamps—the type of lamps that fill the pages of glossy magazines and their endless style manuals, the lamps that are used to shape spaces and create ambiences—indicates not just the avant-garde’s general preoccupation with the art/life dialectic. It indicates, more precisely, a different articulation of what was at stake in the avant-garde’s longstanding quest to operate at the intersection of life and art. The lamps direct us to a field of artistic articulation in which art, technologies, media,

economic production, and personal lifestyles are treated as a continuum. Within this continuum, art or the aesthetic can be seen to occupy a special place — a place that privileges bodily sensations or affects and their “non-economic” forms of production. This perspective is supported by the essentially domestic, personal, and leisurely spaces conjured by the lamp work — the spaces of personal taste and expression that everyone creates. It is as if the aura of the lamps reinforces the idea of art as a sphere of subjective sensation and activity, rather than as a sphere of public manifestation.

And yet, the scenario conjured by the lamp works is more complicated. A discourse concerning work and economic production continually encircles the margins of these works. It makes itself felt once one realizes that the lamps more often than not evoke larger informational or mediatic frameworks — the kind of mediatic frameworks that render the private home a nodal point in the information and media networks of global capital. When Marshall McLuhan wrote about the transformative capacities of electric light, he conceived of the home itself as an informational medium. Any dwelling is a medium — an extension of our sense organs that modifies our perception of the world. But modern electrified homes represent a new type of media that occupies itself with information processing and hence provides human perception with an organic flexibility unknown to any other age. In McLuhan’s cybernetic terminology, electric light is pure information — it has no redundancy and hence no content — and so represents a pure capacity for transformation and differentiation. Its most marked achievement is that of framing the world and thereby continually recreating it. Electric light creates visibilities where previously there was nothing. It produces spaces without walls, redraws the urban landscape, and pulls us into the worlds of the sub-microscopic and the subterranean.⁰²

While McLuhan’s combination of the concepts of information and human perception may seem dubious (in the type of information theory evoked here, information is a purely statistical concept and does not count in the active agency of human perception as a framer of information), he allows for a more general understanding of contemporary homes as mediatic *interfaces*. This understanding is further opened by the lamp works, but with a pointed emphasis on the part played by the home in the social and economic machinery of the larger media networks. Home — the

domain of personal sensations and affect—is the interface that integrates our sensory and cognitive apparatus to the operations of the media machines. Here, perception in the home environment takes on an economic and political dimension in the sense that it may be discussed in relation to concepts of work and social organization.

Two different but interrelated sets of ideas provide an outline for understanding the new political and economic pertinence of subjective perception and mental processes in general. On the one hand, concepts from recent political economy such as “cognitive capitalism,” “immaterial production,” and “attention theories of value” direct attention to the way in which the larger circuits of “media production” modify the concept of value creation. Today, surplus value is created not only from production in the workplace but also from the way we engage our cognitive apparatuses, our attention time, in relation to various media materials. Not just work-time but life-time in general—including the time of those too young or too old to take paid work—is now mined for value. In the work of Michael Hardt and Antoni Negri, this tendency is seen in relation to the gradual shift toward a politics that places life itself at the center of political order—a shift that, in Foucault’s late work, was described as the threshold of political modernity. So-called biopower, or biopolitics, signals a new era of capitalist production in which the borders between economics and politics, and between production and reproduction, are eroding. Life is no longer limited to the domain of reproduction or subordinated to the working process: a new form of governance takes all facets of human life into consideration. The contemporary preoccupation with the self and its affects (with sexuality as well as aesthetics) is an effect of this new form of power, and the aesthetic and cognitive pleasures derived from this preoccupation in turn feed into the power that encircles them. On the other hand, the new significance of life-processes also opens for a rethinking of the idea of the political subject and its space of operation. In the view of Hardt and Negri, the struggle over the senses of languages and technologies plays an important role in such a politics and constitutes possible collective means for the constitution of different worlds. (In Foucault’s strategic conception of power, new forms of control also engender new forms of freedom.)⁰³

It would be preposterous to say that the lamp works engage in this type of political analysis in any kind of detailed or explicit way or (even worse) that they are mere effects of a regime of power or a logic of capital firmly in place. What could be suggested, however, is that these are aesthetic expressions and operations that mark, in their own way and on their own terms, an increasing sensibility to the new pertinence of life issues, not least by establishing a surprisingly systematic series of scenarios that stage or explore the intimate relations between “ordinary” bodies and media technologies. Where the wild fantasies of cyberbodies—the incredible, immaterial bodies of the informational realm—in many cases left ordinary bodies in a pre-informational vacuum, the lamp works place the embodied aspects of everyday media processing firmly at the center of attention.⁰⁴

In an art historical context, this particular sensibility to life issues is interesting in the sense that it marks a difference within the history of avant-garde media art. For in much art-historical writing, the avant-garde’s continual and intensive exchanges with new media technologies are either read as quests for new artistic *formats* or genres that are in step with a contemporary communications culture or as disruptive (Situationist-type) interventions in the institutional or ideological forms of hegemonic media. The lamp works open for an alternative history as they display a clear sensitivity to the capacity of these media to capture, exploit, and work alongside the forces of life itself.

Initially, none of these interpretations would seem very obvious; for despite their high visibility, a sense of self-evidence or silence seems to surround the majority of these lamp-works. The lamps simply hang or stand there, looking good. They emanate light, which is generally pleasant. They present a shape: innovative, baroque, or mundane. They create an atmosphere. Generally, they make you want to just hang around, in a somewhat purposeless way. You are drawn to the circles of light, taken in by the aura of their presence. But you do not necessarily focus on them as works of art.

Just hanging around: this seemed, in fact, to be the main point of the lamp work Pierre Huyghe presented at the 49th Venice Biennale in 2001 (adjacent to the room in which his Atari-game ceiling light was installed).

A lamp prototype—a strange piece with multiple light sources—rose to the ceiling from the center of a rotund seating arrangement, only to cascade over the seats like the branches of a tree. (This “tree” resembled one typically found in a village square surrounded by benches.) (*Fig. 3.13*) Seated on these benches one could, if one wished, watch a video work by Huyghe that was displayed on a wall. But there was no obvious relation between this seating arrangement and the act of watching art videos. The lamp-seat was not a utility placed in front of the screen. It was a focal point in and of itself, a provider of a sort of social arrangement.

In this context, the video screen was no longer an obvious point of focus. No longer just a machine for the representation of a specific type of artistic content, it gained a new type of independence: the activity on the screen emerged as an autonomous signaletic presence, asserting itself adjacent to the lamp, as if the video were just another pulsating light source. In view of this, it was perhaps logical that this specific video work constituted the autonomous “life” of a virtual character, a Japanese *manga* cartoon figure contractually released from the production circuit of the cartoon industry and given the possibility of finding a new mode of existence within Huyghe’s artistic circuits. The video signals that gave her a newly liberated body and a presence then also constituted her as a form of social life existing adjacent to the more obvious form of social life engendered by the lamp-seat.⁰⁵ The question is, of course, how to understand such “existence” in the name of art.

It is a question that is often closed before it is opened. In the critical discourse surrounding the lamp works, their specific form of silence is, most of the time, glossed over. An exception to this is the outcry raised by the fact that the prestigious Turner Prize could be awarded to a work of such staggering banality as Martin Creed’s Brecht-inspired light piece. But most of the time, the lamp works are rationalized: they are described as contributors to (if not wholly inscribed in) a new functionalist discourse in which art works are seen to rub up against the practices and perspectives of design and architecture.

This discourse is perhaps nowhere as clearly formulated as in the discussions of Jorge Pardo’s work, which is generally described as inhab-

iting “the gray area between art and architecture, art and design, and art and life.”⁰⁶ But this gray area seems to have a quite precise definition and function: it is described as the place where the limits of the different artistic disciplines are negotiated. Pardo’s work is said to be “about the speculation of an object and its definition as art,” about using “the language of design to explore and question the conventional limits of sculpture.”⁰⁷ Pardo is then “an artist who has a command of design and industrial material rather than a designer seeking alternative marketing strategies”—a vitally important clarification that returns again and again in the critical discussions, since the works he creates are clearly both utilitarian and formal in their design. Their utilitarian aspect comes across as a traditional ability to construct axes and points of orientation within the spaces to which he contributes. According to a 1997 press release, not only do his lamps “provide light for an entire bar area,” they also “conceptually lead you from the front of the restaurant to the back rooms.”⁰⁸

Thus one of Pardo’s most ambitious works—the lamplike house he constructed both as a temporary exhibition object and as a home for himself (each room is situated at an angle that allows a maximum amount of light during daytime, while the building turns into a giant light box at night)—is seen as both a site-specific sculpture and an attempt to find new architectural solutions to traditional problems of seclusion and openness. Some critics, such as Michelle Grabner, see in this work a kind of subversion of both the “impractical” seriousness of high art and the “serious practicality” of design: Pardo exemplifies the artist as a fashionable tastemaker, playing to his own eye and to the eye of a generation of art-interested shoppers by “opening up the neglected territories of practical high art and design for mere stylistic innovation.”⁰⁹ But many underscore the idea that if Pardo’s work questions the interface between art, architecture, and design, this questioning takes place within the terms of a properly artistic discourse. According to Lynne Cooke, Pardo did not “deem his intervention at Dia [Center for the Arts] an architectural one,” since he recognized “a basic difference in vision—that is, in visual training and practice—between this discipline and the fine arts.”¹⁰ “Spatial orientation,” “sculptural sites,” “sculptural problems,” “artistic opening up,” “stylistic innovation”: the gray area appears more

like a black-and-white checkerboard where multiple strategic players from the fields of art and architecture/design can play for a bit of what each needs, whether that need is for artistic questioning and reflexivity or for design-oriented solutions and formal renewal.

Whatever the positioning, there is little doubt that the main tenet of this discussion is a legalistic form of discourse primarily concerned with the freedoms or constraints dispensed by various aesthetic practices and their rules. It is a discourse that is heir to almost a century of artistic attempts to balance a radically formalist media specificity with an equally radical non-formalist interdisciplinarity—an eternal dialectics of limits and boundaries grounded in the changing strategic viewpoints of a politics of liberation. Yet, with their silent or banal form of presence, the lamps could also be seen to suggest an artistic practice beyond this dialectic, a discursive continuity of a different kind. To see the contours of this continuity, it is necessary to start with the painfully obvious: the light that these lamps emit and the attraction exerted by the presence or aura of almost any light source. Whatever its context, the lamp is above all a creator of atmospheres or a distributor of ambiences—a fundamental feature of any kind of inhabitation or social gathering. A discussion of the lamp works then requires a critical concept of the atmospheric and its relation to art and media.

II

Despite the extensive focus on spatiality in the art of the last half-century—on social spaces as well as natural spaces (and their co-dependence)—the concept of the atmospheric has not been part of the theoretical vocabulary of art-critical discourse. This tendency is probably reinforced by the fact that the concept of the atmospheric has no real position in aesthetic theory either. The one place in which the notion of atmospheres seems to have found some sort of grounding is in a contemporary music criticism preoccupied with a radically reformulated musical object—a musical object that arises not so much out of harmonic systems as out of a continuity of material sounds or frequencies, and that is consequently in permanent dialogue with the more or less subtle or subliminal characteristics

of the physical environment itself.

An aesthetic crypto-tradition has, in fact, been devoted to the atmospheric qualities of music, but recently this tradition has come into far sharper focus, thanks, among other things, to the writings of music critic David Toop, who draws on his extensive knowledge of contemporary music and sound art in order to conjure an image of music as an environmental or ecological system, a dynamic and all-encompassing world designed for inhabitation and living. With its real-time temporality and its unpredictable distribution of intensities and silences, this kind of musical environment invites a very different sort of approach than a traditional musical object designed only for listening. Suddenly, music is not only a temporal but also a spatial object.¹¹

Toop refers, among other things, to the philosopher Gernot Böhme, who has recently tried to launch the notion of the atmospheric as a relevant concept for an aesthetic theory that seeks to look beyond the framework of art criticism (the judgment of artworks) in order to return to Gottlieb Baumgarten's original idea of aesthetics as *aisthetics*—a theory of sensual experience and affective understanding in the broader sense. Here, the concept of the atmospheric is useful in that it helps to direct attention away from the traditional artwork or art object. Atmospheres are in-between phenomena that exist between subjects and objects; while they are always the result of subjective perceptions, they are also object-like emotions that are cast into a shared space. To talk about atmospheres is also to access a large range of daily life experiences, since the potential source material is nearly inexhaustible. Böhme's main preoccupation here is political: He sees the concept of the atmospheric as a tool for a mode of ecological thinking that wants to gain broader impact by evoking individual and collective perceptions of the environment. An ecological discourse dominated by a language of natural science that rarely acknowledges aesthetic sensibilities has less chance of making sense in terms that correspond to the way most people experience their environment.¹²

However, Böhme finds hidden support for his concept of the atmospheric within one influential strain of aesthetic theory: Walter Benjamin's thinking on the concept of *aura*, that is, the experience of the unique, if distant,

presence of the original work of art that appears to have been lost in modern media productions. Here Böhme points to the somewhat surprising fact that while Benjamin sets out to theorize works of art, his *examples* of the workings of the aura—its ability to evoke a combined sensation of distance and presence—are taken from the natural environment. Benjamin famously describes the experience of aura by referring to the person who is resting outdoors on a warm summer day and who takes in the contours of a distant mountain or the shadows cast by a branch of a tree. The atmospheric dimension of this experience is underscored as this person is said to be “breathing” the aura of the mountain or the branch.

In Böhme’s view, Benjamin describes a way of inhabiting aesthetic experiences that may aptly explain the effects of unique works of art, but that is certainly not exclusive to them. For we inhabit other “things” aesthetically as well, a fact that becomes clear once we leave behind the classical thing-ontology (an ontology preoccupied with what separates one thing from another) and instead pay attention to “the ecstasy of things,” that is, to how they appear for our sensory register.¹³ This is where the concept of the atmospheric also gets its critical edge. By moving away from a focus on art objects toward a focus on aesthetic *situations*, this concept might be useful for analyses of the increasing aestheticization of culture and politics—a theme that was also one of Benjamin’s concerns.

This observation would be all the more relevant if Benjamin’s essay were simply a theory of aesthetic experience. However, Böhme’s analysis, which somehow brackets Benjamin’s preoccupation with the changed status of the work of art, also brackets its all-important historical perspective. For Benjamin discusses art mainly in order to focus on the implications of a crucial change in the mode of economic production—a type of focus that gives a far more precise notion of how we inhabit our modern media environments than does the more general or ahistorical concept of atmospheres. In Benjamin’s writing, the work of art associated with the “atmospheric” concept of aura seems to serve as a *strategic tool* that puts a historically new relation between production and perception into sharp relief. And this strategy may be directly relevant for understanding the peculiar use of lamps and lamp-related objects in recent art.

What Benjamin's essay gives us to understand is, then, not primarily the general disappearance of the aura of the original work of art: It deals, more poignantly, with the complex question of the *return* of the aura under the radically changed conditions of production that characterize the modern media and leisure industries. For the auratic or "atmospheric" form of "distant presence" is not simply lost in modern media environments. Benjamin's theory suggests, to the contrary, that a different form of aesthetic inhabitation of spaces takes place under these conditions.

The idea of the return of the aura has been described in some detail by Samuel Weber, who, in his reading of Benjamin, pays particular attention to the way in which the initial understanding of aura (the distant presence of original artworks) actually corresponds with the particular modes of presentation provided by modern mass media. It applies, in particular, to the presentations of the medium of television—a form of live electronic flow that shapes our environment in a way that sets it apart from all other visual mass media. Television provides a medial set-up in which perception is experienced in its differentiation. Weber is interested in what he calls the differential specificity of the medium of television—a medium whose live transmissions do not simply overcome distance but seem to somehow short-circuit the notion of distance itself. It renders distance invisible by *transposing it directly into the live vision it transmits*. This short-circuiting implies a split in the unity of the body's time and place—a well-known feature of both film and photography. But in television this separation is combined with a *presentness* associated with sense perception that involves the actuality of the body in a very different way. It sets up a surrogate for the body in that it allows sense perception to take place, but in a way no body can, for its perception takes place in more than one place at a time. In contrast to film and photography, television (which is organized around a concept of "live" flow of time, even if few of its programs are actually transmissions of live events) does not transmit images or representations, but rather the semblance of presentation as such.¹⁴ Television places one face-to-face with the activity and the complexities of perception.

What disappears in the age of technical (or mechanical) reproduction is, in this account, not aura as such but the aura of art as the *work* of representation, a work that would “have its fixed place, that would take its place as a world-picture.” Here, Weber posits Benjamin’s media philosophy against Heidegger’s dystopic idea of the “world-picture,” i.e. the schematic and universalizing pictorialization of the world that takes place in the realm of modern technology. Or, to be more precise, he compares Benjamin’s idea of the new life of auratic images with the few hints that Heidegger gives of possible openings in (or escape routes from) the world-picture. Interestingly, Heidegger describes such escape routes through metaphors of light and shadow. If the world of representations is a zone of light—a system of visibility where everything has its fixed place—the system’s difference can only be a shadow. What does not quite fit into the world-as-picture is a shadow. Here “shadow” signifies not a lack of light but simply that which escapes representation. The shadow, which “bears witness to an always concealed glow,” is a differentiating agent in the sense that it constitutes an “other” production of light, a form of visibility that continually differentiates itself from the representational matrix of the world-picture.¹⁵

This again makes it possible to describe the aura that returns in the new mediascape—the transient and ephemeral, close-up yet distant images of television as “bright shadows.” They produce glowing appearances, ambiences, or atmospheres that speak of a displacement and transformation of the very perception of presence associated with the concept of aura. “Televisual” reality makes perception come face-to-face with itself *as an event*, just as perceptual activity (rather than representation), so to speak, emerges as the real material of television itself.

In this way, Benjamin’s essay provides a prescient outline of the atmospheric conditions of the modern mediascape, that is, of the way in which bodies “inhabit” modern media. His essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” primarily deals with this issue through an analysis of film—a medium that, Benjamin asserts, transforms space and movement so as to make visible new structural formations in matter itself. But the aspects of film mentioned by Benjamin actually point to conditions that are, in a more fundamental way, characteristic of the medium of televi-

sion. His preoccupation is not with filmic representation but with the process of recording: the event-like blink of the camera-eye and the temporal continuity between recording and real life, demonstrated by the cameraman who records images at the same speed at which people speak. This type of focus is characteristic of live TV or real-time video, and was crucially important in the early developments of television or video art. The returned aura is then essentially a televisual aura, and the question of life in mediatic space is, above all, a question of life in televisual reality.¹⁶

The proposition of this chapter is that the lamps in contemporary art production trigger thinking on and around this televisual “life.” If Benjamin intuited a change in the mode of living that had perhaps not yet taken full effect, the lamp works may, for their part, be said to think alongside this change at a time when the atmospheric impact of the televisual is deepening due to the successful introduction of increasingly interconnected digital media. Internet-connected computers and mobile phones combine more traditional televisual forms of live streaming with a number of other aesthetic and communicational functions so as to take up an exponentially larger section of our time and attention, as well as attend to our basic needs. However, to understand what something as archaic as a lamp could possibly have to do with such a sophisticated technological situation, it is necessary to understand the degree to which the lamp works in question may be understood as *strategic* instances, i.e. as event-producing triggers that insert themselves in specific situations (rather than as representational images or stage-sets).

Again, a comparison with Benjamin’s strategic use of the concept of aura may be of some value. No doubt Benjamin could have contented himself by saying that the conditions of production and reception of film and photography are fundamentally different from the conditions of production and reception of painting. But such a statement would have lost track of the very object in which such changes inscribe themselves as a form of basic conditioning and without which an account of the interrelation between art and life could not be described: notably, the body and its affects. Similarly, there is no doubt that contemporary artists may explore current media conditions by focusing on distinct media and the format and

contexts they create: film, TV, Internet, mobile phones, sound systems, etc. But such a focus easily loses view of the crucial connectedness that exists between bodies and media machines, since any focus on these media “themselves” easily turns attention to either analyses of their communicational contents or formats, or to formalist investigations into their specific modes of functioning. The “strategy” of the lamps is to insert such an embodied perspective into media discourses and frameworks. In this way, a specific type of social relation, normally invisible, comes into view. Such events are triggered as the lamps — mysteriously mute but somehow “live,” aesthetic but not quite “artistic” — initially seem to evoke little more than a desire to simply “hang around.”

The predominantly strategic function of the lamps may be supported by the fact that, once displaced from an ordinary, utilitarian context, they become highly overdetermined objects of signification, setting off chains of associations or a jumble of meanings that may activate thinking. This tendency toward overdetermination is shared with the concept of aura, and Weber has unraveled some of the significations that are operative in Benjamin’s writing. In the original German text, aura may signify a luminous ring around the moon (a *Hof*), a social gathering around the king (*Hof*, here, is translatable as “court”), as well as a notion of allegorical gathering and dispersion (the “court” is a figure for the idea of the allegorical gathering of disparate elements that was so important in Benjamin’s thinking).¹⁷ The “distant presence” of the aura may thus trigger thinking on televisual techniques of gathering and dispersal in social space.

The figure of the lamp has, for its part, long held a place in an aesthetic discourse preoccupied with the projective capacities of the creative mind. One only needs to think of the importance of the lamp in Romanticism, where it replaced the mirror as the central metaphor for artistic production. While the mirror indicates mimetic representation (idealist or realist), the lamp suggests a projective aesthetic in which the mind, so to speak, lights up or shapes its own world.¹⁸ Somewhere along the same line of reasoning, the lamp also becomes a metaphor for memory, as, for instance, in the writings of John Ruskin, who uses the term “the lamps of architecture” to argue, among other things, the significance of

the connection between architecture, place, and historical memory.¹⁹ The lamp is at once the figure for the memory of the past and for the free, creative—and futural—projection. In a different setting, Emil Steiger, Martin Heidegger, and Leo Spitzer (among others) initiate a long debate on the epistemological and ontological status of art based on Eduard Mörike's 1846 poem *Auf eine Lampe* (About a Lamp) and the question of the metaphorical implications of lamplight (*Schein*) in this text.²⁰

The lamp works thus create a relay between a Romantic concept of art and the place of the body in the modern media reality, linked through notions of the projective or creative capacities of the mind. A closer look at the artistic situations in which lamps take center stage shows, over and over again, the same phenomenon: an explicitly articulated continuity between lamps and TV screens—a continuity, that is, between ordinary lamplight and the luminous real-time emanations of electronic and informational media. Placed in such a context, the lamp works evoke both the networked continuity of electronic wiring and the continuous activity of projection that subtends our current way of living, thinking, and producing.

From the *laterna magica* to the popular idea of TV as the modern fireplace, there is a long history of associating film, TV, and video with the basic function of lamps. In the 1950s, as TV sets invaded Americans' homes, a variety of "TV lamps" were developed. Some were backlit ceramic sculptures of exotic design intended to stand on top of the TV and further expand the type of mood light the set itself would produce, while others were motion lamps that made imagery (fireplace flames, clouds, boats at sea, etc.) move as if on television. A third category replicated TV light simply by presenting the lamp as a flat image screen illuminated from the inside. The new lamp works operate as if in extension of this historical connection. Once established as a distinct perspective, the association between lamps and television includes all of the different types of live electronic signals, from the lights of digital clock radios and mobile phones to the constantly flickering advertising messages that illuminate our cities at night.

In fact, in many of the lamp works there is a strange emphasis on wiring—thick undulating wiring spreading out on the floor or hanging

from the ceiling, the kind of wiring one normally makes every effort to hide when creating light installations in a museum or when furnishing a home. The emphasis on wiring indicates that the lamps in question are not just objects of design or functional light sources, but also part of a larger discourse on connectivity. The delicate shapes of the floor lamps created by Philippe Parreno and Jorge Pardo did, for instance, compete for attention with the long and thick wiring that connected them to the circuit. In fact, one of the images documenting this 2003 exhibition at Air de Paris made a point of only showing how the wiring of the different lamps met in one socket. Living in the aura of lamps essentially means having one's entire perceptual apparatus connected to the global electronic and informational networks.

In work after work, this sense of connectedness is played up. A lamp by Cerith Wyn Evans, more often than not, hangs near a computer screen that indicates the existence of a program transforming informational material into Morse code signals. These Morse code signals, in turn, control the distribution of lamplight. The lamps often seem to be blinking, and this blinking is not just the result of decrepit light bulbs, but of the live connection between the light of the lamps and informational circuits and processes. The constantly changing colored light that flows out of an apartment window in a work by Parreno is equally the end result of a peculiar and convoluted media production. The pure video color emanations that light up the apartment are triggered by a Morse code rendition of a text that again tells the story of a film. Pierre Huyghe's grid-like ceiling lamp works like an Atari computer game, and Angela Bulloch's light grids read like pixel screens. Olafur Eliasson's projector lamps often mime the visual effects of video projection, while a project currently under development presents a spherical lamp (a grid of individual pixels taken from a television screen) emitting a light that simply consists of signaletic material from whatever TV channel the lamp is tuned to.

Then there are lamps whose glowing presence is even more "essentially" televisual in the sense that they literally transmit other times and places. The pretty glass lamps that Tobias Rehberger installed in the medieval tunnels in the Italian city of San Gimignano did not simply facili-

tate perception of the place itself. (*Fig. 3.14*) Thanks to a computer program with an Internet connection, they gave off a quantity of light that would at each moment correspond to the actual quantity of sunlight in the Uruguayan capital city of Montevideo. (The choice of the city of Montevideo was, in fact, a direct function of its “televisual” name). In a similar work, *Edith’s Sunny*, Rehberger made present a moment of the “dead” past: the lamps in an elegantly designed cubicle at each moment transmitted only the quantity of sunlight measured on the day of Edith Piaf’s death. The light that engendered a sense of perceptual self-presence was also the agent of a split in that sense-presence. The lamplight was coming from another time and place, but this distance was made invisible as it was transposed directly into the perceptual present of the persons passing through the tunnels or spending time in the beautiful Piaf room. And it is this inability to properly separate or negotiate between here and there, and between now and then that is characteristic of the bodily engagement with real-time television.

Inversely, the many artist-designed environments created for watching video art in museums often present the TV screen as a lamp-like element inside a furniture arrangement. In the exhibition *Rooms with a View* at the Guggenheim Museum Soho, in New York, several of the participating artists, including Bulloch, Pardo, Rehberger, and Parreno, chose to create the type of hip home-like environments where the video screens were integrated in laid-back 1970s retro furnishings. The glow from the TV screens contributed to a cocoon-like atmosphere that was reinforced by hypnotically glowing mood lamps. In sharp contrast to the museal mode of display, created to host paintings and sculptures, art videos were no longer presented as something one would “go and see,” or even necessarily “sit and watch” (with all the implications of upfront visibility and division between producer and receiver that such a perspective entails). The new continuity between home TV and museum video instead evoked a sort of expanded video creativity that folds art museum and home, and artistic creativity and private life-styling into one. At this level, the specific video art content was somehow relegated to the status of atmospheric surround, just as the screens that light up around the private home are not necessarily or not only points of attraction, but emanations that provide a sort of

pulse along which a number of activities take place.

The elliptical, home-like environments created by Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster explore this condition in depth. Each environment conveys a highly specific mood or atmosphere. In her rooms, there are invariably lamps—lit lamps that give off a sense of “real” inhabitation. There may also be a bed or a sofa, and sometimes chairs or pillows. There may or may not be an image on a wall or a heap of newspapers on the floor. But most of the time, streaming media is present: glowing TV screens, blinking clock radios, and sound systems—generally small-scale devices placed informally on the floor or in corners, so that they contribute to the atmosphere without colonizing attention. Her concept of “home cinema” (which departs from the act of viewing movies on TV and extends to the form of spatial projection that informs all interior design) has points in common with Lynn Spiegl’s study of the concept of mobile TV, which became prominent in 1960s America. The significance of the “mobility” of TV had less to do with the fact that the TV set was portable (most people left it in one place); what was significant was the association between TV and mobile (sexually liberated) bodies, fantasies of space travel from within the confines of the home, and the blurring of the boundary between private and public. With the dawn of the digital age, the fantasy of the “mobile home” also turned into the fantasy of the “home office.” Again, this last concept reveals less about how most people earn their salaries than about a sensitivity concerning the new “uses” of bodies, of life.²¹ The intimate, affective basis of new conceptions of work and public life is played out as Gonzalez-Foerster compares her atmospheric creations to a kind of biographical writing or signature writing—another metaphor for the private/public interface.

III

To approach the role of media in the new uses of life, the habitual artistic concern with discrete media formats and genres is displaced. Media—as legal entities—tend to “disappear” only to reappear in terms of a larger *dispositif*, or grid of relations. This type of relation was typically voiced by film critic Serge Daney’s provocative statement that “TV does not ex-

ist—or, at least, not in the form we usually think it exists,” a statement that echoes Foucault’s similar statement on the concept of power. In order to understand TV, one must cease to see TV as a definable “thing,” and rather reconstruct its way of functioning through different categories and frameworks than those normally used.

For a start, one must temporarily put aside the two major frameworks that inform our understanding of televisual images: the idea that they are the products of either the typical propaganda machine of the classical mass medium, or of a purely aesthetic framework in which mass media technologies are deployed for different purposes (the production of video art). The interdependence of these two ways of understanding televisual imagery can be seen in the desire, expressed by many artists and critics in the early years of television art experiments, to use the propaganda-machine of television for a wider distribution of video art, that is, of TV’s own, specifically artistic productions. Such perspectives primarily reflect a concern with the freedom or lack of freedom, and the visibility or lack of visibility of artistic expression within the dominant sphere of mass media.

Moments in the early history of video art and recent theorization of TV and video technologies attest to a shift in perspective along the lines suggested by Daney and performed in the contemporary lamp works. Early TV and video art evolved out of the life-art experiments of the avant-garde, a type of approach that differentiated itself radically from the narrative framework that had come to dominate the medium of film.²² In early video art, the television screen was often integrated in larger environmental or interactive setups that testify to a concern with the relationship between TV and the changing concepts of everyday life. In fact, a “video-philosophy” devoted to the question of the wider grid of televisual relations was developed in embryonic and fragmented form in the early writings, instructions, and manifests of Nam June Paik. But the perspectives outlined in his work and writing were subsequently largely forgotten—among other reasons because of the way in which video technology opened up for narrative formats of a more informal nature than the ones usually associated with film. For the Portapak generation of artists, video became a medium that allowed a visual documentation of the contingent, the personal, and the intimately day-to-day; a critical focus on new autobiographical

formats then tended to displace a more pointed focus on the larger productive frameworks in which the television image itself played a bit part. But recently, Paik's fragmented video-philosophy has reemerged in a far more worked-out and detailed form in the writings of Italian philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato, who approaches video as a key to contemporary social relations. In his view, video technology closely mimes the processes of thinking and memory, and this proximity with mental processes makes TV and video essential machines for a form of production that capitalizes on cognitive and perceptual processes.²³

In a form of production that extracts value from all aspects of life, one could say that time itself is subject to the capitalist creation of value in the sense that thinking, or cognitive operations, are what "give" or "produce" any notion of temporality. If TV and video are part of a group of technologies that seems to process time, i.e. to work on and with temporality itself, there may be a fundamental complicity between such technologies and cognitive operations as well as with economic production. Lazzarato's analysis is based on Henri Bergson's account of memory and time: television and video have a capacity for condensing, extending, recapitulating, and previewing time that closely resembles the way the mind itself produces temporality. Time, here, is not a linear process, but a "crystallization" of past, present, and future. The present is conserved in the memory of the past and the past is a memory of the contemporary. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson presents a model for a non-psychological memory—a sort of ontological memory that could also be called a virtual memory, since the coexistence of the present and the past described is a coexistence of the actual and the virtual.²⁴ The technologies of time can, of course, only imitate the complexities of memory in a very limited way, but what they *can* do is to reproduce its temporalities. Television may store and review material within the unfolding presence of a real-time transmission, a transmission that also folds the perceptual presence of the viewing body back on itself. Television or video technologies could then be said to function like a form of social memory: as they store, manipulate, and distribute time material, they work alongside the mental processes of thought or intellectual work in general. This point is reinforced as Bergson's description of the workings of perception is compared with the way

video technologies handle what are commonly referred to as “images.” Bergson imagines perception as a sort of interaction with flows or streams of images that create relations between various forms and types of durations. Images are not phenomena that spring out of subjective imagination or even out of human activity; rather, they exist outside and beyond such activity as autonomous phenomena, i.e. as streams of light. Human perception creates its own particular cuts or intersections in these streams and in this way establishes a relation between meaningful visual durations and random streams of light.

According to Lazzarato, video and digital technologies distinguish themselves by replicating this “perceptual” logic to a much greater degree than a time-based medium like film. As Paik has pointed out, there is no such thing as an “image-space” in a television image. Television images consist of continually moving streams of light and can, therefore, never be contained as spatial unities the way still photography (the still photographs that are chained together in film) “contains” a certain spatial continuity. In television, spatial information is translated into points and lines that have no spatial extension. The mode of extension of video images is then purely temporal: video is primarily a modulation of time. In relation to TV, the world is always already image, or streams of light. For this reason, there is no longer any question of representing or making images, but of manipulating images. Video technology allows access to something that belongs to the realm of pure perception in that it interacts with, or creates various forms of durations or cuts within the streams of light or image flow that exist independently of this particular technology or medium.²⁵ While film also has the capacity to contract time, this can only happen in a *reproduction* of reality and the time of movement. Only video technologies may manipulate light streams directly, i.e. within a real-time presentation that replicates the “now” of perception.

The difference between film and video suggested by Lazzarato is obviously controversial. The contention that film essentially consists of discrete and replete image units, while video consists of continuous streams of light or image flow (in which images are neither fully present nor absent) can, as Trond Lundemo has shown, be challenged. The “essence” of film is not the single image, but the activation of the differences between

images. Since it is this activation of difference that produces the impression of movement, the idea of the full presence of image-spaces in film is harder to uphold.²⁶ And numerous works in experimental film explore the complexities of cinematic time-processing and their relation to perception. It would therefore be more precise to say that it was the easily *accessible* manipulations of signaletic material in real time that made video into a privileged technology for artists preoccupied with the new relations between life time and machine time. The integration of TV technologies and the home environment, and the daily experience that any TV user would have with manipulating highly volatile signal flows, may also have helped place the issue of the affective power of the time technologies in the foreground. As Spiegl's studies of mobile TV illustrate, TV was understood and staged as an extension of the body in a highly concrete manner. But it is important to understand how TV as a body-extension differentiates itself from other tools or prosthetic devices. The "mobility" of TV's time processing is above all associated with the mobility of the self, and particularly with the new mobility of gender relations. It expresses processes of personal transformation, self-realization, or self-styling, as if the free modulation of signals was mapped onto the idea of the modulation of the self. The affective power of time technologies comes precisely from their ability to replicate the mental work that, among other things, is involved in the self's work on itself. If (according to Nietzsche), thinking and perception represent affects, or forms of the will to power, then time technologies can be understood as the machines of personal becoming, or of the production of subjectivity.

The prominence of the new time technologies is then primarily related to the fact that they seem to be able to express the significance of time and its affects in the contemporary *social* machines, i.e. the larger apparatus or dynamic set of relations that constitutes contemporary economic and social production. These time technologies express the current coupling of capitalist production and cognitive operations, a coupling that can be said to "extract" affective power—a new and powerful non-organic form of energy. This notion of the "extraction" of affective power temporarily displaces the usual preoccupation with the TV viewer as a user or

consumer of TV content, i.e. the preoccupation with the meaning of TV messages for its recipients. Focus is instead placed on the way in which TV uses subjects as human machines: viewers are intrinsic to TV, parts of its input and output, feedback, and circuitry. The TV viewer is primarily the synapse or relay through which information is passed on so that energy can be accumulated and value created.²⁷ Thus, television functions as a catalyst for various existential functions, since human consciousness is understood as one of the elements that belongs to the televisual machine itself, and no longer just to an “external” understanding of its messages. Such a notion expands on Walter Benjamin’s interest in the mediatic conditions of perception. Thinking, here, is not understood to take place “in” consciousness, but in the middle of social machines—what Deleuze would call “seeing-machines” and “thinking-machines.”²⁸ The description of the newly intimate relation between machines and cognitive processes springs out of an understanding of the historical changes in the man/machine relationship. In Foucault’s account of pre-disciplinary power formations, or societies under the rule of the absolute monarch or sovereign, people are parts of the machines that they build with one another or with tools or animals. But since this machinic relation stands under the direct leadership of a higher order, some inescapable *given*, the significant product of this relation is not a person’s subjectivity. Production is, in other words, not *centered* on the development of the self and its possibilities.

Self-relation only becomes a product once the relation between subjects and machines is understood as purely external. This type of understanding could be illustrated by the industrial payroll regimes that buy the skills of individual workers; the workers then seem to make use of particular machines out of a free and personal choice. The authority of the higher order is, so to speak, relegated to the various subjectivities that are made to relate to the machine as a “thing” or a “tool” that is essentially separate from themselves, but that can be used as part of their self-production.²⁹ The notion of a purely individual use-relation to distinct, thing-like machines has only been reinforced by an information economy that places great emphasis on individual creativity and that idealizes the notion of mobile or “freelance” workforces. This notion, which can be traced in the widespread tendency to approach media technologies as distinct entities,

obscures the specific intimacy of contemporary man/machine relations and the way in which today's subjects are also "parts" of machines.

A key term in this contemporary relation is the concept of attention—the force that connects our "life-time" (the subjective time of thinking and perception) to the new media machines. Attention is, as stated earlier, an important source of value: the very activity of watching TV, reading a magazine or playing with a computer creates value for someone, somewhere.³⁰ The emphasis on TV ratings attests to the continual effort to quantify its force and impact, however elusive. In his 1916 psychological study of film (or "photoplay"), psychologist Hugo Münsterberg focused specifically on the way in which moving images capture attention on an involuntary level. Voluntary attention is activated if one approaches the chaotic impressions of the world with an idea of what one wants to focus on, ignoring all that does not fulfill this specific interest. Work is generally controlled by such voluntary attention. In contrast, the guiding influence of involuntary attention comes from without, through events that we perceive and that grab our attention because they manage to activate our natural instincts, stirring up our emotions. Photoplay, or film, activates involuntary attention since, if we agree with the project of following the photoplay, attentions are drawn in accordance with the intentions of the producers: the mind can easily be influenced and directed in the rapid play of pictures. Involuntary attention is then described as a centering of consciousness on the objects of attention; other impressions fade away and feelings and impulses group themselves around the attended object. But what is startling in this account is the fact that Münsterberg sees the type of involuntary attention triggered by film—most particularly by the use of close-ups—as a process that shapes space itself. The close-up represents an objectification, in our world of perception, of the mental act of attention: "It is as if the outer world were woven into our mind and were shaped not through its own laws but by the acts of our attention."³¹ These are, quite precisely, mechanisms that come into focus in the lamp works. By framing atmospheric and environmental styles rather than distinct media contents, they explore the production of subjectivity *through the relation between moving image media and the "perceptual" creation of space.*

IV

These are also mechanisms suggested in the environmental focus of early video art. But this focus lost some of its impact once video art was framed as a specific artistic medium or technology and was primarily discussed as the preferred mode of expression of a particular generation of artists. From this point onward video was basically framed as another contribution to the discourse of technical and formal innovation that has been central to Western art at least since Romanticism.

This type of framing is particularly paradoxical given the unusual conditions surrounding the emergence of TV and video as artistic media. As Dieter Daniels has pointed out, the art practices that grew out of the TV medium differed in significant ways from the type of artistic practices that grew out of film, photography, and radio. In these cases, the medium developed its own properly artistic forms of expression that (among other things) helped nurture utopian visions of an integration of art and mass culture. Dreams of a televisual medium not yet created also informed some avant-garde projects and writings. But an actual *artistic* experimentation with televisual techniques only took place once TV was established as the world's dominant mass medium, and recognized (by artists and theorists alike) as a prime instrument of the government and/or the entertainment industry. Significantly, these artistic experiments were never identified or promoted as "television art" by the official medium of television (in the way the film industry would recognize the more solipsistic "artistic" productions as part of its *own* range of expressions). For this reason, TV and video art passed completely outside the production and distribution circuits of television.³²

Early TV artists thus remained in a curious outsider/observer position vis-à-vis the medium they had chosen to work with. Unlike most art-oriented filmmakers, they did not simply learn to work with a technology or a medium in the more limited sense of the word. From their outsider position, they seemed, from day one, to enter into an explicit dialogue with a whole set of institutional, cultural, or economic practices—in short, with the televisual *dispositif*. Television was not so much a medium of expression as it was a cultural and economic *fact*. It could, in other words, not be dealt with without taking into account its way of functioning within larger

contexts of production. For this reason, a number of early TV or video artworks presented highly self-reflexive observations on the complicity between the medium of TV and “creative” production in a wider sense of the word. It was a form of experimentation informed by a Constructivist tradition in which social relations are continually objectified: the Constructivist artist systematically observes his or her own creative production or “engineering” of a world and an artistic self. In fact, a more formally oriented understanding of “video art” as a properly artistic *medium* and a series of genre conventions was a somewhat later development.

The lamp works recapitulate, in a more pointed and far-reaching form, the perspectives and considerations that informed the early artistic experiments with TV, among other things, by separating the larger televisual issues from the genre conventions and modes of display most characteristic of video art. They return, in many ways, to the specific take on TV presented in the early work of Nam June Paik. For Paik somehow managed to bridge an interest in the real-time flow of signals with a focus on the TV set as an element within a home environment. In the process he directed attention away from the issue of TV content and its effects on the public.

It was a true outsider’s approach to TV. Paik possessed neither technical nor journalistic skills that might have associated him with the specific formats of the medium, and was not educated in associated visual media such as film or photography. In the early 1960s, Paik was a composer on the German “new music” scene who was, above all, obsessed with the question of the constraints that an object-oriented Western aesthetics placed on the idea of the musical work. In Paik’s view, music was in need of radical temporalization: the dominant focus on musical content should be replaced by a new understanding of the musical time or the musical event. Here was the key to a new ontology of music: “This when (time of day, and day of year, a very interesting measure ... shall be intensely developed and exploited)....”³³ The tempi that structure musical content should, in other words, no longer be separate from the actual time of lived experience.

As a student of composition at the electronic studios in Cologne and an admirer of John Cage, Paik supported and also radicalized Cage’s

project of breaking down the boundaries between life and art through the use of chance processes and event-oriented strategies. Music that moves to the actual time of lived experience necessarily takes into account the events and durations of the social and biological body that *lives* the music, including a sexuality that was generally omitted from “serious” musical discourse (it was, of course, prominent in popular music associated with everyday life and ritualistic behavior). These attempts to displace the limits of music were inspired by the recent developments in electronic music and particularly by the *musique concrète* use of audiotape technology to insert bits of “real life” into the musical composition. But, Paik claimed, the use of audio recordings of environmental sounds or pure frequencies in lieu of musical harmonies would remain a surface effect as long as one was not prepared to fundamentally change the temporality of the musical object. Due to the uni-directional nature of audio recordings, electronic music could only *represent* time, and then primarily the linear drive of historical time. Audiotape technology would, in the end, only reinforce the purely internal structuring of musical temporality. Paik’s preoccupation with the “when” of the musical event was designed precisely to interrupt this structuring. His concept of “sex music” was associated with a series of shock events in which traditional musical objects, ranging from Beethoven piano sonatas to elaborate audiotape compositions, were subjected to the violent actions of a concrete and particular physical body: Paik’s own.³⁴

However, it was TV and video technology that provided Paik with a more compelling solution in his quest for radical temporalization. Its flow of electronic signals delivered precisely the type of infinite, point-by-point variability or indeterminacy that audiotape could not provide. Television’s live transmissions spoke of a type of production that ran parallel to life itself, while the endless mutability of signals indicated a time medium whose contractions and deformations might approach the perceptual processes of the living body. Paik’s writing on the concepts of input-time and output-time, and the differences that generally arise between these two machinic time-flows (due to editing or various other transformations of the signal material), attest to this point of view.³⁵

At the same time, the increasing ubiquity of the TV set as a piece of furniture in every home triggered ideas of a new continuity between art, technology, and everyday living. While other artists, like K. O. Götz, for instance, had approached TV as a purely visual medium that might engender a new type of electronic painting, Paik was the first to state and exploit artistically the fact that television is, first of all, a controller and producer of time itself, and only secondly a provider of various forms of visual, dramatic, journalistic, and commercial content. Significantly, time here is not approached in the abstract or in general, as is often the case in the type of critical argument that promotes the general supremacy of temporality and indeterminacy in the arts over more static or deterministic art forms. In Paik's work and writings, time is above all treated as a singularly important *economic* factor, a rare and valuable commodity that is explicitly compared to an energy source like oil.

In contrast to the process-oriented philosophy of John Cage, which is based on an analogy between the processes of art and the processes of nature, Paik's interest in time and indeterminacy is social through and through.³⁶ The real-time temporality of TV is the temporality of contemporary cognitive production, which mines attention and memory the way industrial production mines oil. Television, for Paik, is then not simply an "artistic medium" but a technology that opens for an integration of art and life on the level of actual social relations and not on the level of some ahistorical concept of nature.

Paik's economic understanding of the productive temporality of TV depends on a point of view that places all emphasis on what we could call the atmospheric, ecstatic, or auratic quality of television. Paik explicitly evokes the ecstatic quality of TV as a way of bringing out the dynamics of an affect-based machinery that reorganizes social space.³⁷ And it is also from this perspective that Paik's work joins the most ephemeral and the most "tangible" aspects of television: on the one hand the real-time flow of signals and, on the other hand, the TV-set as a piece of furniture in the private home, the place where machine-time and life-time are integrated. The two faces of TV are joined in a manner that is, quite literally, hands-on. In one type of work, Paik reaches deep into the internal

mechanisms of TV sets, changing their circuits so that no two sets show the same images, despite the fact that they receive the same channel—a way of bringing out TV’s highly flexible signaletic basis.

Another type of work approaches this same perspective from the receiver’s end, where the idea of touching the screen becomes a figure for the TV viewer’s bodily involvement with the flow of signals—an overlapping between biological life and the technologically “live” that is continually staged in Paik’s work. In his early TV researches, Paik demonstrated how the simple act of touching the screen with a magnet instantly changed its output. A series of works made in collaboration with filmmaker Jud Yalkut presents the tactile, or corporeal, involvement in TV within the framework of infinite regress in which the distinction between the TV signals and the viewers’ bodies are confused. Paik and Yalkut made films of TV sets emphatically placed in particular environments (usually a studio) that show Paik’s televisual manipulations. The key motif of these films is that of someone touching the actual screen of the TV set with his hand, while images of the hand appear in ghostly guises on the TV screen itself.

From this point of departure springs a long series of atmospheric approaches to television. There are TV sets made into furniture (*TV Bed*, *TV Seat*), into musical instruments (*TV Cello for Charlotte Moorman*) and pieces of clothing (*TV Bra*, *TV Glasses*). They also define larger life environments: a densely planted TV garden in which TV screens shimmer among living plants, a TV ceiling that allows images of fish to fly in the sky, or a darkened space lit by twelve images of the moon on twelve different TVs so that all the moon’s phases are compressed into one time and place. This emphasis on the continuity between life and “live” is deepened in a series of closed-circuit video works in which the living time of biological life (often goldfish or flowers) is continually looped into live television. However, the most famous of these closed circuit set-ups are the ones in which a Buddha figure or Auguste Rodin’s *Thinker* watches his own on-screen thinking. These “thinkers” are not just confronted with their own images (the TV screen is not a mirror representation), but with a concrete form of machine thinking in which presence, memory, and projection are demonstrably produced within the same signal flow.

It is perhaps of some significance that Paik's work with TV signals is the immediate artistic and philosophical context for the model for Martin's Creed's lamp work. George Brecht's *Three Lamp Events* proposed a sort of "degree zero" of mediation. All it did was point to a signaletic event that takes place all over the world, all the time, oblivious of any particular aesthetic or mediatic framework: the basic action of a light going on and off. A student of Cage, Brecht shared Paik's obsession with radical temporalization, and in this vein of thought conceived a type of work that would erase the traditional distinction between objects and events. Uncertain material boundaries, dubious visual status, and lack of predefined duration would make the work seem quasi-non-existent. It would only come alive as a work through situational encounters with this non-existence, which would obviously have different implications in different settings. It was the same focus on undecidable signaletic events that made it possible for Paik to focus on the larger televisual environment and its various "productions."³⁸

Such concerns seemed to fade from view as video art asserted itself as a specifically artistic medium with a host of new narrative, visual, and performative genres. It is therefore significant that when these concerns re-emerged in the art of the 1990s, they reemerged not within the framework of video art, but in terms of a new artistic interest in inhabited places and social spaces. These places and spaces—both private and public, and oriented toward leisure as much as toward the more traditional workplace—are primarily staged as places of production. The emphasis on the atmospheric or auratic aspects of these places—articulated through an attention to issues of architecture, design, and lifestyle, which seem to reach a point of high concentration with the ubiquitous figure of the lamp—is simply a way of thinking through or exploring the way in which contemporary production engages our affective registers. The lamp is quite simply *the* figure that invites one to think of media in the fundamentally "productive" sense indicated by Nam June Paik.

- ⁰¹ George Brecht, "Three Lamp Events," from *Water Yam* (New York: Fluxus Edition, 1963).
- ⁰² Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 7–22 and 123–131.
- ⁰³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). The relevant texts by Foucault are *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I. An Introduction* (London: Allen Lane, 1979), "Governmentality," in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 87–104 and *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76* (New York: Picador, 2003). As Thomas Lemke and others have pointed out, it should be noted that the biopolitics outlined by Hardt and Negri is a somewhat narrower term than the one invented by Foucault and which covers subject areas like hygiene, demography, social welfare, and insurance systems. (Lemke, "A Zone of Indistinction. A Critique of Giorgio Agamben's Concept of Biopolitics," in *Outlines: Critical Social Studies* 7, No. 1 (2005), 3–13.
- ⁰⁴ Such a perspective is presented in Mark Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006). A key point in Hansen's analysis is his attempt to historicize the post-human view that is central to the science of cybernetics. This view evolves out of the Shannon-Weaver theory of information, which views information in stochastic or probabilistic terms. The key issue in their information theory was not the communication of significance or meaning but the optimization of the signal-to-noise ratio in message transmission. Alternative theories of information, such as the one developed by Donald McKay, also take interpretation into account as part of the structural component of message: information is defined in terms of the mutual constitution of message and receiver. This model was, however, dropped by American cybernetics that came to dominate the information-theoretical field.
- ⁰⁵ The 1999 project *No Ghost Just a Shell* by Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe launched the life of the cartoon figure named Annlee. They bought the rights to this figure from the Japanese agency Kworks, which develops characters for the Japanese manga industry. A "shell" that could be filled with any type of action or meaning, Annlee subsequently appeared as the "subject" or "actor" in works by a great number of artists (Liam Gillick, Joe Scanlan, Pierre Joseph and Mehdi Belhaj-Kacem, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Henri Barande, François Curlet, M/M (Paris), Melik Ohanian, Richard Phillips, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Anna-Léna Vaney).
- ⁰⁶ Emma Mahony, "The House on the Hill," in *CIRCA* 97 (Autumn 2001), 23–25.
- ⁰⁷ Ann Goldstein, quoted in Emma Mahony, "The House on the Hill," in *CIRCA* 97 (Autumn 2001), 23–25.
- ⁰⁸ Press release for Jorge Pardo's exhibition at LOT 61, New York, NY, 1997.
- ⁰⁹ Michelle Grabner, "Jorge Pardo: Living Without Boundaries," in *Sculpture Magazine* (December 1997), 38–41.
- ¹⁰ Lynne Cooke, "Jorge Pardo: Project," <http://www.diachelsea.org/exhibs/pardo/project/essay.html>.
- ¹¹ David Toop, *Haunted Weather: Music, Silence, and Memory* (London: Serpents Tail, 2004).
- ¹² Gernot Böhme, *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995).
- ¹³ Böhme, *ibid.*, 25–27.
- ¹⁴ Samuel Weber, *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996), 76–129.
- ¹⁵ Weber, *ibid.*, 76–107.
- ¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Kunstverket i Reproduksjonsalderen*, translated by Torodd Karlsen (Oslo: Gyldendal 1975), 35–65, and Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963).
- ¹⁷ Weber, *ibid.*, 92–97.
- ¹⁸ M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).
- ¹⁹ John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (New York: Noonday Press, 1961).
- ²⁰ I am indebted here to Janne Gro Rygg who discusses this debate in her MA Thesis, *Om en lampe. Eduard Mörikes "Auf eine Lampe" og debatten mellom Emil Staiger, Martin Heidegger og Leo Spitzer* (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2004).

- ²¹ Lynn Spiegl, "Portable TV: Studies in Domestic Space Travel," in John Fullerton and Jan Olsson (eds.), *Allegories of Communication: Intermedial Concerns from Cinema to the Digital* (Eastleigh: John Libbey Publishing, 2004), 55–80.
- ²² Experimental film often represents a conscious break with this framework. In addition, Tom Gunning's work on early film has outlined how film at this stage was not yet integrated with the narrative framework. See, for instance, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the [In]Credulous Spectator," in Linda Williams (ed.), *Viewing Positions* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1995), and "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," in Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (eds.), *Early Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1989).
- ²³ Maurizio Lazzarato, *Videophilosophie. Zeitwahrnehmung im Postfordismus* (Berlin: b_books, 2002).
- ²⁴ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, translated by N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991).
- ²⁵ Lazzarato, *ibid.*
- ²⁶ As Lundemo argues, the understanding of the film image as a complete presence is a remnant of a view of cinematic movement based on the retinal afterimage: a frame leaves an impression on the retina that lingers until it blends into the next frame, thus producing the illusion of movement. However, rather than leaving an afterimage, each photogram depicts a position slightly different from the preceding one. According to the "phi phenomenon," movement is inferred from this gap. Importantly, this mental function is based on comparison and on the memory or trace of the preceding photogram. Mental processing is activated by the absence of the object or situation. Because of this absence the cinematic images must, like video images, be understood as incomplete, since there are no afterimages present at all times. (Lundemo, "The Dissected Image: The Movement of Video," in Fullerton and Olsson, *op. cit.*, 2005, 105–122.)
- ²⁷ Lazzarato, *ibid.*, 137–138.
- ²⁸ A thinking with the concept of machines runs through almost all of the works of Deleuze and Guattari. It is extensively developed in their first collaborative work, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (London: Athlone Press, 1984).
- ²⁹ Lazzarato, *ibid.*
- ³⁰ Jonathan Beller, "Kino-I, Kino-World: Notes on the Cinematic Mode of Production," in Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader* (Routledge: London, 1998), 60–86.
- ³¹ Hugo Münsterberg, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (New York/London: D. Appleton & Company, 1916).
- ³² Dieter Daniels, *Kunst als Sendung. Von der Telegraphie zum Internet* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2002), 241–249.
- ³³ The "new ontology of music" was presented in Paik's leaflet manifesto *Postmusic: The Monthly Review of the University for Avant-garde Hinduism* (New York: Fluxus Edition, 1963).
- ³⁴ I am referring here to a series of pieces (*Simple*, *Etude for Piano Forte*, *One for Violin (solo)*, *Young Penis Symphony*, and *Sonata quasi una Fantasia*) that were performed and/or written in the period 1960–62. *Simple* contains the following instructions: 1. *Wirf Bohnen in den Zuschauerraum.* 2. *Schmier Rasiercrème auf Körper.* 3. *Tu Reis in die Rasiercrème.* 4. *Wickle langsam eine Papierrolle ab.* 5. *Geh in Wasserbecken.* 6. *Komm zurück und spiele etwas Klavier mit Babyschnuller im Mund.* (1. *Throw beans in the auditorium.* 2. *Spread shaving foam on body.* 3. *Put rice in the shaving foam.* 4. *Slowly unwind a roll of paper.* 5. *Step into a pail of water.* 6. *Come back and play some piano with pacifier in your mouth*)
- ³⁵ Nam June Paik, "Input-Zeit und Output-Zeit," in Wulf Herzogenrath (ed.), *Nam June Paik Werke, 1946–1976. Musik Fluxus Video* (Cologne: Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1977), 12–13.
- ³⁶ Nam June Paik, "Medienplanung für das nachindustrielle Zeitalter (1974). Bis zum 21. Jahrhundert sind es nur noch 26 Jahre," in Herzogenrath, *ibid.*, 163.
- ³⁷ Nam June Paik, "Nachspiel zur Ausstellung Exposition of Music–Electronic Television, Wuppertal, 1963," in Herzogenrath, *ibid.*, 87–92. In this text Paik explicitly discusses the ecstatic qualities of a musical production based on the production logic of televisual signals.
- ³⁸ One of Brecht's so-called word events – a simple sign reading "exit" – was included in Paik's concert/performance during the Düsseldorfer Kammerspiele in 1962, and Brecht's name generally pops up in

Paik's writing from that time as a central point of reference (among other things on a list where Paik enumerates the connections between aesthetics and cybernetics.) The list is reproduced in Herzogenrath, *ibid.*, 124–125.

Chapter Four

Lamps, Television, and Biopolitics: The Contemporary Lamp Works

I

Consider a strange media object: a film that shows nothing but its own scenario, that is, the generative point of departure for the production of the film itself. Consider, next, that in this case the scenario is not a written text, but presents itself in spatial and atmospheric terms: it is a building. But not your typical kind of building. This particular building is a lamp—a strange tent-like construction covered with semi-transparent rubber sheets that lights up at night like a giant Noguchi lamp (the sheet material diffuses light in the same way that a decorative living room lamp does). Placed among rice fields in Thailand’s Chiang Mai, the inside of this lamp building is simply a dynamo calibrated to generate electricity for ten light bulbs, thanks to the raw muscle power of local water buffalo pulling a two-ton steel counterweight. The lamp building then extracts “biopower” in the most obvious sense of the term.⁰¹ (*Fig. 4.1 – 4.2*)

This lamp-building has no function other than that of serving as the scenario for a film. Consequently, the finished film itself only records or documents this building. Like all film scenarios, the building previews, or “projects,” narrative material for a potential film, a postulated sequence of events. But in this case, it would be more correct to say that it is not really film narrative, but the event of the luminous film projection itself that is being previewed. It is as if the lamp-building already imagines the light that the film itself will generate, or, more precisely, the glowing, atmospheric surround of the film screening, a surround that can obviously also be understood as an inhabited space. The luminous space that normally serves to *diffuse* or distribute a pre-existing narrative is, in this case, already present as the “narrative” material of this particular film.⁰²

The film, made in 2003 by Philippe Parreno in collaboration with architect François Roche, is called *The Boy From Mars*, a title that promises a sci-

ence-fiction story. But this is not the story of the actions of any boy from the planet Mars. The only action that unfolds in *The Boy From Mars* is the lighting of the glowing scenario building as darkness falls on the rice fields and the buffalo do their work. Daytime shots provide a more precise view of the construction of the lamp building and the workings of its muscle-powered dynamo. In daylight, it looks quite mundane: wind and rain tear at its elastomer skin. But then darkness falls, the lamp lights up once more, and the projective magic of the scenario is restored. Projection—whether described as subjective fantasy, mental previewing of the future, or cinema screening—tends to be imagined in terms of the cone of light that cuts through the darkness of night. When the Romantic tradition takes on the lamp (rather than the mirror) as the central metaphor for artistic production, the lamp indicates a projective aesthetics in which the mind, so to speak, lights up or shapes reality.⁰³ In contrast to the artistic ideals associated with mirroring (idealist or realist representations of the existing world), the cone of light that cuts through darkness is associated with the concept of becoming, and so also with the Futurist modes of thinking and creation that would mark Modernity; and, one could add, with the new media machines that would be intimately associated with modern art production and this essentially projective form of imagination.

The few obvious science-fiction elements in *The Boy From Mars* therefore emerge only as if in extension of this projective lamplight. In the darkness of the night landscape, the lamp building is associated with three other sources of light: the few street lamps that exist in the area, the moon that appears behind drifting clouds, and a series of star-like lights that move slowly across the night sky and that present themselves as some kind of alien visitation. In a scene that presents itself as classic sci-fi, the lone buffalo in the night field is the only observer of these UFOs. The point is, however, that the most evident traces of the sci-fi narrative promised in the film's title only appear as if an afterthought to the presentation of projective media machinery. This media machinery appears under two guises: on the one hand, it is an entirely comprehensible technical structure—a muscle-powered electrical generator. On the other hand, it is a slowly unfolding luminous and atmospheric presence filled with untold potential,

a generator that draws not on muscle power but on the power of thinking and imagination.

This is, one could argue, the specific form of biopower extracted by the modern media machines in general. From this perspective, *The Boy From Mars* can be seen as one among a long series of recent artworks in which the power of thinking or the power of affects is emphatically associated with the workings of the media and information machines, rather than with whatever type of humanistic content might be seen to pass through the production and distribution apparatuses of such media. In order to bring out the implications of this perspective as a concrete material structure open for experience and for thinking, the work in question tends to reverse or radically reconfigure the habitual production logic of media such as film and television. Again and again, the lamp turns up as a key figure around which the reconfiguration turns:

A chandelier hangs from the ceiling of what will be a living room, a bed light stands on the floor of what will be a bedroom. Lights are on in all the rooms. To start with, it was a sales gimmick: with light falling fast, it was decided to put lights in the rooms to give an impression of life as people walked around the housing complex.⁰⁴

The above description is taken from a text by Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno called *The Story of a Feeling (Notes)*, a text that revolves in oblique ways around Anna Sanders, the name of a character in a film the authors claim is “currently being written,” but also the name of a film production company as well as a magazine that conjure this persona without ever publishing a picture of her. Like *Brigitte*, *Marie Claire*, or *Elle*, *Anna Sanders* is a media identity that cannot be referred to in terms of a psychological character or a physiognomy, but rather in terms of a sort of evocative power. The evocative power of *Anna Sanders* is above all linked to the creation of a sense of atmosphere or environment. As with the case of *Marie Claire*, her identity emerges only through the choice of articles, images, ads, and other editorial material that fills the magazine. A media

identity of this type could be understood as a social space of sorts, inhabited by the magazine reader who immerses him- or herself in a magazine's particular atmosphere or surrounding. But social space here is obviously not understood as a given (an object available for sociological description), but as an emergent space, an effect of the creative projections of each magazine reader.

Similarly, *The Story of a Feeling (Notes)* does not involve looking for "a story that might legitimize a feeling," and which would then provide a portrait of Anna Sanders through the psychological narratives that dominate the format of the novel as well as the many films based on novels. A number of *potential* stories may, on the other hand, arise as an effect of the emotions or atmospheres conjured by the notes. Significantly, the dominant part of this material describes leisure-oriented spatial settings that involve holiday trips, hotel rooms, housing complexes, shopping malls, and sports arenas. Here, the continual references to lamps help emphasize the atmospheric quality of all these spaces. For it is this atmospheric dimension that activates an affective register and so transforms these mundane spaces of economic exploitation into evocative, projective spaces. Lights are turned on in the rooms of the still-empty housing complex in order to conjure fantasies for potential buyers of what the place might one day become.

This distinct emphasis on social space as an atmospheric, evocative construct makes it possible to expand the significance of the concept of the scenario presented in a work like *The Boy From Mars*. The scenario is, most obviously, a point of departure for media productions—usually film. But to the extent that the cinematic scenario is also associated with inhabited space—as in Parreno's lamp-building or the lamp-lit, housing complex described in *The Story of a Feeling*—social space is itself so to speak infused with a projective logic, what we may call "scenario mentality." This means that social space forms the point of departure for a specific mode of futuristic thinking, in which the future emerges as a mutable sequence of possibilities. Scenario thinking or scenario mentality is a contemporary way of thinking about the future that seems to take a cue from the type of "thinking" that is activated in media like film and television.

Moving beyond the controlled production of newness associated with the older planning economies (a newness carefully based on the parameters of the known), the production of newness associated with scenario thinking derives from the ability to capitalize, in the here and now, on the suggested *potential* of a number of hypothetical futures. Its driving force is not a governmental agency disciplining the future to take place according to a desired pattern, but media machines that capitalize on the mere ability to hope, dream, and imagine—that is, on the cognitive abilities of individual subjects. It would, therefore, be incorrect to say that the scenario mentality is another word for pure fantasy, since it is a call to imagine deployed to have material effects in the present.

In a text that reads like a manifesto of artistic production, Liam Gillick sees the typical risk-oriented “what if” question of scenario thinking as an emblematic figure for the struggle to ensure the mobility and reinvention required to conjure the dynamic aura of so-called free market economies. The logic of scenario thinking is reinforced in the realm of cultural production, particularly through mainstream film and television, where films like *Back to the Future* or *Groundhog Day*, and series like *Time Tunnel* and *Quantum Leap*, play up fantasies of prevision and mutable temporalities.⁰⁵ Along with the media that express this mode of thinking, the scenario mentality might then also be seen as one of the social machines of control society, in the sense that control mechanisms are instantiated through a continual focus on openness and potentiality. Yet, in general, film and TV tend to disguise their roles as the expressive agents of the scenario mentality. This disguise is possible because in most films the projection of hypothetical futures and time travel is identified with a narrative structure (for instance, a science-fiction novel) that is seen as *previous to*—and thus also fundamentally independent of—the media machines in which they are presented. Everything then proceeds as if the Futurist fantasies just happened to pass through the apparatus of film or television. The feature film or the TV series is simply presented as the end product of a narrative desire whose origins lay elsewhere—putatively in the autonomous imaginative capacities of human (artistic) consciousness.

The Boy From Mars turns this media logic inside out. Here, the form of thinking or affect characteristic of the scenario mentality is emphatically placed in the middle of the media machines, associated with the very working of these machines. This is the primary result of Parreno's reconfiguration of the habitual production logic of film and TV, in which media consistently emerge as illuminated and inhabited spaces. In a work like *Mont Analogue*, a video that consists only of changing color emanations screened inside a Parisian apartment, the video is basically a lamp that lights up both the apartment and—through its windows—the night streets outside.⁰⁶ (Fig. 4.3 – 4.4) However, the durations and rhythms of the luminous color changes are the end products of a complex media processing which, again, eschews the use of narrative as an independent point of departure for media production. The color changes are generated by Morse code signals that beat out the words of a text, a story. But this text is a story *about* a film, a film based on French Surrealist René Daumal's unfinished mystical/spiritual novel *Mount Analogue* (1952), itself dealing with issues of time/space travel. Subtitled *A Novel of Symbolically Authentic Non-Euclidian Adventures in Mountain Climbing*, it tells the story of the ascent of a mountain that can only be perceived by realizing that one has traveled further in traversing it than one would by traveling in a straight line, and can only be viewed from a particular point when the sun's rays hit the Earth at a certain angle. (Cult filmmaker Alexandro Jodorowsky's *Holy Mountain* is largely based on *Mount Analogue*.) The video light that illuminates the Parisian apartment like a sophisticated mood lamp is the signaletic residue of an unfinished novel turned into a film and then mediated through a narrative that is in turn coded in one of the languages of information processing. Everything in the work takes place, so to speak, within the folds of information and media machines. More than just a formalist play with technological supports of aesthetic expressions, the association between lamps, media, and the question of habitation, traced in work after work, is an aesthetic and political strategy that makes visible the specific ways in which the contemporary media machines should be understood as social sites that represent specific subjectivation processes. It is an artistic strategy that compels one to see these media machines as producers of social relations before one sees them as producers

of specific aesthetic expressions or ideological messages. By reconfiguring media productions as atmospheric spaces, this type of work explores the forces at work in an everyday environment formed and informed by a logic of projection.

From this point onward, the lamp works can be seen to operate along two main strategic axes. One type of work presents arrangements in which the habitual elements of media production are emphatically reconfigured, in that they are reversed or turned inside out. A different type of work seems to engage with the machines of perception from a more intimate perspective. Here the complicities between media production and individual perception are approached on a more explicitly somatic level. Characteristic of all the lamp works, though, is the way they present an everyday environment informed by televisual temporalities, now understood as a social memory or mode of thinking.

The lamp works create spaces where lifetime and real-time are intertwined. The flexible temporal modulations of memory and affects, represented by the media machines as well as by the stylistics of the inhabited environment, function as the points of connection between real-time and life-time. In this way, the lamp works create a setting in which the forces that work to extract value from time are, so to speak, made visible: the appeal to dreamlike time/space travels, to mental stimulation, individual transformation, challenge and excitement, or to immersion in beauty pure and simple. Such forces are not presented from an ironic or distant perspective, as tools of media manipulation. On the contrary, they constitute the key elements in aesthetic situations or events that draw the viewer in and that are experienced as accessible, and even desirable life-worlds, parallel in so many ways to the ones we live in or wish to live in. However, as the lamp works reconfigure the tenets of media production, they introduce *formal* complications that intervene in the *uses of time* in this production.

The question is, notably, how to understand the strategic role of time in these works. The lifestyle and media culture evoked here is often discussed in terms of Guy Debord's notion of the "spectacle"—a condition of late capitalism in which all that was once directly lived is said to have been

transformed into representations or images. The unity of life has thus become fragmented and, in a reality that can now only be considered partially, the world of images or representations unfolds as “a pseudo-world *apart*, an object of mere contemplation.” Even so, the spectacle is an instrument of unification since it is that part of society “which concentrates all gazing and all consciousness.”⁰⁷ The critical relation to the spectacle or media reality (performed in numerous artistic actions) is then imagined as a refusal of the unifying drive of the spectacle, primarily through a disruption of its mechanisms: a deconstruction of the autonomy of images, a refusal of visuality, or a critique of the functions of the gaze.

There are important reasons why the time strategies of the lamp works cannot be easily identified with Debord’s description of the spectacle, or with the critical strategies that turn on this description. For the notion of the separate yet unifying force of the spectacle only makes sense in terms of the notion of visual focus. The spectacle takes over the field of vision and as a result everything else is obscured; only in this way can the separate world of images, strangers to “life itself,” become a total world. The spectacle is then essentially imagined as a theatrical representation that is viewed from the outside and that may also be challenged from the outside, presumably by those critical enough to avert their eyes. In contrast, the emphasis on the “memory-like” operations of media technologies derive from a very different analysis of the power of media culture, an analysis according to which the spectacle is not understood as an autonomous visual production but as a disciplining of the senses that takes place by means of the time crystallization machines.

From this perspective, the notions of averting one’s eye or refusing/dismantling the world of images no longer make much sense. Vision may be cut off, but there is simply no easily conceivable *outside* to the realm of thinking and memory. When the lamp works bring out the power of time modulation as an object of contemplation, their critical strategy must be understood in a different way: *as a playing along with and even an acceleration of the forces at work in the time machine’s disciplining of the senses.* As Maurizio Lazzarato suggests, to exploit the time production of mental processes is to relegate control to something that is also essentially uncontrollable. Video-time and real-time involve a complete-

ly flexible manipulation of durations: temporal contractions and accelerations take place, so to speak, within the “passage” of time itself, just as they do within the “now-time” of one’s thought processes. As contemporary capitalism extracts value from time itself, an empty temporality of exchange value is constantly doubled by a real-time that is, in fact, an “uncontrollable” time of creation and of events. The first instance controls or streamlines the temporal multiplicities that capitalism itself calls forth in its eternal demand for “the new”; the second instance is a creation of heterogeneous durations—uncontrollable time.⁰⁸

The political conclusion that may be drawn from this type of description opens complex debates concerning the definition of new forms of freedom and political organization; this topic will not be dealt with here. But in terms of understanding the strategies or operations of the lamp works, the dialectic of controllable/uncontrollable time may at least open onto the following conclusion: Simply the fact of presenting, exploring, and *thinking* the time of the media machines, in its qualitative dimensions, may function as an instance of “out-of-control” time, an event-like interruption in a particular meaning and function of time. In this context, “thinking” is obviously not just the contemplation of a recognizable object. Gilles Deleuze, who consistently tried to challenge the very image of thought (especially the ingrained notion that thinking takes place in the realm of recognition), dares us to imagine thinking as an event, a shock-like encounter with what is outside of thought or consciousness itself. For, as Deleuze argues, we only think when something *forces* us to do so.⁰⁹ A work like *The Boy From Mars* inserts a formal complication into the dynamic but always controlled imagination of the future produced by the media machines and the related scenario mentality. This formal complication may be understood as a force or an event that triggers thinking. In *The Boy From Mars*, we encounter a media object in which the familiar—the reassuring aura of projected light and the equally reassuring rhythm of projective narratives—has also become unfamiliar. Parreno’s work may be understood as an event that brings out the material basis of the modes of Futurist imagination at work in contemporary culture, but it is also an event that opens up Futurist thinking itself toward other meanings. In this

sense, and this sense only, *The Boy From Mars* might be called a true work of science fiction.

II

The experience of inhabited spaces as real-time spaces is perhaps nowhere as clearly articulated as in the work of Tobias Rehberger, an artist who tends to be associated with the supposed merger of art, design, and architecture, and who is particularly known for filling his exhibition spaces with beautifully designed lamps. Huge, white, drop-shaped glass lamps decorated the ceiling of one of the Old Masters' collections spaces in the Hamburger Kunsthalle. Clusters of different types of lamps—spherical yellow double glass lamps, drop-shaped clear-glass lamps, lantern-like lamps with screens made out of colorful Velcro bands—filled one entire ceiling at the Museum für Neue Kunst in Karlsruhe. (Fig. 4.5–4.6) A compilation of different types of George Nelson paper pendant lamps made up an installation at the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst in Leipzig. A single lamp was even suspended from the branches of a tree, above a stone bench, at the edge of the oak woods in the small German town of Lage.¹⁰

But despite this predilection for furniture-like arrangements, Rehberger's works are not about design in the sense that they create design solutions or new design styles. Rather, style is above all a time machine, deployed or evoked for its ability to order and distribute time. On the surface, however, the rooms he creates simply seem like rooms to inhabit. Superficially, a work like *Fragments of their Pleasant Spaces (in my fashionable version)* simply seems devoted to the task of creating a series of hip relaxation spaces, based on the personal desires of the artist's friends.¹¹ Subtitles like *Lying around lazy. Not even moving for TV, sweets, Coke and vaseline*, and *No need to fight about the channel, together, leaned back*, indicate the type of "commission" behind each single constellation of couches, carpets, tables, and TV sets. Low-slung, minimal, and elegant, yet optimistically colorful, they represented, on the face of it, the high end of the 1990s art lounges. (Fig. 4.7–4.8)

But closer inspection uncovers a built-in timeline that takes the work in a very different direction. The arrangements are less design solutions than ephemeral style suggestions imbued with the restless knowledge of being precisely dated, fashion-wise, and so also soon outdated. The key to the whole project lies in the promise that Rehberger regularly updates these design arrangements in keeping with the changing fashions of interior design. And so the original 1996 designs presented at the Galerie Bärbel Grässlin in Frankfurt were modified in an updated version at the same place in 1999 (a third and final modification will take place in 2009). It is, in other words, not style or fashion but what Walter Benjamin called fashion's "sense of time" that is isolated, framed, and put to work here. This sense of time has certain structural similarities to the way real-time technologies manipulate time. Design and fashion keep us committed to the sense of an urgently lived present, a continual now-time that is expressed through the individually felt obligation to "appear" in one way rather than another. This idea of appearance is all about timing: it has less to do with being proper than with never being outdated or "out-of-time." Simultaneously, the fashion "now" is a present in which the memory material of "period styles" and "new ideas" of future living are continually processed. In this sense, it is not too far-fetched to associate the time machine of style with the intimate disciplining of the senses operated by the time-crystallization machines. If style is a time machine in Rehberger's work, it is also worth noting that the actual design styles he creates appear as a sort of mutable memory material rather than as "good form." For all their solid shapes, elegant colors, and obvious fashion references, his furniture arrangements still strike one as being elliptical, fragmentary, or slightly sketchy, as if they belong in the realm of thought or imagination rather than as physical objects for use, located in the "real world."

The time machine of style is juxtaposed—or integrated—with televisual time machines. The aura of Rehberger's beautifully designed lamps is never simply the aura of "presence," since the lamps tend to transmit, in real time, the light from other times and places. In Karlsruhe, the yellow double-glass lamps transmitted the natural light outside the museum, while the Velcro lamps transmitted light conditions in California. A light switch in-

side the security guards' dressing room controlled other lamps, so that the work was, in fact, modulated by those people normally designated "outsider" guardians of aesthetic productions.

At the same time, TV sets and TV light are continually made to function as lamps. Rehberger's spaces are systematically illuminated by live televisual feeds that are remarkable primarily for the fact that they never show televisual imagery in the ordinary sense of the word. Specific televisual contents or forms of programming are used—most notably the popular film classics that are a standard feature of TV programming—but what is retained from these films is above all a sort of luminous emanation, something that is retained as an impression, a quality, or an atmosphere. In one work, the most frightening scene from Stanley Kubrick's horror classic *The Shining* (the "Here's Johnny" scene) is projected on a screen as a mere light reflection from a TV hidden behind this screen, so all that is seen is the shifty rainbow-colored aura of TV signals.¹² In another work, TV screens featuring films—chosen for their particularly affective content—are built into furniture arrangements so that the actual screens face the wall and the TV content is only visible as vibrant halos of light along the walls. (*Fig. 4.9*)

Incidentally, this way of using TV sets has many points in common with the so-called TV lamps that became popular in the early days of television, when TV was often watched, cinema-style, in the dark. As mentioned previously, the TV lamps were small sculptural objects designed to stand on top of the TV set. Discreetly lit from behind, the light served to further expand or diffuse the glowing aura of the TV itself. (*Fig. 4.10*) It is exactly the same diffusion principle that is put into play when Rehberger turns TV-screens against the wall, as if the TV-set itself were a 1950s TV lamp. Just as TV lamps reinforced the purely atmospheric qualities of television, Rehberger's use of the TV sets as diffusion lamps transforms the memory material of specific TV content into purely perceptual material—time, light, and movement. With light and color changing to the rhythm of hidden film action, the spaces illuminated by the TV sets become fraught with the activity of mental projection.¹³

Rehberger invents a number of complex formal strategies in order to turn the collective memory material of old TV content into uncon-

trollable flows of light, as if anything to do with TV production should be reconsidered or reframed in terms of TV's production of time. And all of these strategies turn, at one point or another, around issues of interior style and design. "TV content" encompasses, of course, a number of different phenomena. The narratives and imagery of popular films or TV series are typical forms of content. The charismatic TV personalities—the talk-show hosts, the newsreaders, the comedians, and the journalists with whom each generation of viewers develops quasi-personal relationships—are another important form. Characteristic of the last form is the way in which such personalities contribute to the experience of TV as being perpetually "live," even when it clearly is not. Like the aquarium fish that used to fill the empty time slots between programs in the early days of TV, these personalities seem to "live in the media": we seem to access their lives whenever we turn on the television. Once they are past their prime (time), they become significant memory material, continually reworked by the TV medium itself. The current obsession with re-runs, re-makes, and nostalgic or satirical reinterpretations of old TV programs shows that both television and the film industry have learned to exploit the affective power of these recalled presences. And the media longevity of talk show hosts like Johnny Carson and David Letterman, whose programs run for decades on end, infuses TV itself with a continual sense of recall, simply through this ceaseless documenting of personal life spans.

Tapping into the same source of affective power, Rehberger created his own peculiar form of TV personality recall. When he asked retired Italian TV stars to give him pieces of clothing from the time of their TV prime, he was, so to speak, accessing actual bits and pieces of their former "TV bodies." When, subsequently, he cut up each piece of clothing and turned the pieces of fabric into loose patchwork curtains, he subjected these TV bodies to radical formal rearrangement.¹⁴ But one could argue that in actual fact this rearrangement was no more radical than the always possible rearrangement of the flow of signals that makes up a recognizable TV image. Television malfunction shows this on a daily basis. In his early TV work, Nam June Paik demonstrated how relatively simple manual operations could trigger such rearrangement, and how this potential for formal transformation *in real time* was one of the defining features of televi-

sion. Of course, working with bits of fabric—a decidedly non-signaletic material—might initially seem like an action that would place this media memory material in a realm well beyond the televisual. But Rehberger had invented his own way of reinjecting this material with signaletic “liveness.” This was, obviously enough, done by means of light. Curtains filter light and when the finished curtains were placed in front of windows, daylight shot through the patchwork of different fabrics in uneven and unpredictable ways, creating a shimmering play of light and color that could, from a certain perspective, be interpreted as a radically low-fi version of the “light-collage” of TV signals.¹⁵ Once the resolution of the TV image slips beneath a certain threshold, the self-evident focus on TV content makes way for an investigation of the peculiar status of TV images. In a sense, all Rehberger does is downgrade resolution as far as it is physically possible in order to quite literally “materialize” the way in which the very visibility of a fragmented, tattered past is constituted only as a function of live and present streams of light. On TV, all material, whether re-runs of *Dynasty* or direct transmissions of the Olympic Games, is passed on to the viewers as live streams of light.

As Rehberger constructs continuities between TV light and daylight, it becomes clear to what degree his work depends on a different conception of images than the optical and metaphysical models that inform most art historical accounts. In such models, world and image tend to be posited against one another so that images are typically understood to come into being as light is *thrown* on things in the world. In contrast, Bergson’s philosophy presents a model where all objects and all perceptions are themselves already light; this means that what in a more specific sense are called images are not functions of light, but of time. Images arise only as a function of the brain’s ability to contract and distribute temporal matter. Because video can be understood, in analogous terms, as a dispenser of time, Nam June Paik wanted to replace the term *history* with what he called *videorie*. While history conjures the notion of throwing light on the passive objects of the past, videorie evokes the live production of memory material.¹⁶ Rehberger’s work with TV’s own memory material is clearly linked to a similar method of “history writing”: all the different things called images—TV images, in particular—come forward

as existential operators rather than as presentational format.

This may be why, in Rehberger's work, the mode of history writing dubbed *videorie* is staged as a form of biographical writing. And this staging is made possible by completely bypassing the normal calibration of media in terms of human attention span. Television programs and art videos alike are, of course, all perceived as durational visual formats, but that does not mean that the radically temporal character of images is brought out in the open. In contrast, TV images are normally formatted in terms of the limited attention units (also called programs) that keep their radically temporal operations—their “existential” operations—below the threshold of visibility. Individual productions may challenge the typical attention units (most famously the “long, boring art video” or the live broadcasting of major public events such as royal weddings or general elections), but they rarely displace it as an ideal measure. Ordinarily, televisual real-time is understood as contained or formatted *within* a more general life-time of the subject who simply “watches” TV output.

The focus on attention units then reproduces a subject/object model of thinking which obscures the role of TV as a machine that has the capacity to mine life-time itself. In contrast, the work entitled *81 Years* defines “life-time” *in terms of* real-time machines—essentially by creating a presentational framework that extends the duration of real-time beyond any imaginable framework of attention.¹⁷ (*Fig. 4.11*) In this work, Rehberger has eschewed all traces of narrative and charismatic TV content. All that remains is a minimal form of action—so minimal, in fact, that it is almost imperceptible. Here, television appears in its most raw or reduced state: as a dispenser of light and time. What is significant is that this dispensing of time takes place through processes that cannot be framed, surveyed, or controlled by a human consciousness that stands outside of it and watches. With an actual duration of eighty-one years, the work's time span matches the average life expectancy of a person in an affluent European country, yet obviously lasts longer than the waking hours in the life of any human being. This means that if all one were to do during one's lifetime is watch this work (discounting the time needed for sleep), one would still never be able to see it all.

Given this temporal framework, the visual “content” of the work is simple in the extreme. Foregrounding the mere existence of video signals, it presents the entire range of color nuances that these signals can produce. This range of colors is presented, from one end of the spectrum to the other, with unprecedented slowness, over the eighty-one years that the work will last. While the computer program that runs the work ensures that something is continually happening (pixel by pixel, from one end of the screen to the other, a change in nuance is always taking place), the change is so imperceptible to the human eye that it is only by leaving the work and coming back weeks later that any *visible* change may be noted.

Rehberger’s *81 Years* is then not in any conceivable way a work about “watching” media content or transmitting media representations. The immediate experience that there is “nothing to see” in this work is key: it is the event that upturns all expectations about media visibility. With its truly imperceptible action, one could even say that the work does not really *address* human attention at all, at least not as a visual representation. In contrast, like a lamp, it seems to produce a time/light surround that only addresses human perception in the most general way. Photographic documentation shows that many visitors tend to treat the work as a mood lamp of sorts, sitting down on the floor to simply bask in the colored light rather than looking for visual action. But even this ultra-simple time/light surround has a mechanism for manipulating memory material that may be understood as analogous to thought processes or mental “time travel.” The computer program’s clock may “fast-forward” or “rewind” the signal feed to any desired year (the colors get a bit more interesting after the first years; in the beginning, there are mainly black and grays). What cannot be done is to compress the work’s time-production into a containable media format. The time of the work can never be encompassed by a more “general” temporality.

The eighty-one years of continually changing signals, then, deliver the essentials of video technology, distributed as a maximally stretched-out temporal palette. In this sense, it envelops human memory, rather than being enveloped by it. Perception and memory — thinking — work *in* it, not *on* it, and the real-time principle actually makes it possible to imagine all sorts of thought-like contractions and organizations of this palette. The

work could therefore—in principle—*generate any sort of image*. A veritable toolbox of video or television production, the work then demonstrates that what real-time produces is in fact nothing *but* potential: new time, new moments. Few works have ever given such a clear-cut presentation of TV as an existential operator.

The biographical dimension of the work unfolds once one realizes that Rehberger actually places his own life in the middle of this time machine. In keeping with Rehberger's explicit reconfiguration of normal media formats and production principles, this work, which refuses all "formats," is still presented as a "video film." And, like most video films, it comes with a musical soundtrack. Music—essential memory material and also essential atmospheric material—is used here as the material through which Rehberger's personal biography takes on actuality and presence. Music makes a key moment in the artist's life into a continually unfolding event that moves alongside the video work.

The soundtrack is based on a typical "biographical item": a song that had a particular impact on Rehberger's life during his impressionable teenage years. He chose "This Is the Day" by 1980s art-pop heroes The The, because this song was part of a set of cultural phenomena that inspired him to become an artist and that, in fact, made it possible for him to imagine artistic life as an option. However, by digitally cutting up the song into a series of frequencies and then distributing these frequencies in chronological order as a series of equal durations over a time span of twenty-four hours (the "day" referred to in the title), the song loses all sense of contour and format; in fact, it loses all of its appeal to normal attention. Now this key biographical item exists only as the raw temporal matter of affects or thinking.

This is only possible to the extent that the pop song is here completely identified with a media technology that reads it primarily in terms of signals and frequencies, bits and bytes—a technological perspective in which the difference between sound signals and light signals may basically also be described as a matter of difference in frequency. But certain types of economic analyses would also tend to see this as the "proper" realm of

the song. To the extent that contemporary subjectivities are key products of the media machines, pop songs must also be understood as important components of these machines; the pop song and its whole apparatus exemplify how contemporary capital draws on the forces of personal memory and affects. When people refer to items of pop music history as “the soundtrack to their lives,” “life” is defined as if it were, in fact, a media production. In Rehberger’s work, this definition is no longer just a form of tacit knowledge or intuition, but something that is enlarged, exaggerated, and formalized. To this end, he externalizes, or objectifies, the role played by the media machines in his own formation as an artist or in the development of his own “aesthetic sensibility.”

From this perspective, *81 Years* may ultimately be seen less as an artwork *by* Tobias Rehberger, than as a time-crystallization machine that produces, among other things, the creative output *of* the artist-subjectivity named Tobias Rehberger. It is an example of the larger framework of media machines and time machines inside which the artist’s creative work and thinking have evolved over the years. But this particular time machine is not construed so as to produce “aesthetic durations” of various kinds (whether art videos or TV programs). It is construed to produce a distinct sense of the forces at work in time-production as such, as well as the passion of the biographical subject named Tobias Rehberger for playing around with these forces. In this sense, it could well be described as the matrix of his particular form of artistic production.

III

Like lamps in general, Rehberger’s *81 Years* passes completely beside the concept of attention and the specificities of media contents and formats. But in his continual reconfigurations or reversals of media productions, Rehberger also at times deploys the parameters of attention and the relationships between attention and space described in the early psychological film study of Hugo Münsterberg. The creation of emphatically styled environments is here a function of involuntary immersion in media content. For, as Münsterberg puts it, when attention focuses on a special feature, the surrounding adjusts itself, eliminating what is not in focus and mak-

ing the object of attention more vivid. It is then as if the outer world were shaped not by its own laws but by the acts of our attention.¹⁸ In 1998, at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Rehberger created yet another space within the folds of media production: a superbly designed one-man cinema built in a trendy 1970s corporate style infused with vague space-age connotations.

However, the one-man cinema was not just a built space in the conventional sense of the term. It could also be understood as a kind of wearable environment, a cinema fitted to one body only—a body that would not only be engulfed by the screen image, but that would also practically be wearing the cinema space itself as a second skin, as if the viewer and his or her world had “become” film. In short, the cinema in Stockholm suggested a situation in which the synchronization of film and cognitive apparatus had actually materialized in built space. If cinema manages to activate involuntary attention in a much more intensive way than (for instance) theater, this was, according to Münsterberg, thanks to the effect of the close-up, the cinematic technique that draws the viewer into the image, shutting out all that is irrelevant. The tiny one-man cinema seemed built so as to ensure a perpetual close-up effect. And the flashy styling of the space seemed, perhaps more than anything, to be a direct effect of cinematic imagination; it evoked all those slick expanses of corporate architecture loved by filmmakers and endlessly caressed by cameras. In this way, it also shared in the design logic of early cinema theaters, which were often made to look like veritable palaces of cinematic fantasy: just by entering the cinema, one had already accessed other times and spaces (ancient Rome or Egypt, China or the Wild West), as if the movie had already begun in the lobby.

Named *JP 005 (Model for a Film)*, this piece of built space was at once a space of cinematic projection (in technical, architectural, and cognitive terms) and a scenario for a film—much like the building in *The Boy From Mars*. As Rehberger had planned it, a film production would actually be made based not on a written script but on the architectural, stylistic, and atmospheric qualities of the space. Rather than being the end point of media production—the place where media content demands attention—this attention-space would be the starting point of a film project in which every step in the production process occurred in re-

verse order. Whether the final product would be called a film in the ordinary meaning of the word was immaterial. Like all projection spaces, Rehberger's one-man cinema takes film itself for granted; in fact, it takes on the whole cinematic context or "apparatus" as a given. There is, and will be, film: beyond individual productions, film is an existential condition, something we live by. It seemed only logical then, that this attention space, in which image and viewer can no longer be separated from one another, could itself be the object of spectatorship. Through tiny windows in the walls, outside viewers could inspect the melding of cinema and subjectivity—and the style space that was, so to speak, its objective, physical trace.

The most general operation performed by the figure of the lamp can thus be described as follows: as it moves alongside the forces at work in the contemporary production of subjectivity, it also triggers thought on the production of social space. As Henri Lefebvre argued, one cannot just investigate production *in* space as if space itself were simply a given; one has to investigate how space itself is formed under different conditions of production.¹⁹ The question is, then, how the economics of the media and information networks form space—an issue that may seem more abstract or intangible than, say, the connection between petrol production and the expansion of highways, but one that is just as significant for critical geography. The lamp works open up this question by reconfiguring the very image of media production so that "media" are not primarily identified with specific formats or genres, but with more extensive and unpredictable spatial, temporal, and existential ensembles.

The lamp works then open onto what Lefebvre called "spatial practice"—the practice through which a particular society's space is secreted and reproduced, so that it is given some sense of continuity and cohesion. The relatively new need for perpetual "connectedness," or for the administration of attention, both of which are facilitated by media machines, constitutes such a practice. But the lamp works also engage with the particular *representations of space* engendered by this practice. In Lefebvre's terminology, representations of space are the more-or-less abstract conceptions and models of spatial practice that are put to use in the

work of planners and technocrats of all kinds. In this particular case, the scenario mentality—the model of thinking that makes it possible to capitalize on spatial potential (or spatial fantasy)—emerges as a historically specific representation of space and not just as an example of dynamic thinking in general.

Numerous phenomena attest to the effects of this particular representation, from the rapid rise of the new Asian mega-cities to the redefinition of the relation between local territory and workforce to the ever-changing styling of private and public environments and the emphasis on the precarious *question* of such styling. Environmental styling appears as one of the mechanisms through which social subjects are continually *mobilized* in relation to space: attracted, engaged, repulsed, and chased away. Its function is that of maintaining the potential of space itself, of keeping it endlessly disposable. Lighting lamps in a new housing complex so as to give an *impression of life* as people walk around is the perfect emblem of this representation of space.²⁰

In the work of Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, however, it is tourism that functions as the key trope for the production of potential space—a production that must, in her words, be explored in terms of the relation between space and image.²¹ The image in question—the image of the modern city, for instance—is not simply a recording of some existing spatial configuration. It is, instead, an image *of* mediation or, more precisely, an image that transfers the very sense of potential brought on by the communications media that define urban life. To this end, Gonzalez-Foerster explores the relation between image and space through a form of film that passes beside the usual cinematographic representation *of* spaces. Instead, she invents a sort of unbounded camera strategy that, once again, establishes continuities between projected space and lived-in space.

Again, media production is made to turn upon the issue of environmental styles and atmospheres. In Gonzalez-Foerster's films, spaces are approached primarily in terms of their atmospheric qualities. On one level, the films do what any tourist brochure does: they present the specific atmosphere evoked by the key stylistic features of each location, contempo-

rary, historical, or both—the type of presentation that reduces a particular space to an image or to a series of images. The big city *is* the expanse of high-rise buildings and the accumulation of giant-sized LCD boards, just as the holiday resort *is* the beach at sunset or the waterfront restaurant. But there is another form of mediation going on here as well. Through the use of unusual temporalities and ways of framing, moving “irrationally” between seemingly random detail and long, slow overviews, between sudden and often long fixations on some scene or object and equally sudden movement in various directions, the camera seems to reproduce the vagaries of subjective perception in a particularly intimate way. The result is that the films allow the atmospheric spaces to unfold as pure durations, rather than as images that have a particular extension in relation to the precise framings imposed by a documentary or a fictional narrative. In this way, the films *create* the atmospheric spaces of subjective perception, rather than simply record or document them.

This creation of space through the medium of film stands at one end of a body of work while the other end consists of museum and gallery installations that evoke, in a fragmented and elliptical manner, various types of private-looking rooms. Neither fully furnished nor theatrical or “scene”-like, the rooms contain just enough elements of interior decoration to give off a sense of personal style or mode of inhabitation.²² For this reason, Gonzalez-Foerster tends to describe them as a form of biographical writing, as if biography were written with spatial signifiers rather than with words. These spaces are invariably presented as mediatic interfaces, spaces infused by various sorts of time-based media. Her concept of “home cinema,” in particular, closes in on the private home as the key locus of “touristic” projection and spatial fantasy. But it is the notion of space as a form of biographical writing that really places focus on the way in which self-relation and self-production are put to work in the general production of potential space.

Lamps appear as figures that pull the two ends of Gonzalez-Foerster’s work together. In a quite obvious way, they contribute to the distinct and personal atmospheres in the biographical spaces. But they also emerge as fo-

cal points in several of her films, where they seem to produce a different sense of the cinematic “object” itself. Lamps may, of course, be seen as quasi-cinematic apparatuses of projection, but their central and, at times, even dominant presence *in* films seems to turn cinematic production inside out; the apparatus of projection now quite literally resides *within* cinematic imagery itself. Such a statement could, of course, be a psychological description of the cinematic “mentality”. Film images are projected (technically), and this imagery again produces mental projections (in the spectators). However, the act of turning cinema inside out is not oriented toward a “deconstruction” of cinema in general, but toward the relation between image and space. It turns, in particular, around one specific cinematic feature, incidentally, the one shared by cinema and real estate. This feature is *location*. Gonzalez-Foerster’s films open up the question of the very place and presence of cinematic location, the concrete and identifiable geographical locations that seem to be the raw material of her works, as well as their “subject matter.”

Geographical locations often appear as if their existence were a mere function of lamps. They are urban outdoor and interior spaces that are either illuminated by lamps or punctuated by lamp objects. Series of different nighttime locations present a range of atmospheric qualities, depending on the type, design, and light quality of indoor and outdoor lamps, LCD boards and neon signs. Daytime interiors and cityscapes are littered with unlit lamps that speak of imminent and always potential transformation of the sense of space itself: soon darkness will fall and everything will be different. Literally shaped by projective lamps, locations come across as *already cinematic*.

Such a notion of the cinematic or projective quality of space itself has been described by Hubert Damisch in a text for the catalogue of *Projections, les transports de l’image*, an exhibition that dealt with the works of artists who manipulate the very *travel* of luminous images and the temporal aspects of this travel, at the expense of the traditional focus on the cinematic screen. Here he counters the idea of cinema as an essentially narrative medium, the spaces of which only gain visibility through the projection and movement of images that are themselves fixed. Spaces may be seen as projections of the psychic apparatus that do not prefigure

this apparatus: what one calls space is thus the correlative to the operation through which the psychic register opens itself toward the world by projecting itself. (In Freudian terms, the ego can be seen as the mental projection of the surface of the body at the same time as it represents the spatial extension of the psychic apparatus.) Once one sees that such mechanisms of projection are the conditions of what is called representation, cinema space (a typical vehicle of spatial representation) may in fact appear as a space without limits. If cinema space appears framed and limited in every way, this is because the spectator—the viewing subject—has been placed at the margin of a *dispositif* in which the apparatus of projection is also hidden (behind a wall) and where all interest is focused on the precise format and dimensions of the image-screen.²³

It is exactly such identification between cinematic projection and mental projection that is activated in Gonzalez-Foerster's use of well-known locations around the world. The focus on the presence of lamps in these locations seems to establish a link to the projective spectator—a subject who, in daily life, makes use of lamps in order to organize the most basic forms of spatial creation. The lamps simply serve to put the psychic apparatus of the spectator back at the center of cinematic space, and, by extension, at the center of the economic exploitation of potential space.

This quite particular sense of cinematic “location” comes across as a key point in *Ipanema Theories*, a film that seems to systematically move from one lamp to another throughout the ninety-two minutes of its duration.²⁴ (Fig. 4.12–4.31) A film without characters, action, or narrative, it allows a series of urban spaces to unfold through image sequences that continually return to the same types of objects and scenes. Lamps figure as key images that seem to shape each single sequence, returning again and again throughout the duration of the movie. The film contains more than seventy distinct moments during which the camera explicitly lingers on different lamp objects. In addition, numerous other lamp-like light sources are continually in focus, such as the neon signs or the light from windows and doorways that perforate the facades of high-rise buildings and blur the contours of built structures. The differences between the film's various locations (Kyoto, Yokohama, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Paris, and London) are

blurred as well: the continuous movement from one lamp figure to another erases clear-cut distinctions between urban spaces. Distinction and structure in the film were, in contrast, created by means of the pre-existing film material that has informed or inspired each of the nineteen “theories” or sequences in the film, only to have been omitted in the final cut.

The sense of location expounded in these dreamy and atmospheric “theories” was, in other words, informed *by* cinema in much the same way any research or theory-building is based on a set of more-or-less explicit presuppositions that the researcher deems fundamental to the field in which he or she works. One such theoretical presupposition was the final segment of Michelangelo Antonioni’s film *Eclipse*, in which the actors disappear and the city emerges as if on its own accord. The representation of a psychological narrative gives way to a projection of space itself. While a word like “theory” might seem like a joke name for Gonzalez-Foerster’s almost wordless visual flow, it is, in fact, an apt term for what the film does: *Ipanema Theories* triggers thinking on and along the forces of spatial creation the way any theory aims to trigger thinking on an object.²⁵

However, a form of cinema that turns the projective forces of subjective perception into the material of film itself necessarily evokes ideas of a direct and live manipulation of temporal matter, as if film had become a real-time technology like video. But if the lamps in *Ipanema Theories* make space or location appear as a function of the wider cinematic apparatus, real-time machines are associated with this apparatus as well. If lamps are the most frequently repeated focal points in the film, digital clocks of all kinds come in at a close second. The camera lingers on everything from tiny clock radios in private rooms to huge clocks on public buildings and in transport areas. More often than not, each clock remains in focus long enough for its digits to change, i.e. for up to a minute. For shots without movement, action, or dialogue, this is a relatively long time; so long, in fact, that the film is no longer simply contained within a representational format, and in this way the difference between the time of viewing and the representation of time in the film itself collapses. The lamps may place the forces of mental projection at the center of the cinematic space, but this action is reinforced and overdetermined when the many real-time ma-

chines that are represented in the film continually align themselves with the “actual” or lived time of the individual film viewer. And so the imagined difference between the inside and the outside of cinematic space is, once more, rendered indistinct.

This process is further reinforced by the way in which *Ipanema Theories* actually performs in social contexts. As it happens, the film is not necessarily conceived only for the cinema. Its lack of narration, repetitive sequencing, floating imagery, and shimmering light effects make it resemble the type of films or videos that are often used in club settings as visual backdrops to house music. Used in such a way, the entire film does, in fact, have a lamp-like function in concrete physical spaces. Together with the light effects that are also central components of such club events, the film functions as an atmosphere-producer in the room where it is projected—a producer and organizer of social space in the most literal sense.

But in accordance with a logic of production that turns cinema inside out, this organization of social space is actually also staged “inside” the film. The film repeatedly returns to images of a gigantic dance floor where a huge screen shows footage from the film itself as an accompaniment to thumping house music. In fact, *Ipanema Theories* continually cuts from a direct presentation of footage from specific geographical locations to views of the screening of this footage inside a club setting. In this complete unsettling of the location of cinematic space, space inside the film and space outside the film emerge as parts of the same ongoing spatial production. The lamps that appear on so many levels in this work, and with such striking regularity, then have a sort of double function: they are the nodal points that accelerate the production of potential space, and, in the same movement, reflects on it.

IV

If Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster’s lamp works help put the viewing subject back at the center of cinematic projection, Olafur Eliasson seems to use lamps to move even closer to this subject and the conditions under which one sees anything at all. In his works, the viewer is given an opportunity

to explore his or her own position as a subject of perception, that is, as a subject that to a large degree constructs the surrounding world through individual and situational acts of perception. Perception is generally understood as a reflex detection of reality in which one manages to make sense of one's physical surroundings by combining preexisting information with new information. This detected reality is not a fixed or stable entity but is rather dependent on the psyche of the individual perceiver, which is then projected back onto the world through patterns of conduct and exchange with the surroundings. It is this contingent and variable aspect of the creation of reality that is enlarged and opened up in Eliasson's phenomenological explorations, as a counterpoint to the illusion of the world's fixity (most commentators on his work agree on this point).

But what distinguishes his work from general exercises in phenomenology that have been so important in artistic work since the 1960s, is the way in which his use of lamps and lamp projections highlight a mode of perception conditioned by the productive frameworks of media technologies—a perspective that opens for a more historically and politically oriented approach to Eliasson's exploration of the minutiae of perceptual processes. In his work, the natural world (represented by conditions of light and meteorological phenomena, for instance) exists in a seamless continuum with the human world of technology: this continuum *is* human reality. While Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the machine indicates a basic ontology of production that cannot be confused with conventional notions of technology, Eliasson's work explicitly blurs the distinctions between the natural or given and the continually constructed in a way that makes it more meaningful to state—as do Deleuze and Guattari—that we see and perceive in terms of machinic assemblies. An assembly can be defined as the point where a discursive formation intersects with a material practice; since this intersection is a point of emergence it is also historical through and through. A machine, in this sense, does not itself have to be optical, but is nevertheless an assembly of organs and functions that makes something (rather than something else) visible and conspicuous.²⁶

There is no doubt that Eliasson's work leaves plenty of room for general reflections on the phenomenology of perception. But the systematic use

of lamps in his works seems to set up situations in which one continually comes face-to-face with conditions of light and time that are characteristic of modern media machines and of TV, in particular. Again and again, the phenomena produced in his works present themselves as media phenomena or media effects, as if they were simply generated by video or film projectors. The point is that they are not. For Eliasson's reflexive take on the perceptual reality ordered by the media machines only really becomes possible once the formats, contents, and viewing patterns associated with such media are generally absent from the situations he creates. Hence there are generally no TV sets, no video installations, no films, and no computer screens in his work. Instead, the perceptual reality of modern media is evoked through technology that appears far more intimate, everyday, self-effacing, and familiar; in short, far closer to the perceiving body of the spectator. In fact, the televisual effects and temporalities appear as functions of the activity of the perceiving spectator, rather than as spectacles placed in front of his or her eyes. This is what is achieved through the simple technology of lamps: in Eliasson's work, a range of lamp objects and lamp functions manages to evoke both the production of a televisual world and the viewer's positioning within this televisual production of reality.

One very recent work indicates this general framework. It is, quite simply, a televisual lamp, that is, a lamp whose light source consists of the light dots or image pixels that illuminate a high-definition TV screen. By means of fiber-optic cables, individual pixels from one part of a TV screen have been liberated from the flat screen and placed one in each triangle of a rotund geodesic structure that is mounted, lamp-style, on a tripod.²⁷ (*Fig. 4.32*) Placed like this, they still transmit television signals from whatever channel the lamp is connected to: the lamp can transmit via antenna, cable, satellite, or Internet. The difference between the lamp and ordinary television is simply that the signals no longer cohere into a comprehensible image, but function as an ambient source of light. The light of this lamp is, in other words, the light of streaming real-time media output—a continually changing, flickering, remote-control shaping of the visible world. Its light signals attest, in other words, to the basic conditions of a televisual

perception of reality and the adaptation to a televisual handling of time and space. They indicate a world in which a perceptual here and now is modified by a remote perception of other times and places. Interestingly, Eliasson imagines the TV lamp as a possible project for a big airport, as a potential light source for use in the transfer area—essentially the place one goes to when one is “lost.” The lamp is, in other words, thought of in terms of a site that is associated with the gathering and dispersal of bodies typical of both televisual transmission and airplane travel.

But Eliasson’s work, which is basically about harnessing the forces of perception and affects in the production of worlds or environments, does not start or end with lamps or lamp objects. What is significant is, rather, the fact that so many of his works specifically choose to pass through lamp functions in order to trigger such production. These lamps engender qualitatively different temporal and spatial situations based on the types of visibility or presence they themselves seem to have. While the lamps, as sources of light, are never hidden in his work, some are explicitly present as utilitarian apparatuses of projection and others have a more discreet presence that seems to invite a higher degree of simple immersion.

Numerous lamps have a strategic function because of the way they melt into the everyday environment and even tend to homogenize the information this environment contains. Such homogenization is obviously key to the way in which one attempts to create a stable reality around oneself. As Eliasson points out, the perfectly diffused light of most designer lamps produces a softened, smoothed-out view of the world as an image, a world without shadows and thus without difference. In contrast, the parallel beams of the more utilitarian projector lamps (used in theater productions, etc.) resemble the absolutely parallel beams of the sun in that they create strong shadows and thus also indicate their own projective presence in a more forceful way. Such lamps provide more information and more difference: in principle, it is possible to create lamps that make every hair on a head stand out as an individual object that casts a shadow. Eliasson’s work operates in the dialectic between perfect diffusion and total parallelism, but the emphasis is on the moment at which diffusion is interrupted by the creation of shadows. For this reason it would perhaps

be most accurate to say that his lamps produce bright shadows; they produce a “different” form of light, a light that contributes to a defamiliarization of the habitual operations of perception.

This is, essentially, what takes place when what is intuitively recognized as a film or video projection turns out to be the product of far simpler technological procedures. A work like *Remagine* plays off the fact that the human eye needs only a few elements in order to perceive depth and construe a perspectival vanishing point. Thus, by simply illuminating parts of a wall, one instantly creates the illusion of depth or distance. (Fig. 4.33) When a sequence is added to this process (by timing the fade and movement of up to twelve projector lamps that illuminated parts of the walls in a darkened room), the onlooker tends to neglect the presence of the lamps and read the effects on the walls as if they were the result of a film projection (a somewhat abstract film showing very bare architectural spaces in a highly reduced color scale).²⁸ Similarly, the visual effects of a 1994 Eliasson piece that consists of a projector lamp, a shallow plastic pool containing water, and a dripping device, initially read as a sophisticated video projection.²⁹ The projector lamp illuminates the pool, and the reflection from the pool and the movement created as drops hit the water’s surface form a pattern of moving rings on the wall, a pattern that resembles early nineties advances in computer graphics. In both cases, perception tends to shortcut to particular forms of media representation. Yet the projector lamps still have a role to play as “shadow producers.” To the extent that they are taken into account as the actual sources of these moving images—and, given their physical size and presence, how could they not be?—they could be seen to illuminate not only the walls, but this shortcut itself. They would, in other words, make visible one aspect of the reflex automatism of the mediatic perception of reality.

What matters in these explorations of the mediatic conditions of perception is above all the critical issue of time. It is an issue that returns in different forms and shapes in the course of almost a century of avant-garde art operating on the outer edges of media production. As the media machines mine the time of perception and of thinking, it is not surprising that

so many art productions identify time itself as both a locus of desire and as a key to various strategies of “liberation” (the celebration of process and change is one obvious example). But what emerge with insistent clarity in the lamp works are the constraints placed on time itself and the need to re-imagine “free” time.

This dimension stands out with particular clarity as Eliasson spins ever-tighter loops between real-time machineries and perceptual processes. Again, using simple lamps, Eliasson explores perceptual “closed-circuit” phenomena that are comparable with the closed-circuit processes made possible by video technology and explored in numerous early works of video art. For Paik, the concept of the closed circuit seemed to epitomize televisual perception, in the sense that one could see the mediation as it was taking place, and thus experience a collapse in the conventional chronological separation of actuality and memory, life, and its representation. Eliasson’s sustained work with after-images plays with the way perception modulates and cuts into the continuity of light, much the same way video technologies do. This type of work departs from the well-known fact that when one looks into a lamp and then looks away, an after-image of the lamplight appears for one’s “inner” vision. With some training, one can learn to manipulate and retain this vision and can, in fact, regard it as a recording of sorts, and to observe this recording (or this creation of an image by memory) as it takes place. On one occasion, Eliasson used a projector lamp to project directly into the eyes of an audience, and then made a simple line drawing with the lamp. Looking at a neutral wall afterward, the audience members saw a mental “recording” of this drawing. Such a drawing could be superimposed on those created by the individual members of the audience as they moved their eyes in relation to a fixed lamp point.

By relocating the quasi-magical closed-circuit phenomenon from the “perceptual” technology of video to human bodies, Eliasson put another moment of reflexivity and temporal deferral into the process of seeing the mediation of vision. It testifies to the desire that seems to run through both his own artistic projects and the lamp works in general: to create a distinct sense of *more time*, an unreasoned acceleration of the production of time.³⁰ More time, here, is a qualitative rather than a merely quantita-

tive concept. It means unaccounted-for time produced by unaccounted-for thinking *on* time and its machineries.

The above is, essentially, the strategy of the lamp works. This is how they contribute to a type of artistic performance that moves alongside the increasingly intimate capture of life-forces in contemporary economy and politics. But it is probably more precise to say such performance is *made visible* by the surprisingly regular distribution of lamps of all kinds in a type of contemporary work that systematically associates art production with social and economic production. For the lamps do not constitute a separate category of work. They are not the beginning nor the endpoint of the works in which they appear. And neither do they constitute a single formal principle that could be said to unite a lot of otherwise very different works of art. In the artworks discussed in this text, a lamp or lamp-like function is one among many elements within complex assemblages of people, materials, and technologies. Here, lamps basically function as indicators, that is, as keys to a new way of paying attention to the influx of design and lifestyle phenomena in recent art. These design and lifestyle phenomena appear in the context of artworks that are consistently staged as social sites and that can only really be understood in these terms. In what follows it is therefore necessary to discuss in what sense the style site works could be said to introduce modifications or differences in the very concept of “the social” that is operative in the much-discussed “social turn” in recent art.

⁰¹ The construction, named *Hybrid Muscle*, was produced by the architectural company Roche & Cie, 2002. It was originally planned to use the muscle power of an elephant—a driving force in the Thai tourist industry. This construction is the focal point in Philippe Parreno's film *The Boy From Mars*, 2003, 35mm, 11 min.

⁰² It should, of course, be noted here that in French the word *diffusion* is, in many contexts, synonymous with *distribution*.

⁰³ M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971). The mirror metaphor of artistic production notably indicates the ability of the artwork to deliver a mimetic representation (idealist or realist) of the world.

⁰⁴ Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno, “The Story of a Feeling (Notes),” in *Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno* (Paris: Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1999), 116.

- ⁰⁶ Liam Gillick, "Should the Future Help the Past?" in *Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno* (Paris: Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1999), 18–28.
- ⁰⁶ Philippe Parreno, *Mont Analogue*, 2002.
- ⁰⁷ Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1992), particularly pp. 15–25.
- ⁰⁸ Lazzarato, *ibid.*, 86.
- ⁰⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, translated by Paul Patton (London: The Athlone Press), 139, 132.
- ¹⁰ The works/exhibitions referred to are *Bindan GmbH & Co*, Hamburger Kunsthalle, 2000; *Geläut – bis ich's hör* at ZKM | Museum für Neue Kunst, Karlsruhe, 2002; *Most Beautiful*, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, 1999; *Caprimoon '99*, site-specific work in Lage, Germany, 2000.
- ¹¹ 1996, exhibited at Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt.
- ¹² Tobias Rehberger, *Shining, Shining, Shining*, TV installation, 2002.
- ¹³ Tobias Rehberger, *Video Library*, 2002. Each television turned toward the wall shows extracts from films without the sound. Each apparatus shows a compilation of one particular type of film scene, collected from many different movies.
- ¹⁴ Tobias Rehberger, *Luci Diffuse*, at Spazio Viafarini, Milan, 2001.
- ¹⁵ There is a direct parallel here with Paik's stated interest in low-fi TV emanations – a state of technical imperfection that makes the very working of televisual signals more evident and ruptures the illusion of televisual image-spaces. With low-resolution imagery the difference between TV "coverage" and free electronic creation becomes less easy to uphold. Paik discusses this fact in relation to the lowered image standards during the live transmission of the moon landing in his 1972 letter to "friends at Radical Software," in *Videa 'n' Videology*, 1973 (1997), unpaginated.
- ¹⁶ This method may be viewed in the context of Gilles Deleuze's discussion of the relation between the two elements that make up Foucault's historical strata, notably things and words, visibilities and discourses. For, again, the visible is not exactly the same as forms or objects or things in the world. Deleuze describes visibility as a flash-like form of luminosity created by light itself: it is then essentially the condition under which something becomes visible, the event through which bodies or things of the past are assembled for our perception. From Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, translated by Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 47–70.
- ¹⁷ Tobias Rehberger, *81 Years*, computer-based video film and soundtrack, 2002.
- ¹⁸ Hugo Münsterberg, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (New York/London: D. Appleton & Company, 1916).
- ¹⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Blackwell Publishing, 1991).
- ²⁰ As referred to in *The Story of a Feeling (Notes)*, *ibid.*
- ²¹ This relation was perhaps made most explicit in the intensely atmospheric videowork *Exotourisme* for which she won the Prix Marcel Duchamp, 2002.
- ²² Examples of these spaces are *Nos Années 70*, Gio Marconi, Milano, 1992; *Et la chambre orange*, Villa Arson, Nice, 1992; *Les Heures*, Galerie Jennifer Flay, Paris, 1994; *Home Cinema*, Gallery Robert Prime, London, 1998.
- ²³ Hubert Damisch, "Morceaux Choisis," in Dominique Païni (ed.), *Numéro Bleu* (Paris: ARC, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1993). *Projections: Les Transports de l'Image*, Le Fresnoy, Studio national des arts contemporains (Paris: Les Éditions Hazan, 1997), 15–25.
- ²⁴ Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, *Ipanema Theories*, video, 92 min.
- ²⁵ There is an interesting parallel here with W.J.T. Mitchell's suggestion that theory itself is a medium and should to a much larger extent be viewed as such. Mitchell, "Medium Theory: Preface to the 2003 Critical Inquiry Symposium," in *Critical Inquiry* 30, No. 2 (2004), 324–336.
- ²⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, translated by Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 58.
- ²⁷ Olafur Eliasson, *TV Lamp*, stainless steel, wood, TV receiver, control unit, LED light, cable, tripod, 2006.
- ²⁸ Olafur Eliasson, *Remagine*, 2002. (Shown at ARC, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, among other places.)
- ²⁹ Olafur Eliasson, *Beauty*, 1993.
- ³⁰ During my interviews with Olafur Eliasson, conducted during Summer/Autumn 2005, the notion that certain procedures would lead to a work "having more time" emerged as a general ideal.

Chapter Five

Art's Social Turn and the Style Site

I

The local area produces lightbulbs, special lightbulbs for films. Bulbs are to be used as lamps for particular situations. And all the workers drink a lot because the place where they are is basically the only place that's working; it's the only place that appears to be functioning like a factory. Everyone else in the area might as well be building their own vision of a hovercraft.

The lamp factory lamps are used in the making of films. The only factory, the only place in this bar-ridden environment where there is the memory and projection of an idea of productive work. Where there might be some echoes of earlier visions of how to get better. The factory is the first factory that has ever been seen in these parts yet it's a factory that produces unique things. It never produces the same thing twice, it makes lamps to order, it makes special lamps.⁰¹

The passages above, evoking lamps, films, factories, defunct workplaces, customized or non-serial production, and the “productive” working of subjective imagination belong to a text that holds a central place within the current proliferation of artistic practices that turn around notions of sociality or “the social.” They are taken from *Literally No Place: Communes, Bars and Greenrooms*, a book by Liam Gillick that presents the fragmentary and meandering narratives of six nameless characters who conduct research on the participants of a utopian commune.

The book is clearly a piece of fiction, yet resists easy immersion in a fictional universe. Its description, by some commentators, as “theory-meets-fiction” may also be a bit misleading since it seems to imply that “theory” has been dressed up as fiction, making the book into an allegory of, for instance, artistic practice. But the resistance to immersion can be read in another way as well. “Theory” — primarily present in the form

of quotations spread throughout the book—opens up the fictional world of the book itself to a wider textual grid of relations. In fact, this wider grid is further evoked and elaborated in Gillick’s visual and sculptural work, which explicitly plays off of key moments in the book. (*Fig. 5.1*) The book is then not so much a singular work as a nodal point in a network of relations that includes the following elements: a group of fictional personae and their actions and reflections; a well-known body of writings in the fields of philosophy, political theory, and utopian speculation, ranging from Karl Marx and Theodor Adorno to B. F. Skinner and the Khmer Rouge; a series of colorful and stylishly designed architectural or quasi-architectural constructions set up in galleries, museums, and public spaces; a series of suggestions as to what type of managerial, pedagogical, communitarian, and creative behaviors and actions might possibly be facilitated by these constructions; and, finally, the actual individuals or groups of people who may visit the museums or public spaces in question, and who may or may not feel compelled to engage in the sort of action proposed, implicitly or explicitly, by these constructions.

None of these elements is reducible to one another, nor can they be mapped onto one another (in that real or imagined social behavior would be metaphorically represented by spatial constructions that have a parallel articulation in the field of fiction but that would ultimately be contained and explained by social and political theory). Instead, Gillick’s book contributes to a wide-ranging *assemblage* of elements that together make up a specific social site. In what follows I will discuss this assemblage as an entirely *art-specific production of sociality*, a production that constitutes what I have earlier referred to as a *style site*. The lamp figure that occurs as one of the elements of this site is a token of its connection to the specific issues of style and sociality brought on by the lamp works discussed in the previous chapters. The assemblage of elements in *Literally No Place* is an example of the type of social site that the figure of the lamp contributes to produce or conjure. And it is only by understanding the precise construction of such a site that it is possible to understand what it may mean when works like these are discussed, as they often are, as “social” works.

To speak of this work as social in one sense or another is to engage in what is today a highly contested discourse in art production and criticism. If post-1960s art has renewed the historical avant-garde's focus on the social or collective aspects of art production and reception, the last fifteen years have been marked by a certain shift in emphasis. The predominance of institutional critique and interventionist strategies has, at least to some extent, given way to a preoccupation with various forms of collaboration and co-presence as well as to community-oriented approaches that explicitly offer up the positivity of the social as an arena for artistic activity. While there is nothing historically new about this, the weight and visibility given to this type of practice — its sheer ubiquity — is historically unprecedented. At the same time it is precisely the meaning of “the social” that is at the contested core of contemporary debates. For once this type of artistic activity reaches a certain critical mass, as well as a certain level of conceptualization, fundamental differences also come into view.

At one end, practitioners oriented toward actionist politics and community work often question the relevance and necessity of the artistic context and the art institutional framing of their activity. At the other end, less immediately actionist approaches — works that do not envisage collaborative solutions to various trouble zones of politics and social life but simply evoke interactivity and collaboration in a “softer” or “looser” sense — have come under attack for their supposedly harmonizing or conflict-insensitive take on the social. This type of work is now often critiqued as an apolitical idealization of social bonding or “networking” in the name of art. Underlying both of these critical tendencies is the question of why artists should work in and with “the concretely social,” when this is obviously done more efficiently and convincingly by social workers, activists, politicians, and not to mention (at the non-crisis end of the scale) party planners, café owners, club hosts, etc.

At stake here are both notions of the critical difference of art and aesthetics and the autonomy of social and political activists vis-à-vis the interested but ultimately uncommitted embrace of agents whose final allegiance is with the field of art. Such critiques may be relevant when it comes to pointing out certain impulses, tendencies, and critical danger zones but they tend to overlook the specific ways in which *the social is*

produced through, or in terms of, artistic work. On the actionist/community-oriented end of the scale, there is often a political and strategic *use of* the art institution for visibility and funding, for instance, or in order to accommodate an exceptional type of “ethical operation” that depends on a temporary, disinterested, or ritualized framework in order to come about. At the other end, the social may be evoked or framed through complex formal operations that seem to complicate the very idea of the immediacy and self-evidence of “community,” even as they draw actual audiences or participants into various forms of interaction. In both cases, the framework of art and aesthetics plays a fundamental role, although in ways that seem largely incompatible.

These markedly different uses of the aesthetic framework have recently been described in terms of a difference between those artists who advocate transparency within art versus those who see the need to counter the complexity of contemporary social relations with more opaque, veiled, and meandering approaches.⁰² An alternative distinction could, in some cases, be set up between pragmatic and reflexive uses of the artistic or aesthetic context in relation to “the social,” but there is no perfect polarization, no clear-cut division between opaque/reflexive approaches and transparent/pragmatic approaches. There are only tendencies in one direction or another, depending on what type of “social object” the work tends to construct.

In what follows, it is primarily a certain type of work belonging to the opaque/reflexive end of the axis that will be the object of discussion. This is not only because its particular production of sociality is (arguably) the least understood; it is also because it may provide a perspective on why “the social” itself is raised to a principle *within* art practice at this moment in history. For it is only at the opaque end of the axis that the difficult social, political, and economic conundrum named “aestheticization” becomes an object of inquiry—an object that concerns the generalization of artistic values, operations, and forms of knowledge in common culture. This generalization is now *seen from the point of view of art itself*. The emphasis on style and form that was once the hallmark of modern art’s status as a separate and anti-economic domain within an increasingly specialized, complex, and “economistic” social totality, is here explored both

for its all-important role in economic production and for the way it also informs numerous utopian attempts at social design. The opaque/reflexive approach to the social can, in short, be understood as an approach in which art tries, among other things, to “think” or “re-imagine” the social forms that art itself has helped engender.

Grant H. Kester's *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* and Miwon Kwon's *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* are to date the most influential critical discussions of activist and community-oriented art practices and the political and ethical dilemmas that arise when what could well appear as social work is conducted or initiated from within the art institution.⁰³ However, even at a level at which many of the same or similar types of work are discussed, “the social” is framed in very different terms. Kester's concern is with a type of artistic practice that too easily falls outside the purview of art criticism, and his book is primarily an attempt to develop frameworks of explanation that allow the specific political achievements of this type of work to be understood and critiqued in aesthetic terms at all. But this works the other way as well: understanding the aesthetic dimension of community-oriented art makes it possible to discuss what may or may not make individual cases of such work into valid forms of social and political practice.

“Dialogical aesthetics” is the term Kester suggests in order to indicate a practice of listening and intersubjective exchange alien to the presentational emphasis in most Western art and aesthetics. By picking up elements from Jürgen Habermas's discourse ethics as well as ideas on how subjectivity constitutes itself through communicative interaction with others, found in the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Mikhail Bakhtin, Kester conjures an aesthetic ideal that is based in ethics. And ethics is here seen as fundamental to any “thinking” or “philosophy” since it is key to the very constitution of subjectivity. However, this ethical/aesthetic model or ideal must be brought into some strategic relation with the quotidian practice of human interaction in order to be of interest. It is this strategic relation, performed in a number of artworks, that is ultimately the object of Kester's study.⁰⁴

But it is also at this strategic level, at which Kester discusses the artistic engagement with what he terms “politically coherent communities” — pre-existing communities or communities created through the context set up by the artwork — that his work comes under the critical radar of Miwon Kwon’s project. In her book, Kwon traces the shift in public art from large-scale sculptural objects to physically or conceptually site-specific works and then to audience-specific or issue-specific projects. This shift, described as a passage from an aesthetic function to a design function to a social function, is thematized as a displacement of the very concept of “site” itself. Audience- or issue-specific works are understood in terms of a discursive virtualization of the site, in the sense that the social identities evoked through such work are constructed within complex discursive fields. And it is from the point of view of this virtuality — theoretically underpinned by Jean-Luc Nancy’s non-identitarian theory of sociality presented in *The Inoperative Community* — that Kwon critiques Kester for harboring essentialist ideas of communitarian identity. In her view, such essentialism is politically dangerous in that it may reinforce prejudices surrounding existing and problematic social identities rather than focusing on future constructions of the social.⁰⁵ Kester’s response to this critique is that it is precisely the pragmatic and situational application of dialogical aesthetics that will determine the political validity of each project. A blanket charge of essentialism is simply too abstract given that the collective identities in question may well understand themselves as contingent or contextual rather than as natural or essential. While Kwon seems to reject the very idea of coherent community, arguing that truly critical work must take place in the interstices between identities and communities, Kester believes that unanticipated forms of knowledge can be produced through dialogical encounters with politically coherent communities.

Kester and Kwon may agree, in the end, that essentialist perspectives on social phenomena are to be avoided. But the main point is that their respective takes on “the social” are fundamentally incompatible and can therefore hardly be expected to inform each other in very productive ways. This incompatibility can be ascribed to a specific version of the opposition between transparent/pragmatic and opaque/reflexive social art practices. For

while Kester evaluates art on its ability to instigate a different type of contact zone or mediation in specific social and political situations, Kwon's perspective departs from a more formally and art historically oriented concern with art's changing relation to an entity named "site." As a concept, "site" only has meaning in relation to the idea of the proper place or placement of a work of art. It evokes the rich and complex history of the passages and links between architecture, site-specific sculptural and painterly monuments and ornaments, and the freestanding (non-site-specific) art objects of modernity. To take a principled interest in the issues of the site is, in other words, to take an interest in the framing devices or parergonal structures through which modern art's relation to its own "inside" and "outside" is negotiated. To discuss the more recent returns to issue- and context-oriented work in terms of site-specificity is to inscribe them into precisely such a formal framework of explanation. It evokes art's sustaining and differentiating relation to itself: any production of sociality here only emerges through a reflexive take on aesthetic boundary issues. When Kwon critiques the tendency to view the specificity of sites or social identities in terms of a closed set of differences (one place or social identity after another), she advocates a more radically differential or relational take on site specificity. The logic of her argument evokes more recent definitions and defenses of medium-specificity in the work of Rosalind Krauss. An idea of the medium as a recursive structure—i.e. a structure in which some of the elements produce the rules that generate the structure itself—allows for a view on artistic media as not given and fixed, but as continually made or produced. Medium-specificity should thus be understood as a self-differentiating activity, not as a framework for an increasingly ossified reproduction of purely art-internal concerns.⁰⁶ The dialectical tension retained in this perspective prevents any simple opposition between formalist art and anti-formalist anti-art (in which the latter is typically heralded as the space of "social" work). Similarly, a perspective on the specificity of art's various "sites" (whether those sites are physical places, communities, issues, or functions) needs this type of tension if one wants to keep track of the contradictory social mechanisms that produce these as sites *of and for* art in the first place.

II

The point is, again, not to pass a final judgment in the debate between Kwon and Kester; their basic concerns are ultimately too different. What I want to point out is the way the specific type of differential formalism underlying Kwon's arguments may be informative in relation to the strategies or modes of operation of a type of work that evokes "the social" through terms that are closer to the practices and values of art itself than to the more typical focus on places, communities or issues. One such strategy may be the type of artistic activity that Craig Saper defines as sociopoetic practices—practices that rely on ironically *miming* institutions like shops, bureaus, archives, institutes, or museums.⁰⁷ But what interests me in this context is rather the type of work where the social seems to be continually evoked through the terms and practices of visual style, that is, in terms of the kind of artistic *forming* and *shaping* that is generally understood to be at the core of fashion, architecture, and design. Sociality is, here, evoked through precisely those instances that are generally recognized as the "official" limit-phenomena of art proper. For architecture and design continually emerge as instances in which art's "spillover" into general culture is either anxiously debated or euphorically celebrated. And, to a large extent, the anxieties and euphoria surrounding the art/design/architecture boundaries seem generated by issues of style: the dream of creating new styles of life based on artistic creativity or the fear that genuine artistic style will bleed into the superficial stylistics of commodity culture.

What is peculiar about the new style site works is that this complex boundary situation has become a site of artistic activity in its own right. But this also means that the works in question place themselves beyond the two main positions articulated in avant-garde practice: on the one hand, the fear that art will sell out to fashion or "mere stylistics" unless it manages to uphold its critical difference and, on the other hand, the hope that art will become more democratic through utilitarian design and, in fact, contribute to the creation of a new society. In contrast, by keeping these contradictory impulses in tension, the work in question is able to establish a site of activity where the contradictory sociality of twentieth-century art itself is produced as a space of play and projection. At this site, the reas-

asuring utopian promise of the social relevance, accessibility, practicality, and use-value of artistic creativity is held in check against the experience of how precisely this type of artistic creativity, as well as its democratization, is mobilized to great effect by contemporary capitalism—not least by contributing to the production of the “right kind” of subjectivities.

The title *Literally No Place: Communes, Bars and Greenrooms* evokes the non-localized and non-localizable site of this specifically “artistic” sociality. In one sentence, it spans the whole contradictory range of social spaces informed by notions of artistic creativity. On the one hand, there are the communes, the utopian experiments in alternative living, fictional as well as real. From the early days of Soviet Constructivism to the behaviorist commune depicted in B. F. Skinner’s novel *Walden Two* (in which artistic competition and jealousy are supposed to have vanished due to behavioral design) to artist-created alternative societies such as the commune of the Viennese Actionists or the present-day Atelier van Lieshout, there is no commune without a marked ideology of art, an idea of how art plays into the social economy. On the other hand, there are the greenrooms—spaces that are above all characteristic of contemporary televisual reality. The greenroom (a term originally taken from the theater) is the liminal space where the participants in live TV shows wait before they go on camera and where they mingle afterward. It is a social space that frames televisual performance and thus also demarcates the shaped and edited nature of televisual real-time—the apparently spontaneous and unbroken flow of events that aligns TV time (as well as its artistic sidekick, video art) with lived temporality in general.

Mediating between the two, keeping them both together and apart, there is the bar. It is a place of easy conviviality and togetherness, a space where conversations and discussions both matter and do not matter, where the focus and purpose of “production”—both TV production and the collective economic production of the commune—is temporarily and ritually suspended. (We often dismiss a certain type of communication as “bar talk,” and in the book *Discussion Island/Big Conference Center*, Gillick repeatedly describes how one of his bargoers takes part in discussions while his thoughts are elsewhere.)⁰⁸ And while the bar is often idealized as

a space of real communality, a public place where social differences are supposedly laid aside, it is also a dream space of sorts. More often than not, the bar is also a heavily designed and stylized space, a space whose designs project other times and places in the midst of “reality,” not entirely unlike the type of everyday escapism facilitated by a medium like television. So, in a very simple and basic sense, the bar can thus be seen as a space that mediates between the social utopia of the commune and the mediated sociality of the greenroom.

The bar—or its close equivalents, the lounge and other informal places where people get together—is a key element in the style site works. Bar-like spaces or situations are often the point of departure for actual audience interaction in the art situation and for the creation of temporary forms of togetherness. At the same time, the bar/lounge format of sociality has spurred the most violent critiques of this type of work. Kester, for instance, references the critique raised against the social practice of Rirkrit Tiravanija by the actionist and community-oriented artist Jay Koh. Tiravanija is best known for creating hospitality-oriented situations centered around sharing food that is cooked on site by the artist himself; the formal framework of these situations often references bars, lounges, and the informal private party. As one such hospitality situation at the Kölnischer Kunstverein took place in proximity to a police attack on a homeless community, the “hospitality” of Tiravanija’s work could be questioned. Since this work did not actively engage with the social problems in its immediate vicinity, the exclusionary mechanisms surrounding its supposed generosity and conviviality were, in Koh’s view, exposed.⁰⁹

In a trenchant critique of the social work of Gillick and Tiravanija, as well as the notion of relational aesthetics (launched by critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud in an early response to this type of work), Claire Bishop equally focuses on the conviviality model of the bar/lounge situation, claiming that such an approach to sociality rests too comfortably within a quasi-democratic ideal of community as immanent togetherness and consensus. It does not, in other words, touch on the actuality of social differences or antagonism and the need to understand democracy as a space where such conflictual relations are sustained rather than erased.¹⁰ All this

type of work does is present a harmonizing and noncommittal feel-good model of sociality.

Both of these critiques are relevant enough in their own terms, and would have to be taken seriously if the bar/lounge format of sociality constituted the single, isolated, and perfectly transparent core of Tiravanija's and Gillick's work. But, as the title *Literally No Place: Communes, Bars and Greenrooms* indicates, the conviviality of the bar/lounge-situation should rather be seen as one moment or mediating function within a larger assemblage of elements. It is true enough that neither Gillick nor Tiravanija seems to engage in the type of activist/community-oriented practice that informs Koh's own work and that forms the horizon of his critique. Neither do they emulate the confrontational or interventionist strategies of an artist like Santiago Sierra, presented by Bishop as a critical counter-ideal to the idyllic sociality of Gillick and Tiravanija and whose work (in her words) is "marked by sensations of unease and discomfort rather than belonging" because it "acknowledges the impossibility of a 'microtopia' and instead *sustains* a tension among viewers, participants, and context."¹¹

One has, of course, every right to express regret that Gillick and Tiravanija have not chosen those particular paths of activity. But the point is that a more precise understanding of their actual work cannot be developed from criteria stemming from quite different forms of artistic practice. The point—missed again and again in the critical writing—is that there can be no single approach to artistic work with "the social," just as there is no single sociality "out there" that can simply be accessed by artistic activity. Unless a more differentiated set of notions of the often incompatible *forms* of sociality produced in artistic activity is developed, this type of criticism unwittingly tends to reinforce entirely traditional realist and essentialist notions of both "the social" and "the artistic"—notions that presuppose each sphere as a given. Sociality here seems accessible to vanguard or radical artistic activity precisely because of its imagined separation from "art proper," generally meaning various types of formalist approaches, etc. Moreover, this sociality only exists "for" art to the extent that it is a field in which problems are to be solved, relations engineered. Here, art's approach to the social mimes the dominant trend in sociology

since Emile Durkheim, notably the tendency to conflate the understanding of the social link with the need to solve specifically "social" problems. Sociology then becomes a political project devoted to the task of engineering a modern society.

The logic behind this take on the social is the idea that there exists something like a social "context" in which non-social activities take place. As Bruno Latour puts it, the social is presented as a specific domain of reality that always encompasses the agents that are "inside it," and it can be used as a specific type of causality to account for the residual aspects that other domains (psychology, law, economics, etc.) cannot completely deal with.¹² Social scientists have managed to make this definition of society into the default position referred to by all other disciplines and agents as well. This is why boundary problems arising in the field of art tend to be referred to the problem-solving domain called "the social." It is along this line of thinking that issues of form and style are routinely separated from any discussion of art working in and with the social, whether that art is defined as context art, community-based or activist. Style is what art and art history deal with "on their own"; a different set of issues "belongs" to the social. This is fair enough to the extent that a lot of such social artwork has a different type of focus than the politics of the shaping of the visual world. But this separation between style and sociality cannot be upheld on principle. The fact that style itself actually functions as an anxiously guarded and highly contested boundary zone of modern art is not just a symptom of a particular way of thinking about art versus the social. It can also instigate thinking on the way stylistic issues may function as components in a specific *creation* of sociality.

In order to think this possibility at all, sociology has to open up its own concept of the social, and Latour presents the contours of such an opening when he contrasts Durkheim's "sociology of the social" with the small subfield that he prefers to call "the sociology of associations," but which is more officially known as "actor-network theory." Inspired by the example of Gabriel Tarde, who thought of the social as a kind of circulating fluid that should be followed by new methods and not a specific type of realm or context, the social is here not a thing among things, but a principle of

connectivity between things that are not themselves social. For sociology the focus may then be on the ever-new configurations or assemblages of elements. While this might seem like a vague type of proposition compared with the relative fixity of the notion of a social domain or context, Latour argues that this principle of connectivity lies behind the most common experience we have in “encountering the puzzling face of the social”:

A new vaccine is being marketed, a new job description is offered, a new political movement is being created, a new planetary system is discovered, a new law is voted, a new catastrophe occurs. In each instance, we have to reshuffle our conceptions of what was associated together because the previous definition has been made somewhat irrelevant Thus, the overall project of what we are supposed to do together is thrown into doubt. The sense of belonging has entered a crisis. But to register this feeling of crisis and to follow those new connections, another notion of the social has to be devised. It has to be much wider than what is usually called by that name, yet strictly limited to the tracing of new associations and to the designing of their assemblages.¹³

Such a principle of connectivity may be a relevant framework for understanding how “the social” figures in the work of Gillick and Tiravanija, among others. It can, for instance, be used to make sense of the complex web of elements that come together under the title *Literally No Place: Communes, Bars and Greenrooms*. It may then be a key to understanding the *specificity* of the site conjured by these artists—the site tentatively defined as an entirely new way of playing around with the deeply political boundary issues of artistic style itself. Only by paying attention to the specific *construction* of sociality in these works can their equally specific way of handling issues of tension, contradiction, and antagonism be discussed.

The question is, of course, how a term like “antagonism” is to be understood in this context. For Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, antagonism becomes a key term as they try to account for a new political landscape

marked by a plurality of struggles, a multiplication of conflict zones, and hegemonic relations that surpass the traditional categories of Marxist theory. By approaching the concept of hegemony as the discursive surface of Marxist theory, they also trace the historical transformations in this discursive surface: the strictly marginal or supplementary position of hegemony (destined for irrelevance after the coming of true socialism) acquires an increasingly central position as conflicts multiply rather than disappear. But this fact opens up a different understanding of the social itself: the multiplication of hegemonic relations represents a surplus of social relations that exceed the rational and organized structure of society (the idea of social order). The important point here is that hegemony, and the related concept of antagonism, does not simply indicate tension or opposition between already defined classes, identities, and positions. More precisely, it promotes an understanding of the social field itself as emergent and differentiating, something that must continually be thought of in new ways.

This type of insight has some bearing on the charges that the social work of Gillick and Tiravanija lacks the antagonistic element that makes Santiago Sierra's work into a truly critical social art practice. There is no doubt that Sierra's work represents or dramatizes familiar relations of conflict or difference, such as those that may exist between illegal immigrants and the typical white/bourgeois museum audience. But there are other ways to bring out and sustain antagonistic relations as well, and one such way would be to demarcate a social field of ambivalence, difficulty, and contradiction *that is not yet recognized as such*. My contention is that the style site produces such a field: it is articulated or demarcated *as* a conflictual field as artists start to intervene in the ambivalent historical and political terrain marked by the increasing generalization of the significance of style. Since this generalization is related to new and intimate techniques of economic exploitation and political control, it is obviously also a terrain of potential conflicts of interest, a new surface of antagonistic relations.

The opacity that typically marks the style site works may then be related to the way in which they trace an *emergent* social reality. The work on the new and highly ambivalent boundaries of style constitutes what Laclau

and Mouffe would call an articulatory practice, a social field where the different elements have not yet crystallized into fixed moments, not yet become parts of a closed set of social or political identities whose meanings in relation to one another are already determined. In any case, it is safe to say that no simple representation of existing social spaces comes forth in the web of elements in which Gillick's communes, bars, and greenrooms rub up against one another. (In fact, the critical fixation on the bar/lounge format may, of course, itself be a symptom of a desire for a representation of at least one known social space, one which has the added benefit of being an easy target for critique due to the "unserious" associations attached to it.)

At this stage, all one has to go by is a certain structuring principle that informs the assembly of elements. Throughout the work, elements seem suspended between two great machineries of social production—the utopian and the televisual. Each comes with its own spaces, formats, history, and theoretical literature. At the same time, the two often appear to intersect or overlap. As it happens, the medium of television and the various media of utopian imagination can be described as time machines, in that they administer complex temporalities where the future or the past continually impinges on the present. The style site conjured up by Gillick (and also, as we shall see, by Tiravanija) is entirely organized around such issues of temporality; its specific take on "the social" cannot be grasped without reference to those issues. What remains to be discussed is the conflictual dimension of these temporal issues and their relation to the issue of style.

III

One does not read far into *Walden Two*, B. F. Skinner's novel about a scientific utopia, before issues of art, architecture, and design appear.¹⁴ In fact, these are among the first issues discussed by the protagonists who visit the commune for the first time and discover the various design strategies and innovations that are described at length. There are, for instance, the practical benches with tables attached. There are the specially designed food trays that facilitate eating, and, even more importantly, save time

and effort during cleaning. There are the curiously tall hanging tea-glasses, which are practical both for keeping the drinks warm and for helping oneself to several cups in one go. On the communal bulletin board, all information is given in plain typeface, with no glaring images or headlines, so as to avoid visual competition. And a somewhat similar attitude is reflected in the dress code, where one tries to abolish the waste of time, effort, and expense imposed by constantly changing fashions. A broadening of the tastes, instead, allows each woman (the emphasis in the text is on women) to develop her own personal beauty rather than be constricted by irrational style dictates. A similar broadmindedness seems to reign in the architectural department:

The rooms were decorated in various styles. It was possible to dine briskly in a white-walled room bustling with speed and efficiency or at leisure in a pine-paneled Early American dining room in beeswax candlelight, or in an English inn whose walls carried racing pictures or in a colorful Swedish room. Two carefully designed modern rooms, one with booths along one wall, came off well by comparison.

I was rather offended by this architectural hodge-podge Through some principle which I did not fully understand, it appeared that the ingestion of food had something to do with the development of aesthetic preferences or tolerances.

In this controlled communal cultivation of variation and individuality, design is the critical issue, minutely described and evaluated. A plurality of styles is advisable since it seems to promote a form of “aesthetic tolerance” that is compared to food tolerance; one will not be bodily *affected* by it. Art, in contrast, remains curiously neutral in relation to the constitution of the commune itself. All one knows is that in an age of generally second-rate art, the art produced in the commune is of high quality. Its production is essentially the successful symptom of a wide array of pragmatic design strategies that range from the design of cafeteria trays to the behaviorist design of minds and bodies — strategies that, taken together, procure the sum

total of leisure time necessary for everyone to be given the opportunity to be artistically creative. "Leisure's our levitation," as the original creator of the commune puts it. Art is then mainly the signifier of "free time," or the ability to enjoy "seeming to be free," as the creator also states. In sharp contrast to Joseph Beuys's romantic (and quasi-Marxist) suggestion that *all* forms of work be associated with the creative freedom and self-determination of artistic work, free time is here strictly a product. The utopian commune is a rational economist, a purveyor of free time, art time. And it is precisely access to this time, or rather to its imagined freedoms, that makes the steely discipline of the commune endurable.

The objects, texts, and images assembled around the title *Literally No Place: Communes, Bars and Greenrooms* insert themselves into precisely this separation between pragmatic design strategies and their ideal product—the free time of artistic creativity; or, to put it more succinctly, into the separation between the potential "waste time" of fashion styles and the "spend time" associated with true artistic style and form. Evoking Skinner's utopian novel, they intrude in the entirely familiar economy of art that seems to subtend the sociality of *Walden Two*, an economy that dictates that in order to be able to freely spend time on art, time must not be wasted on the empty stylistics of fashion. While *Walden Two* reiterates a typically modernist ambivalence about the relationship between art, architecture, and fashion, this ambivalence is not primarily sexual, as in the type of architectural discourse which vehemently protects the idea of construction from the feminine eroticism of fashion.¹⁵ In *Walden Two*, the ambivalence has to do with time management, with the need to avoid wasting time on the changing sensibilities of fashion. Gillick's intrusion into this complex first and foremost takes place at a stylistic level, that is, at a level where the forms and styles that may feed into either artworks or design solutions take on a certain autonomy with respect to the two temporal registers.

The only thing that seems certain is the fundamental complicity between the two temporalities. The imagined freedom of "art time" is determined by a disciplinarian shaping and forming that produces surplus time and that could itself not be endured without these moments of free-

dom. The time of true art style and the time of fashion stylistics are reigned in, controlled, and connected in the same economic circuit. What Gillick seems to want us to remember, however, are the larger issues of the administration and mining of time that are key factors in production in general. For, first among the series of quotes that frame and break up the main narrative of *Literally No Place* is County Magistrate Broughton Charlton's appalled speech on child labor, reported in the *Daily Telegraph* of January 17, 1860 and quoted by Marx in *Capital*. And here, in this absolutely grotesque depiction of capitalist production, it is above all issues of time—the ages of the children and the hours of their labor—that give offense:

Children of nine or ten are dragged from their squalid beds at two, three or four o'clock in the morning, and compelled to work for a bare subsistence until ten, eleven or twelve at night, their limbs wearing away, their frames dwindling, their faces whitening, and their humanity absolutely sinking into a stone-like torpor, utterly horrible to contemplate.¹⁶

To the extent that the minutely perfected economy of “art-time” and “design-time” at *Walden Two* has a recognizable, familiar, normalizing beat to it, it is perhaps because it also has something in common with the no less persistent but far more variegated and subtle mining of time in contemporary production. The behaviorist utopia of *Walden* is the place where the very forces of desire are designed, kept in check, and productive through sophisticated techniques of self-government. This is how *Walden Two* manages to function without more traditional or external governmental bodies. Government and politics are not necessary since each person governs himself or herself without even noticing: the constant payoff (time for art) makes control seem like freedom. For the desires that are controlled in this art/design economy are entirely associated with the forces of time and temporalization.

What this means is that the radical utopia of *Walden Two* is maybe not all that far away. If anything, its apparently harmonious obliteration of external forms of government may seem like a parodic extreme of the more individual forms of disciplining characteristic of neo-liberal-

ist control society. In fact, the question of the actual “distance” to *Walden Two*—brought up through metaphors of finding, staying at, leaving or returning to the commune—returns as a key issue in *Literally No Place*. The main narrative of Gillick’s book takes off where *Walden Two* ends, that is, where Skinner’s narrator describes his final decision to return to *Walden Two* in order to live there. He returns to its isolated location on foot, becoming stronger as he walks: “My step was light and I could feel the ball of each foot pushing the earth down from me as I walked.”¹⁷ In Gillick’s account, a group of people, walking for no clear purpose, encircle a terrain that is recognizable as *Walden Two* only because of the moments of repetition that resonate between this text and Skinner’s novel. While Skinner’s narrator intently returns, Gillick’s walkers, having no clear plan and only unresolved desires, allow themselves to swing in an arc. However, their walking is described by the same optimistic metaphor as the one used by Skinner (with only a shift in the personal pronoun): “Their step was light and they could feel the ball of each foot pushing the earth down from them as they walked.”¹⁸

This sentence, which seems to express the full scope of the desire invested in the very “ground” of this contemporary utopia (a paradoxical kind of ground since “utopia” literally means “no place”), triggers a series of ambiguous design solutions. In a text in *Parkett*, Gillick states that the main ideas in *Walden Two* have formed a subliminal model for “certain socio-economic developments” that “circulate around post-corporate and post-industrial environments,” and that these ideas could in fact be reframed as a beach towel with the sentence

“MYSTEPWASLIGHTANDICOULDFEELTHEBALLOFEACHFOOT-PUSHINGTHESANDAWAYFROMMEASIWALKED” (*sic!*) woven into its fabric as if it were a corporate logo. A beach towel, of course, makes perfect sense in this context: it is a true token of the leisure time or “free time” of personalized aesthetic sensibilities that is mined by the stylistically oriented branding economies.¹⁹

The notion of reframing this sentence (and all that it comes to stand for in the past as well as in the present) as the logo of a beach towel shows precisely the penchant for condensation, layering, and even willed

confusion that informs Gillick's work in and with "the social." In a 2003 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the same sentence (with the words pulled together as in the previous example) was turned into a different kind of design object. For this occasion, it was shaped into a three-dimensional signboard made up of big colorful letters in modernist *sans-serif* typeface. (Fig. 5.2) This sleek corporate-style space divider cum signage system was used—along with an abstract wall painting miming the visual language of graphic design—to frame a bar/coffee shop area placed in the middle of the vast lobby area of the museum. Both the letters and the wall painting featured the color orange—a color that contemporary designers use to signal happiness, activity, and optimism. A watered-down but still visually striking version of the color red, orange has in recent years more or less replaced pure red as the "signal" color of choice among designers; apparently because in an uncertain society, it seems to appear less threatening, less potentially conflictual than red.²⁰ If the color orange retains strong cultural memories of a hippie utopia of boundless communality and distributed creativity, its current incarnation most of all signifies the kind of innocuous freedom allowed within a strictly guarded consensus-oriented environment.

In this case, the orange signage system and wall painting obviously served to draw viewers to the bar—the "social" place in the museum, the place where museum visitors relax and discuss the more solitary experiences of the proper art spaces. But it would be more precise to say that the signage system overlaid, or patched together, two heterogeneous spaces, notably the museum bar and Skinner's commune. These two spaces can be seen to represent reciprocal economies of art. In the commune, the free time of art is the quasi-exceptional but necessary instance that keeps the checks and balances of the social economy in order. The museum bar, in contrast, provides the momentary and necessary time-out from the demands of art (the museal requirement that one has a productive relation with art). In any case, the economy of the time of art is the common denominator between the two spaces. It is continually evoked, produced, framed, or kept at bay by design that guarantees its "unproductive" productivity.

Such patching together of heterogeneous spaces, some expressed in terms of real physical environments and others theoretical or fictional, some present and others distant, is a key strategy in Gillick's work. The transfer or patching occurs as traces of one space—sentences or objects or phenomena described in a text, for instance—reappear as the design elements that give an actual physical site, a place of communal activity, its formal and functional specificity. If his fictional texts continually evoke discussions that are about to take place, or that should hopefully take place, Gillick also designs environments that might seem to accommodate actual discussion situations. His so-called discussion platforms are the open spaces that form under metal-framed canopies made out of multicolored Plexiglas: the halo of color-stained light that appears under the colored glass canopies provides the ambience or atmosphere needed to establish a minimal degree of communality (a prerequisite for “having a discussion”). (*Fig. 5.3*) Here, a mere change in the quality of the light amounts to the design of a social space. A radically “open” alternative to the constrictions of the seminar room or the boardroom, the discussion platforms somehow seem to communicate that walls—in fact, any sign of disciplinary compartmentalization—are impediments to a free and open-ended exchange. Yet, the optimistic orange glow produced by many of these discussion platforms indicates the way in which the very association between open space and open exchange is framed by a fear—in fact an interdiction—of the articulation of conflict. “Discussion” is always benevolent and, as in the fictional texts, a quasi-obligatory activity that never actually seems to go anywhere.

In actuality, discussion never really takes place, at least not under Gillick's explicit guidance. For all their sparseness and apparent functionality, Gillick's design solutions remain elliptical and suggestive, never entirely devoted to the social actuality of the present. The physical and practical concreteness of a built space is always infused with the presence of an elsewhere: hence the opaque and “difficult” quality of his sociality. His corporate-style signage constructions—decorative logo-screens that are perfectly integrated in an urban/corporate environment—present quotes from texts that could be said to be historically or ideologically related to

this environment but not, perhaps, to the way this environment tends to understand itself. In one exhibition, there were wall partitions that looked like temporary space dividers—another type of tool for gathering people for open discussion, perhaps.

Yet the specification given in the title that the partitions belong to a “lamp factory” described in *Literally No Place*—the lamp factory that produces only unique, custom-made lamps for films—immediately opens up the question of how such discussion tools connect with the idea of an industrial workplace tailored to meet the specific needs of post-industrial media production. For all their ability to suggest highly concrete forms of sociality or to evoke specific types of ambience, Gillick’s built spaces are so suffused with connections to other spaces, objects, and histories that they tend to undercut the behavioral patterns and ideals that are most readily associated with their visual/spatial signifiers. To claim that his work simply promotes benevolent discussion and togetherness is then, in a sense, to buy the hype, to respond precisely in terms of these newly ingrained behavioral patterns and ideals. In actual fact, the precise site of Gillick’s sociality is literally no place.

It is at this point that it becomes possible to ask about the location or function of the third space evoked by Gillick in *Literally No Place*: the greenroom. The commune and the bar have, to some extent, been located as textual and/or physical spaces in Gillick’s work, but the space of the greenroom—the televisual space—is slightly harder to find. It would probably be most precise to suggest that it emerges as a specific ordering of time that enters into dialogue with the temporal economy of the commune. This ordering of time makes its effects felt in the very distribution of the textual and visual/spatial material connected to *Literally No Place*. The greenroom is then, in this specific sense, *everywhere* in the work.

In the commune, the relation between time and production is that of a rational, no-loss system of exchange. The full and ideal present—the moment of pleasure and self-realization that is identified with the creation of art—is a guaranteed effect of an economy of time that both separates and connects work and play, useful pursuit and leisure. The time of TV production evoked by the greenroom indicates a less rational or control-

lable temporal economy. In this economy, the full and ideal present is simply harder to locate. While constantly evoked, promoted, and fetishized, associated with ideals of immediate experience and new forms of co-presence and communication, it also continually slips away. The greenroom is the metaphor for this continually evading present. As a medium, television is constructed on highly overdetermined notions of presence. It is centered on the idea of “liveness”—the most remarkable benefit of television’s real-time technologies. Its most characteristic format—the live media event—connects separate people and places in a communal presence, which is why it can be described as an arena for ritualized sociality or communality. The new modes of journalistic presentation brought about by television attest, as Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz have pointed out, to the specific way in which the live media event constructs sociality. No longer an “outside” commentator cynically open to any meanings, the media event reporter tends to be actively involved in the official meaning of the event as it unfolds. Always operating in the middle of TV presence, he or she *enacts* this meaning.²¹

But televisual presence is also a complicated construct. The dispersed nature of its audience challenges traditional notions of communality and its transmissions across time and space change the very notion of the “presence” of perception itself. The greenroom—the place where people hang out both before presenting on TV and afterward—frames TV live-ness with a nervous sense of the just-before and just-after and is, in fact, a perfect metaphor for TV’s overdetermined, slippery, and refractive production of presence. “Sitting in a greenroom ... thinking about how to present,” as Gillick puts it in *Literally No Place*.

But if the greenroom is described as the place where people “circulate around the present,” it is also described as “a true place of debate that may be the perfect model.”²² The greenroom is not just a space at the margins of live TV; it is actually the model for the televisual public sphere. The consensus-environment of post-corporate or post-industrial societies may thrive on certain values subliminally retained from the utopian commune, hence the idealization of “discussion,” “conviviality,” etc. But the very articulation of these relationships is complicated by the “flickering relationships” instigated by TV culture. In fact, since the commune/con-

sensus “discussion” model is only presented in terms of an endless series of elliptical spaces, delayed conversations, fragmentary narratives, and evasive fictional characters, it is perhaps correct to say that in Gillick’s work it only presents itself through a sort of televisual flickering. The idea of flickering is, in any case, a key concept in Gillick’s work, represented, for instance, by his *Big Conference Center Relational Tool* (1998)—a raw pine wall inset with small halogen lights that glow like single pixels. (Fig. 5.4) This weird combination of rational construction and televisual shimmer may, according to Gillick, “highlight a location where it becomes possible to engage in constantly flickering relationships.”²³

Here is, in any case, the structural link between utopianism and TV culture that seems to run through Gillick’s work. It is through this link that the work turns toward the question of how utopianism figures in the present—the utopian models that are, in fact, operative in contemporary production. It frames the similarities between Skinner’s government-free commune and the contemporary emphasis on “free” self-production. In both cases, control and government depend on the shaping of the self. This utopianism is above all framed in terms of its specific ordering of time: the relation between work-time and free time. The commune idealizes the full presence of art and its free time by separating it from design and the sphere of productive work. But since the free time of art is also presented as the *pure product* of the hyper-efficient “working” of good design, its idealized presence is, in fact, inscribed in an economy of time that has a purchase on all of human time. This is perhaps why Gillick’s work presents the social ideals of the commune through the framework of a contemporary TV culture in which free time and the immaterial values of art have obviously become economically productive, to the extent that they modify traditional definitions of work. In the temporal economy of TV culture, the commune’s attempt to distinguish between art and design comes across as irrelevant: *all that matters now is the uncontrollable force of “style,”* or the everyday aesthetics of self-styling or self-production.

This specific framing of the utopianism of the present is a critical background against which at least part of contemporary art's current "confusion" of art, architecture, and design should be understood. It stages the historical relations between art, design, and utopian desires, putting art's contradictory relations to both responsible planning *and* surprise invention, time management, *and* temporal escape, into free play. These are the antagonistic dimensions of art's own sociality, endlessly debated and fought over; the contemporary aestheticization processes only render them more acute. This perspective cannot simply be reconciled with the more idealistic notions of the "need" to break down the barriers between art and design and the special capacity of avant-garde art to front this particular need. If there is a perceived need to break down the barriers between art and design, it is because this need is now economic through and through.

It is, then, in the name of a very different type of thinking that the uncontrollable mobility of style is harnessed in the work of artists like Gillick. Here, art's contribution to utopianism is seen in plainly economic terms. As one of Gillick's fictional protagonists notes, "Tomorrowism is a central dynamic principle in Western capitalism at the end of the twentieth century."²⁴ Yet the open play with the specific antagonisms of art's various identities—the effect of an assemblage that places the "styles" of art against the styles of design in ever new ways—also opens a space of possibility that exceeds a mere representation or description of "current conditions." The last word on the sociality of art has not been uttered.²⁵

Few works bring out this whole conundrum with greater emphasis than the web of visual, spatial, and textual elements assembled under the title *Discussion Island/Big Conference Center*. (Fig. 5.3 – 5.7) The conference center is obviously a key site in contemporary corporate and managerial culture (every city worth its name has one). It is also the well-known terminology of management that gives the book its formal organization, as it divides into sections named "Conciliation," "Compromise," "Negotiation," "Delay," "Consensus," "Revision," "Concentration," "Dialogue," and "Evaluation." These sections somehow reflect the actions of its protagonists—three vaguely defined technocrats of the future who continually "create reflection groups," "arrange repartitions," and "search for a

discussion island.” The confusing dynamics of style envelop this managerial activity from beginning to end: style attracts, facilitates, optimizes, and inspires. In his built constructions, Gillick efficiently conjures whatever is genuinely seductive and socially functional in the typical corporate and managerial environment. He brings out the clean, slick surfaces, the bright or “serious” colors (the scale from optimistic orange to classy and authoritarian dark brown), the sense of air and infinite expanse, all rendered in elliptical formats that always fall short of defining a finished interior. In this way, they manage to impart a sense of movement and potential rather than the drudgery of actual work. But in the fictional text titled *Discussion Island/Big Conference Center*, the activity of the protagonists actually also seems to be slowed down by encounters with the interior design, that is, with the specific details of walls and floors, of carpets, sofas, lamps, doors, and windows that seem indelibly associated with the occasional moodiness of the characters. Style details are, in other words, associated with the moments when their bustling grinds to a halt or loses a sense of purpose.

The twenty-second floor of the conference center is the meeting point for these contradictory impulses, presented as a key space both in installations and in the fictional text. Indicated at the 1998 exhibition at Air de Paris by a discrete floor sign in beige lettering on beige walls, it encompasses, in the 1998 exhibition at the Villa Arson in Nice, an impressive expanse of walls decorated with a giant version of the Classic Greek meander pattern in brown and orange. These brightly patterned walls surround bright orange discussion platforms. In the Air de Paris version of the twenty-second floor environment, one also encounters a more confusing arrangement consisting of brown paint patches smeared on the wall in an attempt to match the exact shade of “Coca-Cola-colored walls” described in the book, as well as a mirror supposedly used “in the search” for its three protagonists. The very idea that there should be a need to search for the three technocrats recalls the fact that the meander pattern is, of course, also a figure for the labyrinth, for wandering without a clear purpose, for lingering and getting lost—the way the characters of *Literally No Place* meander the commune’s surrounding terrain, walking without a clear plan,

ambivalently returning and departing.

Actually, the notion of lingering further emphasizes the unproductive moments in this restlessly productive universe. In the book version of *Discussion Island/Big Conference Center*, the flickering television-type cuts that give the reader a sense of being stuck in the confusing middle of actions only seem to slow down in certain repeated, detailed descriptions of the built environment. The precise placement of carpets and furniture, the traces of aging on the floor, the impression of perpetual newness imparted by a particular chair design seem to represent something akin to the personal point of view of the characters in the book. And, in the habitual rhetoric of film and TV, these slow focus sequences of interior details impart a rather melancholic sense of inactivity and hesitation. "Pain in a building," the text repeatedly states, indicating an identity somewhere between design style and personal emotion. These dysfunctional moments seem to accompany the singular instance of violence that interrupts the endless "discussions," "reflections," and "repartitions" in the book: a suicidal jump from the twenty-second floor. This abrupt and violent event frames the whole text and casts a shadow over the protagonists' ceaseless but also essentially aimless "tomorrowism." Cutting through the endless "present" of their activity, the endless "being in the middle of things," it presents an outside to the utopianism of the present, or what Gillick also calls the "functioning utopia."

IV

This presentation of an outside to the utopia of the present makes less credible the claim that Gillick's work with social relations simply promotes conviviality. What is perhaps less obvious is the fact that this darker outside to utopia could also be seen to inform the work of Rirkrit Tiravanija, an artist many consider single-handedly responsible for the expansion of the ideal of art as benevolent party-like togetherness. On the face of it, no artistic project would seem less oriented toward the antagonistic dimensions of the social than Tiravanija's essentially peaceful activity of cooking Thai food for whoever wants to join the party. All focus seems to be on the basic idea of *sharing*. Sharing food functions as a framework for

sharing a moment in time and generosity functions as a general figure for the presence of sociality *tout court*. A sensation of unmediated non-theatrical presence is added as Tiravanija seems to adhere to a Buddhist-type ideal of non-intervention, which basically means that people are allowed to be themselves (and not “performers”), and that situations are allowed to evolve of their own accord.

As artistic forms that channel the open-ended Fluxus events of the 1960s, Tiravanija’s activities are often associated with a more general interest in the unframed “flow” of phenomena, a being in the middle of situations that have no clearly defined inside and outside. Historically, it was this type of focus that led to the much-discussed redefinition of the spectator as participant and the idea that art situations might replicate the immanence of “real life.” But relatively few have taken an interest in the fact that this preoccupation with unframed events was part of a set of strategies that allowed Fluxus artists to question the very reality of the real itself.²⁶ Consequently, few have bothered to observe how Tiravanija’s apparently unassuming involvement of participants in “real” social situations takes place within formal and spatial frameworks that complicate the very idea of the simple “actuality” or presence of the situation itself.

To the extent that these frameworks are noted, their presence is primarily taken as a sign of a will to demarcate the specific social and ideological framework of his social situations. Sociality is framed by the museum: Tiravanija’s cooking mainly takes place on or around empty museum crates, just as the residue of cooking is left in the galleries or museums for weeks as traces of a past event. In a similar vein, Tiravanija reconstructed his own New York apartment within a German museum space, just as he set up an actual functioning Migros Supermarket within the Migros Museum in Zurich. Not surprisingly, this choice of framework is primarily understood in institutional-critical terms. In Nina Möntmann’s analysis, such displacement makes visible the framing devices and display functions of the museum, in fact exposes its entire *dispositif*.²⁷ And, for Sven Lütticken, it is only this whiff of institutional critique that saves Tiravanija’s work from being seen as a naïve promotion of the idea of the value-free and “open” social encounter.²⁸ Here, Tiravanija’s many and obvious references to the hero of institutional critique, Marcel Broodthaers, seems, above

all, to testify to the preeminence of institutional critique in his work. For in Tiravanija's vocabulary of visual/spatial effects one repeatedly comes across potted palms—unexpected props in the context were it not for the fact that they refer back to Broodthaers's famous evocation, also in the discursive context of the museum, of the nineteenth-century winter garden.

In these accounts of Tiravanija's social work, there is little real engagement with the temporal issues that inform this work, that is, with the way in which the unfolding "presence" of his social events is modified and complicated by highly specific spatial and stylistic frameworks. A time machine metaphor occurs repeatedly in this work and time machine operations can be seen to interrupt the sheer immanence of his social situations. As it happens, the Broodthaers reference may, in fact, have a more precise significance in relation to the temporal operations in his work. Rosalind Krauss associates Broodthaers's interest in the winter garden with a fascination for the outmoded or, more precisely, with a fascination for the utopian promise that Walter Benjamin thought could be glimpsed in once-fashionable commodities, since such phenomena show us the ruins of what was once a new social form or technology.²⁹ In Broodthaers's work, this connection between utopianism and the commodity served to undermine any self-satisfied belief in the radical "present" of contemporary art (or Conceptual art)—an art perceived as being capable of escaping commodification simply by resorting to new artistic formats. Evoking the same lack of faith in the radical present, Tiravanija's work serves as a reminder that the artistic/utopian ideals of interactivity and "participation" that inform his "social" work cannot be seen in isolation from the recent transformation in the commodity form itself, most notably the changes brought on by the so-called experience economy, where potential for economic expansion is identified with the ability to isolate and foreground experiences as the true products for sale.³⁰

The many levels of mediation and reflection triggered by the "Broodthaers palms" (on a superficial level, whimsical decorations for Tiravanija's party settings) open the work to several temporalities. They identify Tiravanija's radical art experiences with a specific political and economic present at the same time as they remove them from any total

determination *by* this present. Tiravanija's situations are perpetually ongoing, perpetually unfolding within this present, but also strangely mediated or dislocated, perpetually circulating *around* this present. The more one pays attention to the specific ways in which he stages these radically open-ended social art projects, the more one also starts to notice how he cuts through their particular purchase on the utopianism of the present.

The recent series of retrospective exhibitions of Tiravanija's work brings this point of view into clearer focus. Here, a curious convergence of metaphors in the work of Tiravanija and Gillick actually seems to give some sense of shape and form to the "outside" of utopia, as if such a thing could, in fact, be imagined in spatial and social terms. The point of departure is Tiravanija's choice of strategy for a series of mid-career retrospectives of his work—a curious embrace of a museal convention that would initially seem completely remote from the perceived "spirit" of his work. Not only did he choose to embrace this particular exhibition format, he also made no attempt to restage or reanimate past moments of sharing. Instead, the fundamentally "unrepresentable" nature of his open social situations was presented in terms of dense layers of spatial frameworks and media presentations that enacted a sort of ghostly recall function in relation to his artistic past. Essentially, spaces in which his events once had taken place were rebuilt as empty space-frames within the museums that organized his retrospectives. (*Fig. 5.8*) These space-frames played host to various other oblique mediations of the past. In Paris, audiences could choose between a museum guide lecturing on the artist's biography, an actor reciting a text on his work written by Philippe Parreno, or the recording of a text by science-fiction writer Bruce Sterling, all of which were continually played on a sound system in the empty space.³¹ In the London version of the retrospective, further layers of mediation were added as key facts in Tiravanija's life and work were included in a newly written science-fiction radio play that ran as a daily series transmitted live from the gallery, featuring passing visitors in some of the roles. In this play, Tiravanija's work was projected into a post-catastrophic future where society is obliterated and a new social order, dominated by a totalitarian supercomputer, is put in its place.

As retrospective presentations go, this was clearly a peculiar construct. The works' past is nothing but empty spaces and media frameworks, and to the extent that the work is given a future, it is catastrophic. What is more, the artist, or, more precisely, a fictional figure perhaps recognizable as Tiravanija, is held to be somehow responsible for this imagined catastrophe. An underground "social sculpture project" initiated by the artist's assistant—a network of underground caves made to provide temporary dwelling for visitors to Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*—has triggered an ecological disaster, altering life on earth. Such association of artistic work with underground activity and ecological disaster inevitably resonates with the theme of a 2004 exhibition by Liam Gillick. This exhibition was conceived, in quasi-cinematic or televisual terms, as a "trailer" for Gillick's discreetly updated publication of Gabriel Tarde's 1896 *Underground Man (Fragments of Future Histories)*, yet another utopian fiction written by a social scientist.³²

But Tarde's text is a utopian fiction like few others, since it rejects the very economism that underpins most other social utopias (including the one invented by B. F. Skinner). An ecological catastrophe that prompts the extinction of the sun and covers the earth with ice has forced mankind to create a new form of life in underground caves, where an unsurpassed concentration of the creative forces of all of human history has not only made life possible but has also entirely redefined social relations. An idea of the social based on the notion of exchange of goods and services has been replaced with an aesthetic model of society in which what is exchanged are feelings, emotions, judgments, and opinions. Social relations turn out to be aesthetic in their nature, that is, affective rather than economical. Here, in other words, is a model for tracing the social dimension of art itself (as opposed to seeing art in a social context).

Like Skinner, Tarde used fiction to give body to his scientific theories, and in his introduction, Maurizio Lazzarato traces the connections between this futuristic fantasy and the main themes in Tarde's sociology. Like Marx, Tarde noted the emergent globalization of the late nineteenth century and saw the obliteration of cultural differences and accumulation of superfluous wealth that followed in its wake as the first signs of a new global totalitarianism. But as he saw it, this globalist regime, the last stage

of what could be called the expansionist or extensive activity of mankind, also contained the grains of its own overturning. What would rise up from its ruins would be an intensive and differential society, a society that could no longer be defined in terms of the stale opposition between individualism and centralized state government proposed by both liberalism and socialism (ideologies that understand social relations in the same economical terms).

In an intensive culture based on the exchange of affects, the very opposition between the individual and the social would no longer be meaningful, since the whole series of distinctions that establish and separate a specific domain as “social” and “economical” would have been rendered invalid. This is the point of departure for the sociology of associations and collaborations proposed by Tarde and taken up again in modified form by, among others, Bruno Latour. The underground—a place where one can never survey any totality—is the utopian counterspace proposed by Tarde for his different and differentiating concept of the social.

In Tarde’s utopian fiction, the fate of architecture functions as a figure for the change in the relation between aesthetics and sociality. “Underground” has no place for monuments, for the distinct buildings or works that stand out under the light of the sun. Artistic activity and social space can then no longer be defined in terms of the relation to such concepts as spatial overview and separate works. The new architectural practice, which consists in carving out rooms (huge networks of tunnels brilliantly lit by lamps, as Tarde poetically describes it), can only focus on interior spaces that spread uncontrollably in any direction—a figure, if anything, for the “being in the middle of things” that must characterize the new intensive sociality of feelings and affects.

In a move that is somewhat parallel to that of Gabriel Tarde, the radio play produced for Tiravanija’s retrospective parodies the globalist and expansionist dynamic in contemporary art itself. This expansionism is actually partly responsible for triggering the catastrophic turnover, since the fatal underground project was only initiated in response to an invitation to participate in the “New World Global Münster Sculpture Project.” But on a less flippant level, Tiravanija’s use of certain key works in

modern architecture as settings for his social situations actually shows a particular dedication to such an underground model of the built world. At the Secession in Vienna, Tiravanija made a project based on the Schindler House in Los Angeles, the famous private home of Austrian architect Rudolf Schindler that was built in 1920/21 as part of an effort to rethink the very idea of inhabitation. (*Fig. 5.9 – 5.10*) In his 1912 manifesto—a protest against the architectural monument and its relation to the power of the tyrant—Schindler starts out by stating that the cave was the original dwelling and that a hollow adobe pile was the first permanent house. Even if modern architecture bases itself on different technical principles, its primary preoccupation is with the spatial shapes of the interior (the exterior follows from the interior). With the advent of reinforced concrete, construction need no longer be the source for architectural form, and so the true medium of the architect becomes space itself. As Schindler puts it, man's home “is no more a timid retreat. The earth has become his home.”³³

The Schindler House realizes these ideas in terms of a wholly new and flexible continuity between inside and outside spaces. In his “remake” of the Schindler House, Tiravanija wanted to recreate its flexible interior and use it as a setting for social activities that would include film screenings, concerts, presentations, lectures, and whatever other spontaneous activities the place engendered during the exhibition. However, true flexibility could not be achieved through a perfect reconstruction of the house: this would be to treat it as the monument architectural history has made it into. Schindler's idea of flexible space was realized only through a partial recall of key stylistic elements of the house, in particular, the columns and door/window grids that open the interior to the outside. Fragments of these constructions were created in stainless steel with shiny mirror-like surfaces, so as to “mobilize” the Secession rooms by blurring the very distinction between space and constructive elements. In this treatment, the very distinctive style of the Schindler House is momentarily unhinged from the historical context (early modernism) in relation to which it emerges as a monument. Not only its sense of space imparted by its particular style, but also the timing of this style becomes refractive, disorganized. In this way, the new forms of mobility that the Schindler House offers (mobile space

for mobile bodies) do not simply emerge as the historical source of the ideals of mobility that inform today's production. While the utopianism of the Schindler House must be related to the utopianism of the present, Tiravanija plays around with its style in a way that also evokes a possible outside to this utopia.

What is important here is, again, the assemblage of elements. Unlike ordinary dinner parties, the actual social situations initiated by Tiravanija do not simply take place as a matter of course, i.e. in order to enhance social relations. Instead, they are connected to highly specific historical, spatial and aesthetic complexes that modify the familiar social relations they might initially seem to evoke. No models from the fields of sociology or anthropology (theories of the exchange of gifts or hospitality) will provide an adequate description for the type of combinations of elements initiated by Tiravanija.

In the end, the continually evolving moments of presence—or co-presence—evoked in Tiravanija's social art projects seem to be suspended between two utopias: on the one hand, the functioning utopia of the experience economy and its aesthetic correlate (the concept of art as experience and the viewer as a consumer/participant), and on the other hand, a post-catastrophic underground or "outside" utopia, apparently triggered by the expansionist move of art or aesthetics into every corner of reality (The New World Global Münster Sculpture Project). No social space or context can sustain this suspense: the work literally has no place "in" social space.

This is precisely what distinguishes Tiravanija's work from the type of social art projects primarily focused on negotiating problems and identities related to specific communities, institutions, or ideological frameworks. While this type of work always refers to a wider social context in which art and aesthetics is but a bit player, the work of Tiravanija, as well as that of Gillick, moves from the opposite direction. Elements specific to the contemporary fields of activity and forms of knowledge named "art" and "aesthetics" are used as points of departure for tracing possible new social links. The new "question of style," or the "crisis" of the proper place and function of art and aesthetics, triggered by the new signifi-

cance and mobility of style, positions style as an *event*, or an unaccounted-for appearance. The style site that forms around this question or crisis then fundamentally turns around the need to rethink the type of social relations that style is habitually made to account for—whether this would be the presence of historical or social context, the constitution of social identities, or the differentiation between free time and work time. The artistic interventions in the style site come across as efforts to further mobilize its various components and to reconnect them in new types of assemblages and constellations. And this activity should, in the last instance, be understood as an attempt to imagine what social relations might possibly come to look like.

⁰¹ Liam Gillick, *Literally No Place: Communes, Bars and Greenrooms* (London: Book Works, 2002), 33, 35.

⁰² Gillick describes such a difference in "Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,'" in *October* 115 (Winter 2006), 106.

⁰³ In the same context, Nina Möntmann's *Kunst als sozialer Raum* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2002) should also be mentioned. It is a thorough discussion of the various constructions of social space in the work of Andrea Fraser, Martha Rosler, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Renée Green.

⁰⁴ Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

⁰⁵ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another. Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

⁰⁶ Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999), 6–7.

⁰⁷ Craig Saper, *Networked Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). Aleksandra Mir's *Corporate Mentality* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2003) also documents a number of artistic projects that work according to this type of logic.

⁰⁸ *L'île de la discussion/Le grand centre de conférence* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 1997).

⁰⁹ Kester, op. cit., 104–5.

¹⁰ Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," in *October* 110 (2004), 51–79.

¹¹ Bishop, op. cit., 70.

¹² Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3–17.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ B. F. Skinner, *Walden Two* (New York: Macmillan Paperbacks Edition, 1962).

¹⁵ See Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001).

¹⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1 (New York: Everyman's Library Edition, 1930), quoted in Gillick, *Literally No Place: Communes, Bars and Greenrooms* (London: Book Works, 2002), 6.

¹⁷ B. F. Skinner, op. cit., 319.

¹⁸ Gillick, op. cit., 2002, 7.

¹⁹ Gillick, "Literally No Place – An Introduction," in *Parkett*, No. 61 (2001), 56.

²⁰ This idea is expressed by, among others, "Athyrius," a blogger on the Graphic Design Forum, in the

article "What's with the Orange?" http://blogs.graphicdesignforum.com/athyrius/archives/2006/02/whats_with_the.html.

- ²¹ Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 89–92.
- ²² Gillick, *op. cit.*, 2002, 48–49.
- ²³ This quote is taken from the Web site of Gillick's Paris gallery, Air de Paris: www.airdeparis.com.
- ²⁴ This is my translation of the sentence in the French text *L'île de la discussion. Le grand centre de conférence*, *op. cit.*, 15: "Le lendemain-isme est un principe centrale de la dynamique occidentale capitaliste à la fin du XXème siècle."
- ²⁵ Elements of the promise of utopianism may be retained in this play, at least to the extent that this promise can be identified with indeterminate forces and not with a planned model future. Jacques Derrida has described the temporal structure of the promise as a performative statement that pertains at once to an immediately present and to a future time. Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," in *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982).
- ²⁶ Ina Blom, "Too Close to the Real," in Peter Weibel (ed.), *Surroundings Surrounded. Essays on Space and Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 100–108, and "Boredom, Oblivion, and the Event," in K. Friedman (ed.), *A Fluxus Reader* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 1998).
- ²⁷ Nina Möntmann, *op. cit.*, 106–132.
- ²⁸ Sven Lütticken, review of Rirkrit Tiravanija, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, *Artforum* (February 2005), 165.
- ²⁹ Krauss, *op. cit.*, 38–42.
- ³⁰ B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999).
- ³¹ Interestingly, Parreno's text evokes the time machine function in Tiravanija's work through a televisual metaphor, notably the notion of the time code. A time code is the electronic indexing method used for editing and timing video programs – a system of digital or analog symbols used for identifying specific instants of time, so that time itself emerges as a mutable material.
- ³² Gabriel Tarde, *Underground (Fragment of Future Histories)*, updated by Liam Gillick, with an introduction by Maurizio Lazzarato, *Les Maîtres des Formes Contemporaines* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2004). Gillick's updating mainly consists in changing the most obviously "dated" types of information, such as the reference to specific technologies or expressions that would seem sexist in today's language. Hence this fiction is located in the present time, i.e. 2004, the year of its publication.
- ³³ Rudolf M. Schindler, "Manifesto (Vienna 1912)," <http://www.fosh.org/RMSchindler.html>.

Chapter Six

Silencing Sound: Art, Rock, and the Ambient Environment

I

In the mid-1990s, a fully operative rock music rehearsal studio could be observed traveling from museum to museum around the world, taking on new guises as it went. The “prototype” of a series of works named *Untitled (Rehearsal Studio #6)*, was constructed at Le Consortium in Dijon, France in 1996. It was an approximate rendition of the New York rehearsal studio of the artist and his friends, a twenty-five-square-meter L-shaped structure filled with electric guitars and amplifiers. (*Fig. 6.1*) The idea was that anyone could enter it and play whatever they wanted: the only advice given by the artist to the musicians was to “play loud.”⁰¹ Loud sound—an essential characteristic of rock music and its related notions of assertive or even violent appropriation of space—was introduced to rooms that normally house only visual art; for the studio was placed in the middle of an informal installation of artworks belonging to the permanent collection of the museum. Works by Louise Lawler, Dan Graham, Allan McCollum, Niele Toroni, Olivier Mosset, Ken Lum, Michel Verjux, David Diao, and Michael Asher were shown leaning against walls, piled on the floor, or half hidden. A work by Matthew McCaslin even occupied a wall in the rehearsal studio itself: a messy wired-up constellation of clocks, ventilators, and lightbulbs, it seemed to provide some basic technical functions needed in a studio, such as light, ventilation, and a way of telling time. All in all, it was as if the whole exhibition framework and all the exhibited works were identified with the informality, technicality, and mediality of rock music. In fact, it was as if the works were made visible and meaningful only in terms of the particular rules and features governing rock’s social space. It was, in other words, yet another take on the frequently staged encounter between art and rock music. But it was also a work that reformulated the very terms of that encounter.

From this prototype, a series of different mediations of the idea of the displaced rock rehearsal studio developed. A visually spectacular “silent” ver-

sion was made for a group exhibition at the Spiral Gallery in Tokyo. (*Fig. 6.2*) At this point, the ordinary looking studio had been recreated as an elegant glass structure with metal framing, a rather spectacular transparent cage that could be viewed from all sides and that contained the full set of equipment from the original New York studio: a drum kit, an electric piano, three microphones for vocals, two guitars, a bass, and headphones for all of the instruments and microphones. The only missing equipment was amplifiers: the instruments were cabled into a twenty-four-track mixing console outside the glass room, permanently manned by a sound engineer who mixed and recorded any sound produced inside the glass box. Visitors, observing the musicians through the glass walls, could listen in on the session by means of headphones. But there was no doubt that visuals won the day: informal rock practice was framed in a glossy edifice, with sound production itself left to the mysterious realm of technology.

A “loud” version, shown at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, reversed everything. Glass walls were supplanted with solid soundproofed walls; nothing could be seen, but muffled sounds might occasionally seep through. Those outside the studio were not privy to what was going on, and could get only a vague idea. But, as in the Tokyo version, a mixing and recording deck was placed outside the box, with a full-time sound engineer recording both for the passing musicians themselves and for an archive documenting the evolution of the project. (The archived recordings from the Tokyo sessions were available, too, for those who wanted to listen.) In contrast, a “loud, open” version, constructed in Kunsthalle St. Gallen in Switzerland, turned the whole series of studio sessions into something verging on live performance. (*Fig. 6.3*) One wall was removed from the studio, making the room into a sort of stage shell. This strange fusion of studio and concert stage mediated between moments in the production of a rock act that are usually fundamentally separate and often even at odds with one another. As if aiding in this mediation between studio work and live act, an ordinary DJ set-up (two turntables, mixer, and headphones) was now added to the studio equipment. For the use of turntables in concert situations is notably one among a series of techniques

that aids rock musicians in recreating the rich, layered soundscapes that are made in the studio mix, and that often complicates the transition from recording to live play.

Post hip-hop and techno, the integrated DJ set has made visible and explicit a fact that has been key to rock music since its inception. It is a constant reminder of the fact that, beyond the focus on romantic subjectivity and do-it-yourself approaches, rock is the first musical form that is entirely a product of mediatic circuits, both in technological and economic terms. Soaking up and transforming everything from global folk music to the latest sound inventions of the “new music” circuits, it is *the* music of the communicational grids of global capitalism: this is the social space of rock. In the Dijon exhibition, the very presence of McCaslin’s confusing mess of electrical equipment on the rehearsal room wall functioned as a sort of emblem of this basic fact. For McCaslin’s work explores precisely the wired-up world of electrical outlets, underground cables, and transcontinental power grids that function as a living circulatory system coursing through our minds and bodies. He makes visible or tangible that which is usually neutral or invisible, and presents it as a distinct ambience or environment. As it happens, the spontaneity, informality, participatory formats, and romantic forms of subjectivity created by rock are functions of—and not an exception to, or a liberation from—these grids and circuits. The social space of rock can only be properly understood in their terms.

In the rehearsal room series, the informal, interactive, participatory, and performative mode of working characteristic of much of recent art was then not only identified with “rock” types of communal or collective behavior (playing together, sharing a listening experience, etc.). It was, more precisely, identified with media machineries that, among other things, generate the musical form called rock. The much-discussed “social” or “relational” turn in art was, in other words, framed by the technological, mediatic, and economic conundrum named “rock.” The rehearsal studio series was, then, more than a celebration of informal play, noise in the museum, and the democratization of technological access, even if such factors obviously played an important role in the work. More acutely, the different mediations of the rehearsal room situation played up the material condi-

tions of rock's "sociality" or collectivity. In turn, sound was isolated from vision, visibility and access were manipulated, and attention was drawn to the varying levels of technological filtering. And all of these operations seemed to isolate and dissect different material aspects of rock sociality. These mediations highlighted the dependence on technology; the relation between performers and audience; the politics of participation; the dialectics of sound and image; the question of sound, space and ambience; the complex relation between recording and live play; and last but not least, the relation between rock and the ideologies, production circuits, and social spaces of contemporary art.

The artist responsible for these mediations of rock music in the museum context is Rirkrit Tiravanija. And the rehearsal room exemplifies his general strategy of using the museum or gallery as a platform through which viewers are made into participants in open-ended social situations based on ordinary forms of conviviality (the informal party, the bar/lounge, the concert environment, etc.). But in the general context of his artistic production, this work still stands out. In contrast to many of his other works, it does not just invoke the participatory desire of anybody who happens to pass by the museum or gallery, but of a particular, if very large, community (or series of communities): those passionate about rock music.

The rehearsal studio series represents one specific type of operation on the site of style. Rock is obviously a highly important lifestyle practice, one that is informed in fundamental ways by ideals and strategies taken from the field of visual art. But it is precisely the *mobility* and the *differentiating force* of rock—its ability to insert itself into new contexts and spaces as well as its ability to constantly create new social surfaces—that makes it into a particularly significant style site. Rock is, quite simply, an aesthetic practice through which relations between appearance and social identity are kept perpetually open, in suspense.

This specific form of openness is the general background against which Tiravanija's rehearsal studio series evokes situations of community, collaborative activity, and collective experiences. And this background further emphasizes the fundamental difference between the problem-solving bent of much community-oriented or activist artwork and Tiravanija's par-

particular ways of accessing sociality. More than many other style site works, the rehearsal room series evokes the orientation toward specific communities or social collectives that marks much site-specific work. However, rock's affect-based or aesthetically oriented community formations can never be isolated from the global media networks that both produce them and capitalize on them. To intervene in the style site of rock is then, once more, to try to imagine how the dynamic frameworks of immaterial or cognitive production construct social space. But the more specific question is how, or on what terms, the social space of rock lends itself to this particular form of imagination within the sphere of visual art.

II

As a point of departure, the function of rock in this context is to simply open up thinking on the relation between art and collectivity or art and sociality, mainly because it provides a compelling social/aesthetic framework that immediately impinges on any idea one might have of the social/aesthetic space of contemporary art itself. The complex interplay of connections and differences between the social spaces of art and rock seems to provide a fertile ground for such thinking. For decades—in fact, since rock's beginning and the almost simultaneous advent of Pop art—rock has been posited as the significant other of modern visual art. As such, it has been the object of endless projection and fantasy, of endless hypotheses of proximity (based on ideas that art and rock spring from the same expressionist impulse or share the same flat space of pop culture), or of difference (based on the fact that rock reaches popular audiences that contemporary art hardly touches, so that in approaching the aesthetics of rock, art takes a leap out of its bourgeois-intellectual confinement). The presence of rock references is no less remarkable in the recent post-Conceptual “style works,” but here a shift in emphasis seems to have taken place. The earlier predominance of iconic references to (or assimilations with) rock culture has given way to a more pointed preoccupation with the spaces, ambiences, collectivities, and production circuits of rock—a fact that is perhaps a function of recent art's reflexive preoccupation with the construction of social space in general.⁰²

The fact is that rock provides a particularly good framework for thinking about the aesthetic in spatial and social terms. The concept of *sound*, which is a historically new concept specific to rock, is above all a spatial concept, a harbinger of myriad fantasies concerning the organization of social space. Sound and associated ideas of “ambience” testify to the way in which rock changes the very idea of the musical object itself. In contrast to, say, a piano sonata in the Romantic tradition, rock music is not primarily an object for contemplative listening, but rather the musical product of a media technology that keeps modern electrical and electronic environments live and connected, and that henceforth inserts its musical product into as many contexts as possible. In many cases, then, rock primarily functions as a kind of quasi-architectural surround or “scene maker,” or as an accompaniment to everyday activity. As if reflecting this change in the mode of musical appearance, rock practice, in many ways, stages itself as a sort of ongoing sociological commentary or sociopoetic happening.⁰³ Rock criticism typically focuses less on musicological analysis in the traditional sense than on the musical ins and outs of the various class/race/gender/subculture-based demarcations that inform every rock expression.⁰⁴ And the creation of new rock sound, for its part, is more often than not related to the notion of new, oppositional, or alternative communities, if only on the level of hopes, dreams, and ideas. In its most general form, such construction of sound is at the very least a way of drawing a boundary between itself and whatever is currently defined as “official” or “adult” culture.

The fact that rock music explicitly thinks of itself as a sort of “social” scenario (rather than just a musical expression) may explain why rock music also seems to have been of particular interest in the field of cultural sociology. Prominent rock sociologists, such as Simon Frith, emerged from within the rock field itself as former musicians and critics—almost as if rock contained a secret appeal to sociological (self) analysis, despite its anti-intellectual rhetoric. The hypotheses of the sociology of rock are of interest in this context since they bring to light not only the contradictions in rock music’s construction of sociality but, more pertinently, the way in which some of these contradictions emerge from the very relation between

the ideologies of art and elite culture and the popular or collective machineries of rock that are part and parcel of rock practice itself. The particular composition of rock's collective formations cannot, in other words, be understood without reference to the intimate relation between art-specific social and aesthetic strategies and the popular or populist social/aesthetic strategies associated with the media industry.

If rock sociologists agree on one thing, it is precisely this: Rock can only be understood as a commodity, and analyses of its cultural forms and collective formations never lose sight of this commodity status. This perspective is important because rock's obvious connection with everyday life and specific social contexts easily opens to a very different explanation of its relationship to communities, notably the folkloric models of explanation. There is a pervasive notion that rock is essentially the folk music of the young urban masses or the true cultural expression of the working class—a notion that is reinforced by the fact that the musical expressions of rock draw on folk music sources from around the world, from early rock's blues, gospel, and country influences to its more recent appropriation of (for instance) elements from Indian or West African folk music. Popular accounts of subcultural formations and forms of expression also contribute to this folkloric myth. Subcultures develop their own independent musical expressions in opposition to official society and its entertainment industry, an industry that will necessarily dilute, pervert, or manipulate these cultural offerings as it attempts to place them in a market context.⁰⁵ But rock is not the spontaneous product of subcultural communities. Subcultures tend, rather, to form around the cultural *use* of commodities (such as clothes, records, or bikes), and to transport class-specific and “alternative” experiences *through* these commercial objects, whose secrets the users know so well and about which they have no illusions. The music industry, for its part, systematically uses the peculiar social relations or consumption patterns of subcultural formations as raw material for another commercial product. Exactly which one of many subcultures will at any one time be used as raw material in this way largely depends on calculations of the buying power of the potential audiences that may be created in response to it. As Peter Wicke has pointed out, folkloric explanations, which judge the social and political relevance of rock in terms of

its ability to genuinely represent specific communities, “completely miss the point of the conditions of cultural mass processes mediated through the media.”⁰⁶

Wicke’s specific brand of rock sociology emerges from a theoretical horizon that tends to see the productive framework of rock in light of industrial mass production (of cars, for instance). This approach is necessarily modified once the media industries are understood as different from the typical mass industries. Because they manipulate the autonomous power of mental time or “attention,” they intervene, above all, in the production of an open, or to-be-made, subjectivity (as opposed to the proletarian subjectivity of classical Marxist theory).⁰⁷ Yet the most general point in his critique of the folk model of explanations is still relevant. The logic behind rock’s specific forms of sociality must be seen in light of the contradictions between its collective or communitarian uses and the concerns and interests of one of the major industries of late capitalism. The two sides in this contradiction convey and limit the other in a process where consumption patterns generate new cultural products—which may, again, generate communities or contexts of use beyond the intention and control of industrial concerns—there is notably no moment when the reality of the commodity is not present as an enabling resource. But what is particularly interesting is the role played by art ideologies as well as by specific art institutions and movements in the constitution of a rock sociality that generates context-specific experiences and new and heterogeneous community formations from within the commercial power grids of media production.

The key figure in this conundrum is the open, to-be-made subjectivity and the discourse of self-determination that emerge in its wake. This figure can be traced in the interaction between the peculiar construction that is the “rock performer,” and the recording and distribution technologies that are integral components of the musical form of rock itself. The collective forms that result from this interaction spring from a concept that is at once musical and spatial, and that is entirely specific to rock, notably the concept of “sound.”

Wicke has given a convincing description of the passage from the collective creation that is key to African-American rhythm-based music to the concept of “sound” that emerged with sound recording technologies. In African-American music, the rhythm functions not as a linear sequence of notes, but as a spatial dimension in relation to which each player creates an individual pattern. The rhythmic structure is ultimately the result of the superimposition of all levels of performance—a collaborative event that also includes the situational responses of the listeners. Because of the collective nature of the endeavor, the final output is less a completely formed expression than an evolving *presentation* of gestures, emotions, and postures. Even if the rhythmic patterns of rock are very simple compared to the African-American forms, the *montage-like* quality of this process has certain basic structural traits in common with rock’s sound-oriented studio productions. In the layering of sounds that takes place in studio production, the adherence to notation and linear progress is notably far less important than the ability to spontaneously add and change elements within the concept of a rhythmical and atmospheric whole.⁰⁸ Studio sound production, then, presents a collectively oriented, atmospheric spatial surrounding that foregrounds the presence of the listener rather than just the expressive individual “voice” of the artist/musician.

At the same time, the increasing (if relative) autonomy of studio production was also instrumental in the creation of the more distinctly art-related concept of rock that evolved from the mid-1960s onward. Remote from the live social context of the dance floor and the immediate demands placed on musicians catering to this context, it opened up the horizon of rock as a purely musical creation.⁰⁹ As the emphasis on the studio creation of sound evolved and deepened, sound itself acquired a semi-autonomous, fetish-like status that was reflected in the increasing preoccupation with perfect sound rendition and ever more sophisticated and imposing hi-fi equipment in the private homes of (male) rock fans. The collective, montage-like, atmospheric, and spatial phenomenon called “sound” was, in other words, *also* the locus of rock’s evolution into an autonomous art form, a form that was, in turn, related to romantic concepts of individual expression and the identification of the rock musician as an artistic subjectivity.¹⁰

This contradiction on the level of sound formation was repeated in the figure of the rock performer himself/herself and his/her relation to technology, on the one hand, and audiences on the other. The new studio technologies opened the music business to musicians who may have lacked formal musical training, but who were not afraid to invent their own relations to new technology. The rock musician was essentially an “anybody,” a self-made performer whose irreverent involvement with media machines would associate him or her with the synthetic, the artificial, and the vulgar.¹¹ And this association with the synthetic and the vulgar constituted a new aesthetic code for the engagement with everyday events. This aesthetic of the everyday served to attach the artistic or “autonomous” subjectivity of the rock performer to the commercial demands of an expansive media industry.

The link between autonomous rock artists and social collectives then has to be understood in quite precise terms. Unlike the folk artist, the rock performer does not simply represent a specific community, and, in many cases, there are also distinct differences between the social backgrounds of the performer and his/her audiences. Emerging in the complex conjunction between ideals of artistic individualism and self-expression (reinforced by the technology of sound production) and the identification with audiences or social collectives (equally reinforced through the concept of sound), the rock performer is an individual artist, but one whose specific individual talent is above all that of selling a specific “audience connection” to the industry. It is well known that the development of rock “sound” as an autonomous artistic expression was institutionally aided or reinforced by the fact that numerous rock performers emerged from an art school context; some of rock’s most illustrious types of rebel behavior (smashing guitars, e.g.) were borrowed directly from teachings of avant-garde art performance.¹² The art school link did not only mean that rock performers had the formal competence needed to invent themselves as spectacular montage-like constructions in the avant-garde vein—using graphics, clothing, images, and sound in surprising, provocative, or “surreal” constellations.¹³ It also meant that as celebrities in a mass media system, they formed the ground for the creation of collective subjectivities that were paradoxically based on art-derived notions of personal freedom

and self-expression (generally articulated as “doing your own thing”).

This means that the identification of rock as art did not seem to distance rock musicians from their audiences. On the contrary, audiences could base their political ideals and collective experiences on the very idea of self-determination that was promoted through the art connection. This process can be traced in the complex stylistic variations in rock. Today, it is difficult to define rock as one type of musical object, based on linear stylistic developments. Rock is, rather, a wide-ranging and organic differentiation of styles that are always embedded in social contexts; what unites “rock” is not so much a strictly musical idea as it is a specific engagement with the media machines of production and distribution. In other words, the subjectivity of the romantic artist formed the basis for the collective processes of social differentiation.

The fact that this contradictory phenomenon took place *in terms of* the technological and economic frameworks of the media industry shows, perhaps better than any other example, the way in which the concept of affect-based production of (open) subjectivity challenges the more traditional notions of mass manipulation that inform much of the writing on pop culture. It exemplifies the way in which the media machines produce such forms of subjectivity on a grand scale and the way in which this production must necessarily inform any idea one can possibly have of contemporary forms of collectivity. P. David Marshall’s concept of the “audience subject” describes, for instance, the particular type of power constellation represented by the media celebrity. Each celebrity is a collective construction in the sense that he or she constitutes a complex form of audience subjectivity; placed within the larger media system of celebrities, this audience subjectivity provides the ground on which social differences, distinctions, and oppositions are played out.

But what is important in this account is how the notion of the audience subject denotes both an ordering and recreation of the social instigated by the media machines. As the nineteenth-century concept of “the crowd” is replaced by the twentieth-century concept of “the mass,” the potentially unruly crowd is pacified as the mass is identified less in terms of categories such as work or class than through the leisure or non-work ac-

tivities related to the new media reality. In extension of this process, the notion of “the audience” signifies a further ordering and stratification of the crowd in terms of its various affective investments.¹⁴ As social machines, the media technologies shape the mass into recognizable consumer categories. This does not, however, contradict the notion of rock’s ability to produce new contexts. The concept of the audience subject must here be distinguished from the more traditional concept of the audience, which is basically the mass form of all the individual psychologies that are subjected to the spectacle’s misrepresentation of reality. Once the media are understood as social machines, i.e. as factories or workplaces that produce a new reality (and not as theatrical producers of representations), the “audience subject” may be understood as a singularization of the collective body of workers.¹⁵ This concept gives a far better understanding of the empirical experiences with the increasing heterogeneity of rock’s forms (the reason why musicologists now resist the master narrative of rock as “one” type of music or “the music of the masses”). In fact, the *practice* of rock—or the singular activities of audience subjects—seems to trigger processes of differentiation that among other things involve the creation of ever-new zones of conflict or non-identification. The subcultural formations associated with rock are then not “outsider spaces” or alternative representations undermining the meaning of the spectacle, but ever more densely coded contexts of use that may be generated by the interests of the media industry, but that also escape its control.¹⁶

Rock is, then, not a realm of symbolical expression that mainly represents existing social forms. It is, rather, a productive machine that constantly creates new social surfaces. This is the point of departure for rock’s continual reflection on “the social,” and may also be the reason why rock emerges as a significant social site for a form of art preoccupied with emerging forms of sociality in general and, in particular, the forms of sociality generated by affective investments. The distinction between rock and folk-oriented models of community shows how the orientation toward rock in these works differentiates itself from the very framing of the social in many community-oriented and activist art practices. In these practices, the crucial political and art critical questions center on the issue of correct representation—

the issue of who can legitimately represent or speak for the community or collective in question.¹⁷ Such approaches and such critical issues can now be associated with a folk-oriented understanding of community that is operative in musical discourse—at least in the sense that this way of framing more or less “indigenous” sociality stands in contrast to perspectives on the way in which collectives are engendered by and formatted within the media industry. In his attempt to describe the type of social spaces created through the affective or aesthetically oriented alliances characteristic of rock or subcultural practices, Lawrence Grossberg also parts with the folk-related preoccupation with representation. Rock collectivities are above all networks of empowerment, organizations of material practices, cultural forms, and social experience that structure our affective investments in the world. These practices should then, importantly, be understood in relation to a production of *nonrepresentational* space.¹⁸ In other words, as rock creates boundaries within a social reality that is primarily marked by otherness, it locates social subjects in a space that escapes the type of description or analysis that is based on the representation or recognition of the already known.

The works of Liam Gillick and Rirkrit Tiravanija discussed in the last chapter can be seen in precisely these terms: they emphatically locate social subjects in a nonrepresentational space. The same can be said for the lamp-like style spaces of Rehberger, Parreno, Gonzalez-Foerster, Eliasson, and others. As they trace the relations between the spaces of everyday affective life and the wider media and information circuits, they invent artistic methodologies that make it possible to focus on the machinic production of sociality, rather than accounting for the givens of social contexts and institutions.

Notions of the atmospheric and the ambient are key to these works, since it is through such notions that they manage to conjure the experience of immersion in stylized environments that double as media environments. As noted, these environments tend to appear at once hedonistic and innocuous, focused on pleasure and play, or on vague notions of social interaction and togetherness. At first glance, they seem to present a lounge version of reality, a fact that many critics misread as a sign of

an evasion of more overtly articulated political themes and strategies normally associated with “social” art. However, as numerous recent social or relational artworks stage encounters with a spectacular media and lifestyle phenomenon like rock, it may provide a clearer perspective on the very particular type of social and political concerns that are operative in these atmospherically oriented works. *For in this encounter it is precisely the social or collective issues brought out by the concept of the atmospheric or “the ambient” that serve to establish a common ground between visual art and rock.* In both fields, the concept of atmospherics or ambiences evokes the notion of social forms engendered by media frameworks. Within the sphere of visual art, the new atmospheric and ambient artworks tend to evoke a televisual environment where human attention and affects are rendered productive. In rock aesthetics, the concept of the ambient is related to the concept of “sound” that made rock conceive of itself as a spatial and social “object,” at once an all-enveloping media-environment and producer of new “scenes” or contexts of use. Brian Eno’s 1978 “invention” of ambient music as a distinct musical form and later phenomena such as ambient techno are then not avant-garde deviances from whatever should be considered “basic rock,” but a theorization and intensification of an aspect that is completely central to the aesthetics of rock itself.

To connect with rock on the level of atmospherics and ambiences (rather than on the level of iconic references, as was the case in much of Pop art) seems to provide a highly concrete and well-known material framework for imagining the contemporary production of social space. And this approach is notably different from other avant-garde attempts to produce new social collectives from the point of departure of aesthetic practices. It cannot, for instance, be associated with the dream of an alternative society that will develop a new and universally valid way of life based on radical artistic experimentation (the Friedrichshof commune of the Viennese Actionists is a good example). For if utopian images and modes of thinking sometimes seem to inform rock’s quasi-autonomous sound spaces, the technological and mediatic constitution of “sound” tends to remain clearly in view, and is, in fact, celebrated as such. The celebration of rock “sound” is, quite specifically, the celebration of the possible modes of life that evolve from within the media machine.

III

The question is, of course, how, or through what visual, spatial, and aural strategies the art/rock encounter is staged within the sphere of art. How does visual art engage with atmospheric conditions based on sound, on the aural?

The displaced rehearsal studio of Rirkrit Tiravanija gives a clue to a more general artistic strategy. Music and sound, as such, are not exactly brought out in this work, even if one is encouraged to fill the museum with loud sound. In fact, musical sound appears under many guises: alternately free-flowing and enclosed, loud and muted, direct and mediated, live and recorded, distributed in open space or transferred only between individual minds connected through technology. What is displayed here are the technical, social, and archival frameworks that are key to rock sound, a sort of media environment or ecology where individual players, behavioral habits, imaginations, instruments, technologies, architectural spaces, distribution principles, and audiences form complex patterns of connection and circulation. The rehearsal room series therefore points toward one of the main tendencies in the staging of the art/rock encounter: *Rock atmospherics are, paradoxically enough, evoked through a momentary but deliberate silencing of rock sound and an emphasis on rock's visual or material counterparts.* This strategy of silencing rock indicates an intervention in the wider social and technological framework of ambient sound itself, an intervention departing from a reconfiguration of its most typical forms, spaces, and meanings.

The proliferation of gramophone records, album covers, electric guitars, amplifiers, mixing consoles, turntables, CDs, and promotional posters in recent art exhibitions testifies to this silencing of rock. There are the meticulously painted hit vinyl records by Steve Wolfe; the stained record sleeves of Kevin Sullivan (Iggy Pop's *Raw Power* with mayonnaise); Jennifer Bolande's sculptures made from loudspeakers; Matias Faldbakken's wall of guitar amplifiers; John Armleder's red and black Gibson Melody Maker electric guitar juxtaposed with a red-and-black fabric print posing as painting; and Jim Lambie's heap of gold record covers (*Fig. 6.4*). There are the *AC/DC Snakes* of Philippe Parreno, a mess of electrical cables

and adaptors of different standards. There are Richard Wright's fragments of punk lyrics printed on walls and ceilings in careful lettering alongside delicately atmospheric wall pattern decorations. There are the many graphically black-and-white sculptural interpretations of heavy metal violence, as seen in, for instance, the (otherwise very different) works of Banks Violette and Bjarne Melgaard. And there are the huge inflatable sculptures and structures of Gerwald Rockenschaub, coolly tracing the visual, spatial, and behavioral links between Minimalist sculpture and techno club aesthetics—to mention just a few examples from the mass of relevant works. All seem to bring out what is left when the sound is gone, and what is left is considerable: a world of objects and images, a whole material culture invested with the affective power of "rock."

Take an early example: the 1971 book by Ed Ruscha, simply entitled *Records*. The pages of this book contain nothing but sixty matter-of-fact photographs documenting thirty vinyl phonograph records and corresponding album covers from the artist's personal collection, including such rock milestones as the Velvet Underground's *White Light/White Heat* and Frank Zappa's *Lumpy Gravy*. Each photographic page contains a single object: either a vinyl disc or a cardboard sleeve, objects as flat as the pages themselves, represented frontally, isomorphic with the printed page. There would obviously be occasion here to speak of a sort of *mise-en-abyme* of the mass-distributed media object, since the work presents an endless series of copies and distribution formats mediating distribution formats. The phonograph record is represented and distributed by the photographic print, which is itself distributed through the medium of the book, and so on.

But it would make little sense in this context to insist too much on the lack of aura of mass-produced media objects. In fact, the dryness of the presentation as well as the collapse of the difference between representational formats and the objects represented only seems to emphasize the quasi-magical aura of the vinyl objects and record sleeves themselves. The dense superimposition of media in this work only gives more weight to the fact that, despite rumors to the contrary (reinforced by the iPod generation of listeners), rock music is hardly just an intangible thing floating in the airwaves or flickering in bits. Regardless of the amount of "airplay"

it received, a significant vinyl record had to be owned and touched, to exist in three-dimensional space. As the silent *Records* book makes vinyl discs and album sleeves simultaneously close and distant, it dramatizes precisely the tension between tangible, bodily proximity and mediatic distance that is a functional principle in rock production. For it is only through this tension that rock produces its various contexts of use. The active relation to such tangible objects allows for a wider definition of the atmospheric spaces of rock and may, in fact, serve as an efficient guide to such contextualism.

The work of Christian Marclay plays off this fact by intensifying or expanding the realm of the most basic physical objects of rock. (*Fig. 6.5*) The radical cut-and-mix techniques of his records and live performances expand upon the material practice of sound recordings; his visual and sculptural works do the same with the purely physical supports of the recording and distribution technologies. These supports now appear monumental, self-supporting, shaped not so much by technical design issues as by the dreams and fantasies that are projected onto them. There is, for instance, a pillow knitted with magnetic tape containing all of The Beatles' recordings. (The sheer physical extension of the crocheted tape prompts one to imagine the endlessly complex remix patterns that hold sway in this intimate everyday object.) There are posters in an array of different styles announcing concerts in an equally great variety of rock genres, all supposedly performed by star act "Christian Marclay." And there are record covers, assembled according to design similarity, arrayed in a perfect circle with a hole in the middle, as if the covers constituted a vinyl record. One assembly consists of album covers that all show close-up photographs of the faces of the recording stars, placed in an overlapping pattern so that only the more or less equal-sized mouths are visible. The circle of mouths denoting famous singing voices evokes a dense layering of silenced sound, a record filled with the infinite (because never fully realized) potential of the mix.

And, finally, and perhaps most remarkably, there are gallery floors carpeted from wall to wall with vinyl records one is actually invited to walk on. The scratches engraved on them from hundreds of sandy shoes,

in fact, constitute a recording session in the most absurdly literal sense of the term. At least this understanding is possible if, by “recording,” one may also mean the everyday inscription of memories, experiences, and events onto a musical object, what one may call a musical “context of use.” In this particular case, it was actually the activity in the gallery that was recorded or superimposed on the grooves of the music, as if a sort of loop movement of usages connected the art and rock spheres: the new recording then seemed to frame the overdetermined art/rock relation itself. It should be noted that, once the exhibition was over, all the records were carefully picked up from the floor and packaged as individual collector’s items. As mass-produced objects literally and indelibly marked by a particular “context of use,” they were directly reinserted into the circulation of commodities that informs both the art and the rock system.

To silence the sound of rock in this way might seem like an act of aggression, a deliberate killing of what is most central to rock itself: its sonic ambience. But this is not necessarily so since rock atmospherics really do consist of much more than just aural “sound.” In fact, the wider understanding of “sound” as “scene” or ambience indicates precisely the significance and peculiarity of rock visuals. One could argue quite convincingly that few other forms of music have produced such extravagant and influential spaces or visuals or engendered such an intense dialectic of sound and image. However, the emphasis here should be on the dialectic, because rock does not imply any kind of simple or natural sound/image combination. On the contrary, sound and visuals are joined only in spite of a fundamental divide. This divide is a direct function of the specialization tendency in early media technologies that seemed to divide the sensory realm into distinct materialities and zones of intensity. Rock notably evolved in tandem with a recording technology that for the first time in history made it possible to radically separate sound and image, that is, to listen to the voice of a body that cannot be seen. It is only because of this technical separation that sound itself turns into a quasi-autonomous object, a perfect undivided “thing.” Audiophilia, headphone, and hi-fi culture are symptoms of the disembodied sonic object of rock, and there is no question that sound is generally considered rock’s true object, while its visual production is seen

as a marginal or purely secondary activity. John Corbett has described this situation in terms of the psychoanalytic definition of fetishism, where the fetish is seen as a unified object construed by imagination in order to cover the fear of lack or absence—essentially the idea of lack presented by the threat of castration. Sound turns into a fetish precisely with the radical lack of imagery that presents itself with the isolation of sound in sound recording. The lack of imagery produces the idea that sound is a thing replete in itself, that no other stimuli are needed.

And yet these incessant assertions of sonic independence also continually point to what is lacking: rock sound produces, so to speak, its own lack of visuals, and the result is an uninterrupted stream of visual articulations. Corbett's point here is simply that rock criticism is mistaken to treat sound as its prime focus since it is impossible to understand the complex desires generated by the field of rock without taking the play around this lack into account. The "sound thing" can only stand out against the supplementary production of lots and lots of "less important" visuals. To understand what rock actually "produces," one must then by necessity pay attention to the neglected visual and spatial cultures of rock: the emphasis on clothes, graphics, and design; the fascination with stereo equipment and technological objects of all types; and, finally, the desire to fill the world with the tactile products of rock (huge record collections).¹⁹

Even if one does not subscribe to the Freudian logic of lack underpinning Corbett's argument, an important point still remains concerning the relation between rock sound and rock visuals. The major point is that this relation is not an organic one. The technological separation between sound and image makes sound emerge as a form of intensity that is understood to be space-generating in its own right, and not (as in opera, for instance) through the *help* of visual/spatial registers. This fact makes the sound/image combinations in rock into an uneasy construction, a point of connectivity that is also a potential point of disconnection. And this point of connection/disconnection is laden with the conflicts and contradictions that inform rock "production" itself. From this point of view, Corbett's basic observation about the construction of sound supremacy against the production of inherently supplementary or marginal rock visuals may be read

in more overtly social and political terms.

The issue, again, concerns the utopian dimensions of rock culture. Rock “sound” produces social spaces: it produces, either as promise or as actuality, a differentiated everyday. Rock visuals insert themselves into the everyday in similar ways. They do not simply remain on the level of the spectacular stage production or marketing strategy, but are equally effective in the constitution of affective alliances—complex visual and spatial practices that turn around the creation of social difference. The space-creating capacity of rock sound is, in other words, repeated in the visual productions of rock. The provocatively open-ended use of signs within punk subcultures is the most referenced example of the way visual materials are put together in order to create a social space that escapes representation (no one could grasp the exact meaning of the safety pin or the swastika in this context). But one could also argue that this way of operating is, in fact, quite general in rock practice. The key here is precisely the *hyperbolic* use of visuals that informs rock aesthetics, the insistent, artificial layering of apparently arbitrary or decontextualized styles, an emphasis on “looks” and on “things” as quasi-independent phenomena. Assemblage techniques inform, in other words, both the “style space” of rock visuals and the “sound space” of rock music.

Yet, for all these similarities, the visual productions of rock seem to suffer the most from the contradiction or conflict that informs rock practice—the contradiction between subjection to the homogenizing force of capitalist media machines and the creation of differentiated contexts of use; or, to be more precise, it seems as though this contradiction is to a large extent displaced onto rock’s visual sphere. Rock visuals tend to figure as the problematic and contested symptom bearers of rock’s *general* contribution to the exploitation of affects in contemporary production. For every rock act profiled through visual hyperbole, there is another act that denounces the manipulative machineries behind visual stylization and settles for emphatically style-less or “antivisual” modes of presentation. But no rock act can avoid decision-making in relation to the visual and each act will be judged on its dexterity in handling or not-handling imagery, no matter what strategies are chosen. And such judgment continually turns on issues

relating to notions of exploitation versus the imagined margin of freedom produced through rock.

Such issues are obviously also present in the evaluation of music, but here it is a far more contested criterion, challenged by ideas of the universal merits of the “good song,” etc. As a result, rock “sound” tends to appear as the more *genuinely* autonomous sphere, a flowing natural surround that contrasts positively with the more problematically constructed, patched-up, and supplementary character of rock visuals. The irony of this “division of labor” (or distribution of problems) between sound and visuals is, of course, the fact that the notion of the autonomous space of rock sound is at least partially a product of interactions with the sphere of visual art. The art-school-educated rock performer contributed significantly to the development of the idea of sound autonomy and the related ideas of self-determination. But at the same time, it is as if the rock performer (the visually dexterous assemblage artist-*cum*-media operator) had been appropriated only under one of the many guises that makes up its historical fabric, notably the guise of the modern artist, who, in signing an artwork, identifies the idea of the work as a replete, self-enclosed entity with the body-entirety of the artist’s self.

Apparently, this complete abstraction of a body is all rock sound needs in order to appear as an innocently replete enclosure, freed from the evils of the capitalist machineries that produce it. If rock so very often emerges as the locus for the most conservative type of celebration of the individual artistic genius, generally male and generally understood to be “in control” of his output, it is relevant to ask what this controller controls. One suspects that it must be something very close to rock itself: the deluge of commercially denigrated, artificial, hyperbolic, and patched-up visuals. This control function manages, as best it can (it’s not an easy task), the changing terms of the difficult connection between rock sound and rock visuals, while constantly selecting and prohibiting and appropriating imagery—in short, keeping the problematic visual realm at a certain distance.

The main conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that the conflict or the contradiction in rock between commerce and countercultural freedom is played out in sound/visual relation itself. And, furthermore, the artworks that conjure a realm of “silenced” rock ambiences play into this conflict. Here, rock visuals no longer simply testify to the homogenizing forces of media production (as opposed to sound’s autonomy). The works give new weight and independence to the sphere of supplementary and condemned rock visuals, explore its proper atmospheric or ambient potential, and treat it as an active component in rock’s differentiating production of social space. In short, they reconfigure the relation between rock sound and rock visuals, creating new sonic/visual constructions or points of connectivity. In this way, they do not just explore the contribution of modern art to the wider concept of rock sound and the generalization of the ideals of self-determination that comes with this concept. More significantly, this reconfiguration opens up—as if for the first time—the very *question* of rock’s production of social space, and the continuities between rock’s spatial creation and the production of aesthetically oriented spaces and lifestyle spaces in general. The momentary and strategic silencing of sound and celebration of visuals brings rock out of its idealized isolation as a purely musical construct. Now rock sound or ambient sound can be appreciated for what it also is: an agent that prepares space for the transactions of global capital.

Alexander Györfi’s work performs precisely this kind of shift in the relation between rock sound and rock visuals. The sound of music is never far away, but it is at every moment emphatically framed, filtered, or reassembled through visual and spatial strategies that take the practices of modern art and art exhibitions as their points of departure. These visuals tend to evoke the type of modernist painting and sculpture that creates an interface between painting and the aesthetics of the machine or, more precisely, between painting and the new media technologies that transformed the relation between art and the social collective. In Györfi’s work it is, in other words, as if rock sound emerges through a visual filtering brimming with references to artists like Fernand Léger, Francis Picabia, Marcel Duchamp, Kasimir Malevich, Piet Mondrian, and Joseph Albers,

as well as the more recent Minimalist constructions of artists like Donald Judd and Robert Morris.

A series of installation works presents the instruments and sound equipment of rock production within a space that unfolds from two-dimensional graphic depiction to three-dimensional sculptural presentation to the complete, interactive surround of a club, studio, or “activity space” of some sort. (*Fig. 6.6*) A sound dimension is activated indirectly through the use of headphones, but it is also continually cut off, thanks to listening devices connected to images only. The mere shapes, forms, and spatial distributions of rock paraphernalia are the primary focus. Tape recorders, amplifiers, microphone stands, cables, and guitars, rendered in the flat and semi-abstract style taken over from technical drawings, are painted directly on the wall or on canvases that either hang or lean against the wall, as objects. An informal array of cubes occupies the floor of the room and establishes a sort of unbroken continuum between Minimalist sculpture, stereo furniture and sound equipment: some are just ordinary white Minimalist cubes, others look like loudspeakers, while a third version serve as supports for a turntable and headphones. Actual cables for sound connection hang limply from the appropriate input or output channels in the painted equipment, evoking missing sound.²⁰ But the mess of cables is also connected to actually functioning technical equipment like a turntable with headphones and a single record ready for play and a small monitor displaying a music video. The record and video present an amateur/fantasy reinterpretation of David Bowie’s “China Girl.” Featuring a female wannabe singer, the video is partly staged in a German/Asian fast-food outlet and in a home recording studio. Rock as self-sufficient sound flow is cut off; instead, it is framed by a visual space that slips and slides between techno-fetishist modernist art, the dinky machine park of the home recording studio, and the contemporary lounge or club hangout.

Within this set-up, the body of the self-made rock performer quite explicitly emerges as an assemblage, put together from bits and pieces, at once singular and collective: a true audience subject. A series of Györfi’s videos develops this perspective without ever having to sacrifice the beat, the driving force of rock sound. In a double-screen projection, the German band Rocket Freudental is seen playing inside a quasi-painterly

environment of overlapping monochrome screens.²¹ (*Fig. 6.7*) In fact, actual studio sound screens and monochrome paintings hanging on the wall merge into a seamless visual surrounding that can be described either as a rehearsal room becoming modernist collage (or *papier-collé*) or as a collage becoming a rehearsal room. The double-screen video projection just adds to the complexities of visual/spatial layering, ambivalently shifting figure/ground relationships in the best modernist tradition. The two members of the band, each inhabiting the space of one screen but still collaborating with the other, fool around with plugs, wires, and instruments, and gradually manage to get the music going. However, as the groove mounts, bodies and spaces overlap and multiply. Thanks to the simple trick of multiple exposure shots, a double of the guitarist suddenly emerges as a singer, sharing the guitarist's screen space. Later, having moved on to a new song, the two members of the band share the same screen space as they play and sing along to a backing track together with a double of the keyboard player (who also adds some percussion). On the other screen, doubles of both players take on the role of audience as they drink beer, smoke, and nod enthusiastically to the groove. All in all, the band of two expands to an amorphous band/audience of five.

It is important to note, however, that there is nothing particularly spectacular, hypnotic, or "surreal" about this effect. In fact, this multiplication of bodies and confusion of roles appears curiously realistic and grounded. It is not identified with the floating "dream space" of the typical music video, but is contained within the relatively precise confines of the painting/rehearsal studio. This space appears at once as a "normal" three-dimensional surround in which a few characters interact during a precisely formatted time-span (the time of two songs), *and* as a complex painterly/formal play with the construction of spatiality and temporality itself, intensified by a multiple-screen video projection. Not only does Györfi bring out the preoccupation with perceptual conditions that is a fundamental feature of modernist paintings and collages; he also explicitly associates such art forms with film and video, key technologies in an economy where the difference between work and perception is erased, so that the media environment is a genuinely productive environment. Sound technologies contribute to this environment, and, in fact, contribute to its con-

stitution as a complete “life surround.” From this perspective, rock music is less a purely musical “thing,” which is technologically produced and distributed, than a perceptual technology that is itself a productive force. As Györfi conflates rock sound with the perception-play of modernist visual art, he quite literally gives form to its space-producing activity.

At this point, rock visuals are obviously no longer just passive and supplementary design surrounds but independent forces capable of articulating the social space of rock in new ways. By “articulation,” I mean the act of actively relating or assembling separate parts, establishing a relation among elements so that their identity is *modified* as a result of the articulatory practice.²² This definition of the sound/visual assemblage stands in contrast to any idea of synthesis, an important point when considering the type of strategic operation that is performed by the works discussed above. The temporary silencing of rock sound is not a proposition for a new sound/image synthesis, one that simply turns the cards around and enters rock from its visual point of access—through, for instance, the Mod Minimalism of its club spaces or its psychedelic design programs. Such approaches (typical of much “rock-inspired” art) simply reconfirm the *identity* between rock sound and rock visuals and are not able to reconsider rock’s spatial practice. The strategy of silencing rock sound departs, in contrast, from the non-organic and asymmetrical relation between rock sound and rock imagery.

What matters in this articulatory practice is, also, what type of bodily existence it seems to open onto. Györfi’s complex space play allows bodies to migrate, multiply, and overlap at the same time as they stay paradoxically grounded, connected to the beat and to a sense of concretely shared space. In this way, he seems to produce figures for the way in which bodies are mobilized in relation to the non-representational and generative space that is the space of rock’s community formations or audience subjects. The works then give an inkling of the material life of what the activist audio collective Ultra-red calls the “sound body”—a concept that makes it possible to question not only habitual notions of “musical space,” but, more specifically, the place and role of bodies within the ambient media environment.²³

IV

This is a far less obvious move than it may seem. For rock's sound also contributes to an elision of the body. To see this process of elision, one only has to pay attention to the way in which rock shapes and forms its environment; as sound, it is not simply music to be listened to, but *the* essential background, inserting itself into as many contexts as possible. This orientation toward the specificity of context lies behind rock's ability to initiate processes of social differentiation. But there is, as mentioned, also a homogenizing aspect to this process that runs against the potential for differentiation. No other form of music can match rock's historical role in the effort to smooth out spatial and contextual difference, so as to prepare the world for global capital. As rock music connects the street and the living room, art and advertisement, local context and global travel, "big industry" and "the social underdog," it serves the management of perception essential to this task.

Rock's own notions of the spatiality of sound may be the best guide to this perception management. These notions find expression in the concept of the ambient that rose to prominence from the late 1980s onward (at the time when the possibility of the emergence of a single global market became a political reality). Once viewed as an arty deviance from official rock, Brian Eno's 1978 definition of ambient music is, in fact, a lucid description of the integrative function of rock sound in general. Inspired by the Cologne Airport, he wanted to create—or rather to *design*—forms of music that could insert themselves seamlessly into specific spaces, enhancing the perception and experience of those spaces while never halting their functioning. For this reason, the music had to be able to withstand interruption (from airport announcements), it had to work outside the frequencies of human voices, and also operate at different speeds than normal speech patterns so as not to confuse communication. In short, it had to be able to accommodate the noises of the space in general.²⁴ In this way, Eno's ambient music presented itself as an alternative to the inane context-insensitivity of Muzak. Paying attention to spatial specifics, he wanted to create new possibilities for musical immersion that were linked to situational reflection.

Yet the notions of accommodation, enhancement, and soothing that underpin his visions (including an “acceptance” of the death risk associated with flying) are indicative of the harmonizing, pastoral ideals that came to inform the fully developed and immensely popular ambient music genre of the 1990s. The environment evoked in this music is that of the womb-like sonic enclosure where aural details (however exotic) are always “interesting” and never disturbing. The increasing integration of sounds of nature in ambient music perhaps shows the drive to align the act of smoothing out space with environmentalist notions of natural balance, the essentially peaceful coexistence of difference. And the lofty “space sound” marking so many world music productions of the same period seems to project the same high-minded idea of natural harmony onto the idea of cross-cultural encounter.²⁵

What is elided with rock’s ambient sound-space is then very often the specificity and historicity of bodies: bodily encounters, bodies in pain, and bodies in conflict. Bodies tend, instead, to be conflated with the spectacular visuals of star imagery or to be celebrated in terms of generalized (and quasi-spiritual) notions of “ecstasy.” The video works of artist and musician Daniel Pflumm seem to play alongside and intensify the act of smoothing out space and the elision of bodies facilitated by ambient music. In these productions, made for play in art galleries and club spaces alike, the specificity of bodies is not simply but *prominently* absent. Operating beyond any specific genre or media format, video after video cleverly integrates bits of news footage, corporate identities, product logos, and advertisement images with the beat of electronic/ambient music. (Fig. 6.8) The high degree of abstraction in Pflumm’s work—he typically cuts such images out of their context, breaks them down into their constituent parts, modifies them, and spins them into endless sequences—only emphasizes their highly seductive, gravity-free form of connectivity. A video like the 1997 *Silencer*, which consists of completely blurred images of neon signs flickering in the urban environment, primarily brings out the atmospheric or ambient qualities of the information networks of global capital. (Fig. 6.9) In an exhibition at Galerie Kristine Englund in 2000, completely abstracted neon signs functioned as the sole light sources for a stylish, club-

like environment that also contained furniture.

Pflumm's visual work then seems to materialize the mechanisms through which sound helps infuse these networks with the promise of infinite spatial access.²⁶ Completely compelling yet unrelated to any established function or meaning (these are not simply music videos), the works are essentially monuments to the desires of a world gone ambient, all the more imposing since this ambient production of space seems just as operative in the absence of actual musical sound. A significant part of Pflumm's work notably consists of a truly confusing jumble of interlinked Web sites that allow the very *sensation* of connectivity to evolve on its own accord. A whirlwind of logotypes, offers, appeals, choices, promises, and linkages never brings the viewer anywhere, but still induces a sense of grazing a territory filled with infinite potential.

In the collaborations between the sculptor Charles Long and the British group Stereolab, the media ecology of the "sound-body" is, in contrast, brought directly into focus. Long's primary concern, as a sculptor, is how to approach issues of corporeality in an information-based media culture in which bodies tend to be foregrounded as images while their biological existence is subject to a combination of economic exploitation and political neglect. This bodily condition cannot simply be addressed by resorting to the issues and problems that have dominated recent sculptural practice. Neither the phenomenological researches of Minimalism nor the transgression-discourse of so-called abject art responds to its specific problems. For the coordinates of these practices are either the body of the spectator/participant activating one specific, physical space, or the traumas of individual subjectivity. The informational body—the sensual and affective life of a self connected to networks of selves—has no clearly articulated place in these scenarios.

Long articulates such bodily existence by projecting the mediatic world of design and fashion onto the basic sculptural activity of "shaping matter." He creates sculptures that come across as strange hybrids of the type of glossy space-age design objects that are routinely cultivated in rock, film, and fashion cultures and a formless materiality that evokes touch, sensuality, individual shaping, etc. (*Fig. 6.10*) But it is the sound

that is integrated into these “media sculptures” that gives the informational bodies they evoke a more specific sense of location. This sound, composed by Stereolab, can only be accessed through multiple headphones plugged into the sculptures (so that a group of listeners can share the experience). Yet, even as sound here is explicitly associated with the collective experiences of “connected selves” or affective communities, it is not simply presented as a quasi-natural ambience. The very creation or production of such ambiences comes into focus and is opened up, since it is here quite literally identified with the manipulatable “media materialism” of the physical sculptures.²⁷

This effect is reinforced by the way in which the music of Stereolab also tends to disturb the naturalization of “sound as surround.” Often labeled “post-rock,” and presented under CD titles such as *Transient Random-Noise Bursts With Announcements* and *Sound-Dust*, Stereolab intensifies rock’s longstanding fascination with its own technological and mediatic genealogy. A key element here is the band’s obsession with the drone effects that have historically been one of the sustaining forces in the development of rock sound as a spatial concept. In songs such as “Jenny Ondioline” (an eighteen-minute track named after a long-obsolete French synthesizer developed in 1938), endlessly repeated guitar patterns produce a reverberating immersive drone-space. But Stereolab’s music never simply wallows in the ecstasy of the drone effect. It tends, instead, to bring the listener into direct contact with the media machines that deploy the drone effects as part of their production of space. The immersive drone sound of Stereolab is repeatedly broken up by the informational reality of patched-up bits and jumbled frequencies. Irregular time signatures and unusual melodic intervals and chord progressions produce a sense of pop music filtered through the radio or played on a gramophone, as much a result of channel switching and (shaky) contact between needle and vinyl as of “musical creation” in any kind of pure state.

The endless drone effect created in the version of “Jenny Ondioline” recorded on *Transient Random-Noise...* is treated to an interruption at once strange and entirely normal. This track actually contains two different songs separated by a brief pause as if it were a matter of two dif-

ferent tracks passing after one another in a radio show. Stereolab's use of such effects is at a very different level than the cut-and-mix strategies of DJ culture, where the glitches and scratches of media technologies already have a prominent presence. In DJ culture, the glitch sounds are generally integrated into the rich and diverse sound texture along with numerous other sound effects, many of which are also pure machine creations, all assembled under one beat. In the work of Stereolab, they actually interrupt. They halt the beat itself, cut openings in the walls of sound. They function, in short, as permanent reminders of the very context *of* rock contexts, of the historical and political situation behind its production of spaces and situations. As suggested in the collaboration between Long and Stereolab, a sound body can only really start to articulate its existence in the gap between these two contextualisms.

V

It was such reconfiguration of the sound/image relation that was initiated with Rirkrit Tiravanija's rehearsal studio series. The work did not simply "present" rock sound itself in the museum context; rock sound was continually about to be made, but as it was being made, its purely aural products were continually muted or mediated, continually displaced from center stage. Instead, the wider spatial framework of rock sound was very literally staged as a "workplace" of sorts: a machinic production space that is above all a space of social production. In this way, the work placed itself at once inside and outside rock sound, inside and outside its production of social relations and the activities of its audience subjects. Most notably, it placed itself at once inside and outside of the overdetermined relation between rock and art itself.

The rehearsal studio series presented, on its most basic level, a series of informal spaces of play, open to free use by anybody without restraint. The (loud!) sound engendered by passing players (i.e. museum visitors) produced moments of informal sociality within the constraints of the museum, as if the ideals of self-determination associated with the rock concept of sound had come to interrupt the anxious pedagogical traditions of the art

institution. But in actual fact, this ideal had long been incorporated in art institutions organized precisely as “open” and “interactive” spaces of play rather than as disciplinarian educators. These institutions had long struggled to transform themselves so as to accommodate artistic contributions that would focus on the creation of social relations rather than just “showing” works of art. And so the very relation between the museum and its audiences was reformed in terms of the ambient parameters of rock “sound”; terms that coincided with the transformations in the commodity form (centered, now, on the production of relationships rather than on things).

With its series of formal transformations of the social space of sound, Tiravanija’s studio opened up this ambient ideal. Playing around with the visual corollaries of rock sound, he cut across the simple *identification* between art and rock constituted through the sound/ambient ideal and reinforced by the notion of supplementary visuals. In this way, the work constituted a challenge. Vested, like rock music itself, in a connection with the everyday as well as in the appeal to collective experiences and contextual understanding, it was at the same time a refusal to simply “listen in on” the everyday. It was a refusal to simply present or evoke the mere existence of social relations as if these were not themselves produced by the machineries of sound.

A similar refusal runs through the many ambient or atmospheric productions discussed in this book and discussed as operations or interventions on the site of “style”—the social site that opens onto the political significance of the relation between aesthetic appearances and personal becoming. The atmospheres or ambiences conjured in these works have been discussed as a means to engage with the environmental surroundings of contemporary media machines; that is, with the perceptual or aesthetic frameworks of a form of economic and social production in which the end product is not “images” or “sound sequences” for consumption but subjectivity itself—the affects at work in the will to become. To paraphrase a statement by sound artists/activists Ultra-red, in the works that align themselves with this form of production, the ambient is not simply brought forth as an object for scrutiny, a sonic or visual gestalt. The ambient, here, is not simply a lounge, a bar, a party, a sound space, or the reflected glow of lamps and

TV screens. Instead, the works produce remarkably *flexible* atmospheres — atmospheres that consist not only of that which is heard and seen but of that which is transformed in hearing and seeing.²⁸

⁰¹ This is according to curator Eric Troncy's text for Tiravanija's 1996 exhibition *Untitled, 1996 (one revolution per minute)* at Le Consortium, Dijon. *Rehearsal Studio* was part of this exhibition. The text is available at www.leconsortium.com.

⁰² David S. Rubin's exhibition catalogue *It's Only Rock and Roll: Rock and Roll Currents in Contemporary Art* (Munich: Prestel, 1995) gives a good overview of various tendencies within post-1950s appropriation of rock culture in visual art, such as depiction of personalities, appropriation of song titles, depiction of the materials of rock culture and general iconographic references. The predominant perspective is a focus on various types of rock iconography and the way in which rock has provided a source of inspiration, influence, and point of identification for visual artists. Rock as a social space is not discussed. Neither does the book provide a more principled discussion of the terms of exchange between the different cultural practices of rock and visual art.

⁰³ I am borrowing the concept *sociopoetic* from Craig Saper, who uses it to point to situations in which poetic decisions embodied in artworks lead to a heightened or changed social situation. At this point it is more useful to describe these forms as sociopoetic rather than just describing them as artworks within a particular social context. The social situation is, in other words, part of a sociopoetic event or experiment. Craig Saper, *Networked Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

⁰⁴ For an analysis of the genres and history of rock criticism, see Ulf Lindberg, Gestur Gudmundsson, Morten Michelsen, and Hans Weisethaunet, *Rock Criticism from the Beginning: Amusers, Bruisers, and Cool-Headed Cruisers* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

⁰⁵ In "Formalism, Realism, and Leisure: The Case of Punk," Simon Frith argues that punk must be seen as *both* countercultural expression and commercial medium, and that its politics can only be understood in terms of this contradiction. In Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (eds.), *The Subcultures Reader* (London: Routledge, 1977), 163–175.

⁰⁶ Peter Wicke, *Rock Music: Culture, Aesthetics, and Sociology*, translated by Rachel Fogg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 179.

⁰⁷ On the production of subjectivity, see Maurizio Lazzarato, *Videophilosophie. Zeitwahrnehmung im Postfordismus* (Berlin: b_books, 2002), 129–157.

⁰⁸ Wicke, *op. cit.*, 18–23.

⁰⁹ Simon Frith, *The Sociology of Rock* (London: Constable, 1978), 159–191.

¹⁰ One of the most significant points in Frith's *Sociology of Rock* is precisely his description of the way in which the ideology of rock is informed by ideals taken from art. The "art school" rocker epitomizes this development. See also Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art Into Pop* (London: Methuen, 1987).

¹¹ My use of the term "vulgar" here refers to Robert Pattison, *The Triumph of Vulgar: Rock Music in the Mirror of Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Here rock's vulgarity simply indicates its refusal of the traditional hierarchies of values.

¹² The famous example here is the fact that Pete Townshend of The Who learned guitar-smashing from his art school teacher Gustav Metzger, the artist behind the *Destruction in Art* manifesto and festivals.

¹³ Early music videos notably drew inspiration from Surrealist imagery.

¹⁴ P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 3–51. In his discussion of affective investments, Marshall draws on Lawrence Grossberg's description of the way in which meaning and affect are dissociated in contemporary culture: an affective economy seems to exist in opposition to a representational economy, so that there is a focus on affective investments without the concomitant association of political investment. The connection to clear-cut meaning is elided from the affective moment, so that a particular song can be

appropriated by very different political parties.

- ¹⁵ Maurizio Lazzarato speaks about the new, non-psychological subject of media capitalism as a singularization of the body of the proletariat. This subject is the "I see" of human beings that think in the middle of productive machines, rather than thinking on and through the frameworks of representation. (Lazzarato, op. cit.)
- ¹⁶ Will Straw, "Communities and Scenes in Popular Music," in Gelder and Thornton, *The Subcultures Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997), op.cit., 494–506.
- ¹⁷ This is notably the critical axis in Grant Kester's *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
- ¹⁸ Lawrence Grossberg, "Another Boring Day in Paradise: Rock and Roll and the Empowerment of Everyday Life," in Gelder and Thornton, *The Subcultures Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997), op. cit., 477–494.
- ¹⁹ John Corbett, *Sounding Off: From John Cage to Dr. Funkenstein* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 1994), 32–56.
- ²⁰ These constellations can be found in Györfi's contributions to the following exhibitions: *Now Is the Time*, Medienturm Graz, 2005; *Live*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2004; *Play*, Gallery for Still and Motion Pictures, Berlin, 2003; *Turning Into a Loop*, Gallery Gio Marconi, Milan, 2000, among others.
- ²¹ The video was made to the Rocket Freudental song *Ich bau Scheisse stapelweise*, and exhibited at *Live*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2004.
- ²² Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 105.
- ²³ Ultra-red's work reformulates the meaning and function of ambient music, so as to reactivate it in relation to the politicized everyday. Ultra-red's texts can be found on their Web site, www.ultrared.org.
- ²⁴ Brian Eno, "Ambient Music," in Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (eds.), *Audio Culture. Readings in Modern Music* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 94–98.
- ²⁵ Douglas Kahn has critiqued the musicalization of all the world's sounds in the work of composer John Cage, as a repression of the semiotic potential of sound instigated through nature metaphors. To the extent that Cage's preoccupation with environmental sound has had a fundamental influence on the concept of the ambient in rock music, this critique can perhaps be extended to the ambient conception of space that works so well alongside today's consumer capitalism. Kahn, "Track Organology," in *October* 55 (1990), 67–78.
- ²⁶ Exemplary works are *Silencer*, 1997; *AT&T*, 1998; *Neu*, 1999; *Ohne Titel (videos)*, 2000.
- ²⁷ The collaboration between Charles Long and Stereolab was named *Amorphous Body Study Center*. The collaboration began in 1994/1995.
- ²⁸ Ultra-red, "Onasoundbody," www.ultrared.org.

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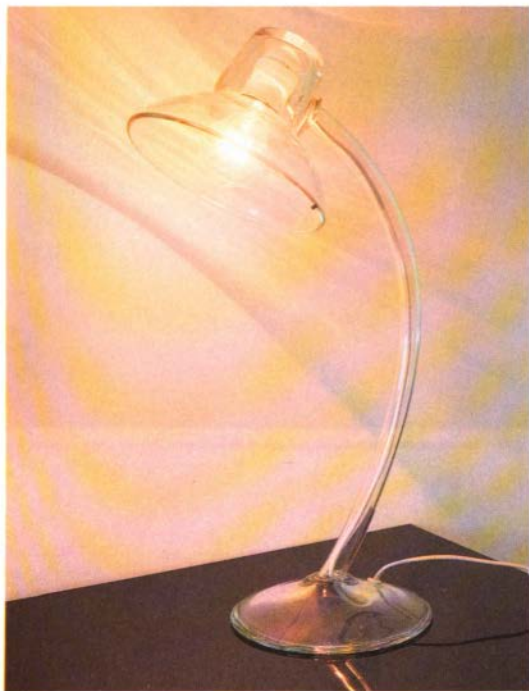


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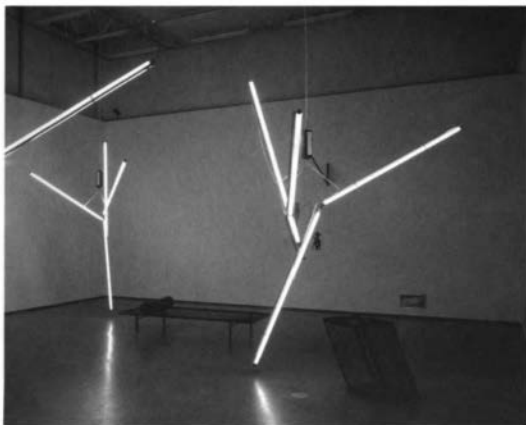


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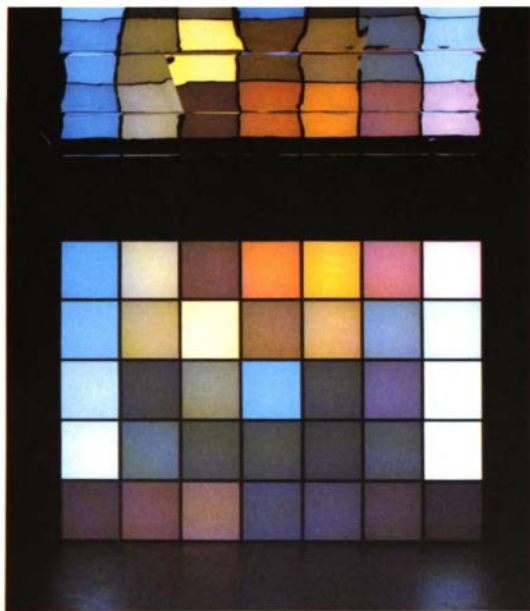


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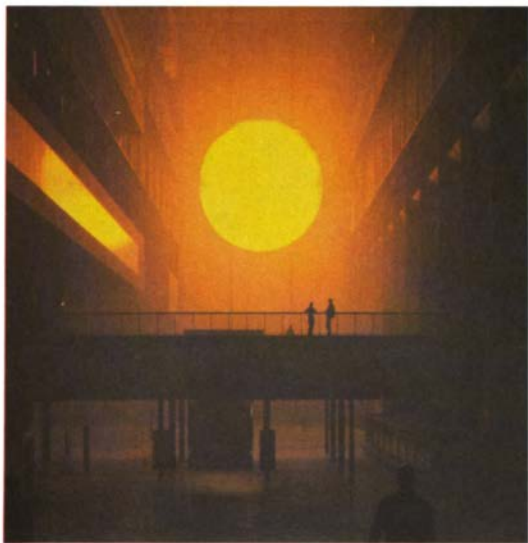


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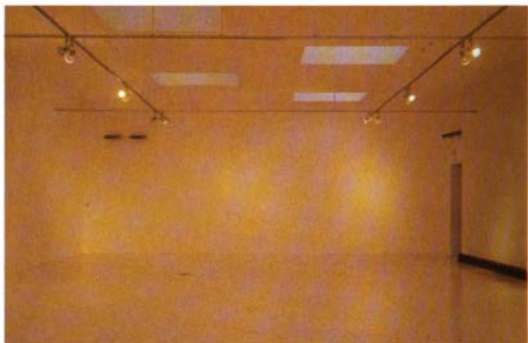


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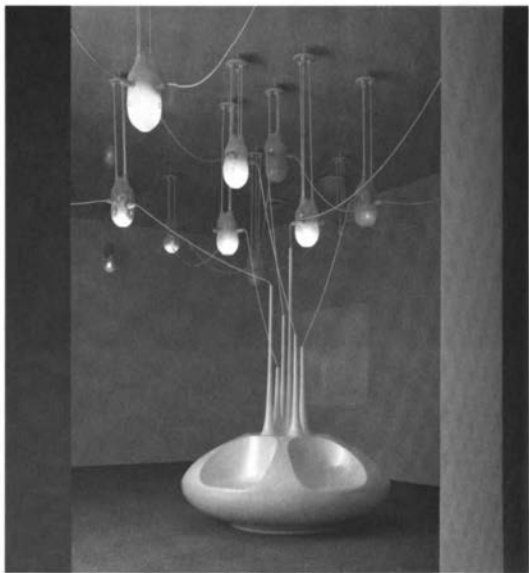


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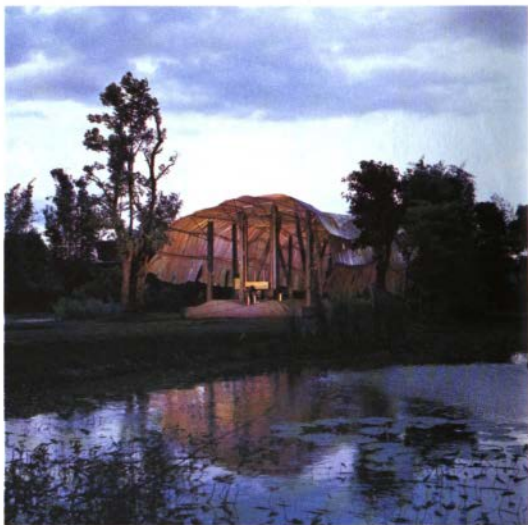


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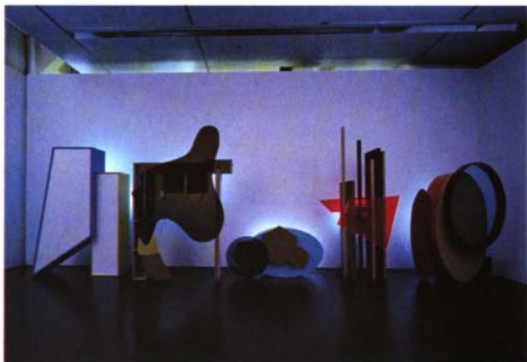


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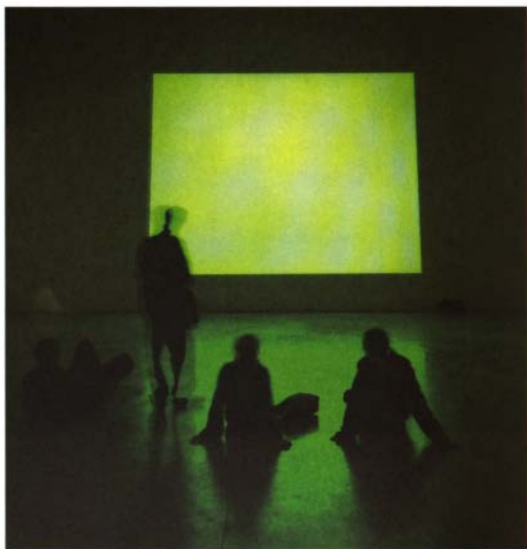


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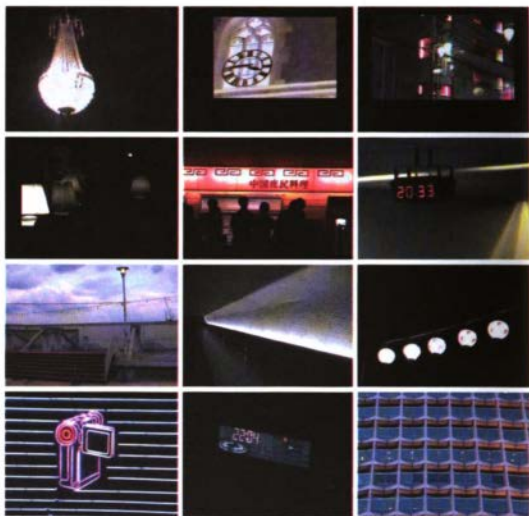


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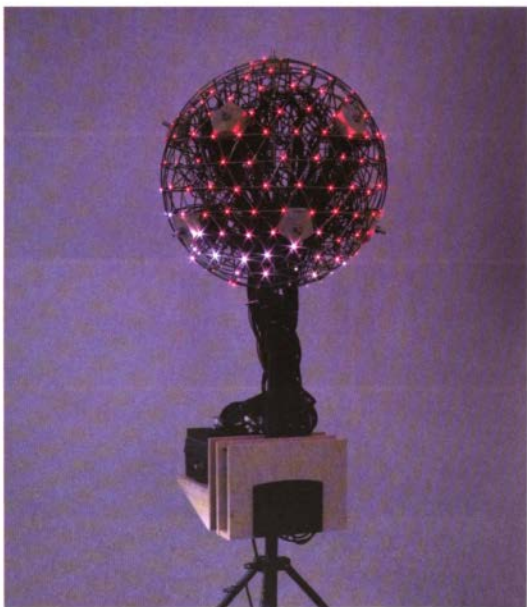


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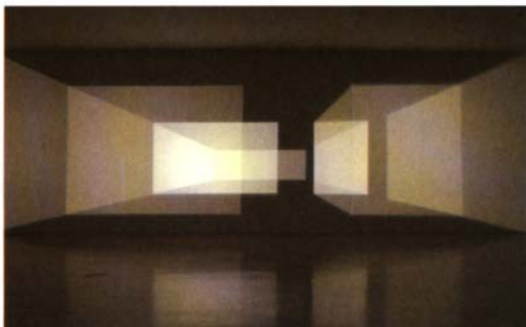


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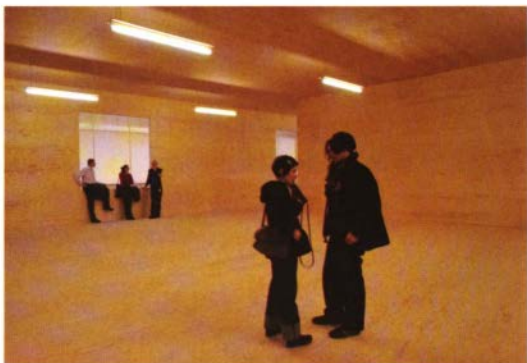


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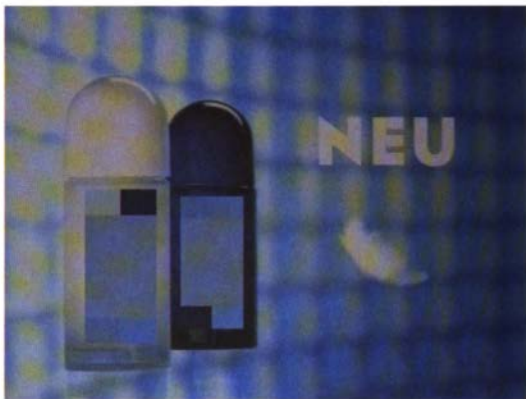


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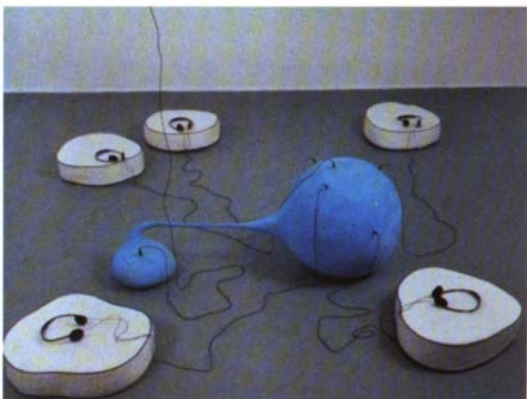


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Contemporain, Dijon, 1996
Courtesy neugerriemschneider, Berlin
- 6.2
Rirkrit Tiravanija
*Untitled, 1996 (Rehearsal Studio #6, Silent
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Installation view, *Join Me!*, Spiral Garden,
Tokyo, 1996
Courtesy neugerriemschneider, Berlin
- 6.3
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#6)*, Kunsthalle St. Gallen, 1996
Courtesy neugerriemschneider, Berlin
- 6.4
Jim Lambie
Reflections in Gold, 2003
Album sleeves, vinyl record, duct tape, gold paper
Dimensions 46 x 46 cm
© the artist
Courtesy of Sadie Coles HQ, London
- 6.5
Christian Marclay
4,000,000 Minutes
Installation view, Montreal Biennale, 2000
Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
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*Pimui presents: Rocket Freudental et peau de
grosse caisse*, 2004
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- 6.7
Alexander Györfi
*Pimui presents: Rocket Freudental –
Ich bau Scheiße stapelweise*, 2004
Two channel video, 7:30 minutes
- 6.8
Daniel Pflumm
Neu, 1999
Still from Betacam SP
Courtesy Galerie Neu, Berlin
- 6.9
Daniel Pflumm
Silencer, 1996
Still from Betacam SP
Courtesy Galerie Neu, Berlin
- 6.10
Charles Long
Good Separation in Soft Blue, 1995
Flocking over plaster, sound equipment and
cushions
256.5 x 170.2 x 53.3 cm
Collection The Museum of Contemporary Art,
Chicago
Courtesy the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery,
New York

Ina Blom
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Published by Sternberg Press

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Cover image: Philippe Parreno, *Happy Ending, Stockholm 1997–1996*, 1997. Courtesy Air de Paris, Paris

Design: Katrin Tüffers, Markus Weisbeck, surface, Berlin/Frankfurt am Main
Printing and binding: Druckerei Otto Lembeck, Frankfurt am Main
ISBN 978-1-933128-30-6

Supported by Norsk Kulturråd – Arts Council Norway



NORSK KULTURRÅD
Arts Council Norway

We would like to thank Air de Paris, Paris, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, Sadie Coles HQ, London, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris, Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt, Galerie Meyer Kainer, Vienna, The Modern Institute, Glasgow, Galerie Neu, Berlin, neugerriemschneider, Berlin, Esther Schipper, Berlin, White Cube, London.

Sternberg Press
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