

**Roland Barthes//Joseph Beuys//Nicolas Bourriaud//  
Peter Bürger//Graciela Carnevale//Lygia Clark//  
Collective Actions//Eda Cufer//Guy Debord//Jeremy  
Deller//Umberto Eco//Hal Foster//Édouard Glissant//  
Group Material//Félix Guattari//Thomas Hirschhorn//  
Carsten Höller//Allan Kaprow//Lars Bang Larsen//  
Jean-Luc Nancy//Molly Nesbit//Hans Ulrich Obrist//  
Hélio Oiticica//Adrian Piper//Jacques Rancière//  
Dirk Schwarze//Rirkrit Tiravanija**

**Participation**

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**P A R T**  
**I C I P**  
**A T I O**  
**N**

**Edited by Claire Bishop**

**Documents of Contemporary Art**

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## Documents of Contemporary Art

In recent decades artists have progressively expanded the boundaries of art as they have sought to engage with an increasingly pluralistic environment. Teaching, curating and understanding of art and visual culture are likewise no longer grounded in traditional aesthetics but centred on significant ideas, topics and themes ranging from the everyday to the uncanny, the psychoanalytical to the political.

The Documents of Contemporary Art series emerges from this context. Each volume focuses on a specific subject or body of writing that has been of key influence in contemporary art internationally. Edited and introduced by a scholar, artist, critic or curator, each of these source books provides access to a plurality of voices and perspectives defining a significant theme or tendency.

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**I WANT  
THE  
PUBLIC TO BE  
IN  
SIDE A  
BRAIN  
IN  
ACTION**

Thomas Hirschhorn, *24h Foucault*, 2004

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## Claire Bishop

### Introduction//Viewers as Producers

The point of departure for the selection of texts in this reader is the *social* dimension of participation – rather than activation of the individual viewer in so-called ‘interactive’ art and installation. The latter trajectory has been well rehearsed elsewhere: the explosion of new technologies and the breakdown of medium-specific art in the 1960s provided myriad opportunities for physically engaging the viewer in a work of art.<sup>1</sup> Less familiar is the history of those artistic practices since the 1960s that appropriate *social* forms as a way to bring art closer to everyday life: intangible experiences such as dancing samba (Hélio Oiticica) or funk (Adrian Piper); drinking beer (Tom Marioni); discussing philosophy (Ian Wilson) or politics (Joseph Beuys); organizing a garage sale (Martha Rosler); running a café (Allen Ruppertsberg; Daniel Spoerri; Gordon Matta-Clark), a hotel (Alighiero Boetti; Ruppertsberg) or a travel agency (Christo and Jeanne-Claude). Although the photographic documentation of these projects implies a relationship to performance art, they differ in striving to collapse the distinction between performer and audience, professional and amateur, production and reception. Their emphasis is on collaboration, and the collective dimension of social experience.

These socially-oriented projects anticipate many artistic developments that proliferated since the 1990s, but they also form part of a longer historical trajectory. The most important precursors for participatory art took place around 1920. The Paris ‘Dada-Season’ of April 1921 was a series of manifestations that sought to involve the city’s public, the most salient being an excursion to the church of Saint Julien le Pauvre which drew more than one hundred people despite the pouring rain. A month later, Dada artists and writers held a mock trial of the anarchist author turned nationalist Maurice Barrès, in which members of the public were invited to sit on the jury. André Breton coined the phrase ‘Artificial Hells’ to describe this new conception of Dada events that moved out of the cabaret halls and took to the streets.<sup>2</sup> At the other extreme from these collaborative (yet highly authored) experiences were the Soviet mass spectacles that sublated individualism into propagandistic displays of collectivity. The Storming of the Winter Palace (1920), for example, was held on the third anniversary of the October Revolution and involved over 8,000 performers in restaging the momentous events that had led to the Bolshevik victory.<sup>3</sup> The collective fervour of these theatrical spectacles was paralleled by new proletarian music such as the Hooter Symphonies: celebrations of machinic

noise (factory sirens, motors, turbines, hooters, etc.) performed by hundreds of participants, directed by conductors signalling from the rooftops.<sup>4</sup> These two approaches continue to be seen throughout the multiple instances of participatory art that develop in their wake: an authored tradition that seeks to provoke participants, and a de-authored lineage that aims to embrace collective creativity; one is disruptive and interventionist, the other constructive and ameliorative. In both instances, the issue of participation becomes increasingly inextricable from the question of political commitment.

One of the first texts to elaborate theoretically the political status of participation dates from 1934, by the left-wing German theorist Walter Benjamin. He argued that when judging a work’s politics, we should not look at the artist’s declared sympathies, but at the position that the work occupies in the production relations of its time. Referring directly to the example of Soviet Russia, Benjamin maintained that the work of art should actively intervene in and provide a model for allowing viewers to be involved in the processes of production: ‘this apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers – that is, the more readers or spectators into collaborators.’<sup>5</sup> By way of example he cites the letters page of a newspaper, but his ideal lies in the plays of his contemporary, the German dramatist Bertolt Brecht. As Benjamin explains, Brechtian theatre abandons long complex plots in favour of ‘situations’ that interrupt the narrative through a disruptive element, such as song. Through this technique of montage and juxtaposition, audiences were led to break their identification with the protagonists on stage and be incited to critical distance. Rather than presenting the illusion of action on stage and filling the audiences with sentiment, Brechtian theatre compels the spectator to take up a position towards this action.

By today’s standards, many would argue that the Brechtian model offers a relatively passive mode of spectatorship, since it relies on raising consciousness through the distance of critical *thinking*. By contrast, a paradigm of *physical* involvement – taking its lead from Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty among others – sought to reduce the distance between actors and spectators.<sup>6</sup> This emphasis on proximity was crucial to myriad developments in avant-garde theatre of the 1960s, and was paralleled by upheavals in visual art and pedagogy. In this framework, physical involvement is considered an essential precursor to social change. Today this equation is no less persistent, but its terms are perhaps less convincing. The idea of collective presence has (for better or worse) been scrutinized and dissected by numerous philosophers; on a technical level, most contemporary art is collectively produced (even if authorship often remains resolutely individual); participation is used by business as a tool for improving efficiency and workforce morale, as well as being all-pervasive in the mass-

media in the form of reality television.<sup>7</sup> As an artistic medium, then, participation is arguably no more intrinsically political or oppositional than any other.

Despite this changing context, we can nevertheless draw attention to continuities between the participatory impulse of the 1960s and today. Recurrently, calls for an art of participation tend to be allied to one or all of the following agendas. The first concerns the desire to create an active subject, one who will be empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation. The hope is that the newly-emancipated subjects of participation will find themselves able to determine their own social and political reality. An aesthetic of participation therefore derives legitimacy from a (desired) causal relationship between the experience of a work of art and individual/collective agency. The second argument concerns authorship. The gesture of ceding some or all authorial control is conventionally regarded as more egalitarian and democratic than the creation of a work by a single artist, while shared production is also seen to entail the aesthetic benefits of greater risk and unpredictability. Collaborative creativity is therefore understood both to emerge from, and to produce, a more positive and non-hierarchical social model. The third issue involves a perceived crisis in community and collective responsibility. This concern has become more acute since the fall of Communism, although it takes its lead from a tradition of Marxist thought that indicts the alienating and isolating effects of capitalism. One of the main impetuses behind participatory art has therefore been a restoration of the social bond through a collective elaboration of meaning.

These three concerns – activation; authorship; community – are the most frequently cited motivations for almost all artistic attempts to encourage participation in art since the 1960s. It is significant that all three appear in the writing of Guy Debord, co-founder of the Situationist International, since it is invariably against the backdrop of his critique of capitalist ‘spectacle’ that debates on participation come to be staged. The spectacle – as a social relationship between people mediated by images – is pacifying and divisive, uniting us only through our separation from one another:

The specialization of the mass spectacle constitutes [...] the epicentre of separation and noncommunication.<sup>8</sup>

The spectacle is by definition immune from human activity, inaccessible to any projected review or correction. It is the opposite of dialogue. [...] It is the sun that never sets on the empire of modern passivity.<sup>9</sup>

If spectacle denotes a mode of passivity and subjugation that arrests thought

and prevents determination of one’s reality, then it is precisely as an injunction to *activity* that Debord advocated the construction of ‘situations’. These, he argued, were a logical development of Brechtian theatre, but with one important difference: they would involve the audience function disappearing altogether in the new category of *viveur* (one who lives). Rather than simply awakening critical consciousness, as in the Brechtian model, ‘constructed situations’ aimed to produce new social relationships and thus new social realities.

The idea of constructed situations remains an important point of reference for contemporary artists working with live events and people as privileged materials. It is, for example, frequently cited by Nicolas Bourriaud in his *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), a collection of theoretical essays that has catalyzed much debate around the status of contemporary participation. In parallel with this debate, and perhaps addressing the sense of unrealized political potential in the work that Bourriaud describes, a subsequent generation of artists have begun to engage more directly with specific social constituencies, and to intervene critically in participatory forms of mass media entertainment.<sup>10</sup> The texts in this reader have been selected with the development of this work in mind. The aim has been to provide a historical and theoretical lineage for recent socially-collaborative art, presenting a variety of positions that will allow students and researchers to think more widely about the claims and implications of the artistic injunction to participate.

The book is divided into three sections. The first offers a selection of theoretical frameworks through which to consider participation. It begins with key structuralist texts by Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes, which concern the new role of the viewer in relation to modern art, music and literature. It is followed by Peter Bürger’s classic Marxist critique of bourgeois art as a failure to fuse art and social praxis. Jean-Luc Nancy, addressing the impasse of Marxist theory in the 1980s, attempts to rethink political subjectivity outside the conventional framework of activation. He posits a community that is ‘inoperative’ or ‘unworked’ (*désœuvrée*), founded not on the absolute immanence of man to man (for example, the ‘being-in-common’ of nations, communities or lovers), but on the presence of that which impedes such immanence, that is, our consciousness of death. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have provided the foundation for several contemporary theories of political action, most notably Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s influential *Empire* (2000), one of the key texts of the anti-globalization movement. (*Empire* is available online, and therefore has not been included in this reader; the most relevant passage is section 4.3 on the multitude.) Ten years prior to *Empire*, Édouard Glissant used Deleuze and Guattari as the theoretical basis of his ‘poetics of relation’, an argument for the creative subversion of colonialist

# ART NO

**LONGER WANTS TO RESPOND TO THE  
EXCESS OF COMMODITIES AND SIGNS**

# BUT

**TO A LACK OF CONNECTIONS**

culture by those subjugated to its language. Guattari's *Chaosmosis* (1992) and Rancière's *Malaise dans l'esthétique* (2004) both offer a tripartite history of art's development, and both argue for a culminating phase in which art has an integral relation to other spheres: for Guattari the ethical, for Rancière the political.

Section two comprises artist's writings, the selection of which has been partially determined by the desire to present informative texts relating to substantial works of art. Another desire was to show a range of different approaches to the documentation and analysis of these often elusive and ephemeral projects. The chosen texts represent a variety of proposals for recording process-based participation on the page: the manifesto format (Debord, Kaprow, Beuys), the project description (Carnevale, Höller, Hirschhorn), the detailed log of events (Schwarze on Beuys), reflections after the event (Piper, Cufer, Deller), dialogues in the form of correspondence (Oiticica and Clark), and a retrospective survey in the form of a third-person narrative (Tiravanija). Limitations of space have prevented a fuller presentation of the Collective Actions group, whose methodical approach to documentation erased the boundary between collaboration, event and reflection: the participants in each work were invited to document their response to it. *Ten Appearances*, for example, is accompanied by long, detailed texts by the artist Ilya Kabakov and the poet Vsevolod Nekrasov.

The final section presents a selection of recent curatorial and critical positions. It begins with excerpts from Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, part of which formed the catalogue essay for his group exhibition *Traffic* (1995). Lars Bang Larsen's 'Social Aesthetics' (1999) is an attempt to present connections between today's participatory practice and historical precursors of the 1960s, here with a focus on Scandinavia. One of the most memorable curatorial gestures of the present decade was *Utopia Station* (Venice Biennale, 2003), a collaborative exhibition whose project description draws a connection between activated spectatorship and activism. The final essay in the book, by Hal Foster, is more cautious, and reflects on the limitations of the participatory impulse. The scope of this reader therefore ranges from the 1950s to the present day; although there are important examples of social participation in the historic avant-garde, it is not until the eve of the sixties that a coherent and well-theorized body of work emerges: Situationism in France, Happenings in the United States, and Neo-Concretism in Brazil.

Many writings outside the discipline of art history could have been added to this anthology, particularly texts that draw attention to the history of participation in theatre, architecture and pedagogy.<sup>11</sup> Important work remains to be done in connecting these histories to participation in visual art. Rancière's



unpublished essay 'The Emancipated Spectator' (2004) has begun to do precisely this task, drawing links between the history of theatre and education, and questioning theories that equate spectacle with passivity.<sup>12</sup> He argues that the opposition of 'active' and 'passive' is riddled with presuppositions about looking and knowing, watching and acting, appearance and reality. This is because the binary of active/passive always ends up dividing a population into those with capacity on one side, and those with incapacity on the other.<sup>13</sup> As such, it is an allegory of inequality. Drawing analogies with the history of education, Rancière argues that emancipation should rather be the presupposition of *equality*: the assumption that everyone has the same capacity for intelligent response to a book, a play or a work of art. Rather than suppressing this mediating object in favour of communitarian immediacy, Rancière argues that it should be a crucial third term which both parts refer to and interpret. The distance that this imposes, he writes, is not an evil that should be abolished, since it is the precondition of any communication:

Spectatorship is not the passivity that has to be turned into activity. It is our normal situation. We learn and teach, we act and know as spectators who link what they see with what they have seen and told, done and dreamt. There is no privileged medium as there is no privileged starting point.

In calling for spectators who are active *as interpreters*, Rancière implies that the politics of participation might best lie, not in anti-spectacular stagings of community or in the claim that mere physical activity would correspond to emancipation, but in putting to work the idea that we are all equally capable of inventing our own translations.<sup>14</sup> Unattached to a privileged artistic medium, this principle would not divide audiences into active and passive, capable and incapable, but instead would invite us all to appropriate works for ourselves and make use of these in ways that their authors might never have dreamed possible.

- 1 See for example Germano Celant, *Ambiente/Arte: dal Futurismo alla Body Art* (Venice: Edizioni La Biennale di Venezia, 1977. Based on *Ambiente/Arte* exhibition, 1976 Venice Biennale); Nicholas de Oliveira, *et al.*, *Installation Art in the New Millennium* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003); Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005).
- 2 See André Breton, 'Artificial Hells, Inauguration of the "1921 Dada Season"' (1921), trans. Matthew S. Witkovsky in *October*, 105, Summer 2003, 139: 'Dada events certainly involve a desire other than to scandalize. Scandal, for all its force (one may easily trace it from Baudelaire to the present), would be insufficient to elicit the delight that one might expect from an artificial hell. One should also keep in mind the odd pleasure obtained in "taking to the street" or "keeping one's footing", so to speak [...] By conjoining thought with gesture, Dada has left the realm of shadows to venture

onto solid ground.'

- 3 For a detailed critical commentary see Frantisek Deak, 'Russian Mass Spectacles', *Drama Review*, vol. 19, no. 2, June 1975, 7–22.
- 4 For a first-hand account of these events see René Fülöp-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism* (London and New York: Putnams and Sons Ltd, 1929) 184.
- 5 Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, part 2, 1931–34 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003) 777.
- 6 The French playwright and director Antonin Artaud developed the term 'Theatre of Cruelty' in the late 1930s. He used it to denote a type of ritualistic drama that aimed, through technical methods (sound, lighting, gesture), to express stark emotions and thereby desensitize the audience, allowing them to confront themselves. See Artaud, *Theatre and Its Double* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1970).
- 7 On a political level, participation is increasingly considered a privileged medium for British and EU government cultural funding policies seeking to create the impression of social inclusion. See François Matarasso, *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts* (London: Comedia, 1997). In Britain, Matarasso's report has been key to the formulation of New Labour's funding for the arts; for a cogent critique of its claims, see Paola Merli, 'Evaluating the Social Impact of Participation in Arts Activities: A Critical Review of François Matarasso's *Use or Ornament?*', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2002, 107–18.
- 8 Guy Debord, cited in Tom McDonough, ed., *Guy Debord and the Situationist International* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002) 143.
- 9 Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) (New York: Zone Books, 1997) 17.
- 10 See for example Matthieu Laurette's *The Great Exchange* (2000), a television programme in which the public exchange goods of progressively less value week by week, and Phil Collins, *The Return of the Real* (2005), which involved a press conference for former stars of Turkish reality television.
- 11 See for example Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1970), Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 1979), Oskar Hansen, *Towards Open Form* (Warsaw: Foksal Gallery Foundation/Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts Museum, 2005).
- 12 Jacques Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', unpublished conference paper, Frankfurt, August 2004, <http://theater.kein.org/>
- 13 Be this a disparagement of the spectator because he does nothing, while the performers on stage do something – or the converse claim that those who act are inferior to those who are able to look, contemplate ideas, and have critical distance on the world. The two positions can be switched but the structure remains the same. See Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator'.
- 14 A similar argument for consumption as creative is put forward by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980). Literary variants of this idea can be found in Roland Barthes' 'Death of the Author' (1968) and 'From Work to Text' (1971), and in Jacques Derrida's idea of the 'Countersignature', *Paragraph*, vol. 27, no. 2, July 2004, 7–42.

**TRUE  
PARTICIPATION  
IS OPEN**

**WE WILL  
NEVER BE  
ABLE TO  
KNOW WHAT  
WE GIVE  
TO THE  
SPECTATOR  
AUTHOR**

Lygia Clark, Letter to Hélio Oiticica, 14 November 1968

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

**Umberto Eco** *The Poetics of the Open Work*//018

**Roland Barthes** *The Death of the Author*//039

**Peter Bürger** *The Negation of the Autonomy of Art  
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## Umberto Eco

### The Poetics of the Open Work//1962

*Italian semiotician Umberto Eco is one of the pioneers of reader response theory. The Open Work (1962) addresses the open-ended and aleatory nature of modern music, literature and art, pointing to the wider implications of this new mode of aesthetic reception for sociology and pedagogy, and for new forms of communication.*

A number of recent pieces of instrumental music are linked by a common feature: the considerable autonomy left to the individual performer in the way he chooses to play the work. Thus, he is not merely free to interpret the composer's instructions following his own discretion (which in fact happens in traditional music), but he must impose his judgment on the form of the piece, as when he decides how long to hold a note or in what order to group the sounds: all this amounts to an act of improvised creation. Here are some of the best-known examples of the process.

1. In *Klavierstück XI*, by Karlheinz Stockhausen, the composer presents the performer a single large sheet of music paper with a series of note groupings. The performer then has to choose among these groupings, first for the one to start the piece and, next, for the successive units in the order in which he elects to weld them together. In this type of performance, the instrumentalist's freedom is a function of the 'narrative' structure of the piece, which allows him to 'mount' the sequence of musical units in the order he chooses.

2. In Luciano Berio's *Sequence for Solo Flute*, the composer presents the performer a text which predetermines the sequence and intensity of the sounds to be played. But the performer is free to choose how long to hold a note inside the fixed framework imposed on him, which in turn is established by the fixed pattern of the metronome's beat.

3. Henri Pousseur has offered the following description of his piece *Scambi*:

*Scambi* is not so much a musical composition as a field of possibilities, an explicit invitation to exercise choice. It is made up of sixteen sections. Each of these can be linked to any two others, without weakening the logical continuity of the musical process. Two of its sections, for example, are introduced by similar motifs (after which they evolve in divergent patterns); another pair of sections, on the

contrary, tends to develop towards the same climax. Since the performer can start or finish with any one section, a considerable number of sequential permutations are made available to him. Furthermore, the two sections which begin on the same motif can be played simultaneously, so as to present a more complex structural polyphony. It is not out of the question that we conceive these formal notations as a marketable product: if they were tape-recorded and the purchaser had a sufficiently sophisticated reception apparatus, then the general public would be in a position to develop a private musical construct of its own and a new collective sensibility in matters of musical presentation and duration could emerge.

4. In Pierre Boulez's *Third Sonata for Piano*, the first section (*Antiphonie, Formant 1*) is made up of ten different pieces on ten corresponding sheets of music paper. These can be arranged in different sequences like a stack of filing cards, though not all possible permutations are permissible. The second part (*Formant 2, Thrope*) is made up of four parts with an internal circularity, so that the performer can commence with any one of them, linking it successively to the others until he comes round full circle. No major interpretative variants are permitted inside the various sections, but one of them, *Parenthèse*, opens with a prescribed time beat, which is followed by extensive pauses in which the beat is left to the player's discretion. A further prescriptive note is evinced by the composer's instructions on the manner of linking one piece to the next (for example, *sans retenir, enchaîner sans interruption*, and so on).

What is immediately striking in such cases is the macroscopic divergence between these forms of musical communication and the time-honoured tradition of the classics. This difference can be formulated in elementary terms as follows: a classical composition, whether it be a Bach fugue, Verdi's *Aida*, or Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, posits an assemblage of sound units which the composer arranged in a closed, well-defined manner before presenting it to the listener. He converted his idea into conventional symbols which more or less obliged the eventual performer to reproduce the format devised by the composer himself, whereas the new musical works referred to above reject the definitive, concluded message and multiply the formal possibilities of the distribution of their elements. They appeal to the initiative of the individual performer, and hence they offer themselves not as finite works which prescribe specific repetition along given structural coordinates but as 'open' works, which are brought to their conclusion by the performer at the same time as he experiences them on an aesthetic plane.<sup>1</sup>

To avoid any confusion in terminology, it is important to specify that here the definition of the 'open work', despite its relevance in formulating a fresh

dialectics between the work of art and its performer, still requires to be separated from other conventional applications of this term. Aesthetic theorists, for example, often have recourse to the notions of 'completeness' and 'openness' in connection with a given work of art. These two expressions refer to a standard situation of which we are all aware in our reception of a work of art: we see it as the end product of an author's effort to arrange a sequence of communicative effects in such a way that each individual addressee can refashion the original composition devised by the author. The addressee is bound to enter into an interplay of stimulus and response which depends on his unique capacity for sensitive reception of the piece. In this sense the author presents a finished product with the intention that this particular composition should be appreciated and received in the same form as he devised it. As he reacts to the play of stimuli and his own response to their patterning, the individual addressee is bound to supply his own existential credentials, the sense conditioning which is peculiarly his own, a defined culture, a set of tastes, personal inclinations and prejudices. Thus, his comprehension of the original artefact is always modified by his particular and individual perspective. In fact, the form of the work of art gains its aesthetic validity precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which it can be viewed and understood. These give it a wealth of different resonances and echoes without impairing its original essence; a road traffic sign, on the other hand, can be viewed in only one sense, and, if it is transfigured into some fantastic meaning by an imaginative driver, it merely ceases to be *that* particular traffic sign with that particular meaning. A work of art, therefore, is a complete and *closed* form in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole, while at the same time constituting an *open* product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity. Hence, every reception of a work of art is both an *interpretation* and a *performance* of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself.

Nonetheless, it is obvious that works like those of Berio and Stockhausen are 'open' in a far more tangible sense. In primitive terms we can say that they are quite literally 'unfinished': the author seems to hand them on to the performer more or less like the components of a construction kit. He seems to be unconcerned about the manner of their eventual deployment. This is a loose and paradoxical interpretation of the phenomenon, but the most immediately striking aspect of these musical forms can lead to this kind of uncertainty, although the very fact of our uncertainty is itself a positive feature: it invites us to consider *why* the contemporary artist feels the need to work in this kind of direction, to try to work out what historical evolution of aesthetic sensibility led

up to it and which factors in modern culture reinforced it. We are then in a position to surmise how these experiences should be viewed in the spectrum of a theoretical aesthetics.

Pousseur has observed that the poetics of the 'open' work tends to encourage 'acts of conscious freedom' on the part of the performer and place him at the focal point of a network of limitless interrelations, among which he chooses to set up his own form without being influenced by an external *necessity* which definitively prescribes the organization of the work in hand.<sup>2</sup> At this point one could object (with reference to the wider meaning of 'openness' already introduced in this essay) that any work of art, even if it is not passed on to the addressee in an unfinished state, demands a free, inventive response, if only because it cannot really be appreciated unless the performer somehow reinvents it in psychological collaboration with the author himself. Yet this remark represents the theoretical perception of contemporary aesthetics, achieved only after painstaking consideration of the function of artistic performance; certainly an artist of a few centuries ago was far from being aware of these issues. Instead nowadays it is primarily the artist who is aware of its implications. In fact, rather than submit to the 'openness' as an inescapable element of artistic interpretation, he subsumes it into a positive aspect of his production, recasting the work so as to expose it to the maximum possible 'opening'.

The force of the subjective element in the interpretation of a work of art (any interpretation implies an interplay between the addressee and the work as an objective fact) was noticed by classical writers, especially when they set themselves to consider the figurative arts. In the *Sophist* Plato observes that painters suggest proportions not by following some objective canon but by judging 'them in relation to the angle from which they are seen by the observer'. Vitruvius makes a distinction between 'symmetry' and 'eurhythmy', meaning by this latter term an adjustment of objective proportions to the requirements of a subjective vision. The scientific and practical development of the technique of perspective bears witness to the gradual maturation of this awareness of an interpretative subjectivity pitted against the work of art. Yet it is equally certain that this awareness has led to a tendency to operate against the 'openness' of the work, to favour its 'closing out'. The various devices of perspective were just so many different concessions to the actual location of the observer in order to ensure that he looked at the figure in *the only possible right way* – that is, the way the author of the work had prescribed, by providing various visual devices for the observer's attention to focus on.

Let us consider another example. In the Middle Ages there grew up a theory of allegory which posited the possibility of reading the Scriptures (and

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eventually poetry, figurative arts) not just in the literal sense but also in three other senses: the moral, the allegorical and the anagogical. This theory is well known from a passage in Dante, but its roots go back to Saint Paul ('*videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem*') ['For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face'], and it was developed by Saint Jerome, Augustine, Bede, Scotus Erigena, Hugh and Richard of Saint Victor, Alain of Lille, Bonaventure, Aquinas and others in such a way as to represent a cardinal point of medieval poetics. A work in this sense is undoubtedly endowed with a measure of 'openness'. The reader of the text knows that every sentence and every trope is 'open' to a multiplicity of meanings which he must hunt for and find. Indeed, according to how he feels at one particular moment, the reader might choose a possible interpretative key which strikes him as exemplary of this spiritual state. He will use the work according to the desired meaning (causing it to come alive again, somehow different from the way he viewed it at an earlier reading). However, in this type of operation, 'openness' is far removed from meaning 'indefiniteness' of communication, 'infinite' possibilities of form, and complete freedom of reception. What in fact is made available is a range of rigidly pre-established and ordained interpretative solutions, and these never allow the reader to move outside the strict control of the author. Dante sums up the issue in his thirteenth Letter:

We shall consider the following lines in order to make this type of treatment clearer: *In exitu Israel de Egypto, domus Jacob de populo barbaro, facta est judea sanctificatio eius, Israel potestas eius.* [When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion.] Now if we just consider the literal meaning, what is meant here is the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt at the time of Moses. If we consider the allegory, what is meant is our human redemption through Christ. If we consider the moral sense, what is meant is the conversion of the soul from the torment and agony of sin to a state of grace. Finally, if we consider the anagogical sense, what is meant is the release of the spirit from the bondage of this corruption to the freedom of eternal glory.

It is obvious at this point that all available possibilities of interpretation have been exhausted. The reader can concentrate his attention on one sense rather than on another, in the limited space of this four-tiered sentence, but he must always follow rules that entail a rigid univocality. The meaning of allegorical figures and emblems which the medieval reader is likely to encounter is already prescribed by his encyclopaedias, bestiaries and lapidaries. Any symbolism is objectively defined and organized into a system. Underpinning this poetics of

the necessary and the univocal is an ordered cosmos, a hierarchy of essences and laws which poetic discourse can clarify at several levels, but which each individual must understand in the only possible way, the one determined by the creative *logos*. The order of a work of art in this period is a mirror of imperial and theocratic society. The laws governing textual interpretation are the laws of an authoritarian regime which guide the individual in his every action, prescribing the ends for him and offering him the means to attain them.

It is not that the *four* solutions of the allegorical passage are quantitatively more limited than the *many* possible solutions of a contemporary 'open' work. As I shall try to show, it is a different vision of the world which lies under these different aesthetic experiences.

If we limit ourselves to a number of cursory historical glimpses, we can find one striking aspect of 'openness' in the 'open form' of Baroque. Here it is precisely the static and unquestionable definitiveness of the classical Renaissance form which is denied: the canons of space extended round a central axis, closed in by symmetrical lines and shut angles which cajole the eye toward the centre in such a way as to suggest an idea of 'essential' eternity rather than movement. Baroque form is dynamic; it tends to an indeterminacy of effect (in its play of solid and void, light and darkness, with its curvature, its broken surfaces, its widely diversified angles of inclination); it conveys the idea of space being progressively dilated. Its search for kinetic excitement and illusory effect leads to a situation where the plastic mass in the Baroque work of art never allows a privileged, definitive, frontal view; rather, it induces the spectator to shift his position continuously in order to see the work in constantly new aspects, as if it were in a state of perpetual transformation. Now if Baroque spirituality is to be seen as the first clear manifestation of modern culture and sensitivity, it is because here, for the first time, man opts out of the canon of authorized responses and finds that he is faced (both in art and in science) by a world in a fluid state which requires corresponding creativity on his part. The poetic treatises concerning '*maraviglia*', '*wit*', '*agudezas*', and so on really strain to go further than their apparently Byzantine appearance: they seek to establish the new man's inventive role. He is no longer to see the work of art as an object which draws on given links with experience and which demands to be enjoyed; now he sees it as a potential mystery to be solved, a role to fulfil, a stimulus to quicken his imagination. Nonetheless, even these conclusions have been codified by modern criticism and organized into aesthetic canons. In fact, it would be rash to interpret Baroque poetics as a conscious theory of the 'open work'.

Between classicism and the Enlightenment, there developed a further concept which is of interest to us in the present context. The concept of 'pure poetry' gained currency for the very reason that general notions and abstract

canons fell out of fashion, while the tradition of English empiricism increasingly argued in favour of the 'freedom' of the poet and set the stage for the coming theories of creativity. From Burke's declarations about the emotional power of words, it was a short step to Novalis' view of the pure evocative power of poetry as an art of blurred sense and vague outlines. An idea is now held to be all the more original and stimulating in so far as it 'allows for a greater interplay and mutual convergence of concepts, life-views and attitudes. When a work offers a multitude of intentions, a plurality of meaning, and above all a wide variety of different ways of being understood and appreciated, then under these conditions we can only conclude that it is of vital interest and that it is a pure expression of personality.'<sup>3</sup>

To close our consideration of the Romantic period, it will be useful to refer to the first occasion when a conscious poetics of the open work appears. The moment is late-nineteenth-century Symbolism; the text is Verlaine's *Art Poétique*:

*De la musique avant toute chose,  
et pour cela préfère l'impair  
plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air  
sans rien en lui qui pèse et qui pose.*

Music before everything else,  
and, to that end, prefer the uneven  
more vague and more soluble in air  
with nothing in it that is heavy or still.

Mallarmé's programmatic statement is even more explicit and pronounced in this context: '*Nommer un objet c'est supprimer les trois quarts de la jouissance du poème, qui est faite du bonheur de deviner peu à peu: le suggérer ... voila le rêve*' ('To name an object is to suppress three-fourths of the enjoyment of the poem, which is composed of the pleasure of guessing little by little: to suggest ... there is the dream'). The important thing is to prevent a single sense from imposing itself at the very outset of the receptive process. Blank space surrounding a word, typographical adjustments, and spatial composition in the page setting of the poetic text – all contribute to create a halo of indefiniteness and to make the text pregnant with infinite suggestive possibilities.

This search for *suggestiveness* is a deliberate move to 'open' the work to the free response of the addressee. An artistic work that suggests is also one that can be performed with the full emotional and imaginative resources of the interpreter. Whenever we read poetry there is a process by which we try to adapt our personal world to the emotional world proposed by the text. This is all

the more true of poetic works that are deliberately based on suggestiveness, since the text sets out to stimulate the private world of the addressee so that he can draw from inside himself some deeper response that mirrors the subtler resonances underlying the text.

A strong current in contemporary literature follows this use of symbol as a communicative channel for the indefinite, open to constantly shifting responses and interpretative stances. It is easy to think of Kafka's work as 'open': trial, castle, waiting, passing sentence, sickness, metamorphosis and torture – none of these narrative situations is to be understood in the immediate literal sense. But, unlike the constructions of medieval allegory, where the superimposed layers of meaning are rigidly prescribed, in Kafka there is no confirmation in an encyclopaedia, no matching paradigm in the cosmos, to provide a key to the symbolism. The various existentialist, theological, clinical and psychoanalytic interpretations of Kafka's symbols cannot exhaust all the possibilities of his works. The work remains inexhaustible in so far as it is 'open', because in it an ordered world based on universally acknowledged laws is being replaced by a world based on ambiguity, both in the negative sense that directional centres are missing and in a positive sense, because values and dogma are constantly being placed in question.

Even when it is difficult to determine whether a given author had symbolist intentions or was aiming at effects of ambivalence or indeterminacy, there is a school of criticism nowadays which tends to view all modern literature as built upon symbolic patterns. W.Y. Tindall, in his book on the literary symbol, offers an analysis of some of the greatest modern literary works in order to test Valéry's declaration that '*il n'y a pas de vrai sens d'un texte*' ('there is no true meaning of a text'). Tindall eventually concludes that a work of art is a construct which anyone at all, including its author, can put to any use whatsoever, as he chooses. This type of criticism views the literary work as a continuous potentiality of 'openness' – in other words, an indefinite reserve of meanings. This is the scope of the wave of American studies on the structure of metaphor, or of modern work on 'types of ambiguity' offered by poetic discourse.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, the work of James Joyce is a major example of an 'open' mode, since it deliberately seeks to offer an image of the ontological and existential situation of the contemporary world. The 'Wandering Rocks' chapter in *Ulysses* amounts to a tiny universe that can be viewed from different perspectives: the last residue of Aristotelian categories has now disappeared. Joyce is not concerned with a consistent unfolding of time or a plausible spatial continuum in which to stage his characters' movements. Edmund Wilson has observed that, like Proust's or Whitehead's or Einstein's world, 'Joyce's world is always changing as it is perceived by different observers and by them at different times.'<sup>5</sup>

In *Finnegans Wake* we are faced with an even more startling process of 'openness': the book is moulded into a curve that bends back on itself, like the Einsteinian universe. The opening word of the first page is the same as the closing word of the last page of the novel. Thus, the work is *finite* in one sense, but in another sense it is *unlimited*. Each occurrence, each word stands in a series of possible relations with all the others in the text. According to the semantic choice which we make in the case of one unit, so goes the way we interpret all the other units in the text. This does not mean that the book lacks specific sense. If Joyce does introduce some keys into the text, it is precisely because he wants the work to be read in a certain sense. But this particular 'sense' has all the richness of the cosmos itself. Ambitiously, the author intends his book to imply the totality of space and time, of all spaces and all times that are possible. The principal tool for this all-pervading ambiguity is the pun, the *calembour*, by which two, three or even ten different etymological roots are combined in such a way that a single word can set up a knot of different sub-meanings, each of which in turn coincides and interrelates with other local allusions, which are themselves 'open' to new configurations and probabilities of interpretation. The reader of *Finnegans Wake* is in a position similar to that of the person listening to post-dodecaphonic serial composition as he appears in a striking definition by Pousseur: 'Since the phenomena are no longer tied to one another by a term-to-term determination, it is up to the listener to place himself deliberately in the midst of an inexhaustible network of relationships and to choose for himself, so to speak, his own modes of approach, his reference points and his scale, and to endeavour to use as many dimensions as he possibly can at the same time and thus dynamize, multiply and extend to the utmost degree his perceptual faculties.'<sup>6</sup>

Nor should we imagine that the tendency toward openness operates only at the level of indefinite suggestion and stimulation of emotional response. In Brecht's theoretical work on drama, we shall see that dramatic action is conceived as the problematic exposition of specific points of tension. Having presented these tension points (by following the well-known technique of epic recitation, which does not seek to influence the audience, but rather to offer a series of facts to be observed, employing the device of 'defamiliarization'), Brecht's plays do not, in the strict sense, devise solutions at all. It is up to the audience to draw its own conclusions from what it has seen on stage. Brecht's plays also end in a situation of ambiguity (typically, and more than any other, his *Galileo*), although it is no longer the morbid ambiguousness of a half-perceived infinitude or an anguish-laden mystery, but the specific concreteness of an ambiguity in social intercourse, a conflict of unresolved problems taxing the ingenuity of playwright, actors and audience alike. Here the work is 'open' in the

same sense that a debate is 'open'. A solution is seen as desirable and is actually anticipated, but it must come from the collective enterprise of the audience. In this case the 'openness' is converted into an instrument of revolutionary pedagogics.

In all the phenomena we have so far examined, I have employed the category of 'openness' to define widely differing situations, but on the whole the sorts of works taken into consideration are substantially different from the post-Weberian musical composers whom I considered at the opening of this essay. From the Baroque to modern Symbolist poetics, there has been an ever-sharpening awareness of the concept of the work susceptible to many different interpretations. However, the examples considered in the preceding section propose an 'openness' based on the *theoretical, mental* collaboration of the consumer, who must freely interpret an artistic datum, a product which has already been organized in its structural entirety (even if this structure allows for an indefinite plurality of interpretations). On the other hand, a composition like *Scambi*, by Pousseur, represents a fresh advance. Somebody listening to a work by Webern freely reorganizes and enjoys a series of interrelations inside the context of the sound system offered to him in that particular (already fully produced) composition. But in listening to *Scambi* the auditor is required to do some of this organizing and structuring of the musical discourse. He collaborates with the composer in *making* the composition.

None of this argument should be conceived as passing an aesthetic judgment on the relative validity of the various types of works under consideration. However, it is clear that a composition such as *Scambi* poses a completely new problem. It invites us to identify inside the category of 'open' works a further, more restricted classification of works which can be defined as 'works in movement', because they characteristically consist of unplanned or physically incomplete structural units.

In the present cultural context, the phenomenon of the 'work in movement' is certainly not limited to music. There are, for example, artistic products which display an intrinsic mobility, a kaleidoscopic capacity to suggest themselves in constantly renewed aspects to the consumer. A simple example is provided by Calder's mobiles or by mobile compositions by other artists: elementary structures which can move in the air and assume different spatial dispositions. They continuously create their own space and the shapes to fill it.

If we turn to literary production to try to isolate an example of a 'work in movement', we are immediately obliged to take into consideration Mallarmé's *Livre*, a colossal and far-reaching work, the quintessence of the poet's production. He conceived it as the work which would constitute not only the

goal of his activities but also the end goal of the world: '*Le monde existe pour aboutir à un livre.*' ['The world exists to end up in a book.'] Mallarmé never finished the book, although he worked on it at different periods throughout his life. But there are sketches for the ending which have recently been brought to light by the acute philological research of Jacques Schéerer.<sup>7</sup>

The metaphysical premises for Mallarmé's *Livre* are enormous and possibly questionable. I would prefer to leave them aside in order to concentrate on the dynamic structure of this artistic object which deliberately sets out to validate a specific poetic principle: '*Un livre ne commence ni ne finit; tout au plus fait-il semblant.*' ['A book neither begins nor ends; it only pretends to do so.'] The *Livre* was conceived as a mobile apparatus, not just in the mobile and 'open' sense of a composition such as *Un coup de dès ...* [*A Throw of the Dice ...*], where grammar, syntax and typesetting introduced a plurality of elements, polymorphous in their indeterminate relation to each other.

However, Mallarmé's immense enterprise was utopian: it was embroidered with ever more disconcerting aspirations and ingenuities, and it is not surprising that it was never brought to completion. We do not know whether, had the work been completed, the whole project would have had any real value. It might well have turned out to be a dubious mystical and esoteric incarnation of a decadent sensitivity that had reached the extreme point of its creative parabola. I am inclined to this second view, but it is certainly interesting to find at the very threshold of the modern period such a vigorous programme for a *work in movement*, and this is a sign that certain intellectual currents circulate imperceptibly until they are adopted and justified as cultural data which have to be integrated organically into the panorama of a whole period.

In every century, the way that artistic forms are structured reflects the way in which science or contemporary culture views reality. The closed, single conception in a work by a medieval artist reflected the conception of the cosmos as a hierarchy of fixed, pre-ordained orders. The work as a pedagogical vehicle, as a monocentric and necessary apparatus (incorporating a rigid internal pattern of metre and rhymes) simply reflects the syllogistic system, a logic of necessity, a deductive consciousness by means of which reality could be made manifest step by step without unforeseen interruptions, moving forward in a single direction, proceeding from first principles of science which were seen as one and the same with the first principles of reality. The openness and dynamism of the Baroque mark, in fact, the advent of a new scientific awareness: the *tactile* is replaced by the *visual* (meaning that the subjective element comes to prevail) and attention is shifted from the *essence* to the *appearance* of architectural and pictorial products. It reflects the rising interest in a psychology of impression



and sensation – in short, an empiricism which converts the Aristotelian concept of real substance into a series of perceptions by the viewer. On the other hand, by giving up the essential focus of the composition and the prescribed point of view for its viewer, aesthetic innovations were in fact mirroring the Copernican vision of the universe. This definitively eliminated the notion of geocentricity and its allied metaphysical constructs. In the modern scientific universe, as in architecture and in Baroque pictorial production, the various component parts are all endowed with equal value and dignity, and the whole construct expands toward a totality which is close to the infinite. It refuses to be hemmed in by any ideal normative conception of the world. It shares in a general urge toward discovery and constantly renewed contact with reality.

In its own way, the 'openness' that we meet in the decadent strain of Symbolism reflects a cultural striving to unfold new vistas. For example, one of Mallarmé's projects for a multidimensional, deconstructible book envisaged the breaking down of the initial unit into sections which could be reformulated and which could express new perspectives by being deconstructed into correspondingly smaller units which were also mobile and reducible. This project obviously suggests the universe as it is conceived by modern, non-Euclidean geometries.

Hence, it is not overambitious to detect in the poetics of the 'open' work – and even less so in the 'work in movement' – more or less specific overtones of trends in contemporary scientific thought. For example, it is a critical commonplace to refer to the spatio-temporal continuum in order to account for the structure of the universe in Joyce's works. Pousseur has offered a tentative definition of his musical work which involves the term 'field of possibilities'. In fact, this shows that he is prepared to borrow two extremely revealing technical terms from contemporary culture. The notion of 'field' is provided by physics and implies a revised vision of the classic relationship posited between cause and effect as a rigid, one-directional system: now a complex interplay of motive forces is envisaged, a configuration of possible events, a complete dynamism of structure. The notion of 'possibility' is a philosophical canon which reflects a widespread tendency in contemporary science; the discarding of a static, syllogistic view of order, and a corresponding devolution of intellectual authority to personal decision, choice and social context.

If a musical pattern no longer necessarily determines the immediately following one, if there is no tonal basis which allows the listener to infer the next steps in the arrangement of the musical discourse from what has physically preceded them, this is just part of a general breakdown in the concept of causation. The two-value truth logic which follows the classical *aut-aut*, the disjunctive dilemma between *true* and *false*, a fact and its contradictory, is no

longer the only instrument of philosophical experiment. Multi-value logics are now gaining currency, and these are quite capable of incorporating *indeterminacy* as a valid stepping-stone in the cognitive process. In this general intellectual atmosphere, the poetics of the open work is peculiarly relevant: it posits the work of art stripped of necessary and foreseeable conclusions, works in which the performer's freedom functions as part of the *discontinuity* which contemporary physics recognizes, not as an element of disorientation, but as an essential stage in all scientific verification procedures and also as the verifiable pattern of events in the subatomic world.

From Mallarmé's *Livre* to the musical compositions which we have considered, there is a tendency to see every execution of the work of art as divorced from its ultimate definition. Every performance *explains* the composition but does not *exhaust* it. Every performance makes the work an actuality, but is itself only complementary to all possible other performances of the work. In short, we can say that every performance offers us a complete and satisfying version of the work, but at the same time makes it incomplete for us, because it cannot simultaneously give all the other artistic solutions which the work may admit.

Perhaps it is no accident that these poetic systems emerge at the same period as the physicists' principle of *complementarity*, which rules that it is not possible to indicate the different behaviour patterns of an elementary particle simultaneously. To describe these different behaviour patterns, different *models*, which Heisenberg has defined as adequate when properly utilized, are put to use, but, since they contradict one another, they are therefore also complementary.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps we are in a position to state that for these works of art an incomplete knowledge of the system is in fact an essential feature in its formulation. Hence one could argue, with Bohr, that the data collected in the course of experimental situations cannot be gathered in one image but should be considered as complementary, since only the sum of all the phenomena could exhaust the possibilities of information.<sup>9</sup>

Above I discussed the principle of ambiguity as moral disposition and problematic construct. Again, modern psychology and phenomenology use the term 'perceptive ambiguities', which indicates the availability of new cognitive positions that fall short of conventional epistemological stances and that allow the observer to conceive the world in a fresh dynamics of potentiality before the fixative process of habit and familiarity comes into play. Husserl observed that

each state of consciousness implies the existence of a horizon which varies with the modification of its connections together with other states, and also with its own phases of duration... In each external perception, for instance, the sides of

the objects which are actually *perceived* suggest to the viewer's attention the unperceived sides which, at the present, are viewed only in a non-intuitive manner and are expected to become elements of the succeeding perception. This process is similar to a continuous projection which takes on a new meaning with each phase of the perceptive process. Moreover, perception itself includes horizons which encompass other perceptive possibilities, such as a person might experience by changing deliberately the direction of his perception, by turning his eyes one way instead of another, or by taking a step forward or sideways, and so forth.<sup>10</sup>

Sartre notes that the existent object can never be reduced to a given series of manifestations, because each of these is bound to stand in relationship with a continuously altering subject. Not only does an object present different *Abschattungen* (or profiles), but also different points of view are available by way of the same *Abschattung*. In order to be defined, the object must be related back to the total series of which, by virtue of being one possible apparition, it is a member. In this way the traditional dualism between being and appearance is replaced by a straight polarity of finite and infinite, which locates the infinite at the very core of the finite. This sort of 'openness' is at the heart of every act of perception. It characterizes every moment of our cognitive experience. It means that each phenomenon seems to be 'inhabited' by a certain *power* – in other words, 'the ability to manifest itself by a series of real or likely manifestations.' The problem of the relationship of a phenomenon to its ontological basis is altered by the perspective of perceptive 'openness' to the problem of its relationship to the multiplicity of different-order perceptions which we can derive from it.<sup>11</sup>

This intellectual position is further accentuated in Merleau-Ponty:

How can anything ever present itself truly to us since its synthesis is never completed? How could I gain the experience of the world, as I would of an individual actuating his own existence, since none of the views or perceptions I have of it can exhaust it and the horizons remain forever open? ... The belief in things and in the world can only express the assumption of a complete synthesis. Its completion, however, is made impossible by the very nature of the perspectives to be connected, since each of them sends back to other perspectives through its own horizons ... The contradiction which we feel exists between the world's reality and its incompleteness is identical to the one that exists between the ubiquity of consciousness and its commitment to a field of presence. This ambiguousness does not represent an imperfection in the nature of existence or

in that of consciousness; it is its very definition ... Consciousness, which is commonly taken as an extremely enlightened region, is, on the contrary, the very region of indeterminacy.<sup>12</sup>

These are the sorts of problems which phenomenology picks out at the very heart of our existential situation. It proposes to the artist, as well as to the philosopher and the psychologist, a series of declarations which are bound to act as a stimulus to his creative activity in the world of forms: 'It is therefore essential for an object and also for the world to present themselves to us as "open" ... and as always promising future perceptions.'<sup>13</sup>

It would be quite natural for us to think that this flight away from the old, solid concept of necessity and the tendency toward the ambiguous and the indeterminate reflect a crisis of contemporary civilization. On the other hand, we might see these poetical systems, in harmony with modern science, as expressing the positive possibility of thought and action made available to an individual who is open to the continuous renewal of his life patterns and cognitive processes. Such an individual is productively committed to the development of his own mental faculties and experiential horizons. This contrast is too facile and Manichaeic. Our main intent has been to pick out a number of analogies which reveal a reciprocal play of problems in the most disparate areas of contemporary culture and which point to the common elements in a new way of looking at the world.

What is at stake is a convergence of new canons and requirements which the forms of art reflect by way of what we could term *structural homologies*. This need not commit us to assembling a rigorous parallelism – it is simply a case of phenomena like the 'work in movement' simultaneously reflecting mutually contrasted epistemological situations, as yet contradictory and not satisfactorily reconciled. Thus, the concepts of 'openness' and dynamism may recall the terminology of quantum physics: indeterminacy and discontinuity. But at the same time they also exemplify a number of situations in Einsteinian physics.

The multiple polarity of a serial composition in music, where the listener is not faced by an absolute conditioning centre of reference, requires him to constitute his own system of auditory relationships.<sup>14</sup> He must allow such a centre to emerge from the sound continuum. Here are no privileged points of view, and all available perspectives are equally valid and rich in potential. Now, this multiple polarity is extremely close to the spatio-temporal conception of the universe which we owe to Einstein. The thing which distinguishes the Einsteinian concept of the universe from quantum epistemology is precisely this faith in the totality of the universe, a universe in which discontinuity and indeterminacy can admittedly upset us with their surprise apparitions, but in

fact, to use Einstein's words, presuppose not a God playing random games with dice but the Divinity of Spinoza, who rules the world according to perfectly regulated laws. In this kind of universe, relativity means the infinite variability of experience as well as the infinite multiplication of possible ways of measuring things and viewing their position. But the objective side of the whole system can be found in the invariance of the simple formal descriptions (of the differential equations) which establish once and for all the relativity of empirical measurement.

This is not the place to pass judgment on the scientific validity of the metaphysical construct implied by Einstein's system. But there is a striking analogy between his universe and the universe of the work in movement. The God in Spinoza, who is made into an untestable hypothesis by Einsteinian metaphysics, becomes a cogent reality for the work of art and matches the organizing impulse of its creator.

The *possibilities* which the work's openness makes available always work within a given *field of relations*. As in the Einsteinian universe, in the 'work in movement' we may well deny that there is a single prescribed point of view. But this does not mean complete chaos in its internal relations. What it does imply is an organizing rule which governs these relations. Therefore, to sum up, we can say that the 'work in movement' is the possibility of numerous different personal interventions, but it is not an amorphous invitation to indiscriminate participation. The invitation offers the performer the opportunity for an oriented insertion into something which always remains the world intended by the author.

In other words, the author offers the interpreter, the performer, the addressee, a work *to be completed*. He does not know the exact fashion in which his work will be concluded, but he is aware that once completed the work in question will still be his own. It will not be a different work, and, at the end of the interpretative dialogue, a form which is *his* form will have been organized, even though it may have been assembled by an outside party in a particular way that he could not have foreseen. The author is the one who proposed a number of possibilities which had already been rationally organized, oriented and endowed with specifications for proper development.

Berio's *Sequence*, which is played by different flutists, Stockhausen's *Klavierstück XI*, or Pousseur's *Mobiles*, which are played by different pianists (or performed twice over by the same pianists), will never be quite the same on different occasions. Yet they will never be gratuitously different. They are to be seen as the actualization of a series of consequences whose premises are firmly rooted in the original data provided by the author.

This happens in the musical works which we have already examined, and it happens also in the plastic artefacts we considered. The common factor is a mutability which is always deployed within the specific limits of a given taste, or of predetermined formal tendencies, and is authorized by the concrete pliability of the material offered for the performer's manipulation. Brecht's plays appear to elicit free and arbitrary response on the part of the audience. Yet they are also rhetorically constructed in such a way as to elicit a reaction oriented toward, and ultimately anticipating, a Marxist dialectic logic as the basis for the whole field of possible responses.

All these examples of 'open' works and 'works in movement' have this latent characteristic, which guarantees that they will always be seen as 'works' and not just as a conglomeration of random components, ready to emerge from the chaos in which they previously stood and permitted to assume any form whatsoever.

Now, a dictionary clearly presents us with thousands upon thousands of words which we could freely use to compose poetry, essays on physics, anonymous letters or grocery lists. In this sense the dictionary is clearly open to the reconstitution of its raw material in any way that the manipulator wishes. But this does not make it a 'work'. The 'openness' and dynamism of an artistic work consist in factors which make it susceptible to a whole range of integrations. They provide it with organic complements which they graft into the structural vitality which the work already possesses, even if it is incomplete. This structural vitality is still seen as a positive property of the work, even though it admits of all kinds of different conclusions and solutions for it.

The preceding observations are necessary because, when we speak of a work of art, our Western aesthetic tradition forces us to take 'work' in the sense of a personal production which may well vary in the ways it can be received but which always maintains a coherent identity of its own and which displays the personal imprint that makes it a specific, vital and significant act of communication. Aesthetic theory is quite content to conceive of a variety of different poetics, but ultimately it aspires to general definitions, not necessarily dogmatic or *sub specie aeternitatis*, which are capable of applying the category of the 'work of art' broadly speaking to a whole variety of experiences, which can range from the *Divine Comedy* to, say, electronic composition based on the different permutations of sonic components.

We have, therefore, seen that (i) 'open' works, in so far as they are *in movement*, are characterized by the invitation to *make the work* together with the author and that (ii) on a wider level (as a *subgenus* in the *species* 'work in movement') there exist works which, though organically completed, are 'open'

to a continuous generation of internal relations which the addressee must uncover and select in his act of perceiving the totality of incoming stimuli. (iii) *Every work of art, even though it is produced by following an explicit or implicit poetics of necessity, is effectively open to a virtually unlimited range of possible readings, each of which causes the work to acquire new vitality in terms of one particular taste, or perspective, or personal performance.*

Contemporary aesthetics has frequently pointed out this last characteristic of every work of art. According to Luigi Pareyson:

The work of art ... is a form, namely of movement, that has been concluded; or we can see it as an infinite contained within finiteness ... The work therefore has infinite aspects, which are not just 'parts' or fragments of it, because each of them contains the totality of the work, and reveals it according to a given perspective. So the variety of performances is founded both in the complex factor of the performer's individuality and in that of the work to be performed ... The infinite points of view of the performers and the infinite aspects of the work interact with each other, come into juxtaposition and clarify each other by a reciprocal process, in such a way that a given point of view is capable of revealing the whole work only if it grasps it in the relevant, highly personalized aspect. Analogously, a single aspect of the work can only reveal the totality of the work in a new light if it is prepared to wait for the right point of view, capable of grasping and proposing the work in all its vitality.

The foregoing allows Pareyson to move on to the assertion that

all performances are definitive in the sense that each one is for the performer, tantamount to the work itself; equally, all performances are bound to be provisional in the sense that each performer knows that he must always try to deepen his own interpretation of the work. In so far as they are definitive, these interpretations are parallel, and each of them is such as to exclude the others without in any way negating them.<sup>15</sup>

This doctrine can be applied to all artistic phenomena and to artworks throughout the ages. But it is useful to have underlined that now is the period when aesthetics has paid especial attention to the whole notion of 'openness' and sought to expand it. In a sense these requirements, which aesthetics has referred widely to every type of artistic production, are the same as those posed by the poetics of the 'open work' in a more decisive and explicit fashion. Yet this does not mean that the existence of 'open' works and of 'works in movement' adds absolutely nothing to our experience, because everything in the world is

already implied and subsumed by everything else, from the beginning of time, in the same way that it now appears that every discovery has already been made by the Chinese. Here we have to distinguish between the theoretical level of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline which attempts to formulate definitions and the practical level of poetics as programmatic projects for creation. While aesthetics brings to light one of the fundamental demands of contemporary culture, it also reveals the latent possibilities of a certain type of experience in every artistic product, independently of the operative criteria which presided over its moment of inception.

The poetic theory or practice of the 'work in movement' senses this possibility as a specific vocation. It allies itself openly and selfconsciously to current trends in scientific method and puts into action and tangible form the very trend which aesthetics has already acknowledged as the general background to performance. These poetic systems recognize 'openness' as *the* fundamental possibility of the contemporary artist or consumer. The aesthetic theoretician, in his turn, will see a confirmation of his own intuitions in these practical manifestations; they constitute the ultimate realization of a receptive mode which can function at many different levels of intensity.

Certainly this new receptive mode vis-a-vis the work of art opens up a much vaster phase in culture and in this sense is not intellectually confined to the problems of aesthetics. The poetics of the 'work in movement' (and partly that of the 'open' work) sets in motion a new cycle of relations between the artist and his audience, a new mechanics of aesthetic perception, a different status for the artistic product in contemporary society. It opens a new page in sociology and in pedagogy, as well as a new chapter in the history of art. It poses new practical problems by organizing new communicative situations. In short, it installs a new relationship between the *contemplation* and the *utilization* of a work of art.

Seen in these terms and against the background of historical influences and cultural interplay which links art by analogy to widely diversified aspects of the contemporary world view, the situation of art has now become a situation in the process of development. Far from being fully accounted for and catalogued, it deploys and poses problems in several dimensions. In short, it is an 'open' situation, *in movement*. A work in progress.

1 Here we must eliminate a possible misunderstanding straight away: the practical intervention of a 'performer' (the instrumentalist who plays a piece of music or the actor who recites a passage) is different from that of an interpreter in the sense of consumer (somebody who looks at a picture, silently reads a poem, or listens to a musical composition performed by somebody else). For the purposes of aesthetic analysis, however, both cases can be seen as different manifestations of the same interpretative attitude. Every 'reading', 'contemplation' or

'enjoyment' of a work of art represents a tacit or private form of 'performance'.

- 2 Henri Pousseur, 'La nuova sensibilita musicale', *Incontri musicali*, 2 (May 1958) 25.
  - 3 For the evolution of pre-Romantic and Romantic poets in this sense, see L. Anceschi, *Autonomia ed eteronomia dell'arte*, 2nd ed. (Florence: Vallecchi, 1959).
  - 4 See W.Y. Tindall, *The Literary Symbol* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955). For an analysis of the aesthetic importance of the notion of ambiguity, see the useful observations and bibliographical references in Gillo Dorfles, *Il divenire delle arti* (Turin: Einaudi, 1959) 51 ff.
  - 5 Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle* (London: Collins, Fontana Library, 1961) 178.
  - 6 Pousseur, 'La nuova sensibilita musicale', 25.
  - 7 J. Schérer, *Le 'Livre' de Mallarmé Premières recherches sur des documents inédits* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957). See in particular the third chapter, 'Physique du livre'.
  - 8 Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1959) ch. 3.
  - 9 Niels Bohr, in his epistemological debate with Einstein; see P.A. Schlipp, ed., *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist* (Evanston, 111: Library of Living Philosophers, 1949). Epistemological thinkers connected with quantum methodology have rightly warned against an ingenuous transposition of physical categories into the fields of ethics and psychology (for example, the identification of indeterminacy with moral freedom; see P. Frank, *Present Role of Science*, Opening Address to the Seventh International Congress of Philosophy, Venice, September 1958). Hence, it would not be justified to understand my formulation as making an analogy between the structures of the work of art and the supposed structures of the world. Indeterminacy, complementarity, noncausality are not *modes of being* in the physical world, but *systems for describing* it in a convenient way. The relationship which concerns my exposition is not the supposed nexus between an 'ontological' situation and a morphological feature in the work of art, but the relation between an operative procedure for explaining physical processes and an operative procedure for explaining the processes of artistic production and reception. In other words, the relationship between a *scientific methodology* and a *poetics*.
  - 10 Edmund Husserl, *Méditations cartésiennes*, Med. 2, par. 19 (Paris: Vrin, 1953) 39. The translation of this passage is by Anne Fabre-Luce.
  - 11 Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943) ch. i.
  - 12 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945) 381–3.
  - 13 *Ibid.*, 384.
  - 14 On this 'éclatement multidirectionnel des structures', see A. Boucourechliev, 'Problèmes de la musique moderne', *Nouvelle revue française* (December–January 1960–61).
  - 15 Luigi Pareyson, *Estetica: teoria della formatività*, 2nd ed. (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1960) 194 ff., and in general the whole of chapter 8, 'Lettura, interpretazione e critica'.
- Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta* (Milan: Bompiano, 1962); trans. Anna Cancogni, *The Open Work* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989) 1–23.

## Roland Barthes

### The Death of the Author//1968

*Roland Barthes' short essay 'The Death of the Author' (1968) should ideally be read alongside 'From Work to Text' (1971) as his key statement on the idea that a work's meaning is not dependent on authorial intention but on the individual point of active reception. Barthes was concerned primarily with literature but his insights are analogous to much contemporary art of this period, particularly works that emphasize the viewer's role in their completion.*

In his story *Sarrasine* Balzac, describing a castrato disguised as a woman, writes the following sentence: 'This was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive worries, her impetuous boldness, her fussings, and her delicious sensibility.' Who is speaking thus? Is it the hero of the story bent on remaining ignorant of the castrato hidden beneath the woman? Is it Balzac the individual, furnished by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it Balzac the author professing 'literary' ideas on femininity? Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology? We shall never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away; the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.

No doubt it has always been that way. As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins. The sense of this phenomenon, however, has varied; in ethnographic societies the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman or relator whose 'performance' – the mastery of the narrative code – may possibly be admired but never his 'genius'. The author is a modern figure, a product of our society in so far as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the 'human person'. It is thus logical that in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author. The *author* still reigns, in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines, as in the very consciousness of men of letters anxious to unite their person and their work through diaries and memoirs. The image of literature to

be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh's his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice. The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* 'confiding' in us.

Though the sway of the Author remains powerful (the new criticism has often done no more than consolidate it), it goes without saying that certain writers have long since attempted to loosen it. In France, Mallarmé was doubtless the first to see and to foresee in its full extent the necessity to substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner. For him, for us too, it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality (not at all to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realist novelist), to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'. Mallarmé's entire poetics consists in suppressing the author in the interests of writing (which is, as will be seen, to restore the place of the reader). Valéry, encumbered by a psychology of the Ego, considerably diluted Mallarmé's theory but, his taste for classicism leading him to turn to the lessons of rhetoric, he never stopped calling into question and deriding the Author; he stressed the linguistic and, as it were, 'hazardous' nature of his activity, and throughout his prose works he militated in favour of the essentially verbal condition of literature, in the face of which all recourse to the writer's interiority seemed to him pure superstition. Proust himself, despite the apparently psychological character of what are called his *analyses*, was visibly concerned with the task of inexorably blurring, by an extreme subtilization, the relation between the writer and his characters; by making of the narrator not he who has seen and felt nor even he who is writing, but he who *is going to write* (the young man in the novel – but, in fact, how old is he and who is he? – wants to write but cannot; the novel ends when writing at last becomes possible), Proust gave modern writing its epic. By a radical reversal, instead of putting his life into his novel, as is so often maintained, he made of his very life a work for which his own book was the model; so that it is clear to us that Charlus does not imitate Montesquieu but that Montesquieu – in his anecdotal, historical reality – is no more than a secondary fragment, derived from Charlus. Lastly, to go no further than this prehistory of modernity, Surrealism, though unable to accord language a supreme place (language being system and the aim of the movement being, romantically, a direct subversion of codes – itself moreover illusory: a code cannot be destroyed, only 'played off'), contributed to the desacrilization of the image of the Author by ceaselessly recommending the abrupt

disappointment of expectations of meaning (the famous surrealist 'jolt'), by entrusting the hand with the task of writing as quickly as possible what the head itself is unaware of (automatic writing), by accepting the principle and the experience of several people writing together. Leaving aside literature itself (such distinctions really becoming invalid), linguistics has recently provided the destruction of the Author with a valuable analytical tool by showing that the whole of the enunciation is an empty process, functioning perfectly without there being any need for it to be filled with the person of the interlocutors. Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance saying *I*: language knows a 'subject', not a 'person', and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together', suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it.

The removal of the Author (one could talk here with Brecht of a veritable 'distancing', the Author diminishing like a figurine at the far end of the literary stage) is not merely an historical fact or an act of writing; it utterly transforms the modern text (or – which is the same thing – the text is henceforth made and read in such a way that at all its levels the author is absent). The temporality is different. The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after*. The Author is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child. In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*. The fact is (or, it follows) that *writing* can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction' (as the Classics would say); rather, it designates exactly what linguists, referring to Oxford philosophy, call a performative, a rare verbal form (exclusively given in the first person and in the present tense) in which the enunciation has no other content (contains no other proposition) than the act by which it is uttered – something like the *I declare* of kings or the *I sing* of very ancient poets. Having buried the Author, the modern scriptor can thus no longer believe, as according to the pathetic view of his predecessors, that this hand is too slow for his thought or passion and that consequently, making a law of necessity, he must emphasize this delay and indefinitely 'polish' his form. For him, on the contrary, the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin – or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins.

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological'

meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. Similar to Bouvard and Pécuchet, those eternal copyists, at once sublime and comic and whose profound ridiculousness indicates precisely the truth, of writing, the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. Did he wish to *express himself*, he ought at least to know that the inner 'thing' he thinks to 'translate' is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely; something experienced in exemplary fashion by the young Thomas de Quincey, he who was so good at Greek that in order to translate absolutely modern ideas and images into that dead language, he had, so Baudelaire tells us (in *Paradis Artificiels*), 'created for himself an unfailing dictionary, vastly more extensive and complex than those resulting from the ordinary patience of purely literary themes'. Succeeding the Author, the scriptor no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense dictionary from which he draws a writing that can know no halt: life never does more than imitate the book, and the book itself is only a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, infinitely deferred.

Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is 'explained' – victory to the critic. Hence there is no surprise in the fact that, historically, the reign of the Author has also been that of the Critic, nor again in the fact that criticism (be it new) is today undermined along with the Author. In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*; the structure can be followed, 'run' (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say *writing*), by refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law.

Let us come back to the Balzac sentence. No one, no 'person', says it: its source, its voice, is not the true place of the writing, which is reading. Another –

very precise – example will help to make this clear: recent research (J.-P. Vernant)<sup>1</sup> has demonstrated the constitutively ambiguous nature of Greek tragedy, its texts being woven from words with double meanings that each character understands unilaterally (this perpetual misunderstanding is exactly the 'tragic'); there is, however, someone who understands each word in its duplicity and who, in addition, hears the very deafness of the characters speaking in front of him – this someone being precisely the reader (or here the listener). Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted. Which is why it is derisory to condemn the new writing in the name of a humanism hypocritically turned champion of the reader's rights. Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is the only person in literature. We are now beginning to let ourselves be fooled no longer by the arrogant antiphrastical recriminations of good society in favour of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers or destroys; we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.

1 See Jean-Pierre Vernant, with Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne* (Paris 1972), especially pages 19–40; 99–131. [Translator]

Roland Barthes, 'La mort de l'auteur', *Mantéia*, V (Paris, 1968); trans. 'The Death of the Author', in Roland Barthes, *Image – Music – Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill & Wang/London: Fontana, 1977) 142–8.

## Peter Bürger The Negation of the Autonomy of Art by the Avant-garde//2002

*Informed by the Frankfurt School of critical theory, Peter Bürger's Theory of the Avant-garde (1974) decries a bourgeois model of art that is produced and consumed by individuals. His influential reading of the historic avant-garde (Dada, Constructivism and Surrealism) as an attempt to fuse art with social praxis, together with the chart reproduced below, provide a poignant contextualization for contemporary collaborative art.*

In scholarly discussion up to now, the category 'autonomy' has suffered from the imprecision of the various subcategories thought of as constituting a unity in the concept of the autonomous work of art. Since the development of the individual subcategories is not synchronous, it may happen that sometimes courtly art seems already autonomous, while at other times only bourgeois art appears to have that characteristic. To make clear that the contradictions between the various interpretations result from the nature of the case, we will sketch a historical typology that is deliberately reduced to three elements (purpose or function, production, reception), because the point here is to have the nonsynchronism in the development of individual categories emerge with clarity.

A. Sacral Art (example: the art of the High Middle Ages) serves as cult object. It is wholly integrated into the social institution 'religion'. It is produced collectively, as a craft. The mode of reception also is institutionalized as collective.<sup>1</sup>

B. Courtly Art (example: the art at the court of Louis XIV) also has a precisely defined function. It is representational and serves the glory of the prince and the self-portrayal of courtly society. Courtly art is part of the life praxis of courtly society, just as sacral art is part of the life praxis of the faithful. Yet the detachment from the sacral tie is a first step in the emancipation of art. ('Emancipation' is being used here as a descriptive term, as referring to the process by which art constitutes itself as a distinct social subsystem.) The difference from sacral art becomes particularly apparent in the realm of production: the artist produces as an individual and develops a consciousness of the uniqueness of his activity. Reception, on the other hand, remains collective. But the content of the collective performance is no longer sacral, it is sociability.

C. Only to the extent that the bourgeoisie adopts concepts of value held by the aristocracy does bourgeois art have a representational function. When it is genuinely bourgeois, this art is the objectification of the self-understanding of

the bourgeois class. Production and reception of the self-understanding as articulated in art are no longer tied to the praxis of life. Habermas calls this the satisfaction of residual needs, that is, of needs that have become submerged in the life praxis of bourgeois society. Not only production but reception also are now individual acts. The solitary absorption in the work is the adequate mode of appropriation of creations removed from the life praxis of the bourgeois, even though they still claim to interpret that praxis. In Aestheticism, finally, where bourgeois art reaches the stage of self-reflection, this claim is no longer made. Apartness from the praxis of life, which had always been the condition that characterized the way art functioned in bourgeois society, now becomes its content. The typology we have sketched here can be represented in the accompanying tabulation (the vertical lines in boldface [substituted by boldface text below] refer to a decisive change in the development, the broken ones [substituted by italicized text] to a less decisive one).

	Sacral Art	Courtly Art	Bourgeois Art
Purpose or function	cult object	<i>representational object</i>	<b>portrayal of bourgeois self-understanding</b>
Production	collective craft	<b>individual</b>	<i>individual</i>
Reception	collective (sacral)	<i>collective (sociable)</i>	<b>individual</b>

The tabulation allows one to notice that the development of the categories was not synchronous. Production by the individual that characterizes art in bourgeois society has its origins as far back as courtly patronage. But courtly art still remains integral to the praxis of life, although as compared with the cult function, the representational function constitutes a step toward a mitigation of claims that art play a direct social role. The reception of courtly art also remains collective, although the content of the collective performance has changed. As regards reception, it is only with bourgeois art that a decisive change sets in: its reception is one by isolated individuals. The novel is that literary genre in which the new mode of reception finds the form appropriate to it.<sup>2</sup> The advent of bourgeois art is also the decisive turning point as regards use or function. Although in different ways, both sacral and courtly art are integral to the life praxis of the recipient. As cult and representational objects, works of art are put to a specific use. This requirement no longer applies to the same extent to bourgeois art. In bourgeois art, the portrayal of bourgeois self-understanding occurs in a sphere that lies outside the praxis of life. The citizen who, in everyday life, has been reduced to a partial function (means-ends activity) can be discovered in art as 'human being'. Here, one can unfold the abundance of one's



talents, though with the proviso that this sphere remain strictly separate from the praxis of life. Seen in this fashion, the separation of art from the praxis of life becomes the decisive characteristic of the autonomy of bourgeois art (a fact that the tabulation does not bring out adequately). To avoid misunderstandings, it must be emphasized once again that autonomy in this sense defines the status of art in bourgeois society but that no assertions concerning the contents of works are involved. Although art as an institution may be considered fully formed towards the end of the eighteenth century, the development of the contents of works is subject to a historical dynamics, whose terminal point is reached in Aestheticism, where art becomes the content of art.

The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men. When the avant-gardistes demand that art become practical once again, they do not mean that the contents of works of art should be socially significant. The demand is not raised at the level of the contents of individual works. Rather, it directs itself to the way art functions in society, a process that does as much to determine the effect that works have as does the particular content.

The avant-gardistes view its dissociation from the praxis of life as the dominant characteristic of art in bourgeois society. One of the reasons this dissociation was possible is that Aestheticism had made the element that defines art as an institution the essential content of works. Institution and work contents had to coincide to make it logically possible for the avant-garde to call art into question. The avant-gardistes proposed the sublation of art – sublation in the Hegelian sense of the term: art was not to be simply destroyed, but transferred to the praxis of life where it would be preserved, albeit in a changed form. The avant-gardistes thus adopted an essential element of Aestheticism. Aestheticism had made the distance from the praxis of life the content of works. The praxis of life to which Aestheticism refers and which it negates is the means-ends rationality of the bourgeois everyday. Now, it is not the aim of the avant-gardistes to integrate art into *this* praxis. On the contrary, they assent to the aestheticians' rejection of the world and its means-ends rationality. What distinguishes them from the latter is the attempt to organize a new life praxis from a basis in art. In this respect also, Aestheticism turns out to have been the necessary precondition of the avant-gardiste intent. Only an art the contents of whose individual works is wholly distinct from the (bad) praxis of the existing society can be the centre that can be the starting point for the organization of a new life praxis.

With the help of Herbert Marcuse's theoretical formulation concerning the twofold character of art in bourgeois society, the avant-gardiste intent can be

understood with particular clarity. All those needs that cannot be satisfied in everyday life, because the principle of competition pervades all spheres, can find a home in art, because art is removed from the praxis of life. Values such as humanity, joy, truth, solidarity are extruded from life, as it were, and preserved in art. In bourgeois society, art has a contradictory role: it projects the image of a better order and to that extent protests against the bad order that prevails. But by realizing the image of a better order in fiction, which is semblance (*Schein*) only, it relieves the existing society of the pressure of those forces that make for change. They are assigned to confinement in an ideal sphere. Where art accomplishes this, it is 'affirmative' in Marcuse's sense of the term. If the twofold character of art in bourgeois society consists in the fact that the distance from the social production and reproduction process contains an element of freedom and an element of the noncommittal and an absence of any consequences, it can be seen that the avant-gardistes' attempt to reintegrate art into the life process is itself a profoundly contradictory endeavour. For the (relative) freedom of art vis-a-vis the praxis of life is at the same time the condition that must be fulfilled if there is to be a critical cognition of reality. An art no longer distinct from the praxis of life but wholly absorbed in it will lose the capacity to criticize it, along with its distance. During the time of the historical avant-garde movements, the attempt to do away with the distance between art and life still had all the pathos of historical progressiveness on its side. But in the meantime, the culture industry has brought about the false elimination of the distance between art and life, and this also allows one to recognize the contradictoriness of the avant-gardiste undertaking.<sup>3</sup>

In what follows, we will outline how the intent to eliminate art as an institution found expression in the three areas that we used above to characterize autonomous art: purpose or function, production, reception. Instead of speaking of the avant-gardiste work, we will speak of avant-gardiste manifestation. A dadaist manifestation does not have work character but is nonetheless an authentic manifestation of the artistic avant-garde. This is not to imply that the avant-gardistes produced no works whatever and replaced them by ephemeral events. We will see that whereas they did not destroy it, the avant-gardistes profoundly modified the category of the work of art.

Of the three areas, the *intended purpose or function* of the avant-gardiste manifestation is most difficult to define. In the aestheticist work of art, the disjointure of the work and the praxis of life characteristic of the status of art in bourgeois society has become the work's essential content. It is only as a consequence of this fact that the work of art becomes its own end in the full meaning of the term. In Aestheticism, the social functionlessness of art becomes manifest. The avant-gardiste artists counter such functionlessness not by an art

that would have consequences within the existing society, but rather by the principle of the sublation of art in the praxis of life. But such a conception makes it impossible to define the intended purpose of art. For an art that has been reintegrated into the praxis of life, not even the absence of a social purpose can be indicated, as was still possible in Aestheticism. When art and the praxis of life are one, when the praxis is aesthetic and art is practical, art's purpose can no longer be discovered, because the existence of two distinct spheres (art and the praxis of life) that is constitutive of the concept of purpose or intended use has come to an end.

We have seen that the *production* of the autonomous work of art is the act of an individual. The artist produces as individual, individuality not being understood as the expression of something but as radically different. The concept of genius testifies to this. The quasi-technical consciousness of the makeability of works of art that Aestheticism attains seems only to contradict this. Valéry, for example, demystifies artistic genius by reducing it to psychological motivations on the one hand, and the availability to it of artistic means on the other. While pseudo-romantic doctrines of inspiration thus come to be seen as the self-deception of producers, the view of art for which the individual is the creative subject is let stand. Indeed, Valéry's theorem concerning the force of pride (*orgueil*) that sets off and propels the creative process renews once again the notion of the individual character of artistic production central to art in bourgeois society.<sup>4</sup> In its most extreme manifestations, the avant-garde's reply to this is not the collective as the subject of production but the radical negation of the category of individual creation. When Duchamp signs mass-produced objects (a urinal, a bottle drier) and sends them to art exhibits, he negates the category of individual production. The signature, whose very purpose it is to mark what is individual in the work, that it owes its existence to this particular artist, is inscribed on an arbitrarily chosen mass product, because all claims to individual creativity are to be mocked. Duchamp's provocation not only unmasks the art market where the signature means more than the quality of the work; it radically questions the very principle of art in bourgeois society according to which the individual is considered the creator of the work of art. Duchamp's Readymades are not works of art but manifestations. Not from the form-content totality of the individual object Duchamp signs can one infer the meaning, but only from the contrast between mass-produced object on the one hand, and signature and art exhibit on the other. It is obvious that this kind of provocation cannot be repeated indefinitely. The provocation depends on what it turns against: here, it is the idea that the individual is the subject of artistic creation. Once the signed bottle drier has been accepted as an object that deserves a place in a museum, the

provocation no longer provokes; it turns into its opposite. If an artist today signs a stove pipe and exhibits it, that artist certainly does not denounce the art market but adapts to it. Such adaptation does not eradicate the idea of individual creativity, it affirms it, and the reason is the failure of the avant-gardiste intent to sublimate art. Since now the protest of the historical avant-garde against art as institution is accepted as *art*, the gesture of protest of the neo-avant-garde becomes inauthentic. Having been shown to be irredeemable, the claim to be protest can no longer be maintained. This fact accounts for the arts-and-crafts impression that works of the avant-garde not infrequently convey.<sup>5</sup>

The avant-garde not only negates the category of individual production but also that of individual *reception*. The reactions of the public during a dada manifestation where it has been mobilized by provocation, and which can range from shouting to fisticuffs, are certainly collective in nature. True, these remain reactions, responses to a preceding provocation. Producer and recipient remain clearly distinct, however active the public may become. Given the avant-gardiste intention to do away with art as a sphere that is separate from the praxis of life, it is logical to eliminate the antithesis between producer and recipient. It is no accident that both Tzara's instructions for the making of a Dadaist poem and Breton's for the writing of automatic texts have the character of recipes.<sup>6</sup> This represents not only a polemical attack on the individual creativity of the artist; the recipe is to be taken quite literally as suggesting a possible activity on the part of the recipient. The automatic texts also should be read as guides to individual production. But such production is not to be understood as artistic production, but as part of a liberating life praxis. This is what is meant by Breton's demand that poetry be practiced (*pratiquer la poésie*). Beyond the coincidence of producer and recipient that this demand implies, there is the fact that these concepts lose their meaning: producers and recipients no longer exist. All that remains is the individual who uses poetry as an instrument for living one's life as best one can. There is also a danger here to which Surrealism at least partly succumbed, and that is solipsism, the retreat to the problems of the isolated subject. Breton himself saw this danger and envisaged different ways of dealing with it. One of them was the glorification of the spontaneity of the erotic relationship. Perhaps the strict group discipline was also an attempt to exorcise the danger of solipsism that surrealism harbours.<sup>7</sup>

In summary, we note that the historical avant-garde movements negate those determinations that are essential in autonomous art: the disjunction of art and the praxis of life, individual production, and individual reception as distinct from the former. The avant-garde intends the abolition of autonomous art, by which it means that art is to be integrated into the praxis of life. This has not occurred, and presumably cannot occur, in bourgeois society unless it be as a

false sublation of autonomous art.<sup>8</sup> Pulp fiction and commodity aesthetics prove that such a false sublation exists. A literature whose primary aim it is to impose a particular kind of consumer behaviour on the reader is in fact practical, though not in the sense the avant-gardistes intended. Here, literature ceases to be an instrument of emancipation and becomes one of subjection.<sup>9</sup> Similar comments could be made about commodity aesthetics that treat form as mere enticement, designed to prompt purchasers to buy what they do not need. Here also, art becomes practical but it is an art that enthralls.<sup>10</sup> This brief allusion will show that the theory of the avant-garde can also serve to make us understand popular literature and commodity aesthetics as forms of a false sublation of art as institution. In late capitalist society, intentions of the historical avant-garde are being realized but the result has been a disvalue. Given the experience of the false sublation of autonomy, one will need to ask whether a sublation of the autonomy status can be desirable at all, whether the distance between art and the praxis of life is not requisite for that free space within which alternatives to what exists become conceivable.

- 1 [footnote 14 in source] On this, see the essay by R. Warning, 'Ritus, Mythos und geistliches Spiel', in *Terror und Spiel. Probleme der Mythenrezeption*, ed. Fuhrmann (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1971) 211–39.
- 2 [15] Hegel already referred to the novel as 'the modern middle-class epic' (*Asthetik*, ed. F. Bassenge, vol. II [Berlin/Weimar, 1965] 452.)
- 3 [16] On the problem of the false sublation of art in the praxis of life, see J. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Neuwied/Berlin, 1968) § 18, 176 ff.
- 4 [17] See P. Bürger, 'Funktion und Bedeutung des *orgueil* bei Paul Valéry', in *Romanistisches Jahrbuch*, 16 (1965) 149–68.
- 5 [18] Examples of neo-avant-gardiste paintings and sculptures to be found in the catalogue of the exhibit *Sammlung Cremer. Europäische Avantgarde 1950–1970*, ed. G. Adriani (Tubingen, 1973).
- 6 [19] Tristan Tzara, 'Pour faire un poème dadaïste', in Tzara, *Lampisteries précédées des sept manifestos dada* (place of publication not given, 1963) 64. André Breton, 'Manifeste du surréalisme' (1924), in Breton, *Manifestos du surréalisme* (Paris: Coll. Idées 23, 1963) 42 f.
- 7 [20] On the Surrealists' conception of groups and the collective experiences they sought and partially realized, see Elisabeth Lenk, *Der springende Narziss. André Breton's poetischer Materialismus* (Munich, 1971) 57 ff., 73 f.
- 8 [21] One would have to investigate to what extent, after the October revolution, the Russian avant-gardistes succeeded to a degree, because social conditions had changed, in realizing their intent to reintegrate art in the praxis of life. Both B. Arvatov and S. Tretjakov turn the concept of art as developed in bourgeois society around and define art quite straightforwardly as socially useful activity: 'The pleasure of transforming the raw material into a particular, socially useful

form, connected to the skill and the intensive search for the suitable form – those are the things the slogan "art for all" should mean.' (S. Tretjakov, 'Die Kunst in der Revolution and die Revolution in der Kunst', in Tretjakov, *Die Arbeit des Schriftstellers*, ed. H. Boehncke (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohit, 1971) 13. 'Basing himself on the technique which is common to all spheres of life, the artist is imbued with the idea of suitability. It is not by subjective taste that he will allow himself to be guided as he works on his material but by the objective tasks of production' (B. Arvatov, 'Die Kunst im System der proletarischen Kultur', in Arvatov, *Kunst und Produktion*, 15). With the theory of the avant-garde as a point of departure, and with concrete investigations as guide, one should also discuss the problem of the extent (and of the kinds of consequences for the artistic subjects) to which art as an institution occupies a place in the society of the socialist countries that differs from its place in bourgeois society.

- 9 [22] See Christa Bürger, *Textanalyse als Ideologiekritik. Zur Rezeption witgen ossischer Unterhaltungsliteratur* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1973).
- 10 [23] See W.F. Haug, *Kritik der Warendsthetik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971).

Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974); trans. Michael Shaw, *Theory of the Avant-garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 47–54.

## Jean-Luc Nancy The Inoperative Community//1986

*A number of post-Marxist theories of community emerged in the 1980s. French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, writing in a Heideggerian and Derridean tradition, argues for an understanding of community founded not on the immanence of individuals being-in-common, but on an 'unworking' (désœuvrement) of togetherness brought about by that which presents a limit to community – that is, death. Nancy's complex text has been referenced by a number of writers on participatory art (George Baker, Miwon Kwon, Pamela M. Lee, Jessica Morgan).*

The gravest and most painful testimony of the modern world, the one that possibly involves all other testimonies to which this epoch must answer (by virtue of some unknown decree or necessity, for we bear witness also to the exhaustion of thinking through History), is the testimony of the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community. Communism, as Sartre said, is 'the unsurpassable horizon of our time', and it is so in many senses – political, ideological and strategic. But not least important among these senses is the following consideration, quite foreign to Sartre's intentions: the word 'communism' stands as an emblem of the desire to discover or rediscover a place of community at once beyond social divisions and beyond subordination to technopolitical dominion, and thereby beyond such wasting away of liberty, of speech or of simple happiness as comes about whenever these become subjugated to the exclusive order of privatization; and finally, more simply and even more decisively, a place from which to surmount the unravelling that occurs with the death of each one of us – that death that, when no longer anything more than the death of the individual, carries an unbearable burden and collapses into insignificance.

More or less consciously, more or less deliberately, and more or less politically, the word 'communism' has constituted such an emblem – which no doubt amounted to something other than a concept, and even something other than the *meaning* of a word. This emblem is no longer in circulation, except in a belated way for a few; for still others, though very rare nowadays, it is an emblem capable of inferring a fierce but impotent resistance to the visible collapse of what it promised. If it is no longer in circulation, this is not only because the States that acclaimed it have appeared, for some time now, as the agents of its betrayal. (Bataille in 1933: 'The Revolution's minimal hope has been described as the decline of the State: but it is in fact the revolutionary forces that

the present world is seeing perish and, at the same time, every vital force today has assumed the form of the totalitarian State')<sup>1</sup> The schema of betrayal, aimed at preserving an originary communist purity of doctrine or intention, has come to be seen as less and less tenable. Not that totalitarianism was already present, as such, in Marx: this would be a crude proposition, one that remains ignorant of the strident protest against the destruction of community that in Marx continuously parallels the Hegelian attempt to bring about a totality, and that thwarts or displaces this attempt.

But the schema of betrayal is seen to be untenable in that it was the very basis of the communist ideal that ended up appearing most problematic: namely, human beings defined as producers (one might even add: human beings *defined* at all), and fundamentally as the producers of their own essence in the form of their labour or their work.

That the justice and freedom – and the equality – included in the communist idea or ideal have in effect been betrayed in so-called real communism is something at once laden with the burden of an intolerable suffering (along with other, no less intolerable forms of suffering inflicted by our liberal societies) and at the same time politically decisive (not only in that a political strategy must favour resistance to this betrayal, but because this strategy, as well as our thought in general, must reckon with the possibility that an entire society has been forged, docilely and despite more than one forum of revolt, in the mould of this betrayal – or more plainly, at the mercy of this abandonment: this would be Zinoviev's question, rather than, Solzhenitsyn's). But these burdens are still perhaps only relative compared with the absolute weight that crushes or blocks all our 'horizons': there is, namely, no form of communist opposition – or let us say rather 'communitarian' opposition, in order to emphasize that the word should not be restricted in this context to strictly political references – that has not been or is not still profoundly subjugated to the goal of a *human* community, that is, to the goal of achieving a community of beings producing in essence their own essence as their work, and furthermore producing precisely this essence *as community*. An absolute immanence of man to man – a humanism – and of community to community – a communism – obstinately subtends, whatever be their merits or strengths, all forms of oppositional communism, all leftist and ultraleftist models, and all models based on the workers' council.<sup>2</sup> In a sense, all ventures adopting a communitarian opposition to 'real communism' have by now run their course or been abandoned, but everything continues along its way as though, beyond these ventures, it were no longer even a question of thinking about community.

Yet it is precisely the immanence of man to man, or it is *man*, taken absolutely, considered as the immanent being par excellence, that constitutes

the stumbling block to thinking of community. A community presupposed as having to be one of *human beings* presupposes that it effect, or that it must effect, as such and integrally, its own essence, which is itself the accomplishment of the essence of humanness. ('What can be fashioned by man? Everything. Nature, human society, humanity', wrote Herder. We are stubbornly bound to this regulative idea, even when we consider that this 'fashioning' is itself only a 'regulative idea'.) Consequently, economic ties, technological operations and political fusion (into a *body* or under a *leader*) represent or rather present, expose and realize this essence necessarily in themselves. Essence is set to work in them; through them, it becomes its own work. This is what we have called 'totalitarianism', but it might be better named 'immanentism', as long as we do not restrict the term to 'designating certain types of societies or regimes but rather see in it the general horizon of our time, encompassing both democracies and their fragile juridical parapets.

Is it really necessary to say something about the individual here? Some see in its invention and in the culture, if not in the cult built around the individual, Europe's incontrovertible merit of having shown the world the sole path to emancipation from tyranny, and the norm by which to measure all our collective or communitarian undertakings. But the individual is merely the residue of the experience of the dissolution of community. By its nature – as its name indicates, it is the atom, the indivisible – the individual reveals that it is the abstract result of a decomposition. It is another, and symmetrical, figure of immanence: the absolutely detached for-itself, taken as origin and as certainty.

But the experience through which this individual has passed, since Hegel at least, (and through which he passes, it must be confessed, with staggering opinionatedness) is simply the experience of this: that the individual can be the origin and the certainty of nothing but its own death. And once immortality has passed into its works, an *operative* immortality remains its own alienation and renders its death still more strange than the irremediable strangeness that it already 'is'.

Still, one cannot make a world with simple atoms. There has to be a *clinamen*. There has to be an inclination or an inclining from one towards the other, of one by the other, or from one to the other. Community is at least the *clinamen* of the 'individual'. Yet there is no theory, ethics, politics or metaphysics of the individual that is capable 'of envisaging this *clinamen*, this declination or decline of the individual within community. Neither 'Personalism' nor Sartre ever managed to do anything more than coat the most classical individual-subject with a moral or sociological paste: they never *inclined* it, outside itself, over that edge that opens up its being-in-common.

An inconsequential atomism, individualism tends to forget that the atom is a world. This is why the question of community is so markedly absent from the metaphysics of the subject, that is to say, from the metaphysics of the absolute for-itself – be it in the form of the individual or the total State – which means also the metaphysics of the *absolute* in general, of being as absolute, as perfectly detached, distinct and closed: being without relation. This absolute can appear in the form of the Idea, History, the Individual, the State, Science, the Work of Art, and so on. Its logic will always be the same in as much as it is without relation. A simple and redoubtable logic will always imply that within its very separation the absolutely separate encloses, if we can say this, more than what is simply separated. Which is to say that the separation itself must be enclosed, that the closure must not only close around a territory (while still remaining exposed, at its outer edge, to another territory, with which it thereby communicates), but also, in order to complete the absoluteness of its separation, around the enclosure itself. The absolute must be the absolute of its own absoluteness, or not be at all. In other words: to be absolutely alone, it is not enough that I be so; I must also be alone being alone – and this of course is contradictory. The logic of the absolute violates the absolute. It implicates it in a relation that it refuses and precludes by its essence. This relation tears and forces open, from within and from without at the same time, and from an outside that is nothing other than the rejection of an impossible interiority, the 'without relation' from which the absolute would constitute itself.

Excluded by the logic of the absolute subject of metaphysics (Self, Will, Life, Spirit, etc.), community comes perforce *to cut into* this subject by virtue of this same logic. The logic of the absolute *sets it in relation*: but this, obviously, cannot make for a relation between two or several absolutes, no more than it can make an absolute of the relation. It undoes the absoluteness of the absolute. The relation (the community) is, if it is, nothing other than what undoes, in its very principle – and at its closure or on its limit – the autarchy of absolute immanence. [...]

The solidarity of the individual with communism at the heart of a thinking of immanence, while neglecting ecstasy, does not however entail a simple symmetry. Communism – as, for example, in the generous exuberance that will not let Marx conclude without pointing to a reign of freedom, one beyond the collective regulation of necessity, in which surplus work would no longer be an exploitative *work*, but rather art and invention – communicates with an extremity of play, of sovereignty, even of ecstasy from which the individual as such remains definitively removed. But this link has remained distant, secret, and most often unknown to communism itself (let us say, to lend concreteness,

unknown to Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky), except in the fulgurating bursts of poetry, painting and cinema at the very beginning of the Soviet revolution, or the motifs that Benjamin allowed as reasons for calling oneself a Marxist, or what Blanchot tried to bring across or propose (rather than signify) with the word 'communism' ('Communism: that which excludes [and excludes itself from] every community already constituted').<sup>3</sup> But again even this proposal in the final analysis went unrecognized, not only by 'real' communism, but also, on close inspection, by those singular 'communists' themselves, who were perhaps never able to recognize (until now at least) either where the metaphor (or the hyperbole) began and ended in the usage they made of the word, or, especially, what other trope – supposing it were necessary to change words – or what effacement of tropes might have been appropriate to reveal what haunted their use of the word 'communism'.

By the usage to which this word was put, they were able to communicate with a thinking of art, of literature, and of thought itself – other figures or other exigencies of ecstasy – but they were not truly able to communicate, explicitly and thematically (even if 'explicit' and 'thematic' are only very fragile categories here), with a thinking of community. Or rather, their communication with such a thinking has remained secret, or suspended.

The ethics, the politics, the philosophies of community, when there were any (and there always are, even if they are reduced to chatter about fraternity or to laborious constructions around 'intersubjectivity'), have pursued their paths or their humanist dead ends without suspecting for an instant that these singular voices were speaking about community and were perhaps speaking about nothing else, without suspecting that what was taken for a 'literary' or 'aesthetic' experience was entrenched *in* the ordeal of community, was at grips with it. (Do we need to be reminded, to take a further example, what Barthes' first writings were about, and some of the later ones as well?)

Subsequently, these same voices that were unable to communicate what, perhaps without knowing it, they were saying, were exploited – and covered up again – by clamorous declarations brandishing the flag of the 'cultural revolutions' and by all kinds of 'communist writing' or 'proletarian inscriptions'. The professionals of society saw in them (and not without reason, even if their view was shortsighted) nothing more than a bourgeois Parisian or Berliner form of *Proletkult*, or else merely the unconscious return of a 'republic of artists', the concept of which had been inaugurated two hundred years earlier by the Jena romantics. In one way or another, it was a matter of a simple, classical and dogmatic system of truth: an art: (or a thought) adequate to politics (to the form or the description of community), a politics adequate to art. The basic presupposition remained that of a community effectuating itself in the absolute

of the work, or effectuating itself as work. For this reason, and whatever it may have claimed for itself, this 'modernity' remained in its principle a humanism.

We will have to return to the question of what brought about – albeit at the cost of a certain naïveté or misconception – the exigency of a literary<sup>4</sup> experience of community or communism. This is even, in a sense, the only question. But the terms of this question all need to be transformed, to be put back into play in a space that would be distributed quite differently from one composed of all-too-facile relations (for example, solitude of the writer/collectivity, or culture/society, or elite/masses – whether these relations be proposed as oppositions, or, in the spirit of the 'cultural revolutions', as equations). And for this to happen, the question of community must first of all be put back into play, for the necessary redistribution of space depends upon it. Before getting to this, and without rescinding any of the resistant generosity or the active restlessness of the word 'communism' and without denying anything of the excesses to which it can lead, but also without forgetting either the burdensome mortgage that comes along with it or the usury it has (not accidentally) suffered, we must allow that *communism* can no longer be the unsurpassable horizon of our time. And if in fact it no longer is such a horizon, this is not because we have passed beyond any horizon. Rather, everything is inflected by resignation, as if the new unsurpassable horizon took form around the disappearance, the impossibility, or the condemnation of communism. Such reversals are customary; they have never altered anything. It is the *horizons* themselves that must be challenged. The ultimate limit of community, or the limit that is formed by community, as such, traces an entirely different line. This is why, even as we establish that communism is no longer our unsurpassable horizon, we must also establish, just as forcefully, that a communist exigency or demand communicates with the gesture by means of which we must go farther than all possible horizons.

The first task in understanding what is at stake here consists in focusing on the horizon *behind* us. This means questioning the breakdown in community that supposedly engendered the modern era. The consciousness of this ordeal belongs to Rousseau, who figured a *society* that experienced or acknowledged the loss or degradation of a communitarian (and communicative) intimacy – a society producing, of necessity, the solitary figure, but one whose desire and intention was to produce the citizen of a free sovereign community. Whereas political theoreticians preceding him had thought mainly in terms of the institution of a State, or the regulation of a society, Rousseau, although he borrowed a great deal from them, was perhaps the first thinker of community, or more exactly, the first to experience the question of society as an uneasiness directed towards the community, and as the consciousness of a (perhaps

irreparable) rupture in this community. This consciousness would subsequently be inherited by the Romantics, and by Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*: the last figure of spirit, before the assumption of all the figures and of history into absolute knowledge, is that which cleaves community (which for Hegel figures the split in religion). Until this day history has been thought on the basis of a lost community – one to be regained or reconstituted.

The lost, or broken, community can be exemplified in all kinds of ways, by all kinds of paradigms: the natural family, the Athenian city, the Roman Republic, the first Christian community, corporations, communes or brotherhoods – always it is a matter of a lost age in which community was woven of tight, harmonious and infrangible bonds and in which above all it played back to itself, through its institutions, its rituals and its symbols, the representation, indeed the living offering, of its own immanent unity, intimacy and autonomy. Distinct from society (which is a simple association and division of forces and needs) and opposed to empire (which dissolves community by submitting its peoples to its arms and to its glory), community is not only intimate communication between its members, but also its organic communion with its own essence. It is constituted not only by a fair distribution of tasks and goods, or by a happy equilibrium of forces and authorities: it is made up principally of the sharing, diffusion or impregnation of an identity by a plurality wherein each member identifies himself only through the supplementary mediation of his identification with the living body of the community. In the motto of the Republic, *fraternity* designates community: the model of the family and of love.

But it is here that we should become suspicious of the retrospective consciousness of the lost community and its identity (whether this consciousness conceives of itself as effectively retrospective or whether, disregarding the realities of the past, it constructs images of this past for the sake of an ideal or a prospective vision). We should be suspicious of this consciousness first of all because it seems to have accompanied the Western world from its very beginnings: at every moment in its history, the Occident has given itself over to the nostalgia for a more archaic community that has disappeared, and to deploring a loss of familiarity, fraternity and conviviality. Our history begins with the departure of Ulysses and with the onset of rivalry, dissension and conspiracy in his palace. Around Penelope, who reweaves the fabric of intimacy without ever managing to complete it, pretenders set up the warring and political scene of society – pure exteriority.

But the true consciousness of the loss of community is Christian: the community desired or pined for by Rousseau, Schlegel, Hegel, then Bakunin, Marx, Wagner or Mallarmé is understood as communion, and communion takes place, in its principle as in its ends, at the heart of the mystical body of Christ. At

the same time as it is the most ancient myth of the Western world, community might well be the altogether modern thought of humanity's partaking of divine life: the thought of a human being penetrating into pure immanence. (Christianity has had only two dimensions, antinomical to one another; that of the *deus absconditus*, in which the Western disappearance of the divine is still engulfed, and that of the god-man, *deus communis*, brother of humankind, invention of a familial immanence of humanity, then of history as the immanence of salvation.)

Thus, the thought of community or the desire for it might well be nothing other than a belated invention that tried to respond to the harsh reality of modern experience: namely, that divinity was withdrawing infinitely from immanence, that the god-brother was at bottom *himself* the *deus absconditus* (this was Hölderlin's insight), and that the divine essence of community – or community as the existence of a divine essence – was the impossible itself. One name for this has been the death of God: this expression remains pregnant with the possibility if not the necessity of a resurrection that restores both man and God to a common immanence. (Not only Hegel, but also Nietzsche himself, at least in part, bear witness to this.) The discourse of the 'death of God' also misses the point that the 'divine' is what it is (if it 'is') only in as much as it is removed from immanence, or withdrawn from it – within it, one might say, yet withdrawn from it: And this, moreover, occurs in the very precise sense that it is not because there is a 'divine' that its share would be subtracted from immanence, but on the contrary, it is only to the extent that immanence itself, here or there (but is it localizable? Is it not rather this that localizes, that spaces?), is subtracted from immanence that there can be something like the 'divine'. (And perhaps, in the end, it will no longer be necessary to speak of the 'divine'. Perhaps we will come to see that community, death, love, freedom, singularity are names for the 'divine' not just because they substitute for it – and neither sublate nor resuscitate it under another form – but equally because this substitution is in no way anthropomorphic or anthropocentric and gives way to no becoming-human of the 'divine'. Community henceforth constitutes the limit of the human as well as of the divine. Through God or the gods communion – as substance and act, the act of communicated immanent substance – has been definitively withdrawn from community.)

The modern, humanist Christian consciousness of the loss of community therefore gives every appearance of recuperating the transcendental illusion of reason when reason exceeds the bounds of all possible experience, which is basically the experience of concealed immanence. *Community has not taken place*, or rather, if it is indeed certain that humanity has known (or still knows, outside of the industrial world) social ties quite different from those familiar to

us, community has never taken place along the lines of our projections of it according to these different social forms. It did not take place for the Guayaqui Indians, it did not take place in an age of huts; nor did it take place in the Hegelian 'spirit of a people' or in the Christian *agape*. No *Gesellschaft* has come along to help the State, industry and capital dissolve a prior *Gemeinschaft*. It would undoubtedly be more accurate to say, bypassing all the twists and turns taken by ethnological interpretation and all the mirages of an origin or of 'bygone days', that *Gesellschaft* – 'society', the dissociating association of forces, needs and signs – has taken the place of something for which we have no name or concept, something that issued at once from a much more extensive communication than that of a mere social bond (a communication with the gods, the cosmos, animals, the dead, the unknown) and from much more piercing and dispersed segmentation of this same bond, often involving much harsher effects (solitude, rejection, admonition, helplessness) than what we expect from a communitarian minimum in the social bond. *Society* was not built on the ruins of a *community*. It emerged from the disappearance or the conservation of something – tribes or empires – perhaps just as unrelated to what we call 'community' as to what we call 'society'. So that community, far from being what society has crushed or lost, is *what happens to us* – question, waiting, event, imperative – *in the wake of society*.

Nothing, therefore, has been lost, and for this reason nothing is lost. We alone are lost, we upon whom the 'social bond' (relations, communication), our own invention, now descends heavily like the net of an economic, technical, political and cultural snare. Entangled in its meshes, we have wrung for ourselves the phantasm of the lost community.

What this community has 'lost' – the immanence and the intimacy of a communion – is lost only in the sense that such a 'loss' is constitutive of 'community' itself.

It is not a loss: on the contrary, immanence, if it were to come about, would instantly suppress community, or communication, as such. Death is not only the example of this, it is its truth. In death, at least if one considers in it what brings about immanence (decomposition leading back to nature – 'everything returns to the ground and becomes part of the cycle' – or else the paradisaic versions of the same 'cycle') and if one forgets what makes it always irreducibly *singular*, there is no longer any community or communication: there is only the continuous identity of atoms.

This is why political or collective enterprises dominated by a will to absolute immanence have as their truth the truth of death. Immanence, communal fusion, contains no other logic than that of the suicide of the community that is

governed by it. Thus the logic of Nazi Germany was not only that of the extermination of the other, of the subhuman deemed exterior to the communion of blood and soil, but also, effectively, the logic of sacrifice aimed at all those in the 'Aryan' community who did not satisfy the criteria of *pure* immanence, so much so that – it being obviously impossible to set a limit on such criteria – the suicide of the German nation itself might have represented a plausible extrapolation of the process: moreover, it would not be false to say that this really took place, with regard to certain aspects of the spiritual reality of this nation.

The joint suicide or death of lovers is one of the mythico-literary figures of this logic of communion in immanence. Faced with this figure, one cannot tell which – the communion or the love – serves as a model for the other in death. In reality, with the immanence of the two lovers, death accomplishes the infinite reciprocity of two agencies: impassioned love conceived on the basis of Christian communion, and community thought according to the principle of love. The Hegelian State in its turn bears witness to this, for although it certainly is not established on the basis of love – for it belongs to the sphere of so-called objective spirit – it nonetheless has as its *principle* the reality of love, that is to say the fact 'of having in another the moment of one's own subsistence'. In this State, each member has his truth in the other, which is the State itself, whose reality is never more present than when its members give their lives in a war that the monarch – the effective presence-to-self of the Subject-State – has alone and freely decided to wage.<sup>5</sup>

Doubtless such immolation for the sake of community – and by it, therefore – could and can be full of meaning, on the condition that this 'meaning' be that of a community, and on the further condition that this community not be a 'community of death' (as has been the case since at least the First World War, thereby justifying all refusals to 'die for one's country'). Now the community of human immanence, man made equal to himself or to God, to nature, and to his own works, is one such community of deaths – or of the dead. The fully realized person of individualistic or communistic humanism is the dead person. In other words, death, in such a community, is not the unmasterable excess of finitude, but the infinite fulfilment of an immanent life: it is death itself consigned to immanence; it is in the end that resorption of death that the Christian civilization, as though devouring its own transcendence, has come to minister to itself in the guise of a supreme work. Since Leibniz there has been no death in our universe: in one way or another an absolute circulation of meaning (of values, of ends, of History) fills or reabsorbs all finite negativity, draws from each finite singular destiny a surplus value of humanity or an infinite superhumanity. But this presupposes, precisely, the death of each and all in the life of the infinite.

Generations of citizens and militants, of workers and servants of the States,



have imagined their death reabsorbed or sublated in a community, yet to come, that would attain immanence. But by now we have nothing more than the bitter consciousness of the increasing remoteness of such a community, be it the people, the nation or the society of producers. However, this consciousness, like that of the 'loss' of community, is superficial. In truth, death is not sublated. The communion to come does not grow distant, it is not deferred: it was never to come; it would be incapable of coming about or forming a future. What forms a future, and consequently what truly comes about, is always the singular death – which does not mean that death does not come about in the community: on the contrary, I shall come to this. But communion is not what comes of death, no more than death is the simple perpetual past of community.

Millions of deaths, of course, are *justified* by the revolt of those who die: they are justified as a rejoinder to the intolerable, as insurrections against social, political, technical, military, religious oppression. But these deaths are not *sublated*: no dialectic, no salvation leads these deaths to any other immanence than that of ... death (cessation, or decomposition, which forms only the parody or reverse of immanence). Yet the modern age has conceived the justification of death only in the guise of salvation or the dialectical sublation of history. The modern age has struggled to *close the circle* of the time of men and their communities in an immortal communion in which death, finally, loses the senseless meaning that it ought to have – and that it has, obstinately.

We are condemned, or rather reduced, to search for this meaning beyond meaning of death elsewhere than in community. But the enterprise is absurd (it is the absurdity of a thought derived from the individual). Death is indissociable from community, for it is through death that the community reveals itself – and reciprocally. It is not by chance that this motif of a reciprocal revelation has preoccupied thought informed by ethnology as well as the thinking of Freud and Heidegger, and at the same time Bataille, that is to say in the time leading from the First to the Second World War.

The motif of the revelation, through death, of being-together or being-with, and of the crystallization of the community around the death of its members, *that is to say, around the 'loss' (the impossibility) of their immanence* and not around their fusal assumption in some collective hypostasis, leads to a space of thinking incommensurable with the problematics of sociality or intersubjectivity (including the Husserlian problematic of the alter ego) within which philosophy, despite its resistance, has remained captive. Death irremediably exceeds the resources of a metaphysics of the subject. The phantasm of this metaphysics, the phantasm that Descartes (almost) did not dare have but that was already proposed in Christian theology, is the phantasm of a dead man who says, like Villiers' Monsieur Waldemar, 'I am dead' – *ego sum*

... *mortuus*. If the *I* cannot say that it is dead, if the *I* disappears, in effect in its death, in that death that is precisely what is most proper to it and most inalienably its own, it is because the *I* is something other than a subject. All of Heidegger's research into 'being-for (or toward)-death' was nothing other than an attempt to state this: *I* is not – *am* not – a subject. (Although, when it came to the question of community as such, the same Heidegger also went astray with his vision of a people and a destiny conceived at least in part as a subject,<sup>6</sup> which proves no doubt that Dasein's 'being-toward-death' was never radically implicated in its being-with – in *Mitsein* – and that it is this implication that remains to be thought.)

That which is not a subject opens up and opens onto a community whose conception, in turn, exceeds the resources of a metaphysics of the subject. Community does not weave a superior, immortal or transmortal life between subjects (no more than it is itself woven of the inferior bonds of a consubstantiality of blood or of an association of needs), but it is constitutively, to the extent that it is a matter of a 'constitution' here, calibrated on the death of those whom we call, perhaps wrongly, its 'members' (in as much as it is not a question of an organism). But it does not make a work of this calibration. Community no more makes a work out of death than it is itself a work. The death upon which community is calibrated does not *operate* the dead being's passage into some communal intimacy, nor does community, for its part, *operate* the transfiguration of its dead into some substance or subject – be these homeland, native soil or blood, nation, a delivered or fulfilled humanity, absolute phalanstery, family, or mystical body. Community is calibrated on death as on that of which it is precisely impossible to *make a work* (other than a work of death, as soon as one tries to make a work of it). Community occurs in order to acknowledge this impossibility, or more exactly – for there is neither function nor finality here – the impossibility of making a work out of death is inscribed and acknowledged as 'community'.

Community is revealed in the death of others; hence it is always revealed to others. Community is what takes place always through others and for others. It is not the space of the *egos* – subjects and substances that are at bottom immortal – but of the *I's*, who are always *others* (or else are nothing). If community is revealed in the death of others it is because death itself is the true community of *I's* that are not *egos*. It is not a communion that fuses the *egos* into an *Ego* or a higher *We*. It is the community of *others*. The genuine community of mortal beings, or death as community, establishes their impossible communion. Community therefore occupies a singular place: it assumes the impossibility of its own immanence, the impossibility of a communitarian being in the form of a subject. In a certain sense community acknowledges and inscribes – this is its

peculiar gesture – the impossibility of community. A community is not a project of fusion, or in some general way a productive or operative project – nor is it a *project* at all (once again, this is its radical difference from ‘the spirit of a people’, which from Hegel to Heidegger has figured the collectivity as project, and figured the project, reciprocally, as collective – which does not mean that we can ignore the question of the singularity of a ‘people’).

A community is the presentation to its members of their mortal truth (which amounts to saying that there is no community of immortal beings: one can imagine either a society or a communion of immortal beings, but not a community). It is the presentation of the finitude and the irredeemable excess that make up finite being: its death, but also its birth, and only the community can present me my birth, and along with it the impossibility of my reliving it, as well as the impossibility of my crossing over into my death. [...]

Community means, consequently, that there is no singular being without another singular being, and that there is, therefore, what might be called, in a rather inappropriate idiom, an originary or ontological ‘sociality’ that in its principle extends far beyond the simple theme of man as a social being (the *zoon politikon* is secondary to this community). For, on the one hand, it is not obvious that the community of singularities is limited to ‘man’ and excludes, for example, the ‘animal’ (even in the case of ‘man’ it is not *a fortiori* certain that this community concerns only ‘man’ and not also the ‘inhuman’ or the ‘superhuman’, or, for example, if I may say so with and without a certain *Witz*, ‘woman’: after all, the difference between the sexes is itself a singularity in the difference of singularities). On the other hand, if social being is always posited as a predicate of man, community would signify on the contrary the basis for thinking only something like ‘man’. But this thinking would at the same time remain dependent upon a principal determination of community, namely, that there is no communion of singularities in a totality superior to them and immanent to their common being.

In place of such a communion, there is communication. Which is to say, in very precise terms, that finitude itself is nothing; it is neither a ground, nor an essence, nor a substance. But it appears, it presents itself, it exposes itself, and thus it *exists* as communication. In order to designate this singular mode of appearing, this specific phenomenality, which is no doubt more originary than any other (for it could be that the world appears to the community, not to the individual), we would need to be able to say that finitude *co-appears* or *compears*, (*com-paraît*) and can only *compear*: in this formulation we would need to hear that finite being always presents itself ‘together’, hence severally; for finitude always presents itself in being-in-common and as this being itself, and

it always presents itself at a *hearing* and before the judgment of the law of community, or, more originarily, before the judgment of community as law.

Communication consists before all else in this sharing and in this compearance (*com-parution*) of finitude: that is, in the dislocation and in the interpellation that reveal themselves to be constitutive of being-in-common – precisely in as much as being-in-common is not a common being. The finite-being exists first of all according to a division of sites, according to an extension – *partes extra partes* – such that each singularity is extended (in the sense that Freud says: ‘The psyche is extended’). It is not enclosed in a form – although its whole being touches against its singular limit – but it is what it is, singular being (singularity of being), only through its extension, through the areality that above all extroverts it in its very being – whatever the degree or the desire of its ‘egoism’ – and that makes it exist only by *exposing it to an outside*. This outside is in its turn nothing other than the exposition of another areality, of another singularity – the same other. This exposure, or this exposing-sharing, gives rise, from the outset, to a mutual interpellation of singularities prior to any address in language (though it gives to this latter its first condition of possibility).<sup>7</sup> Finitude compears, that is to say it is exposed: such is the essence of community.

Under these conditions, communication is not a bond. The metaphor of the ‘social bond’ unhappily superimposes upon ‘subjects’ (that is to say, objects) a hypothetical reality (that of the ‘bond’) upon which some have attempted to confer a dubious ‘intersubjective’ nature that would have the virtue of attaching these objects to one another. This would be the economic link or the bond of recognition. But compearance is of a more originary order than that of the bond. It does not set itself up, it does not establish itself, it does not emerge among already given subjects (objects). It consists in the appearance of the *between* as such: you *and* I (between us) – a formula in which the *and* does not imply juxtaposition but exposition. What is exposed in compearance is the following, and we must learn to read it in all its possible combinations: ‘you (are/and/is) (entirely other than) I’ (*toi [e(s)t] [tout autre que] moi*). Or again, more simply: *you shares me* (*toi portage moi*).

Only in this communication are singular beings given – without a bond *and* without communion, equally distant from any notion of connection or joining from the outside and from any notion of a common and fusional interiority. Communication is the constitutive fact of an exposition to the outside that defines singularity. In its being, as its very being, singularity is exposed to the outside. By virtue of this position or this primordial structure, it is at once detached, distinguished and communitarian. Community is the presentation of the detachment (or retrenchment) of this distinction that is not individuation, but finitude compearing. [...]

This is why community cannot arise from the domain of *work*. One does not produce it, one experiences or one is constituted by it as the experience of finitude. Community understood as a work or through its works would presuppose that the common being, as such, be objectifiable and producible (in sites, persons, buildings, discourses, institutions, symbols: in short, in subjects). Products derived from operations of this kind, however grandiose they might seek to be and sometimes manage to be, have no more communitarian existence than the plaster busts of Marianne.

Community necessarily takes place in what Blanchot has called 'unworking', referring to that which, before or beyond the work, withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do either with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension. Community is made of the interruption of singularities, or of the suspension that singular beings *are*. Community is not the work of singular beings, nor can it claim them as its works, just as communication is not a work or even an operation of singular beings, for community is simply their being – their being suspended upon its limit. Communication is the unworking of work that is social, economic, technical and institutional.<sup>8</sup> [...]

The political, if this word may serve to designate not the organization of society but the disposition of community as such, the destination of its sharing, must not be the assumption or the work of love or of death. It need neither find, nor regain, nor effect a communion taken to be lost or still to come. If the political is not dissolved in the sociotechnical element of forces and needs (in which, in effect, it seems to be dissolving under our eyes), it must inscribe the sharing of community. The outline of singularity would be 'political' – as would be the outline of its communication and its ecstasy. 'Political' would mean a community ordering itself to the unworking of its communication, or destined to this unworking: a community consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing. To attain such a signification of the 'political' does not depend, or in any case not simply, on what is called a 'political will'. It implies being already engaged in the community, that is to say, undergoing, in whatever manner, the experience of community as communication: it implies writing. We must not stop writing, or letting the singular outline of our being-in-common expose itself.

Not only will this have been written after Bataille, but also to him, just as he wrote to us – because one always writes *to* – communicating to us the anguish of community, writing from a solitude prior to any isolation, invoking a community that no society contains or precedes, even though every society is implied in it:

The reasons for writing a book can be brought back to the desire to modify the existing relations between a man and his fellow beings. These relations are judged unacceptable and are perceived as an atrocious misery. (Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 2, 143)

Or else, it is community itself – though it is nothing, *it* is not a collective subject – that never stops, in writing, sharing itself.

The anguish which you do not communicate to your fellow being is in some way scorned and mistreated. It has only to the weakest extent the power to reflect the glory that comes from the depth of the heavens. (O.C. 5: 444)

In *My Mother*, Hélène, the mother, writes to her son:

I admire myself for writing to you like this, and I marvel to think that my letter is worthy of you. (O.C. 4: 260)

But this hand that writes is *dying*, and through this death promised to it, it escapes accepted limits by writing. (O.C. 3: 12)

I would say, rather: it exposes these limits, it never passes beyond them, nor passes beyond community. But at every instant singular beings share their limits, share each other on their limits. They escape the relationships of society ('mother' and 'son', 'author' and 'reader', 'public figure' and 'private figure', 'producer' and 'consumer'), but they are in community, and are unworked.

I have spoken of a community as existing: Nietzsche brought his affirmations to this, but remained alone ... The desire to communicate is born in me out of a feeling of community binding me to Nietzsche, and not out of an isolated originality. (O.C. 5: 39)

We can only go farther.

- 1 Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970) 332; hereafter 'O.C.'
- 2 Considered in detail, taking into account the precise historical conjuncture of each instance, this is not rigorously exact as regards, for example, the Hungarian Council of 1956, and even more so the left of Solidarity in Poland. Nor is it absolutely exact as regards all of the discourses held today: one might, in this respect alone, juxtapose the situationists of not so long ago with certain aspects of Hannah Arendt's thought and also, as strange or provocative as the mixture might appear, certain propositions advanced by Lyotard, Badiou, Ellul, Deleuze, Pasolini and Rancière. These thoughts occur, although each one engages it in its own particular way (and sometimes whether they know it or not), in the wake of a Marxist event that I will try to characterize below and that signifies for us the bringing into question of communist or communitarian humanism (quite different from the questioning once undertaken by Althusser in the name of a Marxist science). This is also why such propositions communicate with what I shall name, tentatively and in spite of everything, 'literary communism'.
- 3 [footnote 5 in source] 'Le communisme sans heritage', *revue Comité*, 1968, *Gramma*, 3/4 (1976) 32.
- 4 [6] For the moment, let us retain simply that 'literature', here, must above all not be taken in the sense Bataille gave to the word when he wrote, for example (in his critique of *Inner Experience* and *Guilt*): 'I have come to realize through experience that these books lead those who read them into complacency. They please most often those vague and impotent minds who want to flee and sleep and *satisfy* themselves with the escape provided by literature' (O.C. 8: 583). He also spoke of the 'sliding into impotence of thought that turns to literature' (*ibid.*).
- 5 [8] See Jean-Luc Nancy, 'La juridiction du monarque hégélien', in *Rejouer le politique* (Paris: Galilée, 1981). Translated in *The Birth to Presence* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).
- 6 [9] See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, 'Transcendence Ends in Politics', trans. P. Caws, in *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. C. Fynsk (Harvard University Press, 1989) 267–300, and G. Granel, 'Pourquoi avoir public cela?' in *De l'université* (Toulouse: T.E.R., 1982).
- 7 [24] In this sense, the compearance of singular beings is anterior even to the preliminary condition of language that Heidegger understands as prelinguistic 'interpretation' (*Auslegung*), to which I referred the singularity of voices in 'Sharing Voices', in *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context*, ed. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989). Contrary to what this essay might lead one to think, the sharing of voices does not lead to community; on the contrary, it depends on this originary sharing that community 'is'. Or rather, this 'originary' sharing itself is nothing other than a 'sharing of voices', but the 'voice' should be understood not as linguistic or even prelinguistic, but as communitarian.
- 8 [26] I do not include the political here. In the form of the State, or the Party (if not the State-Party), it indeed seems to be of the order of a work. But it is perhaps at the heart of the political that communitarian unworking resists.

Jean-Luc Nancy, *La Communauté désœuvrée* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1986); ed. and trans. Peter Connor, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) 1–4; 7–15; 28–9; 31; 40–1.

## Édouard Glissant Poetics of Relation// 1990

*Influenced by Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaux (1980), which advocates an incessant subversion of power via 'deterritorializing' gestures, the French-Caribbean author Édouard Glissant poetically argues for the active appropriation of colonial culture by the colonized, particularly on the level of language. In contrast to the culturally unifying concept of négritude, Glissant's Poetics of Relation (1990) advocates a unity understood as diverse and fluctuating.*

### Errantry, Exile

Roots make the commonality of errantry and exile, for in both instances roots are lacking. We must begin with that.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari criticized notions of the root and even, perhaps, notions of being rooted. The root is unique, a stock taking all upon itself and killing all around it. In opposition to this they propose the rhizome, an enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently. The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root. Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other.

These authors extol nomadism, which supposedly liberates Being, in contrast, perhaps, to a settled way of life, with its law based upon the intolerant root. Already Kant, at the beginning of *Critique of Pure Reason*, had seen similarities between skeptics and nomads, remarking also that, from time to time, 'they break the social bond'. He seems thus to establish correlations between, on the one hand, a settled way of life, truth and society and, on the other, nomadism, skepticism and anarchy. This parallel with Kant suggests that the rhizome concept appears interesting for its anti-conformism, but one cannot infer from this that it is subversive or that rhizomatic thought has the capacity to overturn the order of the world – because, by so doing, one reverts to ideological claims presumably challenged by this thought.

But is the nomad not overdetermined by the conditions of his existence? Rather than the enjoyment of freedom, is nomadism not a form of obedience to contingencies that are restrictive? Take, for example, circular nomadism: each time a portion of the territory is exhausted, the group moves around. Its function is to ensure the survival of the group by means of this circularity. This is the

nomadism practised by populations that move from one part of the forest to another, by the Arawak communities who navigated from island to island in the Caribbean, by hired labourers in their pilgrimage from farm to farm, by circus people in their peregrinations from village to village, all of whom are driven by some specific need to move, in which daring or aggression play no part. Circular nomadism is a not-intolerant form of an impossible settlement.

Contrast this with invading nomadism, that of the Huns, for example, or the Conquistadors, whose goal was to conquer lands by exterminating their occupants. Neither prudent nor circular nomadism, it spares no effort. It is an absolute forward projection: an arrowlike nomadism. But the descendants of the Huns, Vandals or Visigoths, as indeed those of the Conquistadors, who established their clans, settled down bit by bit, melting into their conquests. Arrowlike nomadism is a devastating desire for settlement.

Neither in arrowlike nomadism nor in circular nomadism are roots valid. Before it is won through conquest, what 'holds' the invader is what lies ahead; moreover, one could almost say that being compelled to lead a settled way of life would constitute the real uprooting of a circular nomad. There is, furthermore, no pain of exile bearing down, nor is there the wanderlust of errantry growing keener. Relation to the earth is too immediate or too plundering to be linked with any preoccupation with identity – this claim to or consciousness of a lineage inscribed in a territory. Identity will be achieved when communities attempt to legitimate their right to possession of a territory through myth or the revealed word. Such an assertion can predate its actual accomplishment by quite some time. Thus, an often and long contested legitimacy will have multiple forms that later will delineate the afflicted or soothing dimensions of exile or errantry.

In Western antiquity a man in exile does not feel he is helpless or inferior, because he does not feel burdened with deprivation – of a nation that for him does not yet exist. It even seems, if one is to believe the biographies of numerous Greek thinkers including Plato and Aristotle, that some experience of voyaging and exile is considered necessary for a being's complete fulfilment. Plato was the first to attempt to base legitimacy not on community within territory (as it was before and would be later) but on the City in the rationality of its laws. This at a time when his city, Athens, was already threatened by a 'final' deregulation.

In this period identification is with a culture (conceived of as civilization), not yet with a nation. The pre-Christian West along with pre-Columbian America, Africa of the time of the great conquerors, and the Asian kingdoms all shared this mode of seeing and feeling. The relay of actions exerted by arrowlike nomadism and the settled way of life were first directed against generalization (the drive for an identifying universal as practised by the Roman Empire). Thus, the particular resists a generalizing universal and soon begets specific and local

senses of identity, in concentric circles (provinces then nations). The idea of civilization, bit by bit, helps hold together opposites, whose only former identity existed in their opposition to the Other.

During this period of invading nomads the passion for self-definition first appears in the guise of personal adventure. Along the route of their voyages conquerors established empires that collapsed at their death. Their capitals went where they went. 'Rome is no longer in Rome, it is wherever I am.' The root is not important. Movement is. The idea of errantry, still inhibited in the face of this mad reality, this too-functional nomadism, whose ends it could not know, does not yet make an appearance. Centre and periphery are equivalent. Conquerors are the moving, transient root of their people.

The West, therefore, is where this movement becomes fixed and nations declare themselves in preparation for their repercussions in the world. This fixing, this declaration, this expansion, all require that the idea of the root gradually take on the intolerant sense that Deleuze and Guattari, no doubt, meant to challenge. The reason for our return to this episode in Western history is that it spread throughout the world. The model came in handy. Most of the nations that gained freedom from colonization have tended to form around an idea of power – the totalitarian drive of a single, unique root – rather than around a fundamental relationship with the Other. Culture's self-conception was dualistic, pitting citizen against barbarian. Nothing has ever more solidly opposed the thought of errantry than this period in human history when Western nations were established and then made their impact on the world.

At first this thought of errantry, bucking the current of nationalist expansion, was disguised 'within' very personalized adventures – just as the appearance of Western nations had been preceded by the ventures of empire builders. The errantry of a troubadour or that of Rimbaud is not yet a thorough, thick (opaque) experience of the world, but it is already an ardent, passionate desire to go against a root. The reality of exile during this period is felt as a (temporary) lack that primarily concerns, interestingly enough, language. Western nations were established on the basis of linguistic intransigence, and the exile readily admits that he suffers most from the impossibility of communicating in his language. The root is monolingual. For the troubadour and for Rimbaud errantry is a vocation only told via detour. The call of Relation is heard, but it is not yet a fully present experience.

However, and this is an immense paradox, the great founding books of communities, the Old Testament, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Chansons de Geste*, the *Islandic Sagas*, the *Aeneid* or the African epics, were all books about exile and often about errantry. This epic literature is amazingly prophetic. It tells of the community but, through relating the community's apparent failure or in any

case its being surpassed, it tells of errantry as a temptation (the desire to go against the root) and, frequently, actually experienced. Within the collective books concerning the sacred and the notion of history lies the germ of the exact opposite of what they so loudly proclaim. When the very idea of territory becomes relative, nuances appear in the legitimacy of territorial possession. These are books about the birth of collective consciousness, but they also introduce the unrest and suspense that allow the individual to discover himself there, whenever he himself becomes the issue. The Greek victory in the *Iliad* depends on trickery; Ulysses returns from his Odyssey and is recognized only by his dog; the Old Testament David bears the stain of adultery and murder; the *Chanson de Roland* is the chronicle of a defeat; the characters in the *Sagas* are branded by an unstemmable fate, and so forth. These books are the beginning of something entirely different from massive, dogmatic and totalitarian certainty (despite the religious uses to which they will be put). These are books of errantry, going beyond the pursuits and triumphs of rootedness required by the evolution of history.

Some of these books are devoted entirely to the supreme errantry, as in the Egyptian Book of the Dead. The very book whose function is to consecrate an intransigent community is already a compromise, qualifying its triumph with revelatory wanderings.

In both *L'intention poétique (Poetic Intention)* and *Le Discours antillais (Caribbean Discourse)* – of which the present work is a reconstituted echo or a spiral retelling – I approached this dimension of epic literature. I began wondering if we did not still need such founding works today, ones that would use a similar dialectics of rerouting, asserting, for example, political strength but, simultaneously, the rhizome of a multiple relationship with the Other and basing every community's reasons for existence on a modern form of the sacred, which would be, all in all, a Poetics of Relation.

This movement, therefore (one among others, equally important, in other parts of the world), has led from a primordial nomadism to the settled way of life of Western nations, then to Discovery and Conquest, which achieved a final, almost mystical perfection in the Voyage.

In the course of this journey, identity, at least as far as the Western peoples who made up the great majority of voyagers, discoverers and conquerors were concerned, consolidates itself implicitly at first ('my root is the strongest') and then is explicitly exported as a value ('a person's worth is determined by his root'). The conquered or visited peoples are thus forced into a long and painful quest after an identity whose first task will be opposition to the denaturing process introduced by the conqueror. A tragic variation of a search for identity. For more than two centuries whole populations have had to assert their identity

in opposition to the processes of identification or annihilation triggered by these invaders. Whereas the Western nation is first of all an 'opposite,' for colonized peoples identity will be primarily 'opposed to' – that is, a limitation from the beginning. Decolonization will have done its real work when it goes beyond this limit.

The duality of self-perception (one is citizen or foreigner) has repercussions on one's idea of the Other (one is visitor or visited; one goes or stays; one conquers or is conquered). Thought of the Other cannot escape its own dualism until the time when differences become acknowledged. From that point on thought of the Other 'comprehends' multiplicity, but mechanically and still taking the subtle hierarchies of a generalizing universal as its basis. Acknowledging differences does not compel one to be involved in the dialectics of their totality. One could get away with: 'I can acknowledge your difference and continue to think it is harmful to you. I can think that my strength lies in the Voyage (I am making History) and that your difference is motionless and silent.' Another step remains to be taken before one really enters the dialectic of totality. And, contrary to the mechanics of the Voyage, this dialectic turns out to be driven by the thought of errantry.

Let us suppose that the quest for totality, starting from a non-universal context of histories of the West, has passed through the following stages:

- the thinking of territory and self (ontological, dual)
- the thinking of voyage and other (mechanical, multiple)
- the thinking of errantry and totality (relational, dialectical).

We will agree that this thinking of errantry, this errant thought, silently emerges from the destructuring of compact national entities that yesterday were still triumphant and, at the same time, from difficult, uncertain births of new forms of identity that call to us.

In this context uprooting can work towards identity, and exile can be seen as beneficial, when these are experienced as a search for the Other (through circular nomadism) rather than as an expansion of territory (an arrowlike nomadism). Totality's imaginary allows the detours that lead away from anything totalitarian.

Errantry, therefore, does not proceed from renunciation nor from frustration regarding a supposedly deteriorated (deterritorialized) situation of origin; it is not a resolute act of rejection or an uncontrolled impulse of abandonment. Sometimes, by taking up the problems of the Other, it is possible to find oneself. Contemporary history provides several striking examples of this, among them Frantz Fanon, whose path led from Martinique to Algeria. That is very much the image of the rhizome, prompting the knowledge that identity is no longer completely within the root but also in Relation. Because the thought of errantry

is also the thought of what is relative, the thing relayed as well as the thing related. The thought of errantry is a poetics, which always infers that at some moment it is told. The tale of errantry is the tale of Relation.

In contrast to arrowlike nomadism (discovery or conquest), in contrast to the situation of exile, errantry gives-on-and-with the negation of every pole and every metropolis, whether connected or not to a conqueror's voyaging act. We have repeatedly mentioned that the first thing exported by the conqueror was his language. Moreover, the great Western languages were supposedly vehicular languages, which often took the place of an actual metropolis. Relation, in contrast, is spoken multilingually. Going beyond the impositions of economic forces and cultural pressures, Relation rightfully opposes the totalitarianism of any monolingual intent.

At this point we seem to be far removed from the sufferings and preoccupations of those who must bear the world's injustice. Their errantry is, in effect, immobile. They have never experienced the melancholy and extroverted luxury of uprooting. They do not travel. But one of the constants of our world is that a knowledge of roots will be conveyed to them from within intuitions of Relation from now on. Travelling is no longer the locus of power but rather a pleasurable, if privileged time. The ontological obsession with knowledge gives way here to the enjoyment of a relation; in its elementary and often caricatural form this is tourism. Those who stay behind thrill to this passion for the world shared by all. Or indeed they may suffer the torments of internal exile.

I would not describe the physical situation of those who suffer the oppression of an Other within their own country, such as the blacks in South Africa, as internal exile. Because the solution here is visible and the outcome determined; force alone can oppose this. Internal exile strikes individuals living where solutions concerning the relationship of a community to its surroundings are not, or at least not yet, consented to by this community as a whole. These solutions, precariously outlined as decisions, are still the prerogative of only a few who as a result are marginalized. Internal exile is the voyage out of this enclosure. It is a motionless and exacerbated introduction to the thought of errantry. Most often it is diverted into partial, pleasurable compensations in which the individual is consumed. Internal exile tends toward material comfort, which cannot really distract from anguish.

Whereas exile may erode one's sense of identity, the thought of errantry – the thought of that which relates – usually reinforces this sense of identity. It seems possible, at least to one observer, that the persecuted errantry, the wandering of the Jews, may have reinforced their sense of identity far more than their present settling in the land of Palestine. Being exiled Jews turned into a

vocation of errantry, their point of reference an ideal land whose power may, in fact, have been undermined by concrete land (a territory), chosen and conquered. This, however, is mere conjecture. Because, while one can communicate through errantry's imaginary vision, the experiences of exiles are incommunicable.

The thought of errantry is not apolitical nor is it inconsistent with the will to identity, which is, after all, nothing other than the search for a freedom within particular surroundings. If it is at variance with territorial intolerance, or the predatory effects of the unique root (which makes processes of identification so difficult today), this is because, in the Poetics of Relation, one who is errant (who is no longer traveller, discoverer or conqueror) strives to know the totality of the world yet already knows he will never accomplish this – and knows that is precisely where the threatened beauty of the world resides.

Errant, he challenges and discards the universal – this generalizing edict that summarized the world as something obvious and transparent, claiming for it one presupposed sense and one destiny. He plunges into the opacities of that part of the world to which he has access. Generalization is totalitarian: from the world it chooses one side of the reports, one set of ideas, which it sets apart from others and tries to impose by exporting as a model. The thinking of errantry conceives of totality but willingly renounces any claims to sum it up or to possess it.

The founding books have taught us that the sacred dimension consists always of going deeper into the mystery of the root, shaded with variations of errantry. In reality errant thinking is the postulation of an unyielding and unfading sacred. We remember that Plato, who understood the power of Myth, had hoped to banish the poets, those who force obscurity, far from the Republic. He distrusted the fathomless word. Are we not returning here, in the unforeseeable meanders of Relation, to this abyssal word? Nowhere is it stated that now, in this thought of errantry, humanity will not succeed in transmuting Myth's opacities (which were formerly the occasion for setting roots) and the diffracted insights of political philosophy, thereby reconciling Homer and Plato, Hegel and the African griot.

But we need to figure out whether or not there are other succulencies of Relation in other parts of the world (and already at work in an underground manner) that will suddenly open up other avenues and soon help to correct whatever simplifying, ethnocentric exclusions may have arisen from such a perspective. [...]

### **Dictate, Decree**

[...] Summarizing what we know concerning the varieties of identity, we arrive at the following:

*Root identity*

- is founded in the distant past in a vision, a myth of the creation of the world;
- is sanctified by the hidden violence of a filiation that strictly follows from this founding episode;
- is ratified by a claim to legitimacy that allows a community to proclaim its entitlement to the possession of a land, which thus becomes a territory;
- is preserved by being projected onto other territories, making their conquest legitimate – and through the project of a discursive knowledge. Root identity therefore rooted the thought of self and of territory and set in motion the thought of the other and of voyage.

*Relation identity*

- is linked not to a creation of the world but to the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures;
- is produced in the chaotic network of Relation and not in the hidden violence of filiation;
- does not devise any legitimacy as its guarantee of entitlement, but circulates, newly extended;
- does not think of a land as a territory from which to project toward other territories but as a place where one gives-on-and-with rather than grasps.

Relation identity exults the thought of errantry and of totality. The shock of relating, hence, has repercussions on several levels. When secular cultures come into contact through their intolerances, the ensuing violence triggers mutual exclusions that are of a sacred nature and for which any future reconciliation is hard to foresee. When a culture that is expressly composite, such as the culture of Martinique, is touched by another (French) that 'entered into' its composition and continues to determine it, not radically but through the erosion of assimilation, the violence of reaction is intermittent and unsure of itself. For the Martinican it has no solid rootstock in any sacred territory or filiation. This, indeed, is a case in which specificity is a strict requirement and must be defined as closely as possible. For this composite culture is fragile in the extreme, wearing down through contact with a masked colonization. [...]

Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1990); trans. Betsy Wing, *Poetics of Relation* [footnotes not included] (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997) 11–21; 143–4.

**Félix Guattari****Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm//1992**

*Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm (1992) is the last book written by French psychoanalyst and philosopher Félix Guattari. In it he turns to aesthetics as the model for a new ethical behaviour opposed to capitalist rationality. For Guattari, art is a process of 'becoming': a fluid and partially autonomous zone of activity that works against disciplinary boundaries, yet which is inseparable from its integration in the social field. Chaosmosis is an important reference for the final essay in Nicolas Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics.*

[...] Artistic cartographies have always been an essential element of the framework of every society. But since becoming the work of specialized corporate bodies, they may have appeared to be side issues, a supplement of the soul, a fragile superstructure whose death is regularly announced. And yet from the grottoes of Lascaux to Soho, taking in the dawn of the cathedrals, they have never stopped being a vital element in the crystallization of individual and collective subjectivities.

Fabricated in the socius, art, however, is only sustained by itself. This is because each work produced possesses a double finality: to insert itself into a social network which will either appropriate or reject it, and to celebrate, once again, the Universe of art as such, precisely because it is always in danger of collapsing.

What confers it with this perennial possibility of eclipse is its function of rupturing with forms and significations circulating trivially in the social field. The artist and, more generally, aesthetic perception, detach and deterritorialize a segment of the real in such a way as to make it play the role of a partial enunciator. Art confers a function of sense and alterity to a subset of the perceived world. The consequence of this quasi-animistic speech effect of a work of art is that the subjectivity of the artist and the 'consumer' is reshaped. In short, it is a matter of rarefying an enunciation which has too great a tendency to become entangled in an identificatory seriality which infantilizes and annihilates it. The work of art, for those who use it, is an activity of unframing, of rupturing sense, of baroque proliferation or extreme impoverishment, which leads to a recreation and a reinvention of the subject itself. A new existential support will oscillate on the work of art, based on a double register of reterritorialization (refrain function) and resingularization. The event of its encounter can irreversibly date the course of an existence and generate fields of



the possible 'far from the equilibria' of everyday life.

Viewed from the angle of this existential function – namely, in rupture with signification and denotation – ordinary aesthetic categorizations lose a large part of their relevance. Reference to 'free figuration', 'abstraction' or 'conceptualism' hardly matters! What is important is to know if a work leads effectively to a mutant production of enunciation. The focus of artistic activity always remains a surplus-value of subjectivity or, in other terms, the bringing to light of a negentropy at the heart of the banality of the environment – the consistency of subjectivity only being maintained by self-renewal through a minimal, individual or collective, resingularization.

The growth in artistic consumption we have witnessed in recent years should be placed, nevertheless, in relation to the increasing uniformity of the life of individuals in the urban context. It should be emphasized that the quasi-vitaminic function of this artistic consumption is not univocal. It can move in a direction parallel to uniformization, or play the role of an operator in the bifurcation of subjectivity (this ambivalence is particularly evident in the influence of rock culture). This is the dilemma every artist has to confront: 'to go with the flow', as advocated, for example, by the Transavantgarde and the apostles of postmodernism, or to work for the renewal of aesthetic practices relayed by other innovative segments of the Socius, at the risk of encountering incomprehension and of being isolated by the majority of people.

Of course, it's not at all clear how one can claim to hold creative singularity and potential social mutations together. And it has to be admitted that the contemporary Socius hardly lends itself to experimentation with this kind of aesthetic and ethico-political transversality. It nonetheless remains the case that the immense crisis sweeping the planet – chronic unemployment, ecological devastation, deregulation of modes of valorization, uniquely based on profit or State assistance – open the field up to a different deployment of aesthetic components. It doesn't simply involve occupying the free time of the unemployed and 'marginalized' in community centres! In fact it is the very productions of science, technology and social relations which will drift towards aesthetic paradigms. It's enough to refer to the latest book by Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, where they evoke the necessity of introducing into physics a 'narrative element' as indispensable to a genuine conception of evolution.<sup>1</sup>

Today our societies have their backs up against the wall; to survive they will have to develop research, innovation and creation still further – the very dimensions which imply an awareness of the strictly aesthetic techniques of rupture and suture. Something is detached and starts to work for itself, just as it can work for you if you can 'agglomerate' yourself to such a process. Such questioning concerns every institutional domain; for example, the school.

How do you make a class operate like a work of art? What are the possible paths to its singularization, the source of a 'purchase on existence' for the children who compose it?<sup>2</sup> And on the register of what I once called 'molecular revolutions', the Third World conceals treasures which deserve to be explored.<sup>3</sup>

A systematic rejection of subjectivity in the name of a mythical scientific objectivity continues to reign in the University. In the heyday of structuralism the subject was methodically excluded from its own multiple and heterogeneous material of expression. It is time to re-examine machinic productions of images, signs of artificial intelligence, etc., as new materials of subjectivity. In the Middle Ages, art and technique found refuge in the monasteries and convents which had managed to survive. Perhaps artists today constitute the final lines along which primordial existential questions are folded. How are the new fields of the possible going to be fitted out? How are sounds and forms going to be arranged so that the subjectivity adjacent to them remains in movement, and really alive?

The future of contemporary subjectivity is not to live indefinitely under the regime of self-withdrawal, of mass-mediatic infantilization, of ignorance of difference and alterity – both on the human and the cosmic register. Its modes of subjectivation will get out of their homogenetic 'entrapment' only if creative objectives appear within their reach. What is at stake here is the finality of the ensemble of human activities. Beyond material and political demands, what emerges is an aspiration for individual and collective reappropriation of the production of subjectivity. In this way the ontological heterogenesis of value becomes the focus of political concerns which at present lack the site, the immediate relation, the environment, the reconstitution of the social fabric and existential impact of art ... And at the end of a slow recomposition of assemblages of subjectivation, the chaotic explorations of an ecosophy – articulating between them scientific, political, environmental and mental ecologies – ought to be able to claim to replace the old ideologies which abusively sectorized the social, the private and the civil, and which were fundamentally incapable of establishing transversal junctions between the political, the ethical and the aesthetic.

It should, however, be clear that we are in no way advocating an aestheticization of the Socius, for, after all, promoting a new aesthetic paradigm involves overthrowing current forms of art as much as those of social life! I hold out my hand to the future. My approach will be marked by mechanical confidence or creative uncertainty, according to whether I consider everything to be worked out in advance or everything to be there for the taking – that the world can be rebuilt from other Universes of value and that other existential Territories should be constructed towards this end. The immense ordeals which

the planet is going through – such as the suffocation of its atmosphere – involve changes in production, ways of living and axes of value. The demographic explosion which will, in a few decades, see the population of Latin America multiply by three and that of Africa by five<sup>4</sup> does not proceed from an inexorable biological malediction. The key factors in it are economic (that is, they relate to power) and in the final analysis are subjective – cultural, social and mass-mediated. The future of the Third World rests primarily on its capacity to recapture its own processes of subjectivation in the context of a social fabric in the process of desertification. (In Brazil, for example, Wild West capitalism, savage gang and police violence coexist with interesting attempts by the Workers' Party movement at recomposing social and urbanistic practices.)

Among the fogs and miasmas which obscure our *fin de millénaire*, the question of subjectivity is now returning as a leitmotiv. It is not a natural given any more than air or water. How do we produce it, capture it, enrich it, and permanently reinvent it in a way that renders it compatible with Universes of mutant value? How do we work for its liberation, that is, for its resingularization? Psychoanalysis, institutional analysis, film, literature, poetry, innovative pedagogies, town planning and architecture – all the disciplines will have to combine their creativity to ward off the ordeals of barbarism, the mental implosion and chaotic spasms looming on the horizon, and transform them into riches and unforeseen pleasures, the promises of which, for all that, are all too tangible.

- 1 [footnote 2 in source] 'For mankind today, the "Big Bang" and the evolution of the Universe are part of the world in the same way as, in prior times, the myths of origin.' *Entre le temps et l'éternité* (Paris: Fayard, 1988) 65.
- 2 [3] Among the many works on institutional pedagogy, see René Lafitte, *Une journée dans une classe coopérative: le désir retrouvé* (Paris: Syros, 1985).
- 3 [4] On the networks of solidarity subsisting amongst those 'defeated' by modernity in the Third World: Serge Latouche, *La Planète des naufragés. Essai sur l'après-développement* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991).
- 4 [5] Jacques Vallin (de l'INED), *Transversales Science/Culture*, no. 9, June 1991 (29, rue Marsoulin, 75012 Paris). *La population mondiale, la population française* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991).

Félix Guattari, *Chaosmose* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1992); trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995) 130–5.

## Jacques Rancière

### Problems and Transformations in Critical Art//2004

*The French philosopher Jacques Rancière has written extensively on the relationship between aesthetics and politics as a partage du sensible – the sharing/division of what is visible, sayable and thinkable. In this extract from Malaise dans l'esthétique (2004), Rancière addresses the limitations of didactic critical art, as well as the spectacularization of relational art that seeks to repair the social bond.*

In its most general formula, critical art intends to raise consciousness of the mechanisms of domination in order to turn the spectator into a conscious agent in the transformation of the world. We know the dilemma that weighs upon this project. On the one hand, understanding alone can do little to transform consciousness and situations. The exploited have rarely had the need to have the laws of exploitation explained to them. Because it's not a misunderstanding of the existing state of affairs that nurtures the submission of the oppressed, but a lack of confidence in their own capacity to transform it. Now, the feeling of such a capacity assumes that they are already engaged in a political process that changes the configuration of a given situation (*données sensibles*), and which constructs the forms of a world to come within the existing world. On the other hand, the work of art that 'makes you understand', and that breaks up appearances, thereby kills the strangeness of an appearance of resistance that bears witness to the non-necessary or intolerable character of a world. Critical art that invites you to see the signs of Capital behind everyday objects and behaviours risks inscribing itself into the perpetuation of a world where the transformation of things into signs redoubles the very excess of interpretative signs that make all resistance disappear.

In this vicious circle of critical art we generally see proof that aesthetics and politics can't go together. It would be more fair, however, to recognize the plurality of ways in which they are linked. On the one hand, politics is not a simple sphere of action that comes after the 'aesthetic' revelation of the state of things. It has its own aesthetic: its ways of dissensually inventing scenes and characters, of manifestations and statements different from the inventions of art and sometimes even opposed to them. On the other hand, aesthetics has its own politics, or rather its own tension between two opposed politics: between the logic of art that becomes life at the price of abolishing itself as art, and the logic of art that does politics on the explicit condition of not doing it at all. The difficulty of critical art is not that of having to negotiate between politics and art.

It is having to negotiate the relation between the two aesthetic logics that exist independently of it, because they belong to the logic of the aesthetic regime itself. Critical art must negotiate the tension that pushes art towards 'life' and which, conversely, separates aesthetic sensoriality from other forms of sensible experience. It must borrow the connections that provoke political intelligibility from the blurry zone between art and other spheres. And it must borrow the sense of sensible heterogeneity that feeds the political energies of refusal from the isolation of the work of art. It's this negotiation between the forms of art and those of non-art that permits the formation of combinations of elements capable of speaking twice: from their readability and from their unreadability.

Therefore, the combination of these two forces necessarily takes the form of a realignment of heterogeneous logics. If collage has been one of the great techniques of modern art, it is because its technical forms obey a more fundamental aesthetico-political logic. Collage, in the most general sense of the term, is the principle of a 'third' aesthetic politics. Prior to mixing paintings, newspapers, oilcloth or clock parts, it mixes the strangeness of the aesthetic experience with the becoming-life of art and the becoming-art of ordinary life. Collage can be carried out as a pure encounter of heterogeneities, testifying wholesale to the incompatibility of two worlds. It's the surrealist encounter of the umbrella and the sewing machine, showing the absolute power of desire and dreams against the reality of the everyday world, but using its objects. Conversely, collage can be seen as evidence of the hidden link between two apparently opposed worlds: thus do the photomontages of John Heartfield, revealing the reality of capitalist gold in the throat of Adolf Hitler, or those of Martha Rosler, mixing photographs of the horror of Vietnam with advertising images of American comfort. In this case, it's not any longer the heterogeneity of the two worlds that should nourish a sense of the intolerable but, on the contrary, the making evident of the causal connection that links one to the other.

But the politics of collage finds its balancing point where it can combine the two relations and play on the line of indiscernability between the force of readability of sense and the force of strangeness of non-sense. So do, for example, the stories of cauliflowers in Brecht's *Arturo Ui*. They play an exemplary double game between denouncing the law of the market and using ways of deriding high art borrowed from the market debasement of culture. They simultaneously play on the readability of an allegory of Nazi power as the power of capital, and on a buffoonery that reduces all grand ideals, political or otherwise, to the insignificant business of vegetables. Behind this grand discourse, the secret of the market is thus equated with its absence of secret, with its triviality or radical non-meaning or non-sense. But this possibility of playing simultaneously on sense and on non-sense assumes another, which is

that one may play at once on the radical separation between the world of art and that of cauliflowers *and* on the permeability of the border that separates them. It's necessary that the cauliflowers be without any relation to art or politics and that they be already linked, that the border be always there yet already crossed.

In fact, when Brecht tries to put vegetables in the service of critical distanciation, they already have a long artistic history. Think of their role in impressionist still lifes. Think also of the way in which a novelist, Émile Zola, in *Le Ventre de Paris* (*The Belly of Paris*, also trans. *The Fat and the Thin*, 1874), elevated vegetables in general – and cabbages in particular – to the dignity of artistic and political symbols. This novel, written just after the fall of the Paris Commune, is in effect constructed on the polarity of two characters: on the one hand, the revolutionary who returns from deportation to the new Paris des Halles and finds himself crushed by the accumulation of commodities that materializes a new world of mass consumption; on the other hand, the impressionist painter who sings an epic of cabbages, of the new beauty, opposing the iron architecture of Les Halles and the piles of vegetables that it shelters to the old beauty henceforth deprived of life, symbolized by the neighbouring gothic church.

This Brechtian double game with the political and the apolitical character of cauliflowers is possible because there already exists a relationship between politics, the new beauty and market displays. We can generalize the meaning of this vegetable allegory. Critical art – art which plays on the union and tension of different aesthetic politics – is possible thanks to a movement of translation that has, for a long time now, crossed the border in both directions between the world of art and the prosaic world of the commodity. There's no need to imagine a 'postmodern' rupture blurring the border that separated high art from the forms of popular culture. The blurring of boundaries is as old as 'modernity' itself. Brechtian distanciation is clearly indebted to surrealist collages that brought into the domain of art the obsolete consumer goods from the arcades, the magazine illustrations, or the outmoded catalogues. But the process goes back much further. The moment when high art is constituted – by declaring its own end, according to Hegel – is also the moment when it started to be banalized in magazine reproductions and be corrupted in the bookshop trade and in the 'industrial' literature of newspapers. But this is also the time when commodities started to travel in the opposite direction, to cross the border that separates it from the world of art, to repopulate and re-materialize this art that Hegel believed to have exhausted its forms.

This is what Balzac shows us in *Illusions perdues* (*Lost Illusions*, 1837). The dilapidated and muddy stalls of the Galeries du bois, where the fallen poet Lucien de Rubempré goes to sell his prose and his soul among the trade of the Stock Exchange and of prostitution, instantly become the place of a new poetry:

a fantastical poetry made from the abolition of frontiers between the ordinary of the market and the extraordinary of art. The heterogeneous sensible from which art of the aesthetic age feeds can be found anywhere, and especially on the very terrain from which the purists wanted to eliminate it. Any commodity or useful object can, by becoming obsolete and unfit for consumption, become available to art in different ways, separate or linked: as an object of disinterested pleasure, a body encoded with a story, or as witness to a strangeness impossible to assimilate.

While some dedicated art-life to the creation of furniture for a new world, and others denounced the transformation of art products into the décor of aestheticized commodities, others seized this double movement that blurred the simple opposition of two great aesthetic politics: if art products do not cease to cross into the domain of commodities, then commodities and functional goods do not stop crossing the border in the other direction, leaving the sphere of utility and value to become hieroglyphs carrying their history on their body, or mute disaffected objects carrying the splendour of what no longer bears any project or will. This is what the idleness of the *Juno Ludovisi* could communicate to all obsolete functional objects and advertising imagery.<sup>1</sup> This 'dialectical work in things' that renders them available to art and for subversion – by breaking the uniform run of time, by introducing a temporality within another, by changing the status of objects and the relationship between exchange signs and art forms – is what Walter Benjamin discovered in his reading of Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* (*Paris Peasant*, 1926) which transformed a shop of old walking sticks in the Passage de l'Opera into a mythological landscape and legendary poem. And 'allegorical' art, which so many contemporary artists claim, inscribes itself in this long-term filiation.

It is because of this crossing of the borders and status changes between art and non-art that the radical strangeness of the aesthetic object and the active appropriation of the common world have been able to come together and constitute the 'third way' of a micro-politics of art, between the opposed paradigms of art becoming life and art as resistant form. This process underpins the performances of critical art, and can help us to understand its contemporary transformations and ambiguities. If there is a political question about contemporary art, it is not to be grasped in the grid of the opposition modern/postmodern. It is in the analysis of the changes affecting this 'third' politics, the politics founded on a game of exchanges and displacements between the world of art and that of non-art.

The politics of the mix of heterogeneous elements took a dominant form, from dadaism up to the diverse forms of anti-establishment art in the 1960s: the polemical form. The game of exchanges between art and non-art served to construct collisions between heterogeneous elements, dialectical oppositions

between form and content, that themselves denounced social relations and the place was allocated for art there. The stichomythic form that Brecht gave to a discussion in verse on the matter of cauliflowers denounced the hidden interests behind fine words.<sup>2</sup> Dadaist canvases glued with bus tickets, clock parts and other accessories ridiculed the pretensions of an art cut off from life. Warhol's introduction of soup cans and Brillo boxes into the museum denounced high art's pretensions to isolation. Wolf Vostell's blending of celebrity images and war images showed the dark side of the American dream; Krzysztof Wodiczko's projections of homeless figures onto American monuments denounced the expulsion of the poor from public space; Hans Haacke's little labels placed alongside museum works revealed them to be objects of financial investment, and so on. Heterogeneous collage generally takes the form of a shock, which reveals one world hidden beneath another: capitalist violence behind the happiness of consumption; market interests and violent class struggle behind the apparent serenity of art. Art's self-criticism thus blended with criticism of the mechanisms of state and market domination.

This polemical function of the shock of the heterogeneous is always mentioned in the legitimation of works, installations and exhibitions. However, the continuity of this discourse conceals significant transformations that a simple example can allow us to grasp. In 2000, in Paris, an exhibition called *Bruit de fond* (*Background Noise*) put 1970s and contemporary works on view. Amongst the former were Martha Rosler's photomontages from the series *Bringing the War Home* (1967–72), juxtaposing advertising images of domestic American happiness with images of the war in Vietnam. Nearby was another work devoted to the hidden side of American happiness. Made by Wang Du, it comprised two elements: on the left, the Clinton couple, represented as two mannequins from a wax museum; on the other, another kind of wax figure: a sculpture of Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* (*The Origin of the World*, 1866), which, as we know, explicitly presents the female sexual organs. The two works played on the relationship between an image of happiness or greatness and its hidden side of violence or profanity. But the currency of the Lewinsky affair was not enough to confer political stakes to the representation of the Clinton couple. To be precise, currency was of little importance. We were witnessing the automatic functioning of canonical procedures of delegitimation: the wax figure that turns the politician into a puppet; sexual profanation that is the little dirty hidden/exposed secret of all forms of sublimity. These procedures always work. But they work by turning on themselves, like the denigration of power in general taking the place of political denunciation. Or rather, their function is to make us sensitive towards this automatic-ness itself, of delegitimizing the procedures of delegitimation at the same time as delegitimizing their object. Humorous

distance then replaces provocative shock.

I've chosen this significant example, but you could cite many others that witness, beneath the apparent continuity of mechanisms and of their textual legitimations, the same slide of yesterday's dialectical provocations towards new figures of the composition of the heterogeneous. And you could range these multiple slidings under four major types of contemporary exhibitions: the game, the inventory, the encounter and the mystery.

First of all the *game*, which is to say a double-game. Elsewhere I have mentioned an exhibition presented at Minneapolis under the title *Let's Entertain*, and renamed, in Paris, *Au-delà du spectacle*.<sup>3</sup> The American title already played a double game, winking towards a criticism of the *entertainment* industry, and also towards *pop's* denunciation of the separation between high art and a popular culture of consumption. The Parisian title introduced a further turn. On the one hand, the reference to Guy Debord's book [*La Société du spectacle*] reinforced the rigour of the critique of *entertainment*. But on the other hand, it recalled that his antidote to spectacle's passivity is the free activity of the game. This play on the titles brings us back, of course, to the undecidability of the works themselves. The menagerie of Charles Ray or the huge football-table of Maurizio Cattelan could indifferently symbolize *pop* derision, a critique of market *entertainment*, or the positive power of games. And all the conviction of the exhibition curators was needed in order to prove to us that manga, adverts and disco sounds as reprocessed by the other artists offered us a radical critique of the alienated consumption of leisure by their very reduplication. Rather than a Schillerian suspension of the relations of domination, the games invoked here mark the suspension of meaning in the collages presented. Their value as polemic revelations has become undecidable. And it's the production of this undecidability that is at the heart of the work of many artists and exhibitions. Where the critical artist once painted clashing images of market domination or imperialist war, the contemporary video artist lightly *détournes* video-clips and manga; where giant puppets once made contemporary history into an epic spectacle, balls and toys now 'interrogate' our ways of life. A redoubling of the spectacles, props and icons of ordinary life, flimsily displaced, no longer invites us to read signs in objects in order to understand the jurisdictions of our world. They claim both to sharpen our perception of the play of signs, our consciousness of the fragility of the procedures for the reading of those signs, and our pleasure at playing with the undecidable. The virtue that these artists most willingly reclaim for themselves today is humour: well, humour as a flimsy displacement that it's possible not even to notice in their way of presenting a sequence of signs or an assemblage of objects.

These procedures of delegitimation, passed from a critical to a ludic register,

become, if pushed, indistinguishable from those produced by power and the media, or by the market's own forms of presentation. Humour itself becomes the dominant mode of exhibiting commodities, and advertising increasingly plays on the undecidability of a product's use value and its value as a support for images or signs. The only remaining subversion is, then, to play on this undecidability; to suspend, in a society working towards the accelerated consumption of signs, the meaning of the protocols of reading those signs.

Consciousness of this undecidability favours a displacement of artistic propositions towards the second form, that of the *inventory*. The meeting of heterogeneous objects no longer aims to provoke a critical shock, nor to play on the undecidability of this shock. The same materials, images and messages that were interrogated according to the rules of an art of suspicion are now summoned to the reverse operation: to repopulate the world of things, to re-seize their collective historical potential that critical art dissolved into manipulable signs. Assembling heterogeneous materials becomes a positive memory, in a double form. Primarily it's an inventory of historical traces: objects, photographs or simply lists of names that witness a shared history or a shared world. Four years ago in Paris, an exhibition called *Voilà – Le monde dans la tête* thus set out to recapitulate the twentieth century. Through photographic displays and diverse installations, it was about gathering experiences, about making displays of any old objects, names or anonymous faces speak, about being introduced into these welcoming mechanisms. The visitor was first welcomed by the sign of a game (Robert Filliou's pattern of multicoloured dice), then walked through a Christian Boltanski installation, *Les Abonnés du téléphone*, comprising directories from different years and countries that you could, if you liked, take off the shelves and browse on the tables placed at your disposal. Then a sound installation by On Kawara that evoked, for him, some of 'the last forty thousand years gone by'. Hans-Peter Feldmann then presented photographs of one hundred people aged from one to one hundred years old. Peter Fischli and David Weiss's display of photographs under vitrines exposed a *Visible World* resembling holiday photos from family albums, while Fabrice Hybert showed a collection of bottles of mineral water, etc.

In this logic, the artist is at once an archivist of collective life and the collector, witness to a shared ability. Because the inventory, which evidences the potential of objects' and images' collective history, by bringing closer the art of the sculptor and that of the rag-and-bone man, shows in this way the relationship between the inventive gestures of art and the multiplicity of inventions of the arts of doing and arts of living that constitute a shared world: DIY, collecting, language games, props for manifestations, etc. The artist takes it upon himself to make visible, in art's reserved space, these arts of doing that exist

throughout society.<sup>4</sup> Through this double vocation of the inventory, critical art's political/polemical vocation tends to become a social/communitarian vocation.

This slippage is shown by the third form. I've called it the *encounter*. You could also call it the *invitation*. The artist-collector institutes a space of reception to engage the passer-by in an unexpected relationship. Thus Boltanski's installation invites the visitor to take a directory from the shelves and sit at a table to consult it. A little further along in the same exhibition, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster invited us to take a volume from a pile of pocket books and to sit down and read them on a carpet depicting a desert island typical of children's dreams. In another exhibition, Rirkrit Tiravanija put at the visitor's disposal packets of food, camping gas and cooking pans so that he could prepare a Chinese soup for himself, sit down and engage in discussion with the artist or with other visitors. Parallel to these transformations in the exhibition space are many forms of intervention in urban space: a modified sign in a bus shelter transforms the necessity of everyday life into an adventure (Pierre Huyghe); an illuminated text in Arabic or a loudspeaker in Turkish reverses the relations between the local and the foreign (Jens Haaning); an empty pavilion is offered to the social desires of the residents of a neighbourhood (Group A12). Relational art thus intends to create not only objects but situations and encounters. But this too simple opposition between objects and situations operates a short-circuit. What is at stake is the transformation of these problematic spaces that conceptual art had opposed to art's objects/commodities. Yesterday's distance towards commodities is now inverted to propose a new proximity between entities, the institution of new forms of social relations. Art no longer wants to respond to the excess of commodities and signs, but to a lack of connections. As the principle theorist of this school writes: 'by offering small services, the artist repairs the weaknesses in the social bond'.<sup>5</sup>

The loss of the 'social bond', and the duty incumbent on artists to work to repair it, are the words on the agenda. But an acknowledgement of this loss can be more ambitious. It's not only the forms of civility that we will have lost, but the very sense of the co-presence of beings and things that constitutes a world. This is what the fourth type proposes to mend, the *mystery*. Applying it to cinema, Jean-Luc Godard honoured this category that, since Mallarmé, designates a certain way of linking heterogeneous elements: in the latter, for example, the poet's thought, the steps of a dancer, the unfolding of a fan, the foam of a wave or the movement of a curtain lifted by the wind; in Godard, the rose of *Carmen*, a Beethoven quartet, the foam of waves on the beach evoking *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf, and the surge of bodies in love. This sequence of *Prénom Carmen* that I'm summarizing really shows the passage from one logic to another. The choice of elements put into relation in effect restores a tradition of

*détournement*: the Andalusian mountains become a weekend beach; romantic smugglers become crazy terrorists; the discarded flower of which Don José sings is only a plastic rose, and Micaela massacres Beethoven instead of singing Bizet arias. But the *détournement* no longer has the function of a political critique of high art. On the contrary, it effaces the picturesque imagery to which the critique appeals in order to let the Bizet characters be reborn as the pure abstraction of a Beethoven quartet. It makes gypsies and toreadors disappear in the melting music of images that unites, in the same breath, the sound of strings, of waves and of bodies. In opposition to the dialectical practice that accentuates the heterogeneity of elements to provoke a shock, bearing witness to a reality marked by antagonisms, mystery emphasises the kinship of the heterogeneous. It constructs a game of analogies in which they witness a common world, where the most distant realities appear as if cut from the same sensible fabric and can always be linked by what Godard calls the 'fraternity of metaphors'.

'Mystery' was the central concept of symbolism. And certainly, symbolism is once again on the agenda. By that I'm not referring to certain spectacular and slightly nauseous forms, like the resurrection of symbolist mythology and Wagnerian fantasies of the total work of art in Matthew Barney's *Cremaster* cycle (1997–99). I'm thinking of the more modest, sometimes imperceptible way in which assemblages of objects, images and signs presented by contemporary installations have, over the last few years, slid the logic of provocative dissensus into that of a mystery that bears witness to a co-presence. Elsewhere I have mentioned the photographs, videos and installations of the exhibition 'Moving Pictures', presented at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2002.<sup>6</sup> It affirmed contemporary art's continuity with an artistic radicality born in the 1970s as a critique of both artistic autonomy and dominant representations. But – in the image of Vanessa Beecroft's videos presenting nude and inexpressive female bodies in the museum space, in the photographs of Sam Taylor-Wood, Rineke Dijkstra or Gregory Crewdson showing bodies of ambiguous identity in undefined spaces, or in Christian Boltanski's dark room with lightbulbs illuminating walls covered in anonymous photographs – the interrogation of perceptual stereotypes, which was always invoked, slid towards a completely different interest in the vague borders between the familiar and the strange, the real and the symbolic, that fascinated painters at the time of symbolism, metaphysical painting and magic realism. However, on the upper level of the museum, a video installation by Bill Viola was projected onto four walls of a dark room: flames and deluges, slow processions, urban wanderings, a wake, or casting off a ship, simultaneously symbolizing the four elements and the whole cycle of birth, life, death and resurrection. The experimental art of video thus came to manifest the latent tendency of many mechanisms of today that mimic,

in their own ways, the great frescoes of human destiny that the symbolist and expressionist period had a liking for.

Of course these categorizations are schematic. Contemporary exhibitions and installations confer on the couple 'to exhibit/to install' several roles at once; they play on the fluctuating border between critical provocation and the undecidability of its meaning, between the form of an exhibited work and that of the appointed space of interaction. The mechanisms of contemporary exhibitions often cultivate this polyvalence or submit to its effect. The exhibition *Voilà* thus presented an installation by Bertrand Lavier, *Salle des Martin*, which gathered together about fifty paintings, from the collections of provincial museums, that had as their only shared element the name of their author, Martin – the most common surname in France. The initial idea set this installation in relation to a questioning of the meanings of a work and of the signature that is characteristic of conceptual art. But in this new memorial context it took on a new meaning, attesting to the multiplicity of more or less ignored pictorial abilities, and inscribing a lost world of painting in the memory of the century. This multiplicity of meanings attributed to the same mechanisms is sometimes presented as bearing witness to art's democracy, refusing to disentangle a complexity of standpoints and a fluidity of borders that themselves reflect the complexity of a world.

The contradictory attitudes shown by the main aesthetic paradigms today express a more fundamental undecidability about the politics of art. This undecidability is not the effect of a postmodern turn. It is constitutive: aesthetic suspension lets itself be interpreted in two ways. The singularity of art is linked to the identification of its autonomous forms with the forms of life and with possible politics. These possible politics are only ever realized in full at the price of abolishing the singularity of art, the singularity of politics, or the two together. Being conscious of this undecidability today leads to opposed feelings: in some, a melancholy with regard to the shared world that art carried within itself, if this had not been betrayed by political enrolment or commercial compromises; in others, an awareness of its limits, the tendency to play on the limitation of its powers and the very uncertainty of its effects. But the paradox of our present is perhaps that this art, so uncertain of its politics, might be invited to a higher degree of intervention by the very deficit of politics proper. It's as if the shrinking of public space and the effacement of political inventiveness in a time of consensus gave a substitutive political function to the mini-demonstrations of artists, to their collections of objects and traces, to their mechanisms of interaction, to their provocations *in situ* or elsewhere. Knowing if these 'substitutions' can recompose political spaces, or if they must be content to parody them, is certainly one of the questions of today.

- 1 The *Junon Ludovisi* is a statue described by Schiller in the fifteenth of his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794), and which is key to Rancière's elucidation of the aesthetic regime of art. For a fuller discussion see Jacques Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes', *New Left Review*, March/April 2002. [Translator]
- 2 Stichomythic, from *stychomathia* – dialogue in alternate lines of verse, usually in disputation. From Greek drama. [Translator]
- 3 Cf. Jacques Rancière, *Le Destin des images* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2003) 33.
- 4 Reference is made here to Michel de Certeau's book *Les Arts de faire* (Paris: UGE, 1980).
- 5 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 1998) 37.
- 6 Jacques Rancière, *Le Destin des images*, *op cit.*, 74–5.

Jacques Rancière, 'Problems and Transformations in Critical Art', *Malaise dans l'esthétique* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 2004) 65–84. Translated by Claire Bishop, assisted by Pablo Lafuente, 2006.

**IT  
IS  
NOT  
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QUESTION  
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COULD BECOME INTERESTING  
UNDER NEW CONDITIONS  
OF  
CULTURAL CREATION**

Guy Debord, *Towards a Situationist International*, 1957

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## Guy Debord

### Towards a Situationist International//1957

*Shortly before abandoning visual art for film and literature, Guy Debord outlined his theory of 'constructed situations' – participatory events using experimental behaviour to break the spectacular bind of capitalism. Constructed situations, in which the audience is an active participant, have been an ongoing point of reference for contemporary artists working with live events.*

Our central purpose is the construction of situations, that is, the concrete construction of temporary settings of life and their transformation into a higher, passionate nature. We must develop an intervention directed by the complicated factors of two great components in perpetual interaction: the material setting of life and the behaviours that it incites and that overturn it.

Our prospects for action on the environment lead, in their latest development, to the idea of a unitary urbanism. Unitary urbanism first becomes clear in the use of the whole of arts and techniques as means cooperating in an integral composition of the environment. This whole must be considered infinitely more extensive than the old influence of architecture on the traditional arts, or the current occasional application to anarchic urbanism of specialized techniques or of scientific investigations such as ecology. Unitary urbanism must control, for example, the acoustic environment as well as the distribution of different varieties of drink or food. It must take up the creation of new forms and the *détournement* of known forms of architecture and urbanism – as well as the *détournement* of the old poetry and cinema. Integral art, about which so much has been said, can only materialize at the level of urbanism. But it can no longer correspond with any traditional definitions of the aesthetic. In each of its experimental cities, unitary urbanism will work through a certain number of force fields, which we can temporarily designate by the standard expression *district*. Each district will be able to lead to a precise harmony, broken off from neighbouring harmonies; or rather will be able to play on a maximum breaking up of internal harmony.

Secondly, unitary urbanism is dynamic, i.e., in close touch with styles of behaviour. The most reduced element of unitary urbanism is not the house but the architectural complex, which is the union of all the factors conditioning an environment, or a sequence of environments colliding at the scale of the constructed situation. Spatial development must take the affective realities that the experimental city will determine into account. One of our comrades has promoted a theory of states-of-mind districts, according to which each quarter of

a city would tend to induce a single emotion, to which the subject will consciously expose herself or himself. It seems that such a project draws timely conclusions from an increasing depreciation of accidental primary emotions, and that its realization could contribute to accelerating this change. Comrades who call for a new architecture, a free architecture, must understand that this new architecture will not play at first on free, poetic lines and forms – in the sense that today's 'lyrical abstract' painting uses these words – but rather on the atmospheric effects of rooms, corridors, streets, atmospheres linked to the behaviours they contain. Architecture must advance by taking as its subject emotionally moving situations, more than emotionally moving forms, as the material it works with. And the experiments drawn from this subject will lead to unknown forms. Psychogeographical research, 'study of the exact laws and precise effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, acting directly on the affective department of individuals', thus takes on its double meaning of active observation of today's urban areas and the establishment of hypotheses on the structure of a situationist city. Psychogeography's progress depends to a great extent on the statistical extension of its methods of observation, but principally on experimentation through concrete interventions in urbanism. Until this stage, the objective truth of even the first psychogeographical data cannot be ensured. But even if these data should turn out to be false, they would certainly be false solutions to a genuine problem.

Our action on deportment, in connection with other desirable aspects of a revolution in customs, can be defined summarily as the invention of a new species of games. The most general aim must be to broaden the non-mediocre portion of life, to reduce its empty moments as much as possible. It may thus be spoken of as an enterprise of human life's quantitative increase, more serious than the biological processes currently being studied. Even there, it implies a qualitative increase whose developments are unforeseeable. The situationist game stands out from the standard conception of the game by the radical negation of the ludic features of competition and of its separation from the stream of life. In contrast, the situationist game does not appear distinct from a moral choice, deciding what ensures the future reign of freedom and play. This is obviously linked to the certainty of the continual and rapid increase of leisure, at a level corresponding to that of our era's productive forces. It is equally linked to the recognition of the fact that a battle over leisure is taking place before our eyes whose importance in the class struggle has not been sufficiently analyzed. To this day, the ruling class is succeeding in making use of the leisure that the revolutionary proletariat extracted from it by developing a vast industrial sector of leisure that is an unrivaled instrument for bestializing the proletariat through by-products of mystifying ideology and bourgeois tastes. One of the reasons for the American

working class's incapacity to become politicized should likely be sought amidst this abundance of televised baseness. By obtaining through collective pressure a slight rise in the price of its labour above the minimum necessary for the production of that labour, the proletariat not only enlarges its power of struggle but also widens the terrain of the struggle. New forms of this struggle then occur parallel with directly economic and political conflicts. Revolutionary propaganda can be said until now to have been constantly dominated in these forms of struggle in all countries where advanced industrial development has introduced them. That the necessary transformation of the base could be delayed by errors and weaknesses at the level of superstructures has unfortunately been proven by some of the twentieth century's experiences. New forces must be hurled into the battle over leisure, and we will take up our position there.

A first attempt at a new manner of department has already been achieved with what we have designated the *dérive*, which is the practice of a passionate uprooting through the hurried change of environments, as well as a means of studying psychogeography and situationist psychology. But the application of this will to ludic creation must be extended to all known forms of human relationships, and must, for example, influence the historical evolution of emotions like friendship and love. Everything leads to the belief that the main insight of our research lies in the hypothesis of constructions of situations.

A man's life is a sequence of chance situations, and if none of them is exactly similar to another, at the least these situations are, in their immense majority, so undifferentiated and so dull that they perfectly present the impression of similitude. The corollary of this state of affairs is that the singular, enchanting situations experienced in life strictly restrain and limit this life. We must try to construct situations, i.e., collective environments, ensembles of impressions determining the quality of a moment. If we take the simple example of a gathering of a group of individuals for a given time, and taking into account acquaintances and material means at our disposal, we must study which arrangement of the site, which selection of participants, and which incitement of events suit the desired environment. Surely the powers of a situation will broaden considerably in time and in space with the realizations of unitary urbanism or the education of a situationist generation. The construction of situations begins on the other side of the modern collapse of the idea of the theatre. It is easy to see to what extent the very principle of the theatre – non-intervention – is attached to the alienation of the old world. Inversely, we see how the most valid of revolutionary cultural explorations have sought to break the spectator's psychological identification with the hero, so as to incite this spectator into activity by provoking his capacities to revolutionize his own life. The situation is thus made to be lived by its constructors. The role of the 'public', if not passive at least a walk-on, must ever

diminish, while the share of those who cannot be called actors but, in a new meaning of the term, 'livers', will increase.

Let us say that we have to multiply poetic objects and subjects (unfortunately so rare at present that the most trifling of them assumes an exaggerated emotional importance) and that we have to organize games of these poetic subjects among these poetic objects. There is our entire programme, which is essentially ephemeral. Our situations will be without a future; they will be places where people are constantly coming and going. The unchanging nature of art, or of anything else, does not enter into our considerations, which are in earnest. The idea of eternity is the basest one a man could conceive of regarding his acts.

Situationist techniques have yet to be invented, but we know that a task presents itself only where the material conditions necessary for its realization already exist, or are at least in the process of formation. We must begin with a small-scale, experimental phase. Undoubtedly we must draw up blueprints for situations, like scripts, despite their unavoidable inadequacy at the beginning. Therefore, we will have to introduce a system of notation whose accuracy will increase as experiments in construction teach us more. We will have to find or confirm laws, like those that make situationist emotion dependent upon an extreme concentration or an extreme dispersion of acts (classical tragedy providing an approximate image of the first case, and the *dérive* of the second). Besides the direct means that will be used toward precise ends, the construction of situations will require, in its affirmative phase, a new implementation of reproductive technologies. We could imagine, for example, live televisual projections of some aspects of one situation into another, bringing about modifications and interferences. But, more simply, cinematic 'news' reels might finally deserve their name if we establish a new documentary school dedicated to fixing the most meaningful moments of a situation for our archives, before the development of these elements has led to a different situation. The systematic construction of situations having to generate previously non-existent feelings, the cinema will discover its greatest pedagogical role in the diffusion of these new passions.

Situationist theory resolutely asserts a non-continuous conception of life. The idea of consistency must be transferred from the perspective of the whole of a life – where it is a reactionary mystification founded on the belief in an immortal soul and, in the last analysis, on the division of labour – to the viewpoint of moments isolated from life, and of the construction of each moment by a unitary use of situationist means. In a classless society, it might be said, there will be no more painters, only situationists who, among other things, make paintings.

Life's chief emotional drama, after the never-ending conflict between desire and reality hostile to that desire, certainly appears to be the sensation of time's passage. The situationist attitude consists in counting on time's swift passing,

unlike aesthetic processes which aim at the fixing of emotion. The situationist challenge to the passage of emotions and of time will be its wager on always gaining ground on change, on always going further in play and in the multiplication of moving periods. Obviously, it is not easy for us at this time to make such a wager; however, even were we to lose it a thousand times, there is no other progressive attitude to adopt.

The situationist minority was first formed as a trend within the lettrist left wing, then within the Lettrist International, which it eventually controlled. The same objective impulse is leading several contemporary avant-garde groups to similar conclusions. Together we must discard all the relics of the recent past. We deem that today an agreement on a unified action among the revolutionary cultural avant-garde must implement such a programme. We do not have formulas nor final results in mind. We are merely proposing an experimental research that will collectively lead in a few directions that we are in the process of defining, and in others that have yet to be defined. The very difficulty of arriving at the first situationist achievements is proof of the newness of the realm we are entering. What alters the way we see the streets is more important than what alters the way we see painting. Our working hypotheses will be reconsidered at each future upheaval, wherever it may come from.

We will be told, chiefly by revolutionary intellectuals and artists who for reasons of taste put up with a certain powerlessness, that this 'situationism' is quite disagreeable, that we have made nothing of beauty, that we would be better off speaking of Gide, and that no one sees any clear reason to be interested in us. People will shy away by reproaching us for repeating a number of viewpoints that have already caused too much scandal, and that express the simple desire to be noticed. They will become indignant about the conduct we have believed necessary to adopt on a few occasions in order to keep or to recover our distances. We reply: it is not a question of knowing whether this interests you, but rather of whether you yourself could become interesting under new conditions of cultural creation. Revolutionary artists and intellectuals, your role is not to shout that freedom is abused when we refuse to march with the enemies of freedom. You do not have to imitate bourgeois aesthetes who try to bring everything back to what has already been done, because the already-done does not make them uncomfortable. You know that creation is never pure. Your role is to search for what will give rise to the international avant-garde, to join in the constructive critique of its programme, and to call for its support.

### Our Immediate Tasks

We must support, alongside the workers' parties or extremist tendencies existing within these parties, the necessity of considering a consistent ideological action

for fighting, on the level of the passions, the influence of the propaganda methods of late capitalism: to concretely contrast, at every opportunity, other desirable ways of life with the reflections of the capitalist way of life; to destroy, by all hyperpolitical means, the bourgeois idea of happiness. At the same time, taking into account the existence among the ruling social class of elements who have always cooperated, through boredom and need of novelty, in that which finally entails the disappearance of these societies, we must urge persons who hold certain of the vast resources that we lack to give us the means to carry out our experiments, through an account analogous to what might be employed in scientific research and might be quite profitable as well.

We must introduce everywhere a revolutionary alternative to the ruling culture; coordinate all the enquiries that are happening at this moment without a general perspective; orchestrate, through criticism and propaganda, the most progressive artists and intellectuals of all countries to make contact with us with a view to a joint action.

We must declare ourselves ready to resume discussion on the basis of this platform with all those who, having taken part in a prior phase of our action, are again capable of rejoining us.

We must advance the keywords of unitary urbanism, of experimental behaviour, of hyperpolitical propaganda, and of the construction of environments. The passions have been interpreted enough: the point now is to discover others.

1 In French, *viveurs*, a theatrical pun. Typically, the word means 'rake' or 'playboy', and was thus commonly linked with the dubious morality of the theatrical world; here, Debord assigns it a new meaning that recalls its roots in *vivre*, to live. [Translator]

Guy Debord, *Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste internationale* (Paris: Internationale lettriste, July 1957), first presented by Guy Debord to the founding conference of the Situationist International at Cosio d'Arroscia, July 1957; translated in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002) 44–50.

## Allan Kaprow

### Notes on the Elimination of the Audience//1966

*The emergence of Happenings in New York in the late 1950s was in part a response to the gestural expressionism of Jackson Pollock's paintings. Allan Kaprow sought from the Happenings a heightened experience of the everyday, in which viewers were formally fused with the space-time of the performance and thereby lost their identity as 'audience'.*

Although the Assemblages' and Environments' free style was directly carried into the Happenings, the use of standard performance conventions from the very start tended to truncate the implications of the art. The Happenings were presented to small, intimate gatherings of people in lofts, classrooms, gymnasiums and some of the offbeat galleries, where a clearing was made for the activities. The watchers sat very close to what took place, with the artists and their friends acting along with assembled environmental constructions. The audience occasionally changed seats as in a game of musical chairs, turned around to see something behind it, or stood without seats in tight but informal clusters. Sometimes, too, the event moved in and amongst the crowd, which produced some movement on the latter's part. But, however flexible these techniques were in practice, there was always an audience in one (usually static) space and a show given in another.

This proved to be a serious drawback, in my opinion, to the plastic morphology of the works, for reasons parallel to those which make galleries inappropriate for Assemblages and Environments. But it was more dramatically evident. The rooms enframed the events, and the immemorial history of cultural expectations attached to theatrical productions crippled them. It was repeatedly clear with each Happening that in spite of the unique imagery and vitality of its impulse, the traditional staging, if it did not suggest a 'crude' version of the avant-garde Theatre of the Absurd, at least smacked of night club acts, side shows, cock fights and bunkhouse skits. Audiences seemed to catch these probably unintended allusions and so took the Happenings for charming diversions, but hardly for art or even purposive activity. Night club acts can of course be more than merely diverting, but their structure of 'grammar' is unusually hackneyed and, as such, is detrimental to experimentation and change.

Unfortunately, the fact that there was a tough nut to crack in the Happenings seems to have struck very few of its practitioners. Even today, the majority continues to popularize an art of 'acts' which often is well-done enough but

fulfils neither its implications nor strikes out in uncharted territory.

But for those who sensed what was at stake, the issues began to appear. It would take a number of years to work them out by trial and error, for there is sometimes, though not always, a great gap between theory and production. But gradually a number of rules-of-thumb could be listed: [...]

(F) *It follows that audiences should be eliminated entirely.* All the elements – people, space, the particular materials and character of the environment, time – can in this way be integrated. And the last shred of theatrical convention disappears. For anyone once involved in the painter's problem of unifying a field of divergent phenomena, a group of inactive people in the space of a Happening is just dead space. It is no different from a dead area of red paint on a canvas. Movements call up movements in response, whether on a canvas or in a Happening. A Happening with only an empathic response on the part of a seated audience is not a Happening but stage theatre.

Then, on a human plane, to assemble people unprepared for an event and say that they are 'participating' if apples are thrown at them or they are herded about is to ask very little of the whole notion of participation. Most of the time the response of such an audience is half-hearted or even reluctant, and sometimes the reaction is vicious and therefore destructive to the work (though I suspect that in numerous instances of violent reaction to such treatment it was caused by the latent sadism in the action, which they quite rightly resented). After a few years, in any case, 'audience response' proves to be so predictably pure cliché that anyone serious about the problem should not tolerate it, any more than the painter should continue the use of dripped paint as a stamp of modernity when it has been adopted by every lampshade and Formica manufacturer in the country.

I think that it is a mark of mutual respect that all persons involved in a Happening be willing and committed participants who have a clear idea what they are to do. This is simply accomplished by writing out the scenario or score for all and discussing it thoroughly with them beforehand. In this respect it is not different from the preparations for a parade, a football match, a wedding or religious service. It is not even different from a play. The one big difference is that while knowledge of the scheme is necessary, professional talent is not; the situations in a Happening are lifelike or, if they are unusual, are so rudimentary that professionalism is actually uncalled for. Actors are stage-trained and bring over habits from their art that are hard to shake off; the same is true of any other kind of showman or trained athlete. The best participants have been persons not normally engaged in art or performance, but who are moved to take part in an activity that is at once meaningful to them in its ideas yet natural in its methods.

There is an exception, however, to restricting the Happenings to participants only. When a work is performed on a busy avenue, passers-by will ordinarily stop and watch, just as they might watch the demolition of a building. These are not theatre-goers and their attention is only temporarily caught in the course of their normal affairs. They might stay, perhaps become involved in some unexpected way, or they will more likely move on after a few minutes. Such persons are authentic parts of the environment.

A variant of this is the person who is engaged unwittingly with a performer in some planned action: a butcher will sell certain meats to a customer-performer without realizing that he is a part of a piece having to do with purchasing, cooking, and eating meat.

Finally, there is this additional exception to the rule. A Happening may be scored for *just watching*. Persons will do nothing else. They will watch things, each other, possibly actions not performed by themselves, such as a bus stopping to pick up commuters. This would not take place in a theatre or arena, but anywhere else. It could be an extremely meditative occupation when done devotedly; just 'cute' when done indifferently. In a more physical mood, the idea of called-for watching could be contrasted with periods of action. Both normal tendencies to observe and act would now be engaged in a responsible way. At those moments of relative quiet the observer would hardly be a passive member of an audience; he would be closer to the role of a Greek chorus, without its specific meaning necessarily, but with its required place in the overall scheme. At other moments the active and observing roles would be exchanged, so that by reciprocation the whole meaning of watching would be altered, away from something like spoon-feeding, towards something purposive, possibly intense [...]

Allan Kaprow, *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966) 187–8; 195–8.

## Hélio Oiticica

### Dance in My Experience (Diary Entries)//1965–66

*No account of collective production and reception in art is complete without reference to the work and writings of the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica. By the mid-1960s, Oiticica was collaborating with participants from the samba schools of the Rio favelas to produce disruptive events based around dancing in parangolé capes (see footnote below). The emphasis was on a Dionysian loss of self in social fusion.*

Before anything else I need to clarify my interest in dance, in rhythm, which in my particular case came from a vital necessity for disintellectualization. Such intellectual disinhibition, a necessary free expression, was required since I felt threatened by an excessively intellectual expression. This was the definite step towards the search for myth, for a reappraisal of this myth and a new foundation in my art. Personally, it was therefore an experience of the greatest vitality – indispensable, particularly in the demolition of preconceived ideas and stereotypification, etc. As we will see later, there was a convergence of this experience with the form that my art took in the *Parangolé*<sup>1</sup> and all that relates to this (since the *Parangolé* influenced and changed the trajectory of the *Nuclei*, *Penetrables* and *Bólides*).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it was the beginning of a definitive social experience; I am still unaware of the direction which this will take.

Dance is *par excellence* the search for a direct expressive act; it is the immanence of the act. Ballet dance, on the contrary, is excessively intellectualized through the presence of choreography that searches to transcend this act. However, the 'Dionysian' dance, which is born out of the interior rhythm of the collective, exteriorizes itself as a characteristic of popular groupings, nations, etc. In these, improvisation reigns, as opposed to organized choreography; in fact the freer the improvisation the better. It is as if an immersion into rhythm takes place, a flux where the intellect remains obscured by an internal mythical force that operates at an individual and collective level (in fact, in this instance one cannot establish a distinction between the collective and the individual). The images are mobile, rapid, inapprehensible – they are the opposite of the static icon that is characteristic of the so-called fine arts. In reality, dance, rhythm, is the actual aesthetic act in its essential raw state – implied here is the direction towards the discovery of immanence. Such an act, the immersion into rhythm, is a pure creative act, it is an art. It is the creation of the actual act, of continuity, and also, like all acts of creative expression, it is a producer of images. Actually, for me it provided a new discovery of the image, a

recreation of the image, encompassing unavoidably the aesthetic expression in my work.

The collapse of social preconceived ideas, of separations of groups, social classes etc., would be inevitable and essential in the realization of this vital experience. I discovered here the connection between the collective and individual expression – the most important step towards this – which is the ability not to acknowledge abstract levels, such as social ‘layers’, in order to establish a comprehension of a totality. The bourgeois conditioning which I had been submitted to since I was born undid itself as if by magic – I should mention, in fact, that the process was already under way even before I was aware of it. The unbalance that was entailed by this social dislocation, from the continuous discrediting of the structures that rule our life in this society, specifically here in Brazil, was both inevitable and charged with problems. These, far from being overcome, renew themselves every day. I believe that the dynamics of the social structures were at this moment revealed to me in all their crudity, in their most immediate expression, precisely due to my process of discrediting the so-called social layers. Not that I consider their existence but that, for me, they have become schematic, artificial, as if all of a sudden I gazed from a vantage point onto their map, their scheme, being ‘external’ to them. Marginalization, naturally an already present characteristic of the artist, has become fundamental for me. This position represents a total ‘lack of social place’, at the same time as being the discovery of my own ‘individual place’ as a total man in the world, as a ‘social being’ in the total sense, as opposed to being included in a particular social layer or ‘elite’ – not even in the artistic marginal elite, but that exists (I speak of the true artists, and not of the *habitués* of art). No, the process here is more profound: it is a process in society as a whole, in practical life, in the objective world of being, in the subjective lived experience – it would be the will for an integral position, social in its most noble meaning, free, total. What interests me is the ‘total act of being’, which is what I experiment with here – not partial total acts, but a ‘total act of life’, irreversible, an unbalance for the equilibrium of being.

The old position with regards to the work of art has stagnated – even in those works that today do not demand spectator participation, what they propose is not a transcendental contemplation but a ‘being’ in the world. Dance too does not propose an ‘escape’ from this immanent world, but reveals it in all its plenitude – what for Nietzsche would be the ‘Dionysian drunkenness’ is in reality the ‘expressive lucidity of the act’s immanence’, an act itself not characterized by any partiality but by its totality as such – a total expression of the self. Would this not be the philosopher’s stone of art? The *Parangolé* for instance, when it demands participation through dance, is a mere adaptation of

this structure and vice-versa with regard to this structure in dance – this is simply a transformation of this ‘total act of the self’. The gesture, the rhythm, take on a new form which is determined by the demands of the *Parangolé*’s structure, being that pure dance is a trace of this structural participation – it is not a question of determining value levels in terms of one or another expression, since they are both (pure dance and dance in the *Parangolé*) total expressions.

What has been conventionally described as ‘interpretation’ also suffers a transformation today – it is not a question of repeating, in some cases, of course, a creation (a song for example), giving it greater or lesser expression according to the interpreter.<sup>3</sup> Today an interpreter can reach such an important level that the actual song (or any other form) is surpassed. It is not a case of individual ‘celebrity’, although this also occurs, but of a real expressive valorization. In the old days ‘celebrity status’ served the purpose of immortalizing interpreters according to their creation based upon famous works (in opera and theatre). Today the issue is different: even if the works that are interpreted are not great creations, fantastic musicals (in the field of popular music for example) the interpreter reaches a high expressive level – a singer such as Nat King Cole for example, creates a ‘vocal expressive structure’ that is independent from the songs he interprets. This is a creation that is not simply interpretative but pertains to a highly expressive vocalist. An actor such as Marilyn Monroe for example, due to her all-encompassing interpretative presence, possesses above all else a creative quality, which is structurally expressive. Her presence in certain mediocre films makes these films uncommonly interesting, a fact that is due to her action as interpreter. What is interesting here is the vocalization of Nat and the interpretative act of Marilyn, independent of the quality of the interpreted score or script, even if these possess, of course, a value that is relative and not absolute as before.

#### 10 April 1966 (continuation)

The experience of dance (of samba) therefore gave me the exact idea of what creation through the corporal act may be, a continuous transformability. On the other hand however, it revealed what I call the ‘being’ of things, that is, the static expression of objects, their expressive immanence, which in this case is the immanence of the corporal expressive act, which transforms itself continuously. The opposite, the non-transformability, is not exactly the fact of ‘not transforming oneself in time and space’ but in the immanence that is revealed in its structure, founding within the world, in the objective space that it occupies, its unique place, and this too is a *Parangolé*-structure. I cannot consider today the *Parangolé* as a structure that is kinetically-transformable by the

spectator but neither can I consider it as its opposite; that is, the things or, better still, the objects that *are* create a different relation with objective space: they 'dislocate' the environmental space away from obvious, already known, relations. Here is the key to what I will call 'environmental art': the eternally mobile, the transformable, which is structured by both the action of the spectator and that which is static. The latter is also transformable in its own way, depending on the environment in which it is participating as a structure. It will be necessary to create 'environments' for these works – the actual concept of 'exhibition' in its traditional sense, is changed, since to 'exhibit' such work does not make sense (this would be a lesser partial interest) – structural spaces that are free both to the participation and to the creative inventions of spectators. A pavilion, one of those used these days for industrial exhibitions (how more interesting they are than anaemic little art shows!), would be ideal for such a purpose – it would be an opportunity for a truly efficient experience with the people, throwing them into the creative participatory notion, away from the 'elite exhibitions' so fashionable today. This experience should range from the 'givens' that have already been produced, the 'livings' that structure as if architecturally the routes to be traced, to the 'transformable givens' that demand whatever inventive participation from the spectator (be it to dress and unfold or dance) and the 'givens to be made', that is, the raw material that would be supplied so that each person can construct or create whatever they like, since motivation, the stimulus, is born from the simple fact of 'being there for that'.

The execution of such a plan is complex, demanding rigorous prior organization, and obviously a team. The varied and multiple categories to be explored (elsewhere I will explain what I consider to be the structural categories in this new concept of mine, 'environmental art') in fact being and indeed requiring the collaboration of various artists with differing ideas, solely concentrated on this general idea of a 'total participatory creation' – to which would be added works created through the anonymous participation of the spectators, who actually would be better described as 'participants'.

- 1 The *Parangolés* (a slang term meaning 'an animated situation and sudden confusion and/or agitation between people') were strangely weighted capes made from unusual fabrics that encouraged wearers to move and dance, and forged a circular relationship between watcher and wearer.
- 2 Hélio Oiticica used generic terms that defined groups of works such as the *Parangolés*. His *Núcleo* installations comprised 'floating panels' (acrylic on wood) that hung from latticed structures. Each panel would contain a particular variation in colour, yellow or orange being the predominant tones. With *Núcleo NC1* (1960) the viewer gazes through the structure, directly or indirectly through the mirror placed on the floor. With *Grande Núcleo* (1960) the viewer is

invited to walk through the tonal differentiations stepping on the gravel that surrounds the structure. The first in the series of *Penetrables* that Oiticica would develop was *PN1* (1960). Here the viewer enters an orange/yellow cabin with sliding walls, literally entering into colour. The *Penetrables* vary in material and complexity. They remain in the artist's repertoire throughout his transition from concerns with colour into his late 1960s experiments, which he would define environmental art. *Bólides* could be loosely translated as 'fireballs'; they are generally vessels that vary greatly in dimensions, materials and functions. Oiticica's early *Bólides* were boxes made of wood, and/or glass containing pigment or fabric that would be manipulated by the viewer such as *Box-Bólido 9* (1964) and *Glass Bólido 1* (1963). *Bólides* soon acquired a readymade element such as in *Glass Bólido 10. Homage to Malevich* (1965) in which two bottles (one opaque yellow, the other translucent) would be placed side by side. [Translator]

- 3 Interpreter is here used as the term for a musician who plays or sings a song composed by someone else. [Translator]

Hélio Oiticica, 'Dance in my Experience', Diary entry, 12 November 1965; reprinted in Figueiredo, L., Pape, L., Salomao, W., eds, *Hélio Oiticica: Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986) 72–5; and 'continuation 10 April 1966' (*ibid.*) 75–6. Translated by Michael Asbury, 2006.

## Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica

### Letters//1968-69

*Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark shared an intense artistic dialogue throughout their careers. Excerpts of their correspondence below trace the evolution of their thinking, from interactive sculptural objects to group events that addressed external relations (Oiticica) and interior psychological states (Clark). For both artists, a key term was vivências, or lived experience: the body's heightened sensory presence as authentic, immediate, and resistant to ideological capture.*

#### 26 October 1968

Dearest HélioCaetaGério,<sup>1</sup>

[...]

Since *Caminhando* [Walking, 1963], the object for me has lost its significance, and if I still use it, it is so that it becomes a mediator for participation. With the sensorial gloves, for example, it gives the measure of the act and the miraculous character of the gesture, with its spontaneity, which seems to have been forgotten. In all that I do, there really is the necessity of the human body, so that it expresses itself or is revealed as in a first [primary] experience. For me it doesn't matter whether I am avant-garde or placed within new theories. I can only be what I am and I still intend to produce those films in which man is at the centre of the event. For me, the stones that I come across, or the plastic bags, are one and the same: they are there only to express a proposition. I don't see why we should negate the object simply because we have constructed it. It is important that it should be expressive. If I feel in my life today the state that you feel and define as hallucinatory, it is because through these propositions I have learnt to feel these same moments, and if I had not done so, perhaps I would have never discovered these same moments that are fantastic. What I want is to avoid schematizing anything, and each day eat a new 'pear', to see if it's good or not. Mario's [Pedrosa] term, as always is excellent, but for me it is not about the moment of chance but the 'fruit' of the moment. Fruit in the fruit sense, such is the flavour and the sensuality of eating, of living this moment. I also found it very good when you said that already in the rudimentary element the open structures are liberated despite the fact that we use it precisely because we no longer believe in the aesthetic concept. At the end your text is splendid with regard to the poetic lived experience [*vivência poética*] and the subjective charge, only I do not believe, as I mentioned above, in the marginality of who proposes;

what's great is this diversity of positions, since as long as there is contradiction and negation there is also confirmation of a reality.

[...]

Thousand of kisses to this new HélioCaetaGério!

Clark

#### 8 November 1968

Lygia, my Dear

[...]

Your letter, as always, was fantastic. This issue of being deflowered by the spectator is the most dramatic thing: in fact everyone is, since beyond the action there is the moment-consciousness of each action, even if this consciousness is modified later on, or incorporates other lived experiences [*vivências*]. This business of participation is really terrible since it is what is actually inconceivable that manifests itself in each person, at each moment, as if taking possession: like you, I also felt this necessity of killing the spectator or participator, which is a good thing since it creates an interior dynamic with regard to the relation. Contrary to what has been happening a lot lately, it shows that there is no aestheticization of participation: the majority creates an academicism of the relation or of the idea of spectator participation, to such an extent that it has left me with doubts about the idea itself. The other day with [Mário] Schemberg I discussed this issue a lot over here: he thinks in fact that there is no participation, or this issue, which is perhaps due to his exaggerated generalization with regard to this. What I think is that the formal aspect of this issue was overcome some time ago, by the 'relation in itself', its dynamic, by the incorporation of all the lived experiences of precariousness, by the non-formulated; and sometimes what appears to be participation is a mere detail of it, because the artist cannot in fact measure this participation, since each person experiences it differently. This is why there is this unbearable experience [*vivência*] of ours, of being deflowered, of possession, as if he, the spectator, would say: 'Who are you? What do I care if you created this or not? Well, I am here to modify everything, this unbearable shit that proposes dull experiences, or good ones, libidinous, fuck you, and all of this because I devour you, and then I shit you out; what is of interest only I can experience and you will never evaluate what I feel and think, the lust that devours me.' And the artist comes out of it in tatters. But it is good. It is not, as one could imagine, a question of masochism, it's just the true nature of the business. It's funny, something I experienced the other day has, to a certain extent, a relation to all of this, I'm not sure if you'll agree: the idol, the artist person who uses himself in order to



express. Caetano [Veloso] for example, when he sings and does all of that, is totally devoured, in an almost physical sense: once coming out from Chacrinha [music show recorded for TV], I saw in the corridors millions of students, adolescents, in an incredible fury, grabbing him to ask for autographs, but in reality it was not only that. The true, profound meaning of all of that was of a veritable coitus – Caetano reacted passively, *relax* [originally in English], as you would say, but the whole thing scared me profoundly, such a collective fury in contrast with the noble and delicate intentions of Caetano: a poet, ultra-sensitive, all of a sudden is thrown into an arena of wild beasts, but beasts not in the sense of animals from which you have to defend yourself physically more than psychologically, but human-beasts, like me and you, children almost, each one projecting their own psychological charge in a terrible manner. Something worse happened: at that crap song festival, during the São Paulo preliminaries that I watched on TV, the fury of the organized fan-clubs in the audience functioned as acclamation, equal but in reverse, but ultimately booing and applause become identified with devouring. The audience screamed, booed like I have never seen before, to the point that it was no longer possible to sing. When the song was selected to go on to the next stage, then it was even worse: it was as if the intellectual intention of destruction became conscious of itself. If Caetano had been at people's reach he would have been destroyed in a horrendous manner: everyone shouted queer, queer, queer, and threw objects, bits of wood at him and the Mutantes [pop/rock band inspired by the Beatles and psychedelia] and then they turned their backs to the stage. Then the Mutantes also turned their backs to the audience and Caetano stopped singing and said the most dramatic and profound things I have ever seen, not due to the words themselves but in the sense of their closure and what they represented at that moment. It was incredible, and do you know what it reminded me of? The scene with Abel Gance's Napoleon in front of the tribunal with that *travelling* that Gance made, imitating the movement of the sea, remember? This is what is terrible: the disjunction between the always noble, etc., intentions of the artist and the fury of the participatory relation. I believe that that moment revealed many things for me, especially the 'well nourished' appearance of people, of the destructive fury, as if that moment of lack of repression was a chance for destruction, which to an extent it always is. But it is a good test of the validity of the proposition: to not accept passively is more important than to accept everything, and in this dynamic of the relation new possibilities arise which, even if painful, are essential. I believe that perhaps in Venice you experienced this in relation to the work-spectator-creator, and the will to kill him, to push aside people's unbearable lust; this is important within the dialectics of the issue: because giving does not push aside the taking; on the contrary, it

stimulates it, in an erotic way too. As Marcuse would say, it liberates the Eros that is repressed by repressive activities: the *relax* in participation is a non-repressive activity, which confuses and liberates truly unpredictable forces, and in this, I believe, you base yourself on your own experience, which is also highly revolutionary; this is the great current issue.

I believe that our great innovation is precisely the form of participation, that is, its meaning, which is where we differ from what is proposed in super-civilized Europe or in the USA: we have here a far rougher scene, perhaps, because we have reached these issues in a more violent manner. For example, your black with white line phase, or even the one before that, even the breaking of the frame, this type of painting contains a *sui generis* dramaticity that did not occur even in Argentina, since the Argentines, to a certain extent, are more civilized, more European than us: Brazil is a form of synthesis of the peoples, races, habits, where the European speaks but does not speak so loudly, except in the universalist, academic fields, which are not those of 'cultural creation' but those of closure. Creation, even in Tarsila [do Amaral] and especially in Oswaldo de Andrade,<sup>2</sup> possesses a subjective charge that differs extremely from the rationalism of the European, this is our 'thing',<sup>3</sup> that Guy Brett was able to understand so well and that the Europeans will have to swallow, in fact with appetite since they are fed up with everything and it looks as if that saturated civilization is drying their imagination.

[...]

Kiiiisses,  
Hélio

**14 November 1968**

Dear Hélio

[...]

As far as the idea of participation is concerned, as always there are *weak artists* who cannot really express themselves through thought, so instead they illustrate the issue. For me this issue does indeed exist and is very important. As you say, it is exactly the 'relation in itself' that makes it alive and important. For example, this has been the issue in my work since the sixties; if we go back even further to 1955, I produced the maquette for the house: 'build your own living space'. But it is not participation for participation's sake and it is not a fact of saying, like [Julio] Le Parc's group [GRAV: Groupe de recherche d'art visuel] does, that art is an issue for the bourgeoisie. It would be too simple and linear. There is no depth in this simplicity and nothing is truly linear. They negate precisely

what is important: thought. I think that now we are those who propose, and through the proposition there should be thought, and when the spectator expresses this proposition, he is in reality gathering the characteristic of a work of art of all times: thought and expression. And for me all of this is connected. From the option, the act, to immanence as a means of communication, and the lack of any myth exterior to man and more so, in my fantasy, it connects itself with the anti-universe where things are there because it happens *now*. It would be perhaps the first occasion in which consciousness of the actual absolute is achieved in the now. Another thing that I am very impressed with is today's youth who, like us, want to give themselves meaning from the inside towards the outside as opposed to, as it has always been, from the outside towards the inside. True participation is open and we will never be able to know what we give to the spectator-author. It is precisely because of this that I speak of a well, from inside which a sound would be taken, not by the you-well but by the other, in the sense that he throws his own stone... My experience of deflowering is not quite the same as yours. It is not myself who is deflowered but the proposal itself. And when I cry about this phenomenon it is not because I feel wounded in my personal integrity, but because they ruin everything and I have to start constructing the work all over again. On the contrary, I don't even put on my masks and clothes, but I hope someone will come along and give meaning to the formulation. And the more diverse the lived experiences are, the *more open is the proposition* and it is therefore more important. In fact, I think that now I am proposing the same type of issue that before was still achieved via the object: the empty-full, the form and its own space, the organicity... Only now, with these new sensorial masks, it is man who discovers himself in all his plenitude, and even when he fills the plastic bags (what is important now is also to make the mask) he feels that he is casting himself (in the sense that he exhales the air and the bag takes shape). This same space that comes out of him, as he becomes conscious of his own bodily space that goes beyond him, takes a form that would fill the actual space around him. I for instance, feel that after formulating these large plastic bags with my own lungs, when lying down on the floor in my flat I could touch, with a simple gesture, the ceiling, which is no less than 6 metres high... It is as if I had created an egg of space that belongs to me and that embraces me. It would be the most organic *Breathe with me* [1966] yet less illustrative! Man when putting on these masks turns himself into an authentic beast, since the mask is his appendix, not like the first ones where there was in fact a *real mask*. They turn themselves into monsters like elephants or enormous birds with great crops. More and more [Mário] Pedrosa's sentence functions for my work: 'man as the object of himself'. As you see, participation is increasingly greater. There no longer is the object to express any concept but the spectator

who reaches, more and more profoundly, his own self. He, man, is now a 'beast' and the dialogue is now with himself, to the extent of the organicity and also the magic that he is able to borrow from within himself. As far as Caetano's problem is concerned, it is different since he is affected as a person but is *an idol*; he is the opposite of myself, who no longer possesses anything, not even as a creative artist who provides what is still a total oeuvre that in the end is my self. Each day I loose more of my apparent personality, entering into the collective in search of a dialogue and accomplishing myself through the spectator. And the crises, when they arrive, appear in a more brutal manner, much more painful, yet they pass by quicker than before...

[...]

Thousand of kisses and do write!

Clark

**27 June 1969**

Lygia, my love

[...]

Your letter:

I very much liked the ideas and incredible relations concerning you, that I wrote about in another part of the enormous text that I prepared for the symposium I mentioned. I'll translate a section and I am sure you will love it, since, in fact after I wrote it, I discovered in Marcuse's most recent book a chapter in which he proposes a 'biological society' that would be unrepressed and based upon a direct chain of communication, the same thing I had thought about when writing about your issues; see below in a certain passage of the text:

'... the most recent experiences of Lygia Clark have led her to fascinating proposals as she discovered that certainly her communication will have to be more of an *introduction* to a practice that she calls *cellular*: From person to person, this is an improvised corporal dialogue that can expand into a total *chain* creating something of an *all encompassing biological entity* or what I would call a *crepractice*.<sup>4</sup> The idea of creating such relations goes beyond that of a facile participation, such as in the manipulation of objects: there is the search for what could be described as a *biological ritual*, where interpersonal relations are enriched and establish a *communication of growth* at an open level. I say open level, because it does not relate to an object-based communication, of subject-object, but to an interpersonal practice that leads towards a truly open communication: a me-you relation, rapid, brief as the actual act; no corrupted benefit, of interest, should be expected – observations such as "this is nothing" or "what is it about?", etc., should be expected; an introduction as initiation is

necessary. The elements that are used in all of these process-based experiences, a vital process, are those that are a part of it instead of being isolated objects: they are *orders in a totality...*'

[...]

A Kiss for you,

Hélio

- 1 *HéliCaetaGério* – composite name for Hélio Oiticica, Caetano Veloso and Rogério Duarte, suggesting that Hélio was at that moment immersed in his ideas and activities respectively with the singer/composer and the graphic designer/poet/composer [Translator]. For further reading on the collaboration between Oiticica, Veloso, Duarte and others see *Tropicália: A Revolution in Brazilian Culture*, ed. Carlos Basualdo (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art/São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2005).
- 2 The modernist poet Oswald de Andrade (1890–1954) was the author of polemical texts on Brazilian cultural identity which influenced these artists, particularly his notion of 'cultural cannibalism' in the 'Anthropophagite Manifesto' published in *Revista de Antropofagia*, No. 1 (São Paulo, May 1928), translated in Dawn Adès, *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era, 1820–1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).
- 3 'Pla': slang meaning approximately 'context'. [Translator]
- 4 'Cre' from create, see: Oiticica's concept of Creleisure. [Translator]

Letters between Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, reprinted in Luciano Figueiredo (ed), *Lygia Clark -Hélio Oiticica: Cartas (1964-74)* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFRJ, 1996) 61–2, 69–73, 83–6, 121–2. Translated by Michael Asbury, 2006.

## Graciela Carnevale

### Project for the Experimental Art Series, Rosario//1968

*1968 saw an irruption of politicized participatory practice in many countries, and took a particularly dramatic form in Argentina. The Experimental Art Cycle was a series of actions in Rosario, many of which worked on the audience as a privileged artistic material. Graciela Carnevale's project represents the most extreme example of this approach. In the years that followed, Carnevale, like many of the artists involved in the Cycle, abandoned art for teaching.*

The work consists of first preparing a totally empty room, with totally empty walls; one of the walls, which was made of glass, had to be covered in order to achieve a suitably neutral space for the work to take place. In this room the participating audience, which has come together by chance for the opening, has been locked in. The door has been hermetically closed without the audience being aware of it. I have taken prisoners. The point is to allow people to enter and to prevent them from leaving. Here the work comes into being and these people are the actors. There is no possibility of escape, in fact the spectators have no choice; they are obliged, violently, to participate. Their positive or negative reaction is always a form of participation. The end of the work, as unpredictable for the viewer as it is for me, is nevertheless intentioned: will the spectator tolerate the situation passively? Will an unexpected event – help from the outside – rescue him from being locked in? Or will he proceed violently and break the glass?

Through an act of aggression, the work intends to provoke the viewer into awareness of the power with which violence is enacted in everyday life. Daily we submit ourselves, passively, out of fear, or habit, or complicity, to all degrees of violence, from the most subtle and degrading mental coercion from the information media and their false reporting, to the most outrageous and scandalous violence exercised over the life of a student.

The reality of the daily violence in which we are immersed obliges me to be aggressive, to also exercise a degree of violence – just enough to be effective – in the work. To that end, I also had to do violence myself. I wanted each audience member to have the experience of being locked in, of discomfort, anxiety, and ultimately the sensations of asphyxiation and oppression that go with any act of unexpected violence. I made every effort to foresee the reactions, risks and dangers that might attend this work, and I consciously assumed responsibility for the consequences and implications. I think an important element in the

conception of the work is the consideration of the natural impulses that get repressed by a social system designed to create passive beings, to generate resistance to action, to deny, in sum, the possibility of change.

The 'lock up' has already been incorporated in the verbal image (literature) and in the visual image (film). Here the gambit is not filtered through anything imaginary; rather it is experienced, at once vitally and artistically. I consider that materializing an aggressive act on the aesthetic level as an artistic event necessarily implies great risk. But it is precisely this risk that clarifies the art in the work, that gives a clear sense of art, relegating to other levels of meaning whatever psychological or sociological sense the work might have.

Graciela Carnevale, statement originally published as part of a series of brochures accompanying the 'Cido de Me Experimental'. Carnevale's exhibition took place in Rosario, 7–19 October 1968; trans. Marguerite Feitlowitz, in Andrea Giunta and Ines Katzenstein, eds, *Listen, Here, Now! Argentine Art of the 1960s* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004) 299–301.

These people  
are the actors.  
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## Joseph Beuys and Dirk Schwarze

### Report on a Day's Proceedings at the *Bureau for Direct Democracy*//1972

*Joseph Beuys' concept of 'Social Sculpture' remains an important reference for contemporary artists such as Thomas Hirschhorn. The following report on Beuys' Bureau for Direct Democracy (1972), a 100-day live installation at Documenta 5, records in candid detail the type of relational encounters generated by his activist approach. It is followed by 'I am searching for field character' (1973), Beuys' most concise statement on Social Sculpture.*

30 June to 8 October 1972: Joseph Beuys runs an office of information for the 'Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum' at Documenta 5.

Beuys' participation in the Documenta was instituted with the intention of representing and making known his expanding art concept through an office of information at this internationally respected and visited art forum. During the 100 days of the Documenta, Beuys was present daily at this information office and discussed with visitors the idea of direct democracy through referendum and its possibilities for realization.

Report of a day's proceedings in the office of Joseph Beuys, Fridericianum, written by Dirk Schwarze:

10:00 a.m. The Documenta opens; Beuys, in a red fishing vest and felt hat, is in his office. He has two co-workers. On the desk is a long-stemmed rose, next to it are piles of handbills. On the wall with the window is a blue neon sign that says 'Office of the Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum'. Besides this, there are several blackboards on the walls. On each is written the word 'man'.

11:00 a.m. Until now about 80 visitors in the office. Half, however, remain standing in the doorway and look around, others walk past the blackboards and then remain longer in the office. Some only come to the door and leave in fright, as if they had come into the wrong restroom.

11:07 a.m. The room fills up. Beuys offers a young man material and initiates the first discussion. A young man asks about Beuys' goal and thinks that at a referendum 90 per cent would declare themselves in favour of the present system. Beuys explains the present party structure, which is ruled from top to bottom. He wants a system that is ruled from bottom to top. Still, if 60 per cent voted for the present system in a referendum, it would be a success because through it a new awareness could be created.

11:20 a.m. The discussion expands: five listeners. A man who says he is a member of a party takes part in the talk. Beuys explains his concept: 'We do not want to be a power factor, but an independent free school.' The goal would be to establish a whole network of offices as schooling places which would contribute to consciousness formation. One must start with the present possibilities. Referendum is provided for in the constitution of North Rhine-Westphalia. For a vote of the Federal Diet Beuys recommends a vote of abstinence, linked to a 'counter-demonstration', to make clear why one is not voting. The party member accepts the material: 'This is very interesting to me.'

11:45 a.m. Up to now 130 visitors. The discussion continues, with eight listeners. A young Swiss asks whether Beuys wants nationalization of industry. The answer: 'No, I have no use for nationalization, but I do want socialization.' The state, whether east or west, appears to him as evil. He quotes Bishop Dibelius, who describes the state as 'the animal from underground'.

12:20 a.m. Up to now 210 visitors. A vigorous argument begins between Beuys and a young man who designates himself a member of the German Communist Party. Sixteen listeners. The young man calls Beuys' activities 'nonsense', a waste of energy. 'What have you accomplished?' he asks, and invites Beuys to join the workers' movement rather than to lead an organization that is financed by industrialists. Beuys replies: 'You cannot think straight. I cannot work with the concept of class. What is important is the concept of man. One must straightforwardly realize what has not yet appeared in history, namely, democracy.'

12:35 a.m. In the meantime 22 listeners. An elderly man joins in: 'Can we talk about the Documenta here and not just about politics?' Beuys: 'Politics and the creativity of all are dealt with here.' When the man speaks of the failure of the exhibition because no one here is directly interested, Beuys asserts, 'It is also a failure on the part of the visitors, because they are not more capable of giving of themselves.'

1:00 p.m. Until now 360 visitors. The vigorous talk with the Communist Party member continues, 22 listeners. Beuys energetically defends himself against the reproach that he indulges in a utopia, replying: 'I am against a revolution in which one drop of blood flows.' Marxists, he says, are, for him, devout fetishists in this connection.

1:05 p.m. A young woman: 'Mr Beuys, your artworks are an ingredient in the system - they can be bought.' Beuys: 'Everyone who lives in the system participates in it. I make use of it through the sale of my work.'

1:30 p.m. Until now 450 visitors. At present thirty listeners. A middle-aged man addresses Beuys regarding the possibilities of change through art. Beuys wards it off: 'Art is not there to overthrow the state. According to my concept of

art, I want to affect all areas of life. What I practice here is my concept of art.' He admits, 'I believe in man.'

2:00 p.m. Until now 535 visitors. After the distribution of materials a quiet period sets in. Beuys fortifies himself: coffee and yogurt. He explains his models to a young girl: Rudolph Steiner, Schiller, and Jean Paul.

2:30 p.m. A young man: 'I don't see the connection between your theories and your felt objects.' Beuys: 'Many have seen only my objects, but not my concepts, which belong to them.'

3:00 p.m. Until now 560 visitors. A young girl comes to Beuys and asks: 'Is this art?' Answer: 'A special type of art. One can think with it, think with it.'

4:05 p.m. Until now 625 visitors. Two Italians want to know whether Beuys could be called a non-violent anarchist. Beuys says 'yes.'

4:15 p.m. The office fills up again. A teacher asks: 'Whom do you represent? Democracy, what does that mean? What models do you have?' Beuys: 'I have no historical model apart from reality and want to better these realities for the well-being of all.' An argument starts over whether direct or only representative government is possible.

4:30 p.m. Until now 670 visitors. At present twenty listeners. An elderly man: 'One is entertained too little here, there is so much at the Documenta that is boring. Documenta is still too elite.' Beuys: 'Art is experiencing a crisis. All fields are in a state of crisis.'

4:40 p.m. A young man: 'You are a big earner on the German art market. What do you do with the money?' Beuys: 'The money goes into this organization.'

4:45 p.m. Eighteen listeners. Beuys suggests to a teacher that he resign his civil service status; a lively discussion begins. The teacher argues that only Beuys could accomplish such a thing, because he is a famous artist. The teacher: 'My situation is fairly bad. It's easy for you to stand there with your moral declarations.'

5:15 p.m. Until now 720 visitors. After a discussion of the role of the art market as a middle market, another quiet period. The sale of the bags with the schematic representation of 'direct democracy' is flourishing. For the first time today a visitor asks for Beuys' autograph on the bag.

6:00 p.m. Visitors slacken noticeably. Until now about 780 visitors.

7:40 p.m. A total of 811 visitors, of which 35 asked questions or discussed.

8:00 p.m. Beuys' office closes.

*Question* To what extent do you believe an exhibition can be the most suitable forum for passing on to the public the impulses which you hope to attain?

*Beuys* The place is relatively unimportant. I have thought this over for a long

Beuys, in a red fishing vest and felt hat, is in his office. He has two co-workers. On the desk is a long-stemmed rose, next to it are piles of handbills. On the wall with the window is a blue neon sign that says 'Office of the Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum'. Besides this, there are several blackboards on the walls. On each is written the word 'man'.

time. For example, I have the office here; it is a copy of my office in Düsseldorf, which gives onto the street. This is so that people can come in right off the street. It looks exactly like our office, exactly. And there anyone can come in. I have thought about which is more effective: if I remain in Düsseldorf or if I climb onto this platform and reach men here. I came very simply to the conclusion that it is vacation time now in Düsseldorf; there we would have perhaps one visitor a day, and here we can reach more people. Here I can reach people from all over the world. Here I can establish international contacts. This is very important.

*Question* Do you see yourself as an individualist and do you see your office here as an isolated department?

*Beuys* No, in no way. I do not see myself as being isolated here. I have all kinds of possibilities here. I can speak freely with everyone. No one has prevented me yet. Whether someone will try to in the future, that we will find out. (Laughing) Yes, that we will find out, won't we?

*Question* You have set up your office here at the fifth Documenta, and with it you pursue not only political intentions but also artistic ones ...

*Beuys* Because real future political intentions must be artistic. This means that they must originate from human creativity, from the individual freedom of man. For this reason here I deal mostly with the problem of education, with the pedagogical aspect. This is a model of freedom, a revolutionary model of freedom. It begins with human thought and with the education of man in this area of freedom. And there must also be free press, free television, and so on, independent of state influence. Just as there must be an educational system independent of state influence. From this I attempt to develop a revolutionary model which formulates the basic democratic order as people would like it, according to the will of the people, for we want a democracy. It is part of the fundamental law: all state power comes from the people.

The area of freedom – not a free area – I want to emphasize this, because they are always being interchanged; people say Beuys wants a free area. I do not want a free area, an extra area, but I want an area of freedom that will become known as the place where revolution originates, changed by stepping through the basic democratic structure and then restructuring the economy in such a way that it would serve the needs of man and not merely the needs of a minority for their own profit. That is the connection. And that I understand as art.

Joseph Beuys/Dirk Schwarze, report on a day's proceedings at the *Informationsbüros der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung*, Documenta 5 (Kassel, 1972); translated in Adriani Götz, et al., *Joseph Beuys: Life and Work* (New York: Barron's, 1979) 244–9.

## Joseph Beuys

### I Am Searching for Field Character//1973

Only on condition of a radical widening of definition will it be possible for art and activities related to art to provide evidence that art is now the only evolutionary-revolutionary power. Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues to totter along the deathline: to dismantle in order to build A SOCIAL ORGANISM AS A WORK OF ART.

This most modern art discipline – Social Sculpture/Social Architecture – will only reach fruition when every living person becomes a creator, a sculptor or architect of the social organism. Only then would the insistence on participation of the action art of Fluxus and Happening be fulfilled; only then would democracy be fully realized. Only a conception of art revolutionized to this degree can turn into a politically productive force, coursing through each person and shaping history,

But all this, and much that is as yet unexplored, has first to form part of our consciousness: insight is needed into objective connections. We must probe (theory of knowledge) the moment of origin of free individual productive potency (creativity). We then reach the threshold where the human being experiences himself primarily as a spiritual being, where his supreme achievements (work of art), his active thinking, his active feeling, his active will, and their higher forms, can be apprehended as sculptural generative means, corresponding to the exploded concepts of sculpture divided into its elements – indefinite – movement – definite (see theory of sculpture), and are then recognized as flowing in the direction that is shaping the content of the world right through into the future.

This is the concept of art that carries within itself not only the revolutionizing of the historic bourgeois concept of knowledge (materialism, positivism), but also of religious activity.

EVERY HUMAN BEING IS AN ARTIST who – from his state of freedom – the position of freedom that he experiences at first hand – learns to determine the other positions in the TOTAL ARTWORK OF THE FUTURE SOCIAL ORDER. Self-determination and participation in the cultural sphere (freedom); in the structuring of laws (democracy); and in the sphere of economics (socialism). Self-administration and decentralization (threefold structure) occurs: FREE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM.

THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL is born

Communication occurs in reciprocity: it must never be a one-way flow from the teacher to the taught. The teacher takes equally from the taught. So oscillates – at all times and everywhere, in any conceivable internal and external circumstance, between all degrees of ability, in the work place, institutions, the street, work circles, research groups, schools – the master/pupil, transmitter/receiver, relationship. The ways of achieving this are manifold, corresponding to the varying gifts of individuals and groups. THE ORGANIZATION FOR DIRECT DEMOCRACY THROUGH REFERENDUM is one such group. It seeks to launch many similar work groups or information centres, and strives towards worldwide cooperation.

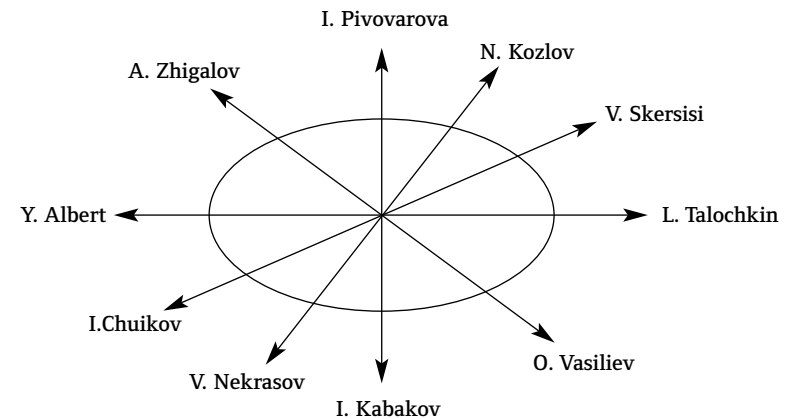
Joseph Beuys, 'I am Searching for Field Character' (1973), in Carin Kuoni, ed., *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1990) 21–3.

## Collective Actions Ten Appearances//1981

*The five-person Collective Actions group, working in Moscow from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, represent a particularly poetic and cerebral approach to participation. Ten Appearances is typical of their work in taking place in fields outside the city, with a small number of participants who took an active part in the action and then contributed to its analysis. These gestures differ from Western equivalents of this period in being preoccupied with art's internal reception and circulation, rather than in its relationship to social institutions.*

In the middle of a large, snowed-over field surrounded by a forest, together with the action's organizers strode ten participants, knowing neither the name of that in which they were about to participate, nor what was to happen.

Ten spoons on vertical nails were affixed to a board (60 x 90 cm) which was laid upon the snow. Each of the spoons was wound with two to three hundred metres of strong, white thread. Each of the participants was required to take the end of a thread from one of the spoons and, unravelling the thread from the spool, move in a straight line into the forest surrounding the field. Thus the ten participants were to have dispersed from the centre of the field in the following directions:



The participants were instructed to move in a straight line as far as the forest and then, entering the forest, to continue on into the depths of the forest for about another fifty to one hundred metres, or to the point where the field could no



longer be seen. Each of the participants travelled three to four hundred metres. Walking in the field and forest entailed a considerable physical effort, as the snow ranged from half a metre to a metre in depth. Having completed his trek, each participant (also according to prior instructions) was to pull to himself the other end of the thread (which was not attached to the spool), to which a piece of paper with factographic text (the last names of the organizers, time and place of the action) was affixed.

In so far as no further instructions had been given, each participant, having extracted his factography, was left to his own discretion as to further action; they could return to the field's centre, where the organizers remained, or, not returning, leave this place behind, moving on further through the forest.

Eight participants came back to the centre of the field within an hour; moreover, seven of them returned along their own paths, and one (N. Kozlov) along a neighbour's path. Two participants – V. Nekrasov and A. Zhigalov – did not return.

The returning participants received photographs (30 x 40 cm), glued to cardboard, from the organizers. Each photograph depicted the portion of the forest into which the participant receiving that photo had walked at the beginning of the action, and the scarcely distinguishable figure of a man emerging from the forest. The photographs were outfitted with label/signatures upon which were written the last names of the action's authors, the action's name *Ten Appearances*, and the event 'represented' in the photograph; for example, 'The appearance of I. Chuikov on the first of February, 1981', and so on. These photographs were taken within the week before the action: the action's organizers photographed in a 'zone of indifferentiation' in the very same directions in which the participants had been directed and from whence they had returned.

Thus the name of the action and its full significance became clear to the participants only at the moment when they received the photographs, and not when they pulled the factographic documents, which signified only the completion of the first stage of the action – the distancing of the participants into portions of the forest visually isolated one from another (at the terminal points of their paths out from the centre of the field, in the depths of the forest, the participants could not see each other, as the interstices between these points measured no less than four hundred metres). During the action, photographs were taken of the actual appearances from the forest. These photographs could be distinguished from those handed to the participants at the conclusion of the action by the differing conditions of the forest (snow which had covered the branches of the trees a week before the action had melted away), and by the absence of the quotation marks, which on the first photographs had been placed

around the names of the events depicted on them, i.e., in the given circumstances the simple appearance of I. Chuikov, I. Kabakov, I. Pivovarova and so on. The figures of the participants emerging from the forest were practically indistinguishable from the figures in the first 'metaphorical' photographs, owing to the fact that they were taken from equal distances (in the 'zone of indifferentiation'). The function of these 'metaphorical' photographs was, in the case of the participants' return, to indicate only the fact of their return (which was utterly volitional, as no instruction to return had been given), without adding any supplementary meaning to their prior acts of walking off and dispersing into the depths of the forest. At the same time these 'metaphorical' photographs were signs of time extrademonstrational (for the participants) to the event and were included in the structure of the action and served as its 'empty act'. In other words, they were signs of the time between the 'end' of the action and the moment when they were handed the photographs indicating their appearance (or return) from the forest, which the participants did not recognize and could not have recognized as the signified and culminating event in the structure of the action.

The fact that of the ten possible appearances only eight, and not all ten, came to pass, represents in our view not a failing of the action but, on the contrary, underscores the realization of zones of psychic experience of the action as aesthetically sufficient on the plane of the demonstrational field of the action as a whole. This is to say that the planned appearance in reality turned out to lie entirely in the extrademonstrational time of the event – the participant appeared from a non-artistic, non-artificially-constructed space.

Collective Actions (Andrei Monastyrsky, Georgii Kizevalter, Sergei Romashko, Nikita Alekseev, Igor Makarevich, Elena Elagina, Nikolai Panitkov), *Ten Appearances* ('Kievi-Gorky', Savel, Moscow Province, February 1981); translated in David A. Ross, et al., eds, *Between Spring and Summer – Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art/Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990) 157–8.

## Adrian Piper

### Notes on Funk, I-II//1985/83

*Adrian Piper's Funk Lessons (1982–84), were a series of participatory social events in which the artist taught white participants about black funk music and how to dance to it. Her four essays entitled 'Notes on Funk' present a thoughtful analysis of her intentions, experiences and of feedback from her collaborators.*

#### Notes on Funk I

From 1982 to 1984, I staged collaborative performances with large or small groups of people, entitled *Funk Lessons*. The first word in the title refers to a certain branch of black popular music and dance known as 'funk' (in contrast, for example, to 'punk', 'rap' or 'rock'). Its recent ancestor is called 'rhythm and blues' or 'soul', and it has been developing as a distinctive cultural idiom, within black culture since the early 1970s. Funk constitutes a language of interpersonal communication and collective self-expression that has its origins in African tribal music and dance and is the result of the increasing interest of contemporary black musicians and the populace in those sources elicited by the civil rights movement of the 1960s and early 1970s (African tribal drumming by slaves was banned in the United States during the nineteenth century, so it makes sense to describe this increasing interest as a 'rediscovery').

This medium of expression has been largely inaccessible to white culture, in part because of the different roles of social dance in white as opposed to black culture. For example, whereas social dance in white culture is often viewed in terms of achievement, social grace or competence, or spectator-oriented entertainment, it is a collective and participatory means of self-transcendence and social union in black culture along many dimensions, and so is often much more fully integrated into daily life. Thus it is based on a system of symbols, cultural meanings, attitudes and patterns of movement that one must directly experience in order to understand fully. This is particularly true in funk, where the concern is not how spectacular anyone looks but rather how completely everyone participates in a collectively shared, enjoyable experience.

My immediate aim in staging the large-scale performance (preferably with sixty people or more) was to enable everyone present to

GET DOWN AND PARTY. TOGETHER.

This helps explain the second word in the title, that is, 'Lessons'. I began by introducing some of the basic dance movements to the audience, and discussing their cultural and historical background, meanings, and the roles they play in

black culture. This first part of the performance included demonstrating some basic moves and then, with the audience, rehearsing, internalizing, re-rehearsing, and improvising on them. The aim was to transmit and share a physical language that everyone was then empowered to use. By breaking down the basic movements into their essentials, these apparently difficult or complex patterns became easily accessible to everyone. Needless to say, no prior training in or acquaintance with dance was necessary. Because both repetition and individual self-expression are both important aspects of this kind of dance, it was only a matter of a relatively short time before these patterns became second nature. However, sometimes this worked more successfully than others, depending on the environment and the number and composition of the audience-participants. (See my videotape, *Funk Lessons with Adrian Piper*, produced by Sam Samore and distributed by The Kitchen, for a record of one of the more successful performances.) Also, the large-scale performance compressed a series of lessons that might normally extend over a period of weeks or months.

As we explored the experience of the dance more fully, I would gradually introduce and discuss the music (which had, up to this point, functioned primarily as a rhythmic background) and the relation between the dance and the music: Because of the participatory and collective aspects of this medium, it is often much easier to discern the rhythmic and melodic complexities of the music if one is physically equipped to respond to it by dancing. Thus the first part of the performance prepared the audience for the second. Here I concentrated on the structural features that define funk music, and on some of its major themes and subject matter, using representative examples. I would discuss the relation of funk to disco, rap, rock, punk and new wave, and illustrate my points with different selections of each. During this segment, except for brief pauses for questions, dialogue and my (short) commentaries, everyone was refining their individual techniques, that is, they were LISTENING by DANCING. We were all engaged in the pleasurable process of self-transcendence and creative expression within a highly structured and controlled cultural idiom, in a way that attempted to overcome cultural and racial barriers. I hoped that it also overcame some of our culturally and racially influenced biases about what 'High Culture' is or ought to be. Again, this didn't always work out (see 'Notes on Funk III').

The 'Lessons' format during this process became ever more clearly a kind of didactic foil for collaboration: Dialogue quickly replaced pseudo-academic lecture/demonstration, and social union replaced the audience-performer separation. What I purported to 'teach' my audience was revealed to be a kind of fundamental sensory 'knowledge' that everyone has and can use.

The small-scale, usually unannounced and unidentified spontaneous performances consisted in one intensive dialogue or a series of intensive

# GET DOWN AND PARTY TOGETHER

dialogues with anywhere from one to seven other people (more than eight people tend to constitute a party, the interpersonal dynamics of which are very different). I would have people over to dinner, or for a drink, and, as is standard middle-class behaviour, initially select my background music from the Usual Gang of Idiots (Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, etc.). I would then interpose some funk and watch people become puzzled, agitated or annoyed, and then I would attempt to initiate systematic discussion of the source of their dismay (in fact these reactions to my unreflective introduction of the music into this social context were what initially alerted me to the need to confront the issues systematically and collaboratively in the performance context). This usually included listening to samples of funk music and analyzing their structures, content and personal connotations for each listener, in a sympathetic and supportive atmosphere. Occasionally, it also included dance lessons of the kind described previously, though this usually worked better with party-size or larger groups.

The intimate scale of the dialogue permitted a more extensive exploration of individual reactions to funk music and dance, which are usually fairly intense and complex. For example, it sometimes elicited anxiety, anger or contempt from middle-class, college-educated whites: anxiety, because its association with black, working-class culture engenders unresolved racist feelings that are then repressed or denied rather than examined; anger; because it is both sexually threatening and culturally intrusive to individuals schooled exclusively in the idiom of the European-descended tradition of classical, folk, and/or popular music; contempt, because it sounds 'mindless' or 'monotonous' to individuals who, through lack of exposure or musicological training, are unable to discern its rhythmic, melodic and topical complexity.

Alternately, funk sometimes elicited condescension or embarrassment from middle-class, college-educated blacks: condescension, because it is perceived as black *popular* culture, that is, relatively unsophisticated or undeveloped by comparison with jazz as black high culture; embarrassment, because funk's explicit and aggressive sexuality and use of Gospel-derived vocal techniques sometimes seem excessive by comparison with the more restrained, subdued, white- or European-influenced middle-class lifestyle. Often this music is also associated with adolescent popularity traumas concerning dancing, dating or sexual competence. These negative associations linger into adulthood and inhibit one's ability even to listen to this genre of music without painful personal feelings.

These and other intense responses were sympathetically confronted, articulated and sometimes exorcised in the course of discussing and listening to the music. The result was often cathartic, therapeutic and intellectually stimulating: to engage consciously with these and related issues can liberate one to listen to and understand this art form of black, working-class culture without

fear or shame, and so to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and political dimensions of one's social identity. What follows are notes I took after having staged the performance at different times. They are the fruit of my dialogues with participants and of my observations of their responses to the performance.

### Notes on Funk II

[...] I suppose that what finally vindicates the performances in my own eyes (as well as the effort to continue engaging with very different kinds of people in doing them) is the undeniable *experience* people seem to get, almost invariably, from participating in them, including me: It just seems to be true that most of my white friends feel less alienated from this aesthetic idiom after having participated in it directly, and discussed their feelings about it in a receptive context, regardless of their reservations about whether what I'm doing is 'art' or not, whether funk deserves the legitimation of 'high culture' or not, and so on. For me what it means is that the experiences of sharing, commonality and self-transcendence turn out to be more intense and significant, in some ways, than the postmodernist categories most of us art-types bring to aesthetic experience. This is important to me because I don't believe those categories should be the sole arbiters of aesthetic evaluation.

But perhaps the real point of it for me has to do with the ways in which it enables me to overcome my own sense of alienation, both from white and black culture. As a Woman of Colour (I think that's the going phrase these days; as my parents often complain, 'What's the matter with 'coloured'? Or 'coloured woman'? That was a good, serviceable, accurate description forty years ago!) who is often put in the moral dilemma of being identified as white and hence subject to the accusation of 'passing', it gives me the chance to affirm and explore the cultural dimensions of my identity as a black in ways that illuminate my personal and political connection to other (more identifiably) black people, and celebrate our common cultural heritage. At the same time, the piece enables me to affirm and utilize the conventions and idioms of communications I've learned in the process of my acculturation into white culture: the analytical mode, the formal and structural analysis, the process of considered and constructive rational dialogue, the pseudo-academic lecture/demonstration/group participation style, and so on. These modes of fluency reinforce my sense of identification with my audience and ultimately empower all of us to move with greater ease and fluidity from one such mode to another. It also reinforces my sense of optimism that eventually the twain *shall* meet!

Adrian Piper, 'Notes on Funk I (1985)', 'Notes on Funk II' (1983), *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume 1: Selected Writings in Meta-Art, 1968-1992* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996) 195-8; 204.

## Group Material On Democracy//1990

*The US collective Group Material began working in the late 1970s, producing collaborative exhibitions with residents of their neighbourhood in Manhattan. Throughout the 1980s their projects grew more critical of the Republican government, particularly its policy on AIDS. The following text introduces Democracy, a conference and installation project they organized at the Dia Arts Foundation, New York, in 1988.*

Participating in the system doesn't mean that we must identify with it, stop criticizing it, or stop improving the little piece of turf on which we operate.  
– Judge Bruce Wright, Justice, New York State Supreme Court.

Ideally, democracy is a system in which political power rests with the people: all citizens actively participate in the process of self-representation and self-governing, an ongoing discussion in which a multitude of diverse voices converge. But in 1987, after almost two terms of the Reagan presidency and with another election year at hand, it was clear that the state of American democracy was in no way ideal. Access to political power was obstructed in complex ways, participation in politics had degenerated into passive and symbolic involvement, and the current of 'official' politics precluded a diversity of viewpoints. When the Dia Art Foundation approached us with the idea of doing a project, it was immediately apparent to us that democracy should serve as the theme.

The subject of democracy not only became our content but influenced our method of working. This theme prompted a greater awareness of our own process. One of the first questions we asked was: 'Why are they asking us?' To us, the Dia Art Foundation signified 'exclusive', 'white', 'esoteric', and 'male', whereas we had always attempted to redefine culture around an opposing set of terms: 'inclusive', 'multicultural', 'nonsexist', and 'socially relevant'. In general, we see ourselves as the outspoken distant relative at the annual reunion who can be counted on to bring up the one subject no one wants to talk about.

The subject that no one in the art world wants to talk about is usually politics. Yet, because every social or cultural relationship is a political one, we regard an understanding of the link between politics and culture as essential. 'Politics' cannot be restricted to those arenas stipulated as such by professional politicians. Indeed, it is fundamental to our methodology to question every aspect of our cultural situation from a political point of view, to ask, 'What politics inform

accepted understandings of art and culture? Whose interests are served by such cultural conventions? How is culture made, and for whom is it made?’

In conceptualizing this project, therefore, we proposed a structure that differed from the conventional art exhibitions, lectures and panels that Dia had previously sponsored. We identified four significant areas of the crisis in democracy: education, electoral politics, cultural participation and AIDS. For each topic, we collaboratively organized a round table discussion, an exhibition and a town meeting. For each round table we invited individual speakers from diverse professions and perspectives to participate in an informal conversation. These discussions helped us to prepare the installations and provided important information for planning the agendas for the town meetings.

Each of the four exhibitions that we installed at 77 Wooster Street reiterated the interrelatedness of our subjects and the necessity of our collaborative process. Our working method might best be described as painfully democratic: because so much of our process depends on the review, selection and critical juxtaposition of innumerable cultural objects, adhering to a collective process is extremely time-consuming and difficult. However, the shared learning and ideas produce results that are often inaccessible to those who work alone.

Our exhibitions and projects are intended to be forums in which multiple points of view are represented in a variety of styles and methods. We believe, as the feminist writer bell hooks has said, that ‘we must focus on a policy of inclusion so as not to mirror oppressive structures’. As a result, each exhibition is a veritable model of democracy. Mirroring the various forms of representation that structure our understanding of culture, our exhibitions bring together so-called fine art with products from supermarkets, mass-cultural artefacts with historical objects, actual documentation with homemade projects. We are not interested in making definitive evaluations or declarative statements, but in creating situations that offer our chosen subject as a complex and open-ended issue. We encourage greater audience participation through interpretation.

One form of participation was the town meeting held for each exhibition. These meetings were well publicized and were open to the public at large. In selecting the town meeting format, we meant not only to allude to the prototypical democratic experience but also to eliminate the demarcation between experts and the public so evident at most public lectures. For the town meetings all audience members were potential participants. Beyond the desire to erode such traditional categories, our expectations for these discussions were somewhat undefined. In the end, each town meeting had a life of its own, determined not only by the moderator, but by who was in the audience and who among them had the courage to speak up. Much of the public discussion built on issues raised in the round table meetings, and it was gratifying to hear different

people discussing their relation to those issues.

The final part of ‘Democracy’, and perhaps the most important, is this book. Through this book we tried to encapsulate many of the ideas that went into and came out of the Democracy Project in order to make them available to a far wider public than could attend the events. We organized this publication very much as we organize our exhibitions, bringing together a variety of voices and points of view to address the issues. In this case, we hope that the results provide a strong analysis of the current situation of democracy in America and suggest possible means for responding to its challenges. [...]

Group Material (Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Felix Gonzalez-Torres), *Democracy: A Project by Group Material* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990) 1–3.

## Eda Cufer

### *Transnacionala/A Journey from the East to the West//1996*

*The five-man Slovenian collective IRWIN are arguably the relational artists par excellence of Eastern Europe. Their live installation NSK Embassy Moscow (1992) addressed social and political relations in the post-Communist period, and the construction of Eastern European identity. The following text by their frequent collaborator, the artist Eda Cufer, is typical of their approach: a wry self-interrogation and poignant analysis of the limitations of a discussion-based road trip across the US, which the group undertook in 1996.*

How to conceptualize *post festum*, an artistic event which, as such, took place within individual and collective thought, in a flow of thoughts and emotions largely determined by the very corporeity and directness of events, vanishing in time as the journey progressed from mile to mile, from city to city, from meeting to meeting?

The non-differentiated, subjective material of *Transnacionala* which the journey's participants brought home from this experience is a kind of amalgam of images, impressions, memories and realizations. The banalities of everyday life, which range from sleeping, eating, the cleaning of the crowded living environment and self, to psychological tensions and attempts to relax – all intertwine with more sublime impressions of unforgettable landscapes, wide expanses and people; with reflections physically linked to these different banal or exhaled states; with memories of conversations and memories of towns and the atmospheres in which they took place; as well as with tentative syntheses occasioned by thought-shifts between different time-space and existential zones – between America, Europe and the world, between memories of local life situations in Ljubljana, Moscow, New York and Chicago – all caught up in the dull gaze and the monotonous image that defined, for hours and hours, the content and basic situation of the motor homes.

Although it is difficult to part from this non-differentiated image, impression and experience of *Transnacionala*, the three months that have elapsed since the project ended in Seattle on 28 July 1996 provide a sufficient time-distance to produce at least a rough reckoning of what the direct experience of the project signifies, in respect to its initial conceptual points of departure.

One of these fundamental points, which specifically enabled the later physical and metaphysical framework of the journey, was the positive experience of the *Apt Art* project, more precisely, the *NSK Embassy Moscow*

project which took place in 1993. The primary motive for *Transnacionala* was to organize an international art project to take place outside the established international institutional networks, without intermediaries, without a curator-formulated concept, and without any direct responsibility towards its sponsors. In short, to organize a project as a direct network of individuals brought together by a common interest in particularly open aesthetic, ethical, social and political questions, all of whom would travel together for one month, exchange views, opinions and impressions, meet new people in their local environments, and try to expand the network based on the topicality of questions posed – spontaneously and without any predetermined, centralized aesthetic, ideological or political objective.

The second methodological point of departure, also based on the positive experience of Moscow in 1992, was to create conditions for a kind of experimental existential situation. Like the one-month stay in an apartment at 12 Leninsky Prospekt, Moscow, in 1992, the one-month cohabitation of ten individuals in two motor homes, in barely ten square metres of physical space, also should have enabled a questioning of the myth of the public and intimate aspects of artist and art – that is, of the split forming the basis of the system of representation.

The next research-oriented point of departure was to analyse the problems of the global art system; the system of values, of existential, linguistic and market models contained therein. The aesthetic and ethical point of departure was the very implementation of the project itself – an attempt to establish a complex personal and group experience, the creation of a time-space module living within the multitudes of linguistically indefinable connections.

On the surface, the *Transnacionala* project may seem yet another attempt to establish or reaffirm the myth of communication. Its mission could be defined as an attempt to bridge personal, cultural, ideological, political, racial and other differences. It was in this positive, optimistic spirit that the first letters to prospective participants and hosts were composed, and quite frequently such an agit-prop discourse was also used in the process of establishing communication with the public in the five US cities we visited. It's more difficult, however, to define how and with what complications this communication really took place. The success of communication by individuals largely coming from spaces and times separate, as to both culture and experience, depends primarily on the skill of the individuals and groups wishing to communicate – their skill at playing a role within the structure of the dialogue. In the context of contemporary art and theory, the role of the engineers of such a communication structure is largely played by various international institutions, intermediaries who have successfully maintained, for the entire century, the illusion that despite cultural,

political, economic and individual differences the contemporary art community speaks the same language. Since the collapse in the seventies of what could be termed the option of the left, an option which determined the system of values and the consistency of language on which the above illusion was based, this institutionalized communication framework has been showing its cracks and fissures. It has shown itself inadequate, yet at the same time it remains the only model linking separate individuals and groups. It protects them from sinking back into more or less primitive national and local communities.

By trying to circumvent the institutional framework, and to ignore the potential of skilful professionals who would inevitably try to place the event within an established context of reception, the *Transnacionala* project deliberately provoked what could be called a communication noise. It placed the event in a certain margin – a margin that was constantly bringing up questions about the point of the participants' own activity, about what makes the project different from a tourist trip abusing art as an excuse for stealing national and international funds in the interest of structuring pleasure, as well as various self-accusatory images in which the participants saw themselves as a bunch of demoralized, neurotic individuals in pursuit of some abstract private utopias, non-existent relations, and deficiencies that cannot be compensated for. These feelings gradually took on the status of a unique experience, of a state we had deliberately provoked. They became the subject and theme of the journey.

The problem of the structure and dominion of the public is specifically that power which decides whether a particular individual or collective art production is a real part of the public exchange of values – or merely what could be termed the hyper-production of an alienated subject, to be stuck in the cellar or attic of a private house, in the inventory of a bankrupt gallery, in a collection that has lost its value overnight, or in some other of history's many dumping grounds.

In view of the prevailing East European provenance of the artists who had embarked on the adventure of discovering America – the central myth of the West – we repeatedly posed a basic question to the American public present at our public events: what does the American cultural public understand by the notions of the East – of Eastern art, of Eastern societies? What already exists in the minds of our interlocutors? On the other hand, we were faced with the question of how to present our real historical, existential and aesthetic experience in such a way as to transcend the cultural, ideological and political headlines linked to the collapse of the Eastern political systems and the wars in ex-Yugoslavia and the ex-Soviet Union. How to define historical, cultural and existential differences in the context of global, transnational capitalism? And finally, how to transcend sociological discourse and establish conditions for aesthetic discourse? Communicating and associating with various American art

and intellectual communities revealed a certain similarity between the psychological relation or attitude – even frustration – of various American minority groups (national, cultural, racial, sexual, religious, ideological) towards the activity of central social institutions, and the frustration of East European cultures in relation to their economically stronger West European and North American counterparts. In other words, the relation of the margin to the centre.

When mentioning this psychological relationship or attitude, or simply frustration, towards the constant of the world order as a point of potential identification within the context of difference, I have in mind primarily the semi-conscious, ambivalent and non-structured nature of the languages used in the structure of public dialogue in connection with this question. Who are we, whom and what do we represent? Who am I, whom and what do I represent? Being the *fil rouge* of private conversations among the participants in the trip, this question was gradually gaining in importance, giving the project a kind of ontological stamp precisely because of its ambivalence and insolubility, which grew with time. None of the so-called East European artists identified themselves with the East in the sense of representing its political or even cultural, messianic role. Our common attitude to this question could be defined as an attempt to take a different view, to formulate a different question: 'How does the East see itself from the outside, from the point of view of another continent, and what consumed its role and place in the structure of the global world order?' What remains of ourselves and our conceptual and aesthetic points of departure, once we are transposed into a foreign cultural and historical context? Who are we by ourselves? Can art really conceptualize and interpret itself through itself? From where do form and content derive? Does autonomy – freedom of art and the individual – exist? If it does, on what values it is based? These seemingly clear, even worn-out and abused questions, brought about numerous conflicts, deadlocked discussions, retreats into silence and reflection, depressions, exalted visions of solutions, utopian impulses, feelings of absurdity, emptiness and exposure to the mechanisms of life, which in the desert between Chicago and San Francisco looked wonderful, yet totally incomprehensible and indifferent to the symbolical and value games playing themselves out in our mental spaces. In the middle of the desert, where all points of the universe seem equally close to, and equally distant from, man as its centre, we were discovering that as East European artists we were not defined so much by the form and content of our mental spaces as by their symbolical exchange value. The previously mentioned frustration of Eastern cultures and societies vis à vis Western ones, which grew even bigger after the collapse of socialism, is manifest in the field of art primarily as the problem of the non-existence of a system of contemporary art in the territory of the East – that is, of a system of symbolic

and economic exchange which would take place in countries sharing the common historical experience of socialism, paving the way to integration into the global contemporary art system. But why would we regret the non-existence of something suppressing the individual and their artistic freedom, at least according to the romantic, utopian definition of art? Which even today is still formally advocated by a great number of ideologues and users of the existing (and virtually the only) West European and North American system of contemporary art? In fact, this is not a regret but a realization that – without a system of institutions which by definition represents the field of contemporary art – there is no broader intellectual and creative production; without a broader intellectual and creative production there are no differences; without differences there is no hierarchy of values; without a hierarchy of values there is no critical reflection; without critical reflection there is no theory; and without theory there is no universally-understood referential language, capable of communicating on an equal footing with other referential languages in other places and times of the existing world.

Despite bringing up problems that promise no imminent solutions, and despite a communication that lacked colloquial smoothness (and which was in fact at times full of clashes and thorns), the *Transnacionala* project achieved its conceptual objective precisely by objectivizing itself in the sphere of intimacy and closeness, which in the process in the journey took on the form of a micro volume of public space. A public space, furthermore, in which views that are still considered taboo in most public contexts of contemporary art could be expressed.

Among the participants in the journey, and among some other individuals met along the way, relationships were established forming a direct, living network. A network in which a sum of problems and realizations constituting the germ of a referential language were caught up and articulated, in order to be further developed.

1 *Transnacionala: A Journey from the East to the West* was an art project initiated by the Ljubljana-based visual art group IRWIN in the summer of 1996. The project took the form of a journey in real time from the East to the West Coast of the USA. The participants, an international group of artists comprising Alexander Brener, Vadim Fishkin, Yuri Leiderman, Goran Dordevic, Michael Benson, Eda Cufer and the five-member IRWIN group set out on a one-month journey across the United States in two recreational vehicles. The aim, quite simply, was for citizens of Eastern Europe to experience the mythology of the American highway Route 66, and to engage each other and the people they would meet along the way in informal and formal discussions about art, theory, politics and life itself. During organized stops in Atlanta, Richmond, Chicago, San Francisco and Seattle, a number of artistic events, presentations and discussions with local art communities took place. The *Transnacionala* journey – its talks, discussions and atmospheres –

is documented in the book *Transnacionala: Highway Collisions Between East and West at the Crossroads of Art*, edited by Eda Cufer (Ljubljana: Koda, 1999).

Eda Cufer, edited version of text written in Ljubljana, October 1996; first published in *IRWIN Transnacionala Barcelona* (Barcelona: Fundacio la Caixa, 1997). Translated from Slovenian by Jasna Hrastnik.



## Carsten Höller

### The Baudouin/Boudewijn Experiment.

#### A Deliberate, Non-Fatalistic Large Scale Group Experiment in Deviation//2000

*Originally trained as a phytopathologist, Carsten Höller often creates experiments in which human participants are subject to behavioural situations. The Baudouin/Boudewijn Experiment: A Deliberate, Non-Fatalistic, Large-Scale Group Experiment in Deviation was originally planned for the Brussels City of Culture 2000, but was banned after the Queen of Belgium (Baudouin's widow) objected to Höller's proposal. The project finally took place the following year, and proposes collective action as a form of radical inactivity. It has no visual documentation.*

The late king of Belgium, Baudouin or Boudewijn, found a remarkable solution to a personal dilemma. As a king, he was supposed to sign every new law established by the parliament. His contribution to the actual formulation of the law, however, was null, thus producing a purely formalistic act in signing the document. At a certain time, the parliament was working out a law which would liberalize abortion. Baudouin/Boudewijn, being a confessed catholic, had moral problems signing the paper; on the other hand, he did not want to obstruct the implementation of a new law. When the time came and his signature was requested, he resigned from being a king for one day. Another king was elected for this one day, who signed the new law. The following day, Baudouin/Boudewijn was king again.

The solution to this dilemma is ingeniously simple. It is a short-term deviation from your usual behaviour, a shift in character for the sake of avoiding producing something you don't want to produce, a refusal in time to be the professional you usually are. It is as if you would cut off a continuous line of being. Stop, and start again? Not a change in what you do, but to include an alien moment of not doing. A deviation, a negative deviation even, since the way is shortened by including a moment of motionlessness.

The experiment planned here will be as follows: a space is provided to accommodate 200 people, willing to step out of their 'usual life' for 24 hours (the amount of time during which the king was not king). The space will be closed from the outside world and mobile phones, radios or TVs will not be allowed. This is to emphasize the group aspect of the experiment and to create a structure in which the 'step-out' can be done commonly. The necessary infrastructure (furniture, food, sanitary installations, safety) will be provided, but it is refrained

from providing a programme or methods to entertain (people are free to bring what they like). Basically, the experiment will be to see what happens under these conditions; people are freed from their usual constraints, and yet confined to a space and a time.

The Baudouin/Boudewijn Experiment will not be recorded by means of film, video or otherwise (and thus is contrary to any Big-Brother-like set up); the only 'recordings' will be the memories of the participants, and they will be 'broadcast' by the stories they are willing to tell. The experiment will thus be a very unscientific one, as objectivity is not the aim. It will rather be a unique opportunity to experience with others the possibility of getting away from what you usually are.

Carsten Höller, 'The Baudouin/Boudewijn Experiment. A Deliberate, Non-Fatalistic, Large-Scale Group Experiment in Deviation' (2000), *De Witte Raaf*, No. 9 (Brussels, May-June, 2001).

## Jeremy Deller

### The Battle of Orgreave//2002

*The British artist Jeremy Deller often collaborates with specific social constituencies to realize event-based projects. In 2001 he organized the reenactment of a key event from the English miners' strike of 1984, a violent clash between miners and police in the town of Orgreave. The event was undertaken with former participants in the strike and a number of historical reenactment societies. Documentation of Deller's work became the premise for Mike Figgis' political documentary The Battle of Orgreave (Channel 4/Artangel, 2001).*

On 18 June 1984 I was watching the evening news and saw footage of a picket at the Orgreave coking plant in South Yorkshire in which thousands of men were chased up a field by mounted police. It seemed a civil war between the north and south of the country was taking place in all but name. The image of this pursuit up the hill stuck in my mind, and for years I have wanted to find out what exactly happened on that day with a view to reenacting or commemorating it in some way.

When I started to do proper research, the consequences of that day took on a much larger historic perspective. After over a year of archive reading, listening and interviewing many of those involved - the reenactment finally did take place on, or as close to as possible, the original site, with over 800 participants. Many of these participants were former miners (and a few former policemen) who were reliving events from 1984 that they themselves took part in. The rest were members of Battle reenactment societies from all over the country.

I wanted to involve members of these societies for mainly two reasons: first of all, they are well trained in recreating combat and in obeying orders. More importantly, I wanted the reenactment of The Battle of Orgreave to become part of the lineage of decisive battles in English history.

I was also interested in the term 'living history' that is frequently used in relation to reenactments, and I thought it would be interesting for reenactors to work alongside veterans of a battle from recent history, who are a personification of the term.

Also, as an artist I was interested in how far an idea could be taken, especially an idea that is on the face of it a contradiction in terms 'a recreation of something that was essentially chaos'.

Of course I would never have undertaken the project if people locally felt it was unnecessary or in poor taste. As it was, we encountered a lot of support

from the outset because there seemed to be an instinctive understanding of what the reenactment was about.

Jeremy Deller, 'The Battle of Orgreave', in James Lingwood, Michael Morris, eds, *Off Limits: 40 Artangel Projects*, (London: Merrell Publishers Limited, 2002) 90–95.

We can smell the scent of a steaming pot of jasmine rice...

Sunlight pours in from an October afternoon, and already we feel the compression of the gallery lifted from our shoulders...

As one sits down for the bowl (white enamel with blue rims) of food, one begins to realize that this is a distinctively different experience from others we have had in an art gallery or with art.

## Rirkrit Tiravanija No Ghosts in the Wall//2004

*Rirkrit Tiravanija has been at the centre of debates about relational art. In the following text, used as the script for an audioguide to accompany his retrospective at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (2004), Tiravanija presents a discussion of his work in the third person. The narrative offers insights into his motivations for working with 'lots of people', and represents an innovative solution to the problem of presenting a retrospective of participatory art. The museum did not show any of his past works, just empty spaces that related to the original venues.*

[The Docent turns away from the window and leads the group into the partitioned room to the left of the space... it is the replicated approximation of a space which is the project room of the Paula Allen gallery... the Docent lines everyone up against the wall as if there was an installation in the middle of the room and proceeds to talk...] Docent: The relative success of *pad thai* from nineteen ninety and the perplexed confusion following his first one man exhibition *untitled blind*, put Tiravanija on the radar of the New York art world, where one exhibition can make or break an artist overnight. We now move forward to the year nineteen ninety two and Tiravanija's second solo exhibition in New York, with the work *untitled in parenthesis free*. Once again the reintroduction of food as the key element in the approach of the work is central. In tandem with this element Tiravanija makes references to the core ideas of conceptual art that question the idealism behind the relevance of authorship and authenticity. There are two parts to the exhibition; we enter to find an exhibition space which is full to the brim with an eclectic mix of objects. The overall view is that of the overpacked storage space of a gallery. It is full of artworks in frames (many are photographs, since the gallery, 303, concentrated very strongly on photography), some paintings and parts and pieces of sculptures. When you enter from the elevator you can see a painted black cartwheel belonging to a Karen Kilimnik installation. Behind this is a curiously tall woodchip crate standing upright forming a column but not quite reaching the ceiling; there are drawers for drawings, cardboard boxes full of unknown contents and some boxes with tennis shoes and a toothbrush – all have been dragged out from all corners of the gallery and put on display, as if to make an exhibition of the entire contents of the gallery.

There is an aisle running around and through the room and we can make our way though the storage and behind the pile of art etc. Once we make our way to the back of the gallery we are surprised to discover the desk of the gallery owner,

and her assistants sitting there amongst this pile. They are working as if it was just another day. Here the intimacy of the gallery has been exposed: walls, cupboards, storage racks of art and even the toilet were stripped bare, without doors to hinder the view of all possible corners of the rooms in the gallery.

We can smell the scent of a steaming pot of jasmine rice, with its very distinct combination of water and the perfume of jasmine. It's enough to make one curious with hunger, and as we make our way through the space we come to the room at the end of the hallway, well lit, with windows at the corner of the building. Sunlight pours in from an October afternoon, and already we feel the compression of the gallery lifted from our shoulders. There are people sitting around round tables and on stools; they are talking, reading the guide for galleries, weighing their next move. The 303 Gallery is at the corner of Spring and Greene Streets in Soho, New York, formerly the main art district of the city.

There is a mess of doors leaning against the walls in this room; doors presumably of the gallery. They are unhinged and stacked. To the right as we enter is a makeshift table made from sawhorses, and yet another door from the space. A couple of people seem to be busying themselves with the preparation of some vegetables – the chopping and cutting; opening gallon cans of bamboo shoots. In the middle of the room there are two pots cooking on camping rings. One seems to have been prepared already, the other is on its way. People are helping themselves to the rice from a cooker large enough to feed the whole Island of Manhattan. Right next to the low gas cookers is an old used refrigerator, white, with hints of age around the edges. As one sits down for the bowl (white enamel with blue rims) of food, one begins to realize that this is a distinctively different experience from others we have had in an art gallery or with art. There are also many milky white cylindrical buckets which seem to be sloshing with waste food, all that is left over. In the refrigerator there are Thai long beans, Thai roundish green eggplants, as well as the mini pea eggplants, looking rather green, with a strong bitterness to their taste. Bitter and stronger. And some packets of green curry.

This exhibition came at an economically depressed moment in New York that provided fertile grounds to establish it as the cornerstone of Tiravanija's practice. We don't use the word 'practice' lightly – it's as if the artist were a doctor administering the viewer with a dose of opiate to cure all maladies.

Tiravanija described his work at this time as comparable to reaching out, removing Marcel Duchamp's 'Urinal' from its pedestal, reinstalling it back on the wall, and then, in an act of return to its original use, peeing into it.

Interest in the identity of the artistic has now fully recovered to the point that the work simply is the artist or simply by the artist. Yet there is a prevalent sensibility to his endeavour, one of which a) resists artifice, b) resists the time

and space continuum which has been imposed on the ontological structure of art making, c) resists unnecessary staging of a reality which does not exist. [*The ghost has been shifting around now... we can hear him going on and on about works which do not necessarily correlate to what the Docent has been speaking about.*]

[*The Docent leads the group over to the windows of untitled free, and crosses the hall into the space of the Kölischer Kunstverein.*] Docent: In nineteen ninety-six Tiravanija, having won the prize from the Köln-based Central Insurance Company (which is comprised of a six month stay in the city of Cologne, Germany), was commissioned by the company to produce a work for an exhibition at the Kölischer Kunstverein. What we are looking at is a structural replica in full scale of Tiravanija's apartment in New York. Tiravanija had lived in this apartment for almost twenty years up to that point. It is a four-flight walkup in a tenement building. The original apartment is very old. The apartment number is twenty-one, actually a lucky number for Tiravanija, as he was also born on the twenty-first day. The actual title of the exhibition is *untitled in parenthesis tomorrow is another day*. The phrase 'tomorrow is another day' came from the director of the Kunstverein himself, Udo Kittelmann – an utterance often used as an expression of relief and resignation. But for Tiravanija it was about the inevitability of daily life. *tomorrow is another day* was for Tiravanija a work where all his essential ideas came together. Tiravanija has often said that his work was 'about use, and through this use meaning is constructed'. Here we see the apartment which was opened for three months and was open twenty-four hours a day, six days a week (it would have been seven days but German labour laws prohibited the work being open on Sundays). This was perhaps the first and only time an exhibition space was left open with full access. For the three months it was open people came and stayed in the apartment; they cooked, they ate, they bathed (everything functioned in the apartment replica as in a normal habitat), they slept, got married, had birthdays, many, many performances of music and otherwise; the space surrounding the apartment became a garden. Many, many people spent a lot of time in and around the apartment, and they shared their time and space together. They drew and wrote notes, comments, drawings, young and old. It was an open house and, against expectations, nothing terrible happened. Tiravanija left Köln soon after the apartment opened. He left everything he had brought (house-wares, TV, stereo, kitchenware... etc.) for his stay at the residency... nothing went missing and in fact people left more things behind, things of value and useful things. [*The Docent takes the group through to the next and last space... while walking the Docent continues with the dialogue...*] Docent: Similarly to *untitled in parenthesis tomorrow is another day*... now at this point you may have all noticed that

Tiravanija most often if not always leaves both his exhibitions and works untitled... however, also always within the parenthesis, from the very first work, we can see that Tiravanija wants to direct our attention to the subtext, or subtitle, of how we can direct our thoughts and ideas towards the experience we are having with his works ...

Yes, *untitled in parenthesis he promised* from two thousand and two. It is the last work we will focus on. As I was saying: similarly to *tomorrow...*, *he promised* is another full-scale architectural representation. In this case it is the house of an Austrian architect who lived in exile in Los Angeles by the name of Rudolph Schindler. Perhaps little known to the lay world, Schindler was a very inspirational figure for a lot of architects and artists due to his quiet but studied ideas concerning the philosophical conditions of living and architecture. Obviously Tiravanija found him so, and in this work, which was made for Vienna at the Secession exhibition space... he made a replica of part of the house which Schindler had designed and built for himself. (This is very similar to Philip Johnson's Glass House, which was also designed and built as the residence of the architect himself.)

This house was in Los Angeles on King's Road (hence it is known as the King's Road House). Tiravanija has replicated in full scale Schindler's own studio, which is one of five sections of the house. We are not looking at the complete representation of the house, as Tiravanija wanted us to focus on this particular space as an idea, as an ideal space. We can sense what life in the structure was like, and is, as we pass through this building. Schindler was highly influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright (having worked for him), as well as by the natural environment, vegetation and climate of Southern California. The house was very open, with a great deal of Eastern, Oriental feel, blurring of the interior and exterior – merging also the functions of life inside and out. In this replication, however, all parts of the architecture are made from chromed and mirrored stainless steel. The entire structure is cloaked in the reflection of its environment. It shimmers as if to disappear, camouflaged by the white of the space... and unlike *tomorrow...*, *he promised...* was not open-ended – it was only open all day and night one day of the week. It was not meant to function twenty-four hours a day. However, time and space would be an important aspect of the work – usage was still primal. But rather than keeping it open-ended, it was programmed. There was a series of different events in which the house acted as a platform and as a lived space, hosting different discussions, exhibitions, films and musical events, Thai massage and of course a barbecue. The process, which we say at the beginning of all Tiravanija's work, was very clear and almost extreme in this situation. The house was fabricated in Guadalajara, Mexico, and since there was not enough time and too much distance, the parts of the house

were slowly shipped to Vienna. As the parts arrived, the house was put up. During the course of the exhibition, which lasted about two and a half months, the house was only completed two days before the exhibition closed. Pictures were taken of the slow process of, amongst other things, what went on in the space, as well as that of the construction process in Mexico. Visitors in Vienna could buy one ticket and return to the space at a later date to keep up with the construction of the house as well as participate in the daily events offered. Tiravanija never did participate in the process of the exhibition or see the completion of the house itself... but, like all this work, Tiravanija was much more interested in the people and how they came and went, how they may have had different views and memories of what they had passed through.

Thank you for joining us, for walking through with us and giving your attention to this 'retrospective'. You may have wondered all this time why we are not in the presence of the work itself and are instead just given a story about or descriptions of the work or event. Tiravanija and the curators believed that this is one of the possible ways this body of work could be represented. There is no object, no picture, no moment, no space and even perhaps no time, but in this void of representation we hope you have heard and have imagined a picture of your own, a memory of your own, and that in the end it was an experience of its own making... [*The Docent shows everyone out...* ]

THE END

Rirkrit Tiravanija, 'No Ghosts in the Wall', *Rirkrit Tiravanija: A Retrospective* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2004) 51–92

## Thomas Hirschhorn

### 24h Foucault//2004

*Unlike many artists who work collaboratively in order to fuse art and social praxis, Thomas Hirschhorn has always asserted the importance of art's autonomy. Projects such as the Bataille Monument (2002) and Musée Précaire (2004) involved collaborations with largely working-class and immigrant communities. 24h Foucault transferred this collaborative approach to philosophers, poets and musicians at the Palais de Tokyo.*

*24h Foucault is the avant-garde of the Foucault Art Work. The Foucault Art Work is the project that I have developed following meetings with Daniel Defert and Philippe Artières on the invitation of Nicolas Bourriaud at the Palais de Tokyo in October 2003. Foucault Art Work is a project (like other projects I have) that remains to be realized in the years to come. It depends on me finding the time, energy, places, partners and money to show the Foucault Art Work. This is my objective and I don't want to lose sight of it. This is why the 24h Foucault is basically the same Foucault Art Work project condensed and speeded up. I want the 24h Foucault to affirm and prove that it's necessary to work as an artist with precision and with excess. I want this project to be precise and exaggerated! For me, the Foucault Art Work will not change, only speed up. The 24h Foucault comprises 1. an auditorium 2. a library/documentation centre 3. a sound library 4. a video library 5. an exhibition 6. the Merve Verlag archives 7. a Toolbox bar 8. a souvenir shop 9. a newspaper 10. a Foucault studio. 24h Foucault is an autonomous work made collectively. 24h Foucault is a work of art!*

#### **24h Foucault, the pre-project**

*I want to try here to express my wish for the Foucault Art Work. This is the title of the work and at the same time it's the Michel Foucault exhibition programme. It's the programme because it's not about doing an exhibition on Michel Foucault. For me it's about showing, affirming, giving form to the fact that Michel Foucault was an artist. That his life and his work were a work of art. It's also about giving form to this affirmation that I share with Marcus Steinweg: philosophy is art! Pure philosophy, true, cruel, pitiless philosophy, philosophy that affirms, acts, creates. The philosophy of Spinoza, of Nietzsche, of Deleuze, of Foucault. I don't know Foucault's philosophy, but I see his work of art. It permits me to approach it, to not understand it but to seize it, to see it, to be active with it. I don't have to be a historian, a connoisseur, a specialist to confront myself*

*with works of art. I can seize their energy, their urgency, their necessity, their density. Michel Foucault's work of art is charged. It's a battery. I can seize this charged battery. I want to give form to this. In the Foucault Art Work project, there is more than a vision: there is a singular commitment. There is the commitment to make a work of art. There is the affirmation that the work of art is philosophy, and that philosophy is a work of art. We must free ourselves from exhibitions. I hate and never use the term *show* in English; I hate and I never use the term *piece*. I never use and I hate the term *installation*. But I want to make a work, a work of art! I want to become what I am. I want to become an artist! I want to appropriate what I am. This is my work as an artist.*

*Foucault Art Work is not documentation. Documentation, documentary films have been overtaken by fiction and by reality of all types. Because documentation wants to place itself in the middle. I don't want to place myself in the middle. I want to overtake the document, the documentary. I want to make an experience. An experience is something from which I emerge changed. An experience transforms me. I want the public to be transformed by the experience of Foucault Art Work. I want the public to appropriate Michel Foucault's work of art. I want the public to be active, participate. Evidently the most important participation is activity, the participation of reflexion, questioning, making your brain work. I want the public of Foucault Art Work to seize the energy, the strength, the necessity of Foucault's work. I want the public to confront what is important in the work of Foucault; I want the public to seize the range and the power of Foucault's philosophy. I don't want the public to understand. I want the public to seize the power. The power of art, the power of philosophy!*

#### **Concretely:**

*The Foucault Art Work takes place from 14 October to 5 December (7 weeks) at the Palais de Tokyo. I want to make a sort of Bataille Monument, but on the inside, in an institution. What have been the lessons from my experience of the Bataille Monument! That this experience produces something: meetings, confrontation, production, thought, more work, loss, discussions, friendship. To produce that, I have understood that it's necessary for the artist to be present all the time and not to be alone. This event must be very well prepared. You have to work uphill on this project with contributors, participants, co-producers. Foucault Art Work is going to be an event that must be produced elsewhere at least once (US, Japan or elsewhere). I want the Palais de Tokyo to be only the first event. There must be another. Another partner must be found. Foucault Art Work must be an event with between 700 and 1000 square metres of space. The proposed alcove of the Palais de Tokyo is too small. I need more space! It needs a minimum of 700 square metres. In the Foucault Art Work event, I want to work closely with my*

philosopher friend Marcus Steinweg from Berlin. He will be with me on site all the time, during the *event*. He prepares, he proposes, and he accompanies this work. He is part of the work. He will affirm. He will appropriate. He will act with love, like me, but not with respect. With the love of philosophy, not with the respect of a homage. *Foucault Art Work* will be made with love and without respect. Every day there will be the *intervention of a philosopher, a friend, a writer who will interpret the work of Foucault. There will be a Michel Foucault exhibition.* I want the public to understand: the exhibition is only one part of the *Foucault Art Work*. The exhibition with photos, personal books, original documents, press cuttings (international). Peter Gente of the *Merve-Verlag Berlin* made a beautiful exhibition at ZKM in Karlsruhe. *There will be a sound-, book- and media-library* with all the books (in all languages), all the videos and all audio material of Foucault. I want there to be photocopiers, video material, sound material, on site, simple and efficient, so that the public can take home photocopies or video and audio copies, books, extracts of books or other documents, as they wish. I want the *Foucault Art Work* not only to be a place of production, but also of dissemination. It is important to diffuse and *give diffusion to the work of Foucault* or to parts of Foucault's works. *There will be a Michel Foucault shop.* The shop isn't a place to sell things, the shop is in fact another exhibition. It's an exhibition of souvenirs made to look at, not to buy. As in the vitrines of a big football club, where trophies are exhibited, photos of former players, the players' vests, the club's different stadiums, the celebrity visits. These are important but not decisive souvenirs. Decisive is what is made today. Today and tomorrow. *There will be a Foucault-Map.* A work that I will do with Marcus Steinweg. Like I did the *Nietzsche-Map* and the *Hannah Arendt-Map*. It's a very big plan of the philosophical position of Foucault in the galaxy of philosophy. There will also be documents and elements that put the *Foucault Archives* at your disposal. This can be integrated in the *Foucault Art Work* project. However the archives must be exposed in another (second) manifestation. Finally I want there to be a simple and condensed auditorium for lectures, concerts, speeches. *I want the public to be inside a brain in action.* There will be no narration, no discussion, no illustration. There will be affirmation. There will be ideas. There will be confrontation. When I say: there is no discussion, I mean: it's not to debate and discuss philosophy and art. It's necessary to confront yourself. It's necessary to forge a resistance. I want all the forms, all the contributions to be chosen politically, philosophically, artistically. Because it's the same thing. No element is chosen for any reason other than political. I want the *Foucault Art Work* project to be a proposition that overtakes me, that makes my capacity for responsibility explode. It's necessary to try and be responsible for something which I can take responsibility for. There must also be a *Foucault-Studio*. A place of work with

computers and space for working. Making sculpture, doing research, having experiences that you don't usually have. Learning another language, for example. I repeat: the *Foucault-Studio*, the *Foucault-Shop*, the *Auditorium*, the *book-, sound- and media-library*, the *Foucault Exhibition*, the *contributors* (every other day), the *Foucault-Map*, the *Foucault Archives*. These eight elements will be put alongside each other as in the human brain; they disrupt each other, they complete each other, they compete against each other. But they never contradict each other – they demonstrate the complexity and the infinity of thought. There will be chairs, lots of chairs, armchairs, lots of armchairs for sitting down and reflecting, reading and exchanging. There will be lots of light. *Foucault Art Work* will be very lit. In the *Foucault Art Work* there will be lots of computers, photocopiers, audio-recorders, video and DVD recorders, TV screens, but all these objects will be integrated, mastered; tools, arms, but never aesthetic effects with which to intimidate the public, or to show them new technology. The technologies serve art, they serve philosophy. They will be tools, but not necessities. To kill them, it's not necessary to have a gun. To construct a house, it's not necessary to have a hammer. You must always work firstly with your brain.

*Foucault Art Work* will not be a Thomas Hirschhorn exhibition. I will have contributed to this project with others, I hope lots of others. Marcus Steinweg, Manuel Joseph, Christophe Fiat, Peter Gente, not to mention those to whom I've already spoken of the project. This project will be made together, multiply, with multiple singularities, active, turned towards affirmation, the other. Turned to the other with friendship, but without compromise. Neither visual, nor of meaning, nor of space, nor of content.

*Foucault Art Work* is an ambitious project. It is itself an affirmation as much as a work of art.

Thomas Hirschhorn, artist's proposal, *24h Foucault Journal* (Paris: Palais de Tokyo, 2–3 October 2004).  
Translated by Claire Bishop, 2006.



COLLABORATION  
IS THE ANSWER  
BUT WHAT IS  
THE QUESTION

Hans Ulrich Obrist, cited in Hal Foster, *Chat Rooms*, 2004

**CRITICAL AND CURATORIAL POSITIONS**

**Nicolas Bourriaud Relational Aesthetics//158**

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## Nicolas Bourriaud Relational Aesthetics//1998

Relational Aesthetics *has come to be seen as a defining text for a generation of artists who came to prominence in Europe in the early to mid 1990s. The following text is a selection of excerpts from Bourriaud's collection of seven discrete essays originally published in magazines and exhibition catalogues.*

### The work of art as social interstice

The possibility of a *relational* art (an art that takes as its theoretical horizon the sphere of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an autonomous and *private* symbolic space) is testimony to the radical upheaval in aesthetic, cultural and political objectives brought about by modern art. To outline its sociology: this development stems essentially from the birth of a global urban culture and the extension of the urban model to almost all cultural phenomena. The spread of urbanization, which began to take off at the end of the Second World War, allowed an extraordinary increase in social exchanges, as well as greater individual mobility (thanks to the development of rail and road networks, telecommunications and the gradual opening up of isolated places, which went hand in hand with the opening up of minds). Because this urban world's inhabitable places are so cramped, we have also witnessed a scaling down of furniture and objects, which have become much easier to handle: for a long time, artworks looked like lordly luxury items in this urban context (the dimensions of both artworks and the apartments where they were displayed were intended to signal the *distinction* between their owners and the *hoi polloi*), but the way their function and their mode of presentation has evolved reveals a growing *urbanization* of the artistic experience. What is collapsing before our very eyes is quite simply the pseudo-aristocratic conception of how artworks should be displayed, which was bound up with the feeling of having acquired a territory. We can, in other words, no longer regard contemporary works as a space we have to walk through (we were shown around collections in the same way that we were shown around great houses). Contemporary art resembles a period of time that has to be experienced, or the opening of a dialogue that never ends. The city permits and generalizes the experience of proximity: this is the tangible symbol and historical framework of the state of society, or the 'state of encounter', that has been 'imposed' on people, as Althusser puts it,<sup>1</sup> as opposed to the dense and unproblematic jungle of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's state of *nature*. Rousseau's jungle was such that there could be no lasting encounters.

Once it had been elevated to the status of an absolute civilizational rule this intense encounter finally gave rise to artistic practices that were in keeping with it. It gave rise, that is, to a form of art with intersubjectivity as its substratum. Its central themes are being-together [*l'être-ensemble*], the 'encounter' between viewer and painting, and the collective elaboration of meaning. We can leave aside the problem of the phenomenon's historicity: art has always been relation to some extent. It has, in other words, always been a factor in sociability and has always been the basis for a dialogue. One of the image's potentials is its capacity for 'linkage' [*reliance*], to use Michel Maffesoli's term: flags, logos, icons and signs all produce empathy and sharing, and generate *links*.<sup>2</sup> Art (practices derived from painting and sculpture and displayed in the form of an exhibition) proves to be an especially appropriate expression of this civilization of proximity. It compresses relational space, whereas television and books send us all back to spaces where we consume in private; and whereas the theatre or the cinema bring small groups together to look at univocal images, there is in fact no live commentary on what a theatre or cinema audience is seeing (the time for discussion comes after the show). At an exhibition, in contrast, there is always the possibility of an immediate – in both senses of the term – discussion, even when the forms on show are inert: I see, comment and move around in one space-time. Art is a site that produces a specific sociability; what status this space has within the range of 'states of encounter' proposed by the *Polis* remains to be seen. How can an art that is centred on the production of such modes of conviviality succeed in relaunching the modern project of emancipation as we contemplate it? How does it allow us to define new cultural and political goals?

Before turning to concrete examples, it is important to take a new look at where artworks are situated within the overall system of the economy – symbolic or material – that governs contemporary society: quite apart from its commodified nature or semantic value, the artwork represents, in my view, a social *interstice*. The term *interstice* was used by Karl Marx to describe trading communities that escaped the framework of the capitalist economy: barter, selling at a loss, autarkic forms of production, and so on. An interstice is a space in social relations which, although it fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, suggests possibilities for exchanges other than those that prevail within the system. Exhibitions of contemporary art occupy precisely the same position within the field of the trade in representations. They create free spaces and periods of time whose rhythms are not the same as those that organize everyday life, and they encourage an inter-human intercourse which is different to the 'zones of communication' that are forced upon us. The contemporary social context restricts opportunities for interhuman relations in that it creates spaces designed for that purpose. Superloos were invented to

keep the streets clean. The same line of thinking governed the development of communicational tools while the streets of our cities were being swept clean of all relational dross. The result is that neighbourhood relations have been impoverished. The general mechanization of social functions is gradually reducing our relational space. Until only a few years ago, the early morning call service still used human voices; the responsibility for waking us up now falls to synthesized voices... The ATM has become the transit model for the most basic social functions, and professional behaviours are modelled on the efficiency of the machines that are replacing them. The same machines now perform tasks that once represented so many opportunities for exchanges, pleasure or conflict. Contemporary art is really pursuing a political project when it attempts to move into the relational sphere by problematizing it.

When Gabriel Orozco puts an orange on the stalls of a deserted market in Brazil (*Crazy Tourist*, 1991) or sets up a hammock in the garden of New York's Museum of Modern Art (*Hamoc en el MoMa*, 1993), he is operating in the heart of the 'social infra-thin' [*inframince*], or that tiny space for everyday gestures that is determined by the superstructure constructed and determined by large-scale exchanges. Orozco's photographs are an uncaptioned documentary record of tiny revolutions in ordinary urban or semi-urban life (a sleeping bag on the grass, an empty shoebox): they bear witness to the silent life (a still life or *nature morte*) that is now painted by our relations with others. When Jens Haaning uses a loudspeaker to broadcast jokes told in Turkish on a square in Copenhagen (*Turkish Jokes*, 1994), he instantly produces a micro-community of immigrants who have been brought together by the collective laughter that inverts their situation as exiles. That community is formed in relation to and inside the work. An exhibition is a privileged place where instant communities like this can be established: depending on the degree of audience participation demanded by the artist, the nature of the works on show and the models of sociability that are represented or suggested, an exhibition can generate a particular 'domain of exchanges'. And we must judge that 'domain of exchanges' on the basis of aesthetic criteria, or in other words by analysing the coherence of its form, and then the symbolic value of the 'world' it offers us or the image of human relations that it reflects. Within this social interstice, the artist owes it to himself to take responsibility for the symbolic models he is showing: all representation refers to values that can be transposed into society (though contemporary art does not so much represent as *model*) and inserts itself into the social fabric rather than taking inspiration from it). Being a human activity that is based upon commerce, art is both the object and the subject of an ethics: all the more so in that, unlike other human activities, *its only function is to be exposed to that commerce*. Art is a state of encounter... [...]

### Conviviality and encounters

A work can function as a relational device in which there is a degree of randomness. It can be a machine for provoking and managing individual or collective encounters. To cite a few examples from the last two decades, this is true of Braco Dimitrijevic's *Casual Passer-by* series, which disproportionately celebrates the names and faces of anonymous passers-by on posters the size of those used for advertisements, or on busts like those of celebrities. In the early 1970s, Stephen Willats painstakingly charted the relationships that existed between the inhabitants of a block of flats. And much of Sophie Calle's work consists of accounts of her encounters with strangers: she follows a passer-by, searches hotel rooms after getting a job as a chamber maid, asks blind people how they define beauty, and then, after the event, formalizes the biographical experiments that led her to 'collaborate' with the people she met. We could also cite, almost at random, On Kawara's *I met* series, the restaurant opened by Gordon Matta-Clark in 1971 (*Food*), the dinners organized by Daniel Spoerri or the playful shop opened by George Brecht and Robert Filliou in Villefranche (*La Cédille qui sourit*). The formalization of convivial relations has been a historical constant since the 1960s. The generation of the 1980s picked up the same problematic, but the definition of art, which was central to the 1960s and 1970s, was no longer an issue. The problem was no longer the expansion of the limits of art,<sup>3</sup> but testing art's capacity for resistance within the social field as a whole. A single family of practices therefore gives rise to two radically different problematics: in the 1960s, the emphasis was on relationships internal to the world of art within a modernist culture that privileged 'the new' and called for linguistic subversion; it is now placed on external relationships in the context of an eclectic culture where the work of art resists the mincer of the 'Society of the Spectacle'. Social utopias and revolutionary hopes have given way to day-to-day micro-utopias and mimetic strategies: any 'direct' critique of society is pointless if it is based upon the illusion of a marginality that is now impossible, if not regressive. Almost thirty years ago, Félix Guattari was already recommending the neighbourhood strategies on which contemporary artistic practices are based: 'Just as I think it is illusory to count on the gradual transformation of society so I believe that microscopic attempts – communities, neighbourhood committees, organizing crèches in universities – play an absolutely fundamental role.'<sup>4</sup>

Traditional critical philosophy (and especially the Frankfurt school) can no longer sustain art unless it takes the form of an archaic folklore, or of a splendid rattle that achieves nothing. The subversive and critical function of contemporary art is now fulfilled through the invention of individual or collective vanishing lines, and through the provisional and nomadic constructions artists use to model and distribute disturbing situations. Hence

the current enthusiasm for revisited spaces of conviviality and crucibles where heterogeneous modes of sociability can be worked out. For her exhibition at the Centre pour la Création Contemporaine, Tours (1993), Angela Bulloch installed a café: when sufficient visitors sat down on the chairs, they activated a recording of a piece by Kraftwerk. For her *Restaurant* show (Paris, October 1993), Georgina Starr described her anxiety about 'dining alone' and produced a text to be handed to diners who came alone to the restaurant. For his part, Ben Kinmont approached randomly-selected people, offered to do their washing up for them and maintained an information network about his work. On a number of occasions Lincoln Tobier set up radio stations in art galleries and invited the public to take part in broadcast discussions.

Philippe Parreno has drawn particular inspiration from the form of the party, and his exhibition project for the Consortium, Dijon, consisted in 'taking up two hours of time rather than ten square metres of space' by organizing a party. All its component elements eventually produced relational forms as clusters of individuals gathered around the installed artistic objects... Rirkrit Tiravanija, for his part, explores the socio-professional aspect of conviviality: his contribution to *Surfaces de réparation* (Dijon, 1994) was a relaxation area for the exhibiting artists, complete with a table-football game and a well-stocked fridge. To end this evocation of how such conviviality can develop in the context of a culture of 'friendship', mention should be made of the bar created by Heimo Zobernig for the *Unité* exhibition, and Franz West's *Passtücke* ['adaptives'].<sup>5</sup> Other artists suddenly burst into the relational fabric in more aggressive ways. The work of Douglas Gordon, for example, explores the 'wild' dimension of this interaction by intervening in social space in parasitic or paradoxical ways: he phoned customers in a café and sent multiple 'instructions' to selected individuals. The best example of how untimely communications can disrupt communications networks is probably a piece by Angus Fairhurst: with the kind of equipment used by pirate radio stations, he established a phone link between two art galleries. Each interlocutor believed that the other had called, and the discussions degenerated into an indescribable confusion. By creating or exploring relational schemata, these works established relational micro-territories that could be driven into the density of the contemporary *socius*; the experiences are either mediated by object-surfaces (Liam Gillick's 'boards', the posters created in the street by Pierre Huyghe, Eric Duyckaerts' video lectures) or experienced immediately (Andrea Fraser's exhibition tours) [...]

### The Subject of the Artwork

Every artist whose work derives from relational aesthetics has his or her own world of forms, his or her problematic and his or her trajectory: there are no

stylistic, thematic or iconographic links between them. What they do have in common is much more determinant, namely the fact that they operate with the same practical and theoretical horizon: the sphere of interhuman relationships. Their works bring into play modes of social exchange, interaction with the viewer inside the aesthetic experience he or she is offered, and processes of communication in their concrete dimensions as tools that can to be used to bring together individuals and human groups.

They therefore all work within what we might call the relational sphere, which is to today's art what mass production was to Pop and Minimalism.

They all ground their artistic practice in a proximity which, whilst it does not belittle visibility, does relativize its place within exhibition protocols. The artworks of the 1990s transform the viewer into a neighbour or a direct interlocutor. It is precisely this generation's attitude towards communication that allows it to be defined in relation to previous generations: whilst most artists who emerged in the 1980s (from Richard Prince to Jeff Koons via Jenny Holzer) emphasized the visual aspect of the media, their successors place the emphasis on contact and tactility. They emphasise *immediacy* in their visual writing. This phenomenon can be explained in sociological terms if we recall that the decade that has just ended was marked by the economic crisis and did little to encourage spectacular or visionary experiments. There are also purely aesthetic reasons why this should have been the case; in the 1980s, the 'back to' pendulum stopped with the movements of the 1960s and especially Pop art, whose visual effectiveness underpinned most of the forms proposed by *simulationism*. For better or worse, our period identifies with the Arte Povera and experimental art of the 1970s, and even with the atmosphere of crisis that went with it. Superficial as it may be, this fashion effect had made it possible to re-examine the work of artists such as Gordon Matta-Clark or Robert Smithson, whilst the success of Mike Kelley has recently encouraged a new reading of the Californian 'junk art' of Paul Thek and Tetsumia Kudo. Fashion can thus create aesthetic microclimates which affect the very way we read recent history: to put it a different way, the mesh of the sieve's net can be woven in different ways. It then 'lets through' different types of work, and that influences the present in return.

Having said that, when we look at relational artists, we find ourselves in the presence of a group of artists who, for the first time since the emergence of conceptual art in the mid-1960s, simply do not take as their starting point some aesthetic movement from the past. Relational art is neither a 'revival' of some movement nor the return of a style. It is born of the observation of the present and of a reflection on the destiny of artistic activity. Its basic hypothesis – the sphere of human relations as site for the artwork – is without precedent in the history of art, even though it can of course be seen, after the event, to be the

obvious backdrop to all aesthetic practice, and the modernist theme *par excellence*. Anyone who needs to be convinced that interactivity is scarcely a new notion has only to reread Marcel Duchamp's 1957 lecture on 'the creative act'. The novelty lies elsewhere. It resides in the fact that, for this generation of artists, intersubjectivity and interaction are neither fashionable theoretical gadgets nor adjuncts to (alibis for) a traditional artistic practice. They are at once a starting point and a point of arrival, or in short the main themes that inform their work. The space in which their works are deployed is devoted entirely to interaction. It is a space for the openness (Georges Bataille would have called it a 'rent') that inaugurates all dialogue. These artists produce relational space-times, interhuman experiences that try to shake off the constraints of the ideology of mass communications; they are in a sense spaces where we can elaborate alternative forms of sociability, critical models and moments of constructed conviviality. It is, however, obvious that the day of the New Man of the future-oriented manifestos and the calls for a better world 'with vacant possession' is well and truly gone: utopia is now experienced as a day to day subjectivity, in the real time of concrete and deliberately fragmentary experiments. The artwork now looks like a *social interstice* in which these experiences and these new 'life possibilities' prove to be possible. Inventing new relations with our neighbours seems to be a matter of much greater urgency than 'making tomorrows sing'.<sup>6</sup> That is all, but it is still a lot. And it at least offers a welcome alternative to the depressive, authoritarian and reactionary thought that, at least in France, passes for art theory in the shape of 'common sense' rediscovered. And yet modernity is not dead, if we define as 'modern' meaning a taste for aesthetic experience and adventurous thinking, as opposed to the timid conformisms that are defended by philosophers who are paid by the line, neo-traditionalists (the ludicrous Dave Hickey's 'Beauty') and militant *passéistes* like Jean Clair. Whether fundamentalist believers in yesterday's *good taste* like it or not, contemporary art has taken up and does represent the heritage of the avant-gardes of the twentieth century, whilst at the same time rejecting their dogmatism and their teleology. I have to admit that a lot of thought went into that last sentence: it was simply time to write it. Because modernism was steeped in an 'oppositional imaginary', to borrow a phrase from Gilbert Durand, it worked with breaks and clashes, and cheerfully dishonoured the past in the name of the future. It was based on conflict, whereas the imaginary of our period is concerned with negotiations, links and coexistence. We no longer try to make progress thanks to conflict and clashes, but by discovering new assemblages, possible relations between distinct units, and by building alliances between different partners. Like social contracts, aesthetic contracts are seen for what they are: no one expects the Golden Age to be ushered in on this earth, and we

are quite happy to create *modus vivendi* that make possible fairer social relations, more dense ways of life, and multiple, fruitful combinations of existence. By the same criterion, art no longer tries to represent utopias; it is trying to construct concrete spaces [...]

### The Criterion of Coexistence (Works and Individuals)

Gonzalez-Torres' art gives a central role to negotiation and to the construction of a shared habitat. It also contains an ethics of the gaze. To that extent, it belongs within a specific history: that of artworks that make the viewer conscious of the context in which he or she finds himself/herself (the happenings and 'environments' of the 1960s, site-specific installations).

At one Gonzalez-Torres exhibition, I saw visitors grabbing handfuls of sweets and cramming as many of them as they could into their pockets: they were being confronted with their own social behaviour, fetishism and acquisitive worldview... Others, in contrast, did not dare to take the sweets, or waited until those next to them took one before doing likewise. The 'candy spill' works thus raise an ethical problem in a seemingly anodyne form: our relationship with authority, the use museum attendants make of their power, our sense of proportion and the nature of our relationship with the artwork.

To the extent that the latter represents an opportunity for a sensory experience based upon exchange, it must be subject to criteria analogous with those on which we base our evaluation of any constructed social reality. The basis of today's experience of art is the *co-presence of spectators before the artwork*, be it actual or symbolic. The first question we should ask when we find ourselves in the presence of an artwork is:

Does it allow me to exist as I look at it or does it, on the contrary, deny my existence as a subject and does its structure refuse to consider the Other? Does the space-time suggested or described by this artwork, together with the laws that govern it, correspond to my real-life aspirations? Does it form a critique of what needs critique? If there was a corresponding space-time in reality, could I live in it?

These questions do not relate to an excessively anthropomorphic vision of art. They relate to a vision that is quite simply *human*; to the best of my knowledge, artists intend their work to be seen by their contemporaries, unless they regard themselves as living on borrowed time or believe in a fascist-fundamentalist version of history (time closing over its meaning and origins). On the contrary, those artworks that seem to me to be worthy of sustained interest are the ones that function as interstices, as space-times governed by an economy that goes beyond the prevailing rules for the management of the public. The first thing that strikes me about this generation of artists is that they are inspired by

a concern for *democracy*. For art does not transcend our day to day preoccupations; it brings us face to face with reality through the singularity of a relationship with the world, through a fiction. No one will convince me that an authoritarian art can refer its viewers to any real – be it a fantasy or an accepted reality – other than that of an intolerant society. In sharp contrast artists like Gonzalez-Torres, and now Angela Bulloch, Carsten Höller, Gabriel Orozco or Pierre Huyghe, bring us face to face with exhibition situations inspired by a concern to ‘give everyone a chance’ thanks to forms that do not give the producer any *a priori* superiority (let’s call it divine-right authority) over the viewer, but which negotiate open relations that are not pre-established. The status of the viewer alternates between that of a passive consumer, and that of a witness, an associate, a client, a guest, a co-producer and a protagonist. So we need to pay attention: we know that attitudes become forms, and we now have to realize that forms induce models of sociability.

And the exhibition-form itself is not immune to these warnings: the spread of ‘curiosity cabinets’ that we have been seeing for some time now, to say nothing of the elitist attitudes of certain actors in the art world, which reveals their holy terror of public spaces and collective aesthetic experimentation, and their love of boudoirs that are reserved for specialists. Making things available does not necessarily make them banal. As with one of Gonzalez-Torres’ piles of sweets, there can be an ideal balance between form and its programmed disappearance, between visual beauty and modest gestures, between a childlike wonder at the image and the complexity of the different levels at which it can be read. [...]

### Relational Aesthetics and Constructed Situations

The Situationist concept of a ‘constructed situation’ was intended to replace artistic representation with the experimental realization of artistic energy in everyday environments. Whilst Guy Debord’s diagnosis of the spectacular process of production seems pitiless, Situationist theory overlooks the fact that, whilst the spectacle’s primary targets are forms of human relations (the spectacle is ‘a social relationship between people, mediated by images’), the only way we can analyse and resist it is by producing new modes of human relations.

Now the notion of a situation does not necessarily imply coexistence with my fellows. It is possible to image situations that are ‘constructed’ for private use, or even situations that deliberately exclude others. The notion of a situation reintroduces the unities of time, place and action in a theatre that does not necessarily involve a relationship with the Other. Now, artistic practice always involved a relationship with the other; at the same time, it constitutes a relationship with the world. A *constructed situation* does not necessarily

correspond to a *relational world* founded on the basis of a figure of exchange. Is it just a coincidence that Debord divides the temporality of the spectacle into the ‘exchangeable time’ of labour, (*‘the endless accumulation of equivalent intervals’*) and the ‘consumable time’ of holidays, which imitates the cycles of nature but is at the same time no more than a spectacle *‘to a more intense degree’*. The notion of exchangeable time proves here to be purely negative: the negative element is not the exchange as such – exchange is a factor in life and sociability – but the *capitalist forms of exchange* that Debord identifies, perhaps wrongly, with interhuman exchange. Those forms of exchange are born of the ‘encounter’ that takes place in the form of a contract between an accumulation of capital (the employer) and available labour-power (the factory or office workers). They do not represent exchange in the absolute sense, but a historical form of production (capitalism): labour time is therefore not so much ‘exchangeable time’ in the strong sense of the terms, as time that can be *bought* in the form of a wage. An artwork that forms a ‘relational world’ or a social interstice can update Situationism and reconcile it, in so far as that is possible, with the world of art. [...]

### The Behavioural Economy of Contemporary Art

‘How can you bring a classroom to life as though it were an artwork?’ asks Guattari.<sup>7</sup> By asking this question, he raises the ultimate aesthetic problem. How is aesthetics to be used, and can it possibly be injected into tissues that have been rigidified by the capitalist economy? Everything suggests that modernity was, from the late nineteenth century onwards, constructed on the basis of the idea of ‘life as a work of art’. As Oscar Wilde put it, modernity is the moment when ‘art does not imitate life; life imitates art’. Marx was thinking along similar lines when he criticised the classical distinction between *praxis* (the act of self-transformation) and *poiësis* (a ‘necessary’ but servile action designed to produce or transform matter). Marx took the view that, on the contrary, *praxis* constantly becomes part of *poiësis*, and vice versa. Georges Bataille later built his work on the critique of ‘the renunciation of life in exchange for a function’ on which the capitalist economy is based. The three registers of ‘science’, ‘fiction’ and ‘action’ destroy human life by *calibrating* it on the basis of pre-given categories.<sup>8</sup> Guattari’s ecosophy also postulates that the totalization of life is a necessary preliminary to the production of subjectivity. For Guattari, subjectivity has the central role that Marx ascribes to labour, and that Bataille gives to *inner experience* in the individual and collective attempt to reconstruct the lost totality. ‘The only acceptable goal of human activities,’ writes Guattari, ‘is the production of a subjectivity that constantly self-enriches its relationship with the world.’<sup>9</sup> His definition is ideally applicable to the practices of the

contemporary artists who create and stage life-structures that include working methods and ways of life, rather than the concrete objects that once defined the field of art. They use time as a raw material. Form takes priority over things, and flows over categories: the production of gestures is more important than the production of material things. Today's viewers are invited to cross the threshold of 'catalysing temporal modules', rather than to contemplate immanent objects that do not open on to the world to which they refer. The artists go so far as to present themselves as worlds of ongoing subjectivation, or as the *models* of their own subjectivity. They become the terrain for privileged experiences and for the synthetic principle behind their work. This development prefigures the entire history of modernity. In this behavioural economy, the art object acquires a *deceptive aura*, an agent that resists its commodified distribution or becomes its mimetic parasite.

In a mental world where the ready-made is a privileged model to the extent that that it is a collective production (the mass-produced object) that has been assumed and recycled in an autopoietic visual device, Guattari's theoretical schema help us to conceptualize the mutation that is under way in contemporary art. That was not however their author's primary goal, as he believed that aesthetics must, above all, accompany societal mutations and inflect them. The poetic function, which consists in reconstructing worlds of subjectivation, might therefore be meaningless, unless it too can help us to overcome 'the ordeals by barbarism, by mental implosion and chaotic spasm that loom on the horizon and to transform them into unforeseeable riches and *jouissances*.'<sup>10</sup>

- 1 Louis Althusser, 'The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter', in *Philosophy of the Encounter. Later Writings 1978-1987*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2006) 185.
- 2 Michel Maffesoli, *La Contemplation du monde* (Paris: Grasset, 1993).
- 3 See, *inter alia*, Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October*, Spring 1979; Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Artwork from 1966 to 1972: A Cross-Reference Book of Information on Core Aesthetic Boundaries* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).
- 4 Félix Guattari, *La Révolution moléculaire* (Paris: 10/18, 1977) 22.
- 5 Franz West's *Passtücke*, or 'adaptives', are uncategorizable works made of papier mâché, plaster, gauze and paint, intended for participants to interact with. West compares them to 'prostheses'. [Ed.]
- 6 The phrase 'making tomorrows sing' alludes to the expression 'vers des lendemains qui chante': the last words written by the Communist Gabriel Peri before he was shot by the Gestapo – and the title of his posthumously published autobiography. [Translator]
- 7 Félix Guattari, *Chaosmose*, Paris: Editions Galilée, 1992, 183.

8 Georges Bataille, 'L'Apprenti sorcier' in Denis Hollier, ed., *Le Collège de sociologie*, Paris: Gallimard 'Idées', 1979, 36–60.

9 Guattari, *op. cit.*, 38.

10 *Ibid.*, 187.

Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 1998), 14–18, 30–33, 45–8, 58–60, 88–9, 106–8. Translated by David Macey, 2006.

## Lars Bang Larsen

### Social Aesthetics//1999

*The Danish curator Lars Bang Larsen has been at the forefront of supporting socially-engaged practices in the Nordic region. In this essay he presents a number of contemporary Scandinavian examples, and seeks to recover a historical context for this work.*

What I choose to call 'social aesthetics' is an artistic attitude focusing on the world of acts. It also experiments with the transgressions of various economies. The term is coined as a common denominator, as one that simply lends itself with the least resistance to the internal and external dynamics of some recent and historic artistic and art-related examples. One could probably say that the examples below describe a recent tradition of art as activism; yet they are perhaps closer to a discussion of the uses of art-institutional space than is commonly seen in art activism. The term 'ephemeral' art is also often used in this discussion as the description of a sensibility and a practice aligned to the heritage of Fluxus and Situationism but not fitting under the artistic demarcations of these schools. Common to the understanding of the eleven examples below is that the dynamic between artistic activity and the realms that are traditionally relegated to the fabric of the social fails properly to describe a dialectic. Social and aesthetic understanding are integrated into each other. Here, some forms of social aesthetic activity have deliberately been launched within the art circuit as art projects; others qualify as art, or qualify for artistic discussion, after their actualization in other contexts.

The untenable dichotomy of art versus reality is exploded by these projects – a dichotomy that anyway usually hides the positioning of art in a privileged and aloof status in relation to other forms of cultural activity, however weak art may be when located in 'living reality'. The distinction between art and other realms of knowledge is made operative in the osmotic exchange between different capacities to do things, which opens up the creation of new subject positions and articulations of democratic equivalence. The same thing goes for the dichotomy of institutional/non-institutional space. The present examples all share the fact that art and the art institution as resource become frames for activity that is real, because social interaction and the observation of its effects are allowed without conceptual rigidity.

The social aesthetic artwork involves a utilitarian or practical aspect that gives a sense of purpose and direct involvement. In the construction of the

subject's interaction with culture it could be said that social aesthetics discusses a notion of the lasting phenomenon that substantiates a critical cultural analysis, a reason for one's existence. It is a way of involving the metaphorical value of artistic concepts and projects on other professional spheres, such as architecture, design, financial structures, etc., either as an understanding integrated in an artistic project, or as a process of decoding and actualizing art-related activity within its cultural location. In this way artistic work assumes a general focus on performance in a social perspective, either by means of its own nature as an ongoing project without closure or by the real activity it occasions. This often involves collective organization and an employment of art's capacities for going against professional specialization.

Nonetheless it would be wrong to say that the opposite of social aesthetics is a painting or a sculpture, or any other traditional form of artistic expression. Social aesthetics can't be observed alone and in this sense the term is double bound. It says that the social probably can't operate in a meaningful way without the aesthetic and vice versa, hence both the social and the sphere of art and aesthetics inform it.

The following examples are all related to the Scandinavian art scene, which may be due to a certain orientation, especially among Copenhagen artists. But if one employs the results of the small but distinct number of contemporary artists working with a productive revisitation of 1960s strategies in the visual arts, it would surely enable an outlook untrammelled by geographic boundaries. There remain many stories left unexplored in the local and global histories of art's ramifications on the social.

The examples are presented in dialogue across history. These dialogues represent associated motifs and related engagements and ideas. As motifs they qualify each other by dint of uncovering mutually specific, historical references. A sort of historical double-exposure or cross-fertilization, if you like.

#### ***Playground action on Nørrebro, Model for a Qualitative Society and N55/Spaceframe***

During one Sunday in the spring of 1968, the artist Palle Nielsen built a playground in the slum of Copenhagen's Northern Borough. Together with a group of left-wing students he planned to clear the court of a neglected housing scheme and erect new facilities for children. At seven o'clock in the morning the group went around to all the residents with a bag containing two rolls and a paper attached to it with an image of two children playing on the kerb. The text read:

Do you have children yourself or do you just hear the children scream and shout in the stairwell and entrance when you come home? Do you remember your own

possibilities for playing as few? Why do the children still make noise in the entrances? So few things have changed since you were a child. You may now follow up the demands for more kindergartens and day nurseries, for better playgrounds and youth centres, and for greater investment in children's well-being by actively participating in a public debate. Have you asked your council or your local residents' association about investments in child-orientation? Do you know that the authorities are empowered to give grants and are willing to invest in children's well-being if you demand it? It is your attitude towards the needs of adolescent children that decides the size of investment that funds increased clearing of backyards, better play facilities in future developments and new designs of municipal playgrounds. Sensible facilities for play means that the children stop making noise in the entries and stairwells. They won't have time. They'll be playing.

So, the residents came down and participated in the action, and by four o'clock in the afternoon everything was changed.

In 1968, during a research stay in Stockholm, Palle Nielsen chose the Moderna Museet as a framework to explore what he had previously been practising as actionism. After a period of bargaining for an invitation, in October 1968 a playground in the museum, *Model for a Qualitative Society*, was built with the assistance of a group of local Vietnam activists. Facilities for continued creativity were at the children's disposal during the entire course of the manifestation, in the form of tools, paint, building materials and fabrics. The Royal Theatre donated period costumes from different epochs to be used for role play. To this day, the noise level of the pedagogical art project is surely unparalleled in art history: loudspeaker towers were placed in each corner of the exhibition space, and the young museum-goers operated the turntables with LPs from every genre, playing dance music from the Renaissance at an ear-splitting level. In the restaurant a number of TV screens with live transmission offered a panopticon for uneasy parents, and enabled more sedate visitors to take in the active study of children's contact language. The playground architecture made concrete the pedagogical aim: a protected but pedagogically empowering milieu, to be accessed freely by all of Stockholm's kids (adults had to pay 5 crowns to get in). During its three-week exhibition period the *Model* received over 33,000 visitors, 20,000 of whom were children.

The notion that a child's early social relations form the adult individual was investigated by way of the *Model*. Creativity and experiential contact were thus incited as ways of assigning new priorities to human needs and acknowledging the 'qualitative human being' as an individual of society. The value of group relations was made evident as well as the necessity to work collectively as an

alternative to authoritarian society. The *Model* accepted the white cube as a 'free' topological premise: free in the sense of public access, accentuated by the anti-elitist stance of the *Model*; free in the sense that what is inserted into art institutions automatically legitimates its existence (or that is what they tell us, anyhow). Hence the *Model* embraced the art institution as a vehicle positioned in such a way in culture that the statements it conveys are catapulted into society.

The Copenhagen artists' group N55 rethink the social dimensions from which we basically structure our everyday lives. In the summer of 1999, on a dock by Copenhagen harbour, they built *N55 Spaceframe*: a residential unit of transformable, lightweight construction in flexible steel modules designed in collaboration with an architect. It is a functional and inhabitable sculpture and constitutes a radical revision of the house as we know it, as an object stationary in its construction and placement. Being much more than merely a goal-oriented installation, the construction of the living unit suggests an organic process that people may enter in all possible ways. Musicians, artists, architects, writers and curators each contribute to the social ambience of the work with projects, labour force, and their mundane, sociable presence. *N55 Spaceframe* constitutes the frame for activities that the participants themselves will establish, without any institutional interference. *N55 Spaceframe* is, for that matter, a utopian project in as much as it is an initial gesture, a rediscovery of the world. But in contrast to the great utopia, each time it is erected, *N55 Spaceframe* is architecturally and socially connected with the social surplus that it provides in connection with the process of construction and the context within which it functions. The 'utopian' in the project is not like a master plan that analytically anticipates social change, but one that describes a determined attitude from people's actions in concrete situations.

Palle Nielsen's way of practising art as a critique of architecture and living conditions is aligned with N55's praxis as a social fantasy, so to speak. As a reconceptualization of the residence, the *N55 Spaceframe* stands, shimmering, in the middle of Copenhagen as a fantastic creature which has just landed, staring the demands of contemporary living right in the eyes. If the idea of settling in an *N55 Spaceframe* doesn't appeal to you, then the project, at least constructively, constitutes a way of reflecting on the opposition between the individual and the forms of habitual thinking that too often sneak their way in as a syntax for our lives. One could object that N55 is merely replacing the old habits and linguistic forms with new habits, but in the space between these two positions and in the movement away from that which already is ossified toward the new and self-conceived, room is being made for the formulation of new differences. N55 accommodates what is currently the dominant, neoliberal determination of freedom of choice and is displacing the market mechanisms' relational dynamics in the direction of postulating that there are things which must be done.



### **Palle Nielsen's projects for *Festival 200* and *Middelburg Summer 1996***

In his writing, Palle Nielsen addresses the notion of large-scale communication including collective production of significance and value, and modes of distribution. Proceeding from a collective discussion and praxis surrounding common intentions, and in contradistinction to 'consumption's constraint and the production apparatus's power over the people', one can have qualitative and quantitative goals and thereby push communication boundaries. This calls for a positive and outgoing revision of aesthetic expressions which have been overhauled and repeated, and a revision of traditional forms of art distribution. The art institution's resources are cast into public space.

*Festival 200* in 1969 was the 200-year jubilee of Charlottenborg Udstillingsbygning, the exhibition building of the Royal Danish Art Academy. Art historian Troels Andersen was invited to curate the anniversary show, and in accordance with his orientation towards non-violent anarchism – and in response to a minimal budget – artists from all over Europe were given a train ticket and free exhibition space if they would show up and participate with some project or other. In the week before the opening of the exhibition, the invitation to participate was open to everybody.

Palle Nielsen participated in three projects: a shooting range, a roulette, and an offset-printing works, all functioning representations of mass communication with popular appeal, imbuing the exhibition with a theme park atmosphere. Placed as the first thing by the entrance, the roulette was provided by the child-welfare committee and functioned as a metaphor for the anarchistic freedom promised by the exhibition. The shooting range offered air guns with which you could shoot your dislikes, organized in the form of photographs of Danish and international politicians and public persons. The roulette, as well as the shooting range, stood unattended.

The offset-printing works consisted of state-of-the-art rotaprint equipment to be used freely by everybody, and its appurtenant photo lab enabled general access to artistic expression. The festival's daily paper, flyers, leaflets, and printed matter in all colours were produced here. Some of it was distributed in the city or in other contexts, while others were integrated into the exhibition.

Palle Nielsen's projects introduced a reflexivity between play and production which must have seemed somewhat frivolous in the light of the era's will to revolutionary upheaval. On the one hand, play qualified large-scale communication as a way of stating that political artistic engagement doesn't exist in terms of practical politics, but as reform work with the prospect of change. On the other hand, play had to be organized and set free, seeing that society no longer offered integrated possibilities for living in its regulated, specialized spheres. To introduce social processes in the art institution is,

according to Nielsen, socially irrational. Social processes should happen where people are, in direct relation to what they do. But since social reproduction is in dire straits, there is a strong need for the production of participation, and for accessible metaphors of freedom.

In 1995 and 1996, Jens Haaning produced a series of production lines, where a number of people engaged in symbolically charged but ultimately undefined activities. In *Weapon Production* (1995), part of the group show *RAM* held in a Copenhagen suburb, a handful of young immigrants with some previous experience (so to speak) assisted the artist in the production of illegal street weapons; in *Flag Production* (1996), shown at the *Traffic* show in Bordeaux, France, Asian pupils from the local art academy sewed flags for an unknown nation. *Middelburg Summer 1996* (1996), a solo show at De Vleeshal, in the Dutch city of Middelburg, was in a sense the culmination of these works, in that the activity of the workers wasn't art-related in the first place:

Haaning engaged the Turkish-owned clothing manufacturers, Maras Confectie, to relocate its production facilities to the Kunsthalle for the duration of the exhibition. The entire institution was transformed into an appropriate environment for Maras Confectie's twelve Muslim (Turkish, Iranian and Bosnian) employees, replete with an office and canteen, soccer banners and blaring *TÜRKÜ* (a form of Turkish blues). As a beholder, you had to adapt to a peripheral position, as opposed to laying claim to the visual control and leisurely regulated space that exhibition architecture usually offers. You were, in fact, trespassing in foreign territory: not only an alien workplace, but a place where 'aliens' work. *Middelburg Summer 1996* provided an episodic mobilization of the dynamics of the cultural other, or 'the world market as ready-made', as one critic put it.

The work's critical position could also be summed up in the words of sociologist John Foran, writing in the 1997 *Theorizing Revolutions*: 'Oppositional cultures are often elaborated in contradistinction to the state, but they are also always rooted in the actual experience of diverse social sectors, that is, they have an eminently practical dimension.' As Fordist artefacts, production lines embody the dimension of physical labour, which is rapidly becoming obsolete in the era of immaterial work. Apart from privileging cultural otherness in a collectively organized form, *Middelburg Summer 1996* rejected art's service relationship to information society. Its laconic, alienating stageplay resisted the communication-driven prescriptions of the agents of the digital age, along with their (our) continual innovation of forms and modalities for the commerce of ideas.

Nielsen and Haaning point to conflicts in social processes and come up with solutions which are formally alike; for both projects Nielsen aptly calls the printing works a 'production installation'. It could be said, however, that *Middelburg Summer 1996* is an aestheticized version of Nielsen's production

installation. Actual participation is one step removed, something that may make the two works seem to differ in their conception of aesthetics; what actually aligns them may be their political stance in terms of social irrationality. (As an aside to his work, Haaning quoted Arthur Schopenhauer's dictum for De Vleeshal's website: 'The world is my imagination'.) The printing works at *Festival 200* and *Middelburg Summer 1996* each delivered critiques of the different effects of the acceleration of modernity's displacements, which increasingly control us as social beings.

### **Public Bath and N55 Hygiene System**

In a feature on Copenhagen called 'Bursting the Gates of Welfare Utopia', the *Village Voice's* David Gurin wrote in November 1969 about 'the energy and beauty of the young Danes involved' in Festival 200:

[Troels] Andersen and a committee of Danish artists offered a second-class train fare to artists from all over Europe. An adventurous group accepted his invitation and put together a fantastically relaxed and unpretentious show. On some days it included a rock band in the sedate Charlottenborg courtyard. Otherwise it began for the visitor on the wall above a grand staircase that leads to the main floor of the gallery – pictures of Albertslund [a working-class Copenhagen suburb] and old Copenhagen were flashed side by side by two slide projectors. They seemed to beckon the viewer to stand up for some kind of environmental choice. A third projector flashed abstract forms. In an anteroom on the main floor were pinball machines and a shooting range with the prime minister of Denmark and Richard Nixon among the bull's eyes. In the grand exhibition hall were drawing tables and two offset printing presses. Materials and paper were liberally provided and anyone could design and print his/her own poster with expert help. At the back was a primitive hut, like a succah,<sup>1</sup> with uneven slats of wood for walls, and branches and leaves for a roof. Inside lived a nude 'family', with varying numbers of adults and children. They ate, drank, played and talked. [...] Occasionally one man in the family would climb up a rope ladder from the hut to the high ceiling of the hall from where, perched nude on the rope-ladder, he would film all the spectators whose eyes were on him. [...] Another room had a Danish artist's love letters strewn on the floor – people stood around reading them. [...] In another grand exhibition hall were a ping-pong table and a functioning sauna and shower. Artists and visitors – and the genius of the festival was that the two were not very distinguishable – played ping-pong, saunaed, and showered in the openness of the hall. [...] One especially touching room had a single rose in water on each of eight pedestals. Each day one rose was removed and a new one added, so the roses were in a gradually withering away of life and death.

The public bath and sauna were installed by the artist Paul Gernes. He wanted the artwork to be inserted in situations where things are used and thus his practice became strongly oriented in the direction of public art. The everyday function is taken literally in his public bath for *Festival 200*, and 'transposed to a level where it affects our senses and our thinking anew'.<sup>2</sup> Troels Andersen continues:

It was given in the ideas of Morris, Ruskin and Gropius that people's behaviour in a surrounding world which in such high degree as ours is determined by things, could be changed by a revaluation of the surrounding objects, aesthetically and functionally. But these fashioned objects let themselves become easily integrated in the existing situation without any significant changes in norms of behaviour. Our society is still built on the nuclear family, and our whole production of consumer items (also counting a number of 'art objects') is based on this structure. What the conception of the happening among many other things contained was the suggestion of a new type of social form. [...] It implied the establishing of a new situation, the construction of an offer – but didn't necessarily force people in a certain direction.<sup>3</sup>

Troels Andersen's revaluation of the object also applies to N55 and their catalogue of functional art objects, with which they aim to create a social surplus. So far, N55's production of functional art objects with ethical and aesthetic consequences include a home hydroponics unit (a device for the domestic growth of vegetables), a clean-air machine, a hygiene system (low-cost bathroom), new designs for chairs, and a table. Everything is of N55 own design, in some cases with the help of experts to solve technical problems. Compared to an ordinary, utilitarian logic, their objects have a twist in relation to formalistic design: N55's attitude to the object is characterized by a sensitivity towards its role as a social determinant, as a role maker. The object answers back to the activity that surrounds it, instead of being a design-like hypostasis of itself. Or, in other words, the human activity and the object factor meld into one another – ergo, socially generous and disarming gestures like a collective installation of the hygiene system in mirthful colours, or the projection of a bed serviceable for six persons instead of the customary one- or two-person model.

### **The Oslo Trip and Travel Agency**

In May 1970 the artists Finn Thybo and Per Bille were invited as part of the Danish representation in the Young Nordic Biennial at Kunstnerens Hus (The Artists' House) in Oslo. They decided to spend their grant of DKK 8,000 on buying 50 return tickets for the Oslo ferry and distributing them to 50 youths, mostly artists, musicians and architects. The group was to be installed,

collectively, in the exhibition as an artwork on the opening night, together with musicians from Oslo invited to participate in a pickup concert with the Copenhagen band Furekåben. Thus the group itself comprised the work of art and no one was allowed to leave it at any point.

Arriving in Oslo in good spirits the group, despite its hippie appearance, made it successfully through customs (with Black Afghan disguised as Tom's Caramels), and moved in one long column up through the streets of the Norwegian capital. Then, to the amusement of local businessmen, the group occupied what later turned out to be the rear entrance of the Oslo bourse. Wearing red banners and red ribbons round the head, or dressed up as native Americans, the group documented itself in front of banks and the sights of the city with a banner reading 'PEOPLE OF THE WORLD UNITE'. The arrival of the artwork at Kunsternes Hus occasioned great commotion in the management, and the entire board was called for, but in the end accepted to host the group. Next, flyers for the opening party were distributed in Oslo, and snapshots and film were quickly developed; the same evening the doors of Kunsternes Hus were opened for a presentation of documentation of the trip and the concert, where the director was seen in the rhythm section playing the bongos. The group returned in good order to Copenhagen on the ferry the next morning.

In Jens Haaning's work *Travel Agency* (1997), airline tickets were sold at competitive prices as artworks at Galerie Mehdi Chouakri in Berlin, capitalizing on German tax laws which exempt art from an eight per cent VAT. Accompanying certificates stated that if used for their original purpose, these tickets ceased to exist as art. If art is taxed less than other goods, why not label those other goods 'art'? That is, the airline ticket had a double capacity, each of which could be respective to art logic and economic logic; but if you want to grasp the idea of the work and the conceptual itinerary of each 'artwork' you can not do without the supplement of the other logic. By refusing to valorize high culture, and instead concentrating on the exchange of artistic ideas with real-world economics, Haaning created the possibility for realizing certain financial gains while upsetting the market at a micro-level.

In the *Oslo Trip* and *Travel Agency*, subversive sensibilities and art institutional allegiances together instigate a set of mutual deformations of incompatible cultural logics. Ideally, cultural and economic significance are put on equal footing, each invested in the multifold processes of ideological and geographic exchange. For *Oslo Trip* participants Finn Thybo and Kirsten Dufour, however, the work itself described a break with the art world for fifteen years.

### ***TTA Løgstør and Life is Sweet in Sweden***

After the *Oslo Trip* the work of Dufour and Thybo moved further in the direction

of activism. They worked with squatters in Copenhagen, and experimented with alternative social structures in small, closed communities in Jutland. In the 'aesthetic and political void' of the early seventies, Dufour and Thybo were looking for a position from which the local population in a given place could participate actively in a social, humanistic and political action. Based in Løgstør in Northern Jutland they started a ragpicker group in 1975, for the benefit of liberation movements in the third world, among them Zimbabwe African National Union and Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front. During the 12 years the group TTA Løgstør (Clothes for Africa) managed to collect the following and send it off to Africa: 112 tons of clothes and shoes; 30 sewing machines; 1 dental clinic; 3 operating tables; 15 hospital beds; 17 wheelchairs; 27 packages of other hospital equipment; 39 packages of toys; 30 packages of educational material; and the sum of DKK 447,911.

These goods were obtained mainly by means of household collecting, flea markets, enquiries at hospitals etc., and clearing up of estates. TTA workers were voluntary and paid a membership fee. Thybo describes the aims of TTA Løgstør:

#### *Interactivity within the ragpicking group:*

By collecting the surplus [of consumer society] and recycling it for humanitarian purposes, we solved several problems at the same time: we could make people aware of the conditions in other parts of the world and get them involved in an action, in the project. Leaflets about the collection of clothes were handed out to new households, and press releases about the annual flea market were sent to newspapers and local radio stations that covered the whole province. Here we informed others about the local conditions in those countries where we supported the liberation movements. We also spoke about the fact that the clothes were given to the liberation movements who distributed them in the refugee camps over which they had taken responsibility.

Last but not least, essential because of their tremendous contribution, the core of the group, 'the activists', who actively took part in the daily work, were recruited from the local community. It was our basis that Clothes for Africa should be both a local/social and a political/global project [...]<sup>4</sup>

The last flea market was held in 1986. There was a steady reduction of activism, membership flow ebbed out, there was a split in the group, and the eventual conclusion was that it looked like solidarity work belonged to a certain generation.

In August 1995, Gothenburg was turned upside down. Sweden's second-largest city was about to host the World Championships in athletics. In an atmosphere of self-conscious activity, the urban environment was transformed through a series of 'beautification' projects, ranging from the architectural

remodelling of the inner city to the injection of a host of new commercial venues – greenery, colourful advertising and ‘fresh paint’ signs were sprouting up everywhere. A new black market for apartment sublets appeared and restaurants were openly advertising for ‘young blonde female’ staff. The visitors arrived at a sparkling new Gothenburg, starting the for-all-tourists search for the authentic folk and local spirit. With gorgeous weather, the pride of the citizens was only slightly stained by the embarrassment of having invented the place and themselves specifically for the tourists, and embarrassed that this act of deception was larger than their own naïveté. More than that, the debate over the day-to-day adjustments to all the newness made clear that, for better or worse, the Gothenburgers were losing their sense of belonging to the place they were proud to represent. The staging of the host’s role turned from being an abstraction, ‘the city’, towards involving every single citizen. The distinction between ‘guests’ and ‘hosts’ began to dissolve. Not even a guide’s uniform guaranteed discretion: everybody was new to the place they found themselves in, and to each other.

In the middle of this turbulence Aleksandra Mir opened *Life is Sweet in Sweden: Guest Bureau*, an alternative tourist office in downtown Gothenburg. 150 square metres were made available from the public sector, and Mir renovated and decorated the premises in a half-official, half-private cosy atmosphere that should make everybody feel welcome. Equipped with comfortable sofas, plastic greenery, an aquarium, dim lights and soft muzak, electric footbaths, a television with shopping channels and even a fresh smelling lavatory, the tourist bureau was freely available for use by any and everybody. The host’s role was personified by anybody who wore the hostess uniform for *Life is Sweet in Sweden*; a blue-yellow dress-suit in a stewardess-cum-cashier cut, with the company’s logo embroidered in silver on the breast pocket. From the beginning, twelve uniforms were available and during the project, 46 persons assumed the role as hostess, regardless of whether they had any connection with Gothenburg or not. With several hundred guests every day during the ten days that the World Championships took place, the tourist bureau became a social limbo, taking shape according to the constellations of people interacting with one another on the spot. The entire process of the situation established itself as a public coefficient where the participants, guests as well as hosts, were involved in a mutual endeavour intrinsic to sociability.

TTA Løgstør was evaluated critically as art after the fact; Dufour and Thybo presented documentation of the project for their exhibition in the N55 spaceframe, opening it up to a new narrative removed from the terminology of its time. TTA Løgstør and *Life is Sweet...* can both be contained in the same sphere as the aims and characteristics of the ‘happening’ – as outlined above by

Troels Andersen – and together they have resonance for more recent notions of identity politics. Just as TTA Løgstør’s working premise was that the local belongs in a global society and that identities are created across geography and nationality, so *Life is Sweet...* was concerned with the loss of what might normally be considered solid identities. It also refers to those who always come back as subjects in the postmodern debate of identity – nomads, hybrids, immigrants, tourists. The limbo of the Gothenburgers – as that of the privileged Western citizen – was the whole point here, a collective intervention and mobilization in the face of an ambivalent official economy.

Both projects, like the other examples, take place in real time and depend on the presence of the other, whether it be the cultural other or the people in local surroundings waiting to be activated. Not least of all, the projects depend on each other in order to live on as collective memories with the people who took part, and the ones to whom the stories are told.

- 1 [A succah is a type of hut like the one described, built during the Jewish festival of Succot, and based on the portable nomadic dwellings of Moses and his followers during their desert exile.]
- 2 [footnote 1 in source] Troels Andersen: *Paul Gernes*, 1966, 1970.
- 3 [2] *Ibid.*
- 4 [3] Dufour, Thybo, Sørensen: *TTA Løgstør 1975–1988*.

Lars Bang Larsen, ‘Social Aesthetics: 11 examples to begin with, in the light of parallel history’, *Afterall*, no. 1 (London: Central Saint Martins School of Art and Design, 1999) 77–87.

## Molly Nesbit, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Rirkrit Tiravanija What is a Station?//2003

Utopia Station, presented at the Venice Biennale in 2003, contained work by over 150 artists. Like Documenta 11 (2002), it was preceded by a number of seminars and exhibitions through which the exhibition's theoretical position was formulated. The following text, written by its three curators, outlines their political and aesthetic aspirations for a re-examination of utopia.

During a debate with Theodor Adorno in 1964, Ernst Bloch, pushed to the wall to defend his position on utopia, stood firm. Adorno had begun things by reminding everyone present that certain utopian dreams had actually been fulfilled, that there was now television, the possibility of travelling to other planets and moving faster than sound. And yet these dreams had come shrouded, minds set in traction by a relentless positivism and then their own boredom. 'One could perhaps say in general', he noted, 'that the fulfilment of utopia consists largely only in a repetition of the continually same "today".'

Bloch countered. The word utopia had indeed been discredited, he noted, but utopian thinking had not. He pointed to other levels of mind, to removes that were less structured by Western capital. Utopia was passing less auspiciously under other names now, he remarked, for example, 'science fiction' and the beginnings of sentences starting with 'If only it were so...'

Adorno agreed with him there and went on. 'Whatever utopia is', he said, 'whatever can be imagined as utopia, this is the transformation of the totality. And the imagination of such a transformation of the totality is basically very different in all the so-called utopian accomplishments – which, incidentally, are all really like you say: very modest, very narrow. It seems to me that what people have lost subjectively in regard to consciousness is very simply the capability to imagine the totality as something that could be completely different.' How to think utopia then? Adorno saw the only possibility to reside in the notion of an unfettered life *freed from death*. All at once the discussion of utopia expanded; it became not merely old, but ancient. It seemed to shed ideologies as if they were skins. Adorno declared that there could be no picture of utopia cast in a positive manner, there could be no positive picture of it at all, nor could any picture be complete. He went very far. Bloch only followed him part way. He summoned up a sentence from Brecht. He let it stand as the nutshell that held the incentive for utopia. Brecht had written 'Something's missing.'

'What is this "something"?' Bloch asked. 'If it is not allowed to be cast in a

picture, then I shall portray it as in the process of being. But one should not be allowed to eliminate it as if it really did not exist so that one could say the following about it: "It's about the sausage". I believe utopia cannot be removed from the world in spite of everything, and even the technological, which must definitely emerge and will be in the great realm of the utopian, will form only small sectors. That is a geometrical picture, which does not have any place here, but another picture can be found in the old peasant saying, there is no dance before the meal. People must first fill their stomachs, and then they can dance.'

'Something is Missing', the statement from Brecht. Typically when searching for utopia, one relies on the steps taken by others, for ever since its first formulation in 1516 in the book by Sir Thomas More, ever since its invention as the island of good social order, utopia has been a proposition to be debated, several speakers often pitching in at once. They bring thoughts, experience, the fruits of the past. For utopia is in many ways an ancient search for happiness, for freedom, for paradise. Sir Thomas More had had Plato's *Republic* in mind as he wrote. By now however utopia itself has lost its much of its fire. The work done in the name of utopia has soured the concept, left it strangled by internal, seemingly fixed perspectives, the skeletons of old efforts which leave their bones on the surface of the body as if they belonged there. Has utopia been strung up? Or obscured by bad eyesight? Certainly it has gone missing. Utopia itself has become a conceptual no-place, empty rhetoric at best, more often than not an exotic vacation, the desert pleasure island of cliché. Abbas Kiarostami, when asked recently if he had any unrealized or utopian projects, refused the long perspectives of utopia altogether. He preferred to fix matters in the present, taking each day one hill at a time. We in turn have set our sights on the middle ground between the island and the hill. We will build a Station there and name it Utopia Station.

The Utopia Station is a way-station. As a conceptual structure it is flexible; the particular Station planned for the Venice Biennale is physical too. It will rise as a set of contributions by more than sixty artists and architects, writers and performers, the ensemble being coordinated into a flexible plan by Rirkrit Tiravanija and Liam Gillick. It has been important to all concerned that the plan not present itself as a finished picture. Let us therefore conjure up the Station by means of a few figures. It begins with a long low platform, part dance-floor, part stage, part quay. Along one side of this platform is a row of large circular benches so that you can watch the movement on the platform or silently turn your back or treat the circle as a generous conversation pit. Each seats ten people. The circular benches are portable; as an option one could line them up like a row of big wheels. Along the other side of the platform a long wall with many doors rises up. Some of the doors take you to the other side of the wall. Some open into

small rooms in which you will see installations and projections. The wall wraps around the rooms and binds the ensemble into a long irregular structure. Over it floats a roof suspended on cables from the ceiling of the cavernous room in the old warehouse at the far end of the Arsenale where the Station sits. Outside the warehouse lies a rough garden. Work from the Station will spill into it.

The Station itself will be filled with objects, part-objects, paintings, images, screens. Around them a variety of benches, tables and small structures take their place. It will be possible to bathe in the Station and powder one's nose. The Station in other words becomes a place to stop, to contemplate, to listen and see, to rest and refresh, to talk and exchange. For it will be completed by the presence of people and a programme of events. Performances, concerts, lectures, readings, film programmes, parties, the events will multiply. They define the Station as much as its solid objects do. But all kinds of things will continue to be added to the Station over the course of the summer and fall. People will leave things behind, take some things with them, come back or never return again. There will always be people who want to leave too much and others who don't know what to leave behind or what to say. These are the challenges for a Utopia Station being set up in the heart of an art exhibition. But in addition, there are the unpredictable effects, which Carsten Höller has been anticipating, the points where something missing turns to something that becomes too much. The doubt produced between these two somethings is just as meaningful as any idea of utopia, he believes. These tensions will be welcomed like a guest.

What does a Station produce? What might a Station produce *in real time*? In this *produce* lies an activity rather more complex than pure exhibition, for it contains many cycles of use, a mixing of use. It incorporates aesthetic material, aesthetic matters too, into another economy which does not regard art as fatally separate.

But what is its place? The discussion of this question has been opened again by Jacques Rancière, in his book *Le partage du sensible*, which in French has the advantage of having a partition and a sharing occupy the same word. What is sectioned off and exchanged? It is more than an idea. Rancière takes his departure from Plato, pointedly, in order to remind us of the inevitable relation between the arts and the rest of social activity, the inevitable relations, it should be said, that together distribute value and give hierarchy, that govern, that both materially and conceptually establish their politics. This theatre of relations wraps itself around visions of worlds, each of them islands, each of them forms, but all of them concrete realities replete with matter and force. This is a philosophical understanding of aesthetic activity; it extends materialist aesthetics into the conditions of our present; it is a book to bring to a Station. As we have. But, once released, a book too leaves its island.

The Utopia Station in Venice, the city of islands, is part of a larger project. Utopia Stations do not require architecture for their existence, only a meeting, a gathering. We have already had several in Paris, in Venice, in Frankfurt, in Poughkeepsie, in Berlin. As such the Stations can be large or small. There is no hierarchy of importance between the gatherings, meetings, seminars, exhibitions and books; all of them become equally good ways of working. There is no desire to formalize the Stations into an institution of any kind. For now we meet. Many ideas about utopia circulate. Once when we met with Jacques Rancière, it was in Paris last June, he spoke to the difficulties involved in putting the idea of utopia forward. He pointed to the line that says 'There must be utopia', meaning that there must not only be calculations but an elevation, a supplement rising in the soul, and said that this line of thought has never interested him. Indeed he has always found it unnerving, even irritating. That which does interest him, he explained, is the *dissensus*, the manner in which ruptures are concretely created – ruptures in speech, in perception, in sensibility. He turned to contemplate the means by which utopias can be used to produce these ruptures. Will it begin and end in talk?

On another occasion, in Poughkeepsie last winter, just as a blizzard was about to blow in, Lawrence Weiner reminded everyone present that the artist's reality is no different from any other reality. Liam Gillick asked that we avoid utopian mirage, instead asking for utopia to become a functional step moving beyond itself. Martha Rosler told the story of going to see the space in Venice, arriving however as night fell to see only an interior of darkness, there being no lights. But utopia, she said, is what moves. Jonas Mekas warned of obsessions with ideas, since the dream, he said, could only succeed if we forget them. Leon Golub was apocalyptic. Allan Sekula, at our urging, showed the first five minutes of the tape he had made the day before during the peace demonstration in New York. Anri Sala showed us a tape of Tirana, where the mayor had painted apartment block walls into a geometric vision, a concrete hope. Édouard Glissant came. He spoke of the desire for the perfect shape, he spoke his language of landscapes. Only by passing through the *inextricable* of the world, he told us, can we save our *imaginaire*. In that passing there would come the *tremblement*, the tremor being fundamental to the passage.

Nancy Spero sent a morphine dream. Agnès Varda sent us the song of the Cadet Rousselle. Together we read an article Étienne Balibar had written six years ago for *Le Monde* which proposed to take complete leave of utopia now, in order to return to the heart of the matter – to let the imagination free to accept the sudden emergence of subjectivity in the social field. Let us make a sudden rush, a place for the imagination to expand, a place of fiction, fiction in its fullest sense. Balibar sees fiction to be the production of the real, something stemming

from experience itself, knowledge and action brought together so that they become indistinguishable, insurrection emptying into constitution. He used these thoughts to preface his *Droit de cité*. Another book for the Station.

It is simple. We use utopia as a catalyst, a concept most useful as fuel. We leave the complete definition of utopia to others. We meet to pool our efforts, motivated by a need to change the landscape outside and inside, a need to think, a need to integrate the work of the artist, the intellectual and manual labourers that we are into a larger kind of community, another kind of economy, a bigger conversation, another state of being. You could call this need a hunger.

Dare one rewrite a sentence by Brecht? Something *we need* is missing. The man who, seventy years ago, wrote 'Art follows reality' would surely not mind. Let us then take these words and press on. We need the words, old words and new words, we need the dance, we need the sausage, and still we need more. We have started, we meet in the Utopia Station, we start out again. The Station becomes a place to gather our starting points temporarily. It is primarily for this reason it resists capture and summary as a single image. Or is it the image of open possibility? The image of mixed use? Many things will happen there. And they will spark others.

Think of the Station as a field of starting points, many starting points being brought and offered by many different people. Some will bring objects now, others later. Each present and future contributor to the Station is being asked to do a poster for use in the Station and beyond: wherever it can hang, it can go. A paper trail for once goes forward. New posters continue to be added. In this way the Utopia Station produces images, even as it does not start with one. And a loose community assembles. It develops its own internal points of coherence, which shift with the times, as conversations and debates do.

Each person making a poster has been asked to make a statement of at least one and up to two hundred words. Independent of one another the statements collect. Stuart Hall and Zeigam Azizov elaborate upon a proposition: the world has to be *made to mean*. The bittersweet baked into hope, writes Nancy Spero. Pash Buzari sent a poem where darkness is dialled. The Raqs Media Collective calls utopia a hearing aid. This probably will not work. Jimmie Durham cites the Cherokee, and adds that the 'probably' keeps people active. There will be hundreds of statements like these in the end. They will branch out. As they do certain figures begin to repeat. Ships and songs and flags, two times potatoes, two times Sisyphus, figures familiar from the discussion of utopia forty years ago, but they have been assimilated rather than cited. Utopia becomes the secret garden whose doors can be opened again. Utopia becomes the catalyst that burns and returns. None of us can say we begin from scratch.

These activities imply an activism. For many who come to the Station, its

invitation to self-organize speaks a political language already known to them and already being practised. The proposal to build non-profit de-centralized units and make them become the underlying mode of production, fitting together through the real market (not the monopolistically controlled world market of the present system), has been made by Immanuel Wallerstein in his book *Utopistics*. It would eliminate the priority given to the endless accumulation of capital. Still another book for the Station.

As the catalyst burns, it fumes. For ours is not a time of continually same todays. When we met in Poughkeepsie in mid-February, around the world vast crowds marched for peace. Seven weeks later, when we met in Frankfurt, the Coalition forces were entering Baghdad. The days come like Kiarostami's hills. It is not the continually same utopia. In the speech to the graduating West Point cadets in June 2002, President George Bush announced his policy of pre-emptive strikes and wars with the reassurance that 'America has no empire to extend or utopia to establish.' The idea of empire has been receiving much scrutiny. But what about the other idea here, the refusal of utopia, the concept that presumes forward social vision? Is it not this refusal that gives us reason enough to revive the question of utopia now? Whether it comes as catalyst or fume, the word should be pronounced. And so we start.

Molly Nesbit, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Utopia Station* (Venice: 50th Venice Biennale, 2003).

## Hal Foster

### Chat Rooms//2004

*The Anglophone reception of relational art has been relatively belated. In the following text, originally written as a book review of Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics and Postproduction, and Hans Ulrich Obrist's Interviews, Hal Foster expresses reservations about the optimistic rhetoric accompanying collaboration and participation.*

In an art gallery over the last decade you might have happened on one of the following. A room empty except for a stack of identical sheets of paper – white, sky-blue, or printed with a simple image of an unmade bed or birds in flight – or a mound of identical sweets wrapped in brilliant coloured foil, the sweets, like the paper, free for the taking. Or a space where office contents were dumped in the exhibition area, and a couple of pots of Thai food were on offer to visitors puzzled enough to linger, eat and talk. Or a scattering of bulletin boards, drawing tables and discussion platforms, some dotted with information about a famous person from the past (Erasmus Darwin or Robert McNamara), as though a documentary script were in the making or a history seminar had just finished. Or, finally, a kiosk cobbled together from plastic and plywood, and filled, like a homemade study-shrine, with images and texts devoted to a particular artist, writer or philosopher (Fernand Léger, Raymond Carver or Gilles Deleuze). Such works, which fall somewhere between a public installation, an obscure performance and a private archive, can also be found outside art galleries, rendering them even more difficult to decipher in aesthetic terms. They can nonetheless be taken to indicate a distinctive turn in recent art. In play in the first two examples – works by Felix Gonzalez-Torres and by Rirkrit Tiravanija – is a notion of art as an ephemeral offering, a precarious gift (as opposed to an accredited painting or sculpture); and in the second two instances (by Liam Gillick and by Thomas Hirschhorn), a notion of art as an informal probing into a specific figure or event in history or politics, fiction or philosophy. Although each type of work can be tagged with a theoretical pedigree (in the first case, 'the gift' as seen by Marcel Mauss, say, or in the second 'discursive practice' according to Michel Foucault), the abstract concept is transformed into a literal space of operations, a pragmatic way of making and showing, talking and being.

The prominent practitioners of this art draw on a wide range of precedents: the everyday objects of Nouveau Réalisme, the humble materials of Arte Povera, the participatory strategies of Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica and the 'institution-

critical' devices of Marcel Broodthaers and Hans Haacke. But these artists have also transformed the familiar devices of the readymade object, the collaborative project and the installation format. For example, some now treat entire TV shows and Hollywood films as found images: Pierre Huyghe has reshot parts of the Al Pacino movie *Dog Day Afternoon* with the real-life protagonist (a reluctant bank robber) returned to the lead role, and Douglas Gordon has adapted a couple of Hitchcock films in drastic ways (his *24 Hour Psycho* slows down the original to a near-catatonic running time). For Gordon, such pieces are 'time readymades' – that is, given narratives to be sampled in large image-projections (a pervasive medium in art today) – while Nicolas Bourriaud, a co-director of the Palais de Tokyo, a Paris museum devoted to contemporary art, champions such work under the rubric of 'postproduction'. This term underscores secondary manipulations (editing, effects and the like) that are almost as pronounced in such art as in film; it also suggests a changed status of the 'work' of art in the age of information which has succeeded the age of production. That we are now in such a new era is an ideological assumption; nonetheless, in a world of shareware, information can appear as the ultimate readymade, as data to be reprocessed and sent on, and some of these artists do work, as Bourriaud says, 'to inventory and select, to use and download', to revise not only found images and texts but also given forms of exhibition and distribution.

One upshot of this way of working is a 'promiscuity of collaborations' (Gordon), in which the Postmodernist complications of originality and authorship are pushed beyond the pale. Take a collaborative work-in-progress such as *No Ghost Just a Shell*, led by Huyghe and Philippe Parreno. A few years ago they found out that a Japanese animation company wanted to sell some of its minor characters; they bought one such person-sign, a girl named Annlee, and invited other artists to use her in their work. Here the artwork becomes a 'chain' of pieces: for Huyghe and Parreno, *No Ghost Just a Shell* is 'a dynamic structure that produces forms that are part of it'; it is also 'the story of a community that finds itself in an image'. If this collaboration doesn't make you a little nervous (is the buying of Annlee a gesture of liberation or of serial bondage?), consider another group project that adapts a readymade product to unusual ends: in this work, Joe Scanlan, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Gillick, Tiravanija and others show you how to customize your own coffin from Ikea furniture; its title is *DIY, or How to Kill Yourself Anywhere in the World for under \$399*.

The tradition of readymade objects, from Duchamp to Damien Hirst, is often mocking of high and/or mass culture or both; in these examples it is mordant about global capitalism as well. Yet the prevalent sensibility of the new work tends to be innocent and expansive, even ludic – again an offering to other people and/or an opening to other discourses. At times a benign image of



globalization is advanced (it is a precondition for this very international group of artists), and there are utopian moments, too: Tiravanija, for example, has organized a 'massive-scale artist-run space' called 'The Land' in rural Thailand, designed as a collective 'for social engagement'. More modestly, these artists aim to turn passive viewers into a temporary community of active interlocutors. In this regard Hirschhorn, who once worked in a Communist collective of graphic designers, sees his makeshift monuments to artists and philosophers as a species of passionate pedagogy – they evoke the agit-prop kiosks of the Russian Constructivists as well as the obsessive constructions of Kurt Schwitters. Hirschhorn seeks to 'distribute ideas', 'radiate energy' and 'liberate activity' all at once: he wants not only to familiarize his audience with an alternative public culture but to libidinate this relationship as well. Other artists, some of whom were trained as scientists (such as Carsten Höller) or architects (Stefano Boeri), adapt a model of collaborative research and experiment closer to the laboratory or the design firm than the studio. 'I take the word "studio" literally', Gabriel Orozco remarks, 'not as a space of production but as a time of knowledge.'

'A promiscuity of collaborations' has also meant a promiscuity of installations: installation is the default format, and exhibition the common medium, of much art today. (In part this tendency is driven by the increased importance of huge shows: there are biennials not only in Venice but in São Paulo, Istanbul, Johannesburg and Gwangju.) Entire exhibitions are often given over to messy juxtapositions of projects – photos and texts, images and objects, videos and screens – and occasionally the effects are more chaotic than communicative. Nonetheless, discursivity and sociability are central concerns of the new work, both in its making and in its viewing. 'Discussion has become an important moment in the constitution of a project', Huyghe comments, and Tiravanija aligns his art, as 'a place of socialization', with a village market or a dance floor. 'I make art', Gordon says, 'so that I can go to the bar and talk about it'. Apparently, if one model of the old avant-garde was the Party à la Lenin, today the equivalent is a party à la Lennon.

In this time of mega-exhibitions the artist often doubles as curator. 'I am the head of a team, a coach, a producer, an organizer, a representative, a cheerleader, a host of the party, a captain of the boat', Orozco says, 'in short, an activist, an activator, an incubator'. The rise of the artist-as-curator has been complemented by that of the curator-as-artist; maestros of large shows have become very prominent over the last decade. Often the two groups share models of working as well as terms of description. Several years ago, for example, Tiravanija, Orozco and other artists began to speak of projects as 'platforms' and 'stations', as 'places that gather and then disperse', in order to underscore the casual communities they sought to create. Last year Documenta 11, curated by an

international team led by Okwui Enwezor, was also conceived in terms of 'platforms' of discussion, scattered around the world, on such topics as 'Democracy Unrealized', 'Processes of Truth and Reconciliation', 'Creolité and Creolization' and 'Four African Cities'; the exhibition held in Kassel, Germany, was only the final such 'platform'. And this year the Venice Biennale, curated by another international group headed by Francesco Bonami, featured sections called 'Utopia Station' and 'Zone of Urgency', both of which exemplified the informal discursivity of much art-making and curating today. Like 'kiosk', 'platform' and 'station' call up the Modernist ambition to modernise culture in accordance with industrial society (El Lissitzky spoke of his Constructivist designs as 'way-stations between art and architecture'). Yet today these terms evoke the electronic network, and many artists and curators fall for the Internet rhetoric of 'interactivity', though the means applied to this end are usually far more funky and face-to-face than any chat room on the Web.

The forms of these books by Bourriaud [*Relational Aesthetics; Postproduction*] and Obrist, the chief curator at the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, are as telling as the contents. The Bourriaud texts are sketchy – brief glosses of projects that use 'postproduction' techniques and seek 'relational' effects, while the Obrist tome is diffuse, with nearly a thousand pages of conversation with figures such as Jean Rouch and J.G. Ballard as well as the artists in question – and this is only volume I. (Ballard lets fly with a sharp aperçu; 'The psychological test is the only function of today's art shows', he says, with the Young British Artists in mind, 'and the aesthetic elements have been reduced almost to zero.' He means it as a compliment.) The conceptual artist Douglas Huebler once proposed to photograph everyone in the world; the peripatetic Obrist seems to want to talk to everyone (many of his interviews take place on planes). As with some of the art discussed in the book, the result oscillates between an exemplary work of interdisciplinarity and a Babelesque confusion of tongues. Along with the emphasis on discursivity and sociability, there is a concern with the ethical and the everyday: art is 'a way to explore other possibilities of exchange' (Huyghe), a model of 'living well' (Tiravanija), a means of being 'together in the everyday' (Orozco). 'Henceforth', Bourriaud declares, 'the group is pitted against the mass, neighbourliness against propaganda, low tech against high tech, and the tactile against the visual. And above all, the everyday now turns out to be a much more fertile terrain than pop culture.'

These possibilities of 'relational aesthetics' seem clear enough, but there are problems, too. Sometimes politics are ascribed to such art on the basis of a shaky analogy between an open work and an inclusive society, as if a desultory form might evoke a democratic community, or a non-hierarchical installation predict an egalitarian world. Hirschhorn sees his projects as 'never-ending construction

sites', while Tiravanija rejects 'the need to fix a moment where everything is complete'. But surely one thing art can still do is to take a stand, and to do this in a concrete register that brings together the aesthetic, the cognitive and the critical. And formlessness in society might be a condition to contest rather than to celebrate in art – a condition to make over into form for the purposes of reflection and resistance (as some modernist painters attempted to do). The artists in question frequently cite the Situationists but they, as T.J. Clark has stressed, valued precise intervention and rigorous organization above all things.

'The question', Huyghe argues, 'is less "what?" than "to whom?" It becomes a question of address'. Bourriaud also sees art as 'an ensemble of units to be reactivated by the beholder-manipulator'. In many ways this approach is another legacy of the Duchampian provocation, but when is such 'reactivation' too great a burden to place on the viewer, too ambiguous a test? As with previous attempts to involve the audience directly (in some abstract painting or some conceptual art), there is a risk of illegibility here, which might reintroduce the artist as the principal figure and the primary exegete of the work. At times, 'the death of the author' has meant not 'the birth of the reader', as Roland Barthes speculated, so much as the befuddlement of the viewer.

Furthermore, when has art, at least since the Renaissance, not involved discursivity and sociability? It is a matter of degree, of course, but might this emphasis be redundant? It also seems to risk a weird formalism of discursivity and sociability pursued for their own sakes. Collaboration, too, is often regarded as a good in itself: 'Collaboration is the answer', Obrist remarks at one point, 'but what is the question?' Art collectives in the recent past, such as those formed around AIDS activism, were political projects; today simply getting together sometimes seems to be enough. Here we might not be too far from an artworld version of 'flash mobs' – of 'people meeting people', in Tiravanija's words, as an end in itself. This is where I side with Sartre on a bad day: often in galleries and museums, hell is other people.

Perhaps discursivity and sociability are in the foreground of art today because they are scarce elsewhere. The same goes for the ethical and the everyday, as the briefest glance at our craven politicians and hectic lives might suggest. It is as though the very idea of community has taken on a utopian tinge. Even an art audience cannot be taken for granted but must be conjured up every time, which might be why contemporary exhibitions often feel like remedial work in socialization: come and play, talk, learn with me. If participation appears threatened in other spheres, its privileging in art might be compensatory – a pale, part-time substitute. Bourriaud almost suggests as much: 'Through little services rendered, the artists fill in the cracks in the social bond.' And only when he is at his most grim does he hit home: 'The society of spectacle is thus followed by the

society of extras, where everyone finds the illusion of an interactive democracy in more or less truncated channels of communication.'

For the most part these artists and curators see discursivity and sociability in rosy terms. As the critic Claire Bishop suggests, this tends to drop contradiction out of dialogue, and conflict out of democracy; it is also to advance a version of the subject free of the unconscious (even the gift is charged with ambivalence, according to Mauss). At times everything seems to be happy interactivity: among 'aesthetic objects' Bourriaud counts 'meetings, encounters, events, various types of collaboration between people, games, festivals and places of conviviality, in a word all manner of encounter and relational invention'. To some readers such 'relational aesthetics' will sound like a truly final end of art, to be celebrated or decried. For others it will seem to aestheticize the nicer procedures of our service economy ('invitations, casting sessions, meetings, convivial and user-friendly areas, appointments'). There is the further suspicion that, for all its discursivity, 'relational aesthetics' might be sucked up in the general movement for a 'post-critical' culture – an art and architecture, cinema and literature 'after theory'.

Hal Foster, 'Chat Rooms' (2004), published as 'Arty Party', *London Review of Books* (London, 4 December 2004) 21–2.

## Biographical Notes

**Roland Barthes** (1915–80), the French literary theorist, critic and innovative exponent of structuralism and semiology, influenced visual theory and practice through his *Eléments de sémiologie* (1964; *Elements of Semiology*, 1967); his analyses of signifying systems in popular culture, collected in *Mythologies* (1957; trans. 1972) and *La Tour Eiffel* (1964; *The Eiffel Tower*, 1979); and his writings on the visual image in *Image–Music–Text* (1977), *La chambre claire* (1980; *Camera Lucida*, 1981) and *The Responsibility of Forms* (1985).

**Joseph Beuys** (1921–86) was a German artist, initially a sculptor, who after collaborating in the Fluxus movement (1962–63) developed his system of synthesizing artistic practice with political ideals and lived experience. In the early 1970s he founded organizations such as the Free International School of Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research. The largest holdings of his work are at the Joseph Beuys Archiv (<http://www.moyland.de/pages/josephbeuysarchiv/>), the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt, the Busch-Reisinger Museum at Harvard University, and the Kunstmuseum Bonn.

**Nicolas Bourriaud** is a French art theorist and curator who introduced the term 'relational aesthetics' in texts such as his catalogue introduction to the *Traffic* group exhibition at capcMusée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux (1995). From 1999 to 2005 he was co-director, with Jérôme Sans, of the Palais de Tokyo, Paris. Projects he has curated include *Aperto*, the Venice Biennale (1993) and the Moscow Biennale (co-curator, 2005). His essays are collected in *Esthétique relationnelle* (1998; *Relational Aesthetics*, 2002) and *Postproduction* (2002).

**Peter Bürger** is Professor of French and Comparative Literature at the University of Bremen. His detailed analysis of the institutions of art has provided a theoretical framework for studying the social context of art's production and reception. His works include *Theorie der Avantgarde* (1974; *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 1984) and *The Decline of Modernism* (1992).

**Graciela Carnevale** is an Argentinian artist who was instrumental in forming the Grupo de Artistas de Vanguarda in the late 1960s, a coalition of artists, joined by sociologists, filmmakers, theorists, photographers and others who staged participatory politicized actions. Based in Rosario, Argentina, their projects included *Tucumán Arde* (*Tucumán Burns*) in 1968, a collaboration with sugar plant workers protesting against government oppression.

**Lygia Clark** (1920–88) was a Brazilian artist who worked in Rio de Janeiro and Paris. Out of a neo-concretist sculptural practice her work evolved in the late 1960s to encompass participatory works involving 'sensorial' experiences of objects and encounters, informed by her concurrent practice as a psychoanalyst. Her ideas were also closely affiliated with those of the artist Hélio Oiticica (see below) and the Brazilian Tropicália movement, in which they had a central role. Retrospectives include *Fundació Antoni Tàpies*, Barcelona (1997).

**Collective Actions** (*Kollektivnyye deistviya*) was founded in Moscow in 1976 by Andrei Monastyrsky, Nikolai Panitkov, Georgii Kizevalter and Nikita Alekseev. Elena Elagina, Igor Makarevich and Sergei Romashko joined the group later, and its composition frequently changed. They are best known for their collaborative, conceptually based actions in rural spaces outside the city. Their

work was included in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, Queens Museum of Art, New York (2000) and *Collective and Interactive Works in Russian Art 1960–2000*, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow (2005).

**Eda Cufer** is a Slovenian artist, theorist and theatre director who since 1984 has worked with the arts collective NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst), and since 1989 has been a female collaborator with its subgroup of five male artists, IRWIN (Dusan Mandic, Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski, Roman Uranjek, Borut Vogelcnik). In 1992 they joined with other groups from Eastern Europe and Russia in the project *NSK Embassy Moscow* (at an apartment, Leninsky Prospekt 12, Moscow), a month of events investigating 'how the East sees the East' – also the title of their book documenting the project.

**Guy Debord** (1931–94), the French writer, theorist and filmmaker, formed the Situationist International with the artist Asger Jorn and others in 1957. His books include *La Société du spectacle* (1967; *Society of the Spectacle*, 1970), his influential critique of the social alienation engendered by the primacy of the image as mediator and regulator of capitalist society; *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle* (1988; *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 1990); and the edited collections *Guy Debord and the Situationist International* (ed. Tom McDonough, 2002) and *Complete Cinematic Works* (ed. and trans. Ken Knabb, 2003).

**Jeremy Deller** is a British artist whose practice has some parallels with ethnographic and sociological research, leading to participatory works based on shared cultural experiences. His projects include *Unconvention* (with Bruce Haines, 1999), *Folk Archive* (with Alan Kane, 1999 to the present), *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001) and *Social Parade* (2004).

**Umberto Eco** is a semiotician, medievalist and novelist who since 1999 has been President of the Scuola Superiore di Studi Umanistici, University of Bologna. His books include *Opera Aperta* (1962; *The Open Work*, 1989), *La Struttura assente* (1968; *A Theory of Semiotics*, 1977), *The Role of the Reader* (translated collection of key essays 1962–76, 1979) and *Incontro–Encounter–Rencontre* (1996).

**Hal Foster** is Townsend Martin Professor of Art and Archaeology at Princeton University, an editor of *October* and a contributor to *Artforum* and the *London Review of Books*. His books include *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (1985), *Compulsive Beauty* (1993), *The Return of the Real* (1996) and *Prosthetic Gods* (2004).

**Édouard Glissant** is Distinguished Professor of French at the City University of New York and a Martiniquan writer, poet and essayist whose work on Frantz Fanon and around the ideas of 'creolisation' and Caribbean identity has been widely influential. His books include *Le Discours antillais* (1981), *Poétique de la Relation* (1990; *Poetics of Relation*, 1997) and *Traité du Tout-Monde* (1997).

**Group Material** was founded in 1979 as an artists' collaborative group in New York which significantly broke down the barriers between art and social and political practice. Attracting temporary members, its core artists became Julie Ault and Tim Rollins (founders), Doug Ashford (from 1982), Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957–96; from 1987) and Karen Ramspacher (from 1989). Projects include *The People's Choice* (1980), *Americana* (1985), *Democracy* (1988), and *Aids Timeline* (1989–92).

**Félix Guattari** (1930–92) was a French psychoanalyst and political activist who was a central figure in the events of May 1968. Best known for his collaborations with the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie*. 1. *L'anti-Oedipe* (1972; *Anti-Oedipus*, 1983); II. *Mille plateaux* (1980; *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987), and *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, 1991; *What is Philosophy?*, 1996), he developed his own social, psychoanalytic and ecologically based theories published in *Chaosose* (1992; *Chaosmosis*, 1995), *Chaosophy* (1995) and *Soft Subversions* (1996).

**Thomas Hirschhorn** is a Swiss-born artist based in Paris, whose anti-aesthetic assemblages, monuments, altars and kiosks, using low-grade everyday materials, invite a questioning of the place of art in community and the contemporary status of the monument. Major projects include *Bataille Monument*, Documenta 11, Kassel (2002), *Musée Précaire Albinet*, Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers (2004), and *Utopia, Utopia*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2005).

**Carsten Höller** is a Belgian-born artist based in Sweden. With a doctorate in phytopathology, he uses his scientific training to make investigatory installations and artworks that actively engage viewers' perceptions and physiological reactions to environments and stimuli. Major solo exhibitions include *Sanatorium*, Kunst-Werke, Berlin (1999), *New World*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm (1999), Fondazione Prada, Milan (2000) and *One Day One Day*, Fargfabriken, Stockholm (2003).

**Allan Kaprow** (1927–2006) was an American artist best known as the inventor of the Happening in 1959, a term he abandoned in 1967, after which he explored other participatory models. The range of his early 1960s works is documented in his *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings* (1966); his writings are collected in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (1993). An important early group show was *Environments, Situations, Spaces*, Martha Jackson Gallery, New York (1961). Retrospectives include Haus der Kunst, Munich (2006).

**Lars Bang Larsen** is a Danish critic and curator based in Frankfurt am Main and Copenhagen. A contributor to journals such as *Documents sur l'art*, *frieze* and *Artforum*, he co-curated *Momentum – Nordic Festival of Contemporary Art* (1998), *Fundamentalisms of the New Order* (Charlottenberg, 2002), *The Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds* (Bilbao, 2005) and *Populism* (Vilnius, Oslo, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, 2005).

**Jean-Luc Nancy** is a French philosopher among whose central reference points are the ideas of Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Derrida and Friedrich Nietzsche. His key works include *Le Titre de la Lettre* (with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, 1973; *The Title of the Letter: A Reading of Lacan*, 1992), *Le communauté désœuvrée* (1986; *The Inoperative Community*, 1991), *Le retrait du politique* (with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, 1997; *Retreating the Political*, 1997) and *Être singulier pluriel* (2000; *Being Singular Plural*, 2000).

**Molly Nesbit** is Professor of Art at Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, and has also taught at the University of California, Berkeley, and Barnard College, Columbia University. A contributing editor of *Artforum*, she is the author of *Atget's Seven Albums* (1992) and *Their Common Sense* (2000). She was a co-curator of *Utopia Station*, Venice Biennale (2003).

**Hans Ulrich Obrist** is a Swiss curator who is Co-Director of Exhibitions and Programmes at the Serpentine Gallery, London. From 1993 to 2005 he ran the 'Migrateurs' programme at the Musée

d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris. Among the many exhibitions and events he has co-curated are Manifesta I, Rotterdam (1996), *Cities on the Move*, Secession, Vienna (1997, and touring), the Berlin Biennale (1998), *Utopia Station*, Venice Biennale (2003), and the Moscow Biennale (2005). Volume 1 of his collected interviews was published in 2003.

**Hélio Oiticica** (1937–80) was a Brazilian artist who worked in Rio de Janeiro and New York. Like Lygia Clark, he moved from neo-concretism in the 1950s to participatory works in the late 1960s involving 'sensorial' objects and installation structures, *parangolé* capes worn by samba dancers, and environments which placed gallery visitors in material conditions evoking Latin American shanty town existence. Retrospectives include Witte de With, Rotterdam (1992, and touring).

**Adrian Piper** is a New York-based artist and philosopher. After participating in the beginnings of New York conceptualism in the 1960s, from 1970 she developed a 'catalytic' form of intervention in public or group situations to involve others in the questioning of perceptions derived from unchallenged notions of race, gender or class. Retrospectives include the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2000).

**Jacques Rancière** is a French philosopher who first came to prominence as a co-author, with Louis Althusser and others, of *Lire Le Capital* (1965; *Reading Capital*, 1979). In the early 1970s he abandoned Althusser's form of Marxism and began to reflect upon the social and historical constitution of knowledges. Since the late 1990s he has investigated the political and its relationship to aesthetics within western culture. His books include *Le Maître ignorant* (1982; *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 1991), *Disagreement* (1998) and *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004).

**Dirk Schwarze** is a German art critic who has been closely associated with Documenta since the early 1970s. His books include *Meilensteine: 50 Jahre documenta* (2005).

**Rirkrit Tiravanija** is an Argentinian-born Thai artist based in Chiang Mai, Berlin and New York, who since the early 1990s has been a leading figure in the development of relational art. Solo exhibitions and projects include Cologne Kunstverein (1996), The Museum of Modern Art, New York (1997), Secession, Vienna (2002), Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (2005) and *The Land*, Chiang Mai, Thailand (ongoing from 1998).

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