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Relational Aesthetics

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Foreword

Where do the misunderstandings surrounding 1990s' art come from, if not a theoretical discourse complete with shortcomings? An overwhelming majority of critics and philosophers are reluctant to come to grips with contemporary practices. So these remain essentially unreadable, as their originality and their relevance cannot be perceived by analysing them on the basis of problems either solved or unresolved by previous generations. The oh-so-painful fact has to be accepted that certain issues are no longer being raised, and it is, by extension, important to identify those that are being raised these days by artists. What are the real challenges of contemporary art? What are its links with society, history, and culture? The critic's primary task is to recreate the complex set of problems that arise in a particular period or age, and take a close look at the various answers given. Too often, people are happy drawing up an inventory of yesterday's concerns, the better to lament the fact of not getting any answers. But the very first question, as far as these new approaches are concerned, obviously has to do with the material form of these works. How are these apparently elusive works to be decoded, be they *process-related* or behavioural by ceasing to take shelter behind the sixties art history?

Let us quote several examples of these activities. Rirkrit Tiravanija organises a dinner in a collector's home, and leaves him all the ingredients required to make a Thaï soup. Philippe Parreno invites a few people to pursue their favourite hobbies on May Day, on a

factory assembly line. Vanessa Beecroft dresses some twenty women in the same way, complete with a red wig, and the visitor merely gets a glimpse of them through the doorway. Maurizio Cattelan feeds rats on "Bel paese" cheese and sells them as multiples, or exhibits recently robbed safes. In a Copenhagen square, Jes Brinch and Henrik Plenge Jacobsen install an upturned bus that causes a rival riot in the city. Christine Hill works as a check-out assistant in a supermarket, organises a weekly gym workshop in a gallery. Carsten Höller recreates the chemical formula of molecules secreted by the human brain when in love, builds an inflatable plastic yacht, and breeds chaffinches with the aim of teaching them a new song. Noritoshi Hirakawa puts a small ad in a newspaper to find a girl to take part in his show. Pierre Huyghe summons people to a casting session, makes a TV transmitter available to the public, and puts a photograph of labourers at work on view just a few yards from the building site. One could add many other names and works to such a list. Anyhow, the liveliest factor that is played out on the chessboard of art has to do with interactive, user-friendly and relational concepts.

These days, communications are plunging human contacts into monitored areas that divide the social bond up into (quite) different products. Artistic activity, for its part, strives to achieve modest connections, open up (One or two) obstructed passages, and connect levels of reality kept apart from one another. The much vaunted "communication superhighways", with their toll plazas and picnic areas, threaten to become the only possible thoroughfare from a point to another in the human world. The superhighway may well actually help us to travel faster and more efficiently, yet it has the drawback of turning its users into consumers of miles and their by-products. We feel meagre and helpless when faced with the electronic media, theme parks, user-friendly places, and the spread of compatible forms of sociability, like the laboratory rat doomed to an inexorable itinerary in its cage, littered with chunks of cheese.

The ideal subject of the society of extras is thus reduced to the condition of a consumer of time and space.

For anything that cannot be marketed will inevitably vanish. Before long, it will not be possible to maintain relationships between people outside these trading areas. So here we are summonsed to talk about things around a duly priced drink, as a symbolic form of contemporary human relations. You are looking for shared warmth, and the comforting feeling of well being for two? So try our coffee... The space of current relations is thus the space most severely affected by general reification. The relationship between people, as symbolised by goods or replaced by them, and signposted by logos, has to take on extreme and clandestine forms, if it is to dodge the empire of predictability. The social bond has turned into a standardised artefact. In a world governed by the division of labour and ultra-specialisation, mechanisation and the law of profitability, it behoves the powers that human relations should be channelled towards accordingly planned outlets, and that they should be pursued on the basis of one or two simple principles, which can be both monitored and repeated. The supreme "separation", the separation that affects relational channels, represents the final stage in the transformation to the "Society of the Spectacle" as described by Guy Debord. This is a society where human relations are no longer "directly experienced", but start to become blurred in their "spectacular" representation. Herein lies the most burning issue to do with art today: is it still possible to generate relationships with the world, in a practical field art-history traditionally earmarked for their "representation"? Contrary to what Debord thought, for all he saw in the art world was a reservoir of examples of what had to be tangibly "achieved" in day-to-day life, artistic praxis appears these days to be a rich loam for social experiments, like a space partly protected from the uniformity of behavioural patterns. The works we shall be discussing here outline so many hands-on utopias.

Some of the following essays were originally published in magazines –for the most part in *Documents sur l'art*, and exhibition catalogues[1], but have been considerably reworked, not to say re-ordered, here. Others are previously unpublished. This collection of essays is also rounded off by a glossary, which readers may refer to whenever a problematic concept rears its head. To make the book that much easier to come to grips with, may we suggest to turn right away to the definition of the word "Art".

1. "Le paradigme esthétique (Félix Guattari et L'art)" was published by the magazine *Chimères*, 1993; "Relation écran" was published in the catalogue for the 3rd Lyon Contemporary Art Biennial, 1995.

Relational form

Artistic activity is a game, whose forms, patterns and functions develop and evolve according to periods and social contexts; it is not an immutable essence. It is the critic's task to study this activity in the present. A certain aspect of the programme of modernity has been fairly and squarely wound up (and not, let us hasten to emphasise in these bourgeois times, the spirit informing it). This completion has drained the criteria of aesthetic judgement we are heir to of their substance, but we go on applying them to present-day artistic practices. The *new* is no longer a criterion, except among latter-day detractors of modern art who, where the much-execrated present is concerned, cling solely to the things that their traditionalist culture has taught them to loathe in yesterday's art. In order to invent more effective tools and more valid viewpoints, it behoves us to understand the changes nowadays occurring in the social arena, and grasp what has already changed and what is still changing. How are we to understand the types of artistic behaviour shown in exhibitions held in the 1990s, and the lines of thinking behind them, if we do not start out from the same *situation* as the artists?

Contemporary artistic practice and its cultural plan
The modern political era, which came into being with the Enlightenment, was based on the desire to emancipate individuals and people. The advances of technologies and freedoms, the

decline of ignorance, and improved working conditions were all billed to free humankind and help to usher in a better society. There are several versions of modernity, however. The 20th century was thus the arena for a struggle between two visions of the world: a modest, rationalist conception, hailing from the 18th century, and a philosophy of spontaneity and liberation through the irrational (Dada, Surrealism, the Situationists), both of which were opposed to authoritarian and utilitarian forces eager to gauge human relations and subjugate people. Instead of culminating in hoped-for emancipation, the advances of technologies and "Reason" made it that much easier to exploit the South of planet earth, blindly replace human labour by machines, and set up more and more sophisticated subjugation techniques, all through a general rationalisation of the production process. So the modern emancipation plan has been substituted by countless forms of melancholy.

Twentieth century avant-garde, from Dadaism to the Situationist International, fell within the tradition of this modern project (changing culture, attitudes and mentalities, and individual and social living conditions), but it is as well to bear in mind that this project was already there before them, differing from their plan in many ways. For modernity cannot be reduced to a rationalist teleology, any more than it can to political messianism. Is it possible to disparage the desire to improve living and working conditions, on the pretext of the bankruptcy of tangible attempts to do as much-shored up by totalitarian ideologies and naïve visions of history? What used to be called the avant-garde has, needless to say, developed from the ideological swing of things offered by modern rationalism; but it is now re-formed on the basis of quite different philosophical, cultural and social presuppositions. It is evident that today's art is carrying on this fight, by coming up with perceptive, experimental, critical and participatory models, veering in the direction indicated by Enlightenment philosophers, Proudhon, Marx, the Dadaists and Mondrian. If opinion is striving to acknowledge the legitimacy and interest of these experiments,

this is because they are no longer presented like the precursory phenomena of an inevitable historical evolution. Quite to the contrary, they appear fragmentary and isolated, like orphans of an overall view of the world bolstering them with the clout of an ideology.

It is not modernity that is dead, but its idealistic and teleological version.

Today's fight for modernity is being waged in the same terms as yesterday's, barring the fact that the avant-garde has stopped patrolling like some scout, the troop having come to a cautious standstill around a bivouac of certainties. Art was intended to prepare and announce a future world: today it is modelling possible universes.

The ambition of artists who include their practice within the slipstream of historical modernity is to repeat neither its forms nor its claims, and even less assign to art the same functions as it. Their task is akin to the one that Jean-François Lyotard allocated to post-modern architecture, which "*is condemned to create a series of minor modifications in a space whose modernity it inherits, and abandon an overall reconstruction of the space inhabited by humankind*'". What is more, Lyotard seems to half-bemoan this state of affairs: he defines it negatively, by using the term "condemned". And what, on the other hand, if this "condemnation" represented the historical chance whereby most of the art worlds known to us managed to spread their wings, over the past ten years or so? This "chance" can be summed up in just a few words: *learning to inhabit the world in a better way*, instead of trying to construct it based on a preconceived idea of historical evolution. Otherwise put, the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realties, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist. Althusser said that one always catches the world's train on the move; Deleuze, that "grass grows from the middle" and not from the bottom or the top. The artist dwells in the circumstances the

present offers him, so as to turn the setting of his life (his links with the physical and conceptual world) into a lasting world. He catches the world on the move: he is a *tenant of culture*, to borrow Michel de Certeau's expression[2]. Nowadays, modernity extends into the practices of cultural do-it-yourself and recycling, into the invention of the everyday and the development of time lived, which are not objects less deserving of attention and examination than Messianistic utopias and the formal "novelties" that typified modernity yesterday. There is nothing more absurd either than the assertion that contemporary art does not involve any political project, or than the claim that its subversive aspects are not based on any theoretical terrain. Its plan, which has just as much to do with working conditions and the conditions in which cultural objects are produced, as with the changing forms of social life, may nevertheless seem dull to minds formed in the mould of cultural Darwinism. Here, then, is the time of the "dolce utopia", to use Maurizio Cattelan's phrase...

Artwork as social interstice
The possibility of a *relational* art (an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space), points to a radical upheaval of the aesthetic, cultural and political goals introduced by modern art. To sketch a sociology of this, this evolution stems essentially from the birth of a world-wide urban culture, and from the extension of this city model to more or less all cultural phenomena. The general growth of towns and cities, which took off at the end of the Second World War, gave rise not only to an extraordinary upsurge of social exchanges, but also to much greater individual mobility (through the development of networks and roads, and telecommunications, and the gradual freeing-up of isolated places, going with the opening-up of attitudes). Because of the crampedness of dwelling spaces in this urban world, there was, in tandem, a scaling-down of furniture and

objects, now emphasising a greater manoeuvrability. If, for a long period of time, the artwork has managed to come across as a luxury, lordly item in this urban setting (the dimensions of the work, as well as those of the apartment, helping to distinguish between their owner and the crowd), the development of the function of artworks and the way they are shown attest to a growing *urbanisation* of the artistic experiment. What is collapsing before our very eyes is nothing other than this falsely aristocratic conception of the arrangement of works of art, associated with the feeling of territorial acquisition. In other words, it is no longer possible to regard the contemporary work as a space to be walked through (the "owner's tour" is akin to the collector's). It is henceforth presented as a period of time to be lived through, like an opening to unlimited discussion. The city has ushered in and spread the hands-on experience: it is the tangible symbol and historical setting of the state of society, that "*state of encounter imposed on people*", to use Althusser's expression[3], contrasting with that dense and "trouble-free" jungle which the *natural state* once was, according to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a jungle hampering any lasting encounter. Once raised to the power of an absolute rule of civilisation, this system of intensive encounters has ended up producing linked artistic practices: an art form where the substrate is formed by inter-subjectivity, and which takes being-together as a central theme, the "encounter" between beholder and picture, and the collective elaboration of meaning. Let us leave the matter of the historicity of this phenomenon on one side: art has always been relational in varying degrees, i.e. a factor of sociability and a founding principle of dialogue. One of the virtual properties of the image is its power of *linkage* (Fr. *reliance),* to borrow Michel Maffesoli's term: flags, logos, icons, signs, all produce empathy and sharing, and all generate *bond*[4]. Art (practices stemming from painting and sculpture which come across in the form of an exhibition) turns out to be particularly suitable when it comes to expressing this hands-on civilisation, because it *tightens the space of relations*, unlike TV

and literature which refer each individual person to his or her space of private consumption, and also unlike theatre and cinema which bring small groups together before specific, unmistakable images. Actually, there is no live comment made about what is seen (the discussion time is put off until after the show). At an exhibition, on the other hand, even when inert forms are involved, there is the possibility of an immediate discussion, in both senses of the term. I see and perceive, I comment, and I evolve in a unique space and time. Art is the place that produces a specific sociability. It remains to be seen what the status of this is in the set of "states of encounter" proposed by the City. How is an art focused on the production of such forms of conviviality capable of re-launching the modern emancipation plan, by complementing it? How does it permit the development of new political and cultural designs?

Before giving concrete examples, it is well worth reconsidering the place of artworks in the overall economic system, be it symbolic or material, which governs contemporary society. Over and above its mercantile nature and its semantic value, the work of art represents a social *interstice*. This *interstice* term was used by Karl Marx to describe trading communities that elude the capitalist economic context by being removed from the law of profit: barter, merchandising, autarkic types of production, etc. The interstice is a space in human relations which fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, but suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect within this system. This is the precise nature of the contemporary art exhibition in the arena of representational commerce: it creates free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the "communication zones" that are imposed upon us. The present-day social context restricts the possibilities of inter-human relations all the more because it creates spaces planned to this end. Automatic public toilets were invented to keep streets clean. The same spirit underpins the development of communication tools, while city streets are swept clean of all manners of relational dross, and neighbourhood relationships fizzle. The general mechanisation of social functions gradually reduces the relational space. Just a few years ago, the telephone wake-up call service employed human beings, but now we are woken up by a synthesised voice... The automatic cash machine has become the transit model for the most elementary of social functions, and professional behaviour patterns are modelled on the efficiency of the machines replacing them, these machines carrying out tasks which once represented so many opportunities for exchanges, pleasure and squabbling. Contemporary art is definitely developing a political project when it endeavours to move into the relational realm by turning it into an issue.

When Gabriel Orozco puts an orange on the stalls of a deserted Brazilian market (*Crazy Tourist*, 1991), or slings a hammock in the MoMA garden in New York (*Hamoc en la moma*, 1993), he is operating at the hub of "social infra-thinness" (l'inframince social), that minute space of daily gestures determined by the superstructure made up of "big" exchanges, and defined by it. Without any wording, Orozco's photographs are a documentary record of tiny revolutions in the common urban and semi-urban life (a sleeping bag on the grass, an empty shoebox, etc.). They record this silent, still life nowadays formed by relationships with the other. When Jens Haaning broadcasts funny stories in Turkish through a loudspeaker in a Copenhagen square (*Turkish Jokes*, 1994), he produces in that split second a micro-community, one made up of immigrants brought together by collective laughter which upsets their exile situation, formed in relation to the work and in it. The exhibition is the special place where such momentary groupings may occur, governed as they are by differing principles. And depending on the degree of participation required of the onlooker by the artist, along with the nature of the works and the models of sociability proposed and represented, an exhibition will

give rise to a specific "arena of exchange". And this "arena of exchange", must be judged on the basis of aesthetic criteria, in other words, by analysing the coherence of its form, and then the symbolic value of the "world" it suggests to us, and of the image of human relations reflected by it. Within this social interstice, the artist must assume the symbolic models he shows. All representation (though contemporary art *models* more than it represents, and fits into the social fabric more than it draws inspiration therefrom) refers to values that can be transposed into society. As a human activity based on commerce, art is at once the object and the subject of an ethic. And this all the more so because, unlike other activities, *its sole function is to be exposed to this commerce.*

Art is a state of encounter.

Relational aesthetics and random materialism
Relational aesthetics is part of a materialistic tradition. Being "materialistic" does not mean sticking to the triteness of facts, nor does it imply that sort of narrow-mindedness that consists in reading works in purely economic terms. The philosophical tradition that underpins this *relational aesthetics* was defined in a noteworthy way by Louis Althusser, in one of his last writings, as a "materialism of encounter", or random materialism. This particular materialism takes as its point of departure the world contingency, which has no pre-existing origin or sense, nor Reason, which might allot it a purpose. So the essence of humankind is purely trans-individual, made up of bonds that link individuals together in social forms which are invariably historical (Marx: the human essence is the set of social relations). There is no such thing as any possible "end of history" or "end of art", because the game is being forever re-enacted, in relation to its function, in other words, in relation to the players and the system which they construct and criticise. Hubert Damisch saw in the "end of art" theories the outcome of an irksome muddle between the "end of the

game" and the "end of play". A new game is announced as soon as the social setting radically changes, without the meaning of the game itself being challenged[5]. This *inter-human game* which forms our object (Duchamp: "*Art is a game between all people of all periods*") nevertheless goes beyond the context of what is called "art" by commodity. So the "constructed situations" advocated by the Situationist International belong in their own right to this "game", in spite of Guy Debord who, in the final analysis, denied them any artistic character. For in them, quite to the contrary, he saw "art being exceeded" by a revolution in day-to-day life. Relational aesthetics does not represent a theory of art, this would imply the statement of an origin and a destination, but a theory of form.

What do we mean by *form*? A coherent unit, a structure (*independent entity of inner dependencies*) which shows the typical features of a world. The artwork does not have an exclusive hold on it, it is merely a subset in the overall series of existing forms. In the materialistic philosophical tradition ushered in by Epicurus and Lucretius, atoms fall in parallel formations into the void, following a slightly diagonal course. If one of these atoms swerves off course, it "*causes an encounter with the next atom and from encounter to encounter a pile-up, and the birth of the world*"... This is how forms come into being, from the "deviation" and random encounter between two hitherto parallel elements. In order to create a world, this encounter must be a *lasting* one: the elements forming it must be joined together in a form, in other words, there must have been "*a setting of elements on one another (the way ice 'sets')*". "Form can be defined as a lasting encounter". Lasting encounters, lines and colours inscribed on the surface of a Delacroix painting, the scrap objects that litter Schwitters' "Merz pictures", Chris Burden's performances: over and above the quality of the page layout or the spatial layout, they turn out to be *lasting* from the moment when their components form a whole whose sense "holds good" at the

moment of their birth, stirring up new "possibilities of life". All works, down to the most critical and challenging of projects, passes through this viable world state, because they get elements held apart to *meet:* for example, death and the media in Andy Warhol. Deleuze and Guattari were not saying anything different when they defined the work of art as a "block of affects and percepts". Art *keeps together* moments of subjectivity associated with singular experiences, be it Cézanne's apples or Buren's striped structures. The composition of this *bonding agent*, whereby encountering atoms manage to form a word, is, needless to say, dependent on the historical context. What today's informed public understands by "keeping together" is not the same thing that this public imagined back in the 19th century. Today, the "glue" is less obvious, as our visual experience has become more complex, enriched by a century of photographic images, then cinematography (introduction of the sequence shot as a new dynamic unity), enabling us to recognise as a "world" a collection of disparate element (installation, for instance) that no unifying matter, no bronze, links. Other technologies may allow the human spirit to recognise other types of "world-forms" still unknown: for example, computer science put forward the notion of program, that inflect the approach of some artist's way of working. An artist's artwork thus acquires the status of an ensemble of units to be re-activated by the beholder-manipulator. I want to insist on the instability and the diversity of the concept of "form", notion whose outspread can be witnessed in injunction by the founder of sociology, Emile Durckheim, considering the "social fact" as a "thing"... As the artistic "thing" sometime offers itself as a "fact" or an ensemble of facts that happens in the time or space, and whose unity (making it a form, a world) can not be questioned. The setting is widening; after the isolated object, it now can embrace the whole scene: the form of Gordon Matta-Clark or Dan Graham's work can not be reduced to the "things" those two artist "produce"; it is not the simple secondary effects of a composition, as the formalistic aesthetic would like to advance, but the principle acting as a trajectory evolving through

signs, objects, forms, gestures... The contemporary artwork's form is spreading out from its material form: it is a linking element, a principle of dynamic agglutination. An artwork is a dot on a line.

Form and others' gaze
If, as Serge Daney writes, "*all form is a face looking at us*", what does a form become when it is plunged into the dimension of dialogue? What is a form that is essentially *relational*? It seems worth while to discuss this question by taking Daney's formula as a point of reference, precisely because of its ambivalence: as forms are looking at us, how are we to look at them?
Form is most often defined as an outline contrasting with a content. But modernist aesthetics talks about "formal beauty" by referring to a sort of (con)fusion between style and content, and an inventive compatibility of the former with the latter. We judge a work through its plastic or visual form. The most common criticism to do with new artistic practices consists, moreover, in denying them any "formal effectiveness", or in singling out their shortcomings in the "formal resolution". In observing contemporary artistic practices, we ought to talk of "formations" rather than "forms". Unlike an object that is closed in on itself by the intervention of a style and a signature, present-day art shows that form only exists in the encounter and in the dynamic relationship enjoyed by an artistic proposition with other formations, artistic or otherwise.
There are no forms in nature, in the wild state, as it is our gaze that creates these, by cutting them out in the depth of the visible. Forms are *developed,* one from another. What was yesterday regarded as formless or "informal" is no longer these things today. When the aesthetic discussion evolves, the status of form evolves along with it, and through it.
In the novels of polish writer Witold Gombrowicz, we see how each individual generates his own *form* through his behaviour, his way of coming across, and the way he addresses others. This form comes about in the borderline area where the individual struggles

with the Other, so as to subject him to what he deems to be his "being". So, for Gombrowicz, our "form" is merely a relational property, linking us with those who reify us by the way they see us, to borrow a Sartrian terminology. When the individual thinks he is casting an objective eye upon himself, he is, in the final analysis, contemplating nothing other than the result of perpetual transactions with the subjectivity of others.

The artistic form, for some, side-steps this inevitability, for it is publicised by a *work*. Our persuasion, conversely, is that form only assumes its texture (and only acquires a real existence) when it introduces human interactions. The form of an artwork issues from a negotiation with the intelligible, which is bequeathed to us. Through it, the artist embarks upon a dialogue. The artistic practice thus resides in the invention of relations between consciousness. Each particular artwork is a proposal to live in a shared world, and the work of every artist is a bundle of relations with the world, giving rise to other relations, and so on and so forth, ad infinitum. Here we are at the opposite end of this authoritarian version of art which we discover in the essays of Thierry de Duve[6], for whom any work is nothing other than a "sum of judgements", both historical and aesthetic, stated by the artist in the act of its production. To paint is to become part of history through plastic and visual choices. We are in the presence of a prosecutor's aesthetics, here, for which the artist confronts the history of art in the autarky of his own persuasions. It is an aesthetics that reduces artistic practice to the level of a pettifogging historical criticism. Practical "judgement", thus aimed, is peremptory and final in each instance, hence the negation of dialogue, which, alone, grants form a productive status: the status of an "encounter". As part of a "relationist" theory of art, inter-subjectivity does not only represent the social setting for the reception of art, which is its "environment", its "field" (Bourdieu), but also becomes the quintessence of artistic practice.

As Daney suggested, form becomes "face" through the effect of this invention of relations. This formula, needless to add, calls to mind the one acting as the pedestal for Emmanuel Lévinas' thinking, for whom the face represents the sign of the ethical taboo. The face, Lévinas asserts, is *"what orders me to serve another"*, *"what forbids me to kill"*[7]. Any "inter-subjective relation" proceeds by way of the form of the face, which symbolises the responsibility we have towards others: *"the bond with others is only made as responsibility"*, he writes, but don't ethics have a horizon other than this humanism which reduces inter-subjectivity to a kind of inter-servility? Is the image, which, for Daney, is a metaphor of the face, only therefore suitable for producing taboos and proscriptions, through the burden of "responsibility"? When Daney explains that *"all form is a face looking at us"*, he does not merely mean that we are responsible for this. To be persuaded of as much, suffice it to revert to the profound significance of the image for Daney. For him, the image is not "immoral" when it puts us "in the place where we were not"[8], when it "takes the place of another". What is involved here, for Daney, is not solely a reference to the aesthetics of Bazin and Rossellini, claiming the "ontological realism" of the cinematographic art, which even if it does lie at the origin of Daney's thought, does not sum it up. He maintains that form, in an image, is nothing other than the representation of desire. Producing a form is to invent possible encounters; receiving a form is to create the conditions for an exchange, the way you return a service in a game of tennis. If we nudge Daney's reasoning a bit further, form is the *representative* of desire in the image. It is the horizon based on which the image may have a meaning, by pointing to a desired world, which the beholder thus becomes capable of discussing, and based on which his own desire can rebound. This exchange can be summed up by a binomial: someone shows something to someone who returns it as he sees fit. The work tries to catch my gaze, the way the new-born child "asks for" its mother's gaze. In *La Vie commune*, Tzvetan Todorov has shown how the essence of

sociability is the need for acknowledgement, much more than competition and violence[9]. When an artist shows us something, he uses a transitive ethic which places his work between the "look-at-me" and the "look-at-that". Daney's most recent writings lament the end of this "Show/See" pairing, which represented the essence of a democracy of the image in favour of another pairing, this one TV-related and authoritarian, "Promote/receive", marking the advent of the "Visual". In Daney's thinking, *"all form is a face looking at me"*, because it is summoning me to dialogue with it. Form is a dynamic that is included both, or turn by turn, in time and space. Form can only come about from a meeting between two levels of reality. For homogeneity does not produce images: it produces the visual, otherwise put, "looped information".

1. Jean-François Lyotard: *"The post modern explained to children"*, London, Turnaround, 1992.
2. Michel de Certeau: *Manières de faire*, Editions Idées-Gallimard.
3. Louis Althusser: *Ecrits philosophiques et politiques*, Editions Stock-IMEC, 1995, p. 557.
4. Michel Maffesoli: *La contemplation du monde*, Editions Grasset, 1993.
5. Hubert Damisch: *Fenêtre jaune cadmium*, Editions du Seuil.
6. Thierry de Duve: *Essais datés*. Editions de La Différence, 1987.
7. Emmanuel Lévinas: *Ethique et infini*, Poche-Biblio, p. 93.
8. Serge Daney: *Persévérance*, Editions P.O.L., 1992, p. 38.
9. Tzvetan Todorov: *La Vie commune*, Editions du Seuil, 1994.

Art of the 1990s

Participation and transitivity

A metal gondola encloses a gas ring that is lit, keeping a large bowl of water on the boil. Camping gears is scattered around the gondola in no particular order. Stacked against the wall are cardboard boxes, most of them open, containing dehydrated Chinese soups which visitors are free to add the boiling water to and eat.
This piece, by Rirkrit Tiravanija, produced for the *Aperto* 93 at the Venice Biennial, remains around the edge of any definition: is it a sculpture? an installation? a performance? an example of social activism? In the last few years, pieces such as this have increased considerably. In international exhibitions we have seen a growing number of stands offering a range of services, works proposing a precise contract to viewers, and more or less tangible models of sociability. Spectator "participation", theorised by Fluxus happenings and performances, has become a constant feature of artistic practice. As for the space of reflection opened up by Marcel Duchamp's "art coefficient", attempting to create precise boundaries for the receiver's field of activity in the artwork, this is nowadays being resolved in a culture of interactivity which posits the transitivity of the cultural object as a fait accompli. As such, these factors merely ratify a development that goes way beyond the mere realm of art. The share of interactivity grows in volume within the set of communication

vehicles. On the other hand, the emergence of new technologies, like the Internet and multimedia systems, points to a collective desire to create new areas of conviviality and introduce new types of transaction with regard to the cultural object. The "society of the 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...

Transitivity is as old as the hills. It is a tangible property of the artwork. Without it, the work is nothing other than a dead object, crushed by contemplation. Delacroix wrote in his diary that a successful picture temporarily "condensed" an emotion that it was the duty of the beholder's eye to bring to life and develop. This idea of transitivity introduces into the aesthetic arena that formal disorder which is inherent to dialogue. It denies the existence of any specific "place of art", in favour of a forever unfinished discursiveness, and a never recaptured desire for dissemination. It is against this closed conception of artistic practice, incidentally, that Jean-Luc Godard rebelled against, when he explained that *it takes two to make an image*. This proposition may well seem to borrow Duchamp's, putting forward the notion that *it's the beholder who make pictures*, but it actually takes things a step further by postulating dialogue as the actual origin of the image-making process. At the outset of this, negotiations have to be undertaken, and the Other presupposed... Any artwork might thus be defined as a relational object, like the geometric place of a negotiation with countless correspondents and recipients. It seems possible, in our view, to describe the specific nature of present-day art with the help of the concept of creating relations outside the field of art (in contrast to relations inside it, offering it its socio-economic underlay): relations between individuals and groups, between the artist and the world, and, by way of transitivity, between the beholder and the world. Pierre Bourdieu regards the art world as a *"space of objective relations between positions"*, in other words, a microcosm defined by power plays and struggles whereby producers strive to "preserve or transform it"[1]. Like any other social arena, the art world is essentially relational, insofar as it presents a *"system of differential positions"* through which it can be read. There are many ways of stating this "relational" reading. As part of their networking works, the Ramo Nash Club (Devautour collection artists) thus suggests that *"art is an extremely co-operative system. The dense network of interconnections between members means that everything that happens in it will possibly be a function of all members"*. Which gives them a chance to assert that *"it's art that makes art, not artists"*. These latter are thus mere unwitting instruments in the service of laws that exceed them, like Napoleon or Alexander the Great in Tolstoy's Theory of History... I don't go along with this cyber-deterministic position, for if the inner structure of the art world actually outlines a limited set of "Possible", this structure relies on a second order of external relations, producing and legitimising the order of internal relations. In a word, the "Art" network is porous, and it is the relations of this network with all the areas of production that determines its development. It would be possible, furthermore, to write a history of art that is the history of this production of relations with the world, by naïvely raising the issue of the nature of the external relations "invented" by artworks. To give a broad historical picture, let us say that artworks were first situated in a transcendent world, within which art aimed at introducing ways of communicating with the deity. It acted as an interface between human society and the invisible forces governing its movements, alongside a nature that represented the model order. An understanding of this order made it possible to draw closer to divine designs. Art gradually abandoned this goal, and explored the relations existing between Man and the world. This new, relational, dialectical order developed from the Renaissance on, a period that attached great importance to the physical situation of the human being in his world, even if this world was still ruled by the divine figure, with the help of new visual tools such as Alberti's perspective, anatomical realism, and Leonardo da Vinci's "Sfumato". This artwork's purpose was not

radically challenged until the arrival of Cubism which attempted to analyse our visual links with the world by way of the most nondescript everyday objects and features (the corner of a table, pipes and guitars), based on a mental realism that reinstated the moving mechanisms of our acquaintance with the object.

The relational arena opened up by the Italian Renaissance was thus gradually applied to more and more limited objects. The question: "What is our relationship to the physical world?" had a bearing, first and foremost, on the entirety of the real, then on limited parts of this same reality. Needless to say, this is in no way a linear progression. One finds painters like Seurat, the rigorous analyst of our ocular ways of perception, living at the same time as someone like Odilon Redon, who tried to see through our relations with the invisible. Essentially, though, the history of art can be read like the history of successive external relational fields, propped up by practices determined by the internal development of these fields. It is the history of the production of relations with the world, as publicised by a class of objects and specific practices.

Today, this history seems to have taken a new turn. After the area of relations between Humankind and deity, and then between Humankind and the object, artistic practice is now focused upon the sphere of inter-human relations, as illustrated by artistic activities that have been in progress since the early 1990s. So the artist sets his sights more and more clearly on the relations that his work will create among his public, and on the invention of models of sociability. This specific production determines not only an ideological and practical arena, but new formal fields as well. By this, I mean that over and above the relational character intrinsic to the artwork, the figures of reference of the sphere of human relations have now become fully-fledged artistic "forms". 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 thus represent, today, aesthetic objects likely to be looked at as such,

with pictures and sculptures regarded here merely as specific cases of a production of forms with something other than a simple aesthetic consumption in mind.

Typology

Connections and meetings

Pictures and sculptures are characterised, by their symbolic availability. Beyond obvious material impossibilities (museum closing times, geographical remoteness), an artwork can be see at any time. It is there before our eyes, offered to the curiosity of a theoretically universal public. Now, contemporary art is often marked by non-availability, by being viewable only at a specific time. The example of performance is the most classic of all. Once the performance is over, all that remains is documentation that should not be confused with the work itself. This type of activity presupposes a contract with the viewer, an "arrangement" whose clauses have tended to become diversified since the 1960s. The artwork is thus no longer presented to be consumed within a "monumental" time frame and open for a universal public; rather, it elapses within a factual time, for an audience *summoned by* the artist. In a nutshell, the work prompts meetings and invites appointments, managing its own temporal structure. Meetings with a public are not necessarily involved. Marcel Duchamp, for example, invented his "Rendez-vous d'art", by arbitrarily ordaining that, at a certain time of the day, the first object within his reach would be transformed into a readymade. Others have summoned the public to observe a specific phenomenon, the way Robert Barry announced that at "*a certain moment during the morning of the 5th of March 1969, half a cubic metre of helium was released into the atmosphere*" by him. The spectator is thus prompted to move in order to observe a work, which only exists as an artwork by virtue of this observation. In January 1970, Christian Boltanski sent a few acquaintances an SOS letter that

was sufficiently vague in its content to be a standard letter, like On Kawara's telegrams informing their addressees, likewise from 1970 onwards, that he was "still alive". Today, the form of the visiting card (used by Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Liam Gillick and Jeremy Deller) and the address book (some of Karen Kilimnik's drawings), the growing importance of the opening as part of the exhibition programme (Parreno, Joseph, Tiravanija, Huyghe), together with the originality endeavour made in the production of invitations (hanfover from mail-art), illustrate the importance of this "rendez-vous" represented by the artistic arena, and which forms its relational dimension.

Conviviality and encounters
A work may operate like a relational device containing a certain degree of randomness, or a machine provoking and managing individual and group encounters. To mention just a few examples from the past two decades, this applies to Braco Dimitrijevic's *Casual Passer-by* series, which exaggeratedly celebrate the name and face of an anonymous passer-by on an advertisement-sized poster, or alongside the bust of a celebrity. In the early 1970s, Stephen Willats painstakingly mapped the relationships existing between the inhabitants of an apartment block. And Sophie Calle's work consists largely in describing her meetings with strangers. Whether she is following a passer-by, rummaging through hotel rooms after being employed as a chambermaid, or asking blind people what their definition of beauty is, she formalises, after the fact, a biographical experience which leads her to "collaborate" with the people she meets. Let us further mention, the On Kawara's *I met* series, the *Food* restaurant opened in 1971 by Gordon Matta-Clark, the dinners organized by Daniel Spoerri, and the ludic shop called *La cédille qui sourit* [*The Smiling Cedilla*] opened by George Brecht and Robert Filliou in Villefranche. The constitution of convivial relations has been an historical constant since the 1960s. The generation of the 1990s took up this set of issues, though it had been relieved of the matter of the definition of art, so pivotal in the 1960s and 1970s. The

issue no longer resides in broadening the boundaries of art[2], but in experiencing art's capacities of resistance within the overall social arena. Based on one and the same family of activities, two radically different set of problems emerge: yesterday, the stress laid on relations inside the art world, within a modernist culture attaching great importance to the "new" and calling for linguistic subversion; today, the emphasis put on external relations as part of an eclectic culture where the artwork stands up to the mill of the "Society of the Spectacle". Social utopias and revolutionary hopes have given way to everyday micro-utopias and imitative strategies, any stance that is "directly" critical of society is futile, if based on the illusion of a marginality that is nowadays impossible, not to say regressive. Almost thirty years ago, Félix Guattari was advocating those hands-on strategies that underpin present-day artistic practices: "*Just as I think it is illusory to aim at a step-by-step transformation of society, so I think that microscopic attempts, of the community and neighbourhood committee type, the organisation of day-nurseries in the faculty, and the like, play an absolutely crucial role[3]*".
Traditional critical philosophy (the Frankfurt school, in particular) now only fuels art in the form of archaic folklore, a magnificent but ineffectual toy. The subversive and critical function of contemporary art is now achieved in the invention of individual and collective vanishing lines, in those temporary and nomadic constructions whereby the artist models and disseminates disconcerting situations. Whence the present-day craze for revisited areas of conviviality, crucibles where heterogeneous forms of sociability are worked out. For her show at the CCC in Tours, Angela Bulloch set up a café. When a certain number of visitors sat down on the seats, these latter set off the broadcast of a piece of music by Kraftwerk (1993)… For the *Restaurant* exhibition in Paris, in October 1993, Georgina Starr described the anxiety she felt about "having supper on her own", and wrote a text that was handed out to lone diners in the restaurant. Ben Kinmont, for his part, proposed randomly selected people that he would do their washing-up, and kept an information network

around his works. On several occasions, Lincoln Tobier has set up a radio station in art galleries, and invited the public to a discussion then broadcast over the airwaves.

Philippe Parreno has been particularly inspired by the notion of party. His exhibition project at Le Consortium in Dijon (January 1995) consisted in "*occupying two hours of time rather than square metres of space*", which involved organising a party where all the ingredients ended up producing relational forms –clusters of individuals around art objects in situation... Rirkrit Tiravanija, on the other hand, has explored the socio-professional aspect of conviviality, by including in the *Surfaces de réparation* show (Dijon, 1994) a relaxation area intended for the artists in the exhibition, equipped in particular with a table football game and a full fridge... To wind up these convivial situations being developed as part of a "friendship" culture, let us mention the bar created by Heimo Zobernig for the exhibition *Unité,* and Franz West's *Passtücke.* But other artists are suddenly emerging in the relational fabric in a more aggressive way. Douglas Gordon's work, for example, explores the "wild" dimension of this interactivity, by acting parasitically and paradoxically in the social space. So he phoned the customers in a café, and sent multiple "instructions" to selected people. The best example of untimely communication upsetting communication networks is probably Angus Fairhurst's piece, for which, with the help of airwave-pirating equipment, he linked two art galleries telephonically together. Each person at the other end of the line thought it was the other person who had called, so their exchanges would end up in an improbable misunderstanding... As creations and explorations of relational schemes, these works form relational microterritories displayed in the depth of the contemporary "socius": experiences publicised by surface-objects (Liam Gillick's boards, Pierre Huyghe's posters made in the street, and Eric Duyckaerts' video-lectures), or else given over to immediate experience (Andrea Fraser's exhibition tours).

Collaborations and contracts
Those artists proposing as artworks:
a/ moments of sociability
b/ objects producing sociability,
also sometimes use a relational context defined in advance so as to extract production principles from it. The exploration of relations existing between, for instance, the artist and his/her gallery owner may determine forms and a project. Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, whose work deals with the relations which link lived life with its media, images, spaces and objects, has thus devoted several exhibitions to the biographies of her gallery owners. *Bienvenue à ce que vous croyez voir (welcome to What You Think You're Seeing)* (1988) included photographic documentation about Gabrielle Maubrie, and *The Daughter of a Taoist* (1992) used a set inspired by intimism to mix Esther Schipper's childhood memories with objects formally organised according to their evocative potential and their colour range (here, a predominant red). Gonzalez-Foerster thus explores the unspoken contract that binds the gallery owner to "his/her" artist, the former being an integral part of the other's personal history, and vice versa. It goes without saying that those fragmented biographies, where the main factors are provided in the form of "hints" and "clues" by the person commissioning the work, conjure up the portrait tradition, when the commission formed the social bond at the root of artistic representation. Maurizio Cattelan has also worked directly on the physical person of his gallery owners: by designing a phallic rabbit costume for Emmanuel Perrotin, which he had to wear throughout the exhibition, and by earmarking clothes for Stefano Basilico creating the illusion that he was carrying gallery owner Ileana Sonnabend on his shoulders... In a more circuitous way, Sam Samore asks gallery owners to take photographs which he then selects and reframe. But this artist/curator pairing, which is an intrinsic part of the institution, is just the literal aspect of inter-human relations likely to define an artistic production. Artists take things further, by working with spectacle figures; whence Dominique

Gonzalez-Foerster's work with the actress Maria de Medeiros (1990); the series of public activities organised by Philippe Parreno for the imitator Yves Lecoq, through which it was his intent to refashion, from within, the image of a television person (*Un homme public*, Marseille, Dijon, Ghent, 1994-1995).

Noritoshi Hirakawa, for his part, produces forms based on set up meetings. So for his show at the Pierre Huber Gallery in Geneva (1994) he published a small ad to recruit a girl who would agree to travel with him in Greece, a visit that would be the material for the show. The images he exhibits are always the outcome of a specific contract drawn up with his model, who is not necessarily visible in the photos. In other instances, Hirakawa uses a particular corporate body, as when he asked several fortune-tellers to predict his future; He records their predictions that could then be listened to with a walkman, alongside photos and slides conjuring up the world of clairvoyance. For a series titled *Wedding Piece* (1992), Alix Lambert investigated the contractual bonds of marriage: in six months, she got married to four different people, divorcing them all in record time. In this way, Lambert put herself inside the "adult role-playing" represented by the institution of marriage, which is a factory where human relations are reified. She exhibits objects produced by this contractual world- certificates, official photos and other souvenirs... The artist here becomes involved in form-producing worlds (visit to the fortune- teller, officialization of a liaison, etc.) which pre-exist him or her, material that is available for anyone to use. Some artistic events, with *Unité* still the best example (Firminy, June 1993), enabled artists to work in a formless relational model, as the one offered by the residents of a large housing complex. Several of those taking part worked directly on modifying and objectivizing social relations, one such being the Premiata Ditta group, which systematically questioned the inhabitants of the building where the exhibition was being held, so as to compile statistics. Then there is Fareed Armaly, whose installation based on sound documents included interviews with tenants, which could be listened to with headphones. Clegg & Guttman, for their part,

presented in the middle of their work a kind of bookshelf unit, the shape of which suggested the architecture of Le Corbusier, and was designed to hold on tapes each inhabitant's favourite pieces of music. The cultural customs of the residents were thus objectivized by an architectonic structure, and grouped on tape, floor by floor, thus forming compilations that could be consulted by all and sundry throughout the exhibition... As a form fuelled and produced by collective interaction, Clegg & Guttman's *Record lending library*, whose principle was once more used for the *Backstage* show at the Hamburg Kunstverein in that same year, embodies in its own right this contractual system for the contemporary artwork.

Professional relation: clienteles
As we have seen, these various ways of exploring social bonds have to do with already existing types of relations, which the artist fits into, so that he/she can take forms from them. Other practices are aimed at recreating socio-professional models and applying their production methods. Here, the artist works in the real field of the production of goods and services, and aims to set up a certain ambiguity, within the space of his activity, between the utilitarian function of the objects he is presenting, and their aesthetic function. It is this wavering between contemplation and use that I have tried to identify by the term: operative realism[4], with artists as diverse as Peter Fend, Mark Dion, Dan Peterman and Niek Van de Steeg in mind, as well as more or less parody-oriented "businesses" like Ingold Airlines and Premiata Ditta. (The same term might be used for pioneers such as Panamarenko and the John Latham's "Artist's Placement Group"). What these artists have in common is the modelling of a professional activity, with the relational world issuing therefrom, as a device of artistic production. These make-believe phenomena which imitate the general economy, as is the case with Ingold Airlines, Servaas Inc., and Mark Kostabi's "studio", are limited to a construction of the replicas of an airline company, a fishery and a production workshop, but without learning any

ideological and practical lessons from doing so, and thus being restricted to a parody-like dimension of art. The example of the *Les ready-mades appartiennent à tout le monde (Ready-mades Belong to Everyone)* agency, headed by the late Philippe Thomas, is a bit different. He did not have time to proceed in a credible way to a second stage, because his signature casting project ran somewhat out of steam after the *Feux Pales (Pale Fires)* (1990) exhibition at the Capc in Bordeaux. But Philippe Thomas' system, in which the pieces produced are signed by their purchaser, shed light on the cloudy relational economics that underpin the relations between artist and collector. A more discreet narcissism lies at the root of the pieces shown by Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster at the ARC in Paris and the Capc in Bordeaux[5]. These were Biographical Offices where, with no more than an appointment, the visitor came to divulge the salient facts of his life, with a view to a biography that would then be formalised by the artist.

Through little services rendered, the artists fill in the cracks in the social bond. Form thus really becomes the "face looking at me". This is Christine Hill's modest aim, when she becomes involved in the most menial of tasks (giving massages, shining shoes, working at a supermarket check-out, organising group meetings etc.), driven by the anxiety caused by the feeling of uselessness. So through little gestures art is like an angelic programme, a set of tasks carried out beside or beneath the real economic system, so as to patiently re-stitch the relational fabric. Carsten Höller, for his part, applies his high-level scientific training to the invention of situations and objects which involve human behaviour: inventing a drug that releases a feeling of love, Baroque sets, and para-scientific experiments. Others, like Henry Bond and Liam Gillick as part of the *Documents* projects embarked upon in 1990, adjust their function to a precise context. By becoming acquainted with information just as it "came through" on press agency teleprinters, Bond and Gillick would hasten to the places where the thing was happening at the same time as their "colleagues", and bring back an image that was completely out of synch when compared with the usual criteria of the profession. In any event, Bond and Gillick strictly applied the production methods of the mainstream press, just as Peter Fend, with his OECD company, and Niek Van de Steeg put themselves in the architect's working conditions. By conducting themselves inside the art world on the basis of the parameters of "worlds" that are heterogeneous to it, these artists here introduce relational worlds governed by concepts of clientele, order or commission, and project. When Fabrice Hybert exhibited at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris in February 1995, all the industrial products actually or metaphorically contained in his work, as directly dispatched by their manufacturers and earmarked for sale to the public through his company "UR" (Unlimited responsibility), he puts the beholder in an awkward position. This project, which is as removed from Guillaume Bijl's illusionism as from an imitative reproduction of mercantile trade, focuses on the desiring dimension of the economy. Through his import-export activity dealing with seating bound for North Africa, and the transformation of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris into a supermarket, Hybert defines art as a social function among others, a permanent "digestion of data", the purpose of which is to rediscover the "initial desires that presided over the manufacture of objects".

How to occupy a gallery

The exchanges that take place between people, in the gallery or museum space, turn out to be as likely to act as the raw matter for an artistic work. The opening is often an intrinsic part of the exhibition set-up, and the model of an ideal public circulation: a prototype of this being Yves Klein's *L'exposition du vide*, in April 1958. From the presence of Republican guards at the entrance to the Iris Clert Gallery to the blue cocktail offered to visitors, Klein tried to control every aspect of the routine opening protocol, by giving each one a poetic function defining its object: the void. Thus, to mention a work still having repercussions, the work of Julia Scher (*Security by Julia*) consists in placing surveillance apparatus

in exhibition venues. It is the human flow of visitors, and its possible regulation, which thus becomes the raw material and the subject of the piece. Before long, it is the entire exhibition process that is "occupied" by the artist.

In 1962, Ben lived and slept in the One Gallery in London for a fortnight, with just a few essential props. In Nice, in August 1990, Pierre Joseph, Philippe Parreno and Philippe Perrin also "lived in" the Air de Paris Gallery, literally and figuratively, with their show *Les Ateliers du Paradise*. It might be hastily concluded that this was a remake of Ben's performance, but the two projects refer to two radically different relational worlds, which are as different in terms of their ideological and aesthetic foundation as their respective period can be. When Ben lived in the gallery, it was his intent to signify that the arena of art was expanding, and even included the artist's sleep and breakfasts. On the other hand, when Joseph, Parreno and Perrin occupied the gallery, it was to turn it into a production workshop, a "photogenic space" jointly managed by the viewer, in accordance with very precise rules of play. At the opening of *Les Ateliers du Paradise*, where everyone was rigged out in a personalised T-shirt ("Fear", "Gothic", etc.), the relations that were struck up among visitors turned into a while-you-wait script, written live by the film-maker Marion Vernoux on the gallery computer. The interplay of inter-human relations was thus materialised in compliance with the principles of an interactive video game, a "real time film" experienced and produced by the three artists. A lot of outside people thus helped to build a space of relations, not only other artist but psychoanalysts, coaches, friends… This type of "real time" work, which tends to blur creation and exhibition, was taken up by the exhibition *Work, Work in Progress. Work* at the Andrea Rosen Gallery (1992), with Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Matthew McCaslin and Liz Larner, and then by *This is the show and the show is many things*, which was held in Ghent in October 1994, before finding a more theoretical form with the *Traffic* exhibition that I curated. In both instances, each artist was at leisure to do what he/she wanted

throughout the exhibition, to alter the piece, replace it, or propose performances and events. With each modification, as the general setting evolved, the exhibition played the part of a flexible matter, "informed" by the work of the artist. The visitor here had a crucial place, because his interaction with the works helped to define the exhibition's structure. He was faced with devices requiring him to make a decision. In Gonzalez-Torres' *Stacks* and piles of sweets, for example, the visitor was authorised to take away something from the piece (a sweet, a sheet of paper), but it would purely and simply disappear if every visitor exercised this right: the artist thus appealed to the visitor's sense of responsibility, and the visitor had to understand that his gesture was contributing to the break-up of the work. What position should be adopted when looking at a work that hands out its component parts while trying to hang on to its structure? The same ambiguity awaited the viewer of his *Go-go Dancer* (1991), a young man wearing a g-string on a minimal plinth, or the person looking at *personnages vivants à réactiver*, which Pierre Joseph accommodates in the exhibitions at the opening. Looking at *The female beggar* brandishing her rattle (*No man's time*, Villa Arson, Nice, 1991), it is impossible not to avert the eye, enmeshed in its aesthetic designs, which reifies, no precautions taken, a human being by assimilating it to the artworks surrounding it. Vanessa Beecroft juggles with a similar chord, but keeps the beholder at a distance. At her first one-woman show, with Esther Schipper in Cologne, November 1994, the artist took photos, among a dozen girls all wearing identical thin polo-neck jumpers and panties, and all in blonde wigs, while a barrier preventing entrance to the gallery enabled two or three visitors at a time to check out the scene, from a distance. Strange groups of people, under the curious gaze of a voyeur viewer: Pierre Joseph characters coming from a fantastic popular imaginary, two twin sisters exhibited beneath two pictures by Damien Hirst (Art Cologne, 1992), a stripper performing her show (Dike Blair), a walker walking on a moving walkway, in a truck with see-through sides following the random itinerary of a Parisian

(Pierre Huyghe, 1993), a stallholder playing a barrel-organ with a monkey on a lead (Meyer Vaisman, Jablonka Gallery, 1990), rats fed on "Bel Paese" cheese by Maurizio Cattelan, poultry rendered inebriated by Carsten Höller with the help of bits of bread soaked in whisky (collective video, *Unplugged*, 1993), butterflies attracted by glue-steeped monochrome canvases (Damien Hirst, *In and out of Love*, 1992), animals and human beings bumping into each other in galleries acting as test-tubes for experiments to do with individual and social behaviour. When Joseph Beuys spent a few days locked with a coyote (*I like America and America likes me*), he gave himself over to a demonstration of his powers, pointing to a possible reconciliation between man and the "wild" world. On the other hand, as far as most of the above-mentioned pieces are concerned, their author has no preordained idea about what would happen: art is made in the gallery, the same way that Tristan Tzara thought that "thought is made in the mouth".

1. Pierre Bourdieu, *Raisons pratiques*, Editions du Seuil, p. 68.
2. *Cf.* writings of Lucy Lippard such as *Dematerialization of the artwork*, and Rosalind Krauss, *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, etc.
3. Félix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution*, Penguin, 1984.
4. On this concept, we should mention two writings: "*Qu'est-ce que le réalisme opératif*", in the catalogue for *Il faut construire l'Hacienda*, CCC Tours, January 1992. "Produire des rapports au monde", in the catalogue for *Aperto*, Venice Biennial, 1993.
5. Exhibition *L'Hiver de l'amour*, and *Traffic*.

Space-time exchange factors

Artworks and exchanges
Because art is made of the same material as the social exchanges, it has a special place in the collective production process. A work of art has a quality that sets it apart from other things produced by human activities. This quality is its (relative) social transparency. If a work of art is successful, it will invariably set its sights beyond its mere presence in space: it will be open to dialogue, discussion, and that form of inter-human negotiation that Marcel Duchamp called "the coefficient of art", which is a temporal process, being played out here and now. This negotiation is undertaken in a spirit of "transparency" which hallmarks it as a product of human labour. The work of art actually shows (or suggests) not only its manufacturing and production process, its position within the set of exchanges, and the place, or function, it allocates to the beholder, but also the creative behaviour of the artist (otherwise put, the sequence of postures and gestures which make up his/her work, and which each individual work passes on like a sample or marker). So every canvas produced by Jackson Pollock so closely links the flow of paint to an artist's behaviour, that the latter seems to be the image of the former, like its "necessary product", as Hubert Damisch[1] has written. At the beginning of art we find the behaviour adopted by the artist, that set of moods and acts whereby the work acquires its relevance in the present. The "transparency" of the artwork comes about from the fact that the gestures forming and informing it are freely chosen or

We might raise the objection that the artist plays here on facile emotions, that nothing is more ordinary, according to Boltanski, than these aesthetics which swiftly become emotional blackmail. But what matter is what is done with this type of emotion: what they are steered towards, how the artist organises them among themselves, and to what intent.

1. Cornélius Castoriadis, *La montée de l'insignifiance*, Editions du Seuil, 1996.
2. Guggenheim Museum catalogue,1995, p. 192.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
4. Michael Fried, "Art & Objecthood" in Gregory Battock, *Minimal Art: a Critical Anthology*, Dutton, NY, p. 127.
5. On this subject, see the works of Michel Maffesoli, in particular *La Contemplation du monde*, Editions Grasset, 1993.
6. Dave Hickey, *The invisible dragon. Four essays on beauty*, Art Issues Press, Los Angeles, 1995, p. 11.
7. Dave Hickey, op. cit, p. 17.

Screen Relations

Today's art and its technological models

The modernist theory of art postulated that art and technical means were contemporary bedfellows. It believed in indissoluble bonds existing between the social order and the aesthetic order. Nowadays, we can come across in a measured and circumspect way with regard to the nature of these bonds: by noting, for example, that technology and artistic practices do not always go hand-in-hand, and that this discrepancy does no harm to either. On the one hand, the world has "broadened" under our very eyes. You would have to be unbelievably ethnocentric not to see that technological progress is far from being universal, and that the south of the planet, the so-called "developing world", does not enjoy the same reality as Silicon Valley as far as technical goods are concerned, even though both are part of an ever-narrowing world. On the other hand, our optimism with regard to the liberating power of technology has been considerably blurred. We now know that computer science, image technology and atomic energy represent threats and tools of subjugation as much as improvements to daily life. So the relationships between art and technology are much more complicated than they were in the 1960s. Let us recall that, in its day, photography did not transform the relationships between the artist and his *material*. Only the ideological conditions of pictorial

practice were affected, as can be seen with impressionism. Can we create a parallel between the emergence of photography and the present-day spread of screens in contemporary exhibitions? For our age is nothing if not the age of the screen.

It is odd, moreover, that one and the same word is thus used to describe both a surface that arrests light (in the cinema) and an interface on which information is written. This collusion of meanings points to the fact that epistemological upheavals (concerning new perceptual structures), stemming from the appearance of technologies as different as film, computers, and video, are brought together around a form (the screen, the terminal) which encapsulates their various properties and potentials. By failing to conceive of this compatibility at work within our mental apparatus to attain new ways of seeing, we are doomed to a mechanistic analysis of recent art history.

Art and Goods

The Law of Relocation

Art historians are prey to two major stumbling blocks. The first is idealism, which involves seeing art as an independent realm governed exclusively by its own laws. Regarding it, in other words, to use Althusser's expression, like a train whose provenance, destination and stops are known in advance. The second and opposite one involves a mechanistic conception of history which systematically deduces from any new technological apparatus a certain number of changes in ways of thinking. It is easy to see how the relationship between art and technology is considerably less systematic. The appearance of a major invention, photography, for example, clearly alters the relationship between artists and the world, on the one hand, and methods of representation as a whole, on the other. Some things now turn out to be of no use, but others finally become possible. In the case of photography, it is the function of

realistic representation which turns out to be more and more obsolete, whereas new viewing angles become legitimised (Degas' frames) and the operational method of the camera-the rendering of the real through the impact of light-grounds the pictorial practice of the impressionist. Subsequently, modern painting would focus its issues on what it contains in terms of scaling things down to mechanical recording (matter, and gesture, which would give rise to abstract art). Then, in a third phase, artists would appropriate photography as an image-producing technique. These three attitudes which, where photography is concerned, followed on one from the other in time, may nowadays occur either simultaneously or alternately, helped by a speeding-up of exchanges. Every technical innovation that has taken place since the Second World War has thus caused a wide range of reactions among artists, from the adoption of predominant production methods (the "mec-art" of the sixties), to the preservation, come what may, of the pictorial tradition (the "purist" formalism championed by Clement Greenberg). The most fruitful thinking, however, came from artists who, far from giving up on their critical consciousness, worked on the basis of the possibilities offered by new tools, but without representing them as *techniques*. Degas and Monet thus produced a *photographic way of thinking* that went well beyond the shots of their contemporaries. We are a long way from the idea of asserting any kind of superiority of painting over the other *media*. On the other hand, we can say that art creates an awareness about production methods and human relationships produced by the technologies of its day, and that by shifting these, it makes them more visible, enabling us to see them right down to the consequences they have on day-to-day life. Technology is only of interest to artists in so far as it puts effects into perspective, rather than putting up with it as an ideological instrument.

This is what we might call the *Law of Relocation*. Art only exercises its critical duty with regard to technology from the moment when it shifts its challenges. So the main effects of the computer revolution are visible today among artists who do not use computers. On the

other hand, those who produce so-called "computer graphic" images, by manipulating synthetic fractals and images, usually fall into the trap of illustration. At best, their work is just symptom or gadget, or, worse still, the representation of a symbolic alienation from the computer medium, and the representation of their own alienation from methods dictated by production. So the function of *representation* is played out in behavioural patterns. These days, it is no longer a question of depicting from without the conditions of production, but of introducing the gestural, and deciphering the social relations brought on by them. When Alighiero Boetti gets 500 weavers in Peshawar, Pakistan, working for him, he represents the work process of multinational companies much more effectively than if he merely portrayed them and described how they work. The art/technology relationship is thus particularly suited to this *operational realism* which underpins many contemporary practices, definable as the artwork wavering between its traditional function as an object of contemplation, and its more or less virtual inclusion in the socio-economic arena[1]. At least this type of practice shows up the fundamental paradox that binds art and technology together: if technology can by definition be improved, the work of art cannot. The whole difficulty encountered by artists keen to embrace the state of technology, if you'll forgive the banality of this assertion, consists in manufacturing something that will last, based on general, life-producing conditions which are essentially changeable. This is the challenge of modernity: "Taking the eternal from the transitory", yes, but also, and above all, inventing a coherent and fair *work conduct* in relation to the production methods of their time.

Technology as an ideological model
(from trace to programme)

As a producer of goods, technology expresses the state of production-oriented relationships. Photography used to tally with a given stage of development in the western economy (hallmarked by colonial expansion and the streamlining of the work process), a

stage which, in a way, called for its invention. Population control (the introduction of ID cards, and anthropometric record cards), the management of overseas wealth (ethno-photography), the need to remote-control industrial tools and find out about potential mining sites, all endowed the camera with a crucial role in the industrialisation process. In relation to this phenomenon, art's function consists in appropriating perceptual and behavioural habits brought on by the technical-industrial complex to turn them into *life possibilities*, to borrow Nietzsche's term. Otherwise put, reversing the authority of technology in order to make ways of thinking, living and seeing creative. The technology reigning over the culture of our day and age is, needless to say, computing, which we might split into two branches. On the one hand, the computer itself and the changes it has introduced and still is introducing into our way of perceiving and processing data. On the other hand, the rapid progress of user-friendly technologies, from France's "Minitel" system [originally a computerised telephone directory] to the Internet, by way of touch screens and interactive video games. The first, which affects Man's relationship with the images he produces, is making an amazing contribution to the way mentalities and attitudes are changing. With computer graphics, it is actually now possible to produce images which are the outcome of calculation, and no longer of human gestures. All the images we are acquainted with are the result of a physical action, from the hand drawing signs to wielding a camera. The existence of synthetic images, for their part, has no need of any analogous linkage to the subject. For "*the photo is the worked recording of a physical impact*", whereas "*the digital image, for its part, results not from the movement of a body, but from a calculation*[2]". The visible image no longer represents the trace of anything, unless it be that of a sequence of numbers, and its form is no longer the "terminal" of a human presence. Images "*now function on their own*" (Serge Daney), like Joe Dante's *Gremlins* which reproduced themselves by pure visual contamination. The contemporary image is typified

precisely by its generative power; it is no longer a trace (retroactive), but a programme (active). Furthermore, it is this property of the digital image that informs contemporary art most powerfully. In the midst of sixties' avant-garde art, the work came across less as an independent reality than as a programme to be carried out, a model to be reproduced (for example, the games invented by Brecht and Filliou), an encouragement to be a creative oneself (Beuys) or to do something (Franz Erhard Walter). In the nineties' art, while interactive technologies developed at an exponential rate, artists were exploring the arcane mysteries of sociability and interaction. The theoretical and practical horizon of that decade's art was largely grounded in the realm of inter-human relations. So exhibitions of the work of Rirkrit Tiravanija, Philippe Parreno, Carsten Höller, Henry Bond, Douglas Gordon, and Pierre Huyghe all construct models of sociability suitable for producing human relations, the same way an architecture literally "produces" the itineraries of those residing in it. This does not however involve works about "social sculpture" the way Beuys understood it. If these artists do indeed extend the idea of *avant-garde* thrown out with the bath water of modernity (we should stress this point, even if a term with fewer connotations should be found), they are not naïve or cynical enough "to go about things as if" the radical and universalist utopia were still on the agenda. In their respect, we might talk in terms of micro-utopias, and interstices opened up in the social corpus.

These interstices work like relational programmes: world economies where there is a reversal in the relationships between work and leisure (Parreno's exhibition *Made on the 1st of May*, Cologne, May 1995), where everyone had a chance to come into contact with everybody else (Douglas Gordon), where people once again learnt what conviviality and sharing mean (Tiravanija's itinerant cafeterias), where professional relationships are treated like a festive celebration (the *Hôtel occidental* video by Henry Bond, 1993), where people are in permanent contact with the image

of their work (Huyghe). The work thus proposes a functional model and not a maquette; in other words, the notion of dimension does not come into the picture, exactly as in the digital image whose proportions may vary with the size of the screen, which-unlike the frame-does not enclose works in a preordained format, but renders virtualities material in x dimensions. Projects embarked upon by today's artists have the same ambivalence as the techniques from which they are indirectly inspired. As writings in and with the real and cinematic works, they do not claim to be reality, notwithstanding. On the other hand, they make up programmes, like digital images, but without guaranteeing the applicable character of these latter, any more than the possible transcoding into formats other than the one for which they have been designed. Otherwise put, *the influence of technology on the art that is its contemporary is wielded within limits circumscribed by this latter between the real and the imaginary.*

The computer and the camera delimit production possibilities, which themselves depend on general conditions of social production, and tangible relationships existing between people. Based on this state of affairs, artists invent ways of living, or else create an awareness about a moment M in the assembly line of social behavioural patterns, making it possible to imagine a further state of our civilisation.

The camera and the exhibition

The exhibition-set

As we can see, present-day art is being developed in-depth by ways of seeing and thinking which usher in computing, on the one hand, and the video camera on the other. To get a better grasp of the degree of relationship between this paired film/programme factor and contemporary art, we must come back to the evolution of the status of the art exhibition in relation to the objects it contains. Our

hypothesis is that *the exhibition has become the basic unit* from which it is possible to conceive of relationships between art and ideology ushered in by technologies, to the detriment of the individual work. It is the cinematographic model, not as subject but as plan of action, which permitted the development of the exhibition-form in the sixties. What Marcel Broodthaers has done, for instance, is evidence of this shift from the exhibition-store (assembling noteworthy objects separately) to the exhibition-set (the unitary mise-en-scène of objects). In 1975, Broodthaers presented his green room, the latest version of the Winter Garden shown the previous year, as *"the primer for the idea of DECOR that might be typified by the idea of the object reinstated with a real function, in other words, the object here is no longer itself considered as artwork (see also pink room and blue room)[3]."* This "reinstatement" of the art object to the functional arena, a reversal which enabled Broodthaers to stand up to the "tautology of reification" which the artwork represented for him, brilliantly anticipated the artistic activities of the 1990s, and the ambiguity maintained by this between exhibition value and user value, an ambiguity exemplified by almost all the artists of that generation (from Fabrice Hybert to Mark Dion, and from Felix Gonzalez-Torres to Jason Rhoades). The exhibition *Ozone* (devised in 1988 by Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Bernard Joisten, Pierre Joseph and Philippe Parreno, and put on in 1989 at the APAC in Nevers and at the FRAC Corsica), which considerably opened up crucial working avenues for our period, was thus presented as a "photogenic space", that is, in accordance with a cinematographic model, the space of a virtual darkroom within which viewers evolve like a camera, called upon to frame for themselves their way of looking, and cut out viewing angles and bits of meaning. Over and above the "decor/set" according to Broodthaers, designed to dodge the inevitability of reification by the functionality of the elements making it up, *Ozone* introduced the possibility of an ongoing manipulation of its components, and the adaptation of

these to the life of their possible purchaser. Devised as a "programme" giving rise to forms and situations (a "Bag" thus enabled the collector to put his own baggage together, user-friendly accessories such as seats and documents for consultation were made available to visitors), Ozone worked like an "iconographic field", a "set of information strata" (which likens it to the Broodthaers' model), while at the same time stressing values of conviviality and productivity which tipped the Belgian artist's social criticism in the direction of new horizons: among other things, the horizon of an art based on interactivity and the creation of relationships with the Other. This definition of the exhibition as a "photogenic space" was subsequently emphasised with *How We Gonna Behave* (Joisten, Joseph & Parreno, at the Max Hetzler Gallery, Cologne, 1991), where disposable cameras were placed at the Gallery entrance so that visitors could create their visual catalogues themselves.

In 1990, I tried to define these activities by talking about a "directors' art", turning the exhibition/exposition venue (by playing on the accepted meaning of this term in photography) into a filmless camera, a "still short-movie": *"The work does not (offer) itself as a spatial whole that can be scanned by the eye, but as a time span to be crossed, sequence by sequence, similar to a still short-movie in which the viewer has to evolve by himself[4]."* The fate of the cinema (or computer science), as a technology that can be used in the other arts, thus has nothing to do with the form of the film, contrary to what is maintained by the horde of opportunists who transfer on to film (or computer) lines of thinking hailing from the 19th century. So there is much more film in an Allen Ruppersberg or Cartsen Höller show than in many, perforce, blurred "artist's films", and much more computer graphic thinking in the rhizomes of the Ramo Nash Club and Douglas Gordon's activities than in those cobbled together synthetic images driven by a craftsmanship labelled as the most reactionary of the moment. How does film really inform art? By the way it handles the time

factor, by the "image-movements" (Deleuze) it produces. So, as Philippe Parreno writes, art forms "*a space in which objects, images and exhibitions are split-seconds, scenarios that can be re-enacted* [5]".

Extras

The exhibition may have turned into a set, but who comes to act in it? How do the actors and extras make their way across it, and in the midst of what kind of scenery? One day, somebody ought to write the history of art using the peoples who pass through it, and the symbolic/practical structures which make it possible to accommodate them. What human *flow*, governed by what forms, thus passes into art forms? How does video, the latest variant of visual recording, alter this passage? The classic form of the on-screen presence is that of the *summons*, of the involvement of one or more actors called upon to fill a stage. So those living in Warhol's factory were one after the other press-ganged into standing in front of the camera. A film is usually based on actors, those proletarian workers who rent their image as a work force. "*The studio shot*, wrote Walter Benjamin, *is particular in that it replaces the audience by the camera*[6]", and enables the picture editing process to steal the player's body. With video, the difference between the actor and the passer-by tends to diminish. It represents the same development in relation to the film camera as that announced by the invention of paint in tubes for the impressionist generation. As light and easy-to-handle tools, they make it possible to capture things *out of doors*, and permit an offhandedness with regard to the material filmed-something that was not possible with heavy film equipment. The predominant form of videographic resident is thus *the poll*, that random foray into the crowd that typifies the television era. The camera asks questions, records movements, stays at pavement level. The ordinary humanoid inhabits video art: Henry Bond samples moments of sociability, Pierre Huyghe organises casting sessions, Miltos Manetas holds a discussion around a café table. The camera turns into an instrument for questioning people. Gillian Wearing thus asks passers-by to whistle into a Coca-Cola bottle, then edits these sequences in such a way that they produce a continuous sound-allegory of the opinion poll. In other respects, video plays the same heuristic, exploratory role as the sketch played in the 19th century. It goes along with artists, such as Sean Landers who films from his car, Angela Bulloch who records her journey from London to Genoa where she has to put up a show, and Tiravanija, again, who films his trip between Guadalajara and Madrid. Information about the work process, too, as with Cheryl Donegan who films herself producing paintings. But the manoeuvrability of video also means that it can be used as a reified replacement for presence. Hence the installation by the Italian group Premiata Ditta, placing on the table, where a conference was going on, a TV set broadcasting the picture of a man eating, oblivious to everything going an around him, conjures up those acclaimed videotapes portraying a fireplace, an aquarium, or a "disco light". The grapes of Zeuxis are still just as green for post-modern birds.

Post VCR art

Rewind/play/fast forward

The manoeuvrability of the video image is conveyed into the area where images and art forms are handled and manipulated. The basic operations we carry out with a VCR (rewind, hold, freeze frame, etc.) are now part of the array of aesthetic decisions of any artist. This applies to channel-flicking, for example. Like films, according to Serge Daney, exhibitions are becoming "disparate, zappable little programmes", where the visitor can make up his/her own itinerary. But probably the greatest change lies in the new approaches to time brought on by the presence of home video. As we have seen, the work of art is no longer presented as the mark of

a past action, but as the announcement of a forthcoming event (the "trailer effect"), or the proposal of a virtual action[7]. In any event, it is presented as a *material time span* which every exhibition event has to update and revive. The work becomes a still, a frozen moment, but one that does not do away with the flow of gestures and forms from which it stems. This latter category turns out to be by far the most numerous. To mention just a few artists who have recently emerged, Pierre Joseph's *Personnages vivants à réactiver*, together with Philippe Parreno's *Arbre d'anniversaire*, Vanessa Beecroft's living pictures (tableaux vivants) together with Fabrice Hybert's *Peintures homéopathiques*, all are presented as unified and specific time spans which can be *re-enacted*, and on which it is possible to inlay other elements and transmit a different rhythm (fast forward), just like the videos which they often end up becoming. For it would seem quite normal, today, that a piece, an action or a performance should end up becoming documentation on videotape. This forms the work's concentrated focus, which may well become watered down by heterogeneous exhibition settings. Video, as we have noted just as much in the legal domain (with the Rodney King assault, filmed by an "amateur", showing King being beaten up by the Los Angeles police) and the debate stemming from the Khaled Kelkal affair, *works like evidence*. In art, it signifies and demonstrates reality, the concreteness of a practice at times too dispersed and all over the place to be directly grasped (I'm thinking of Beecroft, Peter Land, Carsten Höller, Lothar Hempel). This artistic use of the video picture does not just happen, however. The aesthetics of conceptual art is already a factual, *witnessing* aesthetics, to do with evidence and proof; recent activities are merely following up this designation of the "completely administered world" (Adorno) in which we live, in the casual and literal mode represented by video, instead of the analytical and deconstructive mode of conceptual art.

Towards a democratisation of viewpoints?

Video apparatus is part of the democratisation of the picture-production process (as a logical follow-on from photography), but it also has an effect on our day-to-day life through the generalisation of electronic surveillance, the safety-oriented counterpoint to family video sessions. But do these latter not have something to do with surveillance? Are they not also part of a world monitored, not to say hounded, by lenses, and bogged down in procedures whereby it keeps a close eye on itself, continually recycling the forms it produces and handing them out again in different forms? *Post VCR art* renders forms nomadic and fluid, encouraging the analogous reconstruction of aesthetic objects of the past-"refills" of historicized forms. In doing so, it explains Serge Daney's prediction about film: "*The only thing that will be retained (from art) is what can be remade[8]*"... So Mike Kelley and Paul MacCarthy have had Vito Acconci's performances "re-enacted" by models, in soap opera sets (Fresh Acconci, 1995), and Pierre Huyghe filmed a scene-by-scene remake of Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, in a Paris housing estate. But if video enables (more or less) anyone to make a movie, it also makes it easier for (more or less) anyone to capture pictures of us. When we move about a city, we are under surveillance. Our very cultural works are submitted for re-reading/recycling, attesting to the ubiquity of optical instruments, and their current prevalence over any other production tool. The *Security by Julia* programme, an artistic video surveillance project "directed" by Julia Sher, explores the police, and security, related dimension of the video camera. Playing on security iconography (grills, car-park settings, monitor screens), Julia Sher turns the exhibition into a space where everyone comes both to be seen and to see their own visibility. In a group show, the Danish artist Jens Haaning set up an automatic closure mechanism which shut the visitor away in an empty room, with just a video-spy in it. Caught like an insect, the beholder was transformed into the subject of the artist's eye, represented by the camera. Over and above the obvious ethical problems posed by this kind of action (in which, in no time, relations between artist and public

become sado-masochistic), we have no option but to note that after *Present continuous past(s)*, Dan Graham's extraordinary 1974 installation, which broadcast the picture of anyone venturing into it, but with a slight time lapse, the filmed visitor shifted from the status of a theatrical "character" caught in an ideology of representation to that of a pedestrian subjected to a repressive ideology of urban movement. The subject of the contemporary video is rarely free. This is because he/she collaborates in the great visual census, at once individual, sexual and ethnic, in which all forms of power agency in our society are currently indulging.

The future of art, as an instrument of emancipation, and as a political tool aimed at the liberation of forms of subjectivity, depends on the way artists deal with this issue. For art, no technique or technology is a subject. By putting technology in its productive context, by analysing its relations with the superstructure and the layer of obligatory behaviour underpinning its use, it becomes conversely possible to produce models of relations with the world, heading in the direction of modernity. Failing which, art will become an element of *high tech* deco in an increasingly disconcerting society.

1. Nicolas Bourriaud, "*Qu'est-ce que le réalisme opératif?*", in the catalogue "*Il faut construire l'hacienda*", CCC Tours; and "*Produire des rapports au monde*", in the catalogue *Aperto 93*, Venice Biennial.
2. Pierre Lévy, "*La Machine univers. Création, cognition et culture informatique*", Editions Points-Seuil, 1987, p. 50.
3. M. Broodthaers, in the catalogue "*L'angélus de Daumier*", 1975.
4. Nicolas Bourriaud, "*Un art de réalisateurs*", Art Press. no. 147, May 1990. The exhibition *Courts-métrages immobiles* was put on for the 1990 Venice Biennial.
5. Philippe Parreno, "*Une exposition serait-elle une exposition sans caméra?*", Libération, 27 May 1995.
6. W. Benjamin, *Essais II*, Editions Denoël-Gonthier, 1983, p. 105.
7. Nicolas Bourriaud, "*The Trailer Effect*" in Flash Art, 1989.
8. Serge Daney, "*Journal de l'an passé*", Trafic, no.1, Winter 1991.

Towards a policy of forms

Cohabitations
Notes on some possible extensions of a relational aesthetics

Visual systems
Eyes used to have to be raised towards the icon, which gave the divine presence a material form as an image.
In the Renaissance, the invention of centrist, monocular perspective turned the abstract beholder into a tangible, physical individual; the place allotted to him by the pictorial device likewise isolated him from others. Needless to say, everyone can look at the frescoes of Piero della Fransesca and Uccello from several viewpoints. But perspective singles out a symbolic place for the eye and gives the beholder his/her place in a symbolic social set-up.
Modern art altered this relationship by permitting many simultaneous ways of looking at pictures. But should we not be talking in terms of imports, since this manner of reading things existed already, in different forms, in Africa and the Orient?
Rothko and Pollock included in their work the need for a visual "envelope", for the picture was supposed to encompass, not to say submerge, the beholder in a chromatic ambience. We have often referred to the similarities existing between the "enveloping" effect of Abstract Expressionism and the effect sought by painters of icons. And in both cases it is an abstract humanity that is under consideration, cast