

# Nicolas Bourriaud

## Relational Aesthetics

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les presses du réel

## 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 Thai 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 summoned 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<sup>1</sup>, 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 realities, 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<sup>2</sup>. 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<sup>3</sup>, 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*<sup>4</sup>. 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 (*Hamac 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<sup>5</sup>. 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 Sartrean 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<sup>6</sup>, 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*"<sup>7</sup>. 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"<sup>8</sup>, 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<sup>9</sup>. 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 gear 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". 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 seen 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 (handover 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<sup>2</sup>, 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*"<sup>3</sup>.

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 *Passtiücke*. 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 Fared 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<sup>4</sup>, 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<sup>5</sup>. 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*.