

How to Work Better (1991) [reproduced as text on preceding page] is a well-known work by Swiss artists Peter Fischli and David Weiss. It consists of a ten-point manifesto that the artists found, enlarged, and had painted on the side of a building in Zurich. Their instructions are meant as a self-motivating reminder and description of their own process as artists, but are also directed to the rest of the world as a propositional code of conduct or ethic of behaviour – in fact, a copy of *How to Work Better* is pinned to the wall of countless artists' studios around the world, as well as above the desks of many curators, including this one.

The question of how to work or how to behave is one that lies at the root of all of our decisions. To rehearse a common truism: it's not just what you do, it's how you do it – it's not just what artists or curators do, but how they behave when they do it. Beyond the different styles, techniques or themes that characterize their work are the different codes of conduct that guide the way they act or behave. The same could be said of museums or art institutions: running alongside the question of what they are showing is the question of how they are behaving.

In recent years, small organizations around the world have been formulating different answers to that question. They are taking risks not just with what art to show but also with how to work and how to behave as an institution. In other words, in addition to having an adventurous and forward-thinking curatorial programme, they are experimenting with new institutional and curatorial methodologies that articulate a new ethic of behaviour and a new code of conduct. As a result, they are outlining a context for what it means to propose an alternative today. My own effort towards this, with The Artist's Institute in New York, is but one proposition among many others.

With mainstream museums and commercial galleries often showing uncommercial work by uncommercial artists, the role historically played by alternative spaces has been made somewhat redundant. Now is a time when MoMA shows performance art, the Whitney shows site-specific art, the Guggenheim shows institutional critique, and the New Museum shows artists who are 'Younger Than Jesus' (2009). Commercial galleries such as Reena Spaulings or Alex Zachary, New York, allow the most prominent collectors to buy work by the most uncompromising artists. And those smaller organizations that manage to stay non-profit and independent soon find themselves invited by Tate Modern for 'No Soul for Sale' (2010) or by the ICA, London, for 'Nought to Sixty' (2008).

While these mainstream or commercial structures might take risks with

what they show, few take risks with how they work. In most cases, they produce exhibitions, one after the other, and strategically compete for larger audiences and for more widespread recognition. The challenge for a contemporary alternative space or curatorial approach is to behave differently.

For example, the logic and structure of exhibitions could itself be called into question. Much of the difficulty with making an exhibition lies in the fact that to extract something from circulation – an object, image, practice, or idea – and interrupt it, examine it, and exhibit it, is to do it a great injustice. The philosopher Bruno Latour, among others, discusses the life of things, referring, in the largest sense, to all things that are usually not considered to be cognisant human subjects: objects, pictures, rocks, animals, natural systems, etc.¹ These, he argues – objects, images and ideas included, have their own agency and won't simply sit still under someone else's microscope, on someone else's terms. In fact, what makes them compelling is precisely what animates them, what they want, and how they behave when they are set loose into the world. In other words, objects, images and ideas have lives to live, and instead of conceiving of an exhibition as a way to reign them in and use them carefully to prove a point, an exhibition could be something much riskier: a way to discover, along with the audience, how that point will behave and where it will wander as it lives its life. In this sense, the opening of an exhibition could mark the beginning of a curatorial idea, not its end.

Traditionally, it's the other way around: curators open their shows and play the role of explicators, working to enlighten visitors who don't know what they know. They are expert performers of the I Know and avoid displaying any sign of the I Don't Know. Instead, an alternative curatorial behaviour could be to embrace a more vulnerable relationship to knowledge. An institution could stop behaving like an explanation machine, where those who know are teaching those who don't know, and invest in what philosopher Jacques Rancière calls the 'equality of intelligences',² where those who know something engage with those who know something else. It's not about preparing explanations in advance, but about following the life of an idea, in public, with others.

Clearly, the goal is not to reject the expertise of the I Know in favour of the anti-intellectualism of the I Don't Know, but to step outside of that binary entirely. Following the art critic Jan Verwoert,³ it means performing both the I Know and the I Don't Know in the key of the I Care. Verwoert suggests the I Care as an act of giving what you don't have to people who don't want it, or, in other words, as an act that is more affective than it is effective. If an institution goes from knowing to caring, it could point to the affective relationship that ties people to ideas and become a place for attachment rather than consumption. After all, the ideas that make us curious are not the ones we fully understand, but the ones we care about – I Love It is always more compelling than I Get It.

In unpacking the I Care, Verwoert also points to the importance of the figure of the muse: he or she who inspires and influences you – or, etymologically speaking, who amuses you. Funnily enough, one tends to think of the curator as being the artist's host, inviting him or her into an institution, but it's actually the other way around: we are the guests of the artists we choose to work with. In that context, as for any other house guest, we should find a way to say Thank You. An exhibition could be a homage instead of a lesson – a way to thank artists, not dissect them.

Curatorial responsibility involves the invention of ways appropriately to pay tribute to the lives of artworks and artists – not the invention of curatorial methods for their own sake. By always putting the artist first, a good exhibition behaves like a guest who takes care to do whatever is true to the spirit of the work.

To pay homage to someone falls somewhere between admiring and studying him or her. A tribute is neither an analysis nor just a party. Giving a toast is about making people care, not about making them understand. The act of appreciation, by nature, is not didactic – it's what you like, not what you know – but it is social: it involves not just what you like, but caring about it so much that you want to share it with others. It's more than naming a favourite book, it's recommending it. The affective curatorial approach of the I Care can inhabit that space between homage and explanation, between tribute and analysis, between recommendation and nomination. Once again, this is a place where the I Know coexists equally with the I Don't Know in the form of the I Care. While the uptown museums conduct their art-historical power games and the downtown galleries conceive their elusive tactics and smart chess moves, those eager for another model could perform the vulnerable, dangerous and radical act of wearing their hearts on their sleeves.

While behaving in the key of the I Care can be an act of celebration, it can also be one of critique: the art of the toast is closely aligned with the art of the roast. An alternative and affective curatorial behaviour involves the biting quip and critical edge of *parrhesia* – to use a term resurrected by Michel Foucault⁴ – or fearless speech. To practise *parrhesia* is to have the courage to speak frankly from a position of exposed vulnerability. Unlike the careful and calculated strategies of a much safer practice of rhetoric – the debate of differences between equals – *parrhesia* involves a willingness to stand for irreverent or critical values from the perspective of a less powerful member of the community, and is certainly relevant to those smaller and more vulnerable institutions.

To care also means to take care and to pay attention, and in order properly to do that, as argued by philosopher Bernard Stiegler, we need to slow down and take our time.⁵ While museums build more buildings, produce more exhibitions, raise more money, place more ads, and hope to draw more crowds, another model could be to do less and spend more time with what we do. Rather than

feeding the conveyor belt of the next, next, next, we could stop channel-surfing and demand a more focused and sustained attention span. One way organizations do this is by simply repeating themselves: for example, year after year, the commercial gallery Miguel Abreu in New York repeatedly hosts a screening of films by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, insisting on their sustained relevance to the gallery's identity and programme as a whole. Another way many organizations take their time is by emphasizing research over exhibitions: if exhibitions traditionally last six to ten weeks, research-based initiatives allow for the pursuit of speculative questions over longer periods of time, leading to more in-depth and textured thinking. BAK, basis voor actuele kunst in Utrecht, for example, commits several years to thinking through a single theme through exhibitions, publications, conferences or private round table discussions, all placed on an equal footing. Mamco in Geneva, although far from being a smaller alternative space, conceives of an exhibition as a single programme that evolves over several years, made manifest in a series of episodes. Another mainstream yet relevant institution, the Dia Art Foundation in New York, not only presents single exhibitions that last a minimum of eight months, but is also committed to maintaining (and caring for) expensive long-term projects such as Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field* (1977) and *Earth Room* (1977). While many galleries and art centres seem seduced by Hans Ulrich Obrist's *dontstopdontstopdontstop* (Sternberg Press, 2006), others aren't, and prefer to stop.

The media, of course, always favour the fast and the furious. Therefore, stepping off the conveyor belt also means falling out of the news cycle, and behaving this way will inevitably draw smaller audiences. This smaller scale does come with several advantages: not only is it much cheaper to maintain a smaller physical space, but this intimacy will also favour a face-to-face encounter and demand a more active and immediate engagement. Organizations such as Salon Populaire or Silberkuppe in Berlin, Kunstverein in Amsterdam, Pro Choice in Vienna, Front Desk Apparatus in New York, castillo/corrales in Paris, or New Jersey in Basel are no larger than 100 square metres, and are designed with that very characteristic in mind.

Since they invest in face time rather than in ad time, these small institutions build their audience as the result of a self-selecting process. In other words, the people who pay attention are not the ones who are encouraged to do so, but the ones who choose to do so. Since anyone is invited to attend any of the exhibitions or events, this is not a case of speakeasy or strategic exclusivity, but it effectively creates a space for self-selected and engaged community of people who care. The goal is not to engage in a competition to attract more audiences, but to establish a smaller gift economy for anyone who is curious enough and makes the effort to come by for a visit, whether a friend or a stranger.

More than anything, the challenge for a contemporary alternative space today is to behave the way Martin Luther King Jr. called upon all people to behave: to be maladjusted. By evoking a term usually associated with a psychological defect or illness, Dr King famously declared that he was proud to be maladjusted, and that he would never adjust himself to a society that discriminates against racial minorities. In the art context, these smaller institutions are proud to be maladjusted: they do not adjust themselves to an art community obsessed with knowledge, power and scale. Instead, they step onto the smaller and more vulnerable roads and allow learning to replace teaching, camaraderie to replace competition, the homage to replace the explanation, and the dance move to replace the chess move.

As a tribute to Fischli & Weiss, let me conclude and summarize by proposing an updated set of instructions for a contemporary ethic of curatorial behaviour. It could certainly hang over the desk.

HOW TO BEHAVE BETTER

- 1 REMEMBER THAT YOU DON'T KNOW
- 2 LEARN TO CARE
- 3 SAY THANK YOU
- 4 WEAR YOUR HEART ON YOUR SLEEVE
- 5 INSIST ON TALKING FACE TO FACE
- 6 FOLLOW THE LIFE OF AN IDEA
- 7 SPEAK FRANKLY
- 8 TAKE YOUR TIME
- 9 BE MALADJUSTED
- 10 TOAST

- 1 See Bruno Latour, 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public', in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005) 14–41.
- 2 See Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1987) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).
- 3 Jan Verwoert, 'Exhaustion and Exuberance', *Dot Dot Dot*, no. 15 (2007) 89–112.
- 4 See Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001).
- 5 See Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* (2008) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

Anthony Huberman, 'Take Care', in *Circular Facts*, ed. Mai Abu ElDahab, Binna Choi, Emily Pethick (Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2011) 9–17.

Peter Eleey

What about Responsibility?//2013

A few years ago, I was pestering a dealer about an artwork I was planning to propose for acquisition. How should it be shown? What could we do and not do with it? Had the artist made any particular stipulations regarding its care or exhibition to which the museum would need to adhere? At a certain point, the dealer told me that once we paid her, we could throw the piece off a cliff. While this anecdote will surely confirm artists' worst fears about those whom they entrust to merchandise their work, it obliquely points to an important fact: the sovereign power of those who possess a work of art. The dealer, of course, was right: as soon as we have the thing itself, we can do whatever we want with it.¹

The sovereignty of the curator over the objects we show is absolute. As we have deployed that power more aggressively, we have rightfully subjected ourselves (and been subject) to critical exercises in the ways we define our work and responsibilities. Much as the behaviour of doctors is regulated because of the power they wield over their patients, a number of participants in the system of exhibition-making seem to want a kind of code of conduct that would prevent, or at least call attention to, bad curatorial behavior. Because artists and audiences have better things to do, we curators have been the ones most interested in articulating ways of considering ethical issues that surround the making of exhibitions. 'Curatorial responsibility,' Anthony Huberman recently argued, 'involves the invention of ways appropriately to pay tribute to the lives of artworks and artists – not the invention of curatorial methods for their own sake. By always putting the artist first, a good exhibition behaves like a guest who takes care to do whatever is true to the spirit of the work.'² Huberman's sensitive emphasis on behaviour reminds us of that platitude of curatorial humility – that we should always put the artist first – which, while all too easily forgotten by many of us, is nevertheless a maxim few would dispute. And yet perhaps some cursory digression into *irresponsibility* might be useful. What counts as bad curatorial behaviour? Can it ever be acceptable? And how does curatorial responsibility differ from artistic responsibility?

First, however, we need to distinguish between bad curatorial behaviour and plain old bad curating. (Though they may overlap, they are not the same.) Bad behaviour of the type I am concerned with here involves the misuse of art to 'authorial' ends, done with a degree of self-awareness. Bad curating is an accidental outcome that results from a lack of attention or skill.³ Humans are, it should be noted, equipped with a range of ways to rationalize bad behaviour, and

processes that are interesting not only for the artists but also for an audience. That's a very political moment and this working on structures is very crucial.

Bourriaud The question of meaning is very important. Who produces meaning? There's always this never-ending discussion about the curator who imposes meaning or imposes the concept of art, of what art is. I think it is a wrong opposition. Every artwork produces its concept, or a concept of what art is. And the role of the curator is not to produce a concept of art but to invent, to fabricate, elaborate reading grids or coexistence grids between them. So it's not a battle for a concept of art, it's more dialogical, the organization of the coexistence between the artworks and meanings.

O'Neill And this may also be a question of the art world's (as a social sub-system) inherent organizational structures linked to power. This is a question from Mark Hutchinson: 'Slavoj Zizek has talked about how the revolution must strike twice. It is not enough to seize control of existing power structures and so on. The revolution is not secured in a moment of euphoria when anything seems possible. The values of the old order are embedded in its established habits, routines and customs, however innocent or non-political they may appear. The second strike of the revolution, and the more difficult task, is shifting these entrenched habits. Without this violent reconfiguring, everything will drift back to the old order and its habits and values. In relation to curation, what are the habits, routines and customs that must be overthrown in order to affect any radical change?'

Bourriaud It comes back to the previous question about ethics. If we talk about ethics in contemporary art, what do we exactly point at? Is it the gaze of the beholder? Or is it the production of the artwork, is there an ethical issue here? Is it distribution and the way you show artworks? Or is it, last but not least, the way institutions and structures are functioning? Structures are ideologies, crystallized and functioning within the city, so they do produce a certain relationship to the artwork. They produce a certain beholder, a certain gaze onto artworks. This is an ethical responsibility. Institutions are actually producing a type of viewer or beholder and this is really about ideologies and the way you turn them into solid structures.

Enrico Lunghi Structures change with the rest of the society. At Casino, we set out to change something. We believed in the ideas and joy that art produces. We wanted to share this, so we created the Casino and made it very simple. We had a structure and, like Nicolas said, a structure is the crystallization of an ideology. But, my point of view was always to say: 'OK, we are now changing something outside,

but as soon as this outside changes, we have to change again.' We cannot just stay the same. More people become curious about what we are doing and they reflect and criticize. This is the idea of a reaction and also implication. We try to understand what our new position is, and then produce something out of this position. Structures and institutions might be heavy, but they are not static. The more you try to understand what's happening in the institution in relation to what's outside, the more this dynamic is possible. It's the same in the relationship to the artist: if you just stick to one model of artist and you carry this on for thirty years, it can be very interesting, but you don't see the movements that happen in the art world. It's important constantly to question the perception of what is the present position. I would not claim to call it revolution. There can be revolutionary moments, but no revolution lasts more than a few years and very often it ends in blood. I don't want that, I prefer movement and change, whilst trying to respect the situation. [...]

Nicolas Bourriaud, Enrico Lunghi, Paul O'Neill and Beatrix Ruf, extracts from 'Is the Curator per Definition a Political Animal?', in *The Critics, The Curators, The Artists, Rotterdam Dialogues* (Rotterdam: Post Editions/Witte de With, 2010) 90–93, 96.

Fischli & Weiss How to Work Better//1991

HOW TO WORK BETTER

- 1 DO ONE THING AT A TIME
- 2 KNOW THE PROBLEM
- 3 LEARN TO LISTEN
- 4 LEARN TO ASK QUESTIONS
- 5 DISTINGUISH SENSE FROM NONSENSE
- 6 ACCEPT CHANGE AS INEVITABLE
- 7 ADMIT MISTAKES
- 8 SAY IT SIMPLE
- 9 BE CALM
- 10 SMILE

Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *How to Work Better* (1991). Text found in a factory in Thailand and reproduced in large stencilled letters on the side of an office block in north Zurich.

When I first met Rirkrit, he was very popular. All smiles all around. There was a feeling that he was Mr Goodvibe – getting people together, having a good time blah blah ... kind of a hippy happening thing, a lot of cooking going on, a lot of generosity.

Early on, Lisa at 303 [gallery, New York] invited him into a group show – the first part was Rirkrit together with Andrea Zittel, who was showing her pet chicken, Lulu. Rirkrit decided to put a table with two pots of boiling water and 24 dozen eggs and two egg timers – you could boil an egg and eat it, play with Lulu, etc ...

At the opening there were a lot of people and a lot of empty space, because there was only little Lulu and the eggs. Before getting in the elevator, Tom Cugliani threw his uncooked egg at the wall, and the yellow yolk dribbled down the wall. It was really shocking, and I guess everyone thought it was funny, as many started throwing more eggs at the wall. Gee, a real 'happening' ...

It was frightening though, and even violent, because within what Rirkrit was offering (freedom) there was as much capacity for good as there was for bad, and it was the first time I saw that hardness in his work, and I thought wow, Rirkrit's going to go all the way.

Elizabeth Peyton, 'Rirkrit Tirabunnng', in *Rirkrit Tiravanija: Supermarket* (Zurich: Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, 1998) 76–7.

Paul O'Neill [...] [Can we discuss] the question posed by [the transdisciplinary artist] Barbara Holub: 'Does a curator have to be ethical? Should a curator be ethical? What does it mean to be ethical as a curator?'

Beatrix Ruf [...] Depending on which cultural field one works in, one has more or less dialogue between public and private funding and the changing necessities that come from this neoliberal demand. It is tempting to fall into traps. It is extremely important therefore to define what ethics are – it is a very difficult term to use, of course, and I can only speak for myself. In my situation, with an institution which is predominantly privately financed (not 100 per cent, as in America, but up to 60 or 70 per cent), it is always about a negotiation of the relationship between public and private interests. And my basic understanding of the institution is that it's part of the public domain, that it is not only public space but also a tool or container where public interest is being discussed or public dialogue can happen. And the fact that there has been such a need for private funding, particularly in the last years, makes it an extremely interesting but also dangerous field to act in. [...]

O'Neill Maybe to turn the discussion back to talking about art, I can use Liam Gillick's second question: 'Can the large postwar, mega exhibitions be recast as functional sites for new work, or are they perpetually stuck in a parallel zone of instrumentalization facing celebration?'

Nicolas Bourriaud I'm not sure of the pertinence of the opposition between celebration and instrumentalization. I'm not certain there's an opposition here.

Ruf I was joking on the plane this morning with Hans Ulrich Obrist that I feel I'm not a curator. There are so many different roles in which we work, in providing this place – and I intentionally say 'place' – for things to happen. There is a presumption that curators are defining what the critical potential of art is. I am totally with Seth Siegelaub on this: artists do play an important role in this system. And I understand that the role of the curator/director is to provide this space in a societal context, as someone who creates freedom for things to happen. We constantly have to work on structures, and the same is true for biennials, triennials, documenta. So maybe we have to say 'no' more often, 'no' to situations where there is no production budget, 'no' to situations which do not enable

close of a panel discussion hosted by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, meant to address the status of theory in art school today. After each panelist had delivered his or her respective paper, he commented, rather drolly, 'Not a single art theory has been referred to all evening.' This cautionary last word underscores the slipperiness of 'theory' and the way it doubles for 'language', both of which have so often taken the blame for an overly academic art. But such a public missing-the-mark about theory, (be it art- or any other kind) also suggests, paradoxically, that the act of theorizing itself is, if anything, under- rather than over-utilized in art school. And of course, my teacher's conclusion also warns of the potential for monumental misunderstandings to go unchecked because, *unfortunately, we have just run out of time.* [...]

Frances Stark, extract from introduction to *Primer*, compiled for 'On the Future of Art School' symposium (New York: Dexter Sinister, 2007) 9–10.

Jan Verwoert

I Can, I Can't, Who Cares?//2009

[...] How can we address the current changes in our societies and lives? Some have said that we have come to inhabit the post-industrial condition. But what could that mean? One thing seems to be sure: after the disappearance of factory work from the lives of most people in the Western world, we have entered into a culture where we no longer just work, we perform. We need to perform because to do so is what is asked of us. If we choose to make our living on the basis of doing what we want to do, we need to get our act together, we need to get things done, everywhere and at any time. Are you ready? I ask you and I am sure that you will be as ready as you will ever be to perform, do things and go places.

Who are we? This group is ever expanding. It is us, the creative types who have created jobs for ourselves by exploring and exploiting our talents to perform small artistic and intellectual miracles. It is us, the socially engaged who create communal spaces for others and ourselves by performing the roles of interlocutors in and facilitators or instigators of processes of social exchange. When we perform we create concepts and ideas as well as social bonds and forms of communication and communality. Thereby we create the values that our society is supposed to be based on today. The Deutsche Bank currently sums up its company philosophy in a simple slogan (formulated in a symptomatically

a-grammatical international English): *A Passion to Perform* (you have a passion for something but never to realize an end through actions; the wisdom of grammar). So which side of the barricades are we on then? Where do the barricades stand today, anyway? We are the avant-garde, but we are also the job slaves. We serve the customers who consume the communication and sociability that we produce. We work in the kitchens and call centres of the newly opened restaurants and companies of the prospectively burgeoning new urban centres of the service society. To offer our services we are willing to travel. Being mobile is part of our performance. So we travel, we go west to work, we go north to work, we are all around, we fix the minds, houses and cars of those who stay in their offices. What do we feel about ourselves and our lives? Are we happy? Are we in charge? What pain and what pleasure are we experiencing in the lives we have created for ourselves?

I Can't

What would it mean to put up resistance against a social order in which performativity has become a growing demand, if not the norm? What would it mean to resist the need to perform? Is 'resistance' even a concept that would be useful to evoke in this context? After all, the forms of resistance we know are in fact usually dramatic performances themselves. Or maybe we should consider other, more subtle forms of not performing, of staging, as the Slovakian conceptual artist Julius Koller called them, 'anti-happenings'. What silent but effective forms of unwillingness, non-compliance, uncooperativeness, reluctance or non-alignment do we find in contemporary culture when it comes to inventing ways to not perform how and when you are asked to perform?

Can we ever embrace these forms of non-performance in art and thinking as forms of art and thinking? Or will we always find ourselves on the other side of the barricade, with the performers and those who want to get things done and get enraged by people who stand in their way by being slow, sluggish and uncooperative? After all, is not uncooperativeness the revenge uncreative people take on the society of the creative by stubbornly stopping it in its tracks? Have you ever found yourself screaming (or wanting to scream) at an uncooperative clerk behind a counter: 'I haven't got time for this' – only to realize that, yes, he has time for this, an entire lifetime dedicated to the project of stopping other people from getting things done? These people work hard to protect society from change by inventing ever new subtle ways to stop those in their tracks who want to revolutionize it. Are they the enemy? Or are they today maybe the strongest allies you can find if you want to put up defences against a culture of compulsive performativity?

But does it have to take other people to make you stop performing? When

and how do you give up on the demand and need to perform? What could make you utter the magic words 'I can't'? Does it take a breakdown to stop you? Do the words 'I can't' already imply the acknowledgement of a breakdown, a failure to perform, a failure that would not be justifiable if your body didn't authenticate your inability by physically stopping you? How could we restore dignity to the 'I can't'? What ways of living and acting out the 'I can't' do we find in art and music? Was that not what Punk, for instance, was all about? To transgress your (musical) capacities by rigorously embracing your incapacities? To rise above demands by frustrating all expectations? When the Sex Pistols were on one of their last gigs, when it was practically all over already and the band simply could no longer get their act together, Johnny Rotten turned to the audience and asked: 'Do you ever feel you have been cheated?' Would that be a question to rephrase today? If so, how? There are ways of confronting people with the 'I can't' that put it right in their face. But maybe there are also other means of making the 'I can't' part of a work, of putting it to work, means that art and poetry have always used, namely by creating moments where meaning remains latent. To embrace latency goes against the grain of the logic of compulsive performativity because it is all about leaving things unsaid, unshown, unrevealed, it is about refraining from actualizing and thereby exhausting all your potentials in the moment of your performance. We have to re-think and learn to re-experience the beauty of latency.

What is the Time?

Performance is all about the right timing. A comedian with a bad sense of timing is not funny, a musician useless. Career opportunities, we are told, are all about being in the right place at the right time. Finding a lover to love may also be. Is there a right time for love? Stressed out, overworked couples are advised these days to reserve 'quality time' for each other to prevent their relationship from losing its substance. What is quality time? 'Is it a good time for you to talk?' people ask when they reach you on your mobile. When is a good time to talk? We live and work in economies based on the concept of 'just in-time-production' and 'just in time' usually means things have to be ready in no time at all, urgency is the norm. 'I haven't got time for this!' the just-in-time producer will shout at you when you are not on time and make him wait.

To be in sync with the timing of just-in-time production you have to be ready to perform all the time. This is the question you must be prepared to answer positively: Are you ready? Always. Ready when you are. As ready as I will ever be. Always up for it. Stay on the scene. Porn is pure performance. Impotence is out of the question. 'Get on the fucking block and fuck!' is the formula for getting things done. Frances Stark recently quoted it to me when

we talked about the culture of performance. She got the sentence from Henry Miller and included it in one of her collages.

What happens when there is a lapse of time, when time is out of joint? Are we not living in times now when time is always radically disjointed as the 'developed' countries of the first world push ahead into a science-fiction economy of dematerialized labour and virtual capital? While at the same time pushing the 'developing' countries centuries back in time by outsourcing work to them and thereby also imposing working conditions on them that basically date back to the days of early industrialization? Sometimes the time gap doesn't even have to span centuries, it might be just years, as in some of the countries of the former Eastern Bloc (like Poland for instance) are rapidly catching up to the speed of advanced capitalism, but still not fast enough.

Migrant workers bridge this gap in time. They travel ahead in time to work in the fast cities of the West and North. Yet they face the risk of any time traveller as they lose touch with the time that passes while they are away. Will they ever find their way back into their time or learn to inhabit the new time of the other country? How many time zones can you inhabit? Who is to set the clock and make the pace according to which all others are measuring their progress? 'Que hora son en Washington?' sings Manu Chao, and it may very well be the crucial political question of this moment.

I Can

But would to embrace the 'I can't' mean to vilify the 'I can'? Why would we ever want to do that? After all, the joy of art, writing and performing freely lies in the realization that you can, a sense of empowerment through creativity that in ecstatic moments of creative performance can flood your body with the force of an adrenaline rush. And then living out the 'I can' is not just a cheap thrill. To face up to your own potential might be one of the most challenging tasks of your life if not even your responsibility. Giorgio Agamben speaks about the pleasure and terror of the 'I can' in this way. He refers to an account by the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova who describes how it came about that she became a writer. Standing outside a Leningrad prison in 1930 where her son was a political prisoner, another woman whose son was also imprisoned asked her: 'Can you write about this?' She found that she had to respond that yes, indeed she could and in this moment found herself both empowered and indebted.

Today it seems most crucial really to understand this link between the empowerment and the debt at the heart of the experience of creative performance. In what way are we always already indebted to others when we perform? In what way is it precisely this indebtedness to others that enables us to perform in the first place? Could an ethics of a different type of performance – one that

acknowledges the debt to the other instead of overruling it hectically to improve the efficacy of performance – be developed on the basis of this understanding? How could we perform differently? Freely? In his film *Teorema* Pasolini draws up a scenario of unleashed performativity. A factory owner hands over the factory to the workers. His obligations to work have thereby come to an end. A young man arrives at the villa of the factory owner, he has no personality or features except for the fact that he is a charming lover. He sleeps with all of the members of the family and leaves again. Disconnected from work and freed by love, all of the family members start to perform: the son acknowledges he is gay and becomes a painter. The daughter decides never to move or speak again. The mother cruises the streets and sleeps with strangers. The housemaid decides not to commit suicide; instead she becomes a saint, starts to levitate and cure sick children. The factory owner himself decides to take his clothes off in the main train station and walk off into a nearby volcano. None of these actions are commented upon and they are presented as all having the same value, as they are equally possible and the possibility of each of these performances does not equalize or relativize the possibility of any other. Pasolini thus describes a situation where the end of work and the arrival of love create the possibility for a radical coexistence and co-presence of liberated performances that are not forced under the yoke of any single dominant imperative to perform in a particular way. How could we create and inhabit such a condition of undisciplined performativity?

Who Cares?

To recognize the indebtedness to the other as that which empowers performance also means to acknowledge the importance of care. You perform because you care. When you care for someone or something this care enables you to act because you feel that you must act, not least because when you really care to not act is out of the question. In conversation Annika Eriksson recently summed this point up by saying that, as a mother, when your child is in need of you 'there is no no'. You have to be able to act and react and you will find that 'you can' even if you thought you couldn't. Paradoxically though, the 'I care' can generate the 'I can', but it can also radically delimit it. Because when you care for yourself and others, this obligation might in fact force you to turn down offers to work and perform for others, in other places, on other occasions. When the need to take care of your friends, family, children or lover comes between you and the demand to perform, to profess the 'I can't' (work now, come to the event ...) may then be the only justified way to show that you care. Likewise, the recognition that you are exhausting yourself and need to take care of yourself can constitute a reason to turn down an offer to perform and utter the 'I can't'. So both the 'I can' and the 'I can't' may originate from the 'I care'. The 'I care' is the question of welfare. In

the historical moment of the dismantling of the welfare state this is a pressing question. In a talk Jimmy Durham cited two people he had met in Italy as saying: 'We are liberated. What we need now is a better life.' Maybe this is indeed the question: How do we want to deal with the potential of living life, caring for yourself and others, by negotiating the freedom and demands of the 'I can' and 'I can't', in a way that would make another form, another ethics, another attitude to creative and social performance possible?

Jan Verwoert, 'I Can, I Can't, Who Cares?', concept paper for *Art Sheffield 08 Yes, No and Other Options*, republished in *Open*, no. 17: *A Precarious Existence: Vulnerability in the Public Domain* (2009) 41–5.

Tino Sehgal

On *This Situation* (2007): In Conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist//2011

Hans Ulrich Obrist [...] Whenever we speak you quote all kinds of different thinkers. Obviously, your 2007 piece, *This Situation*, very much brought this into focus. It was always latent in your work, but in *This Situation* it became manifest. So I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that.

Tino Sehgal *This Situation* is one of the pieces closest to me, and I think it is one of the most successful pieces. It is probably one of my most personal pieces, although I don't really say anything in it. You can trace my thinking from the early moments, when a lot of things were intuitive and drawn from my teachers and my own thinking, to later, when I discovered people like J.K. Galbraith, and discovered the idea of 'technologies of the self': the idea that, in contrast to psychoanalysis and to Lacan, you could work on yourself through repetition. So, through hard work, you can change yourself, or change your mode of being. Again, I don't have time to really invest in these topics too much, but I remember when we were at this DLD [Digital Life Design] conference, somebody was saying that yogis claim you can even change your genes, by meditation or in some way. This whole idea of crafting oneself is something that corresponded with my intuition. I advocate a self-confident subject, which does take the agency that it has very seriously, and tries to make the most out of it. Not a subject that is heteronomously bound – of course it is heteronomously bound, but it's not subjected to being heteronomously bound. It's a subject that, even if it's part of a

Today, the terms 'political art', 'committed art', 'political artist' and 'committed artist' are used very often. These simplifications and abbreviations have long been obsolete. They are cheap and lazy classifications. Not for a second do I think of myself as more 'committed' than another artist. As an artist, one must be totally committed to one's artwork. There is no other possibility than total commitment if one wants to achieve something with one's art. This is true for any art. Today there is great confusion concerning the question of what should be 'Political' or 'political'. I am only interested in what is really political, the political that implicates: Where do I stand? Where does the other stand? What do I want? What does the other want? The politics of opinions, of comments and of views of the majority does not and has never interested me. I am concerned with *doing my art politically* – I am not and was never concerned with making political art. 'Doing art politically – not making political art' is a statement I took from Jean-Luc Godard. He said, 'It is a matter of making films politically; it is not a matter of making political films.' But what does it mean to do art politically?

Doing Art Politically Means Giving Form

Not making a form – but giving form. A form which comes from me, from myself only, which can only come from me because I see the form that way, I understand it that way and because I am the only one to know that form. To give form – as opposed to making a form – means to be one with it. I must stand alone with this form. It means raising the form, asserting this form and defending it – against everything and against everyone. It means to ask the question of form for myself and try to answer – through giving form. I want to try to confront the great artistic challenge: How can I give a form which takes a position? How can I give a form that resists facts? I want to understand the question of form as the most important question for an artist.

Doing Art Politically Means Creating Something

I can only create or fulfil something if I address reality positively, even the hard core of reality. It is a matter of never allowing the pleasure, the happiness, the enjoyment of work, the positive in creation, the beauty of working, to be asphyxiated by criticism. This doesn't mean to react, but it means to always be active. Art is always action, Art is never reaction. Art is never merely a reaction or a critique. It doesn't mean being uncritical or not making a critique – it means

being positive despite the sharpest critique, despite uncompromising rejection and despite unconditional resistance. It means not to deny oneself passion, hope and dream. Creating something means to risk oneself and I can only do that if I work without – at the same time – analysing what I am making. To take the risk, to have joy in working, to be positive, are the preconditions for making art. Only in being positive can I create something that comes from myself. I want to be positive, even within the negative. Because I want to be positive, I must gather the courage to touch also the negative – that is where I see the Political. It means taking action, risking an assertion, assuming a position, a position which goes beyond mere criticism. I want to be critical, but I do not want to let myself be neutralized by being critical. I want to try to go beyond my own criticism, but I do not want to make it easier for myself with a – narcissistic – self-critique. I never want to complain as an artist, for there is no reason to – I can do my work, I can create something.

Doing Art Politically Means Deciding in Favour of Something

I decided to position my work in the form- and force-fields of Love, Politics, Philosophy and Aesthetics. I always want my work to touch each of these fields. All four fields are equally important to me. My work does not have to cover all these fields evenly; however, I always want all four fields to be touched. One of these four form- and force-fields, but only one, is the field of Politics. To choose the force- and form-field of Politics means that in my work I always want to ask the question: What do you want? Where do you stand? It also means that I always want to ask myself: What do I want? Where do I stand? The force- and form-field of Politics – just as with the field of Aesthetics – can also be interpreted negatively, I am aware of it. But it is never about excluding or rejecting the negative, it is about confronting the negative also, working within the negative also and involving oneself in it, it is always a matter of not being negative oneself. Through my work, I want to create a new truth beyond negativity, beyond current issues, beyond commentaries, beyond opinions and beyond evaluations.

Doing Art Politically Means Using Art as a Tool

I understand art as a tool to encounter the world. I understand art as a tool to confront reality. And I understand art as a tool to live within the time in which I am living. I always ask myself: Does my work have the ability to generate an event? Can I encounter someone with my work? Am I – through my work – trying to touch something? Can something – through my work – be touched? Doing art politically means considering the work that I am doing today – in my milieu, in my history – as a work which aims to reach out of my milieu – beyond my history. I want – in and through my life – to address and confront universal

concerns. Therefore I must work with what surrounds me, with what I know and with what affects me. I must not give in to the temptation of the particular but on the contrary try to touch universality. The particular – which always excludes – must be resisted. For me this means that I want to do my work, the work that I am doing here and now, as a universal work. That is the Political.

Doing Art Politically Means Building a Platform with the Work

Creating a platform enables others to come into contact with the work. I want all of my works to be understood as a surface or a field. This field or surface is the upper surface that enables access or contact with art. The impact or friction takes place on this upper surface, and through a contact, the other can be implicated. This surface – my work – must be a locus for dialogue or for confrontation. I think that art has the power and capacity – because it is art – to create the conditions for a dialogue or a confrontation, directly, one-to-one, without communication, without mediation, without moderation. As an artist I want to consider my work as a platform, a platform which is a clear opening toward the other. I always want to ask myself: Does my work possess the dynamic for a breakthrough? And I ask myself: Is there an opening; is there a path into my work? Does my work resist the tendency toward the hermetic? My work must create an opening; it must be a door, a window or even just a hole, a hole carved into today's reality. I want to make my artwork with the will to create a breakthrough.

Doing Art Politically Means Loving the Material with which One Works

To love does not mean to be in love with one's material or to lose oneself in it. Rather, to love one's material means to place it above everything else, to work with it in awareness, and it means to be insistent with it. I love the material because I decided in favour of it – therefore I do not want to replace it. Since I decided in favour of it – and love it – I cannot and do not want to change it. The decision about the material is an extremely important one. That is the Political. And because I made that decision, I cannot yield to wishes and demands for 'something else' or 'something new'.

Doing Art Politically Means Inventing One's Own Guidelines

It means inventing one's own guidelines or appropriating them. My guidelines are: acting in headlessness; 'Energy = Yes! Quality = No!'; being weak – but wanting to make a strong work; not economizing oneself; self-expenditure; 'Panic is the solution!'; being both precise and exaggerating; undermining oneself; being cruel vis-a-vis one's own work, being tenacious, 'Less is less! More is more!'; 'Never won, but never completely lost!'; having the ambition to coin a new concept with my work; assuming responsibility for everything concerning

my work; accepting to look dumb in front of my own work; 'Better is always less good!'; refusing all hierarchies; believing in the friendship between Art and Philosophy; being ready – because the first – to pay the price for one's work.

Doing Art Politically Means Working for the Other

Working for the other means first of all to work for the other within myself. It also means working for a non-exclusive public. The other can be my neighbour or can be a stranger, someone who frightens me, whom I don't know and don't understand. The other is someone I did not think of and did not expect. The non-exclusive public is not just 'all' or 'the mass' or 'the majority', the non-exclusive public consists of the others, the sometimes more and sometimes less numerous 'others'. Through and in my work I want to work for a non-exclusive public. I want to do everything in order to never exclude the other from my work and I want to include the other, always and without conditions. I want to include the other through the form of my work. The other is also the reason why I make no distinction between works in public space, in a commercial gallery, in an art fair, a museum, an art centre or an alternative art space. That is the Political. To work for the other enables me to position myself as an artist on the outside of the spectrum of evaluation.

Doing Art Politically Means Being a Warrior. Doing Art Politically Does Not Mean Working for or against the Market

The question is much more about understanding the market as part of the artist's reality and about working in this reality. Not wanting to work for or against the market is not merely a declaration. It is the awareness that only through autonomy and independence can art maintain itself beyond the laws of the market. Only a direct and affirmed confrontation with the reality of the market – despite the errors, the defects, the faults and the injuries – make it possible to resist and go beyond the market pressure and as an artist, I cannot become dependent. The artist – especially during the first years – always needs support and assistance. Although I know the importance of this support and assistance, I must never let myself or my work be dependent upon it.

Thomas Hirschhorn, 'Doing Art Politically: What Does This Mean?' (2008), *Inaesthetik*, no. 1: *Politics of Art* (Zurich and Berlin: Diaphanes Verlag, 2009) 71–82.

[...] The sense of *Arte Útil* (Useful Art) is to imagine, create, develop and implement something that, produced in artistic practice, offers the people a clearly beneficial result. It is art because it is the elaboration of a proposal that does not yet exist in the real world, and because it is made with the hope and belief that something may be done better, even when the conditions for it to happen may not be there yet. Art is the space in which you behave as if the conditions existed for making the things that you want to happen actually happen, and as if everyone agreed with what we suggest, although it may not be like that yet: art is living the future in the present. Art is also making people believe, although we know that we may not have much more than the belief itself. Art is to start practising the future.

Arte Útil concerns the understanding that art that exists only as a proposal is not enough now. *Arte Útil* goes from the state of proposal to that of application in reality. It involves understanding that proposals coming from art must give their next step and be applied, must leave the sphere of what is unattainable, the desired impossibility, to be part of what exists, of the real and functional sphere: to be a feasible utopia. Although *Arte Útil* may be like a pilot or beta program where participants may experience how it feels to live in the world that is being proposed, it must be launched as something real. It should be shown and shared with those who may make it work in a long-term format, that is, the people who derive benefits from the proposal, and who may take it to a more permanent state or existence. Art made as *Arte Útil* does not have a planned obsolescence; on the contrary, it is a proposal that others may remake and continue without the subsequent intervention of the artist. Artists suggest its potential life: some projects are imagined as short and specific; in others there is the desire for a longer repercussion in the lives of people and to be appropriated by society as a whole. *Arte Útil* has nothing to do with consumption but with making something happen.

Arte Útil transforms affectiveness into effectiveness.

For *Arte Útil*, failure is not a possibility. If the project fails, it is not *Arte Útil*. Artists have the challenge of finding forms in which their proposal may actually work; this is not impossible to achieve. So, the means through which art is made do not depend on a capricious ideal of the artist, but on the limits imposed by what can really be achieved, and to what point the reality of what has been dreamed can be pushed. Therefore, the limits of an *Arte Útil* project are determined by the relationship with the people for whom it is made and transformations in the conditions within which the work is made. The perfect moment appears when the

project is already in movement, when the people for whom it was made understand it, when they expropriate it from the artist and make it theirs. *Arte Útil* is involved in the life of people and it is to be expected that it becomes part of it.

Arte Útil has no relationship to the view that falsely sees good in everything; rather, it reflects belief in the potential of people to grow. Artists who make social art are not shamans, magicians, healers, saints ... They are closer to teachers, negotiators, behaviour builders, social structures. *Arte Útil* functions directly within reality. *Arte Útil* has a different society in mind.

Arte Útil is a form of practising social art. It is a socially consistent (artistic) material which functions as an entry point for the audience. With excessive frequency we hear about the barrier that exists between the work of art and the non-informed audience for whom access to the work is impossible. The usefulness of the work for the audience is, from my point of view, the key to solving this barrier of communication and interest by the non-informed/non-initiated audience of contemporary art. It is a displacement of the use of resources as metaphors, allegories, etc; it is a point of entry to understanding the artwork's idea by using usefulness as a system to appreciate the work.

If you work in *Arte Útil*, what can be more gratifying than to see your idea incorporated in the daily life of the people? Or the social programme of a city? Or nuances in the vocabulary of individuals? I believe this is the natural place for the works of *Arte Útil* which reach the higher level of popularity and effectiveness. Just as images based on visual art at times exist as part of a shower curtain, tea cup or t-shirt, for socially committed art, its popular distribution should be society itself, civic institutions, civic behaviour, the daily life of the people. *Arte Útil* should be part of everyday life; it should be a daily exercise in creativity.

Tania Bruguera, extracts from 'Reflections on *Arte Útil*', in *Arte Actual: Lecturas para un espectador inquieto* (Madrid: CA2M Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, 2012) 194–7.

Seth Price

Courtesy of Seth Price//2009

Where to locate the power in this operation? ... A lyric automation of the design function. A zero-sum spell. Artists rummage through the toolkits of past artists for approaches they may make use of. As you look up with bewildered pleasure, the music charges on, diverging from the repetition you expected. Come what may, everything is reused. Each reproduction is an original and a new beginning. Each, in fact, is the first in a potentially infinite sequence, which is to say an infinite sequence. For these reasons, the modern idea of a renovated ruin may be more relevant for art than the nineteenth-century model of picturesque decay. In any case, there's no longer such a thing as a copy. In fact, sampling is not concerned with repetition. In my view, it's refreshing to watch a form deplete itself. It was almost a hundred years before this notion really took hold in the world of music and a composer might actually own his composition. Its purpose is the creation of new, discrete events. Its secrets may have to do with art, but with something else as well, which hovers beyond, with no name forthcoming. Look for the use, not the meaning! And if it's done wrong, no problem, there is produced a nostalgia for the done-right way. Many are interested in the idiom of a form, few in the grammar. On the other hand, it is true that in homoeopathic medicine, and sometimes in magic, you put a drop of the bad thing, the thing you fight, into water or some other medium. Personal computers, for example, were originally made so as to be programmable by their owners, but when consumers eventually rejected this aspect it was removed or hidden. Previously, songs were understood to be common property, and, what's more, mutable, much in the way computer programs were initially understood as communal efforts to be shared, altered and redistributed. Samplers continue to offer one entirely new experience, at least on the level of consumption: the recognition, while listening to an unknown piece of music, of the basis for a sample used in a familiar piece. Sampling may be invasive, negating repetition, disordering us, but then that's the wish of every man: to disorder, to mayhem. Similarly, while the combination of sampled sounds, MIDI [Musical Instrument Digital Interface] and digital manipulation promised all sorts of possibilities, it turns out that most people don't want to build sounds that have never been heard. The machine recalls events and despatches them in a digital relay that is by design simply on or off, making obsolete the weak signal, the half-understood communication. The notion of 'intellectual property' as regards most written material was codified in Europe in the sixteenth century; a response to the new text-copying technology of print. The task is to take these instruments

and fashion new tools. These concerns are often understood to be copyright-related, which means money-motivated, but it's likely that they stem just as much from misgivings about the implications of instrumentalizing human expression. They want sounds corresponding to existing phenomena, invocations of reality at the touch of a finger, like paint straight from the tube: brass, woodwinds, car accidents, shrieks, breaking glass. This gesture, while it banished all communicative symbols, retained the striking look and feel of the work. This is where the gesture's violence is to be found, and why it is attended by cultural anxieties. This text was produced by Dexter Sinister through shell-scripted sorting of selected sentences from *Was ist Los* (aka *Decor Holes*, *Unique Source*, *Akademische Graffiti*, *All Natural Suicide Gang*) by Seth Price. Were it entirely to efface its object, its particular critique would vanish. Whatever pleasure you can sustain must rely on simultaneous presence and absence. You briefly glimpsed a private, inaccessible field between two disparate experiences, a mental correlate to the phantom step at the top of the stairs. You could argue that sampling poisoned the well. You must fight something in order to understand it!

Seth Price (remixed by Dexter Sinister), 'Courtesy of Seth Price', in Dexter Sinister, *Portable Document Format* (Berlin and New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2009) 160–63. Dexter Sinister asked Price for the text file for his 2003–05 essay 'Decor Holes', and then used shell-scripted sorting of selected sentences to generate this new work.

Lygia Clark

Full Emptiness//1960

[...] There are no static things. Everything is dynamic. Even an apparently static object is not still. It is based on a series of supports which are in turn drawn by the force of gravity. My painting therefore expresses a new reality, in which the work of art is expressed as a living object like you and me. In the sense of identifying with the reality of our time: when humanity lived with greater space it could be content, as nature was its *habitat*; one would wake up when light dawned and sleep when night closed in. There was sufficient space, and an integration of human existence with nature. Today, however, one is confined within large buildings, prevented from realizing one's need for expansiveness, without space, in a horizontal sense, that might support one's spirituality. Thus it makes sense for humanity to try to conquer space, with a greater than ever

necessarily unjust. But of course one must imagine this effect, these effects. [...]

Thébaud In the case of prescriptions, the pragmatics is somewhat peculiar, since one of the elements, one of the points of the pragmatic triangle is transcendental, if I may say so. [...] [W]hat is problematic for me is that we are speaking of a language game outside of an immanent functioning of this game.

Lyotard Transcendence is immanent to the prescriptive game. This must be understood. What is being called the transcendence of the prescriptive is simply the fact that the position of the sender, as authority that obligates, is left vacant. That is, the prescriptive utterance comes from nothing: its pragmatic virtue of obligation results from neither its content nor its utterer. [...]

Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, extracts from *Au Juste* (Paris: Christian Bourgeois, 1979), trans. Wlad Godzich, *Just Gaming* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) 60–72.

Nicolas Bourriaud Relational Aesthetics//1998

Contemporary Artistic Practice and Its Cultural Plan

[...] 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 postmodern 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 actually to 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. 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 worldwide 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 network 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 emphasizing 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 *urbanization* 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, 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 civilization, this system of intensive encounters has ended up producing linked artistic practice: an artform where the substrate is formed by intersubjectivity, 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*. 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 civilization, 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 relaunching 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 manner of relational dross, and neighbourhood relationships fizzle. The general mechanization 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 synthesized 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. [...]

Nicolas Bourriaud, extracts from *Esthétique relationnelle* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 1998); English edition, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002) 11–24 [footnotes not included].

Grant Kester On 'The Contemporary'//2009

[...] In *Rethinking Art History* Donald Preziosi has described the relatively undeveloped status of reception as a category of art-historical analysis. 'By and large', he argues, 'the viewer has been seen ... as a passive reader or consumer of images ... This logocentric paradigm is given a characteristic slant or trajectory so as to privilege the maker or artist as an essentially active, originary force, in complementary contrast to the essentially passive consumer or reader of works. It involves no great leap of the imagination to see that the paradigm simultaneously serves as a validating apparatus to privilege the role or function of the historian or critic as a legitimate and unvested diviner of intentionality on behalf of lay beholders.'¹ [...]

Reception is precisely something we can address as historians of the contemporary. Not in order to recover the 'real' or originary meaning of a given work, but because there is a mode of experience that occurs at the site of reception that is significant and worthy of analysis. The relatively undeveloped status of reception theory in art history is particularly evident in research associated with contemporary art practice. This is due in part to the tendency in much recent scholarship to simply import generic reception models taken from the traditions of post-structuralist literary and critical theory into the analysis of contemporary visual art. The result has been the emergence of a quasi-canonical body of art theory centred on the notion of the artwork as a subversive text that seeks to destabilize or otherwise disrupt the viewer's preconceptions. 'Textual' practices lend themselves to an axiomatic form of criticism in which the work instantiates certain propositions about the viewer's experience that necessarily remain untested (except through the surrogate consciousness of the critic). As with any theoretical system it can be deployed with greater or lesser levels of

sophistication. In its more programmatic form, the complexities and contradictions of both theory and practice are elided and practice serves merely to illustrate or verify certain a priori theoretical insights.

This discourse is entirely appropriate for the analysis of art practices that operate within a textual register (the work of art as an event, object or image fabricated by the artist beforehand and set in place before the viewer). Here the artist's vision is enacted for, or against, the viewer through a form of unilateral modelling (the artist's mode of perception stands as the telos towards which the viewer aspires, or by which he or she is guided). The viewer's feedback, as such, is seldom a significant factor and even his or her presence before the work is understood only hypothetically. It is less effective, however, when applied to dialogical or participatory practices that mobilize very different forms of intersubjective affect, identification and agency. Here the process of reception is generative in ways that are distinct from object-based practices. Rather than transmitting a pre-existing content, expression takes place through an unfolding process among an ensemble of collaborative agents. The locus of creative production is displaced from the level of independent ideation on the part of the artist to an indeterminate, collectively authored exchange among multiple interlocutors. I believe that one of the most promising areas for new research in the field of contemporary art involves the development of more nuanced and detailed models of the processes of reception mobilized in such practices. [...]

1 [footnote 2 in source] Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 46.

Grant Kester, extracts from 'Questionnaire on "The Contemporary"', ed. Hal Foster, et al., *October*, no. 130 (Fall 2009) 7–9.

Eyal Weizman Forensic Architecture: Notes from Fields and Forums//2011

The pyramids of Gaza, so a Forensic Architect once told me, proliferate throughout the Strip, but are most commonly seen in the camps and neighbourhoods that ring Gaza City and along the short border to Egypt. They are the result, he said, of an encounter between two familiar elements in the area – a three-storey residential