

## BOURRIAUD - RELATIONAL AESTHETICS - GLOSSARY (INTEGRAL)

From "Relational Aesthetics" by NB, published by "les Presses du Reel", Dijon, France  
2002 english version 1998 french version.  
it costs 11 or 12 euros... Deeply recommended.

### Academism:

1. An attitude that involves clinging to the defunct signs and forms of one's day and rendering these aesthetic.
  2. synonym: pompous (pompiers)
- And why wouldn't he do something pompous, if it pays off` (Samuel Beckett)

### Aesthetics

An idea that sets humankind apart from other animal species. In the end of the day, burying the dead, laughter, and suicide are just the corollaries of a deep-seated hunch, that life is an aesthetic, ritualised, shaped form.

### Art.

1. General term describing a set of objects presented as part of a narrative known as art history. This narrative draws up the critical genealogy and discusses the issues raised by these objects, by way of three sub-sets: painting, sculpture, architecture.
2. Nowadays, the word 'art' seems to be no more than a semantic leftover of this narrative, whose more accurate definition would read as follows: Art is an activity consisting in producing relationships with the world with the help of signs, forms, actions and objects.

### Art (The end of )

'The end of art' only exists in an idealistic view of history. We can nevertheless, and not without irony, borrow Hegel's formula whereby 'art, for us, is a thing of the past' and turn it into a figure of style: let us remain open to what is happening in the present, which invariably exceeds, a priori, our capacities of understanding.

### Artist

When Benjamin Buchloh referred to the conceptual and minimal generation of the 1960's, he defined the artist as a 'scholar-philosopher-craftsman' who hands society 'the objective results of his labour'. For Buchloh, this figure was heir to that of the artist as 'mediumic and transcendental subject' represented by Yves Klein, Lucio Fontana and Joseph Beuys. Recent developments in art merely modify Buchloh's hunch. Today's artist appears as an operator of signs, modelling production structures so as to provide significant doubles. An entrepreneur/politician/director. The most common denominator shared by all artists is that they show something. The act of showing suffices to define the artist, be it a representation or a designation.

### Behaviour

1. Beside those two established genres, the history of things and the history of forms, we still need to come up with a history of artistic behaviours. It would be naive to think that the history of art represents a whole capable of perennially replacing these three sub-groups. An artist's microbiography would point up the things he has achieved within his oeuvre.
2. Artist, producer of time.

All totalitarian ideologies show a distinctive wish to control the time in which they exist. They replace the versatility of time invented by the individual by the fantasy of a central place where it might be possible to acquire the overall meaning of society. Totalitarianism systematically tries to set up a form of temporal motionlessness, and rendering the time in which it exists uniform and collective, a fantasy of eternity aimed first and foremost at standardising and monitoring patterns of behaviours. Foucault thus rightly stressed the fact that the art of living classed with 'all forms of fascism, be they already there or lurking'

### Co-existence criterion

All works of art produce a model of sociability, which transposes reality or might be conveyed in it. So there is a question we are entitled to ask in front of any aesthetic production: 'Does this work permit me to enter into dialogue [ Could I exist, and how, in the space it defines?]' A form is more or less democratic. May I simply remind you, for the record, that the forms produced by the art of totalitarian regimes are peremptory and closed in on themselves (particularly through their stress on symmetry).

Otherwise put, they do not give the viewer a chance to complement them.  
(see: Relational (aesthetics)).

### Context

In situ art is a form of artistic activity that encompasses the space in which it is on view. This consideration by the artist of the exhibition venue consisted, yesterday, in exploring its spatial and architectural configuration. A second possibility, prevalent in the art of the 1990s consists in an institutional structure, the socio-economic features encompassing it, and the people involved. This latter method calls for a great deal of subtlety : although such contextual studies have the merit of reminding us

that the artistic doing does not drop out of the sky into a place unblemished by any ideology, it is nevertheless important to fit this investigation into a prospect that goes beyond the primary stage of sociology, it is not enough to extract, mechanically, the social characteristics of the place where you exhibit (the art centre, the city, the region, the country...) to "reveal" whatever it may be. For some artists who complicated thinking represents an architecture of meanings, no more nor less (Dan Asher, Daniel Buren, Jef Geys, Mark Dion) how many conceptual hacks are there who laboriously 'associate', for their show in Montelimar, nougat production and unemployment figures? The mistake lies in thinking that the sense of an aesthetic fact lies solely in the context.

## 2. Art after criticism

Once art 'overtook' philosophy (Joseph Kosuth), it nowadays goes beyond critical philosophy, where conceptual art has helped to spread the viewpoint. Doubt can be cast over the stance of the 'critical' artist, when this position consists in judging the world as if he were excluded from it by divine grace, and played no part in it. This idealistic attitude can be contrasted with Lacanian intuition that the unconscious is its own analyst. And Marx's idea that explains that real criticism is the criticism of reality that exists through criticism itself. For there is no mental place where the artist might exclude himself from the world he represents.

## Critical materialism

The world is made up of random encounters (Lucretius, Hobbes, Marx, Althusser). Art, too, is made of chaotic, chance meetings of signs and forms. Nowadays, it even creates spaces within which the encounter can occur. Present-day art does not present the outcome of a labour, it is the labour itself, or the labour-to-be.

## Factitiousness

Art is not the world of suspended will (Schopenhauer), or of the disappearance of contingency (Sartre), but a space emptied of the factitious. It in no way clashes with authenticity (an absurd value where art is concerned) but replaces coherences, even phoney ones, with the illusory world of 'truth'. It is the bad lie that betrays the hack, who at best touching sincerity inevitably ends up as a forked tongue.

## Form

Structural unity imitating a world. Artistic practice involves creating a form capable of "lasting", bringing heterogeneous units together on a coherent level, in order to create a relationship to the world.

## Gesture

Movement of the body revealing a psychological state or designed to express an idea. Gesturality means the set of requisite operations introduced by the production of artworks, from their manufacture to the production of peripheral signs (actions, event, anecdotes)

## Image

Making a work involves the invention of a process of presentation. In this kind of process, the image is an act.

## Inhabiting

Having imagined architecture and art of the future, the artist is now proposing solutions for inhabiting them. The contemporary form of modernity is ecological, haunted by the occupancy of forms and the use of images.

## Modern

The ideals of modernity have not vanished, they have been adapted. So "the total work of art" comes about today in its spectacular version, emptied of its teleological content. Our civilization makes up for the hyperspecialization of social functions by the progressive unity of leisure activities. It is thus possible to predict, without too much risk attaching thereto, that the aesthetic experience of the average late 20th century individual might roughly resemble what early 20th century avant-gardes imagined. Between the interactive video disk, the CD-Rom, ever more multi-media-oriented games consoles, and the extreme sophistication of mass recreational venues, discotheques and theme parks, we are heading towards the condensation of leisure in unifying forms. Towards a compact art. Once a CD-Rom and Cd-I drives are available. which have enough autonomy, books, exhibitions and films will be in competition with a form of expression that is at once more comprehensive and more thought-restricting, circulating writing, imagery and sound in new forms.

## Operational realism

Presentation of the functional sphere in an aesthetic arrangement. The work proposes a functional model and not a maquette. In other words, the concept of dimension does not come into it, just as in the digital image whose proportions may vary depending on the size of the screen, which unlike the frame, does not enclose works within a predetermined format, but rather renders virtuality material in x dimensions.

## Ready-made

Artistic figure contemporary with the invention of film. The artist takes his camera-subjectivity into the real, defining himself as a cameraman: the museum plays the part of the film, he records. For the first time, with Duchamp, art no longer consists in translating the real with the help of signs, but in presenting this same real as it is (Duchamp, the Lumière brothers...

### Relational Aesthetics

Aesthetic theory consisting in judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt.(see co-existence criterion)

### Relational (art)

A set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.

### Semionaut

The contemporary artist is a semionaut, he invents trajectories between signs.

### Society of extras

The society of the spectacle has been defined by Guy Debord as the historical moment when merchandise achieved 'the total occupation of social life ', capital having reached 'such a degree of accumulation' that it was turned into imagery. Today , we are in the further stage of spectacular development: the individual has shifted from a passive and purely repetitive status to the minimum activity dictated to him by market forces. So television consumption is shrinking in favour of video games, thus the spectacular hierarchy encourages 'empty monads', i.e. programmeless models and politicians, thus everyone sees themselves summoned to be famous for fifteen minutes, using a TV game, street poll or new item as go-between. This is the reign of the 'Infamous Man' , whom Michel Foucault defined as the anonymous and 'ordinary' individual suddenly put in the glare of the media spotlights. Here we are summoned to turn into extras of the spectacle, having been regarded as its consumers. This switch can be historically explained: since the surrender of the Soviet bloc, there are no obstacles on capitalism's path to empire.It has a total hold of the social arena, so it can permit itself to stir individuals to frolic about in the free and open spaces that it has staked out. So, after the consumer society, we can see the dawning of the society of extras where the individual develops as a part-time stand-in for freedom, signer and sealer of the public place.

### Style

The movement of a work, its trajectory 'The style of a thought is its movement' (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari).

### Trailer

Having been an event per se (classical painting), then the graphic recording of an event (the work of Jackson Pollock with photographic documents describing a performance or an action), today's work of art often assumes the role of a trailer for a forthcoming event, or an event that is put off forever.

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