

2. INTERACTION the difficult birth of the viewer

ART GAMES

FROM THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR TO RELATIONAL AESTHETICS

Texts such as Barthes' 'The Death of the Author' (1977), Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (2002) and Bishop's *Installation Art: A Critical History* (2005) all point towards the centrality of the concept of deconstructing the barrier between the viewer and the work of art which is closely allied to the longstanding avant-gardist goal of bringing art into everyday life. The main point being stressed in this book is that the institutionalisation of transgressive art is slowing the pace of evolution towards this crucial goal. Art of 1980s was rich in critical theory and practice. Art of the 1990s has been theoretically poor. The most significant theoretical text to emerge out of the 1990s is Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* which is an attempt to bring the concept of art into life up to date. Although the aspiration informing this book is laudible the instances Bourriaud cites are unconvincing due to the fact that only one artist, Rikrit Tiravanija, can be referred to as a sustained instance of relational aesthetics. Other artists include relational aesthetic work in their oeuvre but their practice is fundamentally moulded by an institutional matrix that demands precious objects and extraordinary individuals.

What is most remarkable about Tiravanija's relational aesthetic art is that such sustained deterritorialisations of the museum remain a rarity. Nevertheless, Tiravanija and Bourriaud have opened up an important issue, that informs the critique in this book, and hopefully there will be artists with sufficient ingenuity to follow their lead.

In this chapter I will deal with Tiravanija's work and the work of other artists who are also attempting to achieve a greater degree of viewer interaction. Bishop argues that the revolutionary feature of installation lies in its 'activation' of the viewer. That may have been the case in some of the seminal instances of installation art that Bishop cites—e.g. Alan Kaprow, Dan Graham, Hélio Oiticica—but if we examine institutionalised installation art at the turn of the millennium then we need to assess this allegedly new-found liberation of the viewer against the intense concentration of attention on the traditional focus of the artist as exceptional individual.

In the introduction it was noted that in 'The Death of the Author' Barthes' observes that 'classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is the

only person in literature' (Barthes 1976: 148); and that this can be paraphrased as 'the art system has never paid any attention to the viewer, the artist is the only person that matters'. At the turn of the millennium fine art finds itself in a position that is much more bound by tradition than was imagined in the days of postmodern theory and practice of the 1980s or the radical experimentation of the 1960s and 1970s. Accordingly our claims for a new focus on the viewer deserve to be closely questioned.

ARTIST'S GAMES

RIKRIT TIRAVANIJA'S CONVIVIAL GATHERINGS



Rikrit Tiravanija. *Untitled (Free)* 1992. Installation 303 Gallery, New York. Tiravanija transformed the gallery into a kitchen offering free pad tai to visitors for the course of the exhibition

The most sophisticated theoretical text to emerge out of art of the 1990s is Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, and the hero of that narrative is Rikrit Tiravanija. Tiravanija is best known for installations such as *Untitled (Free)*, 1992, in which he made pad tai every day for a month in the 303 Gallery, New York. The gallery became an open house into which anyone could enter and have a meal with Tiravanija together with anyone else who turned up. Katy Siegel and Paul Mattick note that the viewer's consumption of the meal is itself part of the art work' (Siegel 2004: 164). Tiravanija has stated that his work is 'less about things in the gallery and more about the people I've met, had a conversation with, talked about things with, and looked at things with' (Tiravanija 2006). Tiravanija's work has become the prime

instance of a mode of art that ostensibly focuses on human interactions rather than on precious objects.

One might expect Claire Bishop to approve of Tiravanija's ingenious strategy for bringing everyday life into the museum and involving the viewer, but she is highly critical. She accuses him of creating artificially harmonious situations rather than focusing upon a more critical engagement with the everyday. She comments: 'Ultimately Tiravanija's works tend not to destabilise our self-identificatory mechanisms but to affirm them, and collapse into everyday leisure' (2005: 119). It is certainly the case that the mere involvement of the viewer does not lead to a condition of 'activated spectatorship' (Bishop 2005: 11) but few instances of canonical contemporary installation art would inspire 'active engagement in the social-political arena' (Bishop 2005: 11). And perhaps they don't need to; the fact that the viewer is being involved is, in itself, a major step in the context of aesthetic politics. But one of the features of Tiravanija's strategy that can be criticised is that the creative game is played by the artist not by the viewer-participant, but more on that later.

ANGELA BULLOCH'S BEAN-BAG WORKS



Angela Bulloch, *Flexible* at Art Club Berlin, 1997. Three beanbags, CD-Player, headphones, acrylic table.

First we can turn to Angela Bulloch's beanbag works, another instance where an artist provides a participatory role for the viewer. For *Flexible*, 1997, at Art Club

Berlin she provided large, brightly coloured beanbags a cd-player and headphones so that visitors could chill out on the beanbag listening to music. In another beanbag installation for a group show at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, she placed the beanbags in front of monitors showing videos of recently released films. In each case the viewer is not presented with a work of art, instead the viewer is placed in a situation that radically questions our traditional relationship with art works within a gallery environment.

One can understand these chill-out zones as a deconstruction of the self-importance of the gallery environment and the way in which it frames the viewer as one who should submissively and respectfully contemplate what is on exhibition. One can also understand these works by Bullock as turning over power to the viewer. Certainly Bulloch notes that 'It was interesting to me that the person looking at the piece was involved in a level of power given to them unexpectedly or that they could take ... upon themselves to use. This renegotiation of power interested me.' (MCA 1997). What seems significant in the case of the works cited is that the power 'unexpectedly' given to the viewer was the ability *not* to look at art. That is certainly a step away from being conditioned to focus respectful attention on great works of art but it is not participatory art. The viewer remains in the role of a passive consumer. What is more it is the artist and not the viewer who is playing a creative game. The game Bulloch is playing is that of pointing to the power afforded to the artist. But this is only possible because Bulloch is an artist; a status paradoxically defined by the fact that her deconstruction of the defining role of the art gallery is on exhibition in an art gallery.

We find a similar problem in Tiravanija's works. It is difficult to see eating pad tai as a creative engagement on the part of the viewer. That of course is the point. The ingenuity of Tiravanija lies in his very simple solution to the problem of bringing art into everyday life. He takes the Duchampian Readymade to its logical conclusion and declares that everyday life is art. But this solution is flawed because as with Bulloch's chill-out pieces there is no creative game involved except the game that *the artist* is playing. The viewer simply eats pad tai, but the artist is making a statement that is located within the language game (Lyotard 1984) which is the Duchampian Readymade. Marcel Duchamp played on the traditional concept of artistic genius by claiming that anything that the artist chose to be a work of art was a work of art. But this is not the whole story. By the 1960s it became apparent that what Duchamp's Readymade really revealed was that it is not the artist who frames the object as a work

of art, it is the gallery/museum. It is only when the object is exhibited in an art gallery, and better an art museum, that it becomes a work of art. The fact that Tiravanija's convivial gatherings are always located in an art gallery reveals the nature of the art game being played in these instances.

The Readymade strategy can be understood as a creative game, as are most of the seminal strategies invented by Dada and Surrealism. In his landmark book *Theory of the Avant-Garde* Peter Bürger notes:

Given the avantgardiste [sic] intention to do away with art as a sphere that is separate from the praxis of life, it is logical to eliminate the antithesis between producer and recipient. It is no accident that both [Tristan] Tzara's instructions for the making of a Dadaist poem and [André] Breton's for the writing of automatic texts have the character of recipes. This represents not only a polemical attack on the individual creativity of the artist; the recipe is to be taken quite literally as suggesting a possible activity on the part of the recipient. The automatic texts also should be read as guides to individual production. But such production is not to be understood as artistic production, but as part of a liberating life praxis. This is what is meant by Breton's demand that poetry be practiced (*pratiquer la poesie*). (Bürger 1984: 53)

Bürger takes us back to the origins of the discourse of deconstructive art and thereby helps clarify the project of bringing art into life that Dada initiated. Crucial to this project is the concept of **intersecting the praxis of life with creative process**. The games that were devised such as the Readymade, automatism and montage were supposed to be playable by anyone, they were a doorway into everyday life, but artists kept the games to themselves. Or more accurately, the art system, which is always the condition of possibility of the continued existence of art, ensured that the products of such games were treated as precious objects created by individual artist geniuses. And who can resist such adulation? It is not by accident that—like most installation art—Tiravanija's everyday interventions invariably take place within the sanctum of an art gallery.

TAKING A LEAD FROM THE SCIENCE MUSEUM: CARSTEN HÖLLER

The main criticism of both Bulloch and Tirvanija's tactics would be that they continue to place the viewer in the role of a passive consumer. The obvious next step would be to give the viewer something to do that facilitates a greater degree of creative engagement. But before embarking upon an examination of efforts in this direction one can note that a key feature of Tiravanija and Bulloch's work is the

absence of a traditional work of art. What we have instead is an apparatus that the viewer/participant can use. This concept of the substitution of the traditional work of art with an apparatus is also evident in the work of Carsten Höller.

Höller has produced a number of works that focus on providing the viewer with experiences that encourage new ways of seeing. In *Umkehrbrille* (upside-down glasses), 2001, viewers became participants who were invited to wear spectacles which turned the world upside down.¹ In a similar vein he has created a harness on a rotating boom that swings the viewer around the gallery at almost ceiling height providing a very different point of view to that normally experienced when visiting an exhibition. Such works are great fun but they are also informed by Höller's original profession as a scientist. Science is at its most beautiful when nothing is taken for granted and everything is questioned. It is this facet of science that energised the Enlightenment and caused a turn against the doctrinal dictatorship of religion. Such observations should help us understand why Höller has employed the concept of 'doubt' to explain his work; he observes:

Doubt and its semantic cousin, perplexity, which are both equally important to me, are unsightly states of mind we'd rather keep under lock and key because we associate them with uneasiness, with a failure of values. But wouldn't it be more accurate to claim the opposite, that certainty in the sense of brazen, untenable affirmation is much more pathetic? It is simply its association with notions of well-being that gives affirmation its current status. (in Obrist 1999)

Doubt is most certainly a pertinent feature of the deconstructive project which foregrounds less what is known than what is not known; and which constantly questions that which is known on the basis that knowledge is always a cultural construction. One of Höller's most interesting aesthetic approaches—which bears some resemblances to the intersection of art and science in interactive digital art—lies in his translation of scientific experiments into works of art; but in the context of this chapter I would prefer to refer to them as 'art games' where the term 'game' refers to the manner in which the apparatus provides the viewer with an active role.

Returning to *Umkehrbrille*, this interactive installation refers to an historic scientific experiment carried out in the 1890s by the psychologist George Stratton who used similar eyeglasses that inverted his visual field. After wearing these glasses for some time and experiencing increasingly disturbing perceptual distortions Stratton's visual cortex eventually learnt how to reprocess the manifold of data and turn the world

upright again. Stratton's experiment supports the contention that unconscious cognitive (inferential) processes play a very active role in constructing reality. Unfortunately the full experiment requires too much time and too much pain to carry out in the context of an exhibition. Which in a sense makes Höller's installation experience somewhat incomplete. But at least he has drawn the viewer's attention to Stratton's experiment and its implication: which is that the reality we take for granted—including corporeal sensation—is constructed by autonomous mental processes.

In *Phi Wall*, 2002, Höller makes use of another historical psychological experiment. *Phi Wall* is based on the Gestalt psychologist Max Wertheimer's discovery, in 1910–12, that if two dots are projected in rapid sequence next to each other, with a short moment of darkness in between, most observers will perceive the event as one dot moving from one position to another. Like *Umkehrbrille*, *Phi Wall* is a scientific game with philosophical implications that are relevant to the encouragement of creative ways of seeing. The importance of the phi effect is that it shows that we do not perceive what is actually happening—one light switching on then the other switching off—instead we perceive the light as an object that moves from one place to another. The reason why we do not perceive what is actually happening is because *all perception is mediated* by unconscious inferential (cognitive) processes. *Phi Wall* demonstrates that there is no such thing as the innocent eye, or direct perception. Like Stratton's experiment it points to the remarkable powers of unconscious information processing in the brain. Ultimately such experiments indicate the fact that the brain reconstructs the world we experience (including all our bodily sensations); a feat that is nothing short of miraculous. The virtual reality we inhabit is so exquisitely woven that we find it immensely difficult to understand it as a projection unless assisted by devices or chemicals that disrupt the perceptual-cognitive apparatus (Höller refers to entheogenic substances in his work *Pealove Room*, 1993, and *Upside Down Mushroom Room*, 2000).²

Like the Surrealists, Höller explores the effects of interfering with unconscious mental mechanisms but goes that crucial step further by inviting the viewer to participate. In *Light Wall*, 2000, he constructed a consciousness altering machine that consisted of a 19m (62.3 foot) gallery wall filled with 3,552 twenty-five watt incandescent light bulbs that emit flashes of light with a frequency of 8.5hz (8.5 cycles per second). Höller was inspired in this work by the German neurologist Hans

Berger who discovered brain waves in particular the alpha wave and thereby laid the basis for the development of the electroencephalogram (EEG). But Höller is more interested in the phenomenon of neuro-feedback wherein our perception of certain frequencies can induce mental activity to synchronise with the stimulus frequency. In the case of *Light Wall* the frequency of 8.5hz is akin to alpha wave activity (8–12 Hz) which is associated with calmness and relaxation. With its 3,552 light bulbs *Light Wall* is very bright, accordingly, the idea is to close one's eyes in order to synchronise with the pulsation.

Höllner is outstanding amongst contemporary installation artists in his capacity to create interactive apparatuses that touch upon issues regarding the functioning of consciousness. But he is the exception that proves the rule that most contemporary installation art is rather weak in its attempts to involve the viewer due to the traditional focus on demonstrating the artist's individual ingenuity. If we want more instances of an effective, creative, engagement of the viewer we have to shift our attention away from fine art towards interactive digital art.

SEMINAL DIGITAL INTERACTIVE INSTALLATION: *LEGIBLE CITY*, 1989

Interactive digital media should be understood as revolutionary in the same manner that the invention of perspective was revolutionary in the Renaissance. In the case of traditional art we have the viewer and the work of art. In the case of interactive digital art we have the viewer, an input device and the work of art. One of the earliest, sophisticated instances of digital interactive installation art is Jeffrey Shaw's now classic work *Legible City*, 1989, (with Dirk Groeneveld); and it is refreshing to see a collaborator actually credited by the artist. In *Legible City* one rides a fixed bicycle the speed and direction of which effects where one travels within a computer generated city constructed out of 3D letters projected on a large screen ahead of the rider. The principal effect of this work is one of being *embodied* in the 'legible city'. One has a palpable sense of *physical* relationship with the image on the screen to a degree that is rare when viewing traditional fine art media or television or film.

Legible City creates an immersive effect but what is more significant about this work is its intersection of immersion and interaction and it is remarkable that this has not been addressed in the current crop of literature on the topic of installation art. One can, however, criticise the content of *Legible City* on the basis that the interaction amounts to 'bicycling' around a city made of three-dimensional letters. At best it becomes an embodied mode of reading a nonlinear text. But the work is certainly

significant as a phenomenological demonstration that one can achieve a corporeal involvement with a flat screen moving image if that image is coordinated with bodily input. *Legible City* reveals that the critical difference between digital interactive installation and sculptural installation lies in the presence of an interactive input devices—in the case of *Legible City*, the bicycle.

Digital interactive input devices, of which there can be many, are *tools* (e.g. mouse, joystick, gamepad and custom made devices) not works of art. These input devices are replaceable accessories to the work of art and therefore touching them is not a problem, indeed they have no other function than to be handled. It is also the case that the viewer can become an embodied participant without direct touch, via sensors that detect the human body. The level at which devices such as video cameras can scan the human body and enable it to participate in an embodied fashion is incrementing from year to year.³ At the turn of the millennium digital art is evolving in its own parallel universe⁴ that hopefully will eventually intersect with the world of fine art; but this could take a generation to occur.⁵ Certainly the current generation emerging in the early 2000s and following on from the artists who emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s does not indicate any significant shift to new media. However, it is significant to observe that video art remains the most exciting and inspiring field evident in the world of fine art; significant because the logical next step for video art is interactive video.

PLACE: RHUR, 2000

Speaking of interactive video art in *Place: Ruhr, 2000*, Shaw provides a screen-based environment that is immersive in the manner of *Legible City* but has a more complex content and mode of interaction. The work is a computational videographic apparatus that allows the viewer to explore the landscape of the Ruhr, once the industrial heartland of Germany and now undergoing the vicissitudes of post-industrial regeneration.

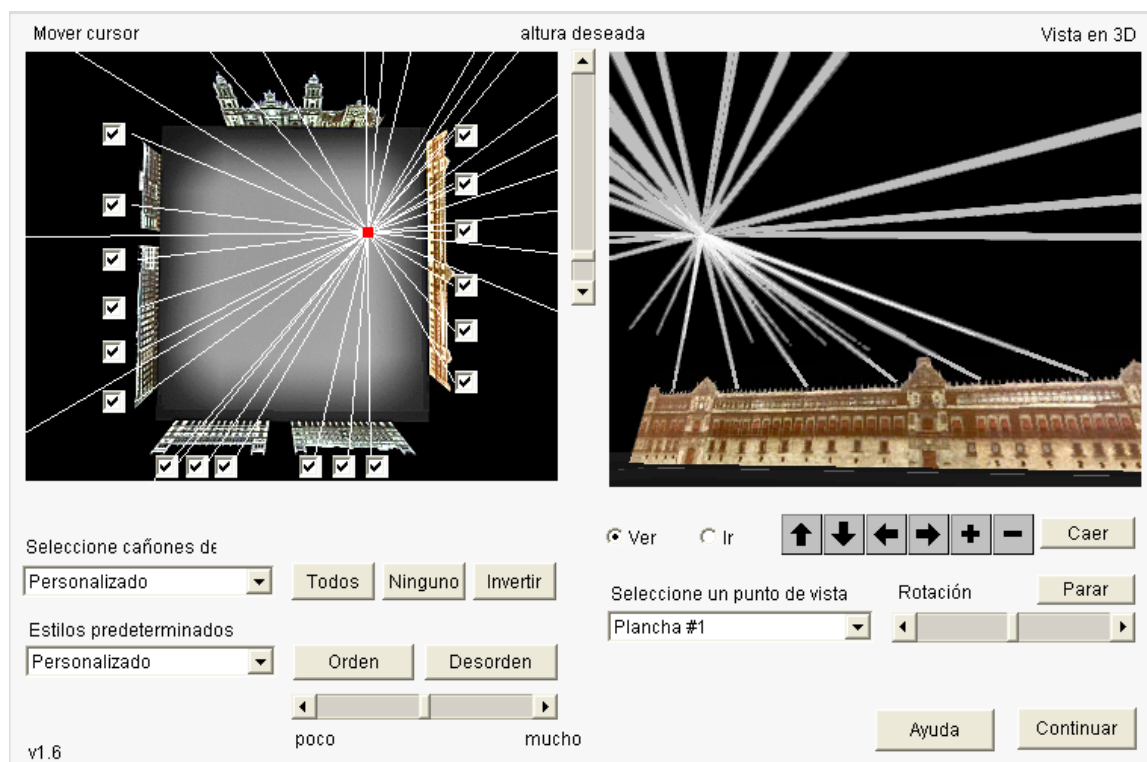
This digital interactive installation is more elaborate than *Legible City*. It is essentially an interactive panorama. The viewer occupies a platform with controls in the middle of a 360° panoramic screen. A 120° field-of-vision image is projected onto the screen. By manipulating the control panel the viewer, standing on a rotatable platform, can position a 120° image within the larger 360° surface. If viewers see something that interests them, they can zoom into the image. The eleven panoramic images of the Ruhr environment are presented on the screen in the form of graphic

cylinders that the viewer can choose to enter. These cylinders refer to the shape of the panoramic screen and also, for Shaw, they connote the eleven interconnected circles of the Sephirothic Tree of Life which, in the context of this work, suggest the exploration of multiple realities and realities within realities. Upon selecting a particular image cylinder via controls on the viewing platform it opens out into a 120° computational panoramic image which the viewer is able to explore videographically. Mark Hansen quotes ZKM (Centre for Art and Media Technology) director Peter Weibel's description of Shaw's use of interactivity as 'a heightened ability to view and use the world according to one's own notions, more individually, more subjectively' (in Hansen, 2004: 51). And Hansen suggests that the physical involvement of the viewer in the viewing process makes 'technology a supplement to the body' (2004: 51).

One might argue that this embodiment is illusory but that observation has to be balanced against the fact that all of our various senses including corporeal senses such as touch and the kinaesthetic senses are interrelated within the processing systems of the brain. Leading edge research into artificial intelligence also indicates that *language* is embodied, which is to say integrated into the internal and external senses (Roy 2005).

Interrelatedness of sense and the senses is necessary to give us a coordinated grip on the world. On the one hand our consciousness of our body and world is produced in the synaptic universe of the brain. On the other hand the interrelated learning networks of the brain are inherently informed by the fact that we have a physical body in a physical world. Which is to say, body and brain are, perceptually and cognitively speaking, intimately entwined. Francesco Varela coined the useful phrase 'embodied mind' to refer to this condition (Varela et al. 1991).

In her history of installation art Bishop mentions the work of Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica who pioneered an embodied mode of installation art. The embodiment took the form of a network of spaces that the viewer was invited to explore. The construction of spaces that the viewer is invited to explore is also evident in the contemporary installation art of Mike Nelson, Gregor Schneider and John Bock. But a parallel process of embodied exploration is taking place in the immersive screen space of *Place: Ruhr*. This parallel mode of embodied exploration is also evident in commercial computer games that involve creative exploration.



Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. *Vectorial Elevation*, 2000. Zocalo Square, Mexico. Web based Java graphic interface allowing general public to manipulate the pattern of lights in Zocalo Square via the Internet.

If Jeffrey Shaw (born 1944) represents the pioneering, first generation of interactive digital installation art then Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (born 1967) is an outstanding representative of the second generation. He has produced several remarkable works but the one I will focus on here is *Vectorial Elevation*, 2000, which is a paradigmatic instance of interactive installation art which facilitates a creative engagement on the part of the viewer and brings art into everyday life.

Vectorial Elevation was staged in Zocalo square, Mexico City, one of the largest public squares in the world. It has played a role in many of the political upheavals in Mexican history as well as being a site for concerts and celebrations. Lozano-Hemmer placed eighteen remote controlled searchlights on the roofs of the building surrounding the square. The movement of these searchlights was controlled via computer and it was possible for people to program the pattern made by the searchlight beams by using a web browser graphic interface that could be accessed anywhere in the world over the Internet. In his video documentation of the project Lozano-Hemmer claims that *Vectorial Elevation* introduces 'new creative relationships between control technologies, ominous urban landscapes and a local and

remote public' (Lozano-Hemmer 2000). He notes that 'the Zocalo's monumental size makes the human scale seem insignificant, an observation that has been noted by some Mexican scholars as an emblem of a rigid, monolithic, homogenizing environment' (Lozano-Hemmer 2000) which is to say the government building flanked square becomes an architectural embodiment of alienation and disempowerment the artist seeks to 'deterritorialise'.

Lozano-Hemmer also notes that 'searchlights themselves have been associated with authoritarian regimes' and one can cite Adolf Hitler's resident designer and architect Albert Speer who on the occasion of a spectacular Nazi rally in the Nuremberg stadium, in 1936, made use of a line of searchlight beams pointing vertically into the sky like a Roman colonnade.

The crucial difference between Speer's fascist spectacle and Lozano-Hemmer's use of searchlights is that Lozano-Hemmer places the means of spectacle into the hands of the viewer. Accordingly, his work goes further than situating art in public spaces. That simply expands the potential audience, it does not offer a more active role to that audience. In addition, in *Vectorial Elevation*, the viewer is not only controlling the lights but also the public square. If Zocalo square can be understood as a site of tension between the power of the state and that of its citizenry, then for duration of his installation Lozano-Hemmer hands the spectacular power of square over to the public.

The significance of *Vectorial Elevation* lies in the manner in which Lozano-Hemmer creates a situation in which the public are placed in control of the means of production of spectacle. If, as Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard argue, spectacle is one of the principal methods whereby the capitalist system ensures its hegemony then *Vectorial Elevation* can be said to possess an emancipatory dimension.

Vectorial Elevation is a quintessential instance of an art game, a game without winners and losers; instead the game is oriented towards creative engagement and empowerment. This work actually achieves the very high aspirations alluded to by Bishop in the following statement.

Many artists and critics have argued that this need to move around and through the work in order to experience it *activates the viewer*, in contrast to art that simply requires optical contemplation (which is considered to be passive and detached). This activation is, moreover, regarded as emancipatory, since it is analogous to the viewer's engagement in the world. A transitive relationship comes to be implied between 'activated spectatorship' and active engagement in the social-political arena. (Bishop 2005: 11)

The exceptional nature of *Vectorial Elevation* is evident in the fact that the achievement of such goals is so extremely rare. It is also extraordinary that current texts on installation art are so focused on traditional fine art that they neglect developments in digital interactive installation art such as *Vectorial Elevation*.

REALITY TV

The key feature of *Vectorial Elevation* that distinguishes it from the instances of fine art addressed in this book is its game-like structure. Like a game designer Lozano-Hemmer becomes a facilitator handing over the active use of the work of art into the hands of the participant.

Vectorial Elevation is a paradigmatic instance of not only interactivity but taking art into life. And it is significant that Lozano-Hemmer states that *Vectorial Elevation* would be an 'ephemeral intervention that would have no linear narrative'. Nonlinear narrative is one of the key principles of deconstructive art to the extent that if work of art does not follow this rule it is not deconstructive. This does not pose a problem when the fundamental goal is creative playfulness but it does pose a problem if one is intent on having a purpose such as creating a functioning design or transmitting an ethical message. The beauty of *Vectorial Elevation* is that it demonstrates that a creative game can square the circle and transmit an ethical message while at the same time being nonlinear.

This is quite an achievement because deconstructive art has been plagued by its devotion to nonlinear narrative. It is the dedication to nonlinear narrative that has led deconstructive art away from social relevance and into the dimension of pure play, and solipsistic private languages.

It should be useful, therefore, to add the concept of the creative game to that of the narrative continuum with its two poles of linearity and nonlinearity. If the linear-nonlinear narrative continuum is the horizontal x axis then we can install a vertical y axis consisting of the poles of the creative versus the classic game. The difference between the two types of game is that the classic game entails winners and losers whereas the creative game concerns exploration and experiment.

The doctrinal dedication of deconstructive art to nonlinear narrative has contributed to its lack of success in attaining the goal of a greater involvement of art in everyday life. Accordingly I would like to take a look now at an area of popular culture—reality

TV—which has turned away from classic linear narrative without losing its popularity. One may think that this instance is just *too* popular but I would argue that in certain cases reality-TV can be more socially significant than fine art.⁶

In drama the logic of the story, narrative logic, is superimposed on elements of everyday life. In the case of reality-TV what is imposed is a game logic, often in the form of a simple model in which there are winners and losers (a microcosm of the game of life). From the standpoint of interaction the pertinent feature of the game is that it can accommodate both spectatorship and active participation.

As in literature and film, reality-TV focuses on human behaviour, in Bourriaudian terms it is quintessentially ‘relational’. This is in stark contrast to the focus on inanimate objects, formalisms and autobiographical obsessions evident in the sphere of modern-postmodern art. This is not, necessarily, to suggest that deconstructive art should turn to reality-TV—although that might be an interesting and productive avenue—instead I am pointing to a phenomenon wherein the non-narrative form of the game is able to intersect in a creative manner with everyday life.

One might also cite sport, which has massive popularity. But, unlike sport which depends upon high levels of skill, most reality-TV games are designed so that anyone can participate, but there is usually a task of more or less complexity that has to be accomplished.⁷ The participant in the reality-TV game therefore can undergo ‘character growth’ which is one of the staples of narrative development in classic cinema.

Comparing and contrasting deconstructive fine art and reality TV is instructive. One can note, for example, that the socially privileged position of successful artists presents a significant barrier to their attempts to interact with social reality. In this sense the producers of reality-TV are at an advantage because they are unencumbered with traditional values such as the intrinsic genius of the reality TV producer. They are simply making a product, not a remarkable contribution to High Culture. And reality-TV offers its participants more than payment it offers them a taste of fame, more than that it can offer a very real sense of achievement and an expansion of life horizons. Whereas the people who take part in works of art are mostly ciphers.

THE SOCIAL REALIST AS ENTREPRENEUR: THOMAS HIRSCHHORN

Unlike the reality TV producer anything a successful fine artist does becomes framed by his or her position within the fine art system. The artist becomes what

Minow Kwon describes as a 'delegate', an official representative, of the art system (2002: 139). Kwon cites the art historian and critic Grant Kester who notes that the artist understood as delegate of the bourgeois art system 'confirms and legitimates his or her political power through the act of literally representing or exhibiting ... [a fine art] community' (in Kwon 2002: 139–140). The artist is given comfort and power by the fine art community, and can never really escape from it into the world outside.

Take the case of Thomas Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument*, 2002. This is a prime instance of a 'collaborative' and 'participatory' project that is a gamespace that belongs principally to the artist due to the pressure of artistic convention. For the occasion of Documenta 11 Hirschhorn decided to construct a grunge-installation monument to the surrealist philosopher George Bataille. Moreover, he decided that this monument must be situated outside the principal venues of Documenta, the middle-class fine art festival that takes over the city of Kassel every four or five years. He chose as his location the Friedrich-Wöhler Siedlung, a mixed Turkish-German social housing complex in a low socio-economic suburb of Kassel.

It seems self-evident that Hirschhorn was seeking nitty-gritty street credibility but remarkably he claims 'I had never thought the *Bataille Monument* could be discussed and criticised as a social art project.' (in Doherty 2004: 137). He does, however, qualify this statement by adding 'I do think social issues can be raised through an art project. It is a question of the surroundings, the environment, the *reality*. That is a goal of *my* work.' (in Doherty 2004: 137) [emphasis added]. Like every artist motivated by the discourse of individual creativity Hirschhorn seeks difference. And the low socio-economic status of the Turkish and German community in this social housing complex were able to provide it. They become part of Hirschhorn's palette, and the artist's dedication to his work is indicated when he notes that, despite his penchant for social realistic situations, 'one thing has always been clear for me: I am an artist and not a social worker.' (in Doherty 2004: 137).

It would appear that we have some contradictions here, on the one hand Hirschhorn wants 'reality', which in the case of the *Bataille Monument* means the milieu of socially marginalised people who need work; and on the other hand he declares that he is an artist and not a social worker: which indicates that he recognises and, understandably, values his extremely privileged position as an international fine art star. The comment 'I am an artist and not a social worker' deserves attention because it refers so directly to the strategy of bringing art into life.

When Hirschhorn states that 'I am an artist' he is relying upon a raft of conventional suppositions concerning the role of the artist. From a creative-deconstructive perspective there is no reason why an artist might not be a social worker. After all Tiravanija makes no such assumptions when he equates making art with cookery. Moreover, in the final chapter 'Situation' we will also consider the case of the Indian art collective Sarai who adopt creative practice for the purposes of a species of 'social work'.

Returning to Hirschhorn's project for Documenta 11, his choice of venue was successful in that he was able to assemble a team of people living in the Friedrich-Wöhler Siedlung who were willing to work on the monument for the eight euros an hour he paid them. And to oversee the construction Hirschhorn moved into an apartment in the Siedlung. Managing the labour force to build his work of art was certainly an entrepreneurial achievement on Hirschhorn's part. He even convinced the people working for him to return his belongings when some of them broke into his apartment and stole his laptop, video, hi fi and camera equipment. The very fact that they did that indicates the significant social divide between them and the artist. Like many artists of the 1990s and 2000s Hirschhorn acts as an entrepreneur, which is to say a boss, albeit a more or less enlightened boss (less, in the case of Santiago Sierra). He chooses a needy social group for the purposes of providing *his* work of art with *reality*, and in this sense his approach is not dissimilar to the producers of reality-TV. But we dismiss reality-TV as pulp realism. In contrast Hirschhorn is an artist and his *Bataille Monument* is a significant work of art that will enter into the annals of art history; and from 2002 onward the previously invisible everyday entity that is the Friedrich-Wöhler Siedlung will be remembered in conjunction with the 'social sculpture' of *Thomas Hirschhorn* but the people who helped him make the monument remain invisible.

Contrast Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument* with the Arts Council supported reality-TV project *The Singing Estate*, 2006 which took its participants from a Friedrich-Wöhler Siedlung-like housing estate in Oxford. The aim of this project was to form a choir from inhabitants of the estate with the goal of performing in the Albert Hall, London. The artist involved in this venture was the choral conductor Ivor Settlefield. But unlike the *Bataille Monument* the focus of *The Singing Estate* was not the artist individual but the people from the housing estate. Settlefield's task was to train sixty inhabitants of the housing estate to a level of skill commensurate with the goal. After

understandable vicissitudes this goal was attained and the participants benefited enormously in personal terms. In stark contrast the ‘participants’ in the Hirschhorn project were thrust into the background as passive, paid manual labourers who were bleached out by the limelight projected onto the artistic genius of Thomas Hirschhorn.

All that Hirschhorn needed to do was to credit the names of the people who helped him build his *Bataille Monument* and the criticism I have just elaborated would evaporate. But the fact that Hirschhorn does not mention those who helped him is not his fault so much as it is the fault of the institutional rules of the art game, which understands that game as belonging to the artist. We can see that this perspective is purely conventional if we swing our attention over to film where crediting everyone involved in a production is the convention.

But the case of Thomas Hirschhorn is useful because it identifies a fundamental problem in fine art at the turn of the century which is that it is very difficult for art to take on a ‘political’ dimension when the art system remains driven by the traditional apotheosis of the artist individual and the elevation of the work of art to precious object.

We can also compare and contrast Hirschhorn’s *Bataille Monument* with *Vectorial Elevation*. In both instances there is an artist individual but whereas that individual takes over the game in the *Bataille Monument* in the case of *Vectorial Elevation* the individual hands over the work to its audience. One can also note that the term ‘work’ suggests something that is finished, which is not the case in *Vectorial Elevation*. Instead *Vectorial Elevation* exhibits one of the key features of the game which is its capacity for a multiplicity of permutations. One can also point to the fact that in the *Bataille Monument* the participants in the were reduced to the condition of labourers whereas in *Vectorial Elevation* they are directly involved in the process of creative construction. But to be provocative I would like to suggest that *The Singing Estate* is the most successful of the three instances.

A MALFUNCTIONING ART GAME: BODY MOVIES, 2001

The next work I would like to examine reveals the considerable difficulties facing the construction of art games, even for outstanding digital artists such as Lozano-Hemmer. The work in question is Lozano-Hemmer’s *Body Movies*, 2001. What is especially interesting about this work is that the interactive game designed by Lozano-Hemmer is not especially successful in practice. What becomes evident is that the artist becomes entangled in his own preoccupations and does not fully consider the

role of the viewer. When viewers play this art game according to the rules laid down by Lozano-Hemmer the resulting interaction is not especially creative. But the apparatus that the artist constructs unintentionally allows more creative viewers to ignore the rules and play much more interesting games.

Lozano-Hemmer reports that the initial inspiration for *Body Movies* was the work of the Dutch painter Samuel Van Hoogstraten a master of ‘perceptual decept such as trompe l’oeil and anamorphosis’ (Lozano-Hemmer 2001) and in particular his engraving *The Shadow Dance* made in Rotterdam in 1675 which shows a source of light placed at ground level and ‘the shadows of actors taking on angelic or demonic characteristics depending on their size’ (Lozano-Hemmer 2001). I cite Lozano-Hemmer’s commentary on *Body Movies* because the most effective aspect of the actual installation became the very simple idea of the giant shadow play.

Like *Vectorial Elevation*, 1999–2000, *Body Movies* is an interactive installation installed in a public square, in this case the Schouwburgplein in Rotterdam. For *Body Movies* Lozano-Hemmer made use of the very large façade of the Pathé Cinema which is normally glass fronted. For the purposes of *Body Movies* this façade was covered in a white screen material so that the façade could be used as gigantic projection screen. Powerful low lying lights set some distance from the cinema would project the shadows of passers by onto the giant screen. People who were some distance from the screen appeared very large whereas those who were closer were smaller.

In retrospect, if Lozano-Hemmer had simply provided this modern day replication of Van Hoogstraten’s *The Shadow Dance* then *Body Movies* would have been a remarkable instance of a minimalist interactive installation. But being a creative artist Lozano-Hemmer has been trained and conditioned to manipulate and transform rather than to simply reproduce. Accordingly he created a much more complex apparatus in which images of people in the streets of Rotterdam, Madrid, Mexico and Montreal were projected onto the side of the Pathe cinema (90m long x 20m tall), Rotterdam, by digital projectors fed with images from a computer. These images were then washed out by intense light streaming from two 7000 watt xenon lamp sources placed at ground level. As soon as people walk on the square at night their shadows are projected and the portraits are revealed within them. The game that Lozano-Hemmer devises then is one in which the viewer needs to align their shadow in such a way as to reveal the still photograph of someone in a street somewhere else in the world. To

encourage the viewer in this endeavour an audible click echoes across the public square whenever a shadow uncovers one of the images.

A complex digital apparatus achieves such effects. And their complexity is evident from Lozano-Hemmer's own description:

Three networked computers control the installation: a camera server, a video tracker and a robotic controller cued by MIDI signals. The camera server feeds video images to a PC over Ethernet twenty times per second. A custom-made software programming in Delphi analyses the video detecting the edges of the shadows. The computer vision system determines whether shadows are covering portraits in the current scene and when a portrait is revealed the hotspot turns white and remains activated for a few seconds. A wav [audio] file sound is also triggered to give feedback to the participants in the square. (2001)

One can see from this passage that Lozano-Hemmer is being drawn into one of the pitfalls of digital art which is obsession with technology. When the technology becomes an end in itself then aesthetic quality tends to suffer. Unaware of this problem Lozano-Hemmer installed a video monitor and loud speaker behind one of the exposed ground level windows of the Pathé cinema so that viewers had a chance to read the instructions on how to play his game.

The video of the installation (Lozano-Hemmer 2001) reveals the problems in the work very clearly. The people who evidently read the instructions and/or responded to the audible clicks that rang out across the square in the proper Pavlovian fashion can be seen dutifully manoeuvring their bodies to reveal the static photographs of people underneath. But when they have done this they appear to be at a loss with what to do next. The best responses we see on the video is people waving their shadow arms or bobbing their heads up and down in an attempt to instill some animation into the deadly stasis of the photographic image. It does not look inspiring either for the participant or to others looking on in the square. In his commentary on the work Lozano-Hemmer reveals his intention that people would be able to 'match or "embody" a portrait by walking around the square and changing the scale of their shadow' (Lozano-Hemmer 2001) but in this case the theoretical enchantment of the concept of 'embodiment' is not transmitted into practice. The actual 'embodiment' is dull and boring. The game does not work, it does not facilitate creative engagement in the manner of *Vectorial Elevation*.

But that is not the end of the story of *Body Movies*. If we watch the video we see other people who neither read the instructions nor listen to the Pavlovian clicks and simply play their own games which are closer to the simpler Van Hoogstraten model than Lozano-Hemmer's complex elaboration. And what is remarkable is that some of these games are highly creative. In other words the installation does work! But not the way the artist intended it.

We see for example a man and a woman shadow boxing the smaller woman hits the enlarged man and he falls back dramatically, the shadow play intensifying the gestures to entertaining effect for the people in the square. Then the man simulates convincing cartoon-like rapid rotational punching of his girlfriend. Another creative use of the apparatus occurs when a gigantic shadow-woman pushes a tiny shadow-man down to the ground and then stomps him with her enormous foot. This is followed by peals of laughter that ring across the square in stark contrast to the deathly silence accompanying the performances of the people who play the artist's game. The creative interactions with *Body Movies* use two simple features of the apparatus: first, its capacity for scale differences and second, the fact that the shadow play like cartoons allows things to be done that could not be done in real life.

The shadow play described above may sound simple, and they certainly are a lot simpler than the technical complexity of the game devised by Lozano-Hemmer, but there are two features that are more significant than the artist's game: first, greater interest and involvement of the others in the square; and, second, we are provided with a perfect instance of a spontaneous human creativity in the absence of control by an artist.

Perhaps the most significant feature of *Body Movies* is that the viewer's not only ignore the rules of the game set down by the artist they *change* the rules. In this respect *Body Movies* reveals an art game strategy that goes beyond even *Vectorial Elevation*. One wonders whether Lozano-Hemmer possesses the proverbial gift of genius because even when he fails he produces something quite extraordinary.

In both *Vectorial Elevation* Lozano-Hemmer 'deterritorialised' the dictatorial aspect of spectacle by turning it over to the public. But there was an, albeit unintentional, dictatorial element to the complex game that Lozano-Hemmer originally formulated. That was a game he really created for his own edification rather than for the viewers' benefit. If he had simply placed lights at a low level then his contribution to the aesthetic game would have been minimal. From the point of view of conceptualist

aesthetics, however, this is not really a problem. We can cite Robert Barry's exhibitions of radio waves, Art & Language's exhibition of a gallery's air conditioning, Ben Vautier's *Personne* (where the gallery was closed for the duration of the exhibition), Ian Burn's mirror works of art, and more recently Martin Creed's *The Lights Going on and Off* which won the prestigious Turner Prize in the same year as *Body Movies* was installed in Rotterdam.

The Lights Going On and Off, 2001, consisted exactly of the lights in a gallery in Tate Britain, London, being placed on a timer so that they were alternately turned on and then off. Otherwise, the gallery was empty. There was no audience participation apart from the allegedly extraordinary phenomenological experience of witnessing the lights going on and then off. This game was entirely and solipsistically the possession of the artist and it won the Turner Prize due to its referencing of the kinds of deconstructive art I mentioned above. Most of all this work exhibited the self-referential and self-congratulatory isolation that is the least productive achievement of deconstructive art since it became the dominant discourse.

If Lozano-Hemmer had decided to go down a similar minimalist-conceptualist route with *Bodies Movies*, and just have the low lying lights and the enormous blank screen then it would have been possible to make a direct comparison with *The Lights Going On and Off*. More than that one would have been able to argue that *Body Movies* was significantly superior to due to its combination of minimalist elegance with an apparatus that gives the person in the street a blank canvas onto which she or he can be playful and creative in a manner that brings art into life in a manner that transcends even the achievements of Rikrit Tiravanija. One would have been able to contrast the peals of joyful and appreciative laughter of the general public in the Schouwburgplein square with the derision and scorn poured on *The Lights Going On and Off* in the British press. Which is to say one could argue, following Jürgen Habermas, that *The Lights Going On and Off* was a prime instance of a game created for a socially isolated aesthetic elite, quite literally art for the sake of the art institution. *Body Movies* on the other hand becomes, even with its flaws, a prime instance of a successful awakening of playfulness and creativity within an everyday context.

CYNICAL SOCIAL SCULPTURE: SANTIAGO SIERRA

I have been critical of Thomas Hirschhorn but I have also stressed that such criticism should not be directed at him so much as at the discursive system that

informs him. The same can be said for Santiago Sierra, who like Hirschhorn is another contemporary art star who appears to be lauded in part due to the socio-political ramifications of his work. But Sierra can also be criticised for promulgating what might be called a politics of cynicism. His work is clearly just as concerned with attacking the complacency of the art institution as it is any social injustice outside the museum, but like Maurizio Cattelan he appreciates that as a fine artist his social critiques are deeply compromised: which is something that Hirschhorn seems to ignore.

If one were following the journalistic register of art writing of the 1990s and early 2000s one might call the work of Hirschhorn and Sierra 'social sculpture'. The term 'social sculpture' was coined by Joseph Beuys and it carries within it Beuys' counter-rational, post-Duchampian romanticism. The phrase implies that art can do something for society when the real question is what can society do for art. Which is to say artists need to explore the world outside the doors of the museum in order to escape the self-reflexive absorption of *l'art pour l'art* that plagues much contemporary deconstructive art.

Sierra *seems* to succeed in being transgressive in a period when transgression appears overwhelmed by the covert return to traditional values. Part of his apparent credibility lies in the fact that he has no illusions about the fact that he is an art star whose work is treated as precious objects. One can also note that Sierra does not deploy the grunge tactic (à la Hirschhorn) which has been reduced to the condition of stylishness by its pervasiveness in the context of contemporary installation sculpture.

Sierra's tactics are relatively unique. His most effective method to date has been to find unemployed casual labourers who are prepared to do virtually anything for minimum wage. Once hired they are assigned by Sierra to especially meaningless and demeaning activities. What follows is a list of such activities:

1. He paid drug-addicted prostitutes to have their backs tattooed for the price of a shot of heroin.
2. He hired 200 immigrants of African, Asian and eastern European origin, all of whom had dark hair, for an 'action' in which their hair was bleached.
3. He hired a group of unemployed men to push concrete blocks from one end of a gallery to the other.
4. In an exhibition at P.S.1, New York, *Person Remunerated for a Period of 360 Consecutive Hours* Sierra hired a person to live behind a brick wall 24 hours a day for 15 days (September 17 – October 1, 2000) without having any

further instructions or duties. P.S.1 staff slid food under a narrow opening at the base of the wall. The individual behind the wall was generally invisible to the audience but was allowed to relate to the other side through the small opening in the wall.

In an interview with Stuart Jeffries Sierra was asked why his employees never rebelled against their exploitation and he responded 'It amazes me that people don't attack me or, very often, the works. I do get annoyed when we speak of these people as "them". Artists are no better. Joseph Beuys once claimed that there was clean money and dirty money. We should only take the former. I don't believe that: there's only dirty money. And as an artist I take dirty money. I'm paid to create luxury goods for art collectors.' (Jeffries 2002).

As has been noted the art system will transform *any* mode of production into precious objects. In the case of Sierra's work such objects would include limited edition photographs of his actions. A specific instance of such an object is a photograph of his action where an eight foot line (2.44 metre) was tattooed on the backs of eight remunerated people. The photograph becomes the precious object and the person who exhibits it—like the person who buys Benetton—buys something more than an art photograph, they buy a chic species of ethical credibility. They also buy a conversation piece. In contrast, the people who took part in the work however remain marked for life by their subjugation to High Art.

Asked by Jeffries why he allowed his actions to be transformed into precious objects Sierra responded: 'I've got to make a living ... That's the truth that lots of people, including conceptual artists of the '60s and '70s, did not really recognise. We all have dirty hands' (Jeffries 2002). We have to admire Sierra's honesty. And, of course artists need to make a living like everyone else.

Exploiting people within a gallery environment is one of Sierra's principal strategies, and it is a brilliant deconstruction of the alleged separation of art from life. Sierra's actions effectively highlight the fact that the art world is ineluctably entwined in the capitalist system.

Another tactic used by Sierra is barring people from entering exhibitions. In South Korea, he paid sixty-eight people twice that nation's minimum wage to block the main entrance to the inauguration of Pusan's International Contemporary Art Festival. On the occasion of the 2003 Venice Biennale he built a wall blocking off the entrance to the Spanish Pavilion. Visitors needed a Spanish passport to gain entry to the

building, through the back door. But even then the visitor was confronted with an empty gallery.

And on the occasion of an exhibition by Sierra to mark the opening of a £500,000 extension to the Lisson Gallery, London, he barred the entrance to the gallery with a sheet of corrugated steel. Sierra comments on the considerable frustration of the invited London glitterati who turned up for the opening: 'It was as though they were saying: "Just get me inside and give me a drink. That's what I've come for"' (in Jeffries 2002).

Like many other works of the installationist genre this piece has a narrative dimension which is a necessary part of its appreciation. **During the economic crisis in Argentina (1999–2002)** the banks closed and protected their facades with corrugated steel. People demonstrated using a form of protest known as *cacerolazo* which consisted of banging pots and pans against the corrugated metal. In 2002 Sierra taped these sounds and sent CDs of the recording out to galleries in London, New York, Vienna, Frankfurt and Geneva (Jeffries 2002). The CD sleeve instructed the owner to put speakers in the window and turn the stereo up full volume during certain specified local times.

One can understand this particular action as a species of game. In other words Sierra transposes a political event into the realm of play. It is an aggressive game, but it is a game in the same way that his barring of people from the Lisson was a game. Another aspect of the Lisson action is the narrative dimension—the corrugated steel barring the entrance was a reference to the steel barriers closing off the banks in Argentina. But as in most instances of installationism this narrative dimension is effectively hidden from the viewer in the same way that prices are left off very expensive goods. You don't need to know anything about the work because you are so educated and sensitive that you just don't need to know. Such artistic pretentiousness is the antithesis of participation. We thought that we had passed beyond the aristocratic pretensions of connoisseurship towards the notion of *reading* works of art. But as deconstructive art becomes more susceptible to the forces of tradition, viewer interaction becomes difficult, and even superfluous, even at the level of interpretation.⁸

If the people invited to the Lisson opening had been told the background to this piece then they would have been less frustrated. And if they had been given pots and pans then the game could have been much more interactive. Despite his transgressive

stance, therefore, Sierra actually fits quite nicely into the traditional mould of the artist creator as an especially privileged individual who can do what he or she likes in the cause of individual freedom of expression.

According to this frame of reference the viewer is either subordinate or unquestioningly admiring which amounts to the same thing. One can see the contempt for the viewer in Sierra's suggesting that the invitees were thinking 'just get me inside and give me a drink'. And his derision is also evident when he adds that 'the aesthetic experience was right in front of them. The corrugated sheet was beautifully made. They just weren't ready to look at it.' (Jeffries 2002). The viewer is someone to be mocked. Knowing the narrative behind Sierra's choice of corrugated metal looking at it as if it were a formalist sculptural object would be an especially obtuse way of understanding this particular work. As such Sierra is adopting an arrogant and derisory stance towards his audience that mirrors the stance he takes towards the unfortunate people who he uses as objects in his installations.

THE MEDIA ART ALTERNATIVE: MULTIPLICITY AT DOCUMENTA 2002

Possibly I am being a little harsh on Sierra because, as in the case of Hirschhorn, it is not the individual that is at fault but the framework in which that individual works. And at least Sierra is well aware of that. But one is, nevertheless, infuriated by the impasse evident in contemporary fine art's attempts to be socially relevant. Modern art came into being on the wave of a social revolution, the industrial-capitalist revolution, called the bourgeois revolution by Marxism. And one of its great breakthroughs was to give the artist what appeared to be total freedom of expression. Prior to bourgeois patronage the artist was the servant of the church, monarchy or aristocracy. As such it is extremely disappointing to see the depths of cynicism evident in Sierra's work because at any other time in the course of the history modern art he would have been an outstanding political artist. So what is wrong with fine art at the turn of the millennium? Basically I have already answered that question. It can be found in a capitulation with wealth and its values.

But whereas Sierra is resolutely cynical, in a manner very similar to Maurizio Cattelan—'we are all corrupted in a way; life itself is corrupted, and that's the way we like it. I'm just trying to get a slice of the pie, like everyone else.' (in Siegel 2004)—I am not. There *is* an alternative and the basic premise of this book is that it lies beyond fine art in the emerging domain tentatively referred to as 'media art'. The term 'media

art' is not perfect because of its resonance with mass media but at the same time that resonance is fruitful because it points to the integration of media art with the visual technology that pervades late capitalist culture. The term 'digital art' can also be used because with the advent and increasing power of the PC in the late twentieth century media technology that was once only affordable by wealthy corporations has become available to the general public, in the First World at least. One of the interesting aspects of media art is that it is no longer handmade and there is, therefore, no necessity for a precious object. This is not a new idea, it was pointed out by the pioneering media art theorist Walter Benjamin in 1936 (Benjamin 1973). In the regime of the art gallery and museum, media such as photography and video are castrated by being turned into limited editions. One could produce thousands of each of Andreas Gursky's photographic prints but instead they are reduced to editions of about five each selling for at least \$100,000 (www.artprice.com), which is akin to the price of works by a leading contemporary painter. There are good reasons for this castration of media; the restriction in supply increases the brand value, and even more importantly sets the stage for the massive hikes in value over the decades that we have seen in the case of more traditional media. Although one wonders whether anyone has considered the fact that the archival quality of Gursky's photographs is limited to seventy-five years, a century at best—but capitalism is intrinsically about risk and short to medium terms gains.

But, stepping outside of the fine art system for a moment, what would happen if art did not have to have a rare and precious object? What if having an object were only a habit, a contingency of the continuing belief that art is fundamentally a handmade object in the tradition of painting and sculpture. To find this kind of art we turn to the phenomenon of media art. And we know this new mode of art can be considered akin to fine art because in 2002 the curator of the international art exhibition Documenta 11, Okwui Enwezor, included a powerful media art installation—*Solid Sea 01: The Ghost Ship*—by Multiplicity.

Multiplicity is an Italian collective based in Milan which defines itself as a 'territorial investigation agency' using the term territorial in a Deleuzian mode that entails a philosophico-political aspiration for *detritorialisation*, the breaking down of borders and boundaries. Active in the fields of urbanisation, architecture, the visual arts and culture in general, Multiplicity initiates and develops projects in different parts of the world. This multidisciplinary collective is made up of architects,

geographers, artists, urban planners, photographers, sociologists, economists, filmmakers, etc. Such interdisciplinary collaboration is fairly typical of the emerging field of media art, and I will treat the benefits of this new field in more depth in the concluding chapter.

Solid Sea 01: The Ghost Ship was presented at Documenta in the form of a simple but stunning video installation. It consisted of a blacked out room with monitors and projections that displayed various data—maps interviews newsreel—relating the story of the night of December 26, 1996, when a ‘ghost ship’ with 283 Sinhalese asylum seekers on board, sank a few miles off southeastern Sicily on route from Malta to the Italian coast. Most on board died. What is most telling about this tragedy was that it was ignored by the Italian authorities. The Third Worlders who died were treated as nonpersons, as nonhuman.

Despite the fact that bodies were continually being caught in the nets of fishing boats from Portopalo and the pleas of relatives and survivors, the authorities denied the existence of what was the greatest marine tragedy off the Italian coast in the post-WWII period. For five years, the sea gradually revealed the traces of the tragedy which were then quietly disposed of by the authorities. Nobody in the fishing community or in local government had the courage to denounce the truth, until the recovery of an ID card belonging to a young man from Sri Lanka. Apparently being human in the administered world is dependent upon whether or not one possesses documentation. Investigations into the tragedy began, driven to a large part by the meticulous work of Giovanni Maria Bellu, a reporter for the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*.

One might call *Solid Sea 01: The Ghost Ship* a documentary film installation. What made it so successful was the intersection of a powerful commentary on the relationship between the First and the Third World with a nonlinear montage-like mode of presentation. The information was not presented in a linear manner but via the nonlinearity typical of installation art. Yet the theatricality of the dark room with lines of flickering monitors on the floor created an ambience wherein the gravity of the story was impressed upon the viewer in no uncertain terms.

Because Multiplicity produce significant and aesthetically sophisticated visual artefacts designed for exhibition it is not especially problematic to call what they produce ‘art’ and, more specifically, ‘installation art’. Accordingly, works such as *Solid Sea 01: The Ghost Ship* both raise the bar for more traditional fine art media at

the turn of the millennium and throw into relief the distinction between ethico-aesthetic art and solely aesthetically sophisticated art.

The crucial distinction between *Solid Sea 01: The Ghost Ship* and the work of Santiago Sierra is that Sierra is an artist in the traditional sense whereas Multiplicity are a new phenomenon: the art collective. The members of Multiplicity are not artists in the traditional sense they mostly work in academia or fields of applied art such as architecture. As such they are not dependent on the same system upon which Sierra is dependent.

What the comparison between Sierra and Multiplicity reveals is the interrelatedness between the institutional structure of fine art and its products. A person who takes up a career as an artist is ultimately dependent upon the commercial gallery system. Indeed the commercial gallery and the *fine* artist are virtually a partnership, one can't have one without the other. Ninety years of deconstructive art has failed to take the *fineness* out of fine art because it is the myth of fineness—and its corollary, genius—that bolsters the massive overvaluation of art objects.

Yet, from an art theoretical standpoint at least, as soon as we understand Walter Benjamin's Work of Art thesis (1973 orig. 1936) we realise that the fineness of fine art is unnecessary. The sophisticated collective creative actions of Multiplicity indicate that the artist-individual is also unnecessary.

There is no doubt that the quality of work produced by Multiplicity is at least as good, from the standpoint of *fine art*, as that of Sierra. And from the point of view of an intersection of aesthetics and ethics its lack of cynicism makes it more successful.

USE VALUE

Another key feature of media art is its intersection with design which recalls the period in history when modern art achieved considerable social relevance. This was the time of De Stijl, Constructivism and the Bauhaus whose liaison with architecture and design achieved, for a time, the goal of bringing art into life. There were problems, certainly, but the turn away from the liaison with architecture and design that accompanied deconstructive art of the 1960s can be considered a backward step.

Deconstructive art is characterised by a dislocation of reason and a fundamental lack of concern with function. A dedication that has led ultimately to a self-reflective and self-absorbed mode of art that fails to integrate with everyday life and eventually, however unintentionally, accentuates elitism.

Of course, the social impact of classical modernism was not without its problems. In particular, in the field of modernist architecture there was a tendency to assume that people had to adapt to the purism of the minimalist modernist box rather than the architecture adapting to the vernacular culture of the people it was housing.

According to populist conceptions—such as Robert Hughes' television series *The Shock of the New*, 1979—the modernist dictatorship of style becomes focused on glaring failures such as the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St Louis, USA, designed in 1951 by architect Minoru Yamasaki (who would later design the ill-fated Twin Towers of the World Trade Center).

Built as a postwar public housing project the large high-rise development was completed in 1956. Over the years the project became such a notorious zone of vandalism and crime that nobody wanted to live there. In 1972 the St. Louis Housing Authority demolished three of the high-rise buildings. The photographs of Pruitt-Igoe imploding in clouds of smoke became a symbol for the fall of the modernist dream of rationally designed mass architecture. But it was more a failure on the part of the St Louis authorities to create workable support structures for the predominantly African-American communities that were relocated into this development.

We are dealing here with pragmatic, rational issues, and this constitutes a problem for art, especially deconstructive art which often embraces the *other* of reason as if it were a political stance. There are, however, facets of deconstructive play that aspire to widen the concept of what we might understand as rational by intersecting creative play with real world issues. In this subsection I will examine the socially relevant work of Atelier Van Lieshout and Dan Peterman. But first I would like to cite an instance of an intersection of art with design that underscores the Dadaistic manner in which deconstructive art can value pure play over and above function.

DADA DESIGN: ANDREA ZITTEL

Andrea Zittel is New York based artist whose approach to the intersection of art and design can be defined in terms of individualism. Individualism lies at the heart of the American dream. It is also one of the targets of the critique in this book, and we should remember that the free-market theory of individual freedom was echoed in Margaret Thatcher's famous 'there is no such thing as society' announcement: 'who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families' (Thatcher 1987). In the age of the disintegration of the family these words

take on the implication that we are, quite simply, on our own. That becomes the definition of freedom in the absence of concepts of society and community. But of course we know that people who are brought up in middle class environments are formed by family, peers and the institutions they are associated with. People can be cultivated and trained to play the social game better than those less privileged. In Foucauldian terms there are societal infrastructures which inscribe body and mind creating the entities we refer to as 'individuals' but which might be better described in terms of their societal connections as nodes in a social nexus.

Zittel claims to produce designs that are mass produced, and on the surface that might make us think that her approach is comparable to the Bauhaus strategy of producing prototypes for the mass production of products that serve to supply a mass society with valuable aids to living. But if we look a little closer we find that Zittel is producing art toys for the collector community. What she produces are works of art that cannot be called functional except in the aesthetic sense of expressing individual creativity.

Take, for example, Zittel's *Escape Vehicles* of 1996, also known as EVs. Zittel observes that in her travels across the United States she noticed that most of the trailers in recreational vehicle (RV) parks were permanently parked. Their owners had 'added elaborate landscaping or "skirts" to conceal the mobility of their vehicles' (Zittel 2003). She reports that she was disappointed at first due to a 'romanticised idea that travel trailers were a means to greater freedom' but eventually realised that the owners found freedom 'in the intimacy of the small and completely controllable universes that they constructed within their trailers' (Zittel, 2003).

Focusing on people's idiosyncrasies is quite a revolutionary concept in the context of classical modernist design where the ideal style was an expression of a mathematical-like essence of reason rather than individual peculiarities. Having gained this valuable insight Zittel embarked upon her plan for the A-Z Escape Vehicle. The concept informing this device was '**escape to one's "inner world"**' as opposed to travelling to a destination in the external world' (Zittel 2003). The device became a species of personalised immersive installation. Zittel reports that ten identical *Escape Vehicles* were constructed at a Camper Company in Southern California: 'As each trailer was purchased, the new owner then constructed his or her ideal escape fantasy on the inside. Some escape fantasies range from the construction

of a floating tank, to a Cinderella carriage crossed with a limousine, to a recreation of a Joseph Cornell environment' (Zittel, 2003).

In her *Escape Vehicles* Zittel produces a design in which function is displaced by fantasy. The closest correlation I can come up with is with a childrens' tree house or Wendy house. Pruitt-Igoe may have been a massive failure but at least it was part of a larger project to integrate art and design with the realities of peoples' lives in a mass society. What we see in Zittel's design is not an explosion of art into the social reality of architecture and design but instead an implosion of design into the idiosyncrasy and elitism of art for art's sake.

On the plus side, however, one can suggest that Zittel is producing personal art zones designed to intermesh her artistic creativity with that of the individual purchasing the unit. Which is to say her work is certainly participatory, but only at the level of the individuals willing to buy her objects.

Another instance of Zittel's *art-design* are her *A-Z Living Units*. These are demountable personal spaces that 'could then be set up inside of homes that other people owned'. This is obviously not functional in the modernist sense. The concept is idiosyncratic and its 'function' is defined entirely by play, accordingly, one assumes that her clientele lies exclusively within the art community (*l'art pour l'art*). When you buy a Living Unit you actually buy a work of art that pretends to be functional. Its actual function is to be eccentric and idiosyncratic in a manner that accentuates the buyer's individuality, freedom, and disposable income. This is the Dada-design that has replaced modernist rational design.

REAL DESIGN: ATELIER VAN LIESHOUT

The European phenomenon that is Atelier Van Lieshout (AVL) offers a more effective solution to interacting creative play with real world problems. AVL was founded in 1995 by Joep van Lieshout but this creative individual backgrounds himself to a significant extent by emphasising the communal aspect of his mode of production. In so doing he removes one of the barriers, alluded to above, that problematises artistic interactions with the everyday. AVL literature informs us that the name Atelier Van Lieshout was chosen to 'emphasise the fact that the works of art do not stem solely from the creative brain of Joep van Lieshout, but are produced by a creative team' (AVL-Ville 2005) The atelier began on the basis of van Lieshout creating simple furniture that sold well. He hired more staff and eventually his venture evolved into a species of commune.

In 2001 Atelier Van Lieshout established AVL-Ville, ambitiously referred to as ‘free state’ in the port of Rotterdam, although obviously it would be under the jurisdiction of Dutch law. A more measured description might be that of a commune. AVL-Ville publicity describes the project as ‘the biggest work of art by Atelier van Lieshout to date. This free state is an agreeable mix of art environment and sanctuary, full of well-known and new works by AVL, with the special attraction that everything is fully operational. Not art to simply look at, but to live with, to live in and to live by.’ One can sense an affinity here with Andrea Zittel’s approach, which appears to be oriented towards selling not simply functional products but a philosophy of life.

There is a curious mix of capitalism and counter-culture evident in AVL’s manifesto. This is made even more curious by the admixture of functional and neo-surrealist design which appears more directed at the art market than the design market. AVL’s bread and butter products are furniture, mostly shaker copies or foursquare furniture made out of urethane foam which AVL describe as ‘primitive’ or ‘simple and straightforward’ suggesting an intentional lack of style. But their reproductions of Shaker furniture suggest that the Shaker’s social philosophy may provide an inspiration for their own functionalist furniture. Then there is the more surreal facet of their productions, for example: ‘a complete series of human internal organs, ranging from heart, and brain to liver, rectum and the male and female sex organs.’ (AVL-Ville 2005).

AVL design becomes especially successful when carries off the difficult task of intersecting the surreal and the functional. A key instance is *Bar Rectum*, 2005, where AVL managed to bring the surreal internal organ aesthetic into gear with practical functional design in the form of a demountable, mobile bar shaped like a giant rectum. Such manifestations add to the counter-cultural image of AVL and they have become much more than simply a furniture factory. For example, in 2001 AVL were commissioned by the Women of the Waves (WOW) an abortion rights organization to design a portable abortion clinic. In their newsletter AVL reports that ‘around the world; every year, approximately 70,000 women die as a result of illegal abortion practices and poor hygiene’ (AVL 2004). In response they constructed *A-Portable*, 2001, a fully functional clinic furnished with all the necessary equipment and approved by the Dutch health authorities.

AVL explains the modus operandi: ‘With a hired ship and the abortion clinic on board, WOW sails to the countries where abortion is illegal. Once docked in harbour,

the organisation provides information on family planning, safe sex and abortion. Women who want to have a safe abortion can board the ship and be treated in international waters under Dutch law' (AVL 2004).

What is impressive about the WOW project is that AVL appear capable of rational design as well as the counter-rational evocations evident in their more surreal designs. It becomes evident that what is being expressed by a construction such as *Bar Rectum*, 2005, is a counter-cultural philosophy that uses a similar vocabulary to that of surrealism and indeed expressionism. The message of a work such as *Bar Rectum* appears to be that the body is repressed in a social imaginary dominated by instrumental rationalism. The body becomes a figure for a subversion of instrumental, governmental control. This is also the case for the WOW project where a real world solution is offered for the control of women's bodies evident in those jurisdictions that do not allow abortion.

We can delineate a line interconnecting the work of AVL with the theatrical actions of artists such as Paul McCarthy and John Bock. But McCarthy and Bock remain contained in the jewellery box of the art institution whereas AVL have at least one foot in the real world. It is to AVL's credit that they can combine a subversive discourse of the body with rational contributions to society rather than being cut off from social function by total dependency on the socially marginalised elitism of the art system.

AVL's achievement also draws our attention to the fact that the museum is a socially condoned zone of subversive expression that implements a variety of devices in order to make what is actually socially unacceptable acceptable. We can now understand the function of the barriers, guards and CCTV in art galleries and museums is not simply to protect the precious object but to create a condition of the disembodied gaze in order to defuse the subversive content of the objects on display.

Museums are, accordingly, akin to the mirrored window that separates the voyeur from a sexual performance. Deconstructive art, therefore, might be thought of as a form of political pornography—an expression of the socially unacceptable made accessible by the regime of the disembodied gaze.

To suggest that museum-bound installation art can transcend that barrier is nothing other than naïve. That barrier can never be transcended because it is the crux of the unwritten contract between art and the broader society. The point of this digression is that AVL come that little bit closer to taking the subversion of

deconstructive play out into the streets. Their WOW project, in particular, points to distinction between the now reified mode of installation art and the younger and more fruitful concept of *situational art*.

REDIRECTING ARTISTIC WEALTH: DAN PETERMAN

Dan Peterman's work provides additional evidence that art can interact with the real world in ways that have some degree of use value. Peterman's *Store (Cheese)*, 1991-93, provides such an instance. In 1991 Peterman read a newspaper article regarding the accidental ingestion of the DDT-like insecticide Aldrin by fifty-one cows at a dairy farm in Hillsboro, Wisconsin. Like DDT Aldrin moves easily through the food chain. The article reported that the dairy farmers would have to continue to feed and milk the cows for a year for the Aldrin level to reach a safe standard, and until that time the milk would be dumped. Peterman was interested by the paradox that even the dumping of the milk was a problem. Indeed, the state government was making life difficult for the dairy farm by placing increasing restrictions on its dumping of the contaminated milk.

Peterman saw this as a 'useful avenue of research' where creative input might lead to a more effective toxic waste disposal programs for Wisconsin farmers' (Peterman 1991). Peterman's solution was to turn the milk into cheese. He noted that 'cheese is a way of preserving milk' (1991) thereby overcoming some of the issues of contamination. In addition the modularity of the pats of cheese enabled them to be exhibited as a work of art in the minimalist aesthetic style that Peterman uses for most of his work.

One could suggest that *Store (Cheese)* was more allegorical than practical. But there was a pragmatic element in that Peterman was able to acquire sufficient funds to interest the financially distressed dairy farm. But also of significance is the way in which Peterman uses the art system. He obtains money for projects from grant awarding bodies and in addition raises money via the sale of his ecological products as works of art. This is one of the most fruitful aspects of Peterman's work because instead of entering the cul-de-sac of institutionalised 'transgression' he takes a highly positive interactive approach in which he not only interacts with social reality but also connects with the money flow of the art system redirecting this flow into socially beneficial avenues.⁹

We should also be impressed by the way in which Peterman's approach achieves the tricky interconnection between functionality and fine artness. Take for example his

Running Table a thirty metre (one hundred foot) long, infinitely extendable picnic table which is set up in the A. Montgomery Ward Garden, Grant Park, Chicago. The work is made out of planks of plastic lumber which is a recycled material that has many industrial and commercial uses. In the case of *Running Table* the work functions both as a classical modernist sculpture in the minimalist mode and as a functioning picnic table for citizens of and visitors to Chicago.

SUMMARY

Interaction is the crux of the deconstructive project at the turn of the millennium. It is a seminal strategy and considerable challenges confront artists who dare to enter into this most difficult avenue of artistic production. There are those who rise to the challenge, but most fine artists are not equipped to deal with it. Digital art and media art seem better placed and it is only a matter of time before, like photography and video before it, digital art takes on a key role in the field of fine art. For the moment however the most promising territory for contemporary installation art lies in domain of nonlinear narrative. This strategy may not involve the viewer to the extent of a creative game but it does enhance the viewer's involvement by presenting creative puzzles. In the next two chapters some of the more successful forays into nonlinear narrative installation art will be explored. In addition, these instances will be evaluated on the basis of to what degree they are successful in involving the viewer in the creative process.

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1 The concept derives from an experiment carried out in the 1890s by the psychologist George Stratton who used similar eyeglasses that inverted his visual field. After wearing these glasses for some time and experiencing increasingly disturbing perceptual distortions Stratton's brain eventually learnt how to reprocess the data and turn the world upright again. Stratton's experiment supports the contention that unconscious cognitive processes take a very active role in constructing reality. Unfortunately the full experiment requires too much time and too much pain to carry out in the context of an exhibition. Which in a sense makes Höller's installation experience somewhat incomplete. But at least he has drawn the viewer's attention to Stratton's experiment and its implication: which is that the reality we take for granted—including corporeal sensation—is constructed within the brain.

2 Höller's Pealove Room, 1993, is more extreme but also less practical because its invitation to interaction is unlikely to be accepted within the gallery environment. Unoccupied Pealove Room looks like a (possibly sadistic) clinical experiment. It consists of two white crotchless harnesses (love swings) hanging from a ceiling over a mattress covered in a white sheet. On the bed is a tray with a bottle containing phenethylamine, PEA, a form of amphetamine (as is Ecstasy: dimethyl-methylene-dioxy-phenethylamine).² PEA is supposedly generated in the brains of people in love (amongst other chemicals). The idea is that a couple can take the drug and then suspend themselves in the harnesses in order to engage in airborne sex. Whether any visitors were sufficiently uninhibited to do so is another question. Upside Down Mushroom Room refers to the Fly Agaric or *Amanita Muscaria* mushroom which contains muscimol.

3 In 2006 EyesWeb provides one of the most sophisticated camera-based embodiment systems.

4 Most digital art is located in the academic and commercial sector with its own infrastructure consisting of university departments and foundations (e.g. the MIT CAVS, MIT Media Lab, ZKM, i-DAT, The Banff Centre, Experimenta, etc.) and exhibitions (Ars Electronica, Isea, Siggraph etc.).

5 Currently the youngest artists coming 'online' were born around 1980, and they are not especially radical in their response to the standard art college training, although they are producing interesting work in the sphere of video.

6 Think for example of Ivor's Choir a project in which a choral conductor trains the inhabitant of a social housing complex. The goal was to perform two choral pieces at the Albert Hall in London. In terms of social relevance and social impact on an underprivileged group of people this particular program is more significant than most of the instances of fine art cited in this book.

7 One reality TV programme in the UK called *The Salon*, 2003, on Channel 4 introduced audience participation. The set was a hairdressing salon and this was accompanied by a website and email over which the audience could book places to have their hair done on television. This particular show was remarkable for its self-referentiality. When members of the audience came onto the show they talked about the show to the people who were dressing their hair, and the people dressing their hair talked about the emails that were coming in. A feedback loop emerged organically between the spectacle of the televised hair dressing salon and the messages being sent to the salon from the audience.

8 These terms refer to Claire Bishop's analysis of installation art (2005).

9 One could suggest, with the considerable benefit of hindsight, that Peterman could have taken his cheese project further by selling a monumental sculpture of Wisconsin Aldrin cheese to an art gallery (the Saatchi Gallery would have been a good choice) on the basis that art galleries are now very used to sculptural objects that contain perishable materials (e.g. Sarah Lucas' use of food). The Wisconsin farm could then rest assured that its massive stock of refrigerated Aldrin flavoured cheese would be profitably called upon at regular intervals over the coming years.