

Releasing Space:
Relational Aesthetics and
The Making of an Artist Removed from the Work

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When Duchamp entered *Fountain* to the *Society of Independent Artists* exhibition in 1917, the art world suddenly had to find new ways to talk about the work as an original piece of art. Once *Fountain* became contextualized as an *object d'art*, the language used to define art had to be reconsidered. Duchamp's work opened up the levees of art's strict and overcomplicated definitions by challenging the dominate language of the art world at the time. By presenting *Fountain* in an exhibition filled with traditional paintings and sculptures, Duchamp was able to place the burden of subjectivity not on the creative process, but on the language used to isolate and safeguard the traditional ideas of art. According to Duchamp, the *Fountain* became a springboard into a free and open definition of art built around the artist. "The urinal is there – it's an invitation...it's the artist's choice. He chooses what art is. We just added to it."¹

Very much like Duchamp's re-contextualization of art, Relational Aesthetics, a contemporary movement, once again asks us to question labels, language and definitions. Unlike the traditional viewing of an artwork that relies on the presence of an object, Relational Art of the 1980 to 2000s focus on the "work" of participation between viewer, artist, and location as the original moment of creation. Relational art calls into question three fundamental characteristics of art; the negation of *object d'art* or performance; the way that object might be created – usually held within the artist studio or taking place in a designated area; and the location an art object usually resides – the location designated by either the artist or the art world. Works by Relational Aesthetics artists vary in

¹ Phillip Hensher p. 2-5

degree: from the personal engagement between two people seen in the billboards of Gonzales-Torres; to the private living and working spaces becoming public in the works of Corin Hewitt and Maurizio Cattelan; to the community dinners of Rikrit Tiravanija. In this paper I will trace the development of work that calls into question the function of participation and the role that participation plays in a non-defined environment. This lineage will outline contemporary artwork and practice, and compare those works to previous art theories starting with the Fluxus movement of the 1960s. This paper will suggest that the focus of Relational Art is not on the object but on the functions consequential to participation.

While Relational Aesthetics calls into question the association between the artist and the work of art, it is important to suggest that this line of questioning is not new. Relational Art serves as an extension to Fluxus art, performance art, and Dada and should be considered within these contexts. What is new for Relational Aesthetics is the function of the ways in which artists, viewers, environment, and objects participate and interact. Instead of an object based artwork, participation becomes the key subject to Relational Art. Additionally, unlike its predecessors, Relational Art liberates the viewing space from the context of art by announcing that all spaces potentially can support art and that all acts can be the production of the aesthetic. In this paper, I hope to address the role of Relational Aesthetics in recording how artist, viewer, and work become a set for social engagement but that the resulting object of the experience is the collaborative “work” equally created by all participants.

In order to contextualize works of art that call into question the role of social participation, the French critic and museum curator Nicolas Bourriaud coined the term

Relational Aesthetics. This new movement of socially conscious artwork - including works by Gonzalez-Torres, Cattelan, Tiravanija, and later by Hewitt - addresses a radical transformation within the relationships between artist and artwork. It also questions up the traditional definitions that surround the work of art and the production of that work. For Bourriaud, Relational Art relies on the social context at the intersection of social situations in which art can be made. In his book, Bourriaud describes Relational Art as: “An art taking at its theoretical horizon the realm of human interaction and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space.”² What is critical to Relational Art is the position the artist takes in relation to the viewer and the object. In many cases Relational Artists perform a mundane act, such as the 1992 exhibition where Rikrit Tiravanija prepares Thai food for the exhibition’s visitors, in order to comment on the social situation in which all art is created. While Relational Art seems too ordinary or unqualified to count as an artistic experience, Bourriaud’s arguments make room for an art that references the social environment and the process by which all art becomes a commodity. Furthermore, it uncovers that even artists and works of art can become a social good.

Much of the work by Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ resides in public spaces: such as large billboards with photographs of beds, pillows, and used-wrinkled sheets that hover over the viewer; piles of candy sitting on the gallery floor waiting to be consumed by the exhibition visitor; stacks of paper waiting to be removed and then dispersed into the world. During a 2003-2004 exhibition at The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Gonzalez-Torres installed a replenishable stack of posters on the gallery floor. The

² Bourriaud, Nicolas p. 14

identical posters of black and white grainy clouds could be copied thousands of times by the gallery staff and left for future visitors to remove. Inside the gallery, the discarded oversized paper posters started showing up on the floors of other exhibitions, in the bathroom, the store, etc. Once outside the gallery, the prints started spreading through the city landscape. There were large posters of clouds lying on the ground, discarded in the ditch, sitting on park benches, and crinkled up in trashcans. The landscape seemed to be filled with little black and white clouds, somewhat mirroring the sky above.

Other exhibitions by Gonzalez-Torres suggest the same concern for participation. In *Untitled (Placebo)*, and *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* Gonzalez-Torres piles thousands of pieces of candy on the floor waiting to be consumed. Brightly colored candy wrappers entice the visitor to take as much as they like, which sends the viewers into a rush to snatch the candy from the pile. In both candy and cloud installations, the viewing public fulfills the art object's presence by pushing copies of the work out into the world where they may never be seen. Thus, the audience gives full definition to the work of art once it is introduced into daily life and common social places. The validity of the *objet d'art* begins once the object is removed from the appropriate place recognized as a space for viewing art. Since the gallery/museum environment does not traditionally extend past its own walls, what do we do with art objects that are removed from the appropriate venue to view art? Would a piece of candy from the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden museum be different than the same piece of candy from a grocery store? These questions are critical to Relational Aesthetics and the artwork of Felix Gonzalez-Torres questions the role of the art object, along with the traditional relationship between artist, viewer, and exhibition space.

Some of the most well-known projects by Felix Gonzalez-Torres are his public billboards with the image of empty beds. The images show a bed recently abandoned by two bodies. These billboards first appeared in metropolitan centers like New York during the 1980 and 1990's. While the content of these billboards spoke to the AIDS epidemic during that time, what was critical was that the art object- images of Felix Gonzalez-Torres's beds – appeared to be both advertisements and public sculpture. The importance of these images is not that they come off as public art but that they engage a public platform for viewing art. The billboards become a visual connection between the artist and the public's daily life. The billboard photographs, while suggestive, also become an aesthetic experience that can be viewed through the public landscape.

While, the large billboards are installed in public, viewing many of Gonzalez-Torres's artworks speak to a shared intimate moment between two people. The audience viewing the multiple cloud prints and the billboard installations were not confined to the museum or the traditional exhibition space with white walls and stuffy attendants. Here, the images either floated above New York's avenues or were carried away under the viewer's arms. The public became participants in the dispersal of and continuation of the aesthetic viewing experience. And, since the images lead to a multitude of questions that could be experienced identically by with a neighbor and a stranger, the experience became a social situation, an interaction and engagement.

Much of the criticism of Relational Aesthetics examines its relationship to other twentieth century art movements, including Dada and Fluxus. The main critique of Relational Art explores Bourriaud's argument as a reposition of performance or public art from the 1960's. It is easy to see that the appearance of Fluxus happenings can be traced

back to Dada sound art and concerts in which artists would present artworks as performance plays that included the audience's participation. It is also easy to see that Relational Aesthetics relates to Fluxus in many of the same ways that Fluxus recalled Dada. I, on the other hand, propose that Bourriaud's Relational Art as both dependent on and isolated from Dada and Fluxus.

While there is validity in the wide criticism of Relational Aesthetics and its relationship to Fluxus, I find three ways in which Relational Aesthetics differs from past participatory artworks. The first places the artist into a position where he or she shares the responsibility to create by questioning the position of artists as producers/managers/geniuses. The second distinction allows social situations, including commerce and capitalism, to be the basis for production and creation. This distinction focuses on the object as a mode of production and reverses the job of the artist to emphasize how artistic creativity itself is also part of the market condition. The final distinction calls into question the dependence on a "utopian" art experience. Overall, Relational Art reveals how works of art are social experiences and must be viewed as such. What is fundamental to Bourriaud's line of reasoning is that the work of art is a shared experience and that the object for which art history holds as an original artifact for re-presentation is in many ways both a process of production and a situation for the everyday. Additionally, for Bourriaud, the process of making is in essence the process of living within a shared environment. "Each particular artwork is a proposal to live in a shared world, and the work of every artist is a bundle of relations with the world, giving rise to other relations, and so on and so forth, ad infinitum."³

³ Bourriaud, Nicolas p. 22

Traditionally, over the last few centuries artists have been considered creators or chief director in the development of a work of art. It is not hard to find the hold that originality and authorship has had on the creative world. Artists have become part of a mythology and at the same time, a product for business. Artists and the works they make are both legends and commodities. Like the artist myth, where genius, talent, or destruction rules, the significance of the creative process of the work also relied on making of a specialized artistic product – the object. Thus, to get the full quality of the artistic experience the art object remained confined to the artist's studio, where object becomes a document of the studio process and the artist's struggle with the forces tormenting his or her creative energies. During Fluxus performances, the artist, usually considered the director/composer, asked viewers to convene in a specific area in order to create, documents, and participate in the creation process. This artist, or composer, was at that time still considered to be the sole reason for the event. In many ways Fluxus events still recalled the traditional role of artist as leader and originator of a significant, transformative experience. What Relational Aesthetics uncovers is that the entire process of creation is a function of the social and economic process - that making works of art resembles a service in which a good is produced and that the artist is both product and production.

The romantic view of the creator, whether it is an artist or author, proposes a creative independence to the creation of the art object where artist become an enlightened maker. This definition remained largely unaltered until 1967 when Roland Barthes wrote "The Death of the Author." In this article Barthes suggests that the artist was not the creative genius that we once regarded so highly, but that the author/artist shared

responsibility with the social context that gave meaning to the words. Here, in Barthes' argument, society and artist performed together to reveal amended information. Barthes writes, "We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture."⁴

George Maciunas founded Fluxus, or Neo Dada, in the early 1960's and initiated a type of performance art that brought artistic presence into collaborative work with the viewing public. In Fluxus performances participants could be engaged by and engage with the artist as subjects under scrutiny. In many of these performances the artist became a type of event leader and the viewer become a participant follower. These "happenings" allowed the artist a chance to directly interact with the audience, much like the concerts/events of the Dada movement. In the 1960's artists sought location as a place to produce a performance event, sometimes even on the side of the street. The location of the event or the possible aura of the event's presence in a certain place contributed into the success and subject of the event. The location allowed artists a place to come together and prompt an action but also referenced the physical plane of creation. Take for example Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* where the event took place on a stage in front of an audience. During this performance Ono became the subject as viewable object.

While there are varying examples of Fluxus art, it is Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* which stands as the seminal Fluxus performance. In this performance piece, first presented in Japan in 1964, then at the Carnegie Recital Hall in New York in 1965, and later at

⁴ Barthes, Roland p. 146

London's *Destruction in Art Symposium* in 1966, Ono sits motionless in the middle of a theater stage and in front of a viewing audience. By her side Ono places a pair of scissors. During the performance viewers were asked to ascend onto the stage, grab the scissors, and cut away from Ono's clothing until she was naked. One by one the participants leapt up onto the platform and cut small scraps from Ono's attire. These performances only lasted a couple minutes and were first halted by Ono once her bra was cut, potentially revealing her breasts. Ono's work comments not only on participation, but also on the control of the body within a male driven art world. During one performance, it was a male participant who became most aggressive in cutting away Ono's clothes. "She [Ono] takes on the look of a creature in the process of being skinned...By ironically replicating stereotypically male practices of voyeurism, as well as stereotypically female states of passivity, she competed with traditions of voyeurism and demonstrated another form of mastery over visual space."⁵

The reason this performance has been labeled a Fluxus event - is that the artists sat in front of the audience and did nothing for her own production while the viewing audience completed the act. Here, members of the audience had the power to participate, to cut, and decided how much to take away. At one point one viewer continues to cut for minutes, revealing Ono's body the most. What is perplexing in Ono's performance is that once the event started, Ono gave over power to the participant outside herself and was left in the hands of the group audience to decide her fate, one cut at a time. Yet, in the end the artists chose when to stop the event, how to sit, what to wear, and possibly who to invite to the performance. Ono's body was freely given to the act and at the same

⁵ Kathy O'Dell p. 53

time still guarded by the artists. Like performance art, the audience may participate, but only to a certain level. In Ono's performance the artist's body becomes the object under view but it was also the group's interaction that became the focus of the event. The bodies that pounced on Ono's lifeless body were the ones doing the action so what the audience was left to come to terms with was the aggravating cutting and dominance of the stranger/neighbor against the surrendered artist body. Here, the audience had control of the artist. According to Amelia Jones the body, the performance body, is both built out of the definition from artist and viewer and that the meaning of the body resides in the interaction of that body by the audience.

The "unique" body of the artist in the body artwork only has meaning by virtue of its contextualization within the codes of identity that accrue to the artist's body and name. Thus, this body is not self-sufficient in its meaningfulness but relies not only on an authorial context of "signature" but on a receptive context in which the interpreter or viewer may interact with this body. When understood in its full open-endedness, live performance makes this contingency, the intersubjectivity of the interpretive exchange, highly pronounced and obvious since the body's actions can be interfered with and realigned according to spectatorial bodies/subjects on the register of the action itself; documents of the body-inperformance are just as clearly contingent, however, in that the meaning that accrues to this action, and the body-inperformance, is fully dependent on the ways in which the image is contextualized and interpreted.⁶

Yoko Ono never fully gave herself over to the audience. By stopping the performance Ono expressed her own power over her body. She also showed that she still resumed the power to be in charge of the event and the other participants. When Ono stopped the cutting of her clothes she made a statement that said to the viewers that enough was enough, they had taken from her too much. Once she stopped the event Ono retreated into the director role and resumed ownership of the artwork. Furthermore, she chose to position herself on a stage built for theater, where participants had to remove themselves

⁶ Amelia Jones (1997) p. 14

from the audience becoming the viewable object themselves. It is important to understand is that the performance remained a performance, not a direct determinable interaction. The event did not allow for completed participation by all members involved. Ono's placement of her body on a stage, and her marketing of the event as an art performance recall the traditional role of artist as creator, or artist as engineer. The viewers who participated in the event showed up for the theatrical staged happening, they were not directed to participate out of their daily lives. The audience knew they were to enter the context of an art event when they entered the theater/performance venue. The audience participated as audience because they began the event as the audience and ended the event as the audience. Ono started her performance as the artist and ended as the artist.

In order for the artwork to be considered a viable object, the artwork had formerly relied on a specific viewer apparatus and, the museum/gallery environment. In most cases, works of art are viewed in isolated places: a museum; a gallery; a performance hall' special private and public collections; etc. Artworks, according to a market mentality that supports the lifestyle of the art world, require places that are particular for their reserved viewing. Even the performance artists who sought participants for Dada installations or Fluxus happenings required that the viewer's mindset change a social area in accordance to the events in front of them, that the artists presented their space as a special venue for the performance. This change in philosophy of location is critical to the way one engages Relational Art but it cannot be said to be a sudden occurrence. In fact, performance art from as early as the 1920's has critiqued participation and space. But it is not until the 1960's that we see audience ownership of that space and not until

Relational Art that we see a full transferring of space between audience and artist. Yet, this transformation did not happen overnight. In fact, the importance of space as a critical statement in the ability to view art became more significant with artworks like Mierle Ukeles' *Maintenance Art*.

Mierle Ukeles' performance pieces that are exhibited under the label *Maintenance Art* can be placed somewhere between Fluxus and Relational Art for the reasons that they reside in the "work" of daily life and at the same time are presented still as a place from which "art work" can be viewed. In her 1974 performance piece, *Washing*, Ukeles goes out in front of a New York gallery and started cleaning the street by removing debris on the sidewalk and scrubbing the concrete. In this three hour performance, Ukeles got on her hands and knees and scrubbed the dirt and grim off the street as people walked by. "Now, what happen was that I started to occupy the area through this repetition of maintenance, of cleaning. And people watched me and were afraid to enter the space. Actually, if someone were to enter, to go into the gallery or to walk across, I would wipe out their tracks immediately. I would follow them on my hands and knees and wipe out their tracks right up to their heels."⁷ Ukeles' act was not specifically developed for public participation in mind, but by maintaining a public space, passersbys would sometimes pitch in and help. For Ukeles the space in front of the gallery became a "territory," an exhibition space that was as equal to the space within the gallery walls. And, since, *Maintenance Art* was not seen as an art form Ukeles crossing of languages allowed for both art and "work" to share aesthetic and theoretical properties. "I was

⁷ Mierle Ukeles [Video]

pushing maintenance to its limits, where it became control of the territory and a refusal to allow anything to last more than a second. It became almost its opposite.”⁸

Ukeles speaks clearly that the point of the piece was to create a space for art to happen. During this 1974 piece the “work” became the action of art and the space from which the work developed and presented is the cause. The resulting object would be shared between the cleaned public avenue and the experience of that event. Yet, the space remains an important notification of the event and for Ukeles the space holds the meaning of the event, that it is an art event. In *Washing* Ukeles suggests that the point of the event was to maintain the space as art as seen in her public notice of the event. “The cleanliness of this area, the entire area outside the gallery is being maintained as Art from 2 pm to 5pm on June 13, 1974. It will be normalized at 5:01pm.”⁹ What is worthy of note is that Ukeles suggests that the space will return to its normal condition once the art event is over, normalcy starts at 5:01pm.

Ukeles’ performance calls on a change of language in order to describe what an art object looks like. Additionally, participation as performance art starts to take more focus in her later works where she collaborates with the New York Sanitation Department in order to produce larger scale public performance pieces where the public cleans their own environment as art. In these later performances the artist still has control over the performance but that control is starting to diminish, with the inclusion of the larger public group and the addition of the NY Sanitation Department. For Ukeles, being the producer of the event, where she finds a cause that would enable a group, is key to her

⁸ Mierle Ukeles [Video]

⁹ Mierle Ukeles [Video]

work. “I always saw performance as setting up a structure and having a lot of opening in the structure for other people to enter at will.”¹⁰

According to Relational Aesthetics artwork can become an interaction, a street occurrence, a social situation, and direct interaction or exchange with the artists. In fact, with works by Relational Aesthetic artists, the viewer becomes integral to the success of the event and at the same time shares in the “knowledge,” or realization of the event. Furthermore, the Relational Aesthetics space is first and foremost a space for social interaction, not a location seeking transformation. Unlike Ukeles’ *Washing*, Relational Art rejects the appropriateness and reliance on the art venue. When Gonzalez-Torres installed his lonely and provocative bed images on the billboards of New York, the artist was asking the viewer to let go of the appropriate viewing space for such images and allow the daily experience the ability to share in those same aesthetic properties. For Gonzalez-Torres, the subject becomes our interaction with the billboards, the interaction of what we are doing the moment we look onto that empty bed.

The same concern resides in the work of Rikrit Tiravanija. In 1992 Tiravanija emptied the contents of the 303 Gallery’s storage room, kitchen, and bathroom and assembled what was found out in the gallery space. During the opening of the show Tiravanija arranged to cook a Thai dinner for his gallery visitors to the exhibitions. During this exhibition the artist took the pressure off the gallery object and put it on the exhibition event. Since Tiravanija did not technically create the objects arranged in the gallery exhibition, but did cook and feed the visitors by hand, the event became the work and the remaining artifacts becomes the presence of the event that took place. When Rikrit Tiravanija’s Thai dinner was complete, the artist left the utensils where they were

¹⁰ Mierle Ukeles [Video]

for the rest of the exhibition schedule. Therefore, the remaining artifacts become the documents of the production's experience, referencing the process of consumption. In Tiravanija's Thai dinner the experience took place of the art object's form and the artifacts left over change from being gallery objects to records of commodity and social interaction/ritual.

Maurizio Cattelan's *The Wrong Gallery* is opposed to participation and does not let you play. By calling into question the function of participation, this artwork keeps you from interaction. Maurizio Cattelan opened a gallery in New York named *The Wrong Gallery* and had the gallery door locked, keeping any viewer from entering this special viewing space. As with many viewers to Relational Art, the viewer of *The Wrong Gallery* is confronted with a realization that they may not be in the correct place in order to participate, that a event might in fact be a party that the viewer just crashed or just happened to show up at the wrong location. This is the point for Relational Art, that the artwork become a common experience and one that is shared with other members of a community, may they be from the arts community or from the general public. Bourriaud writes "Their [Relational Aesthetic artists] works involve methods of social exchanges, interactivity with the viewer within the aesthetic experience being offered to him/her and the various communication processes, in their tangible dimension as tools serving to link individuals and human groups together...The artwork of the 1990's turns the beholder into a neighbor, a direct interlocutor."¹¹

What is central to Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics is the presence of the "everyday." For Bourriaud the everyday sets the performance outside the realm of

¹¹ Bourriaud, Nicolas p. 43

creative space and isolates it as part of the daily experience. Here, Bourriaud relies on the widely used art historical term “form” to detach Relational Aesthetics from other Art movements. Instead of a “form” that recalls the composition of an object, alluding to the object “presenceness,” Bourriaud refers to the form of the Relational Aesthetics artwork as the experience and the interaction between participants. The everyday becomes the “form” of creation; therefore the object under study is the social situation between being and engagement. Bourriaud writes “Our persuasion, conversely, is that form only assumes its texture (and only acquires a real existence) when it introduces human interaction. The form of an artwork issues from a negotiation with the intelligible, which is bequeathed to us. Through it, the artist embarks upon a dialogue. The artistic practice thus resides in the invention of relations between consciousnesses.”¹² Thus what is left is the form of the relationship, the interaction between participants. With Relational Aesthetics artworks, the event is paramount, the rest of the exhibition only acts as a document of the event, much like Rikrit Tiravanija’s Thai dinner.

Questioning viewer participation is not new to art. The varying degrees of participation between artist, artwork, and viewer have been analyzed and addressed throughout the history of art, especially during the 20th century. But, unique to Relational Aesthetics and unlike Fluxus, the finality of the experience, the engagement with the audience, proves to be at the crux of the issues. Relational Aesthetics artists focus on the everyday experience, the situations that may become invisible to daily boredom, like buying groceries, making soup, etc. Take for example the 2008-2009 Whitney Museum of Art exhibition where artist Corin Hewitt moved his life into the

¹² Bourriaud, Nicolas p. 22

museum. In *Seed Stage* Hewitt lived in the gallery for several months, cooking, working, sleeping. Everything Hewitt did was on view, yet the viewers were physically kept away from him by a constructed wall around the artist's life. Once inside the gallery room the viewer was aware of a person on the other side of the wall in front of them, left to their private goings-on. The viewer was not able to watch Hewitt during his day as he was locked inside this living space, guarded by a wall between audience and artist.

For Fluxus, as for most of art history, the object, the performance, the created subject recalls a moment of illumination. This is not the case for Relations Aesthetics. In fact, unlike the performances by Fluxus and Dada artists where the event led to some sort of expected transformation into enlightenment, what is revealed by Relational Aesthetic works is the social condition and the common. At the end of the day the Relational Aesthetic work does not desire utopia, it asks for commonality through engagement with private life in a public way. While Fluxus focused on an "experience" as a goal, Relational Aesthetic looks to an uncovering of the process of living.

Critical to Relational Aesthetics is that the creation of art is not an independent act but an identity within a social system and that the locations for which that creation of art resides is likewise a place built out of the social framework. Additionally, art work is a social construct that derives from the production of "work." Aesthetics, and aesthetic practice, thus resides in the nature of production and highlights the ways in which artists may make work. But, what is at the heart of the Relational Aesthetic philosophy is that the artist work, the way an artist completes a task, can also exemplify the same properties as our definitions of our tradition object. Art practice can be art object. "

"Aesthetic practice, in this instant, requires a reply of sorts – or, at the very least, a reaction. In focusing on 'relations of exchange', social interplay and

intersubjective communication, relational art practices – in their exhibitionary method – also provide nodal points for reflection on their socially transitive potential. This, for Bourriaud, is a political activity in so far as relational art practices not only focus on the ‘sphere of inter-human relations’, a realm that is an endemically political sphere to being with, but also give rise to the conditions within which unprecedented inter-human relations can be articulated...that relational art is not so much about artists taking up political causes per se – an act that can be seen merely to co-opt the political mileage to be had in a subject and rehearse it via art practice – as it is a vision of art reflecting and producing intersubjective relations and imbricating those relations within a sociopolitical rather than, strictly speaking, an art-related forum.”¹³

What is left from the Fluxus happening of the 1960’s into the performance art of the 1970 is the territory of space, as Ukeles calls it. For Relational Art the artistic space is removed and replaced with the common public venue of daily life. Within this new space the ways in which work can be created is free to take on any act, endeavor, or risk.

It is apparent that Relational Art is not a new philosophy within the arts but one linked closely to Dada, Fluxus, and Performance art. On the other hand, Bourriaud’s theory constructs a type of work that is free from the rigidity of space, of authoritative control, and the utopian art experience. With the works by Gonzales-Torres, Rikrit Tiravanija, Maurizio Cattelan, Corin Hewitt, and many others the art world is asked to look at how we define art and try to find ways in which those definitions could change in order to allow room for the social situation, the artist’s shared hands, and the rejection of appropriate locations. Art can be a daily experience and viewed just walking down the street, or sharing in a community dinner, or even through the rejection of not being able to enter where we were allowed to in the past. What Relational Art does is it offers everyone the ability to be take part of the artistic process, to participate as equal creators. Additionally, Relational art deems all space an aesthetic experience because it is a social

¹³ Anthony Downey p. 268

interaction, “work”. What is the underlining concern for Relational Art is that the social interaction is in fact the art work. Likewise, the space that holds the interaction is first and foremost a social environment but also much more. Any space can also be a possible atmosphere for art if artists were to find out how to tap into that social situation as a participant, not as a creator. For Relational Art the point is to participate with the surroundings by acknowledging space and releasing it from its context in order to change the language of that space. That change also asks our own definitions of art to transform. What Relational Art does is it makes the work present. “Art, likewise, is no longer seeking to represent utopias; rather, it is attempting to construct concrete spaces.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Bourriaud, Nicolas p. 46.

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