THE CONTEM-PORARY, THE COMMON: ART IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

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Hypothèse 10 : *La supervision panoramique au cœur du dispositif serait altérée, exprès.*

The panoramic supervison at the center of the set would be altered or purpose.

Work on Stage / agence des hypothèses
Stand WOS, 2008

In *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Rainer introduces a certain number of instructions and props.These latter are in list form, where those taking part in the project fix on an action of their choice, or even a prop, in order to move the 'rehearsal' along.The list includes different individual and group actions, accompanied by props such as pillows, mattresses, poles, cardboard, a pair of wings, inter alia.

The purpose of the exercise is 'to invent and teach new material', avoiding the sense of repetition that comes with a rehearsal mode, repetition as it is ever-present in the (world's) daily lot of work ever since industrialization. In tandem, it is a question of observing what happens in the process, at the very moment of what is known as rehearsal, in the theatre. In the end, there is an attempt to scale back the difference between rehearsal and play, *i.e*. the spectacle itself. In psychoanalysis, the concept that moves the analytical process itself along, the path towards a greater self-knowledge, and an optimization of one's own resources, is called 'perlaboration'. It may be thought to exist in the approach adopted by Rainer, herself an adept of psychoanalysis, here adapted to a collective situation. Rather than being an object, doing art 'work' becomes process and on-going elaboration. In a text titled *Rudimentary Notes Towards a Changing View of Performance*[4], Rainer comments on the effects of her approach. Well aware of the fact that this approach excludes spectacle, seen as the synthesis of a process, as a final, fixed enunciation, she notes the different results reached by her work colleagues, and by herself. Among these we find an enhancement of interrelations. We also find that certain forms of authoritarianism, or *authorism*, topple by virtue of the very fact that work is organized otherwise than in accordance with predictable and repetitive, quantifiable structures, coming under the authority of the director or choreographer, or the artist, depending on whether theatre, dance or visual arts are involved.This authorism is sidestepped or diminished by the establishment of sequences of events, without any precise way of operating coming into the picture. This gives rise to a 'structured'improvisation which, by creting openings in the development of the process, engenders activities and unusual gestures. Yvonne Rainer here offers comments on what she observes in relation to *Continuous Project:*

> «It still cannot be said that Continuous Project is the result of group decision-making as a whole,it is important to point out that there are details throughout the work too nuerous to list that should be credited to individual responses and assertiveness other than my own, or to the manner in which we have come to work together, i.e. freely exchanging opinions and associations about the work as it develops.»[5]

The apparatus (used here in the sense of Jean-François Lyotard's or Giorgio Agamben's notion of *'dispositif'*) is defined in terms of Tasks and Processes, in which the plurality of affects comes into play, along with the invariably central role of the author as mediator.

THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

In the context of Cross Values, I have had the occasion to work at close quarters with two artists invited to take part in the Rennes Ateliers. The Work on Stage collective and Samuel Bianchini have come onto the contemporary art scene forty years after Bruce Nauman and Yvonne Rainer appeared. The work issue, and in particular the processes underpinning the notion of work, are a special preoccupation of theirs.
What is egregious in both cases is the fact that these artists are evolving in a world closely bound up with the world of technologies all about us. Already, in the days when Nauman and Rainer were developing the projects we just discussed, the world of imagery technologies was already there. Nauman explored the notion of task, indisputably linked with the notion of work, through the go-between offered by the video camera. Rainer incorporated in her performance various film sequences which would lead her to film rather than dance throughout almost her entire artistic

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[4] Yvonne Rainer, Work 1961-73, Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, 1974, p.130-131.

[5] Idem, p. 129. This excerpt is taken from the programme notes for the presentation of Continuous Project Altered daily at the
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, March 1970.

career (endless duplication—mise en abyme—of actions and magnification of filmed shots offer a better grasp of the gesture's 'potential'). This presence of technology in artwork has merely become more pronounced ever since, echoing the invasion of daily life by the communication technologies which are nowadays spreading beyond the visual, and encompassing acoustics and kinaesthetics; all the cognitive components of the body are being called upon to be affected and, where pertinent, transformed by the presence of technologies.'The medium is the message', said McLuhan.We cannot deny that our intelligence of the world is intrinsically linked with the technologies which extend our senses, to the point of altering our grasp of time and space.We are living in a digitized world, where the lowest common denominator, where information is concerned, cannot be seen by the naked eye. Nano-technologies, just like digitized images and sounds, form a world which frames contemporary life—something unprecedented.This world is defined by the fragmentation, dissemination, and circulation of data,over and above the circulation of objects, itself forever on the rise. The present-day economy may no longer be focused on the object, but to a great extent on fluid, immaterial processes, but it is not exempt from problems peculiar to it. The hierarchization and division of labour, which might, in former times,have been responsible for individual alienation, are giving rise to other types of difficulties which Richard Sennett has identified as coming under the major headings of risk,precariousness, flexibility and chaos.6 In his view,these data engender 'the corrosion of character' and by 'character' he means that which is peculiar to the individual, and gives meaning to life.

The Work on Stage collective, associated for *Crossing Values* with the Canal+ Group's Customer Relations Centre, has been observing life on the TV company's telemarketing work-sites. It was struck by the similarity between the physical, architectural organization of the work place and the panopticon, that architectural surveillance device invented some centuries ago, connected with military technology and prison structures.The collective was keen

to delve deeper into the '*perceptive'* and '*sensitive'* reality of this work environment and, during its visits to the aforementioned sites,gathered different data,visual and acoustic shots of the venues, empty or in a working hours situation. The aim of the Work on Stage project is to *'challenge the constructive and transformational processes of spaces, along with their functions and fictions'*, an endeavour consisting in picking-up 'unexpected and unproductive moments' into the interstices of reality.

In the context of an office open to the public within the *Crossing Values exhibition*, the Work on Stage collective puts on interactive performances whose goal is to enable the public—as well as the collective itself—to delve deeper into the material gathered at Canal+ by re-interpreting it. The context of the work place, and the daily life that unfolds therein, thus become a source of exploration and re-invention, countering the notion of alienation often associated with work.

In the case of Samuel Bianchini,*Crossing Values* has enabled him to work with the France Telecom research laboratories. Bianchini positions himself as a researcher in the field of interactive communicational research. The work carried out with the help of France Telecom has enabled him to set up an interactive piece titled *Crossing Values*. On a surface of 5 x 2.33 metres[16.5 x 7.5 ft], a wall is covered with light meters in the form of technological 'bricks', each one of which is capable of measuring the distance separating it from the passer-by.This latter'sbody thus seems to appear, like a luminous imprint, on the very surface of the piece. This latter is transformed by the slightest movement. The spectator's stance,and the intensity and rhythmic quality of his body language are immediately translated into a visual form. The relation to the spectator is a datum inherent to art and its history. Painters and sculptors have invariably addressed it.*Velazquez's Las Meninas*, for example, a work analyzed at great length by Michel Foucault, is symbolic of the notion of positioning bodies.[7] The place where each character features in the picture and the axes defined by

6   Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the new Capitalism*, W.W. Norton, New York/London, 2000.

7   Michel Foucault, *The order of Things : An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Ramdon House, New York, 1970 (Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les Choses, une archéologie des sciences humaines*, coll. Bibliothèque des sciences humaines, Paris : Gallimard, 1966).