



*Pierre Huyghe. Streamside Day Follies. Dia Art Foundation, New York, 2003. Photo: Pierre Huyghe. All images courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris and New York, unless otherwise indicated.*

# An Interview with Pierre Huyghe

GEORGE BAKER

*George Baker:* I would like to start by asking you why you are now living in New York, and invite you to introduce the project of your recent Dia installation, on view here in New York before the Dia Center closed last January.

*Pierre Huyghe:* I came to New York for that project.

*GB:* But are you living in New York now?

*PH:* Yes, I have been here for more than a year. I originally came to New York to begin work on my Dia project, some nine months or so before the date of the exhibition. The exhibition is now closed, but the project still continues.

*GB:* Already in the summer of 2003, I saw—or rather listened to, since it was a recorded lecture—a piece of yours in Nicolas Bourriaud's *Mapping* show at the Palais de Tokyo. This lecture seemed to consist in part of thoughts leading to the Dia work *Streamside Day Follies*. There was also a whole series of documentary images of the area in the Hudson Valley with which the work is concerned.

*PH:* That lecture was a sort of thinking out loud about the intentions and parameters of the project, from the theories of Fourier to early American proto-communist communities to the town of Celebration, Florida. It was also an attempt to understand how the artists originally involved with the Dia, like Robert Smithson and others, had played with the protocols of exhibition, and how they shifted the notion of representation.

*GB:* What do you mean by protocols of exhibition?

*PH:* There is one word which I can never translate into English and that word is *instance*. Lyotard used it in the sense that interests me in *L'instruction Païenne*, where he speaks about *les instances du récit*. It refers to the momentum of a narrative. But you don't understand what the protocol of an exhibition is? Broodthaers played with the protocol of exhibitions, the rules.

*GB:* The conventions? The display?

*PH:* Yes. Land art, Minimal art, Conceptual art—these artists were all involved in the reformulation of protocols of exhibition and representation.

*GB:* But the Dia has a very specific history of engaging with this generation of artists and allowing for new types of projects and exhibitions to emerge.

*PH:* Absolutely. So being aware of this, I wanted to try to incorporate the history of

this practice and in a certain way to register the manner in which there had been a shift in terms of these issues between the “Dia generation” and my own generation of artists. The earlier artists were mostly concerned with space and sculptural resolution, whereas temporal issues seem to be more important today.

*GB:* So you wanted to stress a shift from strategies that reformulated exhibition protocols in terms of space to one that would open up these protocols in terms of time?

*PH:* Perhaps. Think of Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970). My interest was not in creating an object that escapes the exhibition frame only to merge with the landscape in its scale, but to do this more in a temporal sense. It would no longer be something in the middle of nowhere, no longer subject to this fascination of the Earth artists with the empty desert. My work would be precisely *in-between* the city and nature, *in-between* this place of meetings, signs, and corporations, which is the city, and nature.

*GB:* Your terms here though are spatial. You are saying that you wanted to locate your work between the city and nature, and in fact in *Streamside Day Follies* you locate the work in suburbia. Temporally, I guess the parallel would be a desire to locate your work between history and nature, history and myth.

*PH:* You can call it suburbia, and this in-between often collapses into what we call suburbia, but the work was not about suburbia. I simply wanted the work to be neither in nature nor in the city, and ultimately to base my action not on the production of a physical form but on an event. And yet, at the same time, this event would have a kind of permanence not unlike Smithson’s production of a material object like the *Spiral Jetty*. The event would not be a performance exactly, because a performance arrives and it dies. Although, as in the theater, it can sometimes be replayed. The replay



really is the most important thing. It is not the event anymore that is important, it is the replay. If artists in the 1960s and the '70s used to deal with this idea of event, performance, action—Kaprow, for instance—the representation of the event was not incorporated into the conception of the project. But now things have changed, and ultimately representation or images became more important than real events. We can see this with the current war, we can witness the way the media twists an event, the way representation is dictating the event. Today, an event, its image, and its commentary have become one object. There is an interchangeability in their occurrence and an anthropophagy.

*GB:* Okay, that is very complicated, although you wrote about it a little in the short piece that I translated for *October* 100. We need to unpack what you have just said. Your focus here on a replay, on repetition, on the use of representation—it would allow us to link *Streamside Day Follies* to your earlier projects, to the repetition embodied in a work like *Remake* (1994–95), for example, where you remade Hitchcock's *Rear Window* scene by scene with amateur actors, or the ambiguities occasioned by your various billboard projects, insertions of fictional representations into the spaces of everyday life. First, however, can you comment on the Dia work's title?

*PH:* Streamside Knolls is a new village in upstate New York on the Hudson River. Streamside Day is the celebration of a custom invented for this new place, and it took place a month before the opening of the exhibition at the Dia called *Streamside Day Follies*.

*GB:* It is the “follies” that I want to hear more about. Can you detail very quickly the work's various elements, as a viewer experienced them at the Dia?

*PH:* The exhibition is a *mise-en-scène* for Streamside Day and presents a project for a community center. The galleries are empty. Walls situated in different rooms



*Facing page:* Streamside Day, 2003. (Production shots.) Photo: Pierre Huyghe, Aaron S. Davidson, and Guilherme Young. *Left:* Streamside Day. 2003. (Video still.)

slowly begin to move toward the main space. The migration ends when they form a new territory in the center of the space. A temporary pavilion thus appears in the exhibition space. It remains in this form for as long as it takes to project the film that I made about the celebration in Streamside Knolls. When the film ends, the pavilion comes apart and the walls go back to their original places. The pavilion prefigures what will be the mechanics of the community center. As the white mobile walls move away from their original position, they reveal a green iridescent verso, evoking perhaps the Emerald City, but also revealing a series of green drawings on the walls of the space. The one at the entrance announces the construction of the community center.

**GB:** Let's return to your notions of an event and of representation, and how they work in this project. Representation was the key critical term for art practices in the 1980s. One often spoke then about the "critique of representation." Your understanding of representation, however, is quite different from the artists of that moment. As is your desire to double events with new representations, to submit historical representations to further repetitions, to disseminate in a certain way an event, a representation, an image.

**PH:** What interested me was to investigate how a fiction, how a story, could in fact produce a certain kind of reality. An *additif* of reality. I'm not speaking about change here. In *Streamside Day Follies*, I wanted to create a fiction that would lead to a *fête*, a celebration, an event that could be repeated. If we take up a musical metaphor, we can call this fiction a "score," and its enactment a "concert." If we take up the metaphor of cinema, we could call it a screenplay. And if we take up the metaphor of theater, we can call my intervention the creation of a script, after which comes the play—and even, a few years later, the possibility for the reinterpretation of this same play.

**GB:** So how precisely "scored" was the event in *Streamside Day Follies*?

**PH:** The "score" was *before* the event; the event in that work—the celebration—is the "play."

**GB:** Well, did you write a scenario?

**PH:** I didn't *write* anything. It was not about planning. It involved the provision of a kind of structure, within which things could happen.

**GB:** You were involved in the creation of a situation, almost in the Situationist sense of the term.

**PH:** It is the production of a situation: that was the project of *Streamside Day Follies*. Inventing the rules of a game, the scenario for a situation that can locally affect a reality. It is a *ritournelle*, a time-score.

**GB:** Are you interested in the Situationist precedents here? Some relation to *détournement* or *dérive* runs through so much of your work (like *Trajet* [1992], or *Extended Holidays* [1996], or *Les Passagers* [1996]). But for this project, were you specifically interested in the Situationist negotiation of what Bataille called *la fête*?

**PH:** Yes, I'm interested in the idea of a celebration, in festivals and rituals. I

wouldn't say, though, that the Situationist ideas constitute the main horizon of the work. And yet what is important to me in this regard is the idea of play, and of the game, *le jeu*. The purpose of art is to involve both; the game is the quintessence of art. The situation I created was about setting up a platform, creating some characters—or elements, if one doesn't want to use the theatrical metaphor—for others to use.

GB: So what were these elements in *Streamside Day Follies*?

PH: My score involved the idea that I would set up a time-based event, and it would be a celebration. Hopefully, if the event is successful, this celebration will be repeated, on the same day every year. It will be like Halloween, or like Christmas. What is Halloween, at its source? There is a scenario for this event too. What are we celebrating? We are repeating the fact that children in Ireland, at the moment of the famine, had to go from house to house to beg for food. It is now more complicated than that; there have been many added layers. But Halloween is a commercial fiction.

GB: It is interesting that you pick Halloween. It has been celebrated for a long time in the United States. But I remember when I was living in France in the late 1990s, it seemed a new import at that time, with a marketing campaign to match. Halloween is a relatively new celebration in France, right?

PH: It is like four years old there. We used to import products, and now we import traditions, invented traditions. I wrote a small piece on this, published in the Munich catalog on my work.<sup>1</sup> What is a celebration? A celebration is supposed to be something that we have in common, that we share, and that we celebrate because of this common basis. It is like a monument. But unlike a monument, an event can be renegotiated each time it is repeated, although this is rarely the case. Mainly, planting a custom is about setting up a stable repetition. It is a marketing strategy, and all you need is to fill the year with traditions, to create a permanent celebration.

For *Streamside Day*, I was searching for something that the community shared—what was the minimum common denominator between all these people? The answer I came to was that everyone came from a completely different place, and so the idea of migration would have to be important. Of that, at least, I was sure. And I was sure about another thing: with this community, they were coming to this specific place because of nature, an attraction to something like that old, old American idea of the wilderness. *Streamside Day Follies* wasn't really about new home developments; it wasn't Dan Graham's *Homes for America* (1966–67). The community here was attracted to ideas of ecology, ecotourism, environmental issues. They were interested in going backward—it was, in a sense, postmodern. The homes in *Streamside Day Follies*

1. See Pierre Huyghe, "Halloweenism," in *Pierre Huyghe* (Munich: Kunstverein München, Kunsthalle Zürich, 2000), p. 190.

were being advertised, literally, as “postmodern housing.” It was about going back to the past, tradition, nature, animals—ways of life from the past.

Now, I was not interested in critiquing any of this. I happened upon this real-estate development by chance. In my language, we would call this a “village,” something like a small town that had just been born, like in the gold rush. It had just been created. Given that newness, I would create a past for this place, or I would link this place to a past, something like the idea of a Founding Day for the community. The score as I envisioned it would concern itself with the two elements of migration and environmental issues, and then it would take the form of a celebration day, like Halloween, or Christmas.

*GB:* Exactly what elements constituted your score? What was planned out? How did you work with the community?

*PH:* You are assuming a lot about what I did. I just came to the community and proposed that there should be a celebration. They were in agreement, and wanted such a celebration. I wound up being a kind of celebration designer.

*GB:* But what did you design?

*PH:* An event that would focus on the shared ideas of migration and the celebration of nature. The village was decorated with white and green and silver balloons and banners. My first idea was to start with a long parade, beginning with all of the city service vehicles parading into the town—a police car, fire truck, school bus, Mr. Softee. The parade reenacts the idea of migration. This is exactly what happens in New York City, with all the different immigrant parades. The fact that they walk here, it signifies the fact that they have arrived. I wanted there to be some floats, very simple floats. It should all have this very polystyrene smell, very artificial, the smell of Dunkin’ Donuts. I was looking at images of many American celebrations. Also, I was thinking back to pagan rituals, and so decided that this parade should then progress to what you always have since man lived in the caves: music and food. I was interested in finding out what was pagan in this neoliberal community.

I had the Mr. Softee music slightly altered by a musician. We set up a stage. On the stage, ultimately the mayor of the town gave a speech, a lecture of welcome. Then the developers spoke. After this there was time for the people to eat, there was a small concert, and the children of the community played games.

*GB:* You contributed these ideas for the event? Or was the community involved in planning the day?

*PH:* I drew up all the aspects of the day, but then I let it go.

*GB:* And you filmed it.

*PH:* From the moment of my early work, I never script something in a totalizing way. I provide a framework, and then I let the framework go and things happen within the framework that are subject to chance, to interaction. These things are beyond my control.



GB: How would you say *Streamside Day Follies* connects to your earlier work? There is the obvious connection to your early event *La Toison d'or* (1993)—the costumes, the mythic elements, the children. Literally, your “score” seemed to borrow various elements from cinema, from representations, to be inserted into the space of a new community—I think of the references that your film of the event makes to Walt Disney’s *Bambi* (1942), but also to the Halloween scene in Steven Spielberg’s *E.T. the Extraterrestrial* (1982). There are surely mythic references as well—with the parade and the children one thinks inevitably of the Pied Piper. Some of your earliest works were billboard projects, where you would hire actors to pose at a construction site, or at a supermarket, performing the actions of labor or of consumption that take place in reality at those sites. You doubled the real here with a fictional documentary image, as if one were to take something like the staged documentary of a Jeff Wall photograph and assert that the truly disruptive place for such a construction is not the gallery wall but the space of the street. *Streamside Day Follies* seems a logical outgrowth, however more complex, of those early works.

PH: It is absolutely linked to the *Association of Freed Time—L’Association des temps libérés*—which is otherwise one of the bases of all my work.

GB: Can you describe this project? I think we might call the piece in English the “Society of Freed Time.”



Huyghe. *La Toison d'or*. 1993. (Event in the Jardin de l'Arquebuse, Dijon.)  
Photo: Pierre Huyghe.





*Huyghe. Chantier  
Barbès-Rochechouart.  
1997. (Billboard, Paris.)*

*PH:* The *Association of Freed Time* was my contribution to a group exhibition, *Moral Maze*, organized by Philippe Parreno and Liam Gillick at the Consortium in Dijon in 1995. I associated all of the artists in this exhibition, giving a social reality to the time of a collective show. The result was to turn the exhibition not into the end goal for various artists' works, a simple place for the exhibition of products, but to turn the time of the exhibition into a departure point for other projects, other scenarios. It was a way to extend the time of the exhibition to other projects of indeterminate length—*The House or Home?* (1995), *Mobil TV* (1995/1998), or *Temporary School* (1996), and even later on the project *No Ghost Just a Shell* (1999–2002).

*GB:* This seems a key idea for you for a long time. To open the space of exhibition, to make of its time a time of process.

*PH:* It is less a question of “process,” which is too linear, but of a vibrating temporality. I was thinking of the exhibition as a departure point, not a place of resolution or conclusion—I was interested in how one can free an exhibition from this temporal format. I mean, why should an exhibition last five weeks? Why not six months, why not a year, why not a lifetime? Why not one day? Why not an hour? The time of visibility should be set in accordance with the project and it should be open to discussion. I am always concerned with the notion of a format, and with reformulating whatever the given conventions might be—whether I'm considering a magazine, a film, a television program, a celebration, an exhibition. Daniel Buren in a sense “freed” space from its given scenario, and from its conventional uses. I associate myself with a linked impulse. It is a re-negotiation.

*GB:* Two things come together in the *Association of Freed Time* that seem to run

through all of your work. On the one hand, you react to the conventions of an art exhibition by collectivizing the work of exhibition itself. You form groups, you collaborate with other artists. This is an old avant-garde ideal. On the other hand, this collectivity and this collaboration work to frustrate the notion of any sense of the completion of an exhibition or the production of a stable art object. You often refuse to produce an object for a specific exhibition space, but you instead use the time of the exhibition to do other things. The idea seems to be to open the exhibition to further projects, to a set of proliferating events. I think especially of your work with and collaboration with Philippe Parreno. You de-emphasize the idea of a singular artist producing work for an exhibition space, and you de-emphasize the production as well of an object for that space. It is extremely difficult as an art critic to even react to such a practice. We have neither a singular author nor a complete object in any one given scenario or situation or exhibition.

*PH:* That is an accurate description of some of my work, but it is not a rule. It is not the only way I work.

*GB:* You are fearful of this working mode becoming its own convention then?

*PH:* In a certain way.

*GB:* But unfortunately, despite your efforts, that conventionalization seems to have happened. Maybe this is part of the reaction of other artists and curators to your work, as well as a more general reaction to Nicolas Bourriaud's arguments in the book *Relational Aesthetics*. Collaboration and the open work have been taken as an increasingly dominant recipe for exhibitions and for art practice today. However problematically, collectivity is asserted and the art object disappears.

*PH:* We are not interested in this vaunted "disappearance" of the art object. We are not returning to that old trap.

*GB:* In fact, *Streamside Day Follies*, while it involved a temporal event and a community, resulted in a rather well-defined set of objects in the space of the Dia.

*PH:* Actually there were no objects in the exhibition. I do believe, however, that art objects should be seen as transitory, they are in-between, they are not ends in themselves. They have an outside. I shouldn't keep returning to him, but this is exactly what Buren showed us. Buren revealed the outside of painting.

*GB:* The outside: I associate this term with the thinking of Maurice Blanchot or Gilles Deleuze, especially his books on cinema. What are the important "outsides" to your practice? I should clarify what I mean: we could have a discussion of the importance of certain artistic histories for your current ideas and strategies. We could talk about Buren, but we could talk too about John Cage, it seems to me . . . both you and Parreno have made works referencing Cage, like your *Silence Score* (1997), or *Le carillon* (1997) . . .

*PH:* Rirkrit Tiravanija has too.

*GB:* . . . we could talk about Situationism, or the *décollagistes*, or *Nouveau Réalisme* more generally. That discussion of artistic precedents is one thing, and it is a

discussion we should have. But the “outside” of your practice often seems to be related to fields that touch upon the visual arts but are not proper to them. I am thinking of the following fields: architecture, design, cinema, and music. These four seem especially symptomatic and important to your specific practice as a visual artist.

*PH:* There are others.

*GB:* I ask this question because one of the reasons I am interested in your work is precisely the difficulty I feel in attempting to “place” it—within avant-garde traditions, within a history specific to visual art. Your questioning of what you have called “formats,” your opening up of exhibition conventions, has led to the production of new forms and alternative formats that are extremely puzzling at times and difficult to place. This, it seems to me, is of course a good thing. We are not reassured by any stable reference to the past in your work, at least not all too often.

*PH:* I am interested in an object that is in fact a dynamic chain that passes through different formats. I am interested in a movement that goes through and between some of the fields that you mentioned.

*GB:* You mean that you are trying to create a chain of connections between these fields? Between art and architecture and cinema. . . ?

*PH:* No, I don’t care about that at all. I am not saying that everything is equal. I am not echoing that sentiment from the early 1990s that you can just abandon specificity and say, okay, now I am acting as an architect, now I am a designer, and so on. I believe each field is absolutely different and singular, and what in fact is interesting about each is its difference. I am more interested in what we can call topological systems.

*GB:* This term “topology” comes up a lot in discussions of your work, or that of Parreno. It is a term Parreno uses, for example, when he writes about your work. I know artists here in New York, like Gareth James, who are completely devoted in their practice to an idea of topology, but perhaps it is understood differently. What do you mean by it?

*PH:* It is about how you use something. It refers to a process of



translation. However, when you translate something, you always lose something that was in the original. In a topological situation, by contrast, you lose nothing; it is a deformation of the same.

*GB:* It sounds like you are referring to a process of exchange, as in capitalist exchange.

*PH:* It refers to an equivalence.

*GB:* Why are you interested in this idea, in this activity? It has become a working method—for you, for Parreno, for others too.

*PH:* In a way, it is rather structuralist.

*GB:* Okay, but I'm not understanding why there is this attraction to topology, to choosing a model of practice that has to do with translating one object into another type of object, one practice into another field of practice. Let me cite Parreno on topology and your work. He seems to connect the topological to specific works by you such as the billboard images, *Trajet*, the movie *Remake*, the film *Les incivils* (1995), your works dealing with pieces by Cage. Parreno writes:

Topology is concerned with the relative positions of figures, a question of points, the set of which defines spaces. . . . A donut and a cup of coffee are topologically equivalent because they describe the same space. An object is a more or less complex situation which can be transformed into another. By deforming it, by pushing it to its limits, we discover its affinities with what exists outside of it. . . . To blow up an inner tube is to transform it topologically.<sup>2</sup>

2. Philippe Parreno, "Pièces versées au contentieux relatif au temps libre," *Speech Bubbles* (Paris: Les presses du réel, 2001), p. 80. Originally published in *Pierre Huyghe*, p. 35.



*Huyghe. Le Château de Turing installation. Venice Biennale, 2001. (Les Grands ensembles, 2001.)*



Can you describe how topology might be said to work in some specific works that you have completed?

*PH:* It is the fold of a situation. It's a way to translate an experience without representing it. The experience will be equivalent and still it will be different.

*GB:* I am wondering why the fields into which you shift your own practice seem so consistent—architecture, design, cinema, music. All four fields were present in your 2001 Venice Biennale installation, *Le Château de Turing*.

*PH:* You mean, why am I not interested in anthropology, medicine, sociology? Why these fields?

*GB:* Yes.

*PH:* I am interested in fields which at the given point of my own practice are actively shaping behaviors. And I am also interested in those fields that are part of what we call “entertainment,” basically. So I would add television to your list of course too. I mean, think of a Frank Gehry building. I don't know what you call such a practice. Sure, it's architecture, but. . . . It is also entertainment. There is a friction and a transformation now in these fields. So when I work with an architect, like François Roche, he is aware of this transformation, and the work is very different. We exchange ideas that are not primarily specific to our own practice.

*GB:* What have you done with Roche?

*PH:* What have we actually built? Nothing. But as happens in architecture, we have completed two proposals for architectural competitions, and we are thinking about a project for a community center for Streamside Knolls. My first encounters with Roche centered on an investigation of the practice of building housing developments in Italy, which led to the work *Chantier permanent* (1993).

*GB:* When I think about your projects as a whole, it seems to me that this early





Huyghe with François Roche.  
*Chantier permanent*. 1993.  
Photo: Pierre Huyghe.

work—it was one of your first—can be seen as an allegory for your own practice, for all of your work.

PH: Perhaps.

GB: How would you translate “chantier”? Shanty?

PH: Construction site.

GB: Permanent construction site.

PH: Exactly. It does have the smell of Cage about it, doesn't it? But I didn't set out to make a work about my own working procedures.

GB: In retrospect, however, *Chantier permanent* seems to be a model for a practice. The project deals with homes that are built in Italy and the Mediterranean that are left unfinished even after they are purchased, in some cases with the intention that they should be perpetually unfinished.

PH: The project revolves around the ideas of planning and scenario, ideas that were becoming important to artists with whom I have been associated. Planning, for example, has been taken up as a model by Liam Gillick and developed in a much more theoretical way.

GB: It occurs to me: if *Chantier permanent* can be seen as a model for your practice, at the same time you can't get any further from the ideas embodied by the content of that early piece as you do in *Streamside Day Follies*. What I mean is that they are completely opposed types of housing projects. But perhaps they are also bookends within your own practice, and its internal transformations from the early 1990s to today.

PH: I don't know if I can respond to that.

GB: Then let's discuss in more detail the earlier work.

PH: *Chantier permanent* focuses upon the negotiation between the necessary and the contingent in architecture. It looked closely at a type of vernacular architecture that was left purposefully open to a future potential. Actually, it is



about the present. It concerns the establishment of what we can call an “open present.” One responsive to any and all incidents that may occur. These houses were forms that were created as platforms, ready to be activated. It was in fact less about planning, less about what Gillick has been interested in, than about scenario. The instability of the situation creates a permanent transitory state. The houses are a form of construction done without an architect, but more than that, they represent an open scenario, a form of potentiality, of possibility.

*GB:* And your work with this housing type consisted simply in documenting it photographically? Writing about it with Roche? These houses reappear in one of your earliest and most important films, *Les incivils*.

*PH:* It was an imperfect piece. The first idea was indeed to document and record this type of architecture. I traveled to the Mediterranean with a professional architectural photographer from *Domus* magazine. I originally hoped to give these documents to an architecture critic in order that this person might write about these buildings.

*GB:* And ultimately you gave them to Roche?

*PH:* Yes, in the end, it was Roche.<sup>3</sup> The change being that he is not a critic but a practicing architect himself. No matter. In fact, the interest at the beginning was to have a whole series of interpretations of one thing.

*GB:* So, just as the homes are available to infinite adjustment and future additions . . .

*PH:* . . . I would invite a group of people to interpret and read these buildings, this phenomenon. The project was to produce a document, and then distribute it to a series of commentators, in effect. Later, in my work, I would do much the same thing in *Mobil TV* or in the *No Ghost Just a Shell* project. And I have also done the same thing with *Streamside Day Follies*. There, I have made a film, documenting the event. I have given it, again, to Roche for commentary; he will build a community center. I will give it to Dave Eggers, the novelist, and to other writers to write about it. Some people made drawings and photographs, and a singer came to produce a song.

*GB:* Interesting. But what I find compelling about *Chantier permanent* is that the “open houses” that you were documenting are left open as a form of fraud. Leaving the building unfinished is a way that property owners can escape paying taxes.

*PH:* Precisely.

*GB:* Well, then that becomes more interesting if we can accept that this piece is a model for your own practice, for this focus on the open work. *Chantier permanent* is a deeply fraught type of open work. It is born from fraudulence. It’s a tax shelter.

*PH:* It is about “making do,” as Michel de Certeau put it. Yes, it is a tax issue, and

3. See François Roche, “Note of Intent,” *Exposé: la maison* 1, no. 3 (Orléans: Édition HXX, 1997), reprinted in *Pierre Huyghe*, pp. 28–29.

this occurs all across the Mediterranean. If you don't finish the house, you don't pay taxes on it.

GB: In your early work, you seemed attracted to working in Italy. After *Chantier permanent* would come the film *Les incivils*, which returned to the same Italian landscape and to the content of Pasolini's film *Hawks and Sparrows* (1966).

PH: This is what I was trying to point to earlier with my ideas about the work of art. This is basically one project, starting with *Chantier permanent*. Then, about six months later I realized that Pasolini had shot his film in the same landscape as these homes. So it is a chain, one work leads to other works. I did a project entitled *Casting* (1995), having been invited to do a gallery show in Milan.

GB: At a gallery called, interestingly, Galleria Fac-Similé.

PH: The time for the casting of the film *Les incivils* became the duration of the exhibition. Amateur actors were invited to a casting session in the gallery, and were asked to perform a scene from Pasolini's *Hawks and Sparrows*. They were in the space, waiting around for their turn, it was impossible to know who were the visitors to the exhibition and who were the actors for the film. It is a moment before an image. After that came what I guess you would have to call a journey, where I set out to "embody" the film. Pasolini's film, for me, became a score. I took *Hawks and Sparrows* as a point of departure. It wasn't about seeing the film as a dead set of shots at the end result of a process, but as an open guide for experiences.

GB: You used *Hawks and Sparrows* as a score.

PH: Whereas in *Streamside Day Follies*, I had to invent the score. I took Pasolini's film, and used it like one would use a manual for building a telephone. I took the film, looked at it in various ways, and attempted to "embody" the film, I would "replay" the film. It is not a citation.



Huyghe. *Casting*. 1995. (Event, Galleria Fac-Similé, Milan.)  
© Galerie Roger Pailhas, Marseille.

*GB:* Can you describe exactly what this meant in the case of *Les incivils*? What did using the film as a score produce?

*PH:* A return as a new experience, a new encounter with a series of situations through which Pasolini himself had passed. It involved looking through the eyes of someone else, meeting with Ninetto Davoli and the current inhabitants of the Roman suburbs.

*GB:* What does it mean to do this to and with cinema? What does it mean to use a cinematic work as a score for an event, an intervention in reality? Before *Les incivils*, you had enlisted amateur actors to redo Hitchcock's *Rear Window* in the film *Remake*, which was filmed, significantly, with residents of a specific apartment complex that was in fact under construction. But the Pasolini film was the first time you would enlist the actual actors or subjects from a previous cinematic product—in this case Ninetto Davoli, but then later you would do something similar with Bruno Ganz in your use of Wim Wenders's *The American Friend* for your project *L'Ellipse* (1998), or then John Wojtowicz in relation to the movie made about his actions, *Dog Day Afternoon*, in your work *The Third Memory* (2000). And *Les incivils* amounts to the first time you used a movie as what you are now calling a score, a representation that produces a new chain of representations, or perhaps even a real event. What does it mean to do this with a movie?

*PH:* A film is a public space, a common place. It is not a monument but a space of discussion and action. It's an ecology. Yes, that *Les incivils* was the first is significant. Pasolini had this famous sentence: "Cinema is the written language of reality." If this is true, then it becomes possible to imagine taking up this language to effect reality. For Pasolini, it was the "sequence shot" that was the capture of reality, but it was then in the editing that one arrives at a "written language of reality." The editing is a sentence and one sequence shot is just a word.

*GB:* He calls it a "subjective." Meaning one view on the world, one view on reality.

*PH:* Exactly. And what then becomes crucial is to imagine all the possible sequence shots on the real, the multitude of subjective points of view.

*GB:* At the end of your Munich catalog, you allow a citation from Pasolini's essay "Observations on the Sequence Shot" to stand alone, as a kind of enigmatic conclusion to your book. It is the passage concerning Pasolini's thoughts on the film footage of the assassination of President Kennedy. You leave it in French only—the rest of the book is in English and German. But the passage is, more or less, this one, you place it under the subtitle *Prévision*:

In the possible film on the death of Kennedy all the other visual angles are missing. . . . Supposing that we had some short films shot from all those visual angles, what would we have? A series of sequence shots which would reproduce the real things and actions of that hour, seen contemporaneously from various visual angles: seen, that is, through a series of

“subjectives” . . . [Now suppose that someone was able to coordinate these shots.] After this work of choice and coordination, the various visual angles would be dissolved, and the existential subjectivity would give way to objectivity, there would no longer be the pitiful pairs of eyes-ears (or cameras-recorders) to capture and reproduce the escaping and so scarcely cordial reality, but in their place would be a narrator.<sup>4</sup>

Your citation differs slightly from this, in the French. You end by calling this a “reproduction of the present.” Why is this idea and this passage important to you?

*PH:* I’m actually going to Texas later today and I’m going to go see where Kennedy was assassinated tomorrow. Really, I’m not kidding. Imagine: you have Kennedy shot, right here. And then surrounding this event, you have all the sequence shots, all the subjective points of view on one event. This has always fascinated me. What I have always wanted to do is to make the film of all these different points of view on an event while removing the event itself. Can you see what I mean? You could imagine doing the same thing right now with the war in Iraq. You would take into account the media coverage and all the talk about it, but not only that, you would take into account each person who was there and now comes back. You would also have to take into account the views of the people who weren’t there but saw the media version. And you would take into account the person who didn’t see the media but heard the person who did talking about it. What is this infinite set of perspectives? It is the story of the narratives of a story. It is like an organism. This is what I am interested in. When I speak about a dynamic chain, I’m speaking about such an organism.

*GB:* You have to explain that to me better.

*PH:* It is like a hologram image of a situation.

*GB:* I am intrigued by the divergence of connections and references raised by your project. While on the one hand we could be discussing your reflection on Cage or on Buren, we are now finding a model for your practice in Pasolini’s thoughts on cinema. Other filmmakers whom I have talked to about your work see an indebtedness in your project to Jean-Luc Godard. This is a new position, I think, in which to be: within recent histories of contemporary art, I’m not sure that the range of practices to which one responded have ever been so divergent.

*PH:* I am supposedly linked to Godard?

*GB:* I’m wondering if you do reflect upon his legacy, just as Pasolini is obviously an explicit reference point for your activities. It is hard to think of two more opposed figures from the cinema of the 1960s and ’70s.

4. Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Observations on the Sequence Shot,” *Heretical Empiricism*, trans. Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 233–35.

*PH:* You can judge things for their diversity. Anyway Pasolini is not the reference. The thing specific to Pasolini that is crucial for me is the complexity and the urgency of his various practices and all the inner paradoxes with which he had to deal.

*GB:* You are specifically interested in Pasolini's counterintuitive claim, for the 1960s, that cinema has a unique purchase on reality. His continuance of a kind of "heretical" realism.

*PH:* Sure, but though the means differ, one could say much the same thing about early Godard, about the *nouvelle vague* and its breaking of the conventions of narration, its more direct contact with reality.

*GB:* Would you accept the supposition that Pasolini's essay on the sequence shot has served you as a working model for the production of an open work, just as the houses documented in *Chantier permanent* did? An essay by an intellectual, a vernacular architectural type, all of these divergent things can serve as a model for work?

*PH:* For Pasolini there is always an address, a "for who" and a "for where." An address that produces a tension and an outside.

*GB:* Pasolini has been an important reference point for your collaborator Parreno too, and instead of the sequence shot essay he speaks more about Pasolini's elegy to the disappearance of fireflies, the firefly essay.<sup>5</sup> But I disagree with Parreno that Pasolini's essay on the fireflies was simply about the "end of ideologies" in postwar Italy. I don't believe in the end of ideologies, and I don't think Pasolini did either.

*PH:* The relation between the two forms of the poetic and the political is the key. I like what Pasolini said about his project *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*. He speaks about viewing something through the eyes of someone else. Deleuze too takes up this idea from Pasolini . . .

*GB:* The idea of what Pasolini calls "free indirect discourse." For him, this was the essence of cinema.

*PH:* For me it is a technique, a tool, that I absolutely put to use. So you spoke about "models." But I'm taking tools—from Pasolini, from Cage, from Roche. And it is hardly new at all to make such links between divergent practices. Think of Cage himself, borrowing from Satie, from Duchamp, from Mallarmé. A musician, but also a poet, and a visual artist.

*GB:* Okay, you just brought up Pasolini's and Deleuze's idea of free indirect discourse, and now you speak of a kind of strategic borrowing from divergent fields. This may be our opportunity to speak about the rhetoric of "relationality" in contemporary art—in your project, but also the understanding of this that we witness in Bourriaud's idea of a relational aesthetic.

5. Philippe Parreno reproduces and translates Pasolini's essay in relation to his own work *The Firefly Article* (1993). See Parreno, *Alien Affection* (Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2002), pp. 226–31, 384–85. Pasolini's essay was originally published under the title "The Power Vacuum in Italy," in *Corriere della Sera* in February 1975.

*PH:* In terms of relations, your implication that one form of this is to interrelate divergent fields—art, architecture, cinema—is not interesting. This is a means for me, it is hardly a goal.

*GB:* But your work's idea of the relational seems to focus upon ideas of the open work, the link between practices, the permanent construction site. . . . Why is it important to work in this way now? Is it a political gesture? A linkage, like Pasolini's, between poetics and politics?

*PH:* It is an expanded field. The more tools, the more one can expand the game. The more one can play. The tools themselves are not important in comparison to the ability to play. Think about Robert Filliou.

*GB:* You seem to resist, however, thinking about these strategies in political terms. Let me clarify the stakes of my question. I am asking you directly about politics because it seems to me that the question of the relational—I'm thinking specifically of Bourriaud now and of the artists that he has supported—has functioned in the artistic discourse of the 1990s to displace a model of politics and critique that was central to advanced art in the 1980s. Think of Hans Haacke, think of Barbara Kruger; this clarifies what I'm trying to point out. So how are we to understand this displacement? Is a "relational aesthetic" about a reformulation of a political project? Is it instead about an avoidance of the term political? Or is it a kind of pragmatism or realism that we face here—a realization that false political claims for artistic practices were made in the 1980s, and one must not falsely claim immediate political functions for cultural or aesthetic projects?

*PH:* Your last point is key. And it should apply as well to critics and historians. It is obviously difficult to define oneself after a postmodern period where we all became extremely self-conscious and aware about the consequences of our actions. This is why conclusions should be suspended but the tension should remain. There is a complexity that must be recognized and that produces a fragile object.

And this is why I have had some problems with the last two *Documenta* exhibitions. A false claiming of the political. It is a huge problem when the "political" becomes a subject for art. For me, Buren is a political artist. It is a practice that is political, not the subject or the content of art. Politics is not an apple that you paint in order to legitimate the fact that you paint. That is a moral issue.

*GB:* You are interested then in a politics of form?

*PH:* Always, what is crucial is not the arrangement but the rules of arrangement.

*GB:* Do you accept Bourriaud's term "relational aesthetics" as an accurate description of your own practice?

*PH:* No. I do not believe that Bourriaud's book was written with any ambition of being an historical record. It was an experiment, an attempt to capture what was new about a vast array of recent artistic practices. It wasn't a history, it wasn't an attempt to predict the future either. Bourriaud was simply capturing



a moment, a set of new practices that he saw arriving at that moment. Over the last few years, however, more and more people are using the term “relational aesthetics” as a label to frame a certain practice. I cannot use it as an “-ism” very simply because I don’t accept it as a term to describe a set of practices including my own.

What is new and crucial, the shift that Bourriaud captured—it has to do with economies. In the 1960s, it was important for artists to deal with the product and the object. Perhaps then, you can speak of modes of production and along with the product you analyze the factory as well, the production line, the process. But today this former economy of industrial products has shifted to an economy of service. Human relations are directly involved in such an economy. The downfall of industrial economies and objects, the rise of a service economy, the new importance of entertainment—within this nexus, the idea of relations, of inter-human relations, co-habitation, and social context become crucial.

*GB:* It is a pity that Bourriaud’s account does not analyze that social nexus in the precise way that you just did, however.

*PH:* Whether we agree or not with Nicolas’s groupings of artists, the importance of relationality in the last decade of cultural practice is undeniable.

*GB:* But we need clarification as to how artists understand the relational, which is why I was raising the possibility that it signals a displacement of a former understanding of the political in art. In your work, sometimes the relational seems to be embodied simply by working collectively, by working together with other artists in groups. Your relations are relations with other artists; a perfect example of this is the outgrowth of your project *L’Association des temps libérés* that you called *The House or Home*? There you purchased an unfinished house and all the artists in the Association lived there together collectively, adding to and altering the space in various ways.

This was a work you created with Parreno, and in fact you have worked closely with Parreno many times. It is interesting, for while there are strong linkages between your work and his, there are many significant differences too. But with other artists with whom you work, aside from Parreno, you often seem to have extremely little in common. It reminds me really of the Dadaists as a group formation. Here was a group formed in contradiction more than commonality. Think about Duchamp and Picabia—what did they really have in common as figures in the end? But their projects were at times indistinguishable, and presented in parallel and in tandem. I think about this when I wonder what you could possibly have in common with the project of Rirkrit Tiravanija, or, well . . . Maurizio Cattelan. . . .

*PH:* Nicolas was instrumental to setting up this group of artists, and sure, I agree with you, it is a group that on the surface doesn’t seem to share too many things. I do think that I share many things with Philippe; we work together closely, as I do with Rirkrit Tiravanija, with Liam Gillick, or Dominique

Gonzalez-Foerster. And yes, in fact I do share concerns with Maurizio Cattelan in a certain way.

GB: Do you want to specify what it is that this group might share?

PH: Sure, we could do that, but you might find it arbitrary. And then you would say, basically, we are just talking about a group of friends—but a group that understands their differences, which allows them to escape from the strictures of a monomaniacal practice.

GB: One could surely conclude that it is just about friendship. At times, the “sociality” discussed by recent critics and curators and artists seems to amount to little more than that, which is okay as far as it goes. I have nothing against having friends! But I want to know what artistic concerns might be shared.

PH: In a certain way, Nicolas’s book was like the production of a new scenario, in the manner I discuss this in my own practice. His book and his words provided the linkage between various artists and people. For if you really focus on the idea of human interrelation in art practice, this was really the primary concern of Rirkrit.

GB: I agree, the term relational aesthetics as Bourriaud uses it seems to apply and to emerge mostly from the work of Tiravanija.

PH: Absolutely. But the “production of scenario” can be linked to many figures, more even than Bourriaud mentions in his book.

GB: Can you tell me exactly what you mean when you keep using this term the production of a scenario? You use the term as a title in your work *Multiscénarios (pour une sitcom)* (1996).

PH: Of course, yes, that needs to be defined. It is a rather abstract term. What is a scenario? What do we mean when we refer to this? Well, we could use the tools of Liam Gillick to define this further. Liam opposed the idea of planning—the modernist or communist or early capitalist model of social planning—to the production of scenarios used in the late capitalist system, one based on possibilities, a free-market economy constantly re-adapting itself to the needs of an audience. Liam linked the term “scenario” to the economy, where speculation becomes a mode of action or *prévision*.

But, of course, you can link the word “scenario” to the cinema, the just-before, when things are still potentially changeable. Human society is structured by narratives, immaterial scenarios.

GB: Which would be your interest.

PH: I use the term “scenario” interchangeably with the word “screenplay,” and with the word “score.” So the production of a scenario is the production of the set of possibilities and rules that will give rise to something.

GB: Is this definition of a scenario—you applied it interestingly just now to Bourriaud’s book, meaning Bourriaud’s book allowed for a kind of artistic production to coalesce and take shape—is this a term we could apply to your recent activities with Parreno in the founding of what you call Anna Sanders



*Huyghe and Philippe Parreno. Anna Sanders Films: Blanche-Neige, Lucie. 1997.*

Films? I would really like to discuss Anna Sanders Films, because I don't think I understand at all what Anna Sanders Films is.

*PH:* I should start by explaining that we decided to write a scenario for a film. We ended up deciding to publish a part of the scenario, revolving around a character. This became the magazine *Anna Sanders, the story of a feeling* (1996). Further issues would have introduced other characters.

It was an attempt to define a feeling (*sentiment*) through a character, through images and text. We were interested in the format of the magazine for presenting this, because it is not involved in a linear reading like the form of the novel. You can flip through, flicking back and forth, reading in different areas. Eventually, we formed a film production company and we named it after this fictional character.

*GB:* Why Anna Sanders?

*PH:* It is an invention.

*GB:* When did you form this company? I think your film *Blanche-Neige, Lucie* was one of the first Anna Sanders films, right?

*PH:* Yes. It was the first film, produced in 1997.

*GB:* Do you view Anna Sanders Films as a simple production company? Is it just that? Does it function like a normal film production company? By now, Anna Sanders has produced films by a very wide range of filmmakers. How do you define it?

*PH:* This is difficult to answer, because the project has only been defined by the films produced. At the beginning there was the intuition that one could do things like portray the landscape as a character, try and catch something like a feeling, produce a mental map of a group of people, a relation between reality and fiction, focus on the "off-screen." There was no real theorization, just intuitions. It is not yet clear, though, what the Anna Sanders films share. The things shared are far outnumbered by the divergences.

*GB:* Then why is it important to have this collective tool? This grouping? Anna

Sanders seems another machine for producing collectivity. But it is clearly a capitalist machine, right? You offer a model of collectivity on the model of the film production company.

*PH:* Not at all. Anna Sanders has existed for eight years, but we don't "show" the film company as a project. It is a tool that is at the service of a group of authors.

*GB:* There have been screenings of the Anna Sanders Films. There has been a book published on Anna Sanders Films.

*PH:* As with any film production. We came from the world of visual art but just like some independent filmmakers we built an alternative tool for production. Kubrick did it in the 1960s and '70s, and today you would look to Lars von Trier. Or Nanni Moretti in Italy.

*GB:* It is interesting that you mention von Trier. More or less, Anna Sanders Films was founded at the same moment as Dogme. Is there a comparison here?

*PH:* We should be up front and admit that von Trier is someone who is highly skilled in using the media, highly aware of it. You must know that Dogme is simply a marketing strategy. What is interesting about Lars von Trier is his accepting of a system of internal constraints in order to produce something new. So this is an example of a filmmaker producing his own tool, his own system, and his own advertising. Anna Sanders is not that.

*GB:* I still feel no closer to understanding the project. Maybe you are trying to tell me that you don't feel the need to define Anna Sanders or understand it either.

*PH:* No, it is not meant to be mysterious. I've been telling you what it is. As I said before, it is not a project in itself. Anna Sanders is a tool that serves as a point of reunion, a meeting of people who have an intuition and wish to bring it to life, and who share some ideas.

*GB:* Ideas about cinema?

*PH:* No. Well, some ideas about cinema are shared, even though we came from a different field and slowly explored this territory. But it is not about resolution, not always pointing toward the end point of a work. It is a group of people who share ideas with each other. It is difficult to define what these ideas might be, for the group is in constant movement and flux; sometimes there are moments of clarity and sometimes things are more blurry. For sure, in the films, there is the shared concern with *mise-en-scène*. You can see it in the films of Parreno, in Gonzalez-Foerster, in Charles de Meaux's films. There is the idea of a *mise-en-scène*, on a transportation to an elsewhere. This is in my films too.

*GB:* Should the films be understood in connection to ethnographic film?

*PH:* No, it's not Jean Rouch. Of course, Jean Rouch is really interesting, but I prefer Chris Marker. You simply cannot take up again today this innocence or direct gaze, that is from another time. I am, though, very much interested in documentary. This was my starting point as an artist. However, I just don't know how today you can go and take a camera and put yourself in front of

something, record it, and think that this is realism. All you see is a set of academic conventions. I can't understand this, say, after Pasolini, realizing the necessity of going through the eyes of someone else.

*GB:* Okay, let's leave Anna Sanders Films then and instead take up what you just said about *mise-en-scène* in these films, also about your distrust of documentary. One tactic that characterizes your work is to use representational conventions as a mode for doing things in reality, as opposed to documenting reality within representation. You are interested in reversing a former understanding of documentary. You don't "capture" the real in an image; you are interested in using representation to effect the real.

*PH:* That is one possibility.

*GB:* Can you talk more about such a strategy? Because the danger in it, for me, is that it almost seems to imply a type of aestheticist position, an aestheticism. One uses the conventions of art forms to produce reality—I mean how different is this than Huysmans?

*PH:* I see where you are going. But don't forget that I am dealing with form.

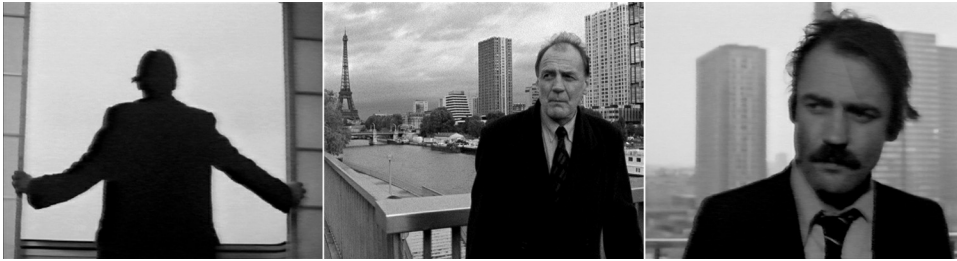
*GB:* As opposed to thinking of *l'art pour l'art*, you could see such a strategy in relation to spectacle, which would be more relevant, I suppose. At times yours seems like a strategy of allowing the spectacle to run wild, making of spectacle a form of life. Which I guess for a long time now it actually has been. But what are you doing with this strategy? Is it allegorical? Is it a form of mimicry of the conditions of spectacle and how they shape reality and life today?

*PH:* First, we must dispel one received idea and that is that the spectacle is a fatalism, inherently alienating. The spectacle is a format, it is a way to do things. It is a "how." This "how" is a tool, not an allegory.

*GB:* It is a social form.

*PH:* Yes, it is a social form with an ideological setting. But spectacle has always been linked with illusion, with manipulation, with the culture industry. It is though a format and a way of doing things that can be taken and appropriated, and used for other purposes. The point is not as an artist to occupy the position of simply rejecting the spectacle or entertainment as bad; this is a form of escapism. Nor is the point just to incorporate spectacle, and occupy the position of an artist saying, "I will also just be an entertainer." The point is to take spectacle as a format, and to use it if the need presents itself.

I do use conventions of representation to frame, catch, and affect reality. I know quite well the traditions of documentary film and photography. Documentary form has always been important to me. The problem is that the form of capturing reality has become itself a convention. So the problem then becomes, again, one not about the arrangement itself, but about the rules of arrangement. One has to transform the conventions. I am still interested in capturing reality. But the way of capturing it has been conventionalized. What



Huyghe. *L'Ellipse*. 1998.

we see now when we look to representations for a record of reality are a set of conventions.

*GB:* The lesson of spectacle and the point of departure for your work is that the distance between reality and its representation has collapsed in a certain sense.

*PH:* Sometimes a pure fiction film, even a science-fiction film, tells us more about reality than a documentary. I am interested in this. I am attempting, in my work, to “re-scenarize” the real.

*GB:* My question here began, however, by wondering if the danger with this isn’t a form of aestheticism. You are using art and its conventions to reformulate the real.

*PH:* I mentioned science fiction. But the most extreme opposite of a documentary film is a musical. This is why, in my recent work, I am actually very interested in the format of the musical. Sometimes science fiction or a musical will tell you more about the reality of the moment or of a situation than a director going with his own camera out onto the battlefield of a war. We have known this ever since we have known what television is doing. Television is a direct assault on the idea of documentary, on the reality that it could represent. Television simply presents reality under the false subjective of one point of view, hardly in any sense the multiple points of view of Pasolini’s musing about the possible film of Kennedy’s death, not even the technique of Godard in, say, *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*. In that film, through a fiction, Godard was able to reach an exposition of a reality that no documentary technique could ever achieve. He used the format and the tools of representation in order to catch a reality.

When I turned to Bruno Ganz and asked him to cross this bridge in my film *L'Ellipse*—filling the empty jump cut between two scenes in Wenders’s film—I used a tool that allowed me to catch a moment of accident and chance, things which I never put into the *mise-en-scène*. I never plan this out. I put up the frame and whatever happens within the frame happens. We are back to the tactics of *Streamside Day Follies*.

*GB:* How so?



*PH:* In *Streamside Day Follies* there was the score, and then things happened.

*GB:* You mean that your work is always opened onto chance?

*PH:* Yes, that is what I am saying. In *Streamside Day Follies* I announced that we would have a parade, and then some talks, and then a concert. But that is it. I had no further control over what was going on. On the one side, I created a scenario and set it into motion. Then, letting it go, I could approach on the other side with my camera and film the entire thing objectively, like a documentary filmmaker happening onto this pagan event surrounded by postmodern houses. I occupy both sides of a divide: I build up a fiction and then I make a documentary of this fiction. The point is: we should invent reality before filming it. We need to “re-scenarize” the real.

—New York City, May 13, 2004