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Witness and presence in the work of Pierre Huyghe

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Abstract The relation between "presence" and "representation" is an age-old topic in the arts, but it is further complicated in our time of advanced media conditions. Pierre Huyghe is one artist who has consistently addressed questions of presence and representation throughout his artistic oeuvre, including the role of the witness within it. Considering the sophistication of Huyghe's work with regard to the riddle of presence in the realm of contemporary means of representation, the artist's work is taken as a case study for a broad range of artists exploring related topics within the arts and the media. This paper argues that art that interrogates the question of presence within the context of contemporary media culture—from Marina Abramović to Stelarc, Jeffrey Shaw to Julia Scher—asks for being interpreted through presence theories developed within the field of media studies in addition to methods of art theory and criticism. Accordingly, Huyghe's work is productively related to one such theory, namely the YUTPA model by Caroline Nevejan, which theorizes the interrelated concepts of natural, mediated, and witnessed presence.

Keywords Pierre Huyghe · Contemporary art · Media · Presence · Representation

1 Preface

The Oxford English Dictionary defines "witness" as "the action or condition of being an observer of an event".[1] What identifies the figure of the witness, according to this definition, is the (physical) presence of a person. Caroline Nevejan describes the related concept of "witnessed presence" in her dissertation, *Presence and the Design of Trust*, as "the attestation of witnessing the presence of others" (Nevejan 2007, p. 79). The act of witnessing and the fact of being witnessed are both temporally conditioned: they unfold in real time—in the "here and now." Pierre Huyghe's short video, *Two Minutes Out of Time* (2000) can be seen as a special case of witnessed presence because the observer does not see another human being in real time and space, but an animated Japanese Manga character with exaggerated physical features in cyberspace. AnnLee, as this feminine character with ultramarine blue hair, almond-shaped eyes, and Dr Spock-like ears is baptized, is an imaginary figure of which Huyghe and Philip Parreno bought the copyrights. Then, they made the character available to a group of befriended artists, such as Rirkrit Tiravanija, Liam Gillick, and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, who used her as an inspiration source for their own work in a variety of media. Huyghe also created a few works with AnnLee himself, such as the just-mentioned video, in which we witness this charming cyborg as she is reflecting upon her own digital presence and brief existence: "I have 2 min", she warns her witnessing spectators, "in 2 min I'll be away" (Fig. 1).

Huyghe's animation challenges the concepts of witness and presence as described in the opening paragraph. The artist does everything to bring AnnLee "to life"—providing her with recognizable human emotions and a keen intellect—but the question remains whether the term "presence," in the classic, ontological sense, can be used

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[1] Oxford English Dictionary online, s.v. "witness". Accessed on 15 March 2011.

Fig. 1 Pierre Huyghe, *Two Minutes out of Time* (2000)

Fig. 2 Pierre Huyghe, *One Million Kingdoms* (2001)

for a virtual character? Can we claim that we witnessed AnnLee's short-lived presence during those ephemeral minutes or do we have to modify our ideas of presence and witnessing in the face of personae in cyberspace, which today make up such an integral part of social online environments, from Facebook to Second life? In other words: how do such virtual identities—whose physical counterparts we mostly never meet in real life—relate to our actual corporeal beings? How do they relate to our notions of reality and fiction in general? While AnnLee is not an avatar created for the Internet, she certainly triggers essential questions about our constructed "Self" in the digital age.[2]

The relation between presence and representation in the arts has never been simple, as the many philosophical reflections and historical disputes on the classical question of *mimesis* demonstrate since Plato and Aristotle began to problematicize it in the 4th century BC, not to mention the never-ending debate on *Ut Pictura Poesis* ("as is painting so is poetry"), which Horace introduced in his treatise on poetry in the first century BC. The role of the spectator—or witness—in this ever-changing tension between presence and representation similarly forms a crucial topic in major art historical debates, even though with a new intensity since the emergence of the technological media in the 19th and 20th centuries. "The arts requires witnesses," as Anne Wagner recalls the words of the 18th century writer Jean-François Marmortel in her essay, "Performance, Video and the Rhetoric of Presence" (2000, p. 61). The digital media—or so-called new media—has further complicated this age-old problem of witness and presence, which Huyghe recognizes in his AnnLee project, *No Ghost Just a Shell* (1999–2000), of which the video *Two Minutes out of Time* is a part. In another work of this collaborative project, *One Million Kingdoms* (2002), Huyghe draws an analogy between the actual landing on the moon and the invention of digital space, both of which opened up previously unknown yet imaginative territories. In this animated film, we witness AnnLee walking through a lunar landscape that is mapped out and developed on the intonations of a narrator's voice that recites actual recordings of Neil Armstrong mixed up with excerpts of Jules Vernes' science fiction, *A Journey to the Center to the World* (1867). The underlying message is clear: AnnLee's march through digital space can be seen as "a giant leap for mankind" just as Armstrong's historic moon walk (Fig. 2).[3]

The AnnLee videos are a good example of the way in which Huyghe investigates questions of presence in contemporary media culture and society, but the greater part of his oeuvre deals with topical issues of presence and representation, including the roles of observing and being observed within it: from the billboard *Chantier Barbès-Rochechouart* (1994) to the double projection *The Third Memory* (2000), and his more recent, large-scale project *A Journey that Wasn't* (2005)," Huyghe reveals the intricate levels of reality which, as Rosalind Krauss puts it, "retreats behind the mirage-like screen of the media" (Krauss 2004, p. 48). As evident from Krauss's word choice in the full quote of *Art since 1900*, she disapproves of those media: "Two kinds of absences structure the field of aesthetic experience at the end of the twentieth century into the twenty-first century. One of them we could describe as the absence of reality as it retreats behind the mirage-like screen of the media sucked up into the vacuum of the

[2] An early and by now classic book on the virtual personae we create in cyberspace is Turkle (1995). On the concept of the cyborg, see Haraway (1991).

[3] Armstrong spoke the following legendary words when he set foot on the moon: "That's one small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind".

television monitor, read off so like so many prints-out of a multi-national computer hook-up" (2004, p. 48). Yet, the fact that reality is concealed behind "the mirage screens of the media," as I argue in my dissertation *The Problem of Media in Contemporary Theory (1960–1990)*, is not a persuasive reason to avoid addressing one of the main issues—presence—related to contemporary means of representation.[4] German media theory has taken the complex issue of presence at a time of advanced media conditions more seriously. Oliver Grau, for instance, includes a chapter on "Tele-presence in his *Virtual art: from illusion to immersion,*" in which he investigates the question of presence through the perspective of the (new) developments in robotics, telecommunications, and virtual reality. He also discusses projects by pioneering artists in this context, such as Ken Goldberg, Eduardo Pac, Simon Perry, and ART + COM (Grau 2003). Chris Salter published an equally important book, *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance*, in which he deals with *tele*-presence in chapters such as "The Projected Image" and "Interaction" (Salter 2010). This idea of tele-presence—presence over a distance—is a crucial one in performance art in general because of its common use of video, as Wagner shows in the already mentioned essay, but it takes on different forms with the new interactive possibilities of the computer and Internet. More comprehensive books on the arts and the media also came out, in which topics related to presence and representation are being discussed. For example, *Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary after Film*, edited by Jeffrey Shaw and Peter Weibel (Shaw and Weibel 2003), and the scholarly *Media Art Histories* by Oliver Grau (Grau, 2007). The first book is a huge catalogue published on the occasion of an all-inclusive exhibition on expanded cinema at the Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe that also featured the work of artists engaged with (tele-) presence and representation, such as Shaw's own projects on virtual reality, Blast Theory's explorations of the boundaries between real and virtual presence, and Jordan Crandall's early work in which he employs military targeting technology to probe new modes of representing (or tracking) presence. The second book is a first serious attempt to reconsider art history from the perspective of science, technology, and media. It includes a wide range of articles that intersect with the subject matter of presence in different ways, such as Weibel's paper on early forms of virtual art, Louise Poissant on the interface, and Sean Cubitt on the screen.

Huyghe's work was included in both the show and the catalogue of *Future Cinema*, but evidently he is not the sole artist who is interested in questions of presence and representation, truth and fiction, reality and simulation in the field of art and media culture. I take his work as my case study, because the artist not only works these crucial issues through on different levels of complexity, but also addresses the broad issues that a journal such as *AI & Society* is interested in, namely how contemporary media conditions impact society at large in a cultural, political, ethical, aesthetic, and even philosophical sense. An additional advantage of Huyghe's work is that it is recognized by both art history and the rival field of (new) media studies. One of the main conclusions of my dissertation, *The Problem of Media of Contemporary Art Theory* (*1960–1990*), is that a polemic antagonism has developed between art history and media studies in the postwar period since Clement Greenberg's "Modernist Painting" (1960), Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964) and van der Meulen (2009, pp.14–16). This seemingly never-ending rivalry, however, is unproductive for both fields. Huyghe's work builds one possible bridge between the contesting disciplines of art history and media studies, because a full analysis of his oeuvre requires concepts and methods developed in both fields. More specifically, Huyghe's work asks for being interpreted through current presence theories that can do justice to the medial scope of his oeuvre in addition to the methods developed in art history, theory, and criticism. Presence theory is an interdisciplinary field of study that has developed into a discipline of its own within the field of media studies. Presence theory does not reconcile to the fact that reality has vanished "behind the mirage-like screen of the media (Krauss)," but rather tries to develop new concepts and tools for analyzing the underlying screen condition and its implications for the experience of presence.

This paper does not intend to give an all-inclusive overview of presence theories, but makes use of one theory in particular to demonstrate its point that contemporary art can benefit from such interdisciplinary approach.[5] The chosen theory, which will be productively related to Huyghe's work, is Caroline Nevejan's conceptual model of YUTPA (an Aristotelian acronym for "Being with You in Unity of Time, Place, and Action"). Nevejan develops this theory in the context of a sociological study on how new technologies change the relationship between people. But the important part of Nevejan's study for my analysis is that she theorizes the interrelated concepts of natural, mediated, and witnessed presence, which are crucial for understanding Huyghe's work. Nevejan discusses the

[4] The textbook *Art since 1900* is divided into two volumes, one for art from 1900 until 1945, and another for art since 1945. While it is justifiable to not discuss media in the visual arts before 1945, when the term 'media' was still only in use within the field of advertisement, it becomes problematic in the second volume on art in the postwar period.

[5] For a list of research sites on presence theory, see Nevejan (2007), p 277.

concept of "witnessed presence"—introduced at the beginning of this essay—in relation to two closely related concepts: "natural presence" and "mediated presence." Her definition of natural presence is rather straightforward: "Presence as a phenomenon is, in first instance, associated with being physically present. Our natural presence is defined by our body, which is present at a certain moment at a certain place, and this is perceived by the body itself and/or by its environment" (Nevejan 2007, p. 62). Mediated presence, in contrast, is *not* dependent on the living body. Nevejan describes mediated presence as the trace of any presence, from a footprint on the beach to a photograph that testifies that someone has "been there." Mediated presence, then, is not necessarily dependent on technology. Still, it is clearly the kind of presence as mediated by technology and their effects on (new) social environments that Nevejan herself is the most interested in: "For centuries people have mediated presence consciously by telling stories, making drawings, sending messengers and writing books. Via technology, people can now mediate their presence to other places in real time. Via radio, mobile phones, Internet, and TV we perceive other people's presence in a variety of ways" (Nevejan 2007, p. 13). Natural and mediated presence, in Nevejan's theory, are closely linked to each other through an indexical relation. But the interesting aspect about witnessed presence—defined by Nevejan as "perceived presence"—is that it influences *both* natural *and* mediated presence. In Nevejan's words: "Witnessed presence assumes an effect on natural and mediated presence; it has implications for the way people enact their being in natural presence and it also has implications for the way people enact their data identity in mediated presence" (Nevejan 2007, pp. 79–80). One of Nevejan's claims is that, in today's technological society—i.e., the world conditioned by the contemporary media, from the printed media, radio, film, and television to the computer and Internet—human beings are faced with multiple presences. Natural, mediated, and witnessed presence respond to and act upon each other. The three terms, in other words, cannot be separated from each other but should be thought together, at least if we wish to develop a conceptual framework for analyzing the complex media situations in which we encounter and negotiate these different kinds of presence in our everyday lives. Walter Benjamin already theorized the difference between physical and mediated presence in his renowned essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Benjamin 1969, originally published in German in 1936), albeit within the specific context of the artwork. On the basis of the categorical distinction between the original work of art and its copy, he defines the renowned concept of *aura* that he locates in the "here and now." An artwork, however, that for its realization relies on its technical reproducibility, and thus can be copied anywhere and anytime, becomes detached from a specific time and place. Recognizing the central role of Benjamin's essay for contemporary presence theories, Nevejan states: "Benjamin's analysis of the aura of the original may be understood as the aura of what we call "natural presence," But she adds that "70 years of media history later Benjamin's words have to be contextualized in his time" (Nevejan 2007, p. 69). Nevejan points to the necessity to put Benjamin in historical context because he lived in the age of film and photography rather than TV and the computer. Benjamin's "age of mechanical reproduction" has been surpassed by the digital age, which obscures the relation between presence and representation beyond the mechanical reproduction techniques. Thus, Nevejan searches for another model of thought that could help clarify the coexistence of a variety of presences beyond Benjamin's distinction.

2 Chantier barbès-rochechouart

Huyghe already addressed issues of presence and witnessing in his early billboard, *Chantier Barbès-Rochechouart* (1994).[6] The title refers to a construction site on a square in the center of Paris, where Huyghe rented a billboard for 1 month.[7] Huyghe took a photograph of this construction site and enlarged it to a poster format for the billboard. Hence, the artist created a photographic representation of the construction site *right in front* of the site and the building activities (Fig. 3). The French critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud—well known for his advocacy of one of the major artistic movements in the 1990s, relational art—misinterpreted the billboard at the time in his Deleuzian terminology as "*une image directe,*" which supposedly captured the event in real time.[8] Although it is accurate to say that Huyghe investigates the idea of simultaneity between an event and its image in the context of contemporary means of representation, the artist's intention is not to construe a direct image in the manner of live television. Huyghe rather questions the degree of

[6] I analyzed this work in depth in an unpublished paper on Huyghe, Sjoukje van der Meulen *Remake vs. Readymade* (2003), in which I argued that Huyghe mobilizes the remake as a medium in a critical response to Duchamp's concept of the ready-made, which has lost its conceptual strength in the age of advanced media conditions.

[7] More precisely, *Chantier* means building site in French, and Barbès-Rochechouart refers to the area around a subway stop with that name to the North of the city.

[8] "Huyghe représente des gestes quotidien… et les expose dans la rue, sur les lieux même où la photographie a été prise: réduisant ainsi à presque rien l'écart existant entre l'image et son modéle, entre le moment de la prise de vue et celui de l'exposition, il invente une sorte de différé quotidien, *une image directe*". Bourriaud (Bourriaud 1996a, b), p. 49.

illusion built into today's modes of representation, as well as the role of the observer within it; if only, as we shall see, by re-staging the action on the site instead of merely recording it.

Given Bourriaud's erroneous use of the Deleuzian concept of the direct image, I propose to relate Huyghe's billboard to a relevant text of another (media) theorist, Samuel Weber. In his critical essay "Television: Set and Screen," Weber reminds us that *tele*-vision—as its name indicates—is a medium that enables us *to see over a distance*: "The fascination and power of television as medium would derive, in great part, from its promise of providing a remote control, commanding not just at a distance but also over a distance" (Weber 1996, p. 116). One of the consequences of this "power" of television, according to Weber, is that television occurs at three places at once: the place of production (where the program is recorded), the place of reception (where it is received), and the space of transmission in-between. Given that transmission is required to bridge the gap between the spaces of production and reception, Weber concludes that "television is perhaps first and foremost a method of transmission" (1996, p. 116). Huyghe's billboard is powerful because he reveals the fundamental problem of live television—the split between the spaces of production and reception, which television carefully conceals—in one single image by juxtaposing the construction site and its image on the billboard.

Another interesting aspect of Weber's analysis of television in this context is that he links the above-described characteristic of television—transmission—to questions of presence and representation. What makes television distinct from other media, Weber contends, is that it transmits information over a distance that gives the spectator the sense of being there: "What television transmits is not so much *images*, as is almost always argued. It does not transmit representations but rather *the semblance of presentation as such*, understood as the power not just to see and to hear but *to place before us*" (Weber 1996, p. 117). The crucial term in Weber's phrase is "semblance," which implies that this immediate representation, this sense of simultaneity is based on illusion. In Weber's words: "If television is both here and there at the same time, according to traditional notions of space, time, and body it can neither be fully there, nor entirely here." Thus, Weber comes to the conclusion that television produces at best the idea of simultaneity or a quasi-simultaneity: "The unity of television as a medium of presentation involves a simultaneity that is highly ambivalent. It overcomes spatial distance but only by splitting the unity of place and with it the unity of everything that defines its identity with respect to place: events, bodies, subjects" (Weber 1996, p. 117). With these terms—events, bodies, subjects—we enter the realm of YUTPA, Nevejan's short form for "Being with You in Unity of Time, Place, and Action." As indicated before, Nevejan identifies presence with a human being's body that is present—and active—at a certain time in a certain place. Nevejan assumes that the synchronous relation between time, place, and action significantly change in a situation mediated by technology such as television. Nevejan's theory is useful in addition to Weber's essay on television for analyzing Huyghe's oeuvre, because like the artist, she does not focus on a specific medium-like television but rather develops a general theory that can function as an explanatory model for all media: "You, time, place and action can be understood as dimensions that have different values between You and not-You, Now and not-Now, Here and not-Here, Do and not-Do…. YUTPA provides a conscious description of the Time, Space, Action and You configuration of a certain product or process in which natural presence, mediated presence and witnessed presence all play a role" (Nevejan 2007, p. 240).

The idea of YUTPA is grounded in the age-old theory of three unities of Aristotle, the philosopher who already in the fourth century BC theorized the unity of time, place, and action in regard to Greek drama.[9] The classic idea of a tripartite unity in the context of representation, however, cannot be upheld in a time of advanced media conditions. Nevejan argues that this idea of unity has become more complex and varied in contemporary mediated situations. She captures the possible dimensions of the new interrelations between Aristotle's original terms of time, place, and action within the context of the contemporary media of

Fig. 3 Pierre Huyghe, *Chantier Barbès-Rochechouart* (1994)

[9] In the 19th century Aristotle's idea of the three unities are turned into a law for theatre. Aristotle himself, however, only formulated the way in which time, place, and action are the determining factors that help shape a (staged) event and are thus important for establishing the difference between reality and fiction.

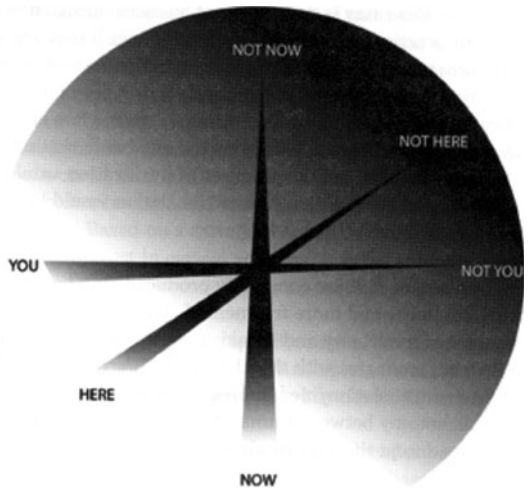

Fig. 4 YUTPA (graph: Max Bruinsma)

communication through a graph based on the binaries "now/not now," "here/not here," and "you/not you" (see Fig. 4).[10] Depending on the type of media, then, such as telephone, television, or the World Wide Web, the relations between "Now," "Here," and "You"—Nevejan's shortcuts for time, place, and action—are being determined. Nevejan specifies a meeting in real life as "You/Now/Here," for instance, which in the graph occurs entirely in the white area where interaction between people is easy. But Weber's live-broadcasted news program on television is described as "Not-You/Now/Not Here," because of live television's particular form of mediated presence as a result of transmission. In television, according to Nevejan, there is unity of time but not of place and action. The intersections in the diagram where the three dimensions of a news program meet, then, are largely located in the dark half of the circle where direct interactions are difficult. It must be noted that Weber's analysis of television also questions the idea of simultaneity in live television, or the "now" dimension in Nevejan's model. Many of Nevejan's examples, in fact, may have a more complex YUTPA than her graph allows us to analyze or "configure." But my point is that Nevejan interprets Weber's conclusion of the gap between the places of production and reception as a general condition for *all* media and mediated events, albeit on the basis of the recognition that each single medium breaks up the unity of time, place, and action differently. Due to this power of the media to split the unity of time, space, and action, it is often difficult to determine what is "here" and "there;" or what the boundaries are between natural, mediated, and witnessed presence. Nevejan's graph, then, gives us a conceptual framework for analyzing the temporal and spatial differences between a variety of media, as well as their effects on human interaction. In *The Problem of Media in Contemporary Art Theory (1960–1990)*, I diagnosed the lack of an adequate vocabulary and critical apparatus for analyzing the work of Huyghe and other media-conscious artists today (van der Meulen 2009, p. 1). With the interrelated terms of natural, mediated, and witnessed presence, and the theoretical model of YUTPA, Nevejan helps establish such a language for art.

Looking at Huyghe's billboard with Nevejan's presence vocabulary at hand, there is a central dynamic between natural and mediated presence in the work. In the real-time situation, on the square itself, the construction workers embody natural presence, since they—with their bodies indeed—are at work on a certain place, at a specific time. The image in the billboard, on the other hand, is an obvious example of mediated presence as it represents the workers by the means of photography. The tension between these two kinds of presence is created by the fact that it is unclear whether the image in the billboard is direct or indirect. The question raised by these two presences—above all as they are so much alike—is what we actually perceive in the work. This brings us to the third term in Nevejan's terminology, witnessed presence. If one studies the billboard closely, it becomes clear that the image in the billboard is *not* exactly a doubling of (a moment) from the real-time event. The figure in the middle of the poster, for instance, acts more like the director of a theater play than the head of a working crew. The whole crew might be actors simulating construction activities.[11] For all intents and purposes, the photograph, in other words, is a careful mise-en-scene that blurs the distinction between fact and fiction, natural, and witnessed presence. The result is an *indirect* image that points to the potential for manipulation of mediated images. It must be noted that Huyghe chose a construction site for his billboard. So, the message of the work is that images are being constructed, just as buildings are. The verb "to construct," and its Latin root, *construere*, connote both construction and interpretation: construction, then, implies per definition interpretation and vice versa. The construction or making of images, in other words, involves the act of interpretation—or manipulation.[12]

Questions of witnessed presence, then, lie at the core of Huyghe's billboard. Witnessed presence, or the witnessing

[10] For the graph and its explanation, see Nevejan (2007), pp. 242–243.

[11] In a conversation with the author, Huyghe confirmed that he had the construction activities re-enacted. Sjoukje van der Meulen, conversation with Pierre Huyghe, Paris, September 2002.

[12] Huyghe stresses this also by rotating the square and the buildings in the photograph about ninety degrees in relation to the actual building site: the whole scene, then, is not only temporally manipulated but also in a spatial sense.

of the presence of others, is questioned through the coexistence of natural and mediated presence of what looks like one and the same event. The witness himself, the observer of the event, also plays a central role in the work. The peculiar unity of the two kinds of spaces creates a typically Brechtian *Verfremdungseffect*, a deliberate act of "rendering strange." Bertolt Brecht used the *V-effect* (as the term is abbreviated in English) as a theatrical tool to prevent the spectators of his theater plays from becoming absorbed by the actors through mere identification. He wished the public to reflect upon the play—theater should arouse the critical consciousness of the spectator rather than numb it. The intention of Huyghe's work and his use of the Brechtian technique, as I understand it, is that the passerby of the billboard in Paris (or the visitor to the museum or art gallery who looks at a photograph of the construction site and the billboard) is "awakened" by the *V-effect*. This encourages the observing subject to think about the way in which images are being made instead of thoughtlessly accepting them as a *fait accompli* in media society today. By thinking of the construction of the image in front of him, he would also be able to detect his position vis-à-vis—and within—the image. In the photograph of the work, one notices a passerby who seems unaware of the strange juxtaposition of the construction site and its photographic image. It is this kind of indifference that Huyghe attempts to remedy through art. What the artist cultivates is a new kind of media-savvy observer, who is not only able to witness an event first hand but also its second-hand mediations.

The idea that the new technological media has changed our idea of presence, and witnessing has been observed before in art theory and criticism, in particular in regard to video. Wagner published the already mentioned paper on this topic, "Performance, Video, and the Rhetoric of Presence," in which her motto is that "the arts require witnesses" (Wagner 2000, 61). Wagner's essay is a critical response to Rosalind Krauss's contentious yet influential essay, "Video, The Aesthetics of Narcissism" (1976), where the latter argues that the medium of video art is marked by narcissism. Krauss criticizes artists in this relatively early phase of video for making mediocre artworks by using the medium simply as a technologically inflected mirror for recording themselves. Her attack on video art revolves around Vito Acconci's *Centers*, in which the artist is narcissistically pointing to the camera for about 20 min. Wagner counters Krauss's reading of Acconci's work by arguing that he is not so much pointing at himself but rather at us. Video, in other words, is not so much an egotistic but a public art form. Wagner discusses the early history of video in relation to performance art to provide more evidence for her argument that video is not just about private but also about public questions of presence and witnessing. Besides other works by Acconci, such as *Following Piece* (1972) and *Undertone* (1974), she also discusses Dan Graham's video performance *Performer/Audience/Mirror* (1975–1977). Graham is another early master of video art who understood the complexity of the medium and its effects on presence in all of its natural, mediated, and witnessed forms (see for instance, his complex video scenarios in the *Time Delay* series).[13] The early history of video art, in other words, indisputably dealt with issues of presence and witnessing in the context of art and media. Yet, Huyghe is part of a younger generation of artists who grew up in a highly developed media culture far beyond television and video. As a child of the simulated real-time television and computer-generated Internet age, Huyghe is not so much concerned with "the rhetoric of presence" per sé, but rather with the way in which a variety of—simultaneous—presences are shaped in media culture at large. In 1981, 1 year after Ted Turner founded the live television news channel CNN, Baudrillard began to theorize the ever-increasing divide between reality and its representation in media society, whereby he observed that media stories began to generate their own reality or "simulacrum." Since the technological materialization of the computer, virtual reality, and Internet, however, different theories of "simulacrum" are necessary. In *Simulation and its Discontents*, Sherry Turkle argues not only that the technologies of simulation condition our culture, but also that the distinction between the real and the simulacrum (in Baudrillard's sense of a copy without an original, or pseudo-event) has become inconsequential due to the ongoing interaction between them in which neither the one nor the other takes primacy. Paradoxical as it may sound, we live in the reality of what Turkle calls a "simulation culture (Turkle 2009)," While Huyghe's billboard still closely relates to Baudrillard's idea of simulacrum, *The Third Memory* correlates with tangled concepts of the "real" and the "virtual" implied in simulation culture.

3 The third memory

A wide range of artworks has been created within the new media that can be explained through the interrelated concepts of natural, mediated, and witnessed presence. A classic example is Stelarc's tele-performance *Ping Body* (1996), in which the artist is connected to a muscle stimulator that can be operated by users/spectators at a distance via Internet. Another classic example from the early days

[13] In *Time Delay* series the artist presents a variety of scenarios for video cameras, recorders and mirrors in various constellations spread over one or two rooms to investigate the interrelations between natural, mediated and witnessed presence (Graham 1979).

Fig. 5 Pierre Huyghe, *The Third Memory* (2000)

of the Internet is Ken Goldberg's *Tele-garden* (1995). The growth of this small garden could not only be observed but also be cultivated by the users of the Internet through a webcam linked to a robotic arm programmed to water on demand. Other projects worth mentioning are Julia Scher's projects, such as *Security by Julia* (1989–1990) and *Security land* (1995), because her work interrogates camera-based surveillance systems in both real and virtual environments. Then, there are also a couple of real-time performances not dependent on technology such as Marina Abramović's two and a half months performance *The Artist is Present* in the MoMA (2009), in which she sat silent at a table in the museum's atrium every day, facing a chair that could be occupied by museum visitors who wished to engage in a (spiritual) encounter with the artist. The work perfectly fitted in Abramović's oeuvre, which has always tested physical limits and psychological endurance, but at the same time, the performance functioned as a tacit protest against the mediated world, where physical and spiritual presence are often overshadowed by images and simulated realities. But, while there are many artworks that deal with the complexities of natural, mediated, and witnessed presence, just a very few critically dissect the impact of the media and its workings on culture and society at large, from aesthetics to ethics, human perception to social relations, cultural representation to historical memory. This, I argue, sets Huyghe's work apart. Besides the billboard in Paris, in which he reflects on the status of the image in media culture and society, another good example is *The Third Memory* (2000), a multimedia installation based on a remake of Sidney Lumet's well-known film *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975) about a bank robbery that actually happened in New York (1972). Besides the fact that Lumet's film narrates a real event, which is stated at the opening of the film, *Dog Day Afternoon* is a remarkable movie for other reasons as well. First, it features the first televised bank robbery in media history, which is to say that the heist was captured on live television when it occurred—in unity of time, place, and action, as Nevejan would say. Second, the motivation behind the robbery was rather extraordinary: an act of love by a homosexual who wanted to finance the sex change operation of his adored lover. As a result, the bank robbery was hotly discussed in both the printed media and on television sit coms and put the whole scope of the media apparatus in full motion—i.e., television, film, and the printed media, including a novelette, *The Boys in the Bank,* on which Lumet's film is apparently based. The installation is all about the workings of the media in culture of society, and our participation in this "reality of the mass media" (Luhman 2000).

In the best presentations of the work, the installation is shown over two adjacent spaces: the first space exhibits the news items that occurred about the event and the TV sit coms (including *The New York Times, Daily News,* etc.) against the wall that both spaces share, while the second space shows a double-screen video projection on that wall's backside, where fragments of the film and its remade version are set side by side (Fig. 5). With such a crystal clear design of the installation—as in the presentation in the Centre Pompidou (2000)—the spectator gains vital information about the bank robbery in space one, while he is prepared to compare fragments of Lumet's film with Huyghe's remade version upon entering space two.[14]

The reason why this work relates not only to physical and mediated presence (the actual event versus the mediated event), but also to witnessing and witnessed presence is because Huyghe decides not to recreate the film himself, but to track down the bank robber who committed the crime at the time, John Wojtowicz, and invite him to redo Lumet's film.[15] Needless to say, I assume that Wojtowicz is the crown witness of the event. The main concept behind Huyghe's remade film is what the artist coins a

[14] In Gallery Marian Goodman in New York, the newspapers articles were hung unnoticeably in the corridor leading up to the space where the double-screen video projection was shown. The pedagogical clarity of the presentation in The Centre Pompidou was lost. Even worse, in the Guggenheim Museum, the work was integrated into a video program, and nothing left of the indispensible part with the printed news media.

[15] Huyghe succeeded in figuring out John Wojtowicz's address in Brooklyn, where he has lived since his release from prison.

Fig. 6 Pierre Huyghe, *The Third Memory* (2000)

mise-en-situation, his creative reworking of the notion of *mise-en-scene*.[16] The tradition of *mise-en-scene*—which translated literally, means "placing-on-stage"—originates in the theater, where it refers to the entire stage design, including the positioning and the movements of the actors on the set. It is also used in cinema, where it refers to the arrangement of everything that appears before the camera, such as sets, props, actors, costumes, and lighting. The classic concept of *mise-en-scene*, however, is inadequate to explain Huyghe's remake, because the artist does not work with actors and film sets but with real-life people and real-time situations, however, reconstructed they might be. Huyghe, in other words, places a person back into a bygone situation and asks him to reenact the event. More than a film set, therefore, a mise-en-situation resembles an on-site reconstruction as is often ordered by a court and enacted by the main accused (Fig. 6).

The association with a criminal court reconstruction is apt also because Wojtowicz's helper ended up being killed by the police on the airport for dubious reasons. In Lumet's film, the helper is shot in a seemingly unavoidable and well-prepared action of the FBI, but in the remake, the former bank robber tries to convince us that his buddy was "cold-bloodedly" murdered thanks to "orders from Washington." Wojtowicz complained about the false account of this fact in Lumet's film long before Huyghe's remake in a page long article in the *New York Times* (exhibited with other news items in space one), in which he declared that "only 30% of the film is true."[17] The crown witness in Huyghe's remake thus evokes the legal sense of the concept of witness: a persona who offers not just first-hand information but is also responsible for telling the truth. The remake is a deadly serious affair for the bank robber, who aims at nothing less than bringing the "real" criminals—the FBI—back on stage, who in Wojtowicz's own account acted within that one fatal moment of media's blind spot, when the view of the cameras on the airport was blocked. It is crucial to give a sense of the whole story, including its traumatic closure on JFK, because it clarifies what is at stake in Huyghe's remake in terms of witnessing and witnessed presence. On the one hand, Wojtowicz is a criminal, but on the other, he is a media victim. In the whole media circus that develops around the crime, however, Wojtowicz gradually becomes aware of the workings of the media and discovers ways to get his story across despite media's alleged gross misreadings—first by his confessions and criticisms of the Lumet's film in a one-page article in the New York Times then by redoing the same film on Huyghe's request. For this goal, Huyghe provided the bank robber with the means of production, namely a film set with the recreated bank office and a number of actors. By means of this film equipment, Huyghe allows the crown witness, this susceptible pawn in media's constructions, to take the media effectively into his own hands, thereby turning his media vulnerability into media potency. In the remake, then, we see and hear the bank robber directing his own film that is shown next to Lumet's original film in the installation. The moral is that if we gain a certain level of media literacy, everyone can seize media's process of signification, including his own representation within it. This is probably why Huyghe has described *The Third Memory* as "the most straightforward, the most didactic of all my work" (McDonough 2004, p. 107).

The complicated questions of witnessed presence in *The Third Memory* are closely linked to comparable dilemmas inherent in mediated presence, in particular in the form of a quest for truth (which is also at stake in the legal sense of witness). And yet, it must be noted that even if the bank robber and the artist find each other in their wish to empower the figure of the witness in media's signifying system, Huyghe is not primarily concerned with disclosing the truth. In analogy to the billboard on the construction site, the artist's major point is that media images are *constructs*. Rather than establishing the truth, then, Huyghe makes visible the structure of media in which such claims of truths are being endlessly produced and conveyed. The underlying questioning of the whole concept of truth is reminiscent of the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, who in his writings regards the concept of truth as a playful but fictional entity, justified by what he identifies as the logic of the ontological. Or as Derrida formulates it: "[T]he presumed possibility of a discourse about what is, the deciding and decidable logos of or about the *on* (being

[16] In a conversation I had with the artist in Paris (2001), Huyghe explained and elaborated on his original idea of *mise-en-situation*.

[17] This crucial newspaper article is reprinted in Huyghe (2000), p. 73. The sentence I am referring to can be found in the second column, and reads as follows: "I estimate the movie 30% true even though it states: this movie is based on a true incident that occurred in Brooklyn, NY".

present)" (Derrida 1987, p. 191). And he clarifies: "That which is, the being present, is distinguished from the appearance, the image, the phenomenon, etc., that is, from anything that, presenting it as being present, doubles it, represents it, and can therefore replace and de-present it. There is thus the 1 and the 2, the simple and the double. The double comes after the simple; it multiplies it as a follow-up" (Derrida 1987, p. 191). I quote this passage because it helps understand Huyghe's inquiry into the relation between presence and representation in the context of the media, even if the artist counters the irreversible logic described by Derrida. The artist, after all, questions the hierarchy between presence and representation by recognizing the coexistence of multiple presences today that cannot be captured in simple numerical terms like the single and the double. Huyghe makes the point that the Derridian logic of presence ("what is") versus mediated presence ("the image") is not irreversible—the "two," or "double," in Huyghe's work, can come before the "one," or "single." In other words, the artist questions the hierarchy between these binary terms because in the process of signification that takes place within media's system, the distinctions between reality and fiction, real and image, present and past, true and false, the simple and the double—in short, presence and representation—are often blurred to the point where they merely act on each other, in no set order of hierarchy. One concrete example in Huyghe's remake of how an image can precede the present is when the bank robber informs us that he has seen a film, *The Godfather*, just before he committed his crime, which influenced some of the decisions he made in relation to the robbery (remarkably, both *The Godfather* and *Dog Day Afternoon* feature Al Pacino in a leading role). Another noteworthy moment in Huyghe's remake is when the bank robber exclaims "but in the REAL film…!" Referring to the real event as film, he seems to fictionalize the event itself, thereby not only pointing out the paradoxical bond between reality and representation, but also implicitly questioning the ontological logic of their fundamental difference. Confronted with contemporary media conditions, Huyghe necessarily takes a step further than Derrida by going beyond the binary of simple and double, presence and representation. This brings us back to Nevejan's theory of YUTPA, because in *The Third Memory* Huyghe interrogates the more complicated interrelations between natural, witnessed, and mediated presence. The different kinds of presence and mediations in Huyghe's work operate, in sum, in an intricate network of what we could call fictionalized facts and actualized fictions, where "doubles and simples," in Derrida's vocabulary, change roles endlessly.

The other important term in Nevejan's dissertation is "trust," as is evident in her title, *Presence and the Design of Trust*. This is related to the sociological nature of Nevejan's presence research. She investigates the specific social environments that are produced by new technologies and the kinds of social interactions occurring within them. "Presence" is an important term because, however, much these technological environments mediate social interaction; ultimately, they are grounded in the physical presence of human beings. The term "trust" plays into her analysis because some of these environments are evidently more reliable than others, which can be determined through the YUTPA of the social situation in question. While the author admits that "trust" is a blurry word, it came up naturally in the particular environments that served as her cases studies, the Galactic Hacker Party, and the Seropositive Ball. These events were pioneering in using extensive internationally operating social networks mediated by technology—producing a hybrid of natural and mediated presences. Given the nature of the second event in particular, in which the lives of many sick people were at stake, it was often of vital importance that the communicated information via those networks was trustworthy. The reason to bring up this aspect of Nevejan's theory is because in *The Third Memory,* the aspect of trust is also at stake in the form of the quest for truth—trust and truth are related, although the first term is commonly used for relation between people, while the second is used for situations and concepts. Both concepts ideally set a standard for accountability and credibility. While the Derrideanminded Huyghe does not uncritically accept the concept of truth (thus, he is ultimately not interested in whether or not his crown witness is "trustworthy." whether he speaks the "truth"), nevertheless, he admits that truth has a vital role to play in our ever-increasing mediated world where real presence and witnessed presence are hard to tell apart. Far from being paralyzed by this aporia of fact and fiction, however, in Huyghe mobilizes his remake as an artistic strategy to disentangle the whole media complex as such an endless medial replay with the concept of truth constantly folding upon itself between the different levels of natural, mediated, and witnessed presence. *The Third Memory* and other works by Huyghe thereby transcend what Benjamin Buchloh has called the spectacle value: "that condition in which media's control of everyday life is mimetically internalized and aggressively extended to those visual practices that had previously been defined as either exempt from or oppositional to mass cultural regimes" (Buchloh 2001, p. 163). "Spectacle," of course, is a term originally conceived by the situationist Guy Debord to describe the way in which society—including the social relations between people—is conditioned by the media, and everything and everyone have become part and parcel of its consequent spectacle: "The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that

was once directly lived has become mere representation" (Debord 1995, p. 12). Recognizing that it is not possible to counteract, or even reverse, media's influence on art and culture at large—like Debord or Buchloh aspire—Huyghe puts his remake at work to interrogate media's complex modes of operation and its processes of signification, to the point where the work of art becomes a self-reflexive instrument that operates as media's critical consciousness.

The fact that Nevejan's work is a sociological research that investigates new forms of social interactions brought forth by the digital media, in which the notion of "relation" plays a central role (which she identifies as the fourth dimension of inter-action in her chart), is yet another good reason to introduce it to the field of contemporary art. The "artistic medium" of relational art, after all, is social interaction. Relational art, in other words, similarly investigates new forms of social interactions opened up by contemporary media. For some reason, however, the movement has almost exclusively been interpreted in terms of conventional forms of social interaction, even though Bourriaud has emphasized that the emergence of the new communication technologies are a historical condition for relational art. Bourriaud first employed the term relational art in the catalogue of *Traffic,* a show that he curated in the museum of contemporary art of Bordeaux (Bourriaud 1996a). In his introductory essay, entitled "Space–Time in the 1990s," Bourriaud raised the question what "the real challenges" are "facing contemporary art vis-a-vis society, history and culture? (Bourriaud 1996b, p. 1)." In the answer to this own question, he concluded that in "the age of simultaneous communications (satellites, cable TV, faxes, the World Wide Web, and so on)," we are confronted with different concepts of space and time, which are "interactive, convivial, and relational (1996b, p. 2)." The new generation of artists in the 1990s (such as Huyghe, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Douglas Gordon, and Liam Gillick), according to Bourriaud, moved away from the materially based, aesthetic object and began to produce "relations between people and the world, *by way of aesthetic objects,* thereby stating that immaterial art can have aesthetic content despite its ephemeral character (1996b, p. 8). Bourriaud questioned the distinction between the material and the immaterial altogether: "In a way, the object is every bit as immaterial as a phone call. And a work that consists of a supper around a bowl of soup is as material as a statue. Objects, institutions, times, and works are all part and parcel of human relations, because they render social work material" (Bourriaud 1996b, p. 4). Bourriaud is not the first to think about the way in which the communication media change our materially based concept of art in post-war France. François Lyotard similarly addressed the relation between materiality and immateriality in his visionary show *Les Immatériaux* (1985) on the basis of the assumption that new technologies of information would have a lasting effect on human life and culture—which he, notoriously, declared the postmodern condition (Lyotard 1984, p. 3, originally published in French in 1979). While Lyotard's show also featured a range of conventional exhibits (paintings alongside cutting-edge technologies), *Les Immatériaux* marked a decisive break with the modern exhibition because it transformed the entire floor of the Centre Pompidou into a postmodern sensorial labyrinth, in which the visitor had to find his way—equipped with headphones—through an intricate network of visual, audio, audiovisual, and linguistic routes.[18] Bourriaud's *Traffic* is related to Lyotard's show because of the shared exploration of interactivity in the aesthetic encounter of material objects with immaterial situations. Not surprisingly, Bourriaud includes one chapter of his book, *Esthétique Relationelle* (an extended version of his catalogue text for *Traffic*), on the impact of new technologies in the 1990s, entitled "*Relations Écrans* ('screen relations')," and subtitled, "*L'art d' aujourd'hui et ses modèles technologiques*" (Bourriaud 1998, p. 67). Bourriaud proclaims that "*notre époque est bel et bien celle de l'ecran*"—not that far from Krauss's idea of a "reality that retreats behind the mirage-like screen of the media"—and reflects upon the immaterial impact of the new communication technologies on the material object of art.

It is important to highlight Bourriaud's concerns about contemporary media conditions in response to a strong line of criticism on relational art that has belatedly emerged in the US; that is, about a decade after the movement began in France. The starting point of this criticism is an issue of *October* (Fall 2004), in which its new editor George Baker introduces a cluster of essays on relational art on the basis of a couple of negative assumptions about the movement and its advocate, Nicolas Bourriaud. Both, Baker claims, fail to recognize relational art's precedents, such as Fluxus, Happenings and the situationists, which already developed participatory models in the 1960s. Baker also claims that relational art has a misconceived idea of concepts such as "interactivity" and "sociability," not to mention their naïve embrace of the avant-garde. Baker sums up his criticism of relational art's ideas as a "potentially retrograde vision of the social fields and its engagement with social relations" (Baker 2004a, b, pp. 49–50). It is Claire Bishop, however, who receives the task of questioning the ambitions and premises of relational art in greater analytical depth. In "Antagonism and Relational Art," Bishop

[18] One of the best synopsis of this show is Rajchman's exhibition review in *Art in America* at the time itself, especially in combination with Rajchman;s discussion of Lyotard's entire intellectual work in a memorial of the French philosopher after his death in an essay for the journal *October*. See Rajchman (1985), pp. 110–17, and Rajchman (1998), pp. 3–19.

thus tackles the work of Rirkrit Tiravanija and Liam Gillick, which she presents as the two poles of Bourriaud's relational stable: at the one end Tiravanija, who mobilizes relational art's participatory idea quite literally by cooking Thai dinners on art openings, while the intellectually oriented Gillick choreographs his abstract scenarios for *possible* encounters on the other. While this is not the right place for a defense of the "quality" (a term used by Bishop) of the social relations facilitated by Tiravanija or Gillick, Bishop's choice is certainly selective—if not straightforwardly strategic—and does not do justice to relational art in all its complex manifestations (see the work of Maurizio Cattalan, the "early" Douglas Gordon, Carsten Höller, Huyghe, Gillian Wearing, and others). Bishop does recognize that the founder of relational art aims high: "It is important to emphasize that Bourriaud does not regard relational aesthetics to be simply a theory of interactive art. He considers it to be a means of locating contemporary practice within the culture at large" (Bishop 2004, p. 54). But she only admits Bourriaud's high cultural ambitions as a springboard to her own criticism, namely that relational art did not succeed in establishing relations with culture and society at large, but stayed safely within the confines of the art world—and here Tiravanija's dinners on art openings, and Gillick's scenarios for exhibition spaces serve to prove her point.[19] And a point she has: indeed, a bothersome amount of relational artworks consists of second-rate social events or socially engaged projects within the context of art.

Yet, Bishop ignores Bourriaud's insistence that relational art has something to do with the above-described screen condition. Bishop, in fact, is not interested in media conditions, but in a socio-political commitment with culture in the tradition of art movements in the 1960s and even in the advancement of democratic ideals through the means of art. The core of Bishop's essay revolves around the concept of "antagonism," which she sees as vital for a democratic base of social interactions in the public sphere. She argues that relational art lacks antagonistic debate and is based on unconvincing utopian ideals instead: "I dwell on this theory [antagonism] in order to suggest that the relations set up by relational aesthetics are not intrinsically democratic, as Bourriaud suggests, since they rest too comfortably within an ideal of subjectivity as a whole and of community as immanent togetherness" (Bishop 2004, p. 67). But while antagonism can be seen as a sign of a functioning democratic society, its foundational heart remains participation. A media theorist who investigates the status of democracy in advanced media society, Thomas Meyer, has argued that participation has become difficult in a society where the media have colonized the public domain to such an extent that we should speak of a "mediocracy" instead of democracy (Meyer 2001). Huyghe's work is particularly relevant in this context because he encourages a media-conscious attitude that opens up creative modes of participation in complex media contexts, all of which paves the way for critical and responsible interaction with today's mediocratic society. This is one of the reasons why I find it constructive to look at Huyghe's contributions to relational art in addition to those of Tiravanija and Gillick.[20] Huyghe's *Chantier Barbés-Rochechouart* and *The Third Memory* not only address Bourriaud's "screen condition," but also engage the ethico-political dimensions of art that Bishop so desires. Whether or not intended by Huyghe himself, *The Third Memory* and other works of his raise important questions about a new kind of ethics necessary for contemporary media society on a global scale.[21] Such an ethico-political intent is without doubt what drives Nevejan's sociological thesis. Nevejan's ambition is nothing less than setting a (new) standard for human behavior and well-being in the age of advanced media conditions—the 21st century that is. Nevejan takes the "Declaration of Human Rights," formulated by the United Nations after the Second World War, as her point of reference: "…the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been chosen as the essential normative perspective of social interaction, and thus for the potential building or breaking of trust"

[19] Liliam Gillick writes a critical response to Claire Bishop's essay in a later issue of *October*, in which he attacks her reading of relational art and his own work. He also rightly points to the many factual errors in her essay. I attended the opening of *Traffic*; wrote the first review on relational art in The Netherlands, and have followed the development of relational art and its critical reception ever since in both Europe and the US. Thus, I was equally disturbed by the multiple mistakes in Bishop's essay and her inadequate readings of many artworks (especially of Tiravanjia) and Bourriaud's ideas. See Gillick (2006), pp. 95–107; and van der Meulen (1996), p. 55.

[20] In his analysis of classic films and other media, Bismuth has shown how to infiltrate and interrupt existing codes of meaning in culture at large. The same goes for Douglas Gordon in his early work such as his notorious appropriation of *24 h Psycho* (1993).

[21] Another work to mention in regard with a new ethics is Huyghe's relatively early video projection, *Show white* (1997), in which the artist also interrogates deeply ethical questions as a result of the result of the tension between natural presence and mediated presence in a rather touching manner. *Show White* is a documentary about Lucie Dolène, a woman who 'gave' her voice to the French translation of Walt Disney's movie on the same fairy tale. Dolène sued Disney for abusing her voice when the company did not give her the proper royalties for the distribution of a new edition of the film. Dolène's motivation to go to court, however, had to do with ethical issues of privacy and ownership rather than money. What is at stake in this work, then, are fundamental issues of property rights in the age of advanced media conditions. We have learnt from John locke a long time ago that property and property rights have something to do with ourselves, with our own existence, our physical body. A question such as Dolène's as to whether or not our own voice (or image) also belongs to our property, in other words, is an ethical challenge of the media society in which we are living today.

(Nevejan 2007, p. 11). Nevejan thus shares Bishop's concern for "qualified relations" in a broad socio-political sphere, but she locates and understands these relations in a technologically driven media environment. I argue that Nevejan's new ethics and Bourriaud and Huyghe's aesthetics are linked through their shared diagnosis of the new spatial and temporal conditions generated by the media, which profoundly effect our whole cultural and social environment—"media determine our situation," as Friedrich Kittler states it concisely in one single phrase (Kittler 1999).

While Bourriaud and Nevejan develop their theories in the different contexts of art and sociology, they both look for the same kind of "qualified relations" as described by Bishop in her developed critique of relational art, but in the process they give a more convincing analysis of *contemporary* conditions than the latter does. Bourriaud does not limit relational art to interactive art, as Bishop also observes, but this does not mean that the new media context should be negated in the critical assessment of the movement. This brings me back to Baker's "retrograde vision." Relational art, it appears to me, is only "retrograde" if you do not acknowledge that the movement looks ahead and not just into its (art historical) past, which, by the way, it recognizes. Which is not to say that relational art is indifferent to its art historical precedents. Far from it. Bourriaud has often referred to Fluxus as an inspiration source for relational art. In *Esthétique Relationelle*, for instance, he states unambiguously: "La 'participation' du spectateur, théorisée par les happenings et les performances Fluxus, est devenue une constante de la practique artistique" (Bourriaud 1998, p. 25).[22] While Bourriaud refers somewhat less frequently to the situationists, he does criticize Debord's *Society of Spectacle* openly: "Les utopies sociales et l'espoir révolutionnaire ont laissé la place à de micro-utopies quotidiennes et à des stratégies mimétiques: tout position critique 'directe' de la societé est vaine…" (Bourriaud 1998, p. 31). Evidently, Bourriaud is indebted not only to Lyotard's show, *Les Immateriaux*, but also to his postmodern theory, in which the philosopher develops the idea of the *"petites récits"* (Lyotard 1984, originally published in French in 1979). So, Bourriaud's assessment of contemporary culture and society can be conceived as a critical response to Debord's analysis of the spectacle society. In the introduction of a new English edition of his *Society of Spectacle* in 1993, Debord states that "nothing has changed" since he wrote the book, and that he still intends to "harm society" (Debord 1995). Bourriaud, Huyghe and other relational artists, in other words, do respond to the situationist legacy (think of Huyghe's idea of "*mise-en-situation,*" or his critical take on the spectacle value), but they are less optimistic about the possibility of changing society according to the good old Marxist model—a sign of antagonism that Bishop chooses to ignore. It is precisely Baker's argument of the historical weight of the 1960s avant-gardes, as embodied by the situationists, which annoyed the younger generation of relational artists, not because they were irreverent to historical precedents, but because it blocked the recognition of what Bourriaud called "the *real* challenges of art vis-à-vis society, history and culture" (Bourriaud 1996b).[23] Though relational art questions the situationists's conviction that we can—and must—subvert media society, it still holds that we can find other ways to productively relate to, and operate within, spectacle society. Huyghe does not shy away from today's intricate media situation, but rather thinks the consequences of contemporary media conditions through for culture and society, including the possibilities for the human subject to be proactive within it.

4 A journey that was not

We have drifted away somewhat from Nevejan's theory of YUTPA through this reassessment of relational art, but the point of my analysis of *The Third Memory* is that the different kinds of presence are brought together in such entangled configurations that they trouble a clear characterization of "its" YUTPA, or relations between "You and not-You," "Now and not Now" and "Do and not-Do." For that reason, the work serves as a catalyst for my proposition that Nevejan's three categories of natural, mediated. and witnessed presence should be complemented by a fourth if we wish to grasp the complex relations between presence and representation in Huyghe's work: fictional presence. In an interview with George Baker, Huyghe clearly expressed his interest in fiction; or more precisely, in investigating "how a fiction, how a story, could in fact produce a certain

[22] It must be said that at the time itself Bourriaud was not the only one who pointed through both texts and exhibitions to the historical precedents in the 1960s such as Fluxus while arguing that we need to address new contemporary conditions. See, for example, Bart de Baere, *This is the Show and the Show is Many Things* (Ghent: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1994), Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Take me (I'm Yours)* (London: Serpentine Gallery, 1995), or my own introductory text for the exhibition of the first International Curatorial Training Program at the De Appel Foundation in Amsterdam. See van der Meulen (1995).

[23] I heard the next critique of relational art within the line of negative criticism in the US on the CAA conference in Chicago (2010), where Jennifer Stobb attacked Bourriaud and relational aesthetics in her paper "Anti-art, Non-event: The Situationist Inverse of Relational Aesthetics". While Stobbs argued convincingly that Bourriaud does not sufficiently recognize the legacy of Guy Debord and the situationists, she (like Bishop) failed to understand the deeper motivations of relational aesthetics in the 1990s as a *distinct* phenomenon of the 1960s artistic movements such as Fluxus and the Situationists.

kind of reality. An *additif* of reality (Baker 2004b, p. 84)." Fiction is usually at stake in the artist's work, from the billboard Chantier Barbès-Rochechouart to *The Third Memory*, but probably most directly in one of his large-scale projects, *A Journey that wasn't* (2005).

"Fiction" is something of an odd term because it refers at once to the imagination, as well as to something invented or made up. This double meaning of fiction, in a positive sense as something created imaginatively, and in a negative sense as something as opposed to fact, makes it a rather useful term for Huyghe's oeuvre, which as a whole hovers between facts and fiction. In Nevejan's theory, fictional presence would most likely be classified under "mediated presence," as can be deduced from her statement, "For centuries people have mediated presence consciously by telling stories, making drawings,…and writing books, etc". (Nevejan 2007, p. 13). That fictional presence is not given its own category is understandable in a book that is written from a sociological standpoint, but from the point of view art—the profession of fiction par excellence—it seems legitimate to "petition" for a distinct category of fictional presence. Fiction, of course, is not the same as fictional presence. Fiction refers to an imagined story, while fictional presence points to something that is both fictional and has an *acte de présence*—it involves the position of the viewer/listener/reader vis-à-vis the story. In the context of Nevejan's theory, I define fictional presence as a type of imagined or forged presence that can nonetheless be in a dynamic dialogue with, and have a decisive impact on, all other forms of natural, mediated and witnessed presence.

Huyghe's interest in how fiction can create "an additief of reality" evokes Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum once again. Baudrillard first defined this term in his pivotal essay *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981). In his sophisticated thought on the development of the media image in contemporary culture, Baudrillard distinguishes "four phases:" first, the image as a mere reflection of a reality; second, the image that is described to "masks" such a reality; third, the image that entirely covers up "the absence of a reality;" and fourth and last, the image that "has no relation to reality whatsoever" and has become, in Baudrillard's words, "its own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard 1994, p. 6). This ever-increasing capacity of the image to simulate reality is Baudrillard's pessimistic scenario of contemporary society, in which the subject is thought to be deeply affected by the "additives of reality" that the media create. Still, Baudrillard mobilizes his media theory to criticize contemporary events as represented by the media, such as the first Gulf War in his controversial *La Guerre du Golf n'a pas eu lieu* (1991). The Gulf War is Baudrillard's schoolbook example of a situation in which reality (the war) and its representation (live coverage of CNN) have separated to such an extent that they can be argued to have no "relation whatsoever," and the image has thus reached phase four—of the "pure simulacrum." This is why Baudrillard declares, provocatively, that "the war did not take place." Huyghe accepts Baudrillard's theory of simulacra (as evident from the shared conceptual denial of an actual event in Baudrillard's "The Gulf War that didn't take place" and Huyghe's "A Journey that wasn't[24]), but with a few major differences. First of all, Huyghe does not share Baudrillard's 'gloominess', which is a result of the fact that the latter does not see any possibility of human agency within the bastions of media power. Huyghe's art, in contrast, is all about the role—and power—of the subject. As he shows in *The Third Memory*, the subject can (and does) interact with the constructed realities by the media. Media society as a whole can be seen as a closed system within and with which we all the same can interact politically, ethically, aesthetically, and socially. Another difference between Baudrillard and Huyghe's approaches to simulation culture is that the latter recognizes that a simulated reality—or a fiction in the double sense as described above—is ultimately a construction. Huyghe, in other words, does not believe in an objective relation to the image and thus takes the "make-ability" of images and events for granted. My reading of Huyghe's interest in the make ability of an event that produces "a certain kind of" or "*additif*" of reality is triggered by that pivotal billboard on (and of) a construction site at the start of his career, in which the artist pointed to the fact that images are being made. But I borrow the suffix "-ability" (or "*-barkeit,*" in German) from Samuel Weber, who in his latest book on Walter Benjamin, *Benjamin's Abilities*, argues that the renowned cultural critic mobilized this suffix throughout his oeuvre—see for example his use of terms such as "citability," "translatability," and, of course, "reproducibility." As Weber explains: "These are Benjamin's "*-barkeiten,*" his "-abilities," which define his major concepts in terms of what Derrida has called *structural possibility* rather than in terms of their actual realization (Weber 2008, p. 39). What the suffix refers to, then, is a state of possibility or potentiality. This idea of potentiality—which suggests a capacity rather than a reality, something active rather than passive—applies to the media image as problematized by Huyghe ever since his first billboard, where the becoming of images rather than their permanent status as a representation is the point at issue.

[24] Cultural critics have attacked Buadrillard's provocative statements because his media perspective avoids to address any circumstance or relevant background, and is seen as immoral because he ignored the reality of people dying in this event. Huyghe's work escapes such criticism because of his inoffensive topic of a journey.

Before returning to *A Journey that Wasn't,* and how that work relates to this idea of the make-ability, it is interesting to note that Gilles Deleuze phrased the Derridian problem of presence and representation in terms of the binary of *actual* and *virtual*. Each image, Deleuze holds, has two sides, the actual and the virtual, but they can develop in both directions by being either actualized or virtualized. I mention Deleuze because Weber relies heavily on the French philosopher's theorizing of terms such as "virtual," "possible," and "actual." As Weber explicates Deleuze: "The virtual must above all be clearly distinguished from the possible…. [S]ince the virtual, in contrast to the possible, already possesses *a certain reality in itself* [my emphasis], it cannot be simply defined in opposition to the real. It is already real, although not in terms of its representational content or reference. The virtual is not oriented or directed toward a reality outside of itself: rather, it is defined, negatively, with respect to the actual, the here and now (2008, p. 32)." And Weber continues: "[t]he virtual becomes actual, but only in altering itself. It realizes in staying what it was, but in becoming something different (2008, p. 32)" This passage on the actual and the virtual makes clear that Deleuze's theory is more adequate than Derrida's idea of the single and the double for thinking about presence and representation in regard to media images because it explains the way in which the virtual (or media) image can contain "a certain reality in itself" even if it is connected to reality. The Deleuzian distinction between the actual and the virtual, then, elucidates the ultimately ontological problem of the fundamental hybridity between facts and fictions in a time of advanced media conditions, to the extent that a fiction can have an impact on the real world instead of the other way round.

Now, Huyghe's *A Journey that wasn't* evokes fiction by its title alone because of its poetic denial of a certain expedition that appears to have happened. The expedition in question is an actual trip to a "non-topographical island" somewhere in the Antarctic in search for a rare species, an albino penguin, about which Huyghe had heard and read. So, Huyghe and his team—seven artists and ten crew members—traveled to Antarctica, where they set up a research station as the home base for their expedition that was then undertaken on both foot and with a speedboat. The voyage might be less poetic as it sounds at first, because in Huyghe's account global warming has melted away the poles' ice shelf and created previously nonexisting islands and ecosystems. So, the blend of imaginative fiction (a journey to the "unknown," "unknown species," etc., evokes all sorts of expedition stories) and bare reality (the effects of the climate crisis, as vividly depicted in Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*) is already conceived in the idea of the project. This journey—that did take place—initiates the first phase of the project, *A Journey that wasn't* (Fig. 7a).

Fig. 7 Pierre Huyghe, *A Journey that wasn't* (2005)

The second phase of this real-time event consists of a representation of the trip in the form of a musical staged on the ice skating ring in Central Park, New York (Fig. 7b). Huyghe has described this part as "the typography of an island in musical form."[25] In order to realize this artistic translation of the journey, he transferred the sounds and shapes of the island into morse code that subsequently determined the format and shape of the artificial icescape in Central Park. Staging pitch black rocks of ice and using spectacular atmospheric and lighting effects, the musical (based on an original score of Joshua Cody, a composer who studied with Pierre Boulez and Louis Andriessen) was performed live in the park by a symphonic orchestra.

Yet, the end product of the journey to Antarctica and the spectacle in New York is a film that is thus based on the footage of the real journey *and* the fictionalized multimedia show, woven together into a series of episodes that create an intense dialogue between natural and witnessed presence and mediated representation. After a concise prologue by a voice-over, who recapitulates the film as "the story of

[25] Huyghe, *A Journey that Wasn't*.

a tragic odyssey," images that serve as proofs of the expedition's presence in the extreme environment of the Antarctic and images of the mise-en-scene in Central Parc are juxtaposed to set the scene and disclose the structure of the film. Then, longer episodes of the journey—the sailing boat trying to clear a path through the iceberg laden waters, whales appearing and disappearing on the surface of the sea, the setting up of the research station—are alternated with scenes of the theatrical set up in Central Park, such as shots of the dramatically staged Arctic landscape, the orchestra and the audience. The "story" develops in each episode of the two sharply contrasting yet closely related sets of images: on the one hand, the journey to and landing on the island, the installment of the campsite with its meteorological apparatus, the search of the albino penguin—all in vintage documentary style; on the other, the carefully orchestrated opening of the whole set up of the open air musical in its urban surroundings to the dramatic start and unfolding of the concert.

Huyghe's *A Journey that wasn't* brings to mind Broodthaers's film, *A Voyage on the North Sea*, and not just because they share the word "journey" in their title: there is something about the deeply inter-media approach in both works, plus the relation to metaphor, that seems to bind them.[26] Broodthaers's work shows a variety of boats, drifting on the sea (a modern yacht, a traditional schooner, a life boat) on an displayed strip of film. The interesting part of the work is that it intelligently plays out the conventions of various media, such as a book (see the shots with only the word "page" on it, combined with a number), painting (shots of painted boats and close ups of a bare canvas) and, obviously, film itself (on the verge of photography because of its use of still images). This inter-media condition of the work is the reason why Rosalind Krauss mobilizes it to elaborate on her idea of "art in the age of the post-medium condition" (Krauss 1999). Krauss's approach to her own diagnosis is rather paradoxical because on the one hand she argues that art has reached the stage of "the post medium condition" and yet on the other, she defends the concept of medium—albeit not in the classical Greenbergian sense of material conditions but in the revised form of the (immaterial) "medium-as-idea." The crux of the argument, which relates to my analysis of Huyghe's project here, is that Broodthaers is devoted to one specific medium throughout his work, namely the "master medium" of fiction (Krauss 1999, p. 46). For Krauss, in other words, Broodthaers's relation to fiction goes deeper than simply using it as a strategy in some of his best-known works to demythologize conventions, such as in his *celèbre* Museum of Modern Art: "What is at issue in the context of medium is not just the possibility of exploiting the fictional mask to unmask reality's lies (here Kraus refers to Broodthaers's fictional museum), but of producing an analysis of fiction itself to a specific structure of experience" (1999, p. 47). This significance of fiction as a gateway into (aesthetic) experience is applicable to Huyghe's whole multi-media project as well, which coalesces in the film *A Journey that Wasn't*. Like Broodthears, Huyghe does not tell a story but rather displays the condition of its narrative. The film begins with a voice-over statement that it will "prolong the experience of the journey" but in the process, and through the use of fiction, the multi-media project lays bare the structure of experience as it occurs in the hybrid configurations of natural, mediated, witnessed and fictional presence in media society.

Huyghe's work, therefore, can only be fully understood with the help of a conceptual framework that reflects on these interrelated kinds of natural, mediated, witnessed, and, as I argue, fictional presence. Witnessed presence, as I explained at the start of this essay, often bridges the other kinds of presence. If you can locate the position of the witness, then you can unravel the interrelations between, for instance, natural, and mediated presence. This is the reason why the witness is such an important figure in Huyghe's work. In *A Journey that wasn't*, the witness and witnessing again play a decisive role. Huyghe begins the film with the statement that the goal of the trip was "to verify its [the albino penguin's] existence." Verifying is the business of witnessing and done by those who question mediated knowledge and want to see with their own eyes. Truth is again at stake in this work, as well as the authentication of truth against possible fictions. But this idea of witnessing is complicated by Huyghe in the multi-media spectacle he constructs around the journey, where the status of witness becomes a different one: the audience is the "real" witnesses (eye-witnesses, that is) of a "real" event (the musical) that nonetheless is already a radically mediated, if not fictionalized, event. The terms of mediated, witnessed, and

[26] Another artist with whose work Huyghe seems to engage in an intense artistic dialogue is Robert Smithson. This is not the place for an in-depth analysis of the interrelations between Smithson and Huyghe, but it is clear that Huyghe's project in the antartic relates to Smithon's *The Spiral Jetty* in many ways. Both artists went to a distant place to produce their art within raw nature, far from the cultured artworld, and both then brought a representation of the work back into civilization. Issues of presence and representation, or site and non-site in Smithson's terminology, are at the heart of both works. It is also notable that in the work of both artists the idea of process, or the making of the work as a temporal event, is crucial. In an essay on *The Spiral Jetty* of 1972, Smithson describes in great detail the proces of finding the right location for his work, the journey to that place, the making of the work with tons of basalt blocks and earth and big trucks. Smithson also emphasizes in text and image (i.e. in films about *The Spiral Jetty*) the importance of experiencing "the fluctuating scale" (not just the size) of the work while walking on it—natural presence, our own physical body, in that particular space in Utah at a certain time, is thus central to the work. Finally, the work of both Smithson and Huyghe has an intermedia character in the sense that they both use a wide variety of media to represent the work and experience it in different ways.

natural presence, therefore, become blurred in this fictionalized version of the actual journey to the extent that it turns out to be almost impossible to determine its "YUTPA" configuration. As I have already explained in the context of Huyghe's billboard, this kind of media witness who experiences real events first hand that are nevertheless essentially mediated, is a novel figure; the kind of witness that can only occur in a media society and may well be the most common kind of witness in today's state of such society. Consequently, we need to develop analytical skills to determine our own position as subject in this blurred situation. In Huyghe's *A Journey that Wasn't,* however, yet another type of witness enters the game: the "inner witness." The inner witness is a concept of the Holocaust specialist Doru Laub and should be understood within the broader context of the double meaning of witnessing: eye-witness testimony based on first-hand knowledge and bearing witness to something beyond recognition—like faith, or God (Oliver 2001, p. 17). This distinction between eyewitness and bearing witness, as Oliver Kelly explains in her book on witnessing, has to do with the tension between historical facts and psychoanalytical truth, the two extreme poles between which the whole process of witnessing takes place. The psychoanalytical idea of inner witness is closer to the concept of bearing witness than to the idea of the eye witness, because it is based on imaginative power rather than verifiable proof. The inner witness, therefore, could be productively related to the concept of fictional presence proposed here. This category of presence, and the different type of witness that belongs to it, is important for Huyghe's work because in the end, it does not really matter what "truth" is in his work. This was already clear in *The Third Memory*, but it also comes through in Huyghe's provocative statement about *A Journey that Wasn't*: "We don't know if I even went there—if I saw this island or the albino penguin. Maybe I did. Maybe it's a special effect. I don't care." It is art or fiction, after all, which made possible this "certain kind of reality," this "*additif* of reality," or fiction. And the accompanying concept of inner witness resembles something like artistic vision. Still, I am not sure whether we should take Huyghe on his word that it does make a scrap of a difference whether or not the penguin exists, as the rare animal certainly was the big trophy of the journey. It is interesting to note in this context that the veracity of the penguin touches upon Benjamin's good old question of aura. As one of the participating artists, Alexandra Mir, describes it: "[Huyghe] had declared a motive: to find an albino penguin on this journey. Considering his limited knowledge of navigation, the fact that penguins usually hang out in groups of several thousand, and that half of them are in the water most of the time, nobody really believed he would discover this penguin. It was a sort of joke on board, a kind of myth. Then of course he did find it, as if they had made an appointment to meet, and when that happened there was truly a magical aura around him".[27] Just as the aura sparked off by the actual encounter of Huyghe and the penguin, Benjamin's concept of aura also relates to authentic presence. Benjamin, in fact, frames "aura" in an almost existential, Heidegerrian sense of *Dasein* when he describes it as the experience of a wanderer resting on a mountain on a summer afternoon: "to follow a chain of mountains on the horizon or a branch casting its shadow on the person resting—that is what it means to breathe in the aura of these mountains, of this branch". Benjamin relates this deep sense of presence in the "here" and "now"—with Being as such as Heidegger would say—to the experience of the original work of art, and then contrasts it with a technically reproduced artwork, or copy, which he identifies with the loss of aura. However, Samuel Weber has proposed that the aura has not disappeared in the age of the media but only took on a different form. In this context, he introduces a neologism, the *mediaura*, which he describes as "auratic flashes and shadows that are not just produced and reproduced by the media but which are the media themselves (Weber 1996, p. 106)". Suggesting that the aura continues in the age of the (new) technological media, Weber concludes: "What is condemned in the age of technical reproducibility is not aura as such but the aura of art as a *work* of representation (1996, p. 107)". The penguin that suddenly occurs in *A Journey that wasn't* is a case in point. Whether it is real or fake, the appearance of the penguin has an auratic effect; or rather, a mediauric effect. In Nevejan's terms, we can conclude that Huyghe plays out the complex tensions between natural, mediated and witnessed presence (in which the riddle of the "real" penguin is but one factor in a dense cloud of meanings within the narrative structure of the work), but it is the power of fiction that gives the film its mediauric quality in the end. Or? (Fig. 8).

Fig. 8 Pierre Huyghe, *A Journey that wasn't* (2005)

[27] See http://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue7/journeythatwas.htm.

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