

“airs de paris” instructions for use

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This multidisciplinary exhibition, focusing on today’s art, is being held to mark the Pompidou Centre’s 30th anniversary, and keenly explores the themes of the city and urban life, taking Paris as the starting point of a centrifugal energy which goes way beyond its origins. The artists selected for this exhibition have either lived and worked in Paris, or are presently living there, and are involved in specific projects in the city. Paris has been chosen as the context, but it is an open-ended context combining the local and the global, otherwise put, a “translocal” context adopted at a time when identity-related obsessions are gathering sway, representing a real pitfall for the development of the political, social and art worlds. Artists are particularly in sync with internationalism. They travel, set themselves up here, there and everywhere; they leave a place, only to return to base, turning metropolises into temporary places of semi-residence. Be it Paris, Berlin, Shanghai or Los Angeles, a city nowadays is nothing more than a creative hub, just one among many others, caught up in some mighty movement made up of exchanges and multiple networks and systems.

The exhibition’s title is inspired straight from *Air de Paris*, Marcel Duchamp’s last readymade – allegedly at least, for it would seem to have been particularly “assisted”¹– dated 1919 and held in the Pompidou Centre’s collections in its 1964 version put out by the Schwarz Gallery, in Milan. This work, which was shown at the first major show to be held at the Pompidou Centre in 1977, curated by Pontus Hulten and Jean Clair², symbolizes the direction that the “Airs de Paris” exhibition intends to espouse. Duchamp’s *Air de Paris* was the artist’s brainchild gift to his collector friends Louise and Walter Arensberg, celebrated art donors to the Philadelphia Museum, which he took with him on a visit to the United States; it consisted of a 50 cc. phial of physiological serum, emptied of its liquid content, on which Duchamp had written its title. Paris is, by definition, moveable, divisible and, thanks to the travelling artist, transportable. So Duchamp’s work contains within it the idea of international citizenship – citizen-of-the-world – shifting borders, and an interweave of different geographical contexts. Almost 50 years ahead of the pack, it foreshadowed the emergence of a “transnational social space”, *a fortiori* in the art arena,

as described by Ulrich Beck, within the framework of a sociology of globalization, running parallel with the phenomenon of economic denationalization³. This work right away raises the issue of the context of art. It may well be problematic, these days, to put on exhibitions on a given country’s stage, or on the stage of a specific city, or period, but this is because the context of art is being articulated more than ever somewhere between the local and the global. In a way, Duchamp anticipated the shift towards internationalization, which is more than just a new phenomenon, by coming up with a shared air across the seas. He also anticipated the definition of globalization given by Anthony Giddens, which thoroughly challenges the idea that nations and societies are separate from one another. Globalization actually implies: “acting and living (together) with distance, across the apparently separate worlds of national states, regions, and continents”.⁴ Duchamp described himself as a “breather”⁵ (*respirateur*) of the different airs of Europe and America, settling in the United States as he did after the war because of a shortcoming peculiar to his native land where he felt something akin to a restriction of freedom caused by too much standardization, as described during a television interview: “In Europe, [...] the individual is forced to fit into a category, be it political, colleague-related, a school, or of things”⁶, he declared in an attempt to explain why he had gone to the United States. So the artists selected for the “Airs de Paris” exhibition have a link with the city, but without making direct reference to it or necessarily living in Paris. Thomas Demand, Carsten Höller, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Wilhelm Sasnal and Louise Bourgeois, to mention just a handful, are among them. Laurent Jeanpierre returns at a later stage to the tricky question of an air specific to Paris by way of his essay “New Metropolis, metamorphosis of the perceptible and changes in the system of the arts”⁷.

The artists were selected by Daniel Birnbaum and myself, using a specific methodology. Several works by hundreds of artists, some more closely connected with Paris than others, were analyzed on the strength of what they are dealing with. The theme of the city and its contemporary changes came quite naturally to the fore, along with several specific themes chosen for their relevance to the development and growth of our urban

world. So these themes hail from the works themselves, not from some pre-ordained theory, in a symmetrically critical position, in relation to the showing of works, which shies away from theory that affords little or no attention to artwork. The issue subsequently raised, which confronts all curators, was one involving the combination of a desire for deeper theoretical exploration and a choice of works which, by their very nature, contain many different meanings, at times visible, at others opaque, and neither can nor should represent the illustration of a model, at the very same time at which so many art system models are following in each other's footsteps, without making a point of doing so. This is tantamount to saying, if we are referring to science, that a theory that has no application in experience does not deserve to be called a theory. At the very least we might be able to talk in terms of partial theories where the artistic arena is concerned, but under no circumstances can we talk of unified theory or even theory aimed at unification, as is the case in the field of cosmology, for example. In our concern to offer the public a forum for reflection, discussion and investigation in relation to recent developments in the urban world, we have opted for an experimental method creating a new public place, namely the formation of a team of intellectuals with no direct link with art, but whose work, on a daily basis, involves looking at, analysing and forecasting these changes. The idea of an online discussion forum⁸ took shape, in the hope of creating an arena of ongoing autonomous thinking, culminating in the exhibition – thinking which, over and above its own existence, can be conveyed to the public by way of an educational discourse actually within the show, which will use certain facets of it. During our analysis of the history of exhibitions at the Pompidou Centre and our discussions with artists about those which have influenced them, the fact clearly emerges that “Les Immatériaux”, put on by the Cei in 1985 and brainchild of Jean-François Lyotard and Thierry Chapot, had been a landmark reference, and one even with mythical status⁹. The interviews conducted in this catalogue by Daniel Birnbaum¹⁰ with Daniel Buren and Philippe Parreno fully confirm the extent to which this postmodern manifesto of art and technology has left its mark in people's memories, attempting, as it has, to create a dramatic treatise on the burgeoning day and age. Within this mythical status – because few people actually saw the show and any reference made to it tends to focus on its catalogue¹¹, and few people actually recall what there was to see in it, but rather remember the direction adopted by the undertaking – it would seem that Lyotard's project, aimed at creating a discussion among a certain number if those taking part, was something fundamentally utopian. What Lyotard actually did was to attempt to present a collective writing experiment in 1984, one which was interactive and remote-controlled, carried on with microcomputers (Olivetti M20) fitted with early word-

processing and communicational software programmes. Of 26 intellectuals and artists involved, Daniel Buren, Michel Butor, Jacques Derrida, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers all took part in this experiment, giving voice to their conception of words connected with the art-and-technology linkage, ranging from artificiality to voices, by way of numerous references to matter and body, in tandem with the creation of works on the Minitel – works which do not appear to have left any dazzling recollection in their wake. As Lyotard wrote in his “Post-scriptum”¹², this writing experiment also came to a blatantly obvious sticky end as far as its effective outcome was concerned¹³, although, paradoxically enough, the myth remained intact. It is this myth that we are now revisiting, at the risk, once again, of not living up to people's expectations. But as I write these words, it strikes me that several pitfalls have been avoided, and in particular the very first snare involving effective participation, which does not rule out a subtle later conclusion. If it is true that the most significant proportion of the “Airs de Paris” Forum's contents is the doing of just a handful of individuals, matter for and of reflection has all the same already emerged to enrich both this catalogue and the texts that can be read as you make your way round the exhibition. The philosopher Elie During and the sociologist Laurent Jeanpierre agreed to assume responsibility for this ambitious project, and have both contributed outstanding energy and enthusiasm to bring it to life, starting back in May 2006. The authors of this catalogue have all been called upon to take an active part in its realization. Meetings helped to enable a certain number of persons involved to meet one another with the aim of developing a shared body of shifting thought. The exhibition catalogue has, furthermore, been designed in the same spirit. Though limited, lengthwise, as compared with its authors' usual writings, the basic texts have been requested from the world of research rather than from the art world – from philosophers, sociologists, city planners, anthropologists and psychoanalysts, who have been questioned about the exhibition's different themes (grouped here in chapters), but without them having to comment on the works chosen by the curators, even if they are acquainted with them. They will get together with us after the exhibition for a symposium organized by *Forums de société* or Social Forums, thanks to the cooperation of Bernard Stiegler and Roger Rotmann. Discussion evenings will also be organized with each catalogue author face to face with an exhibition artist, to exchange viewpoints about the themes bringing them together. The intent is to create a disjunction, a side-by-side phenomenon which gives the public a chance to forge links between work and theory, without the works being reduced to an orthodoxy of thinking (*pensée unique*). In a nutshell, questions rather than answers. The purpose of this exhibition is to bestir discussion within the public who will incidentally also be able to react to the “Airs de Paris” Forum by

contributing their points of view after visiting the show. The choice of works also illustrates present time by, it just so happens, taking the nature of time itself into account. A return to the past helps to open up the “cone” of the future, as physicists would say. One or two works emblematic of the history of the Pompidou Centre over these last 30 years, carefully selected in the circuit around the show, are today effectively echoed in the present: Gordon Matta-Clark’s *Conical Inter-Sect*, a *Date painting* of On Kawara, Chris Marker’s *Zapping Zone (Proposals for an Imaginary Television)*, and Gérard Gasiorowski’s *Le Grand Ensemble de la Guerre*. Each work points to a break, a precise vision, a premonition of todayness. Gordon Matta-Clark produced a work during the construction of the Pompidou Centre, which marked the development of the French capital towards a massive growth of gentrification and the rejection of the city centre – downtown Paris – by the middle classes. He had a hunch about the way contemporary cities were shifting towards a diminishing social mixedness and intensified museification. On Kawara’s *Date Painting*, side by side with its twin by Olivier Babin dated the last day of the show, marks the time elapsed between 1977 and the near future. It makes us aware of time, disappearance and death, and impermanence, which all relativize the whole theme of the exhibition, all the more so because On Kawara’s work was already being exhibited at the Pompidou Centre in 1977¹⁴. Chris Marker’s *Zapping Zone*, created for the “Passages of the Image” exhibition in 1991, pointed to the great technological revolution which radically altered the landscape of the late 1970s and shifted it towards a virtualization of reality, while at the same time confronting the private individual with the world’s conflicts. Thanks to the use of computers, it opens up an area of interaction for the public, an area conspicuously occupied today by artists. As far as the work by Gérard Gasiorowski – a major artist in the French art scene, if still underrated in the international one – is concerned, it makes a tragic connection between the 20th and 21st centuries by way of themes of accidents, war, and conflict.

The various chapters of the exhibition have undergone a slow process of maturation. It emerged, first off, that the matters exercising the artists in question could be organized in three parts, to wit: the actual changes themselves; the matter of the linkage between society and communities; and, lastly, the issue of the individual in the face of these changes, and the way communities were evolving. In the end, ten chapters took shape, based on the works, and in a state of dialogue, with the part of the exhibition given over to landscape, architecture and design, as developed in parallel by Valérie Guillaume. At a time when the traditional city has altogether vanished, and we are witnessing the development of things urban and the non-city, as well as the “après-city”, not to say the “post-city”. To use

the terminology coined by many experts, from Françoise Choay to Thierry Paquot, this catalogue’s authors bring to the fore certain lines of thought which can be summed up as follows: a new system of the arts, brought about by changes modifying things urban, seems to be emerging, one which Laurent Jeanpierre describes as “viscous”¹⁵. The “sub-city” or “suburbia” is taking on a role of major significance as a place of creative activity, a place that has indefinite extension, with no vanishing point. This “post-city” is seeing the emergence of communities marked by the ritual moment, to use Michel Agier’s words¹⁶, in spite of the upsurge of a sense of permanent conflict and ecological danger. In this new urban space, fluidity and ongoing shift and motion – there is an analogy here with surfing (as suggesting by Christophe Kihm¹⁷ – guide people who are struggling to redefine things local and things personal and private. Dream, here, reassumes its fullest dimension, according to the psychoanalyst Didier Houzel¹⁸. The exhibition opens with the issue of the city regarded as a built-up area. So the city is no longer to be perceived solely as an architectural spectacle, but also and above all as a place or space of circulation, movement and linkage, to borrow Françoise Choay’s words (*espace de circulation, espace de branchement*). Artists are striving to remix the city, and endlessly reinvent this “post-city” in its current challenges, with a particular interest in the question of mobility (circulation, connections). Remixing comes across like a second line of force and guiding principal in artists’ approaches and methods, whether what is involved is architecture in particular or things urban in general. What is more, one of the major present-day changes under way has to do with our perception of the urban space. The remix operation seems like a second line of force in artists’ methods, whether it is a matter of architecture in particular or things urban in general. Furthermore, one of the major changes currently under way has to do with our perception of the urban space and of time within this space, especially because of the emergence of new information and communication technologies, and the development of “suburbia” and the “sub-city”, as Bruce Bégout¹⁹ calls it, which has replaced the suburbs. New public languages are also emerging. Posters are gradually disappearing, and tagging and graffiti are changing. New forms of popular culture, as described by Christophe Kihm, are being developed. Artists are drawing inspiration from the street, from skateboarding, from graffiti, from pop music and from comics, and challenging the issues of author and copyright by putting forward the idea of “copysharing”. As far back as 1985, Lyotard noted that “the identity of the author” was “more and more difficult [...] to define. The authorship of a work is indefinable.”²⁰

The new media, computers, the Internet, and the like, are all altering our perception of the world, and turning the city into an “e-topia” or a “bit-city”²¹. Far-reaching changes are affecting urban mobility and our everyday

habits, phenomena that are familiar to the New Generation Internet Foundation (NGIF; French acronym FING), a group of researchers headed by Daniel Kaplan²², aided and abetted by Thierry Marcou, at the forefront of such observations and particularly when it comes to the imminent development of biotechnologies and their miniaturization (bionanotechnologies). These technological methods are virtualizing war and telling us that we are living, more than ever before, in a society of risk, a capsular society, to borrow the terms used by Lieven de Cautier, who, along with Michiel Dehaene²³ and in the wake of Paul Virilio and his celebrated *Essay on Territorial Insecurity (Essai sur l'insécurité territoriale)*²⁴, describes a society of catastrophe. The quality of life and the whole environmental issue, together with the linkage between nature and city, are more than ever at the core of people's concerns and worries. Artists are especially clued up on all this. The sociologist Salvador Juan²⁵ describes the challenges and stakes at issue at that ecological turning-point in the heart of the 20th century, an ecology of rational and artificial space. One of today's major problems also lies in the issue of communities. What is "common" is not what joins us together, as per the etymological sense of *communitas*, but what involves us with respect to others. This issue is a particularly burning one in Paris – literally and figuratively – because of the presence of more than 170 nationalities, and the city's recent history, which teaches us that, from now on, Paris represents a concentration of these problems, with a new kind of violence in attendance. The fringes are more visible than ever, even unto the Pompidou Centre's Piazza, which has become a stomping-ground for a large number of homeless persons, to whom the NGO *Médecins du monde (Doctors of the World)* recently handed out basic survival tents. Artists are frequently confronted by such problems as they are, too, by issues associated with the links between communities and internationalism. The anthropologist Michel Agier²⁶, who is a researcher at the CNRS (France's National Centre for Scientific Research), deals at some length with these questions, by trying to define communities marked by micro-events and topicality, while the philosopher Elie During²⁷ analyses the actual notion of place with regard to the global world by revisiting the issue of the local, and urban phenomena likely to shed some light on all this.

Lastly, the individual him or herself must be redefined in this great muddle. More than ever, people are looking for boundaries, and at times they lose sight of them. The habitat is being re-occupied, like an envelope to be made use of. Psychoanalysis, moreover, makes reference to a large number of pathological states bound up with the issue of envelope and skin. The psychoanalyst Didier Houzel, who has carried on the work done by Didier Anzieu on the *Ego-skin (Moi-peau)*, and the Ego's physical and bodily envelope as "habitat"²⁸, develops an original viewpoint, in turn

inspired by the meditations of Martin Heidegger, on private and urban space, whereas private life and public life are intermingling with each other more than ever.

The exhibition also offers one or two novel features, such as several works available as podcasts, for downloading, on the Pompidou Centre website²⁹. Like the discussion forum, these proposals encompass the latest technologies, enabling some artists to push their intentions and aims still further. Among many new works, productions and commissioned works on view – almost a third of the works being shown in "Airs de Paris" – several are available on the Pompidou Centre website as podcasts. We should mention three sound pieces in particular, which are especially suitable for this medium. Marcelline Delbecq thus proposes a new experience of urban space by strolling around the city listening to her work in MP3 format through headphones, while Rainier Lericolais composes a *Paris Air*, which is a manifesto, no less, for free copyright. Anri Sala offers visitors a chance to try out his piece *No Formula One No Cry (2002-2007)* in any taxi, using a walkman. These pieces all come with an attitude involving broadcasting and distribution, in an age of technical reproducibility, running counter to restrictions dictated by copyright and the art market, which, more than ever, is on the increase, while at the same time being careful to impose limits in order to keep the rarity factor and fix *ad hoc* prices. These artists – Rainier Lericolais and Marcelline Delbecq alike – are part of a particularly lively new young generation which I recently made mention of in my article "The French Connection"³⁰: artists such as Adel Abdessemed, Saädane Afif, Loris Gréaud, Guillaume Leblon, Zoulikha Bouabdellah, Vincent Lamouroux and many more, whom this show intends to make a partial showing of. We shall come back to the themes and works in a more specific way in the various chapters and notices in the pages that follow. Our thanks go to all those associated with this book for the energy and enthusiasm they have invested in this project, as well as the artists with whom the pleasure of exchanging ideas, and working and producing together, has been especially powerful and stimulating – a gift from all of them to the Pompidou Centre and its public, for its 30th anniversary.

Translated by Simon Pleasance & Fronza Woods

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NOTES

1. Christine Macel, note on Marcel Duchamp's *Air de Paris*, in this catalogue, p. 32.
2. "Marcel Duchamp. Retrospective", 31 January 1977-2 May 1977, Mnam, Grande Galerie, inaugural exhibition at the Pompidou Centre. The copy on view in this exhibition was loaned by the Louise and Walter Arensberg collection. The Pompidou Centre's copy, which differs from the above version, became part of the Mnam collections in 1986.
3. Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization?*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2000, p. 19 and p. 25.
4. Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1994.
5. Reply to Michel Sanouillet, quoted in *Marcel Duchamp*, Paris, Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 1977, p. 97 (exhibition catalogue: note 2).
6. "Changer de nom, simplement", Marcel Duchamp interview on Canadian radio and television on 17 July 1960 by Guy Viau, *Tout fait. The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online* (www.toutfait.com).
7. Laurent Jeanpierre, "Nouvelle métropole, métamorphose du sensible et mutation du régime des arts", in this catalogue, p. 46.
8. www.airsdeparis.centrepompidou.fr
9. "Les Immatériaux", whose initial title was "La Matière dans tous ses états", was shown from 28 March to 15 July 1985 at the Pompidou Centre.
10. Daniel Birnbaum, "...and...and...and...", in this catalogue, p. 22.
11. The *Les Immatériaux* catalogue is divided into two volumes. The first volume consists of a paperback book titled *Album* (reproduction of a notebook and miscellaneous things prior to the exhibition) and a set of 50 datasheets titled *Inventaire* dealing with the different parts of the exhibition. The second volume, *Épreuves d'écriture*, is a set of answers by several intellectuals and artists to a list of 50 words.
12. Jean-François Lyotard, *Les Immatériaux*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, *Épreuves d'écriture*, p. 259.
13. Commenting on the experiment carried out between September and December 1984, Lyotard and Chaput write in "La raison des épreuves": "In this way we wanted to create a workshop of divergences, as is the case in a dictionary (or a catalogue), a museum of consensuses. [...] the workshop of divergences had to become a laboratory of differences of opinion." In Lyotard's text "Post-scriptum" of February 1985 can be read the statement of a "general and far-reaching confusion in writing" probably due to the methods that have affected the way authors write. The result appears, as the authors not unwittingly put it, as a "sort of compilation of opinions relating to one and the same corpus of terms, but written in heterogeneous genres and styles. A doxographical anthology therefore, which is also a satire, in the old Latin sense of *salade*" (p. 6 and p. 263).
14. "97 Consecutive *Date Paintings*; journals of 1966 to 1975", Mnam, 30 March-16 May 1977, leaflet. The On Kawara exhibition was the second major solo show after the Marcel Duchamp exhibition which marked the opening of the Pompidou Centre in 1977.
15. L. Jeanpierre, "Nouvelle métropole, métamorphose du sensible et mutation du régime des arts", *op. cit.*, p. 46.
16. Michel Agier, "Le ban-lieu du monde. Marges, solitudes et communautés de l'instant", in this catalogue, p. 180.
17. Christophe Kihm, "Cultures urbaines ou pratiques de la ville", in this catalogue, p. 96.
18. Didier Houzel, "Intimités et espace urbain", in this catalogue, p. 222.
19. Bruce Bégout, "Suburbia. Du monde (urbain) clos à l'univers (suburbain) infini", in this catalogue, p. 82.
20. J.-F. Lyotard, "Tous les auteurs", *Les Immatériaux*, vol. 1, *Inventaire*.
21. William J. Mitchell, *E-Topia. Urban Life, Jim – But Not As We Know It*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2000.
22. Daniel Kaplan, "Évolution des TIC et avenir des territoires", in this catalogue, p. 128.
23. Lieven de Cauter and Michiel Dehaene, "L'archipel et le lieu du ban : tableau de la ville désastre", in this catalogue, p. 144.
24. Paul Virilio, *Essai sur l'insécurité du territoire*, Paris, Stock, 1976.
25. Salvador Juan, "Environnement et écologie urbaine", in this catalogue, p. 156.
26. M. Agier, "Le ban-lieu du monde. Marges, solitudes et communautés de l'instant", *op. cit.*, p. 180.
27. Elie During, "Invention du local, épuisement des lieux", in this catalogue, p. 206.
28. Didier Anzieu, *Le Moi-peau*, Paris, Dunod, coll. "Psychismes", 1995.
29. www.centrepompidou.fr/airsdeparis/telechargements
30. Christine Macel, "The French Connection", *Flash Art*, July-September 2006.