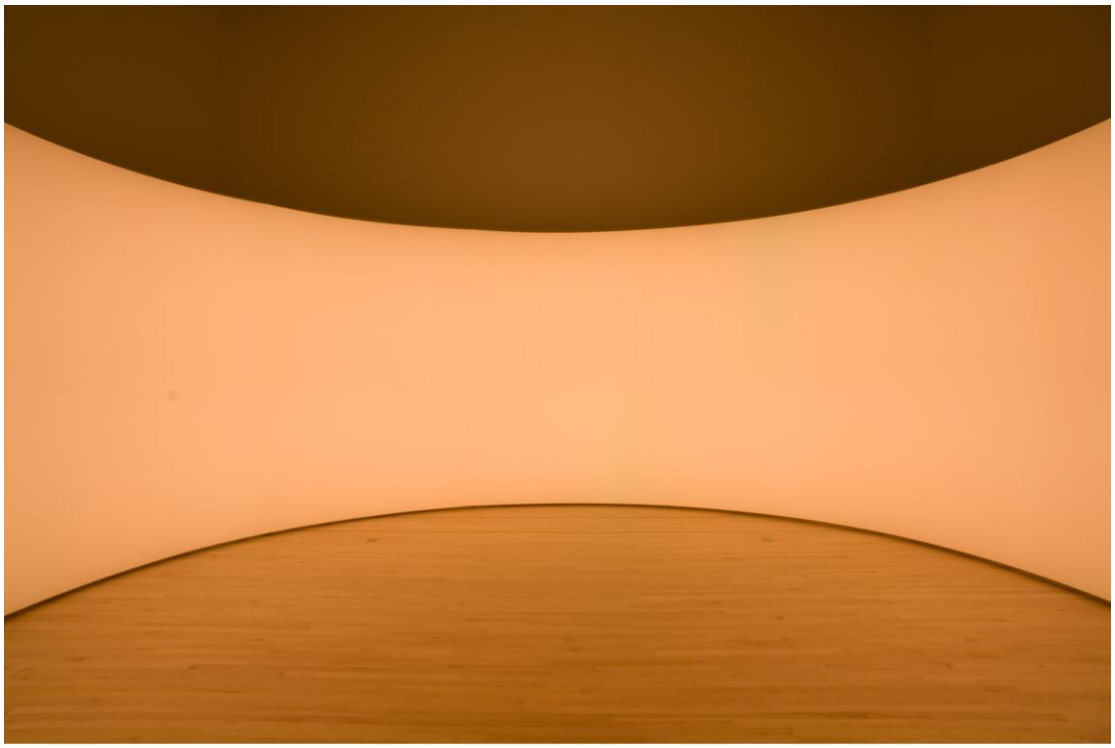
An inquiry of the politics of aesthetics

in between the sublime and relational in Olafur Eliasson's installations

THE POLITICS OF NATURE

By Synnøve Marie Vik



Master thesis in Art History

Department of Linguistic, Literary and Aesthetic Studies

UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN

2009

Norsk sammendrag

Denne oppgaven er en undersøkelse av politisk estetikk satt opp mot det sublime og det relasjonelle i Olafur Eliassons installasjoner.

Den islandskdanske kunstneren Olafur Eliasson (f.1967) er en av samtidskunstens mest ettertraktede kunstnere. Store utstillinger de senere år som *The Weather Project* (2003) på Tate Modern i London, den retrospektive utstillingen *Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson* (2007) på Museum of Modern Art i San Francisco (senere vist på MOMA i New York) og offentlige kunstprosjekter som *The New York City Waterfalls* (2008) har befestet hans posisjon som en av samtidskunstens mest sentrale aktører. Eliasson installasjoner, der han ofte anvender naturens egne materialer som vann, jord og mose eller gjenskaper naturfenomener som solen, en regnbue eller en foss, er høyst forførende og sanselige. Men ved å synliggjøre verkets underliggende konstruksjon og slik bryte illusjonen, oppfordrer Eliasson til refleksjon og gjør betrakteren oppmerksom på seg selv og sine omgivelser.

Denne oppgaven omhandler en side ved Eliassons kunst som ikke har fått den oppmerksomheten den fortjener i den eksisterende forskningslitteraturen; større analyser av hans kunst i lys av det sublime, det relasjonelle og det politiske. Mine hovedanalyser er av verkene *Beauty* (1993), *360º room for all colours* (2002) og *Multiple Grotto* (2004).

Hvordan kan en undersøkelse av forholdet mellom kunst, natur og politikk kaste lys på Olafur Eliasson's installasjoner? For å svare på dette omfattende spørsmålet foretar jeg en innledende metodisk introduksjon, der jeg diskuterer hvorvidt en sanseopplevelse i Susan Sontags ånd eller en hermeneutisk fortolkning i Hans G. Gadamers tradisjon er mest hensiktsmessig i forhold til Eliassons installasjoner. Deretter undersøker jeg hvordan Eliassons kunst kan gi en sublim opplevelse, slik filosofen Jean-François Lyotard beskriver det, før jeg videre diskuterer om vi kan se Eliassons kunst som representant for Nicholas Bourriauds relasjonelle estetikk, der verket fungerer som en katalysator for sosiale situasjoner. Disse lesningene fører frem til en diskusjon om hvordan vi kan se Eliassons kunst som uttrykk for en politisk estetikk, slik den blir lagt frem av filosofen Jacques Rancière, og videre til Rancières kritikk av det sublime og det relasjonelle som deler av den postmoderne kunstscenen.

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Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine –
Unweave a rainbow. (…)

From Larnia (1820) by John Keats.

Foreword

Several people and institutions have made the process of writing this thesis easier for me.

A travel grant from the department for Linguistic, Literary and Aesthetic studies at the University in Bergen facilitated a research trip to San Francisco in September 2007, where I had the opportunity to see Olafur Eliasson's retrospective exhibition *Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson* at the Museum Of Modern Art in San Francisco, and attend the media preview. I want to thank the staff at SFMOMA and Camilla Kragelund at Studio Olafur Eliasson.

I want to thank my supervisor Professor Siri Meyer for her commitment to my project and good and much needed advice during my writing process. Martin Grüner Larsen and Melanie Fieldseth for proofreading and other comments. Louise Braathen, Eva Rem Hansen, Camilla Haukedal, Stina Jensen, Linda Myklebust, Solfrid Otterholm, Tove Sørvåg, Julie Tessem and especially Heidi Ann Kjellsdotter Jaeger – thank you for making this a wonderful time!

My family have been asking me 'What is art?' at every family gathering since I first started studying art history. Somehow they never settled with my answers, thus encouraging me to continue my studies, always supporting my choice. Thank you.

Finally, thank you, Kristoffer, for always taking your time to engage in conversations on art, nature and politics, for always inspiring me, always challenging me and always believing in me.

1 – Introduction

Subject and motivation

Olafur Eliasson's art is most of all *open*: Open to sensual experiences, open to interpretation, and open for *you*. In fact, it is *about* you, and by way of including the possessive "your" in the titles of many of the works, his art demands an active approach to seeing and sensing. This thesis is not an attempt to survey neither Eliasson's artistic career nor all the different possible aspects of his art. I have narrowed down my interest to three aspects: the notion of the sublime, relational aesthetics and the politics of aesthetics. I have chosen to do this for several reasons. That Eliasson's art can give a sublime experience, and arrange for relations between the viewers and their surroundings has almost been taken for granted as sound theoretical approaches to Olafur Eliasson's art. However, the existing research history on Eliasson's art has to a large extent only superficially labelled his art as sublime or relational and avoided more thorough discussions. During my initial reading of texts covering these theoretical subjects, I found them to be interesting, yet strangely inadequate or unfulfilling in describing Eliasson's art. I found texts that briefly discussed the politics at work in his art, and one text in particular held my attention: curator Daniel Birnbaum entered the philosopher Jacques Rancière's politics of aesthetics into the discussion. In this paper I will discuss these theoretical aspects further.

The presence of nature and natural phenomena in Olafur Eliasson's installations is considerable and highly interesting. My thematic approach will be to investigate how nature is perceived and interpreted in Eliasson's installations. I will investigate how nature is exposed, expressed and how it may provoke sublime experiences, relations between the viewers and how the display of nature in contemporary art might be seen as part of a democratic political process, making us as viewers aware of our surroundings.

Eliasson's works are highly sensual. They awaken and stir our senses. The installations are sensational, both spectacular and as a sense-experience. However, as Eliasson at the same time displays the underlying construction of the work of art, standing in front of or inside one of his installations we experience a collapse of meaning between our expectations and our previous experience, between reality and illusion.

Eliasson's art centers fundamentally on an actively engaged spectator. As curator Madeleine Grynsztejn says, "In promoting a kind of awareness of conventions of seeing,

Eliasson's work encourages a critical attitude toward normative processes of perception while at the same time offering viewers opportunities to expand their ability to envision."[1]

Biography

Olafur Eliasson was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1967. He grew up in Copenhagen but spent large periods of his childhood on Iceland, where his parents are from. Eliasson attended the Royal Danish Art Academy in Copenhagen from 1989 to 1995. He is currently sharing his time between Copenhagen, where he lives, and Berlin, where he has a large production space for his art – Studio Eliasson. The space has been expanded and now includes a separate floor for talks, debates and seminars, in addition to work space for his employees. In October 2008 it was released that Olafur Eliasson will be Professor at Institut für Raumexperimente, a new interdisciplinary department of Universität des Kunstes in Berlin. The art academy will have its first semester in Winter 2009/2010 in a separate floor of Studio Eliasson, giving the students the opportunity to engage in and contribute to the ongoing art projects in the studio, as well as developing their own projects. [2]

The biographical fact of Olafur Eliasson's close connection to Iceland is often commented upon by critics focusing on the importance and presence of nature in his art. Eliasson uses a great variety of materials in the art production, mostly elements drawn from nature but often to a large extent combined with technical constructions relying on natural science or architectural elements. Water in all forms, from ice to mist and rain, or soil, arctic moss, wind and light are all-important materials. Nature merges with artifice in Eliasson's installations. He recontextualizes natural elements to create entirely new circumstances in order to shift the viewer's consciousness and sense of time and place. When successful, this may lead the viewer to a stronger engagement with the world and

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[1] Madelein Grynsztejn "(Y)our entanglements: Olafur Eliasson, the museum and consumer culture" in *Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson* (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: Thames and Hudson 2007). p.17.

[2] For the last 15 years Eliasson has worked in Berlin, building up Studio Olafur Eliasson. The Studio employs around 35 people, both architects, artists, art historians, carpenters and metal workers. The studio moved to a new location in a former brewery in Prenzlauer Berg in August 2008. Two of the floors in the building contain workspace for the art production and a metal workshop. There is also a separate large white cube for testing installations. A third floor contains workspace for the administrative staff, architects, engineers and remaining staff, as well as the publishing department and archive, and the fourth is for the art academy. For further reading on the significance of the material conditions in relation to Eliasson's art production, see Synnøve Vik "Eliassons institusjoner" in *Billedkunst* no.6/2008. http://www.billedkunstmag.no/Content.aspx?contentId=1483.

our everyday life. His art covers a large span also when it comes to media. From nature photography taken in Iceland, like *Jokla series* (2004), to a wide variation of site-specific installations, large-scale environments and freestanding sculpture, to projects on the verge of being architecture – latest and most notably the Serpentine Gallery Pavilion 2007 in London, in co-operation with the Norwegian architect Kjetil Thorsen. In the production process he cooperates with professionals from a variety of fields, ranging from artists, curators, natural scientists, mathematicians, engineers, city planners and architects. In the production of Eliasson's installations new technology is one of the premises. This demands highly specialized workers. The old and common conception of the artist as a genius giving life to matter is long gone and replaced with hard work and learned skills. Assessed and rejected is also the idea of the artwork as unique. Instead Eliasson's installations are both possible to reproduce, massproduce (at least in principle) and altered for different venues.

Figure 1. *Serpentine Gallery*

Figure 2. *Jokla series*

Olafur Eliasson's exhibits are often simple yet carefully thought-through displays, and easily available for the audience. With their elegant, elaborate and beautiful performance and workmanship they often function as an entrance to the art world for people all over the world, including many people that do not usually appreciate art, and would not normally step into an art museum. They do not demand any previous knowledge of contemporary art, only the willingness to participate and engage in the experience and situation facilitated by the works of art.

In recent years we have witnessed several large blockbuster-shows and artworks by Eliasson. In 2003 he represented Denmark in the 50th biennial in Venice with *The Blind Pavilion*, followed by *The Weather Project* in the Turbine hall at Tate Modern in London, where he installed a gigantic artificial sun, attracting more than 2,2 million visitors. In 2007 the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art opened the exhibit *Olafur*

Eliasson: Take Your Time, the first retrospective of Eliasson's art in the USA,[3] and in the summer of 2008 he made new landmarks in New York; *New York City Waterfalls*. These are only a few examples of the exhibitions and projects that have made him into something of an art world star, famous outside the art crowd, as well as a favourite of the critics. In 2008 he was ranked as number 50 on the periodical *ArtReview's* "2008 Power 100 List"[4] His art reside in several major worldwide collections, including SFMOMA; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Deste Foundation, Athens; and the Tate Modern, London. Among his recent exhibitions are solo shows at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; the Malmö Konsthall, Sweden; the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; and the Kunsthaus Zug, Switzerland.

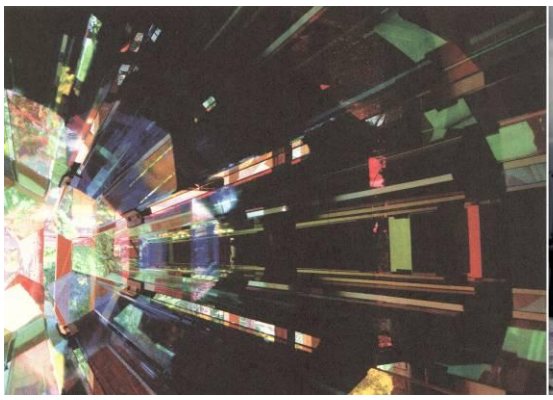

Figure 3. *The Blind Pavilion*

Figure 4. *The New York City Waterfall*

The artist's intention

Since establishing a firm position as one of the leading artists on the international contemporary art scene, Olafur Eliasson and his *oeuvre* have been subject to extensive writing relatively speaking, especially considering the fact that he has only been working as an artist since 1993. Several broad and thorough catalogues, books and monographs, numerous articles and several conversations have been published over the years. Eliasson himself is also an active writer, and has published essays on his own work, and contributed to many of his own exhibition catalogues. He has recently started his own publishing house, run from his studio in Berlin. It is uncommon, and highly interesting, that an artist actively engages in the critical debate of his work by so clearly stating in

[3] The exhibition continued to the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2008.
[4] ArtReview has published a list of the 100 most powerful people in the art world every year for the last 7 years. For the full list se for example: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3562100/2008-Power-100-List.html

writing (as well as in speech) his own thoughts and sources of inspiration.[5] There is always the question of whether to take the artist's intention into consideration or not, and with regards to Eliasson, the question is ever-present. Intentionality in a work of art is difficult to account for.[6] Even if the artist's intention is made public through interviews, books or conversations, we cannot know whether the intended meaning can be said to be true or whether the artist even has an adequate understanding of what the art signifies. We must consider the fact that the artist's intention can never fully account for the meaning of the work of art, simply because the meaning is the result of a process in and between several instances; artist and the art production, the viewer, the reception and surroundings. However, since Olafur Eliasson is highly engaged in the development of a language for understanding his art, it can be interesting to take his thoughts into account. I will therefore choose to quote Eliasson where his point of view may add something interesting to the text and contribute to and expand on our understanding of his art.

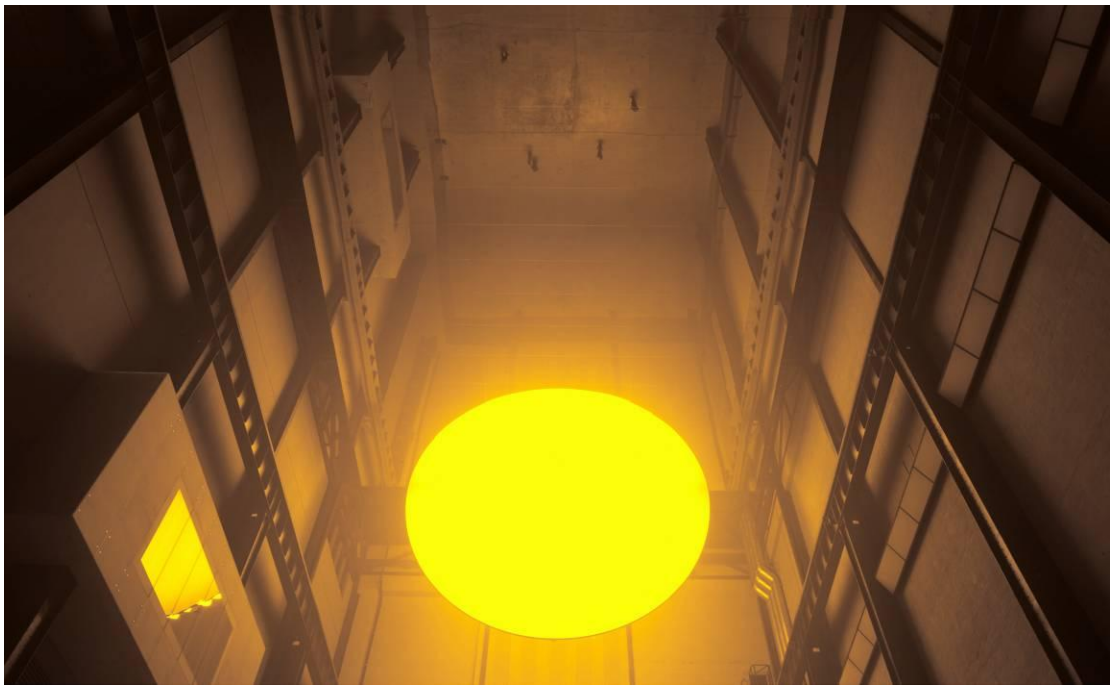

Figure 5. *The Weather Project*

[5] For a good introduction to Olafur Eliasson's intentions and thoughts on his own artistic projects, see Engberg-Pedersen, Anna and Wind Meyhoff, Karsten *At se sig selv sanse: Samtaler med Olafur Eliasson* (Copenhagen: Informations Forlag 2004.)

[6] For further reading on the artist's intention, see: Baxandall, Michael *Patterns of intention : on the historical explanation of pictures* (New Haven, Conn. : Yale University Press 1985.)

Olafur Eliasson's installation art: Context and Research history

Installation art can be difficult to define. It has not had a straightforward historical development, but has been inspired by an array of artistic practices, ranging from sculpture, architecture, painting, cinema, set design, performance art and curating.[7] In *Installation Art, a Critical History* from 2005, art critic Claire Bishop surveys the history of installation art, dividing it both thematically and theoretically into four parts, categorized by different ways of experiencing the installations.[8] She defines installation art as "a term that loosely refers to the type of art which the viewer physically enters, and which is often described as 'theatrical', 'immersive' or 'experiential'."[9] "Insisting on the viewer's first-hand presence in the work", she further asserts, "installation art has come to justify its claims to political and philosophical significance on the basis of two arguments: *activated spectatorship* and the idea of the *dispersed* or *decentred subject*."[10]

Today, installation art is almost as diverse a term as 'art'. The background for the multifaceted artistic practices that make out installation art today can be traced to the 1960s. In the essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" from 1979, Art Historian Rosalind Krauss discusses the stretched boundaries of Minimalist sculpture in the 1960s. She sees the expanding category of sculpture, where a work as Bruce Nauman's *Corridor* (1968-70)[11] can be art, to symbolize a historical break with the logical conditions of Modernism. Jean-François Lyotard first theorized *Postmodernism* in *The Post-Modern Condition* from 1979. Krauss applies the term on the Minimalist's approach to art, where each art project demanded its most suitable medium or material, and form was inferior.[12] Whereas Krauss, together with art critic Michael Fried, in the 60s was one of the most dedicated followers of the formalism proposed by art critic Clement Greenberg, she changed her view radically towards the middle of the 70s, only to become one of the harshest critics of Modernism. What she so strongly opposed was Greenberg's extreme purity of the medium, the autonomy of aesthetics and the historical continuity.

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[7] Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), p.8
[8] The four categories are: The dream scene, heightened perception, mimetic engulfment and activated spectatorship. Bishop identifies Eliasson's installations as representative of 'heigthened perception'.
[9] Ibid. p. 6.
[10]Ibid. p.128.
[11] Bruce Nauman became famous during the 60s with his physical jokes as *Self-Portrait as a Fountain,* a photograph of him spitting a stream of water.
[12] Krauss, Rosalind "Skulpturen i det utvidete felt" [Sculpture in the expanded field] in *avantgardens originalitet og andre modernistiske myter* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2002)

Greenberg's modernist project started as early as 1939 with the article *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, where he begins to develop his view on the critical potential in Modernism, aimed at Marxism. In the years to follow he develops a formalistic perspective, where the autonomy of aesthetics became central. In 1960 he surveys the evolution of Modernism in *Modernist Painting*, where he explains how he sees Modernism as carrying on in the tradition of the Kantian self criticism of the enlightenment era, demanding that we only use the methods characteristic of a certain discipline to criticize the very discipline, thus ruling out any other material or method than the ones immanent in the specific medium. For painting, this was flatness.

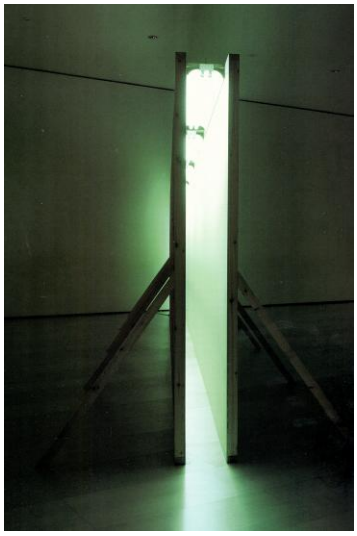

Figure 6. Bruce Nauman *Green Light Corridor*

Michael Fried a student of Greenberg developed this theory further, adding the terms *instantaneousness* and *presentness* to the discussion in his article *Art and Objecthood* from 1967.[13] Both Greenberg and Fried were skeptical to Minimalism and artists as Donald Judd, whose art Fried criticized for getting to close to theater (thus deteriorating) in its focus on the meeting between viewer and art object, and the importance of the temporal aspect of the art experience.[14]

Several critics note Eliasson's strong connection to the Light and Space movement of the 1960s.[15] Claire Bishop stresses Eliasson's art historical debt to the late 1960s precursors of the Light and Space movement, and artist Dan Graham's perceptual experiments in the 1970s. She notes how *360° room for all colours* (2002) is highly reminiscent of Bruce Nauman's *Green Light Corridor* (1970-1). She sees this return "partly from Eliasson's belief that the project of dematerialization begun during this decade is

[13] Fried, Michael: "Kunst og objektalitet", ["Art and Objecthood", 1967] in Agora, no. 2/3, 2001, p. 65.

[14] Ibid. 'Art and Objecthood' ended up having the opposite effect as Fried wanted, being one of the most precise descriptions of Minimalism at the time, and together with the works of Krauss contributing to the further development of Postmodernist theory.

[15] Grynsztejn et.al *Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson* 2007 includes a collection of essays promising to be a long-lasting contribution to the contextualizing and art historical framing of Eliasson's art. A conversation in print between Olafur Eliasson and artist James Robert Irwin concerns topics as the dematerialization of the art object and the viewer as the coproducer of the work. Klaus Biesenbach and Roxana Marcoci discuss the protocinematic aspects of Eliasson's art, drawing lines to artists as James Turrell and Robert Smithson, the New Vision experiments of El Lissitzky and László Moholy-Nagy as well as more contemporary artists. Art historian Pamela M. Lee makes an interesting inquiry into Eliasson's historical roots, focusing on Minimalism and the Light and Space movement of the 1960s and its implications for the critical reception of his art. Henry Urbach discuss those of Eliasson's projects that verge on being architecture, and those who draw on the scale and strategies of architectural design.

still urgent and necessary (…) and partly from his conviction that chronological distance permits a more nuanced rereading of this work, particularly with regard to its understanding of the viewer."[16]

Olafur Eliasson came from an artistic environment in Denmark in the 1980s that took an interest in neo-expressionistic painting and an object-oriented, market-conscious art production. Eliasson thus became a part of an international trend concerned with experimenting with visual phenomena as well as new materials.[17] His interest in the American minimalism of the 1960s should prove to be an important art historical foundation for Eliasson, not least because of their enhancing of anti-illusionism and their participation in the change of focus from object to subject in art at the time. The minimalists made the viewer aware of her physical presence in relation to the minimalist piece, by way of depleting the piece of any meaning. Robert Morris, who dematerialized the artwork and included the forces of nature with his use of dirt and damp as materials, became important to Eliasson's artistic exploration. Other sources of inspiration were Robert Irwin and James Turrell[18], modernists and frontiers in the Southern California Light and Space movement in the 1960s, a movement that were more preoccupied with the dematerialized art object than the minimalists on the east coast. Turrell was particularly interested in heightening perception of cognition: "to perceive their perceptions – making them aware of their perceptions"[19], from which we can see a direct line to Eliasson's own production. Gordon Matta-Clark did *Day's End* in 1975, an intervention in Pier 52, Gansevoort and West Streets in New York. In this piece Matta-Clark cut a large round hole in the rood of a vacant building, letting in the sunlight in the form of a giant, radiant circle. An obvious parallel, to the degree that it might seem as a true replica at first sight, is Eliasson's *Your Sun Machine* from 1997, where Eliasson cut a circular hole in the roof of an art gallery in Los Angeles, and the audience could follow the path of the sun throughout the day, manifested as a beam of light on the walls and the ceiling.[20]

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[16] Bishop, op.cit p. 76. For further reading, see Broeker, Holger (ed.) *Olafur Eliasson: Your Lighthouse; Works with Light 1991 – 2004,* a book entirely devoted to Eliasson's works with light, where for example Annelie Lütgens' essay "Twentieth-Century Light and Space art", where Lütgens contextualizes Eliasson's works by surveying an entire tradition of Light and Space art.

[17] "Survey" i *Olafur Eliasson*, Madeleine Grynsztejn, Daniel Birnbaum og Michael Speaks, Phaidon Press Limited, London 2002, s.39. This interest might have been triggered and inspired by the Italian Arte Povera. *Ibid, p. 41.*

[18] Ibid. s.45.

[19] Ibid. s.46.

[20] In *The Weather Project* and *Double Sunset* we might say that Eliasson took it even further, creating his own sun.

Figure 7. Gordon Matta Clark *Day's End*

Figure 8. *Your Sun Machine*

Whereas installation art in the 1970s through to the 90s to a larger and larger degree involved the actual room in creating what Bishop calls 'spectacular immersion',[21] as we have passed the millennium it may seem as we are seeing a sensual approach in contemporary art. Such an approach is surveyed in *Installation Art in the New Millennium: The Empire of the Senses* from 2003, where the author Nicolas de Oliveira refers to Eliasson's installation *The Things You Cannot See* (2001) as an example of installations that envelop the viewer physically as well as psychologically.[22] We might see The Venice Biennale in 2007 as an attempt to highlight this approach, at least the title, *Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind – Art in the Present Tense*, indicates a high degree of interest in the viewer's experience.

The philosophy of phenomenology[23] and its workings of consciousness, theorized by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and an important framework to the Minimalists in the 1960s, has been an important theoretical background for Olafur Eliasson ever since his student days, as phenomenology was a source of influence at the time when he attended the Royal Academy in Copenhagen. Merleau-Ponty and Husserl both stress the centrality of the body in the construction of space and time. As Merleau-Ponty said: "my body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my "comprehension"."[24]. Bishop sees Eliasson as representing a group of artists in the 1990s that turned to a new[25]

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[21] Bishop op.cit p.37.

[22] Nicolas de Oliveira et.al (ed.), "Escape" in *Installation Art in the New Millennium: The Empire of the Senses*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), p. 49-53, 72.

[23] Phenomenology is the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience. Sokolowski, Robert, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.2

[24] Merleau-Ponty *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1961) (London: Routledge (1945) 2000), p.235.

[25] Bishop notes how after the 1970s the writings of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida et al. "placed the subject in crisis, dismantling Merleau-Ponty's assertion of the primacy of perception to reveal it as one

phenomenology truer to the original writings of Merleau-Ponty than the "reductive thinking offered by Minimalism"[26], and addressing time, memory and individual history.[27]

Art historian Ina Blom has in her recent book *On the Style Site: Art, Sociality and Media Culture* from 2007 pointed out the presence of a sophisticated "phenomenology of perception" and all-encompassing "media machines" in Eliasson's works with lamps, exemplified in *TV lamp* 2006. Blom describes how Eliasson's artificial environments creates a new environment where the first-person perspective of phenomenology no longer is a self-evident starting point, but where "(reality) is rather dependent on the psyche of the individual perceiver, which is then projected back onto the world through patterns of conduct and exchange with the surroundings."[28] Interestingly, Blom argues that what distinguishes Eliasson's work from other contemporary phenomenological practices is that in his work nature and artifice exists in a seamless continuum, as she says: "this continuum *is* human reality."[29] It is worth noting that Blom briefly notes how the viewer's reflexivity of the mediation of vision in Eliasson's art is *made visible* by the *distribution* of lamps.[30] Without saying so explicitly she refers to the distribution of the sensible proposed in Rancière's politics of aesthetics, a notion I will be discussing in chapter 6.

The Mediating Factor

An important aspect to consider is how the relationship between the art, the viewer-participant and other viewers is mediated. Of particular importance in this are nature, culture and society, institutions like museums, and the public sphere. Representation is central to this relationship, and the structure of the work and the artistic effects Eliasson uses are part of a discourse on representation and perception both inside and outside of the scope of a cultural institution, including different levels of representation. The role of

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more manifestation of the humanist subject," and subject to racial, sexual and economic differences. Bishop p.77.

[26] Bishop p.76.

[27] Phenomenology opens up to several of the subjects discussed in this thesis, from the private sense experience, via the social happening, to an art experience that changes the spectator's view on her surroundings, and become political. The importance of phenomenological questions in Eliasson's art is especially evident in his practice of integrating visual phenomena as an artistic tool. Several critics and art historians have written extensively on the phenomenology at work in Olafur Eliasson's installations, some also linking phenomenology with politics. Although an interesting approach to his art I will not pursue it further in this thesis. For more reading on Eliasson and phenomenology, see for example: Birnbaum, Daniel "Heliotrope" in *Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson* 2007 and Grynsztejn, Madeleine "Survey" in *Olafur Eliasson* 2002.

[28] Ina Blom: *On the Style Site Art Sociality, and Media Culture* (Berlin: Sternberg Press 2007) p.116-122, quote from p.117. My italics.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.p.122.

the art institution as a mediator between work and viewer is important to Eliasson. In the essay "Museums are radical" in *Olafur Eliasson: The Weather Project* (2003),[31] Eliasson points to how he in the initial phase of the exhibition became aware of the underlying structure of the museum as an institution, and how important it is to the final artistic results.[32] With regard to this aspect of his art, the artistic practices of Daniel Buren and Vito Acconci are interesting points of reference. Buren has been concerned with the art institution in all of his artistic production, at first highly critical to the institution, representing an artistic practice that wanted to overturn the system by addressing the structure, later in a more nuanced form. Just how alike Buren and Eliasson are in their view on the institution is evident in an interesting conversation between the two in the periodical Artforum in 2005.[33]

Figure 9. Carsten Höller *Test Site*

Yet, as Bishop also notes, Eliasson and his contemporaries as Carsten Höller, differ from the institutional critique where the aim is to activate the spectator. Instead they are concerned with producing in the viewers a critical attitude toward their *perception* of the institution (and might we add, the rest of the world). I myself have experienced Carsten Höller's slide for *The Unilever Series* in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern[34], noticing how a slide in a museum changes my perception of the place radically. The potential lies within the subject. In Eliasson's case, he often address the viewer directly: *Your windless arrangement* (1997), *Your natural denundation inverted* (1999) and *Your intituitive surroundings versus your surrounded intuition* (2000) only being a few on many examples where the title implies the priority of the viewers individual experience.

[31] Published in connection to the exhibit *The Weather Project* at Tate Modern Oct. 16th 2003 – March 21 2004, edited by Susan May
[32] Olafur Eliasson in "Museums Are Radical" in *Olafur Eliasson The Weather Project*
[33] Olafur Eliasson and Daniel Buren "In Conversation" in *Artforum* May 2005. Vol.43, no.9, p.208.
[34] *The Unilever Series: Carsten Höller* was shown in the Turbine Hall in Tate Modern in London from the 10th October 2006 – 15th April 2007.

Eliasson's critique is not aimed at the white cube or its authority[35], but rather at "its 'natural' presentation of objects".[36] As Eliasson says it:

> I think that the museum, historical or not, much too often is exactly like *The Truman Show*. The spectator is tricked and neglected with regards to the museum's failure to carry out or enforce its responsibility by means of the way it discloses its ideology of presentation. Or to put it more straight: most institutions forget to let the spectators see themselves seeing.[37]

Bishop notes the paradox in how Eliasson makes a point of the mediation of our perception of nature today through installation art, "a medium" she says, "that insists on immediacy".[38] This is particularly evident in *The Weather Project* where, she says, "it was curious to see visitors stretched out on the floor bathing beneath Eliasson's artificial sun."[39]

Art and Science

Eliasson's installations bear the mark of being based on thorough investigation, and so follow in the tradition of scientific research. Thus it is possible to say that his art bears certain similarities with conceptual art, with its insistence on the analyzing and investigating aspects of the artistic practise. The curators of the exhibition Surroundings Surrounded from 2001, Christa Steinle and Peter Weibel say that Eliasson's interests lean toward "the factors of human perception in an age of technology and the laws of nature from the perspective of their anthropological relativity. His work addresses the question of our conception of nature and the technical aids that we use to observe, construct, and measure it." [40] They further argue:

> Romanticism wanted to rescue nature from mankind by anti-scientific means. The ecology movement wants to do this in scientific fashion. Olafur Eliasson takes up both impulses and develops a new artistic strategy by displaying nature as the testing ground and the contruct of science. Instead of addressing a pre-scientific or premeditated perception of nature, his installations deal exclusively with phenomena of nature as natural science has made them analytically accessible to us.[41]

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[35] Although interesting, issues concerning the white cube remains outside of the scope of this thesis. For further reading on the subject of the presumably neutral white cube see Brian O'Doherty's classic collection of articles originally published as a series in *Art Forum* in 1976: Brian O'Doherty, Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space (San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986)

[36] Bishop p.77.

[37] Ibid. p.77.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid. For further reading on the mediation of the art institution in the reception of Eliasson's art, see Grynsztejn, Madeleine "(Y)our Entanglements: Olafur Eliasson, the Museum, and Consumer Culture" in Grynsztejn, Madeleine (ed.) *Take your time : Olafur Eliasson* 2007.

[40] Christa Steinle, Peter Weibel in *Olafur Eliasson: Surroundings Surrounded Essays on Space and Science* (The MIT Press 2001), p.12.

[41] Ibid, p. 12-13.

Eliasson then unites in his very own way these two directions, by walking the middle way. *Olafur Eliasson: Surroundings Surrounded: Essays on Space and Science* (2001) is an anthology of essays concerning different aspects of *space* and *science*. Here Eliasson gives an interesting approach to the relationship between art and science, as he does not take nature as a starting point for research, but rather the science that explains nature to us – that is natural science. As the editors Steinle and Weibel says: "His art is a kind of meta-science, which appropriates and reflects the findings of natural science, and transforms them into art, into aesthetic experience, and into sensual experience."[42] They see this new alliance as a paradigm shift, "which introduces entirely new paths and options for twenty-first century art."[43]

What is the relationship between art, nature and politics?

Figure 10. *Your utopia*

Utopia is generally attributed to an ideal (unattainable) world, as opposed to our real world. Utopia is not only a daydream, however, but also a constructive criticism where politics might me applied in order to achieve a better life.[44] One comprehensive definition states:

> [Greek: no place], title of a book by Sir Thomas More, published in Latin in 1516. The work pictures an ideal state where all is ordered for the best for humanity as a whole and where the evils of society, such as poverty and misery, have been eliminated. The popularity of the book has given the generic name Utopia to all concepts of ideal states. The description of a utopia enables an author not only to set down criticisms of evils in the contemporary social scene but also to outline vast and revolutionary reforms without the necessity of describing how they will be affected. Thus, the influence of utopian writings has generally been inspirational rather than practical. The name utopia is applied retroactively to various ideal states described before Moore's work, most notably to that of the Republic of Plato.[45]

[42] Ibid. p.16.
[43] Ibid. p. 16.
[44] An interesting note is that utopia in daily speach often has a negative ring to it, bearing connotations to all that cannot be achieved.
[45] From The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. 2001-07.
http://www.bartleby.com/65/ut/Utopia.html . Downloaded 01.May 2009.

Olafur Eliasson has used the term utopia to describe an optimism on behalf of art's potential.[46] One of his works of art is even titled *Your Utopia* (2003). In a gallery at the Venice Biennale, Eliasson installed a white plastic drum with a red button on it that said 'PRESS'. Those who pressed the button was seconds later startled by an intense flash of light from within the drum. In the next several minutes, each time the viewer blinked, the word 'UTOPIA' was imprinted on her retina. In *Samtaler med Olafur Eliasson* he explains what utopia means to him:

> Previously the idea that Utopia was something you projected onto your surroundings dominated. I, on the other hand, think that it is something inside oneself, a kind of wisdom which occurs when you are able to say "this is a situation with which I want to engage." This introverted engagement is, for me, the new Utopia. It involves the production of our surroundings, which we undertake with a belief in the relevance of our work and actions, though always with a naturally integrated evaluation and self-criticism.[47]

According to Eliasson then, the actual production of our surroundings, here and now and by way of our active, introverted engagement, is utopia. His installations then become the means for producing active engagement.

Contemporary art has turned away from the autonomous art object and towards artistic practices that involve not only different functions but also different media and more meanings. I am concerned with issues concerning the relationship between the viewer and her surroundings, as modified by natures' intervention in culture, and how nature can function as a means for dialogic engagement in the viewer's relationship to his surroundings and the surroundings' effects on the viewer.

Eliasson's work is about the dematerialization of the art object, and the viewer as the co-producer of the artwork. He makes the perceptive subject into the art object itself. In doing so he tries to create a critical space for seeing our surroundings. Eliasson's art takes part in socio-political, anti-modernist and anti-formalist discourses. It revolves around spatial and temporal complexities in contemporary art. Perception, in Eliasson's work, is not in opposition to socio-political terms, and cognition and interpretation are produced in an active relation with the spectactor.[48] Through his art Eliasson researches how art can encourage us to frame our own experiences, and to ask ourselves: "What am I sensing and why?" Eliasson refers to a

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[46] Engberg-Pedersen and Wind Meyhoff 2004 op.cit p. 39.

[47] Original quote: "Tidligere gjaldt forestillingen om, at Utopia var noget, man projiserede ud på sine omgivelser. Jeg mener derimod, at det er noget inde i én selv; at det er en form for vished, deropstår, når man kan sige: "Denne situation ønsker jeg at engagere mig i." Dette introverte engagementet er for mig det nye Utopia. Det drejer sig om, at vi producerer vores omgivelser med en tiltro til relevansen af vores arbejde of handlinger, der naturligvis altid indeholder en integreret evaluering og selvkritik." Ibid. p. 39.

[48] In this thesis I will use the terms viewer, spectator and viewer-participant interchangeably.

process by which we actively evaluate our experience when engaging with art and the world. By creating environments with light, colour and water, he calls attention to the ways our senses shape our everyday life.

Eliasson's art differs from the artistic and political heritage of the 1960s and -70s and I will not make an attempt to label Eliasson's art as political in the traditional definition of political art. Eliasson himself has on several occasions denied that his work is in any way more political than any other random artwork that involves public spaces or the spectator in any way. Instead he makes us question how we see reality, by simulating natural phenomena as art, while at the same time revealing the technique used to recreate it. By introducing such natural phenomena into an unexpected setting, he invites us to reflect on our perception of the physical world. His artworks are less objects than experiences. With installations that include a warm breeze, thundering water fall, or the smell of arctic moss, he invokes on our senses beyond the mere visual. They call for an active viewer, starting a process of interacting with the works which makes the viewer conscious of her own cognition. Eliasson generally describes this effect "seeing yourself seeing", an idea that is key to all of his work.

Knowing this it is apparent that it is difficult to write about an experience that is not first-hand. With regard to his installations, it most often is the case that "you had to be there". His art is physical, emotionally evocative, sensational and culturally dependent. In this text my main focus of attention will be a small selection of works that I have experienced first hand, namely *Beauty* (1993), *360° room for all colours* (2002) and *Multiple Grotto* (2004), and that will be described in part 2, as well as discussed throughout the thesis. In addition to these I will refer to several other works from his large oeuvre. My descriptions, at least what goes beyond the mere constructional, are evidently subjective, and it is important to stress the fact that you as a reader may have an entirely different experience of the art experiencing it first-hand. It is however not the experience *per se* that is the main objective of my concern,[49] but the politics involved in experiencing the art.

Are Eliasson's installations best understood through sense or reflection? In part 3 I will approach Eliasson's art methodically through discussions of the 'erotics' of art proposed by Susan Sontag and the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Here, I will

[49] For an investigation on the art experience in Eliasson's art, see Lønmo, Solveig *Relasjoner En undersøkelse av kunstopplevelsen som fenomen med utgangspunkt i Olafur Eliassons installasjoner.* Master thesis in art history, NTNU, 2007. Lønmo also writes on the relational aesthetics in Olafur Eliasson's art, but without making a full account of the extended critique of Bourriaud, nor the connection between the sublime, the relational and the political in Eliasson's art.

not use theory unilaterally as a means to explain Eliasson's art. Rather, the piece *Beauty* engages in a dialogue on equal premises with the theories: it complements and completes the theories on central points and in important ways.

Eliasson's work displays as we have seen an array of options for an art historical contextualization and art theoretical interpretation. However, his recurring theme does seem to be the perceiving subject's relation to its heterogeneous environment.[50] The presentation and representation of nature is an essential aspect of this relation. Eliasson evidently escapes from any labelling. But in these critics' texts there are hints of a common resonance in a political aspect of his art.[51] Of our particular interest is two essays discussing the subjects of this thesis; the notion of the sublime, relational aesthetics and the politics of aesthetics: In *Heliotrope* curator and critic Daniel Birnbaum contextualize Eliasson's work with relational aesthetics, briefly introducing Jacques Rancière's politics of aesthetics to the theoretical discussion. In *Light Politics* scholar, cultural- and art critic Mieke Bal discusses the sublime and political in Eliasson's art. In this thesis I will pick up the ball from Birnbaum and Bal, discussing their ideas further. There has not been made a thorough attempt to discuss the politics of aesthetics, as proposed by Rancière, at work in any of Eliasson's numerous art pieces. I will make an attempt to investigate, explain and argue how the previous entrances to Eliasson's installations are incomprehensive, and how an understanding of the politics of aesthetics at work in Eliasson's art brings together Lyotard's notion of the sublime and the social aspects of relations aesthetics.

I will discuss whether the sublime and the relational make for adequate understandings of Eliasson's installations. My notion is that it is in the combination of the sublime and the relational that his art displays a politics of aesthetics. I will discuss his works mainly in relation to the writings in Jean-Francois Lyotard's *On the Sublime*[52], Nicholas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (2002)[53] and last but not least Jacques Rancière's *The Politics of Aesthetics*[54]. There is a very sharp distinction in Eliasson's art between what the art *is* and what the art *does*. It all comes down to a subtle political aspect. Eliasson tries to redefine art's political potential by renegotiating the subjects, and erasing art's

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[50] Birnbaum, Daniel "Heliotrope" in Grynsztejn et.al *Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson* 2007 p.140

[51] Lotte Juul Petersen discusses the German political theorist Hanna Arendt's notion of the political in "Det politiskes aktualitet i Olafur Eliassons kunst." in Ratcliffe, Malene (ed.) *Olafur Eliasson: Det indre af det ydre*. Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag 2008. Although an interesting approach, I will not discuss it further here.

[52] Lyotard, Jean-Francois *Om det sublime* (Danmark: Akademisk forlag, 1994).

[53] Bourriaud, Nicholas *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon–Quetigny: les presses du réel, 2002).

[54] Rancière, Jacques, *The Politics of Aesthetics, The Distribution of the Sensible*, (London: Continuum (2004) 2006).

autonomy. His art stands in a position between art and *something else*, at the same time a part of and cut loose from the viewer. In order to make an inquiry of the politics of nature in Eliasson's installations, I will start by asking: How does art create a critical space for seeing the world? What renders Eliasson's art political? How is nature represented? How may an inquiry into the relationship between art, nature and politics contribute to our understanding of Eliasson's installations? Through a discussion of Jacques Rancière's assessment of the relation between art and politics, outlining his position against the claims of relational aesthetics on the one hand and the radical heteronymous aesthetics of the sublime on the other hand, an interesting approach to Eliasson's installations appear. According to Rancière, both aesthetics, each in their own way, amount to a return to what he calls an 'ethical regime' of art in which political dissent is eliminated. Against the backdrop of Rancière's critique of both relational and sublime aesthetics, I will discuss how Mieke Bal links Eliasson's art to the notions of the sublime and baroque politics, ending up in concluding remarks.

2 – Presentation of works of art

Beauty (1993)

Fresnel lamp, water, nozzles, hose, wood, and pump.
Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, purchased with funds provided by Paul Frankel.
Figure 11.

Inside a museum space, in a dark room, a fine mist of raindrops is falling like a veil from the ceiling. There is a quiet hissing somewhere, as from a garden hose. As my eyes slowly adjust to the deep darkness surrounding me, the outlines of the room become clearer, and before me a rainbow appears. A prismatic spotlight shines obliquely through the tiny drops of water coming from a perforated hose mounted in the ceiling. A rainbow is visible, dancing in the mist, yet only visible to viewers from certain perspectives. The installation involves sensation as well as the mere visual perception. As I move around in the room, through the soft mist and the rainbow, the moisture in the air condenses on my skin, leaving a feeling dampness. The experience gives a sensation of steam or fog surrounding me. The almost ghostlike appearance of the veil and the rainbow is mesmerizing. The sound of the water streaming from the hose is almost like the light rain on a summer day. How the rainbow appears however, or if it appears, depends entirely on me and my position in the room. The work of art, where I am an integrated and wholly necessary part, is continually moving and changing. Depending on time, place and me as a spectator, the rainbow will never appear the same twice. The work holds a special relationship with my physical body. The visualization of colours is entirely a result of a physiological process happening when the light reaches the retina of my eye, creating after-images, and turning me into a co-producer. Beauty is Eliasson's first fully matured work. The allusion to the spectator-as-subject is strong. Maybe you see the rainbow, maybe you don't.

The one thing that holds me from only seeing and experiencing the work and the phenomenon as merely beautiful is the exposed construction of the installation. The hose, the spotlight, the water and the gallery room itself are openly exposed and are there for me to experience as part of the installation. I take a mental step back and end up seeing myself being in the situation. I become aware of the works' potential for a different meaning, aside from the sensational and aesthetic aspect of it that initially took my breath away. Yet even if the deliberate disclosure of the mechanics behind the artworks is central to Eliasson, the result always remains magical.

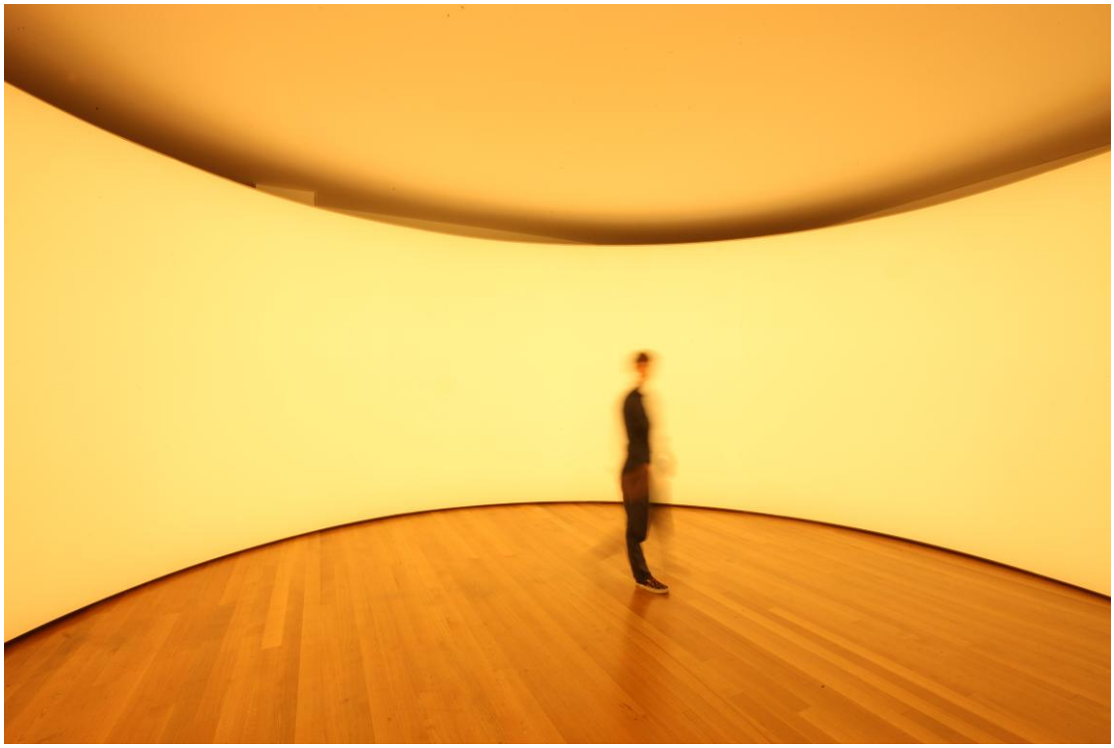
I reflect on the fact that my experience is individual. The very experience of standing inside *Beauty* shift focus away from the art object itself and toward me as a viewer and the primacy of my own perception. As I stand inside the rainbow (rather than standing in front of it as I would a painting) I ask myself: What am I seeing here? How am I seeing it? Do others see the same as I am seeing?" I as a viewer am integral to the fulfilment of the potential in Eliasson's installation, in that the completion of the work is

so inextricably and indivisibly linked with my own physiological process as I experience it.

In the beginning I am by myself, only sensing the mist, the humidity, the tiny drops of water gathering on my forehead and bare arms. My heart beats fast as I walk through the rainbow, as if I might somehow ruin it, or that somebody will see me, as if it should be forbidden. Nothing happens, so I continue to move my arms through it. After all, how often do you really have the opportunity to touch a rainbow? Then a small group of people join me in the room. I take a step back, to watch what their reaction will be, and if it will be any different to mine, now that there are people watching and experiencing it together. After the initial perceptual adjusting they stand there for a long time, just watching it, slowly walking around it, and seeing it from different, ever-changing perspectives. Then a couple of kids, around twelve years old, take each other's hands and jump right through it, giggling and laughing, making everyone smile. I recognize the sense of liberty they must be feeling. It is like running through the water from a garden hose on a hot summer's day. After that, everybody throws themselves into it, approaching the rainbow not so much with awe and hesitation, as with dare and sparkle in their eyes.

360 ° room for all colours (2002)

Installation views at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de paris, 2004. Stainless steel, projection foil, fluorescent lights, wood, and control unit. 126 x 321 x 321 in. (320 x 815.3 x 815.3 cm). Private collection, courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York. Figure 12 and 13.



As I step into the installation *360º room for all colours* I find myself immersed in a panorama of changing light representing the entire colour spectrum. The colours are moving continuously over the wall like waves, but I find it is difficult to decide where these waves start and ends. The installation has a perfectly circular structure, an open top, with one entry, and forms a spacious room situated within a dark, somewhat larger, square room. A white screen lines the interior of the circle, covering an intricate electrical system that comprises more than five hundred fluorescent lights, illuminating the room. The coloured light flowing from the installation seeps into the larger room. The ceiling of the larger room functions as a higher ceiling, reflecting the colour of the wall, but with darker hues.

The colour combinations change approximately every thirty seconds, and are regulated by a computerized control unit. The light is constantly changing ever so slightly, barely noticeable. The spectre of colour is variations of one single colour – one colour is being shown in 360 degrees and affects the entire room. As in *Beauty* the light is not produced until it hits the retina of the eye. But after a while the eye starts producing afterimages of colours, turning my physical body into a co-producer, and me into a viewer-participant. The work explores light and optic phenomena via an immersive environment that entirely depends on the viewer. The rosy sunset on a spring evening, the pale whiteness of a gloomy autum sky, the magenta, grass green and Klein blue, how do they *feel*?

Standing inside the room full of overwhelming light is reminiscent to standing in front of one of the artist Mark Rothko's glimmering abstract paintings, that seems to contain an inner light. Standing up-close to one of Rothko's paintings, or standing close to Eliasson's wall, the light and colour embraces me, and I feel overwhelmed. I feel the need to take a step back, looking at the wall from some distance, and find that it gives me an entirely different impression – standing inside *360º room for all colours* it's not possible to step too far back, I am surrounded, encircled, trapped in colours.

Several other viewers step into the room. My reaction to being there, as well as my reaction to the other people in the room, changes according to the light and the colours. I immediately realize how the colours affect my feelings. I also realize that strongly depending on whether or not I am alone inside the installation, the colours evoke conflicting feelings in me, feelings I direct towards the other viewers. It almost seems like two entirely different experiences, based on two different works of art. The warm shades of colours make me feel physically warm and psychologically aroused –

varying largely from warmth, joy and happiness to irritation and anger. The colder shades make me feel calm and balanced, less connected to my surroundings. Being inside the installation with somebody, I find myself striking up conversations with strangers, or just listening to other people's conversations in a more conscious way than elsewhere. As soon as I realize the effect of the colours in me, I start noticing how the light and the work of art affect other people too. And in turn this reflects back on me – subtly changing my own feelings and perception of my surroundings and other people.

Like an abstract painting as Rothko's, Eliasson's art can be slow to reveal itself. Time is essential in *360º room for all colours*. It takes three quarters of an hour for the scheduled colours to come back to its starting point. As a viewer-participant I have to take my time. Two elderly women walk into the room, spend two minutes inside, much too little time to notice the slowly changing colours, before they turn around and walk back out. They didn't give it enough time. They missed it.

When I'm left alone again I suddenly find the circular room full of light to be somewhat overwhelming. Staring at one fixated point on the wall I start to feel engulfed in the light. It is like staring at the sun, without the risk of going blind. It is absolutely beautiful, and somewhat terrifying. And it is a lonely experience. The experience and perception of the work thus changes radically: From being socially engaging just a minute before it becomes something aesthetically beautiful, on the verge of frightening. In this way *360º room for all colours* operates in different relations – to myself and between other people and myself.

Multiple Grotto (2004)

Installation views at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2006. Stainless-steel mirrors. 180 x 180 x 180 in. (457.2 x 457.2 x 457.2 cm). San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Accessions Committee Fund purchase. Figure 14.

Multiple Grotto is a hollow crystalline metal walk-in construction to be installed inside an exhibition space. At the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco it is situated within a large square white cube, surrounded by nature photography. Entering the museum room I only see the enclosed side of the sculpture, and it seems solid and aggressive with its sharp cones and metallic structure. I approach and enter the grotto from an opening in the side. The interior resembles the inside of a kaleidoscope, each kaleidoscopic cone replicating an actual crystalline pattern found in nature. Just as in with a regular kaleidoscope, the patterns change, each individual viewer creating her own unique visual patter. As I stand within the core of the installation, gazing through its myriad openings, I see my surrounding environment reflected kaleidoscopically in the radiating mirror panels. From the outside several large pointy cones stand out, making the installation resembling a crystalline figure, origami forms or a snowflake. From one side I can see the inside and the outside of the grotto on the same time, making visible the structure of the work and the different modes of seeing it. The title, Multiple Grotto, alludes to its' resemblance to a grotto or cave, yet it also points to the fact that (except from at a distance) it is not perceived only as one grotto, but as multiple. The cones are not closed but open at both ends. This makes it possible to stand on the outside looking through them and into the grotto, where I see the interior of the grotto in an unending kaleidoscopic gaze. Standing inside it and looking through the countless cone shaped openings I see my surroundings multiplied and reflected kaleidoscopic in shining panels, including the photographs of Icelandic nature and landscapes hanging on the walls of the museum space. Hence several different grottos appear: Depending on my bodily positions, other people standing outside or inside the grotto, or which cone I am looking through, the grotto appears different at every new gaze. Time, space and movement are activated in me as the viewer and leads to a lack of orientation. Seen from the outside the work seems massive and present, completely dominating the museum room, and with its odd shape and curious look it immediately demands my presence and attention. From the inside it dissolves, and I see my surroundings reduced to thousands and thousands of small particles. The kaleidoscopic colour-spectrums created as I am standing inside are beautiful and mesmerizing. The mirror-like surfaces of the metal plates mirror each other and myself, resulting in a veritable explosion of colour and new surfaces, resembling crystalline fragments. The contrast between the raw materiality of the work and the fragile insubstantiality of its effect is no less than intriguing.

Whenever one person is standing inside and another is standing outside, an interesting thing occurs. To the outside observer looking through the cones it is like peeking in on another person. I see her looking at her surroundings with multiple viewpoints, not fixing her eye. Standing on the outside I have one singular viewpoint, although I do have the possibility to choose which cone to look through, whether it should be one high up or closer to the ground, hence creating wholly different viewpoints. Standing inside is quite a different thing, the person on the outside only shows as a fixed eye. Watching an eye watching me in such a way is startling, and as the eye (or eyes if several people are involved) is discovered I may not feel so at ease with my surroundings. They are looking back at me. I become acutely aware that they are in fact my surroundings, constantly changing, and that I am likewise changing my perspective and perception of them, through time and physical movement. By use of mirrors the viewer's perception of both art object and self are displaced. The interior resembles the inside of a kaleidoscope. The kaleidoscopic elements bring the outside in, merging nature with culture, creating apparently boundless fragments of shapes and forms, reminiscent of snowflakes. The work challenges the traditionally static form of an artwork as new forms and reflections appear at every movement, inverting the viewer's passive visual absorption of information. Eliasson's photographic work has followed his sculptural and installation projects. He works in series, capturing different aspects of the primordial landscape and spectacular weather at Iceland. *The inner cave series* (1998) consists of thirty-six prints that survey the openings of various caves. *Multiple Grotto* literally reflects nature's own caves that represent transitional places, where the hidden inner of the earth meets the visible surface.

3– Sense or reflection? Confronting interpretation

When experiencing a piece like Olafur Eliasson's *Beauty*, the work immediately appeals to our senses; we feel the dew on our skin, hear the hissing from the sprinkling water, smell the moisture of the mist, see the rainbow appearing before our eyes. The experience is mesmerizing, and fulfilling in itself. We could leave the room at this point, content with our art experience, emphasizing the *experience*. This approach goes hand in hand with the American writer Susan Sontag's (1933-2004) term *erotics of art*. The opposite position would be to stay, unsatisfied with the mere experience, persistently trying to understand what the piece and our experience of it might *mean*. This approach, using cognitive interpretation, is called hermeneutics, and is best known through the philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002). Hermeneutics (from Greek, *hermeneúein*) means the art of interpretation or theory of interpretation, and is the knowledge of understanding. Hermeneutics has three meanings: 1) to express, say. 2) to explain, lay out. 3) to translate, interpret.[55]

In experiencing Olafur Eliasson's art, must we necessarily choose between sensing and a cognitive aspect leading to interpretation of the work? Is it possible to have the best possible experience *and* understanding of the work by taking up an aesthetic position in between Sontag's' erotics and Gadamer's hermeneutics? This methodical approach will be useful as a foundation for the further discussions in my thesis. It is interesting in terms of the actual art of Eliasson, an art that is both striking aesthetically *and* that slowly exposes several layers of interpretation. It is also highly interesting in relation to my three main theoretical approaches to his art; the aesthetics of the sublime, relational aesthetics and the politics of aesthetics. As I see it, Eliasson tries to show that a strong aesthetics and a public engagement can be united in his minimalistic, non-representative approach. I will argue that interpretation *may* have the effect that it leads us *into* the work, as opposed to *away* from it. In fact, Olafur Eliasson's art will show us that what we need is a moderation of the position for or against interpretation.

[55] Lothe et.al *Litteraturvitenskapelig leksikon* Oslo: Kunnskapsforlaget 1999. p. 96-98.

I will first make an account for the main arguments against hermeneutics made by Sontag in her text "Against Interpretation",[56] and explain what she means by the expression "the revenge of the intellect upon art", and thereafter move on to some of the most important features of hermeneutics as they are proposed in the text "The Elevation of the Historicality of Understanding to the Status of Hermeneutical Principle" from *Truth and Method*[57] by Gadamer. Further I will apply their theories in a brief and tentative analysis of the work *Beauty* by Olafur Eliasson. The work may present a kind of mediation between Sontag and Gadamer, thus creating a more adequate attitude in relation to Eliasson's art, an attitude that may contribute to a heightened understanding *and* a heightened experience of the works of art. In my discussion I will treat the terms art and literature as analogues.

Sontag and the erotics of art

"In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art."[58] With these words Sontag concludes her essay "Against Interpretation" from 1963. The essay is a fierce confrontation with the reigning hermeneutical practice in the literary sciences, and the intellectualizing that characterized art. Sontag puts forth a manifest in defence of art's aesthetic aspects as well as the art experience.

What does Sontag mean when she writes that interpretation is "interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art"? Sontag defines interpretation as "(…) a conscious act of the mind which illustrates a certain code, certain "rules" of interpretation. Directed to art, interpretation means plucking a set of elements (…) from the whole work."[59] Sontag argues that contemporary interpretation is aggressive and lacks respect for the work of art.[60] Where the interpretation of previous times was satisfied by raising "another meaning on top of the literal one"[61] the modern tradition wants to "excavate, and as it excavates, destroys; it digs 'behind' the text, to find a sub-text which is the true one."[62] The interpretation wants to "assimilate Art into Thought, or (worse yet) Art into

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[56] Sontag, Susan: "Against Interpretation" (1963), from *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1966), downloaded from http://idst.vt.edu/modernworld/d/sontag on 05.05.2009.
[57] Gadamer, Hans-Georg: *Thruth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1988 [1960]).
[58] Sontag (1963).
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

Culture"[63] at the expense of the sense-experience of art. Sontag argues against interpretation in general, that you should find a meaning in a work of art, and that this meaning has to be *dug out*. She argues instead that there is no immediate meaning. Interpretation makes us *translate* a work of art into something other than what it is. Symptomatic for this way of thinking is a sharp division between *form* and *content*, where content is more important than form. Sontag says that "(…) it is still assumed that a work of art is its content. Or, as it's usually put today, that a work of art by definition says something."[64] The reason for this is that interpretation has become the way we understand things: "(…) it is the habit of approaching works of art in order to interpret them that sustains the fancy that there really is such a thing as the content of a work of art."[65] Form, Sontag argues, is more important than content.

Sontag is critical towards how hermeneutics works as a method. Through interpretation we gather knowledge of, and control, the world. "By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art."[66] Art is broken down into smaller fragments, functioning as man's vehicle. "In a culture whose already classical dilemma is the hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of energy and sensual capability, interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art."[67] By that she means that interpretation makes art bendable and understandable, art is reduced to articles of use. Sontag's attack on hermeneutics is a defence of the strangeness and the *unheimlich* of art. By interpreting the alarming aspect of art we become blind for art itself. In a situation of interpretation art's intellectual aspect is at the expense of the sensible aspect. "Thereby interpretation is always at risk of reducing art into communication, whereas art first and foremost is form, dynamics, sensibility."[68] Sontag points to how artists themselves try to escape interpretation.[69] How is it then, according to her, possible to break with this reigning regime of interpretation? Sontag calls for art that is so immediate, with such dynamics and clear address, "that the work can be … just what it is"[70], instead of pretending to be something else.

Sontag wants more attention to form in art criticism and among art commentators, and she sees a descriptive language of form as the solution. At the same

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[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Atle Kittang in "For eller imot tolking" in *Sju artiklar om litteraturvitskap*, (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2001), p.45.
[69] Sontag (1963).
[70] Ibid.

time she wants a criticism that gives "a really accurate, sharp, loving description of the appearance of a work of art."[71] "Our task is to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all."[72] She ends by calling for an erotics of art, where the senses' immediate receptivity marks the experience of the art, a mode of experiencing that makes art "more, rather than less, real to us. The function of criticism should be to show how it *is what it is*, even that it *is* what it is, rather than to show *what it means*."[73]

Critics have claimed that there is little news in Sontag's critique of interpretation, the same criticism came earlier from the formalists.[74] What makes Sontag different is the fundamental polemic drive of her thinking, and perhaps her link to a contemporary scene of aesthetics that is perhaps not too far from our own?

Gadamer's hermeneutics

What are the hermeneutics towards which Sontag is so sceptical? I will answer that question starting with German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's (1900-2002) understanding of the hermeneutical circle.[75] Gadamer's book *Wahrheit und Methode* from 1960 was an attempt to approach the human nature of knowledge. Where the philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was concerned with ontological questions in his fundamental ontological hermeneutics, Gadamer's hermeneutics poses philosophical questions by looking at what makes understanding possible, and what we do when we interpret. Gadamer's redefined circle of hermeneutics addresses the ontological question of being.[76]

For him, what characterizes Man is that he has a conscience and that his conscience is directed at something. Man is in the world and in time and is therefore directed towards the world to understand it, which is a fundamental human trait. We revise our understanding of the future by turning back to the past. That the understanding is tied to time in this way makes understanding historic, something Gadamer labels the thesis of the historicity of understanding.[77] In the same way language is directed towards something, and will always have content. Hermeneutics is to translate

[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid. Italics in original.
[74] Kittang.op.cit.p.45.
[75] Hermeneutics has a long tradition, however, it was the german hermeneutic Friedrich Schleiermacher that came up with the idea of the hermeneutical circle, and it was further evolved by later theoretics. Skorgen, Torgeir, *lecture* LITTEHF, University of Bergen 05.03.07.
[76] Gadamer builds his hermeneutics on the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

an inner thought to an outer manifestation of language. The thesis of the universality of understanding is "Being that can be understood, is language."[78] Gadamer finds all fundamental understanding to be language. "Mennesket er innrettet på å finne et språk for sine erfaringer, og at våre erfaringer er innrettet mot språkliggjøring og meddelelse."[79] Man is constituted this way to understand it's own existence: "Først i og ved språket går verden opp for oss."[80]

Gadamer thinks that we relate to our surrounding world constantly; that we are in an engaged relationship to our surroundings. The starting point for understanding is that there is a connection between work and viewer, we experience the historic work as present and there is a fusion of horizons that are the fundament for understanding.[81] The hermeneutical circle is a principle that explains the relationship between work of art and viewer, where the viewer breaks down the work into smaller fragments to understand the entity/wholeness. The understanding of the world has a "prestructure". In the encounter with a work of art we bring a general or specific preapprehension or prejudice that can be right or wrong. Gadamer explains briefly the hermeneutical circle, as Heidegger used it, like this:

> A person who is trying to understand a text is always performing an act of projecting. He projects before himself a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the latter emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. The working out of this fore-project, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there.[82]

Gadamer enhances the meaning of what Heidegger calls a draft, and argues that all understanding is built on preunderstanding or prejudice, *Vorurteil*, that can be judged both negatively and positively.[83] This means that we approach the work with a preapprehention of the meaning or content of the work. Understanding something involves or implies that the *something* is *about* something or other. A hermeneutically trained conciousness must be receptive of what is *different* with the text[84] right from the beginning. Interpretation then leads to change. Understanding of the work becomes an unending process, where perpetual cognition modifies your point of departure. For Gadamer, the hermeneutical circle is not really a circle, to the degree that it shows a

[78] Lægreid, Sissel and Skorgen, Torgeir: "Hans-Georg Gadamer Fordommens produktive mening og forståelsens universalitet", i *Hermeneutikk – en innføring*, (Oslo: Spartacus, 2006), p.220.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Skorgen, *op.cit.*
[82] Gadamer *op.cit.* p.236.
[83] Ibid. p.240.
[84] Ibid.p.238.

continual revision and interaction between prejudice and cognition. Gadamer claims that the question of epistemology has to be put in a fundamentally new way. He asserts that understanding is something we *are*. He rephrases the task and nature of hermeneutics.

"(…) the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being."[85] This means that Gadamer's point of departure is not the epistemological question of the conditions of understanding, but rather the ontological question of the nature of understanding as a way for us to relate to the world, and to our situation in the world.[86] Hermeneutics, as Gadamer sees it, becomes an endless attempt to understand understanding.

Beauty between aesthetics and hermeneutics

In his art, Olafur Eliasson deals with fundamental issues concerning the relationship between the work of art and the viewer. He turns the perceptive subject into the art object and the centre of attention. *Beauty*, where the viewer is an integral and necessary part of the work, is in constant motion and change. Depending on time, place and the viewer the rainbow will never appear the same twice. Thereby the work holds a special relation to the physical body of the viewer. The mist leaves moisture on the viewer, further enhancing the physical relationship. The viewer also holds a fundamental consequence of the fulfilment of the work, in the sense that the rainbow does not exist until the light reaches the eye of the beholder.[87] Without the beholder, no art. Even though the structure of the work; the perforated hose, the water and the spotlight, is laid bare, and both motif; a rainbow, and title; *Beauty* is a cliché, the viewer can rejoice/enjoy in an immediate experience.

Beauty invites immediately to a sensual experience, and further to a light-formalistic description in the spirit of Sontag. And we could let that suffice. However, as previously noted, Eliasson is concerned with indicating to the viewer how a phenomenon appears, by making visible the mere technical construction of a work – in this case the hose. Gadamer's hermeneutical prejudice therefore encounters several challenges in Eliasson's art. In front of his art we experience a loss of meaning between the expectations and experiences we take with us in the encounter with the work, and the

[85] Ibid. p.245.
[86] Lægreid og Skorgen, *op.cit.* p.241.
[87] That is not to say that the refraction of light is observer dependent, it is, however, only a visual phenomenon, and thus only comes into existence upon visual perception.

reality as it appears to us when we become aware of the construction of the structure of the work, and the primary illusion of the sense experience is broken. The viewer ends up reflecting on her own process of perception. The work makes visible the underlying construction of the experience itself, by so evidently displaying the means, thus making the viewer conscious of her role, and giving her the opportunity to reflect on the experience as a whole and how it affects her. Coincidentally she becomes aware of the disproportion of her preapprehension/prejudice and how the work actually is. The work plays with illusions, expectations and experience. In this way the viewer and the work engages in a circle of hermeneutics.

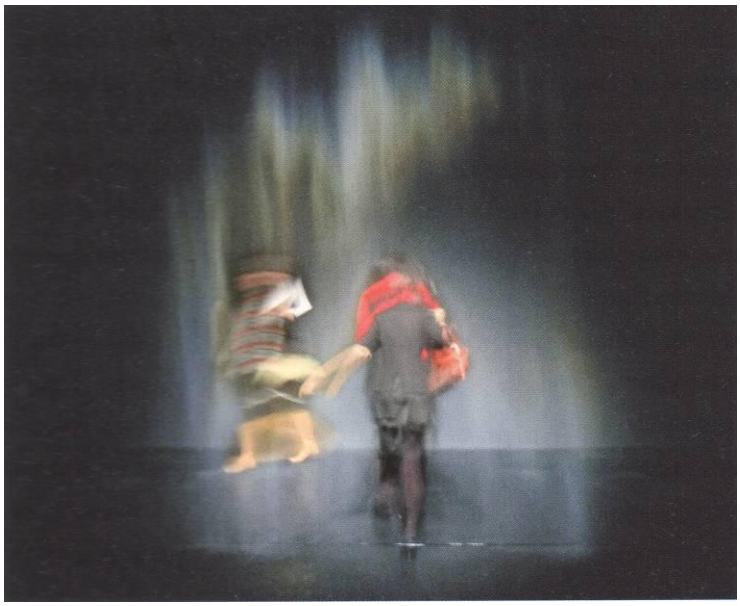

Figure 15. *Beauty*

Beauty exposes itself for us *as it is*, it shows *how it is what it is* and *that it is what it is*, as Sontag writes, but at the same time it opens up to an interpretation of *what it means*, in the elongation of Gadamer. In a hermeneutical reading/interpretation the viewer transmits the meaning of the work to a wider range/extent. Art does not interest us first and foremost as documentation, but by saying something universal about us as humans here and now. An understanding of the work is, in the elongation of Gadamer, to find the questions the work might be imagined to answer. This way a piece like *Beauty* puts itself both in the tradition of hermeneutics *and* anti-hermeneutics.

Eliasson's art modifies the two positions regarding the problems of interpretation. When I say that a work like *Beauty* opposes Sontag's polemical eroticism, it is as a form of moderation; we want to find what can be useful from hermeneutics. In light of the work of art, we can defend interpretation, but we also need to agree with Sontag in her critique of the reading of a message into the work. It is evident that

interpretation can lead to a loss of the art's sensibility.[88] However, it is also clear that there is a big problem with Sontag's argumentation: What seems to be missing in her critique is the cognitive aspect of literature, that there *is* meaning. Sontag sees art as a dynamic, sensible *form*. However, without perception there is no rainbow, hence neither a meaning. The perception engages the viewer in a process of cognition and reflection that uncover the very form. And so not even Sontag can manage without a language for description. On the other hand; to grasp the meaning of *Beauty* we need to describe our perceptual experience. We need to rehabilitate the cognitive thinking, without going back to a traditional hermeneutics. We have to see literature as literature, and not as an expression of something else. Literary texts make interpretation problematic, to the degree that they are subject to self-interpretation; a process of interpretation within the text. This is a feature of literature, since literature is language, and therefore literature as literature is maintained. Literature expresses itself through language and is not clear and unambiguous. This throws the reader into reflection, exemplified in good literature, or in Eliasson's art. And although our interpretation has to correlate to the self-interpretation of the text, we do not get an answer regarding the meaning of the work. *Beauty* conveys the alternative way of thinking about art that makes us capable of *interpreting ourselves* differently. The French philosopher and writer Paul Ricoeur expands on the subject when arguing that an interpretation fulfils itself only when becoming a means to the interpretive subjects' self-interpretation, hence making the subject understanding herself either better, differently or simply just beginning to understand herself. Ricoeur enhances however, that the interpretive subject need to dare to expose herself to the disturbing interpretation going on within the literary works.[89]

Confronted with a work like *Beauty* the viewer sees the work of art for what it is, by way of an interest in the formal aspects of this specific work. She dares to expose herself to the self-interpretation of the work by encountering it openly, directly and sensually, and read the work from what she sees, including the underlying construction that unveils the work's deeper dimensions of space and time. Thereafter the viewer can transmit the interpretation of the work to an interpretation of herself and her situation as a viewer, in her surroundings in a gallery, and as a viewer in the world, her being in the world and her being in time.

The most remarkable thing about Sontag's position is that she establishes such a sharp division between form and content. A description or interpretation will always be

[88] Kittang makes a similar point in "For eller imot fortolking" (2001).
[89] Ibid.p.53.

subjective. But Sontag is wrong in claiming that an interpretation leads our attention away from what is essential in art, and conveys to a poorer experience of the totality. Description and interpretation as it acts out in Gadamer's hermeneutical circle can give a deeper experience of a work. It can realize the work for the viewer. It is necessary to occupy an aesthetic position between the erotic and the hermeneutic, relating to *both* through our senses and our thought experience to be led *into* a work and have a best possible experience of and understanding of the work. In the case of Eliasson's art it may get us closer to a complete and utter art experience. In the words of Eliasson:

> (…) our ability to see ourselves seeing or to see ourselves in the third person, or actually step out of ourselves and see the whole set up with the artefact, the subject and the object – that particular quality also gives us the ability to criticise ourselves… [and gives] the subject a critical position, or the ability to criticise one's own position in this perspective.[90]

[90] Grynsztejn, et al. *op.cit* p.10.

4 – Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime

> there was this little girl standing in the stream of water, utterly entranced, with everyone watching her. The light reflected off of her face and she was completely entranced in the experience. It seemed like a focal point for the entire exhibit. Then someone tried to take a picture, to extend the moment, and was stopped, and the magic shattered …[91]

The sublime is generally referred to as a term that gained philosophical and aesthetic importance during the Enlightenment era, and implies that which exceeds rational understanding because of extraordinary qualities or a scale beyond human comprehension. The sublime is in every matter a private experience. Several critics have addressed the experience of the sublime in Olafur Eliasson's art, drawing on the traditions of the Romantic landscape painters to describe the sublime. By manipulating light and colour to create natural phenomena such as rain, mist, fog, ice, wind and sunshine inside art institutions, Eliasson stages empowering interactions between the viewer and the environment. The experiences may be said to verge on the sublime.

Eliasson attended the Royal Danish Art Academy in Copenhagen from 1989 to 1995. In 1985 the Academy published a small collection of texts titled *On The Sublime*[92], edited by Stig Brøgger, Else Marie Bukdahl and Hein Heinsen (Brøgger et al.). The editors were all professors at the Royal Art Academy. The publication included, in addition to a foreword on the sublime and the postmodern condition by the editors, Danish translations of Barnett Newman's *The Sublime is Now*[93] and Jean-François Lyotard's *The Sublime and the Avantgarde,*[94] and finally *En samtale med Jean-François Lyotard* by Bernhard Blisténe.[95] The publication, and the fact that the texts were put on the curriculum at the Academy, tells us that notions of the sublime and the postmodern held a strong position at the Academy in Copenhagen during the mid and late eighties. And it was into this art environment Eliasson was enrolled in 1989.[96]

Knowing this about the Academy, and considering that little research has been conducted on the topic in relation to Olafur Eliasson's art, it would be interesting to

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[91] On *Beauty* (1993) posted by visitor Andrew Calkins on Dec 28, 2007 at the SFMOMA webpage.
[92] Original title: *Omkring det Sublime*.
[93] First published in 1948.
[94] First published in 1984.
[95] Translated: *A conversation with Jean-François Lyotard*. The conversation was held and published in 1985.
[96] It is also possible that the sublime, via Immanuel Kant, may have lead Eliasson to Phenomenology, his earliest personal source of theoretical framework and inspiration. Although interesting and relevant to the understanding of Eliasson's art, I will not pursue this here. Lyotard's aesthetics of the sublime may further lead to interesting implications for the political aspects of Eliasson's art, which I will discuss in part 6.

investigate it in further detail. How does Eliasson's art transmit or express a sensation of the sublime? How and why could the sublime be relevant to our experience of the art of Olafur Eliasson? And might his art be able to contribute something to notions of the sublime?

Without making a full account of the theory of the sublime and its history, in this chapter I will discuss parts of the key notions of the sublime that I find relevant to Eliasson's art. I will discuss how *Beauty* (1993), *360° room for all colours* (2002) and *Multiple Grotto* (2004) may be described as sublime or invoking a sublime experience, and I will also introduce other key works in order to elaborate on the presence of the sublime in Eliasson's art.

Ancestors of the sublime

In *The Sublime and the Avantgarde* Jean-François Lyotard refers to and discusses the text *Du Sublime (Greek: Perì hypsous)* published by Nicholas Boileau-Despéaux in 1674.[97] The treatise is attributed to a certain Longinus.[98] Longinus practices a new kind of literary criticism, where he differentiates between good and bad writing through examples, promoting an "elevation of style" as well as an essence of "simplicity". [99] What is important for us is that the sublime to Longinus is a quality of the object itself, in this case literature. However, Longinus sets out five sources of sublimity, some which relate to the writer/subject: "great thoughts, strong emotions, certain figures of thought and speech, noble diction, and dignified word arrangement. The effects of the sublime would be: loss of rationality, an alienation leading to identification with the creative process of the artist and a deep emotion mixed with pleasure and exaltation".[100] Longinus opens up dimensions in language that cannot be anticipated or put into a common poetics. Rather, it stirs emotions. This can be seen in the following centuries, as a gradual turn from the object to the subject. Longinus moves from the formal description of the matter to something irrational or without form. In the 18th century, nature was seen as sublime for

[97] Boileau-Despéaux also published the more famous *Ars poétique* the same year.
[98] The true identity of Longinus is not known, but he is thought to be a previously unknown rhetorician most probably from the first century A.D.
[99] The treatise focuses on the effects of good writing. Together with Aristotle's *Poetics* (approx. 335 B.C.) it is considered to be one of the most important ancient treatises on aesthetics. In *Du Sublime*, Longinus breaks with the rhetorical tradition of Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian, who valued a more pedagogical mode of speaking, in exchange for, as Lyotard states, an almost "sublime" rhetoric, where great effort is made to write "above the ordinary".
[100] Leitch, Vincent B. (ed.) *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* (New York: Norton. 2001) p. 135-154.

the thrill of its fierceness and intensity. Transferred to art, this was contrasted with beauty. The contrast then distinguishes between the formless sublime tied to the subject, and the beauty in form, tied to the object.

The Sublime and the Avantgarde – Utopia

After Boileau-Despéaux's publication of Longinus' treatise, Longinus' thoughts on the sublime became very well known, contributing to the formation of the aesthetics of the sublime at the time, including the separation and definition of the term *beauty*. Beauty ties aesthetic qualities to an object that exists independently of the viewer; its aesthetics are tied to specific rules. This aesthetics of rules was dominant up until the 18th century. The sublime, instead of focusing on beauty, is interested in the formless, what transgresses form and object and stirs strong emotions in the viewer. What we see is a turn of interest from the object to the subject.

Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) represents a new theory of cognition that more than anything at the time triggered the interest in the sublime in the 18th and 19th century, and became a turning point with regards to the classical aesthetics of its time. Burke sees the sense of the sublime as inherent to the object, not to the sensation itself. He separates the psychological factors behind "the beautiful" and "the sublime" into "pleasure" and "pain". These two psychological factors function as a fundament for his further distinction between "beauty" and "sublime". He is, however, also concerned with describing the aspects of our world, real as well as artificial, which is inhabited by the viewer and gives him or her a sensation of the "beautiful" or "sublime".[101] Burke sees all phenomena in art and real life that give an experience of pain, anxiety *and* pleasure, as sources of the sublime. On the other hand, all phenomena that give an experience of tenderness or affection are sources of beauty. Neither, however, is under the control of "the reasoning faculty", hence theory and emotion are separated.[102] Simply put, when you are confronted with feelings of fear and anxiety, and have reached the very limit of these feelings, you realise, in the moment when excitement peaks, that life and hope are *not* lost, and so your emotions turn to intense pleasure. The real life phenomena that are capable of giving such an experience of the sublime are limitless, blurry, infinite, vast,

[101] Ibid. p. 7.
[102] Ibid. p. 8.

magnificent or in any way powerful.[103] At Burke's time, the phenomena that most commonly gave such experiences and feelings were attributed to nature. Light, water and fog – many of the materials Eliasson works with make it natural to draw a line to the sensibility, spirituality and emotionality of the Romantic era, as exemplified by *Ruins of the Oybin Monastery* (after 1810) by Caspar David Friedrich, or *Study of Sky* (c. 1816-19) by J.M.W Turner. Like them, Eliasson is concerned with recreating the fleeting phenomena of nature. In Eliasson's *Beauty* it is exactly a powerful and magnificent real-life natural phenomenon that is on display; a rainbow. We see the same thing in Andreas Gorsky's photograph "Niagara Falls" (1989), a representative of the New Romantics. Eliasson's *Double Sunset* (1999) can be placed in this tradition. But where the Romantics wanted to transmit a heightened experience through perfect representation, Eliasson chooses to expose the underlying construction of the representation.[104]

Figure 16. JMW Turner *Study of Sky*

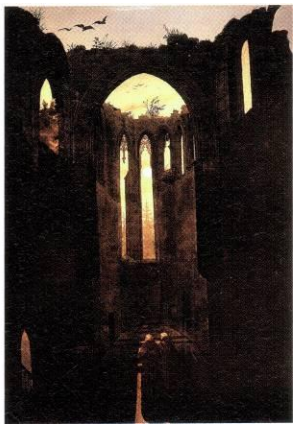

Figure 17.
Caspar David Friedrich *Ruins of the Oybin Monastery*

In *Kritik der Urteilskraft* from 1790, Kant submitted his understanding of the sublime. He mentions Burke, dismissing his philosophy of sensuality. However, Burke and Kant agree that neither beauty nor sublimity has anything to do with the cognition of terms. Burke and Kant further agree that objects may give an experience of the sublime if they present the concept of infinity, and that this experience contains both pain and

[103] *Ibid.* p. 9-10. Burke distinguishes between literature and painting, where literature seems more adequate to presenting the unpresentable. At the time, painting was commonly seen as incapable of visualising the phenomena that create a sublime experience, simply because these experiences have no form, whereas painting has. Literature, on the other hand, is able to make us visualise the concepts. The 18th century author and philosopher Denis Diderot thought Burke's analysis of the sublime to be a much needed alternative to the longing for meaning or content in art that dominated the classical aesthetics of the time. However, Diderot disagreed with Burke's distinction between visual art and literature, and was convinced that visual art had a stronger effect than literature. Although ahead of his time, Diderot was incapable of giving existing contemporary examples of what he had in mind, and realised that an art freed from representation could indeed inhabit the possibility of giving an experience of the sublime.
[104] Susan May i "Meteorologica" i *Olafur Eliasson. The Weather Project.* (2003). p. 18.

pleasure. But where Burke sees self-affirmation as a fundamental drive for the experience of pain, Kant sees the pain as a result of a feeling of powerlessness or impotence. On the other hand, Kant sees pleasure as the result of realising that *reason* overruns both our sensibility and nature itself. Only the boisterous violence of the sensual experience can result in an experience of exaltation, and this sensation has no sensible form.[105] Kant understands that to be able to transmit an experience of the sublime, art has to be abstract, the negative representation of infinity.

In *The Sublime and the Postmodern Condition* Brøgger et al. asserts that the new interest in the aesthetics of the sublime comes as a reaction to the ideas of the philosophers of the Enlightenment era. This may seem a quite natural reaction, since the representatives of the aesthetics of the sublime were interested in parts of reality and art that lingered on the absolute outskirts of the field of interest of Enlightenment philosophers. In other words: they were interested in what cannot be shown or presented, what was unlimited, unreachable and unpresentable. This idea of presenting the unpresentable is confirmed by a new understanding of the difference between philosophy (literature) and art (painting).[106] Literature and painting do not have a common task but are significant on their own terms; they have their own points of orientation and their own interpretation of the world.[107] In the 17th and 18th centuries, there was commonly believed to exist an irrevocable gap between Man and Nature and between subject and object. In the Enlightenment era, the task was to transgress this gap and reconcile Nature and Man. This is where aesthetics, or reflection on the notion of beauty, becomes an important feature of modernist thought and remains so until postmodernism in the 1960s and 1970s.

Boileau-Despreaux determined that the sublime cannot be learned and is not bound to rules of poetics. It is up to the reader to know. This breaks with the writing of Longinus but coincides with Père Bouheur who declares that beauty demands a "je ne sais quoi", or something inexplicable, hidden, a God-given gift only sensible to a chosen person, someone particularly inclined. Lyotard sees this poetic-philosophical discussion as a being or not being of art. He asks if there are there rules to be followed. If not, as he claims would be the case for the sublime, what follows would be perceived as chaos by the 'taste' of the 'enlightened' people.[108]

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[105] Ibid. p. 12
[106] Brøgger, Stig, Bukdahl, Else Marie and Heinsen, Hein *Omkring Det Sublime* (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademi København, 1985) p. 6.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid. p. 32.

Lyotard refers to Denis Diderot's remarks on this change. With the turn to the artist as genius, a recipient of inspiration, the audience is no longer compelled to abide by the rules and criteria of common joy but are individually capable of experiencing unforeseen emotions such as admiration, shock or indifference. No longer is it a question of pleasing the audience by letting them participate in a reproduction through recollection or adoration but of surprising the viewer, Lyotard states, even to the point of shock.[109] He agrees with Boileau that the sublime is not visible or provable, but something quite wonderful that shakes you and stirs your emotions.[110] Even imperfection such as ugliness plays a part in this condition of shock,[111] according to Lyotard.[112] He refers to such a state, what Martin Heidegger called 'ein Ereignis', as simple yet only attainable if we let go of thought, as thought always and insistently tries to grasp, reflect and understand what is experienced.[113]

Through this historical survey, Lyotard wanted to show how Burke, more than Kant and even before Romanticism, opened a world of possibilities for the experience of art. It was now up to the modernist avant-garde to make its way through it.[114]

The term *avant-garde* (from the French, meaning advance guard or vanguard, originally a military term) is used to describe a radical, original artistic and intellectual activity[115] and is generally attributed to modernism as opposed to postmodernism.[116], which especially appreciated originality, the first artistic avant-garde being the artists who organised and exhibited at the Salon des Refusés in Paris in 1863, thereby challenging the strict and conservative conventions of good art.[117] It is tied to the linear understanding of time and also presupposes an understanding of time. Lyotard breaks with the understanding of the avant-garde, no longer subscribing to the belief in a utopia. What happens then when the avant-garde has lost its hope of winning new territory?

Lyotard finds that because of the aesthetics of the sublime, it becomes art's task to prove that the indefinable exists. Representation was always the intent of the paintings of

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[109] Ibid. p. 33.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Lyotard further refers to the artist Paul Klee with respect to art's refusal to represent the world, which instead longs to create a new world, 'ein Zwischenwelt.' Though an interesting connection, I will not discuss it further here.
[113] Ibid. p. 23.
[114] Ibid. p. 39. Lyotard does however note that it is not likely that Manet, Cèzanne, Braque or Picasso ever *read* Kant or Burke. Any 'influence' is rather due to the irrevocable diversions of the path of art.
[115] It can be defined as an intelligentsia that develops new or experimental concepts, especially in the arts. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/avant-garde. Downloaded 01.05.09.
[116] Except with regard to music, where the term *avant-garde* is still often used to describe innovative music.
[117] Among these artists were the painters Gustave Courbet, Paul Cézanne and Edouard Manet.

Romanticism, as Burke also stated. Manet and Cézanne, however, started to question the rules of representation, and as Lyotard puts it, Cézanne constantly questioned himself: 'what is painting?' Cézanne's basic colour sensations were at the core of his paintings, and these "petites sensations" were available to the viewer's perception if he was willing to go through an inner process of freeing himself from perceptual and intellectual preconditions. Art should unveil what could be seen, not what is already visible.[118] Lyotard argues that the quest to grasp perception and reproduce it the moment it is born is precisely the point; To catch colour in the very minute it comes into existence.

Figure 18. Paul Cézanne, *Mont Saint-Victoire, seen from Les Lauves*,

Modernism and the aesthetics of autonomy

The aesthetics of autonomy were established during modernism and remained in place during postmodernism. It signifies the belief that art is best studied separately/broken loose from the artist, the viewer and historical context, thus stressing the ambiguity, paradoxes and inner tensions in the art object. This can be seen in opposition to studies of art's intervention in everyday life, the relations of exchange between art and reality, art and history. This changed in the 1960s, as the idea of the art object as a closed entity gave way to an understanding of the work as event or unlimited process. Art was cut loose from the narrow definition of a painting to involve performance, installations, happenings, video installations etc.

[118] Ibid. p. 40-41.

In *The Sublime is Now* Barnett Newman argues that the moral struggle between notions of beauty and a desire for sublimity came from the confusion of the Absolute and the absolutisms of perfect creations. This was evident in Longinus, for whom the (sublime) feeling of exaltation became synonymous to a perfect rhetorical statement; in Kant, who in his theory of transcendent perception held the phenomenon to be *more* than simply the phenomenon; and in Hegel's theory of beauty, where the sublime is at the bottom of a range of hierarchies, and where the relationship to reality is strictly formal. The struggle between beauty and the sublime reached its climax in the Renaissance, Newman argues, and with the beginning of modern art as a reaction to it. He sees the artist Michelangelo as setting a new standard for sublimity when he made sculptures that transformed Christ the Man into God. Painting, however, unable to express what sculpture could, continued to forfeit and represent beauty until the Impressionists broke down the beautiful surface and motif with their persistent insistence on 'ugly' brushstrokes.[119] But, he argues, the Impressionists, as the Cubists, ended back at their point of departure, with the question 'what is the nature of beauty?' This consistent failure to achieve the sublime comes, he says, from a desire to exist inside the objective world and to make art within the framework of the Greek ideal of beauty. Modern art kept struggling over the nature of beauty, destroying and denying it, but without the capability to create a sublime image, because they did not have (nor understand) sublime content. Newman believed the solution was to stop asking what or where the problem of beauty was, and start asking how they could create a sublime art. By freeing themselves from history, they exalted themselves and their own feelings.

Barnett Newman is one of the first to rebel against modernism. Newman urged renewed attention to the sublime, the creation of art freed from history. The minimalism of the 60s that Newman himself "fathered", contained all this.[120]

For Lyotard the aesthetics of the sublime are a pillar of the avant-garde of the 20th century. He is first and foremost concerned with postmodern art's break with modernism, and its attempt to find coherency and unity in a fragmented world, to outweigh the grief this has created in Man. Lyotard developed Newman's interpretation of the sublime into a comprehensive task for art: to attain an understanding of the unpresentable, sharpening art's rules and thereby liberating it from having to express any message while still expressing intimacy and, not least, intensity.[121]

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[119] Ibid. p. 17.
[120] Ibid.p.12.
[121] Ibid.

Brøgger et al. sees the sublime as liberating, and the aesthetics of the sublime as a reaction to the close ties between art and society, thus liberating creativity. The interest taken in the sublime in the 18th century may therefore be due to the emphasis on reason during the Enlightenment, and the reinterpretation of the sublime in the 20th century may be seen as a natural reaction to modernism with its hierarchies and internal rules of art. Newman realised that such strong rules could narrow the possibilities of art. As a consequence, the Minimalists made art with infinite serial events, where the sublime was present in our imagination of their endlessness. This is a remnant of Burke, who tied the sublime to the repetition of monotonous units that goes on into infinity, most notably seen in numerous pieces by minimalist artists. One example is Donald Judd's equal units stacked on top of each other in *Untitled* (Stack) from 1967. Repetition is also an important part of Eliasson's *360° room for all colours*, where the colours move slowly and repetitively over the interior surface of the panoramic installation. However, there is a crucial difference between the *repetitive* work by minimalists like Judd, and *360° room for all colours*. In the former, the repetition makes us imagine that the units continue into infinity. In the latter, they actually do. Of course not literally, but it may seem so to the viewer, as *time* is such a decisive factor in this piece, and the colours continue to 'roll' slowly over the screen, one following the other. After the whole spectrum of one colour has been shown, it starts again without breaking the flow of colours, leaving us utterly unaware of the end/beginning of a sequence. Another variant of infinite repetition can be found in *Multiple Grotto*, where the countless cones and our own reflection in them are repeated endlessly in their mirrored panels. The multiple points of view offer seemingly infinite perspectives that might lead to a trembling, almost sublime experience.

The notion of the sublime in Minimalism broke with the hierarchies of modernism, which means that the viewer turned her eyes towards her surroundings, paving the way for new relations between art, society and science.[122] An active subject was required to walk around the art object and experience it, rather than stand in front of it, as you would a painting. Brøgger et al. conclude that the contradiction between presence and infinity is distinctive for art, and that there is a particular need to maintain this contradiction in our postmodern condition. If not, the fight for broader horizons, creativity and intensity that characterises the very dynamics of postmodernity is lost.

[122] Ibid. p. 14.

Only our attempts to grasp and hold onto the sublime, what is not yet presented and might never be, can create these dynamics.[123]

The sublime: 'here and now'

Newman is familiar with several key philosophical texts on the sublime, by Longinus, Kant, Hegel and Burke. He thinks that the artists of his own time have lost the ability to express the sublime. What's more important is that he argues that some American painters are now defying the history of art and the Greek idea of beauty as an ideal, and are instead making art that has subjectivity as its main subject.[124] He calls the American artist a barbarian, incapable of expressing refined European sensations, neither in emotion nor subject. This is why they are capable of approaching the source of tragic emotions, and why artists should instead try to find new motifs for this expression.[125]

What then distinguishes the notion of the sublime that Newman refers to in *The Sublime is Now*? Newman criticised Burke for his 'surrealistic' description of the sublime work.[126] Moreover, Newman also criticised the way pre-romantic and romantic surrealism treated the indescribable as something unreachable – 'over there', free from time and space – that was art's primary task to express. In *The Sublime and the Avant-garde* Lyotard refers to Newman's text. With Newman's title as a starting point, Lyotard asks how we are supposed to understand the sublime as something 'here and now', or if it is necessary to allude to something inexplicable?[127] According to Lyotard, Newman could not have been thinking of the 'now' as immediate, a notion that has been subject to analysis from the time of Augustine to Edmund Husserl, as a 'now' for temporal ecstasy, where time and conscience are merged. Lyotard asserts that Newman's 'now' is rather what escapes consciousness, what consciousness cannot formulate or even what it forgets in order to stay calm.[128] Lyotard discusses what Newman might have meant in *The Sublime and the Avant-garde*. He argues that what was new was that Newman sought the sublime in a *here and now*, in the actual presence of 'it is happening', in the inexplicability of colour and of the painting itself.[129] This means that the sublime is formed in the force of the vertical line cutting through one of Newman's paintings. Lyotard asserts that the difference between the 'now' of Romanticism and that of the

[123] Ibid. p. 15.
[124] Ibid. p. 19.
[125] Ibid. p. 20.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid. p.21.
[128] Ibid. p.23.
[129] Ibid. p.27.

'modern' avant-garde, can be explained by replacing 'the Sublime is Now' with 'Now the Sublime is This'. Here and now is in the painting where there might not be a line at all. This, Lyotard states, is sublime. Being open to the possibility that the painting might not have taken place, might not be visible; this is what characterises the avant-garde (of post-modernism). It is sublime as Burke and Kant experienced it, but different: same but different.[130]

This new emphasis on the *now* signifies a new timeline. In modernism the art object was worshipped as a completed whole, with forms that evoked a longing for an imagined utopia that would be realised sometime in the future, following a linear notion of time. With Newman and postmodernism, the sublime focused on what is happening here and now, that which can neither be foreseen nor pre-apprehended, and is thus situated in a non-linear notion of time.

Lyotard further explores the properties of pain and anxiety in the sublime as proposed by Burke. In every aspect of life we assert that a new experience will follow, Lyotard argues. Only the artist or someone dependent on creativity might feel a tension in this: *What if* I can't write another line? What then? These negative feelings of anxiety are associated with the possibility that nothing will happen are, however, often followed by feelings of joy or excitement, a longing for the unknown. Most often this causes split emotions, he argues. So the 'now' *may* cause nothing to happen, but, on the other hand, it says 'is it happening?'[131] It's like tiptoeing on the verge of 'something'.

Lyotard notes that the task of proving the existence of the indefinable has broken down barrier after barrier, leading to artists' questioning the purpose of frames, canvas and colour. The purpose of colour was answered by Malevich's black square on white in 1915, the purpose of canvas with body-art, happenings and performance art, and the purpose of exhibition frames with Duchamp's *Fountain* in 1917. However, Lyotard suggests that Daniel Buren's art in public spaces contradicted Duchamp[132] as does, I would add, Olafur Eliasson's public art projects.

Lyotard goes on to assert that our experiences, regardless of whether individual or common, are now disappearing in a moment's self-gratification from our own success. Now that information has become the only criterion of social importance, experience becomes fleeting.[133] In commenting the state of the avant-garde in his time, Lyotard

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[130] Ibid. p.29.
[131] This feeling was in the 18th and 19th century in Europe labelled the Sublime, and led to an aesthetic approach to art and the introduction and victory of Romanticism.
[132] Ibid.p.43.
[133] Ibid.p.47.

stated that the secret of becoming a successful artist is to balance the surprising with the familiar, information with code, thereby playing with the 'taste' of the audience, expressing the 'Zeitgeist', yet really only reflecting the state of the market.[134] With regard to Olafur Eliasson's immensely popular installations, one might say that Lyotard was right.

Lyotard ends his essay by stating that the sublime no longer exists in art, only in speculation about art; in other words – in the subject. However, the question of 'is it happening?' is not solved by this, and the task of making art that presents the indefinable is as present and persistent as ever. But the question mark has been suspended, according to Lyotard. "Viljen besejres af hændelsen. Det bliver avantgardens opgave at gøre ende på de åndelige tankeeksperimenter, der beskeftiger sig med tid. En sådan afvikling kaldes at have følelse for det sublime."[135]

Olafur Eliasson's sublime beauty

In his allegory of the cave, the philosopher Plato speaks of a group of prisoners in a cave, facing a blank wall, all of their lives. They have never ventured outside to see the sun, but have watched and ascribed forms to shadows projected on the wall by things passing in front of the cave entrance. These shadows are all they know as reality. Plato says that knowledge can only be reached through escaping the cave and realising that the world as we know it is nothing but an illusion. According to Plato, the philosopher, not the artist, is the only one that can attain this knowledge, as the artist merely makes copies of the illusions of the cave. Olafur Eliasson is just the kind of artist Plato wanted to expel from his ideal state. He creates illusions. Whereas the sun for Plato signifies insight and knowledge earned through a lifetime of effort, Eliasson reverses this. It is the sun that is the shadow. The moment of sublimity is replaced with blurred sensations, where mist, sunshine and the reflections on the ceiling are inseparable. Only by realising this, by experiencing his art, do we understand that it is fabricated, that it is an illusion.

Eliasson's art resembles the art of the Romantic era because of the position of the sublime. Yet there is a notable difference between Eliasson and the Romantics. Whereas the Romantics depicted and represented nature in painting, Olafur Eliasson *distils* elements of nature. Eliasson searches – and finds – in his very own way, the sublime in nature. Yet, his installations often invoke an anti-sublime rather than a true

[134] Ibid.p.48.
[135] Ibid.p.49.

sublime sensation, because the natural elements reveal themselves to be mediated. In this he is more of a Lyotardian than a Romantic. This mediation is a double bind; it may trigger the experience of the sublime, but it might also halt it. The sublime in Eliasson's installations is a deeply troubling sublime. We ask: what is this rainbow doing in here? It plays with the sublime, unsettling it in a disturbing and powerful experience of here and now.

This is evident in *Beauty*. It is close but distant, and recedes even further into the distance the closer we try to get, highly reminiscent of the otherworldly and saturated landscapes and sky and rock formations that characterize Caspar David Friedrich's paintings. Watching the delicate rainbow twinkling in the mist the viewer realises she is inside a museum. She realises Olafur Eliasson is 'presenting something unpresentable'. But what happens at that point? Eliasson creates a particular phenomenon of weather that traditionally is associated with heightened perception and sublimity. Our time is an age when notions of the sublime in art most often seem as passé as pastels and watercolors. How does Eliasson 'get away with' making works of such sublime beauty?

By placing a romantic natural phenomenon indoors, *Beauty* evokes the sublime only in trying to reject it. Its structure is laid bare and its motif and title, a rainbow and *Beauty* respectively, are clichés. The possibility of experiencing the sublime is evident in its use of a rainbow as motif. Two things are worth noting, however: the obvious artificiality of the work, and the fact that the work is placed inside a building. What might this imply? The title plays an important part in our perception of the work. It mediates our experience, enhancing the artificiality of the work. It might even create an ironic distance to it, by way of our pre-apprehension of the connotations of the word.

Beauty consists of three simple materials only: a water hose, water and a spotlight, situated in a dark room. But according to the artist it was exactly by this simple construction that he first became fully aware of the viewer's crucial importance in the completion of his works of art: "If the light doesn't go into your eyes, there's no rainbow".[136] And if there is no rainbow, there's no artwork. A somewhat similar bodily reaction is found in *360º room for all colours*, where the physical sensations of the shifting colours are mesmerizing. The colours in *360º room for all colours* lead one to think of Philip Otto Runge's (1777-1810) colour theory. Are colours just a phenomenon of the conscious mind, an external phenomenon, or both? The sensations evoked by the experience of colour are illusions. The colour red does not make my body warmer. But

[136] Ibid. p. 22.

the emotion stirred by the illusion is still very real, which means that the emotion is in fact in accordance with the illusion. The work invokes the senses above and beyond the merely visual. The physical experience is therefore important, and the immateriality of the work is essential.

In *Multiple Grotto* immateriality is shown not through dispersion, but through fragmentation. The sublime experience comes from its multiple fragmentation that shatters our visual perspective to pieces and leaves our heads spinning and our bodies unstable. All three works render the ordinary extraordinary, thereby facilitating a sublime experience through representations of natural phenomena (a rainbow, light and colors, and a grotto).

Nature, the immaterial aspect of the sublime experience, and the dissolving of the subject are even more present in *The Weather Project* (2003) at Tate Modern in London, where Eliasson created an enormous constructed sun that never sets inside the Turbine Hall. Consisting of nothing more than a semicircle made up of 200 mono-frequency lamps behind a translucent screen, which are reflected in a mirror overhead, and fog machines emitting a spectral mist, it became a vast, dazzling sphere, a spectacular, apocalyptic installation that provoked nearly religious awe in more than two million visitors. Artistic effects as fog and wind created a highly intriguing, sensual atmosphere in the large hall. The ceiling was covered in mirrors and the viewers could lie casually on the floor watching their own reflections in the mirrors overhead. All the material and construction techniques were made visible to the viewer. The light bulbs making up the sun were not even covered.

The New York City Waterfalls were situated at four different points between Manhattan and Brooklyn, during the course of the summer of 2008. They ranged in height from 90 ft. to 120 ft., each pumping up to 35,000 gallons of water a minute up and over their giant frames. Illuminated at night, they added another level of surrealism to the otherwise dull river. Eliasson's aim was to give New Yorkers back their river by simply activating it/making them aware of its presence. The crowd-pleasing waterfalls greatly resembled the ultimate symbol of the American Sublime: Niagara Falls. Turns out the two "natural" wonders have one more thing in common. As critic James Trainor point out: "One year the falls were turned off completely, like a bath tap, and the cataract was revealed to be nothing more or less than a grand but forlorn pile of rocks. Whether the result of titanic geological forces or generous arts funding, the Sublime is where you

find it. Or where you want to find it."[137] How the Hudson River look to the Manhattanites post-Eliasson remains an open question.

As Newman proposed, the intention of Rothko's generation of American painters was to make paintings that met the viewer as living presences – here and now. They did this through epic canvases. Although initially evoking the same sensation, Eliasson's immersive sunlight/ rainbow is nothing like standing in "the Rothko room".[138] Whereas Eliasson is representing nature, Rothko's paintings are irreducibly abstract. This makes Eliasson's art easy to enjoy, while Rothko's paintings invoke the forbidden. The possible exception being *360º room for all colours*, which reminds us of the 19th century panorama paintings, where the panorama invoked an illusion of timeless, faraway landscapes or historic events. This makes it both an enjoyable representation *and* a 'forbidden' abstraction.

Whenever we change the expected size of something, disturbing yet exciting effects are created. Burke saw a flower to be beautiful, but a mountain could be sublime. The massive, overpowering effect of awe demanded by something bigger and stronger than we are, evokes a sensation of the sublime.

The overwhelming sensation caused by the colours, the fragmentation, the immersion and the incomprehensibility of the large scale of several of the installations, are visibly mediated. The constructions of the works are put on display. We clearly see the hose and light in *Beauty,* the construction of the room that is *360º room for all colours*, the mirrors in *Multiple Grotto,* the lamps and mirrors in *The Weather Project* and the enormous water-pumps in *The New York City Waterfalls*. The visibility of the underlying construction is what makes us aware of our surroundings. Moreover, it is what makes us aware of the *people* in our surroundings.

The moment the viewer becomes aware of his surroundings and notices the effect the experience of the rainbow has on him, and, more significantly, its effect on the people in the room with him, other operations and aesthetics overrun the aesthetics of the sublime. The experience of the sublime is ultimately private and does not account for my perception of other viewers' reactions. A social interaction quickly unwinds and evolves in Eliasson's works, as well as a pressing acknowledgment of the presence of our surroundings, leaving the aesthetics of the sublime inadequate, demanding other

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[137] Trainor, James "Olafur Eliasson Various sites" in *frieze magazine* downloaded 24.04.09. http:/www.frieze.com/issue/print_back/olafur_eliasson4/

[138] The room at Tate Modern dedicated to the mural-scale canvasses painted by the great New York painter Mark Rothko for the Four Seasons restaurant in the late 1950s.

interpretations, other approaches. The art object is less and less important, leaving the stage to the subject(s). We might also then wonder whether this critique might not be applied to the notion of the sublime in relation to *all* art, bearing in mind that even if all experiences are private, no experience takes place in a vacuum. Eliasson's art makes clear that social space is all encompassing.

Olafur Eliasson rejects that he has been influenced by the aesthetics of the sublime. He says that the term has lost its meaning, that neither the sublime nor beauty interests him because they both imply what he calls a standardisation of singular experiences, and further worries that the terms might be used as instruments to indicate qualities in his work:

> Jeg arbejder ikke med begreber som det sublime eller det skønne, først og fremmest fordi de indbefatter en standardisering af de singulære oplevelser. Jeg er ikke bange for, at noget er skønt eller sublimt, men derimod bekymret for, at den slags begreber bruges til at lægge kvaliteter ind I værkerne.[139]

In the next chapter I will discuss another theory of aesthetics that has been used to comprehend and interpret the experience of the art of Olafur Eliasson, namely relational aesthetics.

[139] Engberg-Pedersen and Wind Meyhoff (2004) p. 36.

5 – Eliasson's installations as microtopias

The concept 'relational aesthetics' has been widely used to describe and understand a tendency seen in many artistic practices since the 1990s, one of them being Olafur Eliasson's installations. As opposed to the private experience that is the notion of the sublime, relational aesthetics calls for an ultimately collective experience. How is this theoretical framework suited to Eliasson's installations, and what can Eliasson's art in turn contribute to relational aesthetics? In this chapter I will discuss whether relational aesthetics could be an interesting or important theoretical reference point with regard to Eliasson's art. Several critics, curators and art historians have certainly thought so. However, just as interesting to Eliasson's installations is an account of the criticisms of relational aesthetics.

I will start by giving an account of the arguments for a relational aesthetic made by the French theorist, critic and curator Nicholas Bourriaud (born 1965). Bourriaud was founder and co-director at Palais de Tokyo in Paris from 1996 - 2006. In 1998 he first laid out his theory of relational aesthetics in a collection of essays titled *Esthétique relationnelle*. This short but heavily discussed manifest sums up a *tendency* that Bourriaud felt he could see clearly in contemporary art practises. Even before its translation to English in 2002 it became one of the most important declarations of tendencies in contemporary art, not to mention a great influence on the young artists of the time.[140]

Bourriaud states that relational aesthetics is a new[141] theoretic affiliation for contemporary art, an "aesthetic theory consisting in judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt."[142] The social phenomenon and context thus became more important than representation, expression or material. Art, as Bourriaud sees it, is a form of social exchange: "(…) the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realties, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real (…)" [143] He further defines 'relational (art)' as "A set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an

[140] Andrea Kroksnes in Bourriaud, Nicholas *Relasjonell estetikk* Artes. (Norwegian translation) Afterword by Krogsnes, Andrea (Oslo: Pax Forlag A/S, 2007) p. 172.
[141] Bourriaud admits that art, to a certain point, always was relational, as in a social component and basis for dialogue, due to the bonds it creates between the viewers through its icons and symbols.
[142] Bourriaud, Nicholas *Relational Aesthetics* (English translation) Dijon–Quetigny: les presses du réel, 2002 p.112.
[143] Ibid. p.13.

independent and private space."[144] In his theoretical follow-up *Postproduction* from 2001 Bourriaud continues and further develops the argument that we should stop interpreting the world and rather take center stage in our own experiences.[145] Bourriaud discusses the work of several artists, surveying artistic practices that vary to a great degree. What connects the different practises are not their content or central problems, but that they work with inter-human relations both theoretically and practically. Key terms for this relational practise are interactivity, social relations, sociality and celebration/party.

Bourriaud analyzes contemporary art by taking a sociological approach, rather than art historical. With Guy Debord's *La société du spectacle* (1967) as an inspirational starting point, he discusses how we have become a society where human relations no longer are "directly experienced", but become distanced in their "spectacular representation", due to social relations becoming subjects to capitalization and instrumentalization.[146] Because of this he sees the most central question in contemporary art to be: "is it still possible to generate relationships with the world, in a practical field of art-history traditionally earmarked for their 'representation'?"[147] However, as opposed to Debord, who did not see art as a possible critical tool against the estranged "*société du spectacle"* Bourriaud asserts that contemporary art can function as an interstice, a social interval, for creating an alternative space/time, and thus becoming political: "Contemporary art is definitely developing a political project when it endeavours to move into the relational realm by turning it into an issue."[148] He further asserts that art is a state of meeting. This makes *time* a crucial factor, because the actual meeting, be it between art and viewer or art and artist, makes the foundation for the relational dimension, the inter-human relation. And because relational art is an art practise grown from our contemporary society, it is impossible to understand it against the backdrop of art history. He writes: "[Relational art's] basic claim – the sphere of human relations as artwork venue – has no prior example in art history, even if it appears, after the fact, as the obvious backdrop of all aesthetic praxis (…)"[149]

He sees, however, relational aesthetics more as a theory of form than a theory of art. He insists on the unstable aspect of the term 'form', which often cannot be reduced to merely a 'thing', and it is therefore even better to call them 'formations' than 'forms'.

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[144] Ibid. p. 113.
[145] Ibid. p. 45.
[146] Bourriaud, 2002 A, p.8.
[147] Ibid.p.9.
[148] Bourriaud, 2002 A, p. 17.
[149] Ibid, p.44.

Bourriaud positions his view of art as the opposite of Thierry de Duve's "sum of judgements": "The artistic practice thus recides in the invention of relations between consciousness. Each particular artwork is a proposal to live in a shared world, and the work of every artist is a bundle of relations, and so on and so forth, ad infinitum."[150]

To understand the art practise of the 1990s, according to Bourriaud we have to consider the situation the artists were in. Bourriaud developes the thoughts of Lyotard, and says that artists, after modernism, had a chance to "[learn] *to inhabit the world in a better way*"[151]. Contemporary art creates alternative forms of living *here and now*. This is far from the utopias of modernism. The relational artworks instead produce social experiences and/or objects that produce sociality, what he calls *microtopias*[152], which he see as alternative forms of acting or being. Does Eliasson produce microtopias? A piece like *360° room for all colours* could definitely be said to be such a microtopia. It is a physical room that separates a given space from the outside. The people who walk into the installation are in this defined space with other people. Time is of essence, and the microtopia only exists for as long as the viewer(s) are there. The same is true for several of Eliasson's installations, including *Beauty* and *Multiple Grotto*. The microtopia of *Beauty* might not seem as clearly defined at first glance, yet it is, not by way of walls, but of the space created by the rainbow. The microtopia of *Multiple Grotto* involves both the inside and the outside of the grotto. However, in this particular case it is also notable that depending on the viewers, the inside and outside might turn into two different microtopias. All these microtopias have the temporal aspect in common. People come and go, colours and perspectives change, microtopias come into existence and end before we even realize it.

Figure 19. *360° room for all coulours*

Figure 20. *Double Sunset*

[150] Ibid, p. 22
[151] Bourriaud 2002 B, p.13. Italics in original.
[152] Topos is the greek word for 'place', and is a play on utopia.

One of the most famous examples of relational art, and one that is discussed elaborately in Bourriaud's essays, is the work of Rirkrit Tiravanija. His art invites social interaction within the audience, thus representing the essence of the term relational aesthetics. Bourriaud calls Tiravanija's art a microtopic meeting place where the audience, learns to share and take part in a collective. Interactivity in all fields of communication becomes more and more common, he argues, and in this culture of interactivity (where the internet and multimedia plays a significant role) the transitivity of the object of culture is taken for granted.[153] Bourriaud claims that this transitivity denies the existence of a specific "space for art".

Figure 21. Rirkrit Tiravanija *Untitled (Pad see-ew)*

We must, however, consider the fact that most of these microtopias are created within the frame of the art institution. It may be even more interesting with regards to the public art projects Eliasson has produced. The institution itself functions as a mediating factor, and as its own microtopia. In *New York City Waterfalls* (2008) different sites in New York that were close to the waterfalls form the microtopia. This might on the other hand see this as outside the scope of the microtopia, simply because the topias are too large and ever-changing, as too many people have the possibility to engage, and the frame is not set. Of all of Eliasson's installation, *The Weather Project* is the one I consider to reflect the most on the mediating effect of the art institution in a piece of art. The exhibition functioned as a new public space where Londoners could bring a picnic-basket and spend their afternoon. It became a haven outside the real world. A few years before Eliasson made a similar work, but with a somewhat different effect: *Double Sunset* was shown in Utrecht in the Netherlands in 1999 and consisted of a constructed sun on top of a building by a highway. People passing or driving by experienced a virtual double sunset, when they in the same visual field saw the real sun, and Eliasson's constructed sun, placing the real nature and the artificial nature side by side. Every day at sunset the floodlights from a nearby footballstadium lit up the artificial sun. But what kind of relation does *Double Sunset* create? The relation to other people is one important aspect. A successful effect would be wondrous conversations over the coffémachine at work the next morning, after everyone had driven home from

[153] Ibid. p.34.

work, seeing a parallel sunset. Another important aspect was the presentation of the relationship between man and nature. The artificial sun acted as a twin or shadow to the real sun. What this did was enhance the realness of the real sun, making it visible to us, making us aware that the sun was there.

Bourriaud sees the artistic practise of the 1990s as evolving around a sphere of *inter-human* relations, where the invention of different models of sociability as focal point. Not only the relational characteristics within each work of art, but also the inter-human relations have become artistic "forms."[154] This means that games, parties, casual meetings or planned demonstrations represent aesthetic objects. Bourriaud notes a number of artistic practices where the artist draws from existing social relations, for instance between a gallerist and an artist. Others work on a real production field where they copy an existing profession, including its relational universe. By applying rules from other arenas in the world within the art world, the consciousness of relations to clients or customers, orders and projects are introduced.[155] However, an artwork, Bourriaud says, inhabits a quality that separates it from all other human activity and yet characterizes a product made by man; a social transparency. A successful piece aims to go beyond the frames of its own presence, opening up to dialogue, and ultimately to the inter-human negotiation named by Marcel Duchamp "the coefficient of art"; a temporary process that is set here and now. "The work of art actually shows (or suggests) not only its manufacturing and production process, its position within the set of exchanges, and the place, the function, it allocates to the beholder, but also the creative behaviour of the artist."[156] The artist produces the relation between the world and us, transmitted in the aesthetic object.[157] This is, as we have seen, evident in several of Eliasson's installations, where he tries to conceal neither the manufacturing nor the production process, but rather puts in on display. In *Beauty* we see the lamp and the water hose. Eliasson could have chosen to cover them up, but instead he underlines the fact that the natural phenomenon *is* a construction, made by him – the artist. Material and economical aspects of the production and construction also surface. How are Eliasson's projects financed?

The newness to the art of the 1990s resides in the way they take inter-subjectivity and interaction as both starting point and goal, Bourriaud argues. They produce 'espaces-temps': places for developing alternative social forms, critical models or moments of

[154] Ibid. p.38-39.
[155] Ibid. p. 51.
[156] Bourriaud 2002 p.41.
[157] Ibid. p.60.

presence.[158] However, modernism is not dead, and this new art takes further the heritage of the twentieth century's avant-garde, though denying its dogmatism and teleology, meaning its foundation in conflict, as opposed to the harmony of relations and intimacy.

Rirkrit Tiravanija organized simple dinner parties in otherwise empty gallery spaces. The social interaction that occurred among and between the 'audience', which in this case became participants, was the art experience. The conversations as well as the physical act of parcelling out the soup made up the inter-human relationship that the art was all about. Bourriaud claims to see this tendency in the artistic practices of Maurizio Cattelan, Philippe Parreno, Vanessa Beecroft, Pierre Huyghe and Felix Gonzalez-Torres. The latter, Bourriaud calls the father of relational aesthetics, because of his art's time-dependency and precision. Bourriaud refers to the artwork *Untitled (Blue Mirror)*, 1990. *Offset print on paper, endless copies,* a monumental stack of blue paper. The audience is welcome to take one, but what happens if everyone does so? Some politely respect the unwritten/written rules of 'do not touch the objects' normally so important in the museum and gallery spaces. Others take one or two. The same happens in *Untitled (Lover boy)*, 1989, only here, bonbons are lying on the floor, up for grabs. Some take a few bonbons saving them for later, or quietly sucking away on one. Several, however, grab as many as they can, stuffing their pockets. The ethics of the viewer are at stake. The work leads to a consciousness of the viewer's context, referring to the happenings or "environments" of the 1960s, or installations *in situ*, Bourriaud notes.[159] What characterizes them is the most important thing in the experience of a relational art: *the joint presence of beholders in front of the work*. This presence can be actual or symbolic.[160] The new relational art demands that we approach it with a different attitude than that which is posed by the traditional aesthetic criteria, namely a "criteria for coexistence".[161] Relevant questions would then be whether this art is open to the viewer's existence, whether it includes or excludes the viewer, or whether it permits the viewer to live in an equivalent space and time in reality.[162] These questions are, Bourriaud says, expressions of humanity, a view of art that differs from the fascist-fundamentalist view on history and art as closed.[163] Gonzalez-Torres' (and might we add, Eliasson's) democratic art, differ from the more authoritative structures from most earlier art through a wish that everybody should

[158] Ibid. p.63.
[159] Ibid. p.80.
[160] Bourriaud 2002, p.57. Original italics.
[161] Ibid. p.80-81.
[162] Ibid. p. 81.
[163] Ibid. p.81.

'get her chance' through forms that do not establish an a priori precedence to the producer over the viewer. This opens up the possibility of equality between viewer and producer, thus creating harmonic art practises. While the equality in Eliasson's installations will be discussed in the next chapter, in relation to the distribution of the sensible theorized by Jacques Rancière, we will linger on the democracy of Eliasson's art. The always present user-oriented aspect of Olafur Eliasson's art can be seen as a reaction to the rather undemocratic art practice of the eighties, where expressionist paintings were the height *de rigeur* in a capitalistic, closed market where the Man in the Street was kept on the outside. Starting his artistic training in the late eighties, Eliasson wanted to create a viewer-oriented art, an art that was immediate and available, and where the viewer ultimately becomes a *participant*. A shift of focus occurred, from work to viewer. A term like democratic is nearly everywhere in the reception of Olafur Eliasson's art, sometimes without positive connotations. Critics of *The Weather Project* have seen it as too democratic; meaning that the democracy and availability was all there was to it. The experience was so consuming that the viewer became overwhelmed, and did not search for or question whether or not the work signified something. It became a spectacle, an event. In this it is truly relational. His art has also been called to convey "a politics of enchantment", meaning that it is open, ethereal, intellectually stimulating and beautiful. This characteristic can be both positive and negative; the latter if we see it as passive more than active.

Figure 22. *The very large ice floor*

However, even if the art is oriented towards the viewer-participant, the art object is still there, holding a prominent position. Eliasson refers to his work as "a kind of machine, a phenomenon maker, or you know, a situation"[164], that invites the viewer to participate in the critical act of seeing and experiencing the world. This separates Eliasson's installations from the relational art of Tiravanija, where the social constellation is the very art piece. In *The very large ice floor* from 1998, Eliasson installed a – very large – ice floor at Oscar Niemeyer's pavilion at the biennial in São Paulo, Brazil. This ice floor did not stop at the end of the pavilion, but continued on the outside, transgressing the border between inside and outside, creating an interesting duality in the work. The windows in the pavilion separated two different ways of experiencing the piece. The viewer could encounter the piece inside the frame of the institution, within a cultural zone, – or outside in the 'liberated' or 'natural' part which was the park. The park was a hangout for young skaters, and the ice floor turned out to be the perfect playing ground for teenagers who did not care at all that *The very large ice floor* was 'art'. The experience of the contradiction between the active skaters outdoors and the calm and polite art audience indoors was united in the surreal experience of encountering an ice floor in the middle of a subtropical environment.[165]

Democracy in dispute: Critique of relational aesthetics

No one would deny that Bourriaud's *Relational aesthetics* and *Postproduction* have become important manifests in contemporary art, or that they have set a new agenda for the art produced in the last ten years. However, Bourriaud has been met by considerable critique from several noteworthy critics. One claims that Bourriaud elegantly undermines the fact that the viewer-participant is not a brilliant new idea, but an old art historical tradition: The art critic and art historian Claire Bishop, who in the introduction to a new anthology on participation art, holds forth that the artistic tradition of creating social or collective art projects has to a large extent been forgotten in art historical writings. Since the 1960s, she says, a myriad of artists have produced art that "appropriate *social* forms as a way to bring art closer to everyday life: intangible experiences such as dancing samba (Hélio Oiticica) or funk (Adrian Piper); drinking beer (Tom Marioni); discussing philosophy

[164] Olafur Eliasson, at press preview, SFMOMA 2007.
[165] Susan May in "Meteorologica" in Olafur Eliasson *The Weather Project* (2003) p.20.

(Ian Wilson) or politics (Joseph Beuys)(…).[166] "Their emphasis", Bishop says, "is on collaboration, and the collective dimension of social experience."[167]

She also stresses the fact that Bourriaud claims that artists "instead of trying to change their environment, (...) are simply 'learning to inhabit the world in a better way'", which implies a *passive* engagement.[168] This is exactly what Eliasson himself says about his art and how he would describe the kind of engagement that he intends to evoke in the viewer-participant. What might this imply? Does her critique make Eliasson a relational artist? Maybe he *is* distancing himself from previous artists, but not in the same way as Bishop argues, for the sake of functioning 'microtopias' in the here and now. Standing inside a work like *Multiple Grotto* the viewer quickly realises that this piece becomes much more interesting as soon as other people gather around or enter with her. It comes alive because of the multitude of images it produces when our bodies and movements are reflected in the shiny panels. The presence of other viewers gives the impression of a veritable explosion of colours and motion. There is also something intimate about cramming inside the narrow grotto with a person you have never seen before, sharing the surprise every time there is a movement in the mirrors, or you discover a pair of eyes looking at us at the end of the cones, or peeking through the cones from the outside ourselves, watching the reactions of the person or persons inside. The same thing occurs when you watch and touch the rainbow with the children in *Beauty*, or one can imagine, playing on *The Very Large Ice Floor* under the Brazilian sun. It is not a passive engagement. However, neither is it only about the relations produced between the different viewers. It is rather about the active individual who, by way of a private *and* a collective experience sees her surroundings with new eyes. Whether then she later chooses to *do* something with her surroundings is not relevant here.

Professor of Art History Miwon Kwon criticizes Bourriaud's conception of the democratic process in relational art, exemplified in the works of Felix Gonzalez-Torres:

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[166] Claire Bishop: "Introduction: Viewers as Producers" in ***Participation***, Claire Bishop (ed.), (London: Whitechapel & Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006), p. 10.
[167] Ibid. p.10. Bishop further refers to Walter Benjamin's text *The Author as Producer* (1934) as an important earlier theoretical text accounting for the activization of the viewer that has become common since the 1960s. Benjamin argued, referring to the Soviet Russia, that art should both "intervene in and provide a model for allowing viewers to be involved in the process of production," Art's political function could not any longer be judged by the artists declared sympathies, but also in art's relation to the forces of production. This Benjamin exemplifies by citing the letters page in a newspaper as an example of opening up the newspaper, making it possible for the previously passive reader to become an active writer, (for people to become engaged in society). He also exemplified by referring to the playwright Bertolt Brecht, who created situations that forged active, critical reflection in the audience, by way of his effects of *Verfremdung*. The consumer could be producer.
[168] Ibid. p.116

> Why must I, or any other beholder, be enfolded into a model of sociality that is framed, if not programmed, by another author for my encounter with a work of art to count as a legitimate exercise of emancipated engagement and viewership? Is not the imperative to perform as an actor in someone' vision of "conviviality," in a staging of overcoming alienation, of everyone "getting their chance," itself deceptively authoritarian?[169]

Kwon does not agree with Bourriaud that there is a collective, physical aspect of participation at the core of the art of Gonzalez-Torres. This criticism is interesting also when it comes to Eliasson's installations. They might of course function as interactive artworks, but Eliasson's art does not stage social or other temporal and collective forms, they are about *you* and relate to the singularity of every individual viewer. Even though all the viewers are doing the same thing, they each and every one maintain their private sphere of interpretation. You might wonder if the person next to you sees the same rainbow as you do, and you might feel the urge to compare notes, but this is not at the core of the piece, it is not what it is *about*. However, if we may talk about collectiveness in Eliasson's installations, it is anonymous, formless and fragmented, Kwon argues, contradicting Bourriaud's notion of unity and coherence:

> What FGT allows, in a sense, is for all the viewers paying attention to his work to experience something intimate yet remain a stranger to the work and to one another, to recognize a commonality based not on identification but on distance. ***This*** is what FGT asks us to share: our connection and beholden-ness to one another not only as indefinite strangers but ***because*** we are indefinite strangers, and to understand this connection based on distance as a binding of intimacy.[170]

The bond between the viewers are created *because* they are 'indefinite strangers', and *because* they realize that they have nothing in common except the experience of being inside one of Eliasson's installations.

Bourriaud received the harshest critique in the periodical *October* nr.110 in 2004, where a whole number was devoted to a critique of relational aesthetics. In the editorial George Baker was highly critical to the negligence of the postmodern tradition in relational aesthetics. He accuses Bourriaud of misunderstanding the notions of interactivity, participation and social interstice/relations in contemporary art.[171] In the article "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" in the same issue, Claire Bishop gives one of the most influential criticisms of relational aesthetics, and one that is of particular interest with regards to Eliasson's installations. She claims that the characteristic of democratic art is making conflicts visible through form, whereas Bourriaud sees

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[169] Miwon Kwon: "The Becoming of a Work of Art: FGT and a Possibility of Renewal, a Change to Share, a Fragile Truce" in *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, Julie Ault (red.) (New York & Göttingen: Steidl Publishers, 2006) p. 286.
[170] Ibid. p. 293. Original italics.
[171] George Baker: "Editorial" in *October* 110, (Fall 2004), p. 49-50.

democratic art as giving everybody a chance to partake in the creation of social relations. "Bourriaud argues that (...) all relations that permit 'dialogue' are automatically assumed to be democratic and therefore good",[172] she writes. But what kind of relations is he talking about? Where are the conflicts, tensions and antagonisms in Bourriaud's view on art, Bishop asks.[173] Tensions and conflicts are what challenge the existing order of society, hence inevitable and essential parts of democracy. The alternative would be the forced consensus of totalitarian regimes. Bourriaud operates in this undemocratic, consensus-oriented understanding of democracy, Bishop argues. She calls instead for a relational antagonism, where artists, exemplified by Santiago Serra and Thomas Hirschhorn, reveal what is excluded, in order to create an illusion of social harmony.[174]

Art historian Hal Foster has also criticized relational aesthetics, disputing that art should even produce inter-subjective meetings, and that this is applaudable: "This is where I side with Sartre on a bad day: often in galleries and museums, hell is other people."[175] Foster sees the relational tendency in art as a consequence of a lack of sociality in other spheres of society, hence art has made collectivity and social relations into its very own utopia.[176] Relational aesthetics suits the capitalistic economy of entertainment, he claims, where all seems to be "happy interactivity". He argues that relational art is subject to uncritical aesthetization, no longer separable from market-oriented design.[177] It is worth noting that Eliasson himself believes that the capitalistic system might prove to be more democratic than any other alternatives: "I am a non-marxist, and I believe fundamentally that the capitalistic system might prove to be more democratic than any alternative system."[178] Whether he is right or not is another question.

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[172] Claire Bishop: "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", *October* 110, (Fall 2004), p. 65.
[173] Bishop refers to Ernsto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's discussion of the radical democracy in: *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, (London: Verso, 1985).
[174] Bishop, op.cit p, 79.
[175] Hal Foster, "Chat Rooms" in *Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop (London: Whitechapel, 2006), p.190-194.
[176] Ibid. p. 194.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Original quote: "Selv er jeg ikke-marxist, og jeg tror grunnleggende på at det kapitalistiske system kan vise seg å være mer demokratisk enn alternative systemer." in Synnøve Vik, "Eliassons institusjoner" in *Billedkunst*

Eliasson's relational installations

Gunnar B. Kvaran, the director of the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art Oslo, wrote on the relational aesthetics in the art of Olafur Eliasson, in the introduction to the catalogue of Eliasson's solo exhibition *Colour memory and other informal shadows*[179],

> The art of Olafur Eliasson is clearly related to this [relational asthetic] tendency in art. In his work – especially the light installations – he includes and affects the viewer while situating him or her within a 'social reality', where we can say that the artwork is actualized and viewers made conscious of their own existence and relation with their environment to a greater or lesser degree.[180]

I previously described how at first nobody dared to touch the rainbow in *Beauty*. Slowly the viewers approached it and put their hands gently through the mist, and at last the children came along and jumped right through it, playing in it together, regardless of surroundings or anticipated (museum) behaviour. The obvious difference to this work and Gonzalez-Torres' *"Untitled" (Lover Boys)* being that the rainbow did not *deteriorate* because of the behaviour of the viewers, it only *changed*, whereas Gonzalez-Torres' pile of bonbons became smaller and smaller and so deteriorated noticeably. This marks an important distinction between the two – and if we may generalize[181] – between Eliasson and relational artists. Eliasson has a constant art object at the very core of the art experience, not a happening or social relation, while in the case of *"Untitled" (Lover Boys)* and most of what is presented as relational art, the physical art object is less important than the social engagement and relation it generates. Olafur Eliasson himself states that the social relation that is established in his art is of great concern to him, because it reverses the subject and the object: "If the public gets involved in a stimulating situation, the situation "commits itself" in return. There's a reversal of subject and object here: the viewer becomes the object and the context becomes the subject. I always try to turn the viewer into what's on show, make him mobile and dynamic.[182]As we have seen, however, this does not mean that the art object – the installation – is of less importance than the subject – the viewer turned object. The installation, the viewer and the context become equal, creating the subject together. It would be meaningless for Eliasson to 'do a

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[179] The exhibition *Olafur Eliasson – Colour memory and other informal shadows* was on at the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art in Oslo, 24. January – 02. May 2004.
[180] Gunnar B. Kvaran in *Colour memory and other informal shadows* (Oslo:Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art 2003) p.83.
[181] Whether Felix Gonzalez-Torres's art is relational or not is not for me to discuss here. I use him as an example of a relational artist simply because Bourriaud uses him as one of his premier examles, stating that he is the father of relational art. For more on the discussion see Danbolt, Mathias *Sankt Felix : kunstnerens død og oppstandelse i postmodernistisk kunstteori med utgangspunkt i Felix Gonzalez-Torres "Untitled" (Lover boys)* (Masteroppgave i kunsthistorie - Universitetet i Bergen, 2007).
[182] Olafur Eliasson in Conversation between Olafur Eliasson and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Berlin, October 2001. Museée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, exhibition catalogue, 2002.

Tiravanija' at his retrospective at the SFMOMA and display only anonymous replicas of the physical frame of the social relations previously created in his work.

What characterizes relational art is its openness and resistance against interpretation. The meaning of a work, if there is one, is often not disclosed until the viewer has engaged in the work for some time. (…) This is evident in a work as *360º room for all colours* where other peoples presence have such a significant effect on the overall experience of the work, depending on whether it is seen alone or with somebody, it almost seems like two entirely different works of art. Yet the collective relational experience does not account for the private sublime experience. Eliasson's art is Eliasson but that is not all there is.

Relational in what sense?

In the text *Heliotrope* (2007)[183] author and curator Daniel Birnbaum briefly discusses the art of Olafur Eliasson in relation to Bourriaud's relational aesthetics and Jacques Rancière's politics of aesthetics. Birnbaum touches upon something important that has been missing in the existing research on Eliasson's art, and I therefore find it worthwhile to follow-up.

Birnbaum stresses an important fact: Olafur Eliasson's art does not consist of autonomous objects that are completed without a viewer or participant, they are rather *environments*, in which the viewer-participant is of utmost importance: "His works are not self-sufficient objects in the usual sense; rather, they are environments– productive arrangements, heterogeneous apparatuses– awaiting your arrival. Indeed, they need you."[184] Birnbaum does aknowledge that this in some way or another is true of every work of art, since an experiencing subject is required for all aesthetic experience. "But in Eliasson's case", he argues, "the contribution of the active viewer is so central to the works that one might wager the claim that this very activity is what they are about. You belong to them and they belong to you. (…) a reciprocal creation process.[185] Birnbaum exemplifies by referencing to *Beauty*, a key work he says, that "defines the basic

[183]Birnbaum op.cit.
[184] Ibid. p.131.
[185] Ibid. p. 131. Birnbaum refers to Immanuel Kant in the preface to the second edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, on "the so-called Copernican revolution that placed the experiencing subject at the very center of all epistemological inquiry", Birnbaum further argues that Eliasson's art depends both of the position of the viewer *and* cosmic elements of light, heat, and moisture.

parameters that recur from installation to installation: an emphasis on perception and the viewer's active involvement in the process.[186]

Birnbaum describes how he sees a relational aesthetics at work in the social interaction involved in the art of Olafur Eliasson, but points out that there is something more to it, as it is also always about the private experience.[187] The transgression between the social interaction and the private experience implies that relational aesthetics, and Lyotard's notion of the sublime are inadequate in exploring Eliasson's installations to a satisfying degree. Birnbaum asserts that Eliasson's works "suggest a model of sociability that not only permits the viewer to enter the dialogue but takes this dialogue as its very point of departure. His installations are dialogical in composition and democratic in their very structure. They are about sharing,"[188] the key words here being *dialogue* and *democratic*. Birnbaum refers to Rancières approach to politics and aesthetics that focuses on "the manner in which the arts can be perceived and thought of as forms of art *and* as forms that inscribe a sense of community" [189]. "Every artistic articulation", Birnbaum explains, "involves a distribution of shared experience and is thus a figure of sociability or community."[190] This calls for questioning: "In what sense can an artwork be political? More specifically, in what sense can, say, a sculptural work by Eliasson really be said to be democratic?"[191] He further explains:

> The arts, says Rancière, can "only ever lend to projects of domination or emancipation what they are able to lend to them, that is to say, quite simply, what they have in common with them: bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the parcelling out of the visible and the invisible." An artwork can be political because there is an aesthetics at the very core of political life.[192]

The social relation is not necessarily only about social interaction, but what's more important, it is *grounded in reflection*, as noted by the critic Daniel Birnbaum. He writes, in relation to the work *Beauty*, that "This is the kind of sociability, grounded in reflection, that is typical of Eliasson's art, which is never solely about social interaction. It is never only about private experience either. It is always both."[193] Birnbaum says it in clear words: "If Eliasson is a relational artist, then it is perhaps more in Rancières sense than in Bourriaud's. He is no doubt more interested in art as a way of distributing the

[186] Ibid. p. 132.
[187] Ibid. p. 133.
[188] Ibid. p. 133.
[189] Ibid. p. 133-134.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid. p.133

sensible, and in the politics involved, than in games, festivals, or parties."[194] The 'games, festivals, or parties' Birnbaum is referring to are the same 'microtopias' that Bishop is criticizing. And Eliasson's art is as far from that as it gets. Birnbaum further argues that Eliasson:

> "represents an approach that is all about engaging the viewer. His works suggest a model of sociability that not only permits the viewer to enter the dialogue but takes this dialogue as its very point of departure. His installations are dialogical in composition and democratic in their very structure. They are about sharing."[195]

At the same time he accentuates the difference between Tiravanija and Olafur Eliasson, saying that Eliasson's "works inspire a reflective stance, reminding the viewer of his or her own position as an experiencing, bodily being and of the subjective condition of all interactions with the world (and with other embodied subjects)."

As we have seen, *Beauty*, *360º room for all colours* and *Multiple Grotto* are not only aesthetic objects that 'produce a specific sociability'. Relational aesthetics seems to be too simple an explanation for art that embodies so many levels as Eliasson's. Relational aesthetics seems rather to be a bi-product or a necessary digression from the politics at work. The politics in the form of sublime and relational art encountered in a piece by Olafur Eliasson lies in reflection and a distribution of what is visible and invisible. Olafur Eliasson appeals not only to our private senses, invoking a particular intriguing sense experience lingering on the verge of the sublime and creating social relations, but he encourages us to reflect on what we are sensing. What does this imply? In the next chapter I will explore the political aspect of Olafur Eliasson's art, discussing Jacques Rancière's politics of aesthetics.

[194] Ibid. p. 136-137?
[195] Ibid. p.133.

6 – Art, Nature and Politics

Politics of aesthetics – in between relational and sublime art

> (…) aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense – re-examined perhaps by Foucault – as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolve around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of space and the possibilities of time.[196]

These words belong to Jacques Rancière, and give a good introduction to his theory of the politics of aesthetics. Rancière presents us with an interesting way to understand what is happening when experiencing Olafur Eliasson's art. He has a somewhat different approach to the concept of aesthetics than what we have previously discussed, and his notion of politics has to be understood slightly differently than what we are used to. Rancière has written on film, photography, literature and modern aesthetics. He poses a kind of political utopia, and rethinks aesthetics in a political meaning. As opposed to the private experience that is the sublime, and the collective experience of relational aesthetics, the politics of aesthetics carries a double perspective that takes both the private and the collective experience into consideration. Rancière is influenced by Kant and his a priori forms that control our experience of the sensible.

Before I go on, it would be useful to give some definitions on some of the technical terms offered in Rancière's text. In the glossary to *The Politics of Aesthetics* aesthetics is defined thus:

> In its restricted sense, aesthetics refers neither to art theory in general nor to the discipline that takes art as its object of study. Aesthetics is properly speaking a specific regime for identifying and thinking the arts that Rancière names the aesthetic regime of art. In its broad sense, however, aesthetics refers to the distribution of the sensible that determines a mode of articulation between forms of action, production, perception, and thought. This general definition extends aesthetics beyond the strict realm of art to include the conceptual coordinates and modes of visibility operative in the political domain.[197]

What do the politics of aesthetics imply, and why are they relevant to our understanding of Olafur Eliasson's art? In this chapter I will discuss some of Rancière's key terms: The three artistic regimes, the distribution of the sensible and his definition of politics. I will

[196] Rancière 2006 p.13
[197] Ibid. p. 82

further discuss his criticism of Lyotard's notion of the sublime and Bourriaud's relational aesthetics. Additionally, Mieke Bal has an interesting approach to the political in Eliasson's art, and I will discuss this in relation to the art works and Rancière's theory.

According to Rancière a political society is an aesthetic society, on account of the distribution of the sensible – what is visible and invisible. This is why he calls it a politics of aesthetics. The distribution of the sensible is perceptions that disclose that we all have something in common *and at the same time* the limitations that define parts of, and positions within, that which is common. But, who partakes in this? This is situational and depends on time, place and what people are doing. It defines what is visible and invisible in a common place or space. Eliasson's art – as is all art – is a "way of doing and making" that interacts or breaks into this distribution of the sensible.

The artistic regimes

Rancière's politics of aesthetics refers to a specific way of identifying and reflecting on the arts. This is a mode of articulation between ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility, and possible ways of thinking about their relationships.[198] We might say a distribution of the unrepresentable.

In order for something to be identified as art, there has to be a certain form of visibility and understanding that makes this identification possible, known as the distribution of the sensible. There are several ways for this to happen. Rancière defines three major regimes of identification, an ethical regime, a representative regime and an aesthetical regime. All of the regimes are present at the same time, no regime is exclusive, but to a lesser or greater degree.

The ethical regime of images is primarily concerned with the origin and telos of imagery in relationship to the ethos of the community, and is best exemplified through Plato's epistemology and his polemic against "the simulacra of paintings, poems and the stage."[199] It establishes a distribution of images, yet in this regime art as art does not exist. What matters are the different truths in the pictures, and the pictures' influence on the human *ethos,* the mode of being of individuals and communities. Rancière sees Plato's epistemology as characteristic of the ethical regime. Transferred to Eliasson's *Beauty*, the viewer would merely ask: "Is this a real rainbow?"

198 Rancière 2006 A p. 10.
199 Ibid. p. 21.

The representative regime is an artistic regime that organizes by fiction, genre, coherence and the speeches' precedence as an act. The regime is codified by classisism, and identifies ways of doing and making and representing. Rancière sees Aristotle's poetics and mimesis as identifiers of the substance of art as characteristic of this regime. The regime liberates imitation from the constraints of the ethical regime, creating its own rules and criteria to isolate what is an autonomous domain within certain hierarchies. Art is seen through convention, and the material is given a form. In Eliasson's *Beauty* this would imply that we consider the artefact of the construction of the work and see it as a sculpture or installation.

The aesthetic regime's first manifesto was Schiller's *Aesthetic state,* and it is a regime of visibility that both renders art autonomous and sees the autonomy in relation to "a general order of occupations and ways of doing and making."[200] The regime puts the system of norms into question by "abolishing the dichotomous structure of *mimesis* in the name of a contradictory identification between *logos* and pathos."[201] The aesthetic regime breaks with art as representation and the hierarchic structure seen in the representative regime. Art becomes autonomous. We experience a democratization of style and material that makes it an egalitarian regime, based on justice. Here *Beauty* becomes art because of a sense experience that is different from that of the everyday life. Our reality is changed ever so slightly. Schiller's saw play and game as means to reach the utopia of an ideal state, where our experience of the world is not differentiated by way of split spheres of politics, daily life, religion or art. Former opposites like reality and fiction, material and form, active and passive are united and leads to the fusion of feeling and thought, mind and body. When art is political in this way it means that it reconfigures the world and makes a common world. Rancière sees these opportunities as microsituations, situations that try to create relations between the viewers (and between the work and the viewers), making new forms of participation and confrontation.

The shortcomings of the notion of modernity.

The aesthetic regime of the arts refers to modernity. "It traces, in order either to exalt or deplore it, a simple line of transition or rupture between the old and the new, the representative and the non-representative or the anti-representative."[202] However, it does not contrast the old with the new: "It contrasts, more profoundly, two regimes of

[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid. p.4.
[202] Ibid. p.24.

historicity. It is within the mimetic regime that the old stands in contrast with the new. In the regime of art, the future of art, its separation from the present of non-art, incessantly restages the past." The aesthetic regime of the arts is first of all a new regime for relating to the past.[203]

Rancière has forcefully argued that the emergence of literature in the nineteenth century as distinct from *les belles-lettre* was a central catalyst in the development of the aesthetic regime of art. By rejecting the representative regime's poetics of *mimesis* modern literature contributed to a general reconfiguration of the sensible order linked to the contradiction inherent in what Ranciere calls *literarity*, i.e. the status of a written word that freely circulates outside any system of legitimation.[204]

Rancière is critical of Lyotard and other postmodernists and his theory may be seen partly as a comment on the postmodern. Rancière criticizes Lyotard by arguing that the post-modern is not something new, but rather the logical conclusion of elements in modernism, elements that have been part of the aesthetic regime ever since Schiller.[205]

The sublime ends history and claims to do without dialectics, but Rancière says that the sublime is a perfecting of this dialectics.

> It is, however, the work of Jean Francois Lyotard that best marks the way in which 'aesthetics' has become, in the last twenty years, the privileged site where the tradition of critical thinking has metamorphosed into deliberation on mourning. The reinterpretation of the Kantian analysis of the sublime introduced into the field of art a concept that Kant had located beyond it. It did this in order to more effectively make art a witness to an encounter with the unpresentable that cripples all thought, and thereby a witness for the prosecution against the arrogance of the grand aesthetico-political endeavour to have 'thought' become 'world'.[206]

Rancière has his own notion of the sublime. He stresses the idea of the sublime as a mode of aesthetic comprehension occurring precisely when one experiences the harmonious relation between our various faculties and senses *being overturned*, coincides perfectly with the moment when the subject is made aware of the underlying *construction* of the work of art *and* her perception of the act of perceiving. In *The Future of the Image* from 2007 Rancière postulates a critique of Lyotard's notion of the sublime through a discussion of the question 'Are some things unrepresentable?'. Rancière is influenced by Lyotard, yet criticizes him, saying

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[203] Ibid. p.25.
[204] Ibid. p.5.
[205] Ibid. p. 28-29.
[206] Ibid.p. 29

> (…)Lyotard's schema does quite the opposite of what it claims to do. It argues for some original unthinkable phenomenon resistant to any dialectical assimilation. But it itself becomes the principle of a complete rationalization. In effect, it makes it possible to identify the existence if a people with an original determination to thought and to identify the professed unthinkability of the extermination with a tendency constitutive of Western reason.[207]

Rancière argues that the aesthetic regime began before the arts of mechanical reproduction, and is what made them possible by its new way of thinking of art and art's subject matter.[208] He sees this regime as what initially broke down the system of representation.[209] "Postmodernism", Rancière writes,

> brought to light everything in the recent evolution of the arts and possible ways of thinking the arts that destroyed modernism's theoretical edifice. (…)Postmodernism, in a sense, was simply the name under whose guise certain artists and thinkers realized what modernism had been: a desperate attempt to establish a 'distinctive feature of art' by linking it to a simple teleology of historical evolution and rupture."[210]

In short modernism took after Schiller's 'aesthetic education of man', that he in his turn had derived from Kant's analysis of beauty. Postmodernism on the other hand was 'founded' on Lyotard's analysis of Kant's notion of the sublime. The latter was interpreted as a sublime distance between idea and sense perception. Postmodernism, Rancière argues, became the great 'grief' or 'sorrow' over everything that man could not reach, retract or represent.[211]

Rancière claims that "the aesthetic revolution rearranges the rules of the game by making two things interdependent: the blurring of the borders between the logic of facts and the logic of fictions *and* the new mode of rationality that characterizes the science of history."[212] He further asserts that "the aesthetic revolution drastically disrupts things: testimony and fiction come under the same regime of meaning."[213] Architecture, or in our case nature, becomes art. "The real must be fictionalized in order to be thought",[214] he says, and exemplified in a work like *Beauty* it literally means that the rainbow is not seen properly without the artifice of the construction and the museum walls surrounding it. This means "It is a matter of stating that the fiction of the aesthetic age defined models for connecting the presentation of facts and forms of intelligibility that blurred

[207] Rancière, Jacques, *The Future of the Image,* (London:Verso 2007). p. 134.
[208] Rancière op.cit. p. 32.
[209] Ibid. p. 32.
[210] Ibid. p. 28.
[211] Ibid. p. 29.
[212] Ibid. p. 36.
[213] Ibid. p. 37.
[214] Ibid. p. 38.

the border between the logic of facts and the logic of fiction."[215] "Thus", Rancière continues,

> it is not a matter of claiming that 'History' is only made up of stories that we tell ourselves, but simply that the 'logic of stories' and the ability to act as historical agents go together. Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct 'fictions', that is to say *material* rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is sais, between what is done and what can be done.[216]

The regimes decide how *art* is presented to us, but they lead us to how the *world* is presented to us. In the next part we will see how.

The distribution of the sensible

Jacques Rancière sees a political society as an aesthetic society because of the distribution of the sensible, which decides what is visible or invisible. This is why he calls it a politics of aesthetics. The distribution of the sensible (*le partage du sensible*) is not a perfect translation. But what it implies is that there are perceptions that disclose that we have, as viewers, something in common and at the same time that there are limitations that define parts of, and positions within, what is common. Rancière says:

> I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts.[217]

But what then decides who partakes in this? This is based on time and place/space and what they do. In the aesthetic regime, because of the distribution of the sensible those who do not normally have the opportunity to express their opinion because they are "invisible" in society, now have the opportunity to partake. They are made visible. The partitions of society, with its different groups divided according to social position, function and rights, decide who have a say or don't, who can partake and who are excluded. The distribution of the sensible thus defines what is visible or not in a common space.[218]

"Artistic practices are 'ways of doing and making' that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility."[219] Eliasson's art is one. The invisible become visible and perceptible.

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[215] Ibid. p. 38.
[216] Ibid. p. 38.
[217] Ibid. p. 12
[218] Ibid. p. 13.
[219] Ibid.

The misappropriation of the commonplace is key in Rancière's politics, and in Eliasson's art, as the fundament for the politics involved. This is where the politics of aesthetics makes itself visible. When nature is represented inside a museum or gallery space; when Eliasson displays the underlying construction of the work of art; when the conflict between the social relations and our private experience appear, the political appears.

What really happens when the damp mist from *Beauty* covers your forehead inside the Museum of Modern Art? Or when you suddenly realize that the underlying construction of *360° room for all colours* is visible because you are supposed to see it, to have your experience mediated? Or in *Multiple Grotto* where the work of art suddenly comes alive and is not about you, but about the relationship between you and the old lady peeking in from a cone on the outside, or when you, in a blink of an eye, realize that your surroundings are real and changing constantly, and that you can control them, change them, if only for a moment. The works of art are representing the unrepresentable.

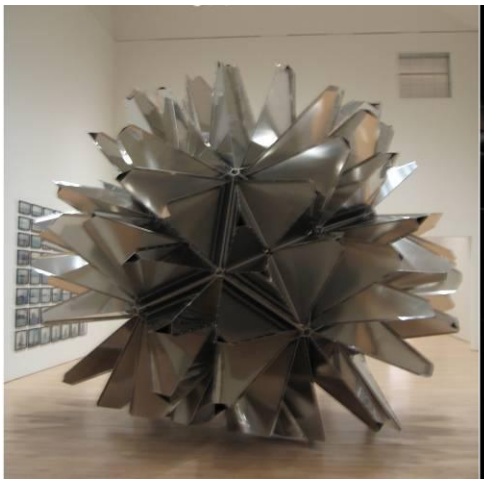

Figure 23. *Multiple Grotto*

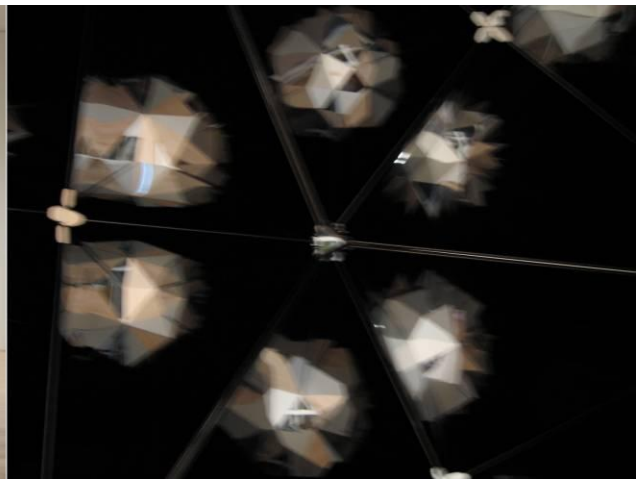

Figure 24. *Multiple Grotto*

Rancière links the artist who engages in the aesthetic regime by abolishing figurative representation, to the revolutionary, or might we say avant-garde, who invents a new form of life.[220]

> "This interface is political in that it revokes the twofold politics inherent in the logic of representation. On the one hand, this logic separated the world of artistic imitations from the world of vital concerns and politico-social grandeur. On the other hand, its hierarchical organization – in particular the primacy of living speech/action over depicted images – formed an analogy with the socio-political order. (and an entire well ordered distribution of sensory experience was overturned.)"[221]

[220] Ibid. p. 16.
[221] Ibid. p.16.

Ranciere states that politics is at work in the theatrical paradigm as "the relationship between the stage and the audience,"[222] in Eliasson's case between the space and the viewer. This happens in three ways: through bodily positions and movements, functions of speech and the parcelling out of the visible and the invisible.[223]

Rancière's Politics

Politics (from Greek: *polis* meaning state or city, *politikos* describing that which concerns the state or city affairs) is generally viewed as the distribution of power in society. What are the politics that Rancière speaks of? First of all: Rancière's notion of the politics of aesthetics has nothing to do with 'political art' or 'political artists' in the traditional meaning of the term. It is not a politics of artists that deal with their personal commitment to social and political issues of their time, as seen in the artistic practices of Martha Rosler or Leon Golub. Rather, as Rancière says in his essay "The politics of literature"; literature *does* politics as literature:

> Politics is first of all a way of framing, among sensory data, a specific sphere of experience. It is a particion of the sensible, of the visible and the sayable, which allows (or does not allow) some specific data to appear; which allows or does not allow some specific subjects to designate them and speak about them. It is a specific intertwining of being, ways of doing and ways of speaking.[224]

Democracy is more than a social state. It is a specific partition of the sensible, as specific regime of speaking whose effect is to upset any steady relationship between manners of speaking, manners of doing and manners of being. (It is in this sense that literature opposed its "democracy" to the representational hierarchy.)[225] "Literature discovers at its core this link with the democratic disorder of literariness. Literature is the art of writing that specifically addresses those who *should not* read."[226]

"First," Rancière says, "I have tried to substantiate the idea that so-called interpretations are political to the extent that they are reconfigurations of the visibility of a common world. Second, I would suggest that the discourse contrasting interpretive change and "real" change is itself part of the same hermeneutic plot as the interpretation that it challenges. (…) The new regime of meaning underpinning both literature and social science has made the very sentence contrasting "changing the world" and

[222] Ibid. p. 17.
[223] Ibid. p. 19.
[224] Rancière, Jacques: *The Politics of Literature* 2004 C p.10.
[225] Ibid. p. 14.
[226] Ibid.

"interpreting the world" into an enigma."[227] However, this idea of interpretation as politics is dependent on an idea of the political as a field of dissensus, where agonists clash.

In his introduction to Rancière's *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Gabriel Rockhill describes Rancière's politics of perception as "a politics of democratic emancipation". He explains the main concepts of the theory:

> The *police*, to begin with, is defined as an organizational system of coordinates that establishes a distribution of the sensible or a law that divides the community into groups, social positions, and functions. This law implicitly separate those who take part from those who are excluded, and it therefore presupposes a prior aesthetic division between the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, the sayable and the unsayable. The essence of *politics* consists in interrupting the distribution of the sensible by supplementing it with those who have no part in the perceptual coordinates of the community, thereby modifying the very aesthetico-political field of possibility. It is partially for this reason that Ranciere defines *the political* as relational in nature, founded on the intervention of politics in the police order rather than on the establishment of a particular government regime.[228]

Rancière's notion of politics cannot be understood without an understanding of his notion of *polis*. He differs between politics and *politeia*. Politics is to Rancière always a disagreement of politics existence. Politeia is politics in the form of consensus. Politics is an intrusion on politeia from those who stand on the outside. The most basic principle of politics is equality, and equality must exist for us to be able to think politics. Politics exist because there is no natural order of society. So equality must be created in a community of language. The order of society is contingent, and is decided by random break-ins or intrusions. Conflicts are based on 'mistakes' that can only be seen on the background of its fundamental equality. By the instrusion/break-in there is a reorganization of politeia that creates a void, a condition for equality between people in our society. The intrusion thus modifies the relationship between consensus and dissensus, distribution of justice and revolution. Everything may be political if it breaks with the negotiations between the different social entities. But what is the relationship between politics and its principle – equality? Rancière states: "Equality is what I have called a presupposition. (…) [but] only generates politics when it is implemented in the specific forma of a particular case of dissensus." (…) Art as we know it in the aesthetic regime is the implementation of a certain equality. It is based on the destruction of the hierarchical system of the fine arts."[229]

Rancière asserts that with the introduction of politics something/-one *new* is seen. This *new* demands equality. In order to gain equality, what or who must we take into

[227] Ibid. p. 23.
[228] Ibid. p. 3.
[229] Ibid. p. 53.

consideration? Rancière differs from Eliasson and Bal's view on the politics of aesthetics as something that only makes us see our surroundings with a fresh sight. "Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct 'fictions', that is to say *material* rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done."[230] And political subjects can challenge the given distribution of the sensible. From what we have seen so far, the political is always aesthetic, and the aesthetics is always political – but it is never given how.

Politics is the constituting of a sphere. Everyone can be a subject. Politics is to redistribute space and time, to redefine speech and noise, visible and invisible. The distribution of the sensible world is the lot of literature, either it wants to or not. Rancière distances himself from the aesthetics of autonomy. Modern art is a new regime of identification, and therefore political. By way of the art's/literature's indifference, it has the possibility to address and exhibit everything that political speakers cannot.

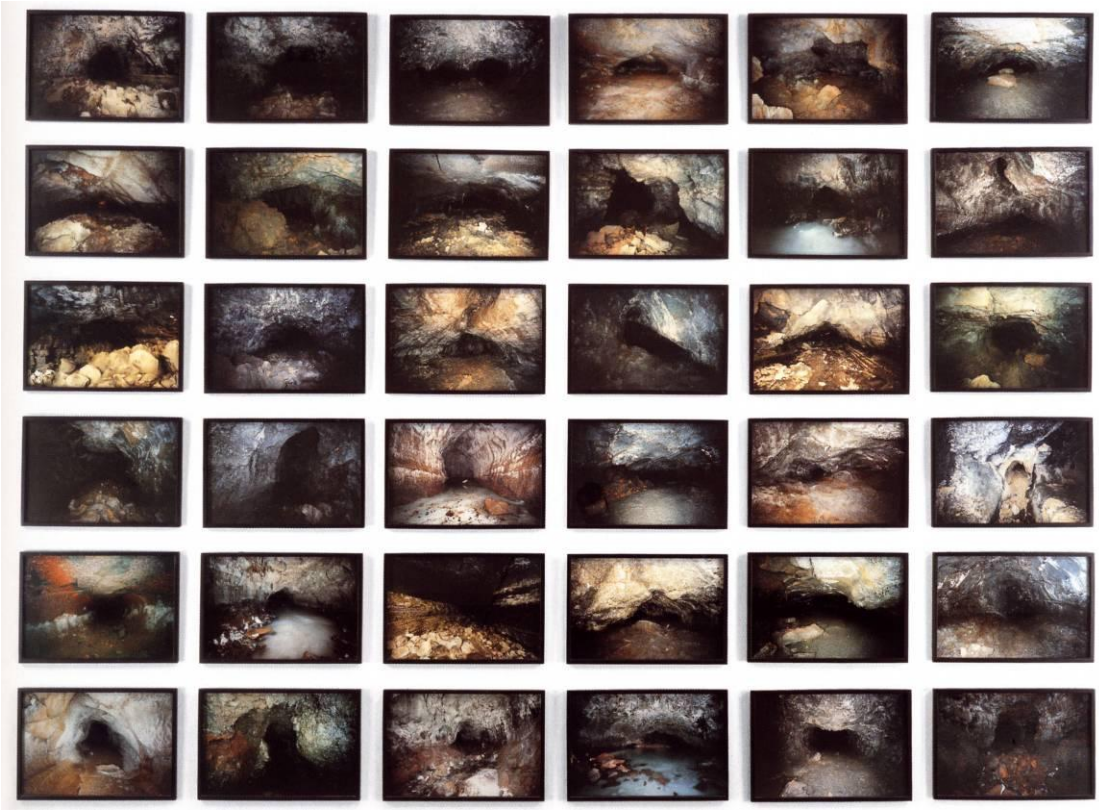

Figure 25. *Inner Cave Series*

Plato's analogy of the cave represents the ethical artistic regime. *Multiple Grotto* makes a good example of the analogy. First of all, to state the obvious, *Multiple Grotto* is a cave that reflects and mirrors the interior, thus representing its surroundings. What is more, it reflects the outside of the grotto by way of the entrance and the wholes at the

[230] Rancière 2006. p. 39.

end of every cone. As we have discussed with regards to relational aesthetics, the fragmented reflections of other viewers on the outside become visible inside the grotto. In SFMOMA however, *Multiple Grotto* the curators had added a new layer to the work. *Multiple Grotto* was positioned in a room with some of Eliasson's landscape photographs on the surrounding walls. Among the depicted natural phenomena were series of waterfalls and caves. Snapshots – and bear in mind – fragmented as such, were represented endlessly on the inside of the grotto. The installation then revealed several layers of representation of nature; the grotto as a representation of nature, the landscape photographs as representation of nature, and finally the grotto ended up representing a representation of nature – the landscape photographs. The perspective is a way of distributing the sensible, of deciding what will be visible. Here, fragmented as it was, what was visible was the radical irreducibility of nature.

Art after utopia?

In the essay "Estetikken som politikk"[231] Rancière criticizes the notion of post-modernity, through analyses of the sublime and the relational as contemporary art practices, which he sees as representing the dissolved union of radicalism in art and in politics.

He refers to a 'post-utopian'[232] contemporary art that holds two attitudes. The first is the Kantian sublime, which can be interpreted in two ways: where the singular force in the work of art consists of creating a common being that goes ahead of all political forms,[233] the other interpretation is Lyotard's "the idea of the sublime as an irreducible distance between the idea and the sensual,"[234] where contemporary art should present the unpresentable. The second attitude in the post-utopian contemporary art, however, is the microsituations in the relational art practices. Rancière sees the relational art of Pierre Huyghe as clearly opposed to the sublime shock in the strike of colour in Newman's canvases;[235] however, he focuses on what they have in common, rather than what separates them. He sees them as both exemplifying a transition of the functioning of politics; from the traditional signification, involving, for example, identity or class issues, to a distancing from these functions through creating and filling a specific space and time. Whereas this space-time in the sublime aesthetics is created in the very conflict

[231] Rancière, Jacques "Estetikken som politikk" (from *Malaise dans l'esthétique 2004*) in Bale, Kjersti and Bø-Rygg, Arnfinn (ed.) *Estetisk teori – en antologi* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget 2008
[232] We may consider the term "post-utopian" as synonymous to "post-modernism".
[233] Ibid. p 534.
[234] Ibid. p. 534.
[235] Ibid. p. 535.

of sensual experience, in the relational aesthetics it is created in the shifting from passive viewer to participant.[236] It is the dissensus within the arts that creates and puts the politics at play, in the reconfiguring of what is visible.[237] Art cannot exist without there being a form of visibility that identifies it as such. Whether there is a utopia or not, he argues, both the sublime and the relational artist is inscribed in the logics of a politics of art. While the sublime appreciates what is private and the relational appreciates what is collective, they are both tying art to a specific way of being in the collective through connecting a material and a symbolic form.[238] This signifies that the question of whether art and politics should be connected is invalid; they already are. There is no opposition between 'art for art's sake' and 'political art'.[239] Post-utopian art tries to escape from two 'evils'; turning into a meta-political act, and turning into the forms of modernist aesthetics. The result is that the critical potential lies in the experience of the work.[240]

Eliasson's art concerns different perspectives and perceptions of nature. The politics of aesthetics decides what and how the world is presented to us. In 1435-36[241] the architect, painter and author Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) published *Della Pittura (On Painting)*, a systematic description of the central perspective, where all horizontal lines come together in a vanishing point only visible from a specific point of view. This was the first modern treatise on the theory of painting and marked a turning point in art, leaving behind the Middle Ages and moving on to the Renaissance. Art should imitate nature, however, not objectively, but with special regard to beauty. Eliasson takes an opposite position from that of Alberti's central perspective, but at the same time his art insists that Alberti's perspective, still up to this very day, has a strong position in the art experience. Eliasson's art revolves around experience and different modes of seeing the surrounding world. This perceptive interruption functions politically. We find that the art of Eliasson stands in stark contrast to, *and* in agreement with, the central perspective. He opposes the renaissance notion that man/the subject is the centre, and that the subject is creating the world and introducing *logos* through its order-inducing perspective. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), one of several artists who later challenged Alberti's notion of the central perspective, created an octagonal room where all the walls were made of mirrors, and where the least movement of the viewer resulted in a perspective chaos, much

[236] Ibid.
[237] Ibid. p. 537.
[238] Ibid. p. 538.
[239] Ibid. p. 543.
[240] Ibid. p.548.
[241] Published in Italian in 1436, first published in Latin as De re praestantissima in 1435.

reminding us of what is happening in Eliasson's *Multiple Grotto,* where the eyes of the viewer are never fixed and there is no privileged point of view. The viewer finds herself *inside* the time-space of the artwork, with several opportunities for alternative viewing points and placement. The image is switching between order and chaos, as a sovereign subject confronted with a supposedly already defined object is overwhelmed and put out of the game by the numerous alternative angles and viewing points. This fragmented and contingent experience points towards the dissensus of the sublime and the microsituations within the work.

Eliasson has a more explicit political side to some of his art: in his projects that take place in public space, where he creates installations or do performances that are available for everybody rather than being on view within the art institutions, often nature is forcing itself upon us in a more pressing and persistent mode than seen in *Beauty* or *Multiple Grotto*. The waterfalls of *The New York City Waterfalls* were for instance visible almost throughout the city, thus in a way being unavoidable. *Green River* is an installation or site-specific performance reminding of political activism or guerrilla art. Eliasson has performed it on several occasions, in Moss, Norway and in Stockholm, Sweden in 2000. Eliasson poured an environmentally friendly green colour into the river that runs through the cities. The colour was naturally taken by the currents and after short time ended up colouring the whole river a poisonous green. On all the occasions, the performances were kept a secret, meaning that the citizens were completely ignorant of, thus spontaneously struck by, what was happening. They were forced to pause in their everyday lives and take a look at their environment. The surrounding cities functioned as a mediating factor between work and viewer, and removed from the walls of the institution, the 'art' in the project was undermined. Instead the 'artificiality' of the river made visible the 'reality' of the river. In 2006 Eliasson displayed the overtly political installations *Eye See You* in the windows of all of the Louis Vuitton stores in the world, as a means to raise funding to his and his wife's charitable foundation *121.ethiopia.org. Eye See You,* a lamp shaped as the pupil of an eye and posited in otherwise empty shop-windows just before Christmas, reflected the gaze of passersby, thus quite directly revealing how people see what they want to see; luxury goods, not poverty in Africa.[242]

[242] It is worth noting that Eliasson does not critizice capitalism. In my interview with him he proclaims to be a non-marxist that fundamentally believe that the capitalistic system may prove to be more democratic than alternative systems. (Quote: "Selv er jeg ikke-marxist, og jeg tror grunnleggende på at det kapitalistiske system kan vise seg å være mer demokratisk enn alternative systemer. (Men) i min virkelighetsoppfatning inngår også de kommersielle strukturer som kunst blir skapt innenfor.") Vik, Synnøve "Eliassons institusjoner" in *Billedkunst* no.6/08.

Figure 26. *Erosion*

Figure 27. *Green River Stockholm*

The Very Large Ice Floor displayed the social spheres constituted inside and outside the pavilion in a very explicit way. What's more interesting is how the ice, such an unnatural natural phenomenon under the Brazilian sun, demanded its presence. The same is seen in *Erosion* in 1997, where Eliasson changed the path of water running through the streets of Johannesburg, forcing people to change their paths as pedestrians. Relational aesthetics then is too narrow an explanation. Inside Eliasson's installations the viewer does not first and foremost engage with other people, she engages with her surroundings. This type of relational activity is more in line with Mieke Bal's theory of engagement.

Bal's baroque politics

In the article *Light Politics* Mieke Bal sees a new affiliation for Eliasson's historical frame: the Baroque.[243] This idea originates from her experience of Eliasson's *Notion Motion*[244], which although it reminded her of both Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above a Sea of Fog* (ca.1817) and her experience of being inside a grotto behind the Niagara Falls, she could not explain with the Romantic sublime lingering within post modernity. "Rather than soliciting the experience of the sublime, then, Eliasson's installation brings water closer to humans. There is no imminent danger, no sense of self-inflicted doom, yet the work is powerfully political."[245] There is a paradox in Eliasson's installations, she argues, in that "Eliasson emphatically does not offer representations, though his art engages the pervasiveness of representation in our visual surroundings."[246] Because of this pervasiveness of representation where something 'real' happens, there is a "brief

[243] Bal has discussed the baroque extensively apropos of Caravaggio in Bal, Mieke *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*. Chicago:The university of Chicago Press, 1999.
[244] The installation *Notion Motion* (last exibited at SFMOMA in San Francisco and MOMA, New York). consists of three connected rooms or situations with light and water, where the viewer's movements within the museum space trigger vibrations in the water.
[245] Bal, Mieke "Light Politics" in *Take your time: Olafur Eliasson*, San Francisco Museum Of Modern Art, San Francisco: Thames & Hudson 2007 p. 155.
[246] Ibid.

suspension of disbelief that transforms the subject's sense of self. This change emerges from an experience of space that is profoundly unsettling."[247]

Both the art of the baroque as well as the art of Eliasson bears an intensity and sense of the immediate that is appealing to the viewers' senses and feelings, Bal argues. She asserts that Eliasson's art is a product of "[…] a sensibility that never went away […]". She sees the baroque as "the name of a relationship between subject and surroundings, or reality, that is neither relativist nor nominalist but literally *engaging*."[248] This opens the way to the political in Eliason's art, she says, in the sense that subjects "must engage with their environments, neither detached nor immersed but active, on innovative, creative and responsible terms."[249] She calls this Baroque Politics.[250]

Bal explains how Eliasson, by creating beauty out of fragmentation, "alludes to sublimity without endorsing it: the haunted beauty of the kaleidoscope, for example, detaches or even detoxes us from the need for unity."[251] She sees it as essential to reflect critically on the sublime in Eliasson's art, because it so clearly invokes and rejects it.[252] "Yet, by taking manifestations of the sublime literally and showing its ideological mechanisms (among other means, through overt acknowledgment of the art's technological mechanisms), these works undermine sublimity's possibility–and, indeed, its desirability." I disagree with Bal on this point, as I rather see an interesting doublebind in the sublime in Eliasson's art. Where Bal sees the visibility of the technological constructions as undermining the possibility of sublimity, I see two possibilities for sublimity; one is the mesmerizing experience of touching a rainbow inside a museum or the immersiveness evoked in *The Weather Project*. The other is the possibility of sublimity exactly *because of* the visibility of the underlying construction. Both during the initial sensual shock of seeing a rainbow inside, and after the impact of realizing and reflecting on the artificiality of the experience, the possibility of sublimity lingers in the air as a continuous cognitive/sensual decision-making process. This is, as I see it, what makes Eliasson's art so intriguing; namely that he renders it impossible to define the experience as sublime or anti-sublime, relational or not. His art escapes any labeling.

To Bal then, instead of sublimity there is a baroque, which she explains to be "(…) a mode of embodied thinking that considers how being "enfolded" in what one is

[247] Ibid.
[248] Ibid. p.156 Italics in original.
[249] Ibid s.157
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid. p.175
[252] Ibid. p. 160.

seeing affects what one sees, and how embodying is a way of fully grasping what is outside the self."[253] Bal applies literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's term *chronotope*, meaning an unbreakable bond between space and time, within which two dimensions the subjects are located.[254] There is an interchanging or mutuality in time of "you" and "I", which makes "the work (…) preposterously baroque, and it is that baroqueness that constitutes its political force."[255] She sees a difference between a common cultural chronotope, and a private chronotope. "The viewer", she argues, "must surrender her baggage of visual knowledge in order to *see* what is *here now*–and, on that basis only, experience time."[256] She suggests that the work's political significance then "rests upon its repositioning of human beings in the environment."[257] Each and one of us must change our position in order to reach our private chronotope, access our subjectivity and then change our surroundings.

Molly Nesbit remarks in *I am the Tiger*[258] that to change the world is of no interest to Olafur Eliasson. The interesting and important thing is to change your view of the world, and to change the way you see the world you have to change your own position.[259] This change of position can be subtle, both physical and mental, and involve only the slightest movement, like experienced and exhibited in *Multiple Grotto*, where the smallest change in bodily position changes your whole visual field. But to see also implies actively positioning oneself: "To try to see the world differently, one needed to change one's own position. The change would need to be physical and mental. Sometimes the sensuous experience of a new sight alone could throw the world open anew. It could be a matter of taking steps to see by a different light."[260] Bal refers briefly to Nesbit, and concludes:

> in order to work politically, Eliasson's art needs to stage a ficticious space for its experiences and experiments. Reluctant to espouse the discourse of political art as manifesto, this work is much more effective, aesthetically and thereby politically, because it does not pronounce upon the world, but considers how seeing it differently is already changing it.[261]

In the foreword to *Your Engagement has Concequeces on the Relativity of Your Reality* (2006) Eliasson takes a quite similar approach to Bal's definition of the political in his art: "[…] what we must do is challenge the ways in which we engage with our surroundings, and

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253 Ibid.
254 Quoting Bal on Bakhtin's own definition: "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed." *Ibid,* p. 169.
255Ibid. p. 174.
256 Ibid.
257 Ibid. p.176
258 Nesbit, Molly, 'I Am The Tiger' in *Olafur Eliasson, Minding the World,* ARoS Aarhus kunstmuseum 2004.
259 Ibid. p.141
260 Ibid. p.174
261 Ibid. p.178.

here, I believe, art has a great potential; it not only encourages critical engagement, but also introduces a sense of responsibility in our engagement that has political as well as social and ethical consequences.[262] It is the *modesty* of this approach that Bal sees as profoundly political:

> The final paradox, then, is this: Eliasson makes powerful statements, proposals for reenvisioning the world; he suggests that we must learn to see it differently rather than change it. This is a call for modesty, for abandoning the utopian passion for a changeable world. Yet the modesty in this limitation is precisely what is most profoundly political about his work.[263]

Bal's notion of the political in Eliasson's art is somewhat similar to Rancière's politics. Yet there is an important difference between them: Whereas Bal (and Eliasson) thinks that *changing our view* of the world is political, Rancière opposes this view of the political potential in art claiming that it is enough to passively view our surroundings anew. He argues that aesthetics are political because aesthetics are essential in deciding *who* decides, and *what* is visible. Rancière's sense of politics has dissensus as a fundamental premise; this involves a much stronger sense of agency and *agon* than what is implied by Bal's meek modesty. I find it remarkable how Eliasson's art exemplifies this by giving a voice to nature, a voice that demands equality and so puts our passiveness to shame. It is worth noting why Eliasson sees the need to always renegotiate and revise the term art, characterized by making transparent and visible the underlying construction and relations of power in our surroundings. If this renegotiation stops, he says, art looses its potential as a dialogical partner in society.[264] This relates to Rancière's notion of the dissensus that is essential in order to achieve equality, a tension that makes the very aesthetic regime working. However, what the art itself shows us, the utopia is not dead. Art makes displays a politics, not by engaging the viewer, but by permitting and inviting nature to engage.

As we see, Eliasson's installations have the potential to create critical spaces for viewing the world, spaces where it is possible to reflect, by way on including nature in the form of rainbows, light, crystalline figures, waterfalls, ice and so forth. The politics in Eliasson's installations is not overtly present. In fact, it turns out that the more successful the politics are, the less visible they are. Eliasson renders experience political by staging empowering interactions between the viewer and the environment, by presenting nature as art. Taking this approach Eliasson shows how aesthetics and public engagement can be combined.

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[262] Olafur Eliasson in the foreword to *Your Engagement has Concequeces on the Relativity of Your Reality.*
[263] Ibid.
[264] Engberg and Wind Meyhoff (2004). p. 18.

How radical is Eliasson's art? It is impossible to say whether or not Eliasson succeeds in making every viewer mentally (and physically) transformed when leaving one of his exhibitions. Since his work relies entirely on the individual spectator, we would have to ask each and every one. I can, however, speak for myself. What strikes me is that his anti-utopian – to use Rancière's term – belief in the viewers' self-criticality signifies a crucial dissensus in contemporary society. At the very end selfishness and disclaim of responsibility is characteristic of our society's demand for individual experience and individual self-criticism. What I find most pressing standing in front of *Beauty*, *360º room for all colours* and *Multiple Grotto* is the overwhelming presence of nature. The power of the natural phenomena at display in his installations is not to be taken for granted. Of course, one might argue that the mediated nature in his installations is the only contact nature-starved urban sophisticates have with moss or waterfalls today. Yet the democratic aspect of nature is exactly what makes his installations so immensely popular, thus disclaiming the validity of the former statement. It is not by way of being unusual that the presentation of nature is so powerful to us, but rather by way of being natural.

To me, Eliasson's installations symbolize and actualize the lack of a *common* criticality in society. As I am finishing this thesis the Norwegian Minister of the Environment, Erik Solheim presents yet another report on the "new, disturbing" measurements of climate gases in our atmosphere.[265] Who *really* take note of such reports? I think that by making nature visible through his installations, Eliasson may contribute to making the reports visible. His art presents a utopia here and now. That is nothing to be ashamed of. I do not think it is sufficient to say that his installations call for an individual self-criticality in our everyday lives, a call for us to see ourselves and our surroundings afresh. Because of the distribution of the sensible in these installations, we might actually begin to take in the implications of the fact that in April 2009, 60 Norwegian weather stations set new heat records.[266]

[265] Tom Egil Hverven "Naturens bok" in *Klassekampen* May 9th 2009.
[266] Ibid.

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Caspar David Friedrich, *Ruins of the Oybin Monastery*, after 1810

Figure 18, p. 48

Paul Cézanne, *Mont Saint-Victoire, seen from Les Lauves*, 1902-1904. Oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm; Private collection; Venturi 799

Figure 19, p. 60

Olafur Eliasson, *360° room for all coulours*, 2002. Stainless steel, projection foil, fluorescent lights, wood, and control unit. 126 x 321 x 321 in. (320 x 815.3 x 815.3 cm). Installation views at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany, 2004. Private collection, courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York. Photo: Bertrand Huet 2002. Printed with the permission of © Olafur Eliasson.

Figure 20, p. 60

Olafur Eliasson, *Double Sunset*, Panorama, Utrecht, 2000. Printed with the permission of © Olafur Eliasson.

Figure 21, p. 61

Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Untitled (Pad see-ew)*, 1990/2000. Performance at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2000.

Figure 22, p. 64

Olafur Eliasson, The *very large ice floor*, 1993. Water, cooling system, metal and plastic foil. Variable measurements. Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil 1998. Picture scanned from Ratcliffe, Malene (ed.) *Olafur Eliasson: Det indre af det ydre* Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag 2008

Olafur Eliasson, *Inner Cave Series*, 1998. Chromogenic prints. Collection of Ruth and Carl Pite

Figure 23 and 24, p. 79

Olafur Eliasson, Multiple Grotto, installation views at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Photographer Synnøve Marie Vik.

Figure 25, p. 85

Olafur Eliasson, *The inner cave series*, 1998. Chromogenic prints. Collection of Ruth and Carl Pite.

Figure 26, p. 86

Olafur Eliasson, *Erosion*, 1997. 2nd Johannesburg Biennial, South Africa, 1997. Suction filter, water, hose, pump. Variable dimensions. Printed with the permission of © Olafur Eliasson.

Figure 27, p. 86

Olafur Eliasson, *Green River*, 1998. Stockholm, Sweden, 2000. Uranin, Water. Printed with the permission of © Olafur Eliasson.