

“A Glossary” (1994)

Meta glossary

The following is a vocabulary based on the “meta” prefix. It is a game of declensions, associations, and displacements of nouns and adjectives for the sake of experimenting with a different approach, a move beyond art: meta-subject, meta-space, meta-conference, meta-protocols, etc. Our first interest in capturing the meta prefix was simply to create a provisional constellation of terms. As clumsy as this prefix is, it is nevertheless useful in the creation of intervals, gaps, displacements, and so forth. “Meta” is always followed by a hyphen, a link that must dissolve bit by bit, and dissolve into something else the elements it provisionally unites. Indeed, the hyphen is often forgotten, but it stands for both a limit and a beginning.

The *protocoles méta-* (assemblage of tools for experimentation)

Met(a) is a prefix that expresses participation, succession, change.

We use it in order to revisit, in an experimental way:

- the notion of the subject and the topodynamics of his activities and passions (the meta-subject with his bodies and products: secretions, signs, and artifacts...meta-activity and meta-body) and
- the topography of places of activity (meta-studio, meta-spaces).
- This leads us to revisit the mode of communication (meta-conferences, bootleg publishing, etc.) by drawing on, among other things, a simple vocabulary (records and indices of materials and gestures: meta-writing, meta-sculpture, etc.) and ordinary actions: speech, activities of composition following flexible protocols and plans of action (meta-activity).

Like an aesthetic of existence and misunderstandings (June 2003):

If one segment of the art world has sought autonomy and legitimacy by allying itself with the art market, another has chosen to venture outside of the laws of the market in order to escape the pressure of having to constantly produce. In most cases, the tendency associated with this second approach is:

- either the desire to turn the life of the creator into a full-fledged experiment by trying to give it a form, a “style”
- or to think of life as a workshop with tasks to be explored day after day, taking into account the impermanence of phenomena and remaining open to unknown becomings.

But is art today still the only guarantor of the “aesthetic illusion”?

For the truly experimental artist, has art not become a substitute for reality, the production of a full-fledged mode of appearances and disappearances, which

requires no other justification than the construction of a “life”? No longer an art but an activity without a name? No longer an aesthetics but a “politics”?

Experimentation is understood here as a full-fledged artistic practice that does not necessarily lead to a final product but rather remains its own object. It is an activity that is open to encounters and risks and is devoted to “impermanence.” This leads us to reinvestigate artistic behavior by exploring the conditions of the meta-subject and her meta-activities.

Meta-subject:

The meta-subject succeeds the notion of the artist-subject, which succeeded the experimental ego.

The meta-subject is a gymnast on foreign terrain. She is capable of doing things that are new to her. She investigates an entire form of being-in-the-world in her continuous activity of the mind, the body, inside, outside, in their fluctuations, etc. She is a polymorphous actor—more than that, a shapeshifter always in the process of becoming. The meta-subject forges her position in relation to art. She does not attempt to create a new form of art, but another consciousness, and it is this consciousness, this philosophy of existence that will inform the exploration of the fluctuating forms of her art of living and doing, her practice.

Meta-space:

The meta-space succeeds the studio and the exhibition space. It is a “gymnasium” of action and thought. It is “established”—provisionally in view of the particular context and circumstances—by one or more meta-subjects. A simple gathering of meta-subjects can constitute a meta-space. A table, for example, can become a meta-space if several meta-subjects are sitting around it.

Meta-activity:

Enigmatic, metamorphing, or very simple, meta-activities can take place anywhere and take on a wide range of forms. The meta-activity succeeds the notion of productive or creative activity. It continues to question notions like work and human activity, but with a certain detachment, not making any significant difference between economizing and spending. A meta-activity is a “small change operation,” beyond the fantasy of the signifying process, moving toward the *je ne sais quoi* and the unrelated...It takes place in a provisional and transitory economy, in which we act, as much as possible, with grace, sensuousness, lightness, and serenity.

As a discreet activity, one meta-activity can be confused with another—and plays with this ambiguity, infiltrating other events and slipping in among other activities. Not having strong characteristics of its own, it is almost imperceptible...

Meta-culture:

Meta-culture is an attempt to deflect the standardizing effects of cultural globalization. Meta-culture is an intermediary culture. Behind a culture just as behind a language, ways of being are cobbled together. Meta-culture is born of the need to reinvent the connections between tradition and modernity, between history and becoming, between politics and aesthetics, for the sake of an aesthetics of existence. Meta-culture is irrigated by an awareness of intercultural misunderstandings, in the name of a new politics of emancipation.

Meta-conference:

The form of every meta-conference is constantly evolving and completely modifiable. Only the principles of perambulation and variation (simultaneity / progression / displacement...) remain permanent attributes.

During one or several days, one or several locations are taken over and developed at the same time, in the manner of a stroll or a construction site made up of multiple activity spots. Several participants can take over the location at the same time. Overall it must be possible to create a combination of actions, mixing together lectures, drawing, the transformation of materials, dance, sound gestures, and a variety of other tasks. Every spot is in itself like a musical score of materials and gestures. Distributing these spots throughout the space allows for a surge of activities, whose intensity and speed are unpredictable. The audience can come and go, stay, sit down, etc. and watch as the site develops. A tentative program allows the visitor to orient himself in the time and state of the site, whereby time and space are understood as materials like any other in the overall operation. There is no hierarchy in the proceedings, which succeed and combine with each other based on the various movements and situations taking place in time and space. Crushing rocks, giving water to crickets, sitting down in front of a computer and browsing the web, drawing on a wall with one's head covered by a hood, breaking a plate, reading a text on potatoes in crazy-talk, starting a video, running into someone, smiling—so many things, so many gestures transforming the space into a stroll, a gymnasium, a conversation, a farm, a dispensary of heteropraxis and heteronomy. A construction site develops at the heart of the operation (gymnopraxis).
Activities: outfitting the space, ruminating on it, constructing it, equipping it, unequipping it.
Reading, then pursuing a meta-conference activity...A video, then an activity.
Have lunch, then a slew of object and meta-body conversations. An action, then an activity. Reading, then an activity. An action, then a meta-conference activity...

Every meta-conference offers an opportunity to experiment, to reexamine the relationships between various media, and to turn different points of view and a variety of behaviors into “conversations.”

It is a matter of transforming—sometimes only in a few hours—a space into a meta-space, into an apparatus of installations and ambulatories in which different participants who have been pursuing a range of activities around a variety of subjects can intersect.

Meta-art:

Wittgenstein claims that “in art it is hard to say anything as good as: saying nothing.”

It is harder to do better in art than to do nothing. (We could apocryphally attribute this statement to Marcel Duchamp)

In art the best way to do anything is to do nothing at all!

Or: today the most relevant way to make art is to do nothing or to do something else!

Practice “*the art of making art*” in an impersonal way.

Not “lifelike art” (Kaprow), since life is irreducible to art; life resists art—“performing life” amounts to creating an actorly distance, when in fact it is a matter of becoming a voluntary observer of what they want to make us do or of what “I want to do.” Create a detachment, a disconnection.

Practicing “*the art of making art*” is a matter of overcoming and forgetting art as it has been and of occupying the symbolic experimental field (to be defined) in order to reconstitute an experiential and signifying space.

Practicing “*the art of making art*” neither resembles art nor life but is rather a way of exploring both.

Not in the sense of Robert Filliou’s “Art is what makes life more interesting than art,” because this instrumentalizes art in the service of life. According to this dictum, art is supposed to stimulate life as if art was not already the result of that very life, as if life were not conceived of as an artist’s dream, matter to be formed...

No—these are old debates and dilemmas.

Neither life nor art—but meta-existence, transcending our passage through life...

Dispel and neutralize that will to power, that artistic will, that infantile mania of wanting things to be just the way I experience them or want them to be. Stay open to what I don’t know.