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2015

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/955>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version

Sammelbandbeitrag / collection article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Lyotard, Jean-François: After Six Months of Work... (1984). In: Yuk Hui, Andreas Broeckmann (Hg.): *30 Years After Les Immatériaux. Art, Science and Theory*. Lüneburg: meson press 2015, S. 29–66. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/955>.

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After Six Months of Work... (1984)

Jean-François Lyotard

After six months of work in partnership with the team at the Centre de Création Industrielle (CCI), and with one year to go before the opening of the exhibition entitled *Les Immatériaux*, I would like to take stock, firstly by making a few clarifications concerning the conception of this exhibition, then by setting out the question of installation as we have collectively thought it through, and reporting on our intended responses to the question of installation, or at least their general direction. Those are the principal points that I would like to cover here.

The initial title of the exhibition, as stated in the plan of the Centre Georges Pompidou, was *Les nouveaux matériaux et la création* [New Materials and Creation]. Such a title obviously brings with it a whole way of thinking, a whole horizon of thinking which we might set out as follows: in making a very fine-grained analysis of natural givens, intelligence arrives at certain elements; it synthesises these elements, it reorganises them, aided by the creative imagination, and in this way engenders hitherto unknown objects. And the philosopher, when he scans this horizon, recognises the figure of modernity, which is perpetuated in the form of a subject that is intelligent, imaginative, and voluntary, a subject that takes hold of a world of given objects and analyses them – that is to say, a subject that reduces them to their finest, most imperceptible elements, and proves his mastery of these givens by creating from these elements completely new tools, new materials, new matter, even.

By calling the exhibition *Immatériaux*, we had, if I may say so, a number of claims in mind. Firstly, we must understand materials in a broad sense, as we have already written, extending the meaning of the word material [*matériau*] to also cover referents [*matières*], hardware [*matériels*], matrices [*matrices*],

and even maternity [*maternité*]. Tracing the common origin of these terms to the sense of the root *mât*, which means both measurement and construction, we tried to rethink everything that the modern project, the project of the figure of the subject I just mentioned, tends to treat as a sort of passivity to be conquered, as data to be analysed. That is to say that I would like personally, in my capacity as a philosopher, to give the word “material” a philosophical pertinence that necessarily exceeds the sense of the word as it is used, for example, by the architect or the painter. If in saying “material” I also understand something as maternity – that is to say, as origin – then obviously I am posing a problem, that of authentication – a problem of authority, a problem of beginnings; and from that point of view, the term “material” immediately raises a question that is generally not considered in relation to the figure of modernity – precisely that of the intelligent, imaginative, and voluntary origin which exerts its domination, its hegemony, its mastery, over what is given. That is the first point. Of course, by distinguishing between content [*matière*], hardware [*matériel*], matrix [*matrice*], maternity [*maternité*], and support [*matériau*], we seek to redistribute the term “material”, which as a term remains rather vague with regard to certain extremely precise and specific functions that are generally distinct for the communications engineer, for example, but also for the linguist and, probably, for the philosopher. This is why, in the first project plan connected with this exhibition, we took as a reference-point the model of the structure of communication that distinguishes between the sender and the recipient of a message – which already gives us two instances – but also the code in which this message is written – a third instance – the support upon which it is written – a fourth instance – and the referent of the message – a fifth instance. It seemed to us that we could distribute the different roots of *mât* in accordance with this structure of communication in a way that is necessarily arbitrary yet convenient, one that would give us a sorting mechanism for the enormous amount of things that the subject demanded we deal with. Thus we decided that the sense of *maternity* obviously belonged to the role of the sender, the sender being the father or mother, as you wish, of the message. As for the word *content* [*matière*], on the other hand, if we follow the usage that is common in high schools, colleges, teaching establishments, and libraries, when we speak of content we mean what the message is about, the matter of which it speaks – that is to say, the referent; thus content becomes referent, content comes under the pole of the referent – when we speak of content in the communicational structure, it is the referent pole we are discussing. Similarly, *matrix* [*matrice*] can be identified, a little arbitrarily, yet not insignificantly, with the code in which the message is written, and *hardware* [*matériels*] are the means of transmission of the message; the hardware is the way in which the message is carried, transported from sender to recipient; these two are therefore devices for the transmission and capture of messages, whatever they may

be. And then the *support* [*matériau*] proper can be identified with the material medium of the message – that of which the message is made. Distributing the different senses of the word *mât* in accordance with the structure of communication in this way, we have at our disposal a way of filtering out what will interest us in the exhibition, of choosing what will be pertinent in relation to our problem.

We must of course emphasise the fact that, in taking this communicational structure as a paradigm and at the same time as a filtering mechanism for what we want to show, we have accepted the hypothesis that belongs specifically to modernity, namely that every given is a message. What I mean is that if, for example, we take the case of architecture, and think about it in terms of this structure of communication, we are saying that, for example, the building, or this room, is itself a message, that this message has a sender, that is to say that it is engendered by a maternity [*maternité*], that it has an author who authenticates it; that it aims at a recipient and therefore that it can be grasped in specific ways by specific hardware [*matériel*]; that it is in some way inscribed in a support medium [*matériau*] according to a code that is its matrix [*matrice*]; and finally that this building has a referent [*matière*] – that is, it “speaks” of something. The same would apply if it were a question of a painting (to stay within the domain of the arts), but also if it were a question of a light signal emanating from a sun many millions of light-years away; and it would be the same if it were a question of mutant bacteria in a biochemical laboratory – these, also, would be treated as a message. This is an idea that has become commonplace. It is closely linked to the very idea of modernity, for it is evidently only at the cost of making every given a message that the hegemony of the intelligence, will, and imagination of the subject can be applied to a given, for this application means very simply that the given must be understood as a sign, and thus as referring, and as being immediately integrable into language. Basically it will always be a question of asking: What does it speak of? How does it speak? What does it speak with? What speaks and what does it speak to? Presupposed in the very idea of modernity is the idea that everything speaks, and that it is enough, in short, to find the constituent elements of the message, since it is these elements that are given by the structure of communication itself. The message is controlled and controllable once all of these instances have been defined. In this sense, then, there is nothing new here in relation to the modern project, but a rather precise way of stretching the meaning of the word “material”, like a sort of fabric, in order to draw it, to stretch it over the structure of communication which is, to my eyes – and I believe that we all agree on this now – the very figure of modernity in its treatment of what is given.

But as you have obviously noticed, we do not say “material”, we say “immaterial”. And when we say immaterial, we obviously mean something

extremely precise: that the contemporary situation – which of course remains to be described – this project of modernity which extends its communicational web to the totality of all possible givens so as to be able to control them by way of translation; in short – since it is a question of translation, a question of the message – that this project is realised fully in the contemporaneity in which we find ourselves today, and which I characterise essentially on the one hand as technoscientific, and on the other as historical – though we may come back to these two points; that this project, then, linked to these structures, is fully realised; but that at the same time this very realisation, this completion of modernity, destabilises the figure of modernity and that, by dint of its very perfection, it arouses disquiet. In particular, the negation *im-* in “immaterials” indicates the situation of a face-to-face, a confrontation that opposes the subject, the subject of will, of spirit, of the gaze, to that which is not him, and which falls under the general denomination *mât*. This face-to-face situation, then, is undermined today. It is undermined not only, as I have said, by technoscience; it is undermined by what I just now called *history* – that is to say, by a sort of chagrin which, in the twentieth century, has replaced the hope that had been opened up by modernity in the strict sense at the end of the eighteenth century, two centuries ago. This chagrin is what I would call the contemporary historical sentiment, insofar as, certainly, most of the hopes of the Enlightenment era – which were not solely technoscientific, but also political – are, I would not say thwarted, but in any case unfinished – this is the object of a discussion with Jürgen Habermas concerning the completion or otherwise of this project of modernity. What I want to say is that, precisely because it results from this project, in a sense not only does technoscience upset and undermine that project, but that in the order of global politics for the last two centuries, the idea of an enlightened, luminous society, a society transparent to itself, whether we call it a socialist or liberal society, it doesn't really matter, has receded considerably for us today – and this is what I call chagrin. And in this sense, by calling this exhibition *Les Immatériaux*, we mean, among other things, that it is a question of contributing to a sort of work of mourning for modernity. We must mourn for modernity, or at least certain aspects of modernity that today seem illusory or dangerous; and we must propose this precisely on the occasion of a reflection on the structure of communication and on its pertinence to the contemporary context. I would say, to jump ahead a little, that what is striking in this completion of the modern project, this hegemony over objects, which at the same time is a destabilisation of the modern project – what is striking is that, on the technoscientific level, we see a sort of reinforcement, an exaggeration almost, of the intimacy between the mind and things. For example, the software that is coming into general use on all scales is mind incorporated into matter; synthetic products, polymers for example, and all such chemical derivatives, are matters that are a result of knowledge – they are instigated by the mind.

Biochemical, or more precisely, biogenetic manipulations, genetics, show that the mind itself, in its most intimate properties and characteristics, can be treated as matter, because it is matter. When modernity presupposes that everything speaks, this means that so long as we can connect to it, capture it, translate it and interpret it, there is no fundamental difference between data and a phrase; there is no fundamental difference between a phenomenon of displacement in an electromagnetic spectrum and a logical proposition, and given this fact, in this face-to-face relation to a universe that is his to dominate – a heroic relation, I would say – in order to make himself the master of it, man must become something else entirely: the human subject becomes no longer a subject but, I would say, one case among others, albeit a case which retains this privilege, until proven otherwise (which is extremely improbable): that we can well imagine that there is no similar case in the whole universe, subject to a complete inventory being made. Yet it is just one case among the many multiple interactions that constitute the universe. You see that, from this “immaterials” point of view, we have emphasised – and this is a part of the work of mourning – a kind of counter-figure that takes shape within the figure of modernity, a counter-figure within which man does not play the role of the master. One might call this figure postmodern, insofar as it has always been present in modernity, but it might be the very completion of the technoscientific project of modernity. And as this project is destabilised, it allows this counter-figure to appear more clearly than before. I would say that we could call it postmodern insofar as this counter-figure brings with it a sort of disappointment in regard to the project of domination, and that it consists in mourning it; but I would say that this makes the figure rather cheerful because, once mourning is over, then happiness comes. But of course this counter-figure is uncertain. And above all, I would say that what this exhibition is interested in – probably the most important thing – is that we know very well that there was a metaphysics corresponding to the technoscience of domination, which was the metaphysics of the subject, the metaphysics of Descartes and of all thinking of the subject up to and including the twentieth century; but that we are not sure what kind of metaphysics could be appropriate to the technoscience of interaction. Not only what metaphysics, what thought, but also what politics, since it is easy to see what the politics of the subject corresponding to the technoscience of domination was: precisely the politics of state power, I would say. If not that of the totalitarian state then in any case that of the hegemonic state – a state that, moreover, allows, before its very eyes, the development of capital as the truth of the metaphysics of will and domination. But this metaphysics is becoming less and less pertinent – I think many scientists are aware of this – for contemporary technosciences and contemporary politics alike. I don't mean to say that the hegemony of the state and of capital has disappeared – far from it, alas – but that in a certain sense it was already destroyed, that we no longer expect any good, any justice,

from these figures, and that, consequently, it falls to us to find a thought and a practice within the framework of the technoscience of interaction – one which, in short, would break from the thought and the practice of science, of technology, and of domination. And in a certain sense, it is this formidable problem that *Les Immatériaux* tries to pose. More formidable yet would be the claim that, in this exhibition, we have to pose the problem that is linked to postmodernity – that is to say, the question of what kind of political power is compatible with a generalised figure of interaction.

Following these few clarifications concerning the project plan, and before tackling the question of its actual spatial layout [*mise en espace*], I would like to turn to some associations surrounding the term “immaterial” – and these are associations rather than analyses. For me, the word “immaterial” is associated primarily with the word “immature”, which is an English word, but one that is increasingly used in French. By immature I mean that, with this technoscience, as with this new politics in waiting, there is something childlike in our contemporary situation. Within the figure of modernity, childhood was a situation in which that which belongs to nature and that which belongs to culture – or rather, I would say, that which belongs to matter and that which belongs to language – is not yet dissociated, is indiscernible, indiscernibly combined, mixed. There is a sort of admixture of nature in culture and of culture in nature that is characteristic of childhood. Now, if there is indeed, as I said, such an intimacy of the mind and of matter in the new technology, then one might characterise the latter as placing humanity in a situation of childhood. To take an example from architecture, in the *Discourse on Method* a whole page – more than one in fact – is dedicated to a comparison between the construction of a rational method and the organisation and construction of a city. Descartes complains – or at least pretends to complain – that these cities were not constructed rationally but were made bit by bit, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, according to needs, according to demographics, invasions, the requirements of new trades, population growth or decline; and that all of this obviously leads to great disorder, whereas if a city could be constructed, as we would say today, to plan – that is to say first of all on paper – then we would see clearly in this city, we would be able to orient ourselves in it very easily; the method being, at least in this text, in Descartes’s eyes (at least this particular Descartes) something like a plan of domination specifying the procedures to be employed in order to master an object of knowledge. Well, in today’s situation, what is called the crisis of architecture precisely tends toward a kind of turning away from this idea, which was still that of the modern movement in architecture – that of an entirely programmed, entirely predictable organisation of architectural and urban space. On the contrary, this crisis consists in perceiving that the charm, what I would call the almost ontological beauty and value of Italian cities, comes from the fact that they were in fact constructed exactly in the way that Descartes complains of – in

a non-dominated way, always in close proximity to the event, an event that could be either the taking possession of the city by some prince of another city, or the accession to power within the city itself of a suddenly rich family, or else the necessity of opening a new space for popular representation – all of this means that the classes, for example, and the routes one finds through these Italian cities do not at all resemble the urban ideal projected by the King of France onto the Place Royale in Nancy or Charleville, or the Place des Vosges. There is thus a return to a type of architecture and an urbanism that is close to the event, which for us today seems like a sort of lost ideal, a lost model. All things being equal, it is against the same Descartes who is startled at the fact that one was a child before being a man, and who could not manage to think childhood, and who wished to overcome this childhood at the architectural and urban level through a complete planning of streets, of places, of dwellings – it is against him, in a certain way, that today's architecture tries to think when it tries to think, I would say, a child city, a city in which the "birthing" of the dwelling is incomplete, and continues to be incomplete. It is not made once and for all, and it is not a question of respecting a plan that has already been made. On the contrary, it is a question of allowing to happen what must happen – whatever happens – and of making a place for it within a space that is necessarily fluctuating. I am not saying that this is an ideal of the postmodern architecture that calls itself "postmodern", and which is infinitely more suspect; but in any case, I see very well how there is something far too mature in the architectural models of ... [word missing in manuscript] or of Le Corbusier, and how, on the contrary, what we need today is a child city, a child habitat in the sense that I just described, and in the sense that, for example, Walter Benjamin describes in his *Berlin Childhood*. So that is a first meaning associated with "immaterials".

Next I would like to associate a second term with this word "immaterial", the term of the increate [*incr  er*], or, if you prefer, the transitive. Let me remind you that the initial plan for the exhibition gave it the title "New Materials and Creation", but that we realised that, when we speak of creation, creativity, the creative society (as I have read recently, rather than consumer society), creator, and even CAD – computer-aided design, but we might also say computer-aided creation – we interpret the technological mutation with which we are concerned (and also the historical change – we must not forget that here) as being still, and only, modern; that is to say that basically we think that, on the occasion of this particular technological mutation, man continues to aim at the mastery of the world – and of himself of course – and that, having made one more step forward in the means of this mastery, this control, he effectively approaches the ideal of the creator. That this is a theological word only reinforces what I say, for if it is true that modernity starts with Saint Augustine, it is also true that it continues with Descartes. The difference between the two is vast and yet slight, vanishing, since it goes without saying

that both of them imply a creative origin – a maternity, to use the word I used before. The fact that this origin is called “God” in Saint Augustine and “ego” in Descartes is of no great importance, for in both cases we remain within the field of a thinking of a modernity which is that of a subject who creates his world, for the ends of the arrangement of this world and the enjoyment of this world, the enjoyment of knowing, of power; and that, fundamentally, if we think the new technologies under the category of creation, if we continue to maintain this idea as if all the new technologies did was to fulfil this desire, this infinity of modern will that is called creation, then I believe we miss something that is very important in this technological mutation, in this third technological revolution, as it is known – namely, I would say, the prospect of the end of anthropocentrism. In any case, this, to my eyes, is the prospect that we may look towards on the occasion of this transformation, this greater intimacy of intelligence and the world, of language and of things that the technologies in question yield: that the counter-figure inscribed in modernity – the modern counter-figure of modernity, that which precisely does not wish to follow the paranoia of the subject dominating the totality of the *mât* – may emerge. If you say creation, that means that you prohibit the other metaphysics that I evoked earlier: a metaphysics in which, precisely, man is not a subject facing the world of objects, but only – and this “only” seems to me to be very important – only a sort of synapse, a sort of interactive clicking together of the complicated interface between fields wherein particle elements flow via channels of waves; and that if there is some greatness in man, it is only insofar as he is – as far as we know – one of the most sophisticated, most complicated, most unpredictable, and most improbable interfaces. You see that what I am indicating here is, perhaps only for myself – and I apologise to my collaborators if so – that on the occasion of these new technologies, perhaps there is a decline of humanism, of the self-satisfaction of man within the world, of narcissism or anthropocentrism, and that an end of humanism may emerge. And I must say that for me it would be a great happiness in my latter years to observe the decline of this most miserable aspect of miserable modernity; not only because, as I have already said, this aspect has an extraordinarily high cost, in blood, in violence, in terror and death; but also because, philosophically, it is most impoverished. And if we really have to name names, then I would say that the metaphysics that may emerge through these new technologies would not be that of Descartes, but rather that of someone like Spinoza; or if you prefer, a metaphysics that would be more along the lines of Zen – not the Californian brand of Zen, but that of the great Zen tradition that is, for me, incarnated in that great Japanese philosopher, living in China, called Ehei Dôgen. This is what I mean when I say “interaction”. When I speak of interaction I don’t want to rehash that petty ideology that attempts to make up for the inability of current media to allow the recipient to intervene in what he sees or hears, and which then heralds interaction as a great triumph in

the reinstatement of dialogue between transmitter and receiver, which I find rather conceited – I have little faith in dialogue, for it, also, must be critiqued in relation to its very Platonic origins. When I say interaction, what I am thinking of is rather a sort of ontology of the endless transmission of messages which are translated by each other, for better or worse, as much as possible, and where man himself is not the origin of messages, but sometimes the receiver, sometimes the referent, sometimes a code, sometimes a support for the message; and where sometimes he himself is the message. This plasticity of humans means that this structure of communication today seems like something upon which identities can no longer be fixed: we can no longer say that in the structure of communication man is, for example, in the role of the sender any more than that of the receiver. With the advance of scientific research – but also literary, philosophical, and artistic research – it seems that he may occupy many places in this structure; so this is what I mean by “interaction”.

I would now like to move on to a new group of associations around the theme of time. The question of time will play a considerable role in the exhibition, as I shall explain later on. And the group of associations that I have in mind ultimately comprises, to simplify somewhat, two main tendencies which are perfectly contradictory. On one hand we are concerned with these new technologies, but also with the so-called postmodern society, in which we maintain a relation to time that comes from modernity, and which is the extension of the modern project of domination. Contemporary technologies and the contemporary way of life aim to exert man's mastery over time in the same way that the modern project aimed, and still aims, to exert man's mastery over space. I would associate the immaterial with the *immediate*, in the sense that mastery over time implies the abolition of any delay, and the capacity to intervene here and now. The other tendency (I shall come back to this point in a few moments), which is in perfect contradiction to the first one – and to my mind this contradiction illustrates very specifically the contradiction of postmodernity itself, which at once completes modernity, or at least extends it, yet on the other hand contradicts and overturns it – the other tendency in the relation of man to time today is that, precisely because of the importance accorded to domination over time, and the value of immediacy, man encounters probably more than ever his incapacity to dominate time precisely insofar as time is not a material. It is difficult to conceive of space without the bodies that occupy space, whereas time, on the contrary, can not only be conceived of but even experienced without any body occupying time; what occupies time is not bodies, and thus, in this sense, time is the form (to speak like Kant) *par excellence* – or the medium, if you prefer – of immateriality. In philosophy it used to be called “inner sense”, but obviously this is a term that we can no longer use today. I will return to these two associations – the association of immateriality with immediacy, and the counter-association of

immateriality with unmasterability. A first point: to master the object – what I have called “*mât*” – the mind translates the properties of that object, or at least those that are considered to be exploitable, and this is what the term “project” means: that the object is addressed in view of exploitation, that is to say in view of domination and usage. Therefore the mind translates the properties judged to be exploitable in language, algebraic language for example, and retranslates the equations obtained into geometrical properties – at least this was the way in which the modern project proceeded. Thus space – which is given spontaneously, naturally, through sight for example, but also through hearing – space received in this way by the corporeal human subject is replaced by a controlled space, one that is controlled via this procedure of analysis, a procedure of translation into mathematical language, and a procedure of synthesis that permits the re-translation of equations back into lines and bodies, a procedure for passing from arithmetic and algebra back into geometry and mechanics – this is a procedure already elaborated by Galileo and Descartes. If we follow the line of this procedure, the ideal pursued by this project of control and mastery in relation to time is the capacity to intervene instantaneously in the object’s behaviour. We will be able to say that the mastery of the object is complete if, as it evolves independently, the observer or the worker can intervene immediately in its behaviour, and intervene in such a way as to immediately carry out the task that the observer or the worker judges appropriate. This means that the analysis of the behaviour of the object, including unpredictable behaviour, and the synthesis of orders to address this object, must occupy the least possible amount of time. It is clear that cybernetics depends upon this principle, and that this is why telematics and informatics count time in nanoseconds today, and will soon count in picoseconds – 10–12 seconds – which on the human scale is close enough to what we call immediacy. Machines that work on such time-scales obviously make possible interactions in what we call “real time”; this is the case, for example, with the Sogitec 4X machine invented at IRCAM, which allows a composer to intervene in the production of synthesised music as it is listened to. I would say that this kind of procedure – one of immediate intervention – fully completes the programme of modern metaphysics, which is also the programme of capitalism – namely, to gain time, to lose as little time as possible. This means that the exhibition will have to show this conquest of time, as we say, and will have to do this across a great many apparently heterogeneous domains. For example, I think that we must use music as a guiding thread here, for reasons that are easy to understand, because it is an art of time, and it is therefore in music that, as if by accident, immaterials have developed most rapidly. But I would very much like, for example, to compare this musical research to financial research concerning the dematerialisation of money and the possibility of carrying out transactions that are almost immediate, transactions that completely do away with the usual

delays in realisation. This idea of immediate intervention is closely tied, as I have said, to the very project of exchange in general – the idea of abridging as far as possible the distance between the purchase of some goods and the remittance of the corresponding sum. I don't want to develop that aspect here; I just want to say that fundamentally the conquest of now – the conquest of the instant, of the straightaway – realises a model of immediacy that we find in what linguists call performativity. The classic example of a performative phrase is that of the chairman of a meeting when he says "I declare the meeting open". It is enough for him to say "I declare the meeting open" in order for the meeting to be open; that is to say that here we have an effectiveness that is immediate in the sense that the phrase itself *is* the effectiveness: it seems to describe a situation but in reality it brings it about; it brings it about with no further mediation – without someone else needing to carry out the order, for example. When we make a promise, it is the phrase itself that performs its meaning, and thus we can say that with the performative we find ourselves in immediacy *par excellence*. I would say that the modern project – and in particular the capitalist project, insofar as it is, obviously, linked to the model of exchange – is a project of the performative. It is a project of a time that is entirely at the disposal of he who speaks, and who is in a position to ensure the immediate effectiveness of that which is enunciated. The classical thinkers, in the ancient discussion, the "quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns", reflected on the biblical phrase "let there be light, and there was light", regarding this as an entirely sublime case of immediacy. It seems to me that this is precisely the project – or rather, the dream – of modernity; a dream which, moreover, is closely linked to that of sublimity: its dream would be to say "let there be the car, and there was the car; let there be petrol, and there was petrol". This, I think, is the idea that goes by the name of creation.

This model of performativity, which corresponds in a certain way to the conquest of the now, implies a sort of priority of language, or in any case a hegemonic predominance of oral language over written language: "I declare the meeting open" is only performative at the moment and in the place where it operates, in actual and punctual fashion; when you read in the minutes of some meeting, or in a novel, that the chairman has said "I declare the meeting open", it does not follow that in your space-time as the reader, some meeting is now open. The performative is always linked, obviously, to a particular space-time, to a here and now which are those of the performative phrase itself, and whose effectiveness is thus linked to the actual enunciation. Whence the importance accorded in the current problematic to orality; not only in the problematic, but, I would say, first and foremost in everyday life: the importance given to the voice over written language is well known to teachers and pedagogues; effects of neo-alphabetisation, of dyslexia, are produced by the predominant use of the telephone, of television, of sound film (I would also include tape recorders) – that is to say, materials that

transmit the voice in its orality, and which have real time effects. Film-makers speak of the reality effect; one might speak of a reality effect of time through oral language which, obviously, written language, language written in a book, does not have; for there is no effect of performativity upon the reader when he reads "I declare this meeting open", whereas on the other hand, if he hears it, he asks himself immediately what meeting has been opened. Perhaps these voice-transmitting materials, this precipitation that I have supposed to be taking place, without being able to attest to it myself, also account for certain changes in language through the loss or withdrawal of the written linguistic referent that might slow down important displacements in language use. Thus, from this performative model, this predominance of articulated language, there follows a sort of predominance of the general attitude of reading. By reading I mean not the decipherment of a text in the space that we call the page, but something a little different: when, for example, we query a server, on Minitel for example – let's take the simplest possible example – the server sends pages to the screen which we read and in which we seek the information we're after. This is an exercise in reading, we read page after page; but this reading, precisely, is not properly speaking a vision, not if we take vision in a strong sense. It is rather of the order of hearing; and as proof, I would draw your attention to the fact that a natural voice or a synthetic voice could very well transmit this readable message were we not able to read it. Of course this means that the text would be interpreted by an actor, by a reader – potentially by a robot reader – thus it is very much an art, but it is an art of time, of the same order as that of music. If, rather than a text, on the screen page or on any surface whatsoever, you have an image – this is what I call visible – it gives rise to a vision; and with something like that the voice – whether robotic or human – cannot reinstate the image for you; by reinstate I mean that when you see the image, you do not read it, you do not hear it. Of course the voice can speak to you of the image, but it cannot speak the image as it speaks a text. In this sense, the traits that form the synthetic letters of our system of writing are incomparable with the traits that form images, even those of so-called ideographic languages. And in this sense, I would oppose vision and hearing as image and language, and of course as space and time. In front of their screens, humans – contrary to what we might think – cease to be lookers and become readers – that is to say, essentially, listeners. In this way, we find ourselves confronting the opposition between the arts of time and the arts of space, I would say a practice of time and a practice of space – between, let us say, music and painting, in short. When I say between music and painting, I mean that voiced, articulated language and music and cinema are an art of time, and that when we pass from the pen and pencil to the keyboard for reading/writing, passing by way of the word-processor keyboard, which had already begun this mutation, we go from a mode that spatialises inscription – as is always the case in painting, and the first writing is a variety

of painting – toward a mode that temporalises inscription. This means that the signifier in this second modality is organised in a chain all of whose elements are not actualisable at once – in the blink of an eye, as we say – as is the case for an image, but only successively – or, as linguists say, diachronically. The screen pages themselves scroll, and when a writer works on a word processor – something that we are also including in this exhibition – the important thing, especially if he is used to working with a pen, is that this writer loses his manuscript page, he loses all the preparatory work where additions are inscribed; the emendations, erasures, and mistakes which are there together in the preparatory text all disappear and give way to a text that itself may also be preparatory, but which is potential – I mean that it is not there to hand, you can't put all the edited pages next to each other to get a view of the whole; you have to bring up one by one this or that past page which has been memorised in your machine. Instead of a preparatory text it is a potential text, a text that is a future text because it is in the process of fabrication, but one which, on the other hand, is more past than the manuscript is, because you can only recall it page by page, to revise and correct it. You cannot have it here, now, *en bloc*; it is never there, any more than a film is ever there as a whole. This also means that, at the keyboard and before the screen, we have an experience of time rather than of space. Bizarrely, this predominance of time signifies a sort of preeminence of movement over rest. Space as the site of inscription – above all the space of painting or of hieroglyphics, hierographics in general – is linked to rest, time is linked to movement. The paradoxes of time are paradoxes of movement, and in a hegemony of reading, like that which I have just described very clumsily, we might say that space is itself but a particular case of time, that is to say that rest – the simultaneous grasping of a visual whole by the eye (a relative rest, since we all know that the eye is in fact very active and is itself always in movement, but the movement is not in the object, the movement is in the eye) – this rest itself is a particular case of movement. You can stop your screen-page to register it in a more stable, slower way, for example, to change speeds as one does with the procession of frames at the cinema; but regardless, the frame itself can only be taken as an extreme case of non-movement, the only universal case being movement (by movement, I repeat, I understand the movement of the object, by virtue of the same principle as in music, where it goes without saying that it is the movement of vibrations that constitute the object to be understood). Now, if there is no such rest to be grasped in these technologies – if, on the contrary, these technologies at once constantly record and utilise movement, and only movement – then it follows that in a certain sense nothing can be grasped in one go, nothing can take place at the same time. Vision can grasp an actual whole at the same time – at least this is a prejudice we have always had – whereas listening never happens at the same time: listening to a piece of music, even a short phrase, cannot take place all in one go. The phrase is not

present all at once. The very notion of the “blow”, in this regard – as in the expression “at one blow” – must be re-examined, since what we call the “blow” – if we wish to think it here as it takes place, for example, in reflections on internal time-consciousness – the “blow” of the arrival of a musical note for example, is an event, a temporal event: something happens. What is this something that happens? It arrives too soon and too late, meaning that, insofar as it is not there, it is not there, and as soon as it is there, it is no longer there as event, it is there as memory, immediate memory. One might say in relation to the event what Freud said about the traumatic event: a traumatic event is one in which our affectivity is struck and marked by certain dispositions – neurotic dispositions, for example, or certain phantasms – and, as Freud says, this requires two blows, not just one. It takes a first blow in which the event is impressed without being recorded, we might say, by the unconscious; and then a second blow in which, on the contrary, an analogue of the traumatising event makes itself known as traumatising when it is not so in itself, but only by analogy with the first blow. In this doubling of the blow lies the whole secret of the fact that time escapes us, that the time of an event itself escapes us, that we are immanent to this time that we cannot master, and that, in this sense, immaterials are both threatening as *imminences*, and at the same time are *unmasterable*.

I would now like to associate the term immaterial with another neighbouring term, that of the *unsexuated* or *transsexuated*; by this I mean that, in the contradictory notion of the immaterial, there is not only the attempt to show that, in these technologies and in this postmodern history, the voluntarist and perfectly materialist project of modernity turns back in a sort of dispossession of will and a dematerialisation of the object; but also that a sort of echo, a sort of consonance is produced in this reversal of the situation which, it seems to me, is specifically postmodern: transsexualism. insofar as transsexuals are in a relation to that referent [*matière*] that is sex. By referent [*matière*] I mean that obligatory reference of the message that is our body, above all our socialised body, in the sense that the body *qua* message teaches us something about sex, teaches us something about what sex we are, and where unfortunately one does not have any choice beyond that of being a man or a woman. Now, the phenomenon of transsexuality – which has of course developed thanks to the progress of medicine, which has developed on a superficial level insofar as we now see it taking place, but which certainly expresses a desire that is very old and very profound, a dream – this phenomenon of transsexualism certainly manifests the indecency of immateriality precisely in the sense that it denies the alternative “man or woman” in regard to the sexual significance of the corporeal message. Just as technology and immaterials are incredulous in regard to the opposition between subject and object, I would say that they also make us incredulous in relation to sexual difference. In any case, they allow this incredulity in regard to sexual difference to become visible, beyond

the equality of the sexes demanded by feminist movements. Wouldn't the true aim of these movements – or in any case the true postmodern aim – rather be the disappearance of the alternative, the transaction between the two sexes, the constitution of a sort of synthetic product? To understand what I am saying here one could do no better than to read a passage from Catherine Millot's book *Horsexe: Essays on Transsexuality*, which expresses what I want to say marvellously:

I shall call him Gabriel, after the archangel, in conformity with his desire to be pure spirit only. He was the only one to take the initiative of talking with me. Aware that I had already seen a number of female transsexuals, he phoned me one day to tell me that he wanted to meet me in order to get the truth about transsexuality straight. He feared that the others had misled me, and wished to rid me of my illusions, for he could not bear the idea of people "talking any old rubbish about transsexuality". He arrived wearing a man's suit (transsexuals generally prefer traditional dress; more informal clothes are sexually less marked), a goatee beard, and was unquestionably masculine in his bearing and his voice. Straight away he declared, "The truth about transsexuality is that, in contrast to what they claim – that their souls are imprisoned in bodies of the opposite sex – transsexuals are neither men nor women, but something else".

This is a quote from Gabriel. Millot adds that it is this difference that Gabriel wants to be accepted, then she lets him speak:

Transsexuals are mutants, different from women when one is all woman, and different from men when one is all man. I feel and I know that I am not a woman, and I have the impression that I am not a man either. The others are playing a game, they are playing at being men.¹

Gabriel, she adds, has never felt like she is a man, but that it was because he was sure of not feeling like a woman that he was called a man. The unhappiness of transsexuals is that there is no third term, no third sex; and according to him, society bears the main responsibility for this bipolarity whose constraints transsexuals suffer from. I would say that – or rather, I will let Catherine Millot say it:

This aspiration towards a third sex is far more common than transsexual stereotypes would seem to suggest. Some female transsexuals stick to their manly pretensions, but in many cases this claim masks a hope of escaping the duality of the sexes. Transsexuals want to belong to the sex of angels.²

1 Catherine Millot, *Horsexe: Essays on Transsexuality*, trans. Kenneth Hylton (New York: Autonomedia, 1990), p. 129–130.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 126.

I find this formula very interesting, and I would say that, in the semantic field onto which the term “immaterial” leads us, we also find this idea of transsexuality – or, if you prefer, angelism. And here I would not have to look far to find a whole mystical tradition that, in its own way, anticipated the medical tradition of postmodern transsexuality.

I would like to associate one last word with that of immaterials, and it is the word *immortals*, but I do not have the time to develop that fully here. I will just read a passage from that old classic, fundamental to the history of technics and of reflection on technics, Mumford's *Technics and Civilization*, where he writes the following – which has already been largely surpassed since this was written in 1934, exactly 50 years ago, but which remains all the more true for the new technologies:

Whatever the psychological reactions to the camera and the moving picture and the phonograph may be [these are the types of hardware <matériels> he is thinking about – J-FL], there is no doubt, I think, as to their contribution to the economic management of the social heritage. Before they appeared, sound could only be imperfectly represented in the conventions of writing [which brings us to the problems of inscription in space and time – J-FL]: it is interesting to note that one of the best systems, Bell's Visible Speech, was invented by the father of a man who created the telephone. Other than written and printed documents and paintings on paper, parchment, and canvas, nothing survived of a civilisation except its rubbish heaps and its monuments, buildings, sculptures, works of engineering – all bulky, all interfering more or less with the free development of a different life in the same place. [Here the accent is indeed put on the question of space – J-FL] By means of the new devices this vast mass of physical impediments could be turned into paper leaves, metallic or rubber discs, or celluloid films [we could add, of course, microprocessors and the chips – J-FL] which could be far more completely and far more economically preserved. It is no longer necessary to keep vast middens of material in order to have contact, in the mind, with the forms and expressions of the past. These mechanical devices are thus an excellent ally to that other new piece of social apparatus which became common in the nineteenth century: the public museum. They gave modern civilisation a direct sense of the past and a more accurate perception of its memorials than any other civilisation, in all probability, had. Not alone did they make the past more immediate: they made the present more historic by narrowing the lapse of time between the actual events themselves and their concrete record. For the first time one might come face to face with the speaking likenesses of dead people and recall in their immediacy forgotten scenes and actions ... Thus a new form of immortality was effected; and a late Victorian writer,

Samuel Butler, might well speculate upon how completely a man was dead when his words, his image, and his voice were still capable of being resurrected and could have a direct effect upon the spectator and listener.³

You can see here how Mumford, precisely through the mediation of the immateriality of new materials, and on the other hand the immediacy of transmission, and particularly the transmission of the voice, rediscovers what we have said in regard to time, within the perspective – which we have not spoken about but which must be developed further – of the relation between immateriality and immortality. And I would add, to complete this field of free associations, that no doubt we should straightaway associate immortality and the angelism of which I just spoke.

Now I will address a second part of this reflection on the exhibition *Les Immatériaux*, dedicated more directly to the problem posed by what is called the spatial layout [*mise en espace*] of an exhibition; what we might call its installation. The contract I signed provides that at the end of this month I supply a synopsis, if only a provisional one, of the exhibition. Synopsis, in Greek, means that one has an overall view of what one plans to do. With this principle of an overall view what is presupposed is that the designer of the exhibition is in a position to bring into view the totality of what he has conceived, to show it at one blow; to give it to be seen at one blow to its recipients. We can see that the very concept of synopsis poses a problem, given that I have associated time and succession with the notion of immaterials that I have been constructing. For if it is true that what is characteristic of the relation being established between the *mât* in general and the mind is that we cannot expect the self-evidence of immediacy at one blow, while the synopsis falls under this delay, this ... This is something we remarked upon very quickly once we started to approach the question of realisation, the passage from conception to spatial deployment. It was fundamentally impossible – this is what we quickly understood – to hold to the traditional nature, that is to say the modern nature, of the exhibition. Exhibition [*exposition* – also “exposure”] or manifestation [*manifestation*] are obviously eminently philosophical terms. They mean that things are posited here, on the outside, in their manifest aspect. And there is a relation implied in this concept of exhibition, the relation of a subject who visualises objects, works, who confronts them, who looks at them face-to-face, with this visualisation – that of those who have conceived the exhibition – controlling it through the spatial layout itself. Thus on the part of the recipient who is the visitor, there is the principle that he is foremost a man who looks, an eye. What is more, this is an eye that is in movement over a body, an eye that wanders, and therefore one that exists in the general register of what were called promenades in the eighteenth

3 Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), p. 244, and 246.

and nineteenth century – what we could call tourism, without seeking to distinguish between the two at present. So this is what is presupposed on the part of the recipient of the exhibition. As for the sender, of whom is demanded the synopsis of this exhibition, what is required is ultimately that he anticipates, on paper at least – that he projects – this visit of the recipient, thus showing that its spatial layout will be made in such and such a way, and that it can be guaranteed that the visitor will conduct himself in such and such a manner, and that therefore the results of this wandering – of this promenade or this tour – can be anticipated. This means that the wandering eye will reconstitute the movement of conception once it is installed – that is to say, laid out spatially. You can see that this presupposition, inscribed in the very term “synopsis” or “exhibition”, is something that is handed down to us from modernity: the first great public exhibitions take place at the end of the eighteenth century, and salons and galleries are the characteristic spaces of these public exhibitions, which will subsequently proliferate during the course of the nineteenth century, with the Republic. What we have to see is that these spaces are characteristic of modernity for many reasons.

Firstly, the eye, as it is thought in the synopsis or in the exhibition in general, is the eye of modernity, as it was established during the fifteenth century. It is a matter of rendering each object visible to this visitor’s eye in a window – I would even say *as* a window, or at least as what one might see in a window or through a window. I thus designate somewhat summarily what fifteenth-century Italian painters called the *veduta* – that is to say, the view onto the vista of a landscape. All the windows to see, or through which to see, are organised into a façade, they are collected in a façade, an internal façade as in the case of the Louvre’s Galerie du Bord de l’Eau. It is not the façade of a house, it is the equivalent of the façade of a house but *inside* a house. That is, the gallery in its very construction is like a road within a building, within a palace—a road which, through the works shown, initially and essentially perspectivist paintings, opens onto an outside. Which means that the eye wanders as in a street, but what it sees through the windows are not scenes that it might see in the street. The visitor is on the inside, he is protected from the street – that is to say, from what we call reality. But this is no dream either, for in the dream there is presumably no window, there is no window at all; oneiric space is not fifteenth-century-type visual space – not a scenic space, at least. And it is not a dream because, in principle, the space of Italian Renaissance painting is not troubling in any way; on the contrary, it aims at a fairly easy recognition of what is in question, of the scene or the characters of the place or even of the moment concerned in this painted scene. I would say rather that the multiplicity of windows constituted by paintings hung on the walls of the gallery opens onto landscapes, portraits, situations, objects; and all of this forms not reality but culture. Basically, all the scenes of culture – or in any case a large number of them, a large number of these

scenes – are presented through these windows which are paintings, hollowed out fictively on the wall of the gallery. And the function of this exhibition – of this exhibition which contains in itself the principle of being exhaustive, and which, also, is an *ex-hibition* [*ex-position*] because it is on the outside of the gallery in the fictive space opened up by the frames – has a function that is inverse to that of the dream. The imaging function of the exhibition – and this, moreover, is why this space is privileged – is to identify, to permit the visitor to identify his belonging to a culture, to identify objects and to permit identification through the identification of the objects presented. I will add that, insofar as it is a question of perambulation, it is a question, as we shall see, of a sort of educational journey. But before talking about this, I should like to clarify something else: what is visualised – staying with the modern space of the exhibition still – are fragments of stories that are identifiable because they are a part of culture. The exhibition allows for a sort of apprenticeship of recognition, of characters, of places, of artists, of that which is presented and of the visitor; an apprenticeship in culture for the visitor in the exhibition. And I would say that this model, this type of auto-identificatory visual machine that is the exhibition, finds its complement or its reciprocal inverse in the modern street, which is also conceived as a gallery – unlike what is the case in a village, for example. The street is conceived as a gallery, the shop windows of the modern street are like picture frames which in their turn give onto landscapes, portraits – scenes which, what is more, just like in the gallery, permit identification. A little surprise, a little identification; a quick surprise, obviously elicited with a commercial aim in mind – which is not exactly the case in the gallery – or at least not always. Into this kind of urbanity, which is an urbanism of the façade, one can, quite obviously, introduce an aesthetic of shock, of the shocking – something that tends toward surprise and destabilisation. From one vitrine to another there are going to be shocking things, and placing things into vitrines can itself make for a certain surrealism. And here I would say that, for example, when we say “shock”, we cannot but think of Walter Benjamin’s outline of an aesthetics of shock for modernity, following Baudelaire. In certain regards we could specify how, presumably along with postmodernity, this aesthetic of shock, this aesthetic of sublimity through shock, which is kept intact in surrealism ... but that is another question.

I can now come back to the second aspect of this type of classical schema, which is in fact a modern schema, of the exhibition – the schema-type of the modern exhibition: perambulation. I have said that there is an eye, an eye in movement, an eye that walks. This perambulation is very important because fundamentally it obliges the designer – the one who is going to make a synopsis – to ask himself the question: What is it to walk in an exhibition? Where is one going? One is going toward the exit, okay, but can one get there in various ways, or via one single path; and what does the exit mean? This is a rather important difference from the street, where the analogy must

end, for the street only ever opens onto another street. There will probably come a moment when, from the street, one passes into the countryside – an extraordinarily interesting and bizarre moment, in fact; but one that is increasingly postponed and which, moreover, in contemporary cities and metropolises, is probably evaded rather than postponed. Which is why streets in cities, and in the suburbs of metropolises constructed in the '30s and '60s, resemble galleries rather than towns. In the modern city, the street leads to the street; in the gallery, walking leads to the exit; one exits the gallery when one enters the street. One goes from the street to the gallery, from the gallery to the street; one goes from one's home to the street and from the street to one's home or to another home. Thus the question of knowing what one does when one walks through the gallery is, of course, a very worrying question for someone who has responsibility for presenting a synopsis. One might be tempted to say – taking up again the analogy of the road and the gallery (despite the differences I have just mentioned) – that the gallery is like a rational street, a utopic street. It is a street insofar as it is a series of façades on the left and right of the visitor, with openings onto fictive spaces which are both cultural and identificatory spaces; but it is a street ordered, for example, according to a historical order, as is the case in museums, or according to a pedagogical order, as is the case in exhibitions – and very often both at once. Which means that the visitor's body traverses the spaces and situations that are shown; he proceeds through them – or, ultimately, his eye proceeds through them – as one proceeds through a course of study. This traversal is like a course, a kind of programme of education. In general I believe that the commissioners and directors of the exhibition, whether consciously or not, take as their aim the education of the visitor; and that in this sense, the gallery is a teaching establishment that one goes through faster than a teaching establishment; it is something like a training film, except that the objects are generally immobile and it is the viewer who moves. But if this is the case, if it is indeed a model street, a street that leads not toward the countryside but toward the heart of culture, a street that goes towards "downtown", toward the centre, then this is also characteristic of modernity insofar as this traversal, which may be long, winding, and even labyrinthine, constitutes a sort of model of modernity itself. This is already the case in the picaresque (especially Spanish) novel, and of course in the *roman de formation* at the end of the eighteenth and during the nineteenth century, and the modern epic in general – and also, of course, the *Bildungsroman*, the novel of culture, the novel of adventure, the travel novel, which develops in the sixteenth century, which is entirely marked by modernity, and which fully flourishes in England, in Germany, in France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This novel is typical of modernity: a subject goes through an experience, and is educated in going through this experience; he is educated by what he experiences, by his experiencing of the situations he goes through and by what he has

experienced. The “formative experience” is a fundamental form of the expression of the project of modernity.

Here I would like to open up a sort of parenthesis which will make for a transition toward what I want to say in regard to the spatial layout of our exhibition, *Les Immatériaux*, having set out, rather abruptly and insufficiently, this sort of model of the modern exhibition. I would thus like to take a detour, to open, in short, a digression, to make a little detour toward someone who, in his description of exhibitions, contributed powerfully to undoing their controlled space of modernity, of the dominating gaze and the edifying organisation. I am thinking of Diderot’s *Salon*, and in particular the *Grand Salon* of 1765 and 1767. What I would like to retain from these salons, above all that of 1767, is a most significant turn in which I believe the modern space of the gallery or the salon or the exhibition is meticulously and secretly attacked. It is the turn whereby, when he describes a whole series of paintings by Vernet in 1767, Diderot represents them as if they were real sites. He calls them sites, not paintings, except for the last one, for a very precise reason – just as if they were real sites in which he was walking. So that, in principle, we are still in the salon that Diderot describes, before the paintings, but the writer’s expression is such that it seems that we are taking a sort of promenade, a journey, a tour which Diderot takes with a character, an Abbé, and his two students, in real places; so that Vernet’s landscapes are described as realities. Diderot tries to show that precisely no painter, including Vernet – at least this is the Abbé’s objection – could equal the beauty of the real landscapes of these sites. So we find ourselves before the dematerialisation of the painting, of Vernet’s paintings, and the realisation of what they represent, that is to say the sites that they make us see, as if these sites were real. And ultimately we observe an exchange of roles between nature and painting. It is nature that is the author of the sites that Diderot and his friend the Abbé visit, whereas we know that it is the painter Vernet who is the author of these sites, in the form of the paintings that Diderot visits in the exhibition. Diderot begins this passage as follows:

Vernet: I’d inscribed this artist’s name at the head of my page and was about to review his works with you, when I left for a country close to the sea and celebrated for the beauty of its sites. There, while some spent the day’s most beautiful hours, the most beautiful days, their money, and their gaiety on green lawns, and others, shotguns over their shoulders, overcame their exhaustion to pursue their dogs through the fields, and others still wandered aimlessly through the remote corners of a park whose trees, happily for their young consorts in delusion, are models of discretion; while a few serious people, as late as seven o’clock in the evening, still made the dining room resound with their tumultuous discussion of the new principles of the economists, the utility or uselessness

of philosophy, religion, morals, actors, actresses, government, the relative merits of the two kinds of music, the fine arts, literature, and other important questions, the solutions to which they sought at the bottom of bottles, and returned, staggering and hoarse, to their rooms, whose doors they found only with difficulty, and, having relaxed in an armchair, began to recover from the intensity and zeal with which they'd sacrificed their lungs, their stomachs, and their reason in the hope of introducing the greatest possible order into all branches of administration; there I went, accompanied by the tutor of the children of the household and his two charges, my cane and writing pad in hand, to visit the most beautiful sites in the world. My intention is to describe them to you, and I hope that these descriptions will prove worth the trouble. My companion for these walks [that is, the Abbé] was thoroughly familiar with the lie of the land, and knew the best time to take in each rustic scene, and the places best viewed in the morning hours, which were most charming and interesting at sunrise and which at sunset, as well as the coolest, shadiest areas in which to seek refuge from the burning midday sun. He was the cicerone of this region; he did the honours for newcomers, and no one knew better than he how to maximise the impact of the spectator's first glance. We were off, and we chatted as we walked. I was moving along with my head lowered, as is my custom, when I felt my movement suddenly checked and was confronted with the following site.

First Site: To my right, in the distance, a mountain summit rose to meet the clouds. At this moment chance had placed a traveller there, upright and serene. The base of the mountain was obscured from us by an intervening mass of rock; the foot of this rock stretched across the view, rising and falling, such that it severed the scene's foreground from its background. To the far right, on an outcropping of rock, I saw two figures which could not have been more artfully placed to maximise their effect; they were two fishermen; one was seated towards the bottom of the rock, his legs dangling; the other, his catch slung over his back, bent over the first and conversed with him. On the rugged embankment formed by the extension of the lower portion of the rock, where it extended into the distance, a covered wagon driven by a peasant descended towards a village beyond the embankment: another incident which art would have suggested. Passing over the crest of this embankment, my gaze encountered the tops of the village houses and continued on, plunging into and losing itself in a landscape prospect that merged with the sky.

Here begins Diderot's discussion with the Abbé:

Who among your artists, my Cicerone asked me, would have imagined breaking up the continuity of this rugged embankment with a clump of trees? —Perhaps Vernet. —Right, but would your Vernet have imagined

such elegance and charm? Would he have been able to render the intense, lively effect of the play of light on the trunks and their branches? —Why not? —Depict the vast distances taken in by the eye? —He's done it on occasion in the past. You don't know just how conversant this man is with natural phenomena ... I responded distractedly, for my attention was focused on a mass of rocks covered with wild shrubs which nature had placed at the other end of the rugged mound. This mass was masked in turn by a closer rock that, separate from the first one, formed a channel through which flowed a torrent of water that, having completed its violent descent, broke into foam among detached rocks ... Well! I say to my Cicerone: Go to the Salon, and you'll see that a fruitful imagination, aided by close study of nature, has inspired one of our artists to paint precisely these rocks, this waterfall, and this bit of landscape. —And also, perhaps, this piece of rough stone, and the seated fisherman pulling in his net, and the tools of his trade scattered on the ground around him, and his wife standing with her back to us. —You don't realise what a bad joke you are making, Abbé ...⁴

Diderot's accusation against the Abbé, in this fictive dialogue which takes place within a supposed landscape which in reality is none other than the landscape painted by Vernet, the Abbé's "bad joke" consists in the fact that the Abbé suspects Vernet of having copied in detail a natural landscape which in reality is none other than a Vernet landscape. Thus here is an exchange of roles between fiction and reality, between creation and nature, as I said just now; but what is more interesting is that a rotation takes place between the instances of the structure of communication: the author of the text passes into the landscape that he is supposed to be describing, and in this landscape he holds a dialogue which speaks of this landscape as if it were real when it is fictive; and what is more, his interlocutor the Abbé speaks of this real landscape as a model absolutely inimitable by the very painter whom Diderot – the author of the text – is eulogising on account of one of his paintings which *is* this landscape. It's a rather simple thing ultimately, and yet it is remarkable insofar as the space of the gallery and of the exhibition in general is profoundly disrupted by it. For it is no longer an eye that perambulates before painted landscapes; it is all of a sudden a speech which jumps into the painted landscape, and which abolishes it *qua* painted landscape, for it is purely and simply abolished; and which, from this landscape taken as real instance, as place, as real space, speaks of the marvel, the sublimity of this landscape as if it were real, defying all painting to equal this sublimity. Thus here there is a sort of transfer from the function of the gaze to the function of speech. The exhibition is exploded, because the windows cease to be windows. Diderot

4 Denis Diderot, "The Salon of 1767", in *Diderot on Art, vol. II: The Salon of 1767*, trans. John Goodman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 86–88 (translation modified).

jumps through the window, installs himself in the fictive space represented by the painter, and in doing so defies all possible painting. That is to say that the truth is that, through the work of writing itself, Diderot no longer seeks simply to describe what the painter has painted, since he judges that in the end writing will never be able to equal nature at the level of description, that writing is an art of time and painting is an art of space, and that the two of them are incommensurable. On the contrary, Diderot, in his work of writing, tries to get across to his reader – for we are reading this – what the power of sublimity of Vernet’s paintings could be for the viewer. Thus here we have a passage from the gaze – I would say an art of seeing and thus of space – to the ear and to an art of time; we have, fundamentally, the passage from Vernet’s paintings to Diderot’s writing, which, in a certain way, breaks open the space of the gallery of the exhibition, because this passage gives a new hegemony to the art of speech, of writing, which is an art of time. So that – as critics who specialise in Diderot have explained very well – this salon of 1767, and before it that of 1765, are already occasions for Diderot to experiment with writing as an art of time and thus as music. Fundamentally, Diderot thinks that one can equal the plastic power of Vernet only through a power, not at all of an equivalent framework of reference, but through a power of evocation, a power of expression that is equivalent in its order – and its order is the order of time, that is to say, the musical order. I would say that this rupture, which I cannot make a fundamental analysis of here, this rupture of the space of the modern exhibition in favour of something that will contain more of music than of the gaze, in a certain way not only announces Diderot’s most postmodern texts, such as *Rameau’s Nephew* and *The Paradox of the Actor* or *Jacques the Fatalist*, but also announces something that will destroy, within the city itself, the project of dominant modernity. In this writing experiment of Diderot’s there is something that tends toward the destruction of a space of façades of mastery, of order: there is a sort of disorder here. Literary critics very often speak of this passage and of equivalent passages in terms of digression. There is therefore a sort of digression which is in reality a whole motif, a whole musical work, and a sort of hysteria of language which tried to provide, within its own order, an equivalent to the plastic power of the visual work. And I would add one more thing, which is that it is acted out, of course, and thus it implies a sort of coldness, for one can only do what Diderot does if one knows very well how to write, and thus if one is not oneself the victim of a blind propulsion. This is precisely how the paradox of the actor is announced, since the actor has to feel all passions, but at the same time has to feel none of them, in order to be able to reproduce those that he is supposed to act out. Which means that what becomes important for Diderot is circulation, exchangeability, the possibility of exiting from the rectilinear, orthogonal modern space, of leaping laterally into digressive spaces, and this at speed, as we shall see, for example, in the very constitution of the text called *Jacques the Fatalist*. The ruptures, I

would say the montages, between a story or a description, between a salon that takes place on the floor of the gallery and the story or the description that takes place in the fictive digressive space of the painting, this montage takes place without any warning, without any announcement, and thus, as film-makers say today, there is a cut and a crossfade. It is precisely here that we meet the theme of shock once more; but it is not shock in the same space and in the same time, but a shock that has taken place between one space-time – for example, that of the gallery – and another space-time – for example, that of Vernet's painted site, in which Diderot and the Abbé suddenly begin their discussion. I think that here we find the embryo, the sketch, already extraordinarily well developed, perhaps unsurpassable, of an aesthetics which is no longer the aesthetics of modernity, which is, to my eyes, a postmodern aesthetics insofar as it implies the disappearance of a common referent, of a shared space-time and, on the contrary, suggests a sort of heterogeneity or incommensurability between situations and thus between subjects. Because what interests me is that here it is not so much a matter of formative experience, and one does not gain so much in experiencing it; instead it is a matter of rendering oneself sufficiently mobile – the god that Diderot constantly invokes is Vertumnus, who, as we know, is characteristically unstable – it is a matter of rendering oneself sufficiently flexible and supple to be able to leap from one space-time to another. I am saying that here this speed – which is a theme that will be reprised by Stendahl and, of course, today, in the commentary of someone like Paul Virilio, but also by our very practice of time in contemporary capitalist and technological society – this speed is already something which, beyond modernity, announces postmodernity.

We must now describe, following the work of certain sociologists, this post-modern space-time, particularly – I would say essentially – in what today we still call the city. Here I follow the brilliant analyses made by Paul Virilio and Gairo Daghini, published in *Change International* no. 1 (December 1983). I will let them speak for themselves, so as to make it understood in what spirit we set to thinking through the spatial layout, or rather the space-time, of the exhibition *Les Immatériaux*. Daghini writes:

[T]he city as form of development plays a fundamental role within what will come to be defined as the project of modernity – namely, the idea set forth by modern sciences of an indefinite progression of knowledge, the aim affirmed in the growth of capitalism of a limitless accumulation of riches, the revolutionary project or the idea of a progressive social and moral amelioration, as defended by socialist and communist movements from the last century onward. It is with this intent that the modern imaginary, what we might call the modern spirit, detaches and frees itself from former constraints, and from that positive idea of progress of which the city is the site. This city, in fact, in itself is one of the

fundamental objects of production, through accelerated urbanisation and industrialisation.

How else can we explain the enormous expansion, starting in the industrial revolution, of a process of urbanisation which holds itself to be universal, the burgeoning of the city into the *Grossstadt*, the inflation of the latter into the global city, and finally the appearance, analysed by Patrick Guetz already at the turn of the century, of urban concentration no longer having the form of the city, but that of conurbations?

These gigantic urban agglomerations which bring together many cities, and for which even the term "metropolis" seems inadequate, consist of numerous complex entities, and only appear as the highest point, or at least as the site of the gestation of the unfinished project of modernity, through an illusory effect. In reality, the continual mutation of their forms, the inextricable ramification of diverse speeds and orientations of development, the internationalisation of forms of central and centred power constantly modify the very paradigm of modernity and call it into question.⁵

And on the subject of this paradigm, Dhagini says the following:

It is not only the form of the city that is lost during the challenge which, in the '80s, becomes a long crisis; what also disappears is a mode of production, since a mechanical-industrial paradigm is on the way to passing into an electronic-nuclear paradigm.

Within this new paradigm the ever more frequent application of informatic procedures to the activities of labour leads to what we might define as a semiotisation of labour, that is to say a labour that is applied to and through signs rather than by way of the worker's direct manipulations of the machine. To semiotise thus comes down to coding, and coding means managing: the post-industrial metropolis of the '80s is thus presented to us by institutional theorists as one within which all activities are resolved into management. Simultaneously the new forms of treatment of space by means of the combined techniques of informatics and telecommunications allow the absorption of the "old" metropolitan concentration-standardisations; they authorise the decentring of the production into new establishments, new "cities". Still, the invisible networks of the informatic metropolis which decentre or centre by thrusting its terminals everywhere, do not at all end up in constellations of new *polises*, any more than they constitute new *Siedlungen*. So it makes sense to ask: What is this new space that is being constituted today through these "invisible

5 Giairo Daghini, "Babel-Métropole", *Change International*, no. 1 (December 1983).

networks", what are the societies that inhabit it, and the urban forms that represent it?⁶

This last question is, if we might say so, the very question that we ask ourselves in regard to the space of the exhibition *Les Immatériaux*: What is the new space that is constituted today through these invisible networks? Dhagini concluded his article by saying:

one thing is certain: once the system has changed, there is no point in making directional and coherent analyses with the logic of this system or with the logic of the project defined as that of modernity. On the other hand, we will have to work patiently and at length so as to grasp and to practice the characteristic logics of the systems in which we are immersed.

In a certain way this patience of which Daghini speaks is something that we as designers of an exhibition must also practise, insofar as we cannot respond too fast to the demand for a plan or for a project concerning this space of immaterials. I remember that, having had to be away from the team for a few months last autumn, I was overcome by a sort of anxiety, thinking that we ought at least to make some indication as to the spatial layout, so as to satisfy the demands of the project. This proposition was rejected unanimously by the team almost without discussion, without any argument – fundamentally rejected, as if the team understood that we could not get to the root of this problem of postmodern space through a rapid, controlled spatial layout of a plan for the exhibition. In his text, Virilio, for his part, extends Dhagini's question, or perhaps contributes an element of a response to him, you could see it either way: what we are seeing, he says, is a paradoxical phenomenon whereby the opacity of the construction materials is being reduced to nothing; thus, Virilio reflects here more precisely on the very notion of exhibition [*exposition*], since the title of his article is "The Overexposed City". I would be pleased if the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* could be called a *surexhibition* [*surexposition*]. Virilio says:

With the emergence of portative structures, curtain walls made of light and transparent materials (glass, plastics) are replacing the stone façade at the same time that the tracing paper, acetate and plexiglas used in project studies are replacing the opacity of paper.

On the other hand, with the screen interface (computers, television, teleconferencing) the surface of inscription – until now devoid of depth – comes into existence as "distance," as a depth of field of a new representation, a visibility without direct confrontation, without a face-to-face, in which the old vis-à-vis of streets and avenues is effaced

6 Ibid.

and disappears. Thus, differences between positions blur, resulting in unavoidable fusion and confusion.

And he emphasises what follows from this:

Deprived of objective limits, the architectonic element begins to drift, to float in an electronic ether devoid of spatial dimensions yet inscribed in the single temporality of an instantaneous diffusion.⁷

This I think speaks for itself, without any need for further comment from me. Further on, he adds the following:

Solid substance no longer exists; instead, a limitless expanse is revealed in the false perspective of the apparatuses' luminous emission. Constructed space now occurs within an electronic topology, where the framing of the point of view and the scanlines of numerical images give new form to the practice of urban mapping. Replacing the old distinctions between public and private and "habitation" and "circulation" is an over-exposure in which the gap between "near" and "far" ceases to exist, in the same way that the gap between "micro" and "macro" disappears through electronic microscope scanning.⁸

Virilio concludes this passage as follows:

The representation of the contemporary city is thus no longer determined by a ceremonial opening of gates, by a ritual of processions and parades, nor by a succession of streets and avenues. From now on, urban architecture must deal with the advent of a "technological space-time." The access protocol of telematics replaces that of the doorway. The revolving door is succeeded by "data banks," by new rites of passage of a technical culture masked by the immateriality of its components: its networks, highway systems and diverse reticulations whose threads are no longer woven into the space of a constructed fabric but into the sequences of an imperceptible planning of time in which the interface man/machine replaces the façades of buildings and the surfaces of ground on which they stand.⁹

As for the surface, in the same text a little further on we find the following definition: "Every surface is an interface between two milieus in which a constant activity prevails, taking the form of an exchange between two substances placed in contact with one another."¹⁰

7 Paul Virilio, "Une ville surexposée", *Change International*, no. 1 (December 1983), p. 19–22; "The Overexposed City", trans. Astrid Hustvedt, in *Zone 1–2* (New York: Urzone, 1986), p. 540–550: 544.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., p. 545.

With these few remarks we have, by way of urban sociology, an approach to what is necessarily in question for us insofar as we confront the question of the spatial layout of *Les Immatériaux*. It is very clear that the exhibition must take upon itself or take up for itself this space-time, a space-time without façade but with an interface, where surfaces are only interfaces – and Virilio and Daghini show us the extent to which these interfaces are essential to the new habitat.

The proposed model here is that of the conurbation, which the urbanised know very well, and which is characteristic of the great inhabited zones, for example, of the South Californian coast, which extends from the Mexican border to the north of Santa Barbara. The conurbation is neither the city nor the countryside; it excludes the opposition between downtown, city centre, and periphery or suburb; it comprises habitat zones and uninhabited zones – not only vague terrains within the city, as seen in the US and pretty much everywhere, but also hilly regions in which one thinks for a moment that one is in the countryside – deserted hills – when one is actually still in the city. This region, which in itself destroys the oppositions corresponding to the division between countryside and city and, at the limit, between nature and culture, suggests the analogy of a nebula, in the astrophysical sense – a mass of dust, a focus of energy forming matter, one that excludes the simple opposition between interior scenes, like living rooms, and modes of circulation, like lines of attraction bringing bodies together. This representation, which is that of classical modernity, will undergo an entirely radical critique – firstly, of course, with the theory of relativity, and then with the idea, the principle that matter is energy, and that the opposition between body and lines of force, for example, cannot be maintained. The same goes – or in any case this is an idea that should be developed – concerning the metropolis that I am trying to describe. There also the opposition between the stable – what I would call hardware habitats [*habitats matériels*] – and modes of circulation – fluidities, like the flow of vehicles, for example – disappears, since the habitats are ultimately only the nodes of circulation of the message, of the electronic message, of photonic messages and sonic messages, which themselves, moreover, are now also transmitted electronically – and of course these messages are far more elaborate than linguistic messages in general and affective messages, which remain to be elaborated at the level of the cosmic or cosmological metaphor I am trying to develop here. So these habitats are, as Virilio has just said, far more interesting *qua* very complex interface than *qua* interiors held within façades. This has already long been reflected, in particular, in the Californian architecture that Frank Lloyd Wright and his school implanted in this region. This is already nothing new, it is inscribed still under the sign of the project of modernity, but nevertheless, the decision precisely no longer to oppose material support [*matériau*] and ornament, to no longer conserve the opposition between inside and outside, but on the contrary, by

means of lighting and transparent surfaces, to place the interior outside and the exterior inside, the profound reflection of shadow and light – all of this already anticipated something that is attained not so much by means of a materiological research but from the sole fact of the predominance of new technologies in the habitat, in architecture and in urbanism. I would say that certain large metropolises – above all if they are not limited in their expansion by the structure of the modern city of yore, with its city centre, commercial, administrative, political centre, and then the various patches of the suburbs – this freedom which holds for the large Southern Californian metropolis which I already referred to, can fundamentally be thought far more easily in terms of the cosmic or cosmological model; but also in terms of a microcosmic model, that of a field of elementary particles which form a content [*matière*], which form a node at certain places of encounter, one which, moreover, is extraordinarily difficult to localise precisely because of the relations of uncertainty – that is to say that each time the observer tries to define the places of encounter of these particles, it is displaced.

If now I take this barely sketched-out model and transport it to the case of the exhibition, asking myself, therefore, what a postmodern exhibition corresponding to the metropolis or to the nebula of conurbation could be, then I am indeed obliged – and this is what we have all concluded – we are obliged to refuse the traditional *dispositif* of the gallery and the salon – that is to say, the *dispositif* which opposes, for example, rooms and the corresponding corridors, habitats and lines of circulation. To refuse the opposition between the central point, the preeminent point of the exhibition and the periphery of the regions, the most important zone, the most important room, and then the outlying rooms, just as the opposition between a downtown metropolis and the suburbs has disappeared. We must even question the relation between entrance and exit by virtue of the same principle, since it is very difficult, in a large nebula like that of South California, to say at what moment we have entered the city or left it. And we must also call into question and probably abandon the principle that there is a direction to the visit, that is to say that in it there is a polarisation of space and of time which means that one either goes toward the secret chamber of the temple where knowledge will be completed, or one traverses all of the rooms by means of the mode of circulation toward the exit, the exit being the end of the apprenticeship and the accomplishment of the initiation. All of these spatiotemporal arrangements, which are powerfully significant for the project of modernity, and which organise the space of the gallery, must be reconsidered if we do not want our exhibition *Les Immatériaux* to be contradictory and, I would say, in contravention of the very name of immaterials and with the very project of exposing some aspect of postmodernity. It must be not an exhibition [*exposition*], but a surexhibition [*surexposition*], to take up the term Virilio uses in relation to the city; it must be an overexposed exhibition. So these are a few

reflections on the spatiotemporal problematic that has preoccupied us, and which will have to be reconciled with a certain number of constraints, because we are not putting on this exhibition on virgin soil, within an untouched space-time. The fifth floor of the Centre is a surface of 4000 square metres, 2700 square metres of usable space if we discount the entrances and exits. It is a space without any partitions, which is a great advantage; but more importantly it is a space that cannot be made completely dark – this should be emphasised insofar as it is precisely a question of that still modern but already postmodern architecture of transparency, given that interior and exterior do not constitute a pertinent opposition here. On the other hand, this space is situated within the Centre Pompidou, in the very centre of Paris, a modern (I would say classical-modern) city, in a neighbourhood which, especially since the building of Les Halles, draws a crowd of visitors, particularly at the weekend, a crowd of people who come from the suburbs; this structure and this situation themselves constitute constraints. On the other hand, the exhibition is not a museum; it is an organisation of space which is temporary, not permanent; and we must include the duration of the exhibition – not only the entire period of the exhibition, but the duration of the visit itself – within the constraints bearing on the organisation of the fifth floor. I will leave aside questions of budget, which everyone can easily imagine, not because I don't want to talk about them but because in the case of *Les Immatériaux* we might think that what is new in the way the question of the budget is posed is that, firstly, the budget will be higher than usual for exhibitions on the fifth floor, because of the very nature of what will be presented – that is to say, technologically complex machines; and on the other hand, that the evaluation of cost is sometimes impossible insofar as we are dealing with the creation of original products. I would add that the very term that designates this space on the fifth floor, the very name of this space is the "Grande Galerie". I am not saying that these constraints make the thing impossible – far from it. On the contrary, if we compare this relatively free space in relation to other spaces, the exhibition can only benefit from being there. Nevertheless, the *Immatériaux* project is rendered paradoxical by the fact of the central position of the site – that is to say that it takes place in a centre, the Centre Georges Pompidou, the establishment of which was indeed disputed at a time when decentralisation was the order of the day; that the supervising body of the exhibition is also a centre, the *Centre de Création Industrielle* (CCI), a centre of creation indeed; and that, on the other hand, the thing – that is to say, the exhibition – is rendered perilous by the fact that its philosophical nature, which is in any case reflexive, and the team's ambition as to what needs to be got across to the visitor, is not exactly tailor-made to maximise footfall. That is to say, the problem of the attendance of an exhibition that precisely will not be made to teach, nor even to show something, since it will not be a façade, and which is also not about marvels, in the sense that one might marvel at new

technologies, but whose aim, for the team in any case, is to question, and I would even say to disquiet, the idea of the will and intelligence of an all-powerful subject, in order to produce instead a sort of effect of modesty in the anthropological atmosphere in which we live – the problem is that it effectively risks ending up in failure. I think the whole team is perfectly aware of the risk we are running in treating the question in the spirit that I have tried to describe. This said, it is now time, not to specify the responses that we will try to give, on one hand, to this questioning of the modern project, and on the other, to the constraints of this space, but to sketch out certain responses that have come up along the way during this very absorbing work, in which the whole team is very much invested, because it is very disquieting – in any case, some local responses. Here is how we have decided to proceed: we adopted the communicational structure, and we decided to extend the sense of the immaterial according to the root *mât* and to distribute the different senses associated with this root, referent [*matière*], hardware [*matériel*], support [*matériau*], matrix [*matrice*], maternity [*maternité*], on the different axes of this communicational structure. With the use of the term “material” and the mediative prefix, we are not suggesting that there is no longer any material support [*matériau*], but we think that we are in agreement in questioning these different senses: Is there still in contemporary technologies and in history a place for something like a *maternity*, as if someone – nature, the world, God, the Great Mother, were addressing messages to we humans, recipients of these messages? Are there still media [*matériaux*] which are only media – that is to say, relatively indifferent supports that are made use of according to an independent project, like, for example, “brick architecture,” to use a term borrowed from our colleague [Alain] Guiheux? Are there *matrices*, that is to say codes which encode messages that we can decode? Is the hardware [*matériels*] for the transit and capture of messages itself stable? Is the very content [*matière*] of messages, that is to say their referent, that of which they speak, independent of these messages? You can see that here there are a series of questions which demand that we group the objects to be shown not into separate domains – that is to say by genre, as one distinguishes biology from cookery, painting, and industry – but on the contrary that we place these objects, that we group them by zone. Each of these zones will fall under the regime of a question of the type: What about the referent [*matière*]? In such and such a domain, whether it is astrophysics, biology, architecture, what about the support [*matériau*]? In such and such a domain, theatre, painting, or industry, what about matrices, what about hardware [*matériels*]? Thus we have been guided by this idea that what is pertinent are the zones corresponding to different questions bearing on the different senses of the root *mât*. We have been led already to this first implicit organisation, a prior organisation of the space, which would be an organisation by zone, grouping sites belonging to domains of different, heterogeneous genres, and whose homogeneity we will

demonstrate precisely through the simple fact that they will be interrogated in the same manner, on the basis of the root *mât*. A second idea is that we do not wish to have, and we cannot have, an overall view of the whole of this space. This means not only that the visitor himself will have no overall view, and that she will circulate immanently in this space, without being able to grasp, at least not immediately, its overall economy; but that even we, who are supposedly the designers or the creators of this space, we do not proceed via a prior division of this space. That is to say that we will not plan out this exhibition and then carry out the planned project, but rather set out from these questions, interrogate the different domains on the basis of these questions, and situate one by one each of the sites that seem necessary to us, those that are most pertinent in relation to these questions, in which, in this or that domain, the project of modernity may be disquieting in some way – on the axis of referents [*matières*], on the axis of matrices [*matrices*], or on the axis of maternities [*maternités*], and so on. And ultimately, in delaying the moment when all of the sites, grouped by zones, will come to cover the fifth floor of the Beaubourg. A third principle is that, if we want to be faithful to the spirit of immateriality, it is important to accord a considerable place to that which relates to time rather than that which relates to space; and that, in particular, we must not – and we see many advantages in not doing this – we must not issue the visitor with instructions, whether an instruction manual or an instructive pamphlet, that is, information booklets. We should use as few text panels as possible, since these are still of the order of inscription – as I have explained before, the inscription of the space – and instead should use the medium of speech, of sound, which belongs to the art of time. We have taken the decision to use an audio programme to cover each of the zones grouping together sites involved in different domains but belonging to the same problematic. For each zone there will therefore be a transmitter, which will be located in the space of the exhibition itself, and at the entrance each visitor will pick up a little receiver that he will wear over his ears so that, passing from one zone to another, the visitor will pass from one transmitter to another, and will thus receive an audio instruction that will be sent to him by the transmitter in question. Through the transmitter we plan to play a tape recording relating to the problems that govern all of the sites placed within the zone; in other words, the instruction will be oral, and this allows us to avoid having too many panels to read. It will also allow us considerable latitude in the nature of messages concerning the zones and the sites, because by using oral speech we can avoid the monotony of written explanation, which generally is of the order of instruction; we can envisage using citations, or textual creations, from completely different genres. We can well imagine poems, fragments of literary prose, instructions in the imperative mode, questions, exclamations, all of this being – at least this is our plan – read by a good, well-known reader, and thus making use of the specific power of speech.

Of course these same receivers could receive musical signals, whether these signals are mixed with text, or whether on the contrary there is an entirely musical zone, as IRCAM have suggested. Once more, the arts of time, oral speech and music, with all the intermediaries between the two, including noises, are much superior to reading. I would add that the interest of proceeding in this way is that – the exhibition space must be kept completely silent – each visitor will be isolated in a singular relation to the transmitters. So, to come back to the sites, these sites will be placed in zones which are transgeneric, trans-domain, these sites will be sometimes singular, sometimes comparative – that is to say, comparing a new industrial technology, for example, with a new artistic technology so that the visitors will be led to question what is supposedly function and what is supposedly expression. Others will be anamnesiac, that is to say that in the domain itself they will compare two states, for example of the question of referent [*matière*] and support [*matériau*].

And finally, the way in which the sites are linked to each other, as I have said, will be through the common problematic of referent [*matériel*], support [*matériau*], and so on. And the way in which the zones that cover each of these problematics will be linked to each other will remain – we are discussing this now – probably relatively loose, which leads us to think that the perambulation within these zones will be at least partly free, so that each visitor will have – I would not say the choice of route, the term “choice” is not satisfactory – but in any case will have the freedom to go here and there, a little according to chance, or his tastes or his momentary inclinations. It is not, properly speaking, a question of a labyrinth, since usually a labyrinth has but one thread, and is perfectly constraining. Instead it is a question – as we have been saying in the team – of a sort of desert in the middle of which these sites have been dropped, with the visitor going from one zone to another with her headphones on her ears. Perhaps, entering into a zone in the middle of the recording, she may wait until the tape goes back to the beginning in order to be able to listen to what the space is about, the region where she is, and will visit the zone in question with this recording, this text, playing in her ears.

Thus the linkage or the sequencing of zones to each other will, if possible, always leave open the question “What happens, what is happening?” and thus the feeling of a kind of contingency and encounter. I will add a last thing as a general principle: since we cannot make the fifth floor entirely dark, as is generally the case in the Beaubourg, we have decided to take the opposite path – that is to say, to overexpose the whole exhibition, to use constant halogen light and to control this light in relation to the external light so as to balance it. Thus we will have constant lighting whatever the time of day, which seems very important to me since it will be part of the extreme modernity or postmodernity to renounce nature in this way, to renounce the seasons, day

and night. What is more, it will allow us, when we feel the need, to create sites or even whole zones that, on the contrary, are completely dark, completely black, through a system of local enclosures. So this is how, at the moment, we imagine the whole of the exhibition.

I would like to add two things: on one hand, that we would like to find a device that would enable us to record the route taken by each visitor. Not to record it in some central server, but such that on the object that he will necessarily have taken at the entrance – it may be a cassette containing all of the recordings produced by the transmitters which the visitor could buy in some way, or it could be a card that he swipes in readers – such that, thanks to these indications one could obtain on demand, on exit, a report of the route that the visitor in question has taken through the space of this exhibition. This doesn't seem to be as easy as we had thought, and the difficulties may oblige us to choose a simpler solution, but nevertheless this aspect is being looked into. This means that each visitor will in a certain way take away the product of his own visit, printing it out using a printer at the exit. A second thing that I would like to emphasise again is that, along with this route, the work that you see here is not exactly a promenade but an investigation – I wouldn't say an adventure, I don't like that word so much – but in any case an exploration of the space of the exhibition. We also envisage completely revising the idea of the catalogue, because the catalogue of an exhibition is a book that has the exhibition as its content [*matière*], that is to say as its referent, and which tries to be as complete a summary of it as possible, in the form of, on one hand, a declaration of intent in the preliminary articles, in particular the commissioner's statement, and then an account of all the objects to be found in the exhibition, the index of these objects and their authors or creators. We should like to proceed in the following way: firstly, to separate it into two book-objects. On one hand we will have as the catalogue a portfolio, which was already started six months ago, the first proof of which some of you have already seen – so we will continue with this portfolio, in which we will include the team's working texts spanning almost two years; and on the other hand, obviously, an account of all the objects, whatever their nature, to be shown [*exposé*] or overexposed [*surexposé*]. It will be quite a large portfolio, then, one that will comprise a set of sheets along with two booklets, a booklet of working files and a booklet that will be a kind of lexicon of the exhibition, with illustrations, all of it in a cardboard sleeve like a box, a double box. You should realise that this is not a matter of making something nice and chic – we are not working on the model of a deluxe book. On the contrary the aim is to make an object that is quite plain, quite simple, with these loose-leaf sheets, and using printing and duplication techniques that do not go beyond offset printing. So that is one of two objects that you will be able to buy in the exhibition.

The other object is entirely different: it is a part of the exhibition itself, one of the experiments that are going to take place inside the exhibition. It would be wrong to call it a catalogue, in fact. It is a question of giving a certain number of people, whom I have somewhat derisively called "authors", a list of a certain number of words. These are words that we might consider as keys insofar as they will be inserted into a central server, but they are not keywords in the strict philosophical sense, if I might say so, but words that we have built up together and which we consider to be important in relation to the exhibition. So we have given these authors, for a period that remains to be determined – this is a matter of both material possibility and cost – word-processing machines. Each of them associates with the words that interest them around a hundred words, a few phrases which we call commentaries. They make a first commentary entirely freely – they are at home with their machine – and then, by calling up the names of the other authors using a code, they can learn what the others have associated with the same word, and then respond to what the others have done. So in the first place their own commentary, then a commentary which they can make on their own commentary, and then, thirdly, a commentary on the others' commentaries – all of this recorded in the memory of a central server. You can see that there is no necessity for the process to be synchronous, that is to say to take place in real time. These commentaries can very well be made diachronically, one after the other, it does not matter much; each can see the commentary of others when he wishes, in whatever medium. But in real time, one can imagine – even if it seems that here also there are considerable difficulties – the different authors responding to one another on their word-processing machines. The company that is responsible for dealing with this aspect of the exhibition has suggested that we could bring about – and as you can imagine, nothing would please me more – what we could call "sparring commentaries", not using word-processing machines, but via Minitel, the little device that is already in place in Paris, and which will be available for all of telephone users in 1985, which is a device with a keyboard and a screen using the telephone network. It may be possible, then, to make in this way a sort of sparring of commentaries where each author will be able to produce a phrase and any one of the others will be able to comment on this phrase – it is a question of a brief phrase that fits in one page on the screen. In that case we would have a production in real time, which would not be so costly since it would use the Minitel network. All of this would of course be available within the exhibition, and we envision that the visitors themselves could participate in this experiment as it carries on during the exhibition. This means that all of the work done by the authors on the word processors could finally, after having been printed, be produced as an experimental book in which it would be precisely the question of the author that would be at issue – Who would the author of this book be? – and in which the very multiplicity of the rules of the game – the author commenting on himself, commenting on others – would

ultimately make the question of the book's maternity particularly disquieting. Of course, the question of the support [*matériau*] would, by virtue of this simple fact, be posed with some force, since each of the authors working on the word-processing machine would be in the keyboard-and-screen situation that I described earlier. So there are a few different aspects to this. For now, we don't want to proceed with the description of the sites, although we could maybe do so if you feel the need.

I should like to add a few disordered remarks. This spatial layout which is in the process of taking shape will itself manifest, within the exhibition, many of the principles that I have described a little abstractly: firstly, the passage from one zone to another should be compared to the passage from one reception zone to another when a driver drives across a large metropolis. When you go from the Mexican border to Santa Barbara you have to retune the radio because you change transmitter; speech and music fade out and become noise, and you have to retune in order to find other speech, other music, you join them in mid-flow, and they are independent of each other. This nebulous aspect of which I spoke earlier, then, we hope to reproduce it through this device. A second thing I also want to say is that the multiplicity of routes through the exhibition – above all if we manage to resolve the technical question of being able to record them at will at the exit – allows it to transpire that, fundamentally, the exhibition contains many possible worlds. Ultimately, a route defines a world, that is to say that it connects up a series of zones, and another route assembles the series of zones into another order; and in this sense, each visitor will have a universe of the exhibition which is inscribed, of which he is the author, but the involuntary author – and of which he is also, one might say, the receiver, meaning that here there is a vacillation on the question of sender and receiver, and above all on the question of content [*matière*] – because it means that the very content of the exhibition, the exhibition *qua* referent of a route is posited: there are ultimately many exhibitions in one, many possible exhibitions. A third point: we can imagine, thanks to the recording, thanks to the freedom that the recording gives us, some very interesting variations in the pragmatic situation of the visitor, because she may sometimes be the receiver of the recording – someone addresses her and this someone, what is more, may be a person out of a painting, may be a piece of a machine, may be the site itself, or the zone, or another zone – she may be the receiver, then. But she may also be placed in the position of the sender, since, precisely, she herself plots her course, and in this sense she is the author of the route, the sender of the sequence that will be recorded at the end. She may herself be considered as a support [*matériau*] insofar as she is placed in the situation of a trigger – Pierre Boulez envisaged a scenario where, through a simple photoelectric cell system, the very passage of a visitor would trigger a piece of electronic music – perhaps at the moment when she passes into one place, she triggers off a camera to record her and

to represent her on a video screen elsewhere in the exhibition. Or again she may be the recipient, in the sense that she is active in this or that site. For example, we can imagine a site where we plan to use a set of synthetic images – which unfortunately risks being extremely costly – where the visitor could breathe onto a screen which represents the snow on a landscape, and by blowing on the screen she would make the snow fall. Thus, the visitor can play a great variety of roles within the structure of communication that serves as the general operator. It seems to me that this corresponds precisely to the satirical route taken by Diderot through Vernet's sites.

Translated from the French by Robin Mackay.

This text is based on the transcript, in French, of a talk that Jean-François Lyotard gave in spring 1984. The transcript exists in several, slightly different copies which are currently stored in different places in the archives of the Centre Pompidou. Different authors therefore refer to it with different document codes, depending on the copy that they used (No. 94033/666, PCA 1977001/129, Dossier 2009012). The most complete version that we could trace, and that was used as the basis of this first translation into English, can be found at "1994033/666".