I have been asked to write about the trajectory of “critical” art in the 1990s, and this is a task that makes me nervous. I find myself queasy, nauseated, before the explicit injunction to translate work from the last decade into an historical object, a task that represents a double impossibility in the face of strategies that have not even begun to receive their public reception, and in light of the fact that history might not want to move so fast, that the past may not come into form so easily, the object of a simple summons. The injunction to translate that which has yet to come to be into a dead object of the distanced past: I fear that this desire exists in opposition to the spirit in which the forums around Contextualize were organized. And yet I also fear the category implicitly created by the forum itself, that of “critical art”. I start asking myself a lot of rather stupid questions (and nothing is more stupid than questions that have no answer): What is a critique? In what ways can it be posed? How is it most effective? Does it need to be effective? Do we really want our art to be “critical”? Why do we want this? Can “critique” and “art” coexist in the same moment or are the two terms antithetical? Or, conversely, is all art worthy of the name inherently critical, a mode (one of the last) of envisioning and constructing things otherwise?

These questions have been posed with insistence throughout the last century; they are part and parcel of the social and aesthetic legacy of the avant-garde; and definitive answers seem by now neither desirable nor forthcoming. The unanswerability or meaninglessness of these questions is their stupidity; and this is the kind of stupidity of which perhaps we need more, for the unanswerability here signifies a project that is still alive, one that has not played out its course, one that will not yet give up its secrets to history. That the question of the viability of a critical art was one of the driving questions of the art of the 1990s is though a significant historical fact—one whose secrets we can divulge—as important in the last decade as questions of photography and film theory were for the 1980s. However, at times it seemed that this question was posed almost too insistently, as if in fear and in compensation for the fact that in the 1990s, critical art had perhaps disappeared, that it could not be taken for granted, that its former avant-garde modes were in crisis and were perhaps no longer viable. And yet never was there more “critical art” in terms of quantity and critical success, exhibitions and essays, than in the last ten years—in every Biennial, in every Kunstverein, sometimes even in America, sometimes even in the Museum of Modern Art. The question of the viability of a critical art was posed as insistently in the last decade as the art of the 1990s itself returned to past critical or avant-garde forms and formats (especially those of conceptual art, site-specificity and institutional critique), repeating them almost to the point of pastiche or appropriation, attempting perhaps to continue an unfinished project, and yet in their repetition perhaps calling these formats’ continued vitality once more into question.

The current invitation has then made me nervous for the very forum and position of Contextualize exists as an extension of this continuing crisis, an extension of this insistent questioning, for with the project of tracing the recent trajectory of “critical” art comes the parallel drive to identify its latest avatars, canonizing the “new critical art” in the way that museums and critics used to market the “new” sculpture or the “new” video, the latest avant-garde trend. We have been witness to the spectacularization of critique and of critical art for a long time now, the constant unveiling of “new” modes of criticality within an artistic system that remains essentially unchanged.

In what follows, I want to examine closely one specific example of the repetition, the return to older formats of avant-garde critique posed within recent art practice—one closely entwined with the question of vitality, with the question of the “life” of critical art itself, in a certain sense. But before doing so, a short story, from the early notebooks of my time as a critic: If the “history” of recent critical art is still too close to have become history, a local anecdote from the art world of New York City in the early 1990s has always struck me as significant, even symptomatic of the larger trajectory of avant-garde practice in the last ten years. I have been holding on to this comparison for a long time; if it seemed symptomatic to me then, it only seems more so now, and I am glad to have a chance finally to share it, to explore its strange, almost black-and-white opposition. In 1992 and 1993, both Christian Philipp Müller and Rirkrit Tiravanija would have their first major one-person exhibitions in New York. Emerging at the same moment—at least for an American critic—the work could not have presented a more stark opposition in terms of its aims. This was the moment of Tiravanija’s Untitled (Frieze) exhibition at the 303 Gallery, where the gallery was occupied by the artist and transformed into a site of alternative exchange, where the office and storage areas normally off-limits to gallery visitors were opened up by the artist and transferred into the exhibition spaces, and where Tiravanija would remain to cook Thai food for all gallery visitors, offering up this repast for free, an exhibition that was also a gift and an invitation to a form of social interaction. This was the beginning of Tiravanija’s particular installation practice, a practice indebted to previous art into life experiments such as those of Fluxus, one that would emphasize use and social exchange, and that eventually evolved into a

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1 Tiravanija had an earlier 1990 exhibition at the Paula Allen Gallery entitled Pad Thai that received much less attention than the 1992 exhibit at 303 Gallery.
medium that the artist described as consisting merely of "lots of people."

At precisely this moment, Müller presented an exhibition as his first show at Colin de Land's American Fine Arts gallery that he called, presciently, *A Sense of Friendliness, Mellowness, and Permanence*. The title seemed not to describe his own exhibition, but perhaps the gallery itself, as Müller's intervention was in some way site-specific. Shortly before Müller's show, gallery owner De Land had opened a "café" in his gallery, a real disorderly mess of an affair where one could buy cappuccinos and the like, and where the gallery itself would attempt to transform the type of social space that it offered in what amounted, however, to a total failure, a miscalculation that in this specific case caused the defection of a number of the most important gallery artists. (It should be noted that such a transformation of the social space of the gallery has had one significant follower in New York City, namely the current dealer of Rirkrit Tiravanija, embodied in the reasonably successful bar attached to the gallery named Gavin Brown's Enterprise.) As opposed to being either "mellow", "friendly", or "permanent", Müller's installation was singularly inhospitable, a false or a fake social space through and through, one that involved covering the gallery walls with wooden wainscoting and outdated light fixtures, a redecorating that seemed to transform De Land's gallery into a café, in this case into an environment reminiscent of a 19th-century Viennese café. In Müller's exhibition, one was confronted by an ersatz social space from another historical era, a fossil from the formative days of the once vital bourgeois public sphere. However, in Müller's "café", nothing was on offer; the artist did not stick around to bake pastries for his visitors; instead a maître d' stand was left in the centre of the space, replete with a "menu" that did display precisely what was on offer to gallery visitors: the gallery artists and a selection of their works and prices, information that galleries are of course often reluctant to give out.

On the one hand, the gallery becomes a space of the gift and sociality, conviviality and celebration; on the other, the gallery is underscored as a space of distance and emptiness, a space of economic transaction that could not simply be transformed at will but perhaps could be made transparent—through, paradoxically, a disguise, but also by calling upon the aspect of the gallery that intersects not just with the commodity but with the historical institutions of the bourgeois public sphere. Before visiting *Contextualize*, I had just come from Paris, where a popular magazine recently interviewed the sociologist Luc Boltanski about his theory that all human activity could be divided into two relatively stable and opposed modes: celebration and critique. While the sociologist was referring to the political tactics of the right and the left respectively, and explaining how an affirmative politics of celebration often wins out over the negative mode of a politics of critique, this division seems to apply rather well to the split in avant-garde practice initiated in the early 1990s by my example of Tiravanija and Müller. And indeed, if a politics of celebration leads more often to popular success, Tiravanija's model has become in some sense prolific: it has become the model for much contemporary "avant-garde" practice, now even canonized within artistic institutions—for example (as I had just come from Paris) as the founding programme of the new Palais de Tokyo in that city. Art, in this model, proposes "interactivity"; it creates "events" and gathers a "community". This is what French critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud, the driving force behind the Palais de Tokyo, would call, in his book of the same name, the "relational aesthetic" of the 1990s. It is what I would have to call a curator- and critic-friendly art, one that would seem to increase the public "use" of institutions that are seeking new public status and new missions, creating "accessibility" and "audience-involvement" in institutions where one is more likely to be asked to remove one's shoes before entering the art than to be presented with the history of a given practice, and where one is more likely to watch television advertisements for the institution's offerings in its on-site bar than one is to attend a scholarly symposium. In other words, this work is "fun". Who doesn't like free Thai food, or artists who give massages, or play really loud music? In other words, this work relates to a transformation in the very "institution" to which institutional critique once responded, a transformation from the museum to the mall, from the academy to entertainment, from critique to service, from impossible to "provisional" utopias.

What I will quickly sketch here is an aesthetic opposed to this institutionalization, one that has its roots in the type of site-specific, audience-specific and institutionally-critical work initiated in the early 1990s by artists like Müller. Call it, for the moment, an "anti-relational" or "counter-relational" aesthetic—although this is a problematic choice of words, as what I am looking for is a form of relationality more intense than any on offer in Bourriaud's account—taking Müller's first New York show as an exemplar, taking the opposition of Müller and Tiravanija as paradigmatic. The relational aesthetic of artists like Tiravanija might best be decoded as a compensatory move made in the face of the overwhelming lack of relationality in contemporary social life; an artistic reconstruction of social...
relations that simply wishes this lack away must, it seems to me, be distrusted. By contrast, what I am calling an "anti-relational" or a "counter-relational" aesthetic would be one that, instead of immediate sociality and conviviality, figures a break or a gap in social orders and social groups. It foregrounds an absence, a lack at the centre of social space, but not only to teach us the sobering critical lesson of the poverty of contemporary capitalist social forms. It foregrounds absence and lack to teach us that it is indeed only around such gaps that social groups and relationality can truly be called into being. As philosophers from Georges Bataille to Jean-Luc Nancy have taught us, it is only around absence that sharing occurs, that relations can be formed. As opposed to the cynical aesthetic of immediate communion and alternative social use, the counter-relational aesthetic proposes new definitions of community and social interaction from the thorough-going critique of accepted ideas of both. And rather than an amplification of the "life" side of the long avant-garde battle between art and life, aesthetics and politics—an amplification that Tiravanija's Fluxus-inspired installations often seem to propose—this art shows that only in intensifying the contradiction between the two will "life" emerge.

II.

Here is another story, one that originates once more in New York, but this time makes its way directly to Germany. It is a story that starts with a quote, a complaint about the place of contemporary art within social space: "By no means of minor importance is the loss of efficient security surveillance. The placement of this wall across the plaza obscures the view of security personnel, who have no way of knowing what is taking place on the other side of the wall." With these words, a vehement opponent called for the removal of what he otherwise described as a "rusty steel barrier", the American sculptor Richard Serra's controversial Titled Arc. Originally commissioned by the United States federal government and installed in 1981 at 26 Federal Plaza in Manhattan, Serra's sculpture unleashed a twelve foot high ribbon of Corten steel that stretched for 120 feet across the site of its installation. By 1985, in the midst of the cultural backlash of the Reagan era, the same governmental body that originally commissioned the work began a smear campaign against it, eventually holding a hearing where it was concluded that Titled Arc should be "relocated" in order "to increase public use" of its site, despite a majority of public opinion in favour of its retention.

"To remove the work is to destroy the work." With these words, Richard Serra explained that Titled Arc could not be simply "relocated", that this was a sculpture that was in fact site-specific. Site-specificity had been crucial to Serra's project from the moment of the artist's emergence in the late 1960s, in for example process-based works such as Splashing, where molten lead was thrown into the corner between the wall and floor of an exhibition space: a sculpture that "cast" the institution of its display, fusing sculpture and site irrevocably. To remove such a work would indeed be to destroy it, and the challenge of the work was both aesthetic and political, countering both the abstract placelessness of modernist sculpture and its traditional modes of apperception as well as the commodification and conventional institutional frame for art. A decade later, Serra's definition of site-specificity was no longer process-based but had evolved into the use of monumental forms, forms that were no longer physically or literally bound to their sites. They would instead be consciously formed in relation to their sites, as in the case of Titled Arc—responding to issues of scale, architecture and social function—proposing in fact that sculpture itself could intervene within and redefine a public space, that public space could become sculptural, rather than the other way around (that sculpture would simply become public, an object now thrown out into the vastness of social space).

We know what happened to this singular instance of the sculptural redefinition of public space. The aesthetic disruption of the putatively social function of the site led to the "removal" of the work, and thus its "destruction" as an artistic form. It could not and of course was not reconstructed. Until, that is, two years ago. For a small retrospective held in Braunschweig, Germany, the American sculptor Tom Burr produced a recreation of Serra's Titled Arc, reduced in scale, transformed in material (wood) and in colour (purple). Like the in-your-face titles of the Minimalist artist Tony Smith from the 1960s (e.g., Die), Burr called his piece Deep Purple. In distinct contrast to Serra's site-specificity, the work was also eminently portable, no longer a massive slab of Corten steel but a series of juxtaposed plywood planks, like a picket fence ready to be disassembled and transported at will. (And indeed, the work will be shown again, this fall at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.) If for Serra to remove the work was to destroy the work, now Burr seemed to ask what

5 I would like to add a caveat to this statement: Tiravanija's work is often better than the aesthetic that he has spawned. One might in fact object to the opposition that I have constructed here, looking instead to the ways in which Tiravanija is often engaged in actions quite close to Müller's, for example the curious site-specificity of both exhibitions that involved the similarity between the geographical displacements of both of their installations, with elements of both Thailand and Austria both transferred to New York. These spatial dislocations in Tiravanija's work are often as intense as the temporal or historical displacements of Müller's project. Also many of Tiravanija's installations would be so disjointed as to evoke the gap in social space they otherwise seem to overturn, one example of which for me would be the artist's work in the 1995 Whitney Biennial (where a film by Marcel Broodthaers concerning Speaker's Corner in London was screened in a replica of Tiravanija's gallery simultaneously filled with a band playing at ear-shattering volume).

6 For an articulation of this alternate definition of community within contemporary art, see my essay "The Space of the Stain," Grey Room 05 (2001), pp. 5-37.

would it mean to remake it? To recreate it as a work designed to be removed? To resurrect it as a form, to bring it back to life, but as a form that stood against the very principle of the original work, a form that stood for that which originally caused its “death”?

For more than ten years, Burr has produced works engaged in some way with the question of site-specific art, with the notion that a critical artistic practice cannot be autonomous but must emerge from a dialogue with the contexts of its production and display. In one of his earliest mature pieces, An American Garden, Burr seemed to deploy Robert Smithson’s idea of landscape displacement in a project that called for the transfer of a portion of Central Park known as the Ramble to a park in Holland being used as an exhibition site. Critics would see in such proposals a rejection of earlier models of site-specificity, with its focus on a literal or perceptual experience of a singular place, for a “mobile” or “functional” definition of space and place, one that sought to create relations between different sites and that would not by definition be tied to a single location. And yet Burr’s conceptions of both space and sculpture have always been more specific than such debates. Crucial to An American Garden was the fact that Burr proposed not a literal displacement of part of Central Park to a park in Holland, but a meticulous reconstruction of the appearance of the Ramble as it was originally designed by the architect Frederick Law Olmsted, replete with the requisite variety of newly planted vegetation, without any of the overgrowth and restructuring to which Olmsted’s design has since been subjected. And the Ramble was also a quite specific portion of Central Park upon which to focus, adjacent to an institution of art (the Metropolitan Museum), and currently used by wildly disparate communities, ranging from dedicated birdwatchers to gay men in search of a site for public sex and cruising. Positioned in Holland near a portion of the park similarly used for cruising, Burr’s reconstructed garden threw into relief the difference between planned design and public use, focusing on a social space opened up by what Smithson might have called “de-architecture”, but which Burr would consistently term “re-architecture”, the alterations to which public space can be subjected through use.

The dual principles of re-construction and re-architecture have since become Burr’s model of avant-garde sculptural practice. For a 1995 group exhibition in Zurich entitled Platzwechsel (Change of Place), Burr again deployed Smithson’s format of landscape displacement to import into a museum space an overgrown portion of an adjacent park, that was in fact a reconstruction of this park’s appearance in the 1970s when it too was used as a cruising ground, prior to a recent “clean up” that eliminated such usage. Burr called his sculpture Circa 1977, and the displacement that his reconstruction posed was evidently temporal as well as spatial, responding to and perhaps commemorating an historical loss in terms of subcultural, queer space. Beyond looking back to Robert Smithson, Burr’s other projects of the 1990s posed a continuous dialogue between avant-garde forms of the recent past, and the subcultural practices or queer “re-architecture” of their time, spaces today on the verge of historical eradication: the photographic typologies of Bernd and Hilla Becher with the endangered architecture of public toilets in New York (Unearthing the Public Toilet); the mirrored cubes or plywood sculpture of Robert Morris with the disappearing environments of urban sex shops (42nd Street Structures); the minimalist forms of Tony Smith with the barren decor of a “back room” in a gay bar (Black Box); the outdoor pavilions of Dan Graham with the architectural type of the peep-show booth (Anti-Public Sculpture).

Burr’s loose usage of previous avant-garde formats might itself be seen as a form of “re-architecture”, a turning of critical forms toward uses for which they were not originally designed. In this, Burr’s work displays a strong affiliation to the appropriation artists of the 1980s like Sherrie Levine, embracing a project founded upon the principle of the copy. This shared terrain has only been clarified by the creation of Deep Purple, a work that seems to herald a shift in Burr’s practice in terms of the directness of its appropriation of a specific work of art, and in the intensity with which it collides the opposed legacies of site-specificity (which privileges the unique, the local, the non-replicable) and appropriation art (which depends upon the copy, the photograph, the multiple). Richard Serra has in fact articulated precisely this contradiction between site-specificity and the copy or the multiple, phrasing the contradiction in terms of a war between sculpture and photography: “If you reduce sculpture to the flat plane of the photograph, you’re passing on only a residue of your concerns. You’re denying the temporal experience of the work. You’re not only reducing the sculpture to a different scale for the purposes of consumption, but you’re denying the real content of the work. At least with most sculpture, the experience of the work is inseparable from the place in which the work resides. Apart from that condition, any experience of the work is a deception. But it could be that people want to consume sculpture the way they consume paintings—through photographs. Most photographs take their cues from advertising, where the priority is high image content for an easy Gestalt reading. I’m interested in the experience of sculpture in the place where it resides. It’s possible that now there is a kind of sculpture that’s reduced to a photograph only. And then you have

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10 As with the Ramble, this queer usage was only one among many in Zurich, for example, the park in question (the Parkanlage) had also been used in the 1970s as a place to take drugs.
Gilbert and George saying they’re real sculpture. But if everything from photographs to performance is considered sculpture, what is *not* sculpture?\(^{11}\)

It must be said that the most common format for Burr’s exhibitions would be to pair sculpture with photography, to arrange a spatial construction in dialogue with a wallboard or a series of photographs. And yet, based upon the denial of the originality of the sculptural object itself, the photograph infects Burr’s structures from the outset, producing a reading of his chosen minimalism forms that is open to a deep multiplicity, true in fact to the original mass-produced, industrial nature of such works. In this, it might be possible to transvalue Serra’s comments. For perhaps, if the photograph heralds a challenge to the specificity and uniqueness of the sculptural medium, the result could be envisioned that if ‘everything’ could become sculpture, we might not be faced just with the mush of what has been called the “post-medium condition”. If everything can become sculpture, Serra had asked, what is *not* sculpture? And yet it had been his desire to redefine public space in sculptural terms, to use sculpture to transform other objects, other spaces. As perverse as this may seem, this desire would seem to be Burr’s as well. Opened up to the principle of the copy, infected by a multiplicity that would seem to threaten the very core of the sculptural medium, sculpture might finally be let loose to itself infect other places, other forms. It might not simply “disappear” as was the fate of Serra’s original work; we are not faced here with the abstract intransigence of Serra’s work, the legacy of modernism still living within it. We are faced here rather with something like a communication or a promiscuity of forms. If “everything” can become sculpture, it might mean that sculpture had been opened up to become a form of relation, between itself and what is “not-sculpture”. Sculpture could become a form that proposes a series of continuous connections, recodings, and reframings of all object conditions.

I realize this is a paradoxical claim to make for a sculpture that would form itself as a literal barrier. And yet if Burr seems in *Deep Purple* for the first time to appropriate a work of art almost for its own sake, replicating the form of *Titled Arc*, this seeming deviation from his previous work has a stunning logical consistency. *Titled Arc* could be directly confronted by Burr for the barrier that it created was *itself* a form of re-architecture, a sculpture that had re-directed the design and use of public space. Creating a negative barrier within a “transparent” public space previously constructed around the principles of surveillance and control, Serra’s sculpture had in part been attacked for creating such a rift, for opening up social space to other uses—including queer uses—for which it had not been designed. The detractors of *Titled Arc* were prone to fantasizing about the life of Serra’s sculpture at night, about the graffiti and public urination that it seemed to attract, attributing larger social problems to its form (infamously, a multiplication of the rat population, or an increased danger of terrorist attack, for which the sculpture would presumably serve as a blast wall that could vent an explosive toward the offices of Federal Plaza). Sited in such a way as to create a pocket of empty, “useless” space between the Kunstverein Braunschweig and a hedgerow that formed the back wall between the Kunstverein and a neighbouring public park, *Deep Purple* became a tool to exacerbate the functions for which *Titled Arc* was originally vilified. And while it thus creates a space freed from surveillance, opened potentially to “other” uses, Burr’s proposal is quite different from the “relational” aesthetic and its transgressive practices of use and exchange. Burr’s work depends upon this barrier, an unbridgeable cut within social space. It brings forms into relation by insisting on this foundational non-relation, a gap or hole within communal space. It brings forms back to life by basing its promiscuity of form on something like an impossible communion, of which the wall of *Deep Purple* is just the literal sign.

Now, of course it was not the normal understanding of modes of appropriation art in the 1980s—from which Burr’s project directly descends—that such work brought forms back to “life”. Rather, such works, like those of Sherrie Levine, were read as allegorical procedures, the ruins or mortifications of the forms that they quoted, melancholy dissipations of all of that for which the original forms stood. To read *Deep Purple* as a similar assault upon the presumptions of *Titled Arc* would be, at least in part, a mistake. Without doubt, Burr’s work overturns the monumentality of *Titled Arc*, as well as the gendered, perhaps masculinist implications of its form: shrinking it in size, substituting organic wood for its industrial steel, warming its antiseptic ornamental rust to the decorative blush of purple paint. And yet Burr’s purpose in so doing seems less deconstructive than archaeological, uncovering layers of allusion in Serra’s otherwise anti-metaphorical art. If Burr’s title deflates the industrial force of Serra’s work through linking it to a heavy metal group of its era (the band Deep Purple’s development—founded in the late 1960s and climaxing in the 1980s—precisely corresponds with Serra’s own), this collision of minimalism and mass culture also reframes Serra’s form. Its brown abstract purity will now be linked to the “excess” implicit in the reference to the band, which was one of the precursors to what is today known as the “Goth” aesthetic, a subcultural scene devoted to dandyism and death, obsessed with a kitsch version of the formerly sublime signs of aesthetic ugliness and horror. Similarly, the non-referential geometry of *Titled Arc* will be exfoliated into a spiralling series of rather concrete and referential, for instance the fact that the newly augmented, shrunken form of Burr’s appropriation doesn’t seem abstract at all, but recalls quite precisely the angles of structures often erected along highways to act as sound barriers for any private property that might be nearby (a reference of both low and high wit, given the bombastic rock group signalled in Burr’s title). The use of Smith’s infamous association of minimalist form...
of the sublime sensory overload of such massive and endlessly repetitive contemporary structures as the New Jersey Turnpike). And yet Deep Purple, as a title, also has secondary meanings—ennobling rather than parodic ones—as if Burr wanted to uncover a level of depth, perhaps even of “deep” affect within his chosen form. Publishing an essay upon the occasion of the first exhibition of Deep Purple, Burr created an ambiguous montage of descriptive notes about Serra’s sculpture with passages drawn from a “gothic” tale by Edgar Allan Poe entitled “The Masque of the Red Death”.12 A 19th-century horror story about a mysterious plague that strikes the blood of its victims, Burr’s allusions served obliquely to remind his viewers that, beyond placing a decorative or gothic spin on the resolute black-and-white seriousness of Serra’s aesthetic, the colour purple has also in recent years been adopted by lesbian and gay political groups in response to the crisis posed by AIDS.

Serra’s Tiled Arc and the AIDS crisis, the crisis of site-specificity and a social catastrophe: These are the types of connections that are at the basis of Burr’s project, his formal promiscuity. They are connections based upon loss, opened up by mutual forms of absence. For if founded upon the principle of the copy, Burr’s work is not a straight appropriation of 1960s or 1970s art. It always puts that art’s forms into relation with precisely that which it repressed, but with which socially it would be inextricably and historically entwined. This is one way of regarding the linkages that Burr creates between the Becher’s pure or “objective”—and yet simultaneously melancholic—photographic language and the decaying public toilets of New York, fading away like some endangered species; or the sculptural languages of Dan Graham and Robert Morris linked to the now-outlawed space of the urban sex shop; or the always displaced non-sites of Robert Smithson resurrecting the lost cruising area of a Zurich park.

How are we to characterize such relations? Is each artwork simply put into relation with a social “outside”, a reconstruction or an evocation of a space of transgression, a kind of cataloguing in Burr’s case of queer space? I would suggest that in Burr’s work the situation is not that simple. For here two “outsides”, two unbridgeable losses meet. And they meet around their relation with a social “outside”, a limit in relation to which it can become other. And the experiences with which sculpture can now enter into a relation are potentially infinite, endless, perhaps unknowable. Opened to a sharing of forms between sculpture and photography, between aesthetic and social experience, Burr’s project will be to carry his anti- or counter-relational aesthetic to the full spectrum of relations that it can encompass.

In both the artistic and the social arena, what I have been calling the “outside” that Deep Purple constitutes might be characterized in terms much stronger than the abstract ones that I have been using of loss or absence. It might be characterized as “death”, in a very direct sense. Burr’s work has often been associated with a project of mourning, its use of the blankness and the negativity associated with the minimalist forms that it quotes the perfect tool to embody melancholia, or to evoke that which has been lost, the Ur-form of the sculptural function of the monument: to speak about that which is past, about that which is gone. This potential in Burr’s work was never made clearer than in his recent exhibition in Berlin where he created an installation of a deceased partner’s paintings framed by his sculptures, in this most recent case citations of the massive forms of Donald Judd’s frame-like sculptures from Marfa, Texas, works made shortly before Judd’s own death.13 A student of Gerhard Richter, Hohn’s colorful abstractions glowed even more brightly against the funereal dark of Burr’s forms, sculptures that at times pressed so close as to block Hohn’s paintings from view, or at other times threw them into piercing focus. In this, Burr revealed his appropriation of past forms as a strategy of sharing, one that would reframe another’s work not only to memorialize it, but perhaps to enliven it, to bring it back to life. And with this we can begin truly to understand what new relations can emerge from the gaps opened up by loss. The model of avant-garde practice that emerges in Burr’s recent work is not confined to eternal mourning and melancholia, nor to the function of the monument, but ex-

12 This text has recently been republished as Tom Burr, “Edgar Allan Poe, DEEP PURPLE, and Haus Salve Hoopen”, Oenôtre, 100 (2002), pp. 28-33.

13 Partnerschaften: Unterbrochene Karrieren (Berlin, Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, 2002). The artists partnert involved were Ull Hohn and Tom Burr, Jochen Klein and Wolfgang Tillmans, and Matt. Ranger and Piotr Nathan. Hohn died of AIDS.
tends to love and to joy, to sharing and communication in absence, to forms of relation that paradoxically emerge from the delimited forms of their non-relation, their relation to an outside, to a limit, to a gap. This is both sad and quite wonderful. *Deep Purple* proposes an aesthetic of resurrection, of both lost artistic forms and lost social spaces. And yet in these returns, it proposes a new model of critique, one previously unavailable or unarticulated in the avant-garde moments that it cites. For Burr’s work and other contemporary projects in this vein begin to overcome the contradiction between celebration and critique with which I began, the war between the relational and non-relational aesthetics to which the 1990s gave birth. In Burr’s sculptural promiscuity, his sharing of form, we witness the relations that can emerge only from non-relation, and the initiation of what we might call a critical celebration.

New York, Paris, Kassel and Hamburg, 2002