

Chance Encounters | a Gesture, an Object, a Décor.

Chance Encounters | *a Gesture, an Object, a Décor.*

BA Thesis

Karin Bartels

Gerrit Rietveld Academic

Jewellery Department

Thesis advisor: Alena Alexandrova

2013

Introduction	
Chance Encounters <i>a Gesture, an Object, a Décor</i>	3
Chapter 1	
Joseph Cornell <i>Archives, Maps and Boxes of Poetic Imagination</i>	9
Marcel Duchamp <i>Cultivating Chance</i>	17
Chapter 2	
The Gift	20
Relational Aesthetics	23
Theatre of Life <i>Paris, the Garden as a Social Public Space</i>	26
Conclusion	40
Atlas	42
Bibliography	43

There is no meaning if meaning is not shared, and not because there would be an ultimate or first signification that all beings have in common, but because meaning is itself the sharing of Being.¹

- Jean-Luc Nancy

Chance Encounters | a Gesture, an Object, a Décor

At the beginning of this year I started with a way of working that I had never dealt with before. My interests and questions have come out of this practice. In this thesis it is not my intention to present my ideas as a matter of fact; it is not possible to reach definite conclusions through a project done on a micro-scale. However I can still explore the questions and discuss the project as it has progressed until now. The project has more or less turned into a field research and is not yet finished; perhaps it will continue indefinitely. I consider myself in the midst of a process where I have become interested and confronted with a different side of jewelry and objects that I have never encountered as a maker or was not necessarily concerned about. This manner of working throws another and important light on my practice. Inevitably this will be a personal reading concerning jewelry, objects and the universe around it.

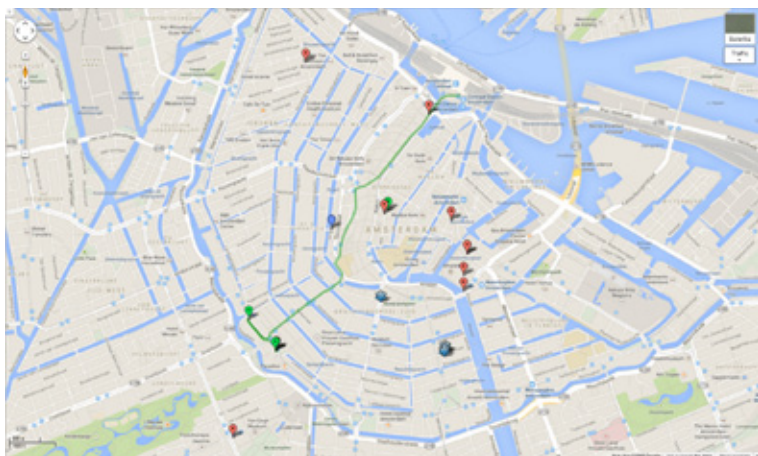
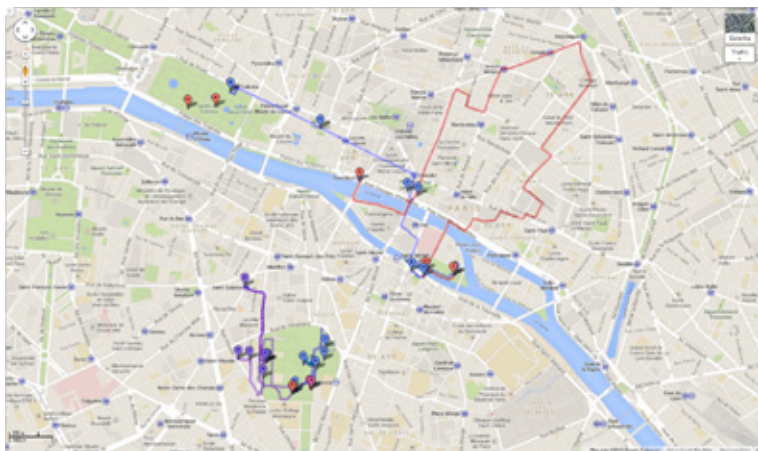
I have a great fascination for everyday matters in life, spending most of my time in public spaces - sitting somewhere for hours and observing what is happening in the world around me. The ever-changing but also repeating rhythms, the pace, the colours, the space, the people, what they are doing, where they are going etc. This is very interesting for me. In these spaces I have had a lot of conversations with strangers that I

¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) p. 2

have met through chance encounters. I felt there was often something special within these shared fleeting moments; they were like little gems to me. Because I am interested in people, I tried to be open to the person with whom I shared the encounter. I let myself be guided by that person and would stay in the conversation until they ended it. I was surprised and fascinated with the stories that came up. This made me want to do something with these little events.

I used Google Maps to collect the information of the people on a personal map. I would place a landmark at the exact spot where I met a particular person. I would also make notes of the date, a description of the person and what I was wearing and or doing because I felt this often evoked the encounter. I also wrote about topics we discussed, short anecdotes, remarkable stories, wonderings and if we walked somewhere together I traced the route. Slowly I was building some sort of archive within this map of encounters. I didn't know what I was aiming at or where it would lead, I just felt the urge to collect this information. The only thing I had in mind was some kind of poetic idea(l) that a fleeting moment could be a gem. The social aspect of the encounter in public space interested me as well.

This all derived from the fact that I don't care for material things, unless they have specific meaning to me. This made me wonder if I could make a work about jewelry without making jewelry pieces. The people, the stories and information also appealed to my imagination. I connected certain information that I had about the people and the circumstances to moments in history, literature, movies, film, art etc. I began collecting objects, images, small pieces and made little drawings. Together with the information that I collected in Google Maps this became an attempt in creating an overview of the encounters - to find its meaning, to grasp or discover something that I did not know yet which would be important for my practice.



Excerpt of the collected encounters in Google Maps - Paris and Amsterdam

To be more constructive I had to do something within the encounter that would express my idea of the moment as a gem. My interests in the immaterial made me think about making a gesture, but what kind of gesture? I decided that I would give something away to mark the encounter as precious. At a certain point I came across vintage hatpins in a thrift store in Amsterdam, they reminded me of the landmarks in Google Maps. I decided to collect these hatpins and give them away. The pins referred to the way I documented and collected my information.

The hatpins are no more than a commodity jewellery piece from the past; they have even lost their actual function today. It wasn't about the piece, but about the gesture. Therefore I wasn't concerned about using pieces that I didn't make myself because I thought these pieces could serve the idea equally well. I also looked for a little box and continued to collect pins during my visit to Paris in the fall. From then on I was carrying around this box constantly. Using the hatpins as a symbolic gesture for the encounters to signify and value this fleeting moment. The person I offered a pin could choose one from the small collection. I made the gesture quite spontaneous; I followed my intuition and when I made the gesture I meant it. I didn't want to "fake" a precious moment; I needed it to be sincere. I had no idea where this would lead and I didn't expect that anything would happen.

It was perhaps naïve, but I did not take in to account that by the gesture of giving I established a relation between the other person and myself. My intention was to mark a fleeting moment, not to create a bond. The winter made the chance encounters in public space less, within three months time I only gave three pins away and I realised that I needed more time to explore this practice. Still every single time it resulted in something unexpected. It varied from being surprising, interesting and touching to disturbing. After making the gesture I took a photo of the pin that the person chose and this photo I would mail to them with a little note.



The collected hatpins in the jewellery box

Once it led to a brief exchange and in two cases this exchange kept continuing and expanding. It created a story - as so often happens with jewelry - around the piece and the connection between the people of the bond. In the context of this project it was between the receiver and me - the giver. At times I came across things that reminded me of the encounter which I shared and vice versa. I noticed that I started to live within the stories. They became part of me and how I looked at things and collected material. I also started to (re)create scenes, record moments and take photos which I sometimes included in my correspondence with these people.

It occurred to me that there is a life around a piece. For every person their relationship to jewelry, objects, the gesture and the bond will differ due to their own knowledge, interest, personal history and memory. This specific information evolved around the subject like a web. Knowledge presented itself, but it was not a general kind of knowledge, so what kind of knowledge was I dealing with? What to do with all this subjective matter concerning jewelry, objects and human relations; what could I learn from this?

In the thesis I will focus on the following conceptual questions and ideas that have arisen in my practice:

The first chapter: I will dive into the work of Joseph Cornell, who's practice involved collecting and archiving the found object; he used them in his practice to capture the fleeting moments of existence through works full of poetic imagination. I also take a look at the work *3 Stoppages Etalon* by Marcel Duchamp in order to discover how he used change in his practice and the way he managed to direct this element.

The second chapter: What happens when you give something to someone? On the gift, the bond and emotional value leading to Relational Aesthetics and a social setting in public space. I will elaborate on the idea that the parks in Paris are an inviting place for social interaction as a result of the cultural history of the city and the presence of an object.

Joseph Cornell | *Archives, Maps and Boxes of Poetic Imagination*

The American artist Joseph Cornell (December 24, 1903 – December 29, 1972) is most famous for his distinctive boxes and assemblages. His work revolves around explorations of the subjects he became obsessed with. Next to the boxes, he worked on films and collages that were all a result of his personal archive that was rooted in mystery, imagination, dreams, fantasy and poetic experiences. He often dedicated his works to other artists, ballerinas or stars of the silver screen. He collected materials, clippings, objects, writings, art reproductions, souvenirs, postcards, film etc. Integrating ballet, literature, film, art history, theatre and natural science in endless files on the different subjects he was researching, accumulating everything that spoke to him. Cornell's arbitrary though persistent way of working was part of an infinite process. His work consisted of a need for archival classification combined with a search for beauty, symbolism, relations with the past and present and meaning through visual metaphors.

Discussing what he calls “archival impulse” in the practices of many artists Hal Foster argues that:

Archival artists seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present. To this end they elaborate on the found image, object, and text, and favor the installation format as they do so. (Frequently they use its non-hierarchical spatiality to advantage – which is rather rare in contemporary art).²

These sources are familiar, drawn from the archives of mass culture, to ensure a legibility that can then be disturbed or detourné; but they can also be obscure, retrieved in a gesture of alternative knowledge or counter-memory.³

2 Hal Foster, “An Archival impulse”, 2004 October 110, Fall 2004, p. 4

3 Hal Foster, “An Archival impulse”, p. 4

Although the information in an archive is never complete and the collection of knowledge related to the interest of a particular person, it is an endless source of inspiration as well as in infinite amount of work. The archive consists of fragments, bits and pieces that create cross-references in a complicated puzzle without a final answer. This inevitably results in the need of creating an archive, to create order in chaos and have a sense where everything belongs. The archive is a tool to structure and label information, to store it in order to continue with new sources. It is much more a necessity to organise this information than it is a choice.

The archive creates a volume of information, this information can offer us new possibilities and discoveries. To reveal the connections and relations of the images that remain invisible in the archival structure, the visual atlas is a tool that provides a different way of understanding these images. I'm interested in the way artists use and produce maps and atlases to gain knowledge by using their imagination. The visual atlas in this sense is not a chart of a geographic area (unless you think of the geography of the mind) but a constellation of images. The images in this kind of atlas guide us through different ways of thinking, traveling and exploring the alternative information that is displayed by the artist. This tool can create an overview of a certain situation and provide different directions. The atlas as a tool serves a process and should have a flexible format. It makes alterations in the explored information possible and offers to arrange new constellations that spin off from its starting point. When mapping the information from an archive into an atlas, there is no centre - every part that reveals itself offers different directions and new possibilities. It leaves traces and generates movements to travel in the mind. Due to this nature, the information around the subject is focused on exploration as a way to find relations and hidden meanings between things, instead of generating clear-cut answers.

Georges Didi-Huberman writes about the Mnemosyne Atlas of Aby Warburg:

The Atlas is guided only by the changing and provisional principles, the ones that can make new relationships appear inexhaustibly – far more numerous than the things themselves – between things and words that nothing seemed to have brought there before.⁴

To me this appears to be a way of dealing with a gap: by putting all the data you have on a certain subject and by discovering its many connections and relations to other things, you might find a possible answer or get an insight on what this gap is about. It can offer you a bigger picture of the fragmentary recalcitrant information that you have been collecting, making leaps from a micro to a macro level.

Cornell was a wizard in using tools like the archive and imagination to create enchanting work. In the 1930's Surrealism was the main artistic influence on Joseph Cornell, but in the 1940's Cornell entered a time of experimentation. In this time his work developed towards a more formal structure, influenced by the meeting of Piet Mondrian. This was also the time he became fascinated, obsessed and committed in his work to the romantic ballet - dedicating collages, boxes and writing essays on this subject. His interest with historical and contemporary people directed him towards his different fields of interest. In his work he often paid homage to women, beauty and their performances. He created boxes that captured their essence in a poetic way. One of his boxes that he made at this time was dedicated to ballerina Marie Taglioni, the work is called *Taglioni's Jewel Casket* (1940).

The box was inspired by the following anecdote adapted from Albert D. Vandam's book *An Englishman in Paris* published in New York 1892:

4 Georges Didi-Huberman (ed.), *Atlas. How to Carry the World on One's Back?*, (Museo Nacional Centro De Arte, 2010) p. 16



Joseph Cornell, *Tagliioni's Jewel Casket*, 1940

On a moonlight night in the winter of 1835 the / carriage of Marie Taglioni was halted by a Russian highwayman, and that enchanting creature commanded to dance for this audience of one / upon a panther's skin spread over the snow beneath the stars. From this actuality arose the legend that to keep alive the memory / of this adventure so precious to her, Taglioni formed the habit of placing a piece of artificial ice in her jewel casket or dressing table / where, melting among the sparkling stones, there was evoked a hint of the atmosphere of the starlit heavens over the ice-covered landscape.⁵

The work consists of a Victorian strongbox lined with brown velvet. A woolworth rhinestone necklace is draped on the inside of the lid, representing Taglioni's jewelry. In the centre of the lid you can read the anecdote of Taglioni's moonlight performance in the snow. At the core of the box there are 12 glass cubes, partly scattered on the velvet and partly in little the compartments of the box. These refer to Taglioni's artificial piece of ice in her jewelry box. Underneath the cubes at the bottom of the box, there is another necklace, slivers of glass and fragments of necklaces. The glass cubes lying on top are able to move freely in the box, as are the pieces in the bottom of the box, which hint at an element of chance (in the encounter of the Russian highwayman and her performance in the snow). The jewelry pieces at the bottom of the box will reflect the light that falls through the glass cubes, adding sparkle to the jewelry and a level of enchantment to the work.

The story of ballerina Marie Taglioni, accompanied by the work that on one hand looks so simple, appeals profoundly to the poetic imagination. It has a dream-like quality; the work and the story transcend and illuminate each other in a mutual relationship. They can both exist without each other, but combined they hint at a rare magic.

5 Diane Waldman, *Joseph Cornell Master of Dreams*, (New York; ABRAMS, 2006) p. 58

Earlier I mentioned the visual atlas. The atlas invites us to make use of knowledge and travel by the imagination. Joseph Cornell applies the use of imagination in his work by making visual symbolic references that hint at different elements of the story and vice versa. He doesn't simply illustrate the story for you, but invites and guides you through the use of visual metaphors to use your own imagination, offering the possibility to discover the work in another way. Baudelaire writes about the imagination:

The imagination is a quasi-divine faculty which perceives first of all, outside of philosophical methods, the intimate and secret relations of things, the correspondences and the analogies. The honours and functions that he [Poe] confers on this faculty give it a value such.⁶

This idea appeals to me because it creates room and freedom for play and association, to make leaps and have inexhaustible sources to refer to within private and public spheres. This could cause a nonlinear chain reaction, where every association potentially links to many new pieces, facts and images that constantly kindle new discoveries - serving as an important source to create work.

The atlas is a tool, not for the logical exhaustion of possibilities given, but for the inexhaustible opening up to the possibilities that are not yet given. Its principle, its motor is none other than the imagination. However disconcerting it is, it has nothing to do with a personal or gratuitous fantasy. On the contrary, it gives us a knowledge that cuts across, through its intrinsic power of montage that consists in discovering.⁷

6 Charles Baudelaire, *1857 a*, p. 329

7 Georges Didi-Huberman (ed.), *Atlas*, p. 15/16

Imagination offers a way to travel, the map represents this as well. “Any map could be a voyage in thought connecting a passage and a territory, the readable and the visible, by capturing the infinite within the smallest detail.”⁸ Cornell who never left New York made between 1942-53 a box with numerous references to voyaging in *Object (Roses des vents)*. In the wooden box is a tray with twenty-one compasses which all point in a different direction. This tray is resting on plexiglas, covering the seventeen compartments beneath that contain small diverse objects like diagrams of the constellations, shells, maps, marbles, spirals, a paper fish and beetle. The German maps on the inside of the lid are of the Coral Sea and the Great Australian Bight. The term roses des vents is French for a compass dial, his inspiration for the box came most likely from French novelist and poet Philippe Soupault who wrote a volume of poetry called *Roses des Vents* in 1920. The compass rose as a symbol of the solar system and in this case also pays homage to Soupault.

“The map is a veritable alternative to the Albertian model of the window opened onto the world and it gives rise to a descriptive and constructed visual arrangement.”⁹ This idea must have suited Cornell perfectly; in many of his boxes there are references to maps, not only from the earth but also of stars, heavens and constellations. His “window” to the world was a window to the entire universe. He managed to find or saw endless connections, making cross-references while at the same time repeating many of them (every time) with a slight alteration. It seems to me that for Cornell there was even something to discover in the change of the smallest detail. The persistent way Cornell explored a certain subject that occupied his mind, might be a result of his obsessive nature. From these repetitions sprung his series of boxes like the romantic ballet, the aviary series or medicine cabinets; perhaps this was an attempt to exhaust a subject in order to be able to continue with something else.

8 Christine Buci-Glucksmann, “From the Cartographic View to the Virtual”, trans. Jane McDonald

9 Buci-Glucksmann, “From the Cartographic View to the Virtual”



Joseph Cornell, *Object (Roses des vents)*, 1942-53

Marcel Duchamp | *Cultivating Chance*

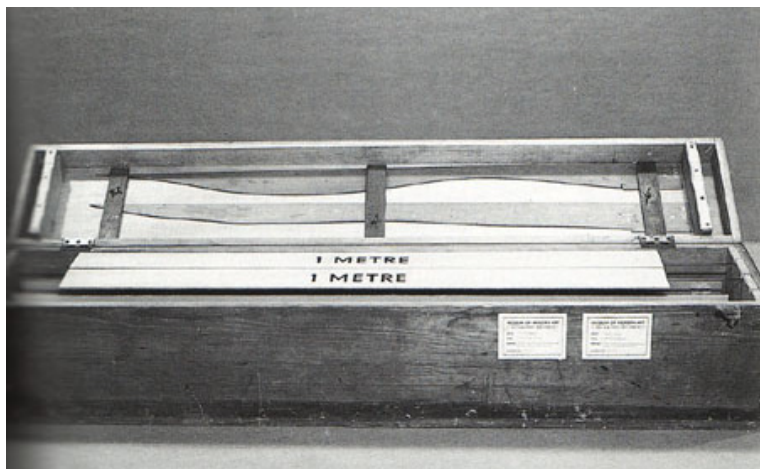
At the end of 1912 Duchamp (28 July 1887 – 2 October 1968) was focusing on freeing painting and works of art in general by focusing on ideas rather than on craft. He sought to eliminate impulse and emotion, to remove all inconstant improvisations and instead aim for a dry conception of art. This notion would lead him to concern himself with chance. “Because any choice or decision, however precise, must contain some element of chance, Duchamp let the decision itself to chance.”¹⁰ In his work he carefully selected the conditions to make chance an important part of his work, without being completely directed by its arbitrariness. He directed chance instead that chance would direct him.

The work *3 Stoppages Etalon* is a clear example and result of this practice. The work made in 1913-1914 sounds like a formula “A straight horizontal thread one meter in length falls from a / height of one meter.”¹¹ Although this formula might suggest a mathematical accuracy, it has total freedom within predetermined limits and is thus a result of chance. Duchamp repeated this action according to the same rules three times by dropping the thread on stretched canvasses and fixing them to the canvas without adjusting any of its curves, then he cuts the canvas next to the line and stuck it to glass plates, putting them together with rulers - which were cut following the same curves, in a wooden box. By fixing the threads the way they dropped on the canvas he précised and preserved chance. “The outcome of cultivated change is the property of the artist.”¹² By the exact registration of chance he could create new rulers of a meter with a different curve each, hereby he challenged the conception of the rational idea (of the metric system).

10 Ecke Bonk, Marcel Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp, the box in a valise: De ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy : inventory of an edition*, trans. David Britt (New York, Rizzoli, 1989) p. 10

11 Marcel Duchamp, *3 Stoppages Etalon*, 1913-14, trans. Katherine S. Dreier Bequest, MoMA Estate of Marcel Duchamp

12 Ecke Bonk, Marcel Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp, The Box in a Valise*, p. 10



Marcel Duchamp, 3 *Stoppages Etalon*, 1913-14

The paradox of the work lies in the fact that the work on one hand is based on chance, but at the same time is restrained by a standardized approach. Thus it operates as both a comment and a parody at the same time.

Due to the fact that my practice is more or less a result of wild chance, this makes it (chance) an important concept to consider. By the use of clear constraints, (e.g. having the same circumstance for each subject I would like to deal with) it is possible to compare the results and to find the intersection of information within different situations. Perhaps it should take place at one specific spot, doing the same thing. Could I script a chance encounter? Which element would be most important to clarify? What is it that I want to capture of these fleeting moments? How literal should I take the encounter, could it also be something that I'm observing? If so, I should focus on the registration of this moment. Which part needs to change to make a convincing set up for a research?

Also do I want a "dry" way of dealing with my work, is this what I'm aiming for? How can I make a work that deals with the different facets that reflect my reason to start this practice in the first place? How can I apply the conclusions that I have made from that? By creating an atlas of the collected information of the chance encounters I realized that in certain situations the encounters were not simply a result of wild chance. There was already an element of chance present at certain locations that enlarged the chance of an encounter even though these limits were not set by me. I will discuss this element in the last part of the second chapter called "Theatre of Life | *Paris, the Garden as a Social Public Space.*" What I find most interesting in this work of Duchamp is the contradiction of the things he poses, being on one hand accurate applying a strict and objective approach and on the other hand he hints at the complete subjectivity of our objective formulas. This made me aware of the strange way I tried to unite the subjective information in a tool that is perceived for objective information, namely the map.

The Gift

While the encounters were determined by chance, and giving the gift was a matter of following the intuition within the encounter, the results of the gift were actually not arising by chance. What is happening beneath the surface when you give a gift to someone (in this case a stranger)? Even though I hardly know the person whom I give a pin, this person is suddenly not a stranger anymore. It creates a sort of familiarity; the person becomes closer - simply by the gesture of the gift. With the gesture I have established a bond. What that bond is, is hard to determine and varies between the people I've encountered. What became clear to me is that a very thin line separates public and private. This line very well might be erased by the gift. This became clear because the "rules" of social behaviour (in terms of emotional and physical distance) seemed to fade away when I gave a pin to a stranger. This directed towards new levels of trust and the sharing of information, but also resulted in a misinterpretation of my gesture. Lewis Hyde writes the following about the nature of giving compared with the nature of a commodity item:

We might best picture the difference between gifts and commodities in this regard by imagining two territories separated by a boundary. A gift, when it moves across the boundary, either stops being a gift or else abolishes the boundary. A commodity can cross the line without any change in its nature; moreover, its exchange will often establish a boundary where none previously existed (as, for example, in the sale of a necessity to a friend). Logos-trade draws the boundary, eros-trade erases it.¹³

13 Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity And The Artist In The Modern World*, (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2009) p. 63

The gift of a hatpin does not simply represent my poetic idea(l) anymore, it became much more a vessel that contained the relation with the person to whom I offered it. The piece is the materialisation of this bond - the tip of the iceberg - the layers underneath remain invisible. To this regard, I don't have the piece anymore, only a photo of it, but when I see or think of this pin I automatically relate this to a particular person, a place, stories and events around it. The person and the piece cannot be detached. It seems to be almost impossible to make this gesture of giving a hatpin to mark a fleeting moment and leave it like that. This harmless little hatpin that I considered practically a non-piece, possessed through the gesture a power which I could have never imagined.

To begin with, gifts do not bring us attachment unless they move us. Manners or social pressure may oblige us to those for whom we feel no true affection, but neither obligation nor civility leads to lasting unions. It is when someone's gifts stir us that we are brought close, and what moves us, beyond the gift itself, is the promise (or the fact) of transformation, friendship, and love.¹⁴

When this particular characteristic of the gift is present, it proposes an opportunity for the human being to give meaning and attachment. An object or piece might be worthless in terms of material value but can become precious due to the emotional value that is added by the person who is connected to the piece. Although in the traditional sense jewelry always has been valuable, emotional value can make even the silliest little thing like a trinket from a gumball machine precious. This also works in reverse, a piece of valuable material can have no meaning to us at all even though it happens to be precious by nature. If a piece would be precious by nature and it is given with the wrong intention it can make us feel uncomfortable and create a feeling of resistance towards the gift. The possibility to give meaning and attachment to a piece is what I value most in jewelry, because the meaning we project on a piece mainly deals with human relations and therefore with life itself.

¹⁴ Lewis Hyde, *The Gift*, p. 71

The problem that I have with jewelry, especially in combination with the gift, is that it is quite loaded and associated with intimate relations; therefore I don't want to use it anymore as a gift to strangers in a social context. Due to the nature of the gift and also the misinterpretation of my gesture, it became trying for me to be attached to more people; besides, by this gesture I perhaps marked but didn't manage to capture my ideas of fleeting moments in the existence of our every day life.

Relational Aesthetics

Nicolas Bourriaud defines relational art as: “An art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space.”¹⁵ Therefore it doesn’t relate to key moments in art history because;

It does not represent a theory of art, this would imply the statement of an origin and a destination, but a theory of form. The form being a coherent unit, a structure (independent entity of inner dependencies) which shows the typical features of the world.¹⁶

Because I am interested in the way people do or do not relate to each other, it fascinated me to see that a simple hatpin as a gift could spark an exchange of information between strangers. But is the knowledge of this information in any way relevant? Perhaps not, at least not in an objective approach of jewelry, but why would I be interested in objective information? Is there not a moment within the idiosyncratic, where the personal views become universal at the same time? Are all things we truly value in life, not matters of subjectivity? Does it not come down to this, that these distinctive things, relations and moments are in the end the most meaningful to most of us? Is jewelry not an ultimate medium of subjectivity and a poetic way to carry the unlimited stories and meanings of the people that connect it to the piece. Is this ability not its charm, strength and beauty? Would this information not be the most exciting or important part of a piece and a way to obtain insight into the context of its relations? This notion relates in the context of this project to relational aesthetics, in which the hatpin as a gift created the conditions for an exchange in an “inter-subjective relation”, that symbolises the responsibility we have towards the other on a micro level.

15 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance & Fronza Woods with participation of Mathieu Copeland, (Paris: Presses du réel, 2002) p.14

16 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.19

The gift enhanced the dialogue and exchange, generating a microcosm of information within this relation. Next to the piece, the circumstances of the encounter played an important role. The city, the specific locations, the gesture, conversation, as well as books, space, clothes, activities and the correspondence that continued after the encounters. The more information I collected and organised in order to try to get an overview, the more it became clear to me that the information made cross references to the past and present, public life, private life and imagination. The information generated from different encounters at times even connected or overlapped; I tried to distill the different elements to grasp the parts that were most important for my work.

While commodity items are typically associated with our western society and freedom, the gift and the bond are related to community and obligations towards each other. It is the freedom that we value most that is at the same time the burden of our society today. Where social indifference, alienation and detachment of the basic means of social interaction are more often the rule than the exception.

I realised through my conversations with strangers in a public space that there is a serious lack in society's striving for efficiency. On one side there were the people who were completely consumed by the obligations of a group and its social pressure without having time for themselves. These people were multitasking their way through on smart phones, juggling with their job, having 3 birthdays, an opening and friends visiting from out of town – all on the same day. On the other hand there were people who for weeks only interacted with the person behind the check-out of the supermarket and their only lifeline was that of online communication. Resulting in an interpersonal void.

The essence of humankind is purely trans-individual, made up of bonds that link individuals together in social forms which are invariably historical.¹⁷

By automating everything from cash machines, to systemised customer service and self-checkouts at the supermarket, this develops to the degree that we communicate with and through machines, thus reducing our social and relational space. Relational aesthetics is about:

Learning to inhabit the world in a better way, instead of trying to construct it based on a preconceived idea of historical evolution. Otherwise put, the role of art is no longer to form imagery and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist.¹⁸

How often do we see people sitting across from each other at the same table communicating and sharing with each other through their smart phones or laptops? It sounds absurd but it is present everywhere you go. It is not that I'm against these tools (they are extremely helpful to work with, are great sources of information and ways of communicating and sharing, they become especially valuable in long distance connections with family and friends) but at the same time we should not forget what it means to be human. "Marx; The human essence is the set of social relations"¹⁹, to be aware of this and spend time with the people who surround you instead of looking at the world through the windows of our screens.

17 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.18

18 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.13

19 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.18

Theatre of Life | *Paris, the Garden as a Social Public Space*

I am interested in the use of this social space that can become relational. How can human interactions be evoked in public space and what does it look like? Is there a way to observe and register these fleeting moments and to create a blueprint of the characteristics of its behaviour? When I came to the conclusion that the jewelry pieces were too loaded to give away in a social context with a stranger I started to think about objects. Even though objects also can contain emotional value I'm rather inclined to say that they are more naturally understood in terms of utility. Because objects seem to be less loaded and associated with intimate relations, they are more inviting to use in a social context as a means to connecting people.

Looking at the encounters I had even before I started making the gesture I realised that the most memorable and enduring encounters took place in the gardens of Paris. This made me wonder if there was something particularly inviting to prompt interaction that could have initiated these chance encounters. The French formal garden with its artificial styles and structures is an extension of the boulevards interwoven as an important part of the aesthetics and daily life of the city. They appeal to the notion of beauty and enhance the enjoyment of one's surroundings.

As a result of the information I gathered from the research of my encounters, I questioned if there was a relationship between the cultural history of the city that defined its décor and people's willingness to interact. Like Haussmann's renovation of Paris, the influence of the Belle Époque, impressionism, fashion and flânerie. Walter Benjamin theorised the 19th century figure of the "flâneur" as an emblem of the changing city and the contemporary use of Parisian public space. How do these historical elements influence the way people use public spaces, in particular the gardens as a social space.

The city has ushered in and spread the hands on experience; it is the tangible symbol and historical setting of society, that “state of encounter imposed on people”, to use Althusser’s expression contrasting with that dense and “trouble free” jungle which the natural state once was, according to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a jungle hampering any lasting encounter. Once raised to the power of an absolute rule of civilisation, this system of intensive encounters has ended up producing linked artistic practices: an art form where the substrate is formed by inter-subjectivity, and which takes being-together as a central theme, the “encounter” between beholder and picture, and the collective elaboration of meaning.²⁰

Hausmann’s renovation of Paris changed the facades of the buildings, the layout of the streets and green spaces, which transformed the city into a metropolis. At the start of the Belle Époque in 1871 Paris was an inviting place where the Parisian bourgeoisie and nouveau-riches were ready to venture to the city. Paris where haute couture was invented was the centre of the Belle Époque; here fashion began to move in a yearly cycle. The impressionist movement as avant-garde in the 1860’s became more prominent during this era due to independent exhibitions. The subjects in their paintings were landscapes and contemporary life. It was photography that inspired impressionists to represent momentary actions - the fleeting moments in the everyday life of people. Impressionist painting often resembles a snapshot; a part of a larger reality captured as if by chance. Photography inspired impressionists to represent transient moments - in the fleeting lights of a landscape and in the day-to-day lives of people. Rather than competing with photography as a means of absolute representation, artists focused on the further development of the conception of subjectivity in the image as an art form.

20 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.15

Artist like Jean Béraud made paintings of fashionable people strolling the beautiful contemporary boulevards of Paris, depicting detailed urban scenes of modern life. Béraud turned these public spaces, 'the realm of the flâneur into arenas for social interaction'.²¹

In Benjamin's words:

It is the gaze of the flâneur, whose way of life conceals behind a beneficent mirage the anxiety of the future inhabitant of our metropolises. The flâneur seeks refuge in the crowd. The crowd was the veil from behind which the familiar city as phantasmagoria beckoned to the flâneur. In it, the city was now landscape, now a room. And both of these went into the construction of the department store, which made use of flânerie itself in order to sell goods. The department store was the flâneur's final coup. As flâneurs, the intelligensia came into the market place. As they thought, to observe it - but in reality it was already to find a buyer. In this intermediary stage [...] they took the form of the bohème. To the uncertainty of their economic position corresponded the uncertainty of their political function.²²

The flâneur enjoys unbounded access to the city and these citizens of Paris were the subjects of many impressionist compositions. In *Place de L'Europe*, 1875 by Béraud, the décor of the painting is a newly completed residential district in Baron Haussmann's quartier de L'Europe. These recently widened boulevards and intersections offered the possibility of social interaction with its accompanying ambiguity. This is seen in the painting in the gaze of the man glancing at the (compared to his female companion) fashionably dressed woman in front of him. The impressionist paintings focused on the new boulevards to represent modernity instead of the impoverished or industrial areas of Paris.

21 Gloria Groom, *Impressionism, Fashion & Modernity*, (Chicago: The art institute of Chicago, 2012) p. 165

22 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Rolf Tiederman (Harvard University Press, 2002) p. 21



Jean Béraud, *Place de L'Europe*, 1875



Édouard Manet, *La Musique aux Tuileries*, 1862

The garden was an extension of these boulevards. One of the early examples of impressionist painting named *La Musique aux Tuileries*, 1862 by Édouard Manet is immediately linked to the subject I want to discuss, namely the public gardens of Paris. In particular Jardin du Luxembourg and Jardin des Tuileries in which the latter is the décor of Manet's painting. Captured in the painting is the atmosphere, fashion and leisure activities of the park. There is one element in particular that I am interested in presenting pertaining to this painting, that is the object that is still a beloved element of the gardens today only in a modern version: the chair. In this painting Jardin des Tuileries is the décor for a gathering of citizens as if it is the living room of Paris. This notion is accentuated by the presence of the chairs, that give the space a more home like feeling and flexibility.

As in the work of Marcel Duchamp and in the work of Joseph Cornell, chance played an important element, which also appears in relational aesthetics. I would like to propose that this is also the case with Jardin des Tuileries and Jardin du Luxembourg, despite the fact that these gardens in Paris are formal in their set-up, I realised that there is an important free element within the framework of the park. While in most public spaces the elements to sit or relax are at a fixed place, the chairs in these gardens are scattered all over. This leaves it up to the people who are present, to create the setting in which they like to engage and adapt them to their needs within the constraints of the space and the availability of the chairs. This element stimulates social interaction in an intimate and even broader set-up. Whether you have lunch with colleagues, relax with a book after work, gather with friends or simply watch the life in the park after a walk through the city like a contemporary flâneur.

The possibility to pick a preferred spot is not only a way to make efficient use of space, hereby I mean in terms of enjoyment of the circumstances in the garden, like the choice of a view, preferences weather-wise (sitting in the sun or in the shade for instance) but also evokes the smallest forms of social interaction. A simple greeting combined with the question if a seat is available starts the most basic level of interaction and invites one



Chairs in Jardin du Luxembourg and Jardin des Tuileries

towards a relational space if it is wanted. The relational space is mediated through the presence of the chair. In this situation I like to see the chair as an object that can be a vehicle for human interaction. What could this chair tell us about the use of a public space as social space?

The people and chairs create patterns of the way we have or haven't related to each other in a social context. The chairs leave traces of our use in public space. They become little portraits as a silent witness of human behaviour. They create a map of the garden as a social space. I would be interested to see the shifting patterns during the development of the hours of the days, the weeks and months as well as the shifting of the seasons. As a contemporary observation from above like in Monet's painting *Boulevard des Capucines*, 1873-74. I imagine these scenes given by tools of modern day technology like Google Earth, that would offer a possibility to record the movements for a year during the opening hours of the park.

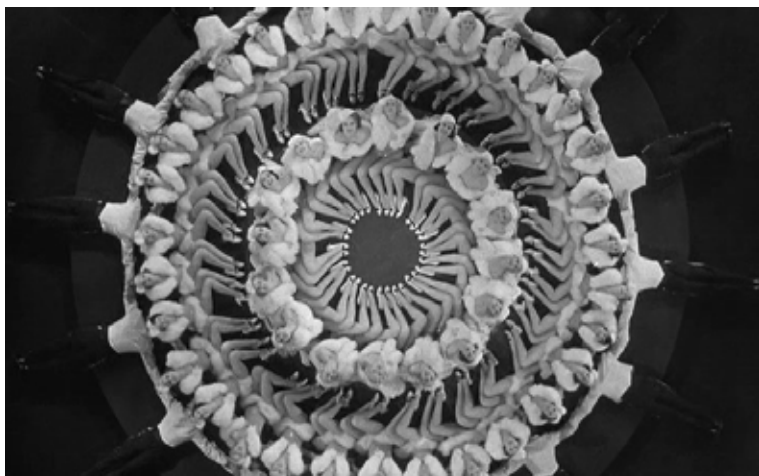
These records will give an account of the created movement pieces as seen from above like in Busby Berkeley's kaleidoscopic choreographies. Only here we do not see the aesthetics of the uniform movement of the people as a result of choreography. Instead the movement will be directed by the space and pattern of the French formal garden. Although these spaces decide the common routes combined with the tendencies of people to behave like herds of animals, the recalcitrance of unorganised movement will be stimulated by the presence of the chair that can be moved freely in space. People dragging them from one place to another to find the perfect spot alone or in a group will bring people beyond the intersections and the predetermined walking paths of the park; it is an invitation to criss-cross where without the chairs there would be more or less a tendency to move in a linear way.



Claude Monet, *Boulevard des Capucines*, 1873-74



Close-up, fragment of Jardin des Tuileries as seen from above in Google Earth, 2013



Film still, *42nd Street*, kaleidoscope like choreography by Busby Berkeley, 1933



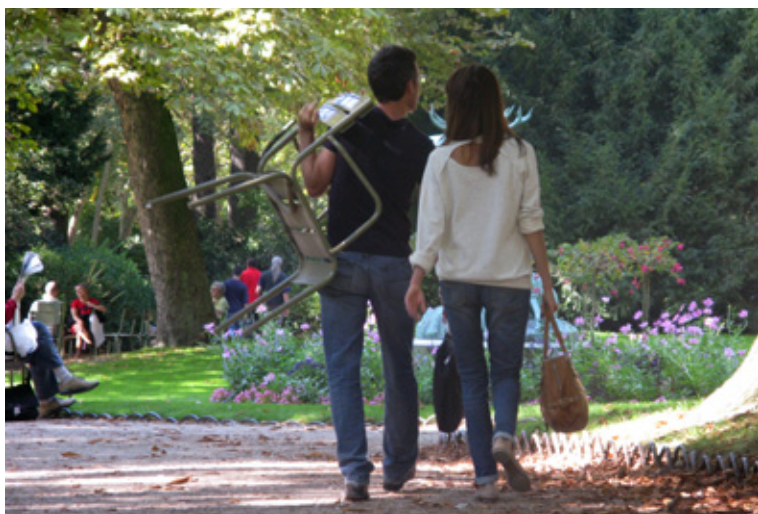
Film still, *Dames*, kaleidoscope like choreography by Busby Berkeley, 1934



Jardin des Tuileries, as seen from above in Google Earth, 2004



Jardin du Luxembourg, as seen from above in Google Earth, 2004



People dragging chairs in Jardin du Luxembourg

It is the efficiency of today's society that "ideally" would like us to move in linear lines, not to lose time and go for the target. We became so goal oriented that the idea of "travel is about the journey" is transformed into "travel is about the destination". We have to get from A to B and there is no room for wandering around. For that reason alone the chairs are in themselves a welcome change in public space - without even thinking about the social and relational space at the moment - simply because they follow their own efficiency of movement outside and against that of today's society.

The chairs also invite people to stay in the garden, not only to take rest from what it is that they were doing, but to provide comfort; the garden becomes the outdoor living room of the city. It asks us to slow down, to take time to be in the present, once this happens there is a bigger chance that we will become aware of our surroundings and the people who share this space with us. When there is no rush it will be easier to engage in a social context within the public space. In this regard I am interested in the portrait of human relations concerning the chair and how people interact with one another. To capture the human characteristics of the everyday, the "infraordinary" in these public gardens like in Georges Perec's book *An attempt at exhausting a place in Paris* to capture as he puts it "what happens when nothing happens."²³ This also serves as a reincarnation of the impressionist movement and chronicles what contemporary life in these gardens looks like one and a half century after *La Musique aux Tuileries*.

The chairs in Tuileries and Luxembourg are as objects separated from the commercial world. They are not part of commodity trade; everybody in the park can use them and they are therefore a gift for any visitor to these gardens. Because the chair does not belong to a commodity trade, it relates to the gift and community and therefore might enhance the feeling of belonging and open people up to a state of encounter.

23 Georges Perec, *An attempt at exhausting a place in Paris*, trans. Marc Loewenthal, (Cambridge: Wakefield Press, 2010) cover



Scenes of Jardin des Tuileries, photo and cut paper

The work on the thesis helped me to develop and think about several different aspects of my practice. The writing gave me an insight in the different topics, and made it clear to me what my main interests are and which ones are important for me to develop in the future. By starting to do things on a micro level and collecting all the little details, I was more clearly able to understand what my work was about in the larger scheme of things. It became apparent to me that I should focus on the notion of interaction and social relations in public space. I need to have a dialogue with people, to interact and see what is happening in daily life in the streets. This is the setting where I become inspired and see opportunities for future work.

It was an eye-opener for me to see what happens in the relational sphere when you offer someone a piece of jewelry as a gift. As an idealist who doesn't care for money I have to conclude that commodity exchange in some cases is a better solution, because you simply can't attach yourself to everyone by offering them a gift. On the other hand, the nature of the gift offered me material that I could never have dreamed of and would not have appeared in any other way of working. The relational aspect played the most important part in giving meaning and attachment to the piece, which enlarged its emotional value. This is the part I value most in jewelry and objects, and will remain a field of interest.

The element of chance that is ever recurring is an exciting and surprising element - you never know what it might offer you. It is difficult though, to rely on wild chance. In order to work like this you have to have trust and plenty of time to work on a project. In the future I would like to continue with this element as well and focus on how I could direct this element in my practice. What I enjoyed is the mix of private and public, the micro and macro and the shifting between these levels in which I felt there was a moment where art and life blend due to the relational interaction.

Additionally, the collecting of seemingly random information in the shape of an atlas somehow started to make sense to me in the end. This approach inspired me and offered me an infinite amount of materials to work with. Starting this practice gave me a lot of insight into the things that motivate me and generate work. At the moment I feel the work in itself is a small step, but for my artistic practice and development it has been the key to the search of where and what I am or want to become in my practice.



Excerpt of the Atlas

Books, Essays & Articles

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994)

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981)

Roland Barthes, *The language of Fashion*, trans. Andy Stafford (Berg Publishers, 2006), chapter “From gemstones to jewellery” (1961)

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Rolf Tiederman (Harvard University Press, 2002) chapter “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century”

Ecke Bonk, Marcel Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp, the Box in a Valise: De ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy: Inventory of an Edition*, trans. David Britt (New York, Rizzoli, 1989)

Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance & Fronza Woods with participation of Mathieu Copeland, (Paris: Presses du réel, 2002) chapter “Relational form”

Christine Buci-Glucksmann, “From the Cartographic View to the Virtual”, trans. Jane McDonald (http://mediaartnet.org/themes/mapping_and_text/cartographic-view/)

Sophie Calle and Paul Auster, *Sophie Calle: Double Game*, (Distributed Art Pub Incorporated, 2007)

Sophie Calle, “*Take Care of Yourself*”, (Distributed Art Pub Inc, 2007)

Sophie Calle, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, (Thames & Hudson, 2005)

Royed Climenhaga, *The Pina Bausch Sourcebook: The making of Tanztheater*, (New York: Routledge, 2013)

Miranda July, *No one Belongs Here More than You*, (Canongate Books, 2005) chapter “The Shared Patio” & “The Swim Team”

Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), chapter “Of Being Singular Plural”.

Georges Didi-Huberman (ed.), *Atlas. How to Carry the World on One's Back?* (Museo Nacional Centro De Arte, 2010) chapter "I Disparates 'To read what has never been written' The Inexhaustable, or knowledge by imagination."

Hal Foster, "An Archival impulse", 2004 October 110, Fall 2004, p. 3-22

Gloria Groom, *Impressionism, Fashion & Modernity*, (Chicago: The art institute of Chicago, 2012)

Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, *Joseph Cornell Navigating the Imagination*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007)

Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity And The Artist In The Modern World*, (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2009)

Kynaston McShine, *Joseph Cornell*, (Munich, Prestel Verlag, 1990)

Georges Perec, *Species Of Spaces And Other Pieces*, trans. John Sturrock, (Penguin classics, 2008)

Georges Perec, *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, trans. Marc Loowenthal, (Cambridge: Wakefield Press, 2010)

Diane Waldman, *Joseph Cornell Master of Dreams*, (New York; ABRAMS, 2006)

Films, Documentaries & Lectures

Marina Abramovic: *A Lecture on Performance and its Future*, (Chicago Humanities Festival 2011)

Marina Abramovic, *The Artist is Present* (2012)

George Balanchine, *Jewels - Emeralds, Rubies, Diamonds* (1967)

Pina Bausch, *Cafe Müller* (1978)

Pina Bausch, *Kontakthof 65+* (2000)

Elisabeth Bronfen, *A Diva's War: Marlene Dietrich's Glamorous Female Soldier*, Lecture given on a conference at Goetheburg University on Female Authorship and Modernity (2010)

Sophie Calle, *Photography Lecture Series*, California College of the Arts (CCA) (2011)

Jellie Dekker (NL), Joes Odufre (DE), Rudi van Dantzig, *Monument voor een Gestorven Jongen* (DE 1965/ NL 1991)

Jellie Dekker, Ine Schenkkan, Rudi van Dantzig, *de Getekende Huid* (1997)

Georges Didi-Huberman, Guided tour *Atlas. How To Carry The World On One's Back?* (ZKM | Museum für Neue Kunst 2011)

Jean Eustache, *La Maman et la Putain*, (1973)

Jean Luc Godard, *Masculin Féminin*, (1966)

Noud Heereksn, Ton Lutgerink, *Man in Motion* (1995)

Noud Heerksens, Ton Lutgerink, *Prive Story* (2000)

Noud Heerksens, Ton Lutgerink, *Nol King Ruter* (2011)

Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker, *Rosas danst Rosas* (1983)

Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker *Monoloog by Fumiyo Ikeda at the end of Ottone, Ottone* (1988)

Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker, *Achterland* (1990)

Anne Linsel, *Pina Bausch TV Documentary* (2006)

Anne Linsel, *Tanzträume Jugendliche Tanzen Kontaktbaf von Pina Bausch* (2010)

Jonas Mekas, *Walden: Diaries, Notes, and Sketches* (1969)

Eric Rohmer, *Ma Nuit Chez Maud* (1969)

Walther Ruttmann, *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927)

Oskar Schlemmer, *das Triadisches Ballet* (1988, first performance 1922)

Josef von Sternberg, *The Blue Angel* (1930)

Josef von Sternberg, *Morocco* (1930)

Josef von Sternberg, *Dishonoured* (1931)

Josef von Sternberg, *Shanghai Express* (1932)

Josef von Sternberg, *Blonde Venus* (1932)

Josef von Sternberg, *The Scarlet Empress* (1934)

Josef von Sternberg, *The Devil is a Woman* (1935)

François Truffaut, *The Adventures of Antoine Doinel*, *The 400 Blows* (1959), *Antoine and Colette* (1962), *Stolen Kisses* (1968), *Bed and Board* (1970), *Love on the Run* (1979)

Lisa Immordino Vreeland, *Diana Vreeland, The Eye Has to Travel* (2012)

Wim Wenders, Pina Bausch, *Pina* (2011)

Performances

Sagi Gross, *One Charming Night, Moon, Side & Skin*, Gross Dance Company (2012)

Keren Levi, *The Dry Piece* (2012)

Exhibitions

Danser Sa Vie, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

Galerie des Bijoux, les Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Goudemalion. Jean-Paul Goude une Rétrospective, les Arts Décoratifs, Paris

De Grote Onidekking Alexander Calder, Gemeente Museum Den Haag

La Triennale | Intense Proximité/y, Palais Tokyo, Paris

L'étoffe de la Modernité, Opéra National de Paris

Louis Vuitton - Marc Jacobs, les Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Madame Grès, Sculpturale Mode, MoMu Antwerp

L'Impressionnisme et la Mode, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Van Cleef & Arpels. L'art de la Haute Joaillerie, les Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Bijoux d'Artistes, une Collection, Crédit Municipal de Paris

Websites

Ubu Web

www.ubuweb.com

Gesture is The Direct Agent of The Heart

<http://gestureagentoftheheart.tumblr.com>

Significant Objects

<http://significantobjects.com>

Google Maps

<https://maps.google.com>

Google Books

<http://books.google.com>

YouTube

www.youtube.com

Jonas Mekas

<http://jonasmekasfilms.com/diary/>

Nina Simon

<http://www.participatorymuseum.org>

