During the era of abstract expressionism, the purpose of artists’ works were to convey some meaning and express their feelings as to how they were feeling. The meaning behind art has come a long way in that it is not so much mainly focused on the meaning of the artist, as it is on the focus of relational aesthetics. According to Nicolas Bourriaud in his paper “Relational Aesthetics (1998)”, he talked about how, “Contemporary art resembles a period of time that has to be experienced, or the opening of a dialogue that never ends” (160). The role of art is changing, and now it is starting to incorporate the element of interaction. It does not necessarily focus on the 1:1 ratio interaction between work and spectator (although it still can) but, on the interaction between the spectators who are viewing the art work themselves. The relational aesthetics within art are special because it builds an environment for discussion that does not feel forced. For example, a classroom setting can feel forced because in a way, one is forced into discussion because it is mandatory to be present in school whereas, in the presence of an art work, one can decide to attend or engage in the interaction with another spectator. Art at this time acted as a social interstice: a space created to allow for dialogue between people, where human interaction was the goal.

The setting in which these interactions took place, were in the spaces occupied by art exhibitions and galleries. The role of art was beginning to move down this direction because human exchange and interaction has started to become less common as technology begins to advance. Like Bourriaud puts it, “The general mechanization of social function is gradually reducing our relational space” (162). The reason for the reduction in relational space is due to the fact that machines are starting to be switched in place of humans, which is resulting in less human interaction. Have you been to the chain restaurant Chili’s lately? Now after finishing your meal, you no longer have to interact directly with your waiter in order to pay for your bill. They now have computer machines stationed at every table, where the person dining can pay for their bill with the touch of a few buttons. After paying on the computer, one can just get up and leave without ever seeing their waiter again. Exhibition spaces allow for groups of people to come together and have discussions and share ideas. It provides a unique social space for people to interact, socialize and put in their input, especially if the art work calls for involvement from the spectator in order for the piece to be understood.

When it comes to the “Art of Cyberspace” (Pierre Levy), the role of artists and the art itself plays a slightly different role compared to what Nicolas Bourriaud was talking about in his text, “Relational Aesthetics”. Although art exhibitions and galleries allow for people to come together and communicate, cyberspace takes it a step further by allowing larger numbers of people to connect from all around the world to conduct discussions. It provides people with access to things such as different art that otherwise would not be available if it were not for the internet. For example, what if there were an exhibition that was on display in New York with a piece of work that you wanted to see, though you did not have the funds in order to fly over and view it, therefore you had to settle with the fact that you would not be able to see it. Cyberspace creates opportunity for art to be exchanged with others. Well known pieces of art are not the only things that can be shared over cyberspace. Unknown artists can share their work as well.

Compared to artists who put on exhibitions of their work, artists who display their work over the web receive less recognition. When one goes to an exhibition, one knows which artist is being viewed. There are labels on walls and/or on the work itself to inform the spectator who created the work. When it comes to the relationship of art and cyberspace, the authorship of the work tends to become blurred where people do not have a clue as to who created it. A good example of this is tumblr. Tumbler is like a blog site where people can post up pictures of their
own interest on their walls. The pictures on this site that you can search for are a large number and they vary in subject. There is a huge database of images that you can search from. Is it possible that every single person knows who created all these images? That is most likely not the case. Authorship on who created what becomes blurred and is not the most important thing that people worry about when on this website. If anything, people are more concerned with sharing and exchanging these photos, which like with exhibitions, creates a space where larger groups of people can discuss and exchange ideas on different interpretations.