

Bourgeois
Post-Production

THE USE OF THE WORLD

ALL CONTENTS ARE GOOD, PROVIDED THEY DO NOT CONSIST OF INTERPRETATIONS BUT CONCERN THE USE OF THE BOOK, THAT THEY MULTIPLY ITS USE, THAT THEY MAKE ANOTHER LANGUAGE WITHIN ITS LANGUAGE. (GILLES DELEUZE)

PLAYING THE WORLD: REPROGRAMMING SOCIAL FORMS

The exhibition is no longer the end result of a process, its "happy ending" (Parreno) but a place of production. The artist places tools at the public's disposal, the way Conceptual art events organized by Seth Siegelaub in the sixties placed information at the disposal of the visitor. Challenging established notions of the exhibition, the artists of the nineties envisaged the exhibition space as a space of cohabitation, an open stage somewhere between decor, film set, and information center.

In 1989, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Bernard Joisten, Pierre Joseph, and Philippe Parreno presented *Ozone*, an exhibition in the form of "layers of information" on political ecology. The space was to be traversed by visitors in such a way that they could create their own visual montage. *Ozone* was offered as a "cinematic space" whose ideal visitor would be an actor – an actor of information. The following year, in Nice, the exhibition *Les Ateliers du Paradis* was presented as a "film in real time." For the duration of the project, Joseph, Parreno, and Philippe Perrin inhabited the gallery space – which was fitted out with artworks from Angela Bulloch to Helmut Newton, gadgets, a trampoline, a Coke can that moved to the beat of music, and a selection of videos – a space in which they moved about according to a schedule (English lessons, a therapist's visit, and so on). On the evening of the opening, visitors were to wear a one-of-a-kind T-shirt on which a generic word or phrase figured (Good, Special Effect, Gothic), allowing the producer Marion Vernoux to draft a screenplay in real time. In short, it was an exhibition in real time, a browser launched in search of its contents. When Jorge Pardo produced his *Pier* in Munster in 1997, he constructed an apparently functional object,

but the real purpose of this wooden jetty had yet to be determined. Although Pardo presents everyday structures (tools, furniture, lamps), he does not assign them specific functions: it is quite possible that these objects are *useless*. What is there to do in an open shed at the end of a jetty? Smoke a cigarette, as the vending machine affixed to one of its walls encouraged? The visitor-viewer must invent functions and rummage through his or her own repertory of behaviors. Social reality provides Pardo with a set of utilitarian structures, which he reprograms according to artistic knowledge (composition) and a memory of forms (modernist painting).

From Andrea Zittel to Philippe Parreno, from Carsten Höller to Vanessa Beecroft, the generation of artists in question here intermingles Conceptual art and Pop art, Anti-form and Junk art, as well as certain procedures established by design, cinema, economy, and industry: it is impossible to separate the history of art from its social backdrop.

The ambitions, methods, and ideological postulates of these artists are not, however, so far removed from those of a Daniel Buren, a Dan Graham, or a Michael Asher twenty years earlier. They testify to a similar will to reveal the invisible structures of the ideological apparatus; they deconstruct systems of representation and revolve around a definition of art as visual information that destroys entertainment. The generation of Daniel Pflumm and Pierre Huyghe nevertheless differs from preceding ones on an essential point: they refuse metonymy, the stylistic figure that involves referring to a thing by one of its constituent elements (for example, to say "the rooftops" for "the city"). The social criticism in which Conceptual artists engaged passed through the filter of a critique of the institution: in order to show the functioning of the whole of society, they explored the specific site in which their activities unfolded, according to the principles of an analytical materialism that was Marxist in its inspiration. For instance, Hans Haacke denounced the multinationals by evoking the financing

of art; Asher worked with the architectural apparatus of the museum and the art gallery; Gordon Matta-Clark drilled through the floor of the Yvon Lambert gallery (*Descending Steps for Batan*, 1977); Robert Barry declared that the gallery showing him was closed (*Closed Gallery*, 1969).

While the exhibition site constituted a medium in and of itself for Conceptual artists, it has today become a place of production like any other. The task of the critic is now less to analyze or critique this space than to situate it in vaster systems of production, with which it must establish and codify relations. In 1991, Joseph made an endless list of illegal or dangerous activities that took place in art centers (from "shooting at airplanes" [cf. Chris Burden] to "making graffiti," "destroying the building," and "working on Sunday"), which made it a "place for the simulation of virtual freedoms and experiences." A model, a laboratory, a playing field: whatever it was, it was never the symbol of anything, and certainly not a metonymy.

It is the *socius*, i.e., all the channels that distribute information and products, that is the true exhibition site for artists of the current generation. The art center and the gallery are particular cases but form an integral part of a vaster ensemble: public space. Thus Pflumm exhibits his work indiscriminately in galleries, clubs, and any other structure of diffusion, from T-shirts to records that appear in the catalog of his label Elektro Music Dept. He also produced a video on a very particular product, his own gallery in Berlin (*Neu*, 1999). Therefore, the issue is not to contrast the art gallery (a locus of "separate art," and therefore bad) with a public place imagined as ideal, where the "noble gaze" of passersby is naively fetishized the way the "noble savage" once was. The gallery is a place like any other, a space imbricated within a global mechanism, a base camp without which no expedition would be possible. A club, a school, or a street are not "better places," but simply other places.

More generally, it has become difficult for us to consider the social body as an organic whole. We perceive it as a set of structures detachable from one another, in the image of the contemporary body augmented with prostheses and modifiable at will. For artists of the late-twentieth century, society has become both a body divided into lobbies, quotas, and communities, and a vast catalog of narrative frameworks.

What we usually call reality is a montage. But is the one we live in the only possible one? From the same material (the everyday), we can produce different versions of reality. Contemporary art thus presents itself as an alternative editing table that shakes up social forms, reorganizes them, and inserts them into original scenarios. The artist deprograms in order to reprogram, suggesting that there are other possible uses for the techniques and tools at our disposal.

Gillian Wearing and Pierre Huyghe have each produced videos based on surveillance camera systems. Christine Hill created a travel agency in New York that functioned like any other travel agency. Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset set up an art gallery in a museum during Manifesta 2000 in Slovenia. Alexander Györfi has used forms from the studio and the stage, Carsten Höller those of laboratory experiments. The obvious point in common among these artists and many of the most creative today resides in this capacity to use existing social forms.

All cultural and social structures represent nothing more than articles of clothing that can be slipped on, objects to be experienced and tested. Alix Lambert did this in *Wedding Piece*, a work documenting her five weddings in one day. Matthieu Laurette uses newspaper classified ads, television game shows, and marketing campaigns as the media for his work. Navin Rawanchaikul works on the taxi system the way others draw on paper. When Fabrice Hybert set up his

company, UR, he declared that he wanted "to make artistic use of the economy." Joseph Grigely exhibits messages and scraps of paper which he uses to communicate with others due to his deafness: he reprograms a physical handicap into a production process. Showing the concrete reality of his daily communication in his exhibitions, Grigely takes as the medium of his work the intersubjective sphere and gives form to his relational universe. We "hear the voices" of his entourage. The artist makes captions for the remarks. He reorganizes human words, fragments of speech, and written traces of conversations, in a sort of intimate sampling, a domestic ecology. The written note is a social form that is paid little attention, generally meant for home or office use. In Grigely's work, it is freed of its subordinate status and takes on the existential dimension of a vital tool of communication: included in his compositions, it participates in a polyphony that is born of a *détournement*.

In this way, social objects, from habits to institutions through the most banal structures, are pulled from their inertia. By slipping into the functional universe, art revives these objects or reveals their absurdity.

PHILIPPE PARRENO & ...

The originality of the group General Idea, formed in the early seventies, was to work with social formatting: corporations, television, magazines, advertising, fiction. "In my view," Philippe Parreno says, "they were the first to think of the exhibition not in terms of forms or objects but of formats. Formats of representation, of reading the world. The question that my work raises might be the following: what are the tools that allow one to understand the world?"⁰¹

Parreno's work starts from the principle that reality is structured like a language, and that art allows one to articulate this language. He

01 PHILIPPE PARRENO, "GENERAL IDEA" IN *DOCUMENTS SUR L'ART*, NO. 4, OCTOBER 1993, PP. 21-26.

also shows that all social criticism is doomed to failure if the artist is content to plaster his or her own language over the one spoken by authority. To denounce or "critique" the world? One can denounce nothing from the outside; one must first inhabit the form of what one wants to criticize. *Imitation* is subversive, much more so than discourses of frontal opposition that only make formal gestures of subversion. It is precisely this defiance toward critical attitudes in contemporary art that leads Parreno to adopt a posture that might be compared to Lacanian psychoanalysis. It is the unconscious, Jacques Lacan said, that interprets symptoms, and does so much better than the analyst. Louis Althusser said something similar from a Marxist perspective: real critique is a critique of existing reality by existing reality itself. Interpreting the world does not suffice; it must be transformed. It is this process that Parreno attempts, starting with the realm of images, which he believes play the same role in reality as symptoms do in an individual's unconscious. The question raised by a Freudian analysis is the following: How are the events in a life organized? What is the order of their repetition? Parreno questions reality in a similar way, through the work of subtitling social forms and systematically exploring the bonds that unite individuals, groups, and images.

It is not by chance that Parreno has integrated the dimension of collaboration as a major axis of his work: the unconscious, according to Lacan, is neither individual nor collective; it exists in the middle, in the encounter, which is the beginning of all narrative. A subject, "Parreno &" (Joseph, Cattelan, Gillick, Höller, Huyghe, to name a few of his collaborations), is constructed through exhibitions that are often presented as relational models, in which the copresence of various protagonists is negotiated through the construction of a script or story.

Thus, in Parreno's work, it is often the commentary that produces forms rather than the reverse: a scenario is dismantled so that a

new one can be constructed, for the interpretation of the world is a symptom like any other. In his video *Ou (Or)*, 1997, an apparently banal scene (a young woman taking off her Disney T-shirt) generates a search for the conditions of its appearance. We see displayed on-screen, in a long rewind, the books, movies, and conversations that led to the production of an image that lasted only thirty seconds. Here, as in the psychoanalytical process or in the infinite discussions of the Talmud, commentary produces the narratives. The artist must not leave the responsibility of captioning his images to others, for captions are also images, ad infinitum.

One of Parreno's first works, *No More Reality*, 1991, already posited this problem by linking the notions of screenplay and protest. An imaginary sequence shows a demonstration composed of very young children armed with banners and placards, chanting the slogan "No more reality." The question was: what are the slogans or subtitles of the images that stream past today? The goal of a demonstration is to produce a collective image that sketches out political scenarios for the future. The installation *Speech Bubbles*, 1997, a cluster of helium-filled balloons in the shape of comic-book speech bubbles, was presented as a collection of "tools of protest allowing each person to write his own slogans and stand out within the group and thus from the image that would be its representation."⁰² Parreno operates here in the interstice that separates an image from its caption, labor from its product, production from consumption. As reportage on individual freedom, his works tend to abolish the space that separates the production of objects and human beings, work and leisure. With *Werk-tische/L'établi (Workbench)*, 1995, Parreno shifted the form of the assembly line toward hobbies one might engage in on a Sunday; with the project *No Ghost, Just a Shell*, 2000, made with Pierre Huyghe,

02 PHILIPPE PARRENO, "SPEECH BUBBLES", INTERVIEW BY PHILIPPE VERGNE, *ART PRESS*, NO. 264, JANUARY 2001, PP. 22-28.

he bought the rights to a Japanese *manga* character, Ann Lee, and made her speak about her career as an animated character; in a set of interventions gathered under the title *L'Homme public* (Public Man), Parreno provided the French impersonator Yves Lecoq with texts to recite in the voices of famous people, from Sylvester Stallone to the Pope. These three works function in a way similar to ventriloquism and masks: by placing social forms (hobbies, TV shows), images (a childhood memory, a *manga* character), and everyday objects in a position to reveal their origins and their fabrication process, Parreno exposes the unconscious of human production.

HACKING, WORK, AND FREE TIME

The practices of postproduction generate works that question the use of work. What becomes of work when professional activities are doubled by artists?

Wang Du declares: "I want to be the media, too. I want to be the journalist after the journalist." He produces sculptures based on media images which he reframes or whose original scale and centering he reproduces faithfully. His installation *Stratégie en chambre* (Armchair Strategy), 1999, is a gigantic, voluminous image that forces the viewer to traverse enormous piles of newspapers published during the conflict in Kosovo, a formless mass at the top of which emerge sculpted effigies of Bill Clinton, Boris Yeltsin, and other figures from press photos of the period, as well as a set of planes made of newspaper. The force of Wang Du's work stems from his capacity to give weight to the furtive images of the media: he quantifies what would conceal itself from materiality, restores the volume and weight of events, and colors general information by hand. Wang Du sells information by the pound. His storehouse of sculpted images invents an arsenal of communication, which duplicates the work of press agencies by reminding us that facts are also objects around which we must circulate. His work method might be defined as "corporate shadowing," i.e.,

mimicking or doubling professional structures, tailing and following them.

When Daniel Pflumm works with the logos of large companies like AT&T, he performs the same tasks as a communications agency. He alienates and disfigures these acronyms by "liberating their forms" in animated films for which he produces sound tracks. And his work is similar to that of a graphic design firm when he exhibits the still identifiable forms of a brand of mineral water or a food product in the form of abstract light boxes that evoke the history of pictorial modernism. "Everything in advertising," Pflumm explains, "from planning to production via all the conceivable middle-men, is a compromise and an absolutely incomprehensible complex of working steps."⁰³ According to him, the "actual evil" is the client who makes advertising a subservient and alienated activity, allowing for no innovation. By "doubling" the work of advertising agencies with his pirate videos and abstract signs, Pflumm produces objects that appear cut out of their context, in a floating space that has to do at once with art, design, and marketing. His production is inscribed within the world of work, whose system he doubles without caring about its results or depending on its methods. He is the artist as phantom employee.

In 1999, Svetlana Heger and Plamen Dejanov decided to devote their exhibitions for one year to a contractual relationship with BMW: they rented out their work force as well as their potential for visibility (the exhibitions to which they were invited), creating a "pirate" medium for the car company. Pamphlets, posters, booklets, new vehicles and accessories: Heger and Dejanov used all the objects and materials produced by the German manufacturer in the context of exhibitions. Pages of group exhibition catalogs that were reserved for them were

⁰³ DANIEL PFLUMM, "ART AS INNOVATIVE ADVERTISING," INTERVIEW BY WOLF-GÜNTHER THIEL, *FLASH ART*, NO. 209, NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1999, PP. 78-81.

occupied by advertisements for BMW. Can an artist deliberately pledge his work to a brand name? Maurizio Cattelan was content to work as a middleman when he rented his exhibition space to a cosmetics manufacturer during the Aperto at the Venice Biennale. The resulting piece was called *Lavorare è un brutto mestiere* (Working is a Dirty Job), 1993. For their first exhibition in Vienna, Heger and Dejanov made a symmetrical gesture by closing the gallery for the duration of their show, allowing the staff to go on vacation. The subject of their work is work itself: how one person's leisure time produces another's employment, how work can be financed by means other than those of traditional capitalism. With the BMW project, they showed how work itself can be remixed, superimposing suspect images – as they are obviously freed from all market imperatives – on a brand's official image. In both cases, the world of work, whose forms Heger and Dejanov reorganize, is made the object of a postproduction.

And yet, the relations Heger and Dejanov established with BMW took the form of a contract, an alliance. Pflumm's untamed practice is situated on the margins of professional circuits, outside of any client-supplier relationship. His work on brands defines a world in which employment is not distributed according to a law of exchange and governed by contracts linking different economic entities, but in which it is left to the free will of each party, in a permanent potlatch that does not allow a gift in return. Work redefined in this way blurs the boundaries that separate it from leisure, for to perform a task without being asked is an act only leisure affords. Sometimes these limits are crossed by companies themselves, as Liam Gillick noted with Sony: "We are faced with a separation of the professional and the domestic that was created by electronic companies ... Tape recording, for example, only existed in the professional field during the forties, and people did not really know what they could use it for in everyday life. Sony blurred the professional and the domestic."⁰⁴ In 1979, Rank Xerox imagined transposing the world of the office to the

graphic interface of the microcomputer, which resulted in icons for "trash," "files," and "desktops." Steve Jobs, founder of Apple, took up this system of presentation for Macintosh five years later. Word processing would from now on be indexed to the formal protocol of the service industry, and the image-system of the home computer would be informed and colonized from the start by the world of work. Today, the spread of the home office is causing the artistic economy to undergo a reverse shift: the professional world is flowing into the domestic world, because the division between work and leisure constitutes an obstacle to the sort of employee companies require, one who is flexible and reachable at any moment.

1994: Rirkrit Tiravanija organized a lounge area in Dijon, France, for artists in the exhibition *Surface de réparation* (Penalty Zone) that included armchairs, a foosball table, artwork by Andy Warhol, and a refrigerator, allowing the artists to unwind during preparations for the show. The work, which disappeared when the show opened to the public, was the reverse image of the artistic work schedule.

With Pierre Huyghe, the opposition between entertainment and art is resolved in activity. Instead of defining himself in relation to work ("what do you do for a living?"), the individual in his exhibitions is constituted by his or her use of time ("what are you doing with your life?"). *Ellipse* (Ellipsis), 1999, features the German actor Bruno Ganz doing a pick-up shot between two scenes in Wim Wenders's *My American Friend*, shot twenty years earlier. Ganz walks a path that was merely suggested in the Wenders film: he fills in an ellipsis. But when is Bruno Ganz working and when is he off? While he was employed as an actor in *My American Friend*, is he still working twenty-one years later when he films a transitional shot between two scenes in

04 LIAM GILLICK, "WERE PEOPLE AS STUPID BEFORE TV?," INTERVIEW BY ERIC TRONCY, *DOCUMENTS SUR L'ART*, NO. 11, FALL-WINTER, 1997/1998, PP. 115-121.

Wenders's film? Isn't the ellipsis, in the end, simply an image of leisure, the negative space of work? While free time signifies "time to waste" or time for organized consumption, isn't it also simply a passage between two sequences?

"Posters," 1994, a series of color photographs by Huyghe, presents an individual filling in a hole in the sidewalk and watering the plants in a public square. But is there such a thing as a truly public space today? These fragile, isolated acts engage the notion of responsibility: if there is a hole in the sidewalk, why does a city employee fill it in, and not you or me? We claim to share a common space, but it is in fact managed by private enterprise: we are excluded from that scenario by erroneous subtitling, which appears beneath images of the political community.

Pflumm's images are the products of an analogous micro-utopia, in which supply and demand are disturbed by individual initiatives, a world where free time generates work, and vice versa, a world where work meets computer hacking. We know that some hackers make their way into hard drives and decode the systems of companies or institutions for the sake of subversion but sometimes also in the hopes of being hired to improve the security system: first they show evidence of their capacity to be a nuisance, then they offer their services to the organism they have just attacked. The treatment to which Pflumm subjects the public image of multinationals proceeds from the same spirit: work is no longer remunerated by a client, contrary to advertising, but distributed in a parallel circuit that offers financial resources and a completely different visibility. Where Heger and Dejanov position themselves as false providers of a service for the real economy, Pflumm visually blackmails the economy that he parasites. Logos are taken hostage, then placed in semi-freedom, as *freeware* that users are asked to improve on themselves. Heger and Dejanov sold a bugged application program to the company

whose image they propagated; Pflumm circulates images along with the "pilot," the source code that allows them to be duplicated.

When Pflumm makes a video using images taken from CNN (*CNN, Questions and Answers*, 1999), he switches jobs and becomes a programmer – a mode of production with which he is familiar through his activity as a DJ and musician.

The service industry aesthetic involves a reprocessing of cultural production, the construction of a path through existing flows; producing a service, an itinerary, within cultural protocols. Pflumm devotes himself to supporting chaos productively. While he uses this expression to describe his video projects in techno clubs, it may also be applied to the whole of his work, which seizes on the formal scraps and bits of code issued from everyday life in its mass media form, to construct a formal universe in which the modernist grid joins excerpts from CNN on a coherent level, that of the general pirating of signs.

Pflumm goes beyond the idea of pirating: he constructs montages of great formal richness. Subtly constructivist, his works are wrought by a search for tension between the iconographic source and the abstract form. The complexity of his references (historical abstractions, Pop art, the iconography of flyers, music videos, corporate culture) goes hand in hand with a great technical mastery: his films are closer to industry-standard videos than the average video art. Pflumm's work currently represents one of the most probing examples of the encounter between the art world and techno music.

Techno Nation has long distorted well-known logos on T-shirts: there are countless variations on Coca-Cola or Sony, filled with subversive messages or invitations to smoke Sinsemilla. We live in a world in which forms are indefinitely available to all manipulations, for better or worse, in which Sony and Daniel Pflumm cross paths in a space

saturated with icons and images.

As practiced by Pflumm, the mix is an attitude, an ethical stance more than a recipe. The postproduction of work allows the artist to escape the posture of interpretation. Instead of engaging in critical commentary, we have to experiment, as Gilles Deleuze asked of psychoanalysis: to stop interpreting symptoms and try more suitable arrangements.