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POSTPRODUCTION
CULTURE AS SCREENPLAY: HOW ART REPROGRAMS THE WORLD

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Since its initial publication in 2001, *Postproduction* has been translated into five languages; depending on the translation schedules in various countries, publication either overlapped with or preceded that of another of my books, *Esthétique relationnelle* (Relational Aesthetics), written five years earlier. The relationship between these two theoretical essays has often been the source of a certain misunderstanding, if not malevolence, on the part of a critical generation that knows itself to be slowing down and counters my theories with recitations from "The Perfect American Soft Marxist Handbook" and a few vestiges of Greenbergian catechism. Let's not even talk about it.

I started writing *Relational Aesthetics* in 1995 with the goal of finding a common point among the artists of my generation who interested me most, from Pierre Huyghe to Maurizio Cattelan by way of Gabriel Orozco, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Vanessa Beecroft, and Liam Gillick - basically, the artists I had assembled in an exhibition called *Traffic* at the CapcMusée d'art contemporain in Bordeaux (1996). Each of these artists developed strangely similar themes, but they were not a topic of real discussion, since no one at the time saw these artists' contributions as original and new. In search of the common denominator, it suddenly occurred to me that there was a new thematic framework for looking at their works. I realized that every one of them without exception dealt with the interhuman sphere: relationships between people, communities, individuals, groups, social networks, interactivity, and so on. In its time, Pop Art was born of a conjunction between the phenomenon of mass production and the birth of visual marketing, under the aegis of a new era of consumption. *Relational Aesthetics* was content to paint the new sociopolitical landscape of the nineties, to describe the collective sensibility on which contemporary artistic practices were beginning to rely. The success of this essay, which - alas - has at times generated a sort of caricatured vulgate ("artists-who-serve-soup-at-the-opening," etc.), stems essentially from the fact that it was a "kick start" to contemporary

aesthetics, beyond the fascination with communication and new technologies then being talked about incessantly, and above all, beyond the predetermined grids of reading (Fiuxus, in particular) into which these artists' works were being placed. *Relational Aesthetics* was the first work, to my knowledge, to provide the theoretical tools that allowed one to analyze works by individuals who would soon become irrefutably present on the international scene.

Postproduction is not a "sequel" to *Relational Aesthetics* except insofar as the two books essentially describe the same artistic scene. In terms of method, the link between them is simple: both present an analysis of today's art in relation to social changes, whether technological, economic, or sociological.

But while the former deals with a collective sensibility *Postproduction* analyzes a set of modes of production, seeking to establish a typology of contemporary practices and to find commonalities. My first reflex was to try to avoid the artists extensively discussed in *Relational Aesthetics*. Then, after a few pages, I realized not only that they fully corresponded to this theory of production but also that I wanted to delve more deeply into these works, which the notion of relational aesthetics certainly did not exhaust. *Postproduction* therefore contains more detailed, more analytical chapters on the work of Philippe Parreno, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Liam Gillick, emblematic of the earlier book, but also deals with the work of Thomas Hirschhorn, Mike Kelley, Michel Majerus, Sarah Morris, Pierre Joseph, and Daniel Pflumm, artists I had yet to write about. In short, the two books show the same scene from two different angles, and the more recent is more centered on form, above all, because the artists in question have impressive bodies of work behind them.

Regarding *Postproduction*, I have often heard the argument: "This is nothing new."

It's true, citation, recycling, and *detournement* were not born yesterday; what is clear is that today certain elements and principles are reemerging as themes and are suddenly at the forefront, to the point of constituting the "engine" of new artistic practices. In his journal, Eugene Delacroix developed ideas similar to those in *Relational Aesthetics*, but the remarkable thing in the nineties was that notions of interactivity, environment, and "participation" - classic art historical notions - were being rethought through and through by artists according to a radically different point of view. The critics who counter my analyses with the argument that "this is nothing new" are often the last to know that Gerald Murphy or Stuart Davis made Pop Art in the thirties - which takes nothing away from James Rosenquist or Andy Warhol. The difference resides in the articulation. The working principles of today's artists seem to me to break with the manipulation of references and citation: the works of Pierre Huyghe, Douglas Gordon, or Rirkrit Tiravanija deeply reexamine notions of creation, authorship, and originality through a problematic of the use of cultural artifacts - which, by the way, is absolutely new.

In *Postproduction*, I try to show that artists' intuitive relationship with art history is now going beyond what we call "the art of appropriation," which naturally infers an ideology of ownership, and moving toward a culture of the use of forms, a culture of constant activity of signs based on a collective ideal: sharing. The Museum like the City itself constitute a catalog of forms, postures, and images for artists - collective equipment that everyone is in a position to use, not in order to be subjected to their authority but as tools to probe the contemporary world. There is (fertile) static on the borders between consumption and production that can be perceived well beyond the borders of art. When artists find material in objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market, the work of art takes on a script-like value: "when screenplays become form," in a sense.

For me, criticism is a matter of conviction, not an exercise in flitting about and "covering" artistic current events. My theories are born of careful observation of the work in the field. I have neither the passion for objectivity of the journalist, nor the capacity for abstraction of the philosopher, who alas often seizes upon the first artists he comes across in order to illustrate his theories. -....."

I will stick, therefore, to describing what appears around me: I do not seek to illustrate abstract ideas with a "generation" of artists but to construct ideas in their wake. I think with them. That, no doubt, is friendship, in the sense Michel Foucault intended.

INTRODUCTION

IT'S SIMPLE, PEOPLE PRODUCE WORKS, AND WE DO WHAT WE CAN WITH THEM, WE USE THEM FOR OURSELVES. (SERGE DANÉY)

Postproduction is a technical term from the audiovisual vocabulary used in television, film, and video. It refers to the set of processes applied to recorded material: montage, the inclusion of other visual or audio sources, subtitling, voice-overs, and special effects. As a set of activities linked to the service industry and recycling, postproduction belongs to the tertiary sector, as opposed to the industrial or agricultural sector, i.e., the production of raw materials.

Since the early nineties, an ever increasing number of artworks have been created on the basis of preexisting works; more and more artists interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, or use works made by others or available cultural products. This art of postproduction seems to respond to the proliferating chaos of global culture in the information age, which is characterized by an increase in the supply of works and the art world's annexation of forms ignored or disdained until now. These artists who insert their own work into that of others contribute to the eradication of the traditional distinction between production and consumption, creation and copy, readymade and original work. The material they manipulate is no longer *primary*. It is no longer a matter of elaborating a form on the basis of a raw material but working with objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market, which is to say, objects already *informed* by other objects. Notions of originality (being at the origin of) and even of creation (making something from nothing) are slowly blurred in this new cultural landscape marked by the twin figures of the DJ and the programmer, both of whom have the task of selecting cultural objects and inserting them into new contexts.

Relational Aesthetics, of which this book is a continuation, described the collective sensibility within which new forms of art have been

inscribed. Both take their point of departure in the changing mental space that has been opened for thought by the Internet, the central tool of the information age we have entered. But *Relational Aesthetics* dealt with the convivial and interactive aspect of this revolution (why artists are determined to produce models of sociality, to situate themselves within the interhuman sphere), while *Postproduction* apprehends the forms of knowledge generated by the appearance of the Net (how to find one's bearings in the cultural chaos and how to extract new modes of production from it). **Indeed, it is striking that the tools most often used by artists today in order to produce these relational models are preexisting works or formal structures, as if the world of cultural products and artworks constituted an autonomous strata that could provide tools of connection between individuals; as if the establishment of new forms of sociality and a true critique of contemporary forms of life involved a different attitude in relation to artistic patrimony, through the production of new relationships to culture in general and to the artwork in particular.**

A few emblematic works will allow us to outline a typology of post-production.

REPROGRAMMING EXISTING WORKS

In the video *Fresh Acconci*, 1995, Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy recorded professional actors and models interpreting performances by Vito Acconci. In *Unfitted (One Revolution Per Minute)*, 1996, Rirkrit Tiravanija made an installation that incorporated pieces by Olivier Mosset, Allan McCollum, and Ken Lum; at New York's Museum of Modern Art, he annexed a construction by Philip Johnson and invited children to draw there: *Untitled (Playtime)*, 1997. Pierre Huyghe projected a film by Gordon Matta-Clark, *Conical Intersect*, at the very site of its filming (*Light Conical Intersect*, 1997). In their series *Plenty of Objects of Desire*, Svetlana Heger and Plamen Dejanov exhibited artworks and design objects, which they had purchased, on minimalist

platforms. Jorge Pardo has displayed pieces by Alvar Aalto, Arne Jacobsen, and Isamu Noguchi in his installations.

INHABITING HISTORICIZED STYLES AND FORMS

Felix Gonzalez-Torres used the formal vocabularies of Minimalist art and Anti-form, recoding them almost thirty years later to suit his own political preoccupations. This same glossary of Minimalist art is diverted by Liam Gillick toward an archaeology of capitalism, by Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster toward the sphere of the intimate, by Pardo toward a problematics of use, and by Daniel Pflumm toward a questioning of the notion of production. Sarah Morris employs the modernist grid in her painting in order to describe the abstraction of economic flux. In 1993, Maurizio Cattelan exhibited *Untitled*, a canvas that reproduced Zorro's famous Z in the lacerated style of Lucio Fontana. Xavier Veilhan exhibited *La Foret*, 1998, whose brown felt evoked Joseph Beuys and Robert Morris, in a structure that recalled Jesus Soto's *Penetrable* sculptures. Angela Bulloch, Tobias Rehberger, Carsten Nicolai, Sylvie Fleury, John Miller, and Sydney Stucki, to name only a few, have adapted minimalist, Pop, or conceptual structures and forms to their personal problematics, going as far as duplicating entire sequences from existing works of art.

MAKING USE OF IMAGES

At the Aperto at the 1993 Venice Biennale, **Bulloch** exhibited a video of *Solaris*, the science fiction film by Andrei Tarkovsky, replacing its sound track with her own dialogue. *24 Hour Psycho*, 1997, a work by Douglas **Gordon**, consisted of a projection of Alfred Hitchcock's film *Psycho* slowed down to run for twenty-four hours. Kendell **Geers** has isolated sequences of well-known films (Harvey Keitel grimacing in *Bad Lieutenant*, a scene from *The Exorcist*) and looped them in his video installations; for *TV Shoot*, 1998-99, he took scenes of shoot-outs from the **contemporary cinematic repertory** and projected them onto two screens that faced each other.

USING SOCIETY AS A CATALOG OF FORMS

When Matthieu Laurette is reimbursed for products he has consumed by systematically using promotional coupons ("Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back"), he operates within the cracks of the promotional system. When he produces the pilot for a game show on the principle of exchange (*El Gran trueque*, 2000) or establishes an offshore bank with the aid of funds from donation boxes placed at the entrance of art centers (*Laurette Bank Unlimited*, 1999), he plays with economic forms as if they were the lines and colors of a painting. Jens Haaning transforms art centers into import-export stores and clandestine workshops; Daniel Pflumm appropriates the logos of multinationals and endows them with their own aesthetic life. Heger and Dejanov take every job they can in order to acquire "objects of desire" and rent their work force to BMW for an entire year. Michel Majerus, who integrates the technique of sampling into his pictorial practice, exploits the rich visual stratum of promotional packaging.

INVESTING IN FASHION AND MEDIA

The works of Vanessa Beecroft come from an intersection between performance and the protocol of fashion photography; they reference the form of performance without being reduced to it. Sylvie Fleury indexes her production to the glamorous world of trends offered by women's magazines, stating that when she isn't sure what colors to use in her work, she uses the new colors by Chanel. John Miller has produced a series of paintings and installations based on the aesthetic of television game shows. Wang Du selects images published in the press and duplicates them in three dimensions as painted wood sculptures.

All these artistic practices, although formally heterogeneous, have in common the recourse to *already produced forms*. They testify to a willingness to inscribe the work of art within a network of signs and significations, instead of considering it an autonomous or original form.

It is no longer a matter of starting with a "blank slate" or creating meaning on the basis of virgin material but of finding a means of insertion into the innumerable flows of production. "Things and thoughts," Gilles Deleuze writes, "advance or grow out from the middle, and that's where you have to get to work, that's where everything unfolds."⁰¹ The artistic question is no longer: "what can we make that is new?" but "how can we make do with what we have?" **In other words, how can we produce singularity and meaning from this chaotic mass of objects, names, and references that constitutes our daily life? Artists today program forms more than they compose them: rather than transfigure a raw element (blank canvas, clay, etc.), they remix available forms and make use of data.** In a universe of products for sale, preexisting forms, signals already emitted, buildings already constructed, paths marked out by their predecessors, artists no longer consider the artistic field (and here one could add television, cinema, or literature) a museum containing works that must be cited or "surpassed," as the modernist ideology of originality would have it, but so many storehouses filled with tools that should be used, stockpiles of data to manipulate and present. When Tiravanija offers us the experience of a structure in which he prepares food, he is not doing a performance: he is using the performance-form. His goal is not to question the limits of art: he uses forms that served to interrogate these limits in the sixties, in order to produce completely different results. Tiravanija often cites **Ludwig Wittgenstein's phrase: "Don't look for the meaning, look for the use."** " . . . "

The prefix "post" does not signal any negation or surpassing; it refers to a zone of activity. The processes in question here do not consist of producing images of images, which would be a fairly mannered posture, or of lamenting the fact that everything has "already been

01 GILLES DELEUZE, *NEGOTIATIONS*, TRANS. MARTIN JOUGHIN (NEW YORK: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1995), P. 161.

done," but of **inventing protocols of use** for all existing modes of representation and all formal structures. It is a matter of seizing all the codes of the culture, all the forms of everyday life, the works of the global patrimony, and making them function. To learn how to use forms, as the artists in question invite us to do, is above all to know how to make them one's own, to inhabit them.

The activities of DJs, Web surfers, and postproduction artists imply a similar configuration of knowledge, which is characterized by the invention of paths through culture. All three are "semionauts" who produce original pathways through signs. Every work is issued from a script that the artist projects onto culture, considered the framework of a narrative that in turn projects new possible scripts, endlessly. The DJ activates the history of music by copying and pasting together loops of sound, placing recorded products in relation with each other. Artists actively inhabit cultural and social forms. The Internet user may create his or her own site or homepage and constantly reshuffle the information obtained, inventing paths that can be bookmarked and reproduced at will. When we start a search engine in pursuit of a name or a subject, a mass of information issued from a labyrinth of data-banks is inscribed on the screen. The "semionaut" imagines the links, the likely relations between disparate sites. A sampler, a machine that reprocesses musical products, also implies constant activity; to listen to records becomes work in itself, which diminishes the dividing line between reception and practice, producing new cartographies of knowledge. This recycling of sounds, images, and forms implies incessant navigation within the meanderings of cultural history, navigation which itself becomes the subject of artistic practice. Isn't art, as Duchamp once said, "a game among all men of all eras?" Postproduction is the contemporary form of this game.

When musicians use a sample, they know that their own contribution may in turn be taken as the base material of a new composition.

They consider it normal that the sonorous treatment applied to the borrowed loop could in turn generate other interpretations, and so on and so forth. With music derived from sampling, the *sample* no longer represents anything more than a salient point in a shifting cartography. It is caught in a chain, and its meaning depends in part on its position in this chain. In an online chat room, a message takes on value the moment it is repeated and commented on by someone else. Likewise, the contemporary work of art does not position itself as the termination point of the "creative process" (a "finished product" to be contemplated) but as a site of navigation, a portal, a generator of activities. We tinker with production, we surf on a network of signs, we insert our forms on existing lines.

What unites the various configurations of the artistic use of the world gathered under the term postproduction is the **scrambling of boundaries between consumption and production**. "Even if it is illusory and Utopian," Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster explains, "what matters is introducing a sort of equality, assuming the same capacities, the possibility of an equal relationship, between me - at the origins of an arrangement, a system - and others, allowing them to organize their own story in response to what they have just seen, with their own references."⁰²

In this new form of culture, which one might call a culture of use or a culture of activity, the artwork functions as the temporary terminal of a network of interconnected elements, like a narrative that extends and reinterprets preceding narratives. Each exhibition encloses within it the script of another; each work may be inserted into different

02 DOMINIQUE GONZALEZ-FOERSTER, "DOMINIQUE GONZALEZ-FOERSTER, PIERRE HUYGHE AND PHILIPPE PARRENO IN CONVERSATION WITH JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYUUX" IN *DOMINIQUE GONZALEZ-FOERSTER, PIERRE HUYGHE, PHILIPPE PARRENO*, EXH. CAT. (PARIS: MUSEE D'ART MODERNE DE LA VILLE DE PARIS, 1998), P. 82.

programs and used for multiple scenarios. The artwork is no longer an end point but a simple moment in an infinite chain of contributions.

This culture of use implies a profound transformation of the status of the work of art: going beyond its traditional role as a receptacle of the artist's vision, it now functions as an **active agent**, a musical score, an unfolding scenario, a framework that possesses autonomy and materiality to varying degrees, its form able to oscillate from a simple idea to sculpture or canvas. In generating behaviors and potential reuses, art challenges passive culture, composed of merchandise and consumers. It makes the forms and cultural objects of our daily lives **function**. What if artistic creation today could be compared to a collective sport, far from the classical mythology of the solitary effort? "It is the viewers who make the paintings," Duchamp once said, an incomprehensible remark unless we connect it to his keen sense of an emerging culture of use, in which meaning is born of collaboration and negotiation between the artist and the one who comes to view the work. Why wouldn't the meaning of a work have as much to do with the use one makes of it as with the artist's intentions for it?

THE USE OF OBJECTS

The difference between artists who produce works based on objects already produced and those who operate ex nihilo is one that Karl Marx observes in *German Ideology*: there is a difference, he says, between natural tools of production (e.g., working the earth) and tools of production created by civilization. In the first case, Marx argues, individuals are subordinate to nature. In the second, they are dealing with a "product of labor," that is, *capital*, a mixture of accumulated labor and tools of production. These are only held together by exchange, an interhuman transaction embodied by a third term, money. The art of the twentieth century developed according to a similar schema: the industrial revolution made its effects felt, but with some delay. When Marcel Duchamp exhibited a bottle rack in 1914 and used a mass-produced object as a "tool of production," he brought the capitalist process of production (working on the basis of *accumulated labor*) into the sphere of art, while at the same time indexing the role of the artist to the world of exchange: he suddenly found kinship with the merchant, content to move products from one place to another. Duchamp started from the principle that consumption was also a mode of production, as did Marx, who writes in his introduction to *Critique of Political Economy* that "consumption is simultaneously also production, just as in nature the production of a plant involves the consumption of elemental forces and chemical materials." Marx adds that "man produces his own body, e.g., through feeding, one form of consumption." A product only becomes a real product in consumption; as Marx goes on to say, "a dress becomes really a dress only by being worn, a house which is uninhabited is indeed not really a house."⁰¹ Because consumption creates the need for new production, consumption is both its motor and motive. This is **the** primary virtue of the readymade: establishing an equivalence between choosing and fabricating, consuming and producing - which is

01 KARL MARX, *A CONTRIBUTION TO THE CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY*, TRANS. S.W. RYAZANIKAYA, ED. MAURICE DOES (NEW YORK: INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS, 1970), PP. 195-96.

difficult to accept in a world governed by the Christian ideology of effort ("working by the sweat of your brow") or that of the worker-hero (Stakhanovism).

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the astonishing structuralist Michel de Certeau examines the hidden movements beneath the surface of the Production-Consumption pair, showing that far from being purely passive, the consumer engages in a set of processes comparable to an almost clandestine, "silent" production.⁰² To use an object is necessarily to interpret it. To use a product is to betray its concept. To read, to view, to envision a work is to know how to divert it: use is an act of micropirating that constitutes postproduction. We never read a book the way its author would like us to. By using television, books, or records, the user of culture deploys a rhetoric of practices and "ruses" that has to do with enunciation and therefore with language whose figures and codes may be catalogued.

Starting with the language imposed upon us (the *system* of production), we construct our own sentences (*acts* of everyday life), thereby reappropriating for ourselves, through these clandestine micro-bricolages, the last word in the productive chain. Production thus becomes a lexicon of a practice, which is to say, the intermediary material from which new utterances can be articulated, instead of representing the end result of anything. What matters is what we make of the elements placed at our disposal. We are tenants of culture: society is a text whose law is production, a law that so-called passive users divert from within, through the practices of postproduction. Each artwork, de Certeau suggests, is inhabitable in the manner of a rented apartment. By listening to music or reading a book, we produce new material, we become producers. And each day we benefit

02 SEE MICHEL DE CERTEAU, *THE PRACTICE OF EVERYDAY LIFE*, TRANS. STEVEN RENDELL (BERKELEY: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, 1984).

from more ways in which to organize this production: remote controls, VCRs, computers, MP3s, tools that allow us to select, record, and edit. Postproduction artists are agents of this evolution, re-specialized workers of cultural reappropriation.

THE USE OF THE PRODUCT FROM MARCEL DUCHAMP TO JEFF KOONS

Appropriation is indeed the first stage of postproduction: the artist is no longer to fabricate an object, but to choose one among those that exist and to use or modify these according to a specific intention. Marcel Broodthaers said that "since Duchamp, the artist is the author of a definition" which is substituted for that of the objects he or she has chosen. The history of appropriation (which remains to be written) is nevertheless not the topic of this chapter; only a few of its figures, useful to the comprehension of the most recent art, will be mentioned here. If the process of appropriation has its roots in history, its narrative here will begin with the readymade, which represents its first conceptualized manifestation, considered in relation to the history of art. When Duchamp exhibits a manufactured object (a bottle rack, a urinal, a snow shovel) as a work of the mind, he shifts the problematic of the "creative process," emphasizing the artist's gaze brought to bear on an object instead of manual skill. He asserts that the act of choosing is enough to establish the artistic process, just as the act of fabricating, painting, or sculpting does: to give a new idea to an object is already production. Duchamp thereby completes the definition of the term *creation*: to create is to insert an object into a new scenario, to consider it a character in a narrative.

The main difference between European New Realism and American Pop resides in the nature of the gaze brought to bear on consumption. Arman, Cesar, and Daniel Spoerri seem fascinated by the act of consumption itself, relics of which they exhibit. For them, consumption is truly an abstract phenomenon, a myth whose invisible subject seems

irreducible to any representation. Conversely, Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, and James Rosenquist bring their gaze to bear on the purchase, on the visual impetus that propels an individual to acquire a product: their goal is less to document a sociological phenomenon than to exploit new iconographic material. They investigate, above all, advertising and its mechanics of visual frontality, while the Europeans, further removed, explore the world of consumption through the filter of the great organic metaphor and favor the use value of things over their exchange value. The New Realists are more interested in the impersonal and collective use of forms than in the individual use of these forms, as the works of "poster artists" Raymond Hains and Jacques de la Villegle admirably show: the city itself is the anonymous and multiple author of the images they collect and exhibit as artworks. No one consumes, things are consumed. Spoerri demonstrates the poetry of table scraps, Arman that of trash cans and supplies; Cesar exhibits a crushed, unusable automobile, at the end of its destiny as a vehicle. Apart from Martial Raysse, the most 'American' of the Europeans, the concern is still to show the end result of the process of consumption, which others have practiced. The New Realists have thus invented a sort of postproduction squared: their subject is certainly consumption, but a represented consumption, carried out in an abstract and generally anonymous way, whereas Pop explores the visual conditioning (advertising, packaging) that accompanies mass consumption. By salvaging already used objects, products that have come to the end of their functional life, the New Realists can be seen as the first landscape painters of consumption, the authors of the first still lifes of industrial society.

With Pop art, the notion of consumption constituted an abstract theme linked to mass production. It took on concrete value in the early eighties, when it was attached to individual desires. The artists who lay claim to Simulationism considered the work of art to be an "absolute commodity" and creation a mere substitute for the act of consuming.

I buy, therefore I am, as Barbara Kruger wrote. The object was shown from the angle of the compulsion to buy, from the angle of desire, midway between the inaccessible and the available. Such is the task of marketing, which is the true subject of Simulationist works. Haim Steinbach thus arranged mass-produced objects or antiques on minimal and monochromatic shelves. Sherrie Levine exhibited exact copies of works by Miro, Walker Evans and Degas. Jeff Koons displayed advertisements, salvaged kitsch icons, and floated basketballs weightlessly in immaculate containers. Ashley Bickerton produced a self-portrait composed of the logos of products he used in daily life.

Among the Simulationists, the work resulted from a contract stipulating the equal importance of the consumer and the artist/purveyor. Koons used objects as convectors of desire: "In the system I was brought up in - the Western, capitalist system - one receives objects as rewards for labour and achievement. ... And once these objects have been accumulated, they work as support mechanisms for the individual: to define the personality of the self, to fulfill desires and express them."⁰³ Koons, Levine, and Steinbach present themselves as veritable intermediaries, *brokers of desire* whose works represent simple simulacra, images born of a market study more than of some sort of "inner need," a value considered outmoded. The ordinary object of consumption is doubled by another object, this one purely virtual, designating an inaccessible state, a lack (e.g., Jeff Koons). The artist consumes the world in place of the viewer, and for him. He arranges objects in glass cases that neutralize the notion of use in favor of a sort of interrupted exchange, in which the moment of *presentation* is made sacred. Through the generic structure of the shelf, Haim Steinbach emphasizes its predominance in our mental

03 JEFF KOONS, FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH QIANCARLO POLITI IN *FLASH ART*, NO. 132. FURTHER QUOTED BY ANN GOLDSTEIN IN *A FOREST OF SIGNS: ART IN THE CRISIS OF REPRESENTATION*. EDITION CATHARINE GUDIS (LA: MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART AND CAMBRIDGE, MA: THE MIT PRESS) 1999. P. 5

universe: we only look at what is well-presented; we only desire what is desired by others. The objects he displays on his wood and Formica shelves "are bought or taken, placed, matched, and compared. They are moveable, arranged in a particular way, and when they get packed they are taken apart again, and they are as permanent as objects are when you buy them in a store." The subject of his work is what happens in any exchange.

THE FLEA MARKET: THE DOMINANT ART FORM OF THE NINETIES

As Liam Gillick explains, "in the eighties, a large part of artistic production seemed to mean that artists went shopping in the right shops. Now, it seems as though new artists have gone shopping, too, but in unsuitable shops, in all sorts of shops."⁴ The passage from the eighties to the nineties might be represented by the juxtaposition of two photographs: one of a shop window, another of a flea market or airport shopping mall. From Jeff Koons to Rirkrit Tiravanija, from Haim Steinbach to Jason Rhoades, one formal system has been substituted for another: since the early nineties, the dominant visual model is closer to the open-air market, the bazaar, the souk, a temporary and nomadic gathering of precarious materials and products of various provenances. Recycling (a method) and chaotic arrangement (an aesthetic) have supplanted shopping, store windows, and shelving in the role of formal matrices.

Why has the market become the omnipresent referent for contemporary artistic practices? First, it represents a collective form, a disordered, proliferating and endlessly renewed conglomeration that does not depend on the command of a single author: a market is not designed, it is a unitary structure composed of multiple individual signs. Secondly, this form (in the case of the flea market) is the locus

of a reorganization of past production. Finally, it embodies and makes material the flows and relationships that have tended toward disembodiment with the appearance of online shopping.

A flea market, then, is a place where products of multiple provenances converge, waiting for new uses. An old sewing machine can become a kitchen table, an advertising poster from the seventies can serve to decorate a living room. Here, past production is recycled and switches direction. In an involuntary homage to Marcel Duchamp, an object is given a new idea. An object once used in conformance with the concept for which it was produced now finds new potential uses in the stalls of the flea market.

Dan Cameron used Claude Levi-Strauss's opposition between "the raw and the cooked" as the title for an exhibition he curated: it included artists who transformed materials and made them unrecognizable (the cooked), and artists who preserved the singular aspect of these materials (the raw). The market-form is the quintessential place for this rawness: an installation by Jason Rhoades, for example, is presented as a unitary composition made of objects, each of which retains its expressive autonomy, in the manner of paintings by Arcimboldo. Formally, Rhoades's work is quite similar to Rirkrit Tiravanija's. *Untitled (Peace Sells)*, which Tiravanija made in 1999, is an exuberant display of disparate elements that clearly testifies to a resistance to unifying the diverse, perceptible in all his work. But Tiravanija organizes the multiple elements that make up his installations so as to underscore their use value, while Rhoades presents objects that seem endowed with an autonomous logic, quasi-indifferent to the human. We can see one or more guiding lines, structures imbricated within one another, but the atoms brought together by the artist do not blend completely into an organic whole. Each object seems to resist a formal unity, forming subsets that resist projection into a vaster whole and that at times are transplanted from one

⁰⁴ SEE LIAM GILLICK IN *WO MAN'S TIME*, EXH. CAT. (NIZZA: CNAC VILLA ARSON, 1991).

structure to another. The domain of forms that Rhoades is referencing, then, evokes the heterogeneity of stalls in a market and the meandering that implies: "... it's about relationships to people, like me to my dad, or tomatoes to squash, beans to weeds, and weeds to corn, corn to the ground and the ground to the extension cords."⁰⁵ As explicit references to the open markets of the artist's early days in California, his installations conjure an alarming image of a world with no possible center, collapsing on all sides beneath the weight of production and the practical impossibility of recycling. In visiting them, one senses that the task of art is no longer to propose an artificial synthesis of heterogeneous elements but to generate "critical mass" through which the familial structure of the nearby market metamorphoses into a vast warehouse for merchandise sold online, a monstrous city of detritus. His works are composed of materials and tools, but on an outsize scale: "piles of pipes, piles of clamps, piles of paper, piles of fabric, all these industrial quantities of things ..."⁰⁶ Rhoades adapts the provincial junk fair to the dimensions of Los Angeles, through the experience of driving a car. When asked to explain the evolution of his piece *Perfect World*, he replies: "The really big change in the new work is the car." Driving in his Chevrolet Caprice, he was "in and out of [his] head, and in and out of reality," while the acquisition of a Ferrari modified his relationship to the city and to his work: "Driving between the studio and between various places, I am physically driving, it's a great energy, but it's not this daydream wandering head thing like before."⁰⁷ The space of the work is urban space, traversed at a certain speed: the objects that endure are therefore necessarily enormous or reduced to the size of the car's interior, which takes on the role of an optical tool allowing one to select forms. --

05 JASON RHOADES, *PERFECT WORLD*, EXH. CAT. (COLOGNE: OKTAGON/DEICHTORHALLEN HAMBURG, 2000), P. 15.

06 *IBID.*, P. 22.

07 *IBID.*, P. 53.

Thomas Hirschhorn's work relies not on spaces of exchange but places where the individual loses contact with the social and becomes embedded in an abstract background: an international airport, a department store's windows, a company's headquarters, and so on. In his installations, sheets of aluminum foil or plastic are wrapped around vague everyday forms which, made uniform in this way, are projected into monstrous, proliferating, tentacle-like form-networks. Yet this work relates to the market-form insofar as it introduces elements of resistance and information (political tracts, articles cut out of newspapers, television sets, media images) into places typical of the globalized economy. Visitors who move through Hirschhorn's environments uneasily traverse an abstract, woolly, and chaotic organism. They can identify the objects they encounter - newspapers, vehicles, ordinary objects - but in the form of sticky specters, as if a computer virus had ravaged the spectacle of the world and replaced it with a genetically modified substitute. These ordinary products are presented in a larval state, like so many interconnected matrices in a capillary network leading nowhere, which in itself is a commentary on the economy. A similar malaise surrounds the installations of George Adeagbo, who presents an image of the African economy of recycling through a maze of old record covers, scrap items, and newspaper clippings, for which personal notes, analogous to a private journal, act as captions, an irruption of human consciousness into the misery of display.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the term "market" moved av.a. from its physical referent and began to designate the abstract process of buying and selling. In the bazaar, economist Michel Hénocq explains, "transaction goes beyond the dry and reductive simplification in which modernity rigs it," assuming its original status as a negotiation between two people. Commerce is above all a form of human relations, indeed, a pretext destined to produce a relationship. Any transaction may be defined as "a successful encounter of histories,

affinities, wishes, constraints, habits, threats, skins, tensions."⁰⁸ ,

Art tends to give shape and weight to the most invisible processes. When entire sections of our existence spiral into abstraction as a result of economic globalization, when the basic functions of our daily lives are slowly transformed into products of consumption (including human relations, which are becoming a full-fledged industrial concern), it seems highly logical that **artists might seek to rematerialize these functions and processes, to give shape to what is disappearing before our eyes. Not as objects, which would be to fall into the trap of reification, but as mediums of experience: by striving to shatter the logic of the spectacle, art restores the world to us as an experience to be lived.** Since the economic system gradually deprives us of this experience, modes of representation must be invented for a reality that is becoming more abstract each day. A series of paintings by Sarah Morris that depicts the facades of multinational corporate headquarters in the style of geometric abstraction gives a physical place to brands that appear to be purely immaterial. By the same logic, Miltos Manetas's paintings take as subjects the Internet and the power of computers, but use the features of physical objects situated in a domestic interior to allow us access to them. The current success of the market as a formal matrix among contemporary artists has to do with a desire to make commercial relations concrete once again, relations that the postmodern economy tends to make immaterial. And yet this immateriality itself is a fiction, Henochsberg suggests, insofar as what seems most abstract to us - high prices for raw materials or energy, say - are in reality the object of arbitrary negotiations.

The work of art may thus consist of a formal arrangement that gen-

⁰⁸ MICHEL HENOCHSBERG, *NOUS NOUS SENTIONS COMME UNE SALE ESPECE: SUR LE COMMERCE ET L'ECONOMIE* (PARIS: DENOEL, 1999), P. 239.

erates relationships between people, or be born of a social process; I have described this phenomenon as "relational aesthetics," whose main feature is to consider interhuman exchange an aesthetic object in and of itself.

With *Everything NT\$20 (Chaos minimal)*, 2000, Surasi Kusolwong heaped thousands of brightly-colored objects onto rectangular shelves with monochromatic surfaces. The objects - T-shirts, plastic gadgets, baskets, toys, cooking utensils, and so on - were produced in his country of origin, Thailand. The colorful piles gradually diminished, like Felix Gonzalez-Torres's "stacks," as visitors of the exhibition carried away the objects for a small sum; the money was placed in large transparent smoked-glass urns that explicitly evoked Robert Morris's sculptures from the sixties. What Kusolwong's arrangement clearly depicted was the world of transaction: the dissemination of multicolored products in the exhibition space and the gradual filling of containers by coins and bills provided a concrete image of commercial exchange. When Jens Haaning organized a store in Fribourg featuring products imported from France at prices clearly lower than those charged in Switzerland, he questioned the paradoxes of a falsely "global" economy and assigned the artist the role of smuggler.