

SOLITUDE

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. Walter Benjamin's reflection defines an alteration in the aura of the original artwork because of reproduction. Yet he does not forget a certain idea of progress, and his 1936 text insists equally on the loss of the ritual dimension and on the change in the social function of art, which now engages in another practice: politics. Today, the authenticity and aura of artwork are validated by the catalogue, the artbook, and the magazine, which are the dominant forms of reception and appropriation for images of art today.

Nonetheless, the aura seems now more than ever to have an underlying presence, not so much in the work itself as in the form of an ensemble defined by the photographs of the exhibition:

the logical result of a policy, a strategy, and finally of the formidable heritage of minimal and conceptual art. In 1971, John Perrault imagined the possibility of a popular conceptual art

(yet without knowing how to manage works that were so unphotogenic, not to mention artists

who took the place of art critics). The conceptual style had perfect autonomy and a very good structure, but a photo of Joseph Kosuth in front of his typewriter remained much less spectacular than a photo of Jackson Pollock doing his drippings beneath the lens of Hans

Namuth. An exhibition shot of Robert Barry, for example, gives more information about the gallery than about the work in situ; and so Perrault was singularly short on objects d'art to satisfy the public's desires for visual stimuli of the time. But as clever strategists, the conceptual artists had learned the lesson of John Cage's piece 4'33: the stupefaction of the spectators before the silent piano was already the statement of the piece. The intangible no less than the inaudible became a cascade of surprises, amidst an ambience close to a form of aura.

In an interview which may have seemed inconsequential, Seth Siegelaub declared, without any further explanation, that this new (conceptual) art "went from one mind to another by the shortest path. "And thus he left floating the information of a future aura (breath in Latin), even as in the occult sciences there exist phenomenal visible only to the initiates. Robert Barry, in his Series of Inert Gases, goes from the mental image of an (invisible) gas to the concrete image of a landscape photographed in California (the places where the gases were released).

The Photo

directs our mental image according to the principle of "what the eye says to the brain". A photo of the surroundings of Beverly Hills provides me only with the image of the desert, even with a liter more Argon, or Krypton or Xenon or Helium in the atmosphere. Thus

Robert Barry likens the gallery or other indoor exhibition sites to real landscape or panoramas. And so I can read an exhibition shot like a landscape; and as far as my perception is concerned, another language and another reading move in, as parasites in the biological sense of the term.

To these observations we can add the gradual shift, beginning

early on, of the conceptual movement toward its fully disillusioned attitude. At the close of the fifties John Baldessari wrote: " I had come to a profound state of disaccord with art in general. So I said to myself, why not give people what they understand best: written language and photographie?...Why flight? Why not simply give them what they want?" Baldessari takes his place within the drift of the conceptual current on the West Coast of the USA, delivering a message that crops up again with Sherry Levine. In her 1982 Declaration, inspired by Roland Barthes (The Death of the Author), but also by a clever sense of strategy, she asserts: "The viewer is a tablet on which are graven all the quotations that make up the painting, without a single one being lost. It is in its destination and not in its origin that the meaning of painting resides. The birth of the spectator comes about at the expense of the painter, "The appropriation of the canonical artist (I wouldn't even mention it if my prints didn't include a part of this process, the reference to a known, indeed almost familiar situation for the art – world public) stimulates the tautological function of art, that is to say , " a rose is a rose is a rose....".

In my practice, I reactualize a principle that was in vogue in the sixteenth century – the emblem. Françoise Charpentier gives the following definition: The emblem, in its usual conception, includes an engraving with a devise (motto), integrated within the image itself or not, followed by a text of varying size, this text is ordinarily in prose, and has a didactic or moralizing character. The emblem is therefore a triple repetition of the same message: the figure, the devise, the commentary. The objects of these emblems can be fabulous or familiar, surprising objects of nature or culture (Curiosa) , or scenes or objects which are assigned a symbolic meaning. They respond to a complex intention, aesthetic, symbolic, didactic. " The emblem adapts freely to numerous variations; I have established no hierarchy between image and text. This excursion into poetry and literature is not innocent: I think above all of Marcel Broodthaers, who gave up literature to enter the mold (the mussel- shell) of art and its mechanical reproduction. The passage in question is a bitter one. "With plastic art my only possible engagement has been on the side of my adversaries" declared Broodthaers, in the hope of selling , succeeding , and stimulating art through the promise of its reification. In this deconstruction he plays with the aura, exhausts it and extenuates it, thus rediscovering the fine line of the purest conceptual art, with charm of poetry as well:

Qu'est ce la plainture ?
 Eh bien c'est la littérature –
 Qu'est ce que la littérature alors ?
 Eh bien c'est la peinture .

Eh bien alors – alors c'est bien.

Mais qu'est – ce que le reste ?
 Ce qui reste C'est une réforme de la lune,
 Quand elle est pleine et que les cons y croient.
 Quand elle n'est qu'un mince croissant et soulève
 des sentiments.
 Quand est la nuit noire théorique.

Marcel Broodthaers

I believe this problem no longer exist today. A new exhibition view , whatever the artist , his school or trend takes one a quite different meaning for me: I only look at the ambiance, seeing a deeper motivation to reproduce the image with the final statement: It's not what I want to show but what I can't keep myself from showing.