

NICOLAS BOURRIAUD
POSTPRODUCTION
CULTURE AS SCREENPLAY: HOW ART REPROGRAMS THE WORLD

11 **HAS & STERNBERG**, NEW YORK

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 problematic 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 ROYOUS" 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?