

‘How can we make do with what we have?’¹, asks the French theorist Nicolas Bourriaud on addressing the development of contemporary culture. His question comes as a result of a perceived stasis which is due to the vast amount of conflicting information we are constantly exposed to. He argues that it has become impossible to invent or to propose new solutions, leading to an art of quotation and selection.

Capitalism and Schizophrenia, a combination of terms associated with the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, forms the title of Stefan Brüggenmann’s recent project, exhibited in various forms in Puerto Rico, London and Mexico City. For Deleuze this represents a reconciliation of Marx’s opposition between production and ideology, and Freud’s opposition of consciousness and desire. Desire is then a central feature of political economy. However, this active and revolutionary desire is always mingled with a reactive desire for repression, hence Deleuze’s idea of desiring machines who acquiesce to their own slavery, as they are seduced by power and wealth². Deleuze believed philosophy to be a ‘critical enterprise of demystification’, which should not be sedentary, that is, working with a priori knowledge, but instead proposes a ‘nomadology’ which refutes the certainty of a ‘first principle’(arche). In Puerto Rico, Brüggenmann gained access to a factory that specialises in the manufacture of styrofoam panels. Over a period of two weeks machines were placed at his disposal to cut the material into vast letters which made up the work, while simultaneously spelling out its title: *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Some months later, the

same statement was used for a neon sign fitted above the entrance at London's Institute of Contemporary Art.

Text-based works were ubiquitous in the 1970s, a decade dominated by the language and processes developed by Conceptual art. While tactically using the language of the institutions of art in order to subvert them, Conceptual art came up with a distinctive 'look'; an appearance of restraint, intellectuality and polemic, an art which eschewed form in order to discover it through a new text. This type of work achieved visibility through artists such as Lawrence Weiner, Joseph Kosuth, Barbara Kruger, On Kawara and Jenny Holzer and became widespread in the late 1980s.

A decade or so later, artists' desire to work with text continues, but the approach has undergone profound transformations. In an age dominated by tele-technologies, where the near and the far have been collapsed into simultaneous transmissions, vision is no longer associated with the perception of tangible space. It is possible to experience different places at one and the same time via the proliferation of the media. In an era dominated by vision, the internet may be the single most important reason in making us readdress our waning relationship with text, albeit in an altered form.

It is curious then, that a whole new generation of emerging artists finds itself with the textual legacy of conceptual art. Current practitioners include Gillian Wearing, Joëlle Tuerlinckx and Bob & Roberta Smith, among others. These artists scrawl their words across canvases, walls and doors or enlist others to write them instead. The negotiation of authorship remains at the forefront of these practices.

The case presented by Stefan Brüggenmann is rather different, in that his textual work always relies on the established voices of others. He variously quotes Kosuth, Holzer, Kawara and Weiner. Brüggenmann, though Mexican, invariably uses the English language and insists on repeating the same typeface, **ARIAL BLACK**, in all his work. A kind of formality is implied, one which pays homage to the appearance of International Modernism. These actions make clear that Brüggenmann uses language as a *style*. The content lies in its appearance, its visibility: a repetitive and familiar format which remains fresh after many uses. Indeed, according to Bourriaud, artists' need to repeat familiar themes through quotation aligns their work with that of the computer programmer and the DJ³. The artist is no longer responsible for creation (the realm of the new or the original) instead becoming a selector. No homage of other works is intended here: rather, they are plundered by the contemporary artist in the search for information. It is thus unsurprising that the visual appearance of these older works is highly prized and fetishized by current artists. The *corporate identity* of Conceptual art is then harvested like a brand and inserted into new contexts.

This re-branding of contemporary art results in a new International style, one which can be seen in galleries from Jakarta to New York and Mexico City to London. It is a direct consequence of this new International style that the artist has returned to being the central focus of the work, not as an original creator or thinker, but as a master of ceremonies, as a host. The transferable nature of these works propose a portability which allows the artist to travel in search of new audiences. As we shall see, this type of physical displacement is not for the purpose of research or discovery, nor do these travels satisfy the artist's curiosity for unknown locations.

In his novel *A Rebours*, J.-K. Huysmans describes the journeys made by the central character, the Duc des Esseintes. Since des Esseintes spends most of his days in bed, it becomes clear that these travels are entirely in the imagination, the product of extensive reading and picturing. One day des Esseintes feels the urge to travel to London and sets off for the train station. Having purchased a Baedeker's guide to the city, he stops by an English tavern to kill time before departure. On reading the guide he becomes entirely immersed in the descriptions of London given by the guide, eventually deciding not to make the journey, since the reality of the actual trip might prove disappointing when compared to the expectations set up in his reading matter.

Another example of such an imaginary journey can be seen in Xavier de Maistre's account entitled *Journey around my Bedroom* (1790). The introduction to the book recommends room-travel 'to the poor and those afraid of storms, robberies and high cliffs.'¹⁴ All that was required for such a journey was a pair of pink and blue striped pyjamas.

For the curious artist travel has always held a particular fascination. *The Grand Tour* of the Romantic period became essential to individuals with cultural aspirations. The great explorations of unknown continents in the 18th and 19th Century required artists to become chroniclers of exotic locations, animals, plants and peoples. The explorer Alexander von Humboldt's journey to South America (1799-1804) was epic in scale: it required ten mules, thirty pieces of luggage, countless scientific measuring and viewing devices, four interpreters and letters of introduction from the king of Spain . In the present day, however, artists have become wary of playing the role of the ethnographer and refuse to convey the notion of *elsewhere* as a place of exotica. Global travel and communication technology have irrevocably altered our relationship with once unbridgeable distances, while local information is available at the touch of a button. These developments have led the American art historian Miwon Kwon to describe the successful contemporary artist as someone who racks up airmiles in the pursuit of ever-increasing international exhibition opportunities. International travel is then seen as being analogous to an artist's marketability and success. Such a statement should not be seen as a way of reducing the

importance of an artist's work, on the contrary, it becomes a way of assessing his/her cultural competence and ability to negotiate and communicate in the present.

The recipe of the successful traveller is outlined in the opening sequence of Lawrence Kasdan's *The Accidental Tourist*. A travel writer played by William Hurt informs us of the need to travel light, since we always overestimate our clothing requirements and our need for distraction through books and magazines. The key is portability: a small case carried on to the plane is always more desirable than a large suitcase in the hold.

This simple theory is echoed in the approach taken by Brüggemann in his work. Eschewing the need for a studio, he is content with a laptop, digital camera and access to a phone line. It suggests that the artist is at home everywhere but nowhere in particular. This approach is entirely different to ideas of site-specificity so prevalent in the 1980s and early 1990s. In that period the site of the work provided both a location and a context. The context set a series of parameters for any given project which the artist was expected to follow and illustrate. This relationship between the artist and the site has altered, in that a place is now seen to provide none of the political, social or historical content for the work; rather, it becomes simply a place for a series of exchanges with an

audience. In an age of travel it would be presumptuous for an artist to reveal one location after another to audiences already based there.

If *revelation* is no longer appropriate, what becomes of the traditional role of the artist? The answer lies in the mirroring effect of contemporary culture. Let us turn our attention to Michel Tournier's *The Legend of Painting*, in which two artists attempt to outdo one another in the production of a painting. The first artist, who had never travelled anywhere, produced an outstanding work, admired by all. The painting seemed peerless until the second artist, a noted traveller, revealed his own work: a mirror placed opposite the painting. This, he argued, is superior, since it incorporates the other, evidently outstanding work and the presence of the viewer. The audience's participation is not external to the work, as in the case of the painting, but instead is indivisible from it through the mirror.

This effect of duplication adds the experience of *knowing* to the phenomenon of viewing. We envisage ourselves in the act of seeing something of which we already have prior knowledge. Artists like Jonathan Monk, Fiona Banner and Stefan Brüggemann deal in second-hand goods. That is, their work is often derivative of existing cultural manifestations. They do not set out to expand art's remit into areas as yet untapped by art. On the contrary, their work borrows from, comments upon, and incorporates already existing works. This is hardly

because they are bereft of ideas or enthusiasm, but instead provides a telling account of cultural production tout court. After all, we are consumed by a desire to repeat. In Harold Ramis' film *Groundhog Day*, the central character, played by Bill Murray relives the same day over and over again with hilarious consequences. Ramis plays with the possibility that forearmed with knowledge, practice makes perfect. In music, on the other hand, one of the most popular song-forms is now the cover-version. If a tune was popular some years ago, why not re-record it using current artists? The *Brit Awards* in 2003 saw a performance of a *Blondie* song from the 1980s performed by teen idol Justin Timberlake accompanied by Kylie Minogue. Here we have a repeat version of a well-known hit, reprised for an audience who are too young to have grown up with the original but who are aware of its classic status, performed by a new artist, together with one who bridges the gap between the two periods. You can have your cake and eat it (again and again) in an ecstasy of false memories.

Brüggemann's more formal work has been accompanied in more recent years by his video diaries. These are labyrinthine, spiralling works which chronicle the artist's personal life. They register like out-takes from his more obviously productive periods. In other words, they represent the downtime when the artist is not clearly engaged in making specific works. They variously depict Brüggemann walking about in different cities (he privately abhors the countryside) talking to friends, sleeping and horsing around with his girlfriend. The unsteady camerawork, lack of editing pretension and general adolescent

atmosphere combine to render these lengthy films enjoyable in the most disengaged of fashions. They are unpretentious diaries devoid of coherent narrative in the manner of Andy Warhol's or Richard Linklater's films. However, what appears like the depiction of a type of boredom, is in fact a calculated and repetitive pattern which appears to reveal the artist's private life. It is therefore particularly puzzling that nothing beyond the artist's appearance is given away. We do not know who the different characters are, nor are we aware of what they do. Instead, we are presented with opaque surfaces which remain impervious to scrutiny. A similar approach can be seen in the artist's printed works, in which he cuts pages from glossy fashion and style magazines. The images of male and female models are gently doctored by the artist and presented as his own works. At face value, they might be seen as critical of consumer-culture or the beauty myth in contemporary post-capitalist society. However, like Vanessa Beecroft's arrangements of live models, these works neither seek to critique nor celebrate any of the above. They are offered without judgement and do not amount to a clear position or statement, though they are deliberate and precise.

These works return us to Bruggemann's installation 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia': in all of these an *attitude* of criticism prevails. They appear to address social or political issues, yet demonstrably fail to deliver any such comments. Instead, they endlessly repeat the availability of such a position without actually assuming it. In this game everything is available yet nothing can

be substantiated: the cause is capitalism, the medium is the mirror, the result is schizophrenia.

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1. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction* Lukas & Sternberg, New York, 2002
 2. op.cit. Gilles Deleuze, in: *The Continental Philosophy Reader*, Kearney & Rainwater (eds), Routledge, London, 1996.
 3. op.cit. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction* Lukas & Sternberg, New York, 2002
 4. Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 2002.