

HANS HAACKE
Victoria Miro Gallery

The momentous 'discovery' of linguistics concerning the arbitrary relationship of signifier to signified in the theory of signs soon gave rise to the recognition that there can be no ultimate reality knowable to humankind - all existence is constituted in and through language. Unfortunately when this conception of a basically 'meaningless' world was taken up by a part of the New York artworld it was filtered through the post '68 disillusionment of Jean Baudrillard, who, reversing the optimism of Nietzsche, wedded his deep fatalism and sense of loss at the 'disappearance' of the 'real' to the naive and totalising analysis of media by Marshall McLuhan. The medium is the message and the message is that the media have penetrated every space, consumerism has colonised every individual and resistance is 'structurally' impossible. Life has 'always' been illusion but now thanks to advertising it is merely a media spectacle lived through signs.

The marriage of Baudrillard's pessimistic structuralism with the careerism of New York's 'hot new realists' has been disastrous. As we all know, everyday life under the sign of capital is 'pornographic' - we don't need to quote Baudrillard to acknowledge that labels like 'kitsch' and 'art' have been equalised and are now interchangeable, as Haim Steinbach does in a recent issue of Parkett. Formalism, (now in its new guise as communications theory) as is well known, is part of an American tendency to globalise all events - so prevalent from Greenberg to McLuhan to Reagan - in its attempt to colonise the world.

It is probably no accident that simulation theory caught on around the same time that Ivan Boesky announced to America that 'we don't have to feel guilty anymore.' It is no surprise that Saatchi collects so avidly art that is a sign for art - a simulation - the collapse of art into advertising. What is surprising, however, is that intelligent as Steinbach, Koons, Halley et al are they have not read Foucault and changed their alibis. On the other hand perhaps it isn't, as even Baudrillard does not know what to do with this great 'success'.

This totalising of theories concerning the reality of our corporate state conveniently allows most artists, critics and philosophers to forget about sites of local resistance which, despite rumours to the contrary, can effect change, because as we know from those very same theories, all ideologies being merely signs are reversible. In the show Global Marketing at Victoria Miro Gallery, Haacke's



Hans Haacke *The Saatchi Collection (Simulations)* 1987

strategy of 'plagiarism with a purpose' has produced three works, one of which is a Steinbach tri-partite laminated shelf in the colours of the South African flag with a collection of not-so-neutral commodities sitting on top. References are made to the Saatchi involvements in South Africa, including the KMP-Compton run 'whitewashing of apartheid's advertising campaigns.

On the wall above, looking very much like one of the Kray brothers, is the art loving Charles with a quote of his appropriated from Lenin which states that 'everything is connected to everything else.' Like the ideologists of the British New Right he must have attended the same seminars on appropriation in New York as all the artists did. Sitting on one of the shelves to the left (of course) is a Jeff Koons cast of Lenin in shiny aluminium.

What Haacke has in common with much of the work that he is plagiarising here is the issue of 'complicity' - a strategy of subversion from within and a partial reliance upon the importance of the institution deconstructed - a strategy made inevitable by the 'failure' of the sixties counter-culture. However what differentiates him is that he uses institutional complicity to reveal the specific connections between art and power and to give others a voice. The refusal of the silent majority of simulated artworks (and artists) has been appropriated and as a strategy of

subversion is no longer effective.

The silence of our institutions regarding South Africa and other 'political' issues in the name of art's autonomy serves the interests of neo-colonial power. If such 'autonomy' has been undermined and revealed to be a construct of language by the work of Koons, Steinbach and Halley, Haacke now asks us in whose interests this language is being used. The silence concerning the fate of resistant bodies' in our "designer world free of repression and exploitation" is perhaps the real pornography of our wonderful culture.

Art in Ruins.

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