

PROPOSE PAR JEROME SANS

DES EMBLEMES COMME ATTITUDES

ABR STUTTGART - ART IN RUINS - BP
GENERAL IDEA - GROUP MATERIAL
INFORMATION FICTION PUBLICITE®
STILLE HELDEN e.V.

EMBLEMS AS ATTITUDES

Art in Ruins, ABR Stuttgart, BP, General Idea, Group Material, Information Fiction Publicité (IFP), Stille Helden e.V., all artists who as much in London, Stuttgart, Paris, Toronto as in New York or Hamburg... approach art today using a different name from their own personal name, a collective name, through a refusal to express each person's own individuality. This disindividuation is certainly part of a general impulse which has marked the history of art since Manet in a significant way, in particular through the various breaks in continuity provoked by successive avant-garde movements up until the 70s, then through people's individual approach. However, this idea of artists being grouped together under a collective name, a decisive step in this individuation process which has its roots in history — from the Surrealist Bureau to European artists grouped around publications like De Stijl, Gegenstand, Ma... right up to N. E. Thing and Co, l'Office de Fend, Art and Language — is being particularly developed at the present time, involving countries such as Yugoslavia (Irwin), Sweden (Paperpool International Corporation), Italy (Premiata Ditta)...

Far from being merely the result of fashion, this attitude exposes a social phenomenon in the widest sense of the term: the disposal of «I». In a society in which man is increasingly an «individual with undefined outlines: sex, appearance, life style» (Michel Maffesoli), an individual who has become social and melted into the collective cause, an individual who can only subsist, extend and defend himself — «becoming indignant is a group activity» (Durkheim) — through a group, in a world made up of endlessly interlocking structures, whether they be political, social, religious, sporting or cultural... «Living man is a group», Proudhon maintained in his time, and by giving man this feeling of isolation, post-industrial society has at the same time created in him an increased need to belong to a group, no matter how ephemeral, which technological development (cable, the various data processing message services) has made possible and swept along with it, as Michel Maffesoli again noted in his «Tribe Time», where he speaks of «neo-tribalism». Identity has passed from the particular to the general and the image from the specific to the generic. «Us» is a new identity in the contemporary world, despite today's stubborn desire to assert one's difference within the generality.

It is from this perspective that we can look at the problem posed by those artists who use the image of structure under a generic name, with all the «impersonality power» (Gilbert Durand) that can imply. But by taking their means and their new identity from the world, they are in no way evading the issue so they can blend into the world or find the comfort of a refuge. It is on the contrary, for each of the generic names, a way of taking up a deliberate position. Individuality, which was in a certain way one of the historical bases of the exhibition — «When attitudes become forms» — here, to some extent, meets its opposite: it leaves room in each of the «groups» for a shared adventure, a common programme; a programme which is defined but open, a policy which is not in any way doctrinal, the opening we generally find in the collective name put forward.

But they are not groups in the strict sense of the word and the problems they pose are not those of artists working in duos such as Gilbert and George, or Clegg and Guttmann... even though these combined names may appear to be a trade name (Saatchi and Saatchi, for example). In a kind of way they work just like in a company or an agency, within the trade name which is declared right from the start: from that point in time becoming a corporate body and no longer individuals. A structure which without any doubt corresponds to contemporary society which hinges on companies and consultancy firms. It is no longer the artist as individual, that heroic and slightly idealistic figure taking on the world alone, but an «artist-cell» which can be represented by any one of its members and which does not exclude the intervention of other artists who may be allowed into the «cell».

It is no longer exclusively the idea of the artist producing art objects, but can serve as an organism which thinks things out and can intervene at all levels of this modern multi-media society, in which each person plays a role in terms of the social model he is attributed. By being both actor and spectator at the same time, each member reproduces the world's theatrical side. In a certain way they plunge straight into a new dimension of the idea of representation which, from being an exclusivity of the art world, has now in the era of omnipresent, planetary communication, taken hold of the modern universe.

Their name, metonym of their collective will, of their attitude to history, art and the world, often speaks for itself and is vivid like a word picture. In a period when the image has trouble existing, has trouble resisting, so often is it called into question and replaced by others, in a period when the image has lost its power as an icon even though it still has the power to fascinate and man is still trying a trifle frenetically to produce even more, despite the prevailing plethora — and the same is true for data and objects — the only ones to be rescued from oblivion are repeated or generic images. In appearing as an emblem or a sign, their name toys with this new specificity: the name-sign, producing sense, at a pinch suffices by itself and can be put forward as a work. Not without a certain desire for ambiguity. A name which exists over and above the individuals which make up its entity, which can therefore go on lasting concretely and do away with the idea of a cycle being limited by an artist's lifespan. An ambitious project which can seem like some new challenge thrown in face of death, of urgency and at the speed entailed by the world of a man like Paul Virilio, and also like the possibility of fixing some trace in time over a longer period, for an individual «is not an end, but an ephemeral episode in the history of knowledge» (Michel Foucault). A project nevertheless which in fact keeps an idea of the fragility which reigns over the contemporary world intact.

This is a long way from Marcuse's negative vision, which saw massive conditioning in industrial society through technological rationalization, imposing the same products and the same behaviour on everyone. The attitude of these artists working under the same emblem, truly contemporary behaviour which for all that has not led them to formulate a genre nor standardize their desires, is in fact the emblematic face of a new freedom in relation to art and to the world. It is as much a question of attitudes as emblems.

Jérôme Sans



STILLE HELDEN e. V
HIER KANN SICH IHRE SPENDE SEHEN LASSEN, 1988,
ECOLE DES BEAUX-ARTS DE TOURCOING

INFORMATION FICTION PUBLICITÉ
ENSEIGNEMENT, 1988,
INSTALLATION, ECOLE DES BEAUX-ARTS DE TOURCOING

ART IN RUINS

FORMÉ EN 1984. GLYN BANKS. HANNAH VOWLES, LONDON.

Dans notre merveilleuse culture où l'illusion d'un monde créatif, libre de toute répression et de toute exploitation, «masque» l'angoisse devant les corps résistants, nous errons d'un fragment à l'autre à travers les cités des morts dans notre grand musée d'intentions ruinées. Nous vivons une vie de ruines dans le nouveau réalisme de notre condition sociale post-moderne, où la «différence» sociale et culturelle est soit *limitée* au spectacle, soit *étendue* au style, mais se doit, dans les deux cas, d'être consommée par le tourisme et où l'art, au lieu d'être un signal d'alarme, n'est plus que le symptôme d'une époque. «Ce qui apparaît tout d'abord comme un travail extravagant et bizarre s'avère en fait n'être qu'un travail réaliste et sombre, à peine allégorique.» Confronté à ces installations, le spectateur est transformé en *voyeur* de la pornographie de leur propre disparition en tant que «sujets» pour devenir les (objets d') industries de promotion et de technologie, ainsi que de la disparition de l'art et de l'architecture dans l'administration, la publicité et la mode (dans la simulation: une économie générale de signes échangés sans autre référence que chacun d'entre eux).

Le «monde réel» et le «moi réel» (l'objet et le sujet) ont également disparu. Ayant toujours été inconnaisables eux-mêmes — ce sont en fait des fictions de langage — ils sont maintenant, dans la société de consommation post-moderne, devenus des fonctions de l'impératif technologique (systèmes d'exploitation, d'administration et de contrôle: l'escalade sans limites «de la maîtrise et du pouvoir sur la Nature» au nom de «l'émancipation») d'une part, et d'une éthique de consommateur avec une subjectivité de créateur (le corps envahi par ces systèmes afin de produire le sujet désirant et consommant) d'autre part. Le véritable corps lui-même devient une ruine échouée entre l'identité institutionnelle de l'impératif technologique et la *subjectivité du créateur*.

Le «corps résistant» (non pas un «individu possessif» mais un corps *social*); dans son incarnation provocante et «sentimentale» de la connaissance, de l'allégorie et de la complicité (avec les fictions), nécessite que les exigences éthiques, morales et politiques soient réexprimées, maintenant que l'art lui-même a disparu, en ne laissant que des fictions servant à dissimuler ce fait.

DESSIN DES CITES DES MORTS: PLACE ROUGE.

Le rouge (Constructiviste) de la Révolution (Russe) (le sang des martyrs) signifiait en général (la) Libération (de la Classe Ouvrière); actuellement (à La Villette) il signifie (leur finale) disparition (Déconstruction) (dans l'Abstraction... la Masse) (?).

Le monde post-moderne poursuit le Tango Moderne (l'échange dynamique et d'exploitation) entre Vérité et Beauté, entre Production et Consommation (Rationalisme et Romantisme) et entre Représentation et Simulation — comme (l'espace conquis de) ce Monde

Crépusculaire de la Puissance de la Mort cherche à se venger du Temps (la décrépitude du corps) au nom de la liberté (émancipation) (de la responsabilité).

«La poursuite nostalgique des référents à valeur permanente comme régulateurs et les refus nihilistes du discours sur la valeur peuvent, tous deux en même temps, être représentatifs des répliques, des incarnations et des effets mimétiques du déplacement vampirique post-moderne de la vie-valeur orientée vers la création.» (d'après John Fekete: «Vampire Value» in «Life after Postmodernism — Essays on Value and Culture» édité chez Macmillan, Londres, 1988.)

Détails de l'installation:

Musique: «Blind Alley Tango» de Gabriel Yared, tiré du film de Jean-Jacques Beineix «La lune dans le caniveau». Moules en plâtre prêtés par l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Tourcoing. Chèvre du Cachemire, renard et lièvre prêtés par Warnie et Tessie, Tourcoing.



In our wonderful culture where the illusion of a designer world free of repression and exploitation «masks» the anxiety of resistant bodies, we wander from fragment to fragment through the cities of the dead of our great museum of ruined intentions. We live a life of ruins in the new realism of our postmodern social condition where social and cultural «difference» is either *fixed* as spectacle or *released* as style both to be consumed by tourism, and where art, rather than a warning sign, has become nothing more than a symptom of the times.

«What appears at first to be a work of bizarre fancy turns out in fact to be a work of sombre and only slightly allegorical realism.» With these installations the spectator is turned into a *voyeur* of the pornography of their own disappearance as «subjects» into (objects of) the promotional and technological indus-

tries along with the corresponding disappearance of art and architecture into administration, advertising and fashion (into simulation: a general economy of signs exchanged with no referent but to each other). The «real» and the «self» (the object and the subject) have also disappeared. Having always been unknowable in themselves — rather they are fictions of language — they have now, in postmodern consumer society, become functions of a technological imperative (systems of exploitation, administration and control: the unlimited growth of «the mastery and power over Nature» in the name of «emancipation») on the one hand, and of a consumer ethic of designer subjectivity (the body invaded by those systems to produce the desiring and consuming subject) on the other. The actual body itself becomes a ruin stranded between the *corporate identity* of a technological imperative and a *designer subjectivity*.

This «resistant body» (not a «possessive individual» but a *social body*) in its defiant and «sentimental» embodiment of knowledge, allegory and complicity (with these fictions) requires that ethical, moral and political demands begin to be articulated once again, now that art itself has disappeared, leaving only the fictions used to disguise this fact.

DRAWING FROM CITIES OF THE DEAD: RED SQUARE

The (Constructivist) red of the (Russian) Revolution (the blood of the martyrs) used to signify (the) Liberation (of the Working Class); now today (at La Villette) it signifies (their final) (Deconstruction) disappearance (into Abstraction... the Mass) (?).

The postmodern world continues the Modern Tango (the dynamic and exploitative exchange) between Truth and Beauty, between Production and Consumption (Rationalism and Romanticism) and between Representation and Simulation — as (the conquered Space of) the Twilight World of Dead Power seeks revenge against Time (the decay of the body) in the name of freedom (emancipation) (from responsibility).

«Both the nostalgic pursuit of the permanent value referents as regulators and the nihilistic refusals of value discourse altogether, may be perhaps characterisable as mimetic replications, incarnations and effects of the vampiric postmodern displacement of creatively orientated value-life.» (From John Fekete: «Vampire value» in «Life after Postmodernism» Essays on Value and Culture. Publ. Macmillan London 1988)

Installation details:

Music: «Blind Alley Tango» by Gabriel Yared from «The Moon in the Gutter» directed by Jean-Jacques Beineix.

Plaster casts lent by Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Tourcoing. Kashmir goat, fox and hare lent by Warnie et Tessie, Tourcoing.



ART IN RUINS

DRAWING FROM CITIES OF THE DEAD: RED SQUARE, 1988
INSTALLATION, ECOLE DES BEAUX-ARTS DE TOURCOING



GENERAL IDEA
AIDS POSTER PROJECT, 1988,
ECOLE DES BEAUX-ARTS DE TOURCOING



GROUP MATERIAL
EDUCATION AND DEMOCRACY 1988,
DIA ART FOUNDATION, NEW YORK



ART IN RUINS & STILLE HELDEN e.V.
WO SICH FUCHS UND HASE GUTE NACHT SAGEN 1988
(WHERE THE FOX AND HARE SAY GOOD NIGHT)
INSTALLATION, ECOLE DES BEAUX-ARTS DE TOURCOING

EMBLEMES COMME ATTITUDES
CURATED BY JEROME SANS
ECOLE DES BEAUX-ARTS DE TOURCOING, FRANCE 1988
INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPHS BY EDWARD WOODMAN