

VIDEO AS PRODUCTION

I remember a discussion in which Saskia Bos and I both participated about the policy of De Appel Foundation in which the debate concentrated on the distinction between "production" and "project;" "production" or "project" being the process of assisting artists to realize and exhibit works of art. As might be expected, almost everyone who participated in the discussion favored the term "production."

A few months later, the French magazine, Art Press, published an article by Elisabeth Lebovici entitled "What Remains Is Art As Production," in which she states, "Vocabulary changes: today we no longer say the 'oeuvre' of and artist, but his/her 'production.' When and why does this substitution of one word for another occur? What are the boundaries of this apparently comforting quarrel of words? And does the cinema, the privileged site of 'production,' help us to see more clearly...." 1

It is particularly interesting that the current fascination, especially in Europe, with the idea of "exhibition" as well as the "programme" 2 and mise-en-scene of the exhibition, seems to pay tribute to the world of cinema. In another issue of Art Press dedicated to the history of the Cinematheque in Paris we read: "to screen films is an activity which reflects and questions contemporary culture in its entirety." In addition, Dominique Paini continues: "This practice of programming assumes, therefore, the job of realizing work, of putting it back into operation." 3 About the same time, Vincent Bioules remarked in Cahiers du Musee National d'Art Moderne, "to hang a show is to put a work in a place destined to produce the work and not just to show it." 4

While this distinction may be valid, we must also recognize that the idea of "production" cannot be the only goal. There must be something else. One should resist both the modernist notion of "production" and the post-modernist notion of heterogeneous or multi-disciplinary work. To consider either argument as an absolute is false. Instead, as Frederic Migayrou suggested in an unpublished critique of the article by Lebovici, one should strive for a "complementary necessity" in the sense of "a synchronic use of the process of construction." Or, to use the words of Saskia Bos, "one should think of artists who are able to react through various media in a given situation, or who are able to create another situation." 5

This video program can therefore be considered a complement to the works in the exhibition. Indeed, both the exhibition

fictions in the objects of Alain Sechas and in the "TV series" by Alain Bourges stem principally from the working process itself: to 'make' a object, to 'make' a film. Jan Van Oost's installations and the megalomaniacal enterprise of Koen Theys, which adapts Wagner's Ring for the TV screen, invest in the exhibition of the work of art, which finally is only an ongoing process of fictionalization.

Most of these video tapes question the idea of "the death of the author". In the work of Koen Theys, the original text is Wagner's, whereas in Alain Bourges' work, for instance, the texts of James Joyce and Arnold Doblin as well as film texts by Jean Luc Godard and Raoul Ruiz are continually cited. "If, as Marcel Broodthaers states (responding to Joseph Kosuth's "Art as Idea as Idea") there remains only 'art as production as production,' it remains also only to produce it in the legal form which structures the aesthetic discourse on 'the death of the author.'" 6

On the other hand, the video works of Graham Young and Studio's Independent Theatre locate anonymity in the foreground: in the place where one might look for the author. This anonymity also casts its shadow over the slow, mundane, even trivial activities preferred by Graham Young and Gerrit Timmers. Absolute Art, a tape about the life of an unknown Dutch abstract painter in the early 1900's, makes the point very clear. Speaking about his tape, Gerrit Timmers states: "most of the painters we know are not famous and they will never be. Yet all of them, the more promising as well as the mediocre ones, believe in their production...." 7

The work of Alain Bourges, Studio's Independent Theatre, Koen Theys and Graham Young are hardly known in the world of 'high video art'. Yet they represent a rare coherence and intelligence, which does not have to do with traditional notions of video. Therefore, this video exhibition should not be seen as a survey of young European video artists, but as a collection of individual works by artists who happen to also make video. Maybe they will change their minds about video, but what matters is that all these artists reflect a 'contained attitude' toward the medium of video itself.

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1. Art Press, No. 107, October, 1986. translated by Valerie Smith.

2. The idea of "programme" refers to Marcel Broodthaers' manifesto. Le Programme

3. Art Press, No, 105, July-August 1986. translated by Valerie Smith.

4. Lebovici, op.cit. translated by Valerie Smith

5. Bos, Saskia, unpublished report for De Appel Foundation, 1986.

6. Lebovici, op.cit. translated by Valerie Smith

7. Timmers, Gerrit, program for Absolute Art, 1985