**IN ART, NOTHING IS CREATED, NOTHING IS LOST, EVERYTHING IS TRANSFORMED – IT WOULD BE STRANGE IF THIS FILM DIDN’T EXIST. Paulo Herkenhoff, 1982.**

Brassieres, coffee grinders, postcards, stamps, calendars, puzzles etc.

Or the “Venus of Milo”, Millet, Duchamp (or Donatello), the Aurignacian period (or Max Bill), Rothko, et alli. After all, everybody wears Levi’s, including Michelangelo’s elegant David and the (neo) classic Jacques Louis David.

It would be very strange if this film didn’t exist. In a sense, it replicates issues present in the works of Essila Paraíso. It is a work that, in order to make itself economically viable, had to build itself strategically, in compliance to the rules that regulate the market: the film is split into two tomes, rather like an art history compendium. Like the film market’s tolerance of short-length films: each volume bearing the maximum length allowed by screening in big movie houses. The film is perhaps one more work for Essila Paraíso’s “Art History”. Piece number 699 in this huge collection.

From the get-go, “Art History” stands in confrontation with Benjamin’s celebrated essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. It is a moot point that the indeterminacy inherent to optical devices occasions a qualitative transformation in the gaze. In the film, certain shots offer new points-of-view, intimacy with objects: the cake, the chalice, the lighter. However, how preposterous the scene in which, during Essila’s exhibition, someone gazes into a round puzzle as intently as one would an original by Robert Delaunay (“Simultaneous Disc”, oil on canvas, 1912)… Easy, now! The artist has no intention of proposing a comeback of the cult of authenticity, or the fetishization of the original. She is only asking, and subtly, if the techniques we have at our disposal are indeed suitable for replicating 20th century works of art satisfactorily: in that period, the artist focused primarily on issues relating primarily to the work’s materiality (texture, weight, dye, dimensions, light, etc). At present, Essila Paraíso works through the absence of the original in order to stress our contemporary anxieties regarding the materiality of the work of art.

The widespread argument – or strategy of ignorance – according to which certain intelligent artworks are generally elitist thus undergoes a litmus test. The music in the film has been composed by Philip Glass, that American identified with the ‘arid’ and difficult *New Music* movement, a sound which is *nothing*: monotonous, repetitious, dull – or so will a mediocre frame of mind have it. But that self-same mediocrity will – in the colourful motion picture, in the cosy dark of the screening room – enjoy the compelling pleasures of sound. Kinaesthesia wraps up the ham, served up for the consumption of the allergic.

Essila Paraíso’s “Art History” exhibit (*Espaço ABC, 1980*) felt like a supermarket to me. The most baffling merchandise were there recounting, bit by bit, the history of art. And they did, in fact, witness a political moment in art. Essila’s work is extremely unpleasant. It had better attain no importance; it must not be seen or analysed.

How trivial, these objects in which works of art were printed! Neither kitsch nor pop – inexpressive. Some not tropical at all. Others, bordering on elegant. Humour, a nuisance to us living artists, insofar as we may ourselves one day come to witness the dilution of our own artworks printed onto any old material, haughty or naughty. Who could have ever suspected that Sol LeWitt, Genovés, Twombly and Oppenheim had already passed onto “Art History”, this anthropophagy of economy?

If art really is no better than ham (Mario Pedrosa), is critique then nothing more than a marketing ploy like any other? The answer belongs neither to artists nor critics.

The phenomenon is no one’s privilege. The Argentinian *dulce de membrillo*, or the pack of braided cotton, smile to us in the store with Mona Lisa’s enigmatic smile. Da Vinci would have incurred into sound dividends also in the field of Japanese fans and African stamps, as well as other geographical rubrics.

The artist replaces the “victims” of the art-market ideology. Replaces them for grouches hungry for monopoly, for the circulation of their own products, market booms, record breaks, reviews in the specialized press, etc. She places them squarely in the capitalist (art) market as such.

And what are production conditions like in said art market? Dire! Non-existent copyright laws, low quality of the national product, coteries etc – this according to many. Highly competitive, a cold economic analyst might venture. Individualistic producers competing amongst themselves all the time. The “Art History” addresses all that. Essila mercilessly points out the naivete of any artist who attempts to practice, with their work, perversities against the dominant factors of the art circuit.

In the film’s closing scene, someone steals the last piece in the exhibition: an Australian dollar bill bearing drawings of Aborigines. Whether he’ll spend it of hang it on a wall, I don’t know. If he’s crazy, as most people would say, then he’ll tear up the symbol.

**Paulo Herkenhoff**

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