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REFERENCES

Bruce Altshuler. *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History 1962-2002*, Londres : Phaidon, 2013

Evelyne Toussaint. *Africa Remix : une exposition en questions*, Bruxelles : La Lettre volée, 2013, (Essais)

When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013, Milan : Fondazione Prada, 2013. Sous la dir. de Germano Celant

- 1 The existence of the history of exhibitions as a discipline needs no further demonstration. Publications which started to appear in the early 1990s have been growing in number for a good ten years, as have specialized magazines.¹ Nor is the institutional field being outdone: publishing house are inaugurating collections, museums are launching self-reflective research programmes, and universities and art schools are offering courses focusing on the study and practice of exhibitions—something that some have in fact already been doing for several decades.² The re-materialization of exhibitions proceeding by way of quotation, complete reconstruction and partial remake has become a frequent phenomenon.
- 2 Yet the reasons for this return to the past are far from being as evident. Over and above the spectacular character that exhibitions can bring to discreet works, to what kind of historical thinking are we invited by their reconstruction, in books and museums alike? What relation do they have with the present? The three books in question here offer very different answers: for Bruce Altshuler, the form of the selective anthology makes it possible to sketch the decisive trends in the art world between the 1960s and the 2000s; the group catalogue edited by Germano Celant for his remake of Harald Szeemann's exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969) opts for a binary contrast between past and

present; in Evelyne Toussaint's monograph, the presentation in Paris of *Africa Remix* in 2005 becomes the pretext for a train of thought about the current state of post-colonial studies in France.

- 3 Bruce Altshuler's book winds up an approach embarked upon 20 years ago with *The Avant-garde in Exhibition*, one of the first attempts to offer an historical narrative through the grouping of several exhibitions.³ The first part of *Exhibitions That Made Art History* linked up with his powerful ideas: the reciprocity between artistic experiments and experimental exhibiting, the exhibition as a social space for modern artistic praxes.⁴ The second part, *Biennials and Beyond*, proposes a different assessment. Among the 25 events used to illustrate the period from 1962 to 2002, only *Freeze*, produced in 1988, can be connected with group exhibitions of artists. If those of the 1960s and 1970s attest to a close collaboration between artistic propositions and choices of curators, (the card-index-exhibitions of Lucy R. Lippard, the catalogue-exhibitions of Seth Siegelaub, Wim Beeren's *Sonsbeek 7*, and Kynaston McShine's *Primary Structures* and *Information*), many others describe a geopolitically exploded history (the 2nd Havana Biennial in 1986, the 1998 São Paulo Biennial, *The Bulldozer Exhibition* in Moscow in 1974, *China/Avant-Garde*, in Beijing in 1989), written increasingly by curators in response to more global societal changes (from Jean-François Lyotard and Thierry Chaput with *Les Immatériaux* of 1985 to Hans Ulrich Obrist and Hou Hanru with *Cities on the Move* in 1997). In the hypothesis posited by these publishing choices, the symbolic dynamics of the past 50 years is less dictated by specific collective events, reacting to transformations of works, than by the assertion of a specialized sphere in which the professionalization of the exhibition curator's job, theme shows and large international events represent the principle symptoms. This historical proposition gradually abandons the categories linked with artistic practices as well as models based on national representation, in favour of an approach which is at once more institutional and more globalized. We may remain sceptical about the marginalization of the recent artistic uses of the exhibition, but the direction chosen by Bruce Altshuler raises real questions, for example when he wonders if the distancing of the visual spectacle in favour of the discursive approach remains the only way for the by now very heavy exhibition industry to link back up with a socially meaningful function (*Documenta XI*, with Okwui Enzewe).
- 4 Defining a unique position based on Germano Celant's catalogue turns out to be harder, probably because of its complex ambition: celebrating, between the lines, his re-exhibition of *When Attitudes Become Form*, while, on the surface, weaving a web of interpretations which—seemingly, at least—do not deal with it directly. This ambivalence appears in the structure of the book whose texts, the product of many contributors, are framed by two sets of photographs. In the guise of an overture, a plentiful series of images exhaustively (although they are for the most part anonymous: no photographer's name is mentioned) re-creates the circuit of spaces and works exhibited by Harald Szeemann in 1969, thus complementing the photographic documentation which appeared in the recent reference monograph.⁵ At the end, a less plentiful series of colour photographs taken by Thomas Demand documents the spaces and works of the 2013 version in a theatrical and carefully crafted aesthetic. Within this visual context, place of choice goes to Germano Celant's approach, explained in his essay, in the interview with him conducted by "the Prada Foundation team, journalists and friends",⁶ and in the slightly tense dialogues between the curator and Rem Koolhaas and Thomas Demand. The 16 other shorter contributions discuss remake and reproduction practices in exhibitions

(Dieter Roelstraete, Claire Bishop, Pierre Bal-Blanc, Francesco Stocchi, Boris Groys), present a reminder of the decisive aspects of the 1969 exhibition (Charles Esche, Christian Rattemeyer, Anne Rorimer, Gwen L. Allen) criticize their limits (Jens Hoffmann, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh) and wind up with the figure of the curator which henceforth has to be associated with the name of Szeemann (Terry Smith, Jan Verwoert, Glenn Phillips). One or two texts hold out against these general themes (Mary Anne Staniszewski, Chus Martínez).

- 5 What reading of history is proposed by this catalogue and the re-exhibition which it accompanies? Germano Celant's response is straight and to the point: Harald Szeemann's exhibition henceforth represents a readymade which the curator appropriates and shifts from its original context (Bern in 1969) to a new context (Venice in 2013) using the intervention of Rem Koolhaas's architects' office, which rebuilt an exact replica of the structure of the Kunsthalle within the 18th century Venetian palazzo housing the Prada Foundation. Just as Marcel Duchamp's gesture replaces aesthetic judgment by a nominalist act, Germano Celant protects himself from any vague interpretative desire, and from any judgment and opinion about the past, by asserting that the clash and gap between these two architectural contexts is the counterpart to the provocative and experimental gauntlet which *When Attitudes Become Form* threw down at that time at the museum order. For Germano Celant, it is a matter of "bring[ing] back the past exactly as it was":⁷ an ambition upheld by his special status as a long-standing exhibition curator, an exact contemporary of Harald Szeemann, and a direct witness. The idea of the exhibition as readymade is implicitly explained in the article by Boris Groys ("Art Topology: The Reproduction of Aura", p. 451-546), for whom the de-historicized copy is the most faithful answer to the 1969 project in which he posits the rejection of the notion of originality as the central preoccupation, consequently concluding with the absurdity of any attempt at historical inscription. For Germano Celant, the at once spatial and historical break created by inserting the Bern maquette into a Venetian palazzo should produce a "perceptual fusion", a both physical and sensorial effect on the visitor.⁸ Surprisingly, his arguments, like those of Boris Groys, are underpinned by a rather mechanical vision of history which reduces the past to a box of now lifeless old objects, to a series of "facts", the opposite of archaeological thinking in Foucauldian terms, and to the detriment of the discursive dimension which nevertheless was the strength behind Harald Szeemann's event. Several other texts (Charles Esche, Francesco Stocchi, Dieter Roelstraete) seek to identify the most important change between 1969 and 2013, and contrast two time-frames, if not two periods: the bygone time of the modernist utopias of change through art, the pursuit of the new and the rejection of the past, and our period, whose instinct for repetition and archive might fill in the cracks of memory in the face of a too rapid acceleration of experience. Indirectly, these readings of the past as inoperative and behind the times in the present are aligned with Germano Celant's refusal to think of the process of reconstruction as a process of translation.
- 6 There is no consensus, however, about this binary vision of history and the remake. Jens Hoffmann, curator in 2012 in San Francisco of a remake of the exhibition in Bern,⁹ tells how, unlike Germano Celant, he opted for a deliberately partial updating, in dialogue with contemporary works, while at the same time criticizing the pitfalls of Harald Szeemann (lack of readability, ambiguity of commercial funding, lack of openness to practices outside the West). Far from opposing the present, the past, with Jens Hoffmann ("Attitude Problems", p. 491-494) underpins the desire for resistance to the bureaucratic and

security rules of the present-day art world. Anachronism as an operational time-frame is also a powerful argument in the examination that Claire Bishop (“Reconstruction Era: The Anachronic Time(s) of Installation Art”, p. 429-436) proposes with regard to exhibition reconstruction practices since the 1970s. She suggests that one of the rare antidotes to the museum “experience economy”¹⁰ which has been predominant over the past 20 years, and to its commercial ramifications, would be to look among artists (Superflex or the Museum of American Art) whose reconstructions combine two time-frames within an “anachronic object”: the representation of the archive and that of an actual voice.¹¹ Two other texts decompartmentalize historical narratives exclusively focused on exhibitions and their remakes, in the direction of the history of ideas and social practices. By including Harald Szeemann’s initiative in the long-term practices of alternative American spaces, Mary Anne Staniszewski (“Alternatives and Attitudes: Today and Yesterday”, p. 457-468) emphasizes the persistence—and not the disappearance—of the utopian dimension of artistic projects up to the present day. In a stimulating essay about the philosophical and sociological extensions of the notion of “attitude”, Chus Martínez offers what might be read as a subtle and pertinent critique of the limits of Germano Celant’s undertaking (“The Politics of Attitudes: On the Relationship Between Attitudes, Skepticism and Disengagement”, p. 511-518). Neither psychological category, nor simply a gesture, attitude, according to her, should be understood as a cognitive structure producing forms which are so many kinds of knowledge. The confusion over the significance and the landmarks arising from the art of *When Attitudes Become Form* thus dons a political dimension, where Germano Celant’s readymade conception creates an impasse, by museifying it.

- 7 Evelyne Toussaint’s book about the travelling show *Africa Remix*, held in 2005 at the Centre Pompidou, painstakingly examines the discursive agencies which contribute to the event (choice of artists and works, critical opinions, positions of the curators, associated lectures) and links them with the challenges of post-colonial studies, following a juxtaposition of positions and varied statements which tend to erase the specificity of the exhibition itself as a situation producing meaning, and render the voice of the author inaudible. The major difficulty posed by the verbal and material reconstruction of exhibitions shows through here: grasping a multiple, composite and ephemeral object, and making it intelligible in the present.

NOTES

1. See the summary proposed by Jens Hoffmann in: “Curating Between the Lines”, *Critique d’art*, no41, spring-summer 2013, p. 73-85.
2. Cf. *Exhibition Histories* published by Afterall in London, the programme of the VanAbbe Museum in Eindhoven in the early 2010s and the research projects under way at the Centre Pompidou and the MoMA in New York.
3. Altshuler, Bruce. *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century*, New York : Harry N. Abrams, 1994

4. Altshuler, Bruce. *Salon to Biennial – Exhibitions That Made Art History*, vol.1: 1863-1959, London ; New York : Phaidon, 2008
5. Christian Rattemeyer et al., *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969*, London: Afterall, 2010
6. *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, Venice : Fondazione Prada, 2013, p. 393. Edited by Germano Celant
7. *Ibid.*, p. 405
8. *Ibid.*, p. 418
9. *When Attitudes Became Form Become Attitudes* took place at the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art in San Francisco from 12 September to 1st December 2012.
10. Celant, Germano, *Op. cit.*, p. 433
11. *Ibid.*, p. 436