Vito Acconci

Vincent Pécoil

Translator: Simon Pleasance

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REFERENCES

Vito Hannibal Acconci Studio, Nantes : Musée des beaux-arts ; Barcelone : Museu d'art contemporani, 2004

Vito Acconci / Acconci Studio. Espace public : une architecture en projet, Rennes : Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2004, (Présent composé n°3)

- 1 Vito Acconci's current activities in France (at the Museum of Fine Art in Nantes, 16 July-17 October 2004) are accompanied by the most comprehensive catalogue *Vito Hannibal Acconci Studio*, jointly published by the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona (MACBA)¹. This is a guarantee of quality, as a general rule, as far as this latter's publications are concerned. The retrospective publication focuses on all the artist's many-faceted work: poetry, performance, installations, video, architecture... In some areas, the book is exhaustive, because, for example, all Acconci's poems, published in the 1960s, have been brought together for the occasion. Acconci's poems may attest to certain affinities with Minimalism, but in many respects their author's itinerary calls to mind that of his friend and colleague Dan Graham. By envisaging the page as a new site or art place, Acconci proceeds—in a way comparable to the movement made by Minimal Art and Conceptual Art—to shift the attention of the viewer-reader of the work itself to its contextual frame (in this instance the page, or the magazine), culminating in a state of phenomenological awareness by the reader of himself as reader. Sylvie Mokhtari reminds us of the publishing and authorial activities exercised by Acconci, especially in the magazine *0 to 9*, which he co-published from 1967 to 1969 with Bernadette Mayer—many excerpts from which are reproduced in facsimile. This avant-garde literature review was a roneo'd and stapled publication, with the appearance more of a fanzine than a "review",

at a time—the period of burgeoning Conceptual Art—when the modest nature of media was being promoted.

- 2 These literary concerns, close in spirit to the avant-garde artistic trends of his period, would lead Acconci towards art, properly so-called, in the form of the performance, first of all. The earliest such concerns date back to 1969. The catalogue follows the development of the work in a chronological way—and all of a sudden also goes along with the *logic* of its development. The famous *Following Piece* of 1969 (in which Acconci followed strangers in the street) was thus at the root, if we are to believe what Acconci himself said—a way of “escaping” from literature: “When I made *Following Piece*, it was a way of getting away from the writer’s desk and venture into the city”. The performances as well as the films and videos (then the installations) are soberly documented (often a single image and a short description of the piece). A lengthy discussion between Acconci and the dancer Yvonne Rainer permits the artist to return to the cross-over situation typical of New York at that time, where the interests of dancers, performers, musicians, writers and artists seemed to overlap and interlock more than today. Evidence of as much includes the interview between Vito Acconci and the musician Thurston Moore, who met Acconci for the first time in 1979—another discussion devoted to Acconci’s “literary” as well as musical activities. With regard to this situation, Acconci further declares in the interview with Y. Rainer (p. 35): “In retrospect, I would say that the fact of intervening in the visual arts arena would authorize you, for example, to steal plenty of things coming from other arenas. [...] More progressively, I’ve realized that I was barking up the wrong tree. Otherwise put, rather than bringing the world into art, I said to myself that I now ought to act in such a way that art enters the world.”
- 3 After exploring the literary space (taken in a literal sense, in part), Acconci’s praxis would thus focus on the exploration of other dimensions of space, like the public and private dimensions. From the space of the page to that of the body and the environment, then to the social corpus, to the public place (in the legal, cultural sense...). Due to its “domestic” use, video is one of the preferred tools in this research, which would be followed by installations and architectural projects.
- 4 Slightly apart, but revolving essentially—between the lines—around aporiae and difficulties concerning the notion of a “public” art, the article by Jean-Charles Massera, where the particular subject is the revolution in airline prices and the comparative merits of the commercial strategies of Dell and Compaq, reintroduces with wry and somewhat sour wit the issues of public place and private space, the here and now, and their contemporary sociological conditions. The essay veers away from art towards something else, as Acconci himself in fact does. In this sense, the article *accompanies* the artist’s approach, rather than commenting on it (J-C. Massera: “I am a writer, not an artist. We are not in a catalogue text, but in a lightning attack. This is not an essay about Vito’s work, it is a rewriting machine operating in the foe’s imaginary.”)
- 5 His thinking about public and private spaces, their confusion and their distinction, led Acconci to reorganize his activity under the sign “Acconci Studio”, created in 1988, devoted to projects occurring in the urban and peri-urban space. The projects in the public place are furthermore commented upon in a text by Lillian Pfaff, and by other notices in the catalogue. But it is above all the DVD, included in the publication, which sheds the best light on the matter. Three films document the Acconci Studio projects involving interiors, architecture and urban developments. The views of maquettes and projects made are commented upon in a voice-over by Vito Acconci, like a guided tour.

Constructed in a very convincing way, the DVD is of an incomparable quality among the early laboured tests of this type (I'm thinking of the abominable "cultural" CD-Roms). Lastly, a very comprehensive bio-bibliography rounds off the book, making it a must reference for anyone interested in Vito Acconci's work.

- 6 In tandem, the publication, in DVD form, too, of *Vito Acconci / Acconci Studio. Espace public : une architecture en projet*, documents Acconci Studio architectural projects since 1985. This is a disk produced by the Department of Plastic Arts at Rennes II University. It includes a filmed interview of the artist, and a series of images of the maquettes of his projects, accompanied by commentaries given by Acconci at the moment of their presentation as part of *Architecture, Projects, Built, Unbuilt, Unbuildable, 1983-2000* (exhibition held in 2001 at the ICAR Foundation, Paris). Less flowing, possibly, than the DVD made by the MACBA/Nantes, the whole package (disk and brochure) is in any event of interest because of the interview with Acconci² and the summary introduction about the artist's work³.
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NOTES

1. There are three editions of the catalogue in French, English and Spanish. After Nantes, the exhibition will be on view at the MACBA from 17 November 2004 to 20 February 2005.
2. Interview by *Odradek*, 21 June 2001, ICAR Foundation, Paris
3. Mokhtari, S. "Espace public et représentation", (texte introductif)