Figures and Numbers of the Modern Œuvre

Christophe Domino

Traducteur : Simon Pleasance

Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/2025>

DOI : 10.4000/critiquedart.2025

ISBN : 2265-9404

ISSN : 2265-9404

Éditeur

Groupeement d'intérêt scientifique (GIS) Archives de la critique d'art

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 1 avril 2002

ISBN : 1246-8258

ISSN : 1246-8258

Référence électronique

Christophe Domino, « Figures and Numbers of the Modern Œuvre », *Critique d'art* [En ligne], 19 | Printemps 2002, mis en ligne le 28 février 2012, consulté le 22 avril 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/2025> ; DOI : 10.4000/critiquedart.2025

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 22 avril 2019.

Archives de la critique d'art

Figures and Numbers of the Modern Œuvre

Christophe Domino

Traduction : Simon Pleasance

RÉFÉRENCE

Semin, Didier. *Le Peintre et son modèle déposé*, Genève : Mamco, 2001

Reproductibilité et irréproductibilité de l'œuvre d'art, Bruxelles : La Lettre volée, 2001, (Essais)

- 1 If modernity were not up to the task, the spirit of contract, protocol and negotiation which permeates contemporary artwork would render indispensable the reflection and historical reference that are suggested in the two titles whose subjects are here juxtaposed. Collectively, the authors of *Reproductibilité et irréproductibilité de l'œuvre d'art* have explored the issue of reproducibility regarded, needless to say, based on a theoretical legacy deeply marked by Benjamin, but also considered as a reality in the nevertheless very different forms of 20th century artwork. Didier Semin also constructs his route on the basis of the artists' production in *Le peintre et son modèle déposé*. In a nutshell, he starts out from one of the most verbal regions of the work of art: the contracts and other forms of patent which, on a case-by-case basis, have at times managed to define the existence, or at least a feature, of such and such a work. If both these viewpoints are steered toward reflections dealing with the redefinition of the work of art, this is because they are grounded in an analysis of precise devices and artistic protocols, the account of which already almost stands up, unaided, as a theory. Works which a split-second of pigeonholing frenzy might array within conceptual *œuvres* (based on a wide-ranging definition, incorporating language as a material) may lie at the heart of the analysis, but it is in a much broader way the conceptual dimension of any work that lies in the line of fire of the essays. The problem of notation—one might say of the degrees of transcribability of the works in the case of Nelson Goodman—and the distinction

between autographic order and allographic order have helped to draw anew a descriptive vanishing line, redefining possible places for articulating the discursive in the work. The theoretical angle here tallies with an historical reality: hasn't modernism been thoroughly permeated by a redefinition of the discursive part of the artwork in a movement which resembles an assumption of authority of the visual over the discursive—or even *vice versa*, inasmuch as art produces its verbal appearance; it might assume authority by making itself the origin—not to say the contract subject rather than the contract object (the classic figure of the commission)? The hypothesis is worth backing; but it is nevertheless not a matter of using these pages to present the project of tailoring a new suit for the old *Ut pictura poesis*! What is more, many other reading angles are possible through the two publications, even to do with matters of classical aesthetics within classical aesthetics, an ontological and fundamental question of the type: What is a work?! The answer, nowadays, cannot be existentialist, but would rather bring in the functional definition. By starting out from works and not from logical categories, a definition starts to take shape: producing a work is to propose a contract. These two volumes scroll through quite a few.

- 2 Didier Semin is incidentally at pains to stay with the documents. He accordingly makes the appendix the fattest part of his book by providing facsimiles of several patents and protocols to do with artistic principles: Klein for the IKB composition, and a goodly number of other unlikely ideas, Tinguely for his drawing machine, Takis for a new process of artistic expression based on magnetism, Hubert Duprat for the production of precious objects by insects, and Buren for his certificates of authenticity. Semin questions these protocols in their historical and theoretical dimension but also—and his experience as a curator has probably served him well here—from the standpoint of the physical and tangible management of works, the sharing (not to say transfer) of responsibilities between artist and collector, and the role of the museum. The figure of Duchamp comes across as the backdrop for a history that has been very shrewdly fuelled by the theoretical production of the Conceptual artists, a history that abounds, and then some, in artists' propositions, and which calls perforce for answers, even though outlined by the art institution, in the form of informal museums, in all the possible extensions of Malraux' imaginary museum intuition. Semin notes the lapse between these artistic realities and ordinary cultural ideology, emphasizing the contradiction with commercial logic, which is still unresolved to this day.
- 3 Based on the problematic legacy of industrial art, the issue of the reproducibility of the work remains readily associated with this logic—paradoxically, for it also helps to describe changes already broadly recorded in the conditions in which the work of art is produced, which mean that it sidesteps them. Yet the conventional manner of existence (in the sense, needless to add, of stemming from an agreed rule...) and the ubiquity of works is a fact, whereas the re-making competes with the making; whereas, too, the myth of originality, now well-worn, makes room for others. Fourteen points of view are not too many to stress the fact that, behind the Benjamin formula, very varied processes are set up. Between the reproduction as a means of distribution and dealing (Pierre-Lin Renié on the Goupil editions) with salient aesthetic consequences (through the distribution, too, of aesthetic challenges) and the paradoxical economy of the remake in the cinema (a major paradigm in the set of problems and in the artistic practices discussed by Jean-Christophe Royoux, Pascale Cassagnau and Luis Perez Oramas, as well as in the introduction by Michel Weemans, whose brainchild, together with Véronique Goudinoux, this series of

writings is), there are major aesthetic and artistic shifts, which nevertheless do not form a continuous history—far from it. By sections, then, these games are constructed, games between "duplication and duplicity", to borrow the words of Denys Riout introducing, *inter alia* and aptly chosen, too, the figure of Rauschenberg in 1957, painting *Factum I* and *II*, within a logic based on replica.

- 4 One last thing: the lines which criss-cross in these pages share in common not just critical relevance, but they also describe and reveal a great artistic verve of modernity, which makes these readings the more exciting.