Art of the scene — the Inscenation of Art
(From the Stage to the Immaterial Scene)
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The enigmatic activities of the world of nature are beyond our control. Nature repeats itself. It does not create new images, it is at best mimicry, protective imitation as a strategy of evolution. This changes in the development of civilization. Trying to get a grip on nature's activities, man develops a mimetic capacity for creating new images, new models. He does not repeat himself. Through simulation, there is deviation, distance, difference, autonomy. The same gives way to something different. An animal uses protective and warning colors as a deployment of defensive strategies, of pretense and misrepresentations, simulating a certain impression, a certain physical appearance, a certain behavior, certain abilities and characteristics, a certain mode of (animal) being. In short, a defense against enemies. To succeed in adapting himself to social models and to show the outer world his best face, man uses techniques that are by far more cunning and insidious. The public advertisement spaces are the post-modern stages for a perfect inscenation of classical values and dreams, family-like scenes of public life and the mise-en-scène of the self. From puberty to politics, the inscenation of life in the media transforms the real demands of the self, the strategies for the realization of the imaginary, the private language into a public language, into a realm where public needs are exploited, into staged simulation. In the public inscenations of self through the media, the self's growth and its gratification become a technology of the market x. The universal language of advertisement becomes the universal pornography of society.

"We all act", Erving Goffman concluded in 1959, after examining the representations of the self in daily life. The modes of representation (faith in one's role, dramatic action, idealization, control of expression) as well as the modes of manipulating one's impression are the techniques used to control social interaction. The techniques used to stage the self reveal that "the structure of our self can be grasped as a representation."[1] Because the role one plays and that what one actually is in the staged public space are the same thing, the audience only ascribes a personal self when a role is played correctly, i.e., in accordance with socially accepted notions. This means that the I, the person, the self is the product of a successfully staged scene and not its motive. Personality is the inscenation of a product. Politics takes advantage of this structuralization of the self through representation by the media. The true qualities of the actor, the politician as an actor, and the qualities of his role originate in various spheres. Today a politician is nothing but an actor, a product of wishful thinking as defined by empirical marketing strategies and demographic research. The acting out of the strategies of a seductive pretense brings forth a rhetoric which reflects the representations and inscenations conveyed by the media.

The political self is no longer bound to a class-specific locus. It disappears in the social role ascriptions of a semi-academic scene. Credibility and political program are, like words, only clothing; gestures are nothing but effective stage directions for a major play. There are no limits to the manipulation of the representation in public life, where public roles are modelled after an ideal image, itself a product of a perfect mise-en-scène. This is Guy Debord's "Society of the Spectacle", an extreme inscenation of communication and social interaction through the media. "The spectacle is not a group of images but a social relationship between people mediated by images" (Guy Debord), resulting in the implosion of meaning in the media and the social in the masses.

The mass media pervert mimicry to masks, to tools for controlling and misleading the masses. In the myths of information society and the mass media, social space disappears and is replaced by fictions and instrumentalized fantasies. The masks of the stage are not imitations of life. Rather the masks of mediation generate life itself, now nothing but forms of staging

and representation controlled by those in power, a spectacle where what is staged and what is real merge. This is the gist of Shakespeare's "the whole world is a Stage".

Simulation and spectacle are the product, the project of modern society. Mimicry as a strategy of survival is thus part of evolution theory. In this sense staging is essential in postmodern life as a production mode. Simulation and spectacle, mimicry and mediatization are inseparably connected with civilization.

"Scene" would be the right name for a global newspaper. Everything is a stage, everything is a spectacle, everything is a scene. The pervasiveness of the scene in all realms of life, culture and art is proof of the power of the mise-en-scène.[2] Not only by journalists, also in established cultural theory, architecture and photography, the term scene is used indiscriminately. This shows how important the art of staging, role playing is in our social life. Everything is staged, from the stage of social life to the immaterial scene of the media. From the media spectacle to the political stage, we live in a totally staged environment. Art also reflects this totalitarian dimension of the post-modern scene, the social inscenation. The mise-en-scène, the representation has priority over the content.

This means that a festival that claims to be contemporary must deal with this phenomenon in various inscenations. This does not only have to do with an art scene, but, more concretely, with the art of the scene. The latter has a great tradition in Austria: from psychoanalysis through to theater, fashion, photography and architecture (Joseph Urban[3] , Friedrich Kiesler, Hans Hollein). In this sense, both the catalogue and the program of the festival provide a comprehensive survey of the historical development of the art of scene in this century. This leads from the mechanical stage of the Bauhaus to the immaterial scene of the media theater, from the scenic voyages to the digital scene. The exhibition will focus on scene in its literary, etymological and political dimensions. In addition to the latest productions from the audio and video scene, scenic and stage performances, national and international works exemplary of electronic art: the video theater or the media opera. This is, technically speaking, the very state of the art of scene, the legacy of the renaissance and baroque periods, the electronic synaesthesia and the scenic artist who is a combination of musician, painter and electronic artist. The symposium will examine how technology has changed society, reflecting how this process in turn advances the art of scene and with it, a type of vampirism.

The motto of our festival for art, technology and society makes it imperative for us to examine technological and social developments. If we grasp the development of art history and its development as a mere game of styles and forms, we neglect those social conditions responsible for the break with traditions and the changes in form and style. As, at the end of the 19th century, scientists began to analyze the world of sensations (Gustav Fechner, Ernst Mach, Helmholtz, G.S. Ohm), they soon discovered the phenomenon of double sensation, i.e., the simultaneous experience of acoustic and color sensations. This was only one reaction to the technological transformation of the natural world of perception and the extension of natural senses, a result of the Industrial Revolution. Once man became literally deluged with acoustic stimuli through industrialization, a new science of psychological acoustics emerged, which focussed on how man perceives acoustic stimuli. This led to discoveries on the influence of sound on light sensations. With the increasing complexity of our acoustic/visual environment, with the expanding technological staging of our urban environment, a theory for the complex interaction of the sensations (secondary and synaesthetic ones) was developed.[4] Once science had begun to examine the synaesthetic accumulation of sensations as a result of immaterial communication media, art proceeded to explore how visual and audial perception, painting and music could become the foundations of a new esthetics. What began at the beginning of this century is being carried on in music videos. The development of synaesthetics in the works of visual artists and musicians, in synaesthetic avantgarde film has resulted in a total synaesthetic experience with optophonetic machines and spectacles. This

electro-mechanical eccentrics began with the Bauhaus stage and continues its triumph today in Broadway musicals, rock shows, and multimedia performances and digital scenes. The total stimulation of the senses in a fully industrialized world coincided with the increase of theatralic mise-en-scènes in the social realm, reflected today by the art of the scene. What we have is a complicity of synaesthesia and inscenation. The Industrial Revolution, the techno-transformation of the world since 1800 has resulted in a drastic increase in synaesthesia, simulation and inscenation.

On the one hand, the art of the scene is characterized by simulation and mediatization. On the other, it directly reflects reality. Its highly sophisticated theatrical strategies are an answer to the highly developed network of role games, manipulated theatrical representations (of the media) in public life. Art, which thrives on proliferation, now has the task to develop subversive strategies of difference, defiance, transgression, dissolution, to recognize the social unconscious lurking behind the masks of the social text and medial dramatization. In this respect, the art of the scene is also a theory and technique of perception that aims at sharpening our senses for complex social interactions, so that we can distinguish what is real from what is pretense on the political stage. The total artwork as an emphatic, rapturous fusion of the arts pounding in on all our senses at the same time (in the tradition of Wagner, Skrjabin, Nitsch) is a false reconciliation. "In the total artwork, ecstasy, as the principium stilisationis, is ineluctable; one moment of self-contemplation vis-a-vis an artwork would be enough to destroy the appearance of its ideal unity."[5] It is not possible to escape the totally staged world in the ecstasy of sensations as this again is nothing but a theatrical manipulation of the senses, an immaterial sensory mise-en-scène of control and an escape to untruth. By virtue of its redemptory claims, art has nothing but an emphatic inscenation at its core. In other words, "transfigured death", the terror of the spectacle continued, only with other means — artistic instead of social ones. "At the innermost core of redemption lies nothingness", Adorno writes.[6] The constructive parallels between music and painting, time and space, sound and light that are sacrificed, in the total artwork, for a false unity is necessarily apparent as something located "between the categories" (Morton Feldman). The art of the scene is a place of enlightenment. As such it reveals the strategies of inscenation by acting "between time and space, between painting and music" (Morton Feldman), between construction and an unconstructed state. The art of the scene is not a mise-en-scène of art, which would only continue the doping, a persevering phantom, but rather a de-inscenation with scenic and medial means. This is where postmodern art should be heading. Forget art!

Notes

1 Erving Goffman, WIR ALLE SPIELEN THEATER (The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life). Piper, Munich 1969, p. 230.

2 Arthur Kroker, David Cook, The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics. St. Martin's Press, New York.

John Fekete, Life After Postmodernism. St. Martin's Press, New York, 1987. Kathleen Woodward, The Myths of Information: Technology and Postindustrial Culture. Coda Press, Inc., Madison 1980.

3 The Austrian set designer and architect Joseph Urban migrated to America after a successful career at the Vienna Opera at the turn of the century. He is one of the two leading pioneers of the art of set design and film architecture in America. "Urban-Blue" is still used as a technical term today. His oeuvre was never shown by an Austrian institution, significantly enough, it is shown this year for the first time by Americans.

4 Bleuler und Lehmann: Zwangsweise Lichtempfindung dutch Schall …" Leipzig 1881 (Compulsory light sensation by sound).

Steinbrügge: Über sekundäre Sinnesempfindungen, Wiesbaden 1887.

Viktor Urbantschitsch: Über den Einfluß einer Sinneserregung auf die übrigen Sinnesmpfindungen, Vienna 1888.

Ewald Hering: Outlines of the Light Sense, Cambridge 1964.

Augusto Garau: Le armonie del colore, Milan 1984.

The interrelationships between the various sensations were examined, at the end of the 19th century, by experimental psychology. Light phonisms are audial sensations caused by light. Sound photisms are color sensations brought about by sound.

5 Theodor W. Adorno, Musikalische Schriften 1, Frankfurt 1978, p. 387.

6 ibid, p. 137.

Translated by CRN