

Logics of a few worlds

The question of appearing



*Logics of a few worlds.
Worlds I, II, III, IV and V (2021).
Photos, blotting paper, translucent paper, ink, wood, glass.*

The essay *The Axiom of Choice*, published at the occasion of the exhibition of the same name, ends with the following perspective:

"I aspire that my work is to conceptual art what categorical language is to algebra." [1]

Two years later, it was therefore time to confront this motto, inspired by the following passage from Alain Badiou's second great book, *Logics of the Worlds*:

"Here is a fundamental thesis, whose argument and detailed exposition occupy the whole of *Logics of the Worlds*: just as being-qua-being is thought by mathematics, likewise appearing, or being-there-in-a-world, is thought of by logic." [2]

A few pages later, the philosopher reiterates "It is now a question of showing that 'logic' and 'appearing' are also one and the same". [3] Getting to grips with his thesis "logic = appearing" was not easy, because when one thinks of "logic" one generally thinks about "reasoning", "syllogism", or "deduction", rather than about "appearing". It was difficult to detach myself from these associations instilled by mathematics teachers, recorded by memory like the multiplication tables.

Strangely, almost in a contradictory way, it was a detour through conceptual art, more precisely the contemplation of Joseph Kosuth's neon installations, Sol LeWitt's structures, and Ad Reinhardt's dark squares, which helped me understand Badiou's thesis: these tautological artworks, these *absolutely logical* objects, all deny, by definition and by provocation, appearance and aesthetics. These great masters had succeeded (willingly?) to exhaust modernism by driving it to its radical conclusion, that dead-end that only the so-called postmodernism seemed able to overcome. In short, they had dissolved the appearing in language.

Those who follow me know what I think: modernism should not have let itself be dominated by the linguistic turn of the sixties or by the ultraliberal drifts of capitalism, and it is possible,

even today, to consider postmodernism as an eclipse. A long eclipse, but an eclipse none the less. In the same way that mathematics succeeded in overcoming the crises it traversed since the beginning of the 20th century, by embracing the stunning results of Georg Cantor, Kurt Gödel and Paul Cohen, I postulate that conceptual art can continue, or rather resume, the modernist quest for perpetual avant-gardisme, and surpass the formalist impasse that abstract expressionism had reached, by seeking *directly in the concept* an aesthetic rather than a tautological inspiration.



World I



World II



World III



World IV



World V

In other words, art can still achieve, albeit with some delay, what philosophy has succeeded in doing since 1988 [4], after having temporarily allowed itself to be seduced by the sirens of post-structuralism, deconstruction or hermeneutics. To do this, art must abandon “relational aesthetics”, theorized by

Nicolas Bourriaud [5], who “refutes modernist formalism in favor of a form which exists only ‘in the encounter, in the dynamic relationship that maintains an artistic proposal with other formations, artistic or not’ ”. [6]



World III - details

What fascinated me in this project *Logics of a Few Worlds*, besides the renewed link with Alain Badiou’s texts, are the unexpected rediscoveries of several central themes of modernism, namely theatricality, absorption [7], and formalism [8].

As a (provisional) conclusion, I propose these few lines from Robert Storr:

"The era following modernism may not be postmodernism, it is quite the opposite, a premodernism reworked in such a way that people have the powers given to them by industry and technology, but without having the culture that goes with it. We are in the age of Enlightenment, but in the dark, in fact." [9]

That seems fair enough to me.

Michel Tombroff
June 2021
www.tombroff.com

[1] Michel Tombroff, *L'axiome du choix*, Anvers, Cookie Butcher, 2019.

[2] Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes*, Paris, Seuil, p. 47.

[3] *ibid*, p. 109.

[4] Alain Badiou, *L'Être et l'événement*, Paris, Seuil, 1988.

[5] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle*, Dijon, Les Presses du réel, 1998.

[6] Didier Ottinger, « Moderne et après », *La parenthèse du moderne*, Paris, Centre Pompidou, 2004, p. 12.

- [7] Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality – Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- [8] Clement Greenberg, « Modernist Painting », in *Clement Greenberg : The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Volume 4, John O'Brian, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- [9] Robert Storr, « Pris entre les trains : en avance, en retard ou à l'heure », *La parenthèse du moderne*, Paris, Centre Pompidou, 2004, p. 131.