

NO!PUNK : No forms, just attitudes!

On Stefan Brüggemann

In December 1970, legendary rock critic Lester Bangs referred to Iggy Pop as "that Stooge punk". Alan Vega, a seminal figure of the New York alternative art scene since the late 1960's – a singularly influential artist and musician, pioneer of minimalist electronic music as cofounder of the mythical band Suicide –, Vega turned Punk into the manifesto of a reason to live. The word punk imposed itself. As Marty Rev, the other half of Suicide, recalled in a discussion in 2009: "We made up our own flyers and decided to call ourselves Suicide, and called these Punk Music and Punk Mass right away. This was at the end of 1970 – Punk Music by Suicide." A PUNK MASS! A pagan ceremony first held at the Manhattan gallery OK Harris – the gallery founded by Leo Castelli former right-hand man, Ivan Karp, the instrumental figure in the emergence of pop art –, during Alan Vega's first solo show at the gallery in November 1970. Arte povera *un*-made in the USA, Vega's exhibition was an art of formless stacks of coloured lightbulbs and neon lights – we will return to neon later.

Michael Elster wrote in 2014 of the word "Punk" in his "Lexiculture: Papers on English Words and Culture, vol. 1, article 5." that "the etymology of punk is unknown, but the historical meanings of it are clear. In the time of Shakespeare it was a synonym for a prostitute. He writes, "She may be a Puncke: for many of them, are neither Maid, Widow, nor Wife" (Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories & tragedies, 1623). In one of the first discernable semantic shifts, punk switched genders and social setting by the early 20th century to mean "a punk's a boy that'll...Give himself to a man," (Berkman, A, Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist, 1912)." The Oxford Dictionary now offers several sub definition, including and tellingly: "A worthless person (often used as a general term of abuse)," "A criminal or thug," or again, "An inexperienced young person."

None of the above – rather, ALL of the above. Stefan Brüggemann's art is not about expression – and especially not his. The art is not about the object – it is an attitude. His aim is to deny – deny the reality of the object, nullify that of the moment, annihilate any thoughts. No forms, just attitudes! An art where NOTHING is certain. NOTHING is *absolutely* certain! All is to be questioned, as he labours his works as generators of doubt through slogans, appropriated texts, poetry... an entire lexicon that frames his very own NO-art, a 21<sup>st</sup> century lineage to NO!Art and Boris Lurie, Sam Goodman & Stanley Fisher. Post-conceptual Punk – Punk nihilism and neo-Punk conceptualism.

There is nothing to be seen in Brüggemann's mirrors, especially not YOU. In their reflections, there is no US. Reversed, saturated, obliterated, the mirrors have lost their functions. There is still something physical about them. They are mass produced and un-precious. When reversed, their backs are neutral, *un*-designed, un-cared, un-kept, they are not to be seen, nor functional. Reversed mirrors are glued directly onto the wall. Reversed, their reality is cancelled. The mirrors no longer reflects an image – or rather it permanently reflect a pure dark, that of its face against the wall. Permanently sealed, they mirror the inframince of the

sombre flat texture. Their reality of being an object is denied. So to say: objectively, no object is objectified.

Their nature is consistently shifting between an appearance and its content. Such an attitude is crystallised in some of the following propositions, and certainly not limited to: Headlines from newspapers and Last Lines from movies are sprayed on mirrors, as so many obliterated views – overblown thoughts from a saturated environment. A shiny Donald Judd mirror-door that constantly turns on itself. An *unconscious* mirror trap door. A mirror exit door that screams that *this is not an exit*, too. A massive rotating mirror rectangle sculpture, that very much like Richard Serra's late *Tilted Arc*, blocks the street at will and forbids you to pass. You must negotiate with the sculpture: as it turns it pushes you away – your choice, to be carried away, or to challenge your own image and pass. A mirror garage door is randomly opening and closing. Nothing but a shiny garage door that reflects the inside and outside a show. An affirmed criticism of any institutions. For us to come in and out, it depends on the door, unreasoned and unreasonable. A door that randomly seals the art space, trapping the viewer in, and at will letting him out. There may be an inside or an outside – both are denied. Where is the object when what is to be seen has no visual consistency other than that of reflecting everything else but what is?! Here, a garage-door made of mirrors reflecting, inverting, distorting,..., a neon statement that defines a soft heart murmur.

Fast backward. Doodles realised in seconds are turned into neon. As a distant echo to John Latham and his *One-Second Paintings*, or again Tom Marioni's *One Second Sculptures*, these scribbles realised in NO time are rendered as obliterated thoughts of colourful neon lights. These *obliterated series* were first exhibited under the headline NO! Prior to these, there were texts of neon – sentences of light. So many written statements that claimed NO!, too. Another obliterations: invited to participate in a group exhibition, Brüggemann decided to simply unplug a classic Dan Flavin piece of fluorescent-light tubes. Simply, but not simple: what is present when what we see is a structure of fluorescent-light tubes switched OFF? A wreck, a carcass, leftovers screaming NO – switched off, everything remains though, as they gain a temporary new signature. It becomes someone's else's art (that is, until someone plugs it back again)! Conceptual Punk: a sensitive reflective NO!

Denying the viewer the possibility to grasp the work in a singular moment is a constant trope in Brüggemann's endeavours, and it is especially what is at stake with, and what constitutes, the "Shifting Piece" that he initiated first with pioneer artist and conceptual hero Robert Barry. A contract binds both Barry and Brüggemann who each assigned legally, for a period of five years one of their work to the other. Then, following this period of time, the works become that of the other, and again in 10, 15, 20, 25,..., years. A work of Barry becomes for five years a work by Brüggemann, whilst a work by Stefan becomes one by Robert. Then, the then piece 'by' Brüggemann becomes – returns to being, but was it ever and *what* was it ever... – a Barry for the next five years, and so on and so forth for each works. Quinquennial, this series was began in 2009 is to be shifted, to be continued. Impermanency is the very nature of a constantly fluctuating world. Lou Reed wrote in the *Finish Line* that "Nothing's

forever, not even five minutes”. Here, contractually, things have a life span of 5 years, every five years!

What is the nature of an art-object, and it’s becoming? Let us consider sentences made of vinyl affixed onto the wall. Yet another trademark seized by the artist, a fixtures within his toolbox. One font, always the same: impact. A definite craving for an immediate impact! As with the mirrors, to remove them is to destroy them. At Kusnthalles Bern – where attitudes became forms in 1969 –, Brüggemann burned all bridges as he over layered all his existing vinyl pieces one on top of the other, creating a visual saturation that lost all textual meanings. Abstracted, in losing the contents, an initial destruction predates the actual destruction of the art object.

Another thought, another series. A home for all: No Rights publishing, Brüggemann’s very own imprint. His publishing is the means to release his manifestoes and essays. Brüggemann’s reports are his own reflection on his work, as seen through the images and words by guest-writers. No statements, no rights, just collections of thoughts manufactured and formatted as A4s.

Talking series: *Beats per Minutes* are immediate impacts – the font Impact lands approximately on fast painted acidic colours. Brüggemann’s brushstrokes and choice of colours are a meaningless expressionism – again, no plan is the plan! *High Speed Contrasts* collide several series of works into one. Low tech and common, the process is as follow: an iPhone close-up photograph of *Headlines and Last Lines in Movies* is reworked in Photoshop where the text is added, the screen of the computer is re-photographed with his smartphone, and ends up as blown-up prints on imposing aluminium sheets. A last touch, a final cherry, a sprayed paint brings back a sense of the original materiality lost in translations, through low-tech over-layering.

Refurbished, reframed, re-contextualised, a final unannounced second showing complete the 2018 gallery exhibition in Ibiza. There, the works are reproduced on paper and become wallpaper pasted in an abandoned derelict building. An old hotel by a starchitect that never was, as the dictator ruled against its ultimate finalisation. All that is left is a raw empty concrete shell! There, images of abandoned paintings are glue-pasted onto the walls of this abandoned building. Jumping the fence, a teenage vandalism spirit guides US through the mirrored show. A silent and absent reflection. Let’s remind ourselves that Dracula can’t see himself in the mirror either!

The white heat of NO!Presence. Flat and Glossy, the work is self consciously straightforward – the artist is an affirmed producer of style. Rough attitudes are formless. The work is the process, and it is deliberately not skilful. Layers of digital and gestural copies – whatever comes out, comes out! The artist’s speed *is* the limit. Time invested is the rapidity to copy and paste, hoping for a lost of control (ctrl). An art of the four symbols that have become the emblem of our celebrated uncreative times: ☿C ☿V.

Mathieu Copeland, February 2018.