

VIVRE SA VIE Bruno Serralongue — A profession of the artist

A FEW years ago Stan Douglas broadcast a series of short videos on Canadian television. The pieces mimicked the language of advertisements, but didn't deliver a product. They were shot with great care, using conventional panning and zooms; showing uneventful encounters between unremarkable individuals in suburbia. Yet at the end, at the climactic point where all is revealed, nothing was offered. When the project was aired, according to Douglas, the broadcast station received numerous calls from viewers that were perturbed by the uncertain nature of these inserts that didn't make any sense in the otherwise clear-cut nature of television viewing. The broadcast station had to forewarn its viewers that 'the following insert is an art project'. The callers stopped.

How to make an image that can actually speak about the status of the 'culture of the image'? What *detour* can be taken to avoid increasing the gigantic heap of popular culture?

Bruno Serralongue's images touch a spot that is close to the Stan Douglas anecdote. His strategy consists of a series of misplacements; to begin with he places himself at will in the straight jacket of the photojournalist; the camera operator who carries a precise command in his pocket. This voluntary annulment of his choice is of course not complete since he is still the 'chooser' of his constraints. In past projects Serralongue has either followed his own command regarding the making of the photograph or has commanded himself to be commanded when he has become a part of a newspaper's work force. It is surprising that images that appear so simple entail the description of a procedure that seems so baroque.

Serralongue makes the oddest reporter: in his operation an image will have failed if it does become exceptional for any reason whatsoever. His skill consists precisely in making the image unremarkable. The deviation that has taken place is what is truly remarkable. The photograph is a marker towards something that has gone askew. It was taken from the wrong place or at the wrong time, by the wrong person or with the wrong equipment. Its quality is too 'professional' for a tacit impersonation of the tourist; its format of presentation is too 'artistic' for the journalist trade; its idiosyncrasy is too feeble to be perceived as a photographer's *oeuvre*.

The photographs that Serralongue finally exhibits are not still images that 'give faith' to an event's existence in time. Rather, they are the nametag of an operation. What is particular to this operation is that it necessarily has 'duration'. The images' continuance, their cinematography so to speak, consists of a series of decisions that lead to their production. That he came late to the Beastie Boys concert, that there was only one ticket left, that he had no press pass, that he was carrying a cumbersome large format camera are all elements that belong to the 'ecology' of the images. They are not anecdotal; they define a concept that is implicated in the series. These decisions are taken precisely with the intention of pointing out the mechanisms by which the quotidian image of the media comes to be; the one that the culture consumes without blinking, shocking as its content might be; an image that is always already inserted in the envelope of a legislated spectacle.

Serralongue imitates a set of prescribed codes that are set to produce the 'legal' image, the one that stands for the event. The locus of this manoeuvre is not the image itself but a set of issues that have to do with its production and its insertion in a system of exchange values. The questions that are posed are rather: who produced the image, what bureaucracy has been established to produce it, under what circumstances, for what purpose, in what context will it circulate, how long will it circulate for? By insidiously entering the assembly line of the image with a second agenda, he engages in the active subversion of an order. He reveals that the simple image is not simple. This follows the train of thought of a filmmaker/art historian like Godard when he points out the ideological implications of any camera movement.

Images are programmed; events have a prefabricated angle for the 'manufacture of a consent' around their nature. It is an act of subtle, yet rigorous rebellion to produce the image that shouldn't exist. Its existence is an immediate question to the other image, the one that stealthily merges in the collective memory with any given event. Serralongue does something wrong, with remarkable precision, so that the suspicion of what it means to do it 'right' is brought forward.

François Bucher

Bruno Serralongue

Bruno Serralongue was born in Chatellault in 1968. He lives and works in Paris. Recent solo exhibitions include *Jornal do Brasil*, Paris (2000); *I Love Dijon*, L'Usine, Dijon (2000); and *Villa Arson*, Nice (1999). Recent group exhibitions include *Form Follows Function*, Foto Biennale, Rotterdam (2000); *Cette culture qui vient de la rue*, Galerie Municipale, Vitry-sur-seine (2000); and *I Love Paris/Duchamp's Suitcase*, Arnolfini, Bristol (2000).

Street Level Gallery

Street Level Photoworks is the foremost photography exhibition space and open access resource in the West of Scotland, whose exhibition programme embraces contemporary lens-based artwork, photography and new media. The gallery programme covers a dynamic range of artistic practices, representing 'up and coming' artists and cutting edge work as well as more established artists of both local and international stature.

Street Level also provides an education programme which seeks to expand the possibilities for interacting with the wider community, through a range of workshops and training courses in traditional techniques, alternative processing and digital imaging.