

Flash Art

The World's Leading Art Magazine - **International Edition** - Vol. XLIV • No. 278 • May - June 2011 - € 8.50 Italy only - \$ 14.95

E. € 15,00 - B. € 11,90 - P. € 14,50 - D. € 9,90 - UK. £ 6,50

Poste Italiane s.p.a. - Sped. in A. P. - D.L. 353/2003 (conv. in L. 27/02/2004 n° 46) art. 1, comma 1 / PE / Aut. N.164 / 2008



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Boris Groys' new collection of essays has many salient points within a tight focus. "The Weak Universalism" essay displays this when it asks, "But who is this artist, and how can he or she be distinguished from a non-artist — if such a distinction is even possible? To me, this seems a far more interesting question than that of how we can differentiate between an artwork and a 'simple thing'." Answers reside in what he calls *self-design*: Groys' central notion is that "the artist has become the artwork." No one familiar with Andy Warhol is likely to be particularly upset by this idea. But Warhol had the glow of novelty that goes with being a creative pioneer, and Groys uncovers some menacing aspects of what it means in practice when everyone has become their own piece of work — on TV, the Internet or in the gallery.

In *Going Public* it is not that artists and their personas now, like film actors, overshadow their artwork (think of Dalí); rather, it is that all people are uniquely objectifying themselves in ways that only artists were able to enjoy in the past. It seems social existence (and art with it) is mediated to such a de-

gree as to make artworks comparatively obsolete.

Maybe worse, they are superfluous. "Today, people are more interested in image production than image contemplation." An example could be *The Starry Night* at MoMA; people from around the world relish not looking at van Gogh, exactly, but in pictures of and with his work. This aura rubbing is a part of the collaborative nature of image sharing that continues to redefine the world, including art, as modes of proximity increase and contemplation becomes more scarce (which maybe explains the steady demand for museums and graduate school). Galleries are one familiar vehicle for public refinement as proximity, where the social setting is image production. Groys calls this linking and enveloping of images inside more and more images, which



includes social media networks, an aestheticizing process of *self-design*. It is innocent in some ways. But, it means that these endlessly coupled images emulate and replace the artist (thus making everyone an artwork without need of an autonomous object or 'simple thing'). Similarly, the design threatens to replace the self, just as the

maintenance of a home can usurp family life.

All this should sound familiar. Yet, the essays in this book have intrigue because Groys tests the implications of these developments in self-design as irreversible affects of art. What kinds of creativity underlie social life when the necessity of design becomes compulsory and the experience of art, like a Facebook wall, becomes indistinguishable from promotion? It is not clear, but new forms of proximity, such as relational

art, are sure to follow. In all this, Groys cautions that "we have been condemned to being the designers of ourselves," whether we like it or not (and some people clearly like it more than others).

The author's own decision to publish with *e-flux* may be an admission of this obligation. *E-flux* expresses the necessity of self-design quite emphatically. One can lament the fact that e-mail blasts are the closest recipients usually come to the art it promotes. Or one can admire the money the artists who run *e-flux* make (at \$600 per email is it?) by simply tallying the mails in one's inbox. Or one can question what this means as a practice. But the niche they have created is undeniable. It is now an essential service in a protocol of self-design for the institutions that use it.

Groys' new essays are right there in the middle of this virtual factory of endless newness, design and promotion, on the intellectual divide that validates the commercial side (adequately to be sure). *E-flux* is only one of many latest means of proximity and self-ottering. Thankfully, Boris Groys asks us to consider why we are there in the first place.

Matthew Schum

BORIS GROYS' GOING PUBLIC

Sternberg Press; e-flux Journal. Cover design Liam Gillick. \$15.

ASSUME VIVID ASTRO FOCUS

By Eli Sudbrack and Christophe Hamaide Pierson, contribution by Cay Sophie Rabinowitz, introduction by Natalie Kovacs. Published by Rizzoli. \$60

stallations. Think of *New Babylon*, the long-term Situationist project by Dutch artist Constant.

Yet the texts seem to be a minor part of the project. We might consider the book more as a sort of flamboyant and ironic interpretation of the catalogue raisonné format. AVAF took this opportunity to archive a selection of large-scale projects and installations dating from 2003 to 2009. Among them it is worth mentioning *assume vivid astro focus XI* (2004), a multilayered work made in collaboration with collectors Rosa and Carlos de La Cruz, in



which AVAF created a colorful environment that embraces works by other artists: from Felix Gonzalez-Torres and General Idea — one of the members of AVAF calls them "primordial influences" — to Marco Boggio Sella and Justin Samson. This

project is emblematic of AVAF's paradoxical notion of signature, and can be a useful starting point for understanding the monograph as a whole. Speaking of signatures, in order to put the viewer into a state of joyful confusion that is perfectly Cariocan (one of the core members of AVAF is

Brazilian) AVAF began to use alternate acronyms, inviting friends and acquaintances to suggest new versions: so we have the work of "absorb viral attack fantasy" presented at Hiromi Yoshii in Tokyo in 2006 or the massive project by "absolutely venomous accurately fallacious (naturally delicious)" presented at Deitch Studios in Long Island City in 2008. Another aspect of AVAF highlighted in the book is the spirit of community: images of people, performances, parties, DJ sets and more are valuable elements for understanding what AVAF is about. The intense overdose of images and the unstoppable rhythm of the layout brings the reader to a state in which it doesn't really matter what is being looked at. The only way to embrace this monograph is to wear the 3-D mask (with the features of a Brazilian tranny) that is included in the book; just start flipping pages until you are visually drunk.

Nicola Trezzi