ANGELA BULLOCH, *Z Point*, 2001. 48 plastic pixels, soundtrack by David Grubbs, 300 x 400 x 50 cm, 00:08:14. Installation view, Kunsthaus Glarus, 2001. On permanent loan from a private collector, Städische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau München

angela bulloch

AMBIVALENT OBJECTS

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Angela Bulloch's *Trans-Europe Express* (1993) appears as no more than a sparsely furnished café, an institutional amenity rather than an artistic intervention. Only once sitting down (and perhaps not even then) does the visitor realize she is in an artwork, as "Trans-Europe Express" (1977) by German electronic group Kraftwerk begins playing or, if it was playing already, stops. Particularly canny or knowledgeable visitors might then recognize affinities with other of Bulloch's "inter-passive" sculptures such as *Yes Sound Chair, No Sound Chair,* and *Maybe Sound Chair* (all 1991), in which sitting triggers the broadcast of a word, or *Pushmepullme Drawing Machine* (1991) in which being seated alters the direction of the lines being inscribed on a wall.[1]

In 1993, Kraftwerk was of particular interest to Bulloch: "Ideas that are mediated in an electronic form," she declared about them, "there are similarities to this approach in my work."[2] Issues of mediation, however, were generally overlooked by Bulloch's earliest champions. Bulloch was lauded instead for creating "interactive" and "user-friendly" spaces of social encounter, "micro-utopias" of largely unproblematized interpersonal connections. In his book *Relational Aesthetics*, for instance, Nicolas Bourriaud cites *Trans-Europe Express* as exemplary of "the present-day craze for revisited areas of conviviality."[3] Such an interpretation overlooks the fact that the music—accompaniment of the supposed conviviality—is interrupted as it is transmitted by visitors' actions. More importantly, however, it fails to account for the specificity of Bulloch's appropriated material. Far from innocuous

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Muzak or euphoric techno, "Trans-Europe Express"—in its unfaltering electronic rhythm, insistently simple keyboard melody, and dispassionate synthetic vocals— self-reflexively comments on the mechanization and repetition in mainstream pop. Furthermore, Kraftwerk's "alien sensibility," as Bulloch called it, evinces an ironic reflection on the utopian aspirations of modernism.[4] As Mike Kelley has put it with particular insight:

> Already in the seventies a band like Kraftwerk had an ironic attitude about their relationship to technology, and their image as a "pop" band. . . . Something's been lost in the translation when the irony of Kraftwerk's relationship to modernist technological utopianism is presented as its opposite. In the depressed seventies, when technological utopianism could hardly be conceivable given the economic downside that left many industrial cities veritable wastelands, Kraftwerk's evocation of Modernist aesthetics could only be read as a cruel joke.[5]

Bulloch, like Kelley, is in on the joke, and *Trans-Europe Express* problematizes the notion of interactivity—a figure of participatory liberation that remains perhaps the most persistent remnant of modernist utopianism, technological or otherwise. A more accurate comprehension of the work's musical implications not only renders it more interesting but also more consistent with the remainder of Bulloch's production, which continually highlights the dependency, regulation, behaviorism, and control operating throughout entertainment, consumerism, spectacle, and design. As an artist, Bulloch works within the realm and limitations of late capitalism, staking out within it a position that is purposely ambiguous or, as I will argue, properly ambivalent.[6]

Like *Trans-Europe Express*, Bulloch's first large-scale appropriation piece, *King of Comedy* (1991) is deceptively simple. It consists of a 35mm slide projection of a laughing crowd and an almost unnoticeable, wall label–sized video-print on the wall standing at ninety degrees to the projection. When moving to examine the print, the viewer blocks the projector's beam, casting her shadow onto, and thereby "appearing in," the larger image. Both print and projection derive from Martin Scorsese's *The King of Comedy* (1983), referencing and replicating a scene in which the ambitious and deluded would-be comic, Rupert Pupkin (Robert De Niro) appears before a photo-muraled crowd in his basement to record an audition tape for late-night talk show host Jerry Langford (Jerry Lewis). Like *Trans-Europe Express*, *King of Comedy* has been discussed as a participatory work in which the

"chief ambition is . . . perfectly clear: to make the viewer not a passive onlooker but the conductor of the situation."[7] Even more evidently than with *Trans-Europe Express*, however, such a reading ignores the connotations of Bulloch's appropriated material.

Far from revealing him as conductor of his fate, Pupkin's appearance before the mural of hysterically laughing faces betrays the futility of his aspirations. From the monologue's first words it becomes clear that his "audience's" reaction is canned, since it erupts into laughter out of relation and proportion to the lines delivered. As Scorsese's camera pans back to reveal the mural's size, the laugh track moves up in the mix, eventually drowning out Pupkin altogether. As it does so, it assumes an extra-diegetic character: no longer emanating from Pupkin's recorder to add atmosphere to his audition tape, it now serves to indicate his delusion, laughing *at* him or ominously resonating within his mind, as a reflection of mental fragility. As the camera continues drawing back, Pupkin becomes no more than a silent, gesticulating shadow (the image in Bulloch's video print), a figure of loneliness and isolation much more than of the subjective empowerment one supposes his mural was intended to provide. "With that work," noted Bulloch, "it is a case of putting the viewer into the psychological dimension of the character's imagining."[8] Placed within an interpellative mise-en-abyme in which "projection" has resonances both physical and psychoanalytic, the viewer finds herself caught within an artwork, a cinematic scenario, and a character's persona.

Bulloch's engagement with appropriation was no doubt spurred by a visit, in the company of Mary Kelly, to the landmark exhibition *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* (1984–85), which included the work of, among others, Kelly, Dara Birnbaum, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, and Martha Rosler.[9] By 1985, however, postmodern appropriation strategies, as curator Kate Linker noted, were "nearly a decade old."[10] Moreover, appropriation had already come under criticism by some of its initial supporters. As early as 1982, Douglas Crimp and Rosler questioned its effectiveness amid the emergence of postmodern pastiche as a general cultural phenomenon. "If all aspects of the culture use this new operation," Crimp noted, "then the operation itself cannot indicate a specific reflection upon the culture."[11] By 1989, another early supporter, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, would pronounce the strategy of oppositional appropriation all but dead.[12] Like Crimp, Solomon-Godeau saw critical appropriation's specificity undermined by postmodernism's general cultural expansion, and she outlined how certain artists had not only been outmaneuvered by growing markets and changing institutional contexts, but also permitted their practices' assimilation by allowing them to become

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mere style. Against postmodern photography's "reduction to stylistics," Solomon-Godeau championed a line of institutional critique (e.g., Michael Asher) that attempted to avoid assimilation by means of rigorously contextual and contingent interventions that refused any substantive form or stylistic generality that could be extracted, abstracted, and thereby détourned.

Such was the situation that greeted Bulloch at the beginning of her career: not only had modernism's utopian aspirations been declared unsustainable, but the postmodern strategies that signaled their exhaustion had themselves been deemed either obsolete or complicit. By 1988 at the latest, Bulloch recognized that the widespread cultural adoption of appropriation problematized its exclusively artistic or oppositional deployment. For Bulloch, this epiphany took place not simply in the library, where she was completing her thesis on "originality and authorship in art" at Goldsmiths College, but also in London's clubs, marked that year by the "explosion of acid house music." "Acid house," explains Bulloch, "is defined by the 'use' of other people's music and making another kind of music by patching short pieces of it together. It is called acid because by using other people's copyrighted music you can get 'burned' or sued."[13] Although Bulloch would draw upon the rigorously contextual legacy advocated by Solomon-Godeau (as shown by *Trans-Europe Express*), her engagement with appropriation was ultimately guided less by the misgivings of its critics than by the transformations of practitioners such as Levine.

Initiated with *The Bachelors (After Marcel Duchamp)* (1989) and continuing with the cast bronze *Fountain (After Marcel Duchamp)* (1991) and the Brancusi appropriation *Newborn* (1993), Levine took to appropriating objects, rather than images, and thereby entered the realm of *production*.[14] Like her rephotographed photographs, Levine's three-dimensional appropriations deconstruct the essentialist binaries characterizing modernism: production versus reproduction, creativity versus copying, art versus design, (high art) resistance versus (mass cultural) complicity, and, perhaps most importantly, the hierarchical male/female binary by which all such distinctions were implicated.[15] As Levine explained about *Newborn*:

> I would like you to experience one of those privileged moments of aesthetic negation, when high art and popular culture coalesce. I would like high art to shake hands with its cynical nemesis—kitsch, which in its sentimentality makes a mockery of desire. I would like the meaning of this work to become so overdetermined and congealed that it implodes and brokers a new paradigm.[16]

The "materialization" of Levine's work brought a thickening of temporal presence, both through a greater demand upon the time of looking and through an increased richness of historical reference and allusion.[17]

From the start, Bulloch was interested in questions of production and design, from the complexity of her drawing machines to the relative simplicity of her tuning fork, *a 'B'* (1999). Beginning with pieces such as *Trans-Europe Express*, *Solaris 1993* (1993), and *From the Eiffel Tower to the Riesenrad* (1993), Bulloch would engage more directly with temporality as well. Appropriating a song or film (what Douglas Gordon calls "time readymades") rather than a single image or object obviously involves duration.[18] More consequent, however, is Bulloch's pursuit of temporal dislocation or "time shifting," palimpsesting one time over another in order to thicken a piece's mnemonic resonances.[19] In *Solaris 1993* this was accomplished by appropriating and reediting a video of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972), redubbing it with her voice and that of Liam Gillick, and thereby highlighting the distance between the moments of production and appropriation or reception. Edited to include only those scenes where Tarkovsky's astronaut, Kris Kelvin (Donatas Banionis) confronts the image of his wife Hari (Natalya Bondarchuk), *Solaris 1993* couples a deconstruction of the gendered binaries of production and consumption with a more explicitly feminist subtext by emphasizing images of women (and women as images) caught within a masculine imaginary: "The female character is just a figment of his imagination and so she either comes to life or she dies."[20]

More recently, Bulloch has effected a similar "time shift" in *Rock 'n' Roll Star: Byrds & Smith* (2005), which is composed of two of her pixel boxes, one playing The Byrds's "So You Want to Be a Rock 'n' Roll Star" (1967), the other, Patti Smith's cover version, "So You Want to Be (A Rock 'n' Roll Star)" (1979). Here, as elsewhere, the specific resonances of Bulloch's appropriation are important, particularly the song's self-reflexive comment on the culture industry. In *Rock 'n' Roll Star: Byrds and Smith*, Bulloch replaces the pixel boxes' frosted-glass "screens" with plywood pierced by holes to replicate Op artist Bridget Riley's painting *White Disks I* (1964). Since the pixel box's scale and materials resonate strongly with Donald Judd's sculpture, Bulloch's reference to Riley effectively crosses the mid-1960s movements of Op and Minimalism. By turning her minimalist boxes to cast colored light on the wall, Bulloch also alludes to the projective kineticism of Nicolas Schöffer (an avowed reference), thereby deconstructing the dichotomy between kinetic art and minimal "theatricality," both connotations being further conjoined to the realm of commercial culture by the pixel boxes' role as speakers.[21]

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Bulloch's peculiarly dialectical and deconstructive objects—at one and the same time produced and reproduced, created and appropriated, new and redolent of historical and mnemonic traces—appear as particularly concentrated symptoms of the socioeconomic conditions of production in the aftermath of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri term "postmodernization." "In this context," they write, "the distinctions that define the central categories of political economy tend to blur. Production becomes indistinguishable from reproduction; productive forces merge with relations of production. . . . In this new historical formation it is thus no longer possible to identify a sign, a subject, a value, or a practice that is 'outside.'"[22]

Proceeding from much the same premises, Paolo Virno argues that rather than standing apart from the new conditions of production and existence, and the forms of domination that accompany them, one must enter into them to investigate the "essential and ambivalent nucleus" of the most ubiquitous characteristics of the new social (and "emotional") situation that arose from the "ethos" of postmodernism: "We need to understand . . . the *ambivalence* of these modes of being and feeling, to discern in them a 'degree zero' or neutral kernel from which may arise both cheerful resignation, inexhaustible renunciation, and social assimilation on the one hand and new demands for the radical transformation of the status quo on the other."[23] Speaking to such undecided potentialities, Virno addresses attitudes and behaviors that find themselves incorporated into the most advanced sectors of post-Fordist economies and he attempts to wrest the neutral core from such ambivalent attributes as cynicism, which "places in full view . . . the naked rules that artificially structure the parameters of action."[24] We have seen that Bulloch, too, is interested in behavior. Indeed, placing the naked rules that artificially structure action in full view succinctly describes her *Rules Series*, in which lists of regulations are appropriated from their original sites and transferred into anomalous locations. Yet Bulloch's work also indicates something like an ambivalent form of *objecthood*.

Unlike Judd's infamous "specific object," which sought a direct and virtually unmediated material and compositional impact, Bulloch's work is saturated with more or less explicit mnemonic traces and associations.[25] Bulloch's objects, such as *Rock 'n' Roll Star*, deconstruct the high/low binaries of art and design, avant-garde and kitsch, and elite and mass culture by multiplying the connotations of pop (music, and by association, art), Op, Minimalism, kineticism, modern design, and—in the resemblance to psychedelic speakers—outmoded commercial fads. "What is important," explains Bulloch, "is the shift between this and that time and a different way of producing something, the means of production."[26]

Bulloch's (artistic) engagement with the new conditions of (economic) pro-
duction sets forth a different response to the appropriation of appropriation as a
generalized cultural practice in the 1980s. By contrast with those artists prac-
ticing forms of institutional critique that seek to remain untainted by existing
socioeconomic conditions and the forms of domination they entail—by eschew-
ing production (and thereby assimilation) altogether—Bulloch investigates the
ambivalent and neutral core of production within precisely these conditions. Her
position *within*, rather than *apart from*, has been succinctly described by the art-
ist herself: "I try to imagine how every thing holds together—like the solar system,
which can be explained, but I cannot imagine a position outside the solar system."[27]
As opposed to the belief that by criticizing the status quo one might success-
fully exclude oneself from it, Bulloch suggests that it is only by engaging with new
conditions of production that one might begin to forge new possibilities within our
condition as post-postmoderns.

NOTES

1. On "inter-passivity" see Suzanne Cotter,
"Conversation between Angela Bulloch and
Suzanne Cotter," in *Angela Bulloch*, exhibition
brochure (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford, 2005), not
paginated.
2. Angela Bulloch in Nadia Schneider and Angela
Bulloch, "Pillow Talk in Public Space," *Parkett* 48
(1996), p. 155.
3. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans.
Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with
Mathieu Copeland (1998; Dijon: Les presses du
réel, 2002), p. 31. Bulloch distances herself from
this reception in Cotter.
4. Bulloch in Schneider and Bulloch, p. 155.
5. Mike Kelley, "An Academic Cut-Up, in Easily
Digestible Paragraph-Size Chunks; Or, The New
King of Pop: Dr. Konstantin Raudive," *Grey Room*
11 (Spring 2003), pp. 28–29.
6. For discussion of a similarly productive artistic
position within late capitalism, see Tom
McDonough, "No Ghost," *October* 110 (Fall 2004),
pp. 107–30.
7. Éric Troncy, "Participation and Accident," *Art
Press* 226 (July–August 1997), p. 46.
8. Maria Walsh, "The Light Fantastic," interview
with Angela Bulloch, *Art Monthly* 292

(December–January 2005–06), p. 2.
9. Cotter, "Conversation between Angela
Bulloch and Suzanne Cotter."
10. Kate Linker, "Difference: On Representation
and Sexuality," Renaissance Society at the
University of Chicago, http://renaissancesociety.
org/site/Exhibitions/
Essay.95.0.0.0.0.html?RENSOC_SESSID=e942df
e6e301e72b3541beba9fdd70dd (accessed
February 4, 2008).
11. Douglas Crimp, "Appropriating
Appropriation," in *On the Museum's Ruins*
(Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), p. 126. See also,
Martha Rosler, "Notes on Quotes," in *Decoys and
Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975–2001*
(Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 135–48.
12. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Living with
Contradictions: Critical Practices in the Age of
Supply-Side Aesthetics," *Social Text* 21 (1989),
pp. 191–213.
13. Cotter, "Conversation between Angela
Bulloch and Suzanne Cotter."
14. Rosalind Krauss, "Sherrie Levine:
Bachelors," in *Bachelors* (Cambridge: MIT Press,
1999), pp. 179–90.
15. Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others:
Feminists and Postmodernism," in *Beyond*

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Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture, eds. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 166–90.
16. Sherrie Levine, "After Brancusi," in *Sherrie Levine: Newborn*, ed. Ann Temkin (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1993), p. 7.
17. Howard Singerman, "Sherrie Levine's Art History," *October* 101 (Summer 2002), pp. 96–121.
18. Douglas Gordon in Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction* (New York and Berlin: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002), p. 86.
19. On "time-shifting," see Liam Gillick, "The Corruption of Time: Looking Back at Future Art," *Flash Art* 29, no. 188 (May–June 1996), pp. 69–70.
20. Angela Bulloch in Walsh, "The Light Fantastic," p. 2.
21. Bulloch mentions Schöffer in Dominic Eichler, "Notional Space and Blurred Systems: Angela Bulloch's Exhibition *To The Power of 4*," in *Secession: Angela Bulloch*, exhibition brochure (Vienna: Secession, 2005), p. 8. On the opposition between Minimalism and kineticism, see Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), pp. 201–42. The term "theatricality" was applied to minimal sculpture by Michael Fried in "Art and Objecthood" (1967), available in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 148–72.
22. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 385.
23. Paolo Virno, "The Ambivalence of Disenchantment," trans. Michael Turits, in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 13.
24. Ibid., p. 17.
25. Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," *Arts Yearbook* 8 (1965), pp. 74–82.
26. Walsh, "The Light Fantastic," p. 4.
27. Angela Bulloch in *SATELLITE—Angela Bulloch*, eds. Angela Bulloch and Stefan Kalmár, exh. cat. (Zurich: Museum für Gegenwartskunst; Dijon: Le Consortium, 1998), p. 14. "However," she continues, "this doesn't stop you trying to imagine it."