

Photo thread thread photo

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by
Marion Strunk

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I

At present I am interested in threads. Not Ariadne's thread, but threads as connections.

I embroider threads into photographs. Photographs like tourists' snapshots - every day subjects. Or photographs I acquire one way or the other - in which case I am neither a photographer nor embroideress... maybe a thief. I embroider into the photograph, using the needlework to lay the thread onto the surface. In the photograph the thread acquires a form, rising from it like a bas-relief and aesthetically integrated into it, the colour of the thread adding to the integration. It is important to me that thread should be distinguishable from photograph at a distance - so sometimes I emphasise their difference yet more and embroider circles. The fiction can unfold like a self-explanatory illusion. But when you touch it you feel the woolly thread, and you understand its tactile quality. The thread is statically in the picture, it is a figure or object in the photographic image and is itself an image as well as a photo - graph. The image cannot however claim that 'this is how it was'.

The connecting of embroidery and photography, needlework and photography work, is a slow activity. I like the equanimity that comes with it. Though it does sometimes annoy me to have to keep on picking up the thread, pushing it through the eye of the needle without loosing it: an embroidered woman in white strolls along a street, yellow figures sit in the sun on a bench, the street names are in English; on one house front I embroider a pattern with 3 threads, two small ones and a longer one in the middle, they look like birds and hang around like notes; I embroider away Audrey Hepburn's escort, Jane Birkin gets a turquoise bow tie and Jean Cocteau green gloves. Round snowflakes stick to the Angora jumper and are warm to the touch. The thread has not yet broken.¹

II

In place of the 'new' and the 'other' there is repetition. The theme of repetition is difference: similarity and difference. The original, in the sense of the 'new' as the 'never-yet-been-here' cannot exist. Thoughts and ideas and materials are part of playing with difference as they - in conjunction with one another - become ideas, and repetition transforms into a different kind of 'new'. The difference, described by the repetition, is in the concentration on the now. The 'new' is in the opening up, adjusting, shifting, like a stand, to new points of view, as the subject - the individual element - repeats the common place. Choosing what pleases. The choice is artistic decision, starting point, concept, and recognition of similarity. Revealing difference: how in the repetition itself form begins to live: texts generate texts, art becomes precondition for art.

The evident effect of this transformed practice is the discussion and critique of the concept of autonomy – and the idea of the autonomous artist, autonomous authorship, the creative artist or autonomous art – and it clearly corresponds with the desire for communicative situations and social relationships in the context of the longing for a means to connect art and life. The effort at transformation remains, but it does not aim to achieve an absolute 'whole' or the 'new'. The theme rather is the opposition between submission/enslavement and freedom/sketch.

The fetish of the 'work' as a single whole is also dissolved. No one today says 'work', instead it is 'product-ion' or 'project' or 'the artist's work' and they mean by this about art that it is produced.

The attitude of art demands openness, authority and ambiguity. So authorship cannot be defined as a unique, 'never-yet-been-here' programme. It describes rather a perspective that is designed for diversity or vision or plurality. From this point of view authorship is always collective - a composite, a gathering of different perspectives, a polyphony. To recognise authorship does not mean approving of its individualisation in the history of culture. It means rather taking seriously the idea of the position of individuals as indispensable in the confrontation with cultural tradition and creating from their insights positions based on difference. In this the new reveals itself as that remainder of subjectivity and freedom that keeps on developing and designing miscellaneous things: fragments that do not add up to a 'work of art' but are possibilities, images, subjective realities, constructions. They are also seductions, they address another person and not the general public. This is not a matter of the new or the very different, it is a matter of interaction through dialogue.

III

Art cannot be creative genius. Instead it may be described as a dynamic system that can be structured and introduced by a director. Artists, people who write, paint, film, make music and everyone else acquire ideas and thoughts, densify/poetize, make dense/make poetry and loose the inverted commas. They need not provide a reference. They can bring in what ever is stored in their memory and what they remember and make present.

The work of an artist is to do projects or make proposals for sensory perception, a demonstration of imagination, a position or subversion, and this is true for all media in art. Lyotard chose the term translation for this process.² The translators can modify the brief and open it up to new readings or leave it in its state of unreadability, they can interlink it with other things or even lead away from it or contradict it. The interest in the brief is not hermeneutic, rather it is constructive, conceptual, a tool for unfolding strategies.

Art does not care about the gender of a person doing artistic work. Art has no gender. What ever the theme of the work may be it may very well represent gender or present it. Mediated by the material it can be thematised through the medium. The work may acquire a philosophical, pragmatic and also a political dimension: what is critical is the

context in which it places the people, in which traditions or inheritances, and what these people have learnt about themselves, what they think and how they act, and which perspective they wish to adopt. Art becomes counter-work³ – not in the sense of opposition but in the sense of caesura, the other, counter discourse. The gesture of hesitation when throwing away.

Hence the question: what is useful? What is meaningful? How can things be seen or used differently?

By questioning the individual, the culture, society as art, art defines itself as art and not theory. By asking how forms can be seen differently, how forms can be shown as being differently viewable, art can disassemble every form, making it available for different content and making it possible to experience it through the senses. Critical encounters in a theoretical or socio-political context require approval. But art needs no recognition nor does it need a public, it needs neither approval nor approbation. Yet this different form of perception cannot be a precept. Aesthetic form in its contrariness does not allow itself to be produced, it cannot be the content of a production. If this were to happen it would be didacticism or education, propaganda or activism. Instead aesthetic form belongs to poetic gesture, which is a very special power or energy. Powers and their effects are unleashed through aesthetic form. But nor can effects be produced. The effect is greater when it is not subject to any intentions but emerges during the process: unintentional. It is this foregoing of the instrumentality of the enquiry to intentionality that ensures that counter-work does not fall into the trap of explanation. Art can question all forms through its self. This is its peculiarity and its obstinacy. Questioning the self and circumventing the self. Art can break out and forget time and place only to remind itself again that there can be no place beyond the here and now, only a place in the thick of things like a thread in its cloth. It is not about inventing something new. It is about connecting one thing with the other and pulling the thread tight.

Notes:

¹ <http://marionstrunk.ch>

Marion Strunk, Wolle 2, Memory / Cage Editions,
Zürich 1999

² Jean-Francois Lyotard, Immaterialität und Postmoderne,
Berlin 1985

³ Menke, Christoph, Die Souveränität der Kunst,
Ästhetische Erfahrungen nach Adorno und Derrida,
Frankfurt / M. 1988

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Photo thread/thread photo

Embroidered Image

Diven:

#1-6, 50 x 70 cm

2007

p: 4
Photo thread/thread photo
Embroidered Image
#2, 50 x 70 cm
2010

p: 6
Photo thread/thread photo
Embroidered Image
#7, 70 x 100 cm
2009

p: 7
Photo thread/thread photo
Embroidered Image
#5, 70 x 100 cm
2009

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