Relational Aesthetics and Morphing Forms

While I arrived at the Ice Cream Social concept intuitively and independently, through my work in comedy, and only learned the term "relational aesthetics" within the past year or two, it is certainly true that the Ice Cream Social is about bringing people together on a platform of artifice sympathetic to the formation of new social rituals. My ice cream socials establish self-conscious, temporary communities. What is this community? For what purpose has it been formed? Though I’m interested in these questions, to my mind the ICS is equally a platform for bringing together forms of expression--formats, media, contexts. Paintings and digital prints, live events, a novella, a TV pilot, a movie script--a formal "morphing," with a concomitant leveling of formal hierarchies, has been a crucial aspect of the project's own narrative. As it has evolved, the ICS has reconciled media and communication contexts with heretofore competing, often conflicting cultural agendas. The story of the ICS is in part the story of its movement from a culturally marginal presentational form to mainstream presentational forms--from a painting to television and movies.

Parasitism and Politics

How does someone with an art mind-set go about working directly in mass media? With relation to the source inspiration, what is the degree of parasitism? In other words, is it possible for a self-described artist to make, say, genuine television and not video art about television? As far as aesthetic matters go, at this point in the Social's development these are the questions that intrigue, motivate, and keep me on track.

I'm not interested to introduce things—materials, subject matter, concepts—into the art context. That seems to me to have been the work of modernism, and a habit of imagination left over from modernism. Instead, with the ICS I'm interested in pushing certain ambitions for the culture and certain attitudes heretofore associated with the art context in the direction of the mainstream. I'm interested to work as an artist in mainstream forms, from a position of respect for mainstream forms. My ambition isn't to get video art shown on a television program or channel. My ambition is to make television shows for popular consumption. What might such shows be like?
Until recently, the gap between "art" and mainstream media was quite large. Only the networks and movie studios possessed the necessary technology. Some of the resentment and "critique" that artists have aimed at mainstream media is attributable, I believe, to their frustration at having been "frozen out" of using powerful, modern communication technology. Today, though, the artist who wants to work in mass media forms needn't adopt that negative stance. The technology gap is closing, and an artist can now create with the same equipment that many filmmakers and televisionmakers use. While it's true that mass media distribution systems still favor status quo entertainment product, as imaginations that have been trained in other traditions increasingly produce in mainstream formats those distribution systems will gradually feel the pressure, and eventually discover the commercial advantage of opening up. It's only a matter of time.

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