

*If this is a contemporary art show, then what does it mean?*

It's difficult to say, I agree. We don't even quite know what it means to be contemporary. What is the time that we live in about? People say we live in times of uncertainty. Is *this* the one certainty we share, then? How do we even know that this much is certain?

*It's what the art shows us: "uncertainty" is what the art represents and expresses, isn't it?*

Well, yes maybe you *could* say that ... but still, how can we be *certain* that the art here represents contemporary uncertainty? For it to do that it would surely have to be certain in its expression for these expressions of uncertainty to convincingly represent the contemporary sentiment. I'm not trying to be willfully paradoxical here. I am simply not convinced that art relates to the contemporary by "representing" or "expressing" it.

*What's wrong with representation?*

Well, a moment ago we were talking about the question of hermeneutics versus hermeticism: whether we still believe art to be a tool of learning which serves to render the world and our desires transparent -- as the hermeneutic approach maintains; or whether we would not rather assume art to be a hermetic language of coded innuendo that yields knowledge only to those willing to initiate themselves into its opaque codes and participate in the experience of codification. In the light of our skepticism with regard to the idea that any language could ever be transparent, it seemed that the hermetic take on how art makes meaning was much closer to the way things actually work.

*Okay ... but isn't that a pretty bleak outlook?*

It doesn't have to be. All I'm trying to say is that art works a bit like fashion: each season there's a new set of codes as fashion re-encrypts the way in which we combine clothes and colors, and which decades we reference when we wear them, and with what kind of attitude we might adopt to carry that look off. To be in sync with fashion you have to initiate yourself in its code and rehearse its combinations, references and attitudes.

When I was here at an Armory building performance last week, it struck me how closely connected the operations of fashion are to that of art -- especially in a city like New York. The clothes the kids in the audience were wearing were coded in much the same way as most of the works on show: they were perfectly in sync. And it seemed that the key cipher in this code was, well, whatever you want to call it: uncertainty, depression, alienation ... or equally, post-punk, new wave, no wave, goth ... late 1970s, early 1980s ...

If you look at this so-called "uncertainty" -- or depression, recession, alienation, et cetera -- primarily as a cipher for a code rather than a sentiment to be represented, then it becomes clear why the "expressions" of uncertainty that define contemporary art, fashion and music *are* so certain, so defined and determinate in their expression: because they are a pretty stable, solid code that artists, designers and musicians have been working on for a couple of years now.

*But if people have been working on these codes for so long, how can it be contemporary? After all, the recession is only happening now -- literally NOW.*

Well, isn't that the fascinating thing about contemporaneity? That to be *truly* contemporary you actually have to be slightly ahead of yourself, you have to be decidedly UNCONTEMPORARY in order to prefigure, presage, and prepare yourself for what is to come. The codes have to already be in place when the shit hits the fan.

Don't you remember the first time around ... ? I recall trying to initiate myself into the codes of alienation as a teenage goth ... god, some twenty odd years ago. At that time I was of course much too young to have experienced anything that could have instilled the deeply existential morbid sense of melancholy I was aiming for. But still I wanted to prepare myself for that experience. The trouble was that I did not *like* parts of the experience of the code. And I *did not like that I did not like them*. So I tried to force my body to process the code. I deliberately put on a record I didn't like very much -- *Psychocandy* by The Jesus & Mary Chain: simple beautiful songs wilfully effaced by too much reverb and random feedback -- then lowered the blinds in the living room and lay on the floor to make my blood pressure drop. All to create an experience through which I would get the code. I don't remember if it "worked", as such, but it prepared me nonetheless.

In this sense you could say that much contemporary art, fashion and music of recent years has not been representing but *preparing* us for a moment of alienation -- for the event of recession -- by teaching us to rehearse the code in advance of eventually experiencing it. You could even say that recession is the event, or rather the revenant, the ghost, that we were actively *summoning* through this ceremony of preparation and anticipation. Maybe anticipation is the key to any code; the key to the desire inscribed in the code. Perhaps codes are even one of the strongest manifestations of a desire -- that strange desire for something, *anything* really, as long as it stops things from being as they are and have been for a while. And all within the context the still-booming art market ... so we arrive at full tables all dressed up and ready for uncertainty and recession. Funny, isn't it?

*Funny? Well I'm not so*