

■ **The Fall of the Studio: Artists at Work**

Alex Coles

The Fall of the Studio: Artists at Work, eds Wouter Davidts & Kim Paice, Valiz, 2009, 249pp, illus, pb, £17.95, 978 9 0789882 9 5.

'The studio has been replaced by urbanism and industry. Steel mills, shipyards, and fabrication plants have become my on-the-road extended studios.'

Richard Serra, 'Extended Notes from Sight Point Road', 1985.

'I don't need one studio, but I do need a lot of studios.'

Philippe Parreno, 'Interview with Kate van den Boogert', 2003.

The introduction to *The Fall of the Studio: Artists at Work* by Wouter Davidts and Kim Paice provides both a thorough overview of the discursive condition of the studio and a survey of the recent literature on the subject, which includes the exhibition catalogue *The Studio* (Dublin City Gallery, 2007) edited by Jens Hoffmann and Christina Kennedy and *Studio and Cube* by Brian O'Doherty (Princeton, 2007). The editors' research and writing is thorough, if somewhat predictable at times, as evidenced by sentences like the following 'Ever since artists embarked upon the radical program of questioning and eventually overturning the traditional and conventional modes of production, reception, circulation, and reception of artworks in the late 1960s, the studio has suffered a series of tragic blows.' Besides their own passages of analysis, the introduction is peppered with quotes from the likes of Robert Smithson, effectively conveying the mood of the late 1960s – the moment of the accepted beginning of the process of questioning the role of the studio and hence the epistemological focus point of the collection. 'Deliverance from the confines of the studio,' Smithson states in 'A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects', 1968,

'frees the artist to a degree from the snares of craft and the bondage of creativity.' Other artists of Smithson's generation for whom the critique of the traditional place of the studio was equally crucial – including Daniel Buren's 'Function of the Studio', 1971; Robert Morris's 'Notes on Sculpture: Part II', 1966; Bruce Nauman's photograph *Bound to Fail*, 1967, as well as various works and essays by Serra – are all brought in to flesh out the historical context and give an accurate sense of both the breadth and the heat of the debate of the time. The trajectory of the studio is brought relatively up to date – though much more could have been done here – by the editors, albeit with the 1960s remaining as an uncontested epistemological focus point. Case studies referred to include Tacita Dean's films that revisit key works by Smithson and Marcel Broodthaers and the peripatetic practice of Philippe Parreno.

The contributors in the chapters that follow have been selected on the basis that their research heeds the editors' premise that 'instead of upholding the accepted wisdom or narrative that *the studio has fallen*', the present task of scholarship on the studio is to 'ambitiously question ... assumptions that underlie the popular and international discussion of the "post-studio"'. An obvious danger would have been to fall back on a more conservative plea for a return to the studio – something the editors avoid. And yet rather than just focusing on artists whose practice neatly unfolds from the high point of the critique of the studio in the late 1960s (which could so comfortably have led to essays on Dean and Parreno et al) they have commissioned essays that go beyond their own limitations – the mark of a good editor – that survey a much broader spectrum of the subject.

So as well as there being the expected essays on Buren ('My Studio is the Place where I am (Working)' by Davidts), Morris ('Continuous Project Altered Daily' by Paice) and Nauman ('Seeing Through the Studio' by MaryJo Marks) there are also analyses of figures such as Mark Rothko and Eva Hesse. 'Portrait of the Artist with Work' by Kirsten Swenson gives an extended analysis of the

photographs of Hesse in her studio in relation to her work. 'Studio Vertigo' by Morgan Thomas is particularly intriguing since it endeavours to offer a more sophisticated reading of the role of the studio in Rothko's practice than hitherto attempted. Thomas's essay turns on a consideration of the complexities inherent in the artist's later works that were commissioned for a particular site and fabricated in a particular studio. Also intriguing is the chapter by Julia Gelshorn 'Creation, Recreation, Procreation' on the work of Matthew Barney, Martin Kippenberger, Jason Rhoades and Paul McCarthy. The essay on Olafur Eliasson, 'The Narcissistic Studio' by Philip Ursprung, is less of a surprise, though equally intriguing as a piece of writing, because of the author's impressive body of work already presented in Taschen's monograph devoted to Eliasson's studio which he edited.

The only real off note sounded in the entire collection is in the final chapter on Jan De Cock, 'Where is the Studio' by Jon Wood. After an opening gambit where Wood makes a link between Albert Camus and De Cock – yes, Camus and De Cock: you read it right – he then proceeds to discuss some of the artist's installations. But at each point in the chapter Wood fails to situate De Cock securely within a contemporary critical landscape. When does an installation by De Cock really engage and question the space of the studio and the space of the discourse on the studio? And when does it fail and why? Wood has no idea. A famous critic allegedly once pleaded to be saved from art historians. Essays like this give you a sense of why. Fortunately it is the exception in *The Fall of the Studio: Artists at Work*. ■

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