



CHRISTIAN BOLTANSKI, *Après (After)*
Mac/Val/ Musée d'Art Contemporain du Val-de-Marne,
Paris.

The concept of death has been a concern for philosophers ever since Aristotle, but it is in the work of a most prominent contemporary artist, **Christian Boltanski**, that we are confronted with our existence and ending in a very unique manner.

Après (After) deals precisely with an encounter of our own earthly existence looked upon from the other world, rather than an encounter with the 'afterlife' as such. The work sets the spectator in that state of being of the "after death", looking

backwards towards to what constitute the most important aspects of life, a sort of self-evaluation at the precise momentum of the departure. In the process of appreciation of Boltanski's great installation, we are forced to reflect upon the process of life and death.



The installation has been set in a huge exhibition space with high ceiling at the **Mac/Val/ Museum of Contemporary Art of Val-de-Marne in Paris**. Upon entering, we are immediately placed within the work becoming part of the setting as well as of the significance in the



manner that the artist conceived it. We are confronted with tall black curtains and a labyrinth of passages and are immersed in the spatial setting and conception. **Boltanski**, presents the spectator with powerful images which are structured in what may seem simple, but it is a simplicity that only a genius can achieve, while conveying a profound significance by a visual and emotional impact.

In some corners a figure has been set of only a stand with a coat, holding two linear neon lights with suggested arms crossed over the breast. The words that come from the inside sound from beyond the grave. The recorded phrases,

repeated constantly, strike the spectator inducing a reflection upon life and death as well as after. The short sentences or phrases are addressed to the viewer with questions such as whether you left many friends, if you want this to be the end, if you see the light, how are you feeling now, questioning the proper significance of what is happening as well as of leaving. Such



probing questions could make the spectator feel uneasy and overwhelmed, in contrast to a general feeling evoked by the setting itself. By means of the perceived environment of light and darkness, sound and touch, the artist takes the spectator away from life and death to the profound state of *after (après)* which is a view of the possible eternal state of the being after the transition from life.

Although we cannot avoid the fact that we are experiencing a work of art, in a certain manner the appreciation process may remind or may induce a feeling in the spectator close to a spiritual setting and ceremony, such as free-masonry by which the participant goes through or passes through the threshold of consciousness towards a different turn in life and forcing a reflection upon our earthly beginning and end. **Boltanski's** creation does achieve such sense of mysticism and spirituality. The artist developed and concretized such profound symbolism of what we may call the transcendental transmutation of matter-spirit duality, which leads to the liberation of the soul or essence of being. In this work by a master artist we are presented with this duality that we are capable of and which permits us to be close even in life to a possible liberation through a process of elevation of mind, rather than by meditation or prayer, by an attunement with the constructed artistic ambience. The concepts that have been interpreted and / or represented by the master possess a symbolic meaning.

In the creative process, **Boltanski** conceives his installations as life itself, with a beginning and end, destined to disappear after they are exhibited. The time before the installation is set constitutes the conceptualization or development of the philosophical and social statement which is followed by the recollection of objects and or recordings which do possess a meaning for the artist as well as for each person who participates in the process in a particular manner. Once the installation takes place in a defined spatial environment, the public or should we say each particular spectator, becomes part of the conception as

well as of the process. Memory, life and death have been a continuum in the artist's conceptual statements.

The work *Après (After)* is complementary to, or related to *Personnes*, conceived for **Monumenta** at the **Grand Palais**, which ended in February 2010.

Après (After) - The installation was seen in March 2010 at Mac/Val/ Musée d'Art Contemporain du Val-de-Marne, Paris, by a special invitation to **AICA**-(International Association of Art Critics) International Administrative Council.

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***Les Regards*, 1993**

Photographic reproductions on paper on exhibit at
Mac/Val/ Musée d'Art Contemporain du Val-de-Marne, Paris,

