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Résumé de l'article

Avec une prédilection pour les images iconiques, la captation de scènes et de situations connues, et un penchant pour les dispositifs de cadrage qui soulignent les structures institutionnelles et cognitives formant notre compréhension du monde et de ses représentations, les photographies et les installations d'Angela Grauerholz manifestent une sensibilité essentiellement archivistique. Dans le dernier projet de l'artiste, *Salle de lecture de l'artiste au travail*, les archives prennent la forme d'un processus abstrait et d'une entité concrètes. Composée du mobilier d'une salle de lecture, d'une projection de film et d'une série de douze livres abritant un vaste assortiment de reproductions éphémères — cartes postales, oeuvres, photos, coupures de presse et extraits de textes variés —, la *Salle de lecture* poursuit l'exploration de l'artiste sur les structures et les processus du langage pour étudier de quelle manière ces innombrables artefacts figuratifs pourraient produire une oeuvre d'art.

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Between Heaven and Earth, the Loci and the Cosmos:
At Work in the Reading Room for the Working Artist

CHERYL**SIMON**

The relation of language to the world is one of analogy rather than of signification; or rather, [the value of words] as signs and their duplicating function are superimposed; they speak the heaven and the earth of which they are the image. . . .
Language possesses a symbolic function; but since the disaster at Babel we must no longer seek for it – with rare exceptions – in the words themselves but rather in the very existence of language, in its total relation to the totality of the world, in the intersecting of its space with the loci and forms of the cosmos.
—Michel Foucault, The Order of Things
(An Archaeology of Human Sciences)

Angela Grauerholz's photographic and installation works present pictures of "the real" that always remind us that reality can never be seen as such, or at least not directly. If her photographs, trading on their indexical nature, initially invoke a sense of the immediacy and historical specificity of the artist's experience, a sense of "presence" in time and place, this impression is necessarily discharged once the interpretive frameworks are set in play – when one begins to "read" the photographs as works of art. At first these pictures appear to be "in" and "of" the moment, due to the continuity of time registered in the flux of the actions described and sometimes, too, to the subtle movement of the camera shaking as the subject is framed and shot. Often the subject matter is so everyday and completely banal that the time depicted seems more to be slowing than to be stilled. However, the images are also deeply generic and so can never actually be of the moment at hand but are of a time more eternal, one that is necessarily collective and culturally determined.

Grauerholz's pictures personify, exemplify, typify – a pool player taking aim is *the* pool player; an empty room appears as the exemplar of all emptied rooms and, at the same time, as the only one we've ever really known. The photographs are never about their subjects per se. Rather, the artist approaches her subjects as subjects that are already objectified and given meaning elsewhere and at another time – in other representations. Her interest lies in the value and meanings that we give to objects and phenomena and the myriad ways in which these values and meanings are expressed through the processes and practices of cultural expression.

That we never get at the thing itself except through a haze of cultural knowledge and interpretive schemes is the critical leitmotif informing both these pictures' takings and their framings. *Eclogue or Filling the Landscape* (1995), a work named after and taking its form from the first bound, edited book of poems produced by Virgil, played with the tension between the visible and invisible, the open and closed dynamics of representational practice, by placing a series of loosely organized and unframed pictures in folio boxes and setting these into the drawers of a transparent storage case. To similar purpose and effect, *Sententia* (1998) installed its pictures of doorways and windows, roadways and passageways – all dynamic, alive, and transitional spaces – into a picture-viewing cabinet that made reference to the architecture of the mausoleum.

With a predilection for iconic imagery, for taking pictures of scenes and situations that seem to have been seen before, and a penchant for framing devices that foreground the institutional and cognitive structures that shape our understanding of the world and, even more importantly, its representations, Grauerholz's works are quintessentially archival in their sensibility. If they do not function as historical documents in any direct way, these photographs present their contents as representational artefacts in their own right, re-presentations of representations – ideas in physical form.

Grauerholz's most recent installation work, *Reading Room for the Working Artist*, gives form to the archive as an abstract process and a concrete entity. Built on the model of Alexandr Rodchenko's communist *Worker's Club*, this is an archive for and about the artist as worker. The installation presents a vast collection of archival documents related to art and its practice, in this instance to *this* artist's practice. In a "found-footage" film projection and a series of twelve thematic artist's books are compiled reproductions of a wide range of ephemera collected over the span of the artist's career. Including representations of both personal and professional significance *Reading Room* houses film and music clips; various types of photographs (some taken by the artist, although more are culled from a eclectic collection of published sources); reproductions of works of art, maps, diagrams, postcards, letters, handwritten notes, and manuscripts; scans of book jackets; excerpts from fictional works, travel writing, scientific treatises, philosophy, art, and literary theory; newspaper clippings; and scanned reproductions of a mass of assorted other things. With these objects in and of reproduction, *Reading Room* extends Grauerholz's ongoing exploration of the structures and processes of language to consider how these representational artefacts might give shape to the artwork itself at its earliest stage, before conception. In the context of the archive, all language and expression exists in a virtual state. Before ideas take material form in the

Sententia I – LXII, 1998
meuble d'archives photographiques
bois de cerisier et bois laqué
(cadres/tiroirs)
203 x 94 x 238 cm
31 tiroirs verticaux (cadres) : 111 x 72 cm
62 photographies : 95 x 63 cm
collection particulière

Angela Grauerholz, born in Hamburg, Germany, has lived and worked in Montréal since 1976. As the co-founder of ARTEXTE in 1980, she also worked extensively as a designer and has been teaching at the École de Design, Université du Québec à Montréal since 1988. Her photographic work has been exhibited and collected nationally and internationally, which includes participations at the Biennale of Sydney in 1990, Documenta IX in 1992 and the Carnegie International in Pittburgh in 1995. Also in 1995, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal presented her work in a solo exhibition, followed by exhibitions at the Power Plant in Toronto, the Albright-Knox Museum in Buffalo and the Biennale de Montréal.

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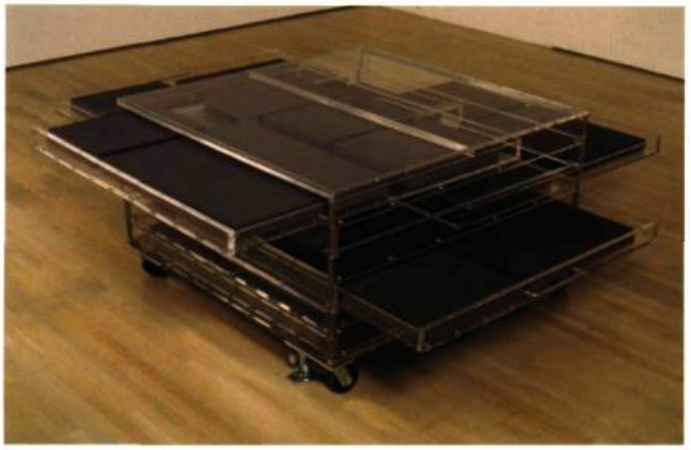


Églogue ou Filling the Landscape, 1995
cabinet en Plexiglas, 152 x 152 cm,
hauteur 91 cm
6 tiroirs, 27 portfolios, environ 216 photographies noir et blanc
collection : Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

practices and productions of culture, the object exists in phantom form as a modality of difference and possibility in relation to the historical a priori of discourse, the myriad ideas and practices that pre-exist it.

Equipped with reading tables and chairs, *Reading Room* is, quite literally, a reading room, a space designed for the stimulation of ideas through a close "reading" of the objects it contains. With the addition of a chess table, the work of the artist in this reading room is imagined as a meeting of minds in an intellectual contest, and the "reading" itself is envisaged as oppositional and dynamic – dialogic, at the very least. Significantly, the title of this exhibition and the structure to which it corresponds refer to and replicate one of the first formal manifestations of an artist's archive-based work. Hence, the first and most important contest in the project occurs between Grauerholz and Rodchenko, and to make this point most salient Grauerholz has built her reading room in response to his designs.

Spare and utilitarian in function and style, the Russian plywood multipurpose table and the chairs and even the chessboard are slightly altered, but otherwise identical to the furnishings of Rodchenko's *Worker's Club*. Yet, if the formal and political intentions of the two artists' archives are similar in their basic function and overall design, the critical orientation of each work and the philosophical principles guiding their functioning are quite distinct, in large part due to the different historical and social contexts within which each project has emerged.

Shown in the Soviet Pavilion at the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris in 1925, Rodchenko's *Worker's Club* was built for and presented at the inaugural exhibition of the machine age. The world's fair that introduced both the "style modern" (art deco) and the outlines for a truly radical modernist vision to the world was also the first to present the objects of industrial and interior design in the context in which they were meant to be consumed. Accordingly, the show helped launch the concept of "lifestyle" into the vocabulary of modern life, with all the attendant self-consciousness that such an idea inspires. Thus *Worker's Club* not only offered a model social space for political enlightenment and communal leisure activities but also staged a critique of the lifestyles suggested by the "comfortable" bourgeois living spaces framing the luxury items on view in the other national pavilions. In contrast to the overstuffed and highly finished interiors of these other settings, *Worker's Club* was conspicuously uncomfortable, unadorned, and functional. More importantly, the objects framed by *Worker's Club* were not decorative items or objects of aesthetic contemplation, but tools for modern living – media materials, historical documents.

If the critical deployment of the worker's club epitomizes the oppositional orientation of the revolutionary artwork of the modern era – anti-museum, anti-aesthetic, anti-art – Rodchenko's vision of a socially relevant and integrative art practice, his privileging of photography over other artistic forms of representation, and his celebration of the political potential of the mass-media archive exemplify the aesthetic dimension and political objectives of the historical avant-garde. Insofar as Grauerholz's *Reading Room* is situated in the art world proper, it begs consideration of the different terms and conditions within which the contemporary artist works. And, although Grauerholz also privileges photography over other forms of representation and celebrates the political potential of the mass media, she does so with a significantly different sense of the values, functions, and effects of these forms of representation. Where Rodchenko championed photography for its immediacy, historical accuracy, and reproducibility, the immediate historical value of the photograph is only part of the value of the photographic image in Grauerholz's work. As with her photographic practice, so too with her archival artwork, the document functions as evidence and allegory simultaneously.

A museum-scaled and -oriented work, *Reading Room* is necessarily framed by the institutions and discourses that Rodchenko's project renounced, and, as such, subjects the objects it encompasses to evaluation under the same terms – *Worker's Room* chief among all others. In Grauerholz's *Reading Room,* Rodchenko's archival structure operates as a functional archival form and a figurative image, not a direct means to social transformation via the work of art but an *idea* of social transformation that has, in fact, inspired change in the practices of art and the discourses of the museum. If Rodchenko imagined the social sphere to exist outside of the world of art, Grauerholz sees the museum, its objects, its discourses, and its participants as inherently social, both within the context of the art world and in its other, more worldly relations.

Both honorific and strategic, the basic syncretistic gesture of this work not only represents *Reading Room's* principle rhetorical strategy but also serves to link Rodchenko's basic interests with this project's central concerns. The nesting of one archive within another speaks to the dialogic process involved in artistic conception and interpretation, and it also articulates the processes of identification across the board. Additionally, the juxtaposition of *Worker's Room* with *Reading Room* underscores the status of both projects as *models* of artistic practice. Rather than functional public spaces for the actual practice of art, both operate as objects of imagination, works of art-cum-worldview.

Where Rodchenko's club provided Grauerholz with a foundational framework for thinking about and imagining a socially engaged and dynamic art practice, other archival models offer the artist other possibilities and artistic tools. Taking *Reading Room's* basic recursive structure and spinning it out exponentially, the bookwork entitled *Vorbilder* presents an archive of archives (within an archive within an archive). Each suggests different possibilities for artistic and archival expression – poetical, historiographical, personal, political. In combination, we are presented with a vast collage of archival forms, with all the historical ruptures and fortuitous recombinations that such an experiment allows. In juxtaposition, Marcel Duchamp's *Green Box* and Andre Malraux's *Musée imaginaire* promote thoughts about the extraordinarily expansive museological possibilities of the work of art in mechanical reproduction. Seen together, *Green Box* and Gilbert and George's personal working archive encourage thinking about the processes of art as forms of documentation and research, planning and administration. And if the multiple juxtapositions of Walter Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*, Aby Warburg's *Mnesosyne Atlas*, and Gerhard Richter's *Atlas* invite consideration of the critical possibilities of a materialist-cum-

Whatever is true for space and time, this much is true for place: we are immersed in it and could not do without it. To be at all – to exist in any way – is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. Place is as requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have. We are surrounded by places. We walk over and through them. We live in places, relate to others in them, die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced.

Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place*

ethnographic historiographical approach – in which the cultural relic is read as symptom – the sheer density and radical eccentricity of Andy Warhol's *Time Capsules* stymie the possibility of drawing definitive conclusions from any such accumulation.

As *Vorbilder* self-reflexively underscores the expressive possibilities of the archive as model or worldview, *Untitled (Circles)* considers the bookwork in kind. A vast reflection on worlds imagined and described, drawn and verbalized, the bookwork begins and ends by making reference to the library as the primary site of knowledge, with the book form offered as its principle emblem. A circular construction, *Untitled (Circles)* makes juxtapositions between a vast assortment of round forms, and all manner of invented structures are included – mirrors and carrousels, courtrooms and playing fields, circular histories and philosophies, zoetrope and fountains, sculptural works and planets, libraries and words, and books and books and books. As elsewhere, if concrete historical connections between things are ignored in favour of formal correspondences and categorical connections, the organization of the imagery is guided by historical concerns. In this instance, the shape of these imaginary cosmologies offers a model of temporal progress. As the image repeats itself, the circular movement broadens its radius at each return, encompassing larger and larger worlds of (circular) imagery and ideas. Conceived as the expression of time advancing, this is also an illustration of how history is materialized, in the ideas that circulate through expanded spheres of human interaction.

This spiralling structure describes not only the increasing movement of historical time but also a mode of transaction basic to the processes of representation and identification; the circuit of exchange between objects and the words or gestures that we use to describe them, the relationship between self-image and worldview, is nothing if not round. *Il neige au soleil* observes the conscious and unconscious correspondences between what we say and how we say it. A book wholly concerned with the relationship between the idea and its expression, *Il neige au soleil* looks for the meaning of words in their actual, concrete forms. Here, letters, notes, salutations, inscriptions, signatures, and marginalia join typescript exposition about the urge to write, with the force of the ideas expressed sometimes more, sometimes less directly through the body than the mind or the type. Where Bataille's compulsion comes from a fear of going mad, and Paul Auster's because he can, others, more simply, seem to write to keep in touch with friends. In each instance it is the author's corporeality – his or her being in and of the world – that is the subject and object of expression in this work.

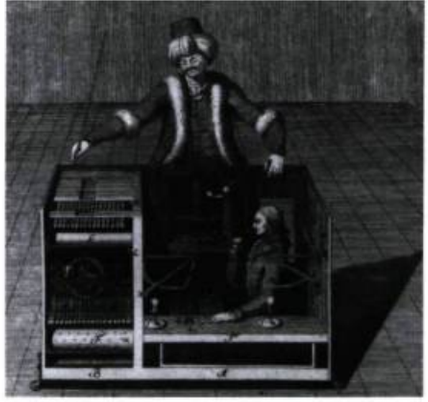
Elsewhere in *Reading Room*, matters of corporeality are expressed more openly. With *Untitled (Courting Death), Untitled (Silence/Riens),* and *Orgueilleux (Pride)*, Grauerholz approaches the subject of the body in language as a question of mortality, with the limitations on human expression seen in direct proportion to the limits of physicality. In *Untitled (Courting Death)*, death is observed and envisioned, faked, performed, anticipated, and mourned, yet it remains illusive insofar as the experience itself cannot be described. If death cannot be recognized as such, its presence is nonetheless felt in the mountains of cemeteries, monuments, tributes, and *mementi mori* that surround us.

Although *Untitled (Silence/Riens)* catalogues all manner of extrasensory things – philosophical, artistic, and literary forays into worlds of nothingness, manifestos on nonsense, and photographs of spirits and ghosts – the pictures of opened mouths silenced by the limitations of the two-dimensional form, offer the most significant visual and thematic motif in this work. It is in the failure of representation that we witness the truth of the body in the world. It is the force of intention that moves us in these images, not the object of representation in and of itself.

Similarly, with *Orgueilleux (Pride),* it is not the pictures of flight and flying that amaze us – as marvellous as the events described are – nor is it their metaphorical value as they describe the courageous force and spirit of human invention. Rather, the power of the imagery lies in what is unstated and unspoken. In this instance, the possibility of failure is quite literally suggested by the gravity of the situation.

Epiphytes, a book about the countless human forms of interdependency, leads us through another kind of hazardous terrain, the emotionally and psychologically precarious path of coupling. An epiphyte, Grauerholz tells us, is an organism, such as moss or an orchid, that is dependent but not parasitic on another. Beginning its journey with the optimistic image of Marcel Duchamp's tiny travelling chessboard, *Epiphytes* moves from this basic gesture of sociality through the emotional and psychological minefield of social bonding. With images and texts by turns innocent and funny, poignant and harrowing, the book explores the myriad risks of human association, from simple friendship to captivation and subjugation, from fear to projection, from nurturing to love. Although the work describes a range of relationships – familial, romantic, professional, civic – each with distinct qualities and concerns, the sense that each, at bottom, might really be a contest between human will and the mysterious, unfathomable, ineffable forces of the cosmos is maintained through the book's multiple references to symbiotic and parasitic relationships in the natural world. Warts, ferns, barnacles, and fungi mix with Siamese twins, family, colleagues, and friends.

Manifest in more exacting terms as a struggle for domination, *Zootomie* and *Washed Water* stage the combat between nature and culture as a relentless relay of projections and introjections. A veritable Noah's Ark of species transmutation, *Zootomie* gives refuge to a remarkable collection of beasts: gentleman monkeys and elephant men, cat women and female crustaceans, flying fish and fur-bearing trout, wolf-men and half-human/half-monstrous venomous bugs. Although the exact genus of the elements featured in *Washed Water* is similarly ambiguous, the relationship between things natural and cultural in this work seems less horrifying and more absurd, a matter not of hybridized relations but of failed correspondences between the world and its representation. Where the paintings, poems, spas, and various sculptural works exploit the metaphorical value of water only to risk missing their mark through romantic overstatement, the commercial endeavours fall much too far short. Reading the impoverished semiotics of the bottled-water industry, Grauerholz takes note of the meaningless tautologies used to describe the element's elemental qualities: free, enhanced, still, smart, designed, natural, virtual, clean, and, of



Aleksandr Rodchenko jouant aux échecs dans le coin Lénine de son club ouvrier.

L'homme machine, un exemple d'androïde de la fin du XVIIIe siècle, tel que représenté dans cette illustration d'une réplique du joueur d'échecs Herr von Kempeln.

Man Ray et Marcel Duchamp jouant aux échecs.

course, washed. With the incorporation of news clippings and reports on global water shortages and widespread contamination, vanity gives way to pathos, and absurdity turns to a horror of a different order.

Insofar as Grauerholz has conceived of the work of the artist as dialogic, the books that focus on the artist at work are concerned with the relational dynamics of sociality as it plays out in processes of artistic conception, identification, and attribution. Each differently, *Untitled (groups of artists in amusing situations)*, *Familiaris,* and *Flâneuse* deliberate on the manner in which artistic identity and artistic expression, form and content, self and other, individual and collective histories, public and private life are enmeshed. *Untitled (groups of artists in amusing situations)* takes the social lives of artists as the literal subject of the work, presenting a stunning collection of photographs of artists at play. Despite the extraordinary range of differences from group to group, the extent to which the identity of each artist and the particularity of each moment surrender to that of the larger social context is striking. This is a function of identification through attribution, the process whereby unknown elements are sifted out, but also, and more significantly, it is a condition of the portrait repertoire of the photograph, in which the private life of the individual gives itself over to a public persona and the present moment to eternal time.

Familiaris (a familiar spirit) approaches the same subject as a question of spatial experience. Ultimately an extended portrait of the artist in the studio, the extent to which the artist's signature style is imprinted on the worlds that he or she inhabits or vice versa, how environment marks artistic expression, is only one part of a more general exploration into the experience of "being in place." An opening statement by Merleau Ponty about the difficulty, even impossibility, of an objective description of the body in space is quickly countered with a series of images that provide striking evidence to the contrary. A scanned cover and the inside pages from a book on northern Germany, the artist's birthplace, written in English, one of the artist's adopted tongues, contends that knowledge of the world as conveyed in language does indeed express our relationship with place to the extent that it describes the circuitous processes through which we arrive there – as it estranges and displaces us, so, too, do we understand emplacement in kind.

Flâneuse ruminates on the possibility that the experiences of estrangement and displacement might be the fundamental condition of modernity, brought on, in large part, by the advent of photography. The book also suggests that it is only at a distance from the world that the artist can function. Made up entirely of Grauerholz's own pictures, the images and accompanying texts of *Flâneuse* tell the story of the artist as traveller. Pictures taken in flight, on trains, in cars, and walking place the artist both inside and outside of place and time, in worlds in between here and there, home and abroad. It's a story about the strangeness of worlds seen in passing, obliquely, directly, and from their outsides and peripheries.

In the end, this is also the story of *Reading Room* as archive, with the archive conceived as a journal of sorts, a record or chart of occurrences and events recorded in the process of their unfolding. In this regard, *Ephemeris*, the title of *Reading Room's* film projection, is aptly named. Meaning a table showing the predicted positions of heavenly bodies, or the title of a collection of such tables, the term describes the curious temporality of the archival form in its transit between past looking and future thinking. The works in *Reading Room* behave in kind. Book, film, archive – all build constellations of representations out of other representations. Joining ideas to ideas and forms to forms, the work charts and anticipates the emergence of new assemblies. A remarkably vibrant space, if minimal in its fixtures and fittings, the sense of its vast abundance is nonetheless felt. Pictures lie within pictures, archives within archives, books within books, images join other images, moving and still, texts meet texts, and ideas meet ideas, in an infinite relay of projections and introjections between the loci and the cosmos, heaven and earth.

Résumé

Avec une prédilection pour les images iconiques, la captation de scènes et de situations connues, et un penchant pour les dispositifs de cadrage qui soulignent les structures institutionnelles et cognitives formant notre compréhension du monde et de ses représentations, les photographies et les installations d'Angela Grauerholz manifestent une sensibilité essentiellement archivistique. Dans le dernier projet de l'artiste, *Salle de lecture de l'artiste au travail*, les archives prennent la forme d'un processus abstrait et d'une entité concrètes. Composée du mobilier d'une salle de lecture, d'une projection de film et d'une série de douze livres abritant un vaste assortiment de reproductions éphémères – cartes postales, œuvres, photos, coupures de presse et extraits de textes variés –, la *Salle de lecture* poursuit l'exploration de l'artiste sur les structures et les processus du langage pour étudier de quelle manière ces innombrables artefacts figuratifs pourraient produire une œuvre d'art.