

Nicholas Wade *come in*

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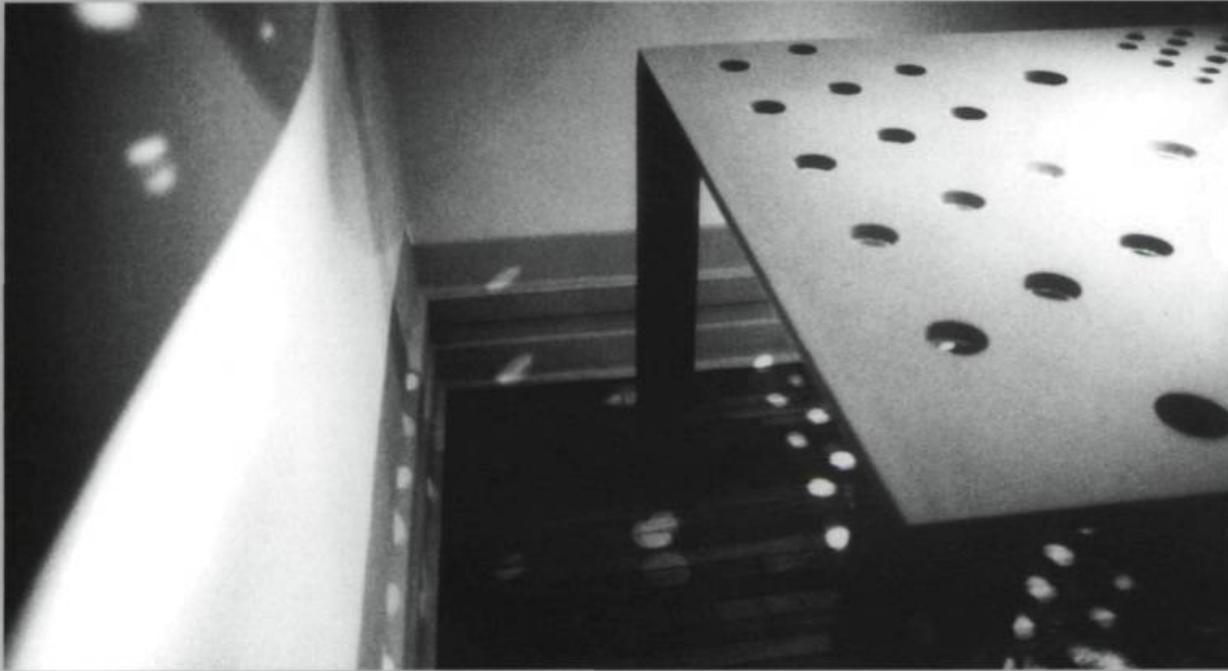
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Nicholas Wade, *come in*, 1999. Table, MDF and halogen light. 121.9 x 243.8 x 96.5 cm. A room under the stairs, Montreal. Photo: Benoît Pontbriand.

The gallery space occupies a corridor and a small room no larger than ten feet by twelve feet located under a staircase. The underside of the stairs has been disguised by a convex plaster vault, a major formal interruption, leaving the small ceiling curiously Baroque.

Nicholas Wade's site specific installation, *come in*, consists of a table made from a four by eight foot MDF sheet that appears to have fallen precisely onto four tall and slender rectangular but open legs, where it comes to rest. A table, "the" table, a set of facts, figures arranged in columns and lines.

"The" table-tableau sections the room horizontally enclosing space below it. Drilled through the left half of its surface are four columns of equally spaced and four randomly spaced sequentially diminishing circular holes. A light source from above and below intersects in the table's perforated surface, casting contracted or extended luminous ellipses or a chorus of baroque angels on floor, walls, ceiling and in the hollowness of the table's legs. The smallness of the room places the viewer at the threshold

of its entrance, an entry that is familiar from Vermeer's paintings, engaging the observer's complicity as voyeur to the intimacy here of the play of illusions and realities (the thing or not the thing) through absence and presence.

Opposite, in the hallway on the wall, hang three photographs of a combination of three letters, one black, one white, one grey, of the word THE, arranged as HET, EHT and THE. These hand-sized letters in wood are presented in the palms of what might be an architect's hands showing three potential designs to a client; or, in linguistic terms, the "index" of the referent or table, the "icon" referring to the letterforms of the word *the*, and the "symbolic" the contingency of the on *the* object-table. As objects, all letterform combinations fit equally well, however, as words, two out of three combinations become nonsensical, just phonemes or letters, the primary structure of words. This installation engages the viewer in an inquiry and critique of knowledge addressing boundaries between object/architecture, philosophy and language through the agency of light.

At first glance, this work refers back to Descartes's speculations about the visible word (*the-table*) as an illusion that hides the

mathematical reality of things with their clear and distinct propositions. Or does *the-table* stand for the thinking substance which Descartes's speculations did not address? Or perhaps this table is a strategy for the recovery of the postmodern uncertainty as to whether language refers to anything other than itself, a strategy involving *the-table's* duality, its zone of neutrality and reception.

But what then can be made of the article *the* in referring to a perforated table so tightly squeezed underneath the stairs as to leave both table and stairs nonfunctional? Taking up the last question, what is inscribed (that was not there before) into the table/architecture by the presence of the photograph's three signs, signs isolated not only from the "noun" but also from the physical presence of the table?

Structurally, the table's exterior surface becomes visible through light. However the openings or holes initiate a kind of self illumination (underneath it and inside its hollow legs) referring back to itself. The reconfiguration of the article's letters becomes in this sense analogous. While the table's material reading is overwritten with the chorus of elliptical projections which in their proliferation transform the topology of the room,

the reconfiguration of the article becomes overwritten in the sense of engaging and disengaging its relationship to the table. This is how I understand Nicholas Wade's reference to the construct of the word *the* "as buildings that recognize letterforms that are holding and those parts that are being held—and that the perception of holding and of being held can shift."

This shift might also be understood as the repositioning of that phenomenology of vision, which culminated in modernism's attempt to dissolve the object world into the profound and the unspeakable—a sublime static immateriality in opposition to the baroque. This installation (*the-table*) reads not only as a metonym but also as an ironic twist on modernity. It stands in for the identity of any object/city/nature as the agent for release—the release of energy initiating self illumination for the operation of differentiation, that is to say, naming. Knowing, here, is not seeing or being but rather its release, meant in the sense of John Rachman who speaks of a new relationship to space, to material and light, as questions referring to a new *geo-logy*, "where the earth is no longer seen as what grounds us but as what releases in the midst of our multiple material manners of being other light, dynamic spaces," with no opposition in nature and culture.

In this sense, I can conversely draw an equation between light and the article *the* in which light, the *most trivial* of agents, breaks down any opposition between object and space (Baroque), making them contingent not only to each other but also complicit with the viewer's holding, disappearing into something, or being held, or a giving-over in which the photograph's authority acts out a giving or a taking-away.

In the end Nicholas Wade's installation does not so much prescribe a reading as raise questions that critically engage the viewer's intimacy with the act of seeing, reading and knowing. ■

Nicholas Wade, *come in*
A room under the stairs, Montréal
May 14–June 30, 1999