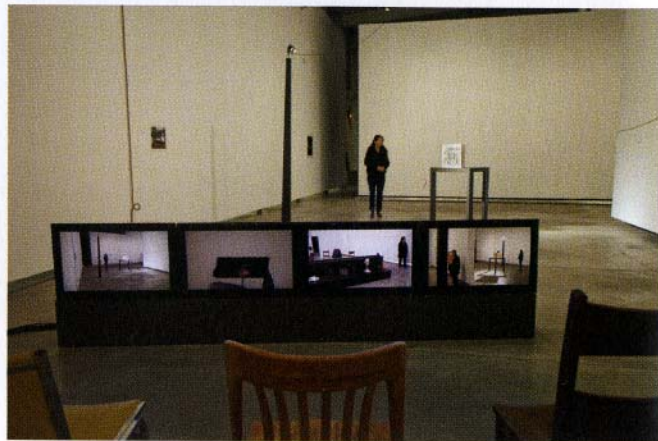


JUDY RADUL IN CONVERSATION WITH MITCH SPEED



World Rehearsal Court
(installation detail), 2009
Courtesy of the Morris and
Helen Belkin Art Gallery
Photo: Howard Ursuliak

Judy Radul's *World Rehearsal Court* was shown from October 9th to December 6th 2009 at the Morris and Helen Belkin gallery in Vancouver. The expansive exhibition was comprised of a seven-channel high definition video installation playing a dramatized court scenario orchestrated by Radul based on transcripts from the Court for Sierra Leone and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, as well as a vast installation of props and objects, which are briefly and unadequately accounted for here. There were at least two human heads sculpted from white plasticine, a pair of calipers for measuring the cranium, an archived collection of audio cassette tapes, a wheelbarrow, a rope which hung from the top of one wall and came to rest coiled on the floor, several photographs, a Ramachandran box used to cure phantom limbs, a Judges robe, a small snare drum, sections of wall from the makeshift courthouse, and a series of surveillance cameras accompanied by high definition monitors, creating a circuit of surveillance within the installation. Many of these artifacts also make appearances in the video, so that links are drawn through space and time between the documentation of an "authoritative" court proceeding in Radul's constructed courtroom outside of the gallery, and the abstracted mis en scene that exists in the here and now.





Mitch Speed: I'm trying to understand the way that World Rehearsal Court operates at its core. We could excavate the particularities of the exhibition until the end of time, but for the moment I'd like to attempt to identify at least one of the central mechanisms on which it depends. Despite being built both physically and theoretically over "authoritative" and "immovable" apparatuses, surveillance systems and the structure of the legal system, this work maintains a very productive kind of instability. Perhaps you could speak to the relationship between a system of objects that operates almost poetically, and the technically rigorous, and authoritative apparatus of the court scenario.

Judy Radul: To respond to this I would wish I could expand as big as expansion itself. You are commenting on what I have come to think of as a jump cut within the exhibition, the apparent difference between its two constituent parts. But I also see this "split" as one of many of the split/joins within the work. There are recurring reflections, on the level of the image, with the mirror in the Ramachandran box, within the plexiglass wall that partitions the hallway. The apparent shift in logic between the 7 camera trial scenes and the other space with the live cameras, is for me, a way of posing the question—how does something as inextricable as "life" relate to a practice like the trial in the court of law. The law is a system that exists to continuously engage its apparent other "lawlessness." Not to validate the horrible, and often very systematic oppressions which are committed, in watching a trial, one is reminded that there is a lawlessness, a complexity to life which contests the court's ability to extricate specific stories from it, following trajectories of cause, knowledge, effect and culpability, and rendering all of this into a written record. (We might think about the aesthetic and literary means it uses to do this.) This extracting and rendering process is a kind of impossibility. Not that it can't be done, as it is done every day, but impossible in the sense that this extraction never fully seems to come to pass. I could give a visual example, I was watching a You-Tube clip of Charles Taylor's testimony, it is from a

news story. They inter-cut shots of Taylor, he is a handsome man, in a nice suit, with gold rings, now having his say within this theatre of logic. The fairness of the court produces a strange effect of legitimizing everyone, if they play by the rules, which requires a kind of mutual respect. He testifies in a calm manner, slightly indignant, and states that he had nothing to do with what happened in Sierra Leone, that he like the rest of the world heard about it and saw it on TV. To further explain the situation the news story must cut between the shots of Taylor testifying in the court (which includes of course establishing shots of the whole court room) to shots of a place we are told is the back country of Sierra Leone, we see people who have suffered amputations, we see villages and verdant land. We are told what to focus on in these pictures, which were gathered probably during the conflict, by international journalists. So even in this document there is the cutting between the court, and a place, in this case Sierra Leone, which is the "outside" of the court, an unsystematic place, of roads, and heat, and jungle, and people using pseudonyms etc... etc... Life. And in the course of the news story the viewer quite easily accepts this cutting back and forth. This is partly an effect of video duration and screens, both of which seem to bring unequivocal things/situations/people together. But on the other hand I also perceive this cutting between the court and the world outside, as a kind of impossible join. I guess I responded to this impossibility, with my own parallel impossibility.

Therefore perhaps the two sides of the work stage a contradistinction, however on a larger scale the work as a totality mirrors, or is analogous to the kind of cut I described above. And this contradiction is an aspect of power, the law, capitalism. The many systems or discourses that we structure our society with and which both oppress and produce subjectivity (put rather simply).

To be continued. Look out for the extended version online at woomagazine.ca or perhaps in a future edition of WOO...