

Phantom Limb

by Anselm Franke

World Rehearsal Court is an installation composed of two separate and yet interconnected parts. At the centre of the project is a seven-channel video work presented behind a glass wall, where we become witnesses to restaged scenes based on trial transcripts from International Criminal Tribunals. The work is based on research undertaken by Judy Radul into the proceedings at the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, situated in The Hague. Radul recreated these proceedings as a theatre captured cinematically (changing all names and places to fictitious ones), directing our attention to the court's protocol and distribution of roles. It is less the particular cases that are important to her, but the theatrical setting itself and all that supports it, particularly the increasing use of media technology in a court of law.

The second part of the installation is an assemblage of objects and live-video cameras that feed several monitors distributed in space. The scenography of objects remains enigmatic—as if we are confronted with

abstracted evidentiary artifacts, a cabinet of props, leading a parallel life or waiting for their extraction and evaluation. The live-video surveillance of moving cameras further animates this space as a theatrical and cinematic scenography and inscribes the visitor's image and movements into it.

What Radul questions with this installation is the way a court functions as a complex apparatus. She abstracts just enough from her base material that it is no longer the individual cases but the work of the court as a machine-like assemblage of procedures and codes that comes to the fore. It is the making of justice that is at stake here—and for once, this *making* is less discussed through content, but instead discussed almost purely in its formal aspects. With this dissolution into form, she reproduces an in-built tendency inherent to all legal proceedings: to turn complex issues into formal questions. Radul takes interest in all aspects and codes of such formal procedure, including its spatial manifestation in the layout of the courtroom; its particular language and the role play it

demands; as well as the use of media technologies, both as evidence (in the form of recorded images or sounds) but also inside the courtroom setting as such, which today increasingly resembles a fully equipped television studio.

The courtroom is in and by itself a boundary-enacting device that recreates and translates complex events into the language of law. It does so through careful separation, measure and calculation. Its formality is the precondition for what it ought to produce: a narrative of past events on which judgment can be based. Its task is to establish the truth, not in and by itself, but within the textual logic of jurisprudence and law. However, we may assume that the increasing presence of cameras and the publicity that accompanies an ever greater number of processes, particularly those that are in some way “exemplary” and of international significance, request that this narrative must also be able to serve as a monument of sorts in public consciousness.

The court shares several features with other modern institutions as a strictly scripted space. Judy Radul points out that the court is the tip of an iceberg in the larger system

of law enforcement and jurisprudence, part of a network of institutions. It is furthermore part of the modern institutions of the state, such as the school, the hospital, the prison or military, each of which Michel Foucault famously described as “disciplinary”; it creates a subject of law and imposes its order on the complexities of life “out there. The distinction between “inside” and “outside” set up by such institutions must be enacted all over again with each case, person or object that comes into its reach. In the context of a court, it is the proceedings that are doing just that: as a boundary-in-the-making, they extract what is juridically relevant from the complexity of life in order to finally separate rights from wrongs. The court includes and excludes in order to establish its boundaries and expand law into the territory of lawlessness. In that sense, the boundary that the court is dealing with is the very boundary of the common society.

This boundary is always also the site of images and indeed image-economies, expressing the logic of inclusion and exclusion in a particular aesthetic dialectic. The imagination is flourishing at this boundary; what has been excluded and relegated to the outside is always pictured in

monstrous form, exaggerated, caricaturized, fictionalized, imagined. It provides the negative foil through which a positive identity is construed. The modern state institutions are designed to tame the imagination gone wild, and to give it a fundament in rational procedures, part of which is to establish “the facts.” Television series such as *CSI* can serve as examples for how “wild imagination” and the clinical language of facts work hand in hand in picturing that boundary at work; that is, when it is endangered, threatened and in need of defence. The courtroom, finally, is a space where the matter is settled after the fact, where “fiction” and “fact” have to be separated in order to close the affair. We can only imagine that if it fails to do so, all the other distinctions subsequently drawn up at that boundary—the normal from the pathological, evil from good, etc.—will consequently erode as well. The courtroom, therefore, must be described as a frontier-institution guarding a boundary.

Through the way a court separates facts from fiction, particularly in its treatment of evidence, it can also be related to a scientific laboratory—yet another frontier-institution. They both pressure material to speak, and they share a con-

cern with cause and effect, as well as the logic of extraction, reduction and purification in the assessment of evidence. The shared concern with facts that “speak for themselves” also holds another clue: in science as much as in court, such facts serve to end debate. Indisputable facts mark the limit of the social, holding it together, positivizing it and giving it its roots in a realm of objective, indisputable reality. Scientific historian Bruno Latour has done much work on how scientific “matters of fact” have generally been used in modernity to put an end to political dispute, creating a realm that is bracketed off from politics. “Matters of fact,” once established, serve a similar function in the court: a single piece of extracted evidence, situated in the right place within the chain of events and the larger picture that a process seeks to recreate, can settle the issue at hand and put an end to debate once and for all. But matter-of-factness is a double-edged sword, for factuality and its truth factor is the product of skilled presentation, particular dramaturgies and protocols of mediation. The language of facts is the language of credible spokespeople (experts) who testify on behalf of mute things. The pathologist, for instance, speaks in the

place of the corpse that has been deprived of speech. The credibility of the spokesperson is a highly theatrical affair, which must deliver performative proof of the exclusive relation the speaker upholds with the respective material. To what degree images, rhetoric and dramaturgy construct indisputable facts that speak for themselves, and to what degree this depends on the self-fashioning authority of the spokesperson, were shown famously by Colin Powell's delivery of proof for the existence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction in front of the UN General Assembly in 2003.

The court, if seen under the aspect of its protocol and script, is situated somewhere between the scientific laboratory, which constructs chains of reference right until judgment can be reached over what constitutes objective truth, and the parliament, which models an assembly of public debate in which legitimate representation is at stake. What is crucial in this respect is that it is precisely that which we find most theatrical in the procedures of such assemblies, particularly in the case of the court, that is tantamount to their ability to transcend mere subjective expression of opinion and their ability to construct a common "truth." Theatricality

and role play, here, are means of de-subjectification and collectivization, and protocol and its gesturality are what allow for measures of credibility and a certain transparency in the collective affairs.

Last but not least, there are certain features the court shares with the modern institution of art and its physical expression, the museum space or gallery (and in a different manner, the theatre). Both are, to a significant degree, concerned with the representation and reconstruction of past events, and both have their own respective discourses and codes of translation and framing in order to legitimize their selective and purifying procedures, their methods of extraction and in- and exclusion.

What Judy Radul does in *World Rehearsal Court*, however, is, if not to insist on such proximity, then to superimpose the two spaces by bringing the court into an exhibition; that is, by translating some of its elements into the parameters of the latter. Without having experienced the *World Rehearsal Court* exhibition, one could easily assume that this would be primarily with the goal of subjecting the court's mechanisms of representation and bound-

ary-making to some sort of critique—especially since Radul’s focus lies on the theatricality of the proceedings. Critique and critical reflection are inherent features of contemporary art exhibitions. Knowing that, we could assume that such translation serves as a dissection of the court’s theatre’s mechanisms of representation, that the very theatricality of the court is being exposed in order to undermine the implicit power mechanisms inscribed into it. Theatricality in the context of an exhibition means not least an emphasis on artificiality and make-believe. In the medium of the exhibition, our attention would thus be directed to the court’s (potentially scandalous) fabrication of truth. To expose the theatrical procedure of the court would suggest what appears to be true is really just made-up—pieced together with the glue of ideology and its conditioning, deceptive, media-enforced tools. The exhibition would be an opportunity to see behind the veil of this ideology and expose the means of its construction, so that what this ideology renders as “justice” can be contested as a conditioning spectacle.

It would seem that there could not be a more suitable space for such a critique to operate than

in that institutional space for art. It is within its walls (whether they are actually present or not) that the fire and fervour of critique-as-defacement is still alive, when everywhere else its light is waning. In the exhibition, we can still expose merely by putting things into parenthesis, which is to reflect and question them, and indeed, to de-naturalize their naturalized share in power. Since *pissoirs* have gained the status of art, the parentheses of exhibiting have been fashioned as tools capable of unveiling the implicit ideological background conditions *behind* the deceitful images, objects and their adjunct narratives.

Yet *World Rehearsal Court* does not engage in such critical debunking. There is no grand revelation here, no big gesture of critique or novel identification of that elusive great machine of power that supposedly holds us at bay. Most likely, the subject of the installation would have been a hard nut to crack anyway—an icon resisting its destruction, with mere parenthesis not quite doing the job—and the invested critical energy would have been backfiring, instead putting into question the medium of the exhibition and its capacities of coping with what *really* matters out there,

in the world. It is important, however, to imagine this possibility of iconoclastic critique, as well as its possible backfiring, to understand just what the superimposition of the two spaces in *World Rehearsal Court* does. In refraining from using its recourse to theatricality and representation as this kind of critique, the work abstains from confirming the age-old distinction between truth and fabrication that says that what is constructed cannot be real. And only because it does so is it capable of directing our gaze to the *how* of the boundary-making practice that is at stake, both in the International Criminal Court and in the medium of an exhibition. The result is that when we enter *World Rehearsal Court*, we enter a territory beyond the modern dichotomies that still force their boundary-making choices upon us, holding our institutional discourses in an iron grip.

Moving ahead in this territory, however, requires a remapping of the past to the point where we are able to situate “court” and “exhibition” in a common landscape, as part of a shared design, to understand how they each relate to the reality/construction dichotomy and to redraw their respective boundaries. A detour via Bruno La-

tour’s concept of the “modern constitution” provides us with a helpful scheme for this task, although he originally included neither the court nor the exhibition in it. This constitution consists of two separations, two related but contradictory boundaries that were drawn as modernity emerged. One is a distinction between the subjective and the objective, signs and things, culture and nature and lastly, the real and imagined (which could be alternatively located on either side of the preceding binaries). To become modern was to push this dualist distinction and separation ever further. Each realm was to be kept separate, and each received its official system of representation: science as the “house” in which objects received proper representation, politics and its parliaments as the “house” in which subjects were to be represented. A second separation, complementary *and* contradictory, this time between practice and concept, made this constitution complete: it holds that the first distinction be true only in concept, but may not (and indeed could possibly never) be applied to *practice*. In concept, the two “houses of representation” were to be kept apart and had to be ever more purified (for instance, in freeing objects from “subjec-

tive projection,” and subjects/ society from the false constraints of nature), but in practice they would be ever more entangled in literally everything of daily concern, especially by means of what is commonly referred to as modern media and technology.

Latour says that the second separation can also be termed the difference between modern and non-modern: modern societies accused other societies of being pre-modern savages, and that accusation was made on the grounds that they did *not* make the separation between subjects, humans, signs, images and culture on the one side and objects, things, matter and nature on the other, but lived in a reality of entanglement, mediation and hybridity. The point of Latour’s contribution is that it makes us understand modernity (and subsequently, its institutions) as a *specific* boundary-making practice. When he says that *we have never been modern*, what he means is that this non-modern dimension of entanglement and hybridity, in which the relations and associations between objective things and subjective humans replace their absolutely distinct existence, has never ceased to be our reality, too. On the other hand, it was the conceptual level that

separated the two, paradoxically, that allowed for what he terms the “proliferation of hybrids”; that is, the previously unseen development of technology in modernity. The point, however, is that this proliferation was only possible because the space in which it happened, that “non-modern” dimension of mediation and hybridity, could by no means be *officially* represented without being subjected to the apparatuses of conceptual separation. Its representation was possible (the paradigmatic object representing such hybridity is the fetish, whether pre-modern or modern), but simply not considered “objectively real.” Claims to reality were only granted if the representations in question were put to a test under the imperative of purification and separation according to the demands of the first separation.

The impossibility of representation without undergoing that first conceptual division has decisively influenced the status of images. The most immediate decision that we must undertake in front of images, ever since this settlement has been operational, is whether an image counts as fiction or fact. Images have to be dissolved at all costs into either pole of the first separation or else be

destroyed in the gesture of critical iconoclasm. Fiction, in this scheme, means that the image has no legitimate claim to objective reality, but has merely subjective or cultural value. Every image, ultimately, has to be either subjective or objective. Although every image, by nature, belongs to the realm of the hybrid and the mediated—it is the stuff mediation is made of—it is relegated to the no man's land *between* the subjective and the objective, and if it makes its appearance on the public stage, it must, together with its onlookers, take sides. Is it constructed by human hand, or the inscription of a reality *beyond* what humans make up? Is it imagination, fiction, mere constructed representation or, alternatively, objective document and inscription? The relation that it enforces, constructs and gives shape to is *not* granted the status of a reality in its own right. In this respect, images are made-up appearance, constructions, aesthetic lies. Or, they are direct, unmediated testimony, a trace or inscription of a reality that they, and only they, reveal. These twisted and forced alternatives still underpin the economy of images today, particularly in situations of political conflict, when power is the ability to sustain a particular version of just what is objective reality,

and when what is at stake is the right to speak in its name.

This is why, at the dawn of modernity and before the invention of reproductive technologies, images had to be banned from courts. Because of photography's status as an imprint of reality, they entered again, but they were still treated with much suspicion and ultimately had to prove their status as reliable evidence. They had, and still have, to be recognizable as documentary in a pure sense (one that could, strictly, never exist) and be free of subjective expression or manipulation.

The modern institution of art occupies the opposite end in this settlement. The contract under which art could depart from ritual (the name for much pre-modern mediation) and assume its freedom and autonomy declared that "art" had to be framed by the magic circle of "fiction" from then on. It could thus be added to Latour's scheme as a possible "third house" and allowed to officially engage with and represent all the images and mixtures of signs and things, the subjective and objective, that in the other two houses needed to be excommunicated and purified, but this official acceptance came at the price of art's being neu-

tralized and rendered politically inconsequential. In the last instance or any case of danger, art could always be reducible to the artist's individual subjectivity, excluded from both objective reality and from claims to political collectivity—and if the latter was not possible, as in the case of so-called tribal art, then it would in this case be rendered as mere “belief” and relegated to museums in which its “value” could be appreciated autonomously from the realities and practices with which it was once inextricably connected. *All* representations since produced *as art* are thus already put into brackets, exempt from reality, mere symbolic rehearsal. To undo this stigma of being rendered inconsequential and fictitious, to cross that magic line separating art from reality, was of course one of the main drives behind nearly all modern avant-gardes. The critical, iconoclastic stance toward imagery in contemporary art practices often amounts to belated attempts to transgress that magic circle in order to undo the shameful political impotence of art.

The title *World Rehearsal Court* is then possibly charged with new significance. Historically, because of the contract that brackets art away from everything else, “art” has become

a privileged site for the interrogation of the condition of subjectivity, since all artistic manifestations, in this instance, are ascribed to the subject and can legitimately only talk about it and its aesthetic constitution. But what if what once referred particularly to aesthetic subjectivity has now become a paradigm for subjectivity at large? What if “the subject” has entered that magic circle that was drawn exclusively around art, and finds itself now in the same conditions, equally neutralized and rendered inconsequential? What if dominant ideology now has it that the subject creates its own world, but in fact such creative construction remains always only a rehearsal of sorts? Crossing the line from rehearsal to reality would demand that individualization and psychologization could be reversed, that what is merely subjective would become collective, and the inside could be turned into an external reality. *World Rehearsal Court*, in that sense, addresses the site of the exhibition as a place in which subjects' own world-rehearsal is at stake.

World Rehearsal Court addresses the problem of individualization at court, and how this relates to the attempt of International Tribunals to re-

hearse into being a collective-yet-to-come, namely the world-community of humanity, which as of now lacks institutions that guard its boundaries. But the attempt to constitute this community *outside* or *above* the political, on the seemingly universal grounds of rights and their violation, is troubled on all scales, as is also evident in the very excerpts that Radul has chosen to re-enact—for instance, when the court struggles with the question of how an individual could be held responsible for a crime committed as part of systemic violence. The court thus runs into danger if it attempts to make *mere symbolic* judgments, since it must take complex political systems and history out of its equation, and in so doing, may come to resemble the fate of art more than we ever liked to imagine. Furthermore, it has to deal with what constitutes the boundaries of radically disparate societies, since it is these boundaries that make up for what in a given situation is accepted as normative and defines the position of individuals within a collective. The historical roots of war and state violence further complicate the task of defining just what exactly should be at court. These challenges demand from international justice that it must

deal with “lived fictions”— that is, those social representations that actually constitute a reality and generate its normative values and protocols of power, particularly in relation to the *political* economies of violence. *World Rehearsal Court* thus addresses a system of art that is confined in fictionalization, and a system of law that needs fiction and doesn’t know how to conceive of it. In *World Rehearsal Court*, Radul composes this relation into an allegory of boundary-practices. I could decode this allegory on the level of the installation’s physical and media architecture—the presence of live-surveillance that fictionalizes one’s own presence, the glass walls, etc.— but there is one object that perhaps brings all this to its point.

Radul has included in one side of the split scenography of the installation (its two parts are the court installation on one side and the live cameras and assemblage of objects on the other) an object that functions as a key to that very split, and to the way fiction works as a boundary by simultaneously transgressing it. This object is a mirror box invented by neurologist Vilayanur S. Ramachandran: a device used to cure phantom limb pain, a condition in which a limb is still felt after it has

been amputated. Much of the pain caused by an absent limb originates from feedback that signals the brain that the limb is paralyzed; the pain then originates from the feeling that it is stuck in impossible positions and cannot be moved. In the mirror box, the good limb is duplicated and thus the patient gets, via visual feedback, the feeling of being able to move the phantom, and gradually releases the paralysis to the degree that the phantom limb can entirely disappear.

Does Radul suggest that the exhibition space as such functions as a sort of Ramachandran box? Indeed we are, in a way, as viewers, fictionalized through the choreography of the real-time video, put by the installation in the place of the phantom—absent and present at the same time, part of a ghostly assembly of the human community that is conjured up and rehearsed. And then there are the phantoms who are being conjured on the other side of the glass wall—the events referred to in the two court cases from the International Criminal Court in The Hague that are being partially restaged in the seven-channel video installation behind the glass wall, where atrocities that figure as crimes against humanity are at

court. Both the very category of “crimes against humanity” and the title of the installation suggest a further interpretation: is it not the global collective, a universal humanity, that figures as the ultimate phantom in this installation? If it is the collective of humanity that has been subject to crime, then the task of the court’s mirroring, if that is what such a process could also be called, of the events of the crime surely must conjure up that collective in the first place, “for the first time, again”?

The box, however, suggests that the mirror image, the duplication of the limb, acts as an operational or necessary fiction of sorts. It is no longer a fiction, but a boundary-image, just like a halfway mirror that inscribes an image of the self onto the world and that world into the self. And this is where the box invites a reading of the entire boundary-allegory that is *World Rehearsal Court*. It is the construction of necessary fictions, and the protocols that operate them, that are at stake. In making reference to formalized court proceedings and bringing them into the exhibition space, Judy Radul points much less to “theatre” and “theatricality” (as swear words for make-believe) than she points toward the need to further undo the

distinction that claims only that which is not constructed can be held true, and all “construction” is rendered in the end fictitious. The collective of “humanity” can only become true if its imaginary is not just constructed, but constructed well, and that requires new protocols for dealing with the extraction of political, scientific, objective or subjective truth from imagery and, lastly, from life.

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www.worldrehearsalcourt.com

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