

500 WORDS

Judy Radul

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Judy Radul, *World Rehearsal Court*, 2009, seven-channel video installation, 4 hours. Production stills.

*Judy Radul is a Vancouver-based interdisciplinary artist whose recent works investigate the relationship between performance and documentation. Here she discusses her new work *World Rehearsal Court*, which opens October 9 at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery at the University of British Columbia.*

IN VANCOUVER, a high-security courtroom was built for the Air India trial, which was held between April 2003 and December 2004. When I saw images of the room in the newspaper, I realized that I was looking at a kind of theater but also a cheap video studio, one that, through wood panel and red carpet, was trying to hold on to traditional courtroom trappings and grandeur. Its bunkerlike appearance is in contradistinction to that of the courthouse itself, which, designed by Arthur Erickson, uses a lot of glass and open space to express more typically utopian values about transparency and participation.

One thing that struck me about this and other new, high-security courts that I have visited since is that the audience is divided from the action by a wall of bulletproof glass, and although they can look through and see the proceedings live, they also watch the action unfold on a closed-circuit television. The whole court is very technological as well as theatrical, and this wall of glass reminded me of seeing a performance of Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysterical Theater where Plexiglas was used to concretize the fourth wall.

When I began to consider making a work that would specifically reference the court, I thought that I might as well reference the one that is perhaps grandest in terms of aspiration—the International Criminal Court (often erroneously called the World Court). This is a supranational court, built in anticipation, or recognition, of an increasing "need" to address the new category of "crimes against humanity" and to end immunity for political leaders who carry out breaches of international law.

In *World Rehearsal Court* I am interested in our political, social, and technical apparatuses. Most people seem very interested in the argument or judgment of specific cases—they are rendered into a narrative by the process of the trial; this extraction of meaning and causality seems important to me, but I am less interested in working with the specifics of any one case. The script for *World Rehearsal Court* is from proceedings of international criminal tribunals for both the former Yugoslavia and the Special Court for Sierra Leone, which is trying Charles Taylor of Liberia. But all names of places, people, religions, groups, armies, factions, and associations have been changed to fictitious ones. The structure more or less takes the form of vignettes, so you never get a whole picture.

Originally, I thought I would make a ten-minute video that would reference a trial and get across my specific formal interests in the theater of the court; I have registered this by using one discrete camera for each member of the court. However, when I attended the trials, I realized that this compressed view was already well known and quite erroneous. In court, things are rendered in detail so slowly and at such a high resolution—looking at all the assertions made by witnesses and the evidence gathered from so many angles. I found this quite amazing. It teeters on the absurd, partly because so little else in our culture is allowed to proceed at this cautious pace. Instead of a ten-minute video, I ended up with a video that is four hours long.

When watching trials, we are aware that in the background there are numerous registers of power—the police, prisons, and the Law (with a capital *L*)—and that the trial itself is just the tip of a more invisible process. The trial actually has a kind of utopian dimension, a hope of bringing things into the public realm and the public record. But what strikes me is that the lawyers, the judges, the defendants, the guards, and the many, many clerks and team members are in a kind of fishbowl where some of them have been appearing, perhaps in the same trial, for several years. And you see these human actors trying to take on these much larger roles—the role of "judge" and "prosecutor" and even "accused." Yet they don't fit so seamlessly into these more abstract categories. Theatrics and aesthetics are therefore called on to reinforce, or make believable, the individual's assumption of a role, and the judge may refer to individuals as "Mr. Defense," "Ms. Prosecution," or "Mr. Witness."

— As told to Aram Moshayedi