

Ocular Lab

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West Brunswick

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(Reconstruction of) THE POLISH GAME.

Le Jeu Polonais, Das Polnische Spiel

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The Polish Game is an idea whose time will never come, or whose time has always passed. It has a number of expressions. The project at *Ocular Lab* is one of them. It will be spread over a five week period, most of that time spent on the production of drawings in the space. These drawings may or may not be "finished". They will exist as *remains* of a procedure. To these will be added the remains of a dinner featuring as its centre-piece *Cassoulet Alexandrin de Rizkalla*, (or, following the regime of austerity that inevitably clings to economic crisis, the inevitable accompaniment to extreme, or obscene, affluence) *Cassoulet Misere*, or even *Cassoulet Desolate*. There is always someone who misses out on the economic miracle. This element of *The Polish Game*, a collaboration with Alex Rizkalla, will continue Rizkalla's history of food projects at *Ocular Lab*.

The final "exhibition" of the "finished" project will be for four hours only, on Sunday, August 8, 2004, from 1-5 pm. The production of the project can be viewed on preceding Sundays between 2-4 pm. from July 18.

The Polish Game concerns rhetorical procedures in art that amount to wilful self-erasure, to the procedures of representation as necessarily self-annihilating. A simultaneous acknowledgement and denial of historic weight, an archaeology of traces, a sedimentation that accrues to forms, is articulated in a tension between what can be described as indexical accretions, that is, the bits of various realities that embed themselves in our exertions and, however invisibly, define what we do and see, and wait to be

deciphered; and the unruly arena of projections or fixations that historic accounts are revealed to be - not a truth or truths nor a reality or realities, but an abyss of obsessions seeking objects.

In the famous debate between Derrida and Lacan concerning the delivery of the letter as an anecdotal construction of the operations of the unconscious, *The Polish Game* tends to Derrida. Lacan asserted the delivery of the messages of the unconscious to consciousness: the letter arrives, the unconscious will find its object. Derrida denied this - the letter never arrives, but we know it is in the post: the unconscious is in perpetual and perpetually frustrated agitation for its object. According to *The Polish Game* the postman is demented. He not only rings twice, he won't stop, he rings incessantly. According to *The Polish Game* history itself is the manic postman.

An ambiguity clings to the deployment of the various references to "a" history. The political and the art historical may credibly be what they say they are, or they may be a subterfuge - the codified play of the subjective, of the movements of the passions. The movements of the passions are equally never anything other than the articulation of politics at the most intimate level. This is a line of thinking after Pasolini, Moravia, Bertolucci, Liliana Cavani, among others. These languages slide into each other.

The Polish Game is like an opera concerning the persistence of these and other, seemingly obsolete, symbolic languages of the twentieth century into the twenty-first, or at least the set for that opera. This operatic set could be described as *hallucinating* politics. It is politics as the chimeras of politics. Fragments from the symbolic articulation of the political, eg the memory of the radical left, indicated by a slogan "*Bilderverbot: Smash Capitalism*" now both an empty echo of a utopian ideal and a dramatic *return* with the increasing activation of this desire as contemporary desire, and the "desecration" of a drawing (recalling a painting of *Judith and Holofernes*) with graffiti including reference to the left terrorist group "*Brigate Rosse*," are both consistent with, and inconsistently in collision with, fragments from the European tradition of painting signified through drawings referring to x-rays of paintings. The decapitation is a desire with multiple objects. It is an iconoclasm of an iconoclasm. The persistent implication of iconoclasm is part of the self-annihilating logic of representation: in this case by action - the graffiti, and by strategy - "bilderverbot" the old testament proscription against graven images retrieved as an analytical category for the left by Adorno. (The drift is this. What is wrong with this picture? Nothing but Capitalism. Its lacerations are what representation registers, Particularly its ideological lacerations).

X-rays of paintings are significant in a number of ways in this project. They are in the first instance ciphers for the symbolic articulation of *historicity* - of the condition of being in history, or the abstraction that is the action of history itself as such. Secondly, they render a repercussion of meanings to do with the forensic intentions of art history, which, literally, through the action of photography (the x-ray) and metaphorically, through the action of "understanding" and the incessant simulation by reference to "originals" dematerialises painting. Thirdly, the dematerialisation of the material articulated by the x-ray - the literal and metaphoric "seeing through" - indicates the status of our inhabitation of representation, of painting, as the inhabitation of, not "painting", nor the meanings of paintings, but the spectre of painting. The x-rays are not of paintings. They are of the ghosts of painting.

The paintings referred to in the *Polish Game* are, however, complete fictions, referring to fictitious x-rays of fictitious "masterpieces". There are references that render them vaguely recognisable - they will evoke a memory of painting which will prove to be false. The *Judith and Holofernes* drawing both is and is not a direct reference to a previous work, to a Cavellino painting and a "correction", "desecration", "interpretation" of the Cavellino painting which, itself, bears this same relation to other Judith and Holofernes renderings. It refers to a group of paintings. A group of false memories. Their constitutive feature is contradiction. We are left ultimately only in a radical hermeneutic space losing objects as we seize them.

The "false memories" in the *Polish Game* constellate around a pre-twentieth century figurative language which was both associated, or indeed contaminated by, the institutionalised political extremes on both the left and the right, as their official artistic expression and eradicated in all but an ironic sense from the language of the twentieth century modernist avant-garde. This language persists as reactionary desire. Or it persists as desire.

The avant-garde and its exclusions, including the figurative articulation of reactionary desire, exude an identical stench.

The avant-garde is present in the *Polish Game* as a memory of *Fluxus*. The remnants of a dinner will remain in the room, the dinner left at a certain point and everything - tables, chairs, food, crockery, cutlery, detritus, possibly the odd errant article of clothing - simply abandoned to the space. There is a direct reference here to *Fluxus* artist Daniel Spoerri's "*An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*", (1966) except that where Spoerri fixed the accidental - the remains of meals, random objects left on tables - where

they lay and then transposed the tables from the horizontal to the vertical, thus making paintings, *The Polish Game* denies this conversion to painting as a resort to objects, as a false pictorialism, asserting rather an altogether other, inverted, pictorialism, a pictorialism of historic space where painting is emptied out of objects. The piece is deliberately scheduled for mid-winter so that the inevitable decomposition that would accompany this indexical moment is an arrest in pungency, an anxiety rather than an assault in smell, a slow and subtle, rather than rancorous, putrefaction.

Both the remains of the meal and the remains of a tradition in painting are a stench in representation. The stench of representation, a permanent self-annihilation in suspension, a death in perpetuity, this putrefaction, this corrosion, we inhabit as false memory. Through its simulations, through the play of its ghosts, through its hallucinations, we are continually rehearsing the "death of painting", continually playing its endgame. Even here, in Brunswick. Or especially here, in Brunswick.

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