Dora Garcia 19/04/03 – 24/05/03

The Locked Room

A conversation between Sonia Dermience, Jan Mot and Dora Garcia
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Dora Garcia: My intention with The Locked Room is to build a space you cannot enter. To build a space that, by means of a compromise, an agreement, exists only on your mind. This agreement means that the person who owns the space must sacrifice a part of his own space to build this room no one can enter. The room is a mental space. It results from a subtraction instead of an addition, as it is usually the case with a work of art. The artist appropriates a portion of the house or the institution where the work is displayed. It is the opposite of the normal transaction in art buying: when a collector buys an artwork, he adds something to his patrimony; here, paradoxically, he subtracts something. In The Locked Room, the collector bans the access to a part of his own house, his own space, and surrenders that space to the artist, who receives as part of the deal the key of the locked door.
This space is made inaccessible to everyone. This volume, this surface cannot be experienced physically anymore: and ideally, this room must exist forever.

Sonia Dermience: For me, the literary link is very strong. First because you wrote a text called ‘The Locked Room’ that tells the story of this inaccessible room. This text was read by an actress two years ago at the gallery (note: by an actor at Ellen de Bruyne Projects). Secondly because, even if not literary, your work calls literary references. In this case, I think about a text by George Perec from ‘Espèces d’espaces’: ‘J’ai plusieurs fois essayé de penser un appartement dans lequel il y aurait une pièce inutile, absolument et délibérément inutile. C’aurait été un espace sans fonction. Il m’a été impossible en dépit de mes efforts, de suivre cette pensée, cette image, jusqu’au bout. Le langage lui-même, me semble-t-il, s’est avéré inapte pour décrire ce rien, ce vide, comme si l’on ne pouvait parler que de ce qui est plein, utile et fonctionnel.’ (‘I have several times thought about a house with a useless room in it, a space without function, absolutely, deliberately useless. As hard as I have tried, it has been impossible so far to realize this wish, to fulfil this image till the end. Language itself, I believe, seems inadequate to describe this nothing, this emptiness, as if you could only talk about that what is full, useful, functional.’)
DG: The other work I present here, Fahrenheit 451, is a complete edition of two thousand
books printed backwards, mirrored, books as you would see a normal book in a mirror. Two thousand times. What you see first is a table overloaded with books; as you approach it, you see all books are the same, what has quite an absurd effect: Why should you display two thousand times the same book?. Only at the last moment you realize that there is something wrong with the books, that they are wrongly printed, an enormous mistake. You have to read backwards, or place yourself in front of a mirror, where the book would appear finally normal, only the person holding the book in the mirror is not really you: it is your image in the mirror. So I like to think Fahrenheit 451 as a sort of switch that turns the space around.

Jan Mot: Could you talk about the relation between The Locked Room and the other work Fahrenheit 451?

DG: Both works have in common the following: by mirroring the text, you place an obstacle between the reader and the text, which appears as a blank, like the wall in The Locked Room. The visitor is puzzled about a room he cannot enter, ( ) and that same visitor is puzzled in front of a book he cannot read, and he cannot read it two thousand times. But both works are not about impossibility, they are about changing your expectations. You thought you could enter the room, but you can't: so now you have to think about it. You thought you could read the books, but you can't: now you have to think about them as something else, as something that is only real somewhere else (in a mirror) somewhere else where you are not real.

The relation between the two works can be explained again with a story. There is this film noir from the forties, 'Scar' or 'Hollow Triumph'. A criminal meets a successful psychiatrist who is his exact double, and he decides to take up his identity. The difference between the two of them is a scar on the doctor's cheek, so our criminal kills the psychiatrist and, in front of a mirror, tries to copy the scar. But because of the mirror, he makes the scar on the wrong cheek. He is desperate at first, but soon he realizes that no one seems to notice. To me, criminal and psychiatrist are identical, and yet opposites. If they must occupy the same space, one of them has to die. They cannot exist in the same room, they cannot be seen at the same time: one of them has to move into another realm, the realm of death or the realm of invisibility. Once the doctor is dead, the criminal, draws the scar on the wrong cheek. The world must be mirrored in order to make the scar correct and to turn the criminal into the psychiatrist. The whole world is then mirrored, but no one seems to notice.