

## RE-READING THE LIBRARY

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VANCOUVER PUBLIC LIBRARY COMMISSION

"Our interest in *lieux de mémoire* [...] has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn -- but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory."

Pierre Nora *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*.

The book as cultural object or medium, and as literary or imaginary space has always been an important part of my practice as an artist, designer and teacher.

With the internet, new technologies and environmental considerations, putting into question the printing of books and hence our forms of reading and writing, I feel compelled to understand within my work what this could mean regarding our attitude toward social interaction and the dissemination of knowledge.

In part, the original **Reading Room for the USSR Workers' Club** (1925, *L'exposition internationale des Arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris) was conceived by Alexander Rodchenko to be a public venue for everybody to enjoy, that is to read, educate themselves and exchange with one another about their thoughts and opinions. In developing the reconstruction of Rodchenko's room and re-contextualizing it within my own practice as the **Reading Room for the Working Artist**, I am aware that, while there are differences between the original and the facsimile, the latter carries with it some of the original idealistic, albeit ideologically driven, or utopian ideas. As we make a difference between real experience and its representation (such as the real event and the photograph), we may realize that the gap or fissure that opens up between original and copy creates a new space where new meanings and interpretations become possible.

I am interested in this physical as well as temporal space that speaks as much of past and memory as it introduces the notion of potential and future, a place of re-readings. The book, and by extension the library, is such a place, where in addition, issues of private and publicity, past and present, original and copy (reproduction), translation and transposition, can all be addressed.

To explore the limits and potential of the **Reading Room** in the context of a public library rather than in a museum or gallery represents for me an exciting opportunity. In addition, the great challenge to work with and around a real collection or archive and a contemporary physical space and architecture - an architecture that in the case of the Vancouver Public Library represents a space referencing another - is quite new to me.

For the various interventions at the library, I hope to create a link between the banners of photographs displayed in the atrium of the library, the **Reading Room** integrated into the stacks and circulation areas of

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the library, as well as several photographs of burned books from the **Privation** (2001) series that are placed at fixed places on each floor of the library, and finally, a website that can be accessed at various computers near the **Reading Room**.

Implicit here is the idea of seeing visual material selected, re-produced and re-interpreted within different contexts, or more correctly different media (i.e. art work, internet, publicity etc). Every medium demands different display strategies to engage the viewer, resulting in a confrontation of different codes of cultural representation, and as such creating expectations (for traditional solutions) and/or discoveries (experimental solutions). The user of the library will encounter and remember, and therefore collect experiences that will run parallel to her/his intended activities. The art viewer will experience and re-read the various works within the given context of the library and so on. I hope to continue the layering, linking and re-contextualizing begun with the **Reading Room for the Working Artist** by carefully constructing more pages of the same book, the same library.