

The
Apprenticeship
Of
Silence



Nicola Loder

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1994

THE APPRENTICESHIP OF SILENCE

1951

First Edition

Whereof one cannot speak
Thereof must one be silent
Wittgenstein

Second Edition

Third Edition

Fourth Edition

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Grateful for the assistance of Mary, who
205 Johnson St., Chicago

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THE APPRENTICESHIP OF SILENCE

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Nicola Loder

ESSAYS

Deborah Hennessy

Jennifer Higgle

Sandra Webster

Nicola Loder

EXHIBITION DATES & VENUE

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Ed Davies

1.

It is a small point but it lingers - does the process of gridding give information or only co-ordinate it. Should I affirm, yet again, the grid as an ordering device, dynamically referring to itself; a structural matrix spread across a single surface or can I look for more fleeting incidents, something more casual than causal.

For the film-maker the contrast of surface and incident would be no problem, the long shot forms the primary frame, an orientating point of entry successively detailed by the economy of 'cutting in'. This technique links by implication the details it abstracts and abbreviates from the undifferentiated long-shot. I fill in the gaps and somehow it tells me more than the grid which forms the big picture by repetition, cutting up the surface, using multiples to insinuate multiplicity, applying rigour with a locking device of intersecting right angles.

Driven to distraction by this 'pointless totality of design' and the repressive silence of pure relationship - regular, ordered, geometrical - I hoped for short cuts to unpredictable sentences in this prescribed syntax of the grid. Why not trace along any axis, or XY co-ordinate to form fictions with your finger, an episode of maybe only three frames, followed in any direction. Any sequence could pretend a relationship to the whole and then not fulfil the contract.

Reading Nicola Loder's work in this way rescues the photographic detail or the resonant still from the oblivion of the grid. As a way of resisting totalizing structures a partial or temporal reading celebrates starting points, casually engages co-incidence and ambiguity to counter the pervasive logic of the grid, and asks why not be absorbed in small pictures that don't need to add up.

Deborah Hennessy 1994

2.

"The grid's mythic power is that it makes us able to think we are dealing with materialism (or sometimes science, logic) while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief (or illusion, fiction)" [Rosalind Kraus]

The photograph is a paradox.
The grid alludes to infinity.

The photograph juxtaposes a closure (a moment frozen, unallowed to continue its movement in time, a movement at once finite and infinite) with the potential of eternal anticipation (what happened next?).

The grid, like the photograph, is a fragment of a greater reality.

The photograph, like the grid, embraces repetition, but every photograph and every grid makes the act of repetition new. The moment is reproduced in a photograph (mechanically reproduced and reproduced in my imagination) but equally importantly the moment is reproduced with each act of looking, and repetition becomes renewal, redefinition, reassessment, a re-looking. Repeat the idea of an image again and again until it becomes something beyond itself, paradoxically within a framework it has already established. In this way repetition develops the original. The grid emphasises the unstable nature of vision by acknowledging the difference between each moment of looking, a moment of looking that disguises itself in a veil of sameness.

I ask the photograph; how may I measure vision?
I am answered silently, with vision itself.

What happens on either side of our moment of vision? Where does the light go? Where does the grid go? Outside the grid lies unstable equilibrium. Inside the photograph lives light suspended in movement.

The grid is at once spatial and temporal. The grid is historical, geographical, religious, mathematical. The grid is lines on a surface. The grid appears always to be the same, but resonates in different ways at different times. The grid is not in nature, but may map the natural. As Deleuze suggests, there is a whole geography in people, with rigid lines, supple lines, lines of flight. Show me a gridded world and I'll show you the hairline fractures. The camera fractures as it shoots. The photograph recognises the fractures in our vision. Quicker than the blink of an eyelid. The grid cannot be neutral.

What meeting takes place at the point where the grid meets the embodiment of light; the photograph? The grid imprisons the light. The grid

makes the light secure. The skeleton of the grid lacks light. Light itself is an intersection. Light complicates the fixity of a position. The grid is not fixed but may initially appear fixed. You control the grid. The light reveals the grid's instability. The grid without light is hollow.

You control the camera.
You control the grid.

Can the photograph control our vision of the moment? Is the grid concerned with control? The grid may be read as an aerial map tracing the gridlock of city streets. I always believed that vertigo lives with control, a dizzy sense of being taller than the world and looking down on it, and imagining yourself floating and dizzy and almost understanding, almost controlling. The grid appears controlled but what happens in the space between the lines? Who controls that space?

Space is never silent. Control is never complete.

If the grid is infinite and the photograph (asking questions of the future) alludes to infinity, how do I know where to begin to look? Why do I decide to cease looking? Where do I enter? Where do I leave?

Moving between the photograph and the grid is like moving between the calculated and the arbitrary. Which is which? In the photograph is a horizon, a line that shifts. The horizon is visible but elusive. If we can see the horizon, but never reach it, how do we know what lies beyond it?

Beyond the line of the horizon is beyond articulation.

Beyond the line of the horizon and between the lines of the grid lies a silence waiting to be filled. A silence that always exists in a state of anticipation. Nothing is exclusively visual. Paul Valéry said that "just as the universe escapes intuition, in the same way it transcends logic". The grid is as contradictory as any absolute.

The grid and the photograph both share informational attributes. We look at grids (as maps, as measurements) to find our way, we look at photographs to remember (to discover?) where we've been. It seems no coincidence that graph paper was invented during the 19th century in a period that saw great developments in inventions for mechanical reproduction. Science sets out to discover the world and reveals more to us than formulas.

Within the repetition of the grid format every grid is different.

The line is never exactly the same. The grid is continuously reinvented. The photograph duplicates a moment, but although ostensibly it looks like that moment, it has become something altogether different. The light of a moment cannot be held but it can be captured. The horizon can never be reached but it can be photographed. The grid is not the same as itself. The photograph is an original even as it duplicates. The grid marries the photograph and celebrates contradiction.

The confusion of form.

The reduction of space.

The expansion of meaning.

The grid and the photograph oscillate between what we see and what we think we see. As Mondrian observed, relationships are defined through multiplicity. Are the lines of the grid a prison, a map or a matrix? A line of writing of streets, of music? A railway line, a dropped line, a line between me and you? Is the line of the grid a parameter, an intersection or a barrier? We cannot construct meaning without space.

Thoreau wrote that music is continual, only listening is intermittent.

Can we say the same about vision? That the visual world is continual, only looking is intermittent.

The photograph emphasises the isolated nature of looking. The photographer turns solitude into an encounter. See for a moment what I see. I am surrounded only by what I include in my field of vision. The parameters of photography become the parameters of sight.

In these photographs the grid maps sight. The parameters of vision, the interconnectedness of looking. The boundaries we drew between places, between people, between the earth and the sky. The lines that link ideas. The grid and the photograph together understand Gertrude Stein when she said "I am inclined to believe there is no difference between clarity and confusion."

The grid meets the photograph at the point at which I stand.

Jennifer Higgie 1994

3.

SILENCE AND SPACE

Silence is the space experienced between things said or heard - and it is a state which is always on the verge of being transformed.

Through the utilisation of the tenets which traditionally define the Sublime - 'height, depth and extension'* - the artist explores sensations of spatial estrangement, or distancing, which mirrors the experience of silence.

The under-exposed/over-exposed images of clouds gathering in the sky - brooding into darkness or burning with an impossible light source - creates a heightened theatrical sense of space which mimics that dreamlike state when we slip between sleep and consciousness. The viewer's sense of scale is endlessly disrupted not only by the difficulties in viewing such a large body of work, but by the peculiar, atmospheric spaces created within the frames of the hundreds of images. The stunted 'lifelike' architectural models with their claustrophobic cleanness, are at once convincing and fake; the vast panorama of the skies seem to be caught in the act of either imploding or exploding; the spreading ground seen from the air - all are reduced to equal proportions: a mass of fragments mastered by the grid's repeating borders (this linear, empirical tool which is, in fact, an accommodating structure that stretches to accommodate infinite possibilities).

The photographs of the architectural models are eerie and off-centre because the model is both familiar and unfamiliar: it looks like a building but is also, patently, a familiar illusionistic representation of a building. This 'doubling' effect is heightened by the recognition of the frozen poses which are struck by the tiny model humans who people the artificial landscape. The models display all of the qualities found in common representations of haunted houses: they are desolate, unoccupied, and exist within an aura of silence. This crypt-like stillness furthers the sense of the uncanny and echoes the sense of desertion found in all the images.

It's difficult to pinpoint 'real time' within these images. There is a cancellation of the past in the collapsed temporality that the models exist within. This collapse is mirrored in the repetition of all the images, which seem to have come into existence without an original source. Rather, they replay the originating moment - within the grid, one senses the effect of a kind of 'tape loop': the images, which appear again and again like waves, are caught in the act of becoming.

Sandra Webster 1994

*The Architectural Uncanny, Anthony Vidler, MIT Press, 1992.

4.

THE APPRENTICESHIP OF SILENCE

All photographs are silent traces of moments now lost to time.

The notion of the trace is interesting for many reasons but mainly because of its inherently paradoxical nature; it implies both presence and absence. The presence of the trace of the thing that is absent and the absence of the thing that is present in the trace. This linguistic conundrum is interesting not only because of its semantic construction, but also because it so adeptly represents the essence and the nature of the photographic image.

Given that language is our primary source of communication, I am interested in looking at the expression of ideas which contradict or are too complex for the limitation of language alone. In this age where meaning has been diagnosed as 'schizophrenic', is it necessary to discern whether there is anything that exists beyond our own linguistic perception of things? Or can it be said that the entire world of everything that we 'know' is infinitely imploding into its own fictitious, linguistic perception of itself?

Lyotard in his essay *Presenting the unrepresentable: The Sublime* argues that 'it is not up to the artist to reinstate a make believe 'reality'... (that) ... the spirit of the times is surely not that of the merely pleasant: (Arts) ... mission remains that of the immanent sublime, that of alluding to the non-demonstrable'.

Photography by nature 'announces' the gap between the real and the illusionary (or the real and the represented) because it simultaneously embodies both states.

Language with its inexorable bonding with logic creates artificial polarities and boundaries between things. Paradox utilises the gap between polarities as it accommodates contradictory ideas in a seamless, harmonious union. The comprehension of a paradox defies the fragmentary processes of empirical methods of analysis which attempt to ignore the implications of synergy. Paradox calls for a state of knowing that exists outside of language, even though paradoxically it is through language that I speak to you now.

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Nicola Loder 1994



PILKINGTON

Panasonic

Even more than you expected



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