

BÜCHER

BOOKS

UNTITLED (EXPERIENCE OF PLACE)

Koenig Books, London 2003

by Marina Gržinić

In this collection of projects, texts and visual essays by contemporary artists and authors with an excellent introduction by Jan Verwoert, questioning the possibilities of documentary photography/projects today, Gregor Neurer, the editor of the book, touches just the tip of an iceberg of obsessive researches in the field of contemporary art and their imagining technologies regarding the question of place. A tip though worth »a hundred of icebergs« due to his precise selection of the contributors. They guide us toward an experience of place that is always accompanied by research into the art medium dealing with it, and therefore it is not just about psychological or individual experiences, but also about historical, strategic and structural questions of places. It is also about the difference between places and spaces, and even more about how a place conditions our experience of art and produces it. The condition of a place within photography and architecture, text and image, as it is thoughtfully presented in the book, is almost always in relation to the question of a place outside the art field and in close relation with mass media and technology.

What are places? Places establish themselves in contrast to spaces. Places are fixed and spaces are somehow a general condition of a location that might be paralleled to a paradigm. Spaces can be only mental, places are always connected to a certain materiality, though not necessarily a physicality of bodies. The connection of different places, or let's call it the concatenation of places with a (hi)story, depends on mobility. Mobility is not just a question of travelling, but also the effect of contemporary technology. Mobility in relation to places means to link, and therefore to make (up)/construct different (historical) stories of places. Ultimately, almost all the essays in the book take such an approach: Reskalenko and Roberts move through Alvar Aalto's Library in Russian Vyborg, Buckingham travels with powerful associations of Poe's The Man in the Crowd beyond it, Jacobs traces in depth Buster Keaton's acrobatics, Tacita Dean flies over German urbanity and modernistic mishaps (pardon, according to Dean, I should rather say: Fritz's urbanity, as this was the nickname of West Germans in the popular imaginary of the 1950s and

1960s). This last travel is similar to that by Moscow-based producer and director Tatiana Didenko, who, in her film called »Mad Fritz«, already a decade ago conducted an analysis of how »Fritz« was portrayed in Soviet Films after the Second World War, resulting in frenetic Keatonian places of grotesque comedy within the Soviet film history of the 1950s and 1960s. Small world, indeed. Two Fritzes as a result of travelling, though just one published and historicized, of course the one by Dean, the other lost in the space(!) of history. Inventory's mobility from place to place narrates the state of the things of streets and margins of cities. Hill's travel is the most directly political, as it questions the colonial past of the Netherlands that seems to be tacitly disappearing today through all sorts of political correct behaving, masking the outrageous accumulation of money and resources stolen from the colonies, in order to display today's peaceful and »permissive Dutch home«.

While each text in the book is a pearl of research and dedication, those by Ashkin and Witek are the most brilliant; they really mobilise the text and the image to point to the conditions of the production of places. Witek does a precise research of a possible historical display of photographic studio places – the settings preceding most photographic spaces. The invisible studios were the skeletons of photographs taken through decades. Ashkin on the other hand is rethinking photography in tight correlation to and introjections of codes of the perception of places that exist outside of photography. And it is precisely because of this that these codes of perception are even more constitutive for the construction of spaces in contemporary photographs.



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