Where Is God

Simulacra

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Presimulacra

This book followed from the wish to make color surfaces that would be based purely on color numbers instead of aesthetic choices, and that could meanwhile still be read as aesthetic objects and physical substances. The images here are made from nothing other than numbers put into Photoshop's digital palettes and subsequent left-button mouse-clicks. The digital printing process pulls them out of the realm of the virtual and adds its own unpredictable translation and aesthetic.

Thinking about this project coincided with thinking about Baudrillard's thoughts on simulations and simulacra. One of the points Baudrillard draws out is that simulacra, as images of God, are only possible if we believe that a sign can be exchanged for a meaning, in other words can represent something. Without that belief signs, including simulacra, will appear to be no more than exactly what they are. *A rose is a rose is a rose.*

Baudrillard claims the iconoclasts must have had their 'despair' rooted in this observation: that simulacra might show that there is nothing behind them and that they are 'actually perfect simulacra forever radiant with their own fascination.' God would be reduced to 'the signs which attest his existence'.[1]

Here Baudrillard has in fact traveled from the first meaning of the word simulacrum to the second and then beyond. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* a simulacrum is '(1) A material image, made as a representation of some deity, person, or thing. (2) Something having merely the form or appearance of a certain thing, without possessing its substance or proper qualities.'

The sense of loss in the second definition already points to the possibility beyond it of losing the (connection to a) referent altogether: the 'certain thing' is gone from its original place. The signs, fully independent, fill up the place where it used to be.

1   Cited from 'Simulacra and simulations' in: Jean Baudrillard. *Selected Writings*. Ed. Mark Poster, Stanford University Press, 2002.

This made me see my 'color surfaces' as simulacra, and compose them into simulacra of simulacra. I tried to locate God in a database and searched an online directory for the phone numbers of names connected to my question: Where Is God. These numbers were then used in Photoshop to determine the percentages of CMYK for the color fields and the opacity of the gradient applied. The gradients understood the images to be of an ephemeral nature. In this manner each of the namenumbers became visualized.

Another process was the textualization of the namenumbers, in order to provide an alternative sign system and to see if texts could also be perceived as simulacra 'forever radiant with their own fascination'. In this case I used the phone numbers to pick words from a list of the 99 words most frequently used in a story I previously wrote in Dutch and which I translated.[2] The texts show the same broken and non-narrative quality that underlies the images, but I think they show it more openly.

If there are any real substances involved in all of this, it must be us; myself in the stage of manipulating the unsubstantial; this book, in the phase of its printed form; and finally of course you, as you are holding it.

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2 'Ergens waar zij ook is' in: *Armada*, April 2004. Processed versions of this story have appeared in *Yang*, July 2007, and in Elisabeth Tonnard, *De wereld is er*. Druksel, Gent, 2007.