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Jank Editions

BAD PRINTING
DUMB PRODUCTION

Antonia Pinter

2011

An Edifice To An Impoverished Present

If reading Marx has informed such a diabolical scheming out and presentation of the socio-economic conditions that rationalize aesthetic production today, the artist's brute extraction of a concrete image of production time from the surrounding flux, and the brute immediacy of its display add up to a gesture of refusal to hand over any more living labor than is logically necessary in the creation of aesthetic surplus value. And only on these prescribed terms can the inevitable speculation on the value of "bad" painting begin, or not.

--John Kelsey
"The Self-Employment Rate"

In 2006, I traveled for a month through Cambodia. Throughout the countryside and the capital, the realities of a forty-year struggle with the Khmer Rouge were immediately visible: landmine victims, incredible poverty, and a low mist over the rice paddies like the specter of

millions dead. Moving from city to city, I attempted to orient myself to the country's current conditions by visiting small makeshift museums, and, leaving an American dollar or two in a small tin can by the door, I'd navigate backyards or mass grave sites; the story of the country's violent struggle with modernity was documented by informal art exhibitions of discarded weapons, hundreds of photographs pinned to the walls, or the strange books I found at the gift shops or on folding tables set up on the neighboring streets. And I always found the same titles: *The Killing Fields*, *Year Zero*, academic texts discussing Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge's genocide of the Cambodian people and the utter destruction of their culture.

Often bootlegged from original texts published in France, the United Kingdom or the United States, the books were poor facsimiles of the originals. To save on cost, they were printed on extremely thin paper with densely set type; and, as blocks of text piled up front to back through the thin sheets, the pages became a swamp of

words, the books, almost completely illegible. I wish I had purchased one, because, instead of contextualizing the artifacts and displays, the formalization of this material only further abstracted the book's purpose. Perhaps, if Cambodia had been allowed, like its neighbors, to grow into an industrial economy (a problematic situation, as well), these books would be authored by Cambodian scholars and printed legibly, but the bootlegged editions, as they appeared in 2006, were more appropriate artifacts to the country's systematic cultural and human annihilation and we can read in them the incredible erasure of a subjective history in the face of a crippling, fascist ideology. These books became the contemporary testimony of an incomprehensible historical fact. An edifice to an impoverished present.

Despite this retrospective rationalization of the Cambodian books, they may also, on a material and practical level, be considered bad. The bad printing, bad paper, bad binding, and bad appearance all together add up to bad quality, a communicative impotence that inappropriately

fulfills the aesthetic criteria attributed to the medium. Simply put, they were unreadable *except* by their lack of quality. And, as page overlaps page, they become dumb objects, unable to extend from their material poverty into the dematerialized abstractions of thought, history, ideology—communication, that which their unfortunately short reach into the past cannot attain, and that which it so thoroughly denies in the present. Yet, this conflation of material and communicative production has become fertile terrain for artists today. And, in Antonia Pinter's *Bad Printing, Dumb Production*, the young artist calls the discursive value of documentation into question when she asks: why did I make anything yesterday, when I reproduce it today?

One way or another, Pinter does not seem to answer this question and from the first page—a rectangle cropping the pink, de-saturated striations that subtly begin to reveal slight smudges toward the bottom of the image—she offers a more oblique circumscription of the question, selecting and manipulating images to achieve a

deliberate illegibility, reframing any traditional aesthetic analysis as a road to nowhere. We will never know what the original artwork was; we're not looking at a monograph. Instead, we're navigating the artist's computer desktop screen, file folders titled, *Body Etchings 2011* and the almost interminable scroll of faceless images, DSC_086, DSC_087, DSC_088... In taking these photographs of her process and of her final artworks, in continuing to possess them as a nebulous archive, Pinter begins to take responsibility for her work's documentation. But, in order to locate the generative value in such material practices, she reorients her position away from a static communication (or sheer possession), from what she has done, choosing instead to employ a deliberate obfuscation of the material toward more poetic ends. If she must re-present her work, then the responsibility for Pinter lies in having a hand in her own making, to demonstrate that the artist is endlessly producing herself. Both work and representation are what the artist does. And, how the artist liberates herself, at least for a moment.

The image that most clearly articulates the liberating effects of Pinter's process represents the artist herself. Cropped, as with all of the images in *Bad Documentation*, into the page's rectangular frame, we see the lower portion of the artist's breast, the curve of her torso, and a sliver of her right arm. She does not give us the whole picture and, caught within the limits of the frame, we see a sensual and obscure portrait of the artist as an abstraction. What remains outside of the representation is the implicit complexity of Pinter's choice, that, when paired with the image on the adjacent page, evokes the Sisyphean struggle circumscribing the artist along with her own propositions. It is here that the artist makes a nod toward the inescapability of an aesthetic analysis of her work, that even in the making of oneself as an abstraction, willfully controlling how to produce oneself as an artist through the functionings of an artwork, that this complexity returns to a Kantian recognition of the sublimity in the shear complexity of such a system.

Pinter reminds us that this is both a painful and pleasurable problem, when the artist is both the producer and that which is being produced.

Sam Korman

















































































































