



Still frame from 'Soundtracks for Revolutions', Film, HDV Color/Sound (120' Loop), 2013
Videographer: Matthew Shannon







Processing Authorities

2013 on-going

In collaboration with the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam

Processing Authorities is a work in progress that evolves around an anonymous and singular group of hammers owned by the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam. These gavels belonged to chairmen and heads of commissions of revolutionary and emancipatory movements mainly related to Dutch Trade Unions – labour movements, propaganda actions, agricultural organizations, religious groups, anti-alcoholism commissions, Esperanto movements, sport associations, feminist movements to name some of them. They were accidentally grouped over the years by the Institute, without full knowledge of their histories and derivations. In the attempt to show them for the first time to the public as a collection – or as a fragment of a collection that doesn't exist yet as such, but that could be particularly rich because of the variety and the number of the objects involved in it – I'm researching their micro- or macro-histories and their shifting symbolic meanings, to shed some light on Western cultural decision-making processes and on the visual representation of authorities. I'm studying the shape, history and potentiality of these hammers – dating back from the Nineteenth Century to nowadays – to turn them into objects of observation and discussion throughout their anthropological, psychoanalytical, social and political perspectives, re-thinking their meaning and questioning them in relation to nowadays.

These gavels don't build a collection in themselves: they are 'fragments' of a larger context, in which they were used. Hence, their exhibitiv moment could be considered as a mental landscape revealing hidden aspects of the forms of knowledge such objects hold – minor histories, ceremonies and gestures – while, at the same time, questioning their influence on the observer, their paradoxical nature of disciplining in the counter-power, of invoking *resistance* as a form of opposition. This exhibition would also stand in a paradoxical relationship to the nature of revolutionary and emancipatory movements these gavels belonged to. Showing them, or writing about them, making their histories or actions public, inscribes them in a discourse that turns them into authority figures – which is completely against their nature. Yet it is in this way only that the contradictions and characteristics these hammers embody can emerge: they become *weapons*, staged through a combination of investigation and actions questioning their forms of power.

The exhibition in Stedelijk Museum Bureau is conceived as first exhibitiv moment of *Processing Authorities* and presents enigmatic visual and performative aspects of these objects within a specifically designed environment, incorporating the original gavels owned by the International Institute of Social History of Amsterdam (IISH) and the film *Soundtracks for Revolutions* that shows the recording of their sounds played by a performer.

This presentation is enriched by a publication thought as a complement to the show: the first *Notebook* conceived as introduction to a wider research made up of considerations and findings on this group of objects; a possible history of gavels, a reflection on the decisional processes they embody, on their identification and definition of authorities. Since no existing publication is devoted to these objects – nor to hammers in Western culture in general – the exhibition and the publication aims at disclosing a hidden history, while offering an example of how these gavels – articulating a language on their own – can be used as tools for creation or destruction within a specific discourse.

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