



Tatiana Trouvé

Something from nothing:
decorated offices, reclaimed
land, hope and anticipation
by Vivian Rebberg

Italian-born Tatiana Trouvé moved to Paris in the mid-1990s – via Senegal, the Netherlands and the South of France – intending to find work and make art. Tough times soon followed. The labour involved in establishing herself as a professional artist – the countless odd jobs, accumulated bursary requests, correspondence with galleries, ideas for works unrealized – led her to pose the thorny question: what does a lack of visible productivity mean for an artist's identity? What suffices to call oneself an artist? Her response materialized in the physical construction of a fictional 'office', a storage-hold of her life and memories that occupied her almost exclusively for nearly a decade.

Trouvé began building her *Bureau d'Activités Implicites* (Bureau of Implicit Activities) in 1997 in order to make something out of the promise of nothing, and in that way it is a fundamentally hopeful project. It explores the nature of time by breaking down the artist's quotidian experience into components and spatializing those components as a set of constantly evolving, differently furnished architectural modules. The first, known as *Module Administratif* (Administrative Module, 1997–2002), is a rectangular construction akin to an office cubicle, which, like all of the *B.A.I.*, is built to standard office-industry scale. The module contains a perpetually expanding archive of administrative documents and paraphernalia: rejection and acceptance letters sealed in plastic, CVs and office supplies such as tacks, rubber bands and stamps displayed on a specially designed desktop. The exterior is decorated with a skirting board of Trouvé's numerous student and national identification cards, with patterns that correspond to the cards running from the bottom to the top of the structure.

Trouvé insists that the *B.A.I.* is not a systematic portrait of her life as such, but obeys the literary logic of an autobiographical fiction developing over time.¹ Its elements have been exhibited as a whole, according to a set floor plan, as well as in discrete clusters. At its heart sits *Module à reminiscence* (Reminiscence Module, 1999), whose cylindrical mirrored surface reflects all the other modules, while its interior safeguards memories on slips of paper in tiny pigeonholes. One of several *Modules d'attente* (Waiting Modules, 2002) is comprised of a Perspex desk surrounded by a custom-made tubular structure with green vinyl seating and a padded pole resembling a piece of gym equipment. Here, the visitor can listen to compilations of sound recordings that Trouvé made while waiting for various things to happen. Other structures – including *Cellule de sable* (Sand Cell, 1997) and *Matrice à fantômes* (Phantom Matrix, 2000) – resemble or incorporate office architecture and furnishings. However, Trouvé's formal manipulations and use of materials such as foam, fabric, sand, chamois and spools of adhesive tape cause them to lapse into non-utilitarian sculptural installations, distancing them from a life solely regulated by bureaucracy.

When Trouvé was starting out, the *B.A.I.* seemed to commemorate latency and temporal deferral – the sort of dormant potential that lies in a catchy title for an unrealized work, or in a memory jotted down or tucked away, only to be triggered later. But the fiction of Trouvé's receptive passivity has become increasingly difficult to sustain. This is not simply because Trouvé has won two prestigious art awards for her efforts (the Prix Ricard in 2001 and the Prix Marcel Duchamp in 2007); it is also because the *B.A.I.* spawned new installations she refers to as *Polders* (1997–ongoing) and, more recently, the related drawings, sculptures and installations in her 'Intranquility' series (2007). Trouvé's *Polders*, named

after the Dutch term for land reclaimed from bodies of water by feats of human engineering, were initially formed from scraps or sediment left over from the modules. Once occupying the margins, all these works have slowly encroached on the *B.A.I.*, like the brass lock 'barnacles' grafted onto Trouvé's recent *Rock* (2007). The frontiers between them are as indeterminate as the distinctions between interior and exterior, fact and fiction or past and future, in the spaces her art represents and dwells in.

Throughout her work, Trouvé's obsession with time is matched by an obsession with scale, which is always strictly calculated. Unlike the standardized elements of the *B.A.I.*, *Polders* are scaled to half the 'normal' size of the objects represented in them and their reproductions are highly deceptive. A perfect case in point is *Polder* (2005), an arrangement of stacking chairs customized from bent black tubes and translucent resin, some of which are topped with the kind of U-shaped basins found in old-fashioned beauty parlours or hospital rooms. A three-armed sculpture made from the same materials occupies the centre of the space like a floor lamp. Partitions of copper tubing, painted white, stretch from floor to ceiling, delimiting the space and producing shadow-drawings on the surrounding architecture. Spatial relations are disorienting and time seems to glide to a slow-motion halt within the boundaries of this *Polder*. One could even say it conveys all the nuances of anticipation, the nerve-racking feeling of welcome associated with a phrase Trouvé is all too familiar with: 'Please, step into my office.'

¹ Tatiana Trouvé interviewed by François Posay in *Tatiana Trouvé: Aujourd'hui, hier, ou il y a longtemps* (Tatiana Trouvé: Today, yesterday or a long time ago), CAPC Musée d'art Contemporain, Bordeaux, 2003, p. 9

Opposite:
Polder
2005
Resin, metal, painted
copper
454x300x450 cm

Below left:
*Bureau d'Activités
Implicites
(Bureau of Implicit
Activities)*
1997–ongoing
Mixed media
Installation view at
CAPC, Bordeaux
2003

Below right:
Untitled
From the series
'Intranquility'
2007
Pencil on paper, vinyl,
graphite frame
84x120 cm

