yellow, yellow, yellow

Yellow ist not always yellow. Yellow ist the colour of light and of lie. We all have our own definitions of coloures. How we experience, remember and categorize the colour is the projects subject and motif. Is the yellow-colour on the printed photography still to be counted as yellow or has it changed into a green-colour - that is dependent on several factors on the way.

The *work Composition with yellow* (part of the Installation) consists of a series of quadratically shaped photographs (details) of yellow objects and surfaces that I took durings my rambles across Berlin.

Aage Langhelle, Berlin 2001.

THE ARCHIVIST'S CABINET

“This book is based on a text by Borges. (...)
This text quotes “a certain chinese encyclopedia” which says that “the animals are sorted as follows:
a) animals who belong to the emperor,
b) embalmed animals,
c) tamed,
d) milkporks,
e) sirens,
f) mythical creatures,
g) stray dogs,
h) those who belong to this group,
i) those who act like mad,
k) those who are drawn with a very fine paintbrush made from camelhair,
l) and so on,
m) those who broke the waterjug,
n) those who look like flies from a distance.”
Michel Foucault, The Order of Things
And that's not all: in some parts of Africa - Tanzania for example - medical tablets are not sold for their function or their effect; you can't go to a pharmacy and buy tablets for malaria or the flu. Instead drugs are arranged by their shape and their colour: you can buy either green or pink, white or yellow tablets. Or you can choose between round or oval, spherical

or liquid drugs. What would you like? I'll take green oval capsules, please. I'd like some pale pink liquid. What these pink liquids and oval capsules are for is of secundary importance. Their function may never be discussed at all.
The description of these chinese or tanzanian cases does not illustrate an absurd or meaningless order. It simply shows that there is some order in which these objects are integrated, whether or not we understand the order represented by these situations. The examples demonstrate that the things are not the things. A tablet is not a tablet and an animal is not an animal. A tremendous chasm separates every object from itself. The phonetic articulation is part of a whole system of relationships and meanings which instantly collapses as soon as it is confronted with an alternate system.
Like objects and their names, colours are also a part of this extensive system. There are not the objects on one side and the colours - that they coincidentally have - on the other. Colours are not the disguise of things, they're not added to them or removed from them. We can't think of objects separately from their colour. Every object has a colour - always. Colours are unremovable aspects of things. But how do things get connected to their colours - and colours to their things? And how, in the beginning or finally, do these arrangements of objects and colours get related to their sense and meaning? How does it work - while we're on the subject - that the colour yellow connotes lying and falsehood. Why not the contrary? And why is this different in other cultures??
Aage Langhelle's work does not focus on the actual assignment of colours to things and to a certain meaning. It is not about the colour yellow and its significance. It could as well be any other colour that is questioned by Langhelle. His work is situated on a more profound level. It is not about a colour as a colour. It is about the system of assignement that they belong to, about the structures of assortment by which colours are added to things and bestowed with meanings, and about the cultural constants by which the assignment of colours is ordered - it is about laws and regulations that make sure that an object has exactly this and no other colour.
That's the difference between an archive of colours and an open range of colours: in an archive it's not about the colours of Mondrian - was it this or that colour and what meaning does it have? But it is about the facts that were caused by this colour and about the rules that were produced by this colour as far as art-history is concerned. It is not about the designing of colours in a staircase of Oskar Schlemmer, but about the question, which order or what archive make it possible that exactly this certain staircase-colour is quoted and no other. And it is not about the scandalous connection between Mondrian and Donald Duck - the mix of high and low, everyday-life and art - but simply about the fact of the archivist's recognition that both pictures, Mondrian and Donald Duck, do work with the same colour. If in the future a certain tone of yellow would be entered into a digital photo-search engine, the technical archive of this image retrieval would show the future gallery on the screen: Mondrian next to Donald Duck.
The archivist's view is producing a new order of visual knowledge. Langhelle deconstructs well-known visual orders and puts them together in a new way. Here we see the importance of art history as one of the most powerful visual orders of our culture. Its archive is broken apart and then re-arranged by new criteria. This new criterion of colour

leads to a mixing with objects of everyday life; but this mixing is not the theme - instead it is a neccessary consequence of the archivist's decision. He forgets about the function and form of objects and simply puts them into a new order only by their colour. Langhelle works with the visual order of somebody buying tablets in Tansania.
A new archive of the colour yellow is started, a new grouping in the order of things is established. This new grouping is not at all an arrangement of old things in another way; the objects are not only rearranged, they are also recreated by this. Like in a dream or in memories the objects also regenerate in this new grouping. As if the isolation of a simple object would dissolve in its new surrounding - as if the single object would never have existed as an isolated one - all of a sudden they change. Aage Lanhelle's cabinet is a magical place of transformation and metamorphosis.
This transformation, this mixing of one thing with another, is materialized in Langhelle's woven pictures: an isolated picture dissolves and gets woven together with an other. Just as in the digital photo search engine Mondrian and Donald Duck are linked because of the new ordering criteria, two pictures are woven together though they have nothing in common in a traditional ordering system. They form a new picture. By this, Langhelle recreates manually the process involved in digital media. The visual order of the future will be just as surprising as Langhelle's ever changing arrangements. But the archives do not only regulate the future.
Memory is the first archive. Memory shows that we don't memorize colours as colours, but only in their connection to things - so to speak colours as objects or colours as things. We remember the colour of a dress, the colour of the room or the screen's colour. But these objects don't simply appear, just as the colour didn't just appear out of nowhere. Instead the colours cling to a certain object, they appear together with them and form an undividable unity. So the dress' fabric can't be separated from the colour it has or has been dyed. As well, the colour of a room can't be separated from the room's walls, from the material and the way the colour was applied. Archive means the different possible ways by which colours can be connected to material.
Memory shows that every archive is connected to its material and because of that to its place. What distinguishes Langhelle's manual work from digital media is the concreteness of his archives. Like the first archives in antique Greece signified the unity of place and object, like an experiment in a laboratory has its concrete place and time, the concrete materialization of an archive exists only at one place: for instance in the pavillon of the Volksbühne. At any other place the archive is different. Every new arrangement of Langhelle's archive could have a thousand ways, but only one is possible and can be materialized.
As in a laboratory or in a modular construction system there are all different elements that are neccessary to create something new; but because of the limited number of these elements the new thing can only have one certain form. Langhelle's archives of colour are radically contingent; they don't exist from what he shows - but the colour's archives have their existence from what can be shown. Though what can be shown - and the examples of the tansanian tablets or the chinese animals demonstrate it as well - is always a frontier.
And so Foucault goes on with his example:

“With the amazement about this taxinomy we reach with one leap what is called in this list the exotic magic of an other thinking - the frontier of our thinking: the pure impossibility to think it.”

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