

This Is Not a Song - This Is Not a Word

Workshop in Transcribing – Thinking Art.

Based on the workshops, which took place in Odense on 12 - 14/10/2010

Day One

[Script]

Aleksander Komarov brought along the daily newspaper 'Politiken' as the object of study for day one of the workshop. The students reflected on the information delivered by the newspaper and questioned the prospect of participating in "writing this script". Aleksander proposed that students produce a handwritten copy of the first page of Politiken on an A4 sheet of paper. Each student wrote a selected portion and then passed his or her paper on to a neighbouring participant. After four hours, fifteen papers were collected through this collaborative effort, with each student having copied the chosen text 15 times and each paper containing fifteen different handwritings of the same text.

'My intention was for the students to experience the ambiguities of reading, writing, coping and ultimately understanding printed matter. The text can simply be seen as material in a chain of producing a work of art. In this case, text is used as an image, created with letters that lose their meaning when enlisted in the process of multiplication. My objective was to initiate a conversation with participants on critical reading and the notion of abstracting what is seemingly everyday common.'

Topics discussed:

- Context - In relation to choosing, reading and writing, and then transcribing.
- Identity - The text acquired different identities through the act of handwriting.
- Gender - Masculine and feminine manners of writing.
- Interpreting - The text became uglier over time, mistakes came about after a certain amount of copies, reading became interpretive, the desire to add idiosyncrasies in writing came about.
- The value of information in newspapers entered different stages - What exactly does originality, authorship, production and reproduction mean? What roles do other news systems - such as Facebook and Twitter - play in today's information age? What impact does the personal approach have on the distribution of news?

Day Two

[Transcription]

Transcription, in the linguistic sense of the term, is the systematic representation of spoken language (or, speech) in written form. Aleksander Komarov asked students to bring along a selection of films and their laptops. They chose two films to work with; *Control* by Anton Corbijn, and a documentary on Hip Hop music as a form of resistance within the African American community in New York.

While each film was projected, students were asked to write - in real time - what was spoken in the film. As with the newspaper exercise, participants only had to transcribe portions of the movie. Time, speed, memory and image influenced the transcription; as well as grammar, spelling, style.

'The purpose was to show the interpretive and inaccurate quality of language, when we try to separate the spoken word from its correct context. In the case of the film, the texts were devoid of the film's sound, voice, and moving image. It introduced a broader understanding of writing into the theme of the workshop. The participants experienced the construction and social connotations of language, and again its ability to abstract, to render things absurd, to become a conceptual entity.'

Topics discussed:

- Filmic narration transferred to printed text - What are the means to do this? What kind of layout does one choose to best interpret the emotional state of language in film? Or does one choose to not interpret what is heard? Suggestions included editing the text as movie subtitles.
- Dialectics of language in film - The intonation of the spoken language, pauses, other sounds, can be described with words aside from the actual text.
- Transcription as a transformation - Dealing with the notion of documentation. The result is not only a document, but also a set of rules for reading (grammar, sentence structure, space, commas, formatting etc).

These rather formal experiments with text and language were exercised to later observe - with ongoing writing - the critical potential of the rhetoric. It made us aware of our participation in constructing language, and prompted us to perceive language in both real and mediated time.

Day 3

[title] This Is Not a Song - This Is Not a Word

Aleksander brought along the film *So Is This*, by Michael Snow (1982). The task for the third day of the workshop was to elaborate on the meaning of text and give the project a title.

Taking a closer look at the newspaper and film transcriptions of the previous two days, we evaluated our works in more detail.

We began to arrange our writings according to noticeable data - like where the same words occurred repeatedly in different writings. We were able to delve into further interpretations and the results were very amusing. For example, it was interesting to learn, that hip-hop music engages word repetition as a means of political message; Later in the documentary, the musicians used proverbial outings to talk about their viewpoints in the interview. In our writings, there was no real difference between the songs' transcriptions and this interview.

After this evaluation process, we added notes to our writings and decided on 'This Is Not a Song - This Is Not a Word' as the title for our project. Through research, experience and humour, we were united in the search for the good - or bad - title. This process, allowed us to exercise the true performative nature of language.

Day 4

[Thinking exhibition]

With “Thinking Exhibition”, Aleksander Komarov endeavoured to have participants think conceptually about space, how it communicates with the artwork and how the work’s message transcribes itself to the viewer by the way it is exhibited.

We all agreed that the writings produced over the four days, were mere exercises. We expressly perceived that our writings were not a collective work, but a collective thinking about works of art. Hence, we decided that the representation of this project should be arranged in a discursive manner; in the same way we intuitively dealt with the various readings and writings. We laid the papers out on tables.