

I'm Trying to Talk to You

**Ka-Yin Kwok
Justine Makdessi
Roberta Rich
Nina Ross**

**curated by Roberta Rich
writing: Tamsin Green et al.**

Monday, 30th June, 2014

Monday, 7th
Some time later...

Dear Artists,

The premise I want to offer you is that an essay can never speak for a work. There is always something in the work that escapes description.¹ And, I can-not speak for you; this appears to be the most preliminary form of ethics in this specific situation. All I can do is make an attempt to speak with you, around the idea of the failure of speech these works communicate. So, I want to give you an open invitation you to insert any text here: into what I am writing, or to remain silent in this text. Perhaps the second option will be prefer-able, after all, the title of this exhibition implies a deliberate attempt to communicate something to someone (an unknown 'You'), however, what connects these works seems to rest in their resistance: the non-articulated vocalisations that are squeezed between official language; the gestures and breath that fall between the architecture of the script.

script
of the
architecture

An action that sums up so much is a sigh; released before the explanation has even been attempted. Right at the beginning of your work, Roberta, this exhalation seems to try and clear a path for words, but in its heaviness it also seem to summarise all the other attempts to be understood that have gone before it. An expression of fed-up-ness. So in this sense, perhaps, nothing else need be said. But perhaps something will always- at some point or another- need to be said, or explained. Questions will always be asked, assumptions always made. Whether these are addressed at the time, deliberated afterwards or even dealt with at all... But then, this particular sigh is also a quote and a translation. This sigh has lineage drawn from multiple sites both personal and art historical. How can a sigh be translated? How can a sigh not always already be translated and translated by one perceiving the sigh, and their assumptions? In taking Piper's text away from its original situation and presenting it in Afrikaans the proposition that there is an actual audience for the work is obfuscated re-positioning the 'corner'... must I privilege English speakers?: so perhaps what you are saying to the 'You' that you address is not within the contents of the speech, but in the question: do you assume the privilege of being able to listen?

"But when the card-carrying listeners, the hegemonic people, the dominant people, talk about listening to someone 'speaking as' something or the other, I think there one encounters a problem. ...they cover over the fact of the ignorance that they are allowed to possess, into a kind of homogenisation."²

Downstairs breath also takes place, but in this case it takes the form of an exchange. (**without an other person in language, language would not exist**). But even though this exchange is consensual, the power is not equal (by definition, perhaps). As discussed, Nina has occupied her position with deliberation, and entered into the situation of being outside speech. The material and social situation of living as an infant while adult discourse goes is manifested in the balloon as speech blocked by breath. (**yes, and I also wanted breath to symbolise speech because breath is life and speech is a form of presence or existence in society**). This performance is a punishing attempt to make speech through obstruction, and through the process an abject form of articulation has been produced. Like Roberta's imperfect Afrikaans the point is not to be absorbed seamlessly into the given form (**exactly because language acquisition is not a simple process; I wanted to represent experiences of an evolution into using it**). As Irigaray invokes, "If we continue to speak this sameness, if we speak to each other as men have spoken for centuries, as they taught us to speak, we will fail each other (**I wanted to explore who and what has influenced the foreign and/or patriarchal languages I speak today**). Again. ... Words will pass through our bodies, above our heads, disappear, make us disappear."³ But in this case the words cannot pass, (**they do not fit or sit comfortably, they are questioned by the learner**), they turn back into the body. (**and begin to produce a history of experiences in the body**).

Because I have the privilege of having seen Ka-Yin's works over time I feel like I know enough to propose a pattern of disruptions: of attempts to represent outside the given structures of representation, to picture without making subjects seen. I'm thinking here of works like your 'hanging out with Jack' where his resistance produced a document of a documentary's failure, as well as a more accurate image of a boy.⁴ So when I see this

study of the zoo I see that what you have uncovered in the zoo is an object lesson in objectification: A familial education in looking and projection. The screens and their reflections are, therefore, the perfect allegory in this situation. And they reflect not only the young, but also the changing ethos of enclosure. No more bars and display cases, just a smooth surface. Your description of the changes at the zoo reminds me of Deleuze's account of the transition from discipline societies to societies of control, where the zoo becomes the self-deforming caste of our collusion with power.⁵ As you mentioned, a kind of junk space where Thai themed elephants are curated alongside a Thai food vans. But as you said, the animals just get on with it in spite of all our landscaping; they don't bother to return the look.

And as I said, this text is not closed. I want to send it to you ahead of time to be disputed or refused. I don't yet know exactly what I can try to say with you, Juz: I know that the action of your work will allow for material of the space to disclose itself: to speak this and other structures. I want to say that it is your agency that uncovers the implications of the constructions in which we are caught... but I know that this would expose an outmoded ontology on my part. The substation and its subtexts, subservience, and subversion: Somewhere between S & M, AC/DC. At this point I am thinking back to that work at Linden... where being forced outside made manifest the material the absurdity of the balcony and its colonial flourish. But what was articulated in that gesture cannot be repeated here: in this text, or in what will be the present performance in the space to come.

That's all for now,

XOXO

Tamsin Green

"The part like the future though, is not closed. But "erasure" is not what is at issue. In an important sense, the "past" is open to change. It can be redeemed, productively reconfigured in an iterative unfolding of ~~erasure~~ matter. But its sedimenting effects, its trace, can not be ~~erased~~. The memory of its materialising effect is written into the world, so changing the past is never without costs, or responsibility."

Sunday, 6th July, 2014

Hi guys,
I am cool with it.
Cheers,
k

Sunday, 6th July, 2014

Dear Tamsin,

I considered choosing not to respond to your letter since my work is based on my experiences of being silenced by language, and in the beginning, having an 'other' to speak on behalf of myself because I had not yet acquired a language to use. But I felt that in not responding, I was perpetuating this silence and not acknowledging the process of finding my voice amongst another's words. So thank you for the opportunity.

Best,
Nina.

¹ As Daniel Buren writes, "writing which debilitates the work to the point that, after reading it, we find there's nothing more to be seen, proves that the work in question about which so much has been said, has in fact, nothing else to say." Daniel Buren, "Why Write?", in Art Journal, Vol. 42, No. 2, Words and Wordworks (Summer, 1982), pp. 108 - 109 (Translator unknown)

² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Questions of Multi-Culturalism," in The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 59 - 66.

³ This raises the question of whether language itself is figured as patriarchal within the dynamics of this work. Luce Irigaray, and Carolyn Burke (trans), "When our Lips Speak Together" in Signs, Vol 6, No. 1, Woman: Sex and Sexuality, Part 2 (Autumn, 1980), pp. 69 - 79.

⁴ Ka-Yin Kwok, *Hangin' Out With Jack*, 2007. Video, 8'11" produced by Jeff Goldfinch.

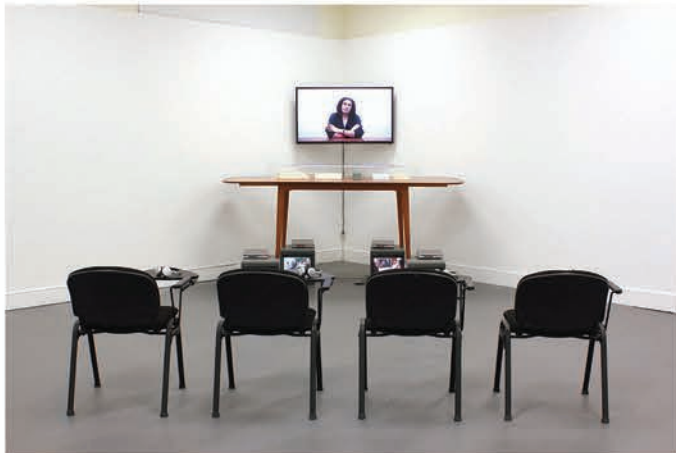
⁵ As Deleuze states: "enclosures are molds, distinct castings, but controls are a modulation, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other." Giles Deleuze, "Post-Script on the Societies of Control", in October, Vol. 59 (Winter, 1992), pp. 3 - 7.



Ka-Yin Kwok | *Can you hear me?* | 2014 HD Video

My body is very important, it's not just a container for my
 brain and my soul.
 I am not a dog.
 I am not a pig.
 I am not a sheep.
 I am not a cat.
 I am not a bird.
 I am not a fish.
 I am not a worm.
 I am not a fly.
 I am not a mosquito.
 I am not a tick.
 I am not a flea.
 I am not a parasite.
 I am not a part of your body.

Justine Makedesi | *More than the Sum* | 2014 Digital image



Roberta Rich | *Ek is in 'n Hoek Vasgekeur/I'm Cornered* | 2013
 Multi-channel HD & SD video installation



Nina Ross | *The Language Between Us* | 2012 HD Video

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