

In 1974 Cornelius Cardew, the British marxist composer, gave a performance of several of his most seminal works. Accompanying this performance, as a second act, he gave a lecture on what he saw as the works' shortcomings. Principal amongst their failures, was an inability to escape the dynamics of bourgeois art consumption. Despite his auto-critique, Cardew did not choose to reform the works, nor did he take them out of circulation, but decided instead to use the circulation of his works to mount a critique of their functions. The work *plus* the critique of the work. The work as a container for its own criticism.

Slow Reading Club formed in the negative space of our educations. Like most of our generation who went through schooling in the arts, we were taught various modes of reading: close reading, critical reading, psychoanalytical reading. We learned that a 'good' reader exercises criticality, contextualises, analyses, and speculates on authorial intent. But in such mechanisms of distancing, other intensities wane. Lighting, paper-stock, surroundings, and bodily state all recede behind a model of reading as the one-directional transfer of knowledge from writer to reader. We started our practice by rehearsing alternatives to the kinds of reading we'd been taught, actively suppressing semantic content through strobe lights, strange postures, sociality, and toxins. In holding semantic meaning at bay, we continually insisted that these readings were not 'better', were not 'useful', would not give priveleged access to some hidden value in a text. In order to learn from the practice, we wagered, it was necessary to abandon the idea that we were learning at all.

Over four evenings in Ghent, together with a chorus of students from the art school, we rehearsed a cover version of one of Cardew's choir works; *Paragraph 7* of *The Great Learning*, from 1971. The score calls for amateur singers. It functions as an open set of rules and relations between singers, both spatially and vocally. Rhythm is defined by the breath lengths of the singers and harmony is a result of each person adjusting to their neighbours. There is no requirement to read music notation or to be able to accurately sustain a pitch. The rehearsal of *Paragraph 7* is not secondary to the piece; the act of gathering to speak and collectively negotiate the score *is* the piece more so than any specific sound image produced by singing. Sometimes the principal value of a public performance is that it produces the need for rehearsal.

What is interesting in practicing the score (rather than studying it) is the strange, collective attention it requires to enact it. The virtual model of the score that exists in reading is almost impossible to sing, especially for the amateur singers that it calls for. But in earnestly attempting to realise it, something else happens. In many ways, rehearsing the piece became for us an exercise in getting comfortable with dissonance. It served as a continual reminder that it is possible to sustain an intensified being together without arriving at (even by avoiding) resolution and consensus. How this acceptance unfolds through rehearsal, in relation to the score, might be said to constitute the politics of the piece.

In 2011 Aaron Swartz, an associate researcher at MIT, was apprehended in a supply closet where he had left a laptop running a custom Python script, programmed to automatically download thousands of .pdfs from JSTOR. JSTOR is a proprietary library for academic writing, accessible by subscription. In the ensuing trial, federal prosecutors argued that these files were destined for mass distribution, that Swartz had planned to impinge on JSTOR's profits by making all the files freely available online. In making their case, they relied heavily on "The Guerrilla Open Access Manifesto," a collaborative text that Swartz had written with others and published on his blog. There's a specifically 'online' utopianism to the thinking in this text: the idea that knowledge can be acquired by anyone with full access to information. In 2013, the threat of jail time, federal felony records, and an enormous fine eventually prompted Swartz to commit suicide, and he quickly became a martyr for activists committed to the cause of open access. At the time of his death Swartz was 26.

As readers, we ourselves are indebted the politics of open access and free information. Between our two hard drives is a vast, vendiagrammatic space of .pdfs which have been passed back and forth, freely downloaded, annotated, and often left unread. When we rehearsed *The Great Learning*, we did it with fragments of "The Guerrilla Open Access Manifesto". On the one hand, a model of learning as the bodily rehearsal of relations; on the other, education as the uninhibited combination of informations. The idea is not to heroicize either of these two models for self-education, but to stage their meeting. Maybe one as form, maybe another as content. There's difference in this meeting, there's mathematically unbridgeable space between them. Statistically, we knew that.

LEARNING

LEARNING

Sightlines (white on black)
Sightlines (black on yellow)
Sightlines (white on blue)
Sightlines (white on brown)
Sightlines (black on white)
Sightlines (white on red)

CNC engraved plastic laminate. Dimensions variable.

Excerpts from literature (mostly novels) present on our hard drives at the time of making, chosen for their description of eye movements. By staging the crossing of these gazes a simple geometry appears. Form derived out of content. The view from outside might not always be the more accurate.

All Available Amplification

with Charlie Usher

Flea-market speakers with custom wiring, office desks, felt. Each desk 140 x 80 x 74 cm.

Always this question of fidelity. The tools for representing a past event are usually at hand, but the connections between them might need to be stripped and rewired. The specific junction of hi-fi and lo-fi. Signal vs noise.

Cover Version (Attachments)

with Charlie Usher

8 channel sound. Loop duration: 37 minutes.

Fragments of the recorded rehearsals are disseminated according to a schema of attachments, silences, and interruptions. Gradually, the event and its reproduction diverge. Memory remaps and produces gaps into evidence.

Choir members: Veronika Akopyan, Seppe Claerbout, Sarah Debaise, Zoë Dejonghe, Aleksander Iliev, Ward Maas, Mieke Schelstraete, Lucas Van der Rhee, Zeger Veters, Hilke Walraven, and Tzu-Jo Wu.

All Possible Outcomes

Letraset on woven satin ribbons, push pins. 63.5 x 112 cm.

In the relationship between individual agency and a predefined score, the 'decision' is the smallest unit.

Plausible Remainder

Letraset on woven satin ribbons, push pins. Diptych. Each piece 40 x 51 cm.

A simple transcription of recorded sound into writing. Repetition is its own grammar.

Call for Participation (Searchlight)

UV print on brushed aluminium. 52.5 x 73.5 cm

Public address. The reproduction of a poster call for participants as a mirrored surface. The end is usually reflected in the beginning.

Random Access Memory

Zine. Laser print on "yellow" paper. 16 pages a5.

As always, the politics of the exhibition are contained in its distribution. The grid as an ersatz grammar for reading, the splitting of information into manageable 'packets' for later recall. The show as a container for its criticism.

Dedication (18.55.6.215)

Recto: Letraset on woven satin ribbons, push pins.

Verso: UV print on brushed aluminium, adhesive felt circles. 95 x 65 cm.

A restaging/return of a work from a prior exhibition (Dedication, Aaron Swartz). Visibility does not equal access. Access does not equal comprehension. The rhythm of mourning is cyclical.

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