

The Pleasure of Language

August 24 - September 28, 2002

<Snuggle^Puff> that wicked one is bad to the bone <pujangga_cinta> meski bumi terbelah dua, kau dan aku tetap saling berpeluk <Snuggle^Puff> is Laughing Out Loud <HempMan> mp3 Bush_-_Headful_Of_Ghosts.mp3 4m 21s 5.96mb <Snuggle^Puff> pujangga_cinta english please <Snuggle^Puff> morning HempMan:) <Snuggle^Puff> hi You^Are^The^Queen^Of^My^Heart, what a sweet nick:) <Three_Horned_Ogre> it's great the way almost everything you say has a smile at the end of it <Snuggle^Puff> lol Three_Horned_Ogre i am just a happy camper:) <kewl_dude> am totally lost here..... first time chatting here

Péter Frucht

The popularity of chatrooms on the Internet and the speed of electronic mail have led to an enormous growth in communication, and with it changes in the use of language and the creation of countless vernaculars. The artists in the exhibition *The Pleasure of Language* are concerned with language in various manners. By means of image, text and sound they both respond to and participate in the ways language use and the communication process are changing. A number of works reflect the body of thought and ways of working of artists from the beginning of the last century, placing these ideas in a contemporary perspective, employing new technologies.

Artists

In his installations the audio artist **Brandon LaBelle** focuses on the dynamics of spaces, objects, bodies and language. His interest is primarily in the performative possibilities of language: how the various consonants and vowels collectively form an architectural whole that enables us to form words and sentences, and subsequently how they achieve and influence communication. For LaBelle the sound of the voice is crucial for the perception and meaning of language. In his work *Text=CD* (2000) he investigated the architecture of the mouth and looked at how this space makes language and communication possible and influences them. In his new installation *Over/Hear* his attention shifted to that what is been said. For the past years LaBelle has been writing down conversations; words found in a given space. "I got struck not so much by what the conversations revealed but by what they concealed, for the 'portrait' of the conversations were dispersed and broken apart in the greater flux of the spoken voice". Using these texts as source material, *Over/Hear* is a series of recordings based on plying notes of a piano as they correspond to letters in the text, from A to G: reading over the text, a note is played each time a corresponding letter is read. Each recording/letter is made separately and amplified within the gallery space through seven speakers. LaBelle uses the architecture and literally replays the snippets of conversations.

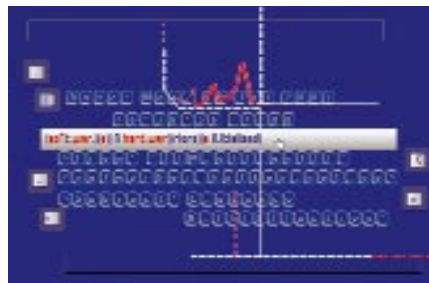
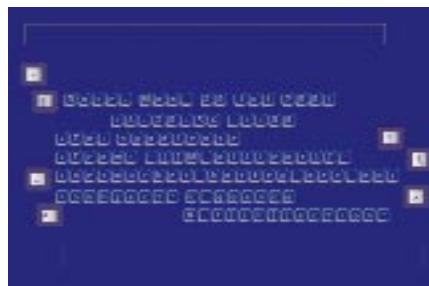
The Hungarian/German artist **Péter Frucht** is fascinated by the misunderstandings that arise in communication. Influenced by his long presence in chatrooms, in his installation *low inanalbipootv mmif with mftw ibn and cotllflohaha isbt* (2001) Frucht captures the endless talks and conversations that take place all over the Internet. He breaks in conversations and extracts parts. When the texts enter in the virtual 3D world the viewer at first is able to read them. When the viewer starts mixing the different parts however, the texts become unreadable. The first selected text turns red and if the second text gets selected it merges with the previously selected text. Immediately certain letters change and the leftovers are automatically rearranged. The result is a wave of live chat that can be mixed and linked together by the visitor. In mixing the various portions of text with each other the texts lose their original content. And by replacing certain letters Frucht alters the literal meaning of the words. But by regrouping the words and texts, new symmetries and new rhythms arise. The boundary between word and image can become very unclear through the various forms that are superimposed over one another. The typography functions here as an aesthetic element and as a connection among words, sentences and texts. This abstract typography and the abbreviations



Péter Frucht *low inanalbipootv mmif with mftw ibn and cotllflohaha isbt* (2001)



Péter Frucht *I Got Flowers* (2002)



mez

used are clear references to conversations in chatrooms on the Internet. What is interpreted as image and what as text depends on the visitor's capacity for abstraction. At the same time the sound is manipulated as well. By using a text-to-speech program different languages become audible. Through the interaction of the visitor the live chat can be mixed, interweaving the various languages ending up in an unintelligible flow of rhythms and melodies. With his installation Frucht shows that language is based on random rules and that it lost its sense long ago. Moreover according to Frucht communication through the Internet is bound to result in misunderstandings and miscommunications. This world of closure and confinement is also physically present in the installation where the visitor can only peak through a small bar into the virtual 3D world and has to find its way using a cumbersome navigation tool. The disbelief in language as truth can also be found in his video *I Got Flowers* (2002). Frucht tells his story through the mixture of a television program (a movie and a talkshow) and a dialogue between a father and his son. The kitchen and the garden in which the father and son spent their time serve as metaphors for the communication between the two. During their talks a television is playing in the kitchen. The interference of the television at times illustrates and exemplifies the conversations between the father and son better than the things they are trying to say to each other. As in *low...*, in the translation among German, Hungarian and English, Frucht makes use of his own symbolic language, which reproduces the relation and communication between two persons better than any other language.

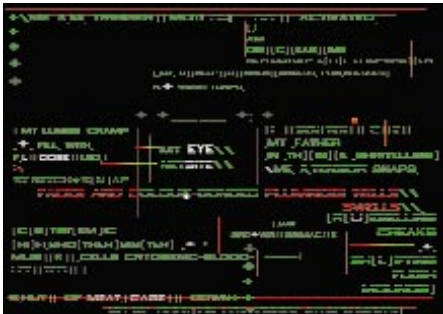
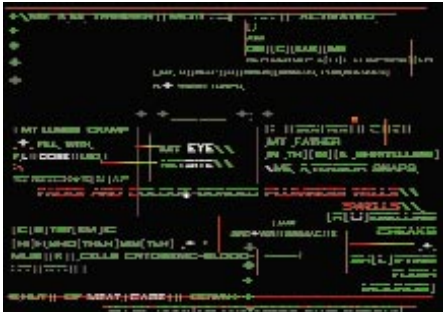
The Australian artist and writer **mez** (Mary-Anne Breeze) produces e-poetry in the Internet which she herself terms **m[ez]ang.elle**. m[ez]ang.elle is a game with language, supported by sound, symbols and text, which arises from abbreviations that are current in email and SMS communication. The words are altered in a manner that reflects the fundamental meaning of the word and calls up new associations. Her language is based on English and contains mathematical, programming and other language codes, in order to develop a language specific to Internet. By introducing punctuation marks reading becomes an active procedure that is more in the tradition of oral than literary culture. In addition to providing a new language inspired by new communications media, mez also wants to overturn other traditions with her texts. For instance, altering the word 'postmaster' to "post[wo]ma[n]ster" not only shatters gender conventions, but at the same time places the word 'master' in an historical context and hints at words that sound similar like 'monster'. In this way a single word can receive multiple meanings, so that the text can no longer be read unambiguously. Even the punctuation marks lose their neutral value, they begin to speak an



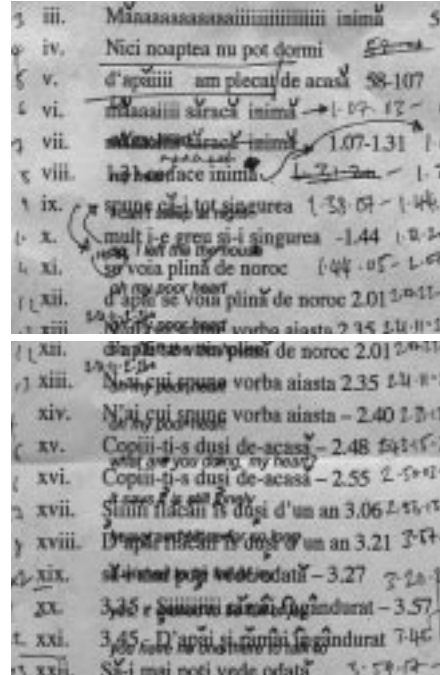
Netochka Nezvanova / Jaine Evans

unuttered language. Like no other, mez employs the hyperstructures of the Internet and brings to the surface the underlying meanings in language. The readers are left to wonder; should they trust the inscription or the encryption?

For the exhibition Netochka Nezvanova has collaborated with Jaine Evans to produce the interactive installation *Hypoderm* (2002). *Hypoderm* allows the visitor to control and reveal bodies of text through establishing a physical language of presence, absence and movement. Bodies of descriptive text are built up through the placing of words and sentences in an associative relationship with one another, in a way that is determined by each individual viewers movements. In this way visitors create a fluid, ever changing descriptive body of text. Through language, *Hypoderm* explores identification and connectivity to the land. It is about contradictions present in the juxtapositions of biological (body) and memory (absence) to the synthetic and organic environments. The creation of artificial electronic forms reminiscent of plantlife and the internal systems of the human body place the viewer within a space that is subjective, bound to an idea of the landscape, while being devoid of any real connection to it. The installation forms a relationship between the human body and the land in which language, sound and movement highlight both an alienation and a (re)connection to the natural environment through the perception of ones body as ones landscape.



mez



Imogen Stidworthy *Substitutes* (2002)

At the opening: KKEP with *See You*
Under the name KKEP, Selene and Stef Kolman have been making their own projects in public space. KKEP is known for their innovative way of working, in which they make use of various channels, from television to Internet and handhelds. KKEP's work consists of a combination of art, advertising, news and entertainment. For the exhibition KKEP uses the SMS protocol to personalise mobile phones with an image of the user's eyes. First send a txt.file to the handheld, the code transfers automatically into an image of the photographed eyes.



KKEP *See You*, 2002

In her work Imogen Stidworthy is constantly in search of the role of language and the place that it occupies in society and in relationships. According to Stidworthy, language is inseparably linked with power. This idea is reflected most strongly in her 1997 work *To*. In her para-documentary video *Substitutes* (2002) Stidworthy is more concerned with the workings of communication in relation to translation. In *Substitutes* Stidworthy shows us two young Romanian singers filmed during a change meeting. Playing the tape back to several people their song provokes diverse translations, memories and interpretations, which she layers over the original recording. The acoustic linking of language and musical sounds produces a hybrid soundtrack understood more as texture than as text or song, while the apparent wholeness of the song is revealed as a patchwork of non-sequiters, grammatical slips and inconsistencies. This reflects the workings of both communication and translation.

In addition to current works, a number of works from the early days of video art from the Montevideo Collection will be shown on monitor. Recordings of performances by Laurie Anderson and Carolee Schneemann, and video works by Vito Acconci and others will show how artists employed language in their work in the past.

Background

A Century of Language in Art

The first impetus for change

Since the introduction of language people have been occupied with the interpretation and organisation of language. It was not until the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th that language was uncoupled from grammar and meaning. The first impetus for presenting the word as a separate entity was given by Stéphane Mallarmé in 1897. In his poem "Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard" (A throw of the dice will never abolish chance) words are separated from one another by white pages and depicted in various forms. Subsequently Filippo Marinetti, the leader of the Futurists in Italy, was the first to speak out against the structuring of language on a page. In his 1912 Manifesto he called for doing away with harmony, and he wanted to confront the reader directly with the word. Only by means of a 'typographical revolution' would the word get back the autonomy and dynamism that it deserved. At the same time, painting was making an approach to language. As early as 1911 words and sentences were being integrated into paintings. Together the expressionists, cubists and futurists liberated word and image from conventional rules. After World War I the Dadaists tried to bring to the surface the true nature of the word or letter. The thread linking all these experiments was dispelling the self-evidence of art, and casting doubt on its content and function.

Growing influence of mass media

The enormous growth of mass media meant that after World War II artists' interest in language shifted to the cultural impact and significance of language and the effects of language on communication. In the 1960s and '70s language was seen in art as an extra means for confronting viewers with themselves and with their environment. In his book *The Pleasure of Text* (1973) Roland Barthes introduced the notion of two sorts of language use: the written, readable ('readerly') text, fulfilling the reader's pattern of expectations, and the 'writerly' text that, conversely, disturbed the expectations. The opacity of text assures that sentences and words must be analysed piece by piece, breaking the existing conventions between object and viewer. The vertical structure of writerly text demands an active role from the reader, in which he or she becomes both reader andrewriter. The attention of the artist must increasingly be focused on the whole communication process rather than making language itself into an artwork. The active vernacular was subjected to investigation in which the emphasis lay on rhetoric and tautology; through slight shifts in the letters new meanings arose, with or without ironic undertones.

The rise of feminism

This trend continued in the years that followed, and was reinforced by the rise of 'story art', which set down short statements, thoughts or events, often accompanied by photography or video. Story art was particularly popular with feminists, who in the mid-'70s were acquiring an increasingly larger voice in art. The slogan "the personal is public and political" was introduced by Luce Irigaray in 1974, and was a protest against an unequivocal conception of truth in language. One of the consequences of story art were the 'sound bites' of the 1980s and 1990s. These too involved social and political slogans, which were placed over images and/or in public space. Sound bites were however much stronger and were permeated with black, cynical humour. Their power lay primarily in the choice of the right words, which would stick in the memory. Mass culture was an important source of inspiration for many of the sound bites. Although because of this the pronouncements often appeared very non-committal, they certainly sparked reflection without offering a solution. The outcome of this process might then lead to improvements. This existential view, in which life is seen as an absurd experience, which can lead to understanding, but not necessarily to improvements in life, is still to be found in art.

From literary culture to oral culture

Responses to the language experiments at the beginning of the last century were far from uniformly positive. Critics saw the investigations not as revolutionary, but as regressive. The artworks were seen as reflections of the time before the introduction of the alphabet, when people only had spoken language, which was impenetrable and inflexible. This comparison is still made today, but now in a positive sense. According to Walter J. Ong, we find ourselves in a 'second orality', the second verbal era. In his book *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982), Ong investigates the contemporary trend toward a new manner of communicating. According to him, the arrival of electronic media has led to a change in our thinking. Interest in the written word will diminish and the spoken word will get the upper hand. He bases this primarily on the non-linear structure of an oral culture, which is also to be found in the structure of the Internet, for instance. He believes the possibilities of interactivity in 'hypernarratives' in which various pieces of text, images and/or sound fragments are connected with one another by means of links, reflects the oral tradition. According to Ong, the 'second orality' will be a period in which the principles of both oral and literary culture will coalesce. The question is whether our society today is showing ever more characteristics of an oral culture, or on the contrary is a deepening of literary culture. In any case, awareness of the differences between oral and literary culture can in the future assist in obtaining interesting new insights for interpretation of language, visual language, culture and communication.

WEBSITES

Brandon LaBelle www.kaon.org/brandon_labelle/index.php
Péter Frucht www.khm.de/~frucht/
mez www.cddc.vt.edu/host/netwurker/
www.hotkey.net.au/~netwurker
Netochka Nezvanova www.steim.nl
KKEP www.kkep.com

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text: **Annet Dekker**
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MONTEVIDEO
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