



Kunstraum Nicoline van Harskamp

25 October – 6 December 2014

Amongst languages world-wide, English has the highest proficiency among populations who speak it as a second language rather than a mother-tongue. As the dominant language of global capitalism and international politics, it is becoming the world's primary lingua franca at a pace unmatched by Mandarin Chinese or Spanish. With non-native English speakers outnumbering English-speaking populations four to one, the idea of a standard version of the language is increasingly devalued.

Nicoline van Harskamp's project imagines and represents a situation where English speakers world-wide rid themselves from a single native-speaking standard of the language and co-opt multiple 'Englishes' towards emancipatory or creative ends; utopian language projects of the past may be renewed; the simplification of English as a relay language may dissolve; the suffocating influence of professional jargon may disappear.

Van Harskamp's language-experiments focus on the unique characteristic and problems of translating from one language to another, as well as the phenomenon of 'grounding' – a mutual fine-tuning in the signification process within spoken interaction. The works exhibited reference female characters such as Eliza Doolittle in George Bernard Shaw's 'Pygmalion', who resists the necessity of linguistic education, as well as the two women in Ingmar Bergman's 'Persona' who through mutual solidarity get entangled in each other's identities.

***Pygmalion* (2014)**

At a live translation event over eight hours on Saturday 18 October, Kunstraum hosted a reading of George Bernhard Shaw's 'Pygmalion' where participants read from a script in their own language, translating it live into English. 'Pygmalion' tells a story of the power relations between language, class and gender; a man and a woman who speak English in very different ways are forced by circumstance to communicate. The play has been translated to many languages since its first staging in 1912, and more than 20 translations were collected for this simultaneous translation. Native speakers of each of these languages – from Turkish to Japanese, Farsi to Czech – created a new version of 'Pygmalion' in English, embodying the unique characteristics of the many 'Englishes', which are spoken worldwide. In the exhibition, recordings from the reading will play alongside 'reportage drawings' from the event and a display of the books used for the translation, which visitors are invited to take from the shelf and follow the reading in their own language. Later the recorded dialogue will be adapted into a new staging of the play, taking on all the idiosyncrasies of the quick-fire translations.

***She Put Me in Complexity of Words* (2014)**

Exhibited for the first time, *She Put Me in Complexity of Words* is a filmed language experiment focusing on the phenomenon of 'grounding' – a mutual fine-tuning in the signification process within spoken interaction. In collaboration with the Baltic Art Centre in Visby, Nicoline van Harskamp invited four proficient yet not native speakers of English to the remote Swedish island Gotland. The women, artists from Korea, Cuba, Serbia and Iran, each

with a specific interest in language, spent three days in an isolated house, a 'place without language'. Van Harskamp asked them to familiarize themselves with each other's 'Englishes' using existing linguistic experiments as a tool. In the work we see the result of an improvisation session where they speak out each other's phrases in an unusual range of interpretations, not attempting to correct them into a more accurate English, but instead attempting to stay true to the original sentence.

She Put Me in Complexity of Words was filmed by a local crew on Färö, a little island north of Gotland, and the set of many films by Ingmar Bergman. The exact location of Hammar beach is where Bergman recorded 'Persona' in 1966, a portrait of two women who get entangled in each other's identities. *She Puts Me in Complexity of Words* resonates Bergman's 'Persona' in the atmosphere of language and location, as well as in the title.

***Her Production* (2014)**

Also exhibited is the short video *Her Production*, consisting of an audio track alongside a projection of subtitles in phonetic symbols. In 'Pygmalion', Bernard Shaw introduces Henri Higgins, the professor who secretly records people's speech patterns with a mysterious notation system. The character of Henri Higgins was modeled after the phonetician Daniel Jones, who was one of the main developers of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), a notation system for every sound that any human on earth can make in speech. Even with contemporary recording technology, IPA still serves an important purpose in the research of the spoken word. Working from UCL in London, Jones initiated a yearly summer course of English phonetics that still brings together large groups of scholars from all over the world.

In 2014 Nicoline van Harskamp, who taught herself IPA and aspires to one day write it like Higgins, at verbatim speed, attended the course. Apart from studying phonetics with over 100 international phoneticians, she conducted an experiment among her fellow students. She played them an audio clip with her own voice and asked them to comment on her English or, in linguistic terms, her 'production'. The various critiques are collaged into an audio track, and subtitled using the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet.

Nicoline van Harskamp (b. 1975) lives and works in Amsterdam, where she is a head lecturer at the Sandberg Fine Arts Institute.

Van Harskamp's recent project *Yours in Solidarity*, which addressed the very recent history of anarchism through a correspondence archive, was presented at MUAC, Mexico City; Frankfurter Kunstverein; Manifesta 9, Genk; Hillary Crisp Gallery, London; the 2013 Shanghai Biennial; GMK, Zagreb; and D+T Project Gallery, Brussels.

Other pieces were presented at Kadist Art Foundation, Paris; Performa 11, New York; Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam; and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. Van Harskamp has staged live works at Witte de With, Rotterdam; New Museum, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Arnolfini, Bristol; Serralves Foundation, Porto; and the Kaaaitheater, Brussels. In 2009 she won the Dutch national prize for contemporary art, Prix de Rome.

Morphologies is a season of exhibitions and events themed around the artistic imagination of the foundations of language. 'Morphology' is the study of structures and forms, ranging from the structure of words to the shape of astronomical objects. To understand the way something is now implies knowing how it got there – languages, galaxies, rivers, and artworks, all of them are in constant flux. *Morphologies* is supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.



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