

Kunstraum

Unlearning to speak

Tyler Coburn, Luca Frei, Joachim Koester, Jacopo Miliani

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Over time COMMA prattle once known and forcibly forgotten may also begin to melt PERIOD We will hear the echoes of unbounded babble PERIOD We may slowly unlearn to speak PERIOD
– Tyler Coburn, *NaturallySpeaking*, 2013/14 *

Unlearning to speak derives its title from Tyler Coburn's work *NaturallySpeaking*, (2013/14). Within the work's text, Coburn imagines the future development of speech in the terms of Daniel Heller-Roazen's *Echolalias*, in which the forgetting of former languages pave the way for the development of new forms of speech. In *Unlearning to speak*, works by Tyler Coburn, Luca Frei, Joachim Koester and Jacopo Miliani explore how escaping from pre-existing language forms may give rise to new ways of thinking.

Unlearning to speak is the final chapter of Kunstraum's ongoing *Morphologies* programme – nine months of exhibitions and events centred on the artistic imagination of language formation and the future potential of new language forms. In science, 'Morphology' is a term used for study of structures and forms, ranging from the structure of words to the shape of astronomical objects or biological organisms. Kunstraum's *Morphologies* develops out of the idea that the structure of galaxies and the structure of sentences can be described and understood in the same terms.

Joachim Koester's 16mm film work, *My Frontier is an Endless Wall of Points* (after the mescaline drawings of Henri Michaux), (2007) points to a moment in the 20th century when new realms of exploration opened up, away from the structures of, national interest, academia and conventional forms of language. *My Frontier is an Endless Wall of Points* animates a series of drawings made by the poet, writer and painter Henri Michaux, made under the influence of the hallucinogen Mescaline. In Koester's words: "Of all Michaux's work these drawings are most often described as 'a venture into foreign territory'. They are seen as an exploration of a vast world on the borderline of words."

In 1926 Karel Teige, a Czech avant-garde artist and designer, illustrated the Western alphabet via photographs depicting the gestures of the dancer Milca Mayerová. Jacopo Miliani imagines Teige's *ABECEDA* alphabet as fixed points in a choreography, where the dancer's transitions between letters are open to improvisation. Which glyph any body position may represent is clouded, and the production of words from these letters is determined as much by the flexibility of the performer as the originator of the text. Miliani's performer transliterates from the Latin script into the language of the human body, the original meaning of the text giving way to the potential of movement.

Luca Frei's works in *Unlearning to speak* use the typographic ligature – the character that is produced from the joining of two or more letters – to develop an ongoing study of the things that join objects or ideas together. The works borrow handwritten fragments from a notebook kept in the 1870s by Alexander Graham Bell, whose experiments on sound and speech eventually led him to patent the telephone. Bell's scrawled notations are recreated by Frei on Kunstraum's walls – the enigmatic words "Soldering without fire" and "Bleeding to death". These words that once traced connections between disparate ideas are here disconnected, deconstructed and reformed.

Tyler Coburn's *NaturallySpeaking* is an experimental essay on the speech act in relation to a narrative of history, told through the standard script used for training a common speech recognition software. Sitting on a chaise longue constructed in basic geometric solids we are invited to each become the narrator of the essay, mimicking the non-affective register of speech that is called for in our interaction with machines. The essay combines stories of the births and afterlives of the voice: from Edison's attempt to capture every sound in the history of the world, to the scene in *Rabelais's Gargantua and Pantagruel*, when the warming air thaws the frozen sounds of a past battle.

Unlearning to speak will be accompanied by a programme of events including screenings, readings, discussions and performances that develop on the ideas of the Morphologies programme.

* Tyler Coburn, *NaturallySpeaking*, 2013/14. Text first commissioned and published in 'You Are Here: Art After the Internet' (Cornerhouse Books, 2014).

List of works:

Joachim Koester, *My Frontier is an Endless Wall of Points*
(after the mescaline drawings of Henri Michaux), 2007
16 mm black and white film loop, 10.24 minutes

Jacopo Miliani, *Alphabet*, 2013
26 photographs, framed
Courtesy of Frutta, Rome. Photo by Roberto Apa

Tyler Coburn, *NaturallySpeaking*, 2013/14
text, screensaver, monitors, furniture

Luca Frei, *Soldering without fire / Bleeding to death*, 2015
acrylic

Luca Frei, *Corrections*, 2015
Giclée print on paper