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October 7, 2000

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"Mary is tampering with the expected sequence. First she broke the sentence; now she has broken the sequence."
- Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (1929)

As one enters the narrow make-shift hallway of Apex, immediately to the right one encounters two apparently uniform paragraphs, red on white, that make up Kay Rosen's wall text entitled *Oh, Eau*. At first glance, the texts seem exactly the same. Upon reading, the only difference between the text is an alteration of punctuation, but this difference creates two diverging narratives - one of an impending deluge, the other a tale of a broken heart. Through the subtle move of shifting commas and periods, Rosen blurs the boundaries between reading and viewing, setting them in flux, challenging the transparency of both words and images.

She makes a double move through time and space, much like Mary Carmichael, Virginia Woolf's alter-ego in *A Room of One's Own*. Rosen sets to work "to catch those unrecorded gestures, those unsaid or half-said words, which form themselves, no more palpably than the shadows of moths on the ceiling…" *Errant Gestures: Visual and Verbal Correspondences* looks through and past these shadows, exploring the works of artists who wander outside established formal and conceptual limits in order to challenge the process of producing social meanings. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Janet Cohen, JonMarc Edwards, Rie Hachiyanagi, Mark Lombardi, Andrea Ray, Kay Rosen, and Leslie Thornton each perform an errant gesture: a strategic double play designed to interrogate the relationship between form and content, signifier and signified.

Mark Lombardi *Banca Nazionale del Larator, Reagan, Bush, Thatcher, Armory of Iraq (1979-1990) (4th version), 1998* (detail) Graphite on paper 51 x 120 inches

Kay Rosen *Oh, Eau*, 1989/92 Silkscreen on wall 2 panels each 36 x 36 inches

These works collectively engage in a semiotic activity where at first glance visual and verbal signs collide and press against each other with no seeming syntactic progression. Upon closer inspection, however, each of the artist's process reveals a sustained commitment to two sites of critique: formal and conceptual. Understanding how language relates to speech and signs, each of the artists in *Errant Gestures* in turn engages their formal medium with an aesthetic language. By doing so, a doubling occurs, in which the artist grafts one form of language onto another to produce a conceptual language, an interstitial site, through which visual art opens up traditional aesthetic categories, but also underscores the inherent ambiguities and slipperiness in language.

There are always gaps between what is seen and understood that point to a politics of language: how one's particular location to language informs the way experience is organized. Who determines these gaps, these slippages of meaning? In other words, who controls the meaning of words or as Humpty Dumpty rhetorically poses the question to Alice (in *Through the Looking Glass*), "the question is, which is to be master - that's all." The works in *Errant Gestures* also pose this question in an effort to reveal language's shortcomings as well as its potential.

Inspired by Michel Foucault's discussion of the calligram and Walter Benjamin's notes on correspondences, *Errant Gestures* aims to look at works that point to the gaps, ambiguities and potentialities of language as well as challenge the hierarchy and binary between reading and perception, the visual versus the verbal. In a reading of

At first glance, the red and black clusters of notations in Janet Cohen's *Montreal at New York, 7-18-99* appear less about documenting an inning in a baseball game than a carbon copy of a statistics exercise that has been worked over repeat-edly. Cohen's short-hand for strikes, balls, hits, and fouls - con-sisting of letters, numbers, exponen-tials, shapes of dia-monds and circles - however random, plot pitches that fall in the

ohen *Montreal at New York, 9, 3rd inning*, 1999 Pencil on paper 13 inches

zone and the play that ensues. Her idiosyncratic visu-uage attempts to compress and manifest time, a passion for baseball, conceptual art and thought ally that of the pitcher's and her own.

Lombardi's large-scale drawing translates the collu-of Banca Nazionale del Lavoro with the Reagan, and Thatcher governments in the arming of Iraq into stellation of radiating arrows, small circles (players in me), larger arcs, solid lines (the movement of influ-dotted lines (the movement of assets), and wavy traces of frozen assets). The intricacy of his "narra-ructures" - a complex web condensed with connec-forged and made obscure - relay and spin a prolifera-f "public information" that takes on a life of its own.

JonMarc Edwards *You Are the Figure*, 1991 Acrylic, canvas 45 x 60 inches

JonMarc Edwards' pictographs -- compression of image, text, information and abstract painting via a textual device, what he calls a "monosyble" -- function much like Foucault's cal-ligrams. The sensual lines and shapes of Edwards' wordplay fulfill a visual plenitude what Foucault remarks as "hushed in the vision, hidden in the reading."[3] The smooth curves of lacquered wood unfurl meaning beyond its connotation that at the same time seems, in the case of *Light*, to illuminate the wall on which it hangs.

In contrast to Foucault's concept of the calligram, Benjamin saw the world as language where mute objects with their "linguistic potential became legible to the attentive philoso-pher who named them, translating this potential into the human language of words, and bringing them into speech."[4] The juxtaposition of these mute objects produces a corre-spondence: a dynamic relationship in which an artist and/or viewer appropriates and reconstructs an event, idea, and object, changing not only the "mute object" itself, but re-invigorating it. Avery Gordon likens the process to "entering through a different door, the door of the uncanny, the door of the fragment...of the shocking parallel."[5] *Errant Gestures* explores the dialectic of these displaced connections through the works of Thornton, Ray and Cha.

In *Adynata's* mise-en-scène of luxurious colors, excessive imagery, overlapping soundtracks, found footage, and still images, Leslie Thornton explores the desire that underlies Orientalism and the mechanism that sustains it. The film begins with an attempt to mimic through gestures and dress the photograph of a Chinese mandarin couple and towards the end juxtaposes found footage of a 1950s science fiction

from a Korean soap opera, highlighting the absurdity to understand and fix the Orient. Through the asynchronism and excess of sound and image, Thornton provokes a visual uncertainty as well as thwarts Orientalism's desire to escape and avoid signification.

Borrowing the setting of Marguerite Duras' novel *Destroy She Said,* Andrea Ray sets the viewer court center on a chaise longue in front of a still image of a tennis court pro-jected against a wall. The repetitive sound of tennis balls being hit converges with the soothing yet spare reading of days gone by at a resort sanatorium. Ray's *Fatiguer (tire)* lulls and lures the viewer in a double play that both conforms and disrupts the viewer's conventional strategy of watching a movie or reading a book.

In Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's video *Mouth to Mouth*, an ori-fice appears like a void, attempting to enunciate the vowels of the Korean alphabet. What follows is a sound-track of static, running water, and birds singing that block mediation and articulation. The disjunctive sounds and the blizzard of video snow that almost threat-en to efface the disem-bodied mouth, coalesce into an uncanny layering that heightens one's desire to look, listen, and speak.


Theresa Hak Kyung Cha image from her book *Dicteé* (New York: Tanam Press 1982)

The artists in *Errant Gestures* in one way or another attempt to break free from the sig-nifying representational function of language.
Rie Hachiyanagi's work focuses on the ellipsis and postpone-ment of language, in particular how language comes into being. For Hachiyanagi, language as well as her material (handmade paper) partakes in a fluidly organic process that explores the potential conversion of silence into language. Informed by Martin Heidegger's search for an essential lan-guage that names everything that is and in turn grants being to beings, Hachiyanagi builds a *house of being* that sus-

traces through the many "invisible" threads a silence, creat-ing a possible threshold, an approach to being.

Heidegger writes in *On the Way to Language*... "we always see the nature of language only to the extent to which lan-guage itself has us in view...that we cannot know the nature of language...is not a defect, but rather an advantage."[6] All of the artists in *Errant Gestures* take advan-tage of the slippages and gaps of language, creating mani-fold language systems, a pastiche of visual patterns, and a cacophonous present that are at once elusive and concrete, yet ephemerally tactile.
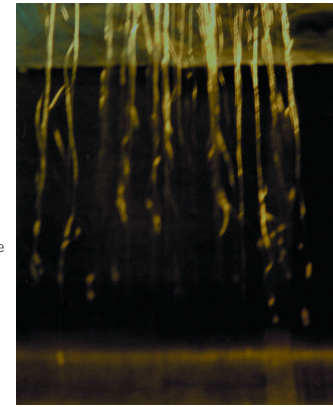
Rie Hachiyanagi *house of being*, 2000
Handmade paper (abaca), threads 3 x 7 x 10 feet

1. Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957, originally published 1929): 88.
2. Foucault, Michel. *This is Not a Pipe* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983): 24.
3. Ibid. 25.
4. Cited by Ernst Bloch in Buck-Morss, Susan. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997): 12. See also footnotes 39, 40.
5. Gordon, Avery F. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 66.
6. Heidegger, Martin. *On the Way to Language.* Trans. Peter D. Hertz (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1971): 134.

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