

Re: feedback

Elvia Wilk <elviapw@gmail.com>

Wed, Nov 21, 2012 at 6:58 PM

To: Jaakko Pallasvuo <jaakkopallasvuo@gmail.com>

Hi Jaakko and Henna (could you forward this to her?),

Thanks for the feedback. Glad to hear from you.

J, when we talked about this text originally, what I understood was that you were not asking me for a press text or critical work, but instead a piece to accompany the videos as a third element in the show. You were clear that you did not want to instruct me but to see what I would come up with prompted by the work. I wanted the writing to directly mirror the devices present in the work rather than address its content head-on. In my mind, the text is directly related to the videos - it literally mimics the processes within them, though it deliberately does not describe or flatter them.

I approached this text as an experiment in transparency and restraint. In the text I am honest about what I intend to do, in the same way that I believe both of your videos are transparent about their devices. Since you are artists who question ways of communicating content through formal means like removal/narrative/self-reference, it seemed an appropriate parallel to make a piece that denies the reader's (and your) expectations for art-related content. Apparently I accomplished this and your expectations were not fulfilled.

If you had asked me for a text with direct use value, I would have been glad to write one. I was given a blank slate, an opportunity to question the mode of art writing rather than just write it - removing its "use value" completely. I mention that I'm being paid right off the bat for precisely this reason: to undermine what is generally expected in a situation like this, when one person is paid to write about another.

Both of your videos are rich with complex material that prompted me to respond in an equally complex way. I am not surprised at your disappointment that the text does not address the videos' content, which was intended, but I thought it would be clearer to you that an analysis and appreciation of the videos is embedded in the text through re-creation of their tactics:

1. H, with the use of duration, deadpan monologues, and a removal of your own body and voice in "On Elegance," you demand concentration and attention with sparse aesthetic touches - choices that are either in tandem with or in contradiction to the subject matter of the work. The tension created between the content and its delivery is emphasized by your implication of yourself in text you have written for two women to perform; you are an absent character who we cannot access, yet your voice is ever present and self-referential. Why this removal of self? Is it a disservice to yourself when you mention that you've written this piece at the last minute? Is transparency/honesty a service to the viewer or an impediment to their approaching the work as such without directions for interpretation?

2. J, transmission of content in the first and last parts of your piece is layered and garbled with formal devices (music, flashing graphics, overlapping text) that make it hard for the viewer to concentrate - resisting engagement at the same time you draw us in with a network of intimate narratives. The middle segment breaks through this wall of information (the same wall of content we bang up against using the internet every day) and suddenly a quiet scene appears, a different mode of removing your own voice using one actor for movements and another for voice-over. The melancholy story delivered by your stand-in is a poetic description of the feeling of artistic futility. Are you disserving yourself by revealing your insecurities? Are we disserved by the clash between the story and the way it is told?

As I wrote in the first sentence of MATERIAL LABOR, you are paying me for a service, which I am happy to deliver. If you ask me to modify the text based on your needs, I will of course do so.

E

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MATERIAL LABOR

I'm getting paid to write this. That's to make writing this text a legitimate service and not a favor.
Art = goods, writing = services.

How can a writer disservice an artist? For someone like Jaakko, a bad review is as good as a good one. Maybe even better. That's not necessarily because he aims to antagonize, but because any reaction at all will be incorporated into his performance. He aims to legitimize failure as a mode of artistic practice, so he says. Then of course if he fails, he wins. If he wins, he fails and wins.

If you can't fail, then what are you risking? Is risk important?

Writing things for friends is always a favor even if it is also a service. I could provide an exclusive service for the other artist in this exhibition, Henna, because I don't know her personally, though I have seen her work. I could probably disservice her if I wanted to, because she has not constructed the completely fail-safe web that Jaakko has. I don't know if she wants to be fail-safe or not. Off the top of my head I'd go with "not," since she's a woman. (I'm not going to explain that; it's too personal. This is not about me.)

I always wanted to be what I call A Primary Producer. That means somebody who ponies up the goods and gets serviced by others. I wanted no part in womanly service labor. Fortunately it turns out that I didn't have to worry, since in the information economy, immaterial labor is now directly productive of capital. We're all constantly servicing each other like housewives. Now that I don't have to produce goods to qualify as a Producer, it seems like the only thing left to make is immaterial Content.

I am disservicing everybody at once here: I haven't written a word about the video art. It's hard for me to resist making even an analytical peep, because I would like to show how good a job I can do. If I did a good job then this piece could be worthwhile, usable as a press text for the artists, a page for me to publish somewhere. Alternatively, I could perform a subversive anti-writing gesture of futility, writing a 6-word-poem, drawing a yin yang, refusing to address the task at hand. But that would also be a useful service. I'm not big on stunts.

When content is dissolved by self-awareness, self-awareness does not necessarily become the content. Most of us are scared that we aren't smart enough. (We aren't.) If I'm not writing about the content of an artwork, and I'm not trying to produce content by somehow subverting the form of art writing itself, where is the content? How will you know I'm smart? Is risk important?

I'll tell you one thing. Both Jaakko and Henna are smart.

My favorite gesture is "hands in the air." I practice abstinence as a hobby. I like to get to know the person first. Sometimes the person gets bored and leaves. It's risky business. Sometimes restraint looks like antagonism, but it's the only way I know how to love.