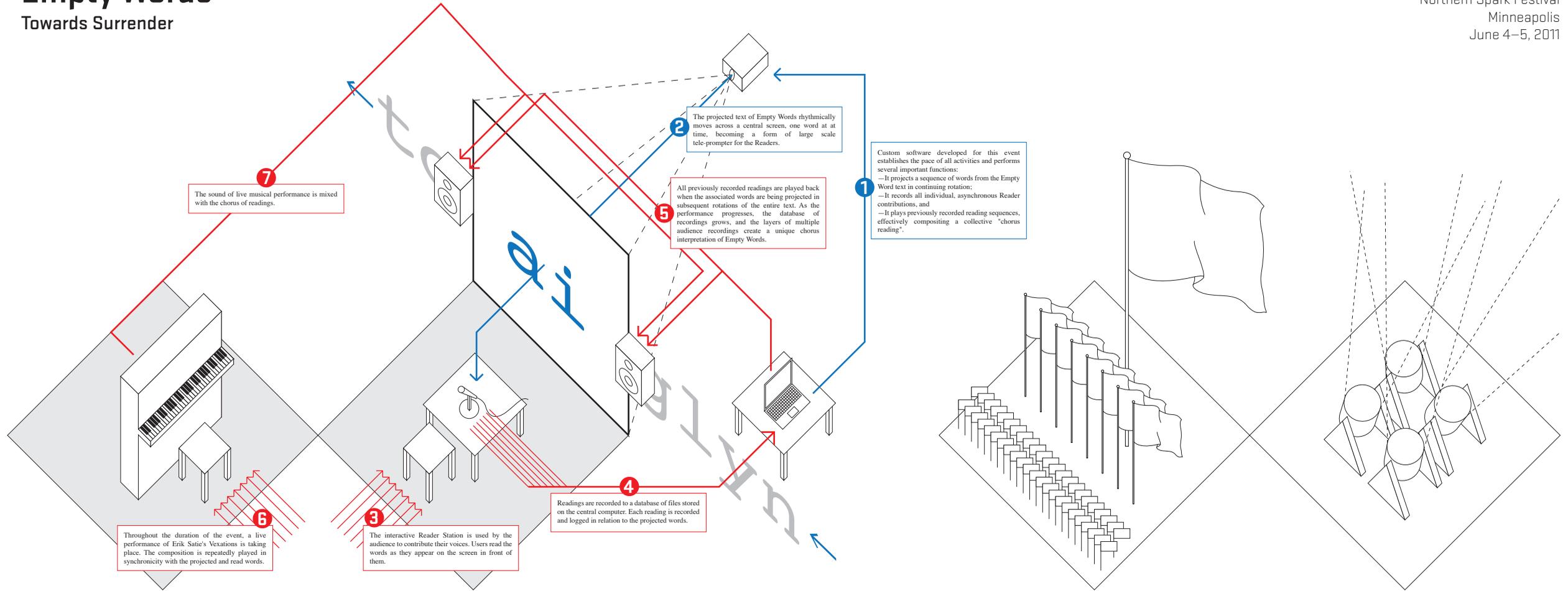


Empty Words

Towards Surrender

piotr szyhalski / Labor Camp Orchestra
Northern Spark Festival
Minneapolis
June 4–5, 2011



TEXT / MUSIC

Empty Words / Vexations

Demilitarization of Language:
Vexations and Vigils / Cycles and Endurance

The central thematic and organizational device facilitating the continuity and cohesion to the entire night is the communal reading of the "Empty Words" by John Cage. A central Reading Station is established which allows multiple individuals to participate in the reading of the texts. Each individual reading is recorded. A custom built software stores all contributions and assembles them in an ongoing chorus of participants. All previously recorded readings are played in cycles through the night, growing in strength and quantity as the event progresses.

The software developed for playback and recording of the texts also serves as the central clock device determining the tempo/pattern of all other events, including the musical performance of the "Vexations" by Erik Satie. A group of local musicians is assembled to perform "Vexations" continuously from dusk to dawn. A marching band performance opening the performance is desirable. Spontaneous participation is encouraged throughout the night as the performative density of the readings and music ebbs and flows. In addition to live readings, the entirety of Cage's "Empty Words" is also printed, one-word-at-a-time on small, paper white flags (see more details below). The flags are distributed to all audience members and participants through the night, allowing the text to physically disperse throughout the city.

The cyclic musical performance and collective readings suggest community-building actions not unlike those of night vigils or prayer services. However, the unique quality of Cage texts allows this transient community to form around a more poetic, de-centralized, open ideas, rather than rigid ideologies of political or religious systems.

MOVEMENT

White Flags

Concentration and Dispersion:
From Control to Surrender

Physical manifestation of the theme of transformation focuses on the objects and ephemera typically associated with mechanisms of control: flags, banners, posters, leaflets etc. In keeping with the "demilitarization through the removal of meaning" approach of "Empty Words" all flags and printed ephemera are designed as empty, white or silent. Multiple forms of printed ephemera ranging from leaflets, pamphlets, to posters and protest signs are prepared and distributed. All materials either echo and propagate the visual language of white flags, or specifically relate to the "Empty Words" text.

Multiple renditions of white flags are prepared and employed throughout the night. The three central white flag formats are:
A. The small paper flags: Hundreds of small paper flags printed with unique singular "Empty Words" from the Cage texts. Designed to have the widest reach, these small objects function as propagators and attractors, allowing the event to expand in time and space.
B. Color Guard: Short programs are performed by Color Guard group(-s) using medium size white flags prepared especially for the event. These programs are choreographed in time with the ongoing musical performance of "Vexations" and readings from "Empty Words".
C. Raising of the Flag: Throughout the night the task of assembling a large scale flag pole is being worked on. Constructing the massive pole, and the largest possible white flag, culminates at dawn with the momentous Raising of the Flag.

LIGHT

Transformation

Transformation and Transition:
From Deceit of Darkness to the Great Light of Day

One of the more powerful visual metaphors sustained throughout the performance is the transformation of night into day. Multiple high power tower lights are utilized to construct the ultra-bright epicenter of the celebrations. It is around this focal point of the work that all satellite events take place. Much like with the variety of flag sizes, the lights are present during the performance at different scales: the massive tower and search lights, smaller stand work-lights, portable work-lights, hand-held lights and mini LED light dots. As the night progresses the large lights are methodically diminished and smaller lights dispersed, allowing for a slow transition of the man-made light into the dawn. Lights, like flags, at times choreographed and structured, other times chaotic and fluctuating, provide the event with the organic texture of constant flux and movement.