

The Critical Potential of Purposeful Misreading as a Spatial Practice

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70733/wqscb834bfi3>

Monica Sand

Reading offers the potential for creative mis-readings or mere mis-understandings, inspiring or destructive depending on the objective. Still, is it possible to read without mis-interpretations related to individual, social and cultural preconceptions? Reading a text, a book or an article generates a situation in which the intentions of the author meet a reader with the individual authority to alternately agree and disagree, understand and misunderstand, often in silence without anyone listening.

During the PARSE conference in November 2019, professor in design Onkar Kular, and architect, researcher and educator Henric Benesch had partly already done the reader's work, while taking on the creative task of a purposeful mis-reading of Arjun Appadurai's influential paper *The Right to Research: Globalisation, Societies and Education* from 2006. Through replacing "research" in the original text with "design", Kular and Benesch defined the "right to design" as "the right to the tools through which any citizen can systematically increase that stock of knowledge which they consider most vital to their survival as human beings and to their claims as citizens." The title of their re-reading, *The Right to Design*, highlights the profound separation between Design, as a professionalised practice and a selling point for a certain contemporary lifestyle, and design as a human right and a powerful tool for informed citizenship.

The spatial and temporal organisation of the session allowed the argument for the potential of a political critical practice to emerge. First, the room chosen, the library, invited the audience, surrounded by books and journals of design, art and craft, to take part in reading as a social situation. The spatial set-up, with its simple, although purposeful, re-conceptualisation of the library room, creating space for a new critical practice of reading, was far from spectacular. Second, the action of the paper being read out loud in calm voices from the beginning to the end, in near slow motion, generated a temporal augmented reality between readers and audience, as well as between visual demonstration and listening, the content and the spatial configuration.

Sitting beside each other at the table, each with a screen displaying their different actions, the presenters took on different roles while taking turns reading. With a colour marker Benesch emphasised specific sequences, a process that could be followed in real time on the screen beside him through a camera installed above the paper. The original paper's references were replaced with visual "footnotes" interpreted by Kular and shown on the second screen, bringing the text and its contemporary "economic, social, cultural, civil, political" conditions into presence. The mis-reading of the original article, which was handed out to the audience, made possible a quite complex integration process of different modes of information dissemination. Listening, reading and

following the activity and references displayed on the screens made it clear that what you read is not what you hear.

The purposeful mis-reading by Benesch and Kular put forward a similar political purpose as Appadurai's text did: the democratic right of taking part in the creative *production* and not only the consumption of research and design. From that viewpoint, the session was not a mis-reading, rather it followed up on Appadurai's intention, aiming at a democratisation of education and a strengthening of informed citizenship. In-between individual readings and the joint paper presentation, this session expanded the spatial boundaries of a shared experience. Re-activating reading as a social situation proved the ambition, and the importance, of a protected space and a stretching of time for the poetics of reading to emerge. Thus, the purposeful mis-reading *takes place*, not only metaphorically but also in a literary sense in a carefully articulated spatial context. The way the purposeful mis-reading was organised, or designed, spatially and in time, made the renewal of the critical political potential, presented in the paper, present.