

Written Response

Name: Yike Liu

ID: 24006407

1.1 Reading List: Roland Barthes – The Neutral

“The Neutral doesn’t affirm, it suspends; it opens, disorients, floats.”

In *The Neutral* (2005) Barthes writes about a way of thinking that avoids fixed definitions or oppositions. He says that being neutral is not about being vague, but about choosing not to give a final answer. This idea is connected to my project, where I try to define what a “door” is using different words. I found that the more words I used, the less clear the definition became. It turned into something confusing and hard to understand. This confusing or uncertain feeling is what Barthes calls “neutral.” His thinking helps me see that being unclear is not always bad. Sometimes, it can be the start of something more complex.

1.2 Reading List: Vilém Flusser – The Gesture of Writing

“Writing is not merely recording speech, but a gesture that changes the structure of thought.”

Flusser thinks that writing is not just for recording ideas. He believes writing is a kind of action that changes how we think. In my project, I use words and word combinations to define “door.” I do not only write definitions — I arrange, repeat, and layer the words. I treat this process like a kind of design action. Flusser’s idea helps me see these language steps not just as writing, but as a creative gesture. It makes me think about how form and process affect meaning. His view gives me a new way to understand what I am doing in my project.

2 Related to Topic: Christian Marclay – Doors

A continuous video montage made from many scenes in different films, where people open and walk through doors.



Fig. 1. Christian Marclay, Doors, 1995.

In *Doors* (1995), Christian Marclay uses scenes from different movies to show people opening and closing doors. He puts them together to make one long, smooth journey. In my first week of the project, I also explored the door as a symbol — not only as something people use, but as something that shows ideas like control, identity, and social meaning. Marclay's video helped me think about how doors can be part of visual language. His work made me ask: Can a door be more than a door? Can it become a symbol or a system? The way he edits and repeats helped me understand how doors can change meaning when we arrange them in different ways.

3. Related to Method: Lawrence Weiner – Statements

"A square removal from a rug in use."

Lawrence Weiner's art uses very short sentences. They look like instructions or small ideas. In *Statements*, he writes one sentence per page. One of them is: "A square removal from a rug in use." This sentence sounds simple, but it makes us think about action, meaning, and space. Weiner does not show the action — he only uses language to suggest it. In my second week, I also used words to define "door." I tried to turn language into something visual. Weiner's work helps me believe that words can be the starting point of design. Language can create space in our minds, not just describe what we see.

4. Critical position: Stefan Themerson – Semantic Divertissements

“Definitions are like buttons: useful until they fall off.”

In *Semantic Divertissements* (1975), Stefan Themerson plays with language in strange and funny ways. His writing shows that definitions are not always clear or stable. Sometimes they stop working, just like buttons that fall off clothes. In my project, I try to define “door” using many words. But after a while, the meaning becomes confused and broken. Themerson helps me understand that language is not always about giving answers. It can also hide meaning or make it more complex. His work shows me that confusion is not always bad — it can be part of the design and thinking process too.

5. Wild Card: Xu Bing – Book from the Sky

The whole work is made of over 4,000 fake Chinese characters, printed in traditional style and arranged on scrolls, walls, and ceilings. It looks beautiful but cannot be read.



Fig. 2. Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky*, 1987–1991. Installation view.

Book from the Sky is a big art piece made with thousands of characters that look like real Chinese writing. But none of them can be read. They are not real words. At first, people think they are looking at a book full of meaning. Then they find out it says nothing. This made me think a lot about my own project. I

used many words to define “door,” but later the meaning became unclear. Xu Bing’s work shows that language can look powerful, but still say nothing. It made me ask: does meaning come from the words, or from what people expect? Maybe in design, being unclear is not a problem — it can also be a strong idea.

Line of enquiry

In this project, I explore how language builds the definition of a “door,” and when that definition starts to fall apart. At the beginning, I used only one word to describe a door. Because there was not enough information, the meaning was abstract and unclear. Then I added more words. With more words, the image of the door became clearer and easier to understand. But when I added too many words, and the structure became more complex, the definition started to break. The meaning of the door became confused again. I want to find the critical point where language stops helping and starts creating problems. This project is about the relationship between language and design, and how we understand, build, and sometimes destroy the meaning of simple things like a door.

List of Images

Figure 1. Marclay, C. (1995). Doors [video still]. Available at: <https://fraenkelgallery.com/exhibitions/art-basel-unlimited-christian-marclay-doors-2022> (Accessed: 1 May 2025).

Figure 2. Xu, B. (1991). Book from the Sky [installation view]. Available at: <https://www.xubing.com/en/work/details/206?type=year&year=1991> (Accessed: 1 May 2025).

List of References

Barthes, R. (2005). *The Neutral*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Flusser, V. (1994). "The Gesture of Writing." In: *Gestures*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 38–44.

Marclay, C. (1995). *Doors* [Video]. Available at: <https://youtu.be/nQxYq7Z5tO8?si=MyqhyzYXsv1hvQyZ>

Weiner, L. (1968). *Statements*. New York: Seth Siegelau.

Themerson, S. (1975). *Semantic Divertissements*. London: Gaberbocchus Press.

Xu, B. (1987–1991). *Book from the Sky*. Beijing: Xu Bing Studio. [Installation]