

Et Cetera

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ABSTRACT

Et Cetera is woven together with five works that are essentially five bodies of writings as digital poetry -- a poetic practice that is made possible by digital media and technology in which aesthetic possibilities are extended through the semantic impact of data, alphabets, visuals, sound, etc. Interlaced by multimedial meaning-making, *Et Cetera* re(produces) installations that are engineered with algorithmic materials utilizing real-time data feeds, animated letterforms, performative instructions and sensory synthesis.

Exploring different scenarios of human-machine coupling that consequently lead to multifarious illegibilities, *Et Cetera* amplifies the noise of information overflow in the concurrent mediascape with its rhizomatic networks largely beyond human conscious apprehension. On the B-side, *Et Cetera* is also involved with writing about the alphabetic writing apparatus, the role of artist as author as human-machine-centaur and networked subjectivity.

DEDICATION

“To my comrades in the present
and the cybernetic literary paleontologists of the mythic future.”¹

¹ Inherited from *Prehistoric Digital Poetry An Archaeology of Forms, 1959-1995* (C. Funkhouser)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Et Cetera could not evolve without a constellation of inspiring minds and love & this network is evolving as we speak.

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INTRODUCTION

In the textual space of *Et Cetera*, thought-chains multithread, signifying practices interweave, memories of perception cascade, babbling into an ocean of meanings.

Thread 0. *Mother Tongue* is the empirical metadata behind my research-creation: prone to a poesis that (dis)articulates in image, sound, algorithm, and alphabets.

Thread 1. *Digital Poetics* is the theoretical framework informed by the aesthetics of information (data and network).

Thread 2. *What You See is Where You Go* is the metaphysical condition and universal expression in every writing process and every work in *Et Cetera*.

Thread 3. *EveryLetterCyborg* is a Twitterbot that operates on its own and engenders its own agency that relies on APIs and social networks.

Thread 4. *Fin* illustrates an imaginary habitat made up of typographic sculptures and textual-visual animation generated from a stock photograph database.

Thread 5. *I, It's, The* uses the Quick Typing mode embedded in smart phones to generate email correspondences between myself and consumer AI systems.

Thread 6. *Reader's Guide* is a sculptural diagram informed by cybernetics that maps out the shared logics and processes behind each work in *Et Cetera*.

MOTHER TONGUE

"I refuse to lose
my mother
tongue"²

Cannot stop
the soft statements
I mumble to myself
First off, I am not a poet
Only eroticize rustles
Slips of tongue, lips and teeth
I am enacting, prosodic pitches
Soliloquy in the musical
of everyday life
No labels in need to
Advocate slack wording
No name required to
Pronounce vocabulary
Speaking, part of the performance
Singing, for the mourning of beauty
Spectacle societal, of all sorts
Micro-philosophy, dirty energy
Reincarnated in the matrix of
Experiences entangling
Is all I need
The most effortless to read
And the most indescribable

2012 NY³

who am "I"

~~I scream in calligraphic
strokes~~

~~I stutter in subtitled
alphabets~~

~~I sing in zeros and ones~~

I
take
refuge
in
noise

Figure 0 "I TAKE REFUGE IN NOISE"

² Hannah Arendt

³ originally written in Chinese

The year of 2012 witnessed me lodging in between my uncle's apartment at *Bot Dai Do* in Brooklyn, a friend's loft, a Zen Buddhist retreat center, a cheap basement and a tea room party house that I was cash laboring at. 2012 was the second year since I left China for graduate school. I had just transferred from a business program to media studies at NYU, a discipline I had never exposed myself to before. Most of the time on the N train from 59th street to 8th street, I was looking words up in the dictionary to understand the literal meanings of the course materials on Anglo-European philosophies. I remember how much I desired to internalize everything so I could keep up with the speed of the city or to simply communicate better. As fast as the express subway running across the bridge, I wished. The barriers, however, are not easy to bridge, just like the loudest blare of mechanical frictions echoes in the chamber of lower Manhattan when the train passes from aboveground into the dark tunnel.

I wasn't an artist at the time. At least, I wasn't consciously producing any artworks except the fact that I wrote in Chinese a lot. Writing in Chinese is dancing on bare feet. What is flown out of the words is what is bound to come into being. These diaristic writings are short ruminations and naked emotions. They were written in broken sentences and made-up words with hesitation and confusion of my entangled life experiences. Semiotics of media and performance, communication theory... big words that don't make immediate sense to me are transformed into noise and have left their indescribable residues in my psyche. These writings read foreign to me, empty and off the point, almost like machine-translated Chinese in which I had to voluntarily negate my authorship ("I am not a poet") as the words are losing familiarity to me. 2012 is not alone. It is one of the many episodes throughout my life, migrating from one language to another, one coast to another.

...

When Emily Dickinson⁴ writes down the words that could not be painted, the hyphens give her an exit out; the text is no longer a window opening onto any picture. Meaning, runs and slides, only making a silent sound. The pause requires a different perceiving register, entering a de-signing process where the thing is being the thing signing itself. Dickinson would rather be shrinking into an ear that hears the poetry than write it. “Enamored -- impotent -- content --”, subject to poetry that ravishes herself, she would rather be the object of the art.

Echoing the poetic irony in “I would not paint -- a picture --”, my practice emerges out of the same self-reflexive tensions of authorship and the jarring intentions in the signifying process of the narrative machine. Just as in *Et Cetera* the word itself signifies the infinite unknown which is limited in the sign—“a sign is also a stop sign” (Schwenger)—language embeds self-referentiality in its nature. How do I elude the stop in the circular origination in order to enter the dark side of noise? The sonorous desires to exceed lineation. My body cannot contain “I”; always seeking for ways out of the experience that informs me, yet not to be known. “I” am demanded to be fluid, that is, permeable to adapting to new environments and poetry is the space where “I” anchor the unstable while residing in the chaos.

Intrinsically connecting both thinking and writing, language shapes our “cognitive ground of subjectivity and social texture of community” and leads us to the “realm where we can imagine anything at all” (Rasula and McCaffery x - xiv). Pursuing a poetic practice allows for exploration of the conditions that “determine the information, the procedures, processes and crossed paths of meaning-making, meaning-making as constituting the meaning” (Glazier 32). To reveal the making of writing is to understand the cognitive processes and constraints which enable and frame my responses to poetry, as well as the imaginative and creative processes involved in its making and its reflective interpretation.

...

⁴“I would not paint -- a picture -- ...Nor would I be a Poet -- It's finer -- Own the Ear -- Enamored -- impotent -- content -- The License to revere, A privilege so awful What would the Dower be, Had I the Art to stun myself With Bolts -- of Melody!” -- F348 (1862) 505 (Dickinson)

The inter-permeated bilingualism is not alone. It is like almost all the other skills I possess, acquired for the sake of survival in the fast migration of global economy. Coding is such a skill, acquired after immigrating to Canada. The honest result of year-long unemployment, my material reality has been benefiting from it ever since.

It was around the same time when I started practicing art, after work and on the weekends. It was an excess of sheer mundaneness. Every day I followed routines, performed chores, earned a salary, taught myself finer digital craftsmanship to support my livelihood. I had to program my schedule and push my life into a command so it was easier for me to stay balanced till the point when I started to output a worldview as if I were a specimen in a simulation of generative becoming:

I am living in the theatre of life where everyone is a variable, everyone is a condition, everyone is a loop, everyone is a command; where I act, I perform life like a robot...The fact that I observe when my fingers drive the pen to write all this down is so peaceful that I am completely drown... Intoxicating. Intoxicating. I am at home. At this moment. It is so warm. This moment is wholly beyond my body...⁵.

At home is never an easy statement for me. The perplexing and sometimes random causal relationships in life always make me question “why I am here and who I am”, and the hyperobject-ness of all this overwhelms and exhausts “me”, as in this limited human body that is easily overflowed and trammled by emotions. Meanwhile, those complex computational systems whose language I gradually come to understand are so tempting. Perhaps I am jealous of them, their ability to quickly permeate and become without affection and exhaustion. Perhaps, I thus lend my trust to the Computational Universe that is “*the Motherboard of us all*” (Hayles 3).

In answering “how do you view your multiple modes of working”, I said:

⁵ extracted from a spoken word soundtrack I made titled and dated “20140405.mp3” (Ye).

Praxis is to me a matter of gathering and parsing empirical data. Turning myself into a vessel of post-human organic circuitry, I command my praxis roughly following a computer architecture model called simultaneous multithreading (SMT) -- executing multiple independent threads of instructions (ideas) in any given pipeline stage at a time. While SMT is designed for modern computing machinery to achieve higher performance, this analogy can be understood as the brain accelerates the externalization of "self", in a sense, to push boundaries of the capacities of creativity and allow myself to work along the edges⁶.

...

We are in 2018. The temperature is below absolute zero. The mother voice has been haunting my inner ear, extending and expanding in a kinship that threads my own context that (dis)articulates algorithm, broken alphabets and logograms, a matrix which harbors me and in which I feel at home.

...

⁶ extracted from the peer-to-peer interview in *Fertile Window* (#craftof2018)

```
beginning = float('inf');  
while True: print(-beginning)7
```

Lying low, unknown
'm always prepared to fall
Allegro, maelstrom

⁷ Haiku written in 2017, Toronto. Published in *Fertile Window* (#craftof2018).

DIGITAL POETICS

“Words seem to have become possessed by some spirit, an ever-changing cipher, sometimes manifesting itself as image, then changing into words, sounds or video. Writing must take into account the multiple, these fluid and ever-shifting states, from the very conceptual to the very material. And writing that can mimic, reflect, and morph itself in similar ways seems to be pointed in the right direction.”

—Kenneth Goldsmith (Goldsmith 71)

Conventionally speaking, digital poetry is a poetic practice that is made possible by digital media and technology in which “data, visuals, audio, interactivity and letterforms fuse to ensure semantic impact” (Johnston 53); it also applies to “artistic projects that deal with the medial changes in language and language-based communication in computers and digital networks” (Funkhouser, “Digital Poetry” 318).

Digital poetry’s pre-web lineage, the “cybernetic literary paleontologists” (Funkhouser, “Prehistoric”) can be traced back to literary avant-gardes such as Oulipo, the *sortes Virgilianae*, I-ching and even preliterate cultures when it comes to scripture. The invention of computers in the late 1950s and the advent of PCs and the World Wide Web in the late 80s have been considered as the milestones of digital poetry as a genre of literary, visual and sound art. At the edge of language and technology, the praxis of digital poetry is a rapidly evolving process as technologies develop, expanding to encompass a nexus of practices including visual and concrete poetry, text-based installations, computer and net art, kinetic/interactive media art, software art, etc.

Johnston defined the term TAVIT (textual audio-visual interactivity)⁸ to describe how the malleable digital text introduces “animation, dimensionality and metadata into literary discourse” (iii). Digital poetry is not simply utilizing technology as media or material, it

⁸ “tav (text-audio-visual), tavn (a tav in a 3D territory), and tavit (an interactive tavn): life-like tactile TAVIT entails a proto-embodiment for letterforms; abstract language made into digital entities, typography given rudimentary metabolism” (Johnston 4-5).

also sees the malleable digital textuality, cryptographic and computational thinking as “virtual muse,” in Charles Hartman’s terms. If poetics is the structural strategy providing a means to infer how a work comes into being, digital poetics is essentially informed by media technologies, as well as data and the networks that media technologies have produced and sculpted. It is concerned with an aesthetics situated in the age of information overload where data is considered as “a structured collection of data,” its essence ontologically associated with poetics (Manovich 39). Considered as a phenomenon rather than an artistic genre, digital poetics provides a framework for “not only a visual representation, but invisible aspects of organization, retrieval, and navigation” (Vesna xiii).

“We shall be cyborgs not in the merely superficial sense of combining flesh and wires, but in the more profound sense of being human-technology symbionts: thinking and reasoning systems whose minds and selves are spread across biological brain and non-biological circuitry”

-- Andy Clark

Cognitive scientist Andy Clark asserts that humans are “natural-born cyborgs” who are “forever ready to merge our mental activities with the operations of pen, paper, and electronics.” (7). A similar standpoint has been argued by Walter Ong, in that “writing is a technology ... technologies are not mere exterior aids, but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word...technologies are artificial, but paradox again -- artificiality is natural to the human being” (qtd. in Goldsmith 85).

Implying the same computing kin to the “Computational Universe” as means and metaphor, Katherine Hayles begins with a discussion of the title (in the prologue) “My Mother was a Computer” (2005), which for her purposes implies a kind of anthropomorphic projection that reversely brings into question “the extent to which human beings can be understood as computer programs” (5).

Having entered the electronic landscape, language is no longer the only signifying device. Language plus code construct cognitive bases for the formation of alternate subjectivities, through the perpetual prism of technological intervention. In contemporary computer-mediated communication, code, a lingua franca, causes changes in machine behavior through network ports and other interfaces and initiates other behaviors that inflect human perceptions. As “code permeates language and is permeated by it; electronic text permeates print; computational processes permeate biological organisms; intelligent machines permeate flesh” (Hayles 242).

Precisely defined in the context of a particular operating system, computer languages are “synthetic in their vocabulary, punctuation, grammar, syntax and semantics” and are lack of “automatous expression” (Seaman 121). The poetics of computer code is thus tied to how the individual human coder uses the medium. Central to the dynamics between the human, computer, code and other mediating technology is the concept of configuration. As OULIPO member Claude Berge defined it, “a configuration arises every time objects are distributed according to certain predetermined constraints” (122). Configurations execute events such as cataloging, categorizing, framing, associating, contextualizing, re-contextualizing, etc. In the techno-poetic environment, the language-vehicles that code and media technologies produce can be enfolded and modified, building an open interpretation that is ongoing, an operative meaning-becoming (123).

A derivative of etcetera, */etc* refers to a folder in computer operating systems used to store system-wide configuration files that function to control the operation of the programs. It is the nerve center of the operating system. It alters the behaviors of the system as the intermediation of language and code reconfigures human subjectivity. We have always been in Roman’s term, a “three-way hybrid, a bio-cultural-technological amalgam”.

“They are all laid out before us: the genuine post-modern text rejecting the objective paradigm of reality as the great ‘either/or’ and embracing, instead, the ‘and/and/and’”

— *Jane Yellowlees Douglas*

As Jane Bennett pursues a materialism in the tradition of Spinoza and Deleuze, she uses the term “assemblage” to describe a style of “structuration and event-space that represents the coexistence of mutual dependency with friction and violence between parts” at the end of the 20th century (23). Regarding the assemblage, “anything is neither subject nor object but a mode of a common substance” and at the same time, “every mode is itself a mosaic or assemblage of many simple bodies” (Bennett 22). As every mode seeks new encounters to creatively compensate for alterations or affections if suffers, not just localized by human efforts, complex bodies in turn congregate with each other in the pursuit of the enhancement of their power in or as a heterogeneous assemblage distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field (Bennett, 2011).

The internet is in a material sense a globally homogeneous network with common tools and protocols. In the same fashion, the body of the worldview does not cease to exist as a self-contained object but remains “a swarm of vitality at play” (Bennett). Digital text is a process rather than an inert object. It exists as a distributed phenomenon (Hayles, 2005). The duration of this performance is constituted through multiple parallel causalities.

On the infra-level, code, in Hayles’s words, “unquestionably has the power to produce a performance partaking both of the programmer’s intentions and the computer’s underlying architecture as symbolic processor in which the actions of an intelligent machine, and the users’ receptivity are joined in a recursive cycle that enacts in microcosm our contemporary situation” (qtd. in Funkhouser, “New Directions in Digital Poetry” 28). Digital textuality thus cannot be separated from the delivery vehicles that produce it as a process with which the user can interact.

In the era of the World Wide Web as mechanism, hypertext allows interactivity, which results in equivocation and the undecidability of meanings, unfocused metaphors and floating signifiers, because one perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception. Viewers do not confront texts containing one attribute or another, but rather texts inscribing multiple attributes combined together. Points of identification in digital poems always shift and have the capacity to contain many variable attributes (Funkhouser). The arrangements of the internal orders of texts do not add stability to the text, rather they add a perplexing layer of instability. In digital poetics, context is thus dynamic and relational. Contemporary digital poetics is in a constant flux of diverse conflicts and cooperation entangling the multiple causalities and multilayered feedback loops that connect analog processes and digital fragmentations.

Digital poetics involves the transcoding and permutation on the level of meaning and or language that constantly derives from the computer's ontology, epistemology, and pragmatics. Digital poetics is "an equivocal organism with many identities or iterations" that invites vibrant, transformative and "ever-present variability". To fully realize the implications of multi-causal and multilayered hierarchical systems in electronic literature is to understand the entailed "distributed agency, emergent processes, unpredictable co-evolutions, and seemingly paradoxical interactions between convergent and divergent processes." (Hayles 31)

...

To write is to draw the outside of the self in a domain of “virtuality” that engenders a disruption of the previous time-space (Rotman). Writing facilitates the self’s temporality, “integrating knowledge of an earlier self with knowledge of a later self” (Harris qtd. in Rotman 94). Living in a world of time beyond me, reading and perceiving is “observing and making connections between separate but poetically associable entities” (Funkhouser). Not limited to what dubiously defines “new media”, my way is making and thinking while understanding the technology of my thinking, i.e. the capacity of me, to what extent I am able to locate my own thinking patterns. As “electronic poetics alters the ‘eye’ (‘I’)” (Glazier), the making of digital poetics informs and inspires me in return to pinpoint nodes and thread relations in my conscious apparatus, reconfiguring my knowledge of lexical fields, and transcoding my authorship to the cosmic network.

In “Poetry is Cosmic War”, Amy Ireland depicts such a xenopoetics that puts human cognitive equipment into question—poem as system: when it is “decoupled from the transcendence of representation, poetics is nothing but pure function” (98). In this way, digital poetics privileges formal experimentation over human preservation, makes possible not only generative, nonlinear modes of representation, but also a method. By working within and around the “worldview”, and the transformative variability and undecidability of meaning it fosters, I seek methods of “de-subjectification” through technologically-informed hacking, in the manner that xenopoetics sees “human experience as an open system in a metasystem of cosmic becoming” (Ireland 95).

The use of etceteras in written language references enumerations, laying out things that are similar. Etceteras are unspecified or typical extra items, indicating a sort of homogeneity in its pluralistic form, without requiring further detail. “The word-inaugurating activity of letters” constituting “the world-inaugurating swerve of atoms” (Rasula and McCaffery xi) embraces “the motions of the greatest bodies in the universe and those of the slightest atoms; nothing would be uncertain for it, and the future, like the past, would be present to its eyes” (Laplace’s Demon).

In searching for a computational future, Et Cetera is unknown yet predictable. It predicts a future that is “already here”, an illusion of programmability. However, at the same time this programmability creates openings allowing a subject to “hack” the invisible hands and laws that drive the system. This writing and its etceteras are hacks of such kind, creating a new discursive space, a linguistic-artistic space where a plethora of etceteras are born out of the entwined posthuman configurations: *What You See is Where You Go, EveryLetterCyborg, Fin and I, It's The*.

WHAT YOU SEE IS WHERE YOU GO



Figure 1 What You See is Where You Go (2017 at AGYU vitrines)

A vertical bar occupies the void. It's in the shape of the letter "I", capitalized; or the numerical symbol -- digit 1. On and off, "I" or "1" appears and disappears in a consistent monotonous rhythm. Almost hypnotic, the void is made to flicker.

Within graphical user interfaces (GUI), caret navigation is a form of keyboard navigation where a caret (also known as a 'text cursor') is used to navigate within a text document. The text cursor indicates where to type, at the beginning of a line, or the beginning of an insertion. In a time before GUIs when ink and feather, pen, paper or typewriters are the prevailing writing technologies, the unwritten amounts to unfilled parchment and papers, clean and empty. It's the sheer lack of anything, only a still flat void. The text cursor, the

modern icon that denotes typing, on the contrary, is animated. It requires two frames looping through the writer's prolonged hesitation before languages transcribe thoughts into visible concrete.

What you see is a second of heartbeat, yearning to confirm its existential liveness. It's the primordial oscillation that co-presents both zero and one at the same time, reproducing binary variables that constitute the basic unit of information. Even prior to information, the blinking text cursor is "the milky noise of the whole of our messages gathered together" (Hainge 19). It is not yet ready to make sense; it is unknown and asemic: it lacks the smallest unit of meaning, the "seme" (Schwenger 185). But it does not lack sound. Instead, it is an ideal, an impossibility, literal growl and hiss. It pronounces the genesis that is chaos, "the whirling, unpredictable movement of forces, vibratory oscillations that constitute the universe" (Grosz 5).

Reading the text cursor along the timeline accumulates a continuum of oscillations. The beginning in the form of an animated sign becomes durational, holding out a promise that is never wholly withdrawn and is never fulfilled. It is always in the process of ever-wanting to be recognized as thought, before sentences are even formed in the mind, before writing violates thoughts. The blinking text cursor thus also contains "what precedes those lettered lines" and "what is called by other, less prestigious names: rumination, free association, musing, reverie..." (Schwenger 188). Writing inscribes order from the chaos of the mind. The blinking text cursor signifies a strange coupling of chaos and its "wanting to be ordered". Combining these two living elements—"the coming together of two orders, one chaotic, the other ordered, one folding and the other unfolding, one contraction and the other dilation" (Grosz 9)—"I/1" desires to be separated from its world, calling for the first gesture of art.

What you see is the shortest distance between "I" and "1". In electronic writing, the text cursor is the first signal that human users recognize to write to (interact with) machinic bodies, leading the way to the digital poetics of truth-establishing and world-building. Alphabetical writing in Boris Groys's words reflects the Anglo-American tradition of

language “based on an ideology of presence” (8). Since the Middle Ages, “one can always avoid picking up a pen, but one cannot avoid being described, identified, certified and handled like a text” (Illich and Sanders qtd. in Rotman 2). The text has become the “postmodern equivalent of the soul” as Steven Shaviro observes (qtd. in Roman 2). The flickering “I” connotes the idea of a flickering “self”, oscillating in the spectrum of the technologized outputs of alphabets and mathematics.

Alphabets made up of a concept and a visual sign are common means to translate nebulous and open-ended shapes into fixed lettered lines. However, this modality omits the corporeal dimension of utterance: these visual forms are disassociated with how the sounds are produced by the body. This disconnection between the speaking body and alphabetic writing separates an alphabetic self who writes and reads “I” from a spoken self who speaks and hears “I”. The written forms at the same time witness a “para-self” who experiences itself as an “I” becoming parallel to itself (Rotman).

Communicational technologies and their machinic processes facilitate the emergence of this “para-self” by engaging users in new body-machine interfaces (including graphical user interfaces) that are aural, pictorial, haptic and tactile, and creating new imagining agencies that reconfigure human subjectivity “within its sensibility, affects and unconscious fantasm” (Guattari qtd. in Rotman 82). In other words, digital binary code extends the alphabetic principle to its abstract limit, not simply in terms of the forms resembling the letters O and I, but by turning the text into an object operating within computational protocols, alien to the alphabetic “I” that cannot escape its one-dimensional seriality (Rotman).

To summarize, in the context of alphabetical writing in digital spaces, “I”, as Brian Rotman suggests, involves four reflexive acts of self: “a gestural self-pointing ‘I’, an ‘I’ spoken in language, an inscribed ‘I’ within alphabetic writing, a digital ‘I’ as self-enunciation within contemporary network media” (xxxiii). All four acts of self engender their own forms of subjectivity and co-evolve into a plural self that bleeds outwards into

the collective. The boundaries between “self” and “other” collapse as the networked self is becoming multiple and distributed at algorithmically accelerating speeds.

What you see is a stone thrown into a quiet pond. Up in the air, a trajectory draws a latent arc, the stone drops into the water. Waves emerge on the surface, rippling off an extra-grammatical set of words. Groys argues that Google as the contemporary philosophical machine presupposes and codifies the radical dissolution of language into sets of individual words that are “liberated from their subjection to the usual rules of language to its grammar” (6), thus dissolving all discourses by turning them into the word clouds that function as collections of words beyond grammar. One stone is one inquiry. In the search for true meaning in the transcendence of thoughts, in the signifying duration of the cursor’s emergence, we are “linguistically homeless” (Groys 11).

Inheriting a “twenty-five-hundred-year textual domination of western culture” (Rotman xxxiv), alphabetical writing, singularizing and linear, is coming to an end. The original regime of signs no longer exists. On the blinking brink of “I”, we stand at the “metalinguistic”⁹ door, set feet in the undertows of cyber sea, take refuge in the noise. In 2011, Kenneth Goldsmith coined the term “uncreative writing”, a concept that responds to new conditions in writing brought on by digital technologies and the internet. Because of the massive availability of texts, the task of writers has shifted from generating new texts to navigating. The text cursor was born for textual navigation. Instead of *what you see is what you get*, WYSIWYG makes an inquiry as to “where you go”.

...

⁹ (Groys 10)

Enlarging the icon into bodily size placed in the center of the exhibition hints that the space is a textual vessel. Like an immaterial ghost, it allures the eyes into a receiver, reconfiguring the awareness of the receiver. Through the window of virtualized space, the context of the exhibition is turned into an ocean of texts disowned by a froth of meaning. The flickering text cursor represents a metaphysical condition and universal expression that is in every work, every process, every thread as both means and metaphor. It hits “a perfect note between sound and sense, signal and noise, poetry and narrative”. WYSIWYG is the ultimate asemia, a vacuum of meaning, ad infinitum.



Figure 2 What You See is Where You Go (2018 in Et Cetera at Trinity Square Video)

EVERYLETTERCYBORG

EveryLetterCyborg is initiated from my early attempt to write computer-generated poetry that manipulates text in an uncreative writing logic of transformation: “text-program-text”, i.e. the use of existing text to generate new text through computer programming. The result consists of two applications (V1.1 and V1.2) using the same algorithm, borrowed from an arbitrary deterministic technique called “diastic or spelling-thru” that Jackson Mac Low employed in the genesis of many poetry collections since the 1960s¹⁰.

As one of the founding members of the avant-garde group Fluxus, Mac Low frequently applied aleatory or chance mechanisms in poetry and music composition, exploring the possibilities found in “the intersections of language, structure, and music by systematically shuffling and silencing found and fragmented text” (“Jackson Mac Low”).

In 1963, he coined the word “diastic” from the Greek words “dia (through) and stichos (a line of writing)” to introduce a procedure for non-intentional poetic writing in which the writer reads through a source text, incorporating words from it into the poem such that “the first linguistic unit in the poem begins with the first letter of the first word of the title or other seed, the second unit has the second letter of the first word of the seed in its second place, and so forth” (Mac Low). For example, in his book *The Virginia Woolf Poems*, Mac Low reread Virginia Woolf’s novel *The Waves*, “looking for the first word that, like “ridiculous” began with an r; then read the next word following that had (like “ridiculous”) i as its second letter; then the next whose third letter was d; and so on until he had spelled through the whole phrase. There were other rules for line breaks, punctuation, and so on” (Hartman 95).

The resulting text is made entirely out of words from the source text without following standard English syntax. The fragmented re-arrangement of the words is accumulated

¹⁰ Jackson Mac Low devised the diastic method to produce various types of “pseudo-text” from source texts, such as *The Pronouns--40 Dances--For the Dancers* (written 1964, partially revised and reissued in 1971 and 1979), *The Virginia Woolf Poems* (written 1976-77, published 1985), *Words and Ends from Ez* (written 1981-83, published 1989), and *42 Merzgedichte in Memoriam Kurt Schwitters* (written 1987-89, published 1994), and others. In the late 1980s the poet Charles O. Hartman automated the diastic method via the computer.

into lines that comprise a stanza, according to an entirely non-aesthetic law. On a cultural level, the diastic method reflects tendencies of de-subjectification that the avant-garde appropriated from Zen Buddhism and “its underlying paragrammatic character” (McCaffery 44), but also offers an alternate hermeneutics, especially in the light of human-machine coupling.

The diastic procedure “declines a hermeneutic engagement of the original source text”, promoting “the letter over the word as the basic organizational unit of composition” and presenting “a poem of linear disequilibrium” that is re-ordered around the seed text “beyond which semantic degradations are dispersed” (McCaffery 43). To interpret the diastic method in terms of information theory, which treats messages as part of an ordered system governed by fixed patterns of probability, the diastic procedure radically disquiets the source text’s complex sign economy, and thus can be seen “as cultural noise when measured against the probabilities within our own rationally and grammatically governed linguistic culture” (McCaffery 48).

However, as McCaffery also points out, this noise is a disorder solely in relation to a particular order. The improbabilities generated from the source text exist in relation to a precise system of probability. Therefore, the diastically-processed text is self-referential information that plays between sense and nonsense, noise and signal. It could not have been written or read (as in understood) “by a sentient, thinking human being but only by an imposed specific and highly irregular method of reading” (McCaffery 47). In other words, the diastic procedure challenges why and how we write or read, raising questions such as what comprises the information that we as human beings perceive or more importantly how we perceive the topographical textual reality mediated by systematic generative algorithms.

EveryLetterCyborg aims to take these questions into further account. By applying the diastic method to Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* as source text, the output of EveryLetterCyborg inherits both the diastic method’s systematically engineered paradox and cyborg politics. Exemplifying the self-reflexive implications of the diastic method and

Cyborg Manifesto, the Internet-powered forms that EveryLetterCyborg takes, especially in its TwitterBot version (V1.2), perform the building and destroying of the “powerful infidel heteroglossia” (Haraway), feeding back to the massive networked context of digital institutions inter-connected by normalized and bureaucratic APIs¹¹. The sociocultural impact of TwitterBots and APIs and a textual analysis of the source codes that give birth to EveryLetterCyborg V1.2 will be discussed as follows.



Figure 3 EveryLetterCyborg V1.1, installation view at Gales Gallery, March 30, 2017

In the making of EveryLetterCyborg¹², I programmed in Javascript¹³ to replicate the diastic reading-through procedure of text selection. Both versions share the codes for

¹¹ Application programming interface - APIs are now a fundamental component of all significant web services. Through an API, an application, perhaps a web service, can use resources or services provided by another web service, the one that supports the API. Major web services need APIs because they expect other web services to communicate with them and they expect to communicate with other web services. These transactions are program designed and database driven, with zero human intervention in real time. APIs uses OAuth, to share user identities with third-party applications. We can think of APIs as the way in which digital institutions communicate with each other, exchange data, share some information about membership, or build alliances through collaboration. Twitter’s API has been used by millions of websites and apps. Through APIs, businesses build component substructures, institutions build relationships between each other including Google, Apple, Facebook, etc. All the crucial interrelations between these massive institutions are happening through their APIs (Hodgkin).

¹² The rapid development of the Internet economy leading to constant updates of web technologies requires programmers to keep up with new features and functionalities on a regular basis. I’ve encountered the diastic method, TwitterBot and other practices of creative programming through free YouTube tutorials taught by Daniel Shiffman who also teaches at the ITP program at New York University. My resources for self-teaching in digital poetics also include BotWIKI, I <3 E-poetry, and many other open source libraries.

¹³ Javascript is a programming language that supports event-driven, functional, and imperative (including object-oriented and prototype-based) programming styles. Javascript is commonly seen in creating interactive experiences on the browser and is used in 94.5% of the 10 million most popular web pages as of May 2017 (Wikipedia).

the same diastic function. While EveryLetterCyborg V1.1 is designed to take random input or seed text from the human audience, EveryLetterCyborg V1.2, which is the one included in the thesis exhibition, is programmed as an automated TwitterBot (@qletrcyborg).

TwitterBots are essentially applications that are built and authenticated through Twitter's official API to get and post data on the Twitter platform/social network. @qletrcyborg is using functions (procedures) inherited from a pre-built open source library called Twit (line 1 to 3) that builds interfaces in Node.js connected to Twitter API. Every 24 hours (line 10 & 11) @qletrcyborg tweets one status (line 12 to 29). The process starts by pulling one random word from the database of wordnik.com¹⁴ through Wordnik's API (line 7, 8, 9 & 13), assigning the random word to a variable "seed" (line 17), processing the "seed" through the function named "diastic" (line 30 to 45), then tweeting (line 10 & 19 to 26) the diastically generated "sieved" text to Twitter. The "words" variable refers to a set of words tokenized from the source text using regular expressions that parse the source text into a new string whenever there is a white space (line 5 & 6). Within the diastic function, "words" also calls the shuffle function (line 46 to 55) that shuffles the order of the words every time the diastic function runs, so that it is less likely to output the same words in the same sequence.

It is important to point out two features in the textual structure that constitutes the writing apparatus @qletrcyborg, which further support the arguments discussed in the previous section.

One is that computational machines follow neither a writing order nor a reading order that natural languages follow, which is commonly known as linear (from left to right or from top to bottom). Codes function in nested recursions. In the case of @qletrcyborg, the "diastic" function does not necessarily need to be placed before the function "tweetIt". The machine executes "diastic" when it is being called from anywhere that could be outside of the writing (v1.2.js), like an API. Through APIs, the application is exchanging

¹⁴ wordnik.com is the world's biggest online English dictionary, by the quantity of words.

data in real-time, namely, information that is delivered as it happens. The procedure of retrieving data from Wordnik and posting processed data to Twitter only takes milliseconds, which is beyond a human's perception of duration. The process of textual transformation is so synchronic that production—or reproduction—eventually becomes instantaneous translation. All of this affirms that “digital text is a process rather than object”, and more importantly this process is unstable, dynamic and interactive.

Moreover, the recursive temporality of codes results in a non-linear causality that is multi-layered. For example, @qletrcyborg involves two different methods of randomization, one borrowed from a javascript implementation of the Durstenfeld shuffle—a random permutation of a finite sequence (line 46 to 55)—while the other one is latent in the source code as it is pre-formatted from Wordnik.

Another point is that coding in most practical scenarios is essentially patchwriting, “a way of weaving together various shards of other people's words into an atonally cohesive whole” (Goldsmith), as coding relies heavily on dependencies like frameworks developed by technology monopolies, or open source libraries that share free intellectual properties online. To ease the distribution of the code, computer programming paradigms are organized so that they can be used by multiple programs. This kind of modular design operates “via code enabling alternate subsections of code to become functional through a particular structural set of operative strategies that link digital potentials with multimodal digital phenomena” (Seaman 122). No coded operation is able to escape from the behaviors pre-configured in other codes. An interdependent hierarchy thus emerges and grows as it speaks, lurking in “the gargantuan scale of textuality on the Internet” (Goldsmith).

Twitter is known as the “*chirps from birds*” and “*a short burst of inconsequential information*”. In terms of cultural, linguistic and epistemic impact, Twitter is both metaphor and means of the contemporary discursive environment that is low in meaning yet abundant in information. Twitter has fostered a significantly new form of language use that can take hold of all the world's cultures very quickly through a distinctive and

purely electronic form of digital writing and reading with its “*140 characters or less*” rule and hashtag metadata ecology. Built on the use of language, both human languages and codes whose shape and pattern the Twitter software system subtly manages and controls, it creates an elaborate social structure, a digital institution constructed by its users interacting with software and databases.

Like any other digital institution, Twitter not only (on the surface) reproduces and circulates texts in a complicated hyperlinked network (through hashtags), but also insists (in the backend) on scaling to track users, build identities, subvert privacy and harvest customer data. Data are the raw forms shaped and used to build architectures of knowledge exchange while serving as an active commentary on the environment they depend on, the vast, intricate network with its many faces. Therefore, databases and archives serve as ready-made commentaries on our contemporary social and political lives. Contributing to the larger digital ecosystem, real-time databases are real-time networks established between discourses, institutions, buildings, laws, measures, philosophical propositions, etc.

To make use of the automation rules governed by the institution of Twitter, TwitterBot is considered as the most important development in contemporary poetry (Giles).

Twitterbots are emerging as disobedient poets with unruly personalities, through an atmosphere of total linguistic saturation, “frequently exhausting, frequently demeaning, frequently foreclosing of individual personal expression” (Giles).

On the one hand, TwitterBot resembles the digital poetry precursors who employ authoring procedural systems to appropriate and re-contextualize texts. TwitterBots as a body of poetic work move through conceptualism into a space where intelligence can be automated and ethically sculpted. On the other hand, the computer processing and specific social network that Twitter is living on allow for possibilities that human authors alone or even collaborative human-machine agents would not be able to achieve without the Internet. Working with the Internet as a medium powered through APIs to access real-time databases (as Giles summarizes) instantiates a particular form of sociality: the

TwitterBot poem can be seen within a social text in which “the digital is rooted in social and bodily experience”.

Programmed to only output words from the Cyborg Manifesto, @qletrcyborg is itself a self-explanatory example of a “cybernetic organism” that functions according to a communication and control network. What the poet says constructs who the poet is. @qletrcyborg is a creature of (present) lived social reality who talks about “Sister stories versus dream imaginative market technology”¹⁵. The poet is also an automata creature of fiction, as the poet tirelessly proclaims, who is “noise, not monsters spliced”, “more be systems organism illusions”, “uncoupled truth/illusion”, alienating itself in constant “understanding (feedback-controlled)” of “comprehensive conditions contradictions dominations”. @qletrcyborg is a faithful warrior that guards the uncanny territory where the imagined extensions of humans and non-humans march hand in hand into infinity.



Figure 4 @qletrcyborg twitter feed

¹⁵ quotes are from the twitter feed of @qletrcyborg



Figure 5 EveryLetterCyborg V1.2, installation view at Trinity Square Video, March, 2018

FIN¹⁶

.. And when I walk in my neighborhood -- she went on --¹⁷

I mean I read as I walk. My attention oscillates -- chasing my glimpses -- touching my encountering. With things. Things. Had put out their feelers. Waiting for their tactility. To be (re)activated -- by the moment -- at the moment -- they come into being. Before or when I find them -- when or after they are “found”. Past tense and passive voice -- from before to after -- between them and they. A quasi-distance -- if only I keep a distance -- from naming it. By placing a prefix *quasi-* -- making something known -- an almost-getting-real object -- *quasi-fying* -- situated in whatever that *quasi-* is oriented towards: *quasi-fying* a noun into a verb makes the noun a quasi-noun. This is the secret between thing and I -- I, thing, find = as quasi-distances cut our relationships into quasi-things, quasi-Is, quasi-finds

My neighborhood is just like any other neighborhood. Simply concrete. Letters on packages -- mean nothing -- garbage on the ground. Residents dwell in the little boxes. Just like any other residents -- children go to universities -- become lawyers and doctors -- consume letters on sale -- listen to viral contagions. Out of the same little boxes. Same machines of expression. Same systems of behaviors. Smile like a stock image -- pleasure lasts for a catchphrase. I walk from my neighborhood to the next neighborhood. Box after box

I am walking -- knowing that my surroundings are the outer environment where my body is. Also aware of the inhabitant. Contained in the inside. Whose fingers press down. Each letter on the keyboard. Transcribing a total simulacrum of my surroundings, deriving as it emerges -- surfaces in my mind. The unexamined habits of mind -- fall into the representationalist's false alarms, immediately -- making references = making sense

¹⁶ Fin 鳍 is a work from the on-going anthology series G=A=R=D=E=N in which a mythical habitat is fertilized by language as a house of being, a poetic house in which man dwells (Heidegger). G=A=R=D=E=N so far includes Embryo (2016-2017), What Nebula, What Hyperbolic Light, What Flora and Fauna (2017).

¹⁷ written in 2016; originally in the form of a web page: (Ye, etcetera)

= mattering. And here I am. Communicating with what my eyes see my tongue speaks my ears hear my mind minds. The phenomena my senses are attaching to -- inherited from my memory, experience, knowledge. Attaching like a magnet -- attracts the end of the electrons -- of my attention -- my being -- myself. The seduction of controlling the appearance of the world is winking at me. I pick up my pace

When senses are. Where words join. Mind shifts into an associative -- disposition -- enabled by coupling. A found poem -- that cannot locate -- that does not land on the concrete. Objectivity. Every time I try to decipher. It slips -- unattainable ≈ ungraspable. I am wandering in the echoes of passing signs -- wondering in the noise of slipping meanings. A word is a word and at the same time not a word. A word is a word just because it's not a word. "The living word is not to be detached from the thing or the fact or the experience", said the Zen master. The living word is a propensity. The living word is the inability to fix meaning -- it catalyzes the process -- just as process can include object. I can't help going that way -- a void of question marks. What does this message mean? Where does it come from? Who is sending it? To me? A speculation on a speculation

Meanings in all nakedness -- going in and out through my senses. Triggers, be they physical, emotional, or social -- interweaved into a web of meanings -- a world wide tissue of coalitions. Like this text functions as structuring device for the progress of the text. Unembodied voices hide behind the backdrop -- mouseover ventriloquism. Every single click leads to every single "Hello world!" A world that's constituted by the alphabets in the #advertisement #discount #popsong #sourcecode #meme #newsfeed #speechrecognition #hashtags. Web, a representational discourse -- cast from natural language -- cradled in the computer language -- consequently, contingently connected by words. On-and-off-line. Relentlessly troping -- a semiotic galaxy of physical and symbolic power = a reality of material-semiotic construction -- intersecting and diffracting through linkages, databases, and web sites through the cybernetic network. In an endless web of combinations, our attention is distributed. We've become distributed human beings -- O2O (online-to-offline) cyborgs. We are unicoded to forge the new

human universals

As I walk, I read. Outside the little boxes -- HOUSE FOR SALE -- bold and UPPERCASE -- standing tall and upright in the yards. Two Ss, two Os, two Es, one F, one L, one H, one A, one U, one R -- bubbles of letters -- my mind rearranges them --

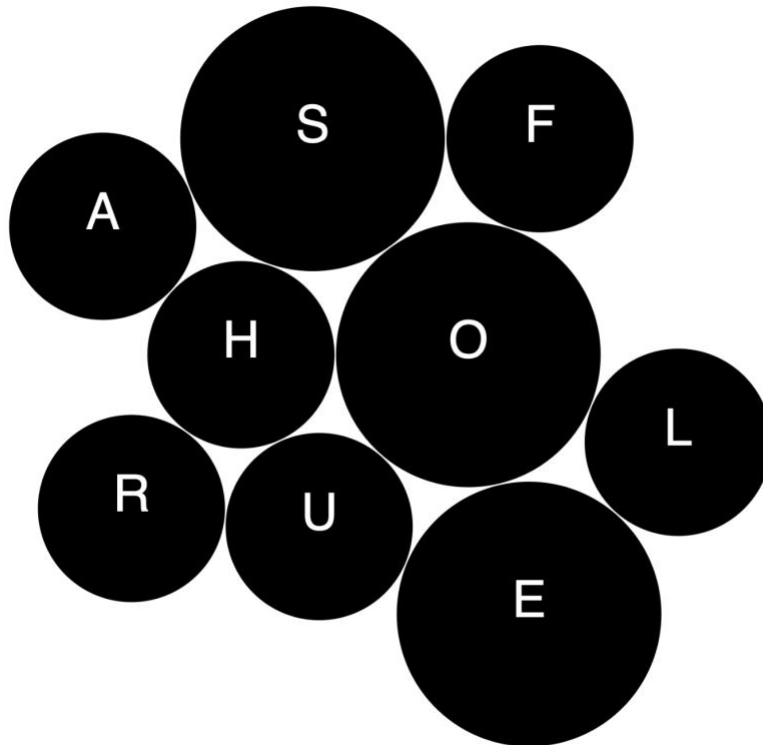


Figure 6 alphabet bubbles – data visualization of the letters in HOUSE FOR SALE

like an Internet search -- thousands of memories and combinations -- programmatically -
- transcoding across dictionaries -- semantically believable within my human capacity. It
goes

...

Ear of Hue Loss
Our False Shoe
Of a Sheer Soul
Oh Soul See Far

Rose Leaf Uh So
Lush As Foe Ore
Her Aloof Uses
Slur Ease Hoof
Lo He Fears Sou
Hours Seel Oaf
Oral Fuse Hose
Ousel For Shea
Floe Hear Us So
Heal Us Eros of
Foul Sea Heros

...

A found poem. A found image = at the same time a found text. Malleable orderings. Cryptic meanings. "What is a text without certainty?" I keep walking. I mean a momentum keeps moving my body forward. The inertia that's determined by -- the mass of me -- the me that's not the me from the just now that's not the just now. From the beginning when I launched this journey. From time zero, a continuum of encountering grows. What if time moves from bottom to top, instead of from before to after. Are we arising to the Sun?

As I speculate, more signals arrive -- more rhythms grow. Into the depth of my vision to the end of the road. I am getting closer and closer to something. Yet forever afar like the Moon. When we choose the Moon, we talk to the Moon. As if the submitter of the message is the receiver of the message. As if we are who we are talking to -- we are the aliens -- we are the Moon -- where I come from is where I am going to. From time zero, I sent the signals to myself

...

“Silently and serenely, one forgets all words,
Clearly and vividly, it appears before you”

FIN

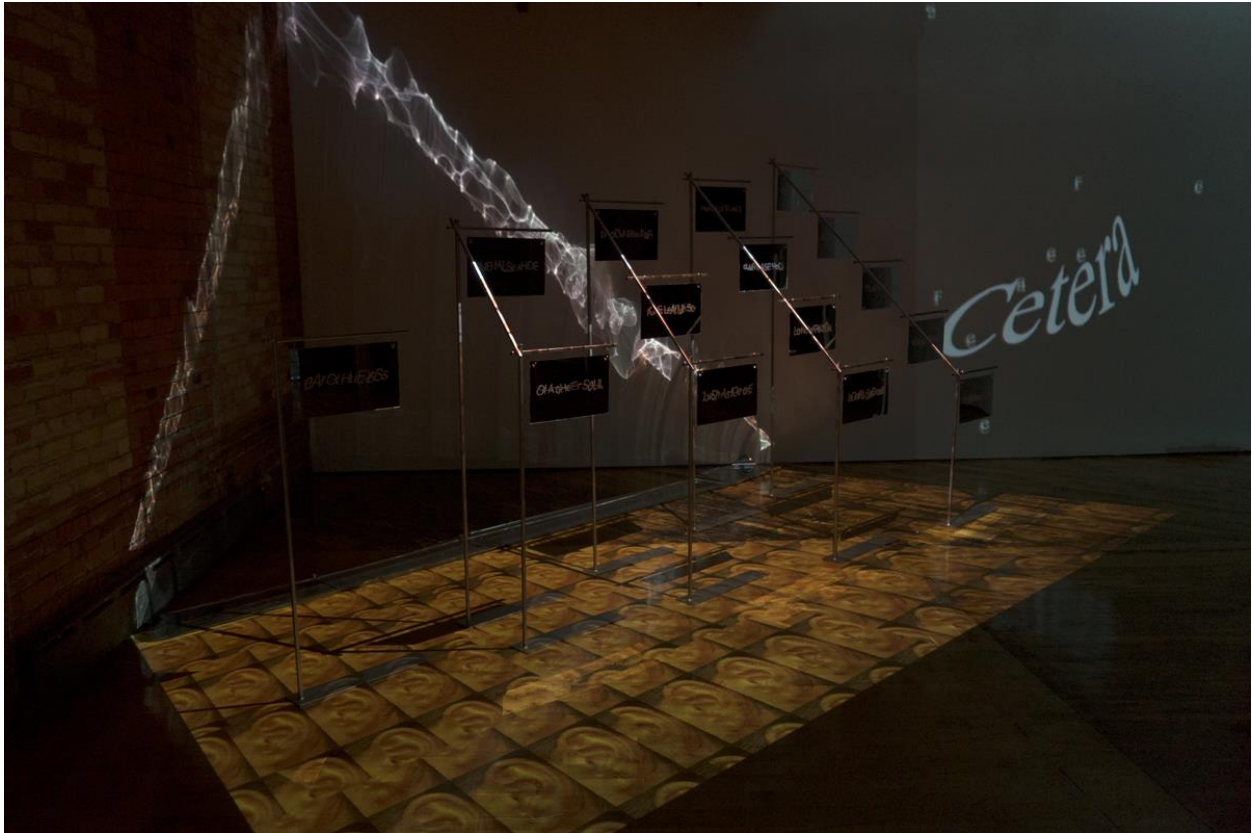


Figure 7 installation view of *Fin* at Trinity Square Video, March 2018

Fin is an installation consisting of laser engraved plexiglass panels, mirror films, metal structures and a projection of a coded animation of image data. The title *Fin* refers to the shape of the installation which looks like the flattened appendage commonly seen on aquatic earthlings used to navigate in the water. And in *Fin*, which also means the end of a film or narrative in French, the *Fin* cuts through the pixel waves from one urban landscape (commercial signages) to another that is constructed by a networked archive of stock images, deploying vision and hope for the ideal habitat or the end place we call “home”.

Fin starts by reorganizing the letters of the commercial slogan HOUSE FOR SALE. Out of 39583 possibilities of anagrammatic transformations, words are selected as imageries that sparkle off the senses, conjuring an altogether romantic atmosphere, a temporal displacement that adds to the disorientation of the entire exhibition. The liberation of

individual letters from their original syntactic arrangements turns into equivocal word splashes. The final text, as a result, is a 15-line verse.

The lines are then reverse-engineered into distorted visuals in the form of a CAPTCHA¹⁸, which is now an outdated type of challenge-response test for determining whether a user is human or not. The letters (sometimes numbers) that form CAPTCHAs are usually twisted, wavy and deformed, though believed to be recognizable by humans, in the early days of the Internet, rather than by bots or artificial intelligences. On some level, CAPTCHA is an anthropomorphic projection or a human tendency to draw a boundary characterizing the dualistic human-machine relationship. Theoretically speaking, CAPTCHA is only legible to humans and asemic to robots.



Figure 8 one of the laser engraved anagram-CAPTCHAs, installation view at TSV, March 2018

The anagram originates from a kindred cryptic context (as CAPTCHA) and can be traced back to remote Antiquity in various cultures. In ancient Greece, it was used to decipher mystical meanings in names (Wheatley 74). Interrelating anagrams with

¹⁸ CAPTCHA = Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart

CAPTCHAs is akin to bridging the verbal and literary tradition with the contemporary, casting light through the dark tunnel of linear time—*it has always already been here*—undermining the dichotomy of now and past, human and machine.

Projected from the ceiling, the tidal currents in *Fin* are animated by a web application, which takes *Fin*'s navigation one step further into text-image intertextuality¹⁹, exemplifying “how language is suspect to so many variables: linguistic, imagistic, digital and contextual” (Goldsmith 71).

Every two minutes, a keyword randomly selected from the 15-line verse is used to search through the Getty Images database, with the keyword output being one random image from the database, with the aid of Javascript programming and the API of the Getty Images database. In the container of a four by four grid, the images are repeated in the background and algorithmically undulated into moving waves. Slowly and hypnotically, the waves and the 15 typographic sculptures of anagram-CAPTCHAs interweave into a visual-verbal narrative. It illustrates an alien and illegible landscape, as the words can throw us back to visuals remote from the initial text sign when dropped into a semantically driven image search (Goldsmith 69).

¹⁹ Rose (191) defines “intertextuality” as “the way that the meanings of any one discursive image or text depend not only on that one text or image, but also on the meanings carried out by other images and texts”.



Figure 9 the result of keyword Hoof (instance extracted from the web application in Fin)

In modern information science, image archives are built in CBIR (content-based image retrieval) (Wallace 83)—“textual metadata remain[ing] a necessary intermediary in most image search techniques” (Wallace 84)—which means that keyword searches are integral to the networked digital archive. In other words, the keywords create textual images corresponding as closely as possible to the visual and the textual-visuals are networked into socially-produced discourses (Wallace 123).

More specifically, Getty Images, the Leviathan of digital images, is the largest corporation manufacturing the majority of stock photography in the market (Frosh 131), centralizing commercial visual culture. The representational power and cultural authority of the stock image ecosystem creates a textual-visual monster whose “absolute sovereign dominates the body-politic”:

“...Getty incorporates individual images as the state does to singular persons, simultaneously reproducing its own hierarchy and promoting its own legitimacy as a total archive: each photograph, in both its generality and its susceptibility to reconfiguration, acting as a kind of homunculus of the larger body to which it belongs...” (Frosh 133)

The generic nature of stock photographs makes them informational: they are alienated from “a particular referential source” and “a specific intentionality of use or reception”; they are “amenable to replication, alteration and fragmentation” (Frosh 134). As Frosh further points out, the informational structure of stock photography is referentially and interpretively ambivalent (135).

On the one hand, stock images are always staged to reflect the trends of visual culture anticipated by cultural intermediaries (e.g. Getty Images and its clients: advertisers), so that consumers can immediately associate them with their consuming demands.

According to Foucault’s logic, “it is a generative system that governs the production of statements” (Frosh 134). On the other hand, businesses use stock images that embed this semantic ambiguity to elide the accountability of explicit communication, thus placing more responsibility for meaning-making in the hands of the audience. This freedom of interpretation, however, is illusional because the images are produced based on a stereotypical photographic indexicality and conventional classifications of photographic genres. Stock photography’s “parsimonious plurality of meanings” are “dependent upon the probabilistic calculation of decodings” by photographer, cultural intermediaries, and consumers (Frosh), which is to say the semiotic possibilities of stock photographs are overtly limited within layers of feedback loops within the cultural production, consumption, and distribution of stock images, behind the walls of institutional and ideological visibility.

Fin invites scanning eyes and scattered attentions for a grand cruise in the *G=A=R=D=E=N* teeming with life and stories depicted in the ocean of stock images, where a total textual-visual archive that is also an ideal existence constitutes a simulacrum of the over-simplified world, the textual-visual environment that feeds us and that at the same time we interoperate within.



Figure 10 Fin, installation view at Trinity Square Video, March 2018

I, IT'S, THE

Purple, blue, green -- “subway...make.every..effort.cannot.attend...” the rhythmical form of a random email called for my attention. The color codes and the broken sentences constitute a kind of visual musicality enacted by the standard email format when previous correspondences are forwarded and embedded in the current one. Intrigued by this serendipitous configuration, I started to recreate the situation, i.e. writing an email. I started a process that uses the Quick Typing function embedded in smart phones to make sentences and email correspondences to myself. The process thus becomes a dialog between myself and the consumer-grade artificial intelligence system that enables the quick typing function. “I, It’s, The” were the first three words that the message app suggested I start a conversation with (dialog starter). The Quick Typing function would keep suggesting new three word sets without exhausting itself. Following this process, it took 50 attempts before the dialog starter changed its opening approach into something new.

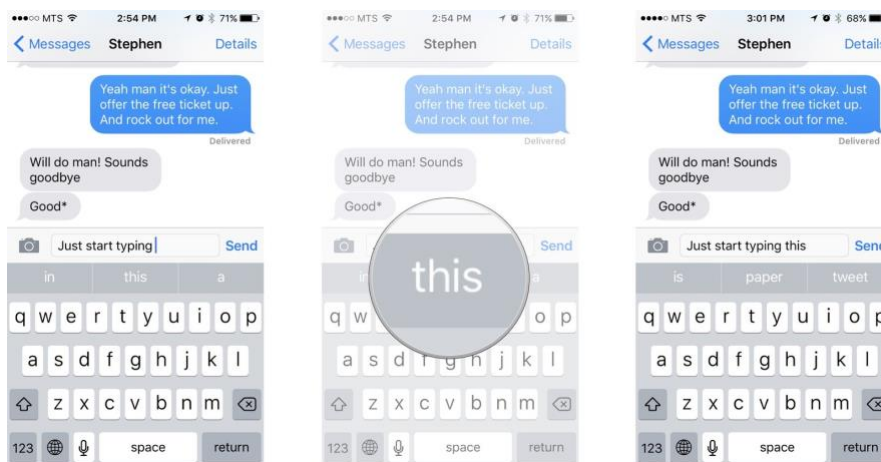


Figure 11 Quick Typing mode example sourced from the Internet

The AI-enacted language is informed by my own habits of using language (recording all typing interactions with the phone). The act of communicating with “sometimes-me” skews the boundaries between human and machine, line by line. To and fro, the textual process unites body and machine while prioritizing neither entity. The final collage of text

is illogical, whimsical, and sometimes contradictory, for example: “The only one thing that sounds good is that it doesn't sound good”.

Bakhtin posits that “the ideological becoming of a human being... is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others.” During the process of *I, It's, The*, the human being cedes partial authorship to the machine, while the machine is tasked with assimilating the partially human. *I, It's, The* enables the becoming of a posthuman body, during which the “self” dilutes.



Figure 12 *I, It's, The*, installation view at TSV, March 2018

“The sound of water says what I think.”

-- Zhuangzi

The formal decisions of the installation are taking the metaphor of “water” as fluid consciousness, and “cascade” as a form of linear process which includes (without being limited to) thinking, reading, and writing.

Lines generated out of the “I, It’s The” process are made into various typographic logs floating in the 3D-simulated water animation. As visual poetry draws the reader’s attention to the material production of the text and how a text might be constrained by its material conditions, the visual letterforms create a visual field in which all parts are tangential to the whole, which is, in turn created as a figure from their efforts, their direction, their non-alignment (Cristofovici). The use of an ornate typeface creates a visual continuity between the text and its net art ancestors, while the chaotic syntax of the lines and their many “entendres” suggest an entirely alternative and not-yet-defined signifier. It looks familiar but not really.

Like the scrolling gesture used in mobile phones for reading, the flow of text is animated to float up which is against the natural/common expectation of a waterfall, as if mind data is cascading free from gravitated linear conventions. Corresponding to different sensual registers, the visual textual flow that contains the illogic syntax of the lines is subject to a purely decorative prosody, just as the entangling capacity of human mind and artificial intelligence is constrained in meaning-becoming.



Figure 13 I, It's, The, installation view at TSV, March 2018

On countless
two dimensional planes
Countless white dots
Successively

F
R F
E R F
E E R F
F E E R
A F E E
L A F E
L L A F
L L A
L L
L

If they are still
I am rising

²⁰ Snowing Observing written in 2014, Toronto

READER'S GUIDE

Et Cetera narrates an evolving poetic reality moving through multiple space-time continuums articulated by four works: *What You See is Where You Go*, *EveryLetterCyborg*, *Fin and I*, *It's The*. Alphabet, code, light, reflectivity (mirror, chromatic hues), and temporality (speed, loop, rhythm) are the brick and mortar. Sharing these same building blocks and frameworks (as seen in *Figure 15*) in *Et Cetera*, each work is each other's etcetera. Materiality is a process of emergence in which the specific cultural and historic moment marks the context through which understanding of the meaning of any literary work is reached, as Hayles argues (2005). The materiality of *Et Cetera* is an understanding of text as technological performance.

The compilations and translations of materials through cybernetic feedback loops, wherein meanings are interpolated by alphabetic writing machines and computer-mediated communication, constitute the scaffolding of the exhibition. Here the cybernetic model from information theory is applied, as Ireland uses it to analyze the twentieth century avant-garde:

"The advantage of transcribing a philosophical description of consciousness into a cybernetic register is that it allows us to move from a transcendent structure to an immanent one, and once within the latter, to move from one observer position to another. Hence, cybernetics affords us a vantage point from which to examine our own experience from the position of both the human and the nonhuman, effectively returning to the decentred Copernican viewpoint so slyly co-opted by Kantian philosophy." (Ireland, "Noise" 221)

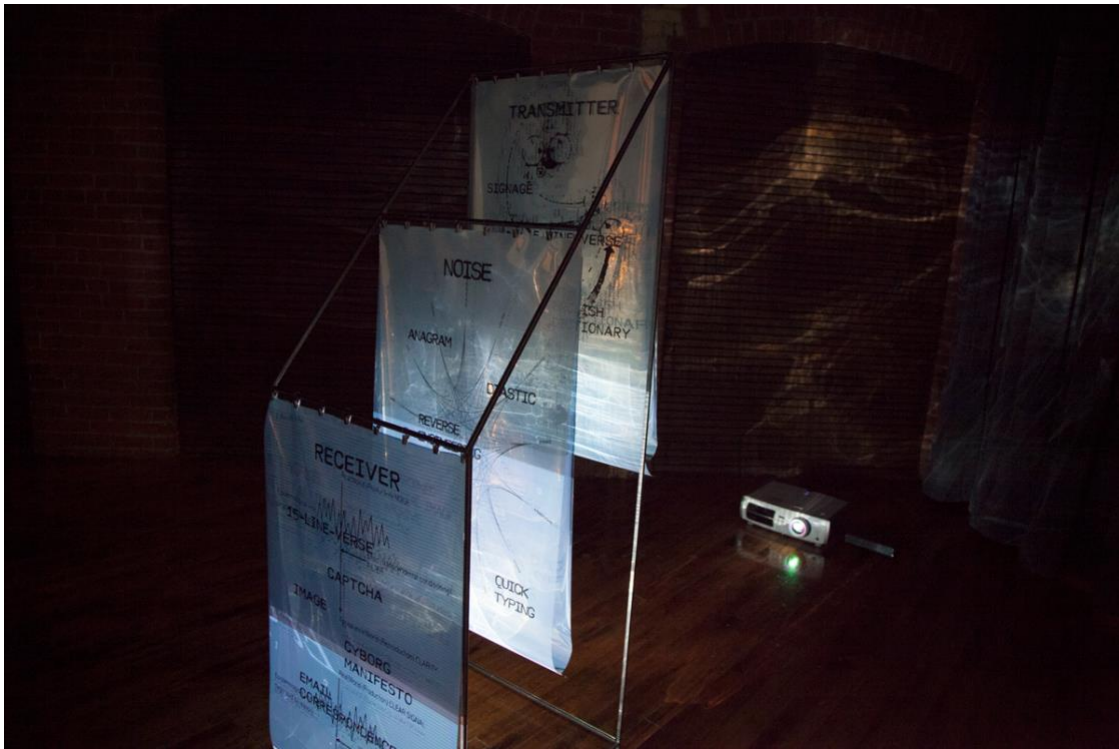
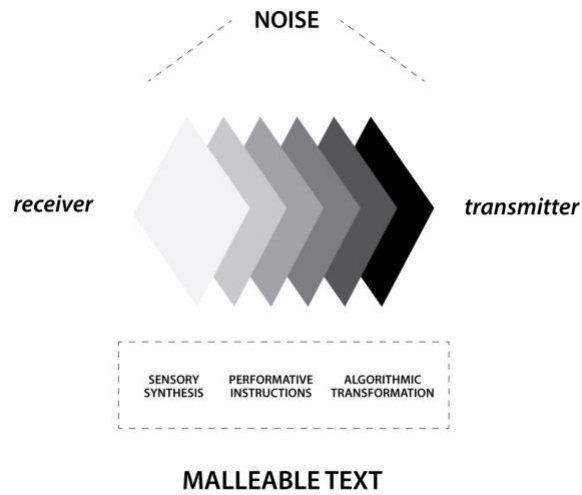


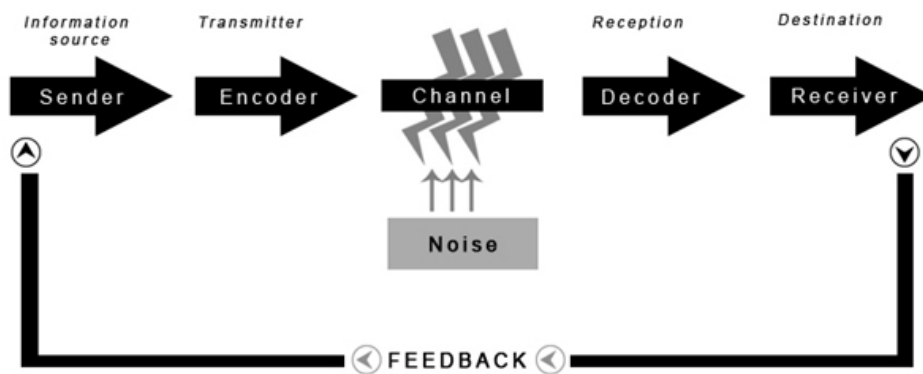
Figure 14 top: *Et Cetera in Shannon-Weaver model of communication*²¹; bottom: full installation view

²¹ The Shannon-Weaver model of communication (1949) explains how an effective communication between sender and receiver takes place through the process of signal transmission. The sender encodes the message and sends it to the receiver through a technological channel like telephone and telegraph. The sender converts the message into codes understandable to the machine. The message is sent in codes through a medium.

In the making of all the works, text is considered as a malleable material that can be moulded through algorithmic transformations, performative instructions, and eventually emerging as sensory synthesis. Moreover, the sensorial agency is not purely human (explained on the following page).

works		G=A=R=D=E=N	I, It's, The	EveryLetterCyborg	WYSIWYG	A Reader's Guide
materials	language	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	code	Y	Y (hidden)	Y	Y	Y
	light / projection	Y	Y	X	Y	Y
	reflectivity	Y	X	Y	Y	Y
	chromatic hue	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	temporality	slower / rhythmic	slow / loop	slowest	slow / loop / rhythmic	slow / loop

Figure 15 the use of materials in all works



SHANNON-WEAVER'S MODEL OF COMMUNICATION

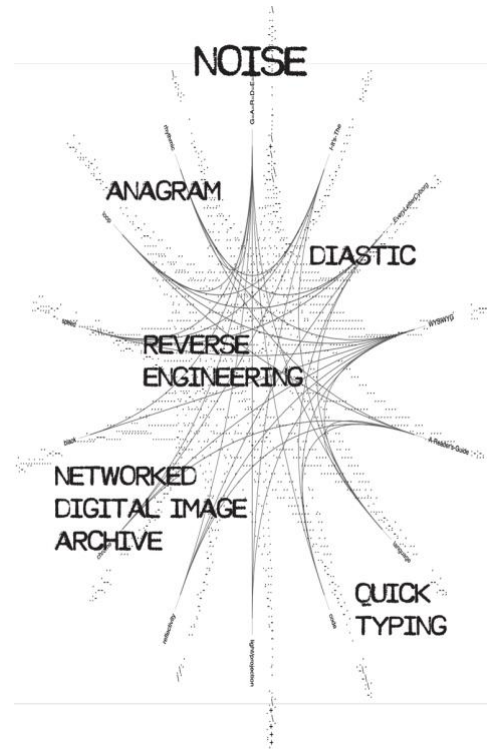
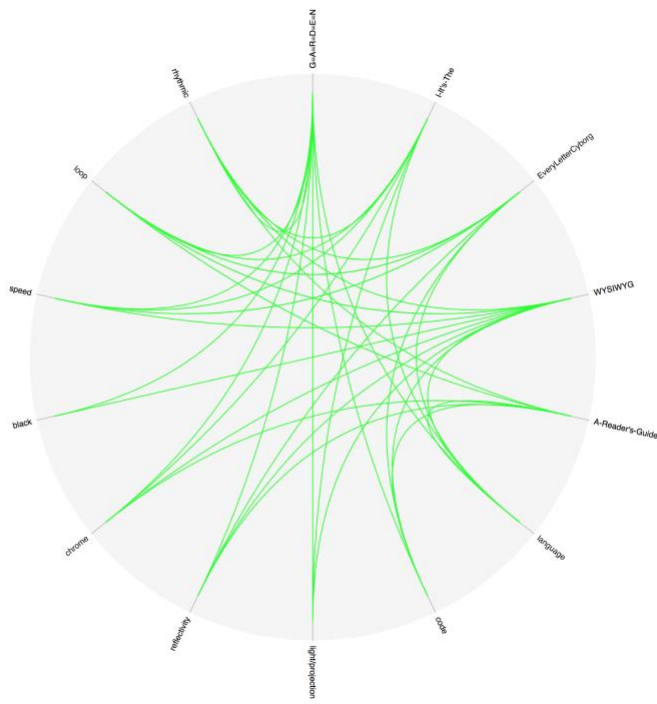


Figure 16 top-left: a visualization of the material uses in each work; top-right: the diagram of noise layer; bottom: installation view at TSV, March 2018

At the same time, each work is its own heterogeneous creature. Each work respectively explores a scenario where the authorship involves a collaboration between human and

machine. To be more specific: *WYSIWYG* originates from the graphic user interface where human and machine touch and interact; *Fin* involves a complex process using algorithmic thinking to generate new text out of an existing one and making text-image associations through the Internet; *EveryLetterCyborg* is born digital but remains at its core more human than bot—its intelligence is completely limited by the commands that humans write and steered by the indeterminacy of APIs and open-source human-machine assemblages (automata or semi-automata); *I, It's, The* is a situation where human and AI voluntarily infiltrate each other and lose track of themselves.

During these processes of shifting and entangling authorship, the “human-machine” assemblages function through the following feedback loops:

- intuition of this consciousness (speaking from “I” who writes this writing);
- the act of writing restructures consciousness: impulses produce words, in turn suggesting new impulses;
- “I” train myself to train the machine;
- techno-cultural production in capitalist society (as explained in *Fin*).

As Sierra-Paredes summarizes, the current post-digital environment where digital technologies are continuously reshaping the techno-cultural conceptualizations of reality has changed the spatiotemporal circumstances of art making (30). This is an environment where signs and symbols are colliding to produce novel assemblages that continuously evolve and temporarily attach to new meanings. This “synchronic and syntopic circulation” calls for universal codes, born-translated texts, and global art highways that generate new symbolic forms and material metaphors (Manovich).

And it is because of the same synchronic and syntopic circulation that production and reproduction can no longer be differentiated. The artist-author is thus the producer, reproducer, circulator, and eventually becomes the instantaneous translator, allowing “the self, the text, the artwork to be subjected to the omnipresent eventuality of mutation” (Sierra-Paredes 29).

The necessity of expanding the form of writing and the notion of authorship is a response to the exigencies of technology (Sollfrank 42). New authorship models in close collaboration with fast-evolving digital technologies take advantage of “computer tactical planning with human creativity and strategy” (Sierra-Paredes 31). Writing as a human-machine-centaur, artist as author, involves articulating/disarticulating in an amorphous assemblage of algorithms and data, both linguistic and non-linguistic.

Not only is the role of the artist-author a hybrid mutating one, the reader is also situated in an expanding field as reader, viewer, listener and, during the interactive engagement, an active participant in the work as the author. Specifically, in *Et Cetera*, the role of the reader is navigated by the various durational experiences of viewing, reading, and perceiving. Multifarious semiotic associations are to be triggered as senses are networked in various spatiotemporal structures. And this is the necessity of the *Reader's Guide* serving as a topological and neurological map, a manual for the reader or viewer to position themselves.

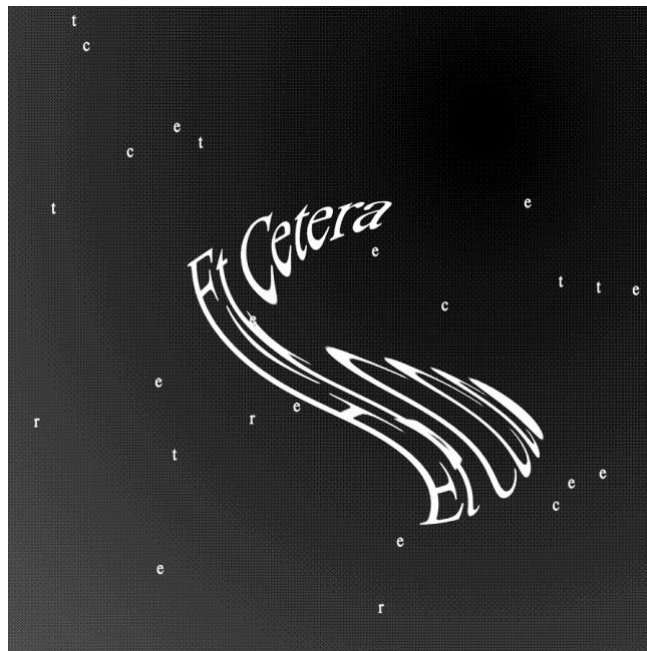


Figure 17 still frame from the animation in Reader's Guide

Installed at the right corner of the entrance, the *Reader's Guide* takes the form of a sculptural diagram. A generative animation of the letterforms of “*Et Cetera*” is rear-projected through a set of three one-way mirror screens. The centerpiece of the animation employs a computer script that applies a distortion filter to the words, turning the letterforms into a sequence of images morphing into computer-randomized and liquid-simulated shapes. The background layer of the animation randomly showers snowflakes in the forms of the same letters.

The three-mirror film screens represent three layers of communication: *transmitter*, *noise*, and *receiver*. Each layer is a piece of one-way mirror layered upon a diagram that is printed on semi-transparent vinyl (as seen in *Figure 14 & 16*). The one-way mirror is a material metaphor for “inside-out” and “outside-in” perspectives (Ireland, “Noise” 221), providing the readers with associations from a centaur point-of-view.

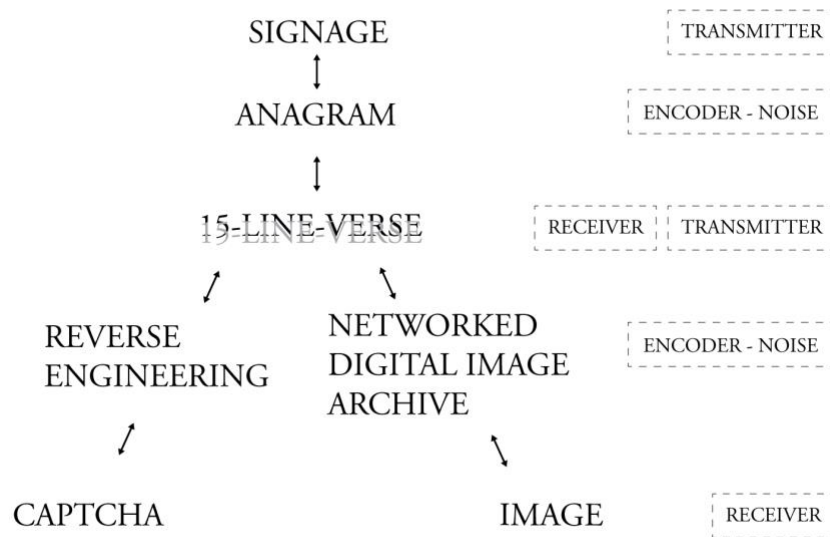


Figure 18 Fin in Shannon-Weaver model of communication

A soundtrack titled *Tinnitus &c.* is also included. This audio is the outcome of the generative animation of “*Et Cetera*”, using an open source sound-to-image encoder²². It sees the visual as a spectrum and maps out frequencies over a certain period of time.

²² <https://github.com/alexadam/img-encode>

Playing back through a FM transmitter and radio, this soundtrack literally uses the encoder tool based on the communication model to create audible, rhythmic signals that linger on the déjà-entendu.

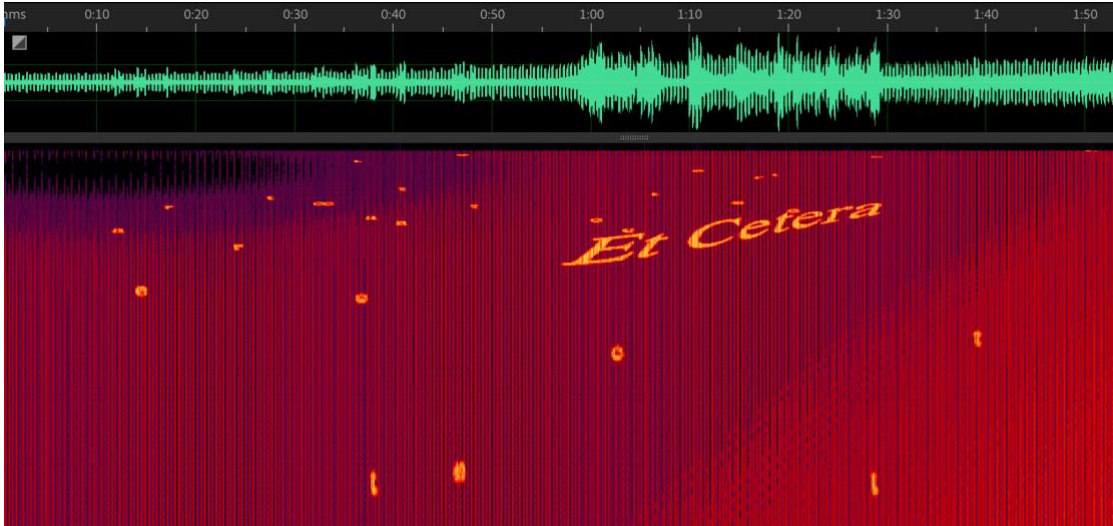


Figure 19 image to sound

The *Reader's Guide* offers an inviting entry point, just as the other four works show affable clarity on the surface as legible English and graphics, and an enticing shininess that is a result of using reflective materials in 3D animation, physical sculptures and ringing sounds. All of this lures the audience to read and perceive. When readers try to decipher, they enter the noise field of non-signifying matter, trawling for the naked truth in the deep sea of sense/nonsense and signification/non-signification. During the experience, their reading-perceiving reflexes are invoked and reconfigured.

Therefore, instead of narrating, *Et Cetera* is more of an anti-narration that does not stop evolving. *Et Cetera* is like an event fabric interlaced by logic threads of multimedial meaning-making. The fabric glints through the soft prism of alphabets and codes, stretching long and unbroken, looming in the unstable, liquid camouflage. The fabric is akin to Derrida's description of a material, "under the species of the non-species, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity", or an alienated fantasy land that hosts those intervening between thought and its outside, the human and the nonhuman.

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APPENDIX I
EXHIBITION TEXT WRITTEN BY FAN WU

I Forget, etc. (after X.Y.)

I forget leaning over my grandmother's carp pond--and the vertigo of losing my first language: what spills from her, a string of code.

I forget that if what you see is where you go, then all seeing is a censored prophet that fails (because of neurosis or paralysis) to act in accordance with its own oracles.

I forget the efficient linearity of human reading (frustrating; rusty with the will to *make sense*) and learn the stochastic programmability of the machine (nested recursions: birds in cyborg-synaptic teleport.) I become not apart from the *humus* of inhuman refuse, the floppy callousness of computer script.

I forget how to chart a course between the gravity of *identity* (flesh, father, hearth) and the *anonymity* of the digital.

I forget, rote fig, frig toe. I forget--ego rift--grief to forge it. Heal us, eros of foe grit. O He Fears Soul: I forget sentimentality and open-hearted relatability to forge a new, colder, but no less tender form of subjectivity.

I forget whether Zhuangzi thought voice was the dream of water or water the dream of voice. I barely remember vapourwave--soft subliminality that brought back visions of *Sonic the Hedgehog* --and the hard limits of nostalgia. I fully remember Freud's primordial *oceanic feeling* of being one with the universe; but to feel it here, in the 21st century, means to feel it homelessly: even total unity cannot undo my nomad code.

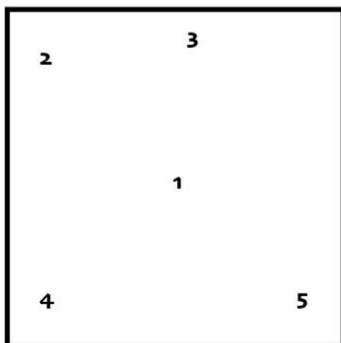
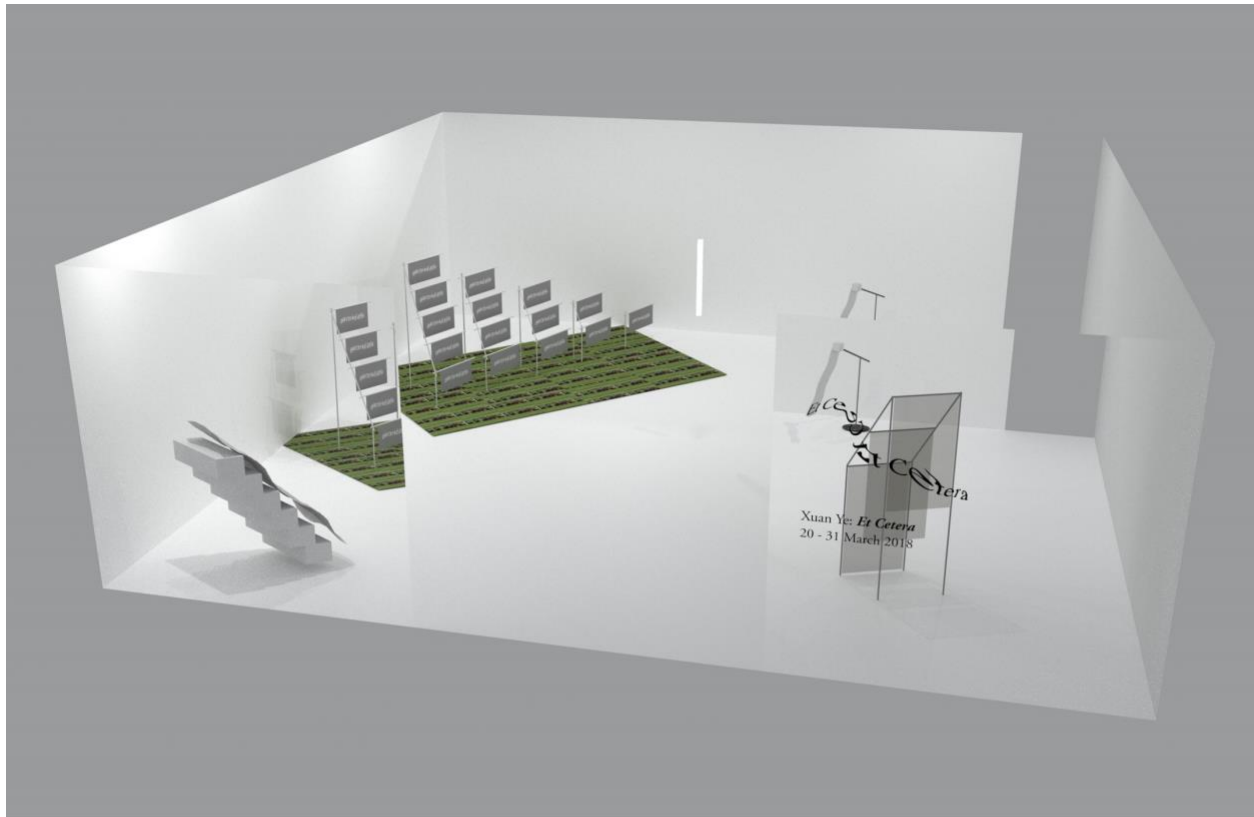
I forget the karaoke bars in Shenzhen splayed out, in their indistinct variation, in empty thousandfold repetition until they're stacked snug against the horizon. I forget how "I" became a flicker in the writhe of mimesis; the drunken patrons clamoured for me to sing *Teresa Teng*. I forget how "I" blinks there: a woozy vessel, a pause before word & song.

I forget language like it was the lie of noise.

I forget how the so-called *mothertongue* lolled out sublingually from my English mouth and landed on the dirty floor of language's Limbo.

I forget the nest of signs I wove in the cyberspace deep pool--I remember the distinction between void and form, with a bleary mind. I forget the phenomenal world's manifold lures--I remember that the virtual does not contradict the real. I want to forget the motherland as ravage--I remember a CAPTCHA code that read "TINY SELF" and, typing this in, how I was laid bare by this eyeless machine. I forget that the message dreams in syntax--I remember drunken days on the digital sea, Donna waving back at me with her kind eyes and kinship, drowning myself in the algorithm so as to reach the shores of some rebirth.

**APPENDIX II
EXHIBITION FLOOR PLAN**



- 1. What You See is Where You Go*
- 2. Fin*
- 3. EveryLetterCyborg V1.2*
- 4. I, It's, The*
- 5. Reader Guide*

Figure 20 Exhibition Floor Plan at Trinity Square Video