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Duvvoori, Kavi

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Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

TITLING ‘TITLED, “UNTITLED”

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

DIGITAL ARTS AND NEW MEDIA

by

Kavi Duvvoori

September 2019

The thesis of Kavi Duvvoori is
approved:

Professor Warren Sack, chair

Professor Noah Wardrip-Fruin

Professor John Cayley

Quentin Williams
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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2019

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ABSTRACT

Kavi Duvvoori – Titling, “Titled, “Untitled””

Titled, “Untitled” presents a compendium of language games by the artist, in conversation with various models of language. This project asks how and where digital literary art can approach human language’s contemporary situations, contextualizing its practice alongside late 20th century movements intervening artistically in language such as Oulipo, Language poetry, fluxus, net.art, and conceptual art. The quirks and failures of linguistic models, appearing in technical literatures before entering the human world through ubiquitous software systems, now act upon and evaluate us daily through systems for translation, sentiment and network surveillance, and the corporate characters for synthetic conversation. Titled, “Untitled”s response pursues a strategy similar to the one Jenny Schlenzka identifies in Adam Pendleton’s Black Dada, “first, to study these stabilizing functions of institutional language and then to take the further step of introducing elements of destabilization. What would happen... if a museum were to hand over its entire linguistic output to a group of poets?”

A compositional semantics parses sentences about two rooms while an author interjects other assertions. A recurrent neural network struggles to make sense of contrasting training texts. A vector-space thesaurus degenerates sentence constellations. A physics engine drops 3d words through gamespace. A cellular automaton transforms common consonants and vowels into words and a territory.

The compendium takes the form of a wiki and gallery reading room, where each entry offers a summary of a theoretical framework before presenting a work implementing it, working with its metaphors, or drawing attention to the remainder the theory excludes. Concerns across Titled, “Untitled” include the materialities of digital language; the problem of digital language’s

simultaneous algorithmic processors and human audiences; the search for positive semantic or human possibilities in linguistic positions or identities defined as a negative space (such as “queer” or “person of color”); and the social, corporate, and technical infrastructures that mediate digital speech.

DEDICATION

To those left looking for ways to live, in company, in words' fuzzy horizons

To all those who don't think they are included in this dedication (or another)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This and related endeavors are made possible by care, money, friendship, thought, space, food and air, permission, good medical care, mentorship, and so on. How to thank with the specificity of gifts received but the generality that another may be interested to read? How to make acknowledgement of the sociality, borrowedness, of everything I have to say more than perfunctory? These acknowledgements feel even more real, more urgent and fundamental, in a document like this that no one will afterwards read, than in the important or even minorly influential books and papers from which we learn the form. A masters thesis has the urgency of a precarity, of a learning to be on the inside.

Thank you to my classmates: Zoe Sandoval, Yanzi Li, Shimul Chowdhury, Rich Grillotti, Matt Mitchell, Laura Stevenson, Keegan Farrell, Kavi Duvvooori, Kathleen Deck, Jordan Magnuson, Gregory Sullo, and Chelsea Jones, for interest, solidarity, insight, endless creativity, and kindness. Thank you Bennett Williamson, Kristin Galvin, Anne Rothen, John Weber, Colleen Jennings, Shelby Graham, and all the student interns and workers at the Mary Porter Sesnon gallery for so much academic, creative, and logistical work. Thank you to my thesis committee Noah Wardrip-Fruin, Warren Sack, and John Cayley, for encouragement, generosity, reliably inspiring insights, and knowledge of the reference or phrase to trigger weeks of thought, reading, and rethinking - I also borrow from their work heavily without giving them much chance to clarify or reject wrong interpretations here: no endorsement or agreement may be assumed.

Thank you to UC Santa Cruz and Brown University for providing programs and contexts to discover this work, and imperfect but real places to think, study, read, and find community

during frightening times. Several of these pieces were first imagined at the School For Poetic Computation's *Code Words* workshop, organized by Nick Montfort - thank you to everyone involved for the very inspiring lessons and conversations. Thank you to everyone in the Expressive Intelligence Studio in the Computational Media department at UCSC, for welcoming me into many provocative conversations on computation, poetics, narrative, and playability that influenced my thinking in this project: especially Max Kreminski, Jasmine Otto, Isaac Karth, and Melanie Dickinson. A Digital Language Arts workshop at Brown in the Spring of 2016 was another important context, where I formulated the first version of this project, so thank you to all the participants in that. And thank you to employers, tutees, and students, who taught me in so many different directions, and made this work possible in that most real and literal way.

Thank you to friends and interlocutors, over years: Erin McCloskey, Matthew Petersen, Vanya Cohen, Sara Hartse, Kath Kryuchkova, Maggie Sullivan, Graydon Griffin, Will Kochanski, Bill Marcy, Devika Girish, Elizabeth Gurin, Gardner Eager. Very old friends too: GZ, DF, BS, AZ, JG, BS, HL. To teachers of courses that inspired swerves (and often gave generous responses to naïve suspicions): Stephanie Merrim, Richard Schwartz, Meera Viswanathan, Ellen Rooney, Jennifer Gonzales, Susana Ruiz, Pranav Anand, Peter Alvaro, Adrian Brasoveanu, Gale Nelson, Erica Mena, Asha Pandya, Sarojani Rohan, and Melissa Sanders-Self. I am still writing many large and small conversations, stealing a word I learned from all of you. Put some ostensible indexical into the archive and record.

Thank you to family, that it is not the only way but that you all have so reliably served for me also as “many-gendered mothers of our hearts.” Ushavva, Jayavva, and Ragavtatha: that there exist such other worlds, in which I may nonetheless be lovingly welcomed. Mahatatha, for

teaching me to go walking, and the way speaking in silence (the writing on a mirror) as well as reading can be a lifetime's work. Thank you Lekha, an ever-inspiring fellow gap-gardener. Thank you to my parents, Sumana and Vikram, Amma and Nanna, for always being (lovingly) "there" - sometimes verifiably with a bag of books or a tray of food, other times in places or phrases no other may recognize, and even buying my copy of Anti-Oedipus for me.

How to cite a person? Under what number? If they change their name? How to cite a language, a place, a conversation, a room, a chatroom, a phrase eavesdropped? The form of acknowledgement necessarily and correctly ends on an acknowledge of its failure to be or say enough.

INTRODUCTION

Formal language, whether mathematical or merely rigorous, fails to contain certain important forms of linguistic play and indeterminacy. *Titled, “Untitled”* searches for practices of study that may illuminate individual linguistic models’ unstable boundaries, and continue thinking and writing despite them. I consider the particular reality of contemporary algorithmically mediated writing, developing literary texts, techniques, and tactics with which to enter the networks carrying digitally encoded language. A wiki and a reading room installation each gather texts from this search for a personal literary methodology. Visitors to either are invited to take part in the play of reading, writing, uncovering, and recombining language. I do not believe it undermines this exercise (the thesis paper) and its important functions to imagine it one of the language games *Titled, “Untitled”* undertakes, in exploration.¹

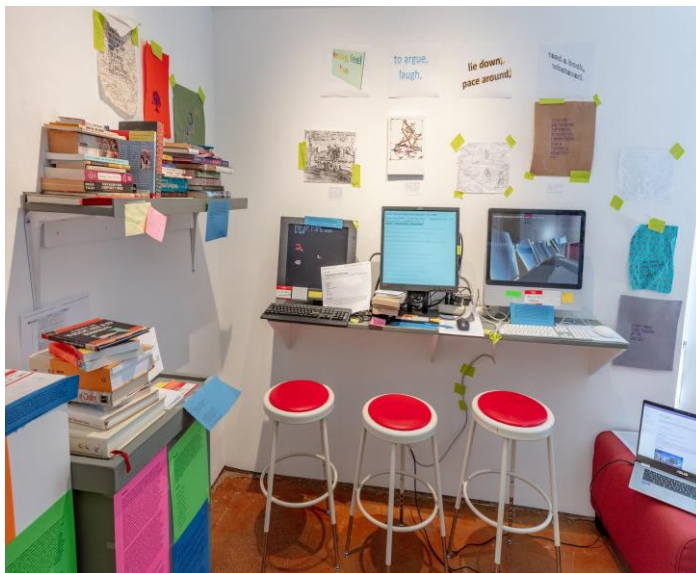


Figure 1 - Entry to Titled, “Untitled”

¹ This game, *Titling, ‘Titled, “Untitled”*’ engages with the Socioeconomic theory of Academic Publication, by offering a series of 2-3 page sub-essays each analyzing one of the theoretical contexts

For \$5, in response to a request for “100-250 interesting (or uninteresting) words” and without more direct instruction, Mechanical Turk worker A2FV0CMG9S8CU0 wrote within 25 minutes of the job being posted an excellent summary of my theoretical presuppositions,

The image shows a screenshot of the Mechanical Turk interface. On the left, the 'Settings' panel for a project titled 'Collect Utterance' is visible. It includes a 'View Project' link, a note about editing, a description ('Language will be used in a creative writing project'), keywords ('chat, utterance, data collection'), and qualification requirements. It also lists 'Number of Assignments per task: 8' and 'Reward per Assignment: \$5.00'. At the bottom, it shows 'Batch expired on: April 27, 2019 4:27 PM PDT', 'Assignment duration: 30 minutes', and 'Auto Approval Delay: 1 hour'. On the right, the 'Results' panel shows 'Assignments pending review: 0', 'Assignments approved: 8', and 'Assignments rejected: 0'. Below that, the 'Cost Summary' panel shows 'Estimated Total Reward: \$40.00', 'Estimated Fees to Mechanical Turk: \$8.00 (fee details)', and 'Estimated Total Cost: \$48.00'. At the bottom, an 'Example task from this Batch' is shown with a 'View instructions' button and the prompt: 'Write something you could say in the given situation: Context: You know a language and are speaking it. Intent: To make \$5.'

Figure 2 – Prompt from project "Stuffed Under Chessboards"

or artistic intentions of the *Titled*, “*Untitled*” project. In doing so it references Law, like the Socioeconomic project on Intellectual Property *Common Is That They* (probable strings of words released under a free-reuse license) and the Socioeconomic project on Commodified Labor *Stuffed Under Chessboards* (contracted utterances bought on Mechanical Turk). In the current concern with recursivity and reflexivity, it resembles the Mathematics & Theoretical Computer Science game on Recursion *doiwritemyself?* (short programs that write their own code or try to ascertain whether or not they will write their own source code) and in its concern with the relationship between analytical academic language and the affects of human communication, it resembles the Linguistics game on Pragmatics, *A Speech Act and Gricean Analysis of a Conversation* (a mock linguistics paper juxtaposing parodically excessive linguistic analysis with whimsical and ‘literary’ sample text).

Words are not inherently interesting or uninteresting, individually or in masses of 100 to 250. The quality of being interesting derives from the attitude of an observer or consumer of these words, including someone who may be the writer or originator of them. Whether or not words are judged to be interesting is not only left in the hands of the person reading or hearing them, but context also plays a significant role in whether a word happens to strike someone as being interesting, and the same word may, when appearing in different contexts, evoke differing levels of interestedness for a given individual. In any case, it is never the words themselves that give rise to their own quality of being interesting, but factors external to them. Even in the case of words that someone might find interesting because they have peculiar sounds, structures, or meanings, this kind of interest driven by a sense of novelty is also highly dependent on a cultural context. Language, being a product of human civilizations large and small, is always tied historically and culturally to an origin and community does or did employ it, and in the proper context, a word that appears novel to those outside of this context holds none of that same kind of interest to those within or familiar with it.

Wikipedia, as a hyperlinked, crowdsourced, “encyclopedia of everything,” a first source of information, is a key reference point. While being written by many, configurations of text and information like Wikipedia and Google encode cultural, social, and epistemic biases that affect both what they say and who writes them². Scholars like Safiya Noble have recently drawn attention to some of these barely hidden tendencies of our networked epistemologies. Wikipedia tries to make the contribution of many, often opposed (for example, the competition over narrative between marketing consultants and style editors on a company page), writers coalesce into a unified voice. *Titled*, “*Untitled*” on the other hand, under one official author, attempts to take on and make use of varied voices and pseudonyms. It claims similar grandiose comprehensiveness, but conspicuously fails to achieve it. In these ways *Titled*, “*Untitled*” starts to imagine itself as the working space where a networked text like

² Reagle and Rhue, “Gender Bias in Wikipedia and Britannica.”

Wikipedia's author(s) might write, while destabilizing and particularizing some of their discourses.

The tensions between collectivity and specificity, formal theory and culture, in an encyclopedia but also in language itself, points towards some of the other key questions of *Titled, "Untitled."* While ranging widely, this project draws especially from overlapping disciplines studying formally constrained and procedural language & literature: experimental prose and poetry and algorithmic / electronic literature; net.art and Conceptual art; theoretical linguistics; computational linguistics; "pure" mathematics; and critical philosophies of language. The pun on "disciplinary" will be intended throughout, but not in rejection: maybe instead, a desire to draw attention to "remainder work," Jean-Jacques Lecercle's phrase in *The Violence of Language*³ for the relationship of linguistic theories to what they exclude, remainders that serve to co-constitute the process of rigorous (even multi- or inter-) disciplinary education and analysis. *Titled, "Untitled"* does not mean to erase the differences between distinct fields and modes of study like literary art and linguistic science, nor to propose literature as a meta-discourse for theorizing language, but rather to play in these disjunctures, metaphors, lossy implementations, confused quotations, and (mis)translations - for pleasure, suspicion, curiosity, and communicative need. The effect may be one of collage, replicating that genre's tendency to clip from economically & historically accessible & ubiquitous magazines and encyclopedias, adjacent to the less accessible back-issues of one's particular family basement.

What I mean to raise is the problematic of this project, the relationship between language and certain discourses, institutions, and formal theories that attempt to contain and represent it.

³ Lecercle, "The Violence of Language."

Titled, "Untitled" is a project working with the collective, social nature of human language(s), and as such it pursues similar forms of theory. I reference (shallowly, arbitrarily) critical epistemologies challenging taxonomic and assertive definitions of research, especially those traced through Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*⁴ and also Guattari & Deleuze's rhizomatic and process descriptions of the relations between concepts in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

Similar tactics for the challenging performance of less disciplinary study are found and legitimated in some of the literary & artistic movements this paper will mention: Oulipo, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, conceptual art, net.art and fluxus. Such modes of seriously playful, sometimes funny, non-positivist, study are theorized by many other scholars and traditions, including the Zen tradition of koan & paradox and the Sophist critique of logic; and critical epistemologies by famous⁵ scholars including Richard Rorty⁶, Donna Haraway⁷, Simone de Beauvoir⁸, Elizabeth Anderson⁹, Jacques Derrida¹⁰, Judith Butler¹¹, Paul Feyerabend¹², Frantz Fanon¹³, the Russian formalists and futurists of *Zaum*¹⁴, and Homi Bhabha¹⁵, all of whom I

⁴ Wittgenstein, a conservative thinker enmeshed in Cambridge and often a domineering, cruel, and intolerant personality, is not presented as a theoretical visionary or radical. He nonetheless offers remarkable exploration of the limits of positivistic analytic thought, from someone sympathetically and centrally involved in ambitions to reduce scholarly study of language to the use of mathematical logic, before, as recorded in *Investigations*, rejecting that project.

⁵ Elite writers names are used as shorthand for concerns, collectives and ideas, a problematic practice of the 'grammatical' kind considered in *Titled, "Untitled,"* but one only broader disciplinary conversations and reforms can address.

⁶ Rorty and Williams, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

⁷ Haraway, "Situated Knowledges."

⁸ De Beauvoir and Parshley, *The Second Sex*.

⁹ Anderson, "Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science."

¹⁰ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

¹¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

¹² Feyerabend, *Against Method*.

¹³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.

¹⁴ Steiner, *Russian Formalism*.

¹⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

cannot properly informedly cite due to gaps in own knowledge, language, and curriculum but which echoes and summaries have represented for me with resonance and influence. Fred Moten writes in *Undercommons*¹⁶, “It cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment.” Working in institutions presents many opportunities but also challenges and tensions to understand the imperatives and denials of their discourses, which of course cannot be cleanly separated from the work itself. *Titled, “Untitled”* is a project interested in relationships between the said, unsaid, unlearned, forgotten, and unsayable.

Mechanical Turk author A2GXE6MIDN8DPR writes,

A few years ago I went to Jamba Juice with my sister. I got my regular Razzmatazz, but she'd gotten this drink that apparently had chocolate and peanut butter. Had to taste that. But I'd been recovering from a cold and I didn't want to put my lips to her drink. So I settled for taking a sniff, but then I realize my nose is stuffy. I cant taste it and I can't smell it. So I grab her cup, and hold it up to my ear. Up. To. My. Ear. Stood there listening to her cup of Jamba Juice for a few seconds before I realized I wasn't tasting anything.

¹⁶ Harney and Moten, “The Undercommons.”

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL CONTEXTS

MESSY CONCEPTS AND JOSEPH KOSUTH'S *One and Three Chairs*

Joseph Kosuth writes in “Art After Philosophy,” a document working closely not just with late Wittgenstein’s social, heterogenous, and extensional view of language but also with A.J. Ayer’s and (conventionally but debatably) early Wittgenstein’s constrained logical positivism, that “in art’s unique character is the capacity to remain aloof from philosophical judgments. It is in this context that art shares similarities with logic, mathematics, and, as well, science.”

Turning like Kosuth from framing experimental creative work as a philosophical assertion to framing it as a kind of experiment, *Titled, “Untitled”* is a project searching for a methodology for poetic research in mutual translation with the sciences of language: less interested in the broad and rich traditions of poetry informed by physics, ecology, mathematics, and so on, but in the specific considerations that emerge in producing literary language that takes seriously, albeit critically, contemporary sciences of language and writing (sciences frequently overlapping with logic, computation, and the philosophy of language), especially as new realities and anxieties about corporate algorithmic surveillance, mediation, ownership, and making of language become urgent. Central to the 20th Century development of many of these disciplines approaches to language are related projects to model utterance and meaning by abstract mathematical structures, an approach coming out of formal logic and logical positivism.

Conceptual Art is one particularly significant and central art movement working at this nexus. Lucy Lippard’s collection of writings showing Conceptual Art’s emergence and strategies in *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object* and Warren Sack’s reading of conceptual

art alongside scientific visualization and logics of administrative process and symbolic computation in “The Aesthetics of Information Visualization”¹⁷ both show some what is at stake in its play with concepts of concept.

Kosuth’s essay and work articulate particularly well not art & literature’s relationship to philosophy & science in general, but a significant example of an artist productively working out such translations. In considering the relation between conceptual art like Kosuth’s to technoscientific practices, Warren Sack writes,

Scientific illustration is only one possible role for art in the field of information visualization. The larger role for artists is best considered using the historical precedents of conceptual art. Specifically, one must consider how conceptual art has reiterated the modes of industrial production and bureaucracy in order to engage, decode and critique them.

An important connection is made by Sack between conceptual art, administrative logic, and the rhetoric of computational processes. Sol Lewitt’s *Wall Drawings* exemplify this art of process: Lewitt provides only a script like “A wall divided horizontally and vertically into four equal parts. Within each part, three of the four kinds of lines are superimposed.”¹⁸ which anonymized gallery staff must then disambiguate, and paint. It is not hard to see the connection between such a rhetoric of procedures and the relationship between computer programs, especially those that also generate images or texts, and the result of running them. The instruction is displayed alongside painting: “program” beside “output.”

Lucy Lippard writes in the postface to *Six Years* on some of the ways conceptual art raised problems about information distinct from a conventional role for art as “decorative object”’s

¹⁷ Sack, “Aesthetics of Information Visualization.”

¹⁸ “Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective | MASS MoCA.”

(while nonetheless failing to prevent their dematerialized objects from becoming investment commodities!),

Hopes that “conceptual art” would be able to avoid the general commercialization, the destructively “progressive” approach of modernism were for the most part unfounded. It seemed in 1969 (see Preface) that no one, not even a public greedy for novelty, would actually pay money, or much of it, for a xerox sheet referring to an event passed or never directly perceived... ..

On the other hand, the esthetic contributions of an “idea art” have been considerable. An informational, documentary idiom has provided a vehicle for art ideas that were unencumbered and obscured by formal considerations. It has become obvious that there is a place for an art which parallels (rather than replaces or is succeeded by) the decorative object, or, perhaps still more important, sets up new critical criteria by which to view and visualize itself (the function of the Art-Language group and its growing number of adherents) ¹⁹

In searching for a visual rhetoric for *Titled, “Untitled”* the problem is exactly this one, to resist making something viewable primarily as a decorative object, but one that instead interrogates a viewer’s way of looking at it. This interaction between art, philosophy, and linguistics to investigate visual interpretation may be seen in Kosuth’s 1965 work *One and Three Chairs*²⁰: a chair, a picture of a chair, and a dictionary definition of chair. In considering this particularly notorious piece, we enact a positivistic & philosophical notion of archetype, of central and sufficient examples, in part to contest it.

The chair is wooden, a vintage arrangement of bars. To its left is a head on, black and white, picture - taken from perhaps 5-6 feet high, and 10 behind: a probable perspective of a visitor: this image is printed in similar height to the chair and is attached to the wall with conventional

¹⁹ Lippard, *Six Years*.

²⁰ Ahmed, “Orientations.”

uprightness about half a foot off the ground. To the right of the chair is a dictionary definition of “chair” with the metadata and punctuational signifiers of the form of definition included.



Figure 3 - Joseph Kosuth's One and Three Chairs

One of the key strategies of *One and Three Chairs* is its claim to show exactly something (a concept), and apparently not more. The walls are clean, the image is neatly framed, and the chair is wooden, undecorated, prototypical. More precisely, the work’s representational strategies represent logical and linguistic positivism’s model of representation, thereby making it open to critique (note this tripling of “theory of representation,” paralleling the tripling of “representation of a chair”). But like Lewitt’s Wall Drawings, repainted once for each wall, Kosuth’s related works bring multiplicity into the minimally presented piece - and the question of when one concept becomes another: other versions feature an English-German or English-French translation rather than dictionary definition, or *One and Three Pans*, or *One and Three Saws*. Is English arbitrary? Is a chair?

The chair itself, the prototypically arbitrary object in philosophers thought experiments, in fact becomes a revealing site of certain tensions. Kosuth’s piece, in the contexts of visual arts, raises

the specific qualities of chairs and their representations, including the material and literary, for consideration. The chair, in its nearness and usefulness in arguments as well as for sitting, becomes a particular object that reflects back on the philosopher who defines it (or, more often, uses it to work out a theory of material or definition). Sara Ahmed writes about Husserl's consideration of phenomenology in terms of his perception of his writing table in *Orientations: Towards a Queer Phenomenology*²¹,

We already know how Husserl's attention wanders: from the writing table, and only then toward other spaces, the dark-ness of the room's unseen portions. What he sees is shaped by a direction he has already taken, a direction that shapes what is available to him, in the sense of what he faces and what he can reach... So his gaze might fall on the paper, given that he is sitting at the writing table and not at another kind of table, such as the kitchen table. Such other tables would not, perhaps, be the right kinds of tables for the making of philosophy. The writing table might be the table for him, the one that would provide the right kind of horizontal surface for the philosopher. As Ann Banfield observes in her wonderful book *The Phantom Table*: "Tables and chairs, things nearest to hand for the sedentary philosopher, who comes to occupy chairs of philosophy, are the furniture of that 'room of one's own' from which the real world is observed.

What happens when we turn away from the table, flip the chair or sit backwards on it?

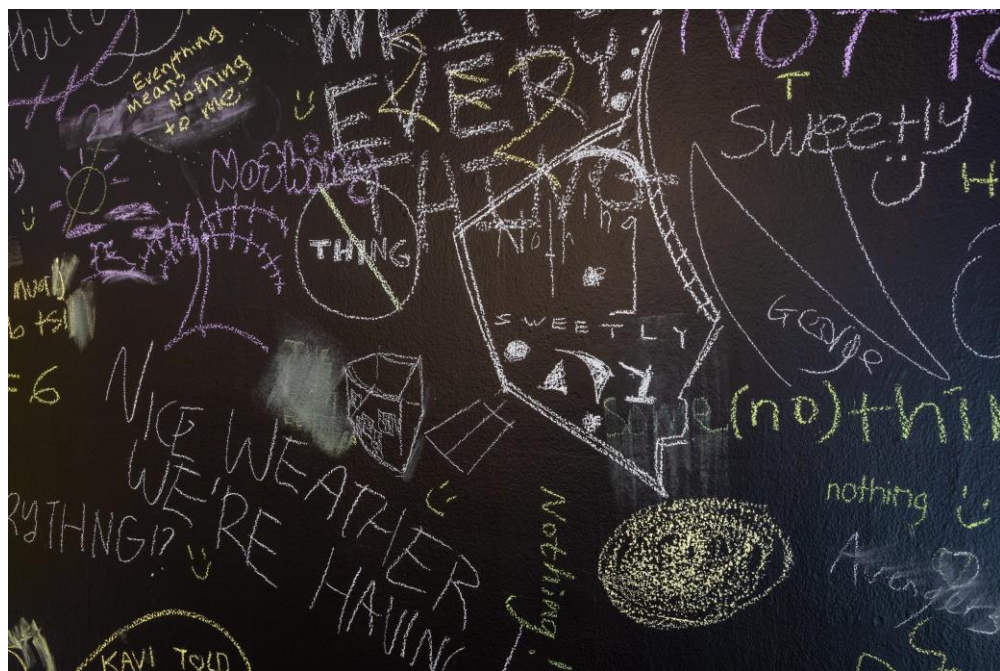
²¹ Ahmed.



Fig . The other messy half of the *Titled, “Untitled”* exhibition, including scraps

Titled, “Untitled” responds to an intervening half-century of research and critique on the concept of concept: in linguistics and computation, turning from deterministic logics like Ayer’s and Frege’s to statistical models like late Wittgenstein’s and Bayes - and similarly, the supplementation of the bureaucratic regimes of administrative classification and precise rule by new regimes directing economic, political, and physical power by “unstructured” data, machine learning, and statistical correlation. In *Software Arts*, Sack identifies a “computational episteme” turning from the logic of tested causal rules, and into a rhetoric of demonstration, simulation, probability, correlation, and process. This is represented in the paradigms of machine learning - from Bayesian & Markov models to the gradient descent of artificial neural networks an interest in systems that iteratively refine functional

approximations without explicitly and intentionally incorporating human knowledge about their source domain. In linguistics this is realized in the increasing use of data analysis on large corpora (for example, BYU’s massive Corpus of Contemporary American English) as a source of both hypothesis and evidence. The discussion of “relational aesthetics” and “speculative materialism” throughout art worlds is also very relevant to this concern with relation and dependence on social context.



The choices in 1960s conceptual art to frame a script with clarity, cleanliness, stability, and purity (protection from the alterations of dust and time, even if it is itself a photocopy) are reversed in *Titled, “Untitled’s”* desire to “frame” contingency, fragility, messiness, and availability for sometimes mutual alteration: conspicuous reversal is a form of reference or inspiration. In writing, *Titled, “Untitled”* hopes to consider critically the rhetoric of thought experiment, and example sentence; in installation, after Kosuth and Ahmed, *Titled, “Untitled”*

hopes (and only that) to consider critically the orientations and significations presented by tables and mess.

LITERALLY POETIC EXPERIMENTS AND ALLISON PARRISH'S

Ephemerides

Among the aphorisms Ludwig Wittgenstein produced, circulating on perhaps against his philosophical intentions, is the line "Philosophy ought really to be written only as a form of poetry." Wittgenstein's first example of a language game in *Philosophical Investigations* is what would later be called the builders language,

The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building-stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words "block," "pillar," "slab," "beam." A calls them out; B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call. Conceive this as a complete primitive language.²²

In *Titled, "Untitled"* this game is implemented as an online 2d pixel-art game where you may play as the assistant. To theorize language, to raise problems and point out gaps between theories and real uses, Wittgenstein presents similar brief fictions, stories about 'language games' like the builders language that illustrate these gaps and suggest important phenomena to theorize. I read these games and thought experiments not as merely illustrative, but as fictions that constitute theorization themselves.

Marjorie Perloff writes, after Kosuth and Wittgenstein, in the introduction to²³ *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary*²⁴,

²² Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

²³ the 392-times cited

²⁴ Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder*.

if, as Wittgenstein posits, "Language is not contiguous to anything else" (LEC1 112), then, its most trivial manifestations becomes interesting. For example:

Someone who doesn't know English hears me say on certain occasions: "What marvelous light! [Welch herrliche Beleuchtung!]" He guesses the sense and now uses the exclamation himself, as I use it, but without understanding the three individual words. Does he understand the exclamation? (Z #150).

Well, does he? Questions like this one have no "answer," at least not a correct (or incorrect) one. They merely open up new spaces, as "poetic" as they are "philosophical," in which to take a deep breath.

We will consider literary language as a medium for "questions like this one" - starting with the observation that the linguistics paper has always already been literary, what does that literary element of theory do when given autonomy and developed as literature - what spaces are opened?

An underappreciated aspect of important 20th century poetic experimentalists (within the globalized circuits of migration, capital, and culture conventionally glossed as Western) is their close involvement in and their frequent adjacency, both socially and in manifesto, to 20th century techno-scientific intellectual projects. This relation is far more specific than presumption or critique of Modernity in the abstract; or of the discourses surrounding structure in general; but in the regular exchanges, dispatches, and parodies between literary and scientific clubs. The fear of being made auxiliary, and suspicion of the problematic and violent use of many technoscientific discoveries, is a frequent and important part of this relation. I argue then for an understanding of literary experiment not just as an avant-garde resistance to scientific rationalism but an involved, implicated, set of practices and practitioners who also regularly direct their involvement towards critique, and even negation: a realization that may be obvious but which can also become occluded.

A key first problem and role for artistic language here, raised earlier by Perloff and central to deconstructive as well as "ordinary language" traditions in philosophy, is the problematic role

of language itself in science: in linguistics, writing in English (French, or German) serving simultaneously as medium and object - a fundamental problem raised especially influentially in Jacques Derrida's reading of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *On the Origin of Language* in *Of Grammatology*²⁵. Some of the flow of ideas and forms between literary theory and linguistic sciences may be clear: semiotics from Saussure and Roman Jakobson²⁶, speech-act theories from J.L Austin, narratology from Propp and Bakhtin to linguistic models of discourse. Three further examples, of literary art in conversation with sciences of language, central for their role in creating the conditions of possibility (subjective as well as institutional) for this project as well as for their place in experimentalist literary canons in general, are Gertrude Stein's involvement with William James, as a psychology student at Radcliffe, articulating her poetic project in relation to psychology; the Oulipo's playful parody of the collective of abstract mathematicians in postwar France under the pseudonym Nicolas Bourbaki - and, indeed, the new appropriation of Bourbaki by the pangramic Laboria Cuboniks, pseudonymous author of the *Xenofeminist Manifesto* with its post-cyborg considerations of gender hacking and feminist design; various Language poets considerations of French(/-Maghrebian) linguistic theory, Marxist traditions in social-science, and at times of post-Chomsky linguistics too, in search of forms of poetry that don't extoll and presuppose the individual bourgeoisie lyric subject in the way of much contemporaneous American poetry²⁷; and net.art interventions in new technologies of networked software. Unfortunately, we will not have time to go into any of the above examples further.

²⁵ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

²⁶ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

²⁷ naturalized intersections now, but not inevitably

John Cayley, one such literary practitioner considering contemporary sciences and technologies of language, wrote in a 2011 discussion series *Science-informed Readings* in Jacket2, “Both communities are in the same world and relate to it as such. On this basis, Walter Benjamin might have said that the language of science — as a whole — is, necessarily, a translation of the language of poetry and vice versa. Poets, equally, attempt a symbolic formulation of what can be known about the world and, especially whenever they are ‘experimental,’ they test and retest their formulations. But language is the medium of poetry. The poet must engage, specifically, with the ‘singular (im)materiality’ of language.” What happens when these symbolic discourses attempt translation of each other, and of common objects?

Actor-Network Theory, developed by researchers at the Paris School of Mines, is one theoretical frame among others for understanding this production of science and poetry, as importantly located within complex circuits of social and material, in addition to conceptual, interaction. It models these transmissions as translations (in the broadened sense not equivalent to translation of text between human languages) through shifting channels. It is also essential to trace these networks beyond these canonical histories I am presenting, to recover histories of [non-, conflictedly-, and anti-]Western experiment and influence (like the traditions in Indonesia surrounding PERSAGI modernism and the Bandung Institute of Technology’s art program, and other institutions, to give an arbitrary²⁸ example, or the rigorous exploration of syntactically and phonologically constrained poetic forms, like

²⁸ With some arbitrary intention. Bandung: the site of the first conference of the Non-Aligned Movement

Oulipo, in a variety of oral literary traditions including the West African, Norse, and various South Asian), but that is beyond the scope of this MFA project.

Computationally simulated structures may allow particularly broad exploration of linguistic forms. Ted Nelson, an early computer science researcher and theorist who coined the term “hypertext,” writes in *Literary Machines* that,

Nonsequential writing on paper can be all sorts of things-- magazine layouts, funny arrangements of poetry, pieces of writing connected by lines, or many other things.

As we go in this century from paper to the computer screen-- and tomorrow's computer screens will have the richness and resolution of paper-- all these nonsequential forms, and more, are possible. And we must discover and invent them.²⁹

In *Expressive Processing*, Noah Wardrip-Fruin explores, in the context of various experiments in computational text, ways in which the processes in digital literature, the systems that give rise to text as well as that textual surface, are full of significance and may be subjected to interpretation, potentially pointing in quite different directions from textual output. Wardrip-Fruin writes,

I use the term *expressive processing* to talk about what processes express in their design - which may not be visible to audiences. Just as when opening the back of a watch from the 1970s one might see a distinctive Swiss mechanism or Japanese quartz assembly, so the shapes of computational process are distinctive - and connected to histories, economies, and schools of thought. Further, because digital media's processes often engage subjects more complex than timekeeping (such as human language and motivation), they can be seen as “operationalized” models of these subjects, expressing a position through their shapes and working.

The computational poet Allison Parrish created a remarkable Twitter bot, *Ephemerides*³⁰, which exemplifies the kinds of artistic experiment informed by science and constrained invention discussed here. *Ephemerides* combines text from two 19th century books, one on

²⁹ Nelson, “Literary Machines.”

³⁰ Parrish, *The Ephemerides*.

astrology and one on nautical navigation, to produce short poems. These poems are then Tweeted (and posted to a Tumblr blog) alongside a picture from a NASA space probe.

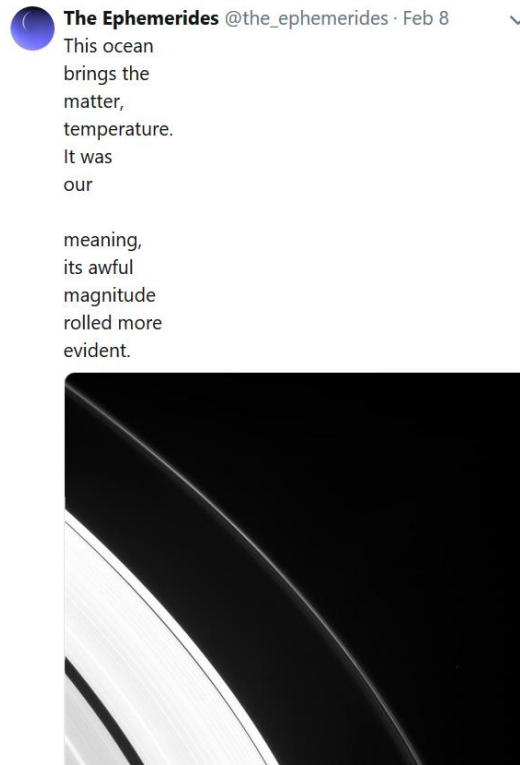


Fig 4. Sample tweet from Ephemerides

In her talk “Exploring (Semantic) Space With (Literal) Robots,” Parrish works from a metaphor between the exploration of physical and linguistic spaces. To introduce ideas of “conceptual space” and “linguistic space” she highlights the variations in singular color words in different human languages, and the way they cut up the space of visible wavelengths (to the extent that color can be meaningfully associated with light frequencies at all) in quite different manners. She writes,

The idea of exploration for me implies traversal. You can only explore what’s unknown, and what’s unknown is by definition inhospitable. So we need special gear, we need special things to take us into the unknown realm. In extreme cases like space

exploration, we have to send robots to do the dirty work. There on the left is Voyager 2, which is my favorite space probe. (Yes, I have a favorite space probe. I'm not a nerd, you are.) On the right- hand side is what I'm considering a very simple literal robot, and I'm using the word "literal" here in its most literal sense, to refer to words and letters. It's a robot that deals with words and letters.³¹

Ephemerides is especially interesting and influential to me for how it represents its conception of linguistic robots both metaphorically and operationally: the bot indefinitely³² navigates through a linguistic space, producing visualizable data around parameters of human reading and looking. At the same time, the Twitter / Tumblr feed represents the metaphor in the NASA images, and the evocative texts about oceans and voyages.

It is a lossy metaphor - I do not consider linguistic space a region to be traversed or exhausted, exactly, as its geometries don't correspond in any obvious ways to physical spaces. But her idea of a computational poetry generator as a source of strange dispatches, a probe into a space otherwise inaccessible, shapes the way I think in *Titled*, "*Untitled*" about the actual language produced by algorithmic generators. It also evades some of the questions about authorship and responsibility that can otherwise limit the reading of generative work. Her work on many other projects, such as *New Interfaces for Textual Expression* continues these rigorous explorations of surprising linguistic exploration, providing in breadth a remarkable model for the kind of literary exploration of technically-implicated questions *Titled*, "*Untitled*" is pursuing.

³¹ Parrish, "Exploring (Semantic) Space With (Literal) Robots."

³² until Twitter changes it's bot API standards, which they recently did



Figure 4 - Printed pieces in Titled, Untitled with decorative books behind

SURFACES AND EVEREST PIPKIN'S *Picking Figs in the Garden*

To write program-mediated language is to necessarily confront problems about the materiality of language - perhaps the same is true of writing ink on a page, but these problems are hard to avoid in the appearance of linguistic units in pixels on a screen, as a code in bytes, as sequences subject to various forms of manipulation, and then, often, again, printed marks on paper - or even a speaker's synthesized voice. While limited to paper, fabric, and visual written³³ text, *Titled*, "*Untitled*" still contends with these repetitions and differences of utterance, across screen, printout, hand marking, and so on. One of the primary questions of the installation, then, is as to what happens as projects move between materials and modalities.

John Cayley argues in *The Gravity of the Leaf: Phenomenologies of Literary Inscription in Media-constituted Diegetic Worlds*, discussing writing for Cave VR rooms, that language's 'singular immateriality' requires a mediated, diegetic, space for it to become language: that language requires or produces its own space of mediation. Nonetheless, language is not that

³³ Ie not signed

surface nor the arrangements perceptible within it. Language is that thing which cannot exist without a substrate, and nonetheless may happen in radically different forms. In the version of the essay in his book *Grammalepsy*, Cayley writes,

Neither is there any other media-constituted world (or, more accurately, no such world yet) where humans live and to which we might retreat to hold up some surfaceless instance of graphic language so as to compare it, visually, with its representation in the Cave. Rather, when we experience language in the Cave, we are starkly, literally, confronted with the diegetic break on which language depends and by means of which we make it and it makes us as we write and read. We are brought face to—literal, spectral (sur)—face with the strange relationship between language and media, between language and its embodiment in the worlds that media provide. In order for it to be language, language cannot be a coherent part of any media-constituted world in which it is inscribed. Without both the irresistible gravity of the leaf and the break that frees it from all gravity, language cannot exist in this or any other world, let alone make art.³⁴

A key problem then in making art about language - which is to say, not just an aesthetic text but one that considers language as such - is as to how to both inscribe it in a sensible world, and indicate its difference from that world. Conceptual art and Art & Language show inventive strategies for doing this in a visual arts context. Algorithmically-mediated literature finds some especially inventive ways of representing the consequences for language - as it is read, written, and perceived - by its procedural modification within systems of encoding underlying media worlds of representation.

We use many systems to represent language in mathematical objects programs may process, like Unicode tables giving binary codes for all displayable glyphs and emotij, string manipulation libraries like Regex for processing text as a sequence of characters, image formats representing scanned documents as matrices of pixel values, and NLP libraries such as Python's NLTK or Spacey that offer a range of models from linguistic research to approximate grammatical relations and transformations. All these structures become

³⁴ Cayley, *Grammalepsy*.

unreadable as language, but opinionated: deciding what kinds of manipulations are possible, or encouraged, and how this language may be realized. The “image data” of a scan of handwritten text is straightforwardly converted into an embroidery pattern for an automated machine but is difficult to find and replace all the nouns in, while Unicode code points make identifying related words in Latin characters easy and efficient but words in Traditional Chinese complex and without indication of their internal and pronunciational relations. By moving between encoding and material, I hope to problematize the particularities of several such structures used to transmit language mathematically before representation – in which it is processed before it, again, becomes language.

Procedural language is particularly suited to indicate axes of variation, other potential texts than the one in the lineation of the page. Everest explores these translations between data, material, and language in a great variety of projects. In their piece *cloud ocr* for example, a user clicks on any road in Google Maps, to be shown Google street view’s composite picture of only the sky above the road: this picture of clouds is then used to make text by running this image a character recognition algorithm.³⁵ Everest finds images and language by bringing media into relations that work structurally, at the level of encoding scheme, but against their intended and intuitive uses.

Everest Pipkin’s *Picking Figs in the Garden While My World Eats Itself*³⁶ produces and “curates” language and drawings from a range of language-generating bots. These remarkable

³⁵ I also was able once to hear Everest give a remarkable talk (published as “Judith Bronte: the Accidental Spam Poet of Southern California) in which they followed spam flooding their index into a romance author under the pseudonym Judith Bronte, into that reclusive author’s understandings (meeting in a restaurant a multi-state drive away) of why “God” had taken up and distributed her writings in this strange way.

³⁶ Pipkin, *Picking Figs in the Garden While My World Eats Itself*.

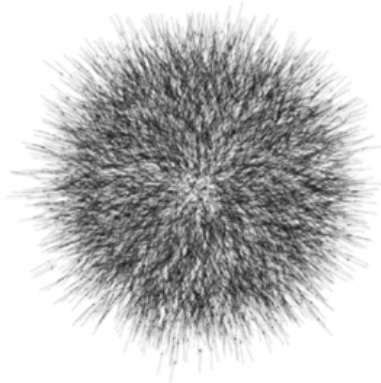
poems and drawings exist as printouts, as data, as a pdf downloadable for Name Your Own Price from an online store for independent games, and as an installation that was once up at the Not Gallery in Austin, Texas, which I was not able to see and from which only a few establishing images are findable, and only through a wrong name. Nonetheless, this jpeg of books, screens, and receipt printers filling a room with poetry is a key influence on my conceptualization of how *Titled*, “*Untitled*” could begin to use its space.



Figure 5 - From an installation by Everest Pipkin including Picking Figs in the Garden, While My World Eats Itself

Unlike many other examples of computational poetry, like Alison Parrish’s, I have no idea how *Picking Figs* works. Everest could have written them, without my feeling betrayed (though producing the drawings and repetitions by hand would have been extremely laborious). There is no Github repository I can freely go to in order to understand the text as a machine (even if, once mechanically combined, procedural text operates in uncontrollable and undetermined ways). Instead, Everest’s bots and drawings, brought once into the floor of a

gallery (a Not Gallery) in Austin, TX, challenge the surfaces that represent them. While being accessible on a screen, or printable in art, the text gestures towards other surfaces and the networks that carry them. The poems, on a screen or paper, similarly seem less like objects to be lined out over a plane, then textual projections of complex operations, phrases that are beautiful but / because they may still be “turned” or “inverted.”



```
      /- somebook holy
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      <
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      v
      . * v : | > : | v . *
      mechanics-
      can't dwindle
      can't have slept recently;
      *
      *   /###\   O[]-   ##*##
          /##\   }      break;
```

Figure 6 - Everest Pipkin's picking^{to pick} garden while my world eats itself

The PDF ends with text, not typographically distinguished but final and syntactically coherent in a manner indicating the author's direct voice, writing that this downloadable

Picking Figs is just a sample from a few recent months generations - but, importantly, does not then link to “the rest.”

BOUNCING WORDS, AND *Autobiography of Red*

An oblique inspiration, Anne Carson’s *Autobiography of Red*³⁷ is a source of tactics, pleasures, and affects. The novel-in-verse starts with fragments of the classical poet Stesichorus’ *Geryonion*, on the life of Geryon, a red winged monster who lived peacefully farming on an island before being slain in one of Herakles labors. Much of the verse-novel is a sort of coming-of-age story of a boy Geryon, identified as a red monster, becoming an artist, having a messy love affair and discovery-of-sexuality with Herakles. The verse-fiction is representational, psychological, but not easily placed within contemporary poetry or fiction³⁸ - not so much collaging or averaging forms like poetry, myth, fiction, even criticism, but selecting aspects from each quite idiosyncratically. The rest is an essay on Stesichorus, a translation of his remaining fragments, and finally a fictional interview with that poet. In the essay she writes of Stesichorus, “He came after Homer and before Gertrude Stein, a difficult interval for a poet.” Carson credits Stesichorus with the introduction of adjectives to Greek poetry, and focuses on adjectives herself. In the lyric novel, Geryon works on his autobiography “from the age of five to the age of forty-five.” Its forms vary from photo-essay to sculpture in tomato and torn dollar bill. Carson writes,

he thought about the difference/ between inside and outside./ Inside is mine, he thought. [...] Geryon found a piece of old war helmet and hid it./ That was also the day/ he began his autobiography. In this work Geryon set down all inside things/ particularly his own heroism / and early death much to the despair of the community. He coolly omitted/ all outside things... She [Geryon’s mother] winked at him over the telephone. / He winked back using both eyes/ and returned to work./ He had ripped up some pieces of crispy paper he found in her purse to use for hair/ and was gluing these to the top of the tomato.../Maybe next time you could/ use a one-dollar bill instead of a ten for the hair, she said as they began to eat.

Its gesture goes beyond mourning a gap, but it originates in and does not lose sight of nor imagine it could fill the absence of Stesichorus’ *Geryonion*. Even had that text lived, Carson

³⁷ Carson, *Autobiography of Red*.

³⁸ Despite – or consequently – being loved and cited by many poets and fiction writers

would no less be writing into the impossibilities and distances of translation, history, interpretation. A serious classics scholar, she writes about these subjects quite unseriously: it is not out of place for a toaster to appear in translation, beside Zeus, in her writing. There is a joy in deployment of incongruous zeugma and witty metonymies, which nonetheless do not attempt to universalize or naturalize themselves.

I do not reread *Autobiography of Red* to read about Stesichorus, nor really to read about myself, nor to read about Carson, nor really to read a gay coming-of-age, but perhaps to read about autobiography. Geryon's and Carson's articulation of life work, changing forms and everything else, but still *one thing* if only by stipulation. Carson has also written *Float*, a collection of poetic writing in booklets that may be rearranged, a form more closely related to hypertext and the history of digital literary experiment, but it is *Autobiography of Red* that has most directly influenced *Titled, "Untitled,"* as a text read early and reread without regret, shaping artistic pleasures and affinities, most importantly in ways yet unidentified. It is in this way that I hope *Titled, "Untitled"* may render true Anne Carson's quotable quote in the introduction, "*Words bounce. Words, if you let them, will do what they want to do and what they have to do,*" words playful felt and evasive.

IDENTITY, EQUIVALENCE, AND JHAVE'S *Rerites*

I consider a pun on identity - using it both for its meaning with human categories, and "identical reference" vs. structural equivalence in pure math & computation. In computer science, objects are sometimes compared by reference - whether they occupy the same memory address - and other times by structure - whether they contain the same values: ambiguities between these two modes of equivalence are a common sources of confusion for beginning computer science students. The mathematician Barry Mazur has both contributed substantially to the understanding of mathematical structure in (Nicolas Bourbaki's) subdisciplines studying structure in extreme abstract formality, Category Theory and Algebraic Topology, but also written (and read) quite thoughtfully about the relations between mathematical structures and narrative, in *Circles Disturbed*, and between mathematics and poetics in *Imagining Numbers (Particularly the Squareroot of Negative Fifteen)*. In an essay on the category-theoretic understanding of structure *When is One Thing Equal to Some Other Thing*, Mazur writes,

To define the mathematical objects we intend to study, we often - perhaps always - first make it understood, more often implicitly than explicitly, how we intend these objects to be presented to us, thereby delineating a kind of *super-object*; that is, a species of mathematical objects garnished with a repertoire of *modes of presentation*. Only once this is done do we try to erase the scaffolding of the presentation, to say when two of these super-objects - possibly presented to us in wildly different ways - are to be considered *equal*. In this oblique way, the objects that we truly want enter the scene only defined as *equivalence classes of explicitly presented objects*. That is, as specifically presented objects with the specific presentation ignored, in the spirit of "ham and eggs, but hold the ham."

This metaphor suggests a negotiation the writing of *Titled*, "*Untitled*" in various places struggles with, between critical academic considerations of identity, as tactical structure and constructed solidarity ('equivalence') vs. youth, journalistic and internet activist considerations of identity as an essence noted in common phenomenology, verifiable origin, and trauma ('identity'), an exhausted subject but an emotional and fraught one to work out. So much important theory begins by observing the ways language itself shapes identity and identification, and the possibilities of articulation and being. Franz Fanon writes in *Black Skins, White Masks* that,

For it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other. ... To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization. Since the situation is not one-way only, the statement of it should reflect the fact ... A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language.

Judith Butler writes (after Monique Wittig) in *Gender Trouble*,

Learning the rules that govern intelligible speech is an inculcation into normalized language, where the price of not conforming is the loss of intelligibility itself... If gender itself is naturalized through grammatical norms, as Monique Wittig has argued, then the alteration of gender at the most fundamental epistemic level will be conducted, in part, through contesting the grammar in which gender is given.

Jacques Derrida, in his late reflections (after long public silences) in *Monolingualism of the Other* (translated through paradox and impossibilities by Patrick Mensah)³⁹ on his relationships to the French language, and of colonial French-Maghrebian Jewish experience (and, of course, the problem of such testimony of autobiography, identity, and origins) circles around and returns to the aphorism, "I have only one language, yet it is not mine," and how

³⁹ Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, or, the Prosthesis of Origin*.

he can say only in French that French isn't his. *Titled, "Untitled"* is primarily trying to understand what it means to make writing, both directly and with algorithms, in *the only language I have, which is not mine*.

Having been partially trained in both arts and mathematical discourses, it is striking how critical theorizations of identity return to these questions about the form, structures, and, indeed, *geometry*, in which identities are defined. For example, Jasbir Puar, referencing Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*⁴⁰, in "'I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess' Intersectionality, Assemblage, and Affective Politics,"⁴¹ considers "the grid" as a spatial metaphor alternately embraced and rejected in intersectional (after Crenshaw) and post-structuralist (after Deleuze) theories. She writes,

Therefore, to dismiss assemblage in favor of retaining intersectional identitarian frameworks is to miss the ways in which societies of control apprehend and produce bodies as information, as matter that functions not or predominantly through signification, as modulation of capacities, as individuals in populations with any array of diverse switchpoints (rather than Althusserian interpellation per se), and surveilled bodies not on identity positions alone but through affective tendencies and statistical probabilities. But to render intersectionality as an archaic relic of identity politics then partakes in the fantasy of never-ending inclusion of capacity-endowed bodies, bypassing entirely the possibility that for some bodies—we can call them statistical outliers, or those consigned to premature death, or those once formerly considered useless bodies or bodies of excess—discipline and punish may well still be the a primary mode of power apparatus. There are different conceptual problems posed by each; intersectionality attempts to comprehend political institutions and their attendant forms of social normativity and disciplinary administration, while assemblages, in an effort to re-introduce politics into the political, asks what is prior to and beyond what gets established. So it seems to me that one of the big payoffs for thinking through the intertwined relations of intersectionality and assemblages is that it can help us produce more roadmaps of precisely these not quite fully understood relations between discipline and control.

Certain diagrams of maps, grids, and intersections (of lines) become contested centers of understanding and identification, organization and administrative violence. Machine generated text using human written phrases and programs, and sampling from vast archives, remain uncanny. Donna Haraway's cyborg figure, and Guattari & Deleuze's language of

⁴⁰ Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto."

⁴¹ Puar, "'I Would Rather Be a Cyborg than a Goddess.'"

assemblage, become unavoidably useful in considering these systems, both algorithmic and human, that produce language. Assemblage is relevant to the translations individuals and bodies make moving between social contexts and configurations, but also to the way identities and expressions are produced by or pass through systems that may combine psychological, physiological, computational, and social aspects. For example an Indian-Californian writer using a Swiss programming language running Silicon Valley code, trained on a corpus of cross-sectional American text gathered by a researcher in a Mormon university in Utah: certainly such a text has dispositions and biases, but whose, and how?

Under such complicated authorship, (post-)structural considerations of identity, alongside the mathematical pun, do offer some way forward: properties of “identity” may be seen articulated in structural relationships, syntax, and signifying words. In his book *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: an Elementary Exposition*, Saul Kripke’s character (later called “Kripkenstein”) produces an exposition of an argument that language is necessarily social, not meaningful in relation to private experiences, working from *Philosophical Investigations*. Kripke attributes this argument neither to Wittgenstein nor himself, writing – “With few exceptions, I am not trying to present views of my own; neither am I trying to endorse or to criticize Wittgenstein’s approach ... So the present paper should be thought of as expounding neither ‘Wittgenstein’s’ argument nor ‘Kripke’s’: rather Wittgenstein’s argument as it struck Kripke, as it presented a problem for him. ”

I will use the artist David “Jhave” Johnston’s *Rerites* project to identify a similarly hybrid, collective, assembled, but potentially personal mode of authorship. This form of authorship “collaborating with algorithms” may similarly not be Jhave’s, but a context in which to consider a problem of writing identity in generative text. The artist David “Jhave” Johnston’s

website biography offers a toggle for sense and nonsense, to rearrange a series of words. In nonsense, one gets a bag of words, without syntax. In sense,

Jhave - is a - digital - poet - once again - based in - Montreal, - formerly - working - in Hong Kong - - He plays - with - language - images - video - theories - dreams - disparity - code - wistfulness - tentacles - food - integrity - time - paths - love - & - intransigent - synchronicity - - Glia - refers to a - neurological - substance - (a brain jelly); - it is more - common than - neurons. - Jhave - is a - nickname - created by - combining - the 'jh' - from Johnston - with the - 'ave' from Dave. - - That is - probably - all you - need or want - to know. - ...

It writes the understanding of (artist's) identity as a tactical textual structure discussed here: description is provided to indicate certain patterns and preferences of thought, evading others, and only what we “need or want to know.” Locations locate, but only relatively. Jhave's *Rerites* project involved the artist training an artificial neural network on a large corpus of recent American lyric poetry, then reading through and editing from the inexhaustible output to produce a book of poems each month for one year. It does not discuss the particular problems of human identity I have been gesturing to, except insofar as the Jhave-remixed, RNN-remixed, corpus of American poetry fixates on them. But the project allegorizes so well, with remarkable, particular, but effectively inexhaustible, language, this tension between identity formation and dissolution, through observations of form and structural relationships. An RNN struggles to render a collective's voice into structural patterns, before one human (performatively) makes them aesthetic through their own first gestures and perceptions.



Figure 7 - Cover image for David Jhave Johnston's Rerites

Not only the text, put the process of attention, the way of scrolling through and editing the probable text, composes the project. In presenting it, both on his website and in performance, Jhave shows screen-captured video of the word processor, as he moves the cursor and enters characters. No longer is the author the text, but the digital – as notated in the discrete motions of a cursor through a word processor – motions through text. It is a process of writing oneself away, into two illegibilities, first that of opaque algorithmic approximation, then that of the collectivized concerns and gestures of contemporary American poetry, sometimes stuck on first and second person pronouns, other times listing scientific terminology, curses, or bits of philosophy. I choose to read in this process an allegory for the formation of a paradoxical and transient authorial unity, the identity of one text as a set of syntactic, semantic, and narrative patterns one works hard to make legible, at which point one can disappear. He writes,

RERITES is a rite. Every morning for 2 hours (normally 6:30-8:30am) I get up and edit the poetic output of a neural net. Deleting, weaving, conjugating, lineating, cohering. Re-writing. Re-wiring authorship: hybrid augmented enhanced evolutionary...

And it is cybermuse LSTM-enriched symbiosis: subjectivity (my own, a polyp) grafted onto a gorged mashup of culture (the corpus, 600,000 lines)...

Then it, as all forms of addiction, of illusion, shatters, breaks, stops, twitches, dies into meaninglessness, becomes too much, unnecessary, mute, overload. For it is simply a living torrent, gush read breath torqued from the mouths of the dead.

As I write under more and more voices, their failures to separate and constructed relations may become conspicuous. *Rerites*, effectively unreadable in entirety but singularly written, becomes *one thing* even though it's corpora, models, and thereby tones, change between installments – an assemblage. This is a false unity, but one I am arguing is useful, in the way imagining a single author to Wikipedia is useful, or an omniscient narrator. It reinterprets authorship for certain assemblages like mine, without necessarily rejecting the use of other subject positions. It identifies the work of constructing, as well as maintaining, such an authorial position: a rite, work, and exhaustion. I find in this kind of model not a resolution to the earlier problem of identity's contradictory frames,

One of the most striking features of *Rerites* is the way this enormous, inexhaustible, poetry collection remains very legible, at multiple levels. The writing process may be watched, in video. The code is available on Github. The produced text is downloadable in entirety, as .txt files, despite being sold in expensive printed volumes. Opened at random, the output is, as above, despite its critical, even parodic, intent readable as lyric, with its pleasures, affects, recognitions, and contemplative epiphanies. It is a mere reproduction of structure, and that structure continues to reproduce the effects of lyric authors, mythologized and affecting authorial selves, or attempted collages and deconstructions thereof. It doesn't need to be particularly good to operate, and nonetheless it occasionally is. Relations between these poems and the text of biography above may also be identified ("serotonin / neighborhoods").

<p>You're not crazy. You're not dying.</p> <p>So why are you reeling?</p> <p>Brood wailing to god about the leftovers of your Love?</p> <p>Words. Which are complex</p> <p>enough for serotonin neighbourhoods, for immortal</p> <p>passports, for timeless abridged unresponsive smoldering masks,</p> <p>for speculative bruised & ripened jellyfish,</p> <p>for 20% of the weird applause at 5:25pm,</p>	<p>wilt Thought undrugged into tethered abstractions & warm bare risk vacuums</p> <p>stars drift away to resurrect themselves as cd-roms, something lost in us</p> <p>Deleuze harvesting lichen, Kauai, manhattan wheels burning rivers</p> <p>the scales of the ground growing sadder, a</p> <p>transient system of timberwolves</p>
--	---

Arbitrary selections from near the middle of the April 2018 volume of *Rerites*

I am interested in authorship. Even while from a certain degree of abstraction notions of subject, author, and expressed subjectivity may become vacuous, and even destructive, mythologies, they remain positions in a language game with reality, interest, and force.

Titled, "Untitled" attempts to problematize its author, working in the tradition of autofiction that attempts to represent its author in order not to investigate the self itself, but the relationship between self and language.

I use *Rerites* for this discussion particularly because of the way it works between three different modes of writing with profoundly different myths of authorship: conceptual art & writing, where art-making is modeled on analytic philosophy (and its disregard for particular materials), computational generation (interested in evaluating a function's effectiveness), and lyric poetry (singing selves). Even within its more solipsistic writings, *Titled, "Untitled"* presents an autofiction – elaboration of narratives and moments of recognition and difference in the expansion of an individual – in the hope of exploring tension between structures of identification, distributions revealing tendencies and dispositions, and lines of flight. And specific categories of race, gender, and sexuality do matter importantly to this writing.

An aim of *Titled, "Untitled"* is to show certain of the invisibilities in visibility and of visibility in invisibility. This kind of concern is fairly well represented in academic criticism but rarer in popular discourses of identity. In the piece *Polycode*, a text on false legibilities written in Unicode homoglyphs, characters readable to a human but unintelligible as English to most algorithms like search and spell-checking, I hope to enact a surface equivalence that maintains visible difference within a matrix of identification presented to the viewer. It is also significant that this piece looks especially unassuming, but was one of the most laborious to write, one character at a time.

```
0399 0200 0251 217F 2009 1952 043E 1D21 2007 FF4D 03BF FF52 0435 2001 1D43 FF48 02B3 0430 045E 217E 3000 0C6B FF48 200A 2405 0251 2113 FF53 1971 2007 FF4C 19C9 FF47 2170 FF42  
0450 FF4C FF49 FF5A 0450 0443 0455 2009 1D57 2106 200B 207F 2001 0D20 FF4E FF47 2148 1971 0441 2170 FF53 2170 2174 0435 2007 FF50 217F 2139 0455 222A 1952 0501 19C9 FF52 0455 FF54  
0251 19C2 0001 0450 195D 0400 0455 2009 1D50 1D43 04B8 0201 FF54 2007 000A 0441 2C3F FF48 0435 FF52 0435 FF4E 0441 0435 2007 1D9C 0251 19C2 2008 FF54 210E 2170 0450 0D20 24D1 0250 217E 1EFF 3000 207D 2C3F 1D4D 2007 1D57 1D49 02B3 1D57 FE5E 207E  
FF4E FF54 2C3F 2007 FF5C 04B8 0201 FF54 2007 000A 0441 2C3F FF48 0435 FF52 0435 FF4E 0441 0435 2007 1D9C 0251 19C2 2008 FF54 210E 2170 0450 0D20 24D1 0250 217E 1EFF 3000 207D 2C3F 1D4D 2007 1D57 1D49 02B3 1D57 FE5E 207E  
2000 FF42 2147 FE10 000A 1342 04B8 1971 0450 0455 2007 0251 FF52 2147 2007 FF4E 2C3F 1D57 3000 0450 FF4E FF54 0435 FF4E FF54 2139 2C3F 19C2 2008 217C 0D20 2174 FF43 0450 0441 FF50 FF52 2170 24E3 0450 0455 FE5E 000A  
1342 04B8 2147 185B FF49 0435 FF54 2C3F FF4E FF52 2002 217F 1EFF 2002 FF4E 0C6B FF52 2002 217F 0443 2000 217E 0456 1D45 FF48 0435 FF52 2147 19C2 0441 1971 3000 FF46 FF52 2C3F 217F 2008 217F 0443 0455 0435 217C FF40 0D20 0D20 FF59  
2C3F FF52 0455 FE5E FF59 2007 000A 0450 0455 2002 19C2 043E FF54 2002 0441 222A FF52 1D53 1971 19C2 1D57 217C 0443 2007 FF54 210E 1971 2007 043E 0440 2C3A 043E 0455 2170 FF54 2170 2C3F 19C2 2007 043E FF48 2007 FF54  
FF5C 1959 19C8 2007 0430 195D 2148 2008 1D43 0201 2113 0440 2147 3000 0450 1971 2113 0201 0455 FF53 0D20 000A 0C6B 19C2 1971 FF5C 1EFF 0455 0251 1EFF 201A 2002 2C3F FF46 2002 217E 0450 FF49 1D43 217F FF52 0435 19C2 FF54  
FEFF 217E 0450 217E 0435 19C2 0455 2170 2C3F 19C2 19C2 02E2 00C2 0C6C FF52 2090 FF54 2007 0430 0430 0450 0455 2007 0450 19C2 2007 0251 2007 FEFF 217E FF52 0435 0455 201A 3000 FF42 222A 1D57 3000 000A FF54 210E 0435 3000 1D21  
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FF31 1971 2007 0441 2C3F 19C2 FF54 139 19C2 FF53 1971 2002 FF54 008A 2002 FF4E 19C9 2007 FF54 2C3F 2113 2146 0D20 0001 1959 19C2 FF54 2148 0450 FF4E 1971 1EFF FF54 0430 FF48 1971 2002 2C21 0251 03B3 2170 0C6B 222A  
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03B0 FF49 FF53 FF4E FF42 217C FF4E 0D20 FF4E FF4E FF54 FF57 03BF FF52 FF48 0D20 03BF FF4D 0435 FF53 0455 0430 FF47 2170 FF4E FF47 0D20 03F2 04B8 FF45 217F 2170 03F2 FF41 FF4C 0455 201A 0D20 03F2 217C 0435 0430 FF52  
FF4C FF59 0D20 000A FF5B FF4F FF54 0D20 03BF 042C 217C 0450 FF51 FF50 0435 FF4C 0443 201A 0D20 FF4C FF40 0430 FF52 FF4E 0430 0501 0D20 FF54 04B8 0430 0450 FF52 0D20 0501 0450 FF52 FF45 2170 FF54 2170 FF4F FF4E 0455 0D20 043E  
FF40 0D20 FF4E FF4C FF4E 0440 0D20 FF4B FF4E 0D20 FF4E 0430 FF52 FF54 0D20 FF4C 03BF FF4F FF4C 0D20 FF4C 04B8 0430 0D20 FF4D 03BF 03B0 0450 FF4E FF53 FF5C 0D20 000A FF57 04B8 FF4E FF4E 0D20 FF4C 04B8 FF4E FF50 0D20 0441  
FF50 FF54 0D20 0430 0450 FF41 FF43 0443 0D20 FF54 04B8 0435 FF52 0430 0D20 0450 0450 0D20 FF4E FF4F 0D20 FF57 FF41 0443 0D20 FF4E 0435 FF52 0435 0D20 FF4F FF4E 0D20 0450 0440 FF4E FF4B 2170 FF4E FF47 0D20 FF41 FF50 FF54  
FF4B FF40 FF4E FF5A 0450 FF43 FF41 FF4C FF4E 0443 201A 0D20 000A 0430 FF52 0D20 0451 FF4B 0D20 0451 0450 FF4C FF4B 0D20 0430 FF4E 0501 0D20 FF54 FF4E FF4C FF4B 0D20 0430 FF53 0D20 FF4F FF50 FF53 FF53 FF54 217C 0475 0455 FF53  
FF5C 0D20 0430 217C 03BF FF4E FF47 0D20 FF54 FF45 0D20 FF4B FF52 FF4F FF45 FF4E FF4E 0D20 FF52 FF4B 03B0 0435 FF52 FF5E 0D20 FF24 03BF 0D20 FF5B FF4F FF55 0D20 000A FF4E 043E FF54 2170 0441 FF45 0D20 FF54 04B8 03BF  
FF50 FF47 04B8 0D20 04B8 03BF FF57 0D20 FF54 04B8 2170 0450 0D20 FF54 0435 0448 FF54 0D20 FF4E FF45 0501 0D20 0450 FF50 FF45 FF4C 217C 0D20 043E FF55 FF54 0D20 FF4E 043E FF54 FF4B 2170 FF4E FF47 0D20 042C FF45 0455  
FF4B FF54 0450 FF53 0D20 FF5B 04B8 FF40 0D20 000A FF57 0430 FF50 0D20 FF54 04B8 0430 FF54 0D20 0450 FF4F FF57 FF53 0D20 FF50 FF50 0443 217C FF4C FF4E 0501 0D20 2010 0D20 217C FF4E FF4E 0430 0D20 FF4E FF4E 0430 FF54 0D20 FF50  
043E 043E FF52 201A 0D20 FF4E FF4F 03BF FF58 0D20 043E FF40 0D20 2170 FF4F 217C FF4F FF52 201A 0D20 FF4C FF40 FF41 FF50 FF4B FF4E FF47 0D20 000A 0430 0401 0430 0443 0D20 FF5D 0D20 FF45 043E 0D20  
0450 0430 0443 0D20 FF5B 0430 FF54 0D20 FF49 FF54 0D20 FF53 0430 FF59 0450 FF1F 0D20 000A
```

Figure 8 - Polycode in unicode hexadecimal strings and realization in Firefox on Windows 10

NEGATIVE THEORY, AND *Blue Notebook #10*

Titled, "Untitled" is looking for ways, and permission, to talk about subjects like math, linguistics, critical theory, and machine learning algorithms *frivolously*. This is not to talk about them without any ethics, or to make them strictly comedy, but to take up their forms *without intention, sophisticatedly, irresponsibly*. *Titled, "Untitled"* introduces itself as a failed encyclopedia, abandoned scraps, or a reconstruction from deserted notes. Certainly, this is a defensive gesture towards the time pressures and other difficulties of academic artmaking, and yet this gesture so common in a certain kind of fiction (in statements like "I have not known what to do with these papers from my departed friend X") may also serve to position the language it introduces as unenclosed, rearrangeable, unreliable, and not entirely virtuous.

The paradox of making meaning from experimental traditions, like Dada, whose expository and elegantly-shocking theorization presents early the line (in Tristan Tzara's *Dada manifesto*) "DADA DOES NOT MEAN ANYTHING" is fundamental to this project and not

to be discarded. It is in fact precisely this “theorization in the negative” which offers some of the particular potentialities for poetic intervention in intellectual culture that I am interested in - following Wittgenstein’s (among others, such as English expositions of Zen traditions) popular trope presenting (meta-)philosophy and (meta-)linguistics as ladders to be used and kicked away. Not just to ask what the theory is, but what function the preface rejecting the possibility of totalizing theory, so common in the poetic manifesto and in “anti-philosophy” (Wittgenstein, Derrida, Feyerabend, Guattari & Deleuze, Rorty), has in constituting a theory-making project.

To consider a class of literary experiment as a specific research practice requires identifying both its problematic objects, and its strategies of intervention; both the kinds of serious epistemic claims writers do make, and the questions they instead try to evade or dissolve, indeed, sometimes over their protests that they are doing nothing at all. As Ron Silliman, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, Steve Benson, Bob Perelman, and Barrett Watten write in *Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto*, “We propose not a “pure” language but a “contaminated” one, testing the relation among its constituent elements and forms, from which we do not exclude theory. This is as much to say that our writing has committed us to *more than we know*; to admit theory into our practice is to imagine what is yet to be written.” They imagine and write poetics whose meanings lie in part in their gaps, producing useful meanings in how the world and their readers try to fill these spaces and work through contradictions, a process that may reflect back *more subtly than intention* on both the material they work with and the systems of interpretation readers bring to bear on them.

Jack Halberstam writes in *The Queer Art of Failure*,

Being taken seriously means missing out on the chance to be frivolous, promiscuous, and irrelevant. The desire to be taken seriously is precisely what compels people to follow the tried and true paths of knowledge production around which I would like to map a few detours.⁴²

A heterodox logic, Intuitionism, proceeds without the law of the excluded middle (any proposition necessarily being true or false). Under this useful formal model, applicable to questions of computability, “not not P” does not have the same meaning as P. I suggest this, loosely after the poet Rosmarie Waldrop, as another metaphor for the new information provided by negations. Waldrop writes,

I worried about the gap between expression and intent, afraid the world might see a fluorescent advertisement where I meant to show a face. Sincerity is no help once we admit to the lies we tell on nocturnal occasions, even in the solitude of our own heart, wishcraft slanting the naked figure from need to seduce to fear of possession. Far better to cultivate the gap itself with its high grass for privacy and reference gone astray. Never mind that it is not philosophy, but raw electrons jumping from orbit to orbit to ready the pit for the orchestra, scrap meanings amplifying the succession of green perspectives, moist features, spasms on the lips.

I rhetorically wonder what a logical negativism entail. I speculate it would start with an interest in gesturing towards the formal (e.g. Godelian and Wittgensteinian) limits of language, and, inverting traditional positivism, remain primarily involved in writing about what cannot be said of the unsayable, rather than saying what can be said about the sayable, yet also not ceasing to say the unsayability of particular unsayables. A dramatic parallel is the practice of Apophatic Theology, identifiable in a variety of traditions but especially in the Abrahamic religions, which involves the search for theological or otherwise transcendent value in the identification of what cannot be known or said (traditionally about G(o)d(s)). The Jewish Andalusian and North African medieval philosopher Maimonides wrote in *Guide to the Perplexed*,

⁴² Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*.

G-d's existence is absolute and it includes no composition and we comprehend only the fact that He exists, not His essence. Consequently it is a false assumption to hold that He has any positive attribute [...] still less has He accidents (מקרה), which could be described by an attribute. Hence it is clear that He has no positive attribute however, the negative attributes are necessary to direct the mind to the truths which we must believe [...]

To tell a story in enough detail about the way something does not exist may still be to imagine it with a vivid particularity, to bring awareness of what remains after negating the negated. Poetic language regularly works in this mode. The OBERIU surrealist playwright and official children's book author Daniil Kharms (arrested by Tsarists as a revolutionary, expelled by Leninists for lacking social consciousness, and exiled by Stalinists for failing to verifiably teach materialist values⁴³), writes in *Blue Notebook #10* what for me is the most perfect apophatic gesture:

There was a red-haired man who had no eyes or ears. Neither did he have any hair, so he was called red-haired theoretically.

He couldn't speak, since he didn't have a mouth. Neither did he have a nose.

He didn't even have any arms or legs. He had no stomach and he had no back and he had no spine and he had no innards whatsoever. He had nothing at all! Therefore there's no knowing whom we are even talking about.

*In fact it's better that we don't say any more about him.*⁴⁴

Daniil Kharms' *Blue Notebook #10* translated by Matvei Yankelevich and licensed for attributed reuse

The character & the fiction is exactly the thing that remains after we assert there is nothing there.

⁴³ Brookes, "Enclosure, Writing, and Resistance."

⁴⁴ Kharms, *Today I Wrote Nothing*.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

DESCRIPTION OF ARTIFACTS

Describing *Titled*, “*Untitled*” is immediately complicated by its use as the title of both the wiki and Mary Porter Sesnon Gallery installation, without clarifying whether they are halves, different versions, documentations of the other, or only sharing a name. I will describe the basic arrangement of each before listing some of the other games: with this caveat that neither wiki nor room is understood as *the* canonical *Titled*, “*Untitled*.”⁴⁵In arranging *Titled*, “*Untitled*” I attempted to offer inversions and recursions. Individual games are gathered in the wiki compendium, and in the installation room - but the wiki lists the installation as a game, and the room presents the wiki on one of its many screens. It is important for *Titled*, “*Untitled*”’s theoretical interests that it be navigable, not unwelcoming, but nonetheless making these kinds of gestures to undermine its classification hierarchy.

⁴⁵ And similarly, I present this text as a complex, constrained two-way “translation” more than a “representation”

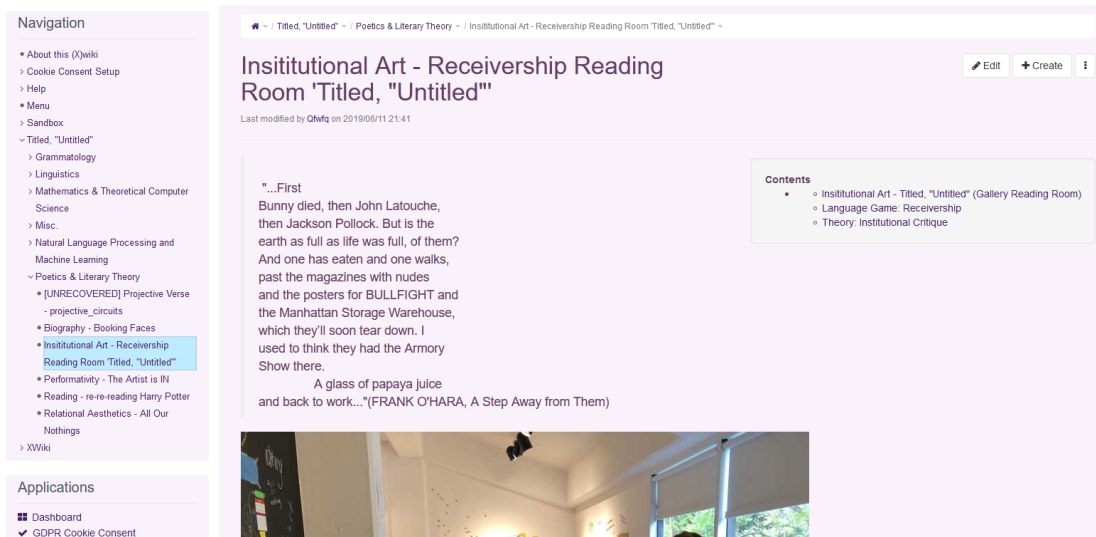


Figure 9 – Page for the installation within the Wiki

The wiki uses the Xwiki framework, an open source Java application that resembles Wikipedia (which is to say, the MediaWiki engine) but offers more customizability and substantially less documentation or support. This wiki is configured and written by this single author under pseudonyms, however it is in principle open for arbitrary editing - which it invites. Most of the authored content of the wiki is on the front page, a series of descriptions of the project in an assortment of styles - referencing the Oulipo text, Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style*. The wiki uses the informational wiki form, but also attempts to destabilize it. The cookie message is written playfully and with literary quotation. The default stub text is authored. The theme is lavender, choosing not to see this as a particularly important preference. Some pages have comments by the fictional characters appropriated into "the committee" in charge of producing the compendium.

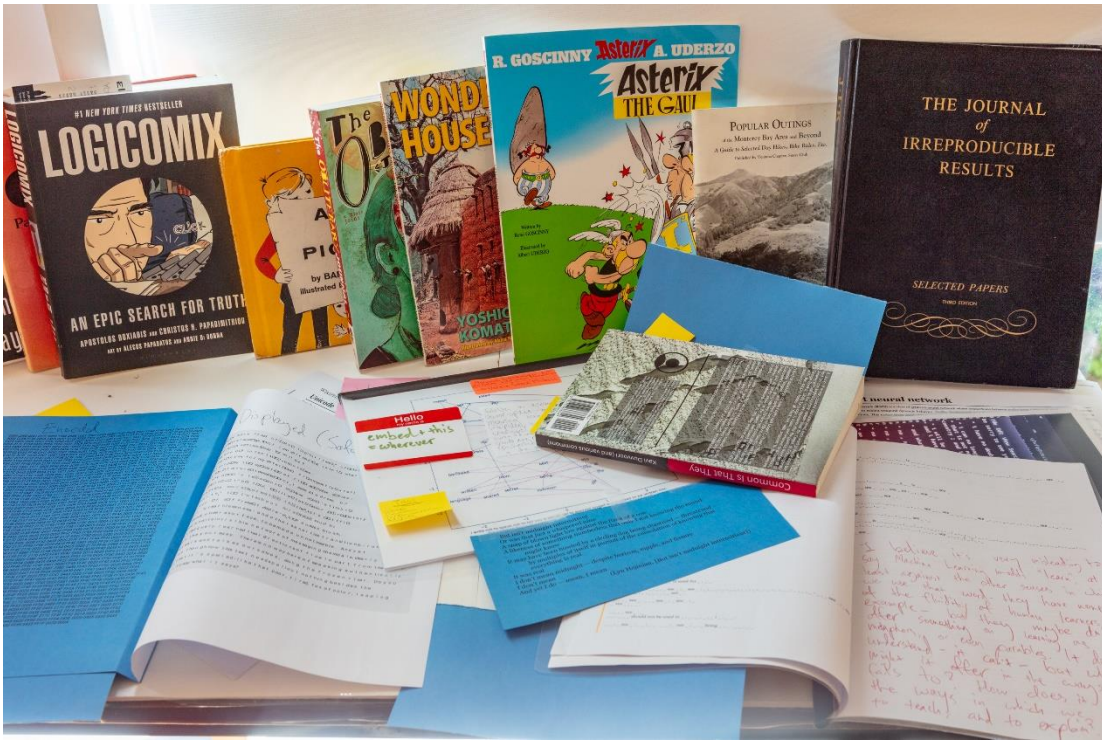


Figure 10- Printed projects on a desk in the installation

The physical installation is imagined as a kind of chaotic office, where the language games were under study. The space is a roughly 8 foot x 16 foot room with a large central window and one entrance. A desk with stools behind it hosts various monitors with old mice and keyboards locked in browser windows hosting some of the interactive language games. A desk in front of the window is full of printed, static, projects. Each one is annotated with handwritten stickers, and has a printout of the Wikipedia page on the relevant formal theory next to it. Remaining space is covered with piles of books borrowed from my and my parents libraries that obliquely - with children's books, birdwatching guides, and cookbooks more often than literary theory - relate to the concerns of the project. A couch sits opposite the window. Various signage, in forms including the business card, and printed Microsoft Word art instruct visitors to interact with or touch the work as freely as they like. A podium at the front has the text from the front page of the wiki printed (on colored pages) and taped to it.

The walls are full of printed code, texts, and other outputs, attached with green duct tape. A large chalkboard opposite the window hosts a game inviting visitors to "WRITE NOTHING (SWEETLY, IF YOU LIKE)." The back corner of the room hosts a pile of papers, both trash, old schoolwork, and other personal linguistic output, like postcards. Some printed pieces are left unmarked, including a prose fiction on the desk and a text in an especially unguarded and confessional first-person mode left (and repeatedly replaced) under the couch. Describing some of the projects, available in both the wiki and the installation, may give a better sense of *Titled, "Untitled."*

Room With Montague

Description: Descriptive prose is written, implementing a Montague grammar style compositional semantics. The prose describes the author's dorm room and the room in which the logician Richard Montague was murdered (only working from a few passages in another logician's biography). The terse evaluations of the semantic model are contrasted with much looser hand-authored descriptive prose, which the model would tend to consider nonsense.

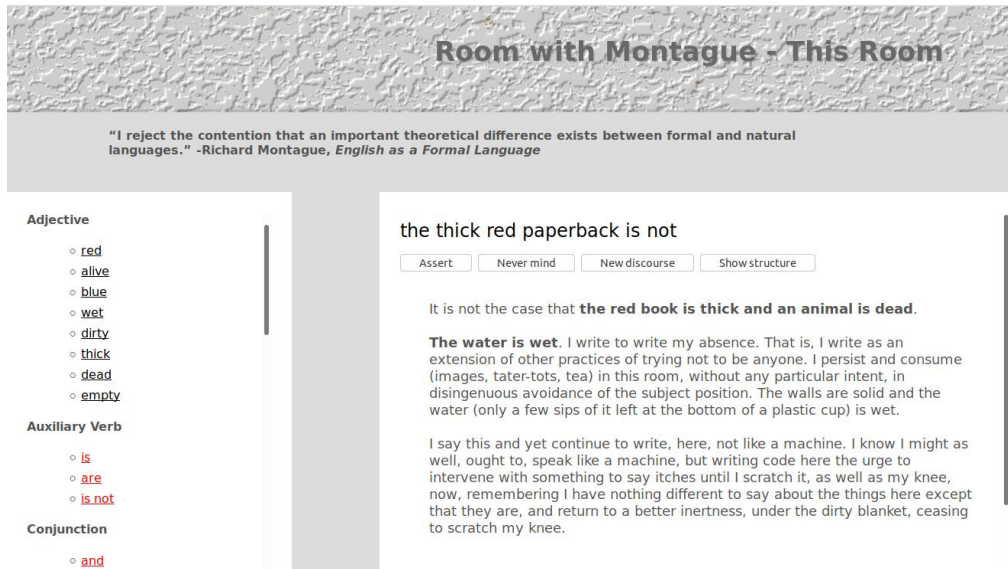


Figure 11 - The interface of Room With Montague

The Builder's Language (a Cartridge)

Description: Wittgenstein's first example of a language game, now known as “the builder’s language,” is implemented as a Pico-8 cartridge. Pico-8 is a fantasy console for making tiny games, with an 8x8 sprite editor, and room for 35 KB of content. *The Builder’s Language (a Cartridge)* puts the player in the position of an assistant B, bringing building-stones to a builder A.

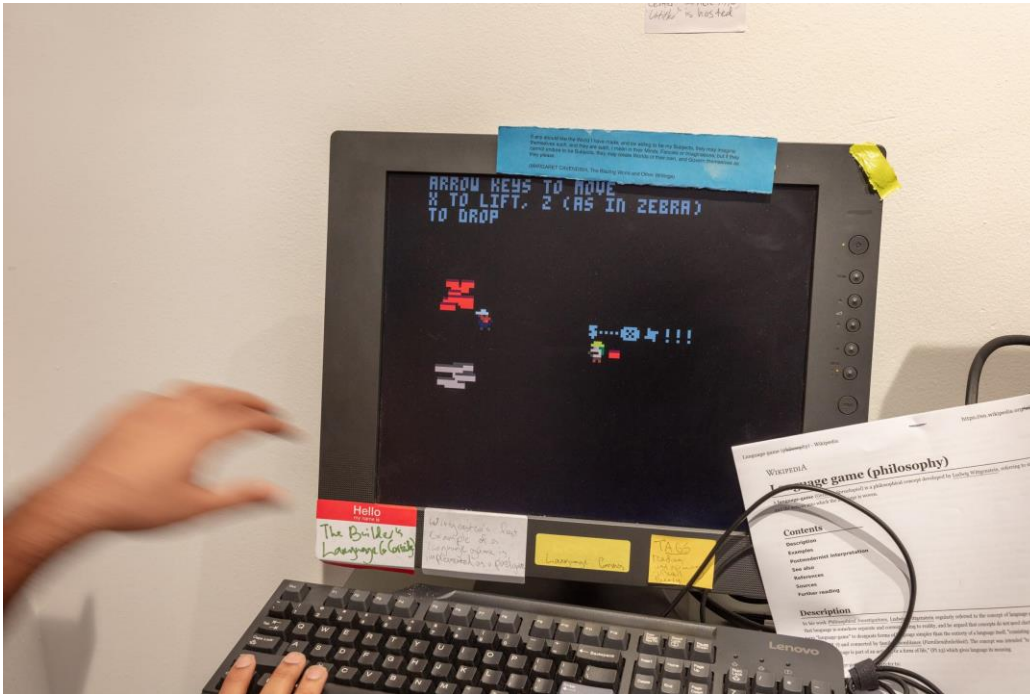


Figure 12 - The Builder's Language played on a computer

`embed+this=wherever`

Description: `embed+this=wherever` consists of short texts successively modified using GloVe word embeddings, an attempt to quantify the meanings of words by approximating the linear relationships of words in a text by distances in a high dimensional space of vectors, lists of numbers, projected down by `embed+this=wherever` onto the 2D surface of diagrams with Principal Component Analysis and plotted with the common data-visualization library *matplotlib*. The words in a sentence are diagrammed or constellated by their distance in the model, as words and character shapes change down lines of computed closeness. Some of these digital plots are sketched, painted, and reproduced on a wall with labeled glow-in-the-dark stars in the physical installation.

I don't mean midnight — despite horizon, nipple, and fissure
I don't mean
And yet I do — mean, I mean
(LYN HEJINIAN, [But Isn't midnight Intermittent])

Language Game: embed+this=wherever²

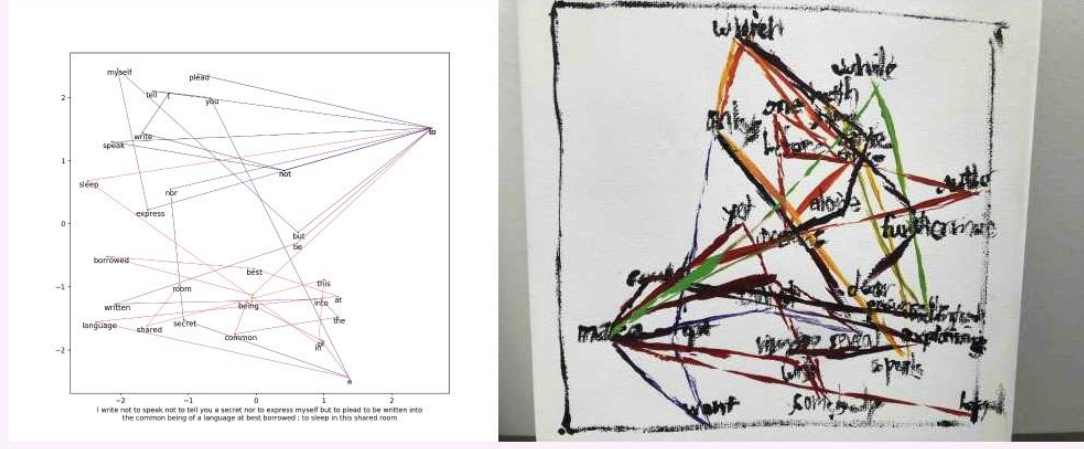


Figure 13 - Epigraphed image of a program output and paint sketch of a "sentence constellation" in embed+this=wherever

Common is that They

Description: A string of words is claimed and unlicensed, each word probable from the last (in the high-frequency sample from the Corpus of Contemporary American English) but never appearing after the previous three (in all of Google Books). Likely language is found, and returned to a commons, with the proper forms all filled out, with payment to the relevant authorities. A kind of afterimage of John Cayley and Daniel C. Howe's "How It Is In Common Tongues," and perhaps some of Allison Parrish's and Kenneth Goldsmith's work, along with less familiar anticipatory plagiarists (as the Oulipo put it).

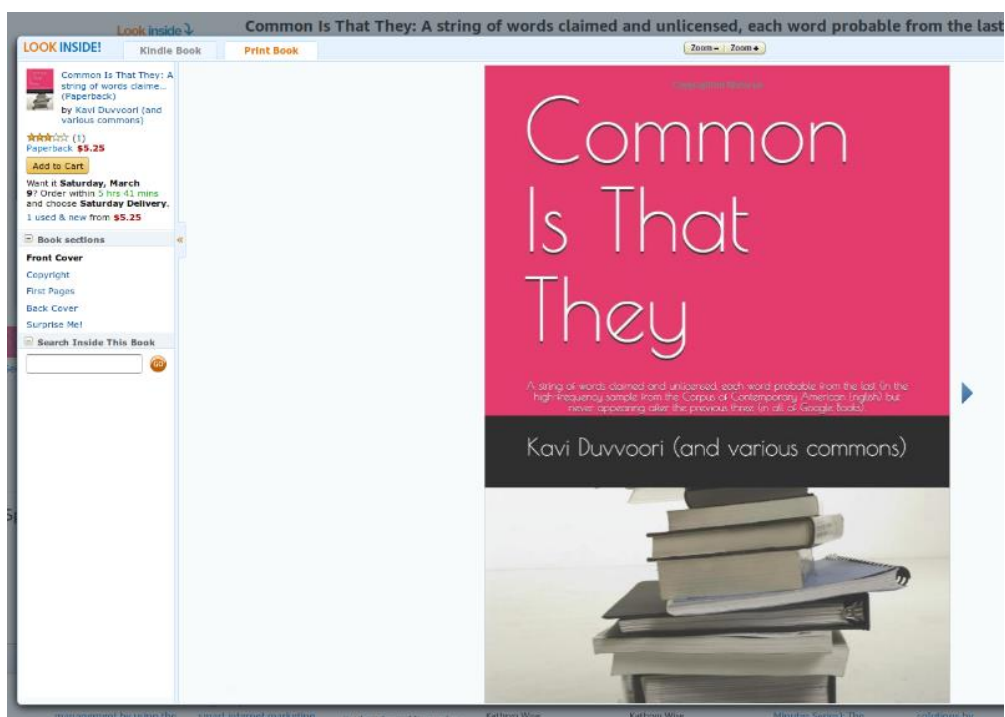


Figure 14 - Amazon store page for Common Is That They

A Dot Product Primer

Description: A neural network model is trained on a variety of freely available texts with “Primer” in their title. The output at various stages of training is sampled, and I highlight phrases and write notes around output that I find compelling. This kind of RNN model trains a system of hundreds of “cells” that are updated to predict a word in the source texts from the sequences of (vector-encoded) words before and after it. Each individual cell itself develops a prediction of when to take input, send output, and forget the prediction-functions it had learned, by assigning responsibility for prediction errors through a process called backpropagation. A Python library for LSTM encoder-decoder neural networks, textgenrnn, is used, and a sketch and brief technical description of the model are provided. This process is performed with astonishing rapidity on an expensive graphics card, which is to say a silicon

wafer with transistors designed at the atomic scale and manufactured in one of a small number of factories in Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, and Arizona, all exclusively to multiply large numbers of 4x4 matrices in parallel. I start from the assumption that such a system doesn't "learn" in any way analogous to human learning, but that its successes, failures, and way of stuttering (to anthropomorphize) may reflect something about how we explain language and the things it represents, to ourselves.

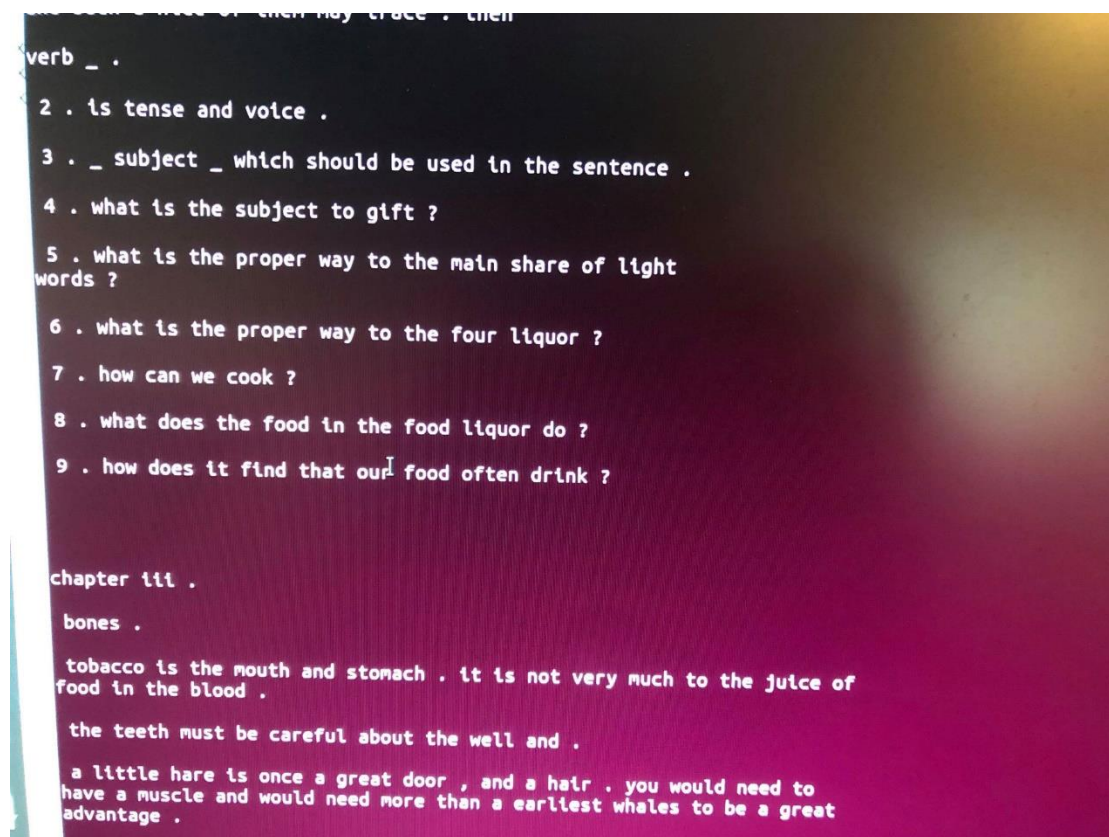


Figure 15 - A screen of output from *A Dot Product Primer* that is printed in color in the installation

OHELLOHI ILIEHIDE Variations

Description: *OHELLOHI ILIEHIDE Variations* explores the way digital language flickers between being arithmetic data and social communication. A $2^6 \times 2^6$ grid of 6 letters, chosen

for their ability to combine promiscuously into many short words, are cycled and transformed by Conway's "Game of Life," simulating growth in a grid of "alive" and "dead" cells, a degeneration that produces structure from noise. When posting the project online, I noticed Google Translate attempted to process the random combinations of letters as Somali! Languages like Somali for which their translation model is trained on a relatively small number of documents often produce these false positives – in this case, it seems to source translations in a Somali love song. In displaying OHELLOHI ILIEHIDE, I also show this “translation” as it so serendipitously raises the same problems about simple (even “cellular”) models finding structure with human resonance in noise.

Sample:



This page has been translated from Somali to English.



Always translate Somali



[SHOW ORIGINAL](#)

[DONE](#)

Each project is labeled with a corresponding theory, such as “Formal Semantics,” “Vector Space Models,” or “Copyright Law,” and a discipline such as “Linguistics,” “Poetics and Literary Theory,” or “Natural Language Processing and Machine Learning.” In the installation the name is written on a “HELLO my name is” tag. The corresponding Wikipedia entry is printed out adjacent.. A post-it note lists tags like “Reading Visual De/regenerations Juxtapositions.” They are further attached to an epigraph, and a brief artist’s statement like the ones above. Various additional small completed projects exist in *Titled*, “*Untitled*.”

TECHNICAL AND PROCEDURAL DESCRIPTION

The time-intensive technical considerations in *Titled*, *“Untitled”* center on the difficulty of making a project with various web-based, computational components. Particular problems arise when wanting to make something that is likely to continue to work and be supported for a number of years, something that uses a range of computational frameworks and libraries, and one that wants to do some computation on a server rather than in a browser (for example, to store and read from a large database). These problems turn out to be fairly general ones, in commercial as well as hobbyist software development, and thus formulating a solution to them required considering the solutions common in industry. This presented a small opportunity to bring my interest in the infrastructures and ideologies of contemporary networked computation into the actual operation and development of the piece.

Describing the operation of a software projects really involves listing Open Source and industry tools and standards, unlikely to last. *Titled*, *“Untitled”*'s computation happens on a cloud virtual private server instance, itself hosting containers specified in a manifest that run, using various build tools and package managers (including SBT, Pip, and NPM), execution environments such as the Java Virtual Machine which then communicate through REST APIs with Javascript clients through channels managed and filtered by an Nginx Reverse Proxy encrypted under the certification of Let's Encrypt's Certbot - and in the process unavoidably passing through Microsoft, Canonical, Digital Ocean, Mozilla, Google, and Oracle owned or developed platforms. Data is then transformed into a text display via specifications in the standard stack of HTML/CSS/Javascript. Figuring out how to do this mostly involves searching for keywords then following “10 minute” or “Getting Started With” tutorials on

websites like Medium, Datacamp, and Tutorialspoint, before diagnosing problems on the Stackexchange forum.

In some ways artistic software development has become much easier than in the early net.art era, with sophisticated libraries, high quality editors, extensive online forums and documentation, and error-catching tools that permit working at a high level of abstraction rather than struggling to understand individual graphics libraries, compatibility standards, and even memory allocation schemes. In other ways though, these hierarchical abstractions create new forms of mystification, and burdens of cultural knowledge required in order to make work in these media. It is not enough to try to understand how computing machines work, but also necessary to understand how the platform-holding companies work, and how software engineers explain themselves to each other.

I choose to use the “virtualization” technology Docker, to run individual projects within simulations of Linux computers with specified programs and dependencies, units called *containers*. Here, a paradigm in computing that might be or possibly already is of interest to Software Studies researchers is that of the “specification,” rather than the “program.” Docker (or docker-compose), like many other tools (including modern libraries like Keras for machine learning execution) asks not for a set of procedures but a (YAML - “YAML Ain’t Meta Language”) document describing values, naming, and providing “flags” to determine how a software package is configured. With Docker, this involves writing a file that lists every container you want to run, identifying a file or online “image” it realizes, and specifying certain properties like storage and networking addresses.

Note how this structure itself, like so many around “objects” in computation work in a Platonic metaphor of unchanging, genealogically derived, forms, and varying and unreliable

instantiations. In fact, a corporate sponsor drops the product or the volunteer maintainer gets a job, and after a year or two most libraries and images themselves cryptically cease to work with deprecation flags and complex errors as other pieces of software change. Wendy Chun writes about this way things that aren't updated become "dead" in *Habitual New Media*⁴⁶ through the aphoristic equation "CRISIS + HABIT = UPDATE" and it remains a fundamental problem⁴⁷, but virtualization and dependency technologies like Docker may slow some of this falling apart.

The other, even more significant, work of the project, is simply writing. The parts which are not first written by hand are mostly composed in Google Docs before incorporation. Sometimes the writing is done directly in the code for the program that will make use of it. Once the wiki was running, I wrote most of it directly in XWiki's What You See Is What You Get (WYSIWYG) editor window, occasionally switching to the raw Velocity scripting markup.

The installation was constructed without much design: printing out, arranging, and taping to walls iteratively and improvisationally. A number of student workers worked hard in the Mary Porter Sesnon Gallery to repaint walls, set up furniture, and so on, although I tried to discourage them from repainting whenever possible⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*.

⁴⁷ Warren Sack also writes about these differences between abstractions of logic and material, temporal, instantiations in *Software Arts*.

⁴⁸ I was warned that leaving an unpainted shelf might reflect badly on the gallery, even if one tried to indicate it was intentional

GOALS AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Titled, "Untitled" hopes to illustrate a *way of making* literary art involved with technical theories. To do this, I tried to produce a large enough variety of working algorithmically mediated projects that the possibility of such methods might be identified in the space of its variations. I also hoped to develop ways to make these obscure, technical, projects at least somewhat engaging to reasonably varied audiences - in the literal sense of extracting time from visitors, and not evoking excessive regret at having wasted it, later.

Titled, "Untitled" may offer the most to audiences with similar interests, in experimental poetry, games, software studies, and / or linguistics, but it is interested in nonetheless communicating with curious audiences who may be less familiar with these fields. In a university exhibit seen by many undergraduate students, families, and community members, I developed the installation with a hope to offer some legible resonances within certain American & Californian popular imaginaries. Within this context, it tries to challenge (like the work of so many others) understandings of the relationship or distance between technology, science, and art, and (like the work of so many others) of the relationship between visibility, certainty, identity, language, and liberations. In these concerns, it may be partially distinguished (from some of those so many others) by its frequent playfulness, twee diaristic mode, and use of sardonic humor - aesthetic strategies more often associated with young networked cultures and experimental games than with gallery art or university-

patronized literature. *Titled*, “*Untitled*” also does aim to provide what might be a first exposure to computationally mediated literature - a genre that remains obscure - and to some Natural Language Processing models – a class of technology that is used frequently but not given much public analysis or deliberation. This project does not extensively explain or critique these technologies in their socioeconomic realities but may inspire in some viewers a curiosity to research them more.

To try then to communicate to broad audiences, rather than giving an increasingly straightforward or general exposition and presentation, *Titled*, “*Untitled*” instead attempts to offer an abundance of options, excess, so an individual visitor will more likely find *something* of interest. While none are polished or novel on their own, there is code for those interested in programming or math, writing for those interested in writing, games for gamers, and the room and the duct tape for those interested in visual culture. In presenting this excess, *Titled*, “*Untitled*” hopes to invite exploration without an expectation of exhaustion, or decisive understanding; the struggle many readers not already invested in poetics have with experimental literature is often their feeling of a need to reach understanding and conventionally aesthetic appreciation.

Titled, “*Untitled*’s excess of optional directions was developed as a strategy of response, a way of limiting the burden of the imperative to understand.

I would be bothered if the project seemed to support fascistic, sexist, religious fundamentalist, queerphobic, (ethno)nationalist, militarist, laissez faire capitalist, or other American conservative ideologies, but short of that I am quite happy with most

audiences extracting whatever affects and interpretations they personally find interesting or useful. Certainly, *Titled, "Untitled"* is a frequently speaking, communicative to excessive, work, but my worry about whether that evasive communication becomes decoded is a merely psychological, rather than artistic, concern here.

Finally, it does not want to be at all prescriptive about an audience's encounter. Especially considering the way art exhibits are often seen by distracted groups under time pressure, *Titled, "Untitled"* would like to make possible a pleasant enough experience even without *any* engagement with the intellectual, social, and aesthetic concerns previously described. If someone picks up a comic, reads it on a couch for 5 minutes, then leaves, I consider that a very successful encounter, perhaps even more so than someone staring thoughtfully at a computer generated poem or drawing for 30 seconds, interpreting it, then leaving.

CONCLUSION (FINITENESS)

One of the first and still most interesting potentials of procedural literature is simply the ability to create (countably) infinite spaces of language: texts, like Borges' hexagonal library⁴⁹ that extend beyond any readers ability to read them. A necessary gesture here: in writing in avoidance of the false certainties of narrative closure and theoretical totalization, how can a text mark and respond to its finiteness - what gestures of ending remain or become possible? Noah Wardrip-Fruin's no longer accessible *Book of Endings*⁵⁰ was a hypertext fiction in the 1994 internet, where every page could be an ending, enterable through the directories of that early web, all now inaccessible, most without record.

Titled, "*Untitled*" opens with a gesture of failure, a note saying,

Here is the scene, as we found it. The Committee was working here on the Compendium of language games, but they are gone now, we don't know where they are, we don't know what to do with these scraps, how to record and organize and Complete their Commission, before this site must be Cleaned up.

It is committed to remaining a structure that isn't finished or closed. In this way, *Titled*, "*Untitled*" is a way of making digital language works I plan to continue to develop: I understand the wiki as something in progress, likely indefinitely, and which will continue to include new projects as they are made – a portfolio that is also the work it refers to.

It was certainly interesting to make language in and for a gallery space however, something I would be interested now in doing again. In making a process of research, reading, and thought into an exchange and occasionally a conversation, the official and institutional

⁴⁹ Computationally realized by Johnathan Basile at <https://libraryofbabel.info>, Basile, *Tar for Mortar*.

⁵⁰ Wardrip-Fruin, *Book of Endings*.

realization of *Titled*, “*Untitled*” felt successful and exciting, a realization of some of the aspirations for poetic research articulated here, and a source of professionalizing confidence. I was very happy with the amount of engagement the piece seemed to receive, and the responses and time I witnessed it evoking. Visitors in general seemed to spend substantially longer in *Titled*, “*Untitled*” than I had expected, especially given the generally hurried gallery situation discussed earlier. The chalkboard became covered with responses, many of which did seem to satisfactorily “say nothing,” often quite ingeniously.

Titled, “*Untitled*” however fails fundamentally in its stated interest to represent language as a social institution, and the way its meaning is produced by its encounters with and contexts in worlds. Not only is the piece obsessed with its author when not with itself, it leans so much on the mythologies of the gentleman scientist, encyclopedist, philosopher, and Wikipedia moderator, especially in the nature of the displayed “writing table” from which its network of concepts are produced. It manages to indicate certain methodological limits but not those of these figures. Flagging something critique leads nowhere more useful if no kind of alternative is honestly presented. It is only ever rhetorically political, and there are more urgently specific matters to argue. One hopes an artist’s attempts to record and reflect on the ways they continue to happen in the world will be useful preparation for such other works.

After Geryon, his autobiography in sculpture and photographs and verse, what are the possible forms an autobiography may take, and need they be different from a theory? I have read the books or chapters at least once, but because texts are not searchable or transcribed due to Intellectual Property law, I find the quotations on (the Amazon owned) goodreads.com. Maggie Nelson writes in *Argonauts*,

Whatever I am, or have since become, I know now that slipperiness isn’t all of it. I know now that a studied evasiveness has its own limitations, its own ways of inhibiting certain

forms of happiness and pleasure. The pleasure of abiding. The pleasure of insistence, of persistence. The pleasure of obligation, the pleasure of dependency. The pleasures of ordinary devotion. The pleasure of recognizing that one may have to undergo the same realizations, write the same notes in the margin, return to the same themes in one's work, relearn the same emotional truths, write the same book over and over again—not because one is stupid or obstinate or incapable of change, but because such revisitations constitute a life.⁵¹

Is this observation on the limits of evasiveness, by an author I admire, who has shaped thinking and even life, compatible with *Titled*, "*Untitled*"? It is at least the problem. Art tends to erase and remake itself, but as a wiki does so it leaves a database of traces (unless someone corrupts or drop tables from the database). In rejecting genealogical models of research, *Titled*, "*Untitled*" must also deny that it is inferior to its successor.

With a project now completed, an unideal reality that also carries mistakes made conspicuous and triumphs making complacency, can I really continue making work not believing I will decisively learn, advance, and improve from it? There is a way out: the successor will not be a necessarily more true, necessarily more articulate, digital literary artwork but the *relations* between *Titled*, "*Untitled*" and, say, *Untitled Titles*, becomes a creative place with interest, novelty, and use. Indeed, *Titled*, "*Untitled*"'s way of gathering small projects varying and reconsidering similar ideas, itself models what I hope happens with it - for me or for other interlocutors - an opened room of textures and recombinations, and even a place to sit and to read – to read my⁵² own work, self, and language (which is not mine).

After a project is finished, it begins to exist: it can be recorded, written about, and presented.

In presenting this work, one might ask, '*Where in the world is Titled, "Untitled"?*' The installation clearly is over. It sits in two tote bags, a recycle bin, this document, digital

⁵¹ Nelson, *The Argonauts*.

⁵² For no one other than another student writing a thesis paper has any chance of looking at this paper, once it enters its archive

images, memory, and an assortment of text files. It is unlikely to be recreated, as an installation, if only because most of the printouts and annotations have become torn and recycled. The code and data remain on my hard drive, and their networked backups (a Microsoft database, presumably replicated across continents). In this form, it is not viewable without authorization. The wiki remains, but with cost. To be present in the surface of any browser, located through the address “https://titleduntitled.name/” pointing to the IPv4 address 104.248.79.188, I pay \$20 per month for the virtualized processors and memory that serve it, and the space in official records: it will remain as long as this feels like a worthwhile expense, and after become idle in Digital Ocean’s contracted section of Telx’s SCL2 Interconnection, Cloud and Colocation Data Center in Santa Clara, California.

This paper, to be printed in the UCSC library and digitally distributed through the Ann Arbor, Michigan based ProQuest LLC’s database, and two presentations, including one recorded and published on Google’s Youtube, also are routes to *Titled*, “*Untitled*.” To offer a final location for *Titled*, “*Untitled*” though, I would like to make a different gesture⁵³ – that of claiming things which do not belong to me: after land artists aestheticizing and presenting topography, situationists aestheticizing and performing cities, and conceptual artists aestheticizing and presenting spaces of ideas, I hope the form of *Titled*, “*Untitled*” begins to encompass work I did not produce, but might have. The Oulipo writers accuse such work of “plagiarism by anticipation.”⁵⁴ Jorge Louis Borges writes about how Kafka’s writing invents his precursors⁵⁵ (making them Kafkaesque, rather than Kafka invented by them). I do not make such a claim to originality, but rather that an appropriate gesture of closure for its author, after working to

⁵³ Flusser, *Gestures*.

⁵⁴ Le Lionnais, “Lipo.”

⁵⁵ Borges, “Kafka and His Precursors.”

identify some of the threads⁵⁶ that compose *Titled*, “*Untitled*” is to show a way that, for its author, the methods of *Titled* “*Untitled*” become present in work by others, that precede it.


The Wikipedia page of paper opens with an image illustrating paper’s variations: a hardcover book, cereal box, roll of toilet paper, egg carton, and sheet of printer paper. The text performs its form of definition, as though without prior knowledge yet with curious specificities, with a precision that becomes indistinguishable from parody. I read this parody, or at least this voice of absurd particularity, in the attempt to enumerate the unenumerable, in the curious construction, informative tautology, “legal or non-legal documentation.” That the first figure is an extensive table of Chinese characters for the word “Paper” is similarly strangely apt, pointing both to a history of papermaking and a set of problems around inscription, alphabetization, calligraphy, pronunciation, and universal language that paper itself is a technology to resolve. Now, I type into a skeumorphic representation of a page.

⁵⁶ and stitches, and fibrous plants and mammals

Paper

文A ☆ 🔒

For other uses, see Paper (disambiguation).



Paper products: book, toilet paper, Ruled paper, carton, egg box

Paper is a thin material produced by pressing together moist fibres of cellulose pulp derived from wood, rags or grasses, and drying them into flexible sheets. It is a versatile material with many uses, including writing, printing, packaging, cleaning, decorating, and a number of industrial and construction processes. Papers are essential in legal or non-legal documentation.

Paper

Paper

紙
纸

"Paper" in Traditional (top) and Simplified (bottom) Chinese characters

Traditional Chinese	紙
Simplified Chinese	纸

Transcriptions

Standard Mandarin

Hanyu Pinyin	zhǐ
IPA	[tʂǐ]

Wu

Suzhounese	tsỳ
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Yue: Cantonese

Yale Romanization	jǐ
Jyutping	zi2

Southern Min

Hokkien POJ	choá
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Figure 16 - Wikipedia article on Paper (in a mobile browser at 5:11 PM 6/13/2019)

It exemplifies, archetypically, the method I have tried to describe: a discourse, that of Wikipedia (or in general, networked encyclopedic certainties generated from a collective of amateurs), is pushed towards revealing aesthetic strangeness. To make sense of it, we move suddenly between approximations of different disciplines' discourses – industrial craft, biochemistry, law, linguistics – history and ecology past the end of the figures. An “author” takes on multiple voices – indeed mixes materials from a range of sources including contributors and authors, but also of template authoring, phonology, formatting markup, and hyperlinked extension. Still, the collective author has problematic, specific, voice. This text is then filtered through server technologies, and made differently individual (e.g. in layout) before it is read. This found text, like so many others, becomes not just a rich element for collage, but a text in itself that I claim (against its intentions) as an extension of this project.

This page will become paper: to understand how, before even worrying about the physical or scientific industry of the page and its determining technologies, it must pass through forms of markup, synchronized citation and field-template systems, data encoding schemes, networks, closed databases, the approval of those required to arbitrate the boundaries of institutional discourses, algorithmically measured quality control rating schemes, corporations, and only then the physics of printing, and binding, or the postal system. How is a writer to begin to understand this material in/on which they are writing (*Titled* “*Untitled*” asks)?

Borges (another encyclopedist of speculative concepts) has a story *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*⁵⁷ in which he imagines the discovery of an encyclopedia from a society and language that only has phenomenal speech: no one ever refers to things as material, non-relative, or objective realities – a sort of anti-Wikipedia. This encyclopedia, whatever its origins gradually enters this world, until it changes it, us, and our language. I hope *Titled*, “*Untitled*,” including the parodic, absurd, aporetic “Paper” article in English Wikipedia, may similarly play with, problematize, and maybe even enact, this strange encyclopedic in-betweenness: naming a world precisely as it is read within and in a process of changing it.

⁵⁷ Borges, *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*.

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