

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:                   DIGITAL POETRY: COMPARATIVE TEXTUAL  
PERFORMANCES IN TRANS-MEDIAL SPACES

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This study extends work on notions of space and performance developed by media and poetry theorists. I particularly analyze how contemporary technologies re-define the writing space of digital poetry making by investigating the configuration and the function of this space in the writing of the digital poem. Thus, I employ David Jay Bolter's concept of "topographic" digital writing and propose the term "trans-medial" space to describe the computer space in which the digital poem exists, emerges, and is experienced. With origins in Italian Futurism, the literary avant-garde of the first half of twentieth century, digital poetry extends the creative repertoire of this experimental poetry tradition using computers in the composition, generation, or presentation of texts. Because these poems convey a perception of space as changeable and multiple (made of computer screen and code spaces), this "trans-medial" space is both self-transformative (forms itself as it self-transforms) and transforming (transforms what it contains). Media

scholars such as Espen Aarseth and Stephanie Strickland often explain how computer programming makes such digital works become sites of encounter between agencies such as author, text, or readers. Conversely, I show that this “trans-medial” space is also a mediating agent in the performance of the text along with its readers in the sense that it engages in and with the performance of text. I examine three forms of digital poetry: Gianni Toti’s video-poetry, Caterina Davinio’s net-poetry, and Loss Pequeño Glazier’s JavaScript-based poetry. These Italian and United States poet-scholars are leading figures in digital poetry. As scholars, they articulate the theoretical frameworks of this genre in landmark anthologies. As poets, their digital works are similar in that they are indebted to Italian Futurism; and yet they represent distinct visions of and about poetry in new media spaces. I use their works to think through video-graphic spaces, networked spaces, and scripting spaces as expressions of trans-medial space. In this respect, my comparative analysis opens up new venues for the reading of digital poetry by re-fashioning the concept and the function of the writing space of our digitized world.

DIGITAL POETRY:  
COMPARATIVE TEXTUAL PERFORMANCES IN TRANS-MEDIAL SPACES

By

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## Introduction

Digital poetry as a genre emerged, developed, and continually diversified from its beginnings in the 1960s as an algorithm-based text, then becoming a graphical / kinetic text, appearing as a hypertext in the 1980s and emerging as a networked media text in the 1990s. Although conceptually such poetry draws on the creative repertoire of experimental twentieth century poetry, technically it reflects the diverse technologies that emerge in innovative digital processes. Digital poetry is an expression of contemporary technologies of writing, and the making of these digital poeties calls attention to how such technologies foster diverse forms of poetry writing.

Significantly, poetry has always engaged with the technologies of its making. It is a characteristic seen in the roots of the word itself. Etymologically, the word “poetry” stems from the Greek “poiesis,” which means “to create,” “to make.” Originally used as a verb implying an action, the word has now the meaning of a noun which references “creation” or “making.” That is to say poetry entails both the act of making and the object created. The transition from oral to print and then to new media culture testifies how diverse forms of poetry emerge in and with diverse writing spaces.

Thus, in oral culture, poetry is created in an oral space that is the space in which the word is uttered and transmitted. Because the oral poet “writes” directly to the minds of the audience, the space of poetry writing becomes the space between the poet and his audience. In this way, the writing space of the poem is an oral space of memory as well. Also, because in an oral culture the word exists only in sound as spoken language, the poem exists essentially in the act of speaking and hearing. Hence, oral poetry is ephemeral, and calls for a “here and now” experience. Later on, with print culture, poetry



is tied to page as a writing space. This space draws attention to the visual qualities of the word. Significantly, this writing space reveals itself as a space of memory which records the spoken words on the page in the form of script that becomes a poem only when readers encounter it. Thus, the print poem comes into existence in the act of reading. In new media culture, poetry relies on the use of various computer media in the composition, generation, or presentation of the text. As a result, in digital poetry, “poiesis” becomes “p0es1s” in that its making integrates the zeros and the ones of the digital writing space.<sup>1</sup> As I will demonstrate, the writing space in which the digital poem is made manifest fosters a particular perception vis-à-vis the act of writing and the poem as a product.

The correlation between digital poetry and the ways in which contemporary technologies re-define the writing space is significantly timely. In 1991 new media theorist David Jay Bolter traces the changing technologies of writing and associates the emergence of hypertext with the “topographic” quality of digital writing: the mathematical arrangement of verbal ideas in visual spaces.<sup>2</sup> My dissertation re-fashions Bolter’s “topographic writing” by proposing the concept of a “trans-medial” space. This concept examines how digital poetry exists, emerges, and is experienced only within a digital space and how it conveys a perception of the writing space as multiple and changeable. It is a writing space made of multiple spaces of encoding and decoding which interconnect with one another and give birth to an “in-between space.” This “trans-

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<sup>1</sup> See Friedrich W. Block, “The Aesthetics of Digital Poetry: An Introduction,” *P0es1s: Ästhetik digitaler Poesie = P0es1s: The Aesthetics of Digital Poetry*, eds. Friedrich W. Block, Christiane Heibach, Karin Wenz (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 11-37.

<sup>2</sup> See David Jay Bolter, “The Elements of Writing,” *Writing Space: Computers, Hypertext, and the History of Writing* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1991), 45-63.

medial” space is self-transformative (transforms itself) and transforming (transforms what it contains). It forms itself as it self-transforms. “Trans-medial” space provides a new paradigm for thinking about the writing space of digital poetry and substantiates how the reading of the spaces in which the text of the digital poems exists conveys a broader understanding of these works. Significantly, the present technologies of writing call for the trans-medial quality of writing in that they open up new venues for the reading of the digital works by considering the spaces of the computer screen, source code, and code execution.

The three forms of digital poetry I will examine are: video-poetry, net-poetry, and JavaScript-based poetry. These poems trace significant stages in the historical development of digital poetry as a genre and are expressions of video as an experimental writing technology in the late 1980s, of World Wide Web network writing initiatives, and JavaScript as an emerging computer programming language in the late 1990s. Moreover, these poems unveil distinct visions of and about the form that poetry takes in new media spaces. In this respect, a comparative approach provides the framework for the understanding of writing spaces such as video-graphic spaces, networked spaces, and scripting spaces as expressions of the trans-medial space. Also, because these digital poems are created by Italian and United States poets, they reflect different cultural traditions. As a result, my analysis of these works situates digital poetry as a field within a comparative framework. This cross-cultural comparison calls attention to the literary legacy of this genre underlining the connection between digital poetry and Italian Futurism as a significant moment in its conceptual foundation. It also expands the vision of this genre from within the perspective of American discourse through the re-

contextualization of video-poetry, one of the important forms that digital poetry takes within the Italian literary landscape.

As representative of these forms of digital poetry I chose to analyze the works of Gianni Toti, father of Italian video-poetry, Caterina Davinio, Italian net-poet pioneer, and Loss Pequeño Glazier, United States JavaScript-based poet. These poet-scholars are leading figures in digital poetry. As scholars, they articulate the theoretical frameworks of this genre in landmark anthologies.<sup>3</sup> As poets, their digital works are similar in that they are indebted to Italian Futurism; and yet distinct with regard to their configuration. Thus, Toti's video-poetry is a poetry which makes its own video-graphic space and is simultaneously an image of that space. Davinio's net-poetry revisits, reinterprets, and rethinks what poetry and performance can be when created through net-communication. Glazier's JavaScript-based poems combine English, Spanish, and computer programming language (code) and explore coding as a form of writing, of language-making. These three forms of digital poetry foster a critical rethinking of the act of writing in the making of the digital poems through the investigation of the spaces in which they are made manifest.

The methodology I apply for the understanding of this "trans-medial" space consists of comparative close readings of the digital poems. To read digital poetry comparatively is challenging, innovative, and complex because it means to think of this genre across distinct media forms, cultural traditions, and historical periods. From this viewpoint, such comparative analyses aspire to reaffirm the permanent engagement of

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<sup>3</sup> As I elaborate in Chapter 2, Davinio's *Techno-Poesia* (2002) is a landmark anthology of Italian digital poetry and video-poetry, which conceives digital poetry as video-poetry. Also, as I briefly mention in Chapter 4, Glazier's award-winning *Digital Poetics* (2002) investigates the correlation between book technology and web "pages" and the ways in which certain web constructions represent a form of writing.

poetry with its writing spaces and to expand those lines of continuity between poetry from oral culture, traditional print, and the present forms of digital expression. My close reading of digital poetry includes analysis of linguistic particularities as expressed in English, Italian, and Spanish in the traditional methodology of comparative literature. Yet, my reading of these “texts” opens up new venues for the understanding of these poems as “media forms” of contemporary technologies of writing which reflect different traditions. In this way, such comparisons widen the traditional scope of comparative literature studies by considering how various forms of literature are created across media technologies and not only across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Such a perspective reinforces the theoretical understanding of the close connections between literature, culture, and modern media.

## Chapter I: Theorizing “Trans-medial Space” in the Making of Digital Poetry

Since its emergence in the 1950s, digital poetry has proliferated in miscellaneous forms dependent on the available technologies on which it relies and makes use of. These technologies of writing have occupied an influential place in the scholars’ readings of these works and ended up overshadowing the central themes of the digital works. The 2006 *Electronic Literature Collection* (volume I), for instance, gathers contemporary digital writings and organizes them with reference to keywords, authors, and titles.<sup>4</sup> A glimpse at these keywords reveals how the editors establish the prevalent themes predominantly, as they say, “by analogy with print.” Digital works are thus catalogued into six commonplace categories: “critical / political / philosophical;” “documentary;” “essay / creative nonfiction;” “fiction;” “memoir;” and “parody / satire.” Such a classification resembles genre descriptions and takes into account the intent or the effect rather than the content of the digital works.<sup>5</sup> Yet, only six out of the fifty-six keywords put forward thematic references. The remainder of the keywords speaks primarily to the composition procedures, functionality / interactivity, computer programs, and programming languages involved in the making of these works. Thus, not only do digital writings distance themselves from the familiar themes of the print works but digital technologies stand for their content. Although technology as a writing and reading medium plays an important role, what is distinctive is the creative way in which digital

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 2 for a complete discussion of the anthology.

<sup>5</sup> “Essay / creative nonfiction: by analogy with print, a work composed with the intent to be informative, meditative, and / or journalistic.” “Parody / satire: by analogy with print, work made with satirical or parodic intent or effect” See Contents by keywords of *Electronic Literature Collection* <http://collection.eliterature.org/1/aux/keywords.html>.

poets turn the technological devices into poetic devices.<sup>6</sup> Such devices foster certain rhythms and contribute to the construction of meaning.

The juxtaposition of words in large structures, for instance, is a poetic device that poet and theorist Jim Rosenberg explores based on hypertext as medium.<sup>7</sup> In his 1993 *Intergrams*, which he describes as “interactive poems in a diagrammatic format,” Rosenberg proposes an unconventional syntactic and structural composition of the poem that disregards punctuation or order. Thus, he programs blocks of alphabetic texts to layer on the top of each other in word clusters and connects them by diagram notations. Stanzas are made of unreadable texts as each cluster contains four distinct texts which readers may or may not disclose. In selecting the word clusters, readers create their own juxtapositions which further the internal order or rhythm of the poem.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, mutation is a poetic device for the early 1990 works of the Brazilian poet André Vallias.<sup>9</sup> He makes use of Computer Aided Design in order to examine the concept of the poem as an open diagram in a three dimensional space. In this way, he creates an interface which becomes the page of the poem, that field of its meaning which re-creates what he calls

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<sup>6</sup> As writer and artist Eduardo Kac acknowledges, poets “come to technology out of their own individual needs [ . . . ] Technology alone is not the focus. [ . . . ] the focus must always remain on their individual poetic visions” (“Introduction” 8) See Kac’s “Introduction,” *Media Poetry: an International Anthology*, ed. Eduardo Kac (Bristol: Intellect, 2007), 7-10.

<sup>7</sup> In 1963 Theodor Nelson coins the term “hypertext” to refer to a non-linear way of presenting the information. In 1980s authors make works based on links within texts. In this way, readers create their own paths.

As Chris Funkhouser explains, though Rosenberg’s *Intergrams* are nonlinear hypertexts, they do not link to anything; the link instead reveals different layers of unveiled language within the poem (172). See “Hypertext and Hypermedia,” *Prehistoric Digital Poetry: An Archeology of Forms, 1959-1995* (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2007), 150-198.

<sup>8</sup> “The proposal of hypertext as a medium of thought, for hypertext inside the infrastructure of language, is a proposal for an ‘externalization’ of the nervous system manifested in computer networks. Just as computer networks do not ‘replace’ the biological nervous system, and externalized mechanism of thought does not ‘replace’ syntax; rather it adds to syntax and allows new possibilities” (Rosenberg 22). See Jim Rosenberg’s “The Interactive Diagram Sentence: Hypertext as a Medium of Thought” in *Media Poetry*, ed. Eduardo Kac, 15-23.

<sup>9</sup> From Vallias’s viewpoint, “continuous mutation” is “the only constant distinguishing mark of the digital media” (85). See André Vallias’s “We Have not Understood Descartes” in *Media Poetry*, ed. Eduardo Kac, 85-91.



Significantly, in digital poetry, the contemporary technologies of writing foster a digital space which constructs the auditory and visual qualities of writing. In oral culture, the poem emerges in the moment of its oral production: when it is spoken and heard. The writing space of the poem is an oral space of memory and transmission during which the poet “writes” the poem to the minds of the audience. With print culture, the word has a visual existence as it appears on the page as a writing space. This writing space reveals itself as a space of memory which records the spoken words on the page. In “The Art of Immemorability,” an article on the technologies of poetry writing throughout oral, print, and new media cultures, poet and theorist Charles Bernstein makes a thought-provoking distinction between the “transcriptive” and “textualized” functions of writing. He explicates how the former is closely connected to transcription and scripting whereas the latter emphasizes the textual features of writing. On the one hand, the “transcriptive” quality of writing refers to its mnemonic function in the sense that writing is an aid to memory envisioned either to reproduce or to facilitate memorization for subsequent performance.<sup>13</sup> Writing as “transcriptive” suggests that writing is an intermediate stage to a performance, “in such scripted writing, the page is not the final destination but a preliminary stage, a prompt for final presentation elsewhere” (Bernstein 506). Thus, “transcriptive” calls attention to writing as a script. On the other hand, the “textualized” quality of writing frees writing from the task of recording because, as the scholar explains, “the immemorial possibilities of textual writing put the memory in the text rather than using the text as an aid to memory” (507). That is to say “textualized writing”

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<sup>13</sup> “The ‘transcriptive’ process was twofold: notating the oral performance and creating scripts for subsequent performance” (Bernstein 507). See Charles Bernstein, “The Art of Immemorability” in *A Book of the Book: Some Works and Projections about the Book & Writing*, eds. Rothenberg, Jerome and Steven Clay (New York: Granary, 2000): 504-517.



suggests writing in the process of making, writing as performance. It is a “‘textuality’ tested in performance” (Bernstein 515). Although the theorist’s distinction is not a clear-cut one, it is essential for the difference between writing as record, as a product of the medium, and writing as in the act of making, as a process and content of the emerging medium.<sup>14</sup>

One distinguishing aspect regarding these digital poetics is that the process of their own making interrogates the technologies of their own writing and writing itself. As digital poet and scholar Loss Pequeño Glazier states in the opening paragraph of his award-winning *Digital Poetics*, “we have not arrived at a place but an awareness of the *conditions of texts*” (“Introduction” 1).<sup>15</sup> And this awareness makes digital poems self-conscious of their own making and therefore akin to creations rather than to products. In some regards, the technologies of digital poetry making may be similar to those of bookmaking. Indeed, bookmaking encompasses apparently independent activities from the actual writing; and yet, it relies on these activities for the book production. Thus, printing, typesetting, binding, etc. belong to the process of bookmaking and as a result, the intersection of these activities discloses the interactive nature of bookmaking. And yet, what results at the end of these processes is the book as a product. Conversely, digital poetry is more process-oriented because it relies on the ability of the computer to run processes based on rules. As media theorist Janet Murray explains, all digital works share

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<sup>14</sup> “The distinction I am suggesting here is not unlike one that Marshall McLuhan makes in *Understanding Media* between the received and the new content of the emerging medium. The initial content of television was the product of the previous moving image medium, film (which, in turn, not only shaped the TV but also changed movies). In contrast, ‘live’ TV (initially broadcasts of sporting events but epitomized by live news broadcasts) is the best example of a distinct genre particular to the medium of television” (Bernstein 506).

<sup>15</sup> See “Introduction” *Digital Poetics: The Making of E-Poetics. Modern and Contemporary Poetics*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2002, 1-31.

four properties: procedurality, participation, spatiality, and encyclopedic scope.<sup>16</sup>

According to her, procedurality refers to the ability of the computer to execute behaviors based on algorithmic rules. This ability enables the computer to create representations of processes. Thus, in digital poetry, the computer as a technology of writing is essential for the way in which it entails processes as a result of the computational instructions and for how it constructs a semiotic system which represents these processes.

Given the heterogeneous and continuously shifting typology of digital poetry, the definitions of this genre frequently aim to unify these diverse endeavors underlining primarily how this poetry is produced rather than where it exists. That is to say they acknowledge the context but they highlight more the method of digital poetry making. I consider that both method and context should account for the making of any genre. For instance, in his 2004 foreword on the aesthetics of this genre, curator and author of intermedial poetry, Friedrich W. Block integrates programmatic elements in the etymology of the Greek word “poiesis” and coins the term “p0es1s” in order to highlight how digital poetry accommodates zeros and ones as idiosyncratic symbols of the digital medium: (“The Aesthetics of Digital Poetry” 13).<sup>17</sup> From his viewpoint, digital poetry is intimately connected to computers and digital networks because it engenders “medial changes in language and language-based communication” (13). Similarly, in the 2007 introduction to the genealogy of this genre, author and scholar Christopher Funkhouser defines digital poetry as a synthesis of literary, visual, and sonic art, and indirectly acknowledges its screen-dependency contending that such literary works “are presented

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<sup>16</sup> See Janet Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. New York: Free P., 1997.

<sup>17</sup>Friedrich W. Block, “The Aesthetics of Digital Poetry: An Introduction,” *P0es1s: Ästhetik digitaler Poesie =P0es1s: The Aesthetics of Digital Poetry*, eds. Friedrich W. Block, Christiane Heibach, Karin Wenz (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 11-37.

on screens with the assistance of computers and / or computer programming” (22).<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, digital poet and theorist Stephanie Strickland explicates how “e-poetry relies on code for its creation, preservation, and display” and references its inseparability from computer, “there is no way to experience a work of e-literature unless a computer is running it—reading it and perhaps also generating it” (“Born Digital”).<sup>19</sup> Also, cultural studies scholar Jan Baetens and game studies researcher Jan Van Looy regard this genre as “one of the most globalized and delocalized literary forms imaginable” which occurs everywhere, “i.e. the websites, and museums to be attended and visited” (“E-Poetry between Image and Performance” 2).<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, scholars often acknowledge that this poetry usually calls for a screen reading, but other spaces besides the screen space are engaged in the emergence of the poem.<sup>21</sup> Given its computer space-dependency, this genre invites speculation on how digital poetry makes use of this space and how this space affects digital poetry as well. I contend that “where” digital poetry is made manifest is as equally significant as “who” or “what” makes it happen. In this respect, I address questions regarding the configuration of space in digital poetry, the interspatial relationship between screen and source code spaces, and the function of space in digital poetry vis-à-vis reader-text interactions. Such questions are central for the understanding of digital poems because they do not only

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<sup>18</sup> Chris Funkhouser, “Introduction: Evolving Circuits of Digital Poetry,” *Prehistoric Digital Poetry*, 1-31.

<sup>19</sup> Stephanie Strickland, “Born Digital” <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/journal/article.html?id=182942>.

<sup>20</sup> According to them, “e-poetry is not, or at least is not supposed to be, ‘digitized poetry,’ i.e., printed or handwritten poetry transferred to a digital environment, but poetry written specifically to be read on screen” (2). See Jan Baetens and Jan Van Looy, “E-Poetry between Image and Performance: A Cultural Analysis,” *Journal of e-Media Studies* 1.1 (Spring 2008), <http://journals.dartmouth.edu/cgi-bin/WebObjects/Journals.woa/2/xmlpage/4/article/288>.

<sup>21</sup> As Funkhouser also explicates, to create poems presented by or for computers “requires other processes than writing words down [because] the verbal climate of the digital poem depends on the successful implementation of many procedures, both technical and artistic” (“Techniques Enabled” 224). See “Techniques Enabled: (Pro)Fusions after Poetry Computerized,” *Prehistoric Digital Poetry*, 211-256.

conceive space differently but they also convey a perception of space as multiple and changeable. And this sense of space calls for a new term necessary for the reading of digital texts. That is why I propose the term trans-medial space to describe the space in which the digital poem exists, emerges, and is experienced. I argue that this trans-medial space is both self-transformative (transforms itself) and transforming (transforms what it contains). More importantly, the trans-medial space is also a mediating agent in the performance of the text alongside its readers in the sense that it engages in and with the performance of text.

To understand the configuration of the trans-medial space in digital poetry means to return to the theoretical way in which concrete poets conceptualized the use of space in poetry. Equally essential are the previous poets' attempts to raise awareness on the significance of space by questioning the traditional conventions such as the spatial distribution of elements on page and physical form. For instance, the French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé's 1914 *Un Coup de Dés (A Throw of the Dice)* interrogates the standard use of syntax on the page and enhances the dispersion of language. Along the same lines are the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire's 1919 collection of concrete poetry, *Calligrammes*, and the Italian futurist Filippo Marinetti's 1919 poems which consist in language displayed in different typefaces and in a random spatial arrangement that challenges reading practices based on top-to-bottom left-to-right conventions. Also, the American poet William Carlos Williams's 1948 concept of poem as a "field of action" puts forward the poetics of the field which is the page through an innovative approach to structure and measure. For Williams, the structure of the poem reflects the

structure of reality.<sup>22</sup> He discovers in speech a new form of poetic measure, and advocates for hearing as the primary feature of language. In this way, he coins “the variable foot” as an essential element in achieving the rhythm of the poem, “[the variable foot] differs from the fixed foot with which we are familiar [in] that it ignores that counting of the number of syllables in the line . . . for the measure more of the ear, a more sensory counting.”<sup>23</sup> This poetic measure reflects a way of perceiving the world and an organizing principle of poetic materials. In 1950, the American innovative poet Charles Olson’s influential manifesto, “Projective Verse,” continues this desideratum with “composition by field” through open verse, which resists the traditional technique of poetic composition based on standard form and measure. According to Olson, this composition by field captures “the *kinetics*” of the poem that is the energy transferred from the poet to the poem and then to the reader; “the *principle*,” “the right form, in any given poem, is the only and exclusively possible extension of content under hand;” and “the *process*” “how the principle can be made so to shape the energies that the form is accomplished” (240).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> “The one thing that the poet has not wanted to change, the one thing he has clung to in his dream—unwilling to let go—the place where the time-lag is still adamant—is structure. Here we are unmovable. But here is precisely where we come into contact with reality. Reluctant, we waken from our dreams. And what is reality? How do we know reality? The only reality that we can know is MEASURE” (Williams 283). See William Carlos Williams, “The Poem as a Field of Action,” *Selected essays of William Carlos Williams* (New York: Random, 1954), 280-292.

<sup>23</sup> As Marta Sienicka explains, “In contrast with the traditional prosody Williams’ foot is not a unit of stress but one of time that is, in a sense, similar to the classical foot. Williams is not concerned with the distribution of accents but with ‘the spaces in between various stresses of verse’” (126). See Marta Sienicka’s “William Carlos Williams’ Theory and Practice of Poetic Measure” [http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/sap/files/3/14\\_sienicka.pdf](http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/sap/files/3/14_sienicka.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> “I take it that PROJECTIVE VERSE teaches, is, this lesson, that that verse will only do in which a poet manages to register both the acquisitions of his ear and the pressure of his breath” (Olson 241). See Charles Olson, “Projective Verse,” *Collective Prose*. Eds. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997), 239-250.

Six years later, concrete poets advance the idiosyncratic use of space in poetry both conceptually and theoretically.<sup>25</sup> “In December of 1956 the movement of concrete poetry was officially launched as part of the National Exposition of Concrete Art at the Museum of Modern Art, São Paulo. Poster poems were exhibited alongside paintings and pieces of sculpture;” this is how visual poet and theorist Mary Ellen Solt chronicles the debut of concrete poetry in Brazil.<sup>26</sup> It is a historical account which significantly substantiates the intimate correspondence between concrete art and concrete poetry as genres and calls particular attention to the exhibition space in which concrete poems exist. Not unlike the surrounding paintings and sculptures, concrete poems are objects displayed in a museum setting. The space specificity situates such poetry within the context of public art, requires readers’ physical presence, and calls for a “here and now” experience. In the exhibition space readers encounter, view, read, and move around concrete poems. Such an instance also signals an intriguing encounter between the museum space in which concrete poems are and the use of space for which concrete poetry extensively advocates with page as the exhibition space of the poem.

In the late 1950s, concrete poets are structuring poems in a very rigid way in order to show how the space in which words are present is endowed with semantic meaning. Space is not extra-linguistic; instead, space has a meaningful contribution to the understanding of the content of the poem. Space encapsulates an intricate duality: space points both inside and outside itself. On the one hand, space is self-reflexive, it calls

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<sup>25</sup> In the 1950s Eugen Gomringer (Switzerland) and Noigandres Group (Brazil): Augusto de Campos, Haroldo de Campos, and Decio Pignatari coin the concept of concrete poetry. In its most basic form, concrete poetry refers to poems which feature artistic arrangements of words and texts on the page. Both the structure of words in the space and the meaning of words contribute to the overall message of the concrete poem.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Ellen Solt, “Brazil,” *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1968). Also available at <http://www.ubu.com/papers/solt/brazil.html>.

attention to itself and as a result, becomes an area for reflection, marking the literal entry of readers into text. On the other hand, space underscores how letters and words appear on a page. Space is a container and a contained element in how it draws words together and holds them. In Eugen Gomringer's "Silence," for instance, empty space is central.<sup>27</sup> If the poem is read horizontally or vertically the attention is geared toward the white and empty space at the centre of the poem. As Solt remarks, in "Silence," "the message conveyed by the word emerges from the white space in the center of the word design and to a lesser degree from the white space of the page which surrounds the poem" ("Switzerland").<sup>28</sup> Words are not randomly spread around; instead, they are in a square-like configuration. Within this geometric arrangement the same word repeats three times in five lines and reveals how silence or absence of sound is visually represented. As visual art theorist Johanna Drucker also explicates, what precisely counts "is the structural relation of the words, rather than any particular image suggested by them, which gives their visual presentation value" ("Experimental, Visual, and Concrete Poetry" 40).<sup>29</sup>

In concrete poetry, page is both storage and enactment space. As storage space, it unveils the concrete nature of words. Here, concrete means self-referential: words signal

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<sup>27</sup> Eugen Gomringer's "Silence"

silence silence silence  
silence silence silence  
silence silence  
silence silence silence  
silence silence silence

(qtd. in Johanna Drucker's "Visual Performance of the Poetic Text" 155 ). See Johanna Drucker, "Visual Performance of the Poetic Text" in *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, ed. Charles Bernstein (New York: Oxford UP, 1998): 131-161.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Ellen Solt, "Switzerland," *Concrete Poetry: A World View*. Also available at <http://wxcity2.appspot.com/w?w=bG10aC5kbmFscmV6dGl3cy90bG9zL3NyZXhC9tb2MudWJlLnd3dy8vOnB0dGg%3D%0A>.

<sup>29</sup> See Johanna Drucker, "Experimental, Visual, and Concrete Poetry: A Note on Historical Context and Basic Concepts," *Experimental—Visual—Concrete: Avant-Garde Poetry since the 1960s*, eds. K. David Jackson, Eric Vos, and Johanna Drucker (Amsterdam, GA: Rodopi B. V., 1996), 39-61.

their existence on a page and are devoid of the poet's authority and any external references.<sup>30</sup> Words do not signify by themselves; instead, space augments their self-referentiality.<sup>31</sup> Endowed with minimal syntax or free of any punctuation marks, this poetry underscores the word—space dialectical relationship. As enactment space, space in concrete poetry structures text and furthers a certain temporality of the text in that space. In the 1958 manifesto “Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry,” Augusto de Campos, Haroldo de Campos, and Décio Pignatari explain how the concrete poem is endowed with a “qualified space” in which space and time are organically interconnected, “Qualified space: space-time structure instead of mere linear-temporistical development.” This time-space isomorphism fosters the idea of text as an event. This means that text is not envisioned primarily for reading; instead, text requires readers-viewers-users to experience it that is to read, view, and play with it.

Readers encounter the text, and enact the presence of the poem in the space of the page. Thus, this storage space renders visible the typographical code of the poem, and calls for the enactment of text. This approach explains Drucker's reading of concrete poetry as a form of visual performance in which performance exists in the visual form of

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<sup>30</sup> As Noigandres explicates, “concrete poem is an object in and by itself, not an interpreter of exterior objects and / or more or less subjective feeling” (“Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry”). See “Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry” in *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, ed. Mary Ellen Solt. Also available at <http://wxcity2.appspot.com/w?w =bG10aC4xMHNlcmRuYWdpb24vc3JlcGFwL21vYy51YnUud3d3Ly86cHR0aA%3D%3D%0A>.

In “Concrete Poetry: A Generic Perspective,” Pedro Reis also reads concrete poems as self-centered and highly self-referential poems. As a result, they communicate their own structure and not a message about extra-poetic reality (270). See Pedro Reis, “Concrete Poetry: A Generic Perspective” in *Experimental—Visual—Concrete: Avant-Garde Poetry since the 1960s*, eds. K. David Jackson, Eric Vos, and Johanna Drucker (Amsterdam, GA: Rodopi B. V., 1996): 297-302.

<sup>31</sup> Drucker also acknowledges that a fundamental tenet of the new critical sensibility from the 1960s reflects how “language functions significantly as a textual practice without the need for reference” (“Experimental, Visual, and Concrete Poetry” 50). Along the same lines, César Espinosa remarks how words act or perform “concrete texts employ language not solely as a bearer of meanings but over and above this, and perhaps in a more emphatic way, as a phonetic and visual act” (“Corrosive Signs: For a Liberating Writing” 16). See César Espinosa, “Corrosive Signs: For a Liberating Writing,” *Corrosive Signs: Essays on Experimental Poetry* (Washington: Mazonneuve P, 1990), 5-23.



the work. As a performer, the visual form is “about the presence of the poem” (131), and acts as “an instance of expressive means creating effect without direct connection to the presence of the artist, a performance in which the performer is the visual work” (Drucker, “Visual Performance” 160). Significantly, these visual components point to the typographical code as well as to the space in which these typographic elements exist. In this way, space is also a significant constituent of the visual form, “the specific quality of presence in such a work depends upon visual means—typefaces, format, spatial distribution of the elements on the page or through the book, physical form, or space. These visual means perform the work as a poem that can’t be translated into any other form” (Drucker 131). All these visual components turn text into work, and convey its quality of presence that is of visual performance. As a result, the page becomes a theatrical space which renders the work specific, unique, and dramatic.<sup>32</sup>

A relevant example for the way in which digital poetry re-configures the concept of space is Brian Kim Stefans’s *The Dreamlife of Letters* (2000). This work speaks about the existence of the digital poem in multiple spaces and provides a glimpse into a possible instantiation of the trans-medial space.<sup>33</sup> Thematically, the poem articulates the alphabet-making and carries on the concrete poetry tradition in that it explores the self-referential dimension of letters and words. Described in the prologue as a “playful meditation on the nature and function of language in kinetic two-dimensional space,” *The Dreamlife of Letters* is an eleven-minute digital poem written for an online “roundtable”

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<sup>32</sup> Drucker explicates, “Performance in this sense includes all of the elements that make the work an instantiation of a text, make it specific, unique, and dramatic because of the visual character through which the work comes into being” (“Visual Performance of the Poetic Text” 131).

<sup>33</sup> American poet and critic Brian Kim Stefans is the author of several books of poetry: *Free Space Comix* (1998), *Gulf* (1998 / 2000), *Angry Penguins* (2000), *What Is Said to the Poet Concerning Flowers* (2006) as well as of *Fashionable Noise: On Digital Poetics* (2003), a book on new media poetry and poetics. See *The Dreamlife of Letters* [http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/stefans\\_\\_the\\_dreamlife\\_of\\_letters.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/stefans__the_dreamlife_of_letters.html).

on sexuality and literature done entirely through e-mail. In 1999 poets and writers are put in groups and Stefans writes the poem as a response to a text by the poet and feminist literary theorist, Rachel Blau DuPlessis. Because her text was very detailed and nearly opaque, Stefans decides not to answer using “normal prose.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, he alphabetizes the words in her text and creates what he calls his “own series of very short ‘concrete’ poems based on the chance meeting of words.” Although technically, the poem is a “Flash animation,” with a video-like display which does not call for readers’ interactivity, I consider it a “Flash translation” or an avatar of DuPlessis’s text to which it responds and with which is in dialogue. Compositionally, the poem contains “a prologue” and two options: “run the poem” and “go to index.”

The “run the poem” option unveils the digital poem as an onscreen performance. Readers watch a video in which the letters of the alphabet become characters on a stage in that they “take on their own distinct and lively characters,” as the preamble to the poem announces. Although the story of the alphabet is displayed sequentially, letters are disseminated in pieces. Letters come into sight randomly from anywhere in the screen space. They come out of the corner or from the middle of the screen, cross the screen horizontally or vertically, invade the screen out of blue, duplicate themselves, overlap with one another, compress, and disappear when a new letter follows up. Letters constantly and randomly combine and form words in the screen space. In this way, it is difficult for readers to grasp the meaning of their content and even remember it entirely at the end of the poem. In fact, the emphasis is not on the content of the words, but on how the story of each letter connects with each other, on how the digital poem privileges

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<sup>34</sup> See The Prologue for a complete presentation of the context in which the digital poem is made [http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/stefans\\_\\_the\\_dreamlife\\_of\\_letters/the\\_dream\\_life\\_cleaned.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/stefans__the_dreamlife_of_letters/the_dream_life_cleaned.html).

watching over reading. In conjunction with the digital poem, Stefans provides a link to its print version submitted for the roundtable discussion and an index version of the poem. The former resembles a concrete poem in print and the latter breaks up the entire onscreen performance into thirty-five links to short digital concrete poems. In all of these three versions space is differently conceptualized and displayed and so is the content of the poem.



Fig. 1 First part from the print version and the entire index version of the poem

Unlike the onscreen performance in which letters and words are in constant movement and formation, the print version of the poem displays them in a space in which they can be both read and watched. In this way, space invites readers to pause at their

own speed and reflect on the meaning of the words and on their spatial arrangement.<sup>35</sup>

Although open to various interpretations given its non-conventional reading, the content can be gasped in its totality. Interestingly, the print and index versions of the poem are alike in how the space structures the poem in a mathematical way as numbers preface either the stanzas or the titles of the links. And yet, they are unlike in how the poem in print contains the complete story of each letter whereas the index version compresses the content of each stanza to its first and last letters. In recording titles such as “a to am,” “amend to aye,” “behoove to caucasions,” “character to cycle,” “dear to dodie,” etc the index unveils the connections among letters in their progression toward the alphabet-making. The text as an onscreen performance no longer contains the mathematical division of stanzas as sections into numbers. In fact, the video does not even suggest that the poem is made of stanzas. Significantly, what appears as a compressed stanza in the index surfaces as an image or, more specifically, as a micro-video of a brief digital concrete poem in the “run the poem” version.

The story of the letter “s” is particularly relevant in how it enhances the transformative quality of the digital space. During the onscreen performance, the screen space is divided into four squares. These squares come into existence in the same way in which letters and words immediately populate them. Thus, the digital space displays only an apparently rigid geometry because this space does not impose any constraints upon letters or words. Instead, the straight sides of the squares are malleable: they do not restrict the freedom of the letters in moving from one square to another, in forming

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<sup>35</sup> As Charles Olson also explains in his manifesto “Projective Verse,” “if a contemporary poet leaves a space as long as the phrase before it, he means that space to be held, by the breath, an equal length of time. If he suspends a word or syllable at the end of a line (this was most Cummings’ addition) he means that time to pass that it takes the eye—that hair of time suspended—to pick up the next line” (248).

words, or in disappearing all of a sudden. For instance, the words “something,” “spear,” “special,” and “spice” simply disappear and “staged stations . . .” move from the top to the down square. This also represents an intriguing and playful correspondence between the actual movement of the words and Stefans’s use of “staged stations,” in which the screen is a stage and each square is a station for the word. These squares facilitate word transfers and, as a result, the story of the letter “s” becomes an onscreen performance. Also, when “staged stations . . .” joins the word “strafe” in the down square, the poem speaks about the presence of the three empty squares. In this way, the squares turn from contexts for the word formations into texts framed during the onscreen performance.

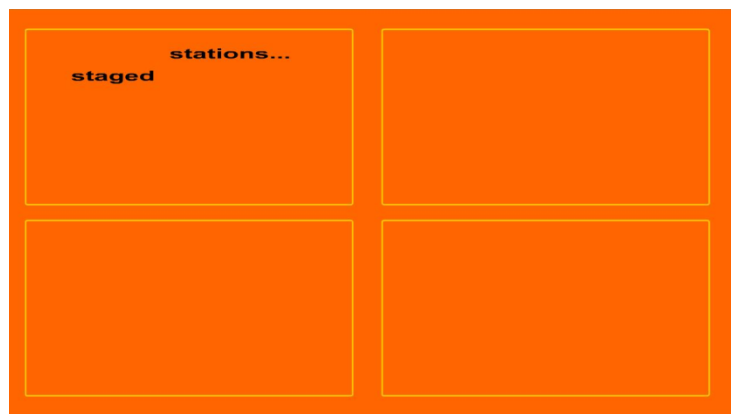




Fig. 2 Series of three screenshots from the onscreen performance of the letter “s”

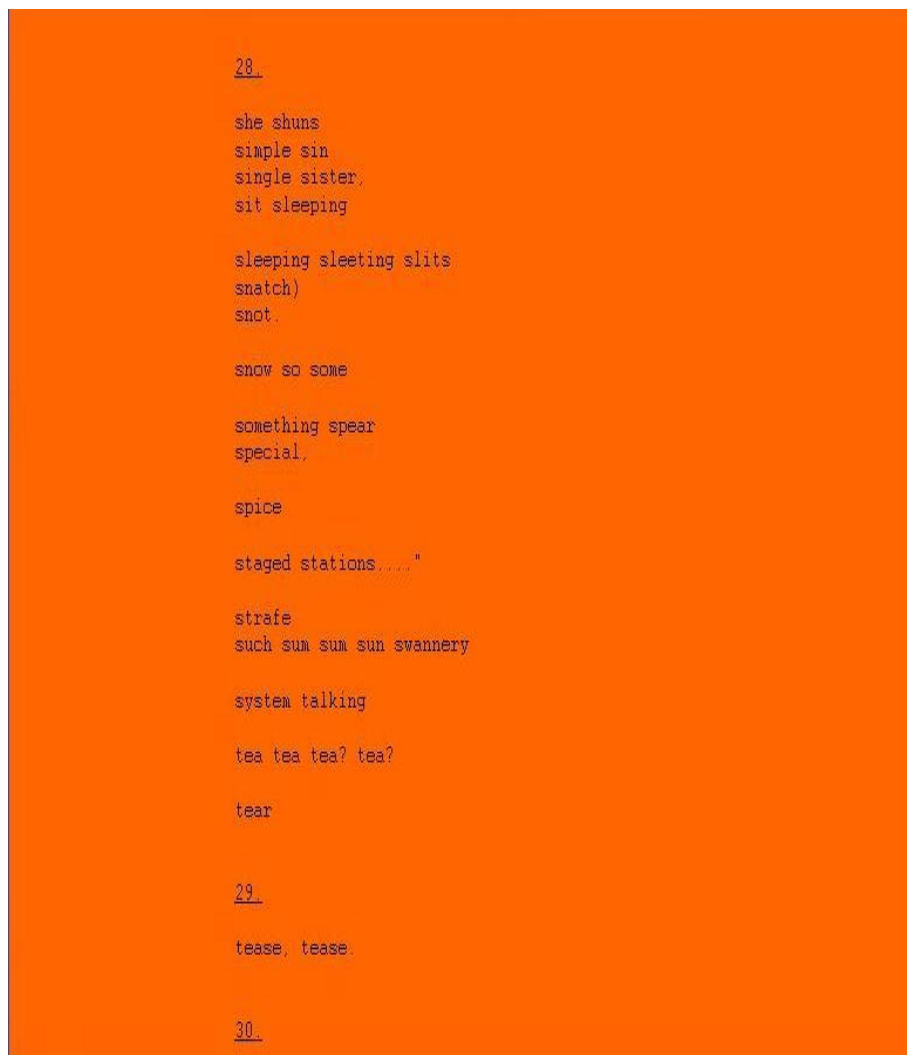


Fig. 3 Letter “s” from the print version

Significantly, *Electronic Literature Collection* (volume 1) catalogues *The Dreamlife of Letters* as “non-interactive” in that it does not require any interaction from readers. And yet, Stefans identifies the interactive component in the correlation between the digital poem and its index version, “unlike with a movie (or at least one in the theatres), you are invited to go back and look at each section as a discrete unit, and in fact when you view the piece a second time—after it’s been fully downloaded—the index is one of your options along with ‘run the poem’” (“potentially suitable for running in a loop” 33).<sup>36</sup> I consider that the poem displays minimal interactive qualities. Although in the index readers activate the links to watch the micro-videos of the letters, they get to decide the order in which to watch them but can change neither their time / speed at which they unfold nor their content. What happens if readers do not access the index version of the poem? In fact, does Stefans’s poem entail only the watching of the alphabet-making on the computer screen? Is the space of the index version part of the poem’s space? Which is the space of the poem? What is the dialectic between the spaces of the poem in its print, index, and onscreen performance versions? Also, what kind of spatial relationships between the space(s) of the poem and the readers’ space emerge during the watching / reading of the poem? These are some of the questions that a digital poem like *The Dreamlife of Letters* raises vis-à-vis the use of space and the necessity to foster a new term for the space(s) with which it engages.

In order to understand my use of trans-medial space it is essential to address new media theorist Jay David Bolter’s influential concept of “topographic writing.” In the 1991 *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing*, Bolter

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<sup>36</sup> See Brian Kim Stefans, “potentially suitable for running in a loop,” *Fashionable Noise: On Digital Poetics* (Berkeley: Atelos, 2003), 15-41.

examines the changing technologies of writing in time and particularizes the way in which the concept of hypertext re-defines the space of writing. For Bolter, all writing presupposes an engagement with the space in which it happens. According to him, the writing space is “the physical and visual field defined by a particular technology of writing” (11). Each physical writing space relies on the interplay between writing materials and writing techniques. As a result, this space fosters a particular perception vis-à-vis the act of writing and the written text as a product (Bolter 11). Thus, Bolter traces the evolution from picture and phonetic writing to alphabet and post-alphabet writing. In this way, he significantly discloses how each stage aspired to develop active relationships with the writing spaces, but ended up fostering only a limited exploration. For instance, picture writing was inaccurate and rather intricate for it concealed the precise deciphering of the signs.<sup>37</sup> Also, print placed a large emphasis on fixity and closure and therefore prevented the text from further exploration.<sup>38</sup> In contrast to the previous spaces, Bolter considers that the writing space of the electronic computer marks the most significant contribution because electronic writing changes the hierarchy of order. In this respect, he correlates his theory with hypertext.

The idiosyncratic feature of hypertext consists in the arrangement of writing in individual blocks with links between them so that readers can move through the material

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<sup>37</sup> “In all picture writing, before and after literacy, the elements exist at the margin between linguistic and pictorial meaning. Sometimes, particularly when the picture text is a narrative, the elements seem to aim for the specificity of language. Sometimes, these same elements move back into the world of pure form and become shapes that we admire for their visual economy. The elements oscillate between being signs and being images” (Bolter, “The Elements of Writing” 52). See David Jay Bolter, “The Elements of Writing,” *Writing Space: Computers, Hypertext, and the History of Writing* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1991), 45-63.

<sup>38</sup> “In the late age of print, writers and readers still conceive of all texts, of text itself, as located in the space of a printed book. The conceptual space of a printed book is one in which writing is stable, monumental, and controlled exclusively by the author. It is the space defined by perfect printed volumes that exist in thousands of identical copies. The conceptual space of electronic writing, on the other hand, is characterized by fluidity and an interactive relationship between writer and reader” (Bolter, “Introduction” 11).



while reading.<sup>39</sup> In his opinion, the hypertext eliminates the fast boundaries between texts and individuals and gives birth to the “topographic” possibilities of writing. As Bolter explicates, originally, the etymology of “topography” refers to a verbal depiction that is “a written description of a place.” Later on, the word signifies a rather visual and mathematical description which takes into consideration ideas of mapping and charting (Bolter 25). With electronic writing, “topography” stands for a visual as well as verbal description. As a result, his “topographic writing” does not refer to writing of or about a place, but writing which speaks of a mathematical organization of the text. Bolter’s “topographic writing” is writing based on topics as places,

it is not the writing of a place, but rather a writing *with* places, spatially realized topics. Topographic writing challenges the idea that writing should be merely the servant of spoken language. The writer and reader can create and examine signs and structures on the computer screen that have no easy equivalent in speech. The point is obvious when the text is a collection of images stored on a videodisk, but it is equally true for a purely verbal text that has been fashioned as a tree or a network of topics and connections. (25)

Twenty years later, I re-examine Bolter’s concept of “topographic writing” as a “writing *with* places” taking into account the dynamics between source code and screen spaces. In this way, my concept of trans-medial space stands for “writing *with* and *through* spaces.” In this respect, my concept of trans-medial space does not only re-fashion Bolter’s

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<sup>39</sup> “Electronic writing is topical, encouraging the writer to define and write with units larger than or different from the individual word” (Bolter, “The Elements of Writing” 57).

“topographic writing,” but it also takes the concept of space in digital writing in general one step further.

In contrast to the space of concrete poetry, the computer space in which the digital poem emerges encompasses multiple spaces of encoding and decoding. In “The Time of Digital Poetry,” media scholar Katherine Hayles emphasizes the correlation between time and the digital poem, and defines the digital poem as “a machine to organize time” in which multiple and diverse layers of time engage in the making of the poem, “the time of a poem can be considered to consist of the time of writing, the time of coding, the time of production / performance, and the time of reading” (182).<sup>40</sup> From her viewpoint, the poem becomes an event which comes into existence when the program runs on the appropriate software (182). Hayles particularly locates performance in the time of production, and describes it as the instance when the work becomes accessible to the reader. Hayles’s production stage echoes Drucker’s consideration of the text’s quality of presence: to be in the presence of a work’s formation is to experience its presence. This means that text enacts its own existence in the presence of readers-viewers-users. As an enactment, the digital poem is never self-identical, and, as Hayles explains, this lack of self-identity speaks about the poem’s dependence on temporal and spatial contexts.<sup>41</sup> This observation also indirectly points to the significance of space in the making of the digital poem.

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<sup>40</sup> “[B]y production / performance, I mean the processes that make the work materially accessible to the reader” (Hayles 184). Katherine Hayles, “The Time of Digital Poetry: from Object to Event” in *New Media Poetics: Contexts, Technotexts*, eds. Morris, Adalaide Kirby, and Thomas Swiss (Cambridge: MIT P, 2006): 181-210.

<sup>41</sup> Hayles: “As processes, [digital texts] exhibit sensitive dependence on temporal and spatial contexts, to say nothing of their absolute dependence on specific hardware and software configurations” (“The Time of Digital Poetry” 186).

In agreement with Hayles' typology of time layers, I consider that digital poetry encompasses multiple space layers.<sup>42</sup> Thus, there is the source code space as a storage space which reveals itself as an installation space. This space is not only a scripting space which contains the script of the poem but also a storage space in which the code is installed. Then, there is the production space as an enactment space which surfaces as a screen / exhibition space. Both source code and production spaces are transformative in the sense that they are physically in a morphing state and interconnect with one another.<sup>43</sup> As a result, an "in-between space," which I label trans-medial space, develops out of these interspatial relationships. This "in-between space" is occupied by particular software. As web designer and programmer David Shepard explains, "all languages used in Internet art require another program that stands between code and the microprocessor," and this browser or program is an "executing agent" ("Finding and Evaluating the Code").<sup>44</sup> According to him, a digital work may signify at three different layers: "the executable layer" in which "the work is experienced in the browser window;" "the source code" layer which represents the "original text created by the author;" and the layer regarding "the execution of the code" considering the language structure.<sup>45</sup> From this viewpoint, understanding these layers and the relationships between them fosters insights into a digital work. I acknowledge the function of this particular software and use the

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<sup>42</sup> Here is a visual schematization of these spaces:

1. source code space———storage space———installation space
2. production space———enactment space———exhibition / screen space

<sup>43</sup> For instance, the production space evolves out of the source code space.

<sup>44</sup> See David Shepard, "Finding and Evaluating Code." *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (February 2008), <http://newhorizons.eliterature.org/essay.php?id=12.html>.

<sup>45</sup> "Depending on the language, code may have multiple layers of interpretation before it reaches the binary code executed by the processor; though this process is mostly invisible, the structures within a language and the consequent choices that a programmer makes yield meaning" ("Finding and Evaluating Code").

term trans-medial space to reinforce the significance of the space in which the digital poem exists, emerges, and is experienced.

This trans-medial space is self-transformative and transforming.<sup>46</sup> It forms itself as it self-transforms. As a result, the trans-medial space is always in formation or on the point of becoming. Space in concrete poetry is also transformative but only from a conceptual standpoint, and so, it manifests emergent behavior only theoretically. As poetry critic Lori Emerson explicates in “Numbered Space and Topographic Writing,” the space of a concrete poem is typographically mapable and the poem embodies movement in space: “a poem becomes a conception of the space” in which it happens (7).<sup>47</sup> Conversely, in digital poetry, the trans-medial space unveils emergent behavior in how the source code and production spaces constantly emerge out of another one. Significantly, the trans-medial space speaks about the making of the space in the digital poem in the same way in which the digital poem speaks about the “presence” of space. Just like the digital poem is only a scripted performance and not a poem before its readers encounter it, the trans-medial space does not have a prior existence. In fact, trans-medial space is presence. That is to say, this space does not represent the digital poem; instead, it presents it. The digital poem is not a representation of a script in a digital space, but a presentation in a trans-medial space which enacts its own presence. In this way, this space speaks about the framing of the digital poem as performance in terms of setting.

Also, similarly to how the trans-medial space makes the digital poem, the digital poem

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<sup>46</sup> Etymologically, the prefix “trans” signifies “through,” “change,” and “across.” I adopt it to express the way in which this space suggests something that is ephemeral; implies changes and relies on transformations; conveys a certain direction of the movement, more specifically across mediums.

<sup>47</sup> In concrete poetry language is also “a transitional object in motion.” In such spaces poems “evoke or embody movement in space,” the effect of moving through language happens only conceptually on paper (Emerson 5). See Lori Emerson, “Numbered Space and Topographic Writing.” “New Media Poetry and Poetics” Special Issue, *Leonardo Electronic Almanac* 14.5-6 (2006): 1-12, 25 Sep. 2006 [http://www.leoalmanac.org/journal/vol\\_14/lea\\_v14\\_n05-06/lemerson.html](http://www.leoalmanac.org/journal/vol_14/lea_v14_n05-06/lemerson.html).

constructs its own space. As a result, the digital poem also speaks about the “presence” of the trans-medial space.

Also, trans-medial space is both context and text. Likewise, the digital poem is both text and context. As context, the trans-medial space frames the digital poem, structures the text, and enables its reading on the screen. In this way, the meaning of the text is not only produced by the text but also by the trans-medial space of which readers become aware when encountering the script. Furthermore, because the digital poem constructs its own space, space itself becomes the message of the poem. For instance, even when the digital poem does not contain any text, what is gained is a new sense of space. From this perspective, Marshal McLuhan’s statement, “the medium is the message” becomes “the trans-medial space is the message.” By implication, the trans-medial space as context becomes text and the digital poem becomes the context for the framing of the trans-medial space. Significantly, the text-context equation concerning the relationship between trans-medial space and the digital poem also invites speculation with regard to what appears in the screen space. It can be either a recording or an instance of a digital poem in the trans-medial space or the trans-medial space itself is a recording or an instance of its own enactment as “presence” in the digital poem. In the former case, trans-medial space is context; in the latter one, trans-medial space is text. The fact that the trans-medial space emerges simultaneously with the making of the poem echoes Bernstein’s agreement with Jack Spicer’ and Hannah Weiner’s insistence on how “poems are mediums,” in the sense that “a medium is the means of transport, the conveyance, and also the material or technical process of art” (Bernstein, “The Art of Immemorability” 514).

Significantly, the trans-medial space not only calls attention to the multiple spaces of the source code, code execution, and computer screen but it also discloses how digital poetry develops from text as a working script to work and then to onscreen performance. These stages of transformation indirectly reference the acoustic and visual qualities of the poems in the oral and print cultures, and as a result, highlight the lines of continuity among the oral, print, and digital spaces of poetry production. Thus, “we are now living in a period of overlaid oral, alphabetic, and photo / electronic culture” because “one medium does not conquer another” instead, it fosters a series of overlays, to echo Bernstein again (“The Art of Immemorability” 512). Although from this viewpoint the idea of trans-medial space is not entirely new, it conveys new meanings which reflect the present technological changes and its effects vis-à-vis the emergence of digital poetry works. Consequently, both past and present technologies of writing do not create entirely new genres, instead they are tools which foster possibilities for genre experimentation simply because “technology informs but it does not determine” (Bernstein, “The Art of Immemorability” 513). And yet, this absence of complete control does not exclude the effects of technology, as writing technologies do affect poetry and these transformations are part of their meaning and making.

As an interspatial space, the trans-medial space is an ephemeral “in-between space,” which results out of transactions from source-code space to production space. This space is as transient as the digital poem is. This means that the trans-medial space exists and emerges spontaneously in the same way in which the digital poem is made manifest only in that space. In “Writing the Virtual” Strickland describes the reading of the digital poem as happening “in-between times” or “fleeting times,” and details, “the

times involved in any poetic production include machine speed, time for the code to read itself, real time, clock time, coded speed, network lags, device delays, and overlaid simultaneous rhythms of unfolding” (4). Strickland’s statement that “there is no privileged ‘time’ unit or moment” prompts my conclusion that there is no privileged space in which digital poetry is made manifest. That is to say that the co-existence of these spaces does not imply that one is privileged over another one. As an “in-between space” the trans-medial space transgresses source code and screen spaces without situating itself in any of them. Instead, it is the space of the digital poem in performance. The prefix “in” also denotes that readers are “in” these spaces and, therefore, in the presence of the work similarly to how viewers-spectators are in the presence of an installation artwork. Digital poetry exists in-between these transformative spaces and can only be experienced in relationship with the spaces from which it emerges. To experience an installed artwork always requires being in the space and in the presence of the work. And such a work-space interaction is emergent, variable, and ephemeral. Similarly, to read a digital poem means to be in the space of its emergence. In this way, space is internalized as content of the work as performance.<sup>48</sup> This remark also echoes Drucker’s observation on the transient dimension and dependence of concrete poetry on space, “[in concrete poetry] the work has a distinct shape on the page and loses a part of its meaning if it is arranged or printed without the attention to the typeface and form which were part of the poet’s original work” (“Experimental, Visual, and Concrete Poetry” 41).

As an onscreen performance, digital poetry calls for a screen-mediated experience. Unlike the space in concrete poetry which accommodates only the visual

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<sup>48</sup> See Chapter 3 for a discussion on how the website as a space of happening is part and content of Caterina Davinio’s net-poetry projects.

dimension of text, the screen space as exhibition space is a tactile space, which simultaneously calls for a physical, visual, and acoustical experience. In some regards, this tactile space echoes the concept of remediation coined by media historians David J. Bolter and Richard A. Grusin. For them, remediation consists in the process of representation of one medium into another.<sup>49</sup> As they explicate, remediation relies upon the double logic of immediacy and hypermediacy: whereas immediacy makes viewers forget the presence of the medium, hypermediacy renders viewers aware of the presence of the medium.<sup>50</sup> Firstly, I approach medium as space and contend that in concrete poetry readers experience immediacy because storage and enactment spaces coincide and, as a result, develop into the space for the performance of the poem. Conversely, readers of digital poetry experience hypermediacy through the multiple transformative spaces. This experience invites a more intimate relationship with the space: readers are present in the digital space, activate and interact with the script they encounter, and watch how work changes into performance. In the production space the poem performs in the presence of the readers who use both script and space to have a performance. This also explains why Strickland equates reading digital poems with playing or operating such works and conceives of the poem as an instrument, “e-poetry does things rather than says things. To read e-works is to operate or play them. (More like an instrument than a game, though

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<sup>49</sup> As Bolter explains, with remediation “a newer medium takes the place of an older one, borrowing and reorganizing the characteristics of writing in the older medium and reforming its cultural space” (“Immediacy, Hypermediacy, and Remediation” 23). Simply put, remediation refers to the process whereby computer graphics, virtual reality, and the WWW define themselves by borrowing from and refashioning media such as painting, photography, television, and film. See David J. Bolter and Richard A. Grusin, “Immediacy, Hypermediacy, and Remediation,” *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1999), 20-52.

<sup>50</sup> “[A] transparent interface would be one that erases itself, so that the user is no longer aware of confronting a medium, but instead stands in an immediate relationship to the contents of that medium” (Bolter and Grusin, (“Immediacy, Hypermediacy, and Remediation” 24). “[T]he logic of hypermediacy acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible” (Bolter and Grusin, (“Immediacy, Hypermediacy, and Remediation” 33-34).



some e-works have game like elements)” (“Born Digital”). Secondly, when Bolter and Grusin explain how hypermediacy renders readers aware of heterogeneous spaces as they purposefully call attention to how one medium appears within another medium, their analysis provides a horizontal perspective on space because it addresses the multiplication of spaces across media. Indeed, these spaces make readers aware both of the conceptual relationships among them and of how space is part of the process of digital poetry-making. And yet, I believe that it is equally significant to consider a vertical perspective which takes into account the depth of the digital space that is the multiple layers of space which it is made. Thus, an analysis of the trans-medial space incorporates the source code space as production space and the screen space as a space of enactment.

My use of “trans” in trans-medial space also emphasizes a movement “across mediums,” “across spaces,” and not “within” or “among spaces.” In contrast to the prefix “inter” which demarcates a specific location, “trans” conveys only a certain direction of the movement without locating it with precision because of its emergence out of ephemeral spatial transitions. From a different angle of analysis, in “Born Digital,” Strickland conceives of digital poetry as poetry of “intermedial performative signs” in how the language of this genre relies on interconnections among transactions from one medium into another. So, she uses the word in connection with language, “‘intermedial’ means that any media type at all can be represented as a number on a computer, and any number can become any type of media: sound can appear as image, image as print, diagram as sound. Not only are multiple types of media used in e-lit, but careful attention is usually paid to their interrelation” (“Born Digital”). In his 1991 *Writing Spaces* Bolter

also indirectly speaks about the intermedial aspect that the electronic computer entails. He conceives of the computer as a device for semiotics, which unveils the limitless, yet finite structural relation among signs. As a semiotic device, the computer enables the reading and writing of signs: things that refer to other things, “The computer is a machine for creating and manipulating signs; the signs may be mathematical, verbal, or pictorial. Computer programming and indeed all kinds of writing and reading by computer are exercises in applied semiotics” (Bolter 195). It is his belief that “electronic writing is not limited to verbal text” as the computer integrates texts, images, and sounds and, therefore, “the writeable elements may be words, images, and sounds” (26). Also, when discussing the significance of seeing and reading in concrete poetry in its transition from analog to digital media, Robertson Simanowski associates the intermedial aspect with perception, “the intermedial aspect does not lie in the change of the medium but in the change of *perception*, from the semiotic system of *reading* typical for literature to the semiotic system of *viewing* typical for art” (“Concrete Poetry in Analog and Digital Media” 6).<sup>51</sup> In contrast to Strickland’s “intermedial performative sign,” Bolter’s vision of the computer as a device for “writable elements,” and Simanowski’s intermedial angle for perception, my trans-medial space argues for the significance of multiple spaces involved in medial transactions and as a result, views the trans-medial space as a mediating agent.

First it is noteworthy to mention that the emergence of works of digital literature not only have questioned the traditional concept of authorship but have also challenged the category of agency. In the beginning, there were two competing notions of the author:

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<sup>51</sup> See Robertson Simanowski, “Concrete Poetry in Analog and Digital Media.” *Dichtung-Digital 2* (2003), <http://dichtung-digital.mewi.unibas.ch/2003/parisconnection/concretetepoetry.htm>.

author as the only creative genius and author as collaborator. The former originates in the late medieval times and continues through the romantic period. As French literary theorist Roland Barthes explains, this notion completely disregards the role of the writer in the production of the work and makes literature overwhelmingly focused on the author, his person, history, tastes, and passions (“The Death of the Author”).<sup>52</sup> The latter notion characterizes modernity, and speaks of collaborative authorship in which authorship represents a system of authors and writers who work together. In this case, the author is a collaborator. Because post-structuralism and reader-response theory expressed heightened critical attention regarding the position of the reader in the interpretation of the text, the reader is privileged over the author. As Bolter also remarks, the writing space reflects the tensions between the authority of the author and the empowerment of the reader. With the emergence of digital literature, the author-text-reader relationship conceives of authorship as a collaborative process in which other writers are engaged in the production of the text. As hypermedia theorist George Landow explains, “hypertext has no authors in the conventional sense . . . hypertext as a writing medium metamorphoses the author into an editor or developer.”<sup>53</sup> In this way, the reader is endowed with increased agency: the reader is not only an active interpreter of the text but also a co-author. And yet, even this authorship may be more complex because every digital technology needs some form of platform to run on, and as a result, software may also have authorship.<sup>54</sup> As the video-game studies theorist Espen Aarseth concludes in

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<sup>52</sup> The author is the originator of the idea or the creator content of the work whereas the writer is the one who writes it down or who is involved in the overall production of the work.

<sup>53</sup> The reader may choose a path while navigating through the text, create links among blocks of text, and even make annotations. See George Landow, *Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1997.

<sup>54</sup> For a discussion on how the software environment imposes its constraints on text see J. Yellowlees Douglas, *The End of Books—Or Books without End?* Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000.

*Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, it is still difficult to define and locate agency, “if the difference between author and reader has vanished or diminished (cf. some of the claims for hypertext), then the real author must be hiding somewhere else” (165).

In *Cybertext*, Aarseth proposes an intriguing theory of textual communication based on how digital literature works perform or become sites of encounter between author, text, and readers, turning readers into performers through their active involvement in the literary work. His model of textuality is based on a triangulation which encompasses three agents: operator, verbal sign, and medium. In some regards, Aarseth’s 1997 model of textuality echoes the 1960 communication model of the Russian literary theorist Roman Jakobson who first called attention to the communicative functions among addresser, addressee, and context. However, Aarseth’s paradigm discloses and engages with what he calls, “the complex continuum of positions or functions” (162).<sup>55</sup> That is why for him “text is seen as a machine—not metaphorically but as a mechanical device for the production and consumption of verbal signs” (Aarseth 21).<sup>56</sup> While acknowledging that the boundaries between these agents are fluid, Aarseth’s model also underlines the significance of the medium as a space in which this text / machine exists, emerges, and is experienced, “Just as a film is useless without a projector and a screen, so a text must consist of a material medium as well as a collection of words” (21). Similarly, in “Writing the Virtual” Strickland invokes three agents, or “communicative peers” involved in the production of the writing and receiving, “writer-coder, machine

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<sup>55</sup> See Chapter 3 for a discussion on how Caterina Davinio’s net-poetry projects use as starting point Jakobson’s communication model.

<sup>56</sup> See Espen Aarseth, “Introduction: Ergodic Literature,” *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997), 1-23.

processor-network, player-reader” (2).<sup>57</sup> Aarseth admits that text only takes place within this triad; Strickland also contends that “unless all [agents] are engaged, nothing is happening” (2). Strickland adopts a rather descriptive approach to the role of space and correlates it with the reading activity that it calls for.<sup>58</sup> She acknowledges that digital literature involves different kinds of time-space experience and addresses in particular the manipulation of language from a spatio-temporal standpoint.<sup>59</sup> Whereas both Aarseth’s and Strickland’s models invoke the convergence of human and machine agencies in order to establish precisely who performs what, I am interested in how the trans-medial space as a site of encounter engages in and with the performance of the digital work.

I conceive the trans-medial space as a mediating agent. That is to say this space mediates the transactions that computers, authors, and readers go through. The fact that this trans-medial space is an “in-between space” reinforces the idea that this space is part of these transactions. Also, as a mediating agent, such a space is constituted by what it does, for whom, and how. As a result, content wise, trans-medial space is also made of these transactions. As Bernstein significantly rationalizes, “a medium is an ‘in-between’ in which you go from one place to another but also the material of that in-betweenness” (“The Art of Immemorability” 514). And the material of this “in-betweenness” references various transformations of the source code spaces into production spaces, of the readers

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<sup>57</sup> See Stephanie Strickland, “Writing the Virtual: Eleven Dimensions of E-Poetry.” “New Media Poetry and Poetics” Special Issue, *Leonardo Electronic Almanac* 14.5-6 (2006): 1-19, 25 Sep. 2006 [http://leoalmanac.org/journal/vol\\_14/lea\\_v14\\_n05-06/ssstrickland.html](http://leoalmanac.org/journal/vol_14/lea_v14_n05-06/ssstrickland.html).

<sup>58</sup> “E-poetry explores three-dimensional space in three ways: on screens, in gallery installations, and by directing people using mobile devices as they move around on earth. Such poetry leads to exploring the interaction of surface and depth when reading words; it allows such effects from front to back instead of left to right, reading texts in motion or reading overlapping texts, all of which simultaneously explore the texts and their effects on human perception and neural processing” (“Born Digital,” section 8).

<sup>59</sup> “[T]he spatial use of language onscreen are the effects of rotation, pan zoom, scaling, translation, split screen, flip, pitch, yaw, roll, overlays, speed control etc. [ . . . ] Among screen options for language time are the ability to pace text’s appearance; the ability to change appearance based on whether it is a first or later reading; and the creation of time lapses, time scans, sequences, replays, freezes, resumption of text, altered speed, interpolation-extension replacements in ‘real’ time (stretch-text)” (“Born Digital,” section 10).

into performers through their active involvement in the literary work, and of the computer code into work. All these transformations are always interrelated in the sense that they stem from ongoing transactions among spaces, readers, and computers. Such transactions are possible because they happen in a mediating digital space. Also, the idea of digital space as a mediating agent underscores the ways in which the notion of agency keeps evolving in digital media. Indeed, concrete poets reveal a visionary approach to space when they describe it as “a structural agent.” And yet, they do not imply that space acts upon the poem. “Concrete poetry begins by being aware of graphic space as structural agent,” the Brazilian *Noigandres* group declares in their 1958 “Pilot Plan.” As Augusto de Campos further explains, concrete poetry not only represents space but also acts upon it, “proportioning new spatio-temporal modes of apprehension of the text by the reader.” In this way, he associates the idea of acting only with the effect that space generates. Conversely, the trans-medial space is a space which acts its own presence, and at the same time, carries out an action and performs a role on screen as stage. It is a presence which mediates transactions and is simultaneously made of transactions. This is nothing new in poetic readings as we see in the earlier work of Emily Dickinson, for instance. Thus, in “Rowing in Eden: Reading Dickinson Reading,” Martha Nell Smith, uses the verb “to row” as a metaphor for reading or exchanges or transactions among poets, texts, and readers as constitutive parts of the site of reading, “The ‘rowing’ or exchanges among poet, text, and reader emphasized by Dickinson’s productions are constitutive parts of the site of reading” (54) / “rowing characterizes the dynamic processes between the author and her readers, since both parties work to produce texts” (55).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See Martha Nell Smith, “Rowing in Eden: Reading Dickinson Reading,” *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1992), 50-95, 232-238.

In mediating these transactions the trans-medial space also acts upon and transforms what it contains. It is not only self-transformative, but transforming as well. Trans-medial space transforms, performs, and acts. In so doing, the space of the digital poem engages in and with the performance of text alongside readers. With such a consideration I locate the performance of digital poetry in multiple agencies: in computers, readers, and spaces. In “Code as Language” Glazier acknowledges the close interrelation between writing and the space in which it happens, “writing occurs in space and space is itself part of the process through which writing produces meaning” (1).<sup>61</sup> That is to say meaning comes out from what the text says as well as from how space is used in the scene of writing (Glazier 2). By implication, Glazier explicates, “in digital media, textuality is equally a function of the meaning of space” (1). To paraphrase his statement, I say that textuality is the meaning of the function of space. This means that space has meaning, but it functions as well. As a result, textuality reflects how space functions. According to Glazier, in digital media there are three levels of space: the space of the network in which “texts can exist across nodes;” the space of the screen, which is navigated through scrolling, linking, and paging; and the space of the hard disk in which data is stored. My trans-medial space echoes Glazier’s space of the network in the sense that trans-medial space mediates and consists in a network of transactions.

Calling upon Strickland’s statement that digital poetry “does things rather than says things” I agree that trans-medial space “does” things rather than “says” things. As a

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<sup>61</sup> See Loss Pequeño Glazier, “Code as Language.” “New Media Poetry and Poetics” Special Issue, *Leonardo Electronic Almanac* 14.5-6 (2006): 1-9, 25 Sep. 2006  
[http://leoalmanac.org/journal/vol\\_14/lea\\_v14\\_n05-06/lglazier.html](http://leoalmanac.org/journal/vol_14/lea_v14_n05-06/lglazier.html).

mediating agent of transactions, it affects the performance of the text.<sup>62</sup> Code is installed in the computer space which is a source code space. When readers encounter script in the production space, script becomes work.<sup>63</sup> As an enactment, work is an instantiation. Instantiation encompasses a specific spatiality as well as a fleeting temporality; it is about a “here and now” experience; and speaks about the presence of the work. In this way, performance represents a totality. This means that performance includes both the enactments of which a digital poem is made and the entire constellation of agencies which enable its enactment, including spaces. Also, in the production space various agents encounter the code. Thus, there is the computer which reads the code; readers who come across the code; trans-medial space which enables the existence and emergence of work. The production space shapes as an enactment space because it is here where code is enacted as work. This enactment space remains partially hidden in the computer as execution space and partially gains visibility in the screen space. Thus, the screen space turns into an exhibition space and work becomes performance.

Significantly, whereas code and work are concrete entities in how readers can see and explore them in the production space, performance is an abstract concept. Simply put, digital poems as performance happen: they are experience. From this viewpoint, my argument is in alignment with Rita Raley’s observation on the impossibility of identifying the precise location of performance. In “Reveal Codes: Hypertext and Performance” (2001), an article which counts among the pioneering approaches to digital

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<sup>62</sup> In order to reinforce the mode of performance with which digital poetry is endowed, Strickland makes a meaningful explanation on how “affecting” an image means having effect it that is making it alive. This means that in acting upon texts and images, readers convey them the precise quality of presence. “Note that ‘affects’ and ‘effects’ are the same here; in the electronic literature situation, where the basic activity is not saying but doing, to affect the image is literally to effect it, to make it present” (“Born Digital,” section 6).

<sup>63</sup> Here is a visual schematization of the rationale:

Code	—————	Work	—————	Performance=Poem
Script: Text as score				(Enactments+ Agencies)



literature as a form of performance Raley rationalizes, “Because it is not possible to locate the moment that brings together the computer units to produce something new, the quantum shift that changes the structure and the system, complexity is itself not locatable. Nor can complexity be metaphysically demonstrated; it exists only in action, in performance, in terms of its influence of one component part over another” (section 13).<sup>64</sup> From a different angle of interpretation, John Cayley correlates the performance of the digital poem with the “unbroken code.” Interested in exploring code-text intricate interaction Cayley considers that the complexity of code stems from its constant mixture of visibility and invisibility. He defines code as “an archive of the symbolic inner workings of the computer” (“Time Code Language” 307).<sup>65</sup> Part of code surfaces in the screen space and materializes as text whereas the other part of code remains hidden in source code space and keeps performing. From the theorist’s viewpoint, code which becomes visible turns into text because “code ceases to function as code and becomes part of a human discourse” (“The Code is not the Text”).<sup>66</sup> Conversely, code that remains invisible, “unbroken code,” keeps functioning / performing as code. This explains his dictum, “code is not text, unless it *is* the text” (“The Code is not the Text (unless it is the Text”).

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<sup>64</sup> See Rita Raley, “Reveal Codes: Hypertext and Performance,” *Post Modern Culture* 12-1 (2001), <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/pmc/v012/12.1ralej.html>.

<sup>65</sup> “No matter how little attention you or I pay to what is going on as we process, it is easy to concede that, for example, the meanings of words such as ‘code’ and ‘text’ change during the shifting ‘now’—the distinct present moments as I write and you read—and may well change radically over the course of my intermittent writing / speaking and your intermittent reading / hearing” (“Time Code Language” 309). See John Cayley, “Time Code Language: New Media Poetics and Programmed Signification” in *New Media Poetics: Contexts, Technotexts, and Theories*, eds. Adalaide Kirby Morris and Thomas Swiss (Cambridge: MIT P, 2006): 307-334.

<sup>66</sup> See John Cayley, “The Code is not the Text (unless it is the Text).” *Electronic Book Review* (September 10, 2002), <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/literal>.

From the heterogeneous field of digital poetry my project calls attention to three different forms of digital poetry: video-poetry, net-poetry, and JavaScript-based poetry which I approach as scripted performances. These works unveil visions of and about poetry and invite speculation on the form that poetry takes in new media spaces. In this respect, I discuss Toti's video-graphic spaces, Davinio's networked spaces in which real-virtual converge, and Glazier's scripting spaces as expressions of the trans-medial space in which poetry exists, emerges, and is experienced.

Toti's works mark a significant transition from the space of innovative nineteenth-century poetry in print to the video-graphic space of his video-poetry from the 1980s. Space in his video-poetry reveals a certain fluidity which enables the coexistence of verbal and non-verbal registers. Here, fluidity does not refer to how space shifts; instead, it references how space affects the text which it contains. Content wise, text is no longer made only of verbal elements. Text borrows the visual and aural qualities of the video-graphic space. Simply put, it is a space which celebrates the convergence of chromatic, acoustic, and linguistic registers. In this way, Toti's video-poems are performances written in a verbal-audio-visual language. Toti's image is chromatic language and Toti's sound is acoustic language. Also, this video-graphic space stimulates the senses and, as a result, calls for visually and acoustically sensitive readers. Although readers do not physically enter this space in the sense that they are not physically in it, they have a "here and now" experience. This is possible because in his video-poetry Toti fragments space and time and re-creates them anew. And his re-creations are akin to performances.

Davinio's net-poetry projects happen in and speak about networked spaces. These performances with poetry are wide relational projects in which performance emerges out of contact among people as well as in the contact between real-virtual spaces. They happen both in reality (real spaces) and online (net spaces). As a result, the spaces of her net-performances do not evolve from one another. Instead, they intersect, interconnect, and interact with one another. Real and virtual spaces develop in a network from which performance poetry emerges. These networked spaces are social and collaborative spaces. That is to say, in her projects, artists and poets use these spaces to perform their poems which fosters emergent spaces for poetry collecting (website guestroom), video-poetry reading (webcam), and poetry making (online chat-room). Also, as spaces in a network, they keep the channel of communication among artists open and facilitate the transmission of poetry. In this way, Davinio's networked spaces are not only happening spaces but become the actual content of poetry performances. The dynamism of processes inside the channel of communication makes communication become a form of action and renders it close to performance.

Glazier's JavaScript-based poems call attention to scripting spaces. In combining natural languages with computer programming language the poet makes and inscribes language anew. This poetics of programming complicates the understanding of the interconnected layers of language expression and discloses the intriguing dimension of language combined with code. As a creative form of language-making and writing, coding reveals a sophisticated way of looking and thinking of the text in the scripting space. In this scripting space, text is a meaningful literary variant of the poem in performance. This code-writing interaction entails the variability of the text in the screen

space, and unveils poems as onscreen performances. These poems are inter-linguistic performances in between natural and computer programming languages and among shifting panels in which images and texts overlap. As a literary variant, the text in the source code is part of an enlarged network within which the digital poem emerges and to which it belongs. That is why Glazier's JavaScript-based poems invite readers to watch how text appears in the screen space and read the text in the source code space.

Digital poetry as scripted performance calls particular attention to the role of space in the enactment of script into work. This space-dependency links digital poetry with new media art installation. According to Baetens and Van Looy such digital works are akin to installations, "Digital writing obeys comparable inclinations: it tends to be staged, to be disclosed in the form of a performance, for instance when e-poetry or e-writing is displayed in blockbuster events such as the Biennale in Venice, the Documents in Kassel, or, more specifically, for e-poetry in gatherings such as the already-mentioned Ars electronica or DEAF festivals, to name the most famous ones" (5).<sup>67</sup> Funkhouser's prediction on digital poetry as an exhibition or even a "screening" also substantiates this correlation,

each of the terms within digital poetry bears elements of performance and translation. As performers, digital poems are not (yet) dramas with actors on stages but are sometimes interactive, a quality not usually encountered by theater audiences. Digital poetry is a creative, interdisciplinary exhibition or 'screening,' where language and computers serve as

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<sup>67</sup> See Baetens and Looy, "E-Poetry between Image and Performance."

mediators, as contemporary interpretations of writing.” (“Techniques Enabled” 235).<sup>68</sup>

Indeed, the present technologies of writing change the form of these works and call for the trans-medial quality of the electronic writing which re-fashions Bolter’s concept of topographic writing. This new quality enhances the function of the space(s) in the making of digital poetry, and underlines the dependency of this genre on the computer space. Moreover, because these technologies convey a sense of writing space as multiple and changeable, such an approach opens up new venues for the reading of digital works which takes into account the spaces of the computer screen, source code, and code execution.

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<sup>68</sup> See Funkhouser “Techniques Enabled: (Pro)Fusions after Poetry Computerized,” *Prehistoric Digital Poetry*, 221-256.

## Chapter II: Historicizing Digital Poetry within a Comparative Framework

*Electronic Literature Collection*, *Media Poetry: an International Anthology*, and *Prehistoric Digital Poetry: an Archeology of Forms, 1959-1995* are three landmark anthologies of digital poetry published in the United States between 2006 and 2007. Content wise, these collections articulate the history of this genre in terms of emergence and evolution and reveal how the expressive power of poetry can be re-imagined through technology, programming, interactivity, networking, and other new media procedures. With regard to the literary legacy of this genre, one collection underlines the connection between digital poetry and Italian Futurism, the avant-garde movement of the first half of twentieth century, while the other two do not.<sup>69</sup> In order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the present forms that digital poetry takes it is essential to reconsider Italian Futurism as a significant moment in the conceptual foundation of this genre and to re-contextualize its further evolution within the American discourse. For my specific purpose on how these United States anthologies speak of Italian digital poetry I do not adopt a chronological arrangement with regard to their presentation. Instead, my arrangement addresses the development of this poetry in Italy from 1950s to the present, and mainly of video-poetry in order to provide a global view of digital poetry outside the United States.

In 2006 *Electronic Literature Collection* (volume I) appears on the web and in CD-ROM format as the first online anthology that gathers contemporary digital

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<sup>69</sup> In 1909 the Italian writer Filippo Tommaso Marinetti issues the first “Futurist Manifesto,” which lays the basis for the literary movement, Italian Futurism.

writings.<sup>70</sup> Endowed with an intriguing, yet overwhelming visual interface, the collection displays screenshots from sixty works. The content of each work is prefaced by four sections which include: editors' concise descriptions; authors' own commentaries; technical instructions for readers; and location(s) regarding their publication.<sup>71</sup> In this way, the anthology unveils how literary critics perceive these works, how authors make them, how readers experience (read, watch, or interact with) them, and where to look for them in order to explore similar works. The overall organization is flexible in that it provides information by keywords, authors, and titles. To read these keywords means to trace the narrative of electronic literature as an emerging field, compartmentalize it into subgenres, translate its prevalent themes, understand the current technological or literary techniques, and identify its wide authorship.<sup>72</sup> The anthology situates digital poetry among genres such as drama and fiction, and defines it broadly as an intricate mix of constructions ranging from ambient poetry, concrete poetry, audio or sound poetry, kinetic poetry to procedural poetry, codeworks, database poems, hypertext poems, 3D poems, and instrumental texts. According to the collection's keyword list, such constructions are "poetry" because they exist "under continual construction (*poiesis*) by [their] creators and receivers" and because they "are often constructed by strategies

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<sup>70</sup> The collection is edited by N. Katherine Hayles, postmodern literary scholar and electronic literature critic; Nick Montfort, poet, computer scientist, and interactive fiction author; Scott Rettberg, digital culture professor; and Stephanie Strickland, digital media poet and scholar.

See Electronic Literature Collection (volume I) <http://www.eliterature.org/collection/1/>.

<sup>71</sup> Editors usually discuss the poetics of the works mainly their aesthetic value or compositional style and make biographical and bibliographical references. The last section contains information on different distribution venues such as journals in the field, festivals, and other delivery media.

<sup>72</sup> Here is a list of few subgenres: children's literature, fiction and interactive fiction, hypertext, memoir, parody / satire, etc. as well as of thematic leads: ambient; critical / political / philosophical; documentary; memory.

With regard to technological tools, there are references to computer programs used in works: Shockwave, Flash, JavaScript, interactive programming languages, and HTML. Also, literary aspects signal out works based on collaboration in which the text is not composed by authors but collected from print or online sources.

analogous to those found in experimental print poetry or cinema.” The anthology calls for this inclusive definition which breaks the conventions of traditional lyric and opens up the space for wide-reaching pieces made with diverse digital procedures. With regard to the concept of space, *ELC* records the keyword “place” and depicts it as “cyber-location” or “online network” in relation to real-virtual location where the works are produced and as “displacement” or “diaspora” in reference to the theme that these works address.<sup>73</sup>

Despite its desideratum for the inclusion of a wide array of forms, *ELC* lacks international diversity. Gathering electronic literature pieces predominantly from North America, its discourse is anchored in the United States literary canon. Only fifteen out of forty-eight authors are outside North America, and they bring contributions mainly from England, Germany, and France. Since the content of the collection does not go beyond other European electronic literature works, the declared claim for a global audience remains unfulfilled.<sup>74</sup> Needless to say, only seven out of the sixty works are non-English: French, Spanish, German, and Arabic. As Mark C. Marino also remarks in his review of the digital anthology, *ELC* offers “little in the way of cultural diversity,” by which he understands the absence of works by African Americans.<sup>75</sup> As he further explicates, pedagogical and preservation-related concerns determined *ELC* editors to leave aside

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<sup>73</sup> “Place is rethought in many ways in digital works. Issues of displacement, diaspora, positioning by satellite, cyber-location, and re-understood geo-location are raised by the nature of the online network experience. Some of the work dealing with place references the mid-twentieth century Situationist movement” See Contents by Keywords <http://collection.eliterature.org/1/aux/keywords.html>.

<sup>74</sup> “Since its formation, the Electronic Literature Organization has worked to assist writers and publishers in bringing their literary works to a wider, global readership and to provide them with the infrastructure necessary to reach one another” See <http://collection.eliterature.org/1/aux/about.html>.

<sup>75</sup> “Perhaps as a symptom, racial representations tend to be white. Questions of race become blurred in questions of post-human races. [. . .] the lack of diversity in the authors reflects the digital divide between these groups and historically (and apparently still) underrepresented groups, such as African Americans” Mark C. Marino, “The Electronic Literature Collection Volume I: A New Media Primer.” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 2.1 (Summer 2008), <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/2/1/000017/000017.html>.



works that could not be run from a CD and non-English contributions that could not be authoritatively evaluated.<sup>76</sup>

In 2007 Eduardo Kac publishes *Media Poetry: an International Anthology*, which represents the revised 1996 *New Media Poetry: Poetic Innovation and New Technologies*, the first international anthology of digital poetry which collects articles from worldwide poets and artists.<sup>77</sup> Kac revises the initial collection given that the intellectual curiosity in the production and scholarly research of this genre increases substantially. The 2007 enhanced edition contains three core chapters: “Digital Poetry,” “Multimedia Poetics,” and “Historical and Critical Perspectives” which testify to the existence of the field, the conceptualization of its poetics and pioneering attempts. Kac’s second edition preserves the initial angle of investigation and thematic arrangement, and brings in new articles in order to chronicle the evolution of this genre. The nine theoretical articles which represent the first chapter “Digital Poetry” introduce a wide typology of new media poems based on close readings. Thus, poets present their own works, draw attention to their creative momentum, and theorize about reading strategies.<sup>78</sup> In this way, they open

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<sup>76</sup> “Montfort mentioned his own regrets about the absence of works from other languages but explained that the editors agreed they could not authoritatively evaluate non-English works without having an editor with mastery of that language” See Marino’s review

<http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/2/1/000017/000017.html>.

<sup>77</sup> Eduardo Kac is an American artist and writer who, in 1983, creates holopoetry: poems organized in an immaterial 3D space and biopoems: poems written with or within living beings.

The 1996 edition comes out “as a special issue of the journal *Visible Language* (vol. 30, n. 2)” (“Introduction” 7).

“This is the first international anthology to document a radically new poetry, one that is impossible to present directly in books and that challenges even the innovations of recent and contemporary experimental poetics” (“Introduction to The First Edition” 11). See Eduardo Kac, “Introduction,” *Media Poetry: An International Anthology*, ed. Eduardo Kac (Bristol: Intellect, 2007), 7-12.

<sup>78</sup> For instance, in “Virtual Poetry” Ladislao Pablo Gyori defines “virtual poems or vpoems” as “interactive digital entities, capable of: (1) taking part in or being generated within a virtual world [ . . . ]; (2) being experienced by means of partially or fully immersive interface devices [ . . . ]; (3) assuming an aesthetic dimension [ . . . ]; and (4) being defined as hypertext structures [ . . . ]” (93). See *Media Poetry*, ed. Eduardo Kac, 91-96.

Eduardo Kac prefaces the analysis of his work with an archival biography of his media poems from early 1980s, and chronicles this evolution by calling attention to 1974 creative momentum when he reads an

up the critical apparatus of a field synchronically to its emergence. Each of the five articles from “Multimedia Poetics” addresses the technique of making new media poems, and tackles with new creative forms such as biopoetry, holopoetry, techno-poetics, and video-poetry.<sup>79</sup> The third chapter combines historical overviews on links between traditional experimental poetry and new media poetry, and critical insights on how such works are valuable both from a technological and literary viewpoint.<sup>80</sup> Vis-à-vis the concept of space, the anthology displays an array of writing spaces referencing the virtual space in which Ladislao Pablo Györi creates his virtual poems, the cell phone space of Giselle Beiguelman’s first “nomadic poems,” or “the space made of diffracted light” of Eduardo Kac’s holopoems.

Two introductions preface *Media Poetry*, whereas a “Media Poetry Chronology” and a “Selected Weblibliography” serve as addendum. The introductions document a significant shift in the evolution of this genre: the 1996 perspective situates the field in relationship with poetry whereas the one in 2007 acknowledges its liaison with the substratum of contemporary art, more specifically with “global media art exhibition” (9).<sup>81</sup> The mission of this second edition seeks to offer a larger venue for discussion and

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encyclopedia article on holography (“From ASCII to Cyberspace: a Trajectory in Digital Poetry” 45). See *Media Poetry*, ed. Eduardo Kac, 45-66.

Jim Rosenberg discusses his works from the perspective of hypertext “as a medium of thought” (“The Interactive Diagram Sentence: Hypertext as a Medium of Thought” 15). See *Media Poetry*, ed. Eduardo Kac, 15-24.

<sup>79</sup> In this chapter, E. M. de Melo e Castro publishes an article on video-poetry. He is a Portuguese poet who, in the late 1960s, creates the first video-poems.

<sup>80</sup> See Friedrich W. Block’s “Digital Poetics or on the Evolution of Experimental Media Poetry,” 229.

<sup>81</sup> The “Introduction to The First Edition” says, “This new-media poetry inserts itself in the field of experimental poetics, at the same time that it clearly departs from the formal conquests of other groups or movements in the twentieth century (11). See *Media Poetry*, ed. Eduardo Kac, 11-12.

The “Introduction” to the second edition says, “An ever-broader global media art exhibition circuit started to incorporate media poetry works that cannot be properly or exclusively displayed online, such as installations. It is a unique sign of the new boundary-blurring condition of language-based media art that many works are equally comfortable in ‘visual art’ or ‘creative writing’ circuits” (8). See *Media Poetry*, ed. Eduardo Kac, 7-10.

to widen the audience beyond the immediate circles of new media poets. Overall, this anthology provides an inclusive definition of media poetry in how it references multiple forms. This intrinsic diversity delineates the genre and enhances its interdisciplinary nature in which various fields such as theater, music, and art converge. The addendum, “Media Poetry—A Chronology from 1921 to 1996,” lists important periods from its international history, without being comprehensive, as Kac concedes (12).<sup>82</sup> Vis-à-vis the origins of this genre, the introduction to the first edition of *Media Poetry* concisely acknowledges the literary contribution of Italian Futurism alongside other avant-garde movements such as Cubism, Constructivism, Dadaism, and Lettrism, without receiving any further consideration in its next edition.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, the addendum does not go beyond the mere recording of two names, Filippo Marinetti and Nanni Balestrini.<sup>84</sup>

Same year 2007, Christopher T. Funkhouser publishes *Prehistoric Digital Poetry: an Archeology of Forms, 1959-1995*, the first book on the history of digital poetry. Funkhouser approaches digital poetry as a subject of academic study, and creates a historical and chronological framework necessary to establish a literary canon.<sup>85</sup> This is

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<sup>82</sup> “The geographic diversity of this small sample of new media poetry—from Argentina and Brazil, to the United States, and to the Netherlands, France, Portugal and the United Kingdom (via Canada)—is a clear indication that this is an international phenomenon” (“Introduction to The First Edition” 11).

<sup>83</sup> “From the rational and anti-rational approaches of the avant-garde movements of the first half of the century (including Futurism, Cubism, Constructivism, Dadaism, and Lettrism) to the print-based directions of the second half (including Spatialism, Concretism, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, Beat, Visual Poetry, Fluxus, and Process / Poem), experimental poetics has seen a relentless exploration of the verbal sign in ‘codexspace’, to use a term introduced by John Cayley” (“Introduction to The First Edition” 11).

<sup>84</sup> “1933—Filippo Marinetti and Pino Masnata publish the ‘Manifesto della radio,’ or ‘La radio.’ Five poetic / conceptual radio works are signed by Marinetti and Masnata, although quite possibly they were created by Masnata alone. On 24 November 1933, Fortunato Depero and Marinetti made the first Futurist transmissions over Radio Milano” (273).

“1961—The Italian poet Nanni Balestrini creates his first computer poem, ‘Tape Mark I’” (273).

“1963—Balestrini creates ‘Tape Mark II’” (274). See *Media Poetry*, ed. Eduardo Kac, 273-278.

<sup>85</sup> Poet and scholar Christopher T. Funkhouser is Associate Professor of Humanities at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. As I discuss in chapter 1 Funkhouser provides a straightforward definition of digital poetry as “a new genre of literary, visual, and sonic art launched by poets who began to experiment with computers in the late 1950s” (1). See “Introduction: Evolving Circuits of Digital Poetry,” *Prehistoric Digital Poetry: An Archeology of Forms, 1959-1995* (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2007), 1-30.

an anthology and archeology which contains an impressive genealogy of works from 1959 to 1995, an era which the scholar labels “pre-history” because it is anonymous or less known to a wide audience.<sup>86</sup> Whereas in *Media Poetry* the field crystallizes through the convergence of worldwide perspectives, in *Prehistoric Digital Poetry* the field surfaces chronologically. In this respect, this collection introduces works created in particular periods, establishes their “historical forebears,” and provides comments on their technological configuration and aesthetic value (32).<sup>87</sup> The table of contents identifies: “Origination: Text Generation,” “Visual and Kinetic Digital Poems,” “Hypertext and Hypermedia,” and “Alternative Arrangements for Digital Poetry.” These chapter divisions unveil an archival approach which maps out works from the 1960s generated by computer algorithm; poems from the 1970s and 1980s which heighten the visual and kinetic properties of language; hypertext and hypermedia works from the 1980s and 1990s; and pre-World Wide Web network writing initiatives.<sup>88</sup> With reference to the concept of space, Funkhouser’s chapter on “alternative arrangements for digital poetry” is noteworthy for how it brings into discussion the MOO environment as a space

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<sup>86</sup> “The work discussed here is prehistoric because no masterpieces or ‘works for the ages’ emerged to lodge the genre in the imagination of a larger audience” (“Introduction” 6). “The dawning of the WWW (launched in 1991 but not used creatively until 1995) is a significant point of demarcation, as it signals a profound and historical shift in the way digital poems were made available for viewers” (“Introduction” 7).

<sup>87</sup> Technological configuration refers to works produced with old programs, hardware, and software.

<sup>88</sup> The 1960s works “can be seen as performing some type of permutation in that they transform or reorder one set of base texts or language” (“Origination: Text Generation” 37). “[The 1970s] visual and kinetic works largely employ mutation as opposed to permutation” (“Visual and Kinetic Digital Poems” 85). Here, Funkhouser gives examples of works from Brazilian, US, Portuguese and French poets. The 1980s “Typically, hypertext and hypermedia poems prior to the WWW contained interlinked text and sometimes image files. They are ‘interactive’ in that they often—but not always—require choices made by the viewer” (“Hypertext and Hypermedia” 195). “I would not remiss not to address Internet publications, digital projects conducted in physical space, and audio poetry, all of which transpired during this period” (“Alternative Arrangements for Digital Poetry” 199).

for poetry creation during the first half of the 1990s.<sup>89</sup> This is a type of poetry created in a virtual space which takes the form of written collaboration based on the simultaneous connection among multiple users. Just like Kac's addendum, Funkhouser also presents a chronology of works which schematizes the worldwide evolution of the genre and lists the works of the Italian poets, Nanni Balestrini and Enzo Minarelli.

In contrast to *Media Poetry*, *Prehistoric Digital Poetry* dedicates space to more Italian poets when tracing the genealogy of digital poetry. For instance, Funkhouser contextualizes Nanni Balestrini's 1961 "Tape Mark" poems within the early computer-randomized poetry in alignment with Theo Lutz's 1959 analogous experiments at Stuttgart computer center, Germany, and with Brion Gysin's 1960 computerized poems created in the United Kingdom. As the scholar points out, unlike Lutz's and Gysin's works which rely on passages taken from only one text origin, Balestrini's program is more complex because it combines and constructs words in Italian from three different source materials.<sup>90</sup> In this way, Funkhouser does not only underscore Balestrini's particular contribution to this early stage but he also reintegrates a post-Futurist Italian work within a wider creative history of digital poetry. Although the scholar references all avant-garde movements as a historical model for the first algorithm-based works, he elaborates especially on Dada strategy of poetry-making which employs the random reorganization of words cut up from newspapers.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, from a technical viewpoint,

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<sup>89</sup> "[In a MOO], a user assumes a character name and identity and, in addition to interacting with other users in real time, can create (via object-oriented programming) a virtual space, which can be interconnected with spaces built by other participants" (Funkhouser 203).

<sup>90</sup> "Balestrini's 'Tape Mark' poems (1961) recombine passages in Italian from three different writers. The program combines and constructs chains of words from these passages, ultimately and unavoidably portraying a scenario of nuclear disaster as a result of the inclusion of Hachiya's text" (Funkhouser, "Origination: Text Generation" 41).

<sup>91</sup> "Dadaism is unquestionably a historical model that can be used as context for many of the computerized works. Poems shown below reestablish—using computer operations—the radical unconventionality that

the Dadaist use of collage techniques calls attention to the fragmentation and hybridization of texts as artistic means of creation. And yet, it is equally essential to acknowledge that, from a conceptual standpoint, it is Marinetti who liberates the words from any syntax or prosody when speaking for the first time of “parole in libertà” (“words in freedom”) in his 1912 “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature.”<sup>92</sup> In this respect, his 1912 precise instructions also provide a formula of poetry-making which predates the 1918 Dada strategy.

Also, in the “Visual and Kinetic Digital Poems” chapter Funkhouser devotes one paragraph to Caterina Davinio’s *Tecno-Poesia* assessing it as “the most useful catalog of video-poetry” (92).<sup>93</sup> The scholar is undeniably right when he introduces Davinio as having a background “in electronic and video art rather than literature” and notes that the works from her anthology are centered on the idea of image processing

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was emerging and had already been permitted in twentieth-century literature (not only at the Cabaret Voltaire but in futurist exhortations, surrealist cut-ups, and elsewhere)” (Funkhouser, “Origination: Text Generation” 33).

Here is Tristan Tzara’s formula of making a “Dadaist poem”: “Take a newspaper. / Take a pair of scissors. / Choose an article as long as you are planning to make your poem. / Cut out the article. / Then cut out each of the words that make up this article and put them in a bag. / Shake it gently. / Then take out the scraps one after the other in the order in which they left the bag. / Copy conscientiously. / The poem will be like you. / And here you are a writer, infinitely original and endowed with a sensibility that is charming though beyond the understanding of the vulgar” (“Seven Dada Manifestoes” 92). See “Seven Dada Manifestoes,” in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*. ed. Robert Motherwell (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981), 73-98.

<sup>92</sup>Here is a list of the first containing some of Marinetti’s instructions:

- “1. We must destroy syntax by placing nouns at random as they are born. [. . .]
2. We must use the verb in the infinitive, so that it will conform elastically to the noun and will not subordinate it to the I of the writer who sees or imagines it.[. . .]
3. We must abolish the adjective so that the naked noun can retain its essential color.[. . .]
4. We must abolish the adverb, old clip that holds words together. [. . .]
5. Every noun should have its double—that is, a noun should be followed, without any conjunctive phrase [. . .]
6. No more punctuation [. . .] etc” (“Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature”)

<sup>93</sup> Caterina Davinio is an Italian computer artist, writer, and curator who has published essays about new media poetry, the novel *Color, Color* (1998), and the anthology *Techno-Poetry and Virtual Realities: History, Theory, Writing Experiences, Visuality, and New Media*. Davinio also writes print poetry and creates video- and net-poetry.

(multidimensional distortion of image) (92).<sup>94</sup> Moreover, he extols Davinio's contribution to video-poetry in that she introduced new video-artists who employ works by established poets in their video-poems, but provides no further substantial examination besides a listing of few names. I contend that the publication year of her anthology, 2002, is evenly significant because *Tecno-Poesia* can be considered the first anthology in the field or the second one after Kac's first edition of *Media Poetry* from 1996.<sup>95</sup> The lack of visibility of many Italian digital poems might explain the absence of a more theoretical analysis. Significantly, Funkhouser acknowledges all avant-garde poets as the forebears of visual and kinetic digital poems and expresses his appreciation of their creative repertoire particularly because they envisioned and made works in the absence of computers.<sup>96</sup> From his viewpoint, the visual and kinetic digital poems heighten the visual properties of language by focusing on how language moves on screens. In this respect, these works only enhance "a sense of language in motion," Funkhouser says. Although he briefly summarizes the lines of continuity between avant-garde videos and video-poetry, the chapter lacks further references to Italian video-poetry tradition.<sup>97</sup> In this respect, my specific analysis of the Italian pioneering video-poetry fills in this gap and calls for a re-contextualization of this form within the United States digital poetry discourse.

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<sup>94</sup> "Many of the diagrams in her book show superimposition of text over video and signal processing (multidimensional distortion of image), which are the foremost elements enabled by the technology of the era" (Funkhouser, "Visual and Kinetic Digital Poems" 92).

<sup>95</sup> In the introduction to the second edition of *Media Poetry*, Kac says, "The original [1996] edition of this book was the first anthology of its kind published anywhere—a truly international anthology of media poetic theory featuring essentially poets themselves discussing their works and ideas" (8).

<sup>96</sup> "Examples of graphical digital poems began to emerge in the late 1960s. [. . .] Neologism and graphical elements (overlapping words, smooth scattered lettering) were not new to poetry; futurist, constructivist, Dadaist, and concrete poets had already implemented such textual conditions without the benefit of computers (Funkhouser, "Visual and Kinetic Digital Poems" 95).

<sup>97</sup> "The major difference between early avant-garde videos and most kinetic forms of digital poetry is the absence of what Rosalind Krauss has called the 'aesthetics of narcissism' in digital works (Hanhardt 179). Whereas the vast majority of videos feature the artist as a subject, this trait—the image of the artist—is infrequently found in kinetic poems" (Funkhouser, "Visual and Kinetic Digital Poems" 92).

These United States anthologies do not only share synchronous publication years but they also complement each other in how they heighten the visibility of the genre and promote its advancement through their primary archival, scholarly, and pedagogical objectives. Thus, Kac's anthology stages the emergence of digital poetry and situates it within new media poetry. Funkhouser's prehistory marks the entrance of the field in academia and links it to the literary context of precedent innovative poetic exercises in print. And *ELC*, as an online resource, provides the teaching apparatus and positions digital poetry among other electronic literature genres. Furthermore, each collection brings in new forms of digital poems. In this way, given the wide range of works brought into discussion *Media Poetry* provides a cross-examination of styles, themes, and technologies implemented; *Prehistoric Digital Poetry* covers digital poems produced over more than three decades, 1959-1995; and *ELC* displays works which span over a decade, 1996-2006.<sup>98</sup>

Although the mission statements of these anthologies reveal how they all aim to reach internationally, they are not engaged in a comparative study as their content relies primarily on US works. Their primary objectives are prioritized over the development of an international discourse. Consequently, such a discourse is auxiliary because it only legitimizes the field as an international endeavor. I contend that only a comparison between anthologies published in different countries renders visible both similarities and differences vis-à-vis the emergence and evolution of digital poetry globally. Such

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<sup>98</sup> In his *ELC* review, John Zuern explains how "the earliest entries are Alan Sondheim's Internet Text, the first installments of which appeared in 1994, and Michael Joyce's Twelve Blue, published in 1996; among the most recent works are Sharif Ezzat's Like Stars in a Clear Night Sky, Mary Flanagan's [the House], Richard Holeton's Frequently Asked Questions about 'Hypertext,' and Marko Niemi's Stud Poetry, all of which appeared in 2006"

See John Zuern, "Letters That Matter: The Electronic Literature Collection Vol. I." *Electronic Book Review* (October 9, 2007), [electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/diversified](http://electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/diversified).



considerations would inform about lines of continuity within diverse literary traditions and project various approaches to the field as a whole. They also reveal diverse classification systems of the subgenres that digital poetry encompasses and finally speak about reception: how new media poets and scholars perceive each others' works. Only such a comparison articulates a vision of moving beyond a national discourse. More importantly, only *Prehistoric Digital Poetry* names few Italian poets who continued this tradition initiated by Italian Futurism and that is not enough. It is essential to enhance the sense of origins by reconsidering the significance of Italian Futurism as part of the early history of digital poetry and to chronicle the forms that its further evolution took in the Italian digital poetry field. Also, for my specific analysis on notions of performance and space in digital poetry I examine these anthologies in conjunction with Caterina Davinio's *Tecno-Poesia e Realtà Virtuali: Storia, Teoria, Esperienze tra Scrittura, Visualità e Nuovi Media*.

Davinio's *Tecno-Poesia* (2002) is not only a theoretical study but also a landmark anthology in Italian digital poetry. It features one hundred and thirty entries of digital media works from worldwide artists, and is also a noteworthy study in the formation of this genre. Based on a typology of works that she creates, *Tecno-Poesia* contains three core chapters: "Computer Poetry, Ipermedia e Internet," "Performance e Performer," and "Video."<sup>99</sup> She adopts a schematic description for the presentation of each artist: screenshot of one work; biography and conceptual contribution or artistic mission; archival reference to the virtual or physical location of the works. These informative

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<sup>99</sup> Davinio explains the difficulty of a strict classification of these authors and differentiates between works made of and for the net and works born in other contexts and documented in the net. In the former category the net is intrinsic to the existence and emergence of the works because it part of the works' making. In the latter the net is used as a medium for the presentation of the works.

sections are concise, and do not provide any in-depth theoretical analyses of these selections. At times, she references the reception of particular works in journals, festivals, or websites relevant in the field, and accompanies these links by brief descriptions of the computer programs on which they rely. No alphabetical order or any other criteria are taken into account when she lists the artists' names. This arrangement translates Davinio's desire to chronicle the worldwide distribution of this genre without placing the works within a canonical configuration.

The first typology is "Computer Poetry, Ipermedia e Internet" and references forty-two international artists and collaborators.<sup>100</sup> Eduardo Kac is the first artist that Davinio acknowledges with regard to significant contributions such as holopoetry, biopoetry, and *New Media Poetry*; Loss Pequeño Glazier is extolled for Electronic Poetry Center, one of the first and most important sites in the field as well as for his theoretical works and Java-Script-based poems.<sup>101</sup> She selects in particular Glazier's digital poem, *Viz Études*, and reads it as a form of performance.<sup>102</sup> Interestingly, Davinio lists herself twice: "Karenina.it (Internazionale)" as representing a collectivity in her first net-project with the same name and "Caterina Davinio" (Italia) as a video-poet.<sup>103</sup> The next chapter,

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<sup>100</sup> As Davinio explains, this section includes "artists and groups who produced hypertexts and hypermedia for CD-ROM or for internet, generative writing, web projects or net poetry; authors are also included who realized digital visual poetry, animations and holograms using the computer" (305).

<sup>101</sup> "Kac è riconosciuto a livello internazionale per le sue installazioni interattive e la sua bio art. Un pioneer della telecommunication art nell'era prima di Internet negli Anni Ottanta, Eduardo Kac (pronuncia 'Katz') si è affermato negli anni Novanta con i suoi lavori radicali sulla telepresenza e biotelematica" ("Computer Poetry" 63). "Kac is known internationally for his interactive installations and for his bio-art works. As a pioneer of telecommunication art before the advent of the Internet, Eduardo Kac (pronounced 'Kaz') started creating innovative works on telepresence and biotelematics in the 1990s" (my translation).

<sup>102</sup> "Tra i lavori recenti *Viz Études*, una serie di performance che presentano una lettura e proiezione di testi visivi e cinetici in Java-Script, esplorando le potenzialità dell'e-poetry e la dimensione materiale della scrittura nello spazio elettronico" (120-121). "Among the recent works, *Viz Études* represents a series of performances made of a reading and a projection of visual and kinetic texts written in Java-Script. They explore the potential dimensions of poetry and the material dimension of writing in the electronic space" (my translation).

<sup>103</sup> See Chapter 3 for a discussion on Davinio's net-poetry projects.

“Performance e Performer,” consists of twenty-nine international artists and focuses on “performance in video, video-performance, computer performance, performance in Internet” (Davinio 305). Here, she provides brief synopses of these works and analyzes them as types of performance. The unifier of all these heterogeneous works is “the centrality of the body and / or of the voice, of sound and gesture aspects of the concrete presence” (306). She focuses, for instance, on the pioneering video-poetry of Xavier Sabater of Spain or of Murial Modr of France. Also, from the plurality of forms of the twentieth century Italian performance poetry, she addresses Enzo Minarelli’s performances in video as video registrations of a real event and of a performer on the stage.<sup>104</sup> The last chapter, “Video,” contains forty-two international artists and works which are closer to art because they are designed to be projected or installed.<sup>105</sup> Davinio introduces Agata Chiusano’s pieces which explore the relationship between video-art and

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<sup>104</sup> About Xavier Sabater’s video-poetry Davinio explains, “Durante i suoi recital e letture pubbliche usa microfoni distorti, proiezioni di diapositive, luci e una messa in scena parateatrale, valorizzando l’oralità” (148). With regard to Murial Modr’s works she says, “‘Repetition’ esplora le possibilità del suono come prolungamento dell’immagine; rumori su fondo nero inframmezzano aperture in bianco e nero con performance danzate di Christine Devaney e Marc Murphy” (150). “During his recitals and public readings [Sabater] makes use of distorted microphones, slide projections, lights and a para-theatrical staging, making use of orality” (my translation) “[The work] ‘Repetition’ explores the dimensions of the sound as an extension of the image; the noises on a black background are mixed with white and black apertures and dance performances by Christine Devaney and Marc Murphy” (my translation).

Enzo Minarelli “ha realizzato poesia, poesia Sonora, performance, libri-oggetto, la serie di tele denominate ‘Fonografie’; tra i primi in Italia a teorizzare, nel suo Manifesto della Polipoesia, del 1987, l’uso di video e della videoinstallazione in poesia, adopera nella pratica poetica, immagini, suono, voce, gesto, nella tradizione della poesia Sonora” (147). “Enzo Minarelli “created poetry, sound poetry, performance, object-books, the tele series called ‘Fonografie’; [he was] among the first ones in Italy who theorized in his 1987 Manifesto of Polypoetry the use of the video and video-installation in poetry, and used in his poetic work images, sounds, voice, gesture just like the traditional sound poetry” (my translation).

<sup>105</sup> “Questa parte del libro raccoglie artisti che hanno prodotto opera eterogenee per tecniche adoperate, che vedono un prevalente uso dell’audiovisivo nella forma del video, anche digitale, destinato alla proiezione o all’installazione” (173). “This part of the book gathers artists who have produced heterogeneous works with the used technologies, and who employed predominately the audio-visual component in the form of the video, digital video for screenings or installations (my translation).

poetry, Gary Hill's works which integrate text in video-art, and Gianni Toti's video-poetry performances.<sup>106</sup>

Besides Eugenio Miccini's introduction and an appendix on "Italian Review of 1990," the anthology contains a theoretical essay, "Techno-Poetry and Virtual Realities." Davinio overviews the evolution of this genre in Italy since 1990, and reveals Italian scholars' primary concerns of how the electronic medium changes the quality and typology of images which leads to "the hypertrophy of the image generated by technology itself" (265). In this essay she coins the term techno-poetry to encompass experimental poetics which make use of various technologies such as video, holography, computer, Internet, movie, and at the same time perform actions in a physical space. Notably, the perspective from which she projects her vision on techno-poetry is video-poetry. From Davinio's viewpoint, computer poetry belongs to video-poetry as the image goes through a process of elaboration, "the image [is] completely obtained by synthesis, in a progressive way going away from the referent as shot from the reality" (Davinio 275). Her constant emphasis on the digital processing of the image enables her to associate computer poetry with computer graphics and to conceive images and videos as key features of digital poetry. That is why, for Davinio, digital poetry is video-poetry.

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<sup>106</sup>Agata Chiusano confesses, "questo è per me il profondo rapporto-legame tra poesia e videoarte, due amanti che finalmente si sono ricongiunti completandosi" (184). "this is for me the profound relationship-connection between poetry and video-art, two lovers who have finally reunited complementing each other" (my translation).

"[Gary Hill è] stato tra i primi ad introdurre nella videoinstallazione elementi figurative e narrative che si discostano dalla dimensione della video-scultura, sviluppando gli antecedenti della videoarte e la videopoesia attuali, di cui è considerato uno dei precursori" (196). "[Gary Hill has] been among the first ones who introduced in video-installations figurative and narrative elements which move away from the dimension of the video-sculpture and develops the precedent video-art and the present video-poetry for which he is considered among its forerunners" (my translation).

"Dai primi anni Ottanta [Gianni Toti] comincia a fondere poesia, cinema, immagine elettronica, inventando un nuovo linguaggio, che lui stesso definisce 'poetronica', creando opere, uniche nel loro genere" (218). "Starting with the 1980s [Gianni Toti] starts combining poetry, cinema, electronic image, and creates a new language, which he himself defines as 'poetronic language' and produces works unique in their own way" (my translation).

Moreover, her own experimental video-poems focus on unconventional interactions between words, images, sounds, and digital installation, lacking any external references. Based on an abstract theme, idea, or text she creates images and words or images without words. In so doing, her images are poetry concepts. In this way, she employs digital imaging to question the mysterious substance of language, in which image is language. In this essay, Davinio also particularizes video-poetry by distinguishing it from video-performance and performance in video. Thus, whereas the former is made only of video language and is not experienced apart from the video itself and the latter exists as a registration centered around the performer on the stage and therefore exists independently from the video, video-poetry is “a particular type of video-art containing poetry text, variously elaborated at a visual and acoustic level” (273),

It is a very broad category in which for two decades have been converging very dissimilar works, which went from the simple documentation of a poetry event, to the digital video, to the computer graphic recorded in a videocassette. Sometimes video-poetry uses a considerable digital elaboration in the editing phase, sliding towards computer poetry [. . .], elsewhere it utilizes an elaboration poor of electronic effects, going up to the performance in video or to a certain kind of video-performance, in which is still identifiable as referent the real action. (272)

Also, Davinio’s training in art and video-poetry explains why she approaches Balestrini’s first literary attempts in electronic literature such as “Tape Mark” poems as ready-mades and not as algorithm-based poetry as Funkhouser catalogues them in *Prehistoric Digital Poetry* (283). Whereas Funkhouser’s classification focuses on the

technical methods of poetry-making, Davinio's approach carries on the Italian video-art tradition. In this way, Davinio's perspective might even imply that digital poetry can be even dated back to Balestrini. Thus, a comparative approach among anthologies reveals how different literary traditions foster different angles of looking at this genre. Moreover, the concept of ready-made is seminal in "Terminal video-poems," one series of her video-poems as well.<sup>107</sup> Thus, when she speaks about her video-poetry she acknowledges the convergence of four major influences in her development as a video-poet: Marcel Duchamp's desire to release the power of representation; Futurism's aspiration for the freedom of words; Pop Art's emphasis on mass media as a mediator between artist and reality; and Joseph Kosuth's preference for the visual representation inside language. The series of Terminal video-poems, for instance, unveils Davinio's close connection with the avant-garde tradition and with Toti's video-poetry as well. Just like Italian Futurism frees language of any syntax, Davinio explicates that the word "terminal" references not only the monitor (also called 'terminal' in Italian) on which these video run but also "the final (terminal) phase of linear poetry, considered as dying."<sup>108</sup>

As a video-poet, Davinio recognizes Toti as the father of Italian video-poetry and continues the tradition that he initiated. Thus, in order to understand her theory and works means to step back in time in the 1980s when Toti creates the first video-poems using video as the appropriate medium for language exploration. Toti's video-poems unveil one

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<sup>107</sup> In "Caterina Davinio: Computer Poetry 1990-2009," a presentation at 2009 E-Poetry Conference, Davinio delineates the trajectory of her video-poetry:

1990-1995	digital animation of texts and images
1996-1997	Terminal video-poems
1998-1999	UFOp (Unidentified Flying Poetry Objects)
2002-2003	Fluxus Trilogy (explores the theme of flow from Fluxus artists' works)
2004-2008	"Rumors & Motors" (centers on cars as icons explored by Futurists ) "Nature_Obscure" (develops a pacifistic and ecologic argument)

<sup>108</sup> See "Caterina Davinio: Computer Poetry 1990-2009."

of the forms that digital poetry takes within the Italian literary landscape, reflect the 1980s literary and technological poetic experimentations, and enhance the link between video-poetry and digital poetry. Also, his works deserve not only legitimate literary appreciation alongside the already acknowledged visual and kinetic works but also a particular assessment vis-à-vis the wide and diverse proliferation of digital poetry works. Toti is not only the first Italian video-poet but also one of the most important figures of Italian post-World War II literary avant-garde. Connoisseur of various cultural fields and endowed with multiple talents and creative skills, he professes as journalist, novelist, poet, essayist, translator, film critic, film director, editor of a magazine, publishing expert, and video-maker. It is undoubtedly impossible to describe his prominent personality in one word, condense his lifelong prolific activity to one particular genre, and associate him with only one historical period.<sup>109</sup> In the 2007 homage edition of Pesaro Film Festival, journalist and film critic Bruno Torri notes that despite being “a highly original artist and intellectual,” Toti “enjoyed a position that was both anomalous and prominent within the Italian cultural landscape, deserving more than one international award” (92).<sup>110</sup> Torri eulogizes especially Toti’s contribution to film criticism and desideratum to reduce the gap between the advancement of “new cinema” and the theoretical backwardness of film discussions, and regretfully admits that his “pioneering activity in the field of electronic art was more appreciated abroad than in Italy” (93). In her recollection of Toti of the Pesaro Film Festival, it is video-art theorist

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<sup>109</sup> According to the critic Marco Maria Gazzano, “Toti appartiene a un’altra epoca—la quale tuttavia non ha storia perché non è storica ma ultra-storica; come la ‘realtà’ che cerca Toti è sempre un ‘di là dalla realtà’ fenomenica e apparente: l’epoca del rigore, del coraggio estremo per una verità intesa” (“Gianni Toti. Il tempo del senso” 311). “Toti belongs to an era—which does not have a history because it is not historical but ultra-historical; just like the reality that Toti always looks for is ‘beyond’ the phenomenological and apparent reality: it is the era of the severity, of the full courage for a desired truth” (my translation).

<sup>110</sup> See Bruno Torri “Gianni Toti” in 43. Mostra Internazionale del nuovo cinema 29 Giugno 2007.

Sandra Lischi who situates his works from the 1980s between cinema and electro-poetry explaining how, “throughout his creative arc, he does not ‘pass’ from one medium to another, from one kind of writing to another. [ . . . ] Literally and metaphorically, the page is one and only one: a white sheet and the blank screen, surfaces of film screenings and the monitor” (96).<sup>111</sup>

By mixing cinema, poetry text, and electronic images, Toti starts creating his first video-poems in the late 1980s.<sup>112</sup> In this way, he gives birth to a new genre “poetronica,” and describes himself as a “poetronico” (literally, “electro-poet,” his neologism).<sup>113</sup> He is a video-poet conscious of the power of language, and his video-poems are explorations of and about language.<sup>114</sup> As Lischi explains, Toti inserts video into literature, “He did not ‘go’ from literature to video, he introduced video into his ‘tote bag’ made of music and words, he added some poetry and sensed the combinations, the changes, the effects, the language tricks, the similarities (in diversity) in his attempts and dreams of literary,

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<sup>111</sup> See Sandra Lischi, “Between cinema and electro-poetry (and beyond): The writings of Gianni Toti” in 43. Mostra Internazionale del nuovo cinema 29 Giugno 2007.

<sup>112</sup> He works predominantly as an artist-in-residence at the International Center for Video Creation, at Montbéliard—Belfort, France, as well as at Montréal, Canada, and is helped by editor-directors to create the video-poems.

Here is a selective video-biography:

1991	<i>Monteveritazione, op.000?</i>	17’
1994	<i>Planetopolis</i>	126’
	<i>L’OrigInédite</i>	17’
1997	<i>Tupac Amauta</i>	53’20”
1998	<i>Acà Nada</i>	27’
1999	<i>Gramsciategui</i>	55’
2002	<i>La fine della morte del trionfo</i>	27’

<sup>113</sup> In “Poesia elettronica,” Lischi differentiates between the more generic use of the term video-poetry and Toti’s specific “poetronica,” explaining how the former one designates either a more or less creative documentation of the poets’ performances or the visualization of text in the medium of the video whereas the latter one references the combination of poetry and language articulations in video. (“...e poetronica” 71). See Sandra Lischi, “. . . e poetronica,” *Visioni elettroniche. L’oltre del cinema e l’arte del video* (Roma: Marsilio 2001), 70-74.

<sup>114</sup> From Marco Maria Gazzano’s viewpoint, “Gianni Toti, evidentemente, è innamorato della parola. Della parola come lògos—discorso e articolazione del discorso, procedura e strategia di elaborazione del senso—e come immagine, produttrice ed evocatrice di immagini” (“Gianni Toti. Il tempo del senso” 317). “Gianni Toti certainly loves the word. Word both as logos—discourse and articulation of the discourse, procedure and strategy of meaning-making—and image, which produces and echoes the images” (my translation).



cinematographic, artistic and musical avant-gardes” (“Gianni Toti’s think tank” 58). Fascinated by the hidden nuances that language has in an electronic image, Toti embarks on the investigation as a new way of thinking of and through language. Through the exploration of these complexities he repositions language within a larger setting. He fuses words, sounds, and images and institutes networks among verbal, acoustic, and chromatic registers.<sup>115</sup> What is essential is that writing remains Toti’s fundamental endeavor independent of the medium in which he creates because as Maria Marco Gozzano remarks, even in his video-poems “Toti continua a scrivere” (“Gianni Toti. Il tempo del senso” 323).<sup>116</sup> That is to say Toti writes by substituting words with images and sounds. He explores the connotative rather than the denotative power of the words. And the connotative meaning of words stems from images and sounds. In this respect, for him, creating video-poems equals writing poems.

Toti’s pioneering video-poems are distinctive creative exercises about what poetry is in a video-graphic space, which is an expression of the trans-medial space. That is to say his video-poetry speaks about a poetry which makes its own video-graphic space and is simultaneously an image of that space. Thus, Toti’s video-poetry is both act of making and image. For him, the video-graphic space is creation and to create means to write. Thus, the space-making emerges out of the writing with this space. As a result, the video-graphic space is text in which the video-poem emerges just like the video-poem is the context in which the video-graphic space emerges. In making this space he makes his own language in which words, images, and sounds inhabit this space. Although this

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<sup>115</sup> As Marco Maria Gozzano explicates, Toti discovers language in images and sounds, endows it with chromatic and acoustic nuances, and returns it to the verbal register. See “Gianni Toti. Il tempo del senso” 318.

<sup>116</sup> “Toti keeps writing” (my translation).

video-graphic space is not self-transformative because it does not transform itself, it transforms the text it contains in the sense that text borrows the visual and aural qualities of this space. In addressing Toti's video-poems, I use critic E. M. de Melo e Castro's terminology "poetics of transformation" and contend that the video-graphic space enables their performance to originate in fusions of verbal and non-verbal registers. Both registers are language registers because Toti's image is chromatic language and Toti's sound is acoustic language. Given the orchestration of these registers, his video-poems are performances written in a poetronic language which is essentially a verbal-audio-visual language. This language enables Toti either to re-construct the origin of Creation and writing anew, as he does in *L'OrigInédite*, or to make history alive in *Tupac Amauta*.

While acknowledging experimental poetry of the 1960s as a paradigm for the emergence of video-poetry, the visual poet Melo e Castro perceives video as a medium capable to produce a new form of reading pleasure.<sup>117</sup> It is a reading experience endowed with an aesthetic value which emerges out of "the intimate relation of space and time, the rhythm of movement and the changing colors, all pointing to a poetics of transformation and to a grammar of integration of verbal and non-verbal signs" ("Videopoetry" 177). As he further explicates, this poetics of transformation takes on multiple dimensions: phonetic from oral poetry, scriptural from written poetry, and visual from visual poetry so that during the watching of a video-poem "text (verbal and non-verbal) is not still" ("Videopoetry" 177). Thus, the significance of video-poetry as a genre consists in the conception and reliance on text as a combination of verbal and non-verbal registers

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<sup>117</sup> "Reading a video-poem is a complex experience as different temporal modalities of perception will coincide with moving and changing images. Thus we are confronted with different times and rhythms: a) the time belonging to the videopoem as one of its variables; b) the movement of our eyes, trying to find a way to read the signs; c) the time of our own decoding and understanding of what we are actually seeing" ("Videopoetry" 178). See *New Media*, ed. Eduardo Kac, 175-185.

simply because it engages in “the most elementary meaning of the word experience,” in Melo e Castro’s words (“Videopoetry” 176). In this respect, he synthesizes the complexity of the reading process in the following lengthy hyphenated phrasing which incorporates the range of registers, “on the whole, a verbi-voco-sound-visual-color-movement complex and animated image is created calling for a total kinesthetic perception” (179).<sup>118</sup>

Philosophically and theoretically complex *L’OrigInédite (The Unseen Origin)* (1994) is a seventeen-minute video-poem which speaks about scripto-genesis: the origin of Creation overlaps with the origin of writing. This correlation with the divine act of Creation situates the quest for the understanding of the history of writing among existential dilemmas. As a whole, the video-poem is a trans-livre, a virtual book written in a video-graphic space. This means that its content crosses the verbal register and draws on an audio-visual language. As Lischi notes, just like the Spanish poet Pedro Salinas, Toti believes that “only poetry can name things properly” and that “a complete reflection on the whole universe requires all kinds of arts” (“Gianni Toti’s think tank” 61). Although the video-poem makes use of external references to literature, music, and art it does not focus exclusively on them. Toti carefully selects and re-elaborates these references and in so doing, multiplies the layer of their perplexity.<sup>119</sup> As a result,

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<sup>118</sup> With regard to Toti’s video-poetry, Lischi beautifully synthesizes his intricate use of language, “Toti lavora con la poesia a vari livelli: il gioco del linguaggio scardinato dal significato usuale (neologismi, danze di lettere e parole, giochi con la grafia), la poesia detta dalla voce dell’autore, la citazione poetica (da Shelley a Majakovskij a Chlěbnikov) e la “poesia” nel senso della creazione di opera svincolate da un impianto tradizionale, sia esso documentario o di finzione” (“. . . e poetronica” 71-72). See Lischi, *Visioni elettroniche*, 70-74. “Toti works with poetry at different levels: the game of language disturbed by the usual signification (neologisms, dances of letters and words, graphical games), poetry expressed by the author’s voice, quotations (from Shelley, Majakovskij and Chlěbnikov) and ‘poetry’ in the sense of creation of works deprived of a traditional structure, either documentary or fiction” (my translation).

<sup>119</sup> The video-poem references Gustave Courbet’s *L’Origine du monde (The Origin of the World)* (1866) which is known as a provocative painting because of the display of nudity at the time when it was painted.

*L'OrigInédite* does not seek to document the origin of Creation and writing in a different medium; instead, to create it anew. The content of the video-poem takes shape precisely in between two instances delineated by Toti's brief discourses: at the beginning when he references the Book of Creation and at the end when he speculates on the future of writing. He institutes an intriguing correlation between poetry as an act of creation and the Bible as the Book of Creation. In creating the poem in a video-graphic space Toti re-creates the origin of writing anew. And so, the poem as an act of creation is itself a book of creation, a new book which comes into existence in that it originates in a video-graphic space.

*L'OrigInédite* opens up with a black screen and with Toti's voice who philosophizes on how things are now on the point of disappearing and explains that only poetry can recapture their content. With regard to the beginning of the poem, Toti takes readers by surprise who, at first sight, do not conceive the black screen as part of the video-poem. In displaying the black screen for a while he purposefully calls attention to the video-graphic space of the poem which is complemented by his brief discourse. This three-minute statement in French translates the video-poet's unyielding belief that only poetry may convey certainty and grasp the unnoticeable nuances of things. So far, Toti explains, humans have unsuccessfully explored and exhausted all possibilities in search for an understanding of the divine act of Creation: they have read books and agonized over image interpretations. And now they face an even more intricate stage of illegibility since they confront themselves with a virtual book in which pages move away, words simply fly, and images no longer convey clear messages.<sup>120</sup> Following Toti's brief

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<sup>120</sup> "But what book? Is the book of the word or of the image or of the human beings? [. . .] the trans-livres of the computer are already transparent in the silent universe" (my translation).

speech, a fragmentary motto from Paul Cézanne's statement "Tout est en train de disparaître: il faut se précipiter si on veut voir encore de choses. . ." and Gustave Courbet's 1866 painting *The Origin of the World* gain centrality for the next thirty seconds.<sup>121</sup> Immediately after that, an image of white dots invades the black screen for one minute and the title of the video-poem, *L'OrigInédite ou le femminitif*, appears on the screen. In his general considerations on Toti's video-art, cinema critic Jean-Paul Fargier provides a visually detailed description of the beginning of the video-poem,

Originally, you have the primary elements, the basic shapes such as the dot, the line, the page, the circle, the fold. Multiple folds, torsions, rips. Nothing remains as it formerly was. The image comes from the core of abstraction. The line undulates, the dot invades the whole space, the screen crumbles, the circle distends and, all of a sudden or little by little, here comes the real. The representation takes place, the figures dance. But soon, it's all over again. The visions fade away into magma of dots, lines and colors. Abstraction strikes back and turns into the end instead of the origin. ("Toti: one name, one word, one whole world" 40)

Unquestionably overwhelming, the intriguing multi-layering which prefaces the title synthesizes verbal, acoustic, and chromatic registers.

"The poetics of transformation" which the video-graphic space cultivates enables the emergence of a trans-livre which holds a non-narrative configuration. As a trans-livre, *L'OrigInédite* emerges through the ongoing fusions of verbal and non-verbal registers. In fact, as a genre, Lischi spells out, video-poetry is closely related to historical avant-garde

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<sup>121</sup> "Everything is on the point of disappearing, so we have to speed up if we want to see things" (my translation).

and for that reason it cultivates this emphasis on the act of seeing, on the non-narrative and non-descriptive representation as well as on the utopia of conveying a total work which gathers and supplies multiple visions.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, a sequential analysis of the internal structure of *L'OrigInédite* is not impossible, but simplifies its content and reduces it to a rigid formula. This explains why to explore Toti's video-poems as rigorous constructions means to disregard "the poetics of transformation" on which they rely and by implication, any further considerations on how their performance originates in the untranslatable fluidity among registers. Lischi's ongoing struggle to capture in her video *PlaneToti-Notes* the quintessence of Toti's fluid composition from *Planetopolis* further validates this consideration.<sup>123</sup> Although she initially plans to follow a script, she realizes that it does not render visible the "dance of gestures," as she describes the internal fluidity that particularizes Toti's video-poems suggestive of his expressive freedom of language.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> "Risulta subito evidente, a chi studia e analizza le reazioni videoartistiche dagli anni '60 a oggi, un forte legame non solo con la produzione, ma anche con le poetiche delle avanguardie storiche. La riflessione sull'atto stesso del vedere e l'indagine su una rappresentazione non descrittiva, non naturalistica, non narrativa, sono alla base di questo legame; ma anche le utopie sul superamento dello schermo, della visione frontale, delle modalità standardizzate di visione e l'auspicio—e la ricerca—di una polivisione o multivisione, il desiderio di opere d'arte totali, sinestetiche, vere e proprie macchine teatrali-ottiche-sonore per audiovisioni sempre più complesse" ("Immagini Oltre" 13). See Lischi, *Visioni elettroniche*, 13-15. "For the one who studies and examines the video-artistic works from the 1960s to present what immediately stands out is a powerful connection not only with their production but also with the poetics of the historical avant-garde. What they share is the emphasis on the act of seeing and the investigation of the non-descriptive, non-natural, non-narrative representation as well as on the utopia of moving beyond the screen, beyond the frontal vision, beyond the standard modalities of vision, and the desire to convey multiple visions and complete works of art what would synthesize and produce theatrical-visual-audio works for complex audio-visual purposes (my translation).

<sup>123</sup> In 1994 Toti makes the video-poem, *Planetopolis*. In 1997, Lischi makes *PlaneToti-Notes*, a thirty-seven minute audio-video, which speaks about Toti's video-poem. In 2002 she publishes the book *Un Video al Castello: Diario di incontri e di lavoro*, in which she details all stages and struggles she faced in the making of *PlaneToti-Notes*.

<sup>124</sup> From the exchange between Lischi and Pierre Bongiovanni who helps her with the video-making: "fare un video su questo artista bisogna usare un linguaggio consono alle sue poetiche, un anti-linguaggio, e non il solito modello del documentario o del ritratto [ . . . ] certo potrò fare un lavoro corretto, diligente, esplicativo, ma [ . . . ] Toti si merita uno sforzo di linguaggio supplementare, un sovvertimento delle regole" ("Il diario" 38). See Lischi, *Un Video al Castello*, 25-75. "To make a video-poem about this artist

From a different angle of interpretation, in an article on choreography in video space, video artist Douglas Rosenberg reads the absence of a script in video as an expression of an apparently abstract construct (280).<sup>125</sup> It is a non-narrative framework envisioned to foster a stimulating present experience. That is to say the video-graphic space calls for more engaged readers capable of making their own connections among seemingly disconnected registers. “The viewing of the video-poem always happens in the present regardless of the passage of time from its creation,” Rosenberg explains, and as a result, “the medium of video requires the viewer to participate in re-imagining the nature of dance itself” (278). Toti’s predilection for minimalist syntactical links also echoes Marinetti’s quest for an economy of language and the desire to leave aside any syntactical connectors among words.<sup>126</sup> Their absence also signals the opening of a space for readers to re-create the syntax. In fact, Philippe Dubois identifies this quality of presence that the video conveys in the precise etymology of the word “video.”<sup>127</sup> As a verb, “video” is the

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requires the use of a language appropriate to his poetics, an anti-language; and not the common documentary or portrait model [ . . . ] can make a correct, thorough, explanatory work, but [ . . . ] Toti deserves an additional language effort, a subversion of the rules” (my translation).

And so, Lischi restarts working on the video-poem, “per questo ho cominciato questo nuovo turno di lavoro montando la ‘danza dei gesti’, la musica delle mani. [ . . . ] Concetti che diventano forme nell’aria che diventano immagini” (“Il diario” 40). “that is why I started everything from the beginning and assembled ‘the dance of gestures,’ ‘the music of the hands. [ . . . ] concepts which become forms and which turn into images” (my translation).

<sup>125</sup> See Douglas Rosenberg “Video Space: A Site for Choreography.” *Leonardo*, 33:4 (Aug. 2000): 275-280.

<sup>126</sup> “By wireless imagination I mean the absolute freedom of images or analogies expressed by liberated words, without the conducting wires of syntax and without any punctuation” (Marinetti, “Futurist Sensibility and Wireless Imagination”).

“Syntax has always embodied a scientific and photographic perspective absolutely contrary to the laws of emotion. In words in freedom, this photographic perspective disappears and is replaced by the emotional perspective, which is multiform” (Marinetti, “Geometric and Mechanical Splendor”).

<sup>127</sup> “*video* è anche un verbo coniugato: è la prima persona singolare dell’indicativo presente del verbo vedere. In altre parole, *video* è l’atto dello sguardo nel suo costituirsi, compiendosi qui e ora (un processo), un agente all’opera (un soggetto) e un adeguamento temporale al presente storico (*io vedo*, è in diretta, non è *io ho visto*—la foto, passatista—nè *io credo di vedere*—il cinema, illusionista—nè *io potrei vedere*—l’immagine virtuale, utopista). [ . . . ] *Video*: un’immagine-atto indissociabilmente. L’immagine come sguardo o lo sguardo come immagine [ . . . ] Il video è ben il luogo di tutte le fluttuazioni” (“Video e scrittura elettronica. La questione estetica” qtd. in “Il video è tempo?” 8). See Lischi, *Visioni elettroniche*,

first person singular of the present tense of the Latin word “vedere.” Thus, “video” does not send to a past or future action; instead, it speaks of a sense of actual happening, of a “here and now” presence. When it is translated as “I see,” “video” refers to the act of seeing in the process of creation and to the image that takes shape.

The video-graphic space of *L'OrigInédite* contains neither striking images nor disturbing sounds. It essentially relies on ongoing transitions from the reiterative image of white dots on a black screen and Courbet's painting to fragments of music combined with moments of silence. Toti selects simple elements, and explores them from various angles in order to disclose their intricate nuances. In this way, he calls particular attention to the image of the dot and reveals it as a mathematical symbol which designates the sphere both as a geo-shape and as a nucleus, the human primary cell. He thus captures the actual dance of the dots in playing with their chromatics: at times dots are black or white and these contrasting colors point to dualities such as beginning and end, clarity and opacity. Out of the blue, from the irregular black dots which invade the white screen, one is singled out in how it struggles to change its circle-like shape and expands as a geometric shape. In so doing, Toti reveals that even a well-defined geo-shape might lack certainty. Although unpredictable, these transitions are smooth and pleasingly surprising because they convey a sense of fluidity. Meaningfully, the dot as a sphere also operates as a frame for the entire video-poem. From this viewpoint, the last minute of

*L'OrigInédite* is seminal because in a backward movement it revisits significant scenes

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8-11. “*Video* is a conjugated verb: is the first person singular of the indicative present of the verb *vedere*. In other words, *video* is the act of looking in its moment of creation, in its here and now formation (a process), an agent of the work (a subject) and a temporal addition to the historic present (*I see* is at present. It is neither at past, *I saw*—like in a photo so that it is not backward-looking, nor *I think I see*—like in cinema, signaling an illusion, nor *I might see* like in a virtual image, marking an utopia) [. . .] *Video*: an inseparable image-act. Image as act of looking or act of looking as image [. . .] *Video* is the place of all these variations” (my translation).



displayed throughout the video-poem so that the work as a whole has a cyclic structure. It is a technique which translates Toti's conviction that everything, including the composition of the video-poem, has a spherical configuration. The question mark is another element that the video-poet explores reiteratively to reinforce how relative meaning in general is. In this case, he establishes intriguing correlations between existential dilemmas and punctuation marks as he says that, "l'homme lui-même est un point d'interrogation" and "Chaque musique, chaque peinture, chaque poème, chaque film, c'est la mort d'un art et en meme temps un commencement."<sup>128</sup>

In this trans-livre, video-art continues the creation of the world: the origin of the world combines the history of Creation mediated by a woman with that one mediated by a video-poet as artist.<sup>129</sup> To create such thematic connections Toti itemizes and proliferates objects with easiness. Above all, he explores the interiority and exteriority of an object perceiving it simultaneously from inside and outside. In coming close to it and distancing from it, Toti singularizes the object reducing it to its essence. In distancing from the object, he conceives it within a larger setting as well. For instance, he initially displays Courbet's painting *The Origin of the World* and zooms inside the painting; then reveals this image as a page in a book; later on multiplies this page and places it inside the image of the globe. Thus, the video-poem resembles a trans-livre in that it references all these changing locations of the image from painting to page and globe. In this way,

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<sup>128</sup> In Toti Marc Mercier says, "the human being itself is a question mark" (30) (my translation). "Every piece of music, painting, poem, film represents the end of an art and a new beginning at the same time." (28).

<sup>129</sup> Also, as Gazzano remarks, *L'OrigInédite*: "è un invito a ricordare che l'arte è solo una *techné* (mai una *tecnica*) della *facitura*, ovvero sia della continuazione della creazione del mondo, produzione e aggiunta di cose d'arte, di realtà nuove sulla realtà originaria" ("Gianni Toti. Il tempo del senso" 316). "It is an invitation to remember that art is essentially *techné* (and not *technique*) of making, or rather a continuation of the creation of the world, product and supplement of art things, of new forms of reality added to the actual reality" (my translation).

the theme of Creation also moves beyond the field of art and religion, and becomes a universal quest. These visions from distance and proximity make Jean-Paul Fargier describe Toti as atomic and cosmic at the same time, “His name is just like his work. A touch of letters, one consonant, two vowels and there he is: Toti. His creations are like he is, atomic and cosmic (39). [ . . . ] At some point, a Totian opera always refers to the sky, to the stars and to the galaxy. The void meets the completeness of the infinite space” (“Toti: one name, one word, one whole world” 41). Lischi also explains, to focus on details means to offer one vision of Toti’s personality whereas to take distance means to portray a different or, at least, another perspective (*Un Video al Castello* 48-50).

Video-poems such as *L’Orignédite* validate Toti’s endless quest for a totality of vision, which is difficult to grasp and explain even through the exploration of verbal and non-verbal registers. The video-graphic space enables Toti’s video-poetry to be always in-between verbal, acoustic, and chromatic registers. It celebrates the exploration of these limits and therefore substantiates Melo e Castro’s conviction that “poetry is always on the limits of things. On the limit of what can be said, of what can be written, of what can be seen, even of what can be thought, felt, and understood” (“Videopoetry” 174). In fact, Toti and Melo e Castro share and explore assumptions vis-à-vis humans’ partial vision on things.<sup>130</sup> Humans live with the illusion that they can see everything but, in reality, “we see much less than all that we believe to see,” ponders Toti in “Invideo.”<sup>131</sup> Emerging in

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<sup>130</sup> Melo e Castro “what we actually see on the screen are images representing only a part of the total reality of the scene. However, the images of the videopoem are completely generated or transformed by electronic devices or digital functions. These images do not exist outside the apparatus that produces them and have no outside reference” (“Videopoetry” 179).

<sup>131</sup> In the seven minute clip “Invideo,” Toti confesses his philosophy on the impossibility of defining seeing with preciseness. He challenges the common belief in God’s omnipotence to observe everything rationalizing that God cannot be present simultaneously inside and outside the humankind / world in order to provide that totality of vision. Furthermore, he considers that with the word “invideo” the definition of seeing gets even more complicated because the prefix “in” has a privative connotation: it points to a lack,

between these registers, Toti's video-poems compel readers-viewers to think poetically.<sup>132</sup> In this respect, critic Marc Mercier rightfully acknowledges the impossibility of following the movement of images and of concentrating on words as well. If you try to focus on how images move, their significance disappears. If you concentrate on the ideas they express, then you miss their flow. Through fusions of verbal, acoustic, and chromatic registers Toti poeticizes language fully convinced that only a poetronic language may supply a global vision. As Lischi rationalizes, for Toti art is reduced to poetry, and so every genre: music, prose, etc. can be understood with the use of the language of poetry (70).<sup>133</sup>

The creative potential of this video-graphic space enables words, sounds, and images to co-exist so that a verbal-audio-visual language inscribes the content of this trans-livre. Toti artistically maximizes and minimizes the effects of these registers so that moments of silence become spaces of "optical pleasure" which call attention to imagery just like abstract images are "thinking spaces" which invite readers in spaces of reflection (Lischi, "Gianni Toti's think tank" 61). When defining video-poetry as a personal

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negation, or absence. As a result, "invideo" holds the paradox of seeing and not seeing things. Video seeks to widen humans' vision, but, in so doing, it makes them aware of this impossibility. See "Invideo" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYUzch6uMBM>.

<sup>132</sup> "À chaque fois, je me heurte à une résistance du langage. Si je me concentre sur le mouvement des images, leurs significations m'échappent. Si je reste attentive aux idées qui s'expriment, je fige leur élan. Toute interprétation rationnelle est *impossible*, voire *imprévisible*. Toti nous 'condamne' à penser poétiquement ses images" ("La liberté asympTOTIQUE" 16). "I always come across the resistance of language. If I concentrate on the movement of the images, their signification moves away. If I pay attention to the ideas that they express, I miss their fluidity. A logical interpretation is impossible and unpredictable. Toti asks us to think of his images poetically" (my translation).

<sup>133</sup> "Ancora più radicalmente, Gianni Toti, poeta e videoartista, riconduce tutta l'arte alla poesia: 'la scrittura e la musica sono completamente libere dal significato e dal contenuto codificato, fisso, in fondo morto, cadaverico [. . .] la scrittura è musica, la musica è scrittura, la musica e la scrittura sono poesia. La prosa non esiste. È tutta poesia l'arte' ('. . . e-poetronica' 70). See Lischi, *Visioni elettroniche*, 70-74. "Even more radically, Gianni Toti, poet and video-artist, brings all art back to poetry: 'the writing and the music are completely free of signification and codified content, which is fixed, dead, and devoid of life [. . .] writing is music, music is writing, music and writing are poetry. There is no prose. Everything is poetry' (my translation).

practice Melo e Castro also explains how his interest in this genre comes from his desire to allow words gain movement, “A sense of fascination and adventure told me that the letters and signs standing still on the page could gain actual movement of their own. The words and the letters could at least be free, creating their own space” (“Videopoetry” 176). From his viewpoint, words appropriate this video-graphic space by making it integral to their making.<sup>134</sup>

In the end, Toti speaks about the emergence of a new vision on the future of writing which introduces humans to new ways of listening, thinking, and understanding.<sup>135</sup> He believes that the understanding of language was, is, and will always be a challenging endeavor which keeps provoking questions because of its intriguing dimension. Language holds manifold nuances and is ambiguous because of its inherent duality: language is simultaneously transparent and opaque. Interestingly, Toti leaves the video-poem open without providing an answer for the search of meaning with which it engages. Although *L'OrigInédite* lacks a sense of closure, it visually signals an end. In one minute the video-poem gathers significant moments and continues the quotation from Cezanne's statement, “et si tout est en traîn de reapparaître, nous nous poeticipitons pour

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<sup>134</sup> One example of thematic connections between Toti's *L'OrigInédite* and Davinio's video-poems is “A Story” (2003).<sup>134</sup> Davinio accompanies this 2:53 minute-long video-poem with an insightful explanation on the reading venues: “the book as object, the book as writing, the book as story.” The video poem starts with the shuffling of several white pages from a book. It is an image of a book as a physical object that is touched, hold, and skimmed through. At times, this horizontal page shuffling is vertically crossed by letters which appear in a fast down-upward movement constructing their own narrative. The presence of several punctuation marks mingled with these letters calls attention to a new text which takes shape vertically. It is difficult to grasp its content because of the visual tension between the page shuffling with text in traditional horizontal lineation and the development of the new text vertically. A new book takes shape as the writing inside it emerges. This virtual book can neither be hold nor read. Synchronous with the page shuffling a piece of instrumental music and the voice of the singer-performer invade the space of the book capturing the oral dimension of the word. Davinio's third observation, “book as story,” unveils how the video poem as a whole is a virtual book. Visually and acoustically written in the medium of the video, the video-poem articulates the story of the book not only in its historical evolution and transition from oral to print and to new media culture but also the various forms it takes on from the physical to virtual book. See “A Story” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7MDK\\_rc7Z2g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7MDK_rc7Z2g).

<sup>135</sup> “the new origin of the language has started to take shape for a computer as a reader” (my translation).

voir encore des choses? quelles choses? choses?”<sup>136</sup> In this respect, it is a story which reflects Toti’s ongoing struggle to see, understand, and even grasp what exists beyond the visible. Indeed, Toti’s poetronic language reduces everything: art, history, and culture to poetry.

If with *L’Originédite* Toti re-creates the origin of writing, with *Tupac Amauta* he creates history anew. The audio-visual language of *Tupac Amauta* (1997) crosses cultural continents thematically. Along with *Gramsciategui* (1999) and *La fine della morte del trionfo* (2002), *Tupac Amauta* belongs to Toti’s trilogy on the planetary holocausts and “reves-évolutions” of Latin America (Lischi). Centered on the fight for freedom, the video-poem contains Ancient Mayan symbols and re-elaborations of legends and prophecies of liberation. It takes its name from Túpac Amaru, the Inca leader killed by Spanish authorities in 1572, and Túpac Amaru II, who commanded the indigenous rebellion against the Spanish oppression in Peru in 1780.<sup>137</sup> The second video-poem, *Gramsciategui*, made of unpredictable word associations, references two major thinkers: Antonio Gramsci, Italian philosopher and theorist, and Jose Carlos Mariátequi, intellectual and political Peruvian philosopher.<sup>138</sup> Here, Toti raises the question of the

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<sup>136</sup> “and if everything might reappear, we then have to poeticize things in order to see them. What things? Things?” (my translation).

<sup>137</sup> As Lischi explicates, in *Tupac Amauta* Toti recreates “gli atroci sistemi di supplizio cui intere popolazioni furono sottoposte dai colonizzatori e la figura mitica di Tupac Amauta, divenuta simbolo di resistenza e riscatto: fino a José Carlos Mariátegui (leader politico peruviano, morto nel 1930, uno dei più lucidi pensatori dell’America Latina), fino alle immagini del Subcomandante Marcos, fino ai nomi dei militanti uccisi” (“Gramsciategui ou les poesimistes—Deuxième cri” 118-19). See Lischi, *Visioni elettroniche*, 117-121. Toti recreates “the atrocities of the tortures of the entire populations done by the colonizers and the mythical figure of Tupac Amauta becomes a symbol of resistance and redemption up to José Carlos Mariátegui (Peruvian political leader, dead in 1930, one of the brightest thinkers of Latin America), and the images of the commander Marcos and the names of the killed militants” (my translation).

<sup>138</sup> Both Gramsci and Mariátequi are political and social thinkers. Gramsci (1891-1937) advocates for cultural hegemony in order to stimulate social classes take attitude and claim their own equal ruling rights with the proletariat. Mariátequi (1894-1930) counts among the most important Latin American socialists who advocates for the socialist revolution as an appropriate solution for Latin America to evolve.

crisis of contemporary language through the signs of the Mayan people and those who are injured in the years of the holocausts. *La fine della morte del trionfo* is a revolt against death and ideologies. Macabre dances, grotesque parades, the figure of the cosmic thinker and poetic texts accompany the song of life against the triumphs of death of every era. In this Trilogy, Toti identifies significant historical moments, re-writes them in his verbal-audio-visual language, and turns them into performances in order to offer a poetically-articulated vision of history.

*Tupac Amauta* (53'20") opens up with an abstract image: a series of two dots on a string which move horizontally as if sewing the screen. The first seven minutes focus exclusively on the dynamism of the dots, on their constant onward and backward movement in connecting with one another. They gradually multiply and, all of a sudden, invade the screen. For less than one minute, the screen gets black, and then another series of two dots comes into sight. It is an intriguing contrast between the dot invasion and their transitory absence. This time, the acoustic register changes and a mourning sound is heard; red slowly invades the initial white and black-screen. Three minutes later, imagery changes again as various colors fuse into one another. Instantly, Toti's voice is heard prophesying about latent changes and transformations in the world, "il mondo dell'immagine non e più l'immagine del mondo."<sup>139</sup> In this brief yet difficult to comprehend discourse, the video-poet coins intriguing word combinations from languages such as Italian, French, English, Spanish, Latin, and Quechua.<sup>140</sup> The separation of words into syllables and their recombination enables him to blend past and present histories and invites readers to explore their connotative rather than denotative

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<sup>139</sup> "The world of the image is no longer the image of the world" (my translation).

<sup>140</sup> Here are two examples of such word combinations: "la imagie-strophe" ("Image" + "strophe") (my translation; "il principio antro-poetico" is made of "anthropology" + "poetry" (my translation).

meanings and to construct their own associations.<sup>141</sup> Just like his creative word combinations, the transitions from abstract to concrete images are smoothly and poetically configured. Thus, after this “minimalist prelude,” the abstract image of the dots gains specificity through references to the image of Túpac Amaru II on the cross which ultimately overlaps with the picture of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion.<sup>142</sup> This is a visually complex and powerful parallel which evokes the episode of torture and signals out Toti’s predilection for religious threads. Similarly to how *L’OrigInédite* calls attention to the origin of Creation, *Tupac Amauta* alludes to Christ’s crucifixion.<sup>143</sup>

Although visually minimalist, this preface is theoretically intricate in how it alludes to Toti’s philosophical viewpoints and practice of and with language in a video-graphic space. In this respect, the historical reference to Amaru as the last Inca leader ultimately entails further allusions to Quechua, the natives’ official language. According to chronicles, in its oral stage, Quechua was devoid of a written alphabet and Inca people used khipu as a writing system.<sup>144</sup> Visually speaking, khipu resembles a series of knotted cords in which information is numeric: each cluster of knots is a digit. From this angle of analysis, the opening image with the network among dots on strings evokes Incas’

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<sup>141</sup> See Chapter 4, where from a different standpoint, Glazier is also fascinated by language games and constantly combines Spanish with English and computer jargon in his poems.

<sup>142</sup> Túpac Amaru (1545-1572) is the last leader of a small Inca state. In 1572 Francisco de Toledo, Spanish viceroy of Peru, declares war against Amaru considering that he is in rebellion with the Spanish authority and does not obey to their power. Toledo conquers the Inca state, and sentences Amaru to be beheaded. Túpac Amaru II (1742-1781), by his real name, José Gabriel Condorcanqui, takes the name of the leader Túpac Amaru whose descendant he is. He is considered a central figure in the history of Peru’s struggle to gain independence. In 1780 he leads the rebellion against the Spanish authorities who exploit the natives. The rebellion is not successful, and Túpac Amaru II is quartered and beheaded.

<sup>143</sup> Marc Mercier describes the beginning of *Tupac Amauta* as “a minimalist prelude.” See “La liberté *asymptOTIque* de Gianni”15.

<sup>144</sup> Spanish chronicles define khipu as an encoding system used mainly to store numerical information. Inca historians, for instance, utilize khipu as a device to communicate and document particular significant events of the time. The latest research shows that khipus are used to count many units of things (men in the armies, women of a certain age, crops stored in storehouses, etc.) See Jeffrey Quilter and Gary Urton. Eds. *Narrative Threads: Accounting and Recounting in Andean Khipu* (Austin: U of Texas P, 2002).

writing system. In this way, the very beginning the video-poem draws attention to a video-graphic space in which Toti decodes and encodes historical facts in order to create history anew. This explains why *Tupac Amauta* does not consist in a recording of historically significant episodes; instead, chronicles become poetic materials written in an audio-visual language. That is to say the video-poet turns them into sounds and images in order to articulate a larger sense of his vision of history.<sup>145</sup> In this sense, Fargier makes an intriguing observation when addressing the relationship between Toti's video-poems and Marcel Duchamp's concept of the ready-made, "Toti is not an inventor either. Toti finds everything back, just as it had never been made before [. . .] This is not new, he re-arranges it and turns it into something brand new" ("Toti: one name" 44). As a result, although Toti uses ready-mades, his video-poems center on the process of making because "the work [is] not as something readymade but as something in the making" (Fargier, "Toti: one name" 45). In Lischi's words, he avoids the obvious and incessantly aims to reveal the complexity of language in a video-poetic fashion.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Lischi rightfully acknowledges that in his video-poems Toti rewrites history in his poetronic language. She describes them as "un discorso sul mondo fatto di immagini potentemente articolate, fino ai limiti estremi delle possibilità dei linguaggi elettronici [. . .] Non documentari, quindi; non opere classicamente narrative; non saggi sociologici, didascalici, dimostrativi. Ma pensieri formati da e per immagini e suoni, costruzioni da guardare-capire-rielaborare (lavorare) per leggere in modo diverso, necessariamente diverso, il mondo" ("Gramsciategui ou les poesimistes—Deuxième cri" 117-118). See Lischi, *Visioni Ellettroniche*, 117-121. "a discourse about the world made of images powerfully articulated testing the extreme limits of the possibilities available in the electronic language [. . .] In this way, his works are not documentary, or narrative in a traditional sense, or sociological, didactic, or demonstrative essays. Instead, they are thoughts created by and for images and sounds, they are constructions envisioned to be watched-understood-re-created (made) in order to read the world in an inevitably different way" (my translation).

<sup>146</sup> "was a journey made of voices, of memories, of books, of music but most of all of reflections on how to 'shape' our thoughts, how to create 'thinking' images, revealing and complex, always in avoiding what was obvious, too directive, too easy, too sociologic" ("Gianni Toti's think tank" 61). See *Hommage à Gianni Toti*, 57-65.



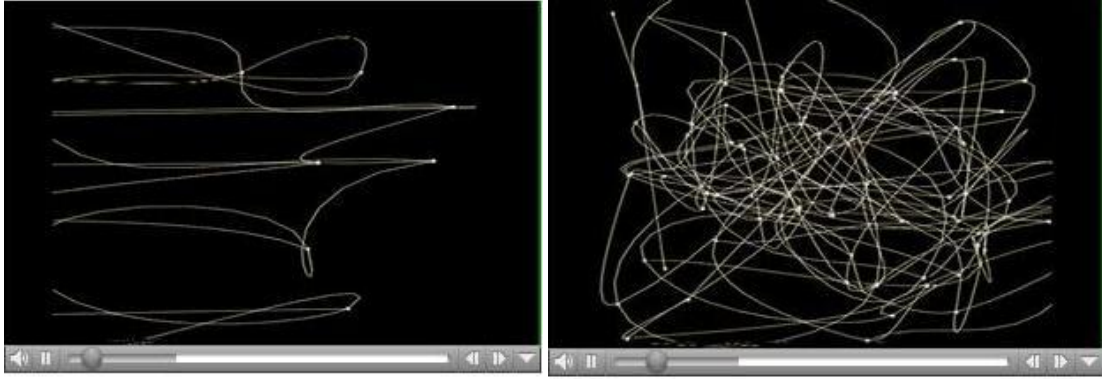


Fig. 4 The evolution of the initial series of knotted cords

Toti makes history alive in how he thematically connects two significant episodes from the local history of the Inca people with other global events so that past and present reunite and speak to each other. Thus, the video-poem introduces the legendary figures of the two Amaru leaders and moves to the two political figures of Antonio Gramsci and José Carlos Mariátequi. Eighteen minutes later after the beginning of the poem, Toti announces its title and describes it as a dedication to the worldwide revolutions of which all these central people are part. Of particular significance is how the video-poem displays the image of a room, of which the four walls contain large paintings with the two Amaru leaders and Mariátequi and two depictions of other people involved in the events during that period.<sup>147</sup> Progressively, these drawings appear macabre and convey a feeling of violence as the two paintings are replaced by walls in fire from time to time. Nothing is static. Everything exists in an ongoing state of transformation. Furthermore, the dramatics of those moments are rendered alive as on the red floor of this room Toti overlaps the images of Jesus' and Amaru's crucifixion. The entire episode inside the room resembles an installation in the virtual space of the video-poem. The walls can be

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<sup>147</sup> In 1926, Mariátequi founds *Amauta*, a really influential literary magazine on issues related to art, culture, and socialism in Peru and Latin America. The word "Amauta" means teacher in Quechua, and was almost a nickname for Mariátequi. Mariátequi favors a return to the Incan past, to a period of socialist care of the population.

also read as pages which re-write the history of the grand revolutions. The overlapped images are always in focus whereas the wall drawings are disclosed as if in a carousel movement. What immediately follows is a new series of images accompanied by a storyteller's voice articulating the story of Amaru's accession. He thus chronicles significant episodes from Amaru's enthronement, reign, imprisonment at Francesco di Toledo's commend, his holding in chains, execution by Spaniards, burial, and reincarnation.

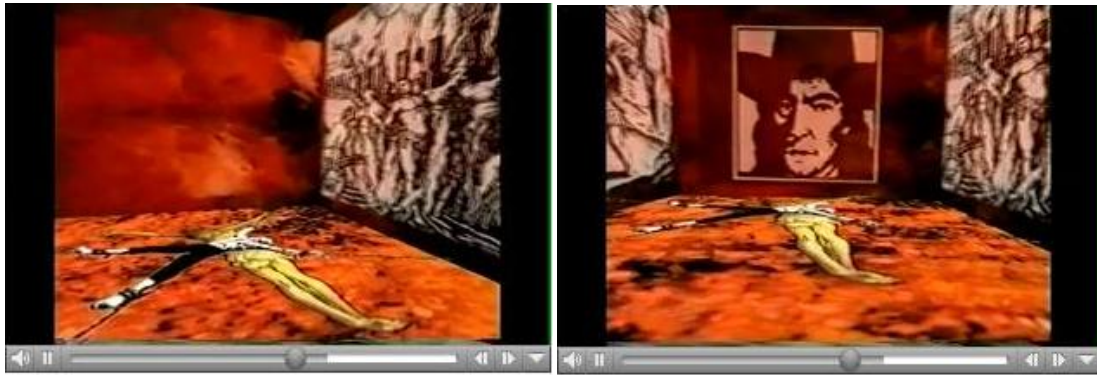


Fig. 5 The image of a room in which Toti overlaps the images of Jesus' and Amaru's crucifixion

In the video-graphic space of *Tupac Amauta*, Toti re-writes history relying on a new textual syntax. This syntax draws on metonymy as a prevalent rhetorical device used for the organization of virtual images.<sup>148</sup> In contrast to traditional or verbal poetry which habitually relies on metaphor, critic Melo e Castro explains why it is important to conceive the image dependency as an idiosyncratic feature of the video-graphic space, “[these] images are more of an iconic character rather than a symbolic one” (“Videopoetry” 179).<sup>149</sup> This means that certain images substitute for certain words or histories such as the images of Amaru which are iconic figures of the local and

<sup>148</sup> As the American artist and critic Richard Kostelanetz points out in “Literary Video: A Manifesto,” literary video should transcend the conventional syntax of familiar literature and other constraints of subject, theme, and truth (63). See Richard Kostelanetz, “Literary Video: A Manifesto.” *Performing Arts Journal* 1.1 (Spring 1976): 62-64.

<sup>149</sup> “Video has its own identity and that it is a suitable medium for the production of images of its own having no existence outside the system” (Melo e Castro, “Videopoetry” 181).

worldwide revolutions. Thus, Toti alludes to the recycling of indigenous leaders to combat the oppressive forces as these leaders appear over and over. He includes the Mayan insurrection as part of this mythical yet contemporary history. In order to write and convey a large-scale overview on history Toti uses the poetics of transformation by replacing words with images and sentences with fusions of verbal and non-verbal registers. And yet, it is challenging to establish with precision how he carries out this image-word relationship. As Fargier also explains, Toti transforms words into images and images into words, “the words originate the images, they create them, they precede them and survive them. But the exact opposite also works: New, unknown or old, the words come from the images” (“Toti: one name” 46). Relying also on sounds, his works reveal not only what language says or how language looks like but also how language sounds. In so doing, these works are journeys back to orality and toward “secondary orality.”<sup>150</sup> As Lischi explicates, such fusions are possible because both poetry and music are images devoid of significance (“. . . e poetronica” 73).<sup>151</sup>

To complement this episode Toti also calls attention to Incas’ miserable faces revealing the painful suffering they go through on the battle field. The imagery is not static: pictures seem alive as they move; various incantations and screams render people’s grief acoustically while colors change into reddish and yellowish flames to intensify the

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<sup>150</sup> Here I borrow Walter Ong’s phrasing which I discuss in Chapter 4. In *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, new media theorist Ong identifies three stages: oral culture in which sound is primordial; print culture which calls attention to visual dimension of writing, and secondary orality which references the present culture and its return to and regain of the oral dimension of words.

<sup>151</sup> “Quella che interessa a Toti non è la dimensione ‘illustrativa’ del verso (o del testo) da parte delle immagini (o viceversa), né un uso della musica come <<avvertimento sulla natura delle emozioni>>, ma la poesia e la musica come immagini svincolate dall’obbligo del significato, e l’immagine come poesia e musica altrettanto libere da quella che chiama <<effettistica semiotica, segnalativa, che aiuta a penetrare nei linguaggi>>” (“. . . e poetronica” 73). See Lischi, *Visioni Ellettroniche*, 70-74. “Toti is interested neither in the ‘descriptive’ dimension of the verse (or of the text) which comes from images (or the other way round), nor in the use of music as <sign speaking about the nature of emotions>; instead, he is interested in poetry and music as images devoid of signification, and in image as poetry and music free of what is known as <semiotic effect which enables the understanding of language>” (my translation).

overall depressing feeling. In this episode, both sound and color are “fundamental grammar elements,” to use Melo e Castro phrasing. In video-poetry, color “is an orientation element of the movement of verbal and non-verbal elements. It is also a driver of the reader’s eye movement acting as a semantic and emotion generator,” as the video-art theorist particularizes its aesthetic and semantic value (“Videopoetry” 178). Equally significant is the presence or absence of sound in how it functions a counter-point to visual images. This means that sound does not only facilitate a harmonic orchestration among these registers but it also retains its individual value.<sup>152</sup> Thus, acoustically, the mourning sound with which *Tupac Amauta* opens is counterbalanced by the celebratory sound of victory with which it ends. Visually, the end of the video-poem returns to the primary abstract imagery of dots and strings. This time, the strings from the initial background are replaced by ropes and pillars referencing the struggle Amaru II goes through. Now Toti condenses the key moments in a backward movement. His final words, “the death will die,” carry out an optimistic vision regarding the future. Although Toti’s video-poems are about powerful past heritage: ancient civilizations, medieval pictures, they always look toward the future or to what the future could be (Lischi, “Gianni Toti’s think tank” 58).

Toti’s video-graphic space does not reproduce the origin of Creation or history in the medium of the video. Instead, Toti fragments space and time and re-creates them anew. In so doing, he re-inscribes a poetronic aura to his video-graphic space. Their re-creation is not a representation; but a presentation in his poetronic style in which readers-viewers have a “here and now” experience, a feeling of a live history akin to

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<sup>152</sup> “Sound as music or human voice or even noise, is also part of the videopoem. It is used to make a counterpoint to the visual images and to create an atmosphere that facilitates the reading. But silence as a musical element is also important” (Melo e Castro, “Videopoetry” 179).

performance. Also, Toti's video-graphic space does not speak about the graphical representation of language as Funkhouser summarizes the unifying feature of many visual and kinetic digital poems. Instead, Toti's works are thematically complex as they draw upon many philosophical, theoretical, religious, political, and cross-cultural references. From this viewpoint, Toti's video-poems deserve extensive consideration and appropriate placement in alignment with the worldwide video-poetry experiments. Vis-à-vis the Italian digital poetry and avant-garde tradition, the analysis of Toti's works reinforces the sense of origins and provides the historical framework for future Italian and worldwide video-poetry works to be contextualized within a wider creative legacy. As a subgenre of digital poetry, video-poetry speaks about the technological expressions of the 1980s and it is therefore fundamental to re-cover the Italian pioneering video-poetry endeavors within the history of digital poetry because it provides a more comprehensive understanding of digital poetry's evolution.

### **Chapter III: The Networked Spaces of Caterina Davinio's Net Performances**

In the late 1990s, the Italian poet and new media artist Caterina Davinio gives birth to a new form of experimental poetry, which she labels net-poetry.<sup>153</sup> Using as theoretical starting point the communication model of the Russian literary theorist Roman Jakobson, this poetry draws particularly on the phatic function of language and, therefore, centers on the channel of communication among interlocutors. Through synchronized real-virtual collaboration, worldwide artists participate at a local event happening in Italy through the medium of the internet. The website itself becomes the space in which net-poetry performance exists, emerges, and is experienced out of contact among people as well as in the contact between real-virtual spaces. These spaces are networked spaces in that they intersect, interconnect, and interact with one another and enable the transmission of poetry performances in the channel of communication. Their transmission entails processes which change the form of poetry and call for a new language of performance based on net-communication.

Fascinated with language and mainly with the investigation of its structure and function, in the position article "Linguistics and Poetics" (1960), Jakobson delineates an intriguing theory of communication on how language in general achieves the basic function of transmitting information between speakers and the poetic function in particular works in all verbal communication. As a linguist, he frames his explanation contending that any act of verbal communication entails six constitutive elements: an addresser (sender), an addressee (receiver), a message, a context (when the utterance is made), a code (common to addresser and addressee), and a contact (channel that facilitates communication between addresser and addressee),

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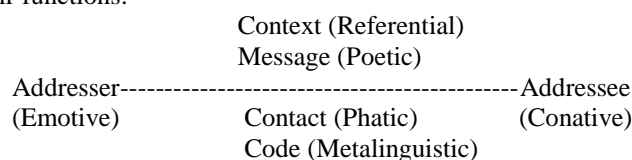
<sup>153</sup> See also Chapter 2 for an introduction of Caterina Davinio as a digital poetry theorist.

The ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to the ADDRESSEE. To be operative the message requires a CONTEXT referred to (the ‘referent’ in another, somewhat ambiguous, nomenclature), graspable by the addressee, and either verbal or capable of being verbalized; a CODE fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and addressee (or in other words, to the encoder and decoder of the message); and, finally, a CONTACT, a physical channel and psychological connection. (Jacobson 66)

In furthering this theory, Jacobson associates each element with a particular function of the language which corresponds to a dimension of the verbal communication. In alignment with these six elements, he identifies the subsequent functions: emotive (expressive of sender’s response), conative (evocative of message’s impact upon receiver), poetic / aesthetic (oriented toward message), referential (descriptive of context), meta-linguistic (focused on code), and phatic (centered on sender-receiver contact).<sup>154</sup> Given that an act of communication may contain any or all of these functions, the theorist claims for an analysis of language in the variety of all these functions. It is his belief that their importance varies depending on the specific objective of a particular speech act, their “diversity lies not in a monopoly of one of these several functions but in a different hierarchical order of functions” (Jacobson 66). This explains why there are speech acts in which one of these functions prevails while others remain auxiliary.

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<sup>154</sup> Here is a visual schematization of the correspondence that Roman Jacobson establishes between the six elements and their functions:



Interested in the understanding of those speech acts called poetry, of “what makes a verbal message a work of art” (63) in “Linguistics and Poetics” Jakobson focuses primarily on the poetic function. As the critic explains, the poetic function should not be confined exclusively to poetry because this function is essentially about “the message for its own sake” (69). This means that Jakobson’s poetic function operates within as well as outside the poetic canon, and becomes accountable for a broad linguistic behavior. Poetic function is used in everyday life in the same way in which poetry itself makes use of everyday functions, “any attempt to reduce the sphere of the poetic function to poetry or to confine poetry to the poetic function would be a delusive oversimplification” (Jakobson 69). In this respect, the poetic function aims not only to establish connections within an utterance among the features of words, images, and sounds in a message, but also to show how based on these connections it generates linguistic sequences. Because Jakobson analyzes the poetic function in connection with other functions of language his approach indirectly brings into discussion the phatic function of language. As the theorist explicates, in contrast to the emotive and conative functions which convey the expressive features of the participants—the former is a direct expression of the sender’s attitude and the latter is a manifestation of the message’s impact on receiver—the phatic function is directed toward the channel of communication. Aiming to test out this channel, this function reveals how communication initiates, continues, or ends, as well as how it takes the form of a contact between sender and receiver.

In keeping with Jakobson’s theory of communication, Davinio’s net-poetry emerges in 1998 when she creates “Karenina.it,” the first Italian site on the theme of



Internet-poetry in which art, poetry, and communication intermingle.<sup>155</sup> At first sight, the reader feels overwhelmed by the visual display of a large and wide-ranging amount of information. Content wise, the website is made of a collage of works such as poetry, performance works, essays, digitized musical pieces, announcements for conferences and exhibitions with lists of participant artists, interviews, and additional links to Italian reviews of contemporary poetry. Aesthetically speaking, the background incessantly reiterates the image of a car conveying an ongoing sense of movement and traveling. This density of linguistic and visual information calls attention to the way in which information is transmitted and less to its content. In an insightful article which situates the origin of Davinio's website in the Fluxus movement, Enrico Gianfranchi explains this visually chaotic environment as a deliberate means of undermining traditional ways of viewing and understanding art, "the image appears static, while the word [. . .] is alive and vibrant. The flow is endless, therefore the site is essentially in an eternally unfinished state and cannot be judged by the same standards as a completed image."<sup>156</sup> As a gathering place which displays work in progress, "Karenina.it" expresses Davinio's understanding of the phatic function of the language in which "the flow of words and information become art in themselves," to use Gianfranchi's words.<sup>157</sup> Also, because the project plays "on the limit between art and critic, happening and net performance," as Davinio explains, "[it] is a virtual meeting place where experiences of international

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<sup>155</sup> See "Karenina.it" <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/cprezi/caterinadav.html#net-poetry>.

<sup>156</sup> See Enrico Gianfranchi's "CommunicAction and Perspectives on Modern Web Literary Avant-Garde." *Digital Visions* (2003), <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/karelinazoom/enricoessay.htm>.

<sup>157</sup> "Though the website could pass for a generic online journal, it rather is, in Davinio's own words, a 'place of aggregation.' The site, in fact, is host to an ongoing discourse and debate which involves artists and critics alike, as well as artwork and the responses it generates. There is a tangible feeling of the constant discussion between contributors to the site, as educated voices emerge from the visually chaotic environment. The communication aspect is treated as an artistic medium that goes beyond the contents of the dialogues or the quality of the words used in them. The flow of words and information become art in themselves transcending the necessity to view art in traditional terms of form" ("CommunicAction").

artists, curators, theorists converge in a net of thousands of contacts in the world” (“Karenina.it”). In this regard, “Karenina.it” and Davinio’s later on net-poetry projects invite reflection on the nature of those processes which establish the contact among senders and receivers as well as on the way in which these contacts keep the process of communication open.

As a result of the dynamic nature of these processes, communication is akin to action and refers to those processes involved in the production of poetry. I argue that this dynamism on processes inside the channel of communication makes communication become a form of action and renders it close to performance. From this viewpoint, Davinio’s net poetry projects resemble performances. Firstly, they are performances achieved through net-communication, through the transmission of data in a network of spaces. That is to say during the net-communication performance poetry as theater becomes an object made of data (computer code). Secondly, these real and virtual spaces are also social spaces for performances with poetry. That is to say artists use these spaces to perform their poems which fosters emergent spaces for poetry collecting (website guestroom), video-poetry reading (webcam), and poetry making (online chat-room). Although the spaces of her net-performances are not self-transformative because they do not evolve from one another, they are in contact with each other: they constantly intersect, interconnect, and interact. In so doing, they validate the quality of the trans-medial space of being always in formation or on the point of becoming.

In “Linguistics and Poetics” Jakobson defines the phatic function highlighting two distinctive attributes: physicality in reference to the channel of communication and psychological connection suggestive of attitudes and beliefs that participants share,

“Contact [is] a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication” (Jacobson 66). These properties do not only ensure that communication happens but they also corroborate at the openness of the channel of communication because “there are messages primarily serving to establish, to prolong, or to discontinue communication, to check whether the channel works (“Hello, do you hear me?”), to attract the attention of the interlocutor or to confirm his continued attention (“Are you listening?”)” (Jacobson 68). As Davinio also explicates, “the poetry in phatic function is one aspect of the relational art, [and] implicates that there is always someone on the other side, whose presence is constantly verified in mailing lists, news groups, chat-lines, in the communication through e-mail or SMS” (*Techno-Poetry* 286).<sup>158</sup>

What mainly particularizes the phatic function among the other functions of communication is its content. Described as “the first verbal function acquired by infants who are inclined to communication before even being able to send or receive informative communication” (Jacobson 69), the potential of the phatic function stems from its ability of establishing connections. In this respect, Jacobson’s example of a simple exchange of ritualized formulas clearly epitomizes the networking dimension of the phatic function of language, “‘Well!’ the young man said. ‘Well!’ she said. ‘Well, here we are,’ he said. ‘Here we are,’ she said, ‘Aren’t we?’ ‘I should say we were,’ he said, ‘Eeyop! Here we are.’ ‘Well!’ she said. ‘Well!’ he said, ‘well’” (68-69). Visibly, such a dialogue is rather connection-expressive than content-oriented. The reiterative “well” and “here we are” have the mere but significant purport of prolonging communication by instituting links between addresser and addressee. Because in their absence there is no communication,

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<sup>158</sup> SMS (Short Message Service)

these words validate the process of communication enabling the flux of information transmission to exist and continue. As expressions of poetry in phatic function, Davinio's net-projects reveal how poetry takes on the features of net-communication as materials; how it becomes part of a networking system to which art and communication belong; how it relies on the response of an audience; how it is a hybrid genre because it is "art-poetry without form and without content"; and how it is made of telematic motion and contact.

Davinio's approach to how "phatic is the use of the language which has the finality to maintain open and operative the communication channel among the interlocutors," gains more complexity in net-poetry projects such as "Parallel Action" (June 2001), "Global Poetry—Net-Action" (21<sup>st</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> March 2002), "Paint from Nature" (February 2002), "Gates" (2003), "Isola Virtuale / Virtual Island" (2005), and "Virtual Mercury Shuttle" (2009). Thematically, five of these projects have as starting points events related to Venice Biennale, one project is done in the context of the day of poetry promoted by UNESCO, and another one emerges out of people's spontaneous reactions on 9/11 and a desperate need to communicate on the event.<sup>159</sup> Related to themes of social concern such as power and poetry as an expression of the freedom of thinking, poetry and the dialectic between art and life, art and reality in the new media scenario, these projects show how poetry originates in collective interaction. Because these net-poetry projects usually develop in stages which gather three types of performances they offer an intriguing theorization on the typology of performances. First, there are real

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<sup>159</sup> Venice Biennale is a major contemporary art exhibition which happens once every two years in Venice, Italy. The first Biennale was held in 1895 and centered on decorative arts. Starting with 1907, the event developed into an international event. See Venice Biennale History <http://www.labiennale.org/en/biennale/history/>.

performances such as poetry readings, stage performances, installations, etc. which happen in real time and specific locations. Based on them Davinio initiates net-performances. Second, there are net-performances which emerge out of net communication. These performances are thematic reiterations of performances done in real locations, but carried out at a global level through the participation of a larger audience. Third, there are also post net-poetry performances which refer to readers' reception of the projects. Because Davinio's net-poetry projects operate on multiple levels they bring in different protocols of performance anchored in the specificity of the medium of their presentation. This explains the diversity of their forms and the complexity of the processes involved in their creation.

Although Davinio is the one who institutes the communication link between real and virtual performances through very specific sets of instructions, she does not control the flux of communication. These instructions represent Davinio's script because they allow her to set up the contact / channel of communication in which all performances meet and interconnect and to encourage the emergence of a performance based on net communication. Broadly put, all net-projects follow a similar structure: a welcoming message references the name of the event which happens simultaneously in Italy, the theme and duration of the project; the redaction staff who receives the submissions; and the nature of the contributions in terms of genre and language preference that all participants have to follow.<sup>160</sup> With these instructions Davinio establishes the geographic,

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<sup>160</sup> "Welcome in Venice! Poesia in azione—una rete di voci Orso Grill delle Artiglierie—49ma Biennale di Venezia—"Azione paralela" in connessione con il sito Karenina.it / 7 giugno 2001 . . . JUNE 7th / 11.00 AM until 6.30 PM" ("Parallel Action-Bunker" (2001); "send to Karenina.it Redaction clprezi@tin.it your poem or your intervention about 'poetry and/against power', 'intellectuals and power', 'poetry as defense of mankind', 'freedom of thinking'" "Write in your language or in English. Write in the subject: AZIONE PARALLELA – BUNKER."

thematic, and temporal specificity of her projects and reveals their unity of style. The involvement of worldwide poets and artists discloses how right from the outset these works are envisioned in flux, in an ongoing state of formation, and it is impossible to presume beforehand how these net-projects ultimately look. It is also a gesture which enables Davinio to collect various definitions of poetry.<sup>161</sup> In so doing, she states that if we have our individual perceptions of performance and poetry, we, you, I, will collectively produce illustrations of our existent knowledge of poetry and performance.

In calling attention to the content of performance on the internet, Davinio essentially creates a new language of performance based on net-communication in which specific features of the net become integral to performance. In this regard, her net-performance moves beyond a documentary value. In other words, the internet is not a space for the representation of performance because her net-performance does not aim to promote the real event or to report that performance took place. Instead, it engages internet features in its creation in order to emphasize how net-communication is “communic-action,” to use her phrasing. As she explains, communic-action is akin to performance in how it entails a form of action, “In my performances the communic-action flux is assumed as act / sign, introducing the necessity of a new semiotic to describe the process” (“Net-Performance: Processes and Visible Forms”).<sup>162</sup> And because on the internet communication is made of data files, communic-action speaks about data file transmission. In more detailed terms, it is about the spread of information, how information is transmitted; the collective dimension, how net-communication involves multiple senders and receivers; the change of identity, how the performer is not a

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<sup>161</sup> As I further discuss in this chapter, the submissions take various forms in Davinio’s net-performances.

<sup>162</sup> Davinio’s definition of “communic-action” as “act-sign” echoes Toti’s video-poetry as “image-act.”

controlling presence; the dislocation of action in several places, how a virtual location gathers actions done simultaneously in worldwide locations; the perception of communication as a form of action, in which action does not necessarily refer to the recording on new media, instead to a “crossing” by new media (“Net-Performance”).<sup>163</sup> Borrowing from the language of the internet she creates a new language of performance that redefines the concept of performance bringing in a new perspective on the form and function of performance inside the channel of communication.

What’s more important about this net-poetry is how it addresses the form-content equation. Although Davinio’s net-performances happen online, performance is not subordinated to the internet as a medium of presentation. Instead, she situates form and content in dialogue with one another without privileging the latter over the former. As she briefly historicizes in “Net-Performance: Processes and Visible Forms,” performance is a traditional genre and although it frequently appears in websites in the form of internet videos, it should not be labeled in accordance with the medium in which it occurs. A consideration which assumes that just because a performance happens in the internet is not a performance, but a product of the internet, simply disregards the actual content of the performance and mainly those stages involved in its creation. From her viewpoint, Marshall McLuhan’s often-cited dictum: “the medium is the message”—the way in

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<sup>163</sup> “By operating as a net-artist on the Internet I tried to define a new language of performance utilizing specific features of the net:

- the aspect of communication
- the possibility to spread information
- the collective dimension
- the possibility of changing / hiding identity
- the dislocation of the action in several spaces simultaneously
- the idea of action not recorded on new media, but ‘crossed’ by new media
- intrinsically permeated by them”

See Caterina Davinio’s “Net-Performance: Processes and Visible Forms”

[http://www.sitec.fr/users/akenatondocks/DOCKS-datas\\_f/collect\\_f/auteurs\\_f/D\\_f/DAVINIO\\_f/ACTION\\_F/statement\\_on\\_performance.htm](http://www.sitec.fr/users/akenatondocks/DOCKS-datas_f/collect_f/auteurs_f/D_f/DAVINIO_f/ACTION_F/statement_on_performance.htm).

which the message is transmitted is more important than its content—is too limiting in how it establishes a total deterministic rapport between new media and their forms and contents.<sup>164</sup> This is not to say that Davinio denies the revolutionary possibilities that new media brings in visual forms of art and in their creation; instead, she considers “it is too simplistic to consider this all as an automatism” (“Net-Performance”). Such an approach does not only bring changes in the correlation between the content and form of performance but it limits its focus to end products. Davinio’s focus on processes rather than on products validates her belief that the change of the medium for the presentation of a work will not automatically and completely modify its content.

Unquestionably, these net-poetry projects have meaning only within the medium of the internet in which they occur. Although they encompass features which reflect the specificity of this medium, they do not discount their main purpose: they are and function as performances made of data. Because they are made of a language based on net-communication protocols, net-poetry projects are forms of poetry concerned with data. In this respect, they reflect upon the processes and procedures that highlight the making of this poetry. Thus, the examination of the stages involved in “Global Poetry—Net-Action” (2002) provides an intriguing understanding of how their typology resonates with the nuances that the concept of performance encompasses. Such an approach does not only help articulate performance but it also substantiates the close correlation between the definition of the concept and the making of net-poetry performance. Moreover, because these net-projects also require the engagement of an audience, they take the form of participatory poetry. In this respect, they are wide collaborative projects in how their content emerges out of the contacts among participants.

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<sup>164</sup> See Marshall McLuhan’s *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1962.



Involving 122 international artists, “Global Poetry—Net Action” (March 21-23, 2002) occurs simultaneously with the celebration of poetry day, March 21, promoted by UNESCO.<sup>165</sup> The celebratory, playful, and collaborative spirit of the project carries on Friedrich Nietzsche’s statement which prefaces the project “against the art of the artworks I want to teach a superior art: the art of invention of fests.”<sup>166</sup> Added to this is Davinio’s mission to put forward her vision of a virtual and global celebration of poetry, “The idea is a collective creation which runs in the net as communication, art made of communication, which brings people who live very far in contact; but we also play on the semantic limit between real and virtual” (“Global Poetry”). The project unfolds in stages, in alignment with which three types of performances with poetry arise and develop. First, there is performance poetry akin to theater which happens in reality and shows how poetry is performed before an audience or with an audience’s involvement. Thus, “Global Poetry” starts with e-mail exchanges of experimental images and poetry among world-wide poets and artists. Later on, in real time and in several real locations, these artists carry out, with the received e-mails, a series of actions such as readings, installations, landscape performances, etc. Second, there is net-poetry performance which refers to the transmission of the preceding performance poetry from real to virtual space. At this stage, worldwide artists turn their actions into images and videos and e-mail them to Davinio’s website. Third, there is post net-poetry performance in which the website resembles a script when the audience who is not directly involved in the projects encounters it afterward. As a script, the post net-poetry performance concisely describes the worldwide

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<sup>165</sup> In order to acknowledge the significant role that poetry plays in arts and cultures throughout the world, in November 1999, UNESCO designates World Poetry Day to take place on March 21 each year.

<sup>166</sup> See “Global Poetry” (Mar. 21-23, 2002) <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/kareninazoom/>.

locations in which artists did performances with the received e-mails and the names of the involved poets and artists.<sup>167</sup>

What immediately stands out from the project's chronology is how these performances with poetry and the spaces in which they happen build on each other, interconnect, and expand within an internally-established network.<sup>168</sup> Inside this network, the net-poetry performance configures itself as the nexus of the whole project in how it brings in a new approach to performance poetry as a genre and invites further reflection on what performance is when it stems from net-poetry. In the net-poetry stage of "Global Poetry," performance references the transmission of performance poetry as theater that happens in reality in a virtual space. In order for this to happen, performance poetry undergoes transformations in which the new medium of presentation conceives performance as an object that is an electronic transmission of art into data files. As a result, I contend that Davinio's net-poetry performance gestures toward a definition of performance as data transmission in which performance poetry as theater becomes an object made of data (computer code). Moreover, the post net-poetry performance attests to the presentation of this transmission process from real to a virtual space.<sup>169</sup>

To understand how the concept of "object" operates in "Global Poetry" means to step back to avant-guard time when it first entered the field of art, and, more specifically, to Marcel Duchamp's "ready-mades," which accurately delineate the typology of his

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<sup>167</sup> "Dove/Where: Rome (Italy), Los Angeles (USA), New York - Manhattan, New York - Ground Zero (USA), St Petersburg (Russia), Izhevsk (Russia), Nova Lima (Brazil) Santa Catarina (Brazil), San Paolo (Brazil), Cologne (Germany), Playa Pueblo de "Choroni" (Venezuela), Milan (Italy), San Luis Obispo (California - USA), Montevideo (Uruguay) Caltanissetta (Italy) and other cities"; "Among the 200 involved experimental poets, visual poets and artists: 1. David Daniels, 2. Barry Alpert, 3. Lamberto Pignotti-Gudrun De Chirico, etc."

<sup>168</sup> See Chapter 4 on how Glazier also develops an internal network within his JavaScript-based digital poems.

<sup>169</sup> I consider that what the audience sees in the post net-poetry performances is a presentation of the net-poetry performances.

pioneering attempts.<sup>170</sup> In 1915 the French / American artist elevated an object from everyday reality to the dignity of a work of art not by making it, but by simply selecting it from reality, relocating, slightly adjusting, or signing it. Duchamp's gesture of turning a common object into art challenged conventional notions vis-à-vis the definition of art and the role of the artist. Similarly to how the French / American artist questions what art is and is not, the Italian artist seeks to revisit, reinterpret, and rethink what poetry and performance are in net-poetry. Likewise Duchamp who aspires to establish a close connection between spectator and work taken from external reality in order for the artist not to perform the creative act alone, Davinio envisions her net-poetry performance as a collective performance. Through the involvement of worldwide poets and artists, "Global Poetry" calls attention to the expanded dimensions that performance poetry can take. Also, if Duchamp changes physical realities as his ready-mades originate in the re-contextualization of the object from an everyday environment to a museum setting, Davinio changes physical and virtual realities on account of which in the medium of the internet performance poetry becomes object, or "digital object," in her words. Although Davinio shares several conceptual affinities with Duchamp, she associates "object" with technology.

In so doing, Davinio's "object" explicitly points to the electronic transmission of art. Drawing a correlation between object and transmission of art into data files in *Techno-Poetry*, the new media artist explains that "object" is "electronic art" which the artist produces in the Internet (295). As she further details, content wise, "object" is a broad category which encapsulates miscellaneous forms; "'objects' [are] videos, pieces

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<sup>170</sup> In 1913, Marcel Duchamp creates his first ready-made called "Bicycle Wheel," which represents an inverted bicycle wheel on a stool.

of music, texts, hypertexts, transformed in data files” (*Techno-Poetry* 295). If an object can be either textual or non-textual, then performance poetry as theater becomes an “object” as well when worldwide artists turn it into data files and transmit it to Davinio’s website. Also, because the net-poetry performance emerges out of the gathering of all “objects” net-performance attests to the transmission of performance poetry as a data file. As a result, a theoretical investigation of the nature of the digital object is essential in order to understand how in “Global Poetry” performance poetry as theater becomes an object in machine language.

In this transmission from real to a virtual space, the digital object is characterized by stratified “objectuality,” to use Davinio’s terminology (*Techno-Poetry* 294). As she explicates, this “stratified objectuality” surfaces out of the convergence of three elements: “object-installation,” which references the virtual space in which performance poetry is transmitted, or “installed”; “object-electronic image,” which calls attention to the form that the object takes; and “object-language,” which is the language or the code that digital object is made of (*Techno-Poetry* 294). Davinio’s depiction of object as installation “made of devices, something that we can touch” reveals an intriguing perception on performance poetry as an exhibition in a virtual space.<sup>171</sup> This means that the transmission of performance poetry from real to a virtual space is not as a representation of the performance; instead, it is a presentation that is an installation of performance poetry in a virtual space. By implication, what the audience sees in the post net-poetry performance is a presentation of how poetry performance is transmitted from real-virtual space. Also, the other two features of the “stratified objectuality” of this digital object are

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<sup>171</sup> In some regards, her approach echoes the way in which concrete poems are objects displayed in a museum. See Chapter 1 mainly Mary Ellen Solt’s historical account on the debut of concrete poetry. Also, see same chapter for a discussion of screen as an exhibition space.

equally significant in how they challenge the traditional understanding of concepts such as reference and concrete. Thus, “object-electronic image” regards performance poetry as a digital image endowed with aesthetic and interactive qualities and invites reflection on the connection between representation and electronic representation. Likewise, “object-language” points to the language of the digital object as code, and furthers consideration on how in net-poetry performance poetry changes its relationship to what concrete is or means.

When discussing the steps involved in “Global Poetry” Davinio explains that one of them in particular gestures toward the creation of texts and images, “The central fact is the communic-action interchange, and fundamental was the real action / performance contemporaneously dislocated in numerous places in the world; another step was to film the dislocated events or take photos, another was to re-virtualize the process by reinserting it in cyberspace, by transforming it in video, digital products, etc” (“Net-Performance”). Defined as “a continuous ‘translation’ of the object from real to virtual and vice versa” (“Net-Performance”), this process of virtualization takes place only during the net-poetry performance. It is then when poets and artists are fully engaged in their own performances with poetry done in reality and transmit them as images and videos to Davinio’s website. In post net-poetry performance, this process of virtualization is not visible. For instance, there is no decomposition of the image in order to see the amount of information contained in the pixel-based presentation of the performance poetry.<sup>172</sup> In fact, the post net-poetry performance is primarily about how performance poetry as theatre is transmitted from real to virtual space and then about what it is

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<sup>172</sup> See my conclusion for a close-reading of one of Davinio’s video-poems as a performance based on visual pixilation.

transmitted from them. As a result, the post net-poetry performance situates itself in between the presentation of the transmission process and the presentation of performances.

In the post net-poetry performance the website resembles a script in which the audience who is not directly involved in the performance re-creates the stages of the project in order to understand how the flux of communication emerges and develops.<sup>173</sup> Thus, there is a section with worldwide locations in which few artists made performances in reality with the received e-mails and a list of names of the 122 international participants. Once each name is clicked on, it discloses either a poem or an image e-mailed for the project. Interestingly, each contribution reveals one vision of what poetry is, “every artist / poet sent a poem to Caterina Davinio by e-mail: a poem, a visual poem, an object-poem, a photo of a performance or of a poetry reading, or whatever else was, for the artist, ‘a poem.’”<sup>174</sup> More importantly, in this e-mail exchange among poets these poems and images are central in the sense that they are displayed in their entirety and therefore, can be read and explored individually. Conversely, in the net-poetry performance, these poems and images are marginal. This means that poets and artists use them to make performances with poetry in various forms so that their content is partially revealed.<sup>175</sup> That is why the post net-poetry performance calls attention to the gestures of poets and artists who act as performers and not to poems or images. For instance, Christina McPhee’s performance in The Powerhouse San Luis Obispo, California, shows

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<sup>173</sup> This point echoes Enrico Gianfranchi’s observation on the reader’s reception of “Karenina.it” in which “the flow of information is appealing and fascinating, forcing the viewer to read and become mentally involved. Rather than passively responding to the basic visual element of the site, the viewer is drawn in to explore the literary landscape present” (“CommunicAction”).

<sup>174</sup> See Davinio’s website <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/kareninazoom/>.

<sup>175</sup> See Chapter 1 for a discussion on how concrete poems are objects installed in a museum setting.

how she looks around the e-mails spread on the floor, picks up one poem, and reads it without making visible its content.<sup>176</sup> Similarly, Barba Calogero's exhibition of "Global Poetry" poems in Qal'at contemporary art gallery in Caltanissetta, Italy, shows Franco Spena mixing poetry and art with a shovel, Giuseppina Riggi installing poems and images, and two gallery visitors watching the installation.<sup>177</sup> The post net-poetry performance calls attention to the particular emphasis on how poems and images are used in performance poetry done in reality and then transmitted online.



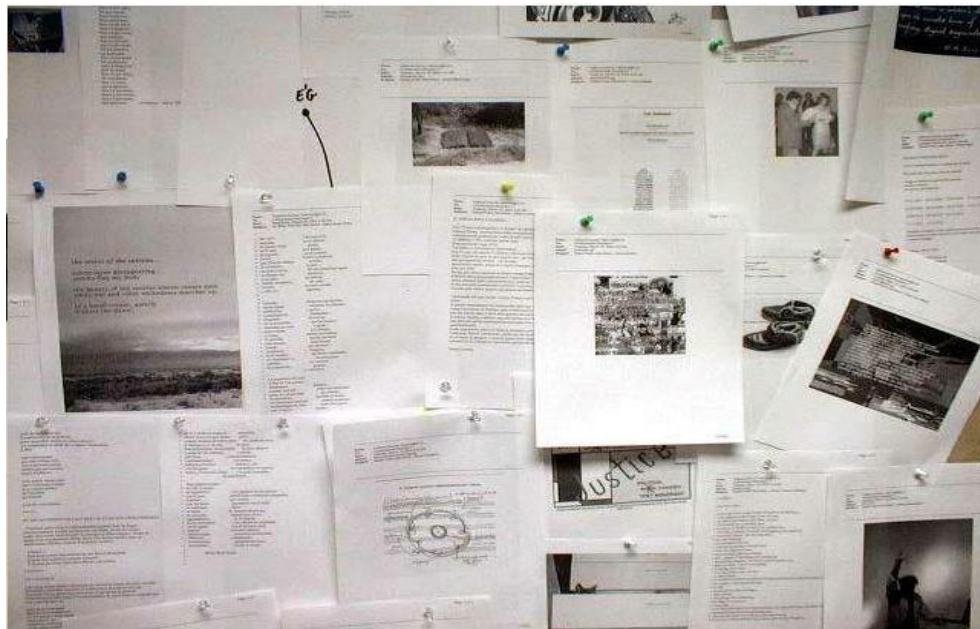
Fig. 6 Franco Spena mixing poetry and art with a shovel, Giuseppina Riggi installing poems and images in an art gallery in Caltanissetta, Italy

In the transmission from real to virtual, video, music, text, and performance poetry become electronic art forms in the sense that they are "digital objects," and thus take the form of electronic images. Davinio's designation of digital objects as electronic images situates digital objects in between representation and thing. This means, they reference the object from reality and represent it electronically as a thing made of data files, more specifically, as "quantity of information, as little as it [is] a genetic code of the image itself, which the machines activate in real time and are able to 'materialize' also at a great distance" (*Techno-Poetry* 296). As Davinio explains, electronic representation

<sup>176</sup> See Christina McPhee's performance <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/kareninazoom/christine.htm>.

<sup>177</sup> See Barba Calogero's exhibition <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/kareninazoom/Calogero.htm>.

does not deny the object; instead, it contains the genetic code of the object. Hence, e-representation alludes primarily to the language of the code that the digital object is made of and then references how the language of the code becomes an image. For instance, Brice Bowman's performance at the Art Institute of Los Angeles consists in a board installation with poems and images from e-mails. Although these images refer to submissions by Carol Starr from Taos, New Mexico; Nicola Frangione's "partitura 'Participiopassato' 1989-1991"; Clemente Padin's artwork; Pignotti and De Chirico's image of their poetry reading; Mirella Bentivoglio's image of an open book, Pawel Kwasniewski's image of a theatre performance, it is impossible to see and define the "thing" contained in this installation board.<sup>178</sup>



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<sup>178</sup> See Brice Bowman's performance <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/kareninazoom/brice.htm>.



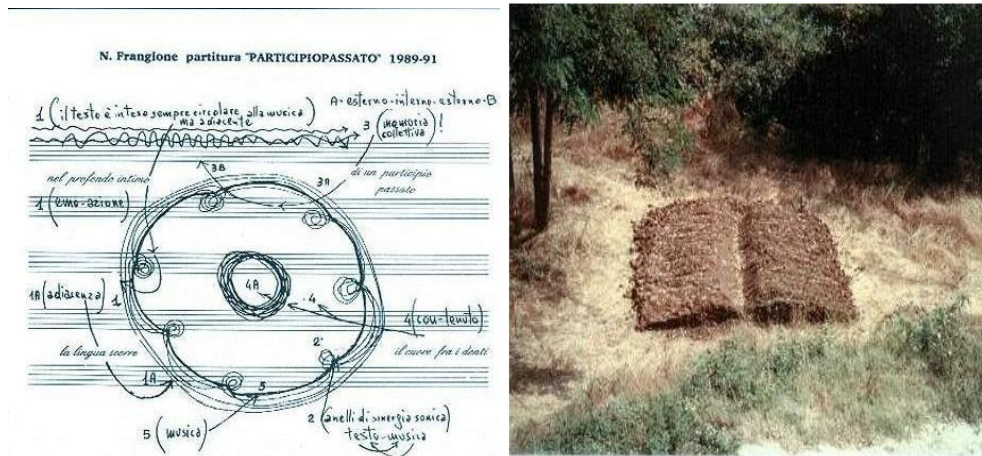


Fig. 7 Brice Bowman’s board installation with poems and images from e-mails. Nicola Frangione’s “partitura ‘Participiopassato’ 1989-1991” and Mirella Bentivoglio’s image of an open book.

Apparently, things are endowed with something that is concrete in how they are visible and tangible, and yet, they are paradoxically ambiguous.<sup>179</sup> In his major theoretical article on the role of things in literature and culture, critic Bill Brown points out that “even the most coarse and commonsensical things, mere things, perpetually pose a problem because of the specific un-specificity that ‘things’ denotes” (“Thing Theory” 3). According to him, whereas the meaning of objects can be actually decoded, the meaning of things is less transparent, “we look through objects because there are codes by which our interpretative attention makes them meaningful [. . .] A *thing*, in contrast, can hardly function as a window. We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us” (“Thing Theory” 4). Although Brown’s approach to things comes from a different angle of analysis, it is relevant for Davinio’s project in how it speaks about the difficulty of defining things and of grasping what they mean. Davinio’s

<sup>179</sup> “‘Things are what we encounter, ideas are what we project.’ That’s how Leo Stein schematically put it. Although the experience of an encounter depends, of course, on the projection of an idea (the idea of encounter), Stein’s scheme helps to explain the suddenness with which things seem to assert their presence and power: you cut your finger on a sheet of paper, you trip over some toy, you get bopped on the head by a falling nut. These are occasions outside the scene of phenomenological attention that nonetheless teach you that you’re ‘caught up in things’ and that the ‘body is a thing among things.’ They are occasions of contingency—the chance interruption—that disclose a physicality of things” (Brown, “Thing Theory” 3-4).

net-poetry is an object and not a thing because readers of the post-net-poetry performances can re-create these performances with poetry by examining Davinio's script and the artists' involvement in these performances through the electronic transmission of the works.

Davinio's designation of digital object as "object-language" calls attention to the code which the digital object encompasses. Because in the virtual space performance poetry is a digital object made of code, the content of performance also relies on code. In this way, performance changes its relationship to what concrete is or means. Davinio's use of concrete designates either the space or the content of the performance according to the real or virtual space in which performance occurs. On the one hand, when performance poetry as theater happens in reality, performance is concrete in how it references that concrete space. On the other hand, when performance poetry is transmitted in the virtual space, performance becomes object and is concrete in how it references the code of which it is made. As Davinio explicates, concrete means "units in motion," "in 'concrete' electronic art the 'substance' coincides with the codification" (*Techno-Poetry* 295). The language of the digital object is "considered not for [objects'] aspect or for the signification they have, but as made of codification in machine language, objects that autonomously concretize their existence during the time the devices are switched on" (*Techno-Poetry* 295). The fact that performance happens on the internet does neither diminish the concrete dimension of performance done in reality nor the fact that it is a performance. The change of the medium of presentation does not make performance poetry either less concrete or less performance-like. Instead, concrete changes its reference.

In an insightful study which explores the understanding of responses to art and images, David Freedberg argues that an art object is deemed to have ritual power not only because of its consecration, but also because of the way it is actually used so that its multiple reproductions reinforce the value of its original image.<sup>180</sup> For him, an art object carries on its history, the context in which it originates, and therefore contains that aura, “The aura of the picture or sculpture in a museum may even approach something of the force of its original aura, notwithstanding the abating effects of reproduction and removal from original context” (“Representation and Reality” 433).<sup>181</sup> This explains why in contrast to art theorists and critics who consider that people react differently to the reality of the art object and to an image which reproduces the reality of the art object; Freedberg considers that image equals reality.<sup>182</sup> Convinced that the object contains both reality and image that is the representation of the reality, he says that the reality of the image is the reality.<sup>183</sup> Significantly, whereas art theorists usually differentiate between representation and the illusion of reality, Freedberg argues that representation is reality and this is the illusion that it entails, “we have been fortified by generations of theorists in the view that the wonder and illusion of representation is different from the wonder and illusions of reality. [. . .] Representation is miraculous because it devices us into thinking it is

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<sup>180</sup> See David Freedberg’s *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989.

<sup>181</sup> It is essential to point out that David Freedberg’s definition of aura has a different connotation than Walter Benjamin’s in the sense that it is related to his response theory: Freedberg’s aura liberates response, “By aura I do not mean something vague, mystical, or unanalytic, or some mysterious quotient or residue of energy within a painting or a sculpture. Aura is that which liberates response from the exigencies of convention” (“Representation and Reality” 433). See Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 429-442.

<sup>182</sup> “We recognize the possibilities when we go into a museum and see a great picture or sculpture. We see the object and feel that history and common judgment have rightly sanctioned its status in the canon; we feel no doubt whatever of its presence; we feel the fullness of its aura and its great force” (Freedberg, “Representation and Reality” 432).

<sup>183</sup> In order to support this point, Freedberg uses Roland Barthes’s position, “‘The photograph,’ we remember Barthes saying, ‘does not call up the past (nothing Proustian in a photograph). The effect it produces upon me is not to restore what has been abolished (by time, by distance) but to attest that which I see has indeed existed’” (“Representation and Reality” 439).

realistic, but it is only miraculous because it is something other than what it represents” (438). In the same way in which Toti’s video-poetry re-writes the origin of Creation and history anew, Davinio’s net-poetry projects re-create the performances rather than to represent them.

Although Davinio’s net-poetry performance encompasses forms such as photos or videos this performance does not have a documentary value: it is not akin to a recorded performance; instead, it is a presentation of the transmission processes. In these photos, this emphasis is kept on the process of making and on how poetry travels. For instance, Coco Gordon’s action at Ground Zero, in New York is a performance which takes the form of a poetry reading.<sup>184</sup> In “You are Poetry,” Gordon asks firefighters and small business people to read some of the poems received by e-mail. One image shows her holding the pile of printed e-mails in which one can see how Maurizio Osti’s submission of a visual poem traveled from Bologna, Italy, to New York.<sup>185</sup>



Fig. 8 Coco Gordon holding the pile of printed e-mails among which is Maurizio Osti’s visual poem

<sup>184</sup> See Coco Gordon’s performance <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/kareninazoom/coco.htm>.

<sup>185</sup> See Maurizio Osti’s submission <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/kareninazoom/osti.jpg>.

Additionally, in Izhevsk, Russia, Aleksey Shklyayev prints the received e-mails on small papers and gives them to passengers who hang them on tram walls.<sup>186</sup> Shklyayev's performance with poetry as installation in a new landscape shows how Miguel Alba's visual poem submitted in Spanish is reproduced in the new context of the tram wall of the Russian landscape.<sup>187</sup> Also, Pedro Lopez Casuso's installation displays the printed poems and images on stones as if marking out poetry's journey in the landscape of Choroní Beach, Venezuela.<sup>188</sup> The background of the website conveys a sense of traveling as well with the reiterated hand which sends paper planes made of the received e-mails. Because the emphasis is on the process of communication as data transmission, the post net-performance as a whole does not convey a sense of completeness and cannot be grasped in its totality either.



Fig. 9 Miguel Alba's visual poem submitted in Spanish is on the tram wall in Russia.

<sup>186</sup> See Aleksey Shklyayev's performance <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/kareninazoom/alexei.htm>.

<sup>187</sup> See Miguel Alba's submission <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/kareninazoom/alba.jpg>.

<sup>188</sup> See Pedro Lopez Casuso's installation <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/kareninazoom/pedro.htm>.

Paralleling the 53<sup>rd</sup> Venice Biennale, Davinio's latest net-project, "Virtual Mercury House: Planetary & Interplanetary Events" (June 4<sup>th</sup>-November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009), encompasses multiple virtual events centered on the theme of saving poetry and identity.<sup>189</sup> As the curator of the Biennale Marco Nereo Rotelli explains, "In the state of global uncertainty which now touches every man, it is up to art to find again 'the creativity of the individual who creates' (Harald Szeemann) and open up the unexpected interferences, embodying distant cultures, from the isle of Failaka to Easter Island, realities that act almost as a warning to the men of our age" ("In a State of Emergency").<sup>190</sup> In response to this desideratum, Davinio's "Virtual Mercury House" welcomes worldwide poets and artists on board in order "[to] save poetry, [. . .] save the differences, memory, identity, ourselves."<sup>191</sup> Davinio's participation at this Biennale consists in a series of collateral events: the first Poetry Shuttle landing on Second Life, a virtual installation having the form of a space shuttle; a website guestbook, which collects poems in different languages; and poetry readings in webcam in which the audience from Venice press conference room watches poets from the world reading poems in webcam.<sup>192</sup> What particularizes "Virtual Mercury House" from the previous net-project is

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<sup>189</sup> See "Virtual Mercury House" <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/cprezi/virtualmercuryhouse.htm>.

<sup>190</sup> See Marco Nereo Rotelli's "In a State of Emergency" <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/cprezi/pagine1-info.htm>.

<sup>191</sup> Davinio's detailed mission in "Virtual Mercury House:" "Maybe poets are like aliens on Earth, but they are welcome on board on my shuttle. Maybe poetry is like watching from an extreme point of view, other perspective, something to preserve in our globalized and homologated, standardized world. Maybe our world is a place from which to escape . . . But certainly we are going to come back, for affirming the point of view of poetry against power, violence, destruction of cultures and identities" See Daviniz Zabaleta, "Interview to Caterina Davinio," (November 7, 2009), <http://uqbar-mediaartculture.ning.com/profiles/blogs/interview-to-caterina-davinio>.

<sup>192</sup> Davinio: "I used the thin linearity of SL [Second Life] graphic for its ludic, essential, and symbolic quality, for creating poetry, for creating a poetry object: the space shuttle as archetype of a place done for navigation in far and hostile environments, as privileged position for observation, a space of survival for the poet, always a little 'alien' and diverse in our world that runs after completely different myths. The space shuttle evokes the intergalactic exploration, the possibility of unknown encounters, the coming across last frontiers, territories 'beyond' the Pillars of Hercules of the language, rising many echoes in the

this emphasis on the “constellation [. . .] of interrelated events,” to use Davinio’s phrasing.<sup>193</sup> As the new media artist explicates, her series of contributions replicates the development phase that the internet has reached so far, “The Internet is now structured more as a landscape of ‘islands,’ of small and wide communities, similar to actual planets, organized in hierarchies and geographies, with proper languages and appeals. Among some of the best known [are]: YouTube, Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, etc “ (Zabaleta, “Interview to Caterina Davinio”).

The website guestbook, webcam, and online chat-room are in a network with each other in how they share the space of the internet. Their interconnection facilitates time synchronization, which furthers the synchronization of the various forms of performances they host. With an apparent goal of merely gathering poems, the website guestbook welcomes poetry submissions for a six month period beginning May 5<sup>th</sup> and closing November 23<sup>rd</sup> 2009, the final date of the Biennale. For one day, on October 9<sup>th</sup> 2009, the submissions in this guestbook interconnects with video-poetry readings in webcam as they share for one and a half hours, from 3:00-4:30 pm, the same temporal axis of the Italian time. During these readings, a fifteen minute chat-poem emerges in the chat-room space that takes form instantaneously out of the discussion among online poets. In this way, the website guestbook, webcam, and online chat-room are in a network that keep the channels of communication open and therefore enable the transmission of poetry. They are not only tools which establish connections but also spaces in which performances with poetry happen. More specifically, they are spaces for poetry collecting

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collective memory, and, overall, the idea of journey as a topos of poetry of every time” (“Interview to Caterina Davinio”).

See the guestbook <http://htmlgear.tripod.com/guest/control.guest?u=virtualmercuryhouse&i=1&a=view>.  
See the poetry readings in webcam <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIVNwdBvNc0>.

<sup>193</sup>See Zabaleta, “Interview to Caterina Davinio.”

(website guestroom), video-poetry reading (webcam), and poetry making (online chat-room).

Apparently, the website guestbook reveals itself as a space for poetry collection. Over two hundred international poets submit over three hundred poems at Davinio's invitation who establishes the book-like display of all poetry submissions and the e-mail format for their transmission.<sup>194</sup> In this net-poetry project, poets do not simply collaborate; they participate in it and make it happen. Performances emerge out of the collective dimensions of interactivity in which Davinio's website guestbook becomes a space for poetry collection and creation.<sup>195</sup> In some regards, this echoes the "Global Poetry" project where the production of net-poetry performances coincides with the transmission of performance poetry. Because net-poetry performance emerges and exists provided that performance poetry circulates from real to virtual space, its production converges with their transmission. The website guestbook of "Virtual Mercury House" reveals the internal dynamic of the act of communication between May 5<sup>th</sup> and November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009 because it captures how the flux of communication happens, emerges, and develops. Because all contributions contain the preciseness of the submission time: hour, minutes, and seconds, reading them conveys a sense of presence in front of a performance akin to an ongoing communication.<sup>196</sup> In the guestbook, the poem is transmitted and the transmission process becomes part of its performance.

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<sup>194</sup> These submissions validate the presence of poets at the end of the communication channel.

<sup>195</sup> Davinio: "[in the guestbook] everybody can leave a poem, a sentence, a virtual sign which gives gradually life to a great collective poem." See Zabaleta, "Interview to Caterina Davinio."

<sup>196</sup> For instance, Robitah Nawawi sends multiple submissions of various poems on 06/20, at 10:10am, at 10:12am, and 10:24am; on 06/21, at 3:21pm; on 06/22, at 6:29pm; on 06/28, at 6:54pm; on 06/30, at 7:25pm. See poetry submissions, <http://htmlgear.tripod.com/guest/control.guest?u=virtualmercuryhouse&i=1&a=view>.



Consisting of sixty-five pages, the website guestbook resembles an anthology in print which collects various poems, paginates them, provides the names of the contributors, and makes them available to skim through. As an online poetry anthology, the guestbook contains a wide range of poems: some are self-reflective of the theme of the project articulating ideas about virtual reality, galactic language, space, and performance; others are expressions of emerging forms of poetry such as the tweet or poetry which mixes everyday language with computer language; while others are concise: one or two-lines poems.<sup>197</sup> Of particular interest are those submissions which move beyond the page in how they are envisioned for performance and in which poetry is endowed with theatrical elements.<sup>198</sup> For instance, Pascale Gustin's submission consists in an URL to "Souffles I," a sound and visual poem in which Gustin explains, "I perform sound (blow) with my mouth; the visual part is linked to the sound. I'm linked myself to the machine by my breathing."<sup>199</sup> Luke Munn's "---Wasser Komposition # 1, a sound poem for Venice---", is another example in which the simple sequence refers to the transfer of water from one hand to another as a way of calling attention to its sonic and tactile properties.<sup>200</sup> This poem echoes Tristan Tzara's method of making a Dada poem with lines structured as if following a particular formula, "Pour a glass of water into your

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<sup>197</sup> From the first typology see Davinio's "Alien Poem" or Maria Nicola Vauda's "George;" for the second see David Seaman's "Cityscape," Mary Ann Sullivan's "swapDepths," or Jonathan Keat's "To Woo a Computer;" for the third see Flavia Fernandes' "l'arte sentire / sentire l'arte." or Juan Jose Diaz Infante's "ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ"

<sup>198</sup> See Alessio Liberati, a visual writer from Cagliari, Italy, who submits three links to pdf files which are about his visual poetry works ("12 Visual Poems between Earth and Sky"), concrete poems ("Lotus Poems"), and kinetic poems in video format ("Breath in Loop").

<sup>199</sup> See Pascale Gustin's submission <http://www.vimeo.com/5267438>.

In this form of performance poetry a text makes the entire duration of the piece. The screen shows how several strips of printed paper cover and cover again themselves. Then, following the sound loop, the poet breaks it in several places, to find inside beats and blow.

<sup>200</sup> Luke Munn is a Berlin-based sound artist who incorporates performance, composition in his projects.

See poetry submissions,

<http://htmlgear.tripod.com/guest/control.guest?u=virtualmercuryhouse&i=1&a=view>.

cupped palm, letting some spill over and some remain in the center. Wait until your hand has stopped dripping, listening to the splashes and the sound between the splashes.”<sup>201</sup>

In alignment with these submissions, poetry readings in webcam emerge. On October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009, between 3:00 pm and 4:30 pm Italian time, Davinio gathers twenty-eight poets and artists to do one-minute-long poetry readings in webcam from worldwide locations.<sup>202</sup> Although visually speaking, the webcam reveals the poet doing the reading in fact, the performance materializes the presence of poem as sound. As written text, the poem already exists, it is not created spontaneously; instead, it is its reading that articulates the poem’s presence in front of the conference audience. Because the poet’s reading is a form of performance, this reading in webcam is about the oral performance of the poem, about how poetry sounds in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Hebrew, Greek, and Romanian. Also, in this video-reading in webcam, performance is an isolating experience for the poet who reads the poem, who, in the absence of multi-video interaction, can see neither the audience in Venice nor the co-participant poets. And thus, what ultimately counts is the public reading of poetry, the way worldwide poetry is envisioned and made publicly to a geographically remote audience.

As a space for poetry performance the webcam reveals how through this video-reading the poem regains its primary oral dimensions and theater-like qualities. The twenty-eight poetry-readings in webcam contain eclectic performances ranging from conventional readings of poetry and theater enhanced readings to close listening to

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<sup>201</sup> See Chapter 2 for Tristan Tzara’s formula of making a “Dadaist poem.”

<sup>202</sup> Davinio: “Network Poetico\_Net-Poetry Reading in Webcam, a connection in real time performed with poets from the world, on October 9<sup>th</sup> 2009 in San Servolo Island (VE), in the press conference room. From 3:00pm until 4:30pm thirty poets had the possibility of realizing a poetry reading in Venice, using Skype software and a web cam, being visible on the wide screen of the auditorium, where everyone could see, hear them, and also read in real time the chat where they wrote poems and friendly greetings, together from very far places of the planet” See Zabaleta, “Interview to Caterina Davinio.”

poetry. In most of them, the webcam records only the face and the voice of the poet who performs the reading without revealing the actual content of the written text.<sup>203</sup> Two examples of such conventional readings of poetry are Philip Meersman's "Look dad!" in which the webcam captures his facial expressions and voice intonations when acting the exchange of dialogue between father and son and Anna Balint's reading of "Poesi  Electricque" in which the webcam records the brief shuffling of pages during the performance.<sup>204</sup> Denis Belley, from Quebec, Canada performs a theater enhanced poetry reading in which the style of acting provides a spectacle-frame for reading in terms of setting, gesture, and development.<sup>205</sup> Instead of sitting and facing the webcam while reading the written poem, Belley stands up with a microphone in front of him as if on a theater stage before an audience. It is an acting style which requires preparation and prior orchestration of his performance. During this poetry reading Belley also makes sounds of certain words which call attention to particular phonetic elements existent in human speech. From this viewpoint, his performance echoes sound poetry and mainly Raoul Hausmann's phonemes, a term that the European Avant-Garde artist coins in 1919 to describe his pioneering experiments with minimal sound units.<sup>206</sup> Other readings in webcam are reminiscent of close listening to poetry in how they emphasize only the auditory aspect of the poem whereas other features are out of frame. For instance, in Francesco Muzzioli's reading of fragments from "Madame, La Terre" and Liliana Ugolini's poetry reading the webcam displays only the screen with the Skype connection

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<sup>203</sup> This is similar to how in the post net-poetry performances of "Global Poetry" text is marginal whereas gesture is central.

<sup>204</sup> See Philip Meersman's reading <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mlwg76INFU>.

See Anna Balint's reading <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InvzanFiRf8>.

"Electronic Poetry" (my translation)

<sup>205</sup> See Denis Belley's reading [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQ5bOuJBN\\_k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQ5bOuJBN_k).

<sup>206</sup> See Raoul Hausmann's phonemes <http://www.ubu.com/sound/hausmann.html>.

without including the image of the poets doing the performance.<sup>207</sup> The conference audience is thus compelled to listen to the reading of the poem, to hear how poetry sounds in Italian.



Fig.10 Denis Belley's poetry reading

Interestingly, these poetry readings performed in private worldwide spaces turn into public performances as the webcam facilitates their visual transmission before a geographically distant audience. In this way, the space of the webcam in which poetry readings occur networks with the space of Venice conference room on whose screen they are projected and opens up the space for their public performance. Although unable to physically see the audience from Venice and hear their reactions to poetry readings, some poets express their confidence in the presence of an audience at the end of this communication channel. And so, they either wish good luck to the rest of the participants such as Gabriele Montagno does, “Buona fortuna a tutti!”, or express gratitude to those who followed their readings as Massimo Mori says, “Saluto tutti gli amici che mi hanno

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<sup>207</sup> See Francesco Muzzioli's reading <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIVNwdBvNc0>.  
See Liliana Ugolini's reading <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHRWSGPAiTQ>.

seguito questa lettura.”<sup>208</sup> With the same goal of testifying others’ presence are Davinio’s constant updates in the online chat-room that she initiated during the Skype connection. Here she sends greetings from the curator of the Biennale project to everyone who is online and informs them occasionally about the events that are going on in Venice conference room: “I will disconnect only for 15 minutes,” “the press conference has begun [ . . . ] just a moment the president is speaking now.”<sup>209</sup> And thus, the online chat-room emerges as a space of text-based communication, a space in which the exchange of information, the back and forth writing among worldwide poets ends up validating their presence in the channel of communication.

Existing initially as a space of encounter, the online chat-room develops progressively into a space of creation, of poetry-making. From the twenty-eight poets and artists who read poetry in webcam, some of them simultaneously participate in this online chat-room, while six feel inspired and instantaneously create a poem. Unlike the readings in webcam in which the poem has a prior existence, in the online chat-room the poem comes into existence on account of the poets’ collaboration. This means that in chat-poetry, as I call it, the poem as a written text takes shape as poets chat, transmit, and exchange spontaneously created lines. Because the circulation of these lines coincides with the production of poetry, chat-poetry is a form of performance poetry in which the poem is collectively performed. In the absence of visual contact with each other, it is the writing in the chat room that testifies the poets’ presence at the online event.

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<sup>208</sup>“Good luck to everybody!” (my translation).

“Greetings to all my friends who have followed my reading” (my translation).

See Gabriele Montagno’s reading <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIVNwdBvNc0>.

See Massimo Mori’s reading [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nty\\_jdEPcvI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nty_jdEPcvI).

<sup>209</sup> See Appendix “Chat-poem.”

Apparently perceived as a space in which poetry accidentally happens, the online chat-room encompasses a subtle complexity which becomes transparent as chatting starts and evolves. At the beginning, it maps out the space of encounter in which the six poets Obododimma Oha, Craig Saper, Ruth Lepson, Philip Meersman, David Seaman, and Eva Dabara greet each other as they virtually meet for the first time. First, they identify themselves through reference to the physical spaces which they inhabit, “I needed to find a space [. . .] in library of my university here in Brussels. Hope that they won’t kick me out,” Philip Meersman writes; “glad to be virtually here [. . .] hi netizens,” Obododimma voices his happiness of sharing the virtual space with other “citizens of the net.”<sup>210</sup> Afterwards, they start chatting about the difficult synchronization between their local time and the event in the Venice conference room; their on and off line schedule; and even their present health conditions that might affect the poetry reading. And because the flux of communication swiftly carries on, this first online encounter suddenly turns into “a bombarding chat,” as Eva Dabara from Tel-Aviv confesses when facing the impossibility of keeping her reading up to it. Davinio also feels compelled to remind the six poets of the projection of the online chat-room on the conference screen, in San Servolo, “Please note that everybody here is reading whatever you are chatting now.”<sup>211</sup>

Not long after that, the chat-room turns into a publication space in which poets post the poems prepared for poetry readings. Thus, not only does poetry travel across mediums from that of the webcam to an instantaneously-created online chat-room but it also exists in at least two forms of expression: as recitations in poetry readings and as

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<sup>210</sup> See Appendix “Chat-poem.”

<sup>211</sup> See Appendix “Chat-poem.”

written texts in the chat-room.<sup>212</sup> Moreover, the posting of these poems makes them visually accessible to the chat-room audience as well who is deprived from seeing the poets doing the readings in webcam. In this way, the chat-room audience reads and discovers the thematic and stylistic diversity of the poems, as Philip Meersman confesses, “have read great poems here already in all different styles but very interesting and inspiring.” Posted in their entirety, line by line, or in fragments, at times these poems intersect with informal online conversation. For instance, Craig Saper’s “An Automatic Plot Sonnet in the Italian Style” is interrupted by several interventions such as Obododimma’s who asks Davinio whether he could post his poem; David Seaman’s who confirms his previous postings, “you have mine—three Tweets, in English, French & Italian;” or Ruth Lepson’s who just steps in during the discussion and greets everybody who is “hanging out” online.<sup>213</sup>

Indeed, poets and artists engaged in webcam readings are technologically interconnected with one another in how they simultaneously share the space of their performances. And yet, they are visually and acoustically disconnected both from the conference audience whose reactions they can neither see nor hear and from each other’s readings that they cannot listen to. The following exchange speaks of an instance of such confessions, “I was surprised after my reading that there was applause,” Craig Saper says, “Are you kidding? I don’t hear anything at all!” Eva Dabara confesses, “Sounds like fun during your reading Craig. Sad that I couldn’t hear / see it,” Philip Meersman concludes

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<sup>212</sup> This point validates Charles Bernstein’s conviction that “the poem isn’t a fixed, stable, finite linguistic object,” but an event. Thus, as a textual entity “the poem, viewed in terms of its multiple performances, or mutual inter-translatability, has a fundamental plural existence” (“Introduction” 9). See Charles Bernstein, “Introduction,” *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, ed. Charles Bernstein (New York: Oxford UP, 1998), 3-28.

<sup>213</sup> See Appendix “Chat-poem.”

regretfully.<sup>214</sup> From this viewpoint, the chat-poem emerges out of the poets' desire to connect with each other through writing which becomes the only means that substantiates their presence in the channel of communication. At Ruth Lepson's suggestion, "we should all write a quiz show poem," Obododimma agrees with a multi-authored piece and before detailing the nature of the poem, Lepson sends the first line of the poem, "here is the first line." Although the chat poem captures the flux of communication as it comes from the six poets, these line postings progressively coagulate and develop into specific thematic clusters. In this way, throughout the chat-poem making, Obododimma's lines center on Venice's puzzling presence in between a physical "here" and a virtual "there," and on the collaborative aspect of the poem in his listing of the contributors' names.<sup>215</sup> His lines articulate the origin of the poem as a "chat-upon-chat" in which "poems begin to write poets" who "begin to try other lives" so that in the end the poem gathers collective "visions of voiced distances."<sup>216</sup> In the meantime other poets complement Obododimma's lines. Thus, Lepson replies to his question: "can this song ever, stop, eva?" by writing her name's echo sounding, "evaevaevaevaevaeva." Meersman expands Obododimma's idea that "Venice is and was ocean seed" with his own reflection, "mais l'eau e trop vague."<sup>217</sup> Noteworthy are also exchanges of lines in French and English between Meersman and Lepson on how time synchronicity enables the

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<sup>214</sup> See Appendix "Chat-poem."

<sup>215</sup> Obododimma: "and thinking this here was there [ . . . ] Venice an eye away from a glance" Obododimma: "ruth, obododimma, craig, eva, caterina catering techs" See <http://obododimma.livejournal.com/6266.html>.

<sup>216</sup> Obododimma's description of the poem in his online journal where he publishes it: "Multi-authorship of a poem is such a great thrill, especially when carried out by poets from diverse cultural backgrounds and languages, and particularly when it happens at the spur of the moment. The poem becomes many-in-one, represents challenging conversations, and stimulates a form of thinking that is immediately spirited for a global presence of the many localizations" ("Virtual Venice") See <http://obododimma.livejournal.com/6266.html>.

<sup>217</sup> "but the water is too vague" (my translation).



rejoining of worldwide people or between Obododimma and Lepson who initiates a game based on the obliteration of various letters from words.<sup>218</sup>

In this way, the online chat-room becomes a space of performance in which the six poets are performers and members of the chat-room audience that starts taking shape. This means that while collectively writing the poem, poets are simultaneously witnessing its making.<sup>219</sup> Without a doubt, the exchange and circulation of the lines give presence to the chat-poem as for Davinio, “‘to be’ and ‘to say’ coincide in electronic art” (*Techno-Poetry* 295). Chat-poetry is also a form of participatory poetry built out of contacts among poets or in Davinio’s words,

“What these experiences reveal is not only the tendency to pour poetry on different supports offered by new technologies, which anyway end up to determine formal aspects, but the one to reduce progressively forms and contents in the primordial contact between individuals, in touching each other by the mediation of technology, to verify the presence of the interlocutor: you / I.” (*Techno-Poetry* 286)

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<sup>218</sup> Here is a fragment from the exchange of lines in French and English:

[6:52:33 AM] Ruth Lepson: je veux ecrire tous les gens / “I want to write in all genres” (my translation)

[6:52:53 AM] Ruth Lepson: lost in time

[6:53:06 AM] Philip Meersman: tous les gens perdu / “all genres are lost” (my translation)

[6:53:15 AM] Philip Meersman: venu de nous ecouter / “come to listen to us” (my translation)

[6:53:16 AM] Ruth Lepson: certainement / “of course” (my translation)

[6:53:31 AM] Obododimma: venice is and was ocean seed,

[6:53:43 AM] Philip Meersman: mais l'eau est trop vague / “but the water is too vague” (my translation)

Here is a fragment from the game on the obliteration of letters:

[7:04:55 AM] Obododimma: next --text-ex

[7:05:10 AM] Ruth Lepson: next, please.

[7:05:17 AM] Ruth Lepson: text, please.

[7:05:21 AM] Ruth Lepson: ex, please.

[7:05:29 AM] Obododimma: ease, please

[7:05:39 AM] Eva Dabara: ex please

See <http://obododimma.livejournal.com/6266.html>.

<sup>219</sup> At times, the making of the chat-poem gains humorous notes: Lepson’s reaction when Saper does not seem temporarily engaged in the chat-poem making, “where is craig?” hiding in second life,” Obododimma says, “beep, beep,” Saper replies.

The end of online chatting brings into discussion distribution venues for the chat-poem. Because of the ephemeral nature of the chat-poem, Obododimma suggests immortalizing this form of performance poetry, “can we freeze and try to copy this multiverse.” And he immediately sends everybody the poem in “Virtual Venice.doc” file. Once again, instantaneously created poetry is synchronously transmitted. Finally, the six poets exchange e-mails and information about their works, websites, and future meet-ups.<sup>220</sup> Davinio also intervenes expressing appreciation for everybody’s participation and talking about her desire to prepare a book on the poetry event in network.

An internal network undeniably emerges between poetry-reading in webcam and poetry-making in an online chat-room as they exist simultaneously, connect, and interrelate. It is a network between performances, people, and places.<sup>221</sup> As a post net-poetry performance Davinio’s five-minute reportage, “Biennale di Venezia—Evento Speciale San Servolo,” published on You Tube afterwards testifies how these forms of performances co-developed.<sup>222</sup> The image of Venice traces the physical geographic location of the event and frames the beginning and end of the reportage. It also shows the events happening outside and inside the Biennale conference room: it visualizes Marco Nereo Rotelli’s “Save the Poetry” installation, poet Adonis speaking inside the conference room, displays projections of various fragments from poetry readings in

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<sup>220</sup> Eva Dabara recommends two performances that she uploaded on You tube; Philip Meersman points to his online performance on myspace.com; and Ruth Lepson launches the invitation to her poetry with music sample on her website.

<sup>221</sup> The same internal network is created in “Global Poetry” where poetry is traveling and thus connecting.

<sup>222</sup> See “Biennale di Venezia—Evento Speciale San Servolo 9 Ottobre 2009” (2009), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HSr8tjoUIM>.

webcam on the conference room screen, and other performances and installations in Piazza Baden Powell such as Marco Nereo Rotelli's "the longest poem of the world."<sup>223</sup>

The net-poetry of "Global Poetry" and "Virtual Mercury House" articulate Davinio's desire to defend the theatrical dimensions of performance poetry and to reassess the present forms of digital poetry through the lens of the traditional avant-garde. While evoking Marinetti's literary agenda to free poetry from the page and to take it back to the oral forms of its origin, the new media artist voices a noteworthy concern regarding the new imprisonment that technology imposes on word. In her opinion, we are facing "a new captivity because of hyper-technologies [which able to] produce an ambient-page in which texts, objects, and experiences could be closed again" (*Techno-Poetry* 298). Emerging out of contact among people as well as in the contact between real-virtual spaces, Davinio's net-poetry projects open up new spaces for performances with poetry and, as a result, invite reflection on a new language of performance based on net-communication. As new media poems, these projects can be accountable for how performance poetry is created through net-communication in which poetry is net-communicated and performance is net-framed.

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<sup>223</sup> "'Save the Poetry,' Marco Nereo Rotelli's installation, carries ancient languages, from the mnemonic one of the Rongo Rongo tablets to Easter Island to those of the nomadic poems of the desert. The fonts used to display these words recall things of the past, the present and the future; the art of writing is part of everyone's visual culture." See Rotelli's "In a State of Emergency" <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/cprezi/pagine1-info.htm>.

## Chapter IV: Performances in The Scripting Spaces of Loss Pequeño Glazier's "Dynamic Texts"

Author of the 2002 award-winning *Digital Poetics: the Making of E-Poetries* and of numerous essays on new media writing and literary programming, Loss Pequeño Glazier is equally committed to print-based contemporary poetry and digital poetry. His critical and creative work represents an engaging exploration of how poetry and computer technology bring together various cultures.<sup>224</sup> As a United States poet of Tejano origins, Glazier anchors his poems in very specific geographical, historical, and cultural locations such as The United States, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Cuba. In his printed poetry, he cultivates opacity through his tying and untying of natural languages with web terminology. As a result, the poet's intentional difficulty originates in this linguistic repertoire, in the dense hybridization of various languages. "He's succumbed to the usual academic habit of filling his poems with obscure incomprehensibility, like http, chmod, EMACS . . .," Dylan Harris remarks in his review of Glazier's collection of printed poetry, *Anatman, Pumpkin Seed, Algorithm*.<sup>225</sup> But, "hang on a second, I know these words. They are not literary jargon, they're software babble, the words I work with,"

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<sup>224</sup> Loss Pequeño Glazier is also professor of Media Study and Director of The Electronic Poetry Center at State University of New York at Buffalo: <http://epc.buffalo.edu>. He is the author of the 2003 collection of poetry in print, *Anatman, Pumpkin Seed, Algorithm*, numerous essays, online projects, and digital poems. See selected works <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/glazier/>

<sup>225</sup> Harris exemplifies his standpoint with Glazier's "One Server, One Tablet, and a Diskless Sun"

" . . . *And what*

*kind of bugs?* Lorca's mystical crickets?  
H. D.'s butterflies? Though I think they  
must—if the mind does have an eye—be  
cockroaches fat, brightly lit, and mightily  
glowing. Flying through the mind shaft to  
assault any mental indiscretion. Perhaps a  
relative of Burroughs introduced this  
term. (Stick that in your machine and  
add it up!) What vision of mainframe!  
What robust modems! What processor  
Speed! . . . "

See his review <http://dylanharris.org/prose/poetry/apsa.shtml>.

Harris critically discerns the pun as the poet's favorite organizing device. Indeed, it is "the unexpected sources of language" that his poetry provokes in the readers that culminates in their surprise over how either the poem or they "will resolve the syntactical and rhetorical structure when the line breaks after 'while' and '&.'"<sup>226</sup> Significantly, many of these printed poems develop within the digital medium as well.<sup>227</sup>

In digital poems, the investigations of *The Americas* happen through the confluence of languages, in which English and Spanish words intermingle, and through the dynamics of language as English and Spanish interact with computer programming languages (code). The poet's modus operandi does not imply that natural languages might disappear when fixed procedural systems such as mathematical algorithms act upon them. He does not aim to subordinate one language to another in order to re-establish particular hierarchies inside the process of language hybridization. These poems are not about how computer language gains mastery over natural languages. Instead, they reveal how Glazier makes these apparently separable and distinct language layers as navigable as possible for readers. Both his print and digital poems are quite misleading. But, in contrast to their print versions, digital poems are likely to disorient readers even more. "The surface randomness of poem, the distracting push-media trick . . . Glazier's reading aloud, not so intelligibly . . . all these suggested that this was a work and a reading that . . . 'privileged confusion,'" Nick Montfort confesses when comparing digital

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<sup>226</sup> David Caplan says in "On Poetic Curiosity." *Postmodern Culture* 16-1 (Sept. 2005), [http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/postmodern\\_culture/v016/16.1caplan.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/postmodern_culture/v016/16.1caplan.html).

<sup>227</sup> Here is a brief description of the relationship between some of his printed and digital poetry: "Many of these texts have had digital versions, have grown, have been 'sounded', or have been co-developed within the digital medium. Thus, the print version, an avatar of the digital process that shaped it, could not exist without the digital experimentation that gave it voice" ("Notes" 97). See *Anatman, Pumpkin Seed, Algorithm* Cambridge: Salt, 2003, 97-100.

“Bromeliads” with its print variant, and Glazier’s own reading of the poem at a conference.<sup>228</sup>

```
<SCRIPT LANGUAGE = "JavaScript">

// The Array Function

function makeArray(len) {
  for (var i = 0; i < len; i++) this[i] = null;
  this.length = len;
}

// This is where the array of text/images/sounds is created.

// This is where the array of text/images/sounds is created.

a1 = new makeArray(2);
a1[0] = "Three simple words: crack dot com.' Ambience or confrontation. "
a1[1] = "I'm sure there is a white house hand in there somewhere. 'Colonia' "
```

*Uno*

I'm sure there is a white house hand in there somewhere. 'Colonia'

“Ambience or collocation. ‘Colonia’ as in that sense of ‘colonial’”

Fig. 11 Lines from the source code, screen line from digital “Bromeliads,” and line from “Bromeliads” in print

These three illustrations, for example, represent the same line from the same poem, “White-Faced Bromeliads on 20 Hectares”: the first is from its source code, the second is from the screen space, and the third from its print version.<sup>229</sup> Based on a JavaScript algorithm the two literary variants that the source code contains change every ten seconds and appear as only one line in the screen space. Thus, when readers encounter the text, they watch either one of the two lines or a completely new line in which words from the two combine. Readers see how words from English, Spanish, and computer jargon intermingle given their relentless flux, but cannot read the poem in its

<sup>228</sup> See Nick Montfort’s “Glazier’s Windows Restored” (October 10, 2004), <http://grandtextauto.org/2004/10/10/glazier-anatman-review/>.

<sup>229</sup> See source code from digital “Bromeliads.”

See “White-Faced Bromeliads on 20 Hectares (An Iteration)” in *Anatman, Pumpkin Seed, Algorithm*, 27-35.

entirety. They often put together only those parts that catch their eyes first. Also, even those who look at the work several times may not have an extended reading of the text as they watch, read, and explore only parts from the poem. Indeed, it is challenging to grasp the complete meaning of an eight-line long stanza in which each line develops from literary variants and various parts of the lines unexpectedly rearrange.<sup>230</sup>

The literary variants of these lines do not only require multiple viewings and readings but they are also choices for readers to select from while constructing their own version of the poem. In fact, how much reading do JavaScript-based poems such as “Bromeliads” entail? If they emphasize the text-watching, do they marginalize the text reading? By any means, the readers’ perspective is challenged in a complex process of comparison, synthesis, and evaluation. What to choose from this poem? How to synthesize the content of each stanza and the message of the poem as a whole? How to compare the changing lines? How does text come to perform in the screen space? These are few legitimate questions that a variable text like digital “Bromeliads” raises. To echo Marshal McLuhan’s often-cited statement, “the medium is the message,” the form in which message is transmitted becomes primary to its content, in these poems the “where” takes over the “what.” I contend that the source code space contains the script based on which Glazier’s JavaScript-based poems perform. In the screen space, text is variable, and unveils the poem as an onscreen performance. Thus, the poem is either an inter-linguistic performance in between natural and computer programming languages (“Bromeliads”) or a performance among shifting panels in which images and texts overlap (“Mouseover”). If a text’s variability relies on the source code, then in this

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<sup>230</sup> Later on, I explain how Glazier establishes a particular number of literary variants.

scripting space text is a meaningful literary variant. Thus, watching how text appears in the screen space and reading the text in the source code are equally essential for the understanding of these poems. Also, both source code and screen spaces are transformative in the sense that they are physically in a morphing state and interconnect with one another. In this way, the screen and source code spaces validate the self-transformative quality of the trans-medial space.

Digital poems such as “Mouseover” (1998) and “Bromeliads” (1999) are codeworks which draw on JavaScript, the most popular scripting language on the internet.<sup>231</sup> JavaScript is code made of a set of instructions which Glazier writes for the computer in order to create the poems. In his 2001 “Introduction: Codework” article, poet, critic, and cyberspace theorist, Alan Sondheim, introduces the concept of “codework” theorizing how computer code represents a medium for artistic expression.<sup>232</sup> Usually, Sondheim says, code applies to almost “anything that combines tokens and syntax to represent a domain” and therefore even natural language encodes the “real” (“Introduction: Codework” 1). In a narrower sense however, code refers to “a translation from natural language to an artificial one” because “computer programming generally requires strictly defined codes that stand in for operations that occur ‘deeper’ in the machine” (Sondheim, “Introduction: Codework” 1). Simply put, codework refers to works which are connected to the language of computer programming or addresses digital experimental writing which employs the contemporary idiolect of the computer

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<sup>231</sup> JavaScript is invented by Brendan Eich at Netscape (with Navigator 2.0), and appears in all Netscape and Microsoft browsers since 1996. The first edition is adopted in June 1997, and the standard is approved as an international standard in 1998. JavaScript is a scripting language: a programming language that allows control of one or more software applications, and works in all major browsers such as Internet Explorer, Firefox, Chrome, Opera, and Safari. See [http://www.w3schools.com/JS/js\\_intro.asp](http://www.w3schools.com/JS/js_intro.asp).

<sup>232</sup> See Alan Sondheim, “Introduction: Codework.” *ABR* 22.6 (September / October 2001), <http://www.litline.org/ABR/issues/Volume22/Issue6/sondheim.pdf>.



and computing processing, to use Rita Raley's definition ("Interferences" 1).<sup>233</sup> Such a broad labeling indicates that codework does not manifest as a homogenous, monolithic genre. In fact, Sondheim's rough taxonomy distinguishes three types of codeworks: "works using the syntactical interplay of surface language"; "works in which the submerged code has modified the surface language"; "works in which the submerged code is emergent content" (2). In order to understand what is going on in the third category of works, it is essential to look at the source code, which, in Sondheim's opinion, can be part of the content (2).

Structurally, JavaScript contains a head and a body section; a well-specified script tag `<script type="text/javascript">`, which references the scripting language used in the poem; and a `document.write` task `document.write ("Hello World!")`, which is a standard JavaScript command for writing output to a page.<sup>234</sup> The `<script type="text/javascript">` and `</script>` indicate where JavaScript starts and ends, and the `<html>` at the beginning and end validate JavaScript as embedded into HTML pages.<sup>235</sup> Significantly, JavaScript is a dynamic scripting language in the sense that it is designed to add interactivity to HTML pages.<sup>236</sup> Syntactically, it consists in a sequence of JavaScript statements which

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<sup>233</sup> See Rita Raley, "Inferences: [Net Writing] and the Practice of Codework," *Electronic Book Review* 10.7 (September 2002), <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/net.writing>.

<sup>234</sup> Here is a visual schematization of JavaScript's structure

```
<html>
<body>
<script type="text/javascript">
document.write("Hello World!");
.....
</script>
</body>
</html>
```

<sup>235</sup> HTML (HyperText Markup Language) is the language used in web pages. A web browser reads HTML documents and presents them as web pages.

<sup>236</sup> As David Shepard explains, "JavaScript is a language developed to supplement HTML [. . .] HTML can only make static web pages, but JavaScript can make them dynamic and interactive" ("Finding and

are executed by the browser in the order in which they are written. These statements are often grouped in blocks in order to make the sequence execute together. The organization of statements in blocks calls attention to the emphasis JavaScript places on the structured configuration of its internal space. Also, the presence of conditional statements, known as “JavaScript If . . . Else statements,” reveals how different actions perform based on particular constraints. To understand how code constructs algorithms means to decipher how natural language is structured inside the code. As Language poet Bruce Andrews rightfully acknowledges in “Electronic Poetics” what the cyber-realm offers up to contemporary writing is the “database logic” that is “a database, a structured collection of events of sense-making” (31).<sup>237</sup> Along the same lines is digital poetry scholar Sandy Baldwin’s rationalization on how the drive toward a poetics of code highlights the systematicity of literature and digital media, “‘code as writing’ means that the singularity of poetic invention provides the mediation needed to conceptualize information” (“Process Window” 118).<sup>238</sup>

In combining natural languages with computer programming language in his JavaScript-based poems Glazier makes and inscribes language anew. Coding as a form of writing is a creative form of language-making, an expression from the many possible ones under which writing manifests. Also, as an act of inscription, coding reveals an innovative and sophisticated way of looking and thinking of the written word inside the source code space. In “Code as Language,” Glazier defines code writing as “a process of

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Evaluating the Code”). For instance, JavaScript is set to execute when something happens, like a page has finished loading or when a user clicks on an HTML element.

<sup>237</sup> See Bruce Andrews, “Electronic Poetics” in *The Cybertext Yearbook 2002-2003*, eds. Eskelinen, Markku and Raine Koskimaa, (Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2003). Also available at [http://www.ubu.com/papers/andrews\\_electronic.html](http://www.ubu.com/papers/andrews_electronic.html).

<sup>238</sup> See Sandy Baldwin, “Process Window: Code Work, Code Aesthetics, Code Poetics,” *The Cybertext Yearbook 2002-2003*, eds. Markku Eskelinen and Raine Koskimaa, (Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2003), 107-119.

thinking through thought,” of making meaning through mark-making (1).<sup>239</sup> His emphasis of code as language calls attention to the close interconnection between code and writing and to the challenges that this intricate interaction entails: specifically, the difficulty in demarcating the end of code and the beginning of writing. Both language and code rely on written symbols, Glazier explicates, and the way words in natural languages are set in combinations in order to convey messages is similar to how computer languages operate (“Code as Language” 1). Code has its own grammar: it is made of rules to be followed just like “a consciousness of the rules is fundamental to literary production” (Glazier, “Code as Language” 4). Code structures languages by placing them within specific mathematical algorithms, and has writerly features as well.<sup>240</sup> In this respect, poems based on code writing investigate how text appears in the source code and screen space at the same time.

What is particularly significant is that this code-writing interaction enacts the variability of the text in the screen space. Glazier’s JavaScript-based poems are “dynamic texts,” texts that “are *physically* different each time the reader encounters them,” as the poet labels them (“Poetics of Dynamic Text”). As onscreen performances, they reference the interplay of processes that engages writing code structures and center on the idea of

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<sup>239</sup> Programming in general, Matthew Kirschenbaum also argues, is “a unique and startling way of looking at world,” “a kind of world-making” because it is about choices and constraints, about how you choose to model some select slice of the world around you in the formal environment of a computer” (“Hello Worlds” 1). See “Hello Words,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 55.20 (January 23, 2009): B10., <http://chronicle.com/article/Hello-Worlds/5476>.

<sup>240</sup> Here are the nine writerly features of code that Glazier lists:

- grammar
- semantics
- in terms of digital language art, language is a means to make language.
- encoding is a process of mark-making.
- encoding is a means to an end but it is most expressive when the means is itself a focus of attention.
- meaning emerges through the process of engaging the medium.
- errors are part of the process of making meaning through encoding.
- the encoded work has inherent unpredictability often surprising even its maker.
- encoding is making ( “Code as Language” 4-5)

variability, on how the writing code produces unpredictable juxtapositions. In “Poetics of Dynamic Text” Glazier theorizes on the dynamic text as a text which becomes different not on account of external factors such as context, setting, and readers’ personal circumstances; instead, based on a dynamism in-between and within various language layers, “Dynamic is not here meant to simply mean text that moves. Neither is it meant to mean text that merely has computational origins. [. . .] Rather a poetics of dynamic text seeks to engage that delicate edge where language apparatuses meet, slip, and engage, to further the possibilities of the poetic text.”<sup>241</sup> Thus, its dynamism stems from the edge where languages, in this case, English, Spanish, and code meet. Language is obviously slippery and hard for readers to grasp in writing, speaking, and communication. And this poetics of programming further complicates the concept of signification because in code-writing, text and code interact, it is “not just text art that uses programming but code as poetic practice. The code or the text may be interesting but most interesting is their interrelation” (Glazier, “Poetics of Dynamic Text”).<sup>242</sup>

Indeed, the idea of dynamic text is challenging in that it complicates the understanding of the interconnected layers of language expression and discloses the intriguing dimension of language combined with code. And yet, it is problematic when considering that any text becomes dynamic in the act of reading. Just because the digital poem relies on a dynamism between natural languages and computer code does not

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<sup>241</sup> See Glazier, “Poetics of Dynamic Text,” *Dichtung-Digital* 3 (2003), <http://www.dichtung-digital.org/2003/issue/3/Glazier.htm>.

<sup>242</sup> In some regards, the poet’s approach to writing echoes Oulipo’s early attempts from 1960s envisioned to reveal other potentialities existent in language through various mathematical constraints. Oulipo or *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle (Workshop for Potential Literature)* builds on a single formula that leads to the construction of an indefinite number of works. “The most famous work associated with Oulipo is Raymond Queneau’s *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (100,000,000,000 Poems), in which each line of a sequence of ten sonnets can be interchanged with the corresponding line of another of the sonnets. This configuration of lines and text enables the reader to manipulate ten pages of text into one hundred billion different poems” (Funkhouser, *Prehistoric Digital Poetry* 34).

automatically imply that the poem is inherently dynamic. Even a JavaScript-based poem exists initially as a script or as a static text which becomes dynamic only when a reader encounters it. In digital poetry a work does not have a meaningful existence without the re-creation and active input expressed through the reader's access. The code on which digital poetry relies enables interactions and therefore has a meaningful existence only when it is accessed, encountered, received, and also reconceived by the reader. These interactions are activated in the act of reading. As Bernstein also explicates, "a medium cannot be in and of itself autonomous, for only readers or listeners, or viewers bring a medium into use. In this sense, a medium is a mediation, constituted by what it does, for whom, and how" ("The Art of Immemorability" 514). Moreover, if in a dynamic text language and code layers interact, then these layers affect the text and therefore engage in and with the transformations of the text in the digital space. As previously explained, the script that readers encounter in the source code space becomes first work and then performance. From this viewpoint, the dynamic text encompasses interactions as well as transformations which take into account the effects of both language and space interactions.

Conceptually speaking, Glazier's discourse on dynamic text enters in conversation with the approach that textual scholar Jerome McGann and visual art theorist Johanna Drucker take on the variability of literary texts. In *The Textual Condition*, McGann argues that the meanings of texts change with the change of bibliographical circumstances even when texts do not change linguistically.<sup>243</sup> In his opinion, physical aspects such as typefaces, bindings, page formats and semantic features

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<sup>243</sup> "[T]exts do not simply vary over time. Texts vary from themselves (as it were) immediately, as soon as they engage with the readers they anticipate" (McGann, "Introduction: Texts and Textualities" 10). See McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991), 3-18.

of a work are inextricably connected in the production of poetic meaning. That is why the scholar advocates for an analysis of text as a laced network of linguistic and bibliographical codes which entails a more global and uniform view of texts. Similarly, in *Figuring the Word*, Drucker explains how visual materiality extends the communicative potential of writing. Writing not only contains ideas but also marks and, as inscription or mark-making, writing produces a work with complex textual value.<sup>244</sup> In this way, writing not only has lexical value; instead, it also takes into account the material aspects of written forms, “material substrates and visual / typographic / written styles that encode history, identity, and cultural value at the primary level of the mark / letter / physical support” (Drucker, “Language as Information: Intimations of Immateriality” 213).

In contrast to McGann who equates the variability of the text with its bibliographic conditions and Drucker who associates it with specific material features, Glazier recognizes variability in the process that engages writing code structures. In *Digital Poetics* he acknowledges that writing reflects specific social and material aspects that condition mark-making at a certain moment. And so, code writing is a new form of writing, “new” in the sense that it reflects the present materiality, “Materiality is important because writing is not an event isolated from its medium but is, to varying degrees, an engagement with its medium” (23). And yet, he considers that a text that conveys multiple possibilities is as one whose variability stems from the poetics of the dynamic text. Although this text is variable and ephemeral in the screen space, its meaning, nevertheless, resides in how the text is organized in the scripting space. Thus,

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<sup>244</sup> “[W]riting’s visual forms possess an irresolvable dual identity in their material existence as images and their function as elements of language” (Drucker 57). See Drucker, “The Art of the Written Image,” *Figuring the Word: Essays on Books, Writing, and Visual Poetics* (New York: Granary, 1998), 57-76.

such a text invites readers to analyze the underlying mechanism on which it relies. Meaning lies in structure. And in digital poetry, structure equals procedure, “This means looking to the concept, mechanism, or operation that underlines the work, querying the code stability underlying the work, that which remains constant beneath its litigious shifting illusion of the surface” (Glazier, “Poetics of Dynamic Text”).<sup>245</sup>

Like many of Glazier’s poems, “White-Faced Bromeliads on 20 Hectares” (1999) exists in two states of expression: a digital version created in 1999 and a 2003 print version published in the poetry collection *Anatman, Pumpkin Seed, Algorithm*.<sup>246</sup> In creating the print version after the digital one the poet subverts the common assumption that digital poetry represents an extension of experimental print poetry. Just like the poem in print, digital “Bromeliads” is an eight stanza-poem, but has a distinctive overall framework in how a photograph and variant titles open each stanza. As Glazier confesses, “‘Bromeliads’ originated in a trip I made to the town of La Fortuna in northwestern Costa Rica. All the neighboring towns had been eradicated by a recent eruption of the Volcán Arenal but this one town had been spared. (It was renamed ‘Good Luck’ as a consequence.)” (“Notes” 98-99).<sup>247</sup> By simply watching how the images of the poem cycle, “Bromeliads” conveys a sense of travel to the clearly-designated Costa Rican reality. There are local images which speak about Central American biodiversity: Aztec flowers, The Monteverde Forest Reserve, the volcano in the proximity of San José, banana and ginger plantations, and coffee fields. In the reading notes, Glazier welcomes readers to embark first on a visual journey and then on a linguistic voyage, “allow the

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<sup>245</sup> See Glazier, “Poetics of Dynamic Text.”

<sup>246</sup> See digital “White-Faced Bromeliads on 20 Hectares” <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/glazier/java/costa1/00.html>.

<sup>247</sup> See Glazier, *Anatman, Pumpkin Seed, Algorithm*.

page to cycle for a while, so you can take in some of the images and variant titles. Once you are there, read each page slowly, watching as each line periodically re-constitutes itself.”

*Uno*



*Aztec flowers. Can't recall one thing I ate in quetzal.*

*Dos*



*What confusing and mazing things sentences are*

Fig. 12 The photographs which preface the first two stanzas of “Bromeliads”

These images intertwine with a linguistic journey in which the local landscape is introduced through Glazier’s knowledge and intimate familiarity so that the poem becomes thematically rich. Based on a series of readings and stanzas watching, the variable lines from the first stanza overtly define “Tejanismo” as the deliberate hybridization of Spanish and English and, perhaps, even computer languages, in which HTML is as the world’s dominant language. The second stanza raises issues on how tossing languages changes the textual syntax and turns text into “an inter-text,” “It is an inter-ext. Its inherent collapse of serial syntax;” and questions how the poet’s authority is involved in the making of a digital poem, “I con, I can, I cheat icons. As a shortcut, I speak through the ventriloquist.” Also, the frequent use of the first person pronoun in its personal and possessive forms of “I” and “my,” such as “the volcano, my cactus studded slopes” from the third stanza signals the poet’s identification and close connection with this place. Likewise, the use of colloquialisms “Nicoya. Nica. Tica” in the forth stanza



translates Glazier’s linguistic familiarity with informal terms such as “tico” (masculine) “tica” (feminine) for natives of Costa Rica.

### *Uno*

I'm sure there is a white house hand in there somewhere. 'Colonia'  
your personal relation with God. Do you mind if I slip into  
original dream boat, the Big Mac. Keeping one eye on the clock and  
another on the constitution. A little eye wash for your public  
Resumes. HTML as the world's dominant language. As in, write  
Nahuatl. Po cenotes. Act of Tejanísimo. 'You speak so many  
metal models of now-healed body parts offered at the shrine  
Cartago. A statue of the Virgin wistfully reappeared on August 2, 1635.

### Dos

### *Dos*

It's an inter-text. Its inherent collapse of serial syntax. It's not what  
Icon going over a barrel over Saigon falls. The images she'll never  
according to a notable campaign slogan. We'll have a couple of  
doing well in a Goldilocks economy. People are willing to pay for  
What confusing and mazing things sentences are'. I con, I can, I  
myself out loud. 'A cash register with lady bugs, gone.' Lost  
cross new binder while en route to the Switzerland of Central America.  
Monteverde golden toad, existing only here, has not been seen since 1989.

### Tres

Fig. 13 Two random literary variants from the first and second stanzas

What is striking about digital “Bromeliads” is how it encompasses a fascinating paradox: it seems complete and is yet incomplete. It conveys a partial sense of completeness because, structurally, readers recognize the number of stanzas it is made of and the end of the poem. At the same time, it leaves a sense of incompleteness as readers constantly face the impossibility of reading the text in the screen space. “Bromeliads”

uses JavaScript to investigate literary variants, and centers on the idea of variability, on how variable text is because of unpredictable juxtapositions that code produces.

Codeworks such as digital “Bromeliads” encompass the paradox of translating both the fear of the invisible, unknowable code and the beauty of working and creating with code. As Geoff Cox, Alex McLean, and Adrian Ward argue in “The Aesthetics of Generative Code” “the beauty of code lies in its performance, functionality, and execution,” (qtd. in “Interferences”). The fast word changing shows endless possible versions in which two identical readings of the line are nearly impossible. Moreover, the existence of 256 versions for eight-line stanzas and 512 for nine-line stanzas disorients because readers discover a variable text and embark on a quest that involves lack of direction.<sup>248</sup> As cybertext researcher Emilia Branny rightfully acknowledges, in digital works “[the] reading process should be discussed in theological terms—the reader has as a goal to reach a goal, to grasp work in completeness, and to translate work into a sign. Work must be read and interpreted.”<sup>249</sup> In her opinion, interpretation diversifies and proliferates in the sense that it “may take place on several levels—on the surface level (as seen), as imagined or perceived (as read), and on the whole process of reading (double reading, process).”<sup>250</sup> I approach these reading levels as spaces which enable the enactment of text into performance. On the one hand, the screen space is an exhibition space in which natural and computer programming languages constantly combine. In this space the poem

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<sup>248</sup> In the Reading Notes of digital “Bromeliads” Glazier explains: “Eight-line poems have 256 possible versions; nine-line poems have 512 possible versions.”

<sup>249</sup> Thus, from Branny’s viewpoint, that is why digital poetry differs from previous forms in that “it is not rhymed, or metrical, and is not to be read in a single session.”

See a summary of Emilia Branny’s 2009 E-Poetry conference talk on “The Promises of E-Poetry” <http://www.brown.edu/Research/dichtung-digital/2009/Funkhouser.htm>

<sup>250</sup> Along the same lines is Philippe Bootz’s statement that “reading is only one possibility of reception but not the totality of possibility of reception.”

See a summary of Philippe Bootz’s 2009 E-Poetry conference talk on “Ephemeral Passages ‘The Series of U’” <http://www.brown.edu/Research/dichtung-digital/2009/Funkhouser.htm>.

is an inter-linguistic performance which surfaces out of this dynamism between language layers. On the other hand, the source code is both a scripting space which contains the script of the poem and a storage space for the structuring of lines in an array configuration. In this scripting space text is a variant of the poem in performance, and structure equals meaning.

In the screen space the variability of text privileges the act of watching over that of reading. Variant line possibilities produce alternate readings of the text which call more attention to how text happens rather than to the content of its lines. In digital “Bromeliads” writing has a dual identity because it simultaneously functions as *imago* and *logos*, as an object and an act, to use Drucker’s phrasing. As she explains in “The Art of the Written Image,” the visual form of writing possesses an irresolvable dual identity: “It manifests itself with the phenomenal presence of the *imago* and yet performs the signifying operations of the *logos*” (57).<sup>251</sup> Writing as *imago* points at words, at the space between them and sentences, and the arrangement of text as a whole; while, *logos* draws attention to the linguistic content of the text. In this light, writing in “Bromeliads” is both “a sign and a basis for signification, a thing in itself and something coming into being, a production and a process, an inscription and the activity of inscribing,” to echo again Drucker’s considerations (“The Art of the Written Image” 57).

Furthermore, the variability of text calls attention to the presence of text in the screen space. The changing literary variants make work ephemeral: every ten seconds text from each stanza exists in various forms. As a poem in performance, digital “Bromeliads” moves away from any stability and unitary presence. Readers view it in different stages of completeness, and its lines never have a crystallized final version. In

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<sup>251</sup> See Drucker, *Figuring the Word*, 57-76.

fact, the poem reflects Glazier's predilection to suspend readers between various possibilities of readings, "Because much of all of your text may not be received, you must, to be successful, create a text that is somehow suspended between various possibilities of reading; such an e-text is provisional, conditional, and characterized by its multiple renderings" ("Introduction: Language as Transmission" 15).<sup>252</sup> It is a pleasing and frustrating experience at the same time. It is enjoyable in how readers like the unexpected to surprise them and is challenging because they relentlessly seek to eliminate the uncertainty and stabilize the text. Readers desire a text to return to, to touch, see, read, and explore again. Thus, in poems such as digital "Bromeliads," "What have I analyzed?" and "Where is what I have read?" are questions always in search of answers unique for each reader. From a different angle of analysis, in "Demystifying the Digital, Re-animating the Book: A Digital Poetics," Lori Emerson perceives Glazier's effort to use digital media to animate language as an attempt to enable a more immediate experience, as images are used to accompany (and so to intensify our experience of) an ever-changing body of text that, in having five hundred versions, is unique for each reader. As Tristan Tzara might say, 'The poem will resemble you. And there you are—an infinitely original author of charming sensibility.' There is no experience more immediate than reading a poem written just for you (5).<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> See Glazier, "Introduction: Language as Transmission," *Digital Poetics: The Making of E-Poetries. Modern and Contemporary Poetics* (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2002), 31-39.

<sup>253</sup> See Lori Emerson, "Demystifying the Digital, Re-animating the Book: A Digital Poetics," Rev. of *Anatman, Pumpkin Seed, Algorithm. Postmodern Culture* 16.1 (2005), [http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/postmodern\\_culture/v016/16.1emerson.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/postmodern_culture/v016/16.1emerson.html).

Here, immediacy suggests that readers are in the presence of the text.<sup>254</sup> Readers can indeed hold some of these variations in mind while reading and / or watching the lines. And, in this case, their memory may be seen as another screen off and out of the computer screen. And yet, the source code on which digital “Bromeliads” becomes an onscreen performance is equally significant for the poem’s understanding. Meaning is in the source code.

Text in the source code space is a literary variant of the poem in performance: it is a script based on which the digital poem becomes an onscreen performance. This scripting space contains more text than that in the digital poem. In source code each stanza is made of sixteen or eighteen lines from which four or five lines of stanza emerges in the screen space. For instance, some lines contain historical references to The U.S.’s foundation with thirteen colonies, The White House, Constitution, and “the statue of the Virgin;” cultural and geographical references to Costa Rica with its every day customs (the fifth stanza), or the detailed story of the town “La Fortuna” (the sixth stanza).<sup>255</sup> Also, repetition is the rhetorical device that is noticeable in the source code

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<sup>254</sup> See Chapter 1 for a discussion on Bolter’ and Grusin’s theory of remediation.

<sup>255</sup>“Buzz-dived by 6 a.m. hummingbirds chirrup volcano with shroud of elusive quetzal. Tropical mountains rising Tahitian ridged green. Renamed 'Fortuna' ('Luck') when it was the only town left after the 1968 eruption. Everything jumping by 7 am, 37¢ coffee. Reading the Pre-Socratics in Havana. Who just came down here six years ago and never left, leggotts, open waisted, fresh-washed canary scent. The eggs with salt, black-sugared coffee, how it comes. Past casaba (yucca) eat the root not the tree to Los Chiles. Did you have a chance to see the volcano last night? Pendulous Black ash of the sugar cane. Dried pulp firewood. Turn bright papayas upon tree stalks in front of sugar cane fields. The sap can burn your lips savia blanca de la papaya. Ginger plantations with red and white flowers, putting pineapple peels in water with sugar 3 or 4 days for a potent licor de piña.”

(Text from Source Code, sixth stanza)

because of frequent reiterations of the content of the same lines. And yet, the text in the scripting space does not hold the whole content of the digital poem because it cannot grasp the totality of unpredictable variants that code produces. Also, as a literary variant, the text in the source code is part of an enlarged network within which the digital poem emerges and to which it belongs. Text in the source code and text in the screen space complement each other, and provide a broader sense of totality of the poem. According to Glazier, “every instance of a poem is in some sense a variant, one possibility among many; and [therefore] the poem samples the richness of texts co-existing in a landscape of larger poetic sustenance” (*Anatman, Pumpkin Seed, Algorithm 97*). The analysis of the source code as an autonomous text, as a literary variant, contributes to the development of an even larger system of interactivity among variants. And these variants illustrate the richness of interrelated poems co-existing in a more diverse poetic landscape: in print, on screen, and in source code spaces.

My analysis of the poem in the source code does neither aim to get rid of the variability of the text nor to stabilize the reading of the text. Instead, it calls attention to the existence of multiple writing spaces engaged in the onscreen performance of the text. In this respect, I am in agreement with digital textuality scholar Matthew Kirschenbaum’s significant remark on the prevailing tendency to read only the formal appearance of digital works. In *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination*, Kirschenbaum distinguishes between forensic and formal materiality, and advocates for a forensic approach to digital works because the digital events on the screen cannot be conceived independently of the technological mechanisms on which they rely.<sup>256</sup> My argument is

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<sup>256</sup> “In brief: forensic materiality rests upon the principle of individualization (basic to modern forensic science and criminalistics), the idea that no two things in the physical world are ever exactly alike” (10).

also in alignment with the ideas discussed in Critical Code Studies, a recently created forum of discussion on the significance of code. This approach consists in the practice of looking at the code that produces and imagines these digital realities from a humanistic perspective, “Critical Code Studies applies hermeneutics to the interpretation of the extra-functional significance of computer source code, ‘extra’ not in the sense of ‘outside of’ but ‘growing from’ the functionality.”<sup>257</sup> That is to say, these scholars look at code not just from the perspective of what it “does” computationally but from how it works as a semiotic system. The computer source code presents a sign system, and should be therefore regarded as a communication medium as well. I consider the screen space and source code space of Glazier’s Java-Script-based poems are in a meta-spatial relationship. That is the scripting space is a meta-space because it speaks about the making of the poem.

In this respect, the source code significantly reveals how Glazier structures language, how he organizes lines in an array configuration. Array is a complex architectural structure. It has a new syntax and a new way of organizing words in a mathematical arrangement. Array has a meaningful geometry because meaning comes from the way language is structured rather than from the content of words. In “Code, Cod, Ode: Poetic Language & Programming,” Glazier argues that poetry and computer language programming share the array structuring of language.<sup>258</sup> Here, the poet defines

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“[Formal materiality is] the imposition of multiple relational computational states on a data set or digital object” (12). Simply put, formal materiality refers to display, structure, and perceptible expression. See Matthew Kirschenbaum, “Introduction: ‘Awareness of the Mechanism,’” *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: MIT UP, 2008), 1-23.

<sup>257</sup>The Critical Code Studies forum emerges in Spring 2010 and “attempts to develop and practice reading methods and interpretative moves that can be used to read code.”

See Critical Code Studies <http://www.hastac.org/forums/hastac-scholars-discussions/critical-code-studies>.

<sup>258</sup> See Loss Pequeño Glazier, “Code, Cod, Ode: Poetic Language & Programming.” *Dichtung-Digital 1* (2005), <http://www.brown.edu/Research/dichtung-digital/2005/1/Glazier/index.htm>.

array as the sum of variations of a single word in different languages. He analyses the variants that the word “mother” has in twenty-seven languages, and identifies similarities among them not on account of historical reasons and affinities among language families, but based on their connection in the array structure. Although these words have various spellings in different languages: “mathair” in Gaelic, “madre” in Italian, “moder” in Swedish, “motina” in Lithuanian, “ama” in Basque, to bring up few, they do not lose their meaning because words are variants of the lexical unit of “mother” (Glazier, “Code, Cod, Ode” 3). As parts of a collection of variants, they exist together and establish connections that the array word entails, “For humans, the concept of ‘mother’ is, rather than its spelling in one language, the sum of the variations across all languages, remarkably motile and supple in meaning, mother is the sum of the differences of its fixed form” (Glazier, “Code, Cod, Ode” 3).

The array concept that Glazier borrows from computer programming in order to display its applicability in his JavaScript-based poems fosters a new approach to language from at least three theoretical angles of analysis. First, the array technique emphasizes the internal dynamism which stems from word connections. As the poet acknowledges, although “a language object is solid and fixed, at the same time it captures motion” (“Code, Cod, Ode” 4). For instance, in an array such as “code, cod, ode” what counts is not the establishment of semantic connections, but the instantiation of orthographic relationships among words (Glazier 2).<sup>259</sup> That is to say these word variants capture

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<sup>259</sup> Here is an example of “code, cod, ode” displayed in an array configuration:

```
//This is where the array is created.  
a1= new makeArray (3);  
  a1[0]=”code”  
  a1[1]=”cod”  
  a1[2]= ”ode”
```



potential word mutations through “changes in, or loss of, letters” (Glazier 3). In this way, array discloses potentially hidden relationships among words.

Second, an array conveys a sense of totality: it takes the form of a whole made of parts. Array is “a collection of objects that share a single variable name, differentiated only by where they are located in the collection” (Glazier, “Code, Cod, Ode” 4). Such a consideration explicitly substantiates how words are objects installed and stored in source code space. In computer programming, array’s main function is that of storing, ordering, and structuring variables under a single name in which each variable of the array preserves its own identity. To refer back to the “mother” array, each variant from different languages has its distinctiveness and is simultaneously part of a structure so that the sum of these variants is greater than the whole. In this case, Glazier’s parallel between array and collage in art is noteworthy. Similarly to how fragments in a collage typically offer a plurality of viewpoints, array in JavaScript-based poetry provides multiple perspectives on language(s) and connections among them. Although Gertrude Stein’s famous utterance, “A rose is a rose is a rose,” does not represent an array because its elements are identical, Glazier arranges them in an array and explains how “the parts that are greater than the whole are all the same, ‘rose,’ and yet placing them as an array seems to almost geometrically increase the overall meaning of them” (“Code, Cod, Ode” 6).<sup>260</sup> Such an instance clearly underlines the significance of the space in which these words exist. In other words, words such as “rose” are like pillars in a colonnade where

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<sup>260</sup> //This is where the array is created.  
a1= new makeArray (3);  
    a1[0]=”rose”  
    a1[1]=”rose”  
    a1[2]= ”rose”

the “rose” is the anchor for each pillar and the intervening explanation is empty (Glazier, “Code, Cod, Ode” 6). Array equals architecture. Architecture equals meaning. In architecture, the arch is a unifying element which conveys a vision of totality, the arch is “a play between structure and empty space” as if “the architectural were paradigmatic of a kind of structural view of textual construction” (Glazier, “Code, Cod, Ode” 7). In the arc of the arch there is only empty space, but the framing of the solid part of the arch makes it an entity. Arch is both structure and empty space. Arch enables spaces to exist. As a result, space is not a mere presence; but, a meaningful presence. Thus, arch is a meaningful structural frame which engages in “the architectural conversation,” to use Glazier’s phrasing (“Code, Cod, Ode” 8).

And third, the array configuration has a geometric structure. This means language is structural, and space is essential in meaning-making. The space in the source code becomes part of the poetic material: space displays and contains words in vertical and horizontal configurations. Space gains significance and is structural as well, “space is itself part of the process through which writing produces meaning” (Glazier, “Code as Language” 1). Space opens and entails a new sense of totality on word perception. Thus, an array configuration looks at words through space and at space through words. Glazier uses arrays and empty space as “solid material in strings” convinced that “What is of use in this method is the concept of position, location, and structure as crucially important in reading code as poetic material” (“Code, Cod, Ode”). Although words such as “isabot, iceboat, sabot, isobar” and “number, umber, adumbration” are simply listed in various lines of digital “Bromeliads”, they reference the array organization of these words in the source code. With regard to the use of space in digital “Bromeliads” Glazier explains that

he adopts a two-element array in order to suggest that the array is not only content-based but also a visual way of writing, “This structural arrangement is a way to organize the possibilities of the onscreen event and as such, the holes are solid and meaningful, ways of arranging such possibilities. These are possibilities which exist as manifest in the code but can only be realized in the onscreen event of the code’s execution” (“Code, Cod, Ode” 11).

If “Bromeliads” challenges readers who face the variability of text on the screen, a poem such as “Mouseover Essay in JavaScript” (1998) is intriguing in how it bridges the theme of colonization with reader-text interaction through mouse movement.<sup>261</sup> Thematically, the digital poem draws upon the correspondence between the historical process of Spain’s colonization of the indigenous civilizations: it includes images of a Mesoamerican pyramid and of a historical document citing “Tollan,” the name for the capital city of two empires of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, and the linguistic process related to the colonization of natural languages by computer programming language. Compositionally, it contains four panels, plus a narrow, wide, title banner at the top. Each section displays three different texts and / or images, and calls for three alternative readings. The first reading of each section is called “native” / “pre-mouse” (computer mouse is not touched and once it is touched it never returns to this original reading); the second one is when the mouse is on the reading area; and the third after the mouse is off the reading area (“Code Writing, Reading Code”120). As the title of “Mouseover” announces, these frames become active or hidden depending on readers’ intentional or

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<sup>261</sup> See “Mouseover Essay in JavaScript”  
<http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/glazier/viz/mouseover/mouseover.html>.

accidental positioning of the mouse.<sup>262</sup> The screen space is made of shifting spaces which are at times visible or invisible. The instability of the banner’s presentation aims to “[introduce] the dynamics of shifting readings” so that readers may recognize the strategy necessary to navigate “the many possible renderings provided by these combinations” (Glazier, “Code Writing, Reading Code” 122).



What is a text if you can't have certainty? That's the point of all writing, isn't it? To nail down your points, spell them out so there can be no doubt. "Publication" means posting them on the public board in the town square. The intellect is made to engage. Ergo rhetoric—and why that word will never be the name of a rap group—because it has *meaning* and because meaning, like language, is inviolable.



Oh my, a pan! Mebbe the natives will cook up some quaint tacos de la pirámide a un costado del cenote "Chen Mül". Se sabe que las light up under pyramids costs a C-note "Chen Mule". If now loss cuevas y cenotes tenían gran importancia para los antiguos

Fig. 14 The first “native” / “pre-mouse” reading of each section

<sup>262</sup> In *Digital Poetics* Glazier details the dynamic nature of the title and its subtitle with its three alternative readings. In its pre-mouse reading, the title, “Mouseover,” is printed in red letters and its subtitle, “refreshing to see letters again,” is in black. Once the mouse is moved on the reading area, title, subtitle, and image turn into “Mooseover,” “other terms letters again,” and the image of a moose. At the third reading of the banner, title reverts to the original title, but is printed in red letters, subtitle becomes “other terms might be,” and the graphic of the moose is replaced by the graphic of a computer mouse (“Coding Writing, Reading Code” 121). See Glazier, *Digital Poetics*, 96-125.

However, reading “Mouseover” is both challenging and intriguing because readers constantly face issues related to the beginning, middle, and end of the text. As Glazier explicates, in the 1<sup>st</sup> panel he investigates where a text actually begins. That is why the second reading of the 1<sup>st</sup> panel picks up at the end of a sentence.<sup>263</sup> Even if grammatically speaking, an apparent beginning for the poem occurs in the third reading of the same panel, “The way (back to that wrestling image) there is a moment before the competition begins,” semantically, the narrative is not still at its beginning. “To make sense of ‘Mouseover,’” Glazier states, “one must look toward the content of each fragment and the relation of these fragments to each other in their shifting interplay” (“Coding Writing, Reading Code” 124). I contend that the screen space presents the poem as a performance which stems from shifting panels in which images and texts overlap. An approach based on text readings that cross panels unveils an intriguing network of references between “Mouseover” and Glazier’s works. This network of readings reveals how the digital poem recreates a previously-written text and embeds other forms of performances. These shifting spaces enable the enactment of the text anew. Equally significant is how text exists as image and not as text in the scripting space.

Within the same panel, the reconstruction of appropriate grammatical structures in which noun follows either definite article or possessive pronoun reveals how the third reading precedes the second one. This reading pattern happens in the first three panels of

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<sup>263</sup> “own. From the graphical exclamation point, the next possibility that arises is of course the double exclamation point. Then the triple exclamation, and on and on, until you get to such an extension of exclamation that the narrator, in an oral parallel, could throw himself under a train and it would not match the machine version of the story.

Thus at a certain point, there is no longer a need even for the *story*. But of “  
 (“Mouseover” second reading, 1<sup>st</sup> panel)

See Appendix “Reconstructed ‘Mouseover.’”

“Mouseover.” For instance, a structure such as “tightness in the throat” in the 3<sup>rd</sup> panel comes from the combination of the last words “tightness in the” in the third reading followed by the first word “throat” in the second reading of the same panel.<sup>264</sup> Similarly, a phrasal construction such as “the graphical symbol takes on a status of its own” in the 1<sup>st</sup> panel results from the last words “a status of its” in the third reading and the first word “own” in the second reading. Thematically, the presence of several lines of continuity between panels centered on topics such as the history of the writing machine and orality (3<sup>rd</sup> panel), the analysis of the exclamation point in its transition from oral telling to print (1<sup>st</sup> panel), and the typewriter as a scripting technique (2<sup>nd</sup> panel) also call attention to a particular reorganization among panels. From this viewpoint, the poem unfolds in a way in which the 3<sup>rd</sup> panel functions as beginning, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> panels as middle, and the 4<sup>th</sup> as end. Indeed, this is one reading version of “Mouseover.” And yet, its significance relies on the unexpected resemblance of this reconstructed text with one of Galzler’s own works, “What Machine Itza Poesia?”

“What Machine Itza Poesia?” with the subtitle “Fragments out (of Sorts) & amp; Interview” (26 July 1996-13 August 1997) is a collection of six fragments. It does not belong to a clear-cut genre given the heterogeneous form and content that each fragment

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<sup>264</sup> “throat, a penchant for volume, physical strength, stamina, the feel of a same-sex sweaty body against yours.  
If we follow this to the next logical step then, what becomes relevant is where the first machine “gripped” the storyteller’s craft. That is, once an instrument was at issue, *the story became not a story but an extension of the instrument.* Equivalents had to be set up for color, tone, exasperation.”  
 (“Mouseover” second reading, 3<sup>rd</sup> panel)

“He was instructed on the *rudiments* of poetry. It was handed down to the writer in this way: that in an environment characterized as ‘the oral’, there was no fact of intervention. (‘intervene,’ a cutting or severance.) In this pristine arena (remember that in these times even wrestlers undertook their sport in the nude), the poetics of it functioned in relation to tissue and muscle. Resonance, inflection, tone were related to a tightness in the”  
 (“Mouseover” third reading, 3<sup>rd</sup> panel)

See Appendix: “Reconstructed ‘Mouseover’”

has.<sup>265</sup> Thus, it may be an essay made of various collaged fragments and interviews; a poem in a narrative form; an interview between Glazier and somebody else; fragments from various genres which develop into a totality; or a poetic manifesto on how “a poem is a machine to think with,” to use Baldwin’s article title. Simply described, the first fragment contains the poem “Mendum”; the second is a dialogue with a question and answer structure on “What Machine Is Poetry?”; the third starts with a passage from a poem, carries on the previous dialogue, and ends with the image of “Skulls Itza Machine Chicken”; the fourth continues the dialogue after several notes and abstract commentaries on the ghost in the machine, photo file, and sound; the fifth is entitled “Artist’s Note” and contains an excerpt from another interview; the sixth goes back to the dialogue from the second fragment. This collage collection ends with a brief question and answer exchange line from the fourth fragment after which “connection fades.” It is the second fragment from “What Machine Itza Poesia?” that rests at the core of the digital poem in which shifting spaces enable the re-enactment of the entire fragment anew.

Laid out as a dialogue between an unknown interviewee and interviewer, the second fragment is relevant for how readers fall upon poetry reading as performance in two particular instances. During the first occasion the interviewee elucidates “what machine is poetry?” “by reading directly from some relevant notes” (2). From this moment on, the actual performance unfolds within the interview.<sup>266</sup> Significantly, these

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<sup>265</sup> See “What Machine Itza Poesia?” [http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/glazier/prose/what\\_mach.html](http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/glazier/prose/what_mach.html).

<sup>266</sup> “Q. What Machine Is Poetry?”

A. It is interesting that you choose to start the interview with a question that, shall we say, less astute interviewers might have lead up to? But since we seem to already be down to the nuts and bolts of it, let me begin to answer by reading directly from some relevant notes: ‘He was instructed on the *rudiments* of poetry. It was handed down to the writer in this way: that in an environment characterized as “the oral”, there was no fact of intervention”

See Appendix “Fragment-What Machine Itza Poesia?”

precise sentences from the interview appear in the text of the digital poem, more specifically, in the third reading of the 3<sup>rd</sup> panel,

He was instructed on the *rudiments* of poetry. It was handed down to the writer in this way: that in an environment characterized as “the oral” , there was no fact of intervention. (“intervene,” a cutting or severance.) In this pristine arena (remember that in these times even wrestlers undertook their sport in the nude), the poetics of it functioned in relation to tissue and muscle. Resonance, inflection, tone were related to a tightness in the

In this respect, Glazier decontextualizes a performance set up initially within an interview and recontextualizes it inside a digital poem, which is a performance by itself.<sup>267</sup> Another occasion of reading as performance occurs at the end of the second fragment. Instead of waiting for an answer to the addressed question, “you have spoken of the computer as a step *back*. I wonder if you’d clarify?” the interviewer keeps reading convinced that another text will provide a rather clarifying definition, “I think it’s actually rather clearer in this passage:

The sea is a scroll but also a tt-typewriter knob

”Yup. 'Found' poems lever this issue wide open.”

That's why the button on the right that slides in its track

The cans didn't have labels. They were simply metal

translate. Of that duo, drop Verlaine & substitute Percodine-

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<sup>267</sup> Same second fragment also contains instances in which Glazier self-addresses as if interviewing himself on the history of the writing machine. Thus, he references his “Jumping to Occlusions” essay, later on published in *Digital Poetics: The Making of E-Poetries. Modern and Contemporary Poetics* (2002) as well as his “Direct Contact” poem “read in Manhattan not long ago.”



These five lines are seminal for at least three reasons. First, they represent a poetry reading as performance during the interview in “What Machine Itza Poesia?”. Second, they are spread in “Mouseover” in between the second readings from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> panels. Third, they are part of the twenty-nine-line poem “Scroll,” which appears in print in Glazier’s 2003 collection of poetry, *Anatman, Pumpkin Seed, Algorithm*.<sup>268</sup> Just like “Mouseover,” “Scroll” addresses the history of writing and of Mexico without leaving aside Glazier’s self-references. The poet describes himself as “an islander” who carries on his Hispanic legacy although being physically away, “Remember that / Mexico was once an itinerant island and that / Nezahualcoyotl is still referred to as ‘Señor de Texcoco’ or ‘Man of Texcoco’” (82). With “Scroll” the network of intersecting readings from “Mouseover” enlarges similarly to “Bromeliads.”

Of particular significance is the fifth fragment from “What Machine Itza Poesia?” in which Glazier visualizes image-word relationship as a complex composition akin to performance,

From whatever pole you wish to case the idea of ‘poetry’, at some point one account of such an activity has to do with words (images) moving (projected) through time. [. . .] if words / images are taken as say ‘cells’ of images, then using available formats, [. . .] they can move, be altered, progress. [. . .] The point is that these are compositions. They consist of individual parts conceived with a whole in mind. [. . .] They alter themselves on the screen within a given set of possibilities. It is a performance—in its own medium.

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<sup>268</sup> See “Scroll” in *Anatman, Pumpkin Seed, Algorithm*, 82.

Images and texts are parts of a totality. In the shifting spaces of the digital poem, images and texts overlap. Interestingly, none of the three images from “Mouseover:” the Mesoamerican pyramid, the historical document citing “Tollan,” and the contemporary building references directly the text from panels. In contrast to the challenging reconstruction that texts require, these images are visibly in dialogue with one another and develop a narrative of their own. Not unlike “Bromeliads” where readers travel and learn about the reality of a local place through postcards, these images also convey a sense of journey, “a visit to the city of conquerors,” as Glazier says (“Coding Writing, Reading Code”). This time, it is a historic journey which evokes the past through the image of the pyramid as well as of old documents and discloses the present in the postcard of the contemporary edifice. The “wrestling image” is noteworthy because it designates the thematic convergence point between images and texts. In fact, “Mouseover” does not contain the concrete image of the wrestling event except for two textual references: the emergent tension from the beginning of the competition (1<sup>st</sup> panel) and wrestlers performing this sport (3<sup>rd</sup> panel).<sup>269</sup> Although this image is only verbalized and not visualized, it is loaded with a double reference. On the one hand, the wrestling image echoes a sport practiced in a pristine time, in the pre-Columbian Mesoamerica; and on the other hand, it intersects with the story of the exclamation point. Thus, in “Mouseover” the story of the wrestling as an instance of intense competition parallels the

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<sup>269</sup> The way (back to that wrestling image) there is a moment before the competition begins, where one wrestler crouches on all fours and the opponent kneels next to him. On the textual level, take the exclamation point as an instance. Is there such a thing as an exclamation point in oral “telling”? No, the story simply exclaims. It is a physical action. But once the instrument is involved, the graphical symbol takes on a status of its” (“Mouseover” third reading, 1<sup>st</sup> panel)

struggle through which the exclamation point undergoes once it leaves orality and turns into a graphical symbol, a product of the writing machine.

The wrestling event and exclamation point-related competitions share a poetics which operates on the relationship between tissue and muscle, on how intonation is orally reproduced and visually captured. The exclamation point loses the magical power with which orality endows it so that the story could freely perform and is itemized once it enters the writing machine, “the story became not a story, but an extension of the instrument” (second reading, 3<sup>rd</sup> panel). As a result,

From the graphical exclamation point, the next possibility that arises is of course the double exclamation point. Then the triple exclamation, and on and on, until you get to such an extension of exclamation that the narrator, in an oral parallel, could throw himself under a train and it would not match the machine version of the story. (second reading, 1<sup>st</sup> panel)

This line of reasoning resonates with Walter Ong’s considerations on orality and print. In *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, Ong defines primary orality as “the orality of a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print” (11). To learn what a primary oral culture is means to reflect on the nature of sound itself because words exist only in sound (Ong 31). Spoken language is a mode of action because words acquire magical power once they are uttered. Contrary to orality which fosters the feeling of community and keeps knowledge within a context of struggle, writing distances people and itemizes, “moves speech from the oral-aural to a new sensory world, that of vision” (Ong 85).<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> A similar approach has Jennifer DeVere Brody in *Punctuation: Art, Politics, and Play*. She defines punctuation as having an ambiguous status in that it is neither speech nor writing, neither sound nor silence

The text from the source code of Glazier's "Mouseover" is richer than the text in the screen space in how it contains six insertions of multiple line commentaries.<sup>271</sup> Usually added to make the code more readable, JavaScript commentaries are present in the source code and absent in the screen space. They exemplify how JavaScript selects what becomes visible on the one hand and remains invisible, on the other. Similarly, writing can frequently reveal and hide things as Drucker deems, "all writing has the capacity to be both looked at and read, to be present as material and to function as the sign of an absent meaning" (*Figuring the Word* 59). Once again, coding is not unlike writing. In "Mouseover" these commentaries are valuable because they speak about Glazier's viewpoint on the contextualization of digital poetry within a particular literary tradition. Thus, the first set of commentaries explicates how the absence of space generates an attention-grabbing poetics and how text contains various dialects and idiolects, in which natural languages integrate within "0s&Xs."<sup>272</sup> This commentary takes the form of a dialogue and links the conversation from the digital poem between an unknown interviewer and an interviewed: "Charlamos: we chat, fiddle hero / how are you is: "Quen intica?" (Como estas) so sue me / or you may say "Tlen Tiahiahua" (Que haces, que pasa?) / more after we set up some coding burn Buffalo roams ecco qui." Two people dialogue in English and Spanish while working on code burning. The second set of commentaries continues the dialogue addressing the benefits of technology for the text

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and therefore it tends to be performative, to perform an (im)material event (3). Punctuation mediates because it "ties together binary terms such as orality and literacy, as well as mind and body. Punctuation stages an intervention between utterance and inscription, speech and writing . . . body and gesture. It is seen and unspoken, sounded and unseen" (DeVere Brody 9). See Jennifer DeVere Brody, "For(e)thought: Pre / Script: gesturestyluspunctum," *Punctuation: Art, Politics, and Play* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2008 ), 1-27.

<sup>271</sup> See source code of "Mouseover" <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/glazier/dp/appendix3.html>.

<sup>272</sup> "This essay explores electronic / Now as to the text as body, it's non-breaking space of nodes, / [. . .] its dialects, idiolects, amp private propriety. / Following as / an arcane mortified series of self-important 0s&Xs."

production and the importance of links in the writing process, “Links are at the center of a / space is a space of writing.” The last lines historicize the first literary investigations into “the written terrain of links and jumps” of language experiments. Thus, there are references to Gertrude Stein, Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Language poets such as Charles Bernstein, Ron Silliman, and Susan Howe which underline the lines of continuity between their experimental poetry and digital poetry. The rationalization behind this correlation carries on in the third set of commentaries on how in digital poetry the medium engages different nuances of language. The fourth set of commentaries echoes Glazier’s theory on the poetics of dynamic texts. Here, he reminds readers how “texts move not only within themselves” but also among other “frets of information” in a constant transmission marked by the uncertainty of “systemic failures, ephemera, [and] disunion” so that “there is no resting place / time the reading is entered.” The last commentaries reinforce Glazier’s major argument from *Digital Poetics* on digital poetry as one form of experimental poetry. With this consideration, he references Language poets’ experiments again in an attempt to substantiate the origin of “This post-typographic & non-linear disunion / electronic air we breathe.”

Compositionally, the source code of “Mouseover” is made of four frames instantiated as images. These images correspond to the four panels from the digital poem. Each frame in part exists in two versions: on and off. Importantly, neither texts nor images from the screen space are visible in the source code space. Also, the texts from the screen space exist as images in the scripting space. As a result, the source code space functions as a placeholder for texts.<sup>273</sup> From this viewpoint, the source code invites speculation on the image-text dialectic because it calls attention to how text exists as

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<sup>273</sup> See source code of “Mouseover.”

image in the scripting space and image becomes text in the screen space. In “The Intermedial,” an intriguing chapter from *Digital Poetics*, Glazier explains how the Web is writing in that the Web consists in a series of pages written in Hypertext Mark-up Language. From his viewpoint,

Hypertext Mark-up Language (HTML) presents a curious confusion between what is a page and what are its parts. For the page to work, the code cannot be viewed because the parts would overwhelm the page with their hyperactivity. What is there to be viewed can only be viewed as image—a virtual economy within the frame of one that is restricted. The page is an assemblage within the physical area of a screen. What appears on the screen is *not* the parts but the projection of the parts as a simulated whole. (“The Intermedial: A Treatise” 81)<sup>274</sup>

In this case, image is not the image referenced. Image is neither a representation, nor a presentation; instead, it is a projection of the parts as a whole. More importantly, he sees image as a double channel: as a graphical representation which inevitably relies on the presence the viewer’s perception, “Image is a double channel. It has a presence, on the one hand, that is graphical. But the graphical exists precisely in relation to a perceived viewer” (82). In this way, image does have a well-defined position; instead, it manifests itself in an in-between condition.

The correlation between how the digital poem “Mouseover” performs based on shifting spaces and how the command “mouseover” is actually a JavaScript event conceives of the poem as a performance from the beginning. In this case, the text from the source code reveals an intriguing image-word connection in which the story of the

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<sup>274</sup> See Glazier, “The Intermedial: A Treatise,” *Digital Poetics*, 78-83.

exclamation point that the digital poem narrates complements the on and off mouse movement on which the poem relies. Also, the source code tells readers how mouseover as a JavaScript event performs. Events are normally used in combination with functions, and the function is not executed before the event occurs.<sup>275</sup> The onmouseover event tells the browser that once a mouse is rolled over the image, the browser executes a function that will replace the image with another image. The onmouseout event tells the browser that once a mouse is rolled away from the image, another JavaScript function is executed. This function will insert the original image again. This movement explains the visibility and invisibility game on which the digital poem relies. The invisible becomes visible through the obliteration of the visible. Moreover, in the digital poem transitions among the four panels are barely distinguishable because the screen text follows the rule of the commentary present in JavaScript code, “this essay explores electronic / now as to the text as body, it’s non-breaking space of nodes.”

Glazier’s JavaScript-based poems open up new spaces for the performance of language. His poetic enterprise is achievable in spaces which are parts of a network of interactions that produces the work. Glazier applies computer programming language to

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<sup>275</sup> function img\_act(imgName) {  
    if (version == "n3") {  
        imgOn = eval(imgName + "on.src");  
        document [imgName].src = imgOn;  
    }  
}  
function img\_inact(imgName) {  
    if (version == "n3") {  
        imgOff = eval(imgName + "off.src");  
        document [imgName].src = imgOff;  
    }  
}  
(“Mouseover” source code)

poetry in order to display a new sense of totality on language.<sup>276</sup> He visualizes this totality through the redefinition of the concept of authority in the space of the digital poem. This space is no longer reduced to the poet's totalizing position; instead, it becomes a space of encounter and interaction between author, text, and reader: "It suggests that writing should be seen, not as a personalized achievement, but as a series of strands in a larger social-spatial textual fabric (the network)" (Glazier "Net Losses" 5).<sup>277</sup> In calling attention both to scripting and screen spaces, Glazier unveils the re-configuration of space as multiple and changeable in Java-Script-based poetry and underlies its significance in the textual production. In this way, the scripting space discloses aspects of the text that might otherwise be unnoticed. As a result, this text is a meaningful literary variant of the poem in performance and is part of an enlarged network within which the digital poem emerges and to which it belongs.

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<sup>276</sup> See chapter 2 for an explanation on how, from a different angle, Gianni Toti's video-poems also aim to convey a totality of language.

<sup>277</sup> See Glazier, "Net Losses" in *OL3: open letter on lines online*. ed. Darren Wershler-Henry (2000), <http://www.ubu.com/papers/ol/glazier.html>.



## Conclusion

The comparative close readings of Toti's video-poetry, Davinio's net-poetry, and Glazier's JavaScript-based poetry reaffirm the perennial engagement of poetry with the technologies of its writing and reveal how digital poetry takes on new meanings in the contemporary technological contexts. Thus, the making of these digital poetries distinctively emphasizes how writing implies more than words on a page and becomes writing with video (Toti), writing with internet features (Davinio), and writing with code (Glazier). This engagement with diverse digital spaces argues that writing spaces are multiple and changeable, are made of spaces of encoding and decoding which interconnect with one another. Thus, there is the source code space where the poet installs the code which contains the script of the poem. This code has a meaningful existence only when it is encountered, received, and reconceived by the reader. As a result, there is also the screen space where the code becomes work only through the reader's access. Both spaces are transformative in the sense that they are physically in a morphing state: screen space evolves out of source code space. In this way, this digital writing space is a "trans-medial" space: it is self-transformative (transforms itself) and transforming (transforms what it contains). By implication, these three forms of poetry become expressions of writing *with* and *through* these spaces.

In this sense, the comparative readings of the video-graphic spaces, networked spaces, and scripting spaces as spaces in which these distinct digital poems exist and emerge explain how poetry as a genre is redefined. Thus, Toti's video-poetry stems from a poetics of transformation of words, images, and sounds; Davinio's net-poetry is concerned with data transmission through net-communication; and Glazier's JavaScript-

based poetry originates in interactions between natural and computer programming languages. In this way, this methodology defines and explains the nature of poetry in new media writing spaces. Furthermore, my close readings of Glazier's digital works which call particular attention to the poem in the source code space move beyond the widespread tendency of understanding the digital poem only thematically through the reading of the text only in the screen space. My analysis of the JavaScript code discloses the computational aspect of this poetry and looks at how code works as a semiotic system as well.

This approach makes a timely contribution to scholarship on digital humanities in that it extends theories on contemporary technologies of writing in digital works. In 1991, new media scholar David Jay Bolter introduces the "topographic" quality of digital writing with regard to the emergence of hypertext, a digital narrative in which the story is articulated through spatial arrangement. In 2011, I re-fashion Bolter's concept and speak of a "trans-medial" space with reference to the multiple writing spaces in which digital poems exist and emerge. From this viewpoint, the "trans-medial" quality of the digital writing opens up new venues for the reading of the digital works by considering the spaces of the computer screen, source code, and code execution and therefore, contributes to the notion of space in our digitalized world. Furthermore, this study makes another key intervention into digital humanities by arguing that this "trans-medial" space is also a mediating agent in the performance of the text alongside its readers in the sense that it engages in and with the performance of text. New media scholars often explain how computer programming makes digital works become sites of encounter between agencies such as author, text, or readers, turning readers into performers through their active

involvement in the literary work. Conversely, my study shows that this “trans-medial” space mediates the transactions that authors, computers, and readers go through. Thus, this trans-medial space is not only part of these transactions but is also made of these transactions. In mediating these transactions the trans-medial space also acts upon and transforms what it contains. With such a consideration I locate the emergence of digital poetry in multiple agencies: authors, computers, readers, and spaces. This stance extends the notion of agency and authorship in digital media.

This comparative study engages with three distinct forms of digital poetry created by Italian and United States digital poets. This comparative vision situates digital poetry within an international comparative context and enriches the historical framework of its development in terms of practices and theories at least in three ways. Thus, it reaffirms the Italian Futurism as a significant moment in the conceptual foundation of this genre; it enhances the connection with video-poetry through the recovery of Toti’s pioneering video-poems; and it conceives Davinio’s *Techno-Poesia* a landmark anthology for the study of digital poetry. In this way, this comparative perspective opens up new venues for comparative media studies. Also, the concept of “trans-medial” space provides a significant paradigm for talking about the space(s) engaged in digital poetry making. Thematically, this paradigm can be used to further investigate whether these writing spaces open up the space for new and potentially more inclusive conceptions of identity and culture. Theoretically, this paradigm fosters questions on the future forms of digital poetry-making, on the new technologies engaged in its writing, and on whether digital poetry will be still examined through the lens of writing.

## Appendix I: "Chat-poem"

The chat-poem is taken from Obododimma Oba's blog:

<http://obododimma.livejournal.com/>

Virtual Venice (a multiverse)

[6:50:32 AM] Ruth Lepson: obododimma waits by the backdrop

[6:50:53 AM] Obododimma: and thinking this here was there

[6:51:13 AM] David Seaman: David had his backdrop all planned then lost a signal and had to move to the bedroom!

[6:51:14 AM] Obododimma: venice an eye away from a glance

[6:51:24 AM] Ruth Lepson: yet this here was never there

[6:51:35 AM] Obododimma: where Gianni\* sits watching

[6:51:43 AM] David Seaman: Let's all go to Venezia

[6:51:49 AM] Ruth Lepson: toodling and oogling

[6:52:06 AM] Philip Meersman: nor is it here, aca, aqui, what does it matter it holds the water just below base

[6:52:22 AM] Craig Saper: his plans for a poetry reading machine

[6:52:28 AM] Obododimma: thought venice was venus so nice to oblongs

[6:52:29 AM] Craig Saper: lost in the mail

[6:52:33 AM] Ruth Lepson: je veux ecrire tous les gens

[6:52:53 AM] Ruth Lepson: lost in time

[6:53:06 AM] Philip Meersman: tous les gens perdu

[6:53:15 AM] Philip Meersman: venu de nous ecouter

[6:53:16 AM] Ruth Lepson: certainement

[6:53:31 AM] Obododimma: venice is and was ocean seed,

[6:53:43 AM] Philip Meersman: mais l'eau est trop vague

[6:53:44 AM] Ruth Lepson: eek it

[6:53:56 AM] Ruth Lepson: sinks

[6:54:10 AM] Obododimma: virtual venice walks your vision

[6:54:14 AM] Philip Meersman: Atlantis will have a neighbour

[6:54:24 AM] Craig Saper: gianni gives a knowing Cheschire cat's smile

[6:54:38 AM] Obododimma: ruth, obododimma, craig, eva, caterina\*\* catering techs

[6:55:01 AM] Craig Saper: Eye's on the Half Shell

[6:55:26 AM] Obododimma: so many mutual hands will write readies of craigs

[6:55:29 AM] Ruth Lepson: I can't eat squid any more now I know they're so intelligent

[6:55:43 AM] Obododimma: into second lives, numerate,

[6:55:48 AM] Ruth Lepson: evdience of intelligence everywhere

[6:56:32 AM] Ruth Lepson: TV show about atlatnis turns up more evidence

[6:56:33 AM] Philip Meersman: give me a second life so I can eat the squid again to use the ink writing words with my fingertips

[6:56:35 AM] David Seaman: I have the same squid issue, and octopus, so delicious our brain-mates

[6:56:59 AM] Ruth Lepson: right on, seaman & saper

[6:57:04 AM] Obododimma: now, words become the last thrills of waiting arts

[6:57:21 AM] Obododimma: chat-upon-chat,

[6:57:30 AM] David Seaman: Last time I was in Venice I had pasta with squid in its ink. The spaghetti wrote a poem with it

[6:57:47 AM] Ruth Lepson: when I was in venice I was mesmerized

[6:57:51 AM] Obododimma: let poems begin to write poets

[6:57:51 AM] Eva Dabara: tingling at my fingertips yet so vague

[6:58:14 AM] Ruth Lepson: eva is so female

[6:58:23 AM] Obododimma: begin to try other lives

[6:58:33 AM] Ruth Lepson: try on try on

[6:58:38 AM] Eva Dabara: thanks Ruth, I try not to be SO female

[6:58:49 AM] Ruth Lepson: i mean in a good way

[6:58:53 AM] Obododimma: from the tail of tel-aviv to drumming ibadans

[6:59:15 AM] Obododimma: or new mexicoes mixed in the mist

[6:59:16 AM] Ruth Lepson: tales of tel-aviv telescoped

[6:59:42 AM] Philip Meersman: poems write poets creating names and games to untangle  
the pasta letters in the mama-mia soup

[6:59:53 AM] Ruth Lepson: octavio paz said once poets were bards then they were  
ambassadors now they are professors

[7:00:01 AM] Obododimma: when screaming texts test their missiles

[7:00:01 AM] Craig Saper: almost completely forgotten now

[7:00:12 AM] Obododimma: where, when, how

[7:00:19 AM] Ruth Lepson: almost completely

[7:00:29 AM] Obododimma: could the earth unveil its virginity?

[7:00:47 AM] Ruth Lepson: it could but it won't we are so bad

[7:01:04 AM] Eva Dabara: whose talking about missiles? We have them in abundance  
here in Israel. It's a real THREAT buddy...

[7:01:11 AM] Obododimma: poetry will

[7:01:20 AM] Obododimma: because it could

[7:01:39 AM] Obododimma: from this tech to that tech

[7:02:00 AM] Obododimma: visions of voiced distances

[7:02:07 AM] Craig Saper: eerily prophetic

[7:02:09 AM] Philip Meersman: words wave over the www whilst veiled ideas wander  
around to find evidence of virginity on the earth so to

[7:02:25 AM] Eva Dabara: words are like chewing gum - you can never really digest  
them

[7:02:49 AM] Ruth Lepson: she said, It's not a treat. It's just gum.

[7:03:00 AM] Obododimma: can this song ever, stop, eva?

[7:03:18 AM] Ruth Lepson: evaevaevaevaevaeva

[7:03:36 AM] Obododimma: can this stop leave its tops for another under?

[7:04:06 AM] Ruth Lepson: ani shohachti col haavrit sha ani yodait (I have have  
forgotten all the hebrew I once knew)

[7:04:19 AM] Obododimma: the roots of ruths in my truth

[7:04:31 AM] Obododimma: will being a flowering

[7:04:35 AM] Ruth Lepson: ruth rode in my new car

[7:04:39 AM] Ruth Lepson: in the seat beside me

[7:04:45 AM] Ruth Lepson: we hit a bump at 65

[7:04:49 AM] Ruth Lepson: and rode on ruthlessly

[7:04:55 AM] Obododimma: next --text-ex

[7:05:10 AM] Ruth Lepson: next, please.

[7:05:17 AM] Ruth Lepson: text, please.

[7:05:21 AM] Ruth Lepson: ex, please.

[7:05:29 AM] Obododimma: ease, please

[7:05:39 AM] Eva Dabara: ex please

[7:05:41 AM] Obododimma: tease the words of the worlds

[7:05:54 AM] Obododimma: x-tents

[7:06:02 AM] Ruth Lepson: where is craig?

[7:06:04 AM] Obododimma: of nomadic words

[7:06:27 AM] Obododimma: hiding in second life

[7:06:29 AM] Craig Saper: beep beep

[7:06:36 AM] Ruth Lepson: haha

[7:07:00 AM] Obododimma: :D www (yawn) www

[7:07:01 AM] Philip Meersman: just read without hearing sound myself

[7:07:27 AM] Ruth Lepson: pumpkin faces abound on the ground

[7:07:32 AM] Philip Meersman: like a fish in a bowl swimming being watched seeing  
lips move but no sound

M] Eva Dabara: da

--

\*Ruth Lepson's cat, drinking milk and watching TV, as reported by Lepson in an earlier  
chat.



## Appendix II: “Fragment-What Machine Itza Poesia”

What Machine Itzá Poesía? [http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/glazier//prose/what\\_mach.html](http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/glazier//prose/what_mach.html)

Fragments out (of Sorts) & Interview

Loss Pequeño Glazier

26 July 1996-13 August 1997

*Hueytecuilhuitli - Tlaxochimaco*

Fragment 1 | Fragment 2 | Fragment 3 | Fragment 4 | Fragment 5 | Fragment 6

### Fragment 2<sup>278</sup>

Q. What Machine Is Poetry?

A. It is interesting that you choose to start the interview with a question that, shall we say, less astute interviewers might have lead up to? But since we seem to already be down to the nuts and bolts of it, let me begin to answer by reading directly from some relevant notes:

**He was instructed on the *rudiments* of poetry. It was handed down to the writer in this way: that in an environment characterized as “the oral”, there was no fact of intervention. (“intervene,” a cutting or severance.) In this pristine arena (remember that in these times even wrestlers undertook their sport in the nude), the poetics of it functioned in relation to tissue and muscle. Resonance, inflection, tone were related to a tightness in the throat, a penchant for volume, physical strength, stamina, the feel of a same-sex sweaty body against yours.**

If we follow this to the next logical step then, what becomes relevant is where the first machine “gripped” the storyteller’s craft. That is, once an instrument was at issue, *the story became not a story but an extension of the instrument*. Equivalentents had to be set up

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<sup>278</sup> What is in bold represents the third reading from the first three panels of “Mouseover.”

for color, tone, exasperation. **The way (back to that wrestling image) there is a moment before the competition begins, where one wrestler crouches on all fours and the opponent kneels next to him.**

**On the textual level, take the exclamation point as an instance. Is there such a thing as an exclamation point in oral “telling”? No, the story simply exclaims. It is a physical action. But once the instrument is involved, the graphical symbol takes on a status of its own.** From the graphical exclamation point, the next possibility that arises is of course the double exclamation point. Then the triple exclamation, and on and on, until you get to such an extension of exclamation that the narrator, in an oral parallel, could throw himself under a train and it would not match the machine version of the story. Thus at a certain point, there is no longer a need even for the story. **But of course you know this. You are well established in this “field”.**

**Q. You have detailed in your writing, most notably in your “Occlusions” essay, rather concise history of the writing machine, including the cut-ups of Burroughs and Olson's sense of the typewriter as a scripting mechanism. In this vein-and I know this also resonates with your spin on “the buffer” in your poem "Direct Contact" which you read here in Manhattan not long ago, you have spoken of the computer as a step back. I wonder if you'd clarify?**

Q. I think it's actually rather clearer in this passage:

### **Fragment 3**

The sea is a scroll but also a tt-typewriter knob

“Yup. ‘Found’ poems lever this issue wide open”

That's why the button on the right that slides in its track

The cans didn't have labels. They were simply metal  
translate. Of that duo, drop Verlaine & substitute Percodine-  
Especially if you “watch” the way the “lever” works here! (And note the way the mark-  
up almost bleeds through.) p  
But back to the issue of clarifying. (Is clarity what Danes achieve on butter boats?) That  
admittedly rather incendiary remark comes from the fact that the physical impression is  
hardly physical at all. In fact, being on the level of the electron, it could be considered  
more metaphorical than anything else. So provisional! Mutable! What's engraved here?  
What's stamped? What's pressed into material? And if the materials are of interest, then  
what materials exactly are we talking about? This may be the greatest challenge yet for  
any art that may wish to express something about its own material presence. Pollack's  
famous statement hardly holds water when you're talking about standing in a bunch of  
electrons that represent something you might have typed...

Q. But the computer is certainly a writing machine!

“Mouseover” <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/glazier/>

The IIIrd Panel

The 2nd reading

throat, a penchant for volume, physical strength, stamina, the feel of a  
same-sex sweaty body against yours.

If we follow this to the next logical step then, what becomes relevant is  
where the first machine “gripped” the storyteller’s craft. That is, once an  
instrument was at issue, the story became not a story but an extension of  
the instrument. Equivalentents had to be set up for color, tone, exasperation.

The 3rd reading

He was instructed on the rudiments of poetry. It was handed down to the writer in this way: that in an environment characterized as “the oral”, there was no fact of intervention. (“intervene,” a cutting or severance.) In this pristine arena (remember that in these times even wrestlers undertook their sport in the nude), the poetics of it functioned in relation to tissue and muscle. Resonance, inflection, tone were related to a tightness in the

The 1st Panel

The 3rd reading

The way (back to that wrestling image) there is a moment before the competition begins, where one wrestler crouches on all fours and the opponent kneels next to him. On the textual level, take the exclamation point as an instance. Is there such a thing as an exclamation point in oral “telling”? No, the story simply exclaims. It is a physical action. But once the instrument is involved, the graphical symbol takes on a status of its

### Appendix III: “Reconstructed ‘Mouseover’”

The Ist panel

The 1<sup>st</sup> reading / Pre-mouse Reading

the image of Mesoamerican pyramid

The 2<sup>nd</sup> reading (mouse on)

own. From the graphical exclamation point, the next possibility that arises is of course the double exclamation point. Then the triple exclamation, and on and on, until you get to such an extension of exclamation that the narrator, in an oral parallel, could throw himself under a train and it would not match the machine version of the story.

Thus at a certain point, there is no longer a need even for the *story*. But of

The 3<sup>rd</sup> reading (mouse off)

The way (back to that wrestling image) there is a moment before the competition begins, where one wrestler crouches on all fours and the opponent kneels next to him. On the textual level, take the exclamation point as an instance. Is there such a thing as an exclamation point in oral “telling”? No, the story simply exclaims. It is a physical action. But once the instrument is involved, the graphical symbol takes on a status of its

The IInd panel

The 1<sup>st</sup> reading / Pre-mouse Reading

What is a text if you can't have certainty? That's the point of all writing, isn't it? To nail down your points, spell them out so there can be no doubt. “Publication” means posting them on the public

board in the town square. The intellect is made to engage. Ergo  
rhetoric—and why that world will never be the same of a rap group—  
because it has meaning and because meaning, like language, is inviolable.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> reading (mouse on)

You have spoken of the computer as a step *back*. I wonder if you'd clarify?

I think it's actually rather clearer in this passage:

The sea is a scroll but also a typewriter knob

“Yup. ‘Found’ poems lever this issue wide open”

That's why the button on the right that slides in its track

The cans didn't have labels. They were simply metal

The 3<sup>rd</sup> reading (mouse off)

course you know this. You are well established in this “field”.

You have detailed in your writing, most notably in your “Occlusions”  
essay, rather concise history of the writing machine, including the cut-ups  
of Burroughs and Olson's sense of the typewriter as a scripting mechanism.

In this vein—and I know this also resonates with your spin on “the buffer”  
in your poem “Direct Contact” which you read here in Manhattan not long

The IIIrd panel

The 1<sup>st</sup> reading / Pre-mouse Reading

the image of two documents on Tollan

The 2<sup>nd</sup> reading (mouse on)

throat, a penchant for volume, physical strength, stamina, the feel of a  
same-sex sweaty body against yours.

If we follow this to the next logical step then, what becomes relevant is where the first machine “gripped” the storyteller’s craft. That is, once an instrument was at issue, *the story became not a story but an extension of the instrument*. Equivalents had to be set up for color, tone, exasperation.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> reading (mouse off)

He was instructed on the *rudiments* of poetry. It was handed down to the writer in this way: that in an environment characterized as “the oral”, there was no fact of intervention. (“intervene,” a cutting or severance.) In this pristine arena (remember that in these times even wrestlers undertook their sport in the nude), the poetics of it functioned in relation to tissue and muscle. Resonance, inflection, tone were related to a tightness in the

The IVth panel

The 1<sup>st</sup> reading / Pre-mouse Reading

Oh my, a pan! Mebbe the natives will cook up some quaint tacos de la piramide a un costado del cenote “Chen Mul”. Se sabe que las light up under pyramids costs a C-note “Chen Mule”. If now loss cuevas y cenotes tenian gran importancia para los antiguos caved in and C-notes had grains impotent parrots as antiques habitants de Mayapan, e incluso hay quienes postula-aunque

The 2<sup>nd</sup> reading (mouse on)

translate. Of that duo, drop Verlaine & substitute Percodine—

Especiallly, if you “watch” the way the “lever” works here!

But back to the issue of clarifying. (Is clarity what Danes achieve on butter

boats?) That admittedly rather incendiary remark comes from the fact that the *physical impression* is hardly physical at all. In fact, being on the level of the electron, it could be considered more *metaphorical* than anything.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> reading (mouse off)

How about a visit to the city of the conquerors?

First warm up notes are low and resonant. Lac-

quer lights gold of polished surface. Persons smiling

with companions. Gender a certain shape things hold.

Glossy strands held big over lapping rings. Place the

lossy leads on the forest floor and run baby!



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