

Writing Through the Digital
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A buffering screen.
A manifestation of potentiality?



Giorgio Agamben writes that the theory of potentiality may be understood as the potential 'not to be'. A buffering screen may never load, and if an image were to load the image actualized or unfolded would be but one possibility and 'potentiality' would persist in the image actualized.

The buffering screen is a banal manifestation, but perhaps this banality is more coherent with the contemporary condition than the romanticism of the past.

Kenneth Goldsmith reads a newspaper. A banal poem.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4H4niRPSEYs>

If a newspaper can be poetry, then what of digital data?

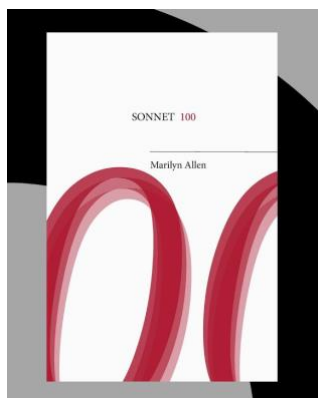
The 21st Century digital citizen encounters an unprecedented number of texts and images; we post, tweet, share, copy, and recycle material more frequently and expediently than ever before. Scanning, sampling, remixing, and reshuffling existing phenomena extends beyond social practice to creative practice, and this paradigm-shift requires critical reflection as to whether texts need to be ‘created’ or whether ‘processing’ a text is the neo-authorial gesture for post-digital practitioners.

“[...] citation, recycling, and *detournement* were not born yesterday; what is clear is that today certain elements and principles are reemerging as themes and are suddenly at the forefront, to the point of constituting the ‘engine’ of new artistic practices.” (Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, 2005, 4)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jr1oVlzt-d8>

Kenneth Goldsmith reads product information from a catalogue and recites information from a traffic report: A ‘textual processing’ suggestive of a neo-authorial gesture.

Digital poetics:



Digital poetics unequivocally involves the processing of text. In this context, as Kenneth Goldsmith suggests, the artist/writer becomes a word processor.

On 23 March 2020, the words of Shakespeare’s 100th sonnet were spoken into a computational voice recognition system where, through a process of mistranslations, a new text was generated. This new text was then spoken into the same software to produce another new text; this process was repeated for 100 days, one iteration per day. *Sonnet 100* concluded on June 30, 2020

The premise of *Sonnet 100* was the potential for new narrative flows to be produced through anomalies or glitches generated between human speech and computational voice recognition.

The *Sonnet 100* human/digital collaboration generated one hundred new sonnets. One hundred possibilities amid a multiplicity of future texts which remain in a state of potentiality.

Warren Motte, author of *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, echoes Giorgio Agamben's theory of potentiality when he writes that; "a potential work is a work which is not limited to its appearances."

Sonnet 100 is a socio–digital practice where human and technological forces collide. *Sonnet 100* was produced through a series of malfunctions or glitches.

Creative glitching:

"We might say then that the glitch names two moments or movements. To break a world and to make a world. In fact these two are never really divorced from one another: to dissent means invariably to affirm some where/thing else. To affirm an elsewhere we have to turn from that which is already here. The glitch is then a moment of critique, a moment of negation – but also a moment of creation and of affirmation. Indeed, the glitch – in whichever regime it operates and ruptures – is the 'sound' of this something else, this something different attempting to get through." (Simon O Sullivan, *From Stuttering and Stammering to the Diagram: Deleuze, Bacon and Contemporary Art Practice*, <http://www.simonosullivan.net/articles/stuttering-and-stammering.pdf>)

Legacy Russell, author of *Glitch Feminism* speaks of the ruptural potential of the glitch. She suggests that the glitching body, a different body, is a necessary form of resistance to the biopolitical control of bodies. She recognises the power of glitching in a socio-political context that is governed by systems of control and regulation and thus issues a call to arms; she says **Be the glitch!**

The glitch, whether biological or textual, performs a form of violence upon majoritarian discourses and subsequently opens reductionist networks to multiplicity and difference.

Further reading:

Agamben, G., 1999, *Potentialities*, [Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen], California: Stanford University Press

Amerika, M., 2011, *remixthebook*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

Brotchie, A., Mathews, H., 2005, *Oulipo Compendium* (2nd Edition), London: Atlas Press

Goldsmith, K., 2011, *Uncreative Writing*, New York: Columbia University Press

McCaffery, S., 2012, *The Darkness of the Present: Poetics, Anachronism, and the Anomaly*, Alabama, USA: University Alabama Press

O'Sullivan, S., 2009, *From Stuttering and Stammering to the Diagram: Deleuze, Bacon and Contemporary Art Practice*, IN, *Deleuze Studies*, 3 (2), December 2009

Russell, L., 2020, *GLITCH FEMINISM: A Manifesto*. Verso.