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# The Limits of My Interface Are the Limits of My World

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## I. Introduction

From a technical point of view, an interface is an apparatus enabling communication to flow between at least two different computer systems through operations of transcoding and information management. The interface is precisely that which is withdrawn from our gaze, or invisibilized as a controlling agent, and yet enables a form of touch in separation between a form legible, or at least empirically perceptible by humans with an unreadable and elusive binary code whose execution remains outside the reach of our experience. As an osmotic membrane, the interface does not have a shape of its own (Quinz): it is dynamic, always in process, modeling our perception of the world both in space and time.<sup>1</sup> In *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich argues that “far from being a transparent window into the data inside a computer, the interface brings with it strong messages of its own” (65). Software takes command then, or as Brazilian poet and critic Giselle Beiguelman puts it: “In the time of nomadic practices, the interface is the message” (“For an Aesthetics”), which also means that the interface, as a buffer, or a translating device between two informational systems, has become the prevalent paradigm for the delineation of the limits of our world. In other words, rewriting Ludwig Wittgenstein’s aphorism, one may make the following statement: the limits of *my interface* are the limits of my world.<sup>2</sup> Donna Haraway concludes her famous manifesto on the definition of cyborg subjectivity in terms of a babelization, which stands as an interruption of the interfacial relation to the world: “This

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1. “Interfaces are not simply objects or boundary points. They are autonomous zones of activity. Interfaces are not things, but rather processes that effect a result of whatever kind” (Galloway).

2. Cf. Wittgenstein 68.

is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia” (181) running against the metaphysical fantasy of a universal code inspired by communication theory.

In communications sciences, *the translation of the world into a problem in coding can be illustrated by looking at cybernetic (feedback-controlled) systems theories* applied to telephone technology, computer design, weapons deployment, or data base construction and maintenance. In each case, solution to the key questions rests on *a theory of language and control*; the key operation is determining the rates, directions, and probabilities of flow of a quantity called information. *The world is subdivided by boundaries differentially permeable to information.* Information is just that kind of quantifiable element (unit, basis of unity) which allows *universal translation*, and so unhindered instrumental power (called effective communication). The biggest threat to such power is interruption of communication. (163, emphases mine)

## II. The Oppositional Translating Cyborg

Beiguelman reverts the commonplace motto WYSIWYG into WYGIWYS (“WYSIWYG or WYGIWYS?”), foregrounding the screenic surface as the ultimate support for our aesthetic experience. In the age of digital reproduction each work is meant to be literally translated onto various interfaces be it through a common structuring language such as XML or emulated, and therefore transcoded, which may affect its instantiation. Code always casts a long shadow on the observer as it cannot be observed in here and now of its performance. It lines the visible and readable surface of the work while remaining at a distance, withdrawn from the reader’s gaze by an invisible interface meant to mediate it as a system of signs. Hence Haraway’s appeal to the figure of what I will redefine as the oppositional *translating* cyborg who seizes upon the encoding tools that mark the world to write her own hybrid or creolized version, undermining the metaphysical fantasy of a universal language, interrupting communication by drawing our attention to the interface effect. To quote Alexander Galloway, “The interface effect is perched there, on the mediating thresholds of self and world.” And he adds that “an interface is not a thing, an interface is always an effect. It is always a process or a translation” (Galloway).

The necessary opacification of the interface as a modulating and controlling process not only echoes the displacement of translation from its traditionally ancillary and repressed position to that of an interventionist gesture that redefines the so-called original and promotes the (cyber)translator's agency, but also points to the intrinsic inoperability of interfacing processes despite their striving at an optimal invisibility. Walter Benjamin's appeal to transparency in his famous essay "The Task of the Translator" should therefore be reassessed: "A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not black its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium to shine upon the original all the more fully" (21). Such a fantasized erasure of mediation would take us back to a metaphysics of presence, that is a non-relation in a pure self-coincidence—death or the divine in other words.

In his 2012 print novel, *The Flame Alphabet*, Ben Marcus affirms the relationship to the Jewish mystique of the kabbalah, suggesting to the reader he holds a sacred interface in his hands, the invisible flipside of the Torah itself whose flame alphabet may well consume her whole being should she approach a little too closely the pure language of the one who shall not be named. Because language in Marcus's novels always takes on a form of intrinsic toxicity, a *pharmakon* indeed, as exemplified in this excerpt from *Notable American Women*:

Spelling puts a corset on words, takes the knives out of them. Spelling a person's name is the first step toward killing him. It takes him apart and empties him of meaning. This is why God is afraid to have his name spelled. (56)

The paradox posited in *The Flame Alphabet* reads as follows: there cannot be any advent of the world outside the body of the letter which delineates its asemantic contours as it spaces it out while every utterance becomes nefarious in turn as soon as it signifies something. What characterizes *homo loquens* announces the end of man without offering any return to an adamic, prelapsarian state, before the naming of names, an ahistorical time opposed to the post-history of a world in which any form of inscription takes on an extreme toxicity for humanity, and more specifically adults. Marcus's vision of posthumanity invites us to think a world without man, or at least a world peopled by an aphasic humanity reminiscent of Ernst Haeckel's *homo alalus* (Agamben 34–37). The main question remains: what shall we do in a world deprived of God while the world can no longer contain itself as cosmos, a world whose outer bounds used to be

defined by the now missing Word of an ultimate transcendent Other.

In a world seized by the so-called lethal *speech fever*, an abject un-world, the reconstructionist forest Jews try to restore the transcendence of the superior world, one can only access through the mediation of a series of technical interfaces, among which the Hebrew alphabet of the Torah. According to the kabbalah, the Hebrew alphabet underpins the materiality of the world, hence its inherent and radical destructive power:

The Hebrew letter is like a form of nature. In it is the blueprint for some flower whose name I forget, and if this flower doesn't exist yet, it will. It is said that the twenty-Hebrew letters, if laid flat and joined properly, then submitted to the correct curves on a table stabbed with pins, would describe the cardiovascular plan of the human body. And not only that. That was child's play. (Marcus, *The Flame Alphabet* 208–09)

The sacred Hebrew characters form the very matter of the world, and hence that of incarnate man—in other words, the Torah, “woven with the ineffable Name [suggesting] the image of a living texture, of a living body according to Azriel of Gerone and *the Zohar*” (Sholem 277).<sup>3</sup> This is how the prophet's body participates here in the proffering of the sacred word as exemplified in *The Flame Alphabet* by the main character's conductivity whose mouth becomes literally that of Moses as soon as he fortuitously places a few cables in it. His body turns into a radio receptor, triggering an act of ventriloquism as he utters an unheard-of prayer so far. Technological transcendence hinges on the mystical experience of what cannot be known, which paradoxically necessitates some prosthetic apparatus as a deciphering device. But maybe this is only a travesty after all, undermining any attempt at reaching a form of worldly knowledge through an intrinsically undecipherable code?

What is left then in Marcus's post-apocalyptic world? What humanism has failed to think through thanks to the divinization of man (Nancy 59)<sup>4</sup> and

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3. A set of twenty three books and a commentary on the mystical aspects of the Torah (the five books of Moses).

4. “[...] cette divinisation a cédé la place, à son tour, car l'‘humanisme’ n'a pas été capable de penser ‘la grandeur essentielle de l'homme’, ou celle de la ‘nature’, ni celle du ‘monde’, ni pour finir celle de l'exister en général.”  
“[S]uch divinisation has yielded its place in turn, for ‘humanism’ has not been able to think ‘the essential greatness of man,’ or that of “nature” or “the world” nor to conclude

what has been appropriated by a totalitarian technocapitalism: a monstrous *ecotechnics* characterized by a generalized interconnection and overall equivalence, a denaturalizing technical environment where martyred bodies are pressed together, concentrated and dehumanized to form an obscene and absurd communication network. Hence the proliferating images of bodies linked to tubes, cables and other conductive wires in the novel such as the Jews imprisoned underground and rigged up with various contraptions to capture the divine message: “Antenna wire grew like creepers up their faces. Test subjects with cages for mouths, human antennas. From their faces came nothing but white noise” (Marcus, *The Flame Alphabet* 248). Confronted with the destruction of humanity through language, Samuel imagines the advent of a certain hebetude, a poverty in a world where the alphabet would bear no more interest to humans than to animals, that is to say “an openness without disconcealment” (Agamben 55) in a non-relation which would preclude any mystical knowledge since it is precisely the experience of a concealment to which animals have no access: “It is what our old poisonous alphabet must look like to an animal, unpromising, of no interest. If it could not be eaten or fucked, what other use could it possibly have” (Marcus, “*The Flame Alphabet*” 209). A more radical form of dehumanization than the nefarious effects of technoscience. Hence, the fantasy of the end of all thought that would usher in this new posthuman era:

Thinking is the first poison, said someone. [...] The thinking should have stopped first. *The thinking*. Perhaps it is next in the long creeping conquest of this toxicity, another basic human activity that will slowly be taken from us.

Oh, I fucking hope so. (*The Flame Alphabet* 65)

Along similar but certainly much more playful lines, Giselle Beiguelman draws our attention to the opacity of code as image in the *QR-comms*,<sup>5</sup> an animated net-art work parodying the Ten Commandments that starts with the following sentence: “I am the Net who linked thee out of the purgatory

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that of existing itself” (translation mine).

5. This work is an unfolding of the 10COMMS project achieved with Mark Amerika, launched at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Buenos Aires Biennial in 2002. Cf. Amerika, Mark, and Giselle Beiguelman. *10 COMMS. Remixing God. Des Virtual*. 2002.

of thy Interface,” an ironic statement immediately followed by its *translation* into a QR-code. Beiguelman foregrounds the reader’s need for a prosthetic interface, or that of the QR-code reader, redoubling the interfacial layers of this computer generated piece displayed on screen as she invites us to use our smartphones or any other electronic devices capable of deciphering the code, only to discover its almost tautological equivalence with the previous commandment, if it were not for the invitation “to watch the video, scan the QR-Codes and share the messages” in mock tele-evangelical fashion “via SMS, Twitter or Facebook.”<sup>6</sup> Beiguelman multiplies the surfaces of inscription, recontextualizing the message while foregrounding the interface effect in a liquid or nomadic, asynchronous reading context promoting the constant flow of information and its various modes of visualization.



Fig. 1.<sup>7</sup>

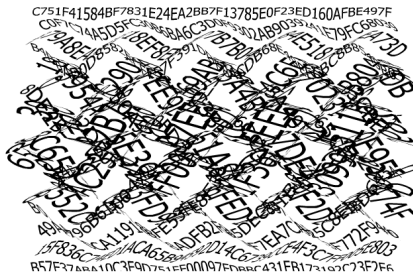


Fig. 2.<sup>8</sup>

6. This quotation appears on the project’s homepage. Cf. Beiguelman, Giselle. *The QR-Comms. DesVirtual*. 2011.

7. Screen capture of one frame of *Code Movie 1*.

8. Screen capture of one frame of *Code Movie 1*.

What is more, translation (interlinguistic and intersemiotic) is at the core of *QR-comms*, which is a bilingual project that can be accessed in English or Portuguese along with matching machine-readable QR-codes. These do not make sense per se and point to the status of images as code, a statement Beiguelman makes even clearer in her 2004 animated poetry entitled *Code Movie 1*, composed with hex, ASCII, and binary codes extracted from JPG images, reworked and edited in Flash. *Code Movie 1* interrogates the role of code in meaning construction and the forms of visibility mediated by digital devices. In transforming a digitized image back into a representation of its original binary code only to reshape it in turn into a sequence of new animated images, Beiguelman draws our attention to the translational processes at work within digital displays. The performance of any electronic work itself, as a text displayed on screen that is, always leaves an ungraspable spectral body made of texts, images, or codes unread and yet radiating, or shining through, that of its alternate, and yet an equivalent version lined with similar code. Such radiation could provide us with a redefinition of aura in the digital age as an aspect of the work revealed and possibly destroyed in the very act of translation through a necessary interfacing process not only between man and machine, but also between machines and machines along a chain of interfacing relays: the absolute singularity of aura as defined by Benjamin would paradoxically lie in the iteration pertaining to the archival nature of such digital works placed under the translator's authority as the one who ensures the texts' afterlife.

As pointed by Florian Cramer, "The grammar of computing, however, differs from the grammar of natural language in that (to use computer science terminology) the namespace of instruction and execution is the same." In other words, when looking at a snippet of binary code, what you see *may be* what you get, but there is no way you can actually tell whether these lines are executable or just a textual instantiation of code as code meant for the human reader, or both. The obfuscation of code behind a transparent interface coupled with its intrinsic undecipherability leads to a mystique of code derived from the kabbalah, as information is coded in an alphabetic or alphanumeric form:

The alphabet of both machine and human language is interchangeable, so that 'text'—if defined as a countable mass of alphabetical signifiers—remains a valid descriptor for both machine code sequences and human writing. In syntax and semantics however, machine code and human writing are not interchangeable. (Cramer)



Now this line of thought serves also as the basis for the notion of the Computational Universe developed by Stephen Wolfram who turns reality into an interface. The following quotation is taken from N. Katherine Hayles's critique:

The Regime of Computation, then, provides a narrative that accounts for the evolution of the universe, life, mind, and mind reflecting on mind by connecting these emergences with computational processes that operate both in human-created simulations and in the universe understood as software running on the "Universal Computer" we call reality. This is the larger context in which code acquires special, indeed universal, significance. In the Regime of Computation, code is understood as the discourse system that mirrors what happens in nature and that generates nature itself. (27)

### III. Mystifying Codes

In *Reconstructing Mayakovsky*, a dystopian online so-called "novel of the future," Illya Szilak parodies and interrogates this attempt at transforming the world into a set of programmed instructions, or code, reducing natural language to a mathematical notation with a view to reverting the post-Babelian fragmentation and dispersion of languages—a fantasy of a universal and pure language, or "reine Sprache" in Benjamin's words<sup>9</sup>—called "OnewOrd<sup>®</sup>" in Szilak's OnewOrld computer simulation. To this homogenization, we can contrast the "creolization" of literary languages (Joyce) as a celebration of their intrinsic untranslatability. Following a transhumanist logic, the characters actually live most of their lives in this computer simulation, leaving their physical bodies behind, which means they exist as data patterns within a

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9. For Benjamin, all natural languages "are not alien to each other, but a priori, and independently of all historical connections, related to each other in what they want to say" (155), a relationship described as one of intimacy in Maurice de Gandillac's French translation later revised by Rainer Rochlitz, or "kinship" in another English translation by Harry Zohn (1968). Benjamin writes in German "die innerste Verhältnis der Sprachen," literally "the innermost relationship of languages." It is doubtful code would share such a relationship with natural languages, since it is supposed not to mean something as such, but rather to enable the performance of a machinic program.

network. Now, contrary to natural languages, code does not tolerate ambiguity and therefore ceases to be code proper as soon as it turns into codework that borders on language, since it needs to be both translated and transcoded. Not only does OnewOrd<sup>®</sup> in Szilak's post-apocalyptic work remind us of George Orwell's "Newspeak" in 1984 or even what is now commonly designated as Globish, an attempt at disambiguating natural languages to facilitate commercial exchanges through a globalized homogenization of differences, liquidating cultural alterity along the way, it is also explicitly linked to the interfacing of the human mind with the Oracle, an AI which (or should we say who?) speaks in Delphic riddles of the Pythia defeating the purpose of a post-babelian, metaphysical return to a universal language both readable by man and executable by machines against a totalitarian background.

At the top of the marble steps of the Ministry of Information and Delphic Prediction, he contemplates the inscription engraved on the lintel:  
"IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD AND THE WORD  
WAS GOOD." (Szilak, *Reconstructing* 31)

"OnewOrd<sup>®</sup>" language is actually English translated into French and back again into English using the Babelfish automatic translation program which both point to a metafictional *mise en abyme* of translation as a necessarily technical interface between digital code and natural languages while foreignizing English through a blind, often literal translation. Such automatic translating process fails to explore the full extent of the linguistic paradigm and ironically requires the intervention of human agents as interpreters as illustrated by the faulty syntax and warped semantics of the following excerpt: "It does not import, if you see in OnewOrd<sup>®</sup>, the memory could be downloaded which harms. Perhaps you caught a virus or perhaps there is something badly with your transmitter" (Szilak, *Reconstructing* 63). At the other end of the spectrum, to be understood by the protagonists, natural languages such as English or Russian need to be translated, or sieved through various protocols into OnewOrd<sup>®</sup>. Hence, the necessity to get immunized against language and the ideologies it carries (51) for "code other than universal is illegal" (87).<sup>10</sup> Once again, the proliferation of

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10. For instance, personal predictions are granted for a substantial fee, yet the Oracle fails to deliver a translatable omen to Vera X as it is delivered in ancient Greek poetry (Szilak, *Reconstructing* 61).

natural languages is considered to be toxic and poses a threat to the cohesion of society. The underlying biological metaphor points to a now common analogy between computer code and genetic code as the DNA algorithms have been re-coded in computational terms. There should be no remainder eluding the grasp of the translational process, no point of friction or resistance, that is no translation at all since such a universal language is by definition transparent to itself and yet glitches persist, maintaining a space of contestation: “Rogue code are random bits and pieces of data that are expurgated from the system in order to maintain integrity. They are harmless unless they mix with other codes that allow them to propagate” (104).

Besides, since code and DNA are akin in OnewOrld<sup>®</sup>, the creolization of code allows for the creation of cyborg monsters at the level of genetic and computer code as exemplified by the character named Luis “who was not altogether human, whose own genetic code was a pidgin tongue” (*Reconstructing* 67). Interestingly enough, this so-called pidgin tongue meets Jacques Derrida’s definition of the monster: a monster cannot be reduced to a hybridized, chimerical being as it is a literally anonymous creature that remains to be named, and thereby domesticated (Derrida and Weber 385–87). Luis’s monstrous code remains untranslatable. It cannot be formalized into either human genetic code or machine binary and thus can elude the identification protocols of the OnewOrld<sup>®</sup> surveillance system as it “only registers human and artificial intelligence cognitive patterns separately” (*Reconstructing* 67). Luis’s untranslatability resists the metaphysics of code as a pure language, the perfect coincidence of the word with the world seen from a mathematical point of view rejected by Derrida as a return to a logocentric theology: “it always will be impossible, and for essential reasons, to reduce absolutely the natural languages and nonmathematical notation” (35). The chimerical nature of our bodily and cultural identities happens to be one of the key metaphors running through Szilak’s work as a trope of cyberpunk fiction:

Besides, “who are you?” was not a question anyone in OnewOrld<sup>®</sup> asked. For the younger generation, inhabiting an avatar for more than a year felt like social suicide. The self was not a masterwork created over the course of a lifetime. It was solely an object of fashion. (*Reconstructing* 46)

Luis’s intrinsically hybridized identity is also a metaphor for the emergence of new linguistic forms, especially in electronic literature with codework, a poetic

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form based on a mix of computer code and natural languages that in some cases may be both human readable and machine executable, but certainly not machine translatable as it opposes the same opacity as any literary language to the machine.

#### **IV. Iteration: The Pharmacological Logic of the Virus**

In Szilak's novel, rogue code stands both for the remaining scorified pieces of useless code cast out of previous sets that still endure as trash, and virus, which speaks of a form of pathology pertaining to and exploiting the network system represented as a metaphorical data-body under the attack of a self-replicating, disseminating pathogen agent of which both Luis and Vladimir Mayakovsky partake. Following the reflection of Galloway and Thacker on network systems, the role of non human actors appears quite relevant here as they affect the network and thrive in the most homogeneous systems. In OnewOrld<sup>®</sup> the claim for universality has produced its own forms of radical difference threatening to bring down the whole grid. As the network transforms into a massified body of data, it becomes the playground of viral logics. Russian poet Mayakovsky is merely a rogue pattern, that is a set of data shaped into a figure whose name functions more like a viral meme than as a reference to an actual person. In *Reconstructing Mayakovsky*, the ghostly figure of the eponymous poet operates as a "strange attractor:" his writings keep haunting and parasitizing the OnewOrld<sup>®</sup> simulation, contaminating OnewOrld<sup>®</sup> with twentieth century Russian (even though we are given a translated version leeching from works available on Googlebooks, an interesting mirror-image of the online version of Szilak's work whose "Archive" section was originally meant to capture data flows through real-time Google image search function) as if poetic language could actually reemerge from unified code in a post-apocalyptic restaging of Babel acting like a non human agent, paradoxically reimpacting humanity to the machinic system.

Poetic language is the Achilles heel of this system. If you think of language as the self-organizing system such as our human society. A complex system can have many attractors and these can change with alterations to the system interconnections or parameters. The system moves towards its attractors in time and space. So, attractors describe long-term behaviour

of a dynamical system. Attractors can be fixed points, periodic or chaotic.  
 (Szilak, *Reconstructing* 100)

As a net-artwork drawing from multiple sites and an interface to various underlying online databases, the text of *Reconstructing Mayakovsky* can be accessed through various so-called “mechanisms” meant to break the logic of search algorithms, such as a changing cloud of keywords leading to various chapters or a now broken Google image search based on concepts such as “freedom,” “human,” or “truth” while other so-called “anti-Google tags” such as “Elegy for Dreams Deferred” and “Final Number” are meant to defy algorithmic categorization:

In my work, I am interested in subverting this Googlification of knowledge and sentiment through a filmic cutting and suturing of media, information, and narrative that eschews both the insular poetics of modernism and the irony and boredom of post-modernism. (Szilak, “Last Words”)

*Reconstructing Mayakovsky* stages poetic language as that of an inoperable



Fig. 3.<sup>11</sup>

11. Screen capture of the “Archive” section showing the mosaic of tiles.

oppositional cyborg bent on bringing out and undermining the interface effect that is responsible for our cognitive mapping of the world. Such interruptions foster a constant redrawing of the liminal zone of the interface, and in turn of our own subjectivity, forcing the reader to determine whether there is any meaning to be found in the prophecies of the artificial intelligence called “The Oracle.” Just like the Pythia, it speaks in poetic riddles patched up from various cultural sources: “appropriated bits of data that range from the lyrics to David Bowie’s ‘Moonage Daydream’ to eyewitness accounts of the bombing of Nagasaki” (Szilak, “Last Words”).

Szilak ironically twists Warren Weaver’s cryptographic translation-idea as a way to attain a transparent form of communication. Weaver’s theory relied on the use of super-computers to apply cryptographic techniques meant to overcome the division of languages considered as sharing a common substrate, or more precisely a transcendent code. Hence the idea of Basic English, meant to follow a codified set of rules and eliminate all ambiguity to enable perfect translatability, transparent translation. As illustrated by Rita Raley’s analysis of Weaver’s project, such universality precludes heterogeneity:

[N]on-European languages are mystifying codes that need to be cracked in order to achieve any degree of communicability, and, unlike [Aladdin’s magic] lamp or the password, the menu offers a parable of a subject that distinctly refuses to operate within the structures of a “foreign” code. (297)

OnewOrd<sup>®</sup> is not only a warped metaphor for any such universal code as it is the very product of a chain of translations, but it is also reminiscent of such taxonomic attempts at standardizing communication as Unicode for instance. The whole irony lies in the fact that the language of the Oracle is the exact reverse of a transparent and universal code even though its obfuscation reads as a metaphysical rewriting of the searing light of the divine Word in the digital era. Its necessary opacity renders it just as inaccessible as the flame alphabet, and therefore constantly begs for interpretation through a translating interface. Pure presence, that is the absolute coincidence between man, be it in the form of a data body, and transcendent machine code can only be conducive to death, foregrounding the stubborn resistance to homogenization and transparency:

They tried jacking into Oracle directly before Day 0, to see if they could



Fig. 4.<sup>12</sup>

remove the distortion in translation, the guy died. No, he didn't die—he fucking spontaneously combusted. They've tried it with humans, too, direct contact, same thing. Too close. It seems that interaction between different agents is absolutely necessary. But, unity is fatal, at least for life as we know it. Up until now, it didn't matter, the translations were good enough for predictions [...]. (Szilak, *Reconstructing* 99)

There is no dominant narrative for the reader to rely upon when exploring the “Archive” section, only networked pieces of data she is free to force into a narrative, or not. For instance, following the thread of the “lost in translation” tag, the reader is invited to explore six tiles in the mosaic (see above) featuring a reproduction of Athanasius Kircher’s Tower of Babel, a photograph of Benicio del Toro, another of Lacan from [ochoa.freeservers.com](http://ochoa.freeservers.com), a Wikimedia image of the Morse code for “I Love You,” a U.S. military friendship leaflet dropped over Afghanistan from [www.psywarrior.com](http://www.psywarrior.com), and a Wikimedia image from a U.S. Army webpage about interrogation. Each tile will reveal a picture or a string of text, a link to one of the chapters in the novel section (most of them just lead

12. Screen capture of the “Archive” section after clicking on the “lost in translation” tag.

to blank sections) and another outgoing link to various websites (YouTube, Wikipedia, etc.) sometimes returning a mere “Error 404 message,” a glitch that is actually part of the digital obsolescence of any digital archive. What is more, clicking on a tile will automatically highlight a series of other tiles, superimposing yet another network over the one delineated by the initially activated tag “lost in translation.” Translation into a meaningful narrative diagram soon proves an impossible task that will always fail to assimilate a resilient nonsensical intersemiotic remainder.

Now, automatic translation is precisely that which complies with machinic protocols while exceeding them through the production of an inassimilable remainder, a form of creative nonsense or linguistic glitch that interrupts the homogenizing process at work within the field of the human language and the world. Automatic translation executes a set of algorithmic programs that remain blind to the semantic aspects of language, thus reintroducing randomness within preset probabilistic patterns. In other words, it opens codified language to possibilities situated outside the range of statistical predictions based on recurrence in an anonymous, *non human* process that addresses both our human cognitive capacities and aesthetic sensitivity, and thus produces an inassimilable remainder—a piece of *trash* that bears the mark of its post- or inhuman origin. “Networks—or living networks—contain an anonymity, a non human component, which consistently questions common notions of action, causality, and control” (Galloway and Thacker 81). Following French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, we may claim that the boundaries separating “nature” and “technology” have been blurred to the point of generating a system of general equivalence (code), or a generalized environment (59) that does not constitute a world. With globalization, as opposed to *world-forming*, the West seems to have lost what traditionally stood as its outside extending itself to the point of erasing its outer limits. Code in Szilak’s work is precisely the illustration of the pharmacological potentialities of code as both a globalizing and a *world-forming* agent—OnewOrld<sup>®</sup> expressed in OnewOrd<sup>®</sup> as opposed to the Oracle’s poetic language echoing Mayakovsky’s poetry that systematically requires translation as an interface, that is to say, a redelineation of the contours of the wor(l)d.

According to Cramer, “literature and computing meet where alphabets and code, human language and machine language intersect, as well as in the interfacing of analog devices through digital control code.” Hence, the necessity to re-encode the world to foster the emergence of a subjectivity that



would not be digital per se, for this would imply the digitization of the subject but an interfacing between our analog perceptions with layers of control code affecting our subjectivity in a constant feedback loop. I therefore posit that the *détournement* of algorithmic tools contributes to the emergence of new meaningful patterns out of random searches gathering like lint around anti-Google tags and thus resisting the taxonomic drive and possibly fostering a new form of technologically mediated aura. The endless translating/remediating process of both code and text paradoxically ensures the work's afterlife precisely because it proves to be an impossible challenge. It can never exhaust the potentialities of the archive that remains always open onto the times to come.

## V. Conclusion

The identity of a virus lies in its capacity for constant self-replication and transformation to exploit the flaws of the network in which it proliferates, be it computer-based or biological. It is actually part of the network and does not automatically register as an agent of disruption: it may also foster new *living* forms through transduction. Hence its intrinsically pharmacological structure: both a poison and a remedy for the network. In the digital era, code structures our transcendental categories as well as our experience per se (Chatonsky). The iteration of translational processes is akin to a form of iterative viral logic—the metaphor of infection being incidentally central in both Szilak's and Marcus's works. A (literary) translation is always begging for another translation as a condition of possibility for the existence of a given language as a set of differences. In translation, the target language becomes the host of another source of meaning as it interfaces with what used to lie on its outer limits, and thus becomes the host of a heterogeneous agent that transforms it from within while transforming itself in an endless process of retranslation, opening onto a viral aesthetics that would expand the possibilities of language: the reciprocal transformation operated by the translational process results in an augmentation of both source and target languages following the non human logic of the swarm or the flood. The analysis by Galloway and Thacker is still indebted to a vision dominated by cryptography: the virus is defined by a becoming-number of its own as what counts is the code, or the number of the host which must be deciphered to allow for an infection to take hold

(86–88). However, contrary to Weaver’s vision of a transcendent code, their approach is marked by modulation, a key feature of Gilles Deleuze’s societies of control, and a politics of hypertrophy (Galloway and Thacker 98) as a form of resistance. Code is to be understood as a pattern in constant flux while poetic language is meant to overwhelm the space of algorithmic possibilities defined by machinic translation and Google searches, not only defeating the ideal of a universal transcendent pattern but also undermining the idea of translation as data conversion:

A fascinating act of transduction<sup>13</sup> is language. But we worry. We worry about the imaginary, supplemental alphabets starting with letter twenty-seven. This is the impulse behind our notes for a liberated computer language, to reintroduce new noisy alphabets into the rigid semantic zone of informatics networks. (159)

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13. Transduction is defined as “the action or process of transducing; *especially*: the transfer of genetic material from one microorganism to another by a viral agent (as a bacteriophage)” (“Transduction”).

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Fig. 1. Beiguelman, Giselle. *Code Movie 1. DesVirtual*. 2004. Web.

Fig. 2. Beiguelman, Giselle. *Code Movie 1. DesVirtual*. 2004. Web.

Fig. 3. Szilak, Illya. *Reconstructing Mayakovsky. A Novel of the Future*. 2008. Web.

Fig. 4. Szilak, Illya. *Reconstructing Mayakovsky. A Novel of the Future*. 2008. Web.

## Abstract

In the age of digital reproduction, each work is meant to be literally translated onto various interfaces be it through a common structuring language such as XML or emulated, and therefore transcoded, which may affect its instantiation. Code always casts a long shadow on the observer as it cannot be observed in the here and now of its performance. It lines the visible and readable surface of the work while remaining at a distance, withdrawn from the reader's gaze by an invisible interface meant to mediate it as a system of signs. Hence Donna Haraway's appeal to the figure of what I will redefine as the oppositional *translating* cyborg who seizes upon the encoding tools that mark the world to write her own hybrid or creolized version, undermining the metaphysical fantasy of a universal language, interrupting communication by drawing our attention to the "interface effect." The interface, as a buffer, or a translating device between two informational systems, has become the prevalent paradigm for the delineation of the limits of our world. In other words, rewriting Wittgenstein's aphorism, one may make the following statement: the limits of *my interface* are the limits of my world. I will address these questions focusing on the metaphysics of interface and its relationship to natural language, computer code, and prosthetic data bodies in Illya Szilak's "Internet novel of the future" entitled *Reconstructing Mayakovsky* (2008), Ben Marcus's print novel entitled *The Flame Alphabet* (2012) and a few instances of Giselle Beiguelman's electronic poetry.

**Keywords:** interface, code, metaphysics, e-literature, translation, deconstruction

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