

The text you write must desire me: fonts as the penultimate interactive artform, second only to sex

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I discuss and present *Alternumerics*, a collection of computer fonts that reinterpret text.

1. INTRODUCTION

Alternumerics explores the intimate relationship between language and interactivity by transforming the simple computer font into an art form that explores the fissure between what we write and we what mean.

By replacing the individual letters and numbers (known as alphanumerics) with textual and graphic fragments that signify what is typed in radically different ways, *Alternumerics* transforms the act of typing into a digital performance and any computer connected to a standard printer into an interactive artmaking installation.

Alternumeric fonts are Macintosh and Windows compatible and work with any application that uses fonts. Each font is accompanied by an art-piece that uses the font to explore the relationship between what is typed, what is translated—and fundamentally—what is communicated when we use language to describe the pleasures of utopia (see Figure 1), the slipperiness of the self (see Figure 2), the friction of desire (see Figure 3), and the poetry of silence (see Figure 4).

Alternumerics has been exhibited in new media festivals and exhibitions worldwide. The fonts can be downloaded on-line at:

www.nationalphilistine.com/alternumerics/

2. HISTORY

I don't remember exactly why I began to mutate fonts into forms that both reduce and expand its signifying possibilities. It wasn't as if language had stopped working for me. I could still signify love and longing and malice and the infinite space of the future through the given set of alphanumerics on my keyboard: I could still write. But I wanted more. I got greedy. I wanted language to only work for me and no one else.

3. PRACTICE

It is relatively easy making fonts. Unlike other new media art practices, the technologies used to make fonts have remained stable. The politics of perpetual obsolescence in technology forces most new media art into a state of permanent retardation. Technology should never dictate the form; it can only dictate the field.

The field that fonts play in is expansive and intimate. It is loaded into your computer on a systems level, so any application that uses different fonts can play. Word processing applications become a canvas for the lines and shapes and markings that make up the materiality of fonts. Database software is transformed into a De Sadean regulator of pies charts and graphs that regulate signifying perversities. Did I mention how small fonts are? Fonts are invariably under 100K and virtually any computer can work with them. Simple. Ubiquitous. Viral.

4. THOUGHTS

It is useful for me to think about my work with fonts as systems that bleed. What I have essentially done is reduce the material possibilities of fonts to signify the immaterial by making the material more specific, more historical, less universal, and more accountable to me. And like any system that reduces the world it is inherently tragic. Think Diderot's Encyclopedia. Think Socialism.

The tragedy and promise of my fonts come from the residue that is left when I reduce the letters and numbers and symbols on the computer keyboard into something other than the signifying practice of a time and a space that neither cares for me nor thinks about me. The residue is a reminder of the unsayable in my font, or any font for that matter. The residue is that which cannot be reduced into language. It is body. It is blood. It is desire that refuses to signify.

I also sometimes think of my fonts as ghosts that take over your body so that they may enunciate a history and a longing that is not your own.

Figure 1



The future must be sweet

Figure 2



Self portrait as a font V.2

Figure 3



Sexual healing / Shift for harassment

Figure 4



Blurry but not blind

THE FUTURE MUST BE SWEET (2000)

Utopian Socialist Charles Fourier believed the world should be organized around our pleasures. Politics become the body that regulates and maximizes our desires by ensuring every one equal access to affection, justice, and exquisite food. This font reinterprets Fourier's philosophy into a textual-graphic

system and gives form to the unique connections Fourier made between radical politics and utopian desires. Different relationships between the letters (and words) develop based on simple changes in word processing: point size, page width, leading and kerning.

SELF PORTRAIT AS A FONT V.2 (2001)

What is it like to write like me? You don't even know me. Lowercase letters are phrases I think I say in conversations. Uppercase letters are parenthetical comments based on what I think I say in conversations and common mistakes I make

when writing. Numbers are names of friends, family, and former lovers. Symbols are incidental words I use to feign interest, confusion, or indifference. And yes, it is my handwriting.

I	DON'T REMEMBER	WON'T EAT BE SURE	NEVER GOT IT	I...	WILL FORGET YOU	BARELY COMPREHEND
a	b	c	d	e	f	g
DIDN'T MEAN THAT	BECAUSE I	DON'T FOLLOW	WILL FORGET IT	IMAGINE	PROBABLY MISREAD IT	APOLOGIZE
h	i	j	k	l	m	n
SOMETIMES I	WANT TO EAT	DON'T LIKE IT	PLAIN FORGOT	NEVER KNOW	OR MAYBE YOU	DON'T UNDERSTAND
o	p	r	s	t	u	v
REALIZE THE GRAVITY	MAY NEVER KNOW	DON'T MEAN MUCH	REMEMBER IT DIFFERENTLY	NEVER	(MOST LIKELY)	(FUNNY)
w	x	y	z	A	B	C
(HONESTLY)	WORKS	(IT'S TOUGH, I KNOW)	(I'M NOT KIDDING)	(IT'S A BIT SAD)	WORKS	(WHATEVER THAT MEANS)
D	E	F	G	H	I	J
(DO I REALLY MEAN THAT?)	(I'M SORRY)	(MARK SAID IT, NOT ME)	(NO OTHER WAY I THINK)	WHAT THE HELL	(AND THATS THAT)	(ALL <u>U</u> ERY CONFUSING)
K	L	M	N	O	P	Q
(HOPE THIS HELPS)	(IT'S NOT THAT FUNNY)	(I DON'T GET IT)	WHATEVER FORGOT	(VOLTAIRE WOULD KNOW)	(IT'S MEANINGLESS)	(IT'S NOTHING)
R	S	T	U	V	W	X
(YES? MAYBE?)	(IS THAT ALL?)	-MINOR PAUSE-	-SILENCE-	CAN'T THINK STRAIGHT.	SLEEP	WITH ME
Y	Z	,	.	?	()

SEXUAL HEALING / SHIFT FOR HARASSMENT (2000)

Lowercase letters are phrases taken from popular love songs of the 70's, 80's, and 90's. Uppercase letters are phrases taken from transcripts of sexual harassment cases in the United States from the 70's, 80's, and 90's. Numbers and symbols

are words that heighten the tension between the play of the uppercase and lowercase letters as they shift between the voice of pleasure and the voice of violence.

so hot	sweet thang	touch me	faster	(you)	hold me	tonight
a	b	c	d	e	f	g
oh god	(me)	don't go	freak me	the pleasure	love me more	feels nice
h	i	j	k	l	m	n
oh	you complete me	I want you	don't stop	oh girl	(he)	oh beautiful
o	p	r	s	t	u	v
I feel it	let's do it	so silky	so much love	stop	I mean it	get off me
w	x	y	z	A	B	C
please stop	don't	it hurts	I'm bleeding	that's enough	oh god stop	the pain
D	E	F	G	H	I	J
let go	don't do this	hands off	grow up	help me	please don't	you're hurting me
K	L	M	N	O	P	Q
help me	rape	back off	(he)	it's not funny	someone help	I'm begging you
R	S	T	U	V	W	X
can't breathe	not happening	(screams)	(silence)	(in a whisper)	no more	(with fanfare)
Y	Z	,	.	?	:	\

BLURRY BUT NOT BLIND —AFTER MALLARMÉ (2001)

“The imperfection of languages consists in their plurality, the supreme one is lacking: thinking is writing without accessories or even whispering, the immortal word still remains silent; the diversity of idioms on earth prevents everybody from uttering the words which otherwise, at one single stroke, would

materialize as truth.” —Stephen Mallarmé. This font formalizes Mallarmé’s idea that silence is the true universal language. Lowercase letters are empty kerning spaces of varying lengths. Uppercase letters are empty kerning spaces and typographic symbols inspired by Mallarmé.

┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	
┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space
h	i	j	k	l	m	n	
┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space
o	p	r	s	t	u	v	
┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	some breezy	and (see)	
w	x	y	z	A	B	C	
warming	()	+ some	┌ white space	┌ white space	()	┌ white space	
D	E	F	G	H	I	J	
┌ white space	()	┌ white space	()	Like a g(host)	here	┌ white space	
K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	
┌ white space	come	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	?	
R	S	T	U	V	W	X	
remember	break the day +	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	┌ white space	↓ *	┌ white space
Y	Z	,	.	?	0	=	

(I DON'T GET IT) DIDN'T MEAN THAT I...
~~WOW~~ APOLOGIZE NEVER GOT IT -SILENCE-

The
End.