

University of New South Wales

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Bouequet, or a joke about the language of flowers

Abstract:

This submission for a creative presentation proposes a performative decipherment of the three short object-poems that currently make up the experimental work-in-progress, *Bouequet*. Each poem has been generated through a process of encryption devised to guide language back to matter, beginning as a written text penned in response to the theories of (poetic) abstraction advanced in Stéphane Mallarmé's 'Crisis of Verse', (Mallarmé, 2007); Georges Bataille's 'The Language of Flowers' (Bataille, 1996); and Ian Bogost's *Alien Phenomenology or What it's Like to Be a Thing* (Bogost, 2012), respectively, and designed to cycle around a central homophonic ambiguity particular to each one. These three original texts have then been transposed phonetically, effectively transforming them into sonic events and consolidating the work's tendency towards homophonic equivocation, activating at the same time the latent potential of the trans-word homophony integral to two of the three poems. Each phoneme has then been paired with a three-dimensional shape designed to express its sonic and connotative properties and then modeled in three dimensions using CAD software. The shapes are strung together in an order that correlates with the phonic representation of each text in an infinite line along the surface of a sphere. Finally, each poem has been 'tightened up', collapsing the materially rendered phonemes inwards so that the assemblage is almost solid and the resulting object is printed in three dimensions in synthetic polyamide, informed by the scale and dimensions of a flower.

When a cipher is provided for the phoneme-to-shape abstraction, it is possible to 'read' the poems haptically by matching shapes to sounds. From there, one can infer backwards from the phonic instantiation to the original, written text. However, if the original text is suppressed, a poem that passes through this system can never be wholly decrypted or laid to rest in a definitive form: a persistent cryptographer will find it impossible to go deeper than homophonic equivocation. Instead, the poems are condemned to flicker eternally between potential readings, setting in motion an infinite permutation of internal tensions that - in the case of the three poems presented here - vacillate between the universal and the particular, the sacred and the profane, and the affirmation and negation of being, the latter citing the poetic form itself.

Biographical Note:

Amy Ireland is a PhD Candidate in Creative Writing with the School of the Arts and Media at the University of New South Wales where she teaches creative writing and co-convenes Aesthetics After Finitude, a research group dedicated to the problematics of speculative aesthetics. Her work is focused on a reappraisal of twentieth century poetics through the prism of new theories of philosophical realism.

Keywords:

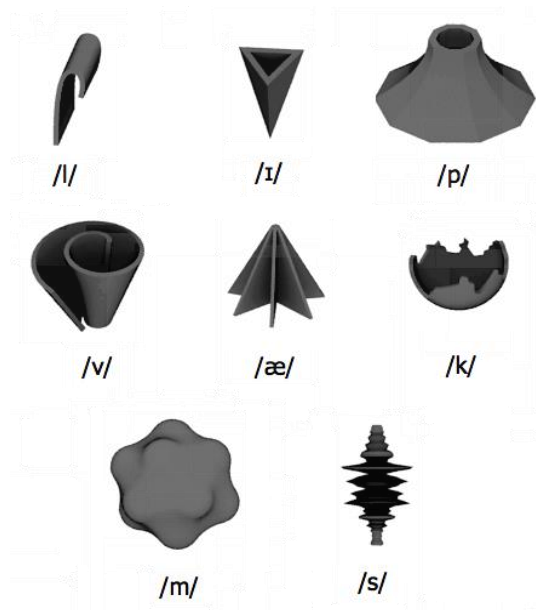
Experimental poetics – Noise – Materiality – Code – Speculative aesthetics

The Poems

I. (Mallarmé)



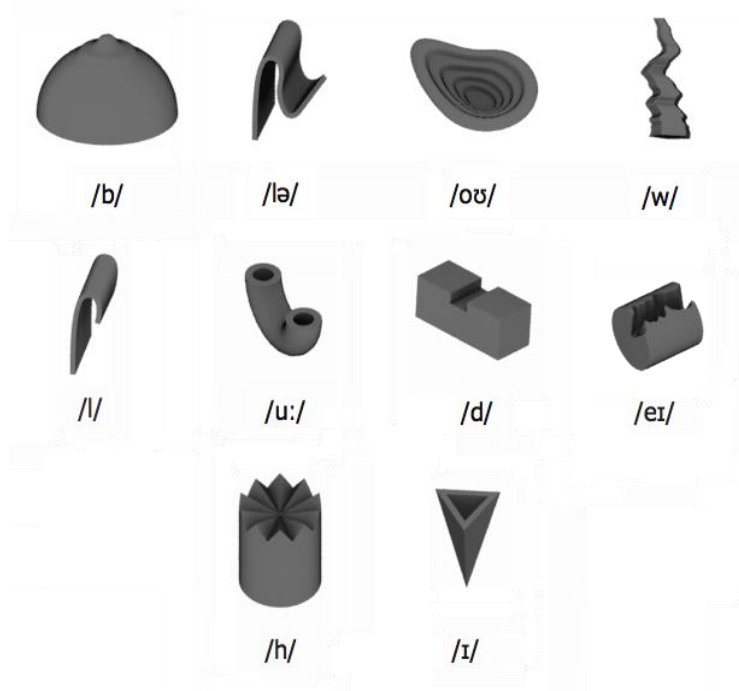
Cipher I.



II. (Bataille)



Cipher II.



III. (Bogost)



Cipher III.



/n/



/y/



/l/



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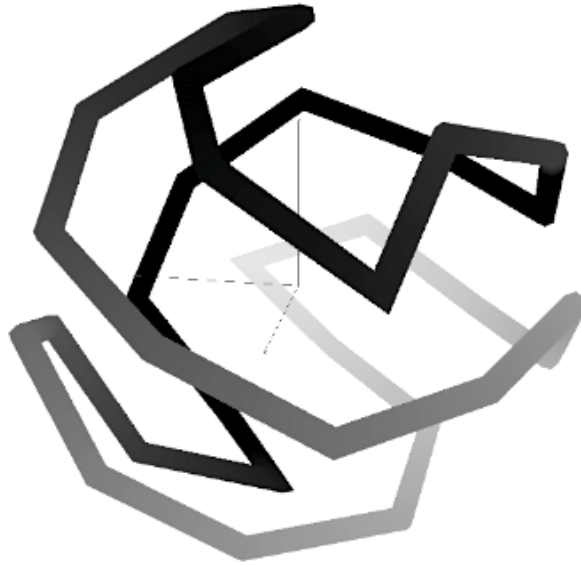


/a/



/e/

Poetic line (I. II. II)



List of works cited

Bataille, G 1996, 'The Language of Flowers', in A Stoekl (ed & trans), *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, 7th edn, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 10-16.

Bogost, I 2012, *Alien Phenomenology or What it's Like to Be a Thing*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Mallarmé, S 2007, 'Crisis of Verse', in B Johnson (trans), *Divagations*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 199-211.

Research Statement

Language is a method of encryption that translates its outside, however one chooses to construe it, into a coded, symbolic inside. Both divine and logical languages, designating as their grail a faultless correlation between these two realms, necessarily underwrite their code systems with either divine guarantee or rational precision. It could be said that poetry capitalises on the failure of these systems, while simultaneously mourning their loss. This, I suggest, is the resurgent dilemma of twentieth century poetics. The twenty-first century retains the basic form of this dilemma yet its anxieties are intensified, for its poets are squarely faced with the problem of what language may become in the wake of the death of both god and the human subject as we conceive of it today.

A hypothesis, then.

If language is code, might it not run wild once the last tethers of human exigency are cut? Language as mad, self-propagating, non-linear putrescence! A growth that crowds out every last hope of logical correlation, dissolving the clarity of things in a ubiquitous mesh, infinitely egged on by its own feedback.

Bouequet is an experimental work-in-progress comprising three short synaesthetic poems responding to three texts that interrogate poetic abstraction: Stéphane Mallarmé's 'Crisis of Verse', (Mallarmé, 2007); Georges Bataille's 'The Language of Flowers' (Bataille, 1996); and Ian Bogost's *Alien Phenomenology* (Bogost, 2012). Following a model of encryption in which semantics is first defiled by homophony then debased, in turn, by substance, these three poems gesture towards a hypothesised global contamination of language by language's own structural operation: unilateral coding. Each new level of abstraction multiplies language's latent ambiguities, engendering a semantic noise that feeds back into the code system, driving it towards entropy. If the original texts are suppressed, poems that pass through this system can never be decrypted back to a definitive form. A persistent cryptographer will find it impossible to go deeper than homophonic equivocation. Instead, the texts are condemned to flicker eternally between potential readings, setting in motion an infinite permutation of internal tensions that - in the case of the three poems presented here - vacillate between the universal and the particular, the sacred and the profane, and the affirmation and negation of being, the latter citing the poetic form itself.

Bouequet proffers a Language of Flowers for the linguistic apocalypse in which missile becomes missive: if it can't be read, then it might at least be hurled. Who or what by, remains to be seen.