



## **Becomings of Digital Poetry**

- The carrier of memory in slow media practice

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# Abstract

This thesis explores the dispositions of digital poetry and moving images. The origin of poetry has an important role also in the digital era, to be a living archive of memory and the tool for storytellers rather than being only aesthetic or technical matter.

In this artistic practice digital poetry is experimented in various ways: by video letters sent through the internet, found poetry with post-VR vibes, immersive interactive way and as media archaeological whispering.

We take a closer look at how digital poetry and slow media could help us uncover the process, stay on an unstable ground in-between disciplines, mediums, analog and digital, past and future, genders, ages and becomings.

keywords

digital poetry, video art, memory, in-betweenness, slow media

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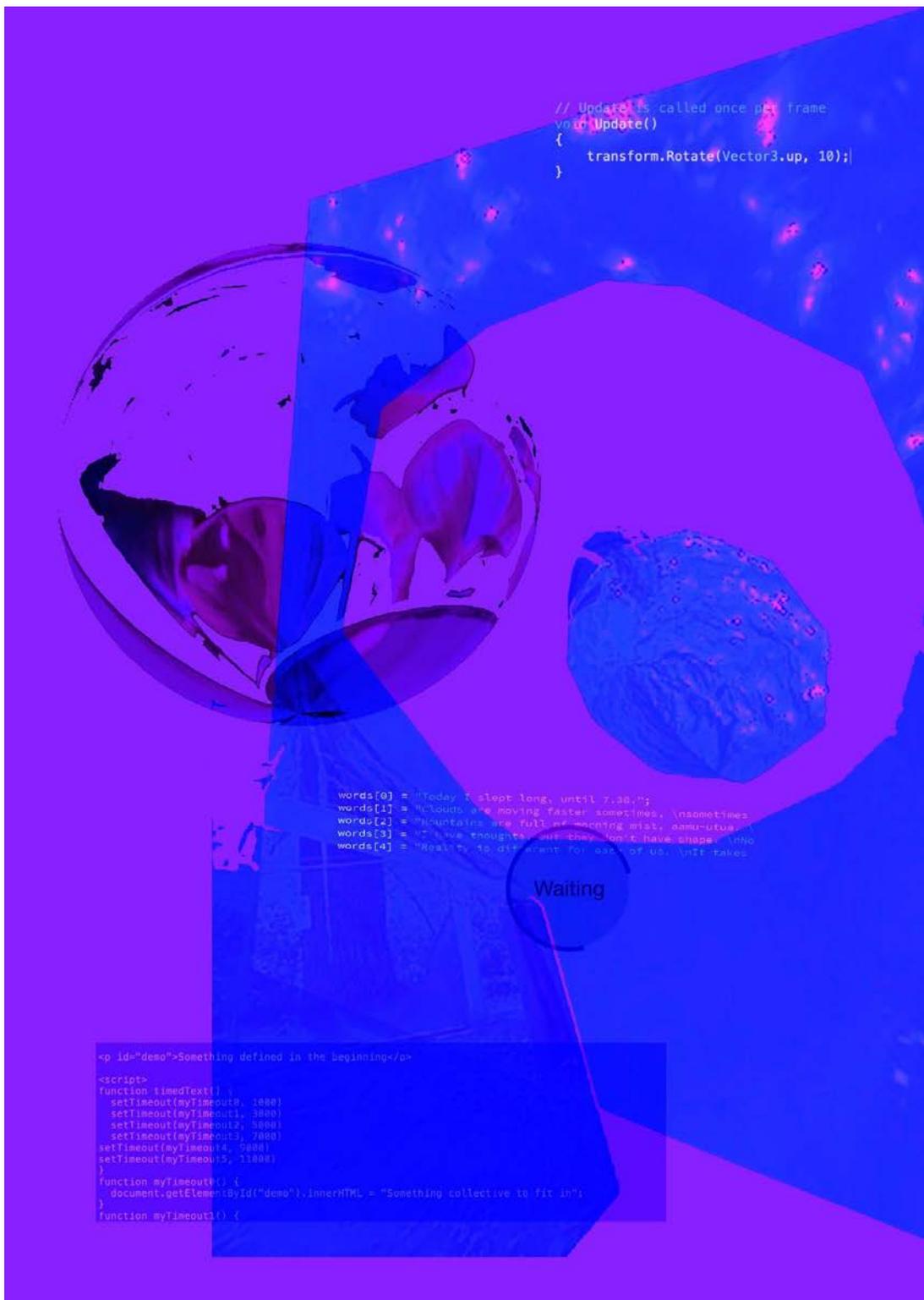
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# Introduction

Often in-betweenness is seen as something in development, something that should decide its direction. I want to see in-betweenness as something that is, staying there, it's a positive state of being, unable to reach any point. It is fluidity like what happens in between frames and overlapping images, they are already there.

**"It is idiotic to wonder whether Sartre was the beginning or the end of something. Like all creative things and people, he is in the middle, he grows from the middle."**

(Deleuze & Parnet, Dialogues, 12, 1977)

Nowadays we cannot separate disciplines or mediums, they are always influenced by each other, there is always conversation between them. There is a dialog and an undefined state of being as well inside a medium, inside a work, as there is inside an artist.

**"What matters on a path, what matters on a line, is always the middle, not the beginning or the end. We are always in the middle of a path, in the middle of something."**

(Deleuze & Parnet, Dialogues, 28, 1977)

Being all the time in the middle of a path is not easy, the human mind is programmed to have goals, past and future, defined practice, to achieve something, in the modern society rather fast and efficient way. Nevertheless being in between is the only possible way to be a human, an artist and a non-static or non-material artwork, there's no final and fixed state of being.

Every movement and interaction has its own speed, which is relatively considered by the view point and viewer, by culture, experiences, lifespan and the other speeds around it. What grows from the middle, suggest Deleuze and Parnet, has the absolute speed<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze & Parnet 31, 1977

Photography and video always seemed magical elements and their tools mighty, but limited in their traditional form, static even in movement. "**There are no longer binary machines**" (Deleuze & Parnet 2, 1977) which hold dualism and binary systems. And there has never been, humans just tend to project existing systems into new ones, as it happens backwards with history, we tend to do it easily from the position we are now.

Poetry comes etymologically from Greek ποιεῖν (ποιεῖν) "to make". Poetry is reorganising, mixing and framing reality similarly to photography, in some forms poetry is more connected to visual and performing arts than to other types of literature. When we get deeper in digital poetry, the definition of poetry is escaping even further and jamming along with all art forms which cannot be solidified.

Poetry is also a tool to deal with memory, in times when stories could not be written, it was easier to remember with rhythm and images. We cannot escape memories, they are our guidance if used right, but we have to carry them with care as they escape exact words and realism.

Nowadays, in an era with multiple recording options, we capture stories, traditions and discoveries to be remembered. At the same time we try to find ourselves, in search of acceptance in a chaotic society, in the middle of automated functions, sometimes we need different kinds of language to understand humanity.

Researcher Anna Helle describes that often poetry examines society and the current reality we live in, in all its banality, violent and emotional forms. Since the internet is such a crucial part of our modern everyday life, it's just part of the poetry, not anymore experimental medium, but rather interesting in content wise.<sup>2</sup>

By the studies poetry is very stimulating for the brain activity, enabling new connections and creativity, making poetry similar to a game<sup>3</sup>. After all it is quite easy to make our brain get excited, just dissociate pieces from the common order, sometimes just one odd word in a sentence makes the errand. Sometimes that one word might leave us in void without any meaning, but if used in a way to allow associations and unconscious relevance we might sprout new ideas and develop understanding of oneself.

These thoughts applied to images are taking an interesting and challenging shift in this journey, but not so distancing one. There are also common ways to see visuals, but on the other hand our society is at the moment excessively visual and stimulating, everyone and every instance trying to invent new ways to get attention.

Later I will go deeper into my own practice and four works from recent years. *Kinesics of Letters* (2020) is a video series of visual and textual poems. *Substrates* (2021) is a video poem made out of found material. *CacheDash* (2021) is an interactive video installation dealing with unconscious human and machined memory. *NFC - Non-Finite Clause* (2020-) is a project of ancient envelopes holding web-based poetry.

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<sup>2</sup> Helle 205, 2019

<sup>3</sup> e.g. Januchowski-Hartley et al. 2018, University of Liverpool 2006

# Motivation

**“Artist should not only represent one's time,  
but involve changing it.”**

(Patti Smith, Just Kids 95, 2010)

Experimentation and becomings are recurrent elements in my practice and works, as they sometimes become into something by reducing and unlearning existing matters and materials, definitions and known structures.

The motivation and inspiration for my works have always been the society around us. The society that has always felt really odd, or even alien, and full of inconsistent rules. But after all it is not so much about society, it is about humanity.

Having my background in communication and photography, I feel art is communication. It is not so much about how we should communicate, but how we could. It is not about our desires and whims, it is about our real needs like to feel connection and to play.

Answers that are keeping both ends open are full of possibilities but uncertainty. In 2013 I was again sailing, this time with a UK-based vessel called “Maybe”<sup>4</sup>. Her name gave a slightly adventurous vibes for the journey, which happened to be intensely stormy, but in the end fun, full of uncertainty, full of possibilities.

Rather than seeking adventure merely, the richest times are in present moments, wind on your face and a cup of tea at five o'clock, being aware of the end points in both directions: storms and havens.

It is about feeling the connection on unstable ground.

Being a human is something else than using tools and devices, they are just tools and devices, when more important and interesting is how we behave around them.

Vasulkas experimentations and interest went beyond the camera, not because of the abstract video but to explore the possibilities.<sup>5</sup> In this new era, many things are possible, but we are in front of different challenges where we have to evaluate what is important when possibilities do not have meaning exclusively.

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<sup>4</sup> “maybe” noun: uncertainty, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/maybe](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/maybe)

<sup>5</sup> Meigh-Andrews 148-150, 2014

I feel the possibilities of in-betweenness are hidden and without language and therefore worth discovering and presenting more. It feels very absurd to make extended versions of humans before we know what humanity is, unless that is the way to learn.

Abstract images, generative art and poetry are close to playing with their nature as something uncertain and unproductive<sup>6</sup>. The play is distinct from ordinary life in a sense of place and fixed time, but at the same time play makes some new order<sup>7</sup>.

Sometimes the play is inside words, between frames, but sometimes it might be in a more obvious way like in my *NFC* project to find the physical objects or when interacting with videos in *CacheDash*.

In my previous MA thesis *Digitised milk does not drain*<sup>8</sup> I examined deeper the sense of time, space and materiality in physical and virtual realities. I found out that in the physical world sometimes the sense of materiality is enough to give simulation and connection, but in digital domains we need some level of interactivity and possibility for self-direction to make our brain excited. Later though I tried to challenge this discovery by making slow and reduced web-based content and a 3D game.

I have observed that digital poetry, like other forms of media art, has the nature of street art, to vanish at one point in time. There is no fixative for these art fields, only documentation for later generations. This is why Chris Funkhouser calls the research archaeological in "Prehistoric Digital Poetry: An Archaeology of Form, 1959-1995"<sup>9</sup>. Besides technical reasons, digital poetry might be complex and indeterminate by its other natures.

**"The deconstructive contention that texts intrinsically contain points of 'undecidability', which betray any stable meaning that an author might seek to impose on a text, is certainly a feature of many digital poems."**

(Funkhouser 31, 2007)

I think one reason I got interested in digital poetry and abstract moving images is that this field is not, and cannot, be thoroughly explained. Many traditional art disciplines like literature, theatre and painting are overly theorised and expounded, which make it easier to practice and develop these fields, but somehow my mind is escaping easily all points of references.

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<sup>6</sup> see e.g. Huizinga 1949, also Tuli & Savu 2017

<sup>7</sup> some of the core ideas of Huizinga 1949

<sup>8</sup> Suorsa 2017

<sup>9</sup> Funkhouser 33, 2007

# 1 Visualising time

As is described about Woody Vasulka's work "Art of Memory" (1987):

**" The digitally produced space becomes a kind of electronic theatre in which images and sequences emerge momentarily before being re-submerged into the undercurrent of history and memory."**

(Meigh-Andrews, A History of Video Art, 223, 2014)

When Chris Meigh-Andrews is describing video works by Daniel Reeves, there is often used the term "poetic" when he means sensibility or understanding relation between frames or pixels<sup>10</sup>. Poetry is a play, is a blender, but mostly it is thinking, understanding and giving space for listening, but not in an explanatory way.

Media art grew from so many directions, video art has its roots connected in the development of photography, where poetry has been developing with performance and Happenings. In "New Media in Late 20th-Century Art" Michael Rush places it all under *time art*, it is all about visualising time<sup>11</sup>.

## 1.1 Moving images

Gene Youngblood and colleagues suggested digital moving images to be considered a separate phenomenon from other forms of cinema in their article "Cinema and the Code" (1989). The definition and how we understand moving images has changed over the decades and has to be extended after each new medium, but code and, they suggest, not any medium in the future will not fundamentally change anything with images.

**"When a strategy that was possible but difficult in film becomes a preset button in video or a command in computer graphics, it tends to be used more frequently. But that does not make it more meaningful."**

(Youngblood 27, 1989)

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<sup>10</sup> Meigh-Andrews 220-221, 2014

<sup>11</sup> Rush 12, 1999

The challenge has always been to translate emotions and expressions into experiences and meanings, to transfer between artist and the audience. It is not about the effect, if it cannot deliver the impression, but it is about the effect if it can.

Most often it is just the matter of language we speak at the moment, for me abstract video and possibilities of code are the languages. On some level it can be generational matter, but it can also be fragmented matter inside culture, something learnt, influenced or intentionally adapted.

Sometimes extra effort and slower process is helping to archive these difficult levels, example if we look the differences in practice: it is very different to do fade-in with one rash click than physically pull the handle while a tape is running

When trying to find their own aesthetics or language, artists are not free, but carrying all definitions from previous media and the language cannot be defined by humans, it exists already and can only be discovered.<sup>12</sup> Machines are like other living species, we cannot define them or give them language, they have their own nature. If we name and use them, it is always just for us, it does not exist in the nature of them.

In mechanical cinema it was all about transition, while in electronic cinema and moving images in this context is about transformation,

**"there are infinite possibilities, each with unlimited emotional and psychological consequences"** (Youngblood 28, 1989).

Here we return to the thought of becomings, being all the time in between something that is continually mutating, and at the same time having human being and human behaviour part of it all.

Digital approach made it possible to rethink space and time, over parallel montage that was the traditional way for simultaneous events. At the moment these effects and manipulations are so common we might not even think of them as effects or a mix of spaces and events, the internet and social media have stirred the whole sense of time and space in multiple ways.

Digital moving image is changing the position and role of the spectator to be a user even in the most simplified format of it, because the work usually needs some level of interaction, not just observation. The virtual camera is not any surveillance tool, but part of the scene and cannot be separated like in traditional cinema.<sup>13</sup>

Marisa Olson is an artist, curator, former punk singer and one of the founders of the *Nasty Nets Internet Surfing club*, often referred to be the first using the term "postinternet". In the article "Lost Not Found" (2011), Olson explores the ways digital images are used in the internet and other internet related spaces by taking a closer look at the use of found photography and cinematic montages.

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<sup>12</sup> Youngblood 28, 1989

<sup>13</sup> Youngblood 30, 1989

Postinternet era is not any different from other art epochs or movements using found material and mix mediums. The art world has seen it all already, only the medium is changing and evolving.

Olson examines the nature of images and their role in different economies, once taken out from the original one, the rules of it do not apply anymore when given new meaning and context. Making postinternet images, still or moving, montages is actually just following the art historical tradition of found images added with hacker skills. Many artworks are meta-commentaries, at the same time experiencing and explicating network culture.

Marisa Olson's statement is that we should not focus only on internet-based art but art that engages with the internet. In this context "post" means something after, not at the end of it. Postinternet is aware of attention as a new currency and absence of physical spaces in net culture.

Networks are so holistically present that postinternet applies universally. The aim is to reflect our society and culture that just happens to be very internet-obsessed at the moment.

**" The postinternet may be ahistorical insofar as it has no degree-zero, but if it could come to arrive at performing posthistorically – that is, to be critically aware of the problems historically reenacted with each new strata of historiographic sediment, then we might really get somewhere."**

(Olson 62, 2011)

Postinternet is disclosing the good old punk and DIY culture with self-publishing and commentaries of wider visual culture. The direction is to work more *with* the internet, not just about it, which was actually how it all started until the profit-seeking population found it and took it as a crucial part of the society.

Moving images are transformative material, just seeking their next dwelling place. Since video art was found, it had a long but complicated relationship with television<sup>14</sup>. This dialogue is still maintained, but in the internet and devices connected to the internet era as the whole nature of television has changed crucially, it is all recorded and manipulative.

In commercial use video quality is one of the key values and the race of increasing it has become insane, but what I see in the art field the authenticity has stayed from the first media images until now. In the 1970's it was about the immature technical possibilities which made the aesthetics and sometimes living in an instant moment in art.<sup>15</sup> These aesthetics are not left behind but brought forth with intentions.

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<sup>14</sup> see e.g. Martin 9, 2006

<sup>15</sup> Martin 12, 2006

At the moment, we have control over all of it, it is not defined by the tool. If it is the unsharp and wobbly image that makes the piece rousing, then that is the value worth pursuing, then that is the image that repeats reality over the obvious one.

## 1.2 Digital poetry

**“A tough life needs a tough language – and that is what poetry is.  
That is what literature offers – a language powerful enough  
to say how it is.  
It isn’t a hiding place. It is a finding place.”**

(Jeanette Winterson, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* 58, 2011)

Poetry has had such a long and varied history, but keeping its core in multiplying and layering meanings, using aesthetic as a language and going beyond obvious, still keeping it detached from narrative when it inevitably mixes with video art, generative art and text art. In other contexts the word “digital” might be used to just describe the digital version of something analog, but here it is used more in a digital-born way.

Digital poetry, e-poetry, electronic literature, net.art, experimental poetry, virtual poetry, to name a few alternatives for the same thing. Funkhouser uses the term “digital poetry” also as a historical concept<sup>16</sup>. At the same time I am aware of its nature and keen relationship with technology, where “experimental poetry” or “contemporary poetry” are exempt from these aspects.

Poetry does not follow the same state as it went with photography or music, when image and sound got digital, even in the digital-born way not much changed in content wise and in fundamental way. Digital poetry is often something quite different from the traditional, printed format of it, not just digitised.

The interface of poetry is interesting, in printed poetry we tend to think in a very physical way through books and papers, when digital poetry sounds spatial and abstract. Likewise with any other digital content, we still have a physical element under our fingertips or feet if not attached as extension of our head and vision. This is relevant later when speaking about gestures and digital poetry beyond the screens.

Jan Baetens and Jan Van Looy explored the nature of digital poetry in their article “E-Poetry between Image and Performance: A Cultural Analysis” (2008), reflecting it with visual, auditive, performative formats and traditional printed text.

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<sup>16</sup> Funkhouser, “Prehistoric Digital Poetry: An Archaeology of Forms, 1959–1995”, 2007

Their thoughts developed in the direction that visually, interactivity and performative aspects are often key elements in digital poetry, but the most important thing is the social and cultural aspect that has gone through rapid and radical change.

The world is full of all kinds of new things, produced faster and faster, for poets new things are not at all relevant, rather given rise to divergent poetry otherwise art becomes easily a product.<sup>17</sup> The most important role of poetry is still in storytelling and as an archive of memory.

There is of course also the difficulty of definition of poetry itself. There might be narrative poetry, fragmented prosaic, representational lyrics and all other forms mixing the categories. Sometimes "poetic" is used as a synonym for something beautiful or skilled, but an aesthetic play has a much wider or even controversial meaning than just beauty.

More interesting than describing and defining what digital poetry exactly is, is how it is experienced, how we behave around it and why it is still relatively unknown and culturally alien. This is also the direction of thinking Kevin Stein emphasises in "Poetry's Afterlife: Verse in the Digital Age" (2010)<sup>18</sup>.

My own simplified answer would be that if media art is sometimes complicated and mixing too many things to be understood and recognised outside its own bubble, digital poetry is too much in between categories and escaping any kind of definitions where one could have some point of reference.

This is something also Funkhouser describes, it is all the time evolving because there are all the time new technologies applied in it. In a historical sense it started before the personal computer, it transformed and got more visibility when the internet hit the road and it is still looking forward to the next form of it.<sup>19</sup>

Funkhouser suggests also that in process and content wise digital poetry is nothing more than what was already before, but of course mechanically experimenting and developing something original.

Based on the ideas of W.J.T. Mitchell, Baetens and Van Looy are pointing out that there are actually very little differences between digital (or digitised) and traditional in content wise if you think of for example photography or plain text, but what is significant is the rapid behavioural change and the new culture around the use of them.

This makes the question and point of view everything else than technical and digital, therefore they suggest we rather use the term *virtual* because of its connotation to cultural studies.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Helle 42-43, 2019

<sup>18</sup> Stein 115, 2010

<sup>19</sup> Funkhouser 28-29, 2007

<sup>20</sup> Baetens & Van Looy 3-4, 2008

Through artistic practice we can see the direction of digital poetry as experienced, used and performed rather than seen, read, presented or published. On the other hand for example Stein sees the collaborative notion very strong in digital and video poetry:

**"Many filmic poems seem not the expression of individual voice  
but rather a collective hallucination given digital reality"**

(Kevin Stein 123, 2010).

The rewarding collaboration is a dialog between individual voices through found images, blending and moving material and new interpretations. Digital poetry as interdisciplinary gives it many dimensions to be practiced and experienced.

Poetry has its roots in performance, revisited there during avant-garde and is still there in the digital era, in virtual formats. Digital poetry is not something we read on the screens, but experience it, or sometimes we have access there only by documentation, because of the nature of technology that works or not, the performance was only once in a festival or it is in a demo state.

Stein is contrasting paper-based poetry and new media poetry for example by the authorship, performance and participation. In printed-page we have single authorship, fixed text and page as the stage. In video or new media it can be easily collaborative and polyvocal, nomadic text and screen allows multiple options and extended domains for example to gallery spaces.<sup>21</sup>

We do not need to read between lines, but the nature of digital poetry is always hybrid. Baetens & Van Looy also adduce that with hybrid we do not speak about poetry taking different shapes, like spoken word being printed afterwards or handwritten text being transcoded into visual poetry, but hybrid-born way, in its fundamental nature<sup>22</sup>.

Technology cannot be either downplayed when the tech and tool part is a substantive part of the work.

**"E-poetry is not a logical successor to print poetry, but a new form,  
and its very appearance changes the poetic field as a whole"**

(Baetens & Van Looy 15, 2014)

There where video art grew from photography, digital poetry and networked art has their roots in performance and Fluxus. Alison Knowles is one of the founding members of the Fluxus movement, mixing mediums and disciplines, working in performance, soundart and publications.

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<sup>21</sup> Stein 117, 2010

<sup>22</sup> Baetens & Van Looy 6-7, 2008

While speaking about her most known performance, *Make a Salad* (1962), Knowles underlines that she wanted people to understand that they cannot control what is going on, that simple things can be done just when you concentrate on what you are doing - just making the salad<sup>23</sup>. The result is not important, only the process, reflections, experience and spatial dimensions.

Knowles came forth also as a poet with found language that often composed itself, not so much in the traditional poet sense. During performance the artist does not know how everything is going to be, and that is inspiring to Knowles. It is also about the context and point of view where we have the artist and the artworks, whether it is in a museum or on the street, where Fluxus started and was later adapted indoors.<sup>24</sup>

Derek H. Whitehead as well leads us into thinking poiesis is about the process of poetry and art, when focused on the final product we should consider it as handicraft made by an artisan.<sup>25</sup>

When allowed things just to be, making becomes the meaning, and the later form of an art piece gets fulfillment only by spectators input, be it touching or just looking.

### 1.3 In-between

As we grow from the middle, we are all the time in between of something, always incomplete. It is an uncertain and unbalanced place to be, usually avoided or covert one, but there we are unfinished and in progress forever between fears and desires, past and future. People are on shaky ground between cultures, languages, genders, ages and becomings.

Dualism, binary thinking arises and is learnt through language and language is something we cannot escape, it gives form for everything we know and understand.<sup>26</sup> We are trapped in the language with which we express ourselves, because the language is born within the surrounding society and environment, and always has some gaps with the wider reality.

Sometimes we must give space for a new format of language. Languages are evolving in use, in different surroundings, with new elements and developed thoughts.

Often there are no words for something that lies between two points, or if there is a new point, it is not making a path, just a new segment. The intent is not to add more segments or points, but to acknowledge what is in between:

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<sup>23</sup> Knowles 2012

<sup>24</sup> Greenberger 2016

<sup>25</sup> Whitehead 2003

<sup>26</sup> e.g. Deleuze & Parnet 34, 1977

**"[-] tracing another line in the middle of the segmentary line,  
in the middle of the segments, which carries them off according to  
the variable speeds and slownesses  
in a movement of flight or of flux."**

(Deleuze & Parnet 131, 1977)

In the article "Has the Queer Ever Been Human?" Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen are pointing out that current states of crises are compelling us to take a queer look at what is it to be a human and would there be some answers in nonhuman aspects of it.

When a human is placed along with nature, the strict parameters do not apply here to describe human and nonhuman, there is no natural law that causes the extremely limited world we live in. It is constructed by other forces and rapacity.

We have framed, territorialised habitat and beings, but by separating something out, we have also separated ourselves out from what is vital for humans. It is only recently brought along with the climate crisis that we started to see humans as species.

Queer life is understood as precarious life, but because of the climate crisis, **"all life, we might say, is now precarious life"** (Luciano & Y. Chen 193, 2015), and we should be able to see beyond human, as we know it, to take some real action.<sup>27</sup> We might find answers in other species, in cyborgian aspects and in humanity in its unbounded versions.

When images are mixing and moving, giving space, when they become abstract and overlapping, there are multiple possibilities for interpretations and perspectives, multiple unconscious levels.

One of the key notions in *Order of Time* by Carlo Rovelli is that without interaction, movement and experience, we would not notice the passage of time at all. The world is made up only of events, happenings, not things, because the objects are just particles having different forms for a while, or hundreds of years, every object and entity is just in between becoming something else, constantly.<sup>28</sup>

So we could think of everything that exists as an event, not as a thing. Every artwork is an event, every human is an event, a collection of particles in different forms and in development to become something else in a year or in a hundred years.

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<sup>27</sup> Luciano & Y. Chen 193, 2015

<sup>28</sup> Rovelli 2018

## 1.4 Slow media

**“Would you like an adventure now,” he said casually to John,  
“or would you like to have your tea first?”**

- Peter Pan (James M. Barrie 1911)

Since industrialisation, current society might feel too fast, and it is taking more speed with new inventions and new standards. Unconsciously we learn to value speed even in small tasks without obvious benefit, we are taught to use money to get things faster and easier. Just to define consumerism briefly from the perspective of time.

In the internet images are circulating rapidly and social media algorithms favor instant sharing, older images are weighted down. The mindset of consuming images and other mediums are programmed subconsciously without space for slow looking. This is something that should be discovered closely, the real meanings of it, and most importantly the causes of it.

In turn, time is just subjective experience and creation of our mind<sup>29</sup>, but that is exactly the purpose of keeping the common rhythm the same. Society as a developed or modern gigant village benefits from the same rhythm and order of inhabitants.

Slowing down is usually showing us what we need instead of what we want. Slowing the process might take the shape of prolonging it, but one value is also prioritising, when something might be reduced and does not happen at all. Slowness means reducing and concentrating on things that matter.

This practice is not new at all especially in the art field, there are multiple artists using this, just as a single example *the Abramovic Method* is based on slow motion or complete stillness to find connection with oneself, with others and with the surroundings.<sup>30</sup> There, like in yoga, movement takes place only in order to benefit and lead into meditation and awareness. In complete stagnation time does not exist, time does not flow.



To achieve some slowness and awareness with medium, already the very first video art works were dealing with this matter, like Nam June Paik's *Zen for TV* (1963) where the image of the TV screen has shrunk into a single line, in some versions the screen placed on its side.

When thinking for example Bill Viola's early work *The Reflecting Pool* (1977-1979), where the reflection of a human is separated and moving in a different time span than the one standing by the pool, time and memory get extended and complex.

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<sup>29</sup> Rovelli 2019

<sup>30</sup> Bonfiglioli 2015

The work *The Greetings* (1995), a scene where three women meet each other, is a 45 seconds clip slowed down to be 10 minutes allowing to dig in-between frames, but mostly to see micro-movements and a variety of emotions, all considerations and intimations that happen unconsciously. I feel these kinds of works are very meditative and even spiritual, seeking some other domains beyond obvious.



Figure 01. Bill Viola *The Reflecting Pool*, 1977-9.  
Color videotape.  
Photo: Kira Perov © Bill Viola Studio.



Figure 02. Bill Viola. *The Greeting*, 1995.  
Video/sound installation.  
Photo: Kira Perov © Bill Viola Studio.

Especially when speaking about video art, it is good to remember that every era has its own perception of fast and slow. For example letters were one of the most efficient forms of communication for hundreds of years until the 19th century, until a new medium, a postcard made people afraid of what will happen to long meaningful communication.<sup>31</sup> It was an efficient and effortless way to communicate, the instant messenger of its time.<sup>32</sup>

Nowadays the narrative is very fragmented, which leads to rethinking communication as something continuous between humans. Sometimes adding more speed does not bring any real new value, only rethinking the whole process, tools and behaviour does.

In the meantime we did not get more time, it did not increase in minutes or days, but we are normalising the amount of events that are squeezed inside of it, reducing little by little something out, like deeper understanding or consideration.

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<sup>31</sup> Invented by the Austrian Dr. Emanuel Herrmann

<sup>32</sup> see e.g. Distad 2020

Social media is an efficient way to spread the message, but the side effect is that we might lose personal connection. Wide and unavoidable hate speech is one of the side effects of modern rapid communication. Good conversation creates trust and intimacy, but the structure of the social media does not support this kind of communication<sup>33</sup>.

The Slow Media movement is part of the wider “slow movement” that started to take its steps in the beginning of the 21st century in different aspects and locations. The Slow Media Manifesto was published in 2009 in German and quite fast translated in multiple languages around the world. Despite the name, slow media is trying to raise awareness to recognise the benefits of different media formats, not to position its agenda to be against fast media.

There are limitations and unanswered questions with new forms of media, but the aim is to use them in a more deliberate way.<sup>34</sup> Most of the new platforms, applications and devices are very defined, controlled and even with the new innovations, very limited in use.

Concentration means monotasking, focusing on the current state, one material at time and sustainable use of them.<sup>35</sup> Slow media does not necessarily mean slowing down time or action, but to use more intentional materials, with the aim to be timeless.

There are increasing amount of thinkers and authors having the same argument: it is not about nostalgia, not about digital to be wiped off, but to find better balance since we are still living in a haptic, real world<sup>36</sup>.

Rarely is there any clear escape from the current situation covered with screens, where I see the role of artists to step in asking questions of the true values and creating alternate realities. In most cases reduction is the answer, not getting something more and faster:

**“All members of the media arts field hold in common:**

**We share the ability to do a lot with little”**

(De Michiel 2002<sup>37</sup>)

In the panel discussion “The benefits of a slow approach and extra effort” by University of Helsinki (2020) were attentive perceptions about slowing down the process. Sampo Pasanen was pondering how making some matter a bit inconvenient, one becomes more aware of the act and oneself, causing weighing thoughts if the current action is really reasoned.

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<sup>33</sup> Janmohamed et al. 2020, 1

<sup>34</sup> Rauch 2011

<sup>35</sup> Köhler et al. 2010

<sup>36</sup> e.g. David Sax, The Revenge of Analog 2016; Golden Krishna, The Best Interface Is No Interface 2015

<sup>37</sup> De Michiel 2002, <https://www.giarts.org/article/towards-slow-media-practice>

The problem might be that often we see the process beforehand as something not valuable, for example when we do not think of the travel itself as an interesting time, only focusing on being in the destination as fast as possible.

Visual artist Tuomo Rainio underlines that slowing down allows one to give meaning and to enjoy the process itself, following the fundamental idea of slow traveling as well, which is usually familiar only for sailors.

Writer Laura Lindstedt gives meaning for slowness by understanding the given space to be able to see a matter from different perspectives and watching it as different versions of oneself since we grow and change every single day and moment.<sup>38</sup>

When thinking about letter writing, sometimes it was the case that a writer returned to write or rewrite a letter during several days, which means the writer was different with every chapter of it, compared to instant messaging nowadays. Slowness and breaks allow new thoughts and moments to break in mind during the process.

Sometimes slow media means low-tech solutions, like *Low-tech Magazine* does.<sup>39</sup> The website is online only when it has been sunny in Spain to charge it, to be able to access the website one has to wait sometimes even days which is amazingly slowing down the common click-and-go internet phase. Interestingly the site also raises the awareness of staying on the site just as long as really needed.

In this sense moving image is an outstanding art form also for the receiver, when one can pass by a photograph or painting in seconds, video work calls to really stop and focus for a while. Slowed down content gives possibility to see in-between, to see the process and that is why to bring the work more close to the audience.

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<sup>38</sup> Lindstedt et al. 2020 panel discussion

<sup>39</sup> <https://solar.lowtechmagazine.com>

## 2 Experiments and abilities of image

When video art started to emerge, in the beginning it was more about Fluxism, political activism and counterforce for commercial television, mixing ideas from various movements like avant-garde, performance art, contemporary theatre and experimental photography.<sup>40</sup>

Abstract video art had an important period in 1965–1975, when many of the experiments were concentrated in the video signals and the abilities of video, especially distorting the broadcast television aesthetics.<sup>41</sup>

I will go through three artists and their selected works to guide us into my own practise, later I will present a few more works along with my own works.

### 2.1 Waking unconscious - Theresa Hak Kyung Cha

**“[-] she creates an experience of the decentered subject,  
rather than making work about it.”**

(Best 124, 2014)

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha was an author and media artist, born in Korea 1951 and moved to the United States 1962. I got interested in Cha's works because of the themes of otherness and fragmentation of memory, as well as working with similar materials and media: moving images, video and text.

Cha's work is based on concrete dislocation and the roots of language, where mine is more universal explorations about alienation in society by the roles, positions and digital communication.

Susan Best was analysing Theresa Cha's works in *Visualising feeling - affect and the feminine avant-garde*. Best is taking into account psychoanalysis and aesthetics as a tool to understand Cha's work better, she describes how both are aware of the limits of thoughts and what is not demonstrable, leaving just the reason underneath.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> see e.g. Meigh-Andrews 2, 2014

<sup>41</sup> Meigh-Andrews 132-134, 2014

<sup>42</sup> Best 124, 2014

What was said before about digital poetry and moving images, the new language is needed when existing ones are lagging. Besides the languages, but also the limits of thoughts, are deepening the realisation that we try to reach something very essential and endogenous.



Figure 03. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Passages, Paysages*, 1978, video stills.  
University of California, Berkeley Art Museum.  
Courtesy of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.

*Passages, Paysages* (1978) is a three-monitor video installation, combining moving images and poetic texts, 11 minutes in duration edited in sequences. Cha is mixing two languages, French and English, already in the title of the work following her earlier artistic practise example in Cha's video poem *Vidéoème*, where words and therefore unconscious are overlapping and blended, words on the screen are different from what we hear in the audio track.

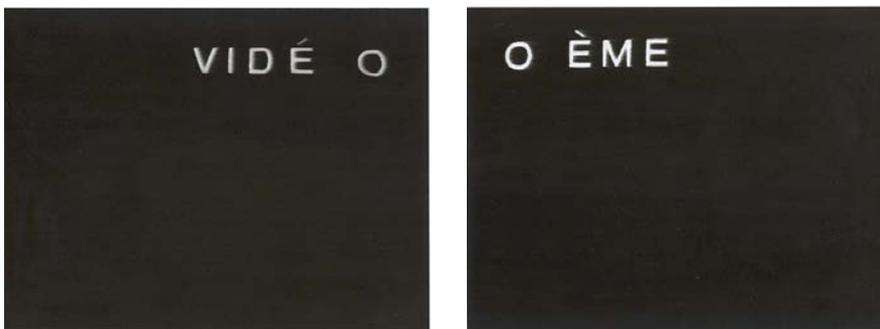


Figure 04. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Vidéoème*, 1976, video stills.  
University of California, Berkeley Art Museum.  
Courtesy of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.

What is fascinating and inspiring in *Passages, Paysages* video work, is Cha's ability to make dream-like space with very little, by playing with the language without rules, for example blending three different tenses and personal pronouns in the same sentence bringing the viewer into unstable ground where everything feels still making some sort of sense.

Cha knew the rules, to be able to break them. Part of this happened probably in the process of learning a new language, which is usually based on an unrelieved amount of rules, logical and impalpable ones, making her see words and the language as editable material.

Cha is playing with the effect of still images, visuals which at the same time are present and absent in various time and space dimensions, at the same time with the viewer and the artist.<sup>43</sup> Still images and texts are static by their nature and could be presented just as they are, but when molded in the form of video, their nature becomes temporal and connected with other elements.

In this process an image surrenders the form that defined it before as it takes another shape and can be understood under different meaning-making. This is where it transforms into poetry as images and texts are not holding any traditional format and can be seen differently by individuals.

Another similar aspect to my own works is that in *Passages, Paysages* is used very slow rhythm, the voice-over is at the same time calm and languorous, like the change of the images with a lot of fragments.<sup>44</sup>

Here we have to keep in mind also that from the perspective of the 2020's this looks particularly sedate, but the normal rhythm of video works were quite composed in the 70's overall, giving much more time for the scenes if compared to the dynamic and rapid cuts in the digital era.

This feeling of slowness might also come from the stationary nature of still images, in movement the sense of time is different. Video can be also very tricky, it makes the viewer watch one image presumably longer than if the image would be printed on the wall.

It gives the promise of enhanced experience, something blended, overlapping, stimulating, moving. Cha's intention was to dissolve the nature of images and narrative.



Figure 05. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Passages, Paysages*, 1978, video stills. University of California, Berkeley Art Museum. Courtesy of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.

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<sup>43</sup> Best 132, 2014

<sup>44</sup> Best 133, 2014

Cha uses images and language that are very personal, from the source of own memories, but she is using them with caution of the viewer's presence and to awaken some dialog between own memories and the viewer's association with them. This is done in means and exploration if there exists something really personal, or all can be understood also universally.<sup>45</sup>

These works were made in the 70–80's, before internet and social media frenzy hit the world, but I must notice these works' timeless explorations of humanity as we seek connection and ways to communicate with each other despite the given tools and media.

This exploration between individual and common is needed while the world gets more segmented. There are more things in common than we want to notice, for example prowling memories, mistakes and devotion.

## 2.2 Uncertainty - Katherine Behar

Katherine Behar is a New York based, interdisciplinary artist using videos, performance, photography and installations. She is often exploring how we can coexist with advanced technology, the practice is focused on gender and labor during the digital era.

What is interesting for me is the approach not to go under the hood of machines but to seek human behaviour around them, but also unexpected similarities between human and machine, when thinking for example being part of different systems. Her long term projects concentrate on the effects of disorientation under technological labor and consumerism, often blending low and high technology, handmade and machine made.



Figure 06. Katherine Behar. INImaging, 2008. Live performance and technology installation. Photograph by John Sisson. Image courtesy of the artist.

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<sup>45</sup> Best 128, 2014

This thought led me back to Behar's work *INimaging* (2008), which is a performance and an installation of life inside Photoshop, about computational understanding of the world based on "either-or" commands, shapes and errors.

*INimaging* got its inspiration from the movie *Tron* (1982) where the character Bit exists only as an incalculable form "Maybe" and has to transform into a computable unit to function correctly inside a computer. The character is living somewhere in between the digital and real life logic, and using understanding of both worlds to succeed in the tasks.

In the *INimaging* installation colour-coded, geometric 3D objects present the values "Yes", "No" and mysterious "Maybe", which violates the order. In the performance the shapes are inhabited by a yogi that transforms the shape with body movements. Visitors are able to see inside these shapes by tiny windows in each of them. Two of the shapes present "drawing" and "erasing" while the third one is overwriting these two by digital noise.

The installation is exploring how we see the world and how well we can and want to transform it to the digital format and in the use of data science. Data is the crucial element of it but has to have some kind of calculable form which is familiar from real society where we try to organise things by simplifying the variety of natural options.



Figure 07. Katherine Behar. *INimaging*, 2008. Photograph by John Sisson.

The idea of science and research is often to have some development or new knowledge, but repeating and looping the same values of the world does not bring any development. By tolerating some noise and uncertainty, there can be new forms of means and values, which are not known for the dominant group beforehand.

Machines are just transforming ideas from actuality into a new format but do not really give space for them to show the variety or to grow into another shape. It is the job of humans to do the meaning-making, but rather we leave everything automated. Sometimes it might be that we are squeezed in "yes" or "no" without flexibility.

*INimaging* deals with the topic in-betweenness in a very concrete way, questioning if we can ever translate the natural, actual world into zeros and ones, into a computational world and if so, does it affect humanity or vice versa?



Figure 08.  
Katherine Behar.  
E-Waste (FN-12B), 2014.

Photography by Jason Mandella.

The different versions of the series *E-Waste* (2014) consists of sculptures which got inspiration from devices that are produced endlessly to increase productivity. The sculptures are based in a science fiction type world after humans when machines just continue their tasks like WALL-E<sup>46</sup> but reluctant in slow-motion.

The sculptures are e-fossiles, or rather some kind of machinic zombies, still making weak noises, lights are blinking and components are moving very slowly. They are from the artist's imagination, not familiar devices, but having a cute form that awakens sympathy.



Figure 09.  
Katherine Behar.  
E-Waste (BK3F-033), 2014.

Photography by Jason Mandella.

The sculptures look more like living species than devices or machines. I see here the question of finding a new connection with other species under uncertain times, at the same time developing even more advanced technology while seeking connection with nature.

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<sup>46</sup> the last robot on Earth in the computer-animated science fiction film produced by Pixar in 2008

With the work *E-Waste*, Behar is also questioning for whom we generate value when browsing and liking on the internet and social platforms. Usually it is for some instance in distance, like big corporations.

We produce and become attached to new devices while we are slowly transforming into one kind of device by ourselves when being attached with mechanical movements with and by machines.

The most obvious theme with the work is environmental challenges with mass produced devices we use shortly but which are left as a materia on the Earth, wandering around not part of the urban system anymore, unable to be part of nature, unable to disappear. It challenges us to think about needs, events and matters in a historical context, on a bigger scale than we are used to. It gives perspective for velocity, materiality and humanity.

### 2.3 Memory is the weakest witness - IC-98

IC-98 is a Finnish artist duo Visa Suonpää (b. 1968) and Patrik Söderlund (b. 1974). They have been working with moving images, site specific works and public commissions, often under themes of ecologies, human and natural history, formations and speculative futures.<sup>47</sup>

Most of the video art works and animations are relatively long, from 10 to 45 minutes, *The View from the Other Side* (2011) is 1 hour and 11 minutes. This timescape demands from the space and spectator stretching the limits of expectations as the piece becomes more like a meditation than constantly stimulating visual work.



Figure 10. A View from the Other Side. IC-98. 2011. Single channel video.

<sup>47</sup> IC-98. <https://www.av-arkki.fi/artists/ic-98/>

From their extensive production here I refer mainly to works *A View from the Other Side* (2011) and *Theses on the Body Politic (The Descent)* (2008), both single-channel video animations with sound work. *A View from the Other Side* work's mood, visuals and sound work is very captivating, a viewer might take a second round coincidentally, in loop there is no beginning or end.

There are the tematics of community memory, personal memories, time distortion and urban environment<sup>48</sup>. The works are characterised by the use of time and space at the same time in a very gentle but intense way, scenes are floating to another seamlessly, the spectator can recognise tiny movement in the image, but cannot follow how it changed to the other scene suddenly. This is the magic in IC-98 works.



Figure 11. IC-98, *A View from the Other Side*. 2011. Single channel video.

Human perception is limited, even if we have all the senses. In the imagined world by IC-98, human need to control and organise everything around us is ripped off, scene after scene the viewer feels overtaken until the only way out is to surrender for the familiar animated world without known rules.

The animation is about one specific view from Turku, Finland, over the historical decades, seasons and time of the day, slowly blending past, present and surreal. There is something strange and dreamy at the same time.

The present moment appears differently for each of us based on our memories and previous experiences, it keeps the experience of art works also special and undefined, even the memory is the weakest witness. There are some elements in which collective memories can arise, but the most important thing is to have some elements where every viewer can relate to and then adapt slowly to the unknown.

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<sup>48</sup> see e.g. Suorsa 2015

Since the work is relatively long, there is time and space to go with the flow even if the atmosphere seems unfamiliar at the beginning, the scene is static and variable at the same time, only with the slowness and frustrating the need for quick pleasure it is possible to adapt to the float.

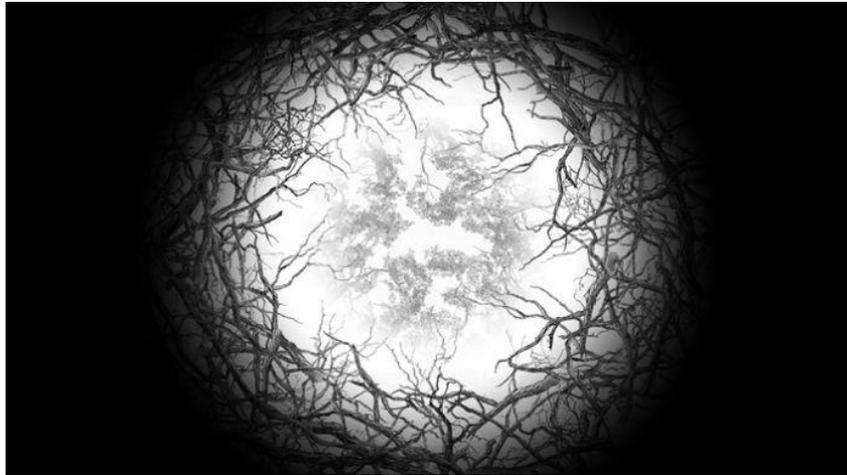


Figure 12. IC-98, *Theses on the Body Politic (The Descent)*. 2008. Single channel video.

*Theses on the Body Politic (The Descent)* animation has been an inspiration for my works mostly because of the aesthetics, form and theme. It is six minutes long, single-channel black and white video work with sounds, reversed Genesis - the madness caused by capitalism. The image is like a vortex where all the slow transformation happens, indiscernible as in all the other works of the duo.

One characteristic aspect in the works is the absence of humans in a world where all the collapse, transformation and development has been caused by humans, which make the mood often vague, but interesting.

The divergent form, a circulating sphere, is enchanting and I called to mind this work since I used a similar approach in my *NFC* project to capture calm and inviting vibrations. This form is also breaking the old dimensions and perspective of rectangular video, having the concentration in the structure, not framed window.

These works follow the idea of constant flow, avoiding absolute stagnation, chasing to keep the human mind excited and hooked by leaving further explanations and giving space for our own imagination and interpretations.

## 3 Artistic practice

In the world of faster experiences, easier life and collapsing human minds, slowness seems one of the most radical things to do, or at least controversial.

In this chapter I will briefly go through my recent practice and experiments, and the processes of four works connected to digital poetry and moving images.

### 3.1 Earlier practice and experiments

- pinhole photography

Even though considered as the younger generation in video art, I feel fortunate that I could experience analog video making with VHS and Video8, physical control handles and one-cut editing as well as the recent possibilities with digital compositing and manipulation.

The last ten years I have been focused on pinhole photography, moving images and experimenting with digital possibilities. The process of making film photos is very sedate, abnormal exposure times, waiting for the results, the amount of failures and remaking.

In videography I have always been fascinated by what happens in between frames and in the digital era the possibilities of new images when manipulated, projected or placed in different realities and virtualities.

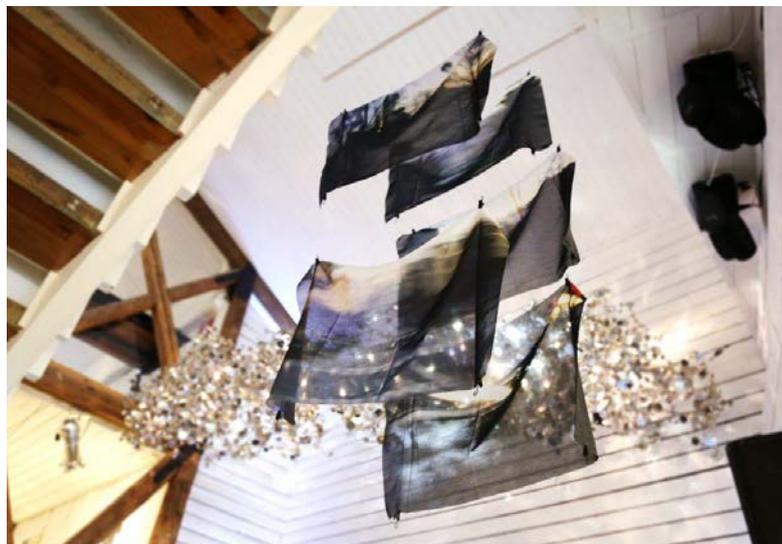


Figure 13. Moments That Are Lingerin'. Tiio Suorsa. 2015/2017. Photo: Tiio Suorsa. In the 30th anniversary exhibition of Photographic Centre Peri, Turku, Finland. 2017.

*Moments That Are Linger* (2017) was a work where I made photos to be more material and at the same time blending with reality. I examined possibilities to keep photography in its natural form but to take it out from the framed substance. Images taken with a digital pinhole camera were printed on silk-cotton fabric and hung to be floating on the air, all the time in a tiny movement, having a different light along the days.

The photos were taken with a digital SLR camera<sup>49</sup> with a pinhole lens, a cap with a needle hole. It was an exploration of urban space that is at the same time for everyone but defined, under a lot of known and invisible rules. The project was mixing and merging primal image making with modern, instant photography.



Figure 14. Single frame from video. Captured Street. Tiio Suorsa. 2017–2019. Camera Mariangela Pluchino. 2018.

I experimented with video as documentation in my pinhole photography project *Captured Street* (2017–2019), where I had a silent one-person sit-in on the streets with a pinhole camera while a photo was exposed. Exposure times were from five minutes to 30 min.

Five minutes does not sound like a lot, but it is a surprisingly long time when you are only standing in the middle of a busy street doing literally nothing. The wooden pinhole camera is small and does not look like any real device, so passerbys did not even notice the role of the exposing apparatus.

Video performance is something used already by Fluxus artists, it opened access to events that had happened, extended the time and space dimension of performance, and became an artwork or commentary itself.<sup>50</sup>

In 2020 video became an essential media and tool for multiple areas in art and life, in streamed and recorded formats. Since we all had to slow down not a little, many people had a chance to face their life rhythm's absurdity.

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<sup>49</sup> Digital SLR or DSLR, a digital single-lens reflex camera typically uses interchangeable lenses

<sup>50</sup> Martin 13 & 18, 2006

During lockdowns in 2020, I took a closer look at the urban space and mental states we live in as a daily routine with the project *Interspaced* (2020), which was a contribution for *COCO-lands* (2020-), a growing media art archive by international artists. *Interspaced* consists of 80 photos, videos and documentations of small camera obscura room actions and performances.

I also took a position of visual communication manager in *COCO-lands* and I had the unique chance to follow the work of others over a year as well, while managing the web platform.

*COCO-lands* was part of Wild State exhibition in Ars Electronica Festival 2020, along with Agora Digitalis panel discussion, and BestOFF 2020 exhibition in Linz 2021.



Figure 15. COCO-lands. 2020. Installation in Ars Electronica Festival 2020. Photo: Iosune Sarasate Azcona.  
Figure 16. Screen capture by Tiio Suorsa. COCO-lands, [www.cocolands.xyz](http://www.cocolands.xyz), Tiio. 2020.



Figure 17. Single frames from videos. Interspaced. Tiio Suorsa. 2020.

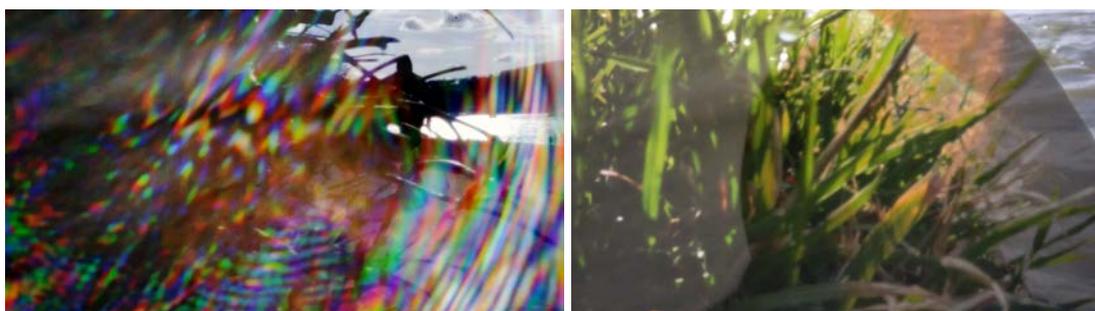


Figure 18. Single frames from video. Frequency of Being. Tiio Suorsa. 2020.

*Frequency of Being* is a single channel video, an exploration of in-betweenness of dream and reality, digital and analog, purposeless and profitable. Urban space is usually just a set piece we pass by in our costumes while at home the space is limited but existence unbounded.

In a hectic and efficient world, sometimes it's that easy to be rebellious, you just need to stop wherever you are at the moment, preferably in the middle of the street. In the video moments are at the same time moving on and constant, some kind of state of being that is worth pursuing.

The video work is filmed with a traditional pinhole lens, attached on a DSLR camera to get a bit of distorted and hazy images, like when eyes are waking up. Sounds are recorded with a self-made hydrophone/piezo that captures vibrations of river, tea water and wet rocks.

*Frequency of Being* was exhibited in Lacuna Festivals (ES) in Lanzarote in 2021 and in screenings at the ZBM Festival (AT) and Dorf TV (AT) in 2020.

## 3.2 Kinesics of Letters

- a video series

*Kinesics of Letters* is a series of four video letters sent once a month, from March to June in 2020. The letters consist of visual, textual, vocal and generative poetry from the trapped situation where we had to find new ways to be humans between virtual and actual realities.<sup>51</sup>



Figure 19. Single frame from video. *Kinesics of Letters* - May, Tio Suorsa. 2020.

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<sup>51</sup> *Kinesics of Letters*, 2020, watch online: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/7565631>

Poems take a closer look at different intermediate states of everyday life, repetitions and small things that took vague form in isolation. The rhythm and aesthetics of the letters follow the current situations from extremely slowed down and confused March until more bustling but still uncertain time in June.

Kinesics of Letters mixes the tradition of handwritten letters, text art and divergent aesthetics, animated and programmed with audio-visual editors, Processing and p5.js.

The aesthetic comes from the moments that start to glitch under the pressure. In the first two letters the content is relatively simple and calm, just one single video with minimal floating movement, snowing or reflection from the sun to tea water. The last two letters consist of multiple videos and text fragments, having more content and events but in a scattered way.

## Process

The poems are constructed using videos which I filmed during the spring, not intentionally for this project, but just as I always take very short video clips of moments that have something interesting, sometimes not visually but the moment is just some I wanted to capture for later. It is an eternally growing, fragmented visual diary.

Texts are handwritten intentionally for this work but in the same negligent way as I would write them to my notebook any other day. I was following the order and mood of the months and made the videos at the end of each like a real paper letter to someone to sum up what is going on.

In *March* there is a single video, snowing from the window, the movement slowed down so that every flake can be tracked. It was windy so some of them are floating upwards which gives the video a bit surreal vibe. As the snow is falling, there are also fragments of text floating around slowly, generated by the Processing program, picking up randomly a fragment and floating it around the screen by defined randomised parameters.

The sentences are also spoken, manipulated and overlapping each other, it is as hard to separate the sentences as it is in the visual form. You might catch a few words over the video, a few spoken words in audio, making dozens of combinations.

In *April* there is also just one video where you can see how the sunlight is extracted into rays through tea while the teapot is moved around. The text is organised in common order, but becomes visible just slowly by the movement of a mouse over the video. This text animation was made with p5.js. It has also a spoken voice track of the exact same text as is written.



*May* and *June* consist of multiple videos that are taken during these months, mainly shot at home but some also outside. These videos overlap, blend and are manipulated in a video editor following chronology, but suddenly jumping by context as it goes when writing a letter to someone. The videos and texts were made simultaneously but blended together only in the post-production phase.

The texts are taking different kinds of forms, sometimes floating completely unorganised and even unreadable, sometimes repeating one fragment and sometimes the everyday poem comes word by word like doubting its existence. These texts were made with Processing, p5.js or animated in the video editor. The last two letters, *May* and *June*, have only original and sampled sounds from the videos, not spoken tracks.

During this period of time, most probably because of the very discomposed situation in Austria and worldwide, I started to seek a method to record this moment in life, but also to find new ways to communicate and listen to myself. The letters became a mixture of world events and personal everyday reflections, when instant messaging was lagging.

While making this project I wrote real letters to my best friend to recall the feeling of writing letters, to take a closer look into every step and thought of the process. In this era of instant messaging, I found it surprisingly odd to write a very long message to someone without reactions in between, just my own fragments.

The time span was wide, which made me extend the time scale of the content also, not just in what is going on at the moment or last days, but to look much further and to go beyond everyday topics into wider thoughts, from matters to ideas.

A letter also has a very strict structure: beginning, content and the end. It is otherwise similar to chats and instant messaging besides often there is no end point, messaging might continue endlessly or just finish without any notion.

Letters consist of humanity, misspelled words, overwritten letters, side notes or odd orders of sentences.

Then that heartbreaking moment when you have to drop this letter to the post box, in uncertainty full of risks. This moment I did not really replicate within this project but in the next one, *NFC*, a year later.

For *Kinesics of Letters*, I wrote all the texts by hand and transcoded later into typed text. Some of the texts I animated in the video editor, but most of them I split in fragments and gave to generative spirits.

I made several different programs in Processing which are using text as a source material and moving them along the screen by defined parameters but everytime with random results.

The slow and tangible approach of letters was the starting point of the project even though the result is very digital. This is one thing I later called into question if I should have left the texts handwritten, but this was also an exploration of the relationship between human and machine, so there needed some kind of translation before it could be complete.

At the same time the slow and haptic touch is invisible in the final letter even existing in the process, which can happen often in all kinds of processes. This is an important point because exactly this might lead to the development of a hectic, growth-based and result-oriented society, when we cannot see the process and humanity, only the result. I feel this is one challenge especially in media arts, where we do not see documentations of the romantic art process in settings in studios like in sculpting and painting.

I used coding and animated texts, which are in this case fixed, for the spectator content is every time the same as videos and recordings are. This is like ready-made documentation of the coded poem by all the mixed materials used.



Figure 24. Kinesics of Letters, installation version. Tio Suorsa. 2020. Photo: Tio Suorsa.

In the planned installation version of *Kinesics of Letters*, video letters are projected on a table, a visitor sits by on a chair and receives the letters as they appear on the surface.

In 2020–2021 the project was presented around online exhibitions, platforms and journals. The web-based format got the right post-postal vibes, as the letters were delivered through the internet when actual world postal services seemed to start collapsing slowly under sudden lockdown pressure.

Digital letters as a format is different from a webpage or a YouTube video, it is made from person to person, or to be published in a journal, not to be shared completely randomly. These letters were delivered via journals and platforms like Nokturno (FI), The New River (US) and Dorf TV (AT)<sup>52</sup>.



Figure 25. Screen capture by Tiio Suorsa. Kinesics of Letter in Nokturno.fi. 2020.

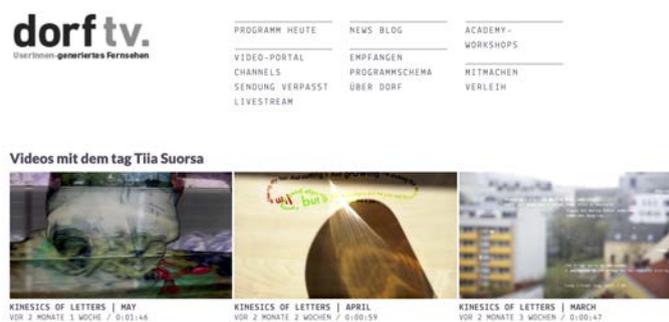


Figure 26. Screen capture by Tiio Suorsa. Kinesics of Letter in Dorf TV. 2020.

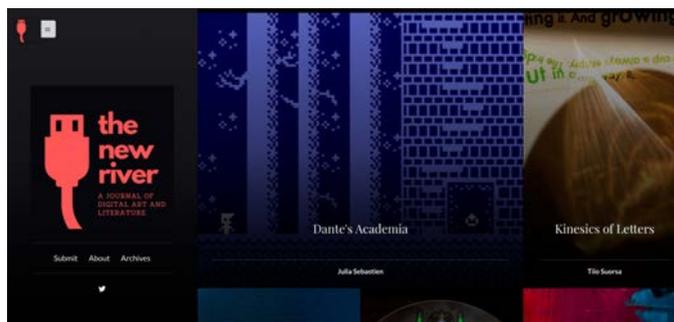


Figure 27. Screen capture by Tiio Suorsa. Kinesics of Letter in The New River. 2021.

The New River is a journal of digital art and literature, in which the series was published in 2021. In the editors' notes Amanda Hodes and Sonya Lara are dropping questions related to *Kinesics of Letters*:

<sup>52</sup> Nokturno 2020, Kinesics of Letters 2021, Dorf TV 2020

**“Does time reel away linearly? Does it wrap up into itself like a thread?**

**Does it propagate, repeat, and scatter across the boxed spaces we occupy?”**

(The New River, Kinesics of Letters, 2021<sup>53</sup>).

These questions were luminous and described very well the mood of a physically isolated state of being, but the other timely and spatial perspectives beyond it where time does not necessarily exist. I was glad they also noticed some details like I was using the plural “s” when speaking about the shapes of time in one poem.

## Inspiration

The first inspiration for this project came from traditional letter writing, which I have always been a fan of. As writer Laura Lindstedt mentioned in the slowness panel discussion, writing by hand gives very special spatial sense<sup>54</sup>.

The process is different from instant messaging, as you might write one letter for hours or even days, having many different thoughts and emotions in between. Because of the time consuming process, one might weigh carefully to whom to write a letter, any incidental receiver is not worth it.

When messages in different applications, emails and posts are effective, handwritten text is often described as more intimate and thoughtful, which comes most probably from the personal haptic touch but also from the time spent in writing.

In the modern era humans started to count time more precisely and thus value time, it is what we measure and care for: most jobs are still done by exchanging time to money and we often tend to talk if we have time or not, like we would speak about food or other vital assets. So if someone used time to write a letter with a pen, it is often valued.

Letter writing was not always as straightforward as digital communication when we tend to think the message is sent or not. Very fascinating letter was written by visual artist and author Tove Jansson in the end of war 1944, where she had an urge to write from Finland to her best friend in America, but it took some time until the postal services started to work again over the Atlantic.

She wrote several letters over months, holding them until the postal system was recovered and working again.<sup>55</sup> Sometimes the process was as important as the final delivery.

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<sup>53</sup> Spring 2021 Editors' Note. <https://thenewriver.us/742-2/>

<sup>54</sup> Lindstedt et al. 2020 panel discussion

<sup>55</sup> Jansson 2019

There was an intention of naming the work as kinesics as the work got inspiration from the early text art works in video format. Kinesics is the recurrent theme of gestures and non-verbal communication that we return later in my works *Substrates* and in a manner with *NFC*.

Placing a poem on screen is giving it kinetic materiality, as Stein described it in *Poetry's Afterlife: Verse in the Digital Age*<sup>56</sup>, it is in the nature of the medium and the tools. Reader has changed to the user before the poem even appears in front of one.

In ordinary use text is understood in certain order, these are learnt meanings. When we add kinesics in words and letters, communication also takes visual and gestural forms, bending the meaning or making completely its own language beyond the obvious one.

In traditional writing and image-making there is a lot of gestural behaviour around the process, Isidora Fićović was exploring the process of these gestures in "Interactivity in drawing/writing gestures" (2016).

There were interesting questions about the bodily presence in prehistoric communication and the modern static way, if there could be some correspondence between these and rethinking the interactivity with machines while writing or making images.<sup>57</sup> In this manner the bodily act becomes a performative language extending the meaning of the written or drawn content.

There are multiple interesting text art video works in past decades I got inspiration from, to mention a few for example Nirit Peled made three poem video series *Poetry in Motion* (2006) with spoken-word poet and LGBT rights activist Stacy Ann Chin. As the words are transformed into visual language, inhabiting undefined digital space, fragments are getting new meanings by the spectator, by the new order.



The words and letters are melting together, expanding, becoming rather material than predefined messages while the content stays sharp in the audible domain. There is also contrast with a gentle and slowly growing digital environment, while text stays uncut and constant.

The wizardry of poetry is often between lines, not in the obvious meaning of single words, it is in the feeling and in the senses of it. With some topics, poetry is one of the rare languages that can get closer to the real meaning of things that do not necessarily have exact terms and definitions.

As the spring 2020 was full of uncertainty, I feel that with digital poetry and moving images I could get closer to faded thoughts that did not have other formats and expressions, receivers of the letters could unlock mutual memories and observations.

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<sup>56</sup> Stein 115, 2010

<sup>57</sup> Fićović 2016

### 3.3 Substrates

- a video poem

*Substrates* (2021) is video poetry based on the virtual visit in ENAS laboratories as exploration of artistic and scientific processes. Gestures and spoken words are found and captured somewhere in between virtual and physical spaces, encoded and manipulated into visual and textual poetry with post-VR vibes.

In virtual worlds we are used to bundling with floating limbs to get some bodily awareness and to attach ourselves with different environments. These are guiding us smoothly to other domains, in deep shiny spaces. In this video poem gestures are still rather mechanical within symbiosis with machines, tools and devices, blue colour making them a bit alien.

At the same time we want to feel a connection with something very humane, but call into question if we should follow tempting oddity.

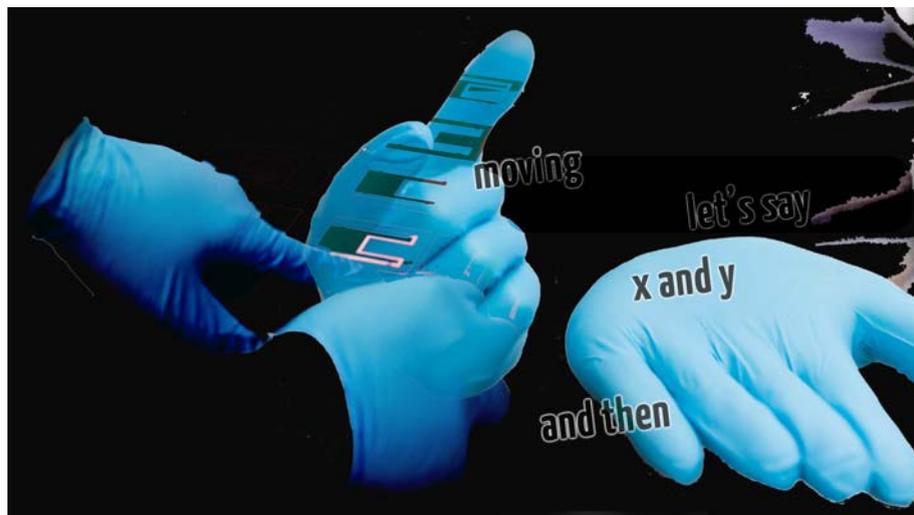


Figure 28. *Substrates*. Tiio Suorsa. 2021. Cover image.

This project and exhibition rebuts myths of artistic and scientific practices by finding the shared interests. The substrate serves as the base layer for microelectronics, but also means a language that gets influenced by another infiltrate language. In between realities, in between processes.

## Process

I participated in the project Labor 2025 in workshop "Artistic Recipes & Scientific Protocols", which was organised for selected international artists in collaboration with artist Fabricio Lamoncha (ES), Fraunhofer Institute for Electronic Nano Systems ENAS (DE) and the cultural partner Klub Solitaer e.V. (DE).

In this project artists came together with high-technology institutes to experiment and share artistic and scientific processes, to find mutual ground and possible interfaces or aesthetic implementations.

The actual visit in the laboratories happened remotely with proximity services, like a streaming mobile device attached on the researcher's chest while they were working in the laboratories. This allowed all the participants to fully follow the processes and to simulate the real visit as far as possible.

Afterwards all the participated artists got the video material to be used in artistic renderings and interpretations. This all led into the CCI Lab exhibition in Ars Electronica Center (AT) in spring 2021 where all the outcomes of workshops were presented.

Already one year watching everything streamed, one would think another four hours video call would be challenging, but I was hooked following the movements and events in the laboratories we rarely have a chance to see.

Some of the procedures seemed even magical because we did not have the full understanding of what was exactly happening, just assumptions based on their explanations and our own earlier experience with microelectronics. It was again like the conjunction with Fluxus, performers following given instructions in front of the audience.



Figure 29. ENAS laboratories. 2021. Photos: Fabian Thüroff.

When I took a closer look afterward into the videos, I got fascinated by the combination of handicraft and automation by machines, some tension and devotion that stayed in between those two. Extracting the surrounding is allowing the act to have multiple interpretations.

*and then*  
*high speed rotation will happen*

*have you heard some nice deionised waters*  
*on the other side stretch*  
*you see this arm*  
*all moving over*

*substrate is still rotating*  
*and then*

*pressured air*  
*or*  
*nitrogen*

Substrates, a poem example. Tiio Suorsa. 2021.

For the text-based poems I was listening through the records we were given from the laboratory visit, finding interesting fragments of words. I wrote down a lot of dialogues, five pages to be accurate, and started to edit and organise them in a more suitable format.

I did not try to make any wider sense or meaning out of them, most of the content was too scientific or specialty, so I trusted the intuition and vibration of the sentences. After all there is only less than one fifth of the text material included in the final video.

Similarly to finding and extracting text, I captured some parts of the records where they used blue protective gloves while working in the laboratories. These parts were edited together to make a raw video of only blue gloves working and wandering around without context.



Figure 30. Single frame from video. Substrates. Tiio Suorsa. 2021.

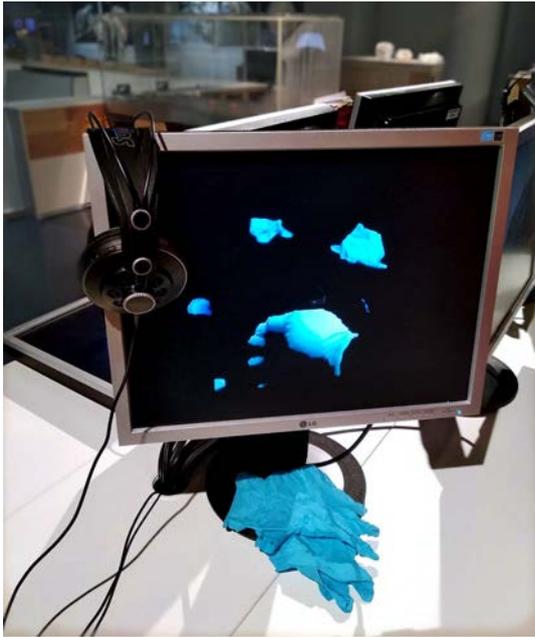


Figure 31.  
Substrates, Tiio Suorsa 2021.  
In Ars Electronica Center 2021.  
Photo: Fabricio Lamonza.

Usually the green screen effect is used to remove the solid-coloured background, but this time it was used opposite, the object was extracted by colour-coding, leaving the new environment to be an indefinite space.

It took quite a lot of effort to extract the gloves since the colour blue had all the shades extended into green and cyan when used under different positions and lightning, when the technique was developed to use chroma key as stable solid colour in a studio.

I blended the visual and textual materials together following my intention of a new language that was born in between human and machine, between physical, virtual and unconscious spaces, to also manifest experimentation on undefined ground.

The four minutes long video is made in an aspect ratio of 4:3 to be installed in an older monitor, looping seamlessly.

## Inspiration

Interdisciplinary practice exempts experimenting in an unstable ground. Recently I have been especially interested in exploring the relationships between humans, technology and nature, but rather by blurring the boundaries and the artificial definitions between species.

While we are seeking efficiency and speed with machines, some things are still crafted. Humans are species that like to watch other humans doing things as a vicarious experience. But what if we don't see the result, tools or surroundings? When we do not understand the whole meaning and process, it is shoving to expand the everyday reality and to blend truth and stories.

Hand gestures are often used especially when trying to communicate in foreign language but also their meaning is different in different cultures. While communicating with machines we use different kinds of gestures, but often very static and repetitional ones because of the nature of devices and technical tools.



Figure 32. Single frame from video by Jenna Sutela. *nimiia cétii*, Jenna Sutela. 2018.

Jenna Sutela (1983) is Finnish, Berlin-based artist working in between futuristic and ancient phenomena, using words, sounds and installations. The audio-visual work *nimiia cétii* (2018) uses machine learning to generate a new language, inspired by experiments in interspecies communication and seeking unconscious connections.

Machine learning happens in a sort of black box where the exact process is still obscure, Sutela noting that they created a kind of alien in that sense, calling the computer as a shaman of modern times as well.<sup>58</sup> Something that develops and gets its shape in between realities may feel inexplicable but it is not too far what happens in our unconsciousness or dreams, mixing the sense of human and machine again.

The work was made by documenting the movement of *Bacillus subtilis natto*, bacteria used in space because of its survival of conditions on Mars and audio recordings of early Martian language. The material was given for a machine to learn and to generate a new language based on these.

**“ [--]seeing ourselves as always already connected, as being part of the system - rather than as masters of the universe to which all beings are inferior - is an important step in developing a more critical and a more responsible relationship to the world[--]”**

(Kember & Zylinska, *Life after New Media*, 193-194, 2015)

There are these similar elements of some magic going on in between virtual and physical spaces, while a human is not anymore an omnipotent controller like Kember and Zylinska described this needed direction.<sup>59</sup> In Sutela’s work humans are part of the process besides by voice material, but as operator or enabler, while in my own work I use humans also as bodily material as part of the outcome.

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<sup>58</sup> Somerset House Trust 2018

<sup>59</sup> Kember & Zylinska 193-194, 2015

It is also interesting what is the role of gestures in the near future, it was our primal language maybe before the vocational one. Communication is always reshaping, in VR we still need this bodily awareness but in a different context blended together with machines and systems.

In spring 2021 I teamed up with Niina Oisalo and Shambhavi Singh in a Digital Literature Hackathon where we shared interest in gestural languages and poetry, and how these can evolve in digital space. This cooperative event happened to be around the same time I was working with *Substrates*. We had great discussions around the theme during three intensive days and after.

In the hackathon we proposed a concept called *Body Poetry* which is an interactive platform with text fragments, illustrations and moving images, demo coded with p5.js. We were thinking of gestures as poetry of the body, a language that was born from emotions and thoughts, therefore could be understood more generally than vocational ones.



Figure 33. Research material of gestures in art and history. Public Domain CC0.

This is also about language as continuous re-coding, in different cultures, in different eras. At the same time how rapidly we might face alienation from the culture of gestures, that we cannot interpret anymore for example in old paintings, and interpretations in memes are made from today's point of view.

Gestures are holding embodied memories, in post-internet time gestures and visual language came through digital domains holding everlastingly new meanings.

### 3.4 CacheDash

- an interactive video installation

*CacheDash* (2021) is an interactive video installation, an exploration with one of the most intimate but controlling parts of our devices, like memories are in our minds. Looping memories are effecting and organising the reality in our unconscious mind.

*CacheDash* is part of my ongoing exploration of how to be a human between virtual and actual realities. It is custom-made for the unique Deep Space 8K at Ars Electronica Center in Austria.

In the installation visitors will enter into a big dark space where each of them gets their own abstract, looping memory as a video clip under their feet. The recorded memory is five to ten seconds long and will follow the visitor making a path while walking in the space, drawing and leaving the current frame like a pigment.



Figure 34. CacheDash. Tiio Suorsa. 2021.  
In Deep Space 8K, Ars Electronica Center. Photo: Indira Di Benedetto.

When the wanderer is standing still, the video runs smoothly as frames are placed on each other like in an animation, but with small misplacement of the frames. When standing still, the sound is lower. The faster one moves, the stronger sound of the video increases and the more fragmented the image develops, leaving only frames after another.

There are eight videos all together in an order. Each video has a different frame making the video look even more hazy, like a reminiscent and dreamy like memories tend to be. Ideally there are multiple persons at the same time wandering around, painting with the memories. We leave traces, traces are left on us.

## Process

After *Kinesics of Letters* I started to take a deeper look at mobile memories we carry with us in devices, our own intentional ones such as photos and videos, but also the ones the device collects by itself in cache memory.

By the end of 2020 the only way to see people was passing by on the streets, keeping distance, and it made me think about when and how we will have some connection again. In this political and digital phase we seem so separated in our bubbles, but we are not so different deep inside.

The project was developed for a very defined space with a specific system. It is made with Processing programming with the TUIO protocol and library<sup>60</sup> with a laser tracking system that is used at the Deep Space 8K.

The process was quite different than usual, when normally the idea is developing in its form - technology, medium and materials are following along or after. Now the technology and space was defined from the beginning and the whole process was somehow upside-down, which twisted my thinking and challenged me to keep the artistic thinking strong.

For me it was clear from the beginning, I would like to use videos even though working with them has been tricky with Processing. I started the project in October 2020, the first sketches included different styles of distorted reality, but later I started to develop the idea in that direction visitors could feel at the same time welcome and nebulous. I tried to avoid predefined reactions.

From the beginning I was very excited and keen to realise the work in this unique place, but the predefined space and novel technology brought challenges. Some moments I was anguished, I had to deal with what I wrote before, to keep myself as an artist in an unknown territory, learning new functions.

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<sup>60</sup> TUIO is an open framework that defines a common protocol and API for tangible multi-touch surfaces. <https://www.tuio.org/>

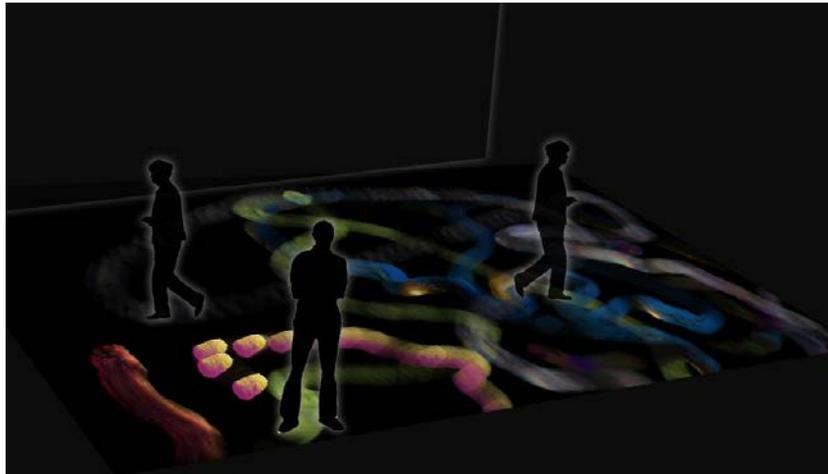


Figure 35. An early sketch of CacheDash. By Tiio Suorsa. 2020.

I had planned to use longer 4K or FullHD videos, but after the first tests I found out there is no chance I would be able to do that, that expensive use was not supported. Since it actually fitted even better in my concept, I edited all the videos to be with reduced quality, blurred and short, like looping memories really are. The final videos are scaled to be in the physical space about 80 cm by diameter while the space itself is 16 x 9 meters.

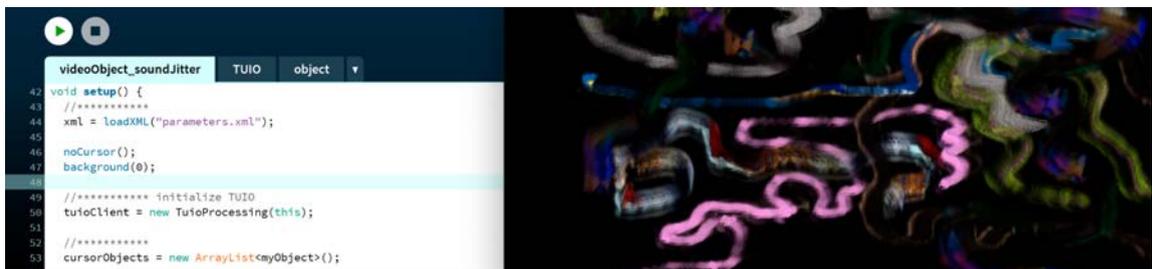


Figure 36. Screen capture by Tiio Suorsa. Programming and testing on a laptop. 2021.

The content of the videos are quite abstract, one may recognise shapes but nothing very concrete, just colours and patterns<sup>61</sup>. This is foremost because of conceptual reasons, to explore if memories are personal or mutual, so each one wandering in the installation has the possibility to relate and evoke their own emotions from hazy, undefined visuals. This happened also because of my aesthetic choices, I tend to go into an abstract and fluid tendency if complying.

The video clips are from my mobile device from the years 2018–2021 and a few clips from the 90's recorded originally on VHS and digitised, to present different memory layers we carry with us in the present moment.

<sup>61</sup> For the curious minds, the videos are for example plants, a thunderstorm, walking in an unknown cottage, dance floor, meeting a friend and reflection of sunlight.

Because of the lockdown, I was working from October until March only on a laptop, trying to imagine what it would look like in a big hall. Sometimes I put the videos in my mini-projector, holded it pointing on the floor and walked around my room in the darkness, the video looping around my feet to catch some spatial feeling of the work in development.

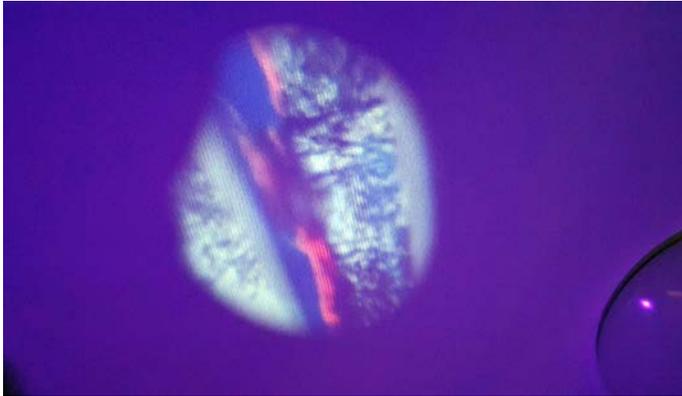


Figure 37.  
Early tests and experiments  
with a basic projector.  
Photo: Tiio Suorsa. 2020.



Figure 38.  
The first test of CacheDash  
at Time-Based Media studio,  
Kunstuniversität Linz.  
Photo: Gerhard Funk. 2021.

The first test in a real space with laser tracking was in the studio at Kunstuniversität Linz in spring 2021. It was amazing to see it working in a real world space out from my laptop, but the dark floor was hiding some tones of colours, and sounds could not be tested.

I did small adjustments in the meantime until it was tested again, the first time in the very real Deep Space 8K in August 2021. Along the whole process I got a lot of crucial help and assistance from Gerhard Funk and Holunder Heiß.

Then it was already the premiere on the Ars Electronica Festival in September 2021. Visitors seemed to love painting with videos, sometimes standing still watching their own video memory, sometimes wandering around in the abstract image, being aware of different content of others and the big picture made together. Some visitors described it as very captivating, which was very nice to hear.



Figure 39. CacheDash. Tiio Suorsa. 2021. In Deep Space 8K, Ars Electronica Center. Photo: Tiio Suorsa.

## Inspiration

We have our memory working without interruption, seemingless from others but often even from ourselves. It is similar to how the very confidential cache in our devices work, unnoticeable, but full of stories and details about our preferences, datum and awareness, ready to be used in any needed second in a random situation or form.

We use a lot of effort to be recognised and remembered as individuals, but at the same time to be forgotten as a humane entity.

We try to teach computers to think and feel like humans with all the complexities, but at the same time we are still quite unsure about all the features the human mind encapsulates, sometimes wishing the human mind would be less complex. In *CacheDash* I am blending these features together, the multiple layers humans carry along.

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha used images and language from the source of own memories to explore if there could be some dialog between viewers associations, if memories are very personal or can be understood universally.<sup>62</sup> In *CacheDash* my intention was not to bring a highly personal approach to the stage, rather to bring this similar dialog and to give viewers material to work with their own possible affections in an abstract way.

I was digging deeper what memories really are, strongly connected to emotions which all have important meaning and role to guide us in life. Most of the memories are very short looping moments when we experienced fear, joy, indignity, happiness or other strong presence.

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<sup>62</sup> Best 128, 2014

As Kenneth Goldsmith is describing in the *Wasting time on the internet*, it is most often embarrassing to see our own browser history, while searching something specific we end up scrolling through all the whims<sup>63</sup>. As we spend most of our daily lives on devices, each move tracked and stored like an automatic diary:

**"I could reconstruct a fairly accurate self-portrait"**

(Goldsmith 49, 2016).

I like Goldsmith's observation that browser history is like the Buddhist mind, giving name for each arising thought and emotion, but I think instead of naming the actual emotions, we are just collecting a punch of vagrant notions that we should not care about at all. I do agree though, our browser history is a mirror that we should face occasionally.

As the chapter title says "Our Browser History is the New Memoir"<sup>64</sup>: our diaries are mechanically written, our minds too busy, but thoughts, desires, hopes, doubts and anxieties are recorded deliberately and unintentionally.

While there are too many things going on and we think to be effective and fast, actually it all got slower: memory is overwhelmed, cache archiving every single move<sup>65</sup>, not to mention sustainability and purpose of this all.

**"Today cinema represents reality; tomorrow it will *be* reality"**

(Youngblood 30, 1989)

This was something they saw coming up, but in 1989 with holography and stereoptics, as it turned out later for example in forms of VR, AR, mappings and projections. There are no frames anymore and spatial sense of image cannot be separated from the current reality, and this forces us to understand reality in a different way, as I often use the term *actuality* when speaking about the tangible world.

Media art has always mixed realities, maybe more obviously than other art fields, but at this moment it all got new dimensions. VR keeps staying alien with the bulky headset, but technology like in Deep Space allows us to travel in very similar places with more bodily awareness and immersive illusion.

We rarely make a stop to separate predefined and endogenous experiences, especially in a gallery space. But could those be blended with benefit? Screens and virtual worlds are taking us apart from actuality, but experiences are still real.

I found these different directions absorbing, again seeking what is hidden in between as ordinarily the answer does not lie in the corners or vanishing points.

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<sup>63</sup> Goldsmith 48-49, 2016

<sup>64</sup> Goldsmith 48, 2016

<sup>65</sup> Goldsmith 55, 2016



Figure 40. The La Halle space at Atelier des Lumières, the first digital museum of fine art in Paris. 2018. Photo: Tiio Suorsa.

*Exploded Views 2.0* by Marnix de Nijs is a very captivating work that mixes urban spaces, individual experiences and movement in real physical space and in the 3D world. It has an object that reminds of a globe that is used for scanning different places in the world, a bit similar to the one we also used in the *COCO-lands* installation.



*Exploded Views 2.0* has many layers on concept level while controlling the view with the globe and sensing two different spaces at the same time. It is interesting to discover if an object makes the difference or can the experience be even more pure with relying only on one's own body and senses.

The first version of the work is using whole body movement to control the visual appearance similar to interaction in *Deep Space*. It seems bodily captivating, making a person linked to the whole ocean of images used to develop this dreamy world.

The second version seemed more intimate as the visual world is controlled by the globe-feeling sphere, making movement more gentle, but mechanical. In this notion one has to fully connect with an object, simultaneously control mind, body and vision. None of the approaches is better or worse, just if it is along with the intention.

In *Exploded Views 2.0* like in *CacheDash* is used consultational interactivity as the user can choose how to distribute the material that is already given, but it is also dynamic, the user is changing its position.

Perry Hoberman has many interesting works that are questioning the behaviour of humans while interacting with technical devices. Interesting aspect in *Lightpools* (1998) is the matter of participation with others because alone the experience stays very bare. Each visitor gets their own stick with a lantern pointing on the ground with different colourful lights and patterns. The artwork takes place in a circular defined space in darkness.

Usually it is very effective to use common objects or behaviour, but with unexpected results and advanced technology. Here the interaction with lanterns is known, if not everyday life, but at least from fantasy stories, but instead of light reflection there are multiple vivid tiny worlds reflected and developed.



*Lightpools* is visually delicate and meditative. It has quite straightforward interaction between visitors and invites stepping out from their own space. The slow sensing of space is sedative with colourful lights, visitors are intuitively guided to use the space in a certain way.

I would state that devices are here to help us to understand our human selves better, to be mirrors in-between, if we dare to look deeper. With *CacheDash* I raised questions of personal and communal memories, as well as created visual comprehension of bubbly underneath of the human surface.

### 3.5 NFC (Non-Finite Clause)

- web-based object installation

*NFC (Non-Finite Clause)* is an exploration of space in between the internet and actuality. The idea for the work came after being exhausted with abundant, but monotonous internet content you cannot escape without escaping the whole system and community.

As Marisa Olson wrote in the post-internet manifesto, we just happen to live in an internet-obsessed society at the moment, and because that, every art that is made at the moment is postinternet art on some level.<sup>66</sup>



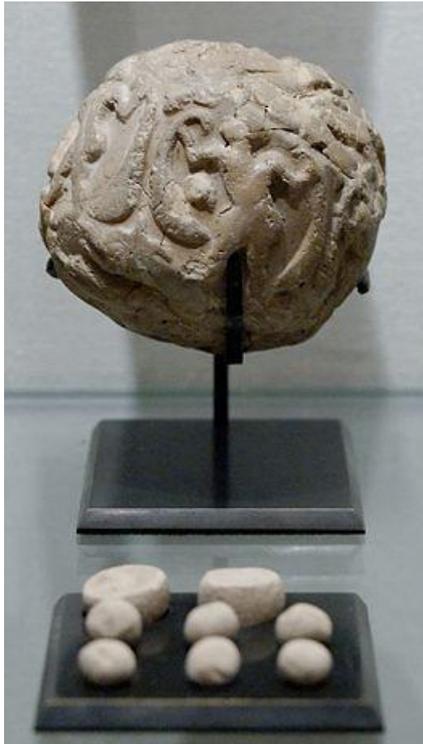
Figure 41. NFC.  
Tiio Suorsa 2021.

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<sup>66</sup> Olson 62-63, 2011

*NFC* consists of clay objects, *NFC* tags<sup>67</sup>, printed images, web pages, moving images, generative art and text-based poems. I used decoupage, moulding, HTML, CSS, JavaScript, Processing, Pure Data, video manipulation and hydrophone recordings to realise the work.

Based on the idea of ancient bullas, a very early form of envelopes made out of clay, the postinternet bullas are covered with images found from the internet and digital spaces, hiding web-based messages inside. Clay as a primal material holds the notion of stability and flexibility of time as one.



Inside each bulla is a hidden *NFC* tag that can be scanned with any mobile device that has an *NFC* reader (most of the phones and tablets).

Once scanned the tag, a web page opens on the device following the structure of popups which come along with poems, and a restful web space with slowly moving videos and animations<sup>68</sup>.

The idea is to have a unique and intimate experience, imitating the act of receiving a traditional letter.

Figure 42.  
A bulla (clay envelope) and its contents on display at the Louvre. Uruk period (4000–3100 BC).  
Public Domain CC0.

Bullas can be found in the gallery space or the nearby area, a bit hidden but reachable. This is an experimental approach to try to expand the defined white cubes. The size of the bulla is approximately 10 cm, one of them 20 cm. There are six bullas at once on display, but the project is in-process and expanding.



Figure 43.  
A bulla hiding in the corner of a gallery space.  
Photo: Tiiu Suorsa. 2021.

<sup>67</sup> Near-Field Communication (*NFC*) is for communication between two electronic devices.

<sup>68</sup> Demo of *NFC*: <http://nfccy.net/demo.html>, open with a mobile device, headphones attached.

## Process

Following the notion by Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska in “Life after New Media”, technology is coming all the time closer to us, from a metal-silicon cyborg to a biotechnological field where it might literally go under the skin.<sup>69</sup> Those mighty-human dreams have no end, I assume, but while others are busy with that, I have been very interested first in what it means to be a human *around* the devices and machines.

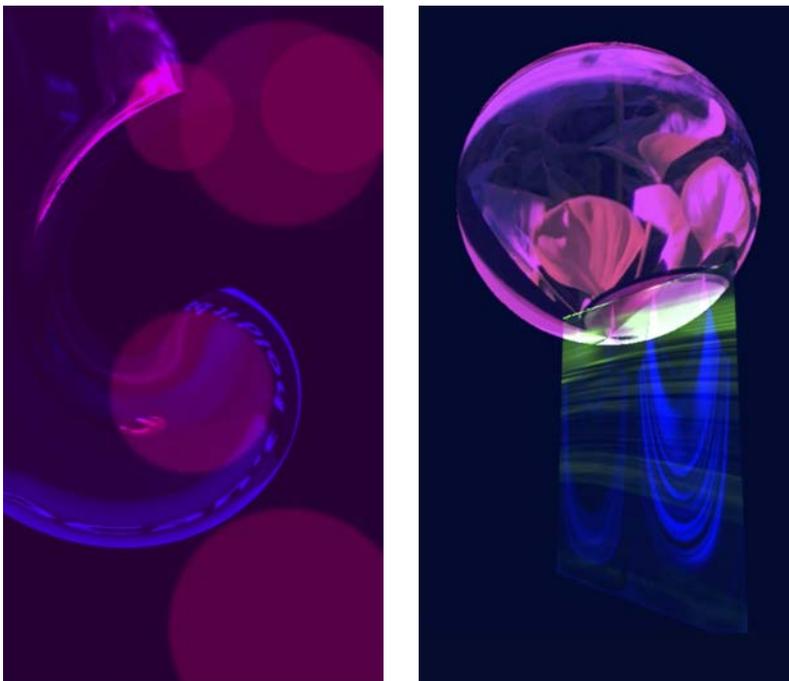


Figure 44.  
Screen captures of  
the web pages on  
a mobile device.

NFC.  
Tii Suorsa.  
2021.

The internet and technology are ubiquitous, they are everywhere. If we cut loose, we have to separate also from the society and community. With this work I am exploring ways to adjust the behaviour by paying attention in the more meaningful decision making, for example when choosing to be the receiver of the content. The videos are like a flowing river, keeping your mind fluid, but not overwhelmed.

Often personalised content is marketed to be customised individually, but in most cases it is actually generated by default settings by assumed age, gender and social status. As humans are guided to read and like things that they should as representatives of their age, gender and social status, we lose our very own opinions, emotions and thinking.

The *NFC* work is not providing personalised content, I think more important than fully personalised content is to provoke again your own thoughts and emotions whatever the content is. This cannot be done in a fast phase with given guidelines.

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<sup>69</sup> Kember & Zylinska 193, 2015

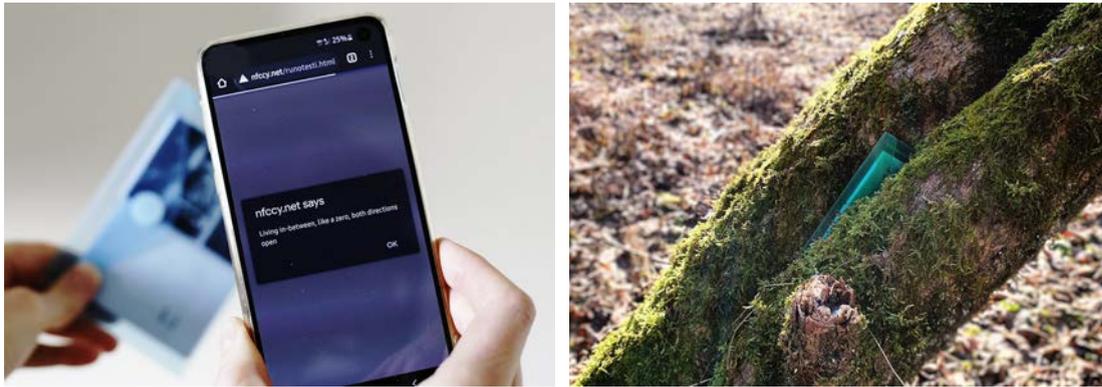


Figure 45. NFC, the first experiments and prototypes. Photos: Tiio Suorsa. 2020.

I started the work in summer 2020 by getting familiar with urban play. The first test versions were plastic envelopes which are easy to hide in wall cracks and between trees. It would be an efficient option, but it felt quite soulless so I continued to develop the format.

After testing and trying different options, I came up with the idea of bullas as ancient envelopes. I like the sense of materiality and versatility, clay is soft but a protean material which can be transformed in multiple shapes. I was seeking spongy and gentle shapes, but with fixed form. Clay carries an awareness of the past and a shared memory.



Figure 46. Making of bullas and placing NFC tags. Photo: Tiio Suorsa. 2021.

In the first prototypes of bullas I placed the NFC tags inside them as letters and a fixed part of the piece, but for the proper versions I got practical and placed the tags under the images on the surface. The life span of the tags is limited, with some only a few years, so it might be I have to replace them some moment.

Interestingly Derek H. Whitehead took clay objects as an example when speaking about poiesis and art-making, when usually there is “formative intentionality” when moulding clay objects, but if left aside the final format, the process becomes more important.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Whitehead 2003

Every time I took a piece of clay, I just started to mold it with a shape in my mind but allowed it to turn out as an object of the process. What contemporary practice can give is this seeking in-between and new processes, if not new materials and new contents.

The clay objects are covered with decoupage by glueing printed images on them. The images are taken from the internet circulation and from the traditional newspapers with internet or digital space related topics. The clay objects are presenting the exhausting and neverending internet materiality, but also colourful and content wise overwhelming aesthetics we have gotten already familiar with.



It was interesting how essentially the images changed the nature of raw and earthy clay to be seemingly part of another kind of system. Also the feel of the objects changed from rough and organic to bald and smoothed, even the objects are not going to be touched by humans, only by devices.



NFC tags are for low-speed connection and small data share, there are multiple things you could code on them and I had to keep my mind stricht with the idea. I still got familiar with all the possibilities that could be coded in the tags, for example reading out loud sensitive content from the mobile device's memory.

In this work I used only the basic feature to open a specific web page. I also tested having two functions in the same tag, but that did not work as smoothly as I wanted.

Figure 47. Two examples of final bullas. NFC. Tiio Suorsa. 2021.

I chose NFC as the technology and communication system for my work because of its straightforwardness, sustainability and timeliness, since contactless payments started to be a thing rapidly in 2020. The background of the NFC is in radio frequencies, but now it is also introducing a different kind of currency and intimate relation with data sharing. NFC tags are unpowered, passive data holders, which are usually read-only, but can be rewritten.

Along with the physical objects I developed the web content which opens once tags are scanned. Quite soon I realised I have to use vertical videos and web elements since they are going to be seen on mobile phones and I wanted the content filling the whole screen.

The content is web-based, following aesthetics from the virtual spaces, I recorded videos and manipulated them until they could not be recognised.

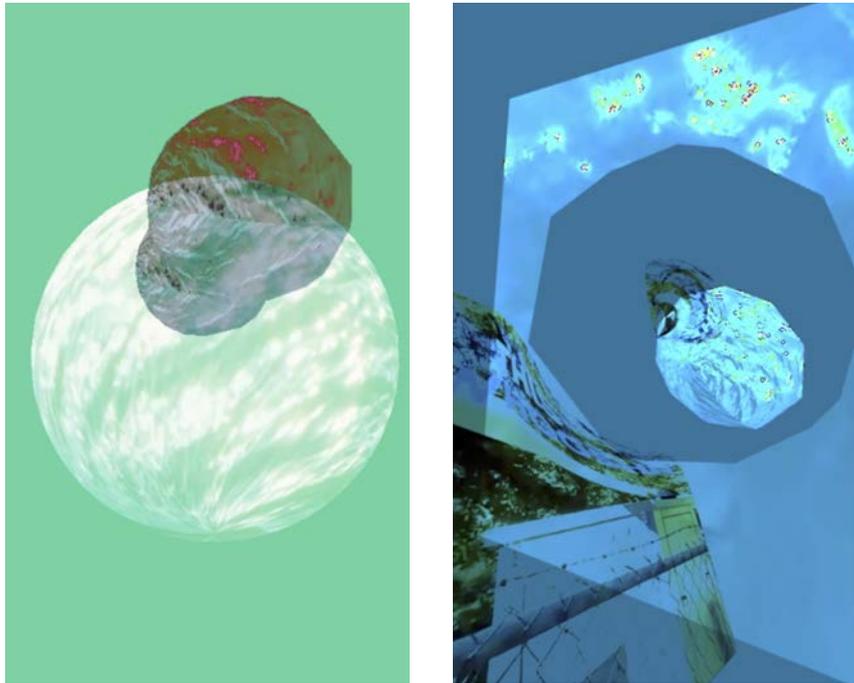


Figure 48.  
Single frames  
from videos.  
NFC.  
Tiiio Suorsa.  
2021.

The videos consist of animations like floating spheres, rendered 3D objects or circular video, which are made with Processing and Pure Data. The videos are rendered and exported in very small size to be sustainable and economical in mobile use, also the length is kept around one minute in loop to archive the blended sense of time.

The pop-up poems are handwritten with electronic paper and pen, but transcoded into typed text. The themes of the poems follow the absurdity of internet life being ostensibly separated but a crucial part of our everyday life, while the structure replicates the annoyance we face dozens of times a day with the nonsense, fragmented nature of pop-up windows.

This is a perfect place for fragmented poetry that usually escapes strict formats with the internet experience itself, at the same time considering and producing it.

Web pages are not linked with each other besides placed under the same domain [www.nfccy.net](http://www.nfccy.net). I knew HTML and CSS beforehand, but for this project I had to recall a bit and to learn JavaScript from scratch.

In the beginning I thought to use p5.js to make generative content on web pages, but I decided to use JavaScript and videos. Many ideas I wanted to archive with p5.js would need a workaround and it started to feel like changing too many things from the original ideas. I am still thinking about this option for a varied version of the *NFC*.

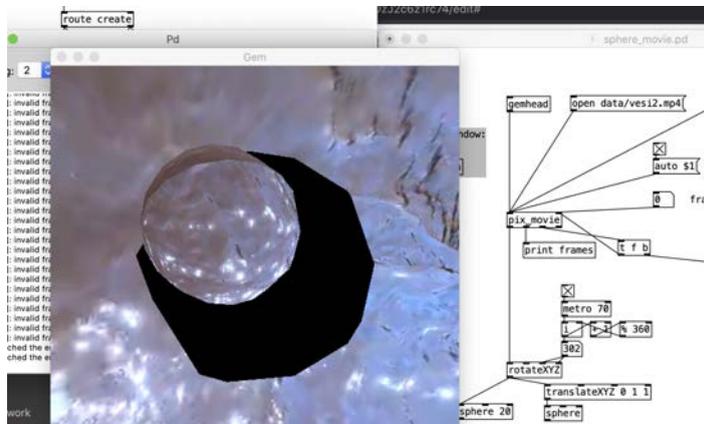


Figure 49. Screen capture by Tiio Suorsa. Testing and making videos with Pure Data. 2021.

After the visitor gets through pop-ups, there is the video looping in the digital void. It is recommended to have sounds on and headphones with the mobile device to get the best experience.



The sounds are recorded with a self-made hydrophone (waterproofed piezo) in water and other surfaces, mixing them into an unknown but inviting bubbly soundscape.

This work is experimental, not so much in technological sense, but in spatial sense. Can we find new kinds of microcosms with our devices which are a solid part of our modern lifestyle? I was also interested to try how this will work in a normal gallery space but in extended domains, outside of the white walls.

Figure 50.  
Recording sounds for *NFC*.  
Photo: Tiio Suorsa. 2021.

While publishing this, exhibitions are upcoming. *NFC* will be in Atelierhaus Salzamt in Linz (AT) as part of a media archaeological exhibition in winter 2021–2022. The solo exhibition in Gallery Jänis in Turku (FI) is confirmed to be in summer 2022, partly on the window, partly in the surrounding area of the gallery consisting of bullas and poster image montage.

## Inspiration

While all machines and media tools aim to be faster, more effective and better quality, I got fascinated by the thought to slow down the process and the tools. I like the idea of extra effort presented earlier, in a thoughtful way.

As Kenneth Goldsmith remarks, on the web we are fishing - dropping a line, hoping something will bite, but we do not know to whom we are speaking and thus cannot expect a coherent response.<sup>71</sup> In *NFC* the objects are left in a space like web pages on the internet, maybe someone will bite.

Like envelope bullas, over history letters are used in multifunctional and very varied ways, not carrying only socio-cultural functions but carrying importance also as objects.<sup>72</sup> The object can be delivered in many different ways and it has been a mirror to the current era.

Besides the content, letters and envelopes are also messages themselves which have different roles in their existence: as material, interface, carrier of content, holder of a memory and even as relic - if not burned or ripped in the moment of catharsis. Letters are context-sensitive and when seen rather as a process than a product<sup>73</sup> it opens up new dimensions to see a letter timeless, active and flexible.

Alexis Gideon used video art and clay to explore what is between truth and stories based on memories.<sup>74</sup> *The Comet and the Glacier* (2016) work also had physical artifacts which may be real parts of history - or just a story. In times of fully recorded and tracked life, it is interesting what is the role and the shape of memory. How does history form? Sometimes a fake image is as good evidence as fragmented memory.

NFC is a special wireless communication protocol since it does not require touch, but devices need to be under three centimeter distance from each other, making it very intimate like digital whispering, finding this very specific relationship being together.

In "Digital Art" (2015), Aram Bartholl's work "Dead Drops" as the cover image, Christiane Paul states that locative media projects continue to grow as new technologies will bear the development.<sup>75</sup>

In the article "Beyond *Beyond Locative Media: Art, Data and the Politics of Place*" (2018) media artist Jessica Thompson debates that the reason for these kinds of locative works' appearance decreased some moment after all media became locative.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Goldsmith 27, 2016

<sup>72</sup> Del Lungo Camiciotti 2014, 17-18

<sup>73</sup> Nevalainen & Tanskanen 2007, 9

<sup>74</sup> Uszerowicz 2016

<sup>75</sup> Paul 237, 2015

<sup>76</sup> Thompson 2018

Nowadays everything is location based, all is mapped and tracked. Beyond being placed on the Earth's crust, we do have mental maps and political maps of the places that go along and layered. Thompson draws a line from early locative media works with GPS and text messages to game apps and data usage:

**“As data becomes more integral to everyday life, our actions will occur within a new form of consciousness and a post-locative physicality, where we are everywhere and nowhere at once.”**

(Thompson 2018)

*Dead Drops* (2010–) is a widely spread project by Aram Bartholl where USBs are bricked in walls and cracks around the cities, and by now around the world. These are offline, peer-to-peer file-sharing networks, but separated and individually working and not connected with each other. The user has to go to the physical outdoor space to share the files by connecting their own device with USB, leaning shoulder by wall.

Whatever you do in the public space there applies the rules of street art, it is all very uncertain. There is always the risk to be physically or digitally damaged, stolen or tuned. As my own work follows the idea of letters, delivered by humans, there are as well the same risks - many envelopes have gotten lost forever.



Figure 51. *Dead Drops* (2010–), Aram Bartholl. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Sometimes the limits of an artwork and reality are blurred, but this is a good example of how everyone is responsible for their own security, while it is indeed an artwork, it is a game, there are no guarantees or promises, it is not a product.

While I started with this project, I found a project very similar to mine, *Stonemaps* by Hanif Janmohamed and colleagues. After one year it looks like a proper product with patent pending, but the idea is based in art practice and slow media.

*Stonemaps* is a project to build a very intentional social, web-based network by physical objects, colour-printed stones. To be part of the social platform you have to meet in an actual world at least one of the members and only by receiving and scanning a stone with NFC tag you are able to join and share in the social platform.

They are examining how gifting is actually awakening responsibility and a sense of connection in us in times of broken connection with each others<sup>77</sup>.



Figure 52. Stonemaps prototypes. Image: ©2021, Hanif Janmohamed.

They use gifts as a media to build a very slowly, intentionally growing network. This seems to give deeper meaning to it, growing as far as the members go. The intention with this is to build better conversation,

**“It creates trust and intimacy. It takes time, practice, and patience.”**

(Janmohamed et al. 1, 2020)

Like with digital content, also urban spaces, smart cities are physical however far digitised. Besides media and art, in “Urban Interfaces” De Lange, Merx and Verhoeff are stating that cities are interfaces for memory-making and connections, platforms for transformations.<sup>78</sup>

They are also pointing out that urban spaces and design are never neutral, there are always underneath the interest of who have the right to the space<sup>79</sup>, sometimes through obvious target groups, by accessibility of structures or defined behaviour.

In the same publication Simon Wind and Ole B. Jensen also point out that cities, urban spaces are at the same time disorganised, messy, playful and rational by their nature. Often the playful part is forgotten in serious technological inventions ruled by growth and control.<sup>80</sup>

When something unexpected is placed in the urban space, these “alien spectacles”, as they call them, expands the understanding of common spaces, objects and installations without reference of use and ordinary practice forces us to rethink our own patterns in the urban area.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Janmohamed et al. 2-3, 2020

<sup>78</sup> De Lange et al. 3, 2019

<sup>79</sup> De Lange et al. 4, 2019

<sup>80</sup> Wind & Jensen 8, 2019

<sup>81</sup> Wind & Jensen 14, 2019

In the artwork *BEFNOED* (2014–), by Eva & Franco Mattes, visitors are forced to take uncomfortable and awkward positions and gestures to be able to see the screens, for example laying on the floor or standing in the corner of the room.



Figure 53. BEFNOED. Eva and Franco Mattes. 2014-.

The content is webcam performances by anonymous workers hired through crowdsourcing services, published in forgotten social media platforms. BEFNOED is an acronym for By Everyone, For No One, Every Day.

It is a great example of how to do a lot with little, making the awkwardness visible with small adjustments. It is also interesting how keen people are to see the content that they are willing to come up with different gestures to reach it, even the content is nothing vital.

I have been keen on street art, besides on the variety in aesthetics, but also on the nature of reaching them. Half of the pleasure is the treasure hunt to find them, sometimes intentionally, sometimes coincidentally, which makes the artwork feel even more special when given extra effort to find it, added experience instead of pre-served. Street art has made its way to the galleries where exactly this part is missing.

## 4 Conclusion

**“Fiction and poetry are doses, medicines.  
What they heal is the rupture reality makes on the imagination.”**

Jeanette Winterson, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (61, 2011)

What we need in the odd and chaotic world is more exposure. I would state here that abstractions, moving images and digital poetry allow us to stay in-between with trust and intimacy. When things are not predefined, it opens spaces for different interpretations, it opens inner worlds but with shared experiences.

What we can benefit with and by technology is to build a more equal relationship with machines and other species, leaving the stress of building an almighty human.

Within these works I explored possibilities to live and work in between different states, between human and machine, between analog and digital, between becomings, genders, ages and cultures, to better understand humanity and these shared worlds.

This is a similar state of in-betweenness where Jeanette Winterson often stays: we tell stories to fix the missing parts and to get better along with the fragmented history. One of the biggest human struggles is to deal with our own fears and errors, therefore to tolerate those in others, and get along with other species and human made machines.

Following loosely the idea of *Slow Media Manifesto*, my recent practice has been focused in choosing the right ingredients and to cook with concentration. I had to step out from some prime opportunities to concentrate on what I was really developing. This is not always possible or easy, but when given the space it is better to use it for growing. The aim is not to be slow in time, but to be concentrated in it with intentions.

I used some handicraft elements like handwriting and molding clay which gave different connections for the work, but also I used extra effort with digital images to place the focus in experimenting and in the process, keeping the outcome as the result of the process not as a predefined frame.

In *Slow Media Manifesto* one key element is the role of user and social community rather than passive consumer. This happened the best with *CacheDash* as it was the most immersive and participatory work, but then on a smaller scale, with micro interactions the works grew into more intimate dimensions, the user is not just a passive passer-by.

Reducing rather than chasing perfection leaves space to have multiple interpretations, it gives respect to the user without compromising the idea of an artist.

In concrete practice I will work on taking the videos out from the ordinary frames, the screens. I am keen on projections but there are multiple possibilities beyond that in performative or object-oriented directions.

In abstraction humans cannot be anymore the master, but as enabler or participant of the process. This practice and thought could lead to better understanding to live with all kinds of species and nonliving entities. All my artworks were important experiments to find this path to follow further on. I have explored what digital poetry can be in an immersive, intimate, shared and personal state.

The moments when we make mistakes or decisions, we make these in obscure states.

Play and joyful are not terms that arise from my works in the first place, but in the process playfulness was a very crucial element. Example the video series *Kinesics of Letters* and web-based work *NFC* were born only through play and experimenting.

Play does not have an end, no definition of ready, it just is, all the time in progress. I think it is very important to make the process itself more visible and an obvious part of the work.

If we return to the very origin of poetry as the tool for storytellers, to be a living archive of memory, it has a very important role rather than being only aesthetic or technical matter.

Not all works are made with the intention to be examined pixel by pixel, but when doing so, the spectator is able to have own experience apart from the artist's intention and point of view. In this case the artwork grows in dimensions that were not drawn or defined beforehand.

Often the difficulty is that humans want everything reserved. The discrepancy comes from the fact that experience can be reached only individually, it is a subjective matter, often different for each.

Looping video is a good way to avoid the obvious and given experience, the spectator has to deal with the exposed and infinite matter, adapting own experience and existence along it, somewhere in between it, unstable ground with connection to other living species.

With trusting the process and slow movement forward, I am suggesting that we are already there.

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## Recent exhibitions

### Recent exhibitions and screenings

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| 2022      | [solo] <i>NFC</i> , Gallery Jänis, Turku (FI)  |
| 2021-2022 | unnamed media archaeological exhibition, Atelierhaus Salzamt (AT)  |
| 2021      | <i>CacheDash</i> , Ars Electronica Festival<br>in Deep Space 8K, Ars Electronica Center, Linz (AT) (catalogue)       |
| 2021      | videoart, in performance Libertalia - Born By the River, Bootle (UK)   |
| 2021      | <i>Frequency of Being</i> , Lacuna Festivals, Lanzarote (ES) (catalogue)   |
| 2021      | <i>COCO-lands</i> , BestOFF 2020, Linz (AT) (catalogue)  |
| 2020      | <i>COCO-lands</i> , Ars Electronica Festival, exhibition Wild State, Linz (AT) (catalogue)                           |
| 2020      | <i>Kinesics of Letters</i> , Dorf TV, Linz (AT)  |
| 2020      | <i>Kinesics of Letters</i> , ZBM online festival (AT)  |
| 2020      | <i>Frequency of Being</i> , ZBM online festival (AT)   |
| 2019      | <i>Ori3ntatioX</i> , Musikkapelle concert, Florentine, Linz (AT)<br>(curated by Enrique Tomás - ultranoise)          |
| 2019      | <i>Are You Sure?</i> , St. Interface festival, Linz (AT)   |
| 2017      | [solo] <i>Lingering</i> , Das Packhaus, Vienna (AT)  |
| 2017      | <i>Moments that are lingering</i> , Photographic Centre Peri's<br>30th anniversary exhibition PERINTÖ:30, Turku (FI) |

## Recent publications

- 2021 *Kinesics of Letters*, The New River, issue #1/2021 (US)  
2020 *Kinesics of Letters*, Nokturno.fi, issue #5/2020 (FI)  
2020 *Kinesics of Letters*, Nokturno.fi, The Dictionary of Digital and Experimental Poetry curated by Kristian Blomberg, author Elina Sallinen (FI)

## Recent collaborative projects

- 2021 *Libertalia*, international multidisciplinary circus theatre, Bootle (UK) as a video artist with eight artists (UK, HU, AT, SV, FI)  
2021 *Body Poetry*, concept, Digital Literature Hackathon, with Niina Oisalo (FI) and Shambhavi Singh (IN)  
2020 *COCO-lands*, international media art project, based in Linz (AT) in curatorial team with Smirna Kulenović (BIH), Carla Zamora (AT), Indira Di Benedetto (IT), Iosune Sarasate Azcona (ES)  
2019 *Ori3ntatioX* & Musikkapelle concert, Florentine, Linz (AT) with Carla Zamora (AT)

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