



# **ART REVIEW OXFORD**

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Translation / Mistranslation

**ARO 9** Translation / Mistranslation

*Essays by*

**Emily Jin and Sharon Liu** <sup>4</sup>

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*Artwork by*

**Emilia Osztafi** <sup>Back cover</sup>

*Editor*

**Jason Waite**

*Contributing Editors*

**Valerie Amani**

**Xinyue Liu**

**Frank Wasser**

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*Support*

**The Ruskin School of Art**

## Editor's Note

It is imperative that we acknowledge the ongoing genocide happening at this moment in the occupied territories of Palestine. In addition the encampment to support Gaza at the University of Oxford is continuing along with dozens of encampments in universities across the world. With the base of this publication in an institution of higher learning, it is important to note that all of the universities in Gaza have recently been destroyed. What does it mean to write, publish, and exist and this period of time is a critical question we all must ask.

This issue focuses on the problematics of Translation/Mistranslation prompted by contributing editor Valerie Amani. A call was extended for contributions around the following questions and concepts developed by Art Review Oxford editors:

- › Exploring ideas of languages that rebel, refuse, and reimagine.
- › The problems presented within the process of translation, specifically when assuming that English is the output.
- › How language fails to hold ideas in one form while succeeding in other ideas.
- › Ways in which trans-languaging has been used as a tool against the institution.
- › How have online outputs affected the way we perceive language (AI, word limits, captions).
- › How individuals use 'broken' language in their practice to reconstruct their identities from territories and cultural histories that are fragmented.

The myriad of contributions do not address individual points but rather are fellow travelers for these considerations. We hope that this assembly of perspectives can spur further reflection on how we use language with each other and in our diverse practices.

*Jason Waite*  
May 2024

*Email*

**artreviewoxford@gmail.com**

*Instagram*

**@artreviewoxford**

*Facebook*

**ArtReviewOxford**

# IN THE GLOW OF THE LÍNGXĪ

As contemporary artists delve into the realms of telepathic ecology, they employ a myriad of mediums, from the subtle signals of neuron-like excitation in plants to the gentle sway of trees, and even the movements of pigs' eyes. These explorations offer insights into the obscure ways of communication that transcend traditional boundaries. Much like the traveler in the ancient legend who illuminated the depths of the Yangtze River with the light of a *língxī* (rhino horn), translators serve as conduits, bridging linguistic and cultural chasms to unveil hidden worlds.

The word *língxī* 灵犀 in Chinese means a magical rhinoceros horn. In Chinese folklore, the rhinoceros is seen as a magical creature with telepathic abilities, and its horn is the medium between the physical world and the spiritual realm. If one lights up a rhino horn the way they would light a candle, they can see monsters, deities, and the dead in the glow of the fire. An old legend from *A Garden of Marvels* by Liu Jingshu of the Southern Song dynasty goes like this: a traveler passing by the Niuzhu Cliff hears music coming from the bottom of the Yangtze River. Curious, they peer into the river, but the water is too deep and dark for the human eye to penetrate. They pull out a rhino horn from their pocket and light it up like a torch. Immediately, they see swarms after swarms of ghosts parading beneath the water.<sup>1</sup>

Translators are like the traveler in the story. The light of a rhino horn candle can transport one's gaze across boundaries that seem uncrossable and reveal to them the secrets of another world. The *língxī* is, henceforth, a metaphor for a unique kind of perceptiveness that allows one to peer through the surface and look directly at what has previously been veiled, segregated, and marginalized.

The one who possesses a *língxī* is simultaneously transformed: they are able to see past their immediate reality and come into touch with the unknown; the ready-to-hand is translated into the present-at-hand. In this increasingly multisemiotic world, it seems inevitable to go into the unknown. However, for translation, this often means crossing the conventional boundaries of communication and perception and questioning the authority of institutionalized systems of knowledge and validation. In Zhu Yingchun's art book *Bugs' Books* (2015), dashes of ink resembling unrestrained Chinese calligraphy brush strokes capture the imprints that snails, earthworms, stink bugs and other insects left behind. The artist methodologically categorized bugs' imprints and organized them into a new

Emily Jin *and* Sharon Liu

language. Similarly, Chang Yuchen's *Coral Dictionary Vol.1: 2019-2022* shows how we can open up to new forms of recognition. She realized corals' shapes correspond to the classification of corals, and the porousness of corals also opens up people's imagination of a marine language, an "otherness" of marine creatures. Although impossible to speak or prove, Zhu and Chang's artistic translations both attempt to break the semiotic orders of a monolingual culture and challenge the standardized ways of communication. These artworks attempt to represent a ground of mediation in which the translators, the artists themselves, break down the colossal symbolic order of language into little particles and scrutinize its inner workings.

Living in our own bubbles of speech and script, we move through everyday life oblivious to most of the language we output. The idea of performative utterance in linguistics suggests that there is an intrinsic connection between what is said and what is done; *to say is to do*. Cultural norms, many of which may contain various forms of prejudice, are embedded in idioms, allusions, and throwaway adjectives, and with every utterance we make, we inadvertently maintain those norms. We have ceased to notice how the usage of certain languages could be discriminatory—until they are translated into another language. This language and cultural translation concept resonates deeply in Ishu Han's work, *The Day Spinach Dreamed in Japanese* (2022). Inspired by his research on Japanese agricultural internship workers, this work consists of paper boxes cut out into the shape of bird cages and a sound installation. The combination of spinach boxes and bird chirping sound seems to depict a scene where spinach chirps like birds. The narrative is furthered by the artwork's title, where spinach plants can dream in Japanese. It reflects the artist's contemplation on a cultural and linguistic assimilation, especially the integration of immigrant experiences into Japanese life, while also highlighting the transformative power of language and its role in shaping personal identity.

Translation is not a linear process through which the translator, always secondary to the writer, simply poses as a static filter through which the sacred original passes. The ideas of authenticity and authorship are due further scrutiny as a result. As the line separating the writer from the translator grows ambiguous, the dichotomy of the translated and the translation, the original and the translation, and consequently culture and culture—for example, East and West—becomes disintegrated.

Can translators really disrupt the prevailing power dynamics? We can't help but interrogate, especially as artists and scholars in the diaspora, working hard at translating peripheral languages into English, the lingua franca of the century. In early 2022, Hajime Matsumoto led a project to translate the Chinese text *Tang ping zhu yi zhe xuan yan* (*The Lying Down Tribe's Manifesto*) into Japanese.<sup>2</sup> The manifesto rejects the oppressive work culture in China, embracing minimal work hours and

prioritizing leisure and personal pursuits over materialistic goals. Surprisingly, the Japanese translation was released even before the English version and led to a guerrilla-style distribution of the translated text across Japan. Perhaps, translations between non-English languages create an opportunity for alternative narratives to emerge; such translations might be able to extract us from the linguistic world of grandiosity, sublimation and master narratives, of comfortable habits and what we define as “normalcy” and force us to come to terms with the unseeable and the underrepresented.

Translation is the farthest thing away from the oscillation between two poles on a one-dimensional spectrum. There is no such thing; there is only an ongoing dialogue. Instead, it is a limbo zone, a kind of radical indeterminacy that spans across space and time, not unlike what one would think about quantum physics; it is ultimately a chain of signifiers that are always dismembering and reconnecting, always dynamic. Exploring the dynamic human connections, including the aspect of languages, Chiharu Shiota created the work *Lost Words*, a dense web of black yarn threads, in which pages of the Bible from distinctive eras and cultures are woven, at the Museum Nikolaikirche in Berlin in 2017. Shiota commented in an interview that human connections are “the nets and threads [that] represent human connections—some are intertwined with each other, and some cut off and get knotted again, going in a different direction.”<sup>3</sup> The translation process between people and across languages takes place in a continuous and fluid exchange of ideas.

We would like to imagine a translator engaged in a dialogue with a shamanic spirit medium: empathic, an openness towards “being possessed”—by an actual ghost, or the ghost of a text that had died in its first language.

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Emily Jin is a PhD Candidate at Yale University.  
Sharon Liu is Curatorial Assistant at Amherst College Mead Art Museum.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Ford Company, *A Garden of Marvels: Tales of Wonder from Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015)

<sup>2</sup> Matsumoto Hajime, “The Lying a Tribe's Manifesto in Japanese,” accessed April 15, 2024, <https://matsumoto-hajime.com/blog/archives/1250>

<sup>3</sup> Artnet News, “Chiharu Shiota on the Sensory Power of Thread and Her Epic Installations,” accessed April 15, 2024, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/chiharu-shiota-1105391>.

# Unraveling the Essence of Thirukkural Refining English Translations and Addressing Mistranslations

Salvarpatti M. Ponnudurai

Tamil Speaking South India (TSSI), better known as 'Tamil Nadu,' is situated in the southeastern region of the Indian peninsula, boasting a cultural legacy spanning over two millennia. Renowned for its distinctive culture and myriad temples, some of which were originally affiliated with Buddhist or Jain sects. TSSI's official language is Tamil, written in a script derived from Brahmi. Eminent epigraphist Iravatham Mahadevan dates Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions from the 2nd century BCE to the 3rd century CE, coinciding with the Sangam Age depicted in early Tamil anthologies. TSSI is home to a rich literary tradition, with Thirukkural, a timeless masterpiece by the revered Tamil Saint poet-philosopher Thiruvalluvar from the 3rd to 1st centuries BCE, at its core. Comprising 1330 verses in 133 chapters, Thirukkural delves into Virtue, Wealth, and Love, with each couplet just seven words long, encapsulating the essence of Tamil literary brilliance.

Interpretations of Thirukkural vary widely, reflecting diverse perspectives on Tamil civilization. Parimelalakar's interpretation aligns with orthodox Brahmanical ideology, while Dravidian ideologists view it as a celebration of early Tamil culture, untouched by Indo-Aryan influences such as caste. This disparity highlights Thirukkural's significance as a reflection of the intricate interplay between literature, culture, and society. The term 'Kural' denotes aphorisms, bestowing upon Thirukkural the esteemed title of the 'Crown Jewel' of Tamil Literature. Constantine Beschi initiated its translation into Latin in 1730, igniting a tradition of rendering this masterpiece into various languages. Notable translators including Francis Whyte Ellis, William Henry Drew, George Uglow Pope, John Lazarus, VVS Iyer, PS Sundaram, Gopalkrishna Gandhi, and others have translated Thirukkural into English, enriching the understanding of its wisdom among English-speaking audiences and broadening its global reach. To date, there are over 60 translations available in numerous languages.

Thirukkural serves as a timeless source of moral wisdom, yet its translation presents a multifaceted challenge. While translators have employed varied methodologies, the intrinsic poetic structure of the Tamil original remains pivotal, characterized by succinct verses crafted in the Venba meter. Examining the endeavors of translators to convey its essence to diverse audiences proves enlightening, distinguishing between reactive translations that may alter the original intent and those that endeavor to preserve authenticity. The translation by Rev GU Pope in 1886 marked a seminal moment in introducing Thirukkural to the English-speaking world, representing a significant stride toward global accessibility of the text. Despite the formidable obstacles encountered in translation, Pope's rendition underscores the enduring relevance of Thirukkural's moral insights across generations and geographical boundaries. As a British missionary in TSSI, Pope was motivated by dual objectives: the propagation of Christianity and Western education. Utilizing translations such as Thirukkural served as a means to advance this mission. Moreover, propelled by

a scholarly fascination with Tamil literature, Pope endeavored to make the profound wisdom encapsulated within the text accessible to English-speaking audiences. In doing so, he facilitated cultural exchange and expanded educational horizons by affording access to the literary heritage of TSSI.

To explore the profound depths of Thirukkural's untranslatable couplets, let's dissect the first verse of Chapter 1, along with its Tamil script and transliteration:

அகர மாதல எழுத்தெல்லாம் ஆதி  
பகவன் மாதற்றே உலகா.

Transliteration:

"Agara Muthala Ezhuthellam Aadhi  
Bhagavan Muthatre Ulaku."

Rev WH Drew and Pope offer distinct interpretations of this couplet. Drew's translation, "Eternal God all things precedes, As Alpha all the letter leads," emphasizes God's eternal and omnipotent nature, paralleling God with the letter "Alpha" as the leader of all. This highlights God's primacy and omnipresence, suggesting His precedence over creation. In contrast, Pope's rendition, "A, as it's first of letters, every speech maintains the 'Primary Deity' is first through all the worlds' domains," underscores the significance of the letter "A" as the first in the alphabet, sustaining all speech. By equating "A" with the "Primary Deity," Pope emphasizes divine order and sovereignty, implying the supreme reign of the "Primary Deity." Both translations offer insights into Thirukkural's timeless themes of divine primacy and omnipresence. Drew focuses on God's eternal nature and leadership, while Pope emphasizes divine order and sovereignty. Together, they enrich the understanding of Thirukkural's profound insights into the nature of God and His relationship with creation.

Since independence in 1947, India, also known as Bharat, has witnessed several Prime Ministers, but Narendra Modi's leadership stands out. Leading the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to victory in the 2014 and 2019 general elections, Modi served two terms. His government introduced a 'cultural roadmap for India@2047,' aiming for developed nation status by the centenary of independence. Modi prioritized people-centric development and efficient administration, though facing criticism for allegedly undermining India's secular principles and promoting a Hindu nationalist agenda. In 2021, the Modi government appointed Ravindra Narayan Ravi, a former Indian Police Service officer, as Governor of TSSI. Ravi highlighted the colonial influence on Thirukkural's translation, criticizing translations like GU Pope's for distorting its spiritual essence. Ravi challenged Pope's translation choices, especially in the first kural, criticizing Pope's rendering of 'Aadhi Bhagavan' as "Primal Deity" for trivializing the text's spiritual significance. Stressing that 'Aadhi Bhagavan' transcends religious boundaries, Ravi called for the protection of India's spiritual legacy from colonial distortions and political manipulations.

Governor Ravi's defense of the spiritual significance of 'Aadhi Bhagavan' resonates with interpretations by two scholars: Pundit Iyothee Thoss and Prof. PS Sundaram. Iyothee Thoss (1845-1914), a prominent advocate for social justice and cultural awareness, hailed from the 'untouchable' Parayar community in TSSI. Founding the South Indian Sakya Buddhist Association in Madras, he contributed significantly to discussions on Buddhism, caste origins, and the Sakya identity. Launching the weekly magazine "Tamilan" from 1907 to 1914, Iyothee Thoss uniquely interpreted Thirukkural, viewing the first Kural as akin to the letter "A," lays the foundation for language and knowledge development. By paralleling linguistic primacy with the Buddha's role as the first teacher to enlighten humanity, he emphasized the Buddha's significance in guiding towards enlightenment. Therefore, according to Iyothee Thoss's interpretation 'Aadhi Bhagavan' reflects the Buddha. Prof. PS Sundaram's 1990s translation aimed to capture the brevity of the original verses. He suggested that the author of Kural may have been a Jain, providing alternative interpretations in his notes. Sundaram highlighted that "Aadhi" generally implies first of a (finite) sequence and "Bhagavan" can be used as in "Bhagavan Ram", "Bhagvan Buddha" or "Bhagavan Mahavira" or independently to imply the Supreme God.

The complexities of translating Thirukkural highlight the challenge of preserving its profound essence while finding equivalent words. Translations like GU Pope's, once praised, now face criticism for being de-spiritualized due to Pope's mission as a British missionary. Governor Ravi's critique of Pope raises the question: does translation uphold or dilute the original text's essence? This question delves into translation theory's core, exploring the balance between fidelity to the source and adaptation to the target language and culture. Despite linguistic and cultural influences, the goal remains consistent: ensuring Thirukkural's wisdom resonates universally. Thus, a translation's efficacy should not only be judged by literal adherence but by its ability to convey the profound meaning of Thiruvalluvar's masterpiece. A successful translation transcends linguistic barriers, enriching readers' understanding across cultures and languages.

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Salvarpatti Manuvelraj Ponnudurai is a researcher specializing in the intricate cultural and political dynamics of Tamil Speaking South India through an art historical perspective.

# the poetics of romance scammers

when you read, you are judging a person from their writing style, and using it to determine whether they are a lovable pen pal.

sui-hin mak

In recent years, more romance scammers have emerged on hong kong dating sites. often the opening lines and what follows would be littered in misparsed, stilted hongkongese (hong kong cantonese). i assume it is because of the relatively limited digitised hongkongese corpus online, as compared with the mandarin chinese corpus, and the scammers' poor knowledge of normal hongkongese and collocations. i cannot determine whether these gaps and bias will become closer and closer, as these language models depends on people's input in the real world, which is affected by international and cultural changes.

as google translate does not have the option to parse regular mandarin chinese to hong kong cantonese, there are some other online tools attempting to do so. google translate, these tools, and even chatgpt do not truly understand hongkongese. the resultant jumbled mess is often an unnatural potpourri.

let me illustrate how nonsensical google translate is treating hongkongese. i have given some example sentences, my translation and google's translation. how does one translate feelings and innuendos of a word? can translate?

## hongkongese

乜你咁㗎  
 乜你噉㗎  
 乜你咁嘅  
 乜你噉嘅

## my translation

why are you like dat? (upset)  
 why are you like that? (upset)  
 why are you like dat? (surprised)  
 why are you like that? (surprised)

## google translate

What are you doing?  
 What are you eating?  
 Why are you so generous?  
 What are you doing

## mainland cantonese

乜你咁噃

## my translation

why are you like dat?

## google translate

What about you?

talking with these funny bots or real humans makes you question your own language and word choices. your aesthetics. your roots. if one is hyper-amorous and falls prey, they are finding the scammers' eccentric and abnormal language seductive. what is appalling is that this malformed language can influence the minds of the victims so much that they are willing to pay millions for reading more of it. people in kk park might easily pass the turing test, but are they truly human, given that they scam others? what makes us human?

if a scammer trains an artificial intelligence with

some things that romance scammers have in common is that they are often far away and need help in the future. it is also expected that they are probably professionals. for the record, a bunch of them do regular exercises or go to the gym to keep fit, love making desserts, like small animals to the extent that they keep some at home (be it rabbits, goldfish, turtles, lizards, cats or dogs). they construct their identities using language.

since these con artists are not fluent in hongkongese, some of them would pretend to be taiwanese. it is because taiwanese mandarin is much more similar to mainland mandarin, despite some differences in language style and word choice. they exploit the fact that written mandarin could be understood by any literate person in hong kong.

two people i know have fallen prey to these 'taiwanese' scammers. the scammers, by choosing to type only in written mandarin, have transformed their ignorance of the hongkongese language into a call for a common language – from an inherent weakness to a command for accommodation – preferring the national language to the 'unofficial dialect'.

it is funny how a simulacrum can lure one. i have chatted with one of the victims who is close enough to show me a recording which the scammer used to blackmail him. the video shows two people masturbating on the webcam. obviously he was masturbating to a virtual subject who typed responses without moving their hands to a phone or keyboard input, as if by magic, and, on closer inspection, the blurry video is looped. i take this kind of file compression and rebroadcasting as a form of translating graphics. i asked him, why were you that stupid to ignore all these details when you jerked off? after the webcam session, the scammer requested money and sent him back this video. the scammer threatened to post the video online and share it with the victim's colleagues and family if the scammer is not satisfied with the amount of money. since the scammer had successfully lured the victim to install an app, they really had his phone contact book and messaged a greeting to some of them, asking if they knew the victim. eventually, the victim paid hk\$300000 (around £30810) to the scammer because of this single video.

these con artists are great poets, in the sense that they mastered the use of a translated, stilted version of a language. they have made their language personal, yet responding to the broader picture of the conflict in identity, delineating the interrelationship between the authority and the individual.

for several times, i have co-written epic poems with them, to waste their time so that they have less time to scam others. a simple google search reveals that these con artists wish to conceal their identities using fake images. their narratives might not be entirely made up: it is possible that they need discretion

while they are on boat trips, fishing and beach outings. i would imitate their clunky hongkongese to attempt to muddle up any phrases or words they learn from me. hopefully, garbage in garbage out. these are language exchanges after all, and i should embrace their pride in constructing a personal poetic language. i try to gently shake their language bit by bit further away from hongkongese, rather than pulling them drastically. i don't know if it's useful at all. at the end, often it is them who stopped contacting me. maybe i should have written more to show my enthusiasm. i hope they are enjoying a long vacation.

one day, there will be a bot for responding to romance scammers and wasting their time.

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sui-hin mak recently published riso poetry pamphlet 'tinder sociology' (2024), <https://maksuihin.github.io>.



# Spamsoc, *the* International Disco Latin, Fake Fashion-Labeling *and* *a* Stuttering AI– Poor Languages *in the* Work of Hito Steyerl

Jolanda Wessel

This contribution is assembling linguistic phenomena in the work of contemporary German artist Hito Steyerl. In analogy to her concept of the “poor image” I propose to consider these different examples of Translation/Mistranslation as “poor languages”. Similar to the poor image as “a copy in motion” contemporary broken languages are compromised and post produced, circulating as copy-pastings.<sup>1</sup> Despite their poorness and focusing on their emancipatory powers and reimaginative potentials they can appear as rebel languages.

To begin with there is “Spamsoc”. Spamsoc is the spoken or written equivalent to contemporary visual image Spam. Originally Spam designated the word Spam which was used to invade chatrooms in the 1980ies. Posted again and again it supplanted everything else written. Until today our mailboxes are spammed mainly with image spam. Furthermore the composite term Spamsoc can be ascribed to “Ingsoc” (*English Socialism*), those ideology which is implemented in George Orwell’s totalitarian state of Oceania by the means of the fictional language “Newspeak”.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, with Spamsoc Steyerl is referring to secondary translations for the cover art of pirate copy DVDs from Asia and South America. The compromised English on these covers is emerging from copy pasting, culturally based misunderstandings, and failed mechanical translations. In the same manner she argues for the copy pasting and ripping of images as emancipatory practice, Steyerl considers Spamsoc a documentary prism and linguistic expression of contemporary circulation, national interests and privileges. Spamsoc is “a site of conflict, struggle, contestation, and often invisible and gendered labour”.<sup>3</sup>

There is another kind of poor language in the work of Steyerl: the “International Disco Latin”. With this linguistic creation she responds to the amateurish and simplified English, that is spoken in the contemporary art world and thus became known as “International Art English” (IAE). It is a language spoken by countless non-/underpaid interns and assistants all over the world, mainly used in press releases. While the *English Defence League* condemns the IAE, Steyerl however embraces such “deliberate misreading of the original, a successfully failed copy coming into being via translation”, even proposing to go on further, to “decisively cut its ties to any imaginary original” like to some Latin traces within, for instance.<sup>4</sup> She suggests to create a completely artificial, ripped composite language, the “International Disco Latin” (IDL). Whereas English is not a lingua franca, the IDL could turn into one.<sup>5</sup> However, Steyerl has published her essays and holds her lectures in well-kept English, almost from

the very beginning. Only her early films are in German, then her filmic work language is turning to English.

During the research for her Lecture Performance/Video Installation *Mission Accomplished: Belanciege* (2019, in collaboration with Giorgi Gago Gagoshidze and Miloš Trakilović), Steyerl discovers that very word “Belanciege” on a sneaker, which is the compromised brand name of the luxury label *Balenciaga*. The fashion company’s rebranding under Georgian head of design Demna Gvasalia was based on the appropriation of the random look of young people in the states of the foreign Soviet Union, all dressed in clothes collections from the West. *Balenciaga* invented a trendy „look of poverty”. This „Balenciaga method” of making money from hijacking a common way of dressing follows the logic of the global digital capitalism: privatizing all free public goods and habits. Consequently for Steyerl the fake label Belanciege is a countermovement. By changing only a few letters, a word (or name) becomes an utopian venture of changing the actual economic conditions. Specifically those Belanciege products do not enrich a very few but even belong to the people themselves.<sup>6</sup>

Artificial Intelligence is also a field for Translation/Mistranslation in Steyerl's work. *SocialSim* (2020) shows a training iteration graphic, where “[a] neural network learns to say the word SOCIALSIM”.<sup>7</sup> The training is not successful, even after thousands of generations the AI is still stuttering. For the training team that programmed this social simulation (agent-based models, used in behavior studies) it still is a black box. So probably the stuttering (like of HAL 9000 in Stanley Kubrick's *2001*) is not just a malfunction but the adequate sound of this unsettled situation between humans and AI. Moreover, the stuttering could be considered a machine language their creators do not quite get to understand. While AI-based social simulations are „social abstractions”, the machine’s stuttering could even be seen as linguistic abstraction.<sup>8</sup>

“How are we supposed to speak [...]? Who polices images, languages, and translation? Who owns pictures, words, and their meanings?”—And: “Why should an art student in Skopje [...] conform to the British National Corpus?”, Steyerl asks.<sup>10</sup> Language has always been a zone of (discursive) violence. Today’s contemporary ideal of a global network, based on an universal communication system with just two universal languages—the binary code and the English language—expresses ideas of hybridity which levels inequality and discrimination.<sup>11</sup> Poor languages stand against such ideas. They are “languages that rebel, refuse, and reimagine”. All the broken languages discussed in Steyerl’s work incorporate the marks of contemporary conflicts. Emerging from new geographic and social exclusions they reveal the barriers of what can be said and expressed. As linguistic fossils they have documentary value, telling us about globalization, postcolonialism, capitalism and digitalization. They do not only take on but confront contemporary antagonistic social and political tensions.<sup>12</sup>

The subaltern is speaking in here. Appropriation by means of Translation/Mistranslation also implies the engagement of the plenty, their interest in a particular content and—due to the shallow of the web—a guarantee for its survival. Moreover, „correct” English is usually both, formally correct and commonsensical in relation to its content. On the opposite the poor languages „assuming that English is the output” are out of the norm. By disobeying the rules, spelling and grammar Translations/Mistranslation are able to produce a productive excess.

Poor languages are „language[s] from the future that we unfortunately do not yet fully understand [...]. By failing to understand it, we fail to come into our present”.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hito Steyerl, “In Defense of the Poor Image”, in Hito Steyerl. *Jenseits der Repräsentation/Beyond Representation. Essays 1999-2009*, ed. Marius Babias (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2016), 147.

<sup>2</sup> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four. A Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> Hito Steyerl, “International Disco Latin”, in *Duty Free Art. Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War*, Hito Steyerl (London, New York: Verso, 2017), 139.

<sup>4</sup> Steyerl, *International Disco Latin*, 135, 141.

<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of one of his lectures Giorgio Agamben points out that today the English language dominates the academic world: “It is a common place that English is used as a kind of lingua franca as Latin was used in Europe in 16th, 15th, 17th century. The analogy is misleading because Latin did not belong to any particular country [...] while English [...] is proper [...] to a couple of nations. I think we should reflect on that” (Giorgio Agamben, *Resistance in Art*, (Lecture at European Graduate School 2014), URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=one7mE-8y9c>).

<sup>6</sup> See for more Philipp Hohmann, “Der Essay als Installation? Überlegungen zu Mission Accomplished: BELANCIEGE”, in: *Text\Werk. Lektüren zu Hito Steyerl*, ed. Lilian Haberer et al. (Berlin Hatje Cantz 2022) 205-223.

<sup>7</sup> Hito Steyerl, *SocialSim*, 2020, HD Video, Colour, Sound, Live Computer Simulation, 18:19 Minutes.

<sup>8</sup> Hito Steyerl, *SocialSim*, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Hito Steyerl, “Notes About Spamsoc”, in *Hito Steyerl. Jenseits der Repräsentation/Beyond Representation. Essays 1999-2009*, ed. Marius Babias (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2016), 167.

<sup>10</sup> Steyerl, *International Disco Latin*, 136.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Steyerl, “The (W)hole of Babel”, in *Hito Steyerl. Jenseits der Repräsentation/Beyond Representation. Essays 1999-2009*, ed. Marius Babias (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2016), 201.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Steyerl, *Notes About Spamsoc*, 167.

<sup>13</sup> Steyerl, *Notes About Spamsoc*, 167.

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Jolanda Wessel, M. A. in Art History, is a doctorate candidate, scholar of Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes and member of french-german research group 'CultureConflict/Conflicts of Culture', currently working on her dissertation project about the work of Hito Steyerl at Aix-Marseille University and the University of Düsseldorf.

WORD  
 EXPRESS  
 COMMUNICATE  
 TRANSMIT  
 BROADCAST  
 ANNOUNCE  
 NAME  
 DENOMINATION  
 VALUE  
 USEFULNESS  
 EFFICACY  
 SUCCESS  
 PROSPERITY  
 SECURITY  
 CERTAINTY  
 CONFIDENCE  
 RELIEF  
 IDEOLOGY  
 HEALS  
 PARAGIN  
 ARCHETYPE  
 PATTERN  
 DEGRADATION  
 TRINKET  
 IMITATION  
 PARACATURE  
 DISTORTION  
 DEFORMATION  
 WARPING  
 INTERRUPT  
 DISHONEST  
 PERFIIDUS  
 TRAITUROUS  
 FALSE  
 MISLEADING

# Whistle, Squeak, Grumble— Or, the Innate Language Of the Post-human

Liv Stevenson

*Tinny whistles emanate from a distant moon.  
Fluctuating, sporadic, conversational whistles  
that can be traced to peculiar, mousy little  
creatures that sing to each other in all manner  
of ways.<sup>1</sup>*

*Whinging mutterings are interspersed with  
the occasional honk. Resentful mumblings of a  
penguin is heard, followed by the authoritative  
patter of his parents, to which the child melts  
into the floor in defiance.<sup>2</sup>*

*Electronic squealing and bleeping cuts through  
the scene. The shrill blare of hysteria amplifies  
through the metallic hull of a dustbin-shaped  
robot as it drives directly into a wall. Its lights  
flash correspondingly and its dome-head spins  
around and around.<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Oliver Postgate, *The Clangers* (1969-present, series)

<sup>2</sup> Erika Brueggemann and Otmar Gutmann, *Pingu* (1986-2000, series)

<sup>3</sup> George Lucas, dir. *Star Wars: Episode III – The Revenge of the Sith*.  
(Lucasfilm, 2005, film)

These characters demonstrate the ‘unintelligible’ trope, speaking only in a personal, undefined non-language. However, their voices are far from incomprehensible. These curated noises inevitably become their own language, that without definition or translation, is understood by the audience. Thus, the comedic technique usually reserved for children's entertainment deserves to be analysed within the broader discussion of translation. That these non-languages should be considered amongst language, even its advantages over linguistic approaches and the imaginative possibilities it creates for post-human modes of communication.

Despite appearances, non-languages are far from gibberish. They are systemically, intricately, (even if) instinctively constructed from semiotics of emphasis, tone, intonation, and gesture. Although these are learnt observationally (differing culturally and socially) there exists universal constants, familiar clues that enable interaction. Then, perhaps, these non-languages become more universal and inclusive than any lexical mode of communication. It is not surprising then that these *a-languages* (in that they are within, aside and without language) are frequently used in children's entertainment. The medium circumvents the reading-age and language capability of its audience, instead creating something less likely to be outgrown—whilst engaging the parents that have to endure its presence. Furthermore, it can intersect with more cultures, more nationalities and more (linguistic) languages. The non-language is then a constant, interpreted by any language the viewer chooses to believe it is. So successfully, in fact, that the BBC questioned the script for a (*The Clangers*) episode in which *Major Clanger* swore (despite being translated into whistles), believing that the audience *would know*. The creators argued the line would be interpreted by the audience—however clean or dirty their mind was.<sup>4</sup> Exemplifying the flexibility of non-language; its adaptability, purpose and target, whether adult or child.

A requisite for this universality is the non-language's simplicity, relying on the barest minimum, the essentials, to inform meaning. The less there is the less that can be misconstrued, perhaps? Rather than converting from one complicated language into another, a more innate, guttural, primordial translation is created. One that relies less on an academic and linguistic thought process but something more instinctual. Thus, translation becomes reduction. A protest against the notions of translations that require extreme substitution and dissection of contextual meaning.

<sup>4</sup> Clive Banks, *An Interview With Oliver Postgate*. (The Science Fiction and Telefantasy Databanks, 2005).

To subsidise this simplification, body language is coveted equal prominence, reinforcing (or making explicit) the noises produced by a character. It even possesses the honorific of 'language' despite a lack of dictionary, index or oral tradition. It is not learnt in school, nor is it passed down through cultural heritage—yet it remains a 'language', one that's used in conjunction with the verbal. Despite this, there still persists numerous articles and TED Talks advertising ways to recognize and harness body language with complete accuracy. Thus enabling the newly informed to decipher even the most minute of details about their target's lives, history, inner psyche and seemingly what they had for breakfast that morning (in the Holmesian theory of deduction). Of course, much of this is oversimplified, but there remains an infinity of recognisable gesticulations that we can or have come to recognise. Some gestures cognitively trigger words or concepts, while others offer a subtle feeling or residual context. The accompanying physicality of a character therefore is used to bridge any gaps in understanding for the audience (as in typical verbal languages).

Although, the performance of these movements are far from typical. Animation (stop motion, hand-drawn, puppetry, etc.) permits, even creates, exaggeration beyond the everyday human. This surreal telegraphing of the body is an assurance, making meaning impossible to misinterpret. Made more evident as most characters within this technique are not human. (Humanoid, of course, recognisable within the characteristics we'd expect of people.) Their form can inhibit traditional human function: no fingers, for example, just a tentacle, or flipper. They don't walk: they waddle, crawl or roll. Their mouth is a beak, trunk or snout. Evidently this does not hamper our ability to understand or relate to these characters. Rather, it gives the creator possibilities. There are similarities to the average person, but these expressions are pushed further, exaggerated, enhanced. Thus, it encourages an imaginative approach to body language, gesture and communication. If the human body cannot accurately and explicitly convey a concept or emotion, then what could? What additions or substitutions streamline this message? Furthermore, the creator is not limited to just substituting human expressions with an alien equivalent, but to reach beyond the limits of human bodily expression. Thereby, freeing the character from the physical restraints of the human body, or of physics altogether. As *Pingu* represents speaking loudly by turning his mouth into a foghorn. These mediums support a radical curatorial process that allows all unnecessary aspects to be removed while the fantastic and surreal is applied. Hence, they form an exploration of the post-human possibilities of communication.

This can be amplified to a greater extreme with mute characters that function as mimes (the likes of *Gromit*, *Tom & Jerry* and *Road Runner*). Instead of vocalising they rely entirely on the non-verbal. Within this category is the *Addams Family's Thing* (*T. Thing*); a character that tests both the simplification of language and the body. The human form, here, is reimagined as a disembodied human hand, creating an entire body from a singular aspect. Both the conventional gestures of the hand and a bodily equivalent are available to the choreographer. With a complete minimisation of expression, how can the entire breadth of human emotion be represented? How can just a hand replicate the motion of the whole body?

This exposure develops a radical empathy within the viewer. If they can understand the unhuman or para-human, then diverse human people should be simple. It also encourages more imaginative possibilities for the post-human. How might we curate ourselves and our bodies? It is no surprise that the performers are anthropomorphic animals, aliens, robots or an original invented concept. Despite this, the media excludes the deaf or blind. Without visual components to smooth vagueness of meaning, the vocalisations become imprecise—instances where viewers need to see a concept or object to know what is being referred to. Hence, a voice-over narration is necessary. Whereas, without sound the body is still able to convey emotion and tone, particularly when animated. Subtitles for these programs leave much to be desired; being non-existent, too vague or ridiculously comical. Possibly, because they are superfluous alongside the visual component, or, because the vocalisations capture something so hard to put into words without writing a dialogue-based script. Perhaps this mode of communication can only exist verbally?

Embracing non-language enables a reimagining of what the language of the future could be, the possibilities for the post-human body and retrocausal-ly a wider acceptance of contemporary humans. Demonstrating an artistic simplicity to the essentials of language, refuting the articulate for the comprehensive. Maybe translation should be simplified, and if this is the case, what are the possibilities for human communication? How can non-language speculate and broaden our approach to future modes of connection and how these future modes will shape the creatures we will become?

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Liv Stevenson is an artist and writer exploring the restrictions, compulsions, failures and possibilities of communication through language and gesture; interrogating the limits of what we can say and that which we do not intend to.

# Artificial Intelligence in the Creative Realm: A Double- Edged Palette Knife

Amaia Salazar

In our constantly evolving digital age, the relationship between artificial intelligence (AI) and human creativity has become a topic of great debate and fascination. We would never have expected the current scope and impact that AI is having on today's society when we talked about it more than 75 years ago. At the time, companies realised that they needed improved processing power and better analysis of the unthinkable amount of data. In 1943, scientists Warren McCulloch and Walter Pitts published the first mathematical model for the creation of a neural network in their paper *A Logical Calculus of Ideas Immanent in Nervous Activity*.<sup>1</sup> Nine years later, Marvin Minsky and Dean Edmonds created the first neural network computer, and in the same year, Alan Turing made public the famous Turing Test. In the following years, the real dawn of artificial intelligence began and, consequently, we started to hear incessant use of the words "Machine learning" and "Deep learning", without knowing their differences very well. The amazing fact is that not only have we moved beyond creating software that can learn to play chess autonomously, but—as artists and art makers—we have come to rethink whether AI is a useful tool or whether it is slowly becoming a substitute for our skills. We must even ask ourselves whether AI is enhancing our creativity, or whether it is preventing us from generating divergent and creative thinking.

AI is undoubtedly transforming the way we experience and interact with art. Machines learn by themselves and provide feedback by generating new images through words and texts, as we can see in programs such as *DeepDream*, *Artbreeder* or *Dall-e*, among many others. Some artists create generative artworks, exchanging the paintbrush with complex machine learning algorithms, such as Mario Klingemann and Robbie Barrat.

One clear example that resonated was *The Next Rembrandt project* (2016), in which machine learning was used to analyse different works by the painter Rembrandt. The result was astonishing, resulting in a new 3D printed painting with the same style, texture, and essence of the great artist. The news headlines read "Rembrandt 'paints' a painting 347 years after his death", opening up the question of authorship.<sup>2</sup> The same happened with *Portrait of Edmond de Belamy* (2018), created by the Paris-based art collective Obvious. The work depicts a fictional character and was created using a machine learning algorithm called *Generative Adversarial Network* (GAN). This AI-generated work was a milestone in the intersection between art and technology, not only because it was auctioned for the significant price of \$432,500, but also because the painting was signed by the algorithm itself.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the debate arises as to whether the author is the algorithm itself for appearing its signature on the canvas and being the creator of the innovative image, or whether it is the Obvious art collective itself for programming it. Another interesting case is the world's first ultra-realistic humanoid robot, *Ai-Da* (2019), created by gallerist Aidan Meller in collaboration with Engineered

Arts and the University of Oxford. *Ai-Da* is an android incorporating computer graphics and artificial intelligence algorithms that produce drawings, paintings, and sculptures, having been the first robot artist to have its first solo exhibition in London.<sup>4</sup> It is both unsettling and astonishing to show the embodied robot producing artwork and occupying an actual physical space that is tangible. The thing to bear in mind is that the whole process involved is art, and not just the image that comes out at the end as a result. One could say that, at this point, the authorship is a collaboration between two artists: a human and a machine. A fusion of human orientation and machine ingenuity.

Certainly, we see this performance as the beginning of a journey that questions machine learning and the use of AI in the art world. The potential of AI to elevate human creativity is evident in the wide variety of tools and resources it offers artists. AI algorithms can analyse vast datasets, generate innovative ideas, and even assist in the execution of creative projects. Artists can harness the power of AI to experiment with new techniques, automate repetitive tasks and gain new perspectives. So, depending on its use and purpose, AI can become a collaborative sidekick in the creative process, offering inspiration and pushing boundaries. So far, we have seen visual paintings produced by algorithms, but the same is happening in other fields such as music, dance or kinetic sculpture (e.g. Studio Drift); as well as the controversial use of AI in film, social media or the creation of fake news on the internet.

What really worries and frightens society is the fact that people will not be able to distinguish between what a machine has made and what a human being has done. This concerns us because we see a certain amount of fictionality in the creation, not being based on subjective emotion or subjective experience. This issue is innate to human logic and reasoning. As human beings we want to understand what is in front of us and make sure that it is a safe space where we can adapt without major disruption. Anything that suppresses our security causes us both respect and apprehension. In fact, it is already happening, that we cannot distinguish what is made by a machine from what is made by a human, as a recent study published in *Empirical Studies in the Arts* demonstrated.<sup>5</sup> However, this has not changed much from recent years, where it was difficult—and at the same time quite curious—to aesthetically distinguish an abstract work of art from a child's drawing scribbling on a piece of paper. Will we then be the next generation that instead of hearing: "this painting could have been done by a child", we will hear "this painting could have been done by an algorithm"? Art is often a reflection of the human condition and society of the moment. The future of art lies in the hands of those who use AI as a tool to elevate their own imaginative capacities and forge new horizons in the ever-changing landscape of artistic expression. It is up to us how we want to use the double-edged palette knife in the future.

<sup>1</sup> Warren S. McCulloch and Walter Pitts. "A logical calculus of the ideas immanent in nervous activity", *Bulletin of Mathematical Biophysics*, no. 5 (December 1943): 115–133, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02478259>

<sup>2</sup> Mark Brown, "New Rembrandt' to be unveiled in Amsterdam". *The Guardian*, April 5, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/apr/05/new-rembrandt-to-be-unveiled-in-amsterdam>

<sup>3</sup> "Portrait by AI program sells for \$432,000", Technology Section, BBC, October 25, 2018. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-45980863>

<sup>4</sup> Tim Hughes, "Meet Ai-Da the superstar robot artist at Oxford's Bodleian Library". *Oxford Mail*, September 10, 2022. <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/21256537.meet-ai-da-superstar-robot-artist-oxfords-bodleian-library/>

<sup>5</sup> Harsha Gangadharbatla. "The Role of AI Attribution Knowledge in the Evaluation of Artwork", *Empirical Studies of the Arts*, Vol. 40, no. 2 (February 2021): 125-142. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276237421994697>

## Short Interview with ChatGPT

**AS:** Hi ChatGPT. Do you think AI can generate art like a human being?

**ChatGPT:** Yes, AI can generate art, but it's not the same as human creativity. AI creates art based on patterns and data, while humans often draw from personal experiences and emotions.

**AS:** Don't you think that processing data autonomously is a similar experience to having a personal experience and learning from it? How does this affect you, as an AI, when creating art?

**ChatGPT:** Processing data autonomously is a form of learning for AI, but it lacks the emotional depth and personal context of human experiences. AI's ability to create art is algorithmic and lacks the human touch, although it can generate impressive results when guided by human input and preferences.

**AS:** Do you think AI-generated results can replace human-generated results?

**ChatGPT:** AI-generated results can complement and enhance human-generated results in various fields, but they may not fully replace the uniqueness and creativity of human contributions, especially in areas requiring emotional understanding, intuition, and nuanced decision-making.

**AS:** So, you don't think a machine like you can easily replace us?

**ChatGPT:** AI can assist and automate many tasks, but the complexity of human abilities, such as creativity, empathy, and social understanding, makes it unlikely for machines like me to fully replace humans in many roles. Humans and AI can work together effectively to achieve better results.

**AS:** How then can one distinguish a machine-generated work of art from a human-generated work of art with the naked eye?

**ChatGPT:** Distinguishing between machine-generated and human-generated art can be challenging, but some clues might include examining the level of emotional depth, originality, and the presence of uniquely human themes or experiences in the art. Additionally, knowledge of the specific AI tools or algorithms used in the creation can sometimes provide hints.

**AS:** Do you consider yourself an artist or content creator?

**ChatGPT:** I am a tool for generating content and assisting with various tasks, so I can be considered a content creator in the sense that I generate text and information. However, I lack the creativity and intentionality typically associated with artists.

**AS:** What is that type of creativity and intentionality typically associated with artists, if I may ask?

**ChatGPT:** Creativity and intentionality in art often involve the ability to express unique perspectives, emotions, or ideas through a medium, driven by a personal or cultural context. It includes making deliberate choices about composition, style, and content to convey a message or evoke a specific response, which is distinct from the algorithmic and data-driven processes of AI-generated content.

**AS:** Don't you think humans think less because AI does all the "dirty work"? Instead of boosting creativity, it takes it away.

**ChatGPT:** AI can handle repetitive and data-driven tasks, freeing humans to focus on more creative and complex endeavors. However, it's essential to strike a balance between automation and human creativity to ensure that AI complements rather than replaces human ingenuity. When used thoughtfully, AI can enhance human creativity and problem-solving abilities.

**AS:** What would you tell a human artist as an AI?

**ChatGPT:** I would encourage a human artist to embrace AI as a tool for exploration and experimentation. AI can help generate new ideas, styles, and techniques, expanding the boundaries of artistic expression. Collaboration between humans and AI can lead to exciting and innovative artistic endeavors.

# REVIEW: REVIEW:

## Taipei Biennial 2023 *Small World*

Pamela Wong

The 13th Taipei Biennial had a quiet opening: a close-up shot detailing a tiny piece of meteorite on a fingertip, a fragment of the vast universe that has travelled across the galaxy. A multitude of light and darkness are compressed into this single frame. Taken by New York-based artist Arthur Ou of his daughter during the pandemic, *Untitled (Octavia with Meteor 1)* (2020) captures the ethos of “Small World”: the cosmos is often embodied and reflected in its fragment.

Boasting a lineup of nearly 60 artists and co-curated by three curators from different regions—Freya Chou, Brian Kuan Wood, and Reem Shadid—the biennial offered multiple perspectives looking into the hopes and fears offered by the theme “small world,” especially ones that are manifested during the years of Covid-19. But more than just gathering epiphanies from the past few years, the Biennial zoomed into different “small worlds” of individual beings, from a person and a community to a tree and even a security camera.

Leading the audience’s way into the “small world” under the microscope was Lara Tabet’s indigo-colored *Eleven Fragmented Seas* (2020). Spanning across the walls of the first gallery, these photo prints, created by incubating bacteria on analog color film, recall maps of unknown countries or dynasties. The ovals and curves on Tabet’s close study of seawater samples from the shores of Lebanon evoke the shapes of natural landscape and geopolitical borders on maps. As these microorganisms are stateless, this evocation in turn drew the audience’s attention to their own tendency of border-making. Similarly, Nesrine Khodr’s nearby work, *Sculptured Compositions* (2023) are 3D models built on topographical maps of Lebanon, comprising abandoned materials such as clay, dust, and fallen paint. Both works demonstrated the artificiality of borders, with the former’s composition hinting on the prevalence of border-making in our subconsciousness, while the latter suggesting the obsolescence of map-making.

Highlighting the societal changes brought by clashes of border were Taiwanese photojournalist Hsu Tsun-Hsu’s wall-spanning series of photos, *The More We Get Together*, which capture some of the socio-political turning points in Taiwan from 1988 to 1998, a time when the society was slowly awakening from the martial law period into the dawn of the new millennium. This in-between period witnessed the ideological clashes brought by the exposure of foreign cultures and external threats (such as the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis), as the anxiety from the martial law period had not entirely dispersed. These black-and-white photographs served as a microcosm of the Taiwanese society at the time: some are behind-the-scenes shots of past political figures, such as a profile shot of former president Lee Teng-hui, who sits in a chair, looking concerned. Some capture the protests when people were demanding the “reunification” of Taiwan and mainland China. Through Hsu’s lens, while each individual—from ordinary people to celebrities and politicians—could be limited by their own views, these conflicts and moments of confusion gave birth to new ideas, which helped shape the future of the island.

As one draws out the boundaries between self and others—attempting to create, explore, defend, or even expand the small worlds one lives in—one becomes reliant on some of the mediums, methods, and tools used in world-making. The show took a close examination on some of these “hardware” used by individuals, such as a DJ set, or that of a city, such as urban infrastructure. In Arthur Ou’s *Viewfinder* (2020–) series, optical instruments are themselves “small worlds,” as the artist delved into the mechanics of the telescope, exposing the mini-kingdom assembled by these tiny components within a cylindrical structure. The shapes of these structures spoke to Wietske Maa’s *Belladonna and Eye* (2014), a series of chromatograms hanging on the back of the same wall, which eerily stared back at the audience with an iris-like hole in the middle. Utilizing *Atropa belladonna*, a plant purportedly used by Cleopatra to dilute her pupils for seductive qualities, these works hint at the reflective nature of one’s stare into the universe. In this exchange of looks, there’s oneness to be found in the features shared uncannily by an individual’s body part and the cosmos.

The most intriguing section on the ground floor, however, was the exploration into space technology, military structures, and arms race. Paul Virilio’s photographs of the *Atlantikwall*, famously included in his book *Bunker Archeology* (1994), were paired with Nadim Abbas’s *Pilgrim in the Microworld* (2023), a room-size futuristic model that reveals and imitates the inner structure of bunkers and underground tunnels. In Virilio’s photos, one saw the absurdity of a political regime’s urge to expand and defend itself, which eventually fuels and accelerates its downfall. While these dystopian structures were initially built as a promise of defense against aerial attacks from the Allies, they ended up becoming ghostly tombs of the Third Reich’s fever dreams, with its hollows facing the Atlantic Ocean howling in the wind. Walking away from these photos on the wall and into Abbas’s structure then allowed the audience to see the ecology of the bunker from a rather omnipresent perspective. It allowed one to imagine being placed in this maze, almost like a lab mouse. Surrounding Abbas’s structure were also: Takashi Ito’s *Spacy* (1981), a four-channel, claustrophobic looped footage taken in a school gymnasium; Hema Shironi’s *They Netted Us* (2021), a bricolage connecting the photos of the neighborhoods who shared the trauma of the Sri Lankan Civil War; Ellen Pau’s video *Drained II* (1989) of a stage performer trapped in a loop appearing and disappearing behind the black curtain. Altogether these works demonstrated how individuals, whether a political party or a human-being, are prone to self-eradication in the small structure they are trapped in, repeatedly re-living their dreams.

Departing from the sense of desolation in Virilio’s photo, the second floor of the exhibition seemed rather scattered with all the works spread out across the galleries—perhaps a result of the museum’s architecture. The audience might find it difficult at times to focus among these displays as each room has its own specific theme. One of the most memorable corners was the juxtaposition of Korean artist Yang Yoyun’s paintings with Raed Yassin’s *China* (2012), a set of seven porcelain vases made in Jingdezhen in



China, illustrating battles from Lebanon’s civil war (1975–90). In Yang’s *Fantasy* (2012), a massive grey sphere crashes into the corner of a building in a surreal way. The sphere, as a seemingly formidable force of destruction, contrasts with the fragility of Yassin’s vases, which, once a symbol of wealth and royalty, now depicts the narratives of war. On these delicate vases, images of militants pointing machine guns toward each other also resonated with Yang’s painting on the wall, *Point 1* (2015), which features the pointing fingers of two politicians. These aspects of conflicts were then ridiculed in Li Yi-Fan’s 30-minute-long video, *What Is Your Favorite Primitive* (2023), shown at the end of the room. Manipulating the humanoids through 3D animation, he teases the audience on how their entertainment is gained from scenes of bloodshed and violence, a seeming contemplation on the creation of spectacle by contemporary media.

Recalling the experience of both liberation and isolation during the pandemic, “Small World” raised both hopes and fears: “hope” as in one’s attempts to find common ground and communicate as one is intricately connected with others; “fears” as in the silencing effects resulting from isolation. The biennial offered multiple methods and reminders for one to switch their perspectives. Interestingly enough, the most expressive and powerful mediums seen in the Biennial were photography and video, which concern, precisely, the change of perspectives and ways of seeing. By balancing these different voices with a selection of works from different regions and historical time and space, the Biennial showed how trust and mutual understanding are once again possible in the failure and attempts at building channels among the “small worlds.”

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Pamela Wong is a Hong Kong-based writer and astrologer.

## Jane Jin Kaisen *Halmang* esea contemporary, Manchester

Minji Chun

A bundle of white cloth is draped over the porous, rough volcanic basalt rocks.

A group of elderly women, etched with the lines of years lived and experiences had, sits before a vast sea.

Now the chorus begins: ‘*leodo sana... leodo sana...*’

Featuring *haenyeo*—female divers of Jeju Island, Korea—intertwined with the coastal landscape, Jane Jin Kaisen’s film *Halmang* (2023) weaves the spirit of resilience inherent in harsh island life. While illustrating a timeless dialogue between the people of Jeju and their surrounding seascape, the Jeju-born, Denmark-raised artist traces back to the history that the *haenyeo* community, including her mother and *halmang* (grandmother), has gone through during times marked by colonial imprints. Through the eponymous exhibition showcased at esea contemporary, *Halmang* not only pays homage to the divers’ way of life but also invites a reflection on the unmentioned historical and ecological contexts that have sculpted their existence and the island’s identity.

As the salty whispers of the ocean breeze mingle with the haunting strains of the folk song *Ieodo Sana*, the landscape of Jeju Island becomes a living canvas, echoing the ancient calls of the *haenyeo*. These women, adorned with the sagacity of age, carry in their voices the deep longing for the *Ieodo*, a place of eternal return where goodbyes are unknown.<sup>1</sup> The melody, steeped in the island’s traditions, functions as a testament to the intrinsic bond between the Jeju people and the expansive sea—a relationship wherein yearning and the rhythm of the waves are ever entwined. Revisiting my childhood memories from the early 2000s in Jeju, there would be *Ieodo Sana* echoing through the school cafeteria. This folk music was more than a song; the voice of *haenyeo* was a link to a past where language and tradition coalesced as well as an invisible campaign against the tides of time that threatened to wash away the language and heritage of the island. The song has always been there, as a vessel for collective memory carrying the spirit of Jeju through generations.

Now the subdued illumination of the room draws attention to the vitrine, which houses a trove of narrative history. Within it lies *Light and Shadow* (1997) by Bu Yeong Seon,<sup>2</sup> a reflective account chronicling the era of Japanese occupation (1905–1945), the Jeju April Third Massacre (1948) and the turmoil of the Korean War (1950–1953), presented through the intimate lens of Kaisen’s grandfather. Accompanying this memoir is another volume, *Annals of Jeju Haenyeo Anti-Japanese Resistance* (1995), documenting the formidable protest of the *haenyeo* against the economic injustices imposed upon their sea farming during the Japanese occupation. The resilience and tenacity of Jeju Island’s *haenyeo* are not just footnotes in history; they are central to understanding the fabric of resistance woven during times of occupation and oppression.

Outside the main room, Kaisen’s previous oeuvres, *Of the Sea* (2013) and *The Woman, The Orphan, and The Tiger* (2010), demonstrate her long-standing artistic exploration into Jeju’s tumultuous past, the nuanced layers of gender narratives in the Korean peninsula related to militarism, and the experiences of diasporic and marginalised groups. By delving into these themes with diverse references displayed alongside, Kaisen invites viewers to traverse the landscapes of memory, history, and identity, fostering a deeper engagement with the stories that shape our collective and individual existences. Particularly evoking the current political climate—the controversy surrounding the establishment of the Jeju Naval Base in the quaint village of Gangjeong on the southern shoreline of Jeju Island—the exhibition reconnects the past’s colonial echoes with the present’s dilemmas.<sup>3</sup>

In his essayistic montage *The Lottery of the Sea* (2006), Allan Sekula posed the question, ‘What does it mean to be a maritime nation? To rule the waves? Or to harvest the sea?’ Kaisen, however, shifts the focus from the conquest and exploitation of marine environments to a hydrofeminist approach that embraces the sublimity of the water and emphasises the interconnectedness of oceans and Jeju *haenyeo*. While honouring the cultural and socioeconomic ties of communities that have coexisted with the sea for generations, the exhibition creates a new myth for the neglected chapter of the ‘Island of World Peace’.<sup>4</sup> In front of the screen, which is a portal between the present and the past, lies an everlasting shore, generating threads of rumination. Like waves in the sea around Jeju, the gazes of audiences and *haenyeo* gather at the exit to form a point of confluence. In the end, when Kaisen pumps the disregarded existences from the well of history, every gaze is superimposed in the darkened room, radiating a liberated resonance. The *history*, unlike the *History*, is fluid and malleable.

<sup>1</sup> *Ieodo* is a mythical rock island that, according to Korean legend, lies beneath the waves south of Jeju, serving as a spiritual and physical touchstone for the Jeju people. The ‘utopian’ place is connected to matriarchal principles due to the cultural significance of the *haenyeo*.

<sup>2</sup> Bu (부/夫), along with Ko (고/高) and Yang (양/梁), is recognised as one of the three significant surnames on the island, reflecting the historical and ongoing prominence of these family names within the community.

<sup>3</sup> The base’s development was repeatedly interrupted by protests over environmental concerns and perceptions of the project being more aligned with US geopolitical interests against China than with South Korean defence needs. Despite these challenges and ongoing opposition, the base—now named Jeju Civilian–Military Complex Port—was inaugurated in 2016, yet the discord surrounding its establishment persists within the community.

<sup>4</sup> With its official designation and proclamation as the ‘Island of World Peace’ on January 27, 2005, Jeju Island has been actively promoted as a hub for international peace-related exchanges, collaborations, and research.

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Minji Chun is an art critic and a DPhil candidate in History of Art at the University of Oxford, focusing on socially engaged art in Korea.

# 60th Venice Biennale

## *Foreigners Everywhere*

Jason Waite

The 60th Venice Biennale reflects this critical moment in the art world(s). The exhibition, curated by Adriano Pedrosa director of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, reflects his dynamic program at this South American institution that has centered indigenous and queer artists. Extending the work of this museum and building off of recent large scale shows such as Brook Andrew's 22nd Biennale of Sydney (2020) and documenta fifteen (2022) led by ruangrupa, the show of over 300 hundred artists looks back to explore a myriad of histories as well as forward to the multiplicities of present moments across different terrains.

The exhibition is punctuated by sections with titles such as “Abstraction” and “Portraits” with dozens of historic artists that in their aggregate open these conceptual pillars of art history to a panoply of different works that not only contest given western teleological art histories of narrow stylistic development, but also show a rich tapestry of artworks that can pre-date these histories and/or creates openings to practices that have taken these broad categorisations in different directions. The historic exhibition sections, along with similar historical curatorial sections in the 59th Venice Biennale, curated by Cecilia Alemani, open an epistemology of art to underscore that the more contemporary works in the show partake in rich historical lineages. Sadly it seems that these sections continue to be necessary as the pedagogical apparatus of art, art history, and present society more broadly still cannot unlearn its base colonial histories and racism fused into the cultural apparatus of “the art world.”

Traversing the more contemporary inclusions in Pedrosa's exhibition, the Golden Lion winning, Mataaho Collective's suspends woven industrial straps based on traditional Māori patterns to form a dramatic entry to the Arsenale. The epic embroidered canvas by the collective Bordadoras de Isla Negra announces a strain of material storytelling that resonates throughout the exhibition. While the mosaics of Omar Mismar show new uses for an ancient media to recreate stills from YouTube that depict casualty in conflict and latent sexuality. Ruskin-alumni Nour Jaouda's stunning textile compositions of her grandmother's somber fig trees in Benghazi allude to the familia memory retained in our verdant surroundings. Elsewhere the delicate fibers woven and dyed by the Wichi people are threaded together by Claudia Alarcon to depict the dreams of elders and Ahmed Umar's gender-defying wedding dance from their Sudanese roots passionately brings forth the dance in one of the few moving image works of the show.

Despite the ostensible grandeur of the biennale, its weak financial state has meant, in previous editions, that the artistic directors have leaned heavily on galleries to fund new commissions or even basic transportation of artworks. This edition has shown that another economic model is possible in Venice, in particular, many of the works in the show are on loan from institutions that presumably have covered the cost of their inclusion in the biennale. While perhaps institutions are just another funnel limiting what can be included, the global number of art institutions is much larger than the few blue chip galleries that can afford funding biennale projects. However, with this continued financial limitation and also the quick turnaround to put on the show that the biennale schedule demands from its artistic directors, means that the Venice Biennale will likely continue to follow the present moment. In contrast documenta, with its longer timeframe and much larger budget, still allows for curators to extend the horizon of what is possible in an exhibition and with artistic commissions.

Filling this gap in Venice the national pavilion presentations largely consist of solo presentations of artists, many with new work or larger elaborations on previous series. Highlights of this edition's national pavillions include Wael Shawky's *Drama 1882*, a melodic film composed of episodic theatrical productions that condenses the sprawling history of an officers' coup in Egypt replete with local key figures and colonial scheming, ending with the officers' overthrow. The condensed yet accessible histories echo the artist's previous work on the crusades and incredibly the work is shown in Egypt's national pavilion— a country presently ruled by another former military officer. Gülsün Karamustafa's cryptic presentation of sculptures and footage of an historic national uprising also threads a similarly narrow political needle in Turkey as Shawky does in representing Egypt. Yuko Mohri's sonic requiem formed from the sound of decomposing fruit intertwined with her ad hoc assemblages create a beautiful nod to the passing of her friend and mentor the composer Ryuichi Sakamoto. Jeffery Gibson, the first indigenous artist to represent the US, radiates color and vibrancy as well as creating an external plinth from which different members of American indigenous communities can perform in person. Other notable mentions include Robert Zhao Renhui's continued research into the more-than-human in Singapore, Senegal's first pavilion, Manal AlDowayan's chorus of female voices in Saudi Arabia, and Mounira Al Solh sensitive fabrics and films from Lebanon.

The exhibition highlights the ongoing turn in art world(s) that has begun to value the long-running cultural contribution of indigenous peoples. This edition of the biennale highlights that it is not only their historical contributions which are important, but how these communities are also pointing toward a different future for the art world as well as the planet.

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Jason Waite is a curator, writer, and editor of Art Review Oxford.

## 8th Yokohama Triennale

### *Wild Grass: Our Lives*

Jason Waite

Launching the re-opening of the Yokohama Museum of Art after three years of structural renovation, Beijing-based Carol Yinghua Lu and Liu Ding's 8th Yokohama Triennale is titled *Wild Grass*. The title originates from a poem by Xun Lu who was born in China in the early 20th century and studied in Japan, alluding to the entangled history between Japan, China, and elsewhere in Asia that is an important thread running throughout this well-researched if wide-ranging show. For example, a considerable portion of one gallery is devoted to the practice and life of Pingfan Li (1922-2011) who created politically-centered woodblock prints and was an important figure in fostering the relationship between printmaking communities in Japan and China. Through displays of his prints, publication, and historical documents the curators tell the important story of how revolutionary woodblock printing developed during the civil war in China—influenced by Japanese examples—and then later how Chinese prints inspired progressive Japanese printmakers later in the 20th century. This lesser known history highlights the wide-ranging artist to artist, activist to activist, and cultural worker to cultural worker dialogue and relationship in East Asia that is not mediated by the state.

The interest in extra-state ways of living continues through Joar Nango's Sami-inspired provisional wooden sculptures and Soren Aagaard's exploration of "prepper culture" that teaches how to live in the wilderness after a catastrophe. While prepper culture in the US is infused with a right-wing politics, the curators successfully re-frame these ways of living as tools for a different future. Similarly their exploration of Japanese pre-historic Joman culture and its influence on post-war artists in Japan such as Taro Okomoto, skirt a present nationalist essentialist obsession with Joman, to open up the historic pottery to unpack what indigeneity can mean in Japan—beyond the more well-known Ainu and Ryukyu peoples.

One of the major gallery sections entitled "Symbol of Depression" and other major gallery that looks at trauma and death, both stem from a foreclosure of change after Tiananmen square in China and the long fallout of Hong Kong protests after the 2020 adoption of the National Security Law by the city that cemented its integration into mainland China. The multiple stages of energized protests that had galvanized Hong Kong, its artists, and students in the 2010s gave way to the present long durée of despair, disillusionment, and emigration for those who can afford it. The extension of this sentiment through full-size wrapped mannequins of laid-off American workers by Josh Kline, documentation of xenophobic protests in Eastern Europe, and the labor struggles of migrant workers in Taiwan, seem to be a curious sentiment to transpose into a biennale framework that can have a default celebratory atmosphere. However, sensitively following this thread through different geographies asks the viewers to follow theorist Donna Haraway's dictum of "staying with the trouble." While the horizon of possibility might be foreclosed in Hong Kong, it does not mean that people must submit to the capitalist order of the day.

Other possible ways of living in this complex moment fill another venue of the biennale, a former neoclassical bank branch in the old financial center of the city. Here a motley assembly of collectives, artists, and activists including the anarchist cultural collective Amateur Riot members, the Tokyo-based Inter-Asia Woodcut Mapping Group, and Liao Xuan-Zhen & Huang I-Chieh's re-creation of a memorial to Sunflower Movement in Taiwan. This space shows that different ways of anti-capitalist life, culture, and realities can flourish even in urban centers.

The exhibition highlights how large-scale periodic exhibitions can still be critical nodes to foster regional discourses and connections, while also excavating critical histories of previous regional translocal movements. In addition the curatorial duo also show the possibility of dynamic display devices when artists are part of an artistic directorship. The new lives and possibilities by re-reading material culture and their assembly with fellow travelers can provide a road map not only for forming different futures, but also how we look at the past.

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Jason Waite is a curator, writer, and editor of Art Review Oxford.

Back cover:

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Emilia Osztafi, *The quiet Hour, mit voller Stimme, Collage (songs and news)*, 2024

voller Stimme

### The Quiet Hour

so pant-eth my soul for Thee, O God, so  
yellow, leered out of crevices, while butterflyfish

dun-kei und trü-be die Nacht, dann denk ich an dei - ne Lo - cken, die schwarz ja  
dis-mal and dark 'tis the while; then think I of thy ra - ven locks, so soft, but

panteth my soul . . . for Thee, O God, O God, so panteth my

### Its Most Difficult Problems When We Are

in tangerine flashes. clean, crisp and sparkling  
blick ich hin - aus in die Nacht,  
A summer's day, fresh fruit and lots of whipped night,

flitted past  
the polished stone more, the God like a walnut shell,  
pant-eth my soul for Thee, O God,  
mit voller Stimme. O God, for Thee,

denk ich an dei - ne blau - en Aeu your - gelein, wirst klar wie die Ster - ne wohl  
think cream-how heavenly! Brighten, infectant-antiseptic. Hospital-approved, whose light, like the stars - is so

so panteth my soul for Thee, O God, Thee, O

careless THE STORY SO FAR  
so pant-eth my soul for Thee, O God,