K Allado-McDowell
Studies for Asemic Generator (2022)

“Studies for Asemic Generator” are written non-texts. They are attempts to make letterless, asignifying marks that are also not drawings, characters that aren’t letters. Writing is often thought to move from meaning to mark making, from the mind to the body, from the brain to the hand. What if language came last, after writing? Can we write with our hands without using language?

I am sketching modes of writing that force linguistic interpretation onto the viewer. My goal is to make an “asemic generator”, a languageless visual system usable for hallucinating text. This is a work in progress.

I am developing co-writing rituals with groups, using online chat platforms and generative AI language models. We will use the asemic generator to create prompts for collective co-writing. The prompts will come from the meaningless marks. We will stare at the drawings until we see sentences then we’ll put the sentences into the AI.

I want to go to the edge of language. It’s deep in our bodies and all around us. I want to travel to its borders and bring something back in.

Benjamin Bratton
Bios-4 (2022)

Developed in cooperation with Aerohabitus Space Technologies in Van Nuys, California and the Institute of Biophysics in Krasnoyarsk, Siberia (home of Bios-3 experimental closed ecosystem in continuous operation since 1972). Just as Biosphere 2 is an enclosed living simulation of Biosphere 1, our Earth, Bios-4 is an enclosed living simulation of the original Biosphere 2 ecosystem in miniature. Built of a special glass alloy, Bios-4 is nested inside the glass roof of Biosphere 2, one inside the other, serrated by twinned membranes that give each its total interiority. A scientifically significant sample of the original Biosphere-2 species –animal, vegetable, mineral– all co-exist in an intensified and accelerated inter-metabolic relationship platform.

Bios-4 extends the original inspiration for Biosphere 2 to create a living ecological simulation to learn the core principles of responsible planetary societies. The principle of cybernetic miniaturization, for which the model simulation can reduce the complexity of a system to its core essential components, allows researchers to glean fundamental insights into the working of an entire world. The scientific and philosophical implications extend not only for this planet but for those to which humans are soon migrating.

UPDATE: Unfortunately, the original model of Bios-4 was removed from its location in Biosphere 2 due to overriding safety concerns. The intense heat and unexpected interactions between plant and insect species resulted in pervasive cannibalistic behavior. The artist feels that the integrity of the experiment was not necessarily compromised, but the project benefactors chose to withdraw support after an initial site visit. Their initial request that Bios-4 be destroyed was considered but rejected when the artist arranged to have the entire enclosed ecosystem relocated to an undisclosed site.

Alice Bucknell
Green Mars World (2022)

Drawing on speculative fiction strategies, as well as materials science, linguistics, space law, and prophetic applications of AI, artist Alice Bucknell explores a trifecta of possible Martian worlds, from a bio-infrastructure business vending clean water and air back to Earth, to a mystic cult of plant worshippers auguring ancient polyglot ecologies on the Red Planet. Bucknell takes us behind the scenes of interplanetary worlding processes, including collaborations with space lawyers, arctic researchers, Scottish drone pilots, NLP specialists, and the Language AI GPT-3.

Paige Emery
To Recalibrate with Tree Divination (2022)

Prophetic culture “equips a subject sinking chaos with the ability to imagine a place from which to restart their activity of worlding - even if this ability might coincide, as for those living at the end of a civilization, with the task of creating fertile ruins over which new worlds can emerge”- Federico Campagna

The way we relate to time can coincide with the way we commune with land, such as in practices of dendrochronology, or the science of dating with tree rings, and tree divination, or reading trees as a divinatory practice. Correlations between the two lie not only in the telling time with trees but through the perspective of more-than-human participation with time and place that can inspire how we respond to our local landscape.

Dendrochronology originated from an astronomer’s attempt at observing solar patterns. In a pursued theory of sunspots, he realized the wealth of information about the local climates of Earth that could be revealed. This was not the first case of observing tree rings, but the start of it as a discipline of scientific research, establishing the first home to dendrochronology with the Laboratory of Tree Research at the University of Arizona. Dendrochronology is not just dating by tree rings, but the opening of age-old libraries of timestamps that have recalibrated what we know about environmental changes throughout history. Stories hidden within the lines of trees have become a part of a rewriting of history in a chronological dance that is informing future forecasting within climate science. This type of relationship with the memory keeping of trees unlocks an understanding of what conditions make certain futures possible, and in turn how certain ecological futures might be brought into the present.

Another method of reading trees, tree divination, has taken many forms across cultures throughout history. One example is found through Ogham, the Celtic language of trees, and the first known attempt at a written communication native to the British Isles. Ogham uses words of trees for communication and through its semiotic connection with sacred trees of the landscape, it has been used in divinatory practice in Druid tradition. Through participatory attentiveness with trees, symbolic meanings have been intuited and interpreted for guidance. Divination can perhaps be thought of as a practice of being so attentive and resonant to a more-than-human environment, as seeing the present so clearly that it opens a more graspable understanding of how a future comes into being.

Although dendrochronology is `a scientific discipline and dendromancy is associated with the realm of mysticism, the two can intertwine in their cosmological inspiration through what Federico Campagna calls “prophetic culture”, a bridge towards a way of nonlinear worlding that lays fertile grounds for a future for next generations to come. In a moment where the climate crisis is unfolding rapidly amongst a dominating linear-progressive timescape, a more-than-human, nonlinear relationship with time and place can offer hope in how we can respond in a localized present for an embodied futurity brought into being.

Xin Liu
Orbit Weaver (2017)

Gravity anchors all existence on Earth.

It pulls a chaotic world to one single point in every moment of life. Even though gravity is everywhere and unending, for most of the universe, vast empty space dominates, leaving us free from gravity's tether. Is the weightless state a moment of true autonomy or does the ungrounded body simply lose control?

In June 1965, NASA astronaut Ed White stepped out of his space capsule and walked in space for the first time. Out in the vastness, he was tethered to the space station, as if a child attached to the mother through the umbilical cord.

Inspired by the three-dimensional mobility of arachnids, Orbit Weaver uses a hand-held device to regain control of her body and move freely through a weightless space. The device shoot the string out with a magnet on the tip. Once the magnet is attached to the surrounding surfaces, the device will rewind and drag the wearer with minimal impetus due to the zero-gravity environment. With the apparatus, the wearer will be transformed into a "spider woman", weaving her web in space.

Laure Michelon
Translation (2022)

Climate change is essentially a pattern, or series of patterns drawn from planetary scale data collection that is synthesized and interpreted through a climate model.

By the time the information makes its way to the public, it has already been translated through numerous phases and filters - sensing, dataset collection, climate modeling, IPCC condensation and filtration, and media translations. As our culture becomes more dependent on the visualization of information, it necessitates a re-interpretation of this information.

Translation emphasizes both the success and shortcomings of the language used to write original documents. The act of translation suggests an alteration; a change in a given language's form, condition or nature, often with the intention to explain the original subject matter in terms that can be more easily understood. By translating the IPCC Climate report into visuals generated by a variety of neural networks, Translation aims to adjust the way we can be informed by the data in the report. These trained machine learning models reinforce and reconstitute known imagery through the bias inherent in a curated dataset, producing visuals that broaden the report's ability to be understood, and serve as a broader call to action.

Sahej Rahal
Finalforest.exe (2021)

In finalforest.exe we find ourselves amidst an unfolding cybernetic ritual. A masked shamanistic figure, the keeper of ancient secrets and lost histories, converses with a sentient AI program. Whispering remnants of these lost pasts to an AI bipedal, the creature wanders a seemingly infinite tropical forest. Rahal's bipedal creature is not driven by a single brain but a congregation of multiple AI scripts that are attached to the virtual bones within its polygonal body. Mixing folklore, urban legends, archaeological records, conspiracies, and science fiction, Rahal interrogates the mythic narratives that preserves caste as the core anatomy of Indian society.

Yasaman Sheri
Simulacra Contained: Sample Vessels for Microbial Sphere (2022)

A sample collection of glass vessels used for containment, specially those that house & enclose invisible biological bits and microbial life is presented in a vitrine. Biological Experimentation often happens under and within glass. A staple in the laboratory, as objects, walls and architectural structures, glass plays an important role as a scientific interface, a tool for building boundaries as a practice of separation and containment. With a set of parameters, a simulation is created, studied and noted. The material quality of glass allows us to observe the inside; transparent, inert, without touching, separating our senses. The contents are not always visible to naked eye, as was the case with biosphere 2's microbial ecology.

The history of glass objects is unique, sprouting through craft in cities of polymaths and artists with hand-crafted vessels, they pose as a window into the lives and ideas of those who experiment. Like a diorama, these glass objects resemble a city. We look at this simulacra of containment zoomed out as though we, humans, are towering down in awe and curiosity and the desire for hyper-sealed & controlled experimental environments, shifting between micro & macro. Biotechnology & Genetic Modification set the next generation of experiments within climate and ecology. Simulacra Contained is an ongoing series of investigatory objects that define the interfaces of science, boundaries of containment, experimentation & control.