PRESS PREVIEW

COMPUTATIONAL POETICS

Curated by Hannah B Higgins and David Familian

Eric Andersen
Christian Bök
George Brecht
Jon Corbett
Cesar & Lois
Clint Enns
Mary Flanagan
Tiffany Foster
Tiffany Funk
Kenneth Goldsmith
Dick Higgins
Alison Knowles
Rafael Lozano-Hemmer
Jackson Mac Low
Nam June Paik
Allison Parrish
Bill Seaman
Sasha Stiles
Emmett Williams

On View: October 1, 2022 – January 14, 2023
Opening Reception: October 1, 2022, 2-5 p.m.
Media previews available by appointment

IRVINE, Calif. (Sept. 23, 2022) – The Beall Center for Art + Technology is pleased to announce the opening of *Computational Poetics*, co-curated by Hannah B Higgins, computer art scholar at the University of Illinois, Chicago, and David Familian, Artistic Director at Beall Center for Art + Technology. The exhibition opens on Saturday, Oct. 1, 2022, and will run through Friday, Jan. 14, 2023.

In FORTRAN IV, the 1960s programming language of computational poetics (for the purpose of this exhibition), a meaning unit (A) can equal itself (A) plus 1. In other words, instead of fixing meaning, computational poetry already exists, always exists, and is in a state of transformation.

This exhibition surveys human/computer collaborations in poetry, with historical work from the 1960s and contemporary experimentation. From the 1960s to the present, emerging computer and telecommunications technologies have necessitated a fundamental rethinking of language. This half-century includes transitions from

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mainframe to personal computers, from individual computers to the Internet, from a fleshy conception of the human body to one dominated by lettered genetic code, from western-dominated humanist-based faith in historical progress to a postmodern and postcolonial collapse of ethos with regards to race, class, and gender norms. Each of these technological shifts both generates and responds to cognitive and linguistic mutations. As mutations, these shifts are less random or chance based than one might suppose. Rather, language changes through emerging use.

Language has met the challenge of computation by accelerating, leaping off the page, expressing its embodied nature, abbreviating itself, visualizing, manifesting via sonification and then joining the landscapes of the Anthropocene. Artists and poets play a critical role in this transformation by exploring and exploiting the ever-expanding misalignment between literary and technological culture. These experimental artists and poets directly oppose the authority structure of normative writing associated with the printed word in ways that include (but are not limited to) poetry as read, poetry as expressing raced, gendered and classed models of authorship and expertise, and poetry as disembodied mediation.

No longer content with either the classical tradition of poetry or the standardizing print grids of moveable type, the artists and poets of *Computational Poetics* first used mainframe computers in the 1960s to explore this space. Not surprisingly, many of the historic poets from the 1960s were associated with John Cage's Experimental Composition class offered at the New School in 1957-9. Others are part of the intermedia Fluxus group. Subsequent generations of computational poets have expanded these boundaries further by developing and using new processes and computer programs, artificial intelligence, biological materials, emerging ecologies, and the internet. Crucially, these poets (and artist poets) are not simple purveyors of randomized language, as one might suppose. Rather, as co-curators Hannah B Higgins and David Familian understand the exhibition, "'Chance' is not random. It is always constrained by situational probability: the number of sticks of the *I-Ching*, letters of the alphabet, permutations of weather, or organic evolution. It is the uncertainty that is introduced into the work that produces new possibilities, which are further enhanced as each version is generated. *Computational Poetics* is a mechanism that generates new ways that poetry is understood, what it can be, in a time of uncertainty."

Some key events of the exhibition: *Computational Poetics* includes a reconstruction of Fluxus artist **Eric Andersen**'s long-lost *Opus 1966*, a piece of computational poetry based on the frequency of words in English that was destroyed around 1970 and remains almost entirely unknown outside Denmark. Computer scientist Henrik Soederstroem has reprogrammed the piece and reintroduced its musical logic in the form of AI-assisted choral performance. Other historic pieces by **Jackson Mac Low**, **Dick Higgins**, **Alison Knowles** and **Emmett Williams** use computation to explore the algorithmic potential of nature, gun violence, food and habitation, and machines, respectively.

The exhibition also represents a fluid, cross-generational typology of artists and poets challenging normative print culture in the name of experimental poetry by using computers: **Cesar & Lois** (Cesar Baio and Lucy HG Solomon; Brazil and USA), **Christian Bök** (Canada), **Jon Corbett** (Cree, Salteux, Métis), **Clint Enns** (Canada) (in posthumous collaboration with **Nam June Paik** (1932-2006; Korea)), **Mary Flanagan** (USA), **Tori Foster** (Canada), **Tiffany Funk** (USA), **Kenneth Goldsmith** (USA), **Rafael Lozano-Hemmer** (Mexico/Canada), **Allison Parrish** (USA), **Sasha Stiles** (Kalmyk/USA), and **Bill Seaman** (USA). Here, too, the work is computational in

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ways that expand algorithmic sensibility into literature, indigenous culture and language, ecology, human reproduction, gender and race.

A public opening reception will take place on **Saturday, Oct. 1, 2–5 p.m**. Admission is free and open to the public. For additional details on the exhibition, including holiday closures, please visit the website at beallcenter.uci.edu. For visitor protocols related to COVID-19 and up-to-date information, please visit the UCI Forward website at uci.edu/coronavirus.

***Computational Poetics* is supported by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and The Beall Family Foundation.**

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Image: Cesar & Lois, <u>*Degenerative Cultures: fire and water*</u>, 2022 (project series 2018–2022); Book with *Physarum polycephalum* (microorganism) growth. Courtesy of the artists.

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Biographies

Hannah B Higgins is the solo author of *Fluxus Experience* (University of California Press, 2002) and *The Grid Book* (MIT Press, 2009) and co-editor of with Douglas Kahn of *Mainframe Experimentalism: Early Computing and the Foundations of Digital Art* (University of California Press, 2012). She has received the UIC University Scholar Award, DAAD, Getty Research Institute, Philips Collection, and Emily Harvey Foundation Fellowships. She is the daughter of Fluxus artists Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles and is co-executor of the Estate of Dick Higgins and the Something Else Press.

Professor Higgins has been teaching at UIC since 1994 and is the Founding Director of the interdisciplinary IDEAS BA in Art. Her research and course topics examine twentieth century avant-garde art with a specific interest in Dadaism, Surrealism, Fluxus, Happenings, performance art, food art and early computer art. Her books and articles argue for the humanistic value of multi-modal sensory cognitive experience.

David Familian is the Artistic Director and Curator at the Beall Center. He began working at the Beall Center in 2005 and was appointed Artistic Director and Curator in 2009. An artist and educator, he received his BFA from California Institute of the Arts in 1979 and his MFA from UCLA in 1986. For the past thirty years, Familian has taught studio art and critical theory in art schools and universities including Otis College of Art and Design, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Santa Clara University, San Francisco Art Institute and U.C. Irvine. Familian initiated Black Box Projects at the Beall Center, which produces collaborative exhibitions in which artists work with scientists and other experts in areas such as Cognitive Robotics, Computational Genetics, and Information Science. He has curated one-person exhibitions of artists Shih Chieh Huang, Golan Levin, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Chico MacMurtie, Jennifer and Kevin McCoy, Nam June Paik, and others. He has also curated numerous group exhibitions that explore topics such as data visualization, new forms of gaming and narratives, real-time data, interactive installations, and sound art. He currently teaches the Beall Center's Digital Arts Exhibition course at UC Irvine's Claire Trevor School of the Arts.

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Fact Sheet
Computational Poetics

Exhibition Iteration Dates:
October 1, 2022 – January 14, 2023
Beall Center for Art + Technology
https://beallcenter.uci.edu/exhibitions/computational-poetics

Events:

> **Media Previews**: By appointment
> Open to all media affiliates, RSVP and appointment requests to jdejong@uci.edu
>
> **Launch Reception**: Saturday, October 1, 2022, 2-5 p.m.
> Free admission
>
> Additional events to be announced online. To receive project-specific updates and invitations, join the project list at http://beallcenter.uci.edu/exhibitions

Description: *Computational Poetics* surveys human/computer collaborations in poetry, with historical work from the 1960s and contemporary experimentation. From the 1960s to the present, emerging computer and telecommunications technologies have necessitated a fundamental rethinking of language, including transitions from mainframe to personal computers, individual computers to the internet, a fleshy conception of the human body to one dominated by lettered genetic code, and western-dominated humanist-based faith in historical progress to a postmodern and postcolonial collapse of ethos with regards to race, class, and gender norms. Each of these technological shifts generates and responds to cognitive and linguistic mutations and, as such, are less random or chance based than one might suppose. Rather, language changes through emerging use.

Language has met the challenge of computation by accelerating, leaping off the page, expressing its embodied nature, abbreviating itself, visualizing, manifesting via sonification and then joining the landscapes of the Anthropocene. Artists and poets play a critical role in this transformation by harnessing the ever-expanding misalignment between literary and technological culture. They directly oppose the authority structure of normative writing associated with the printed word in ways that include (but are not limited to) poetry as read, poetry as expressing raced, gendered and classed models of authorship and expertise, and poetry as disembodied mediation.

Gallery Hours:
Monday - Saturday: 12 p.m. – 6 p.m.; Closed: Sundays
Free admission and docent tours
Holiday Closures: Nov. 11, 24-25; Dec. 26

Location:
712 Arts Plaza, Claire Trevor School of the Arts, UC Irvine, Irvine, CA 92697

Parking:
Student Center Parking Structure: 311 W. Peltason Drive, Irvine, CA 92697
Mesa Parking Structure: 4000 Mesa Road, Irvine, CA 92697
all campus parking requires payment; $2 per hour, $13 full day, $18 reserved, credit and debit cards accepted
For maps, driving directions and parking information go to: http://www.parking.uci.edu/maps/imap.cfm

Note to editors:
Selected high-resolution images for publicity only may be downloaded from
Google Drive

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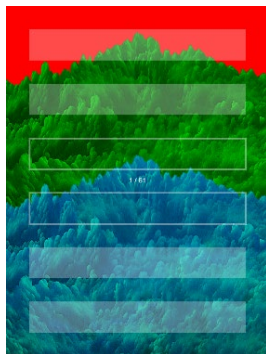# PRESS PREVIEW KIT

Computational Poetics
Group exhibition
Curated by Hannah B Higgins and David Familian
Beall Center for Art + Technology, UCI Claire Trevor School of the Arts
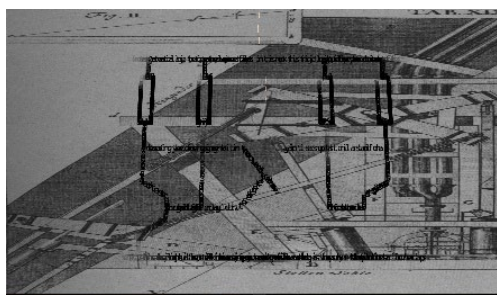
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Photo credits:
1) Cesar & Lois, *Degenerative Cultures: fire and water*, 2022 (project series 2018–2022); Book with *Physarum polycephalum* (microorganism) growth, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artists.
2) Tiffany Funk, *I Ching Online*, 2018; Website. Courtesy of the artist.
3) Alison Knowles, *A House of Dust*, 1967; Seimens System 4004, FORTRAN IV, line printer, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.
4) Bill Seaman, *An Engine of Many Senses*, 2013; Generative installation, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.
5) Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Encode/Decode*, 2020; Interactive monitor-based work. Courtesy of the artist

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About the Beall Center for Art + Technology
The Beall Center is an exhibition and research center located on the campus of the University of California, Irvine. Since its opening in 2000, the Beall Center's exhibitions, research, and public programs have promoted new forms of creation and expression. For artists, the Beall Center serves as a proving ground — a place between the artist's studio and the art museum — and allows them to work with new technologies in their early stages of development. For visitors, the Beall Center serves as a window to the most imaginative and creative innovations in the visual arts occurring anywhere. The Beall Center promotes new forms of creative expression by: exhibiting art that uses different forms of science and technology to engage the senses; building innovative scholarly relationships and community collaborations between artists, scientists and technologists; encouraging research and development of art forms that can affect the future; and reintroducing artistic and creative thinking into STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) integrated learning in K-12 to Higher Education. The Beall Center's curatorial focus presents a diverse range of innovative, world-renowned artists, both national and international, who work with experimental and interactive media. Many of these artists have shown their works primarily within group exhibitions or have a limited number of solo exhibitions in the US. The Beall Center is committed to exhibiting these artists in a way that more fully expresses their individual body of work. We strive to present a direct connection between our programs and the larger trajectory of the history of video, installation art, kinetic and cybernetic sculpture. Our approach is not to exclusively emphasize the technological aspects of works, but to present experimental media projects that are equally strong aesthetically, conceptually and technically.

The Beall Center received its initial support from the Rockwell Corporation in honor of retired chairman Don Beall and his wife, Joan; the core idea being to merge their lifelong passions - business, engineering and the arts - in one place. Today, major support is generously provided by the Beall Family Foundation. For more information, please visit beallcenter.uci.edu.

About UCI Claire Trevor School of the Arts
The Claire Trevor School of the Arts is UCI's creative laboratory, exploring and presenting the arts as the essence of human experience and expression through art forms ranging from the most traditional to the radically new. CTSA has proven itself to be a national leader in training emerging artists and performers since its establishment in 1965. In 2000, the school was named in honor of Academy Award-winning actress Claire Trevor and her involvement with the school and its students.

CTSA is home to the departments of art, dance, drama and music. Undergraduate and graduate degree courses include extensive studio, workshop and performance experiences; theoretical and historical studies; and arts and technology practices.

Boasting an acclaimed, international faculty who work across a wide variety of disciplines and partner with others across campus, CTSA also provides excellent facilities to support artistic development and research. These include four theaters; a concert hall; three art galleries; the Beall Center for Art + Technology; electronic music studios; cutting-edge costume, lighting and scenic design studios; a stage production shop; digital arts labs; and a video production studio. For more information, visit www.arts.uci.edu.