Tactical Poetics

Try:
- **Darija Medić**
- **Uroš Krčadinac**

ERR_INTERNET_DISCONNECTED

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Introduction

Having a stand-alone program that can generate whimsical poems on your computer feels quaint compared to the spew of the massive word generators out there on the Web, tapping into our collective mind.
— Kenneth Goldsmith, Uncreative Writing

There is an intriguing example from technological history, that combines visual aesthetics and military tactics. Before the First World War, the British and US military started to paint its ships in strange – and rather beautiful – black-and-white zebra-like shapes, in order to confuse German torpedo-equipped U-Boats. This naval camouflage tactics was called Dazzle. "This camouflage was not about invisibility", said the writer and producer Roman Mars. "It was about disruption. Confusion." Artists such as Picasso considered these ships aesthetic objects, even claiming such artistic camouflage was invented by cubists.

In 2010 Adam Harvey initiated a media art project called CV Dazzle[01]. It is a set of fashion strategies for making your face unrecognizable by face recognition algorithms. These strategies have an exciting visual flair (including eccentric make-up and hairdos), showing

01 https://cvdazzle.com/

again that a style driven by tactics can indeed be aesthetically significant.

If we apply the same logic to textual instead of visual media, we get a version of textual expression embedded as playful encryption. This is what Tactical Poetics is about.

It differs from what is implicitly inferred as computational poetics: generative poems, live coding performances, algoraves, data visualizations, the celebration of digital mastery and expressive algorithmic media. The realm of technology reduced to the realm of the code-able. That realm is at the same time inaccessible, in the context of requiring technical knowledge, and predictable, because it values expertise rather than experimentation. It is focused, yet reduced. It stays within the paradigm of control and applicability. In other words, it ignores the fact that a digital computer was born in a military lab, as much as torpedoes and battleships.

Tactical Poetics, on the other hand, explores the residue of computational culture, the un-coding practices that offer poetic rebellion and celebrate the adaptive creative potential of the everyday user. A poetics of the digital human condition.

In this case, technology is seen as an amplifier of social narrative, sorting, filtering and adding semantics to existing datasets. The utilitarian mindset, effectively reinforced by information technology, censors autonomous experiments through the positive reinforcement of desirable and monetizable behavior. This process is further supported by the replicability and permanence of digital footprints of both wanted and unwanted traces. The experiment this networked paradigm of forced participation calls for is what Tatiana

Bazichelli refers to as the art of networked disruption, a disruption from within.

Tactical Poetics is an ode to the everyday hack. We have come to explore De Certeau's "Practice of Everyday Life" through scrolls, swipes, and other distinctive actions of contemporary interfacing. Embedded within privacy trade-offs and Terms and Conditions never read, the everyday user picks up small cues and assets from other users in the competitive and hostile environment of digital attention and synchronisation. In the self-preserving rituals of the networked, multiplied, distributed now, the digital bricolage is a tactic of the non-isolated and non-fixed, of collaboration and adaptation. What will be a more functional knowledge (a kind of knowledge James Bridle calls systemic literacy) for the daily technical ecosystem: coding and technical expertise or tactical technical intelligence of the non-experts?

In this booklet, we are offering two such strategies: Tactical Exercises in Style and Tactical Emotions. Tactical Exercises in Style is a compilation of collective browser activity when thinking of and performing the browser as a transmitting unit. With the search engine as a broadcast station, the meaning of the typing activity explores the space of online traceability and archiving, while feeding Google's most valuable algorithm with data not qualifying as search queries. Tactical Emotions subverts the affective computing paradigm by fooling sentiment analysis and emotion recognition software via textual fragments algorithms are unable to recognize, yet are still understood by humans. These fragments are then recontextualized as poetry. Both of these strategies are contemporary Dazzles – textual and digital camouflage.

— φ(⸱ ⸱)

If we take Katherine Hayles "We become the codes we punch" and think of the transformative potential of the embodiment of daily practices, then poetry doesn't just end in being a form of expression. It becomes a form of survival.

$\varphi(\cdot)$

Tactical Exercises in Style

Darija Medić

In 1932, sensing the shifts in the political landscape of the time, Bertold Brecht confronted his readers with a challenging view of the social relationship to information media. In his essay "The radio as an apparatus of communication", he argued that radio transmission should be a two way channel, one that would shift from distribution to communication. He spoke how radio as an object is often seen as a mediator of family life, while its transformative social potential remains in infancy. Fast forward to 2020 – we are surrounded by radio waves and dependent on transmitting data on an instantaneous basis. Participation is not only possible, but a requirement. Has the political potential and awareness increased socially from the consumer to the prosumer?

Tactical Exercises in Style are the result of collective browser expression, a playful take on defaults, offering a space for reimagining media, expression and censorship. They belong to the archive of an interactive piece called "Transmitting is a Two Way Channel," which deals with the perception of "old" and new media through reviving Brecht's concept of radio thought through the browser. Participative network systems, such as the Internet, have been widely celebrated in the early days of the World Wide Web as the opposite to a one directional model

of communication transmission in old mass media. We perceive much of daily typing to be personal and private, whereas what is typed gets unmistakably stored publicly. The mode in which particularly search engines operate, is indicative of the specific manner in which users adapt language to fit the needs of an external factor, such as the search algorithm, while offering much of diverse aspects of personal information through queries sent out. Inspired by this seemingly contradictory comparison, as well as the history of sound and radio interventions as a space of public expression, the work builds a radio FM transmission of textual content typed in the web browser via a text to speech synthesizer.

Appropriating a free FM frequency, as a squatting strategy, reminds us that the FM spectrum became a subject of ownership over time, and at the same time consists of an ephemeral structure – air. One can imagine an alternative history where it stayed a common good, free in both senses of the word. Wi-Fi, itself a technology of radio, shares similar questions, as it does the unexplored possibilities of the radio spectrum.

Reverse engineering is a technical process to deconstruct the building blocks of a certain technology in order to understand its internal mechanism. As an exercise in style, the tactic of Reverse Search Engineering (Search Engine + Reverse Engineering) offers the user the possibility to use search engines (or any other browser text field) as a subversive broadcasting unit, consciously communicating with "smart algorithms" looking for profitable meaning.

The archive is a textual record of conscious and unconscious activity of various participants while

having the transmitting software active in their personal web browser, as well as a public anonymous one. It also gathers keystrokes from the activity of several performances in public events such as poetry nights, feminist festivals, exhibitions and discussions. The text in this book is displayed exactly as it was typed, together with the timestamp, such as this one:

```
_20_07_08_31__792      dadadadadad ad a
                       da dad d ad a da
```

Every key typed on a keyboard is recorded, including all mistakes and erasure. It is the way data tracking works. And it shows that one can rarely be aware to the extent they are transmitting data from themselves in the everyday usage of technology. In this sense, Tactical Exercises in Style explore the realm of post-privacy, visibility, anonymity and expression in the poetics of spoken and written word.

_16_17_43_28__538	koja je tezina informacije
_16_17_43_53__254	radiotalasi radioaktivnost
_16_17_44_48__348	covek zivi u svakodnevnoj tezini informacija i elektromagnetnih talasa svuda u vazduhu
_16_17_45_16__178	na internetu niko ne zna da si pas
_16_17_45_59__497	internet je decentralizovana globalna mreza ah a ahaaa

_16_17_46_28__924	internet je radion i radio je internet
_17_09_25_14__702	opoyzdrav
_17_09_25_29__765	kako ste
_17_09_30_59__061	da li se ovo cuje
_17_09_37_03__384	hola
_17_09_39_26__931	e
_17_09_39_43__211	francisco pizzaro
_17_09_47_03__519	poydraz
_17_09_47_13__600	ciao
_17_09_47_44__615	

_18_07_44_35__959	this morning was the first snow here!!!
_18_18_10_10__039	I need attention
_18_18_10_23__550	pa
_18_18_10_28__171	run run run run run rnun run run run run run run
_18_18_10_45__171	ispade drama bezveze
_18_18_11_15__059	i obeležila sivom
_18_18_11_55__417	it's a nice day for trolling
_18_19_04_13__439	amor mio mi amor
_18_19_04_52__513	my mother always told me my mother always told me my other always told me no no no
_18_23_14_20__389	hello anybody there aybody there
_18_24_02_10__019	someone told me you need to keep still

_20_18_38_06__416 if my nightmare is a
culture inhabited by bodies
posthumans who regard
their bodies as fashion
accessories rather than the
ground of being

_20_18_39_40__871 my dream is a version
of the posthuman that
embraces the possibilities
iof information tehnologies
without being seduced
by fantasies of unlimited
power and sdissembodied
morality
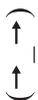
02_14_21_40__179   da li je opravdano
prikazivati eksplicitno
nasilje u umetničkim
delima_?

02_14_22_25__627   trend pisanja o nasilju

02_14_28_43__856   bavimo se krugovima
u kojima na s tapšu
po ramenu ui u kojima
se osećamo sigurno i
ušuškano

02_14_35_47__411   radi se o tome da
seksualno nasilje ne
merimo u odnosu na svoje
iskustvo

02_14_46_26__642   osećanje slobode u
                          izopštenosti

02_17_51_01__286   bila sma am silovana
                          prvi put kad sam imala
                          13 godina, drugi put kad
                          smmmaam imala 15, a
                          treći put kada sam imala
                          17 godina je zlostavljanje
                          trajalo 2 meseca

02_17_57_38__901   nisam znala da postoji
                          termin korektivno
                          silovanje dok nisam ušla u
                          aktivizam[02]

05_18_42_08__225	a posebno ja
05_18_44_24__669	podaci podaci podaci
05_18_46_09__998	podacima
05_18_47_27__921	roboti će sedeti u
	ministarskim foteljama
05_18_50_54__396	apstraktno
05_18_51_56__914	intermeyyzzo

(˜_<)

2 _16_00_01__193 $
2 _16_00_10__13   9 ' WAS H
2 _16_01_04__879   ====&&
2 _16_01_3 2 __502   ==&&&&' ' ' ' ' ' %%%%%%&
2 _16_01_59__779
2 _16_01_56__016'   ' %%%%%%%%
2 _16_02 _18__2 87
2 _16_03 _05__2 57
2 _16_03 _12 __466 $$

2 _16_07_3 9__903   < 3 < < <
$$$$

05_18_52_37__137	svaki bot je poseban[03]
05_19_01_05__638	kako brzo da zaradim na internetu
05_19_09_43__058	slično
05_19_21_35__798	
05_19_22_19__784	tananana
	ajoj
	ajoj
	tehnički problemi
05_19_32_47__953	Participacija
	a sada uaaplauy

```
 ⌒
 ˷ −
 < )
```

Instructions that were given to people participating in the broadcast experience

Join the history of appropriating the means of broadcasting! Use any text field such as this one to type in whatever you want to broadcast on local radio and our hardworking synthetic radio speakers will read it out on the air, as you type. You can type a 100 characters at a time, so plan them well. There is no erasing, and the radio program waits 5 seconds to broadcast, so you need to type fast, but no need to think about grammar. Think about sound. Think about words and letters. Use the browser as a diary, a sound poetry generator, a debate space. A broadcast station. You can also install the software as a firefox add-on and enjoy the transparency of your online intimacy in the comfort of your own home and computer and broadcast your every typing activity on our radio.

Tactical emotions

Uroš Krčadinac

In 2008 my lab partners and I started an open project in affective computing, a field that connects computer systems with human emotions. The project was called Synesketch[04]. It was a free open-source software library for textual emotion recognition and generative visualization. Inspired by the concept of synesthesia, Synesketch was in fact an artificial synesthete, software that maps text to generative visuals via feelings. The project started in the pre-post-truth, pre-crisis era, when affective AI technologies were perceived as relatively innocent, especially among programming communities.

How does Synesketch work? You could, for instance, type in "I am happy" and get a visual swirl of brightly colored particles; or type in "I am not happy" or "I feel heartsick" and get a bluish ocean of twinkling dots. Its recognition technique is grounded on a refined keyword spotting method which employs a set of heuristic rules, a WordNet-based word lexicon, and a lexicon of emoticons and common abbreviations.

Twelve years later, however, when I look at the project, I see it as an abstract portrait of data naïveté. It is hard to deny that affective tech has become another tool for digital control, propaganda, and affect

management, a tool for exploitation of emotional labor. For example, in his "Radical Technologies" Adam Greenfield writes about Japan's Keikyu Corporation, which measures the quality of its frontline employees' smiles. Keikyu's software scans the workers' eye movements, lip curves and wrinkles, and rates them on a 0-100 scale. "For those with low scores," Greenfield quotes a Foreign Policy article about the system, "advice like 'You still look too serious,' or 'Lift up your mouth corners,' will be displayed on the screen. Workers will print out and carry around an image of their best smile in an attempt to remember it."

Although it has nothing to do with these exact algorithms, Synesketch exists within the same category of affect quantification technologies. What was treated as a digital art experiment effectively became a political-economic weapon.

Tactical Emotions reapproach Synesketch in a different way. Similar to Dazzle battleships and their artistic camouflage, its tactic is to deliberately confuse and fool textual emotion recognition systems. Not only Synesketch, but also Python NLTK[05] (for English) and Inspiratron[06] (for Serbian / Croatian / Bosnian / Montenegrin). This is done by searching for phrases, sentences, styles, verses, and text fragments whose emotional meaning these systems couldn't interpret – yet humans can. For example, if you type in "I am happy but", Synesketch will recognize a positive emotion. We as humans, however, know this "but" changes everything. This offers a novel way of looking at literary aesthetics.

05 https://www.nltk.org/
06 https://www.inspiratron.org/SerbianSentiment.php

Metaphors and allegories have always been, at least in part, a form of strategic encryption of meaning. What makes it new is the computational aspect of contemporary surveillance, control, and machine-mediated power. Tactical Emotion is writing against the machine, recontextualized as poetry.

One could say that poetry – by this very definition – is something computers cannot recognize. Instead, poetry becomes digital camouflage.

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‹ ›

it's not you it's me

(recognised positive by python nltk)

```
  ͡ʔ
 ͜ |
  ͡<
```

```
⌒
 ⌣
```
so it goes
— Kurt Vonnegut

(recognised neutral by synesketch)

you are my post-truth

(recognised positive by python nltk)

a working class hero
⌒   *is something to be*
?| — John Lennon
⌣
       (recognised negative by synesketch)

well, that escalated quickly
                                                                        ʔ
                                                                     |
                                                                        ‹

(recognised neutral by python nltk)

i milujemo daleka brda i ledene gore,
blago, rukom[07]
— Miloš Crnjanski

(recognised negative by inspiratron)

07 caressing the distant hills and icy mountains, tenderly, with our hand.

dok je istorija trajala šta sam ja radio?
prosto volio tebe[08]
— Izet Sarajlić

(recognised negative by inspiratron)

08 while history was happening, what did I do? just loved you.

kutija olovnih slova, a to nije mnogo...
ali je jedino što je čovjek do danas izumio
kao oružje u obranu svog ljudskog ponosa[09]
— Miroslav Krleža

(recognised negative by inspiratron)

[09] a box of lead letters, and that's not much... but it's the only thing
man has invented to this day as a weapon in defense of his
human pride

ljubav je svetionik i spaseni pomorci[10]
— Oskar Davičo

(recognised negative by inspiratron)

‿̃‿ *poezija nije mrtva*[11]

(recognised negative by inspiratron)

11 poetry is not dead

About

Born in the mid 80s, Uroš Krčadinac and Darija Medić
belong to the bridge between Generation X and
Generation Y. Spending youth in the speed of dial-up,
the imagination of IRC chats, with email as a form of
personal expression, computational culture is the lens
through which they grew up with and the format of their
art inquiry – or could we say that art is the lens through
which they practice computation? Over the years,
layers of algorithmic culture sediments have formed in
this practice. Together with its sister book, Optimized
Poetics, the pages of Tactical Poetics carve out
potential pathways through these layers, offering diverse
strategies and approaches.

(°ᵕ°)~ð (/'o'')/)

legend

Tactical Poetics Introduction	__φ(. .)	`write / think / text`
Tactical Exercises in Style	(→_→)	`doubt / send / arrows`
Tactical Emotions	(^_~)	`wink / joy / play`
Tactical Poetics About	(°‿°)~ð (/'o'\)	`enemies / bomb / fight`