

Before Language Settles

– Language as Composition: Sound, Text, and Instability

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationships between sound, language, text, and graphic notation through a research-creation practice situated at the intersection of multilingual studies, sound art, and typography. It explores how sound operates as a compositional system for text, shaping how language is perceived, organized, and experienced across diverse linguistic contexts. Utilizing interactive systems, typographic experiments, and poetic computation, the project investigates moments of illegibility, translation failure, and sonic mediation. It asks how meaning is produced and transformed when language is approached as a resonant, embodied process rather than a static semantic structure.

Grounded in contemporary sound studies and experimental typography, this research engages with contexts of migration and cross-cultural exchange, positioning language as a temporal phenomenon emerging through listening, speaking, and reading. Disorientation and partial legibility are treated as productive conditions through which meaning is negotiated across linguistic and sonic boundaries. Methodologically, the project adopts a research-creation framework that integrates sound-responsive typographic systems, interactive installations, and process of poetic computation. These works invite participants to encounter language as a relational and embodied experience. Ultimately, the thesis proposes alternative modes of multilingual legibility that inhabit the liminal spaces between language, sound, form, legibility, and loss.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Sound Studies, Typography, Poetic Computation, Graphic Notation, Embodiment.

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Foreword

离 日落 结束 还 有 五 分钟 ,
 Five minutes before sunset ends,
 해가 저 물 기까지 아직 다섯 분,
 我奔 向 天台 ,
 I race to the rooftop ,
 옥상으로 달려간다 ,
 粉 橙 色 的 云 落 在 我 的 肩 膀 上 。
 rosy-orange clouds fall on to my shoulder .
 분 홍 빛 주황 구름이 어깨 위에 내렸었다.

<Trilingual poem for past work *Among Polyphonic* (2024)>

Prologue

As a child, I began learning classical music before I learned how to name things. Through piano, flute, choir, and orchestra, sound came first, structured yet fluid.

I have always been sensitive to sound. Part of this sensitivity stems from growing up within musical systems; another part emerged through an early attunement to language shaped by my home environment. My mother speaks five languages (Hokkien, Mandarin Chinese, English, Japanese, and French) and language in our household was never singular or fixed. A sentence might begin in one language and end in another; meaning often arrived through tone or rhythm before vocabulary. Long before I could fully articulate meaning, I practiced listening.

This early immersion shapes how I experience language today: not only as a system of signs, but as a sensorial and temporal phenomenon. This way of listening continues to inform how I read, design, and compose with language, providing the foundation for the sound-responsive and typographic processes developed throughout this thesis. It is from this condition

of listening where sound precedes meaning and language remains in flux that this research begins, tracing how sound can reorganize text and give rise to new forms of legibility.

I. When Reading Refuses to Stay Still

Upon relocating in Canada two years ago, the encounter with a diverse spectrum of cultural and linguistic backgrounds catalyzed a shift in my creative focus. Living entirely through languages that are not fully mine stood in sharp contrast to the linguistically homogeneous urban centers of Mainland China, where Standard Mandarin functions as a transparent, dominant medium. In those contexts, the mechanisms of translation and cognitive adjustment remain invisible.

With a background of processing three languages – Chinese, Korean, and English, I often imagine my “language time” as evenly divided. In the linguistic part of my brain, there’s a crowded street, three languages crossing mid-air, voices folding over one another. In this situation, I experience language interference¹ where the brain’s executive functions must constantly navigate competing signals. My eyes catch a sign while my ears catch a sentence, but the meaning fractures before I can hold it still. I am reading, listening, and losing the thread all at once. This state of productive disorientation serves as the reference point for how audiences are invited to encounter language within this thesis.

For people who live between languages, the act of reading is rarely stable. The discomfort of not fully belonging to a single linguistic system becomes a generative force. In

¹ Ellen Bialystok, *Bilingualism in Development: Language, Literacy, and Cognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). This refers to the cognitive “cost” or friction that occurs when multiple languages are active simultaneously in the mind.

Borderlands / La Frontera,² Gloria Anzaldúa describes a linguistic existence that is “neither *espaiiol ni ingles*, but both.”³ By navigating the world with what Anzaldúa terms “a forked tongue,”⁴ I intentionally preserve the edges and the friction of my speech without smoothing them over for the sake of clarity. For the multilingual subject, language is never a static tool but a “borderland,” which is a site of constant negotiation and struggle. Words don’t always arrive intact. They surface first as sound before sense, rhythm before grammar, or as a bodily pulse before a mental image.

When establishing my thesis direction, I revisited my personal journals and noticed an intuitive mixing of Chinese, English, and Korean. If these private notations were to be read by others, would they truly understand what I meant? Are my Chinese, English, and Korean the same as the languages used by others? “How could anyone have a language that is not theirs?”⁵ This tension became especially apparent while reading *She Follows No Progression: A Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Reader*, specifically in the moments where Jennifer Kwon Dobbs transliterates Korean words into the Roman alphabet.⁶ By utilizing phonetic transcriptions such as “Dear Cha Seonsaengnim” or “Yukaejang hanago bap dugaeyo. Dohaneun, boricha issayo”, Dobbs de-centers the visual authority of the script in favor of a sonic encounter. This strategy forces the reader to engage the texts from “recognize” towards “listen”. Even as someone who reads

² Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands = La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 5th ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2022).

³ Anzaldúa, 55.

⁴ Anzaldúa, 55.

⁵ Sanjana Iyer, “Foreword,” in *She Follows No Progression: A Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Reader*, ed. Juwon Jun and Rachel Valinsky (Brooklyn: Wendy’s Subway, 2022), 15.

⁶ Jennifer Kwon Dobbs, “Discuse in a Dead Time: Letters to Theresa Hak Kyung Cha,” In *She Follows No Progression: A Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Reader*, ed. Juwon Jun and Rachel Valinsky (Brooklyn: Wendy’s Subway, 2022), 48, 50.

Hangul, I found that when Korean is filtered through Romanization, it undergoes a transformation into something I can no longer fully grasp. The language on the page is not *my language*. It is just *the author's language*.⁷

Inhabiting a language that remains fundamentally not one's own is central to Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's practice. As a Korean American avant-garde artist and writer, Cha's work foregrounds the material fragmentation of language as a site of embodied memory. In her work, the act of writing is framed as a performance of dictation. While "dictée" typically implies the forceful imposition of language, Cha subverts this power by leaning into the Homonym Error,⁸ in which the act of taking dictation reveals how a single heard utterance can carry doubled, estranged meanings as it is rewritten through the body, exposing the gaps and overlaps between the subject and the language that passes through her. Through Iyer's lens,⁹ this slippage becomes a "looping", physical act of remembrance where every repetition offers the possibility of transmutation.

A similar slippage occurs when I attempt to write exclusively in Mandarin Chinese: English often surfaces first, Korean grammar follows, creating an interwoven hybrid that is the most comfortable language movement of my mind, even as no single language can fully claim it. Like Cha's homonym error, this is the body refusing to host one tongue cleanly. If the languages

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin* (Stanford University Press, 1998), cited in Sanjana Iyer, "Foreword," in *She Follows No Progression: A Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Reader*, ed. Juwon Jun and Rachel Valinsky (Brooklyn: Wendy's Subway, 2022), 15. The original texts: "Je n'ai qu'une langue et ce ne l'est pas la mienne / I have but one language – yet that language is not mine."

⁸ Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictée* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1–3. The opening dictation exercise of *Dictée* stages this condition directly: the student is asked to transcribe spoken English and French into written language, with even punctuation marks such as "comma," "period," and "open quotation marks," rendered as audible words, exposing the gap between phonetic sameness and semantic difference.

⁹ Iyer, 16.

I inhabit cannot sit still as I write them, perhaps they should not be made to sit still on the page either. This internal friction leads me to ask: what if text could inhabit the in-between, between languages, between legibility and loss, and between sound and space? What if typography, instead of transmitting fixed meaning, becomes a resonant surface: a sonic map, a multilingual threshold?

Are we truly communicating the same meanings?

II. Toward a Practice of Listening

Engaging in eclectic musical experiments, ranging from piano improvisation to digital sound synthesis, often triggers a series of inquiries:

How might melody, rhythm, pitch, and tone, which are elements that typically follow rules in the Western classical tradition, affect the structured world of design, especially typography and layout systems?

How might letters and forms in a two-dimensional space move, breathe, and emotionally resonate like sounds?

These questions emerge from long-term embodied engagement with music as a system that balances structure and fluidity.

When composing on the computer using a MIDI keyboard, I often notice how the musical notes I play and the alphabetic letters I type form two parallel worlds.¹⁰ Both are mediated through interfaces; both translate physical gestures into symbolic systems. These

¹⁰ This relates to “Prototype IV. rainy days” (see p. 51), where the keyboard becomes a body of sound and the movement of text emerges through sonic interaction.

parallels draw my attention to composition as a way of organizing relationships across time and space over the musical term.

Composition, especially improvisation, has become one of my most significant ongoing creative and investigative practices. Inspired by artists and composers such as John Cage and Ryuichi Sakamoto, I understand improvisation as an indeterminate process that is fluid, unstable, cyclical, and situated. This improvisational understanding closely mirrors my experience with language. The texts and words in my brain are constantly shifting, unstable, looping, and singular, later become points of attention through which I examine how sound-responsive systems reorganize text.

Beyond mere information exchange, multilingualism functions as a performative act of multilayered listening. Communication here is found in the sensory negotiation of unfamiliar sounds. This negotiation became especially clear during one of the Contemporary Research Method course where we were invited to introduce ourselves in the language we speak the least. While a classmate chose to speak in French, I spoke in Korean.¹¹ Despite the differences between our introductions, we both recognized the English phonetics hidden within our sentences such as “design” “piano” and “guitar”. These words weren’t exactly English but carried its sonic. Those echoes became our bridge: a subtle exchange of half-understood meanings. The act of listening for familiar resonance here outweighed the need for perfect syntax.

I have come to see language not only as a stable system to be fully possessed, but also as something relational, temporal, and resonant. My thesis project is both a synthesis of my past work across sound, design, and language, and an opening toward new forms of inquiry. Instead

¹¹ Dr. Ayumi Goto, Contemporary Research Methods, class session, OCAD University, Toronto, 2025. The script of my self-introduction in Korean: “안녕하세요. 제 이름은 쉐리(sherry)입니다. 대학교 전공은 시각디자인(design)입니다. 평소에는 피아노(piano)와 기타(guitar)를 연주 하면 노래하는 것을 좋아합니다...”

of seeking definitive answers, it asks how text might operate as a resonant surface, inhabiting the liminal spaces between languages, between sound and form, and between legibility and loss.

III. From Script to Score

For years, I found it difficult to work with Chinese characters in my design practice. Hanzi 汉字 are not only carriers of sound; they are logographic and ideographic forms. That complexity made me feel they were almost uncontrollable within a design process. It was after seeing the work of Chinese book designer Yingchun Zhu that I tried to rethink about using Chinese characters in my works. In one of Zhu's poems "Autumn Wind,"¹² the characters of different colors of leaves appear to be scattered and blown across the page, shifting the reader's role from one of decoding to one of witnessing a physical event. Zhu treats characters as living, spatial entities. He masterfully manipulates the spatial rhythm and visual acoustics of Hanzi, allowing words to perform the very concepts they describe.

Another shift in my understanding of typography occurred during a Hangul Typography Workshop.¹³ It was my first time approaching Hangul primarily as a graphic system instead of a language to be read and understood. For someone already possessing some knowledge of the Korean language, the act of separating character from semantic meaning proved unexpectedly difficult. My brain naturally resisted unlearning the phonetic and semantic associations I had already formed.

¹² Zhu Yingchun, "Autumn Wind," in *The Designing Wordsmith* (Guangxi Normal University Press, 2011), <https://www.zhuyingchun.com/books>.

¹³ "Hangul Typography Workshop (vol.2)," workshop, OCAD University, October 28, 2025.

However, the experience of my friend who had no prior exposure to Korean stood in contrast to mine. Using a provided phonetic chart, they reverse assembled Hangul syllables based on the sounds of English names. For example, in attempting to spell my English name “Sherry” in Korean, they constructed ㅅㅎㄱㅣㄹㄹㅣ (shaelli), whereas the conventional orthography is $\text{ㅅㅏㄱㅣㄹㅣ} = \text{쉐리}$ (shwe-ree). In this erroneous assembly, the characters were liberated from their linguistic duty. For my friend, the process of detaching form from original meaning was somehow fluid and immediate, transforming the text into a purely graphic notation. These moments affected the way I approached language. It is a system to be listened to, structured, and composed.

Introduction

In the context of increasing multilingualism and cross-cultural migration, language is no longer a stable or singular tool for communication. This research shifts the understanding of language from a closed semiotic system, where words map directly to fixed meanings, to an open, material phenomenon. Without carrying information, language is defined here as a performative process shaped by constant translation and misinterpretation. Within this framework, text becomes not only a carrier to communicate information, but something to be heard, sensed, and experienced through the body.

This thesis examines the interrelationship between language, sound, text, and graphic notation through research-creation practices. These elements take shape as a loop: language sounds itself into rhythm, that rhythm shapes text, text crystallizes into graphic notation, and graphic notation returns (captured or only half-captured) to the sonic resonance of language. By focusing on moments of illegibility, translation failure, and sonic mediation, this project asks how meaning is reconfigured when language is approached as a resonant and embodied process beyond a fixed semantic structure.

Situated within contemporary sound studies and experimental approaches to poetic computation, this research challenges the modernist separation and hierarchy of reading, listening, and speaking, a divide exemplified by Josef Müller-Brockmann's emphasis on functional clarity and the neutralization of the designer's subjective presence.¹⁴ Since the mid-twentieth century, dominant typographic systems have been treated as stable visual carriers of meaning, prioritizing legibility and a transparent delivery of information. This thesis positions

¹⁴ Josef Müller-Brockmann, *Grid Systems in Graphic Design: A Visual Communication Manual for Graphic Designers, Typographers and Three Dimensional Designers* (Niggli, 2008).

itself within this tension, examining how multilingual experiences, particularly in contexts of migration and cross-cultural exchange, expose the instability of language and open possibilities for alternative modes of textual organization and interpretation.

Methodologically, this project employs a research-creation framework,¹⁵ in which knowledge is generated through iterative artistic practice. The work includes the development of interactive sound systems, sound-responsive typographic experiments, and computational environments. These systems invite participants to engage with language and text through speaking, reading, and listening, emphasizing the embodied and temporal dimensions of linguistic experience. The project prioritizes typography as a dynamic, responsive surface shaped by sound, movement, and interaction.

From this framework, the following questions guide the thesis:

- **(migration, troubled translation)** In contexts of multilingual and cross-cultural migration, how do failures of translation between different languages shape the ways we understand one another?

- **(sound and text)** When sound functions as a compositional typographic system, what new textual forms, structures, or modes of multilingual legibility can be constructed?

- **(embodiment and poetic computation)** Within interactive sound systems and poetic computation environments, how might visitors experience language in an embodied way through shared acts of speaking, reading and listening?

¹⁵ Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and 'Family Resemblances'," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 1 (2012). A more detailed theoretical unpacking and its specific application to the scoring of sound and typography will be discussed in the chapter "Score: Methodology and Research Approaches."

This thesis is structured across six chapters. Following the **Prologue**, which establishes the personal and perceptual conditions that inform the project, **Prelude** situates the project within relevant theoretical, contextual frameworks, and related artworks including contemporary sound studies, poetic computation, compositional typography, graphic notation, and multilingual translation practices. **Variations** traces the artistic trajectory of my past works, examining how earlier experiments in multilingual publishing, performance, and sound-based research led to the present thesis. **Score** outlines the methodological foundations of the research, detailing the research-creation approach and the specific methods through which listening, embodiment, and participation. **Intermezzo** illustrates the development of responsive systems, where these methods are enacted through a series of prototypes. **Performance** presents the project works and exhibition components, focusing on the artwork outcomes, processes, and embodied experiences developed through the thesis. Together, these chapters articulate a research-creation inquiry into sound-based textual practices and multilingual legibility.

Prelude: Literature Review and Contextual Works

Language, Multilingualism and Lost in Translation

Language, in this research, is approached as a material through which perception is formed. Meaning does not reside fully within words themselves. Instead, it emerges through embodied encounters with sound, symbol, and context. Especially within multilingual situations, language reveals itself as unstable and relational, shaped by listening, memory, and interpretation over fixed correspondence.

Working across Chinese, English, and Korean, this project engages three distinct writing systems that encode sound and meaning through divergent cognitive paths. In the English alphabetic system, meaning is accessed indirectly: linear phonetic sequences typically activate sound before semantic access, a process often described as “phonological mediation” in alphabetic reading.¹⁶ Chinese characters, by contrast, operate as logographic forms in which visual density and semantic history are embedded within a single unit, allowing meaning to be accessed without the same obligatory phonological mediation. Korean Hangul, while phonetic, organizes sound into modular syllabic blocks, producing a spatial logic that sits between linear script and pictographic form.¹⁷ Approached durationally, language reveals itself not only as a semantic system but also as a rhythmic one, where consonants form structural markers and vowels activate movement. From this perspective, language operates like musical notation, with meaning unfolding through breath and timing.

¹⁶ Maryanne Wolf, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 112–118.

¹⁷ Insup Taylor and M. Martin Taylor, *Writing and Literacy in Chinese, Korean and Japanese* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1995), 406, fig. 26.1.

This instability echoes philosopher and semiotician Roland Barthes's *Image–Music–Text*,¹⁸ where he describes text as a “parasitic message” designed to connote the image and quicken it with second-order signifieds. For Barthes, text is a verbal message that operates through a “structural reversal” in relation to the visual: it no longer merely illustrates the image but loads it with culture, imagination, and moral value. Barthes argues that text does not simply elucidate or realize meaning; it comes to “sublimate, patheticize, or rationalize” the image, creating a secondary vibration that transforms the informational totality.¹⁹ In this framework, meaning circulates without settling. Image, sound, and language coexist in a shifting relationship of reinforcement and interference. Therefore, text does not clarify meaning so much as amplifies it.

Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic triad model frames meaning as a relational and interpretive process. In Peircean semiotics, a sign refers to an object, while meaning ultimately arises through the interpretant: the mental, cultural, and embodied response generated in the act of interpretation. In my research-creation practice, I reconfigure this triadic model to account for the sensory layers of multilingual experience (see figure 1). Within this model, the “Text” functions as a visual and linguistic surface, while “Sound” operates as a dynamic input that continuously intervenes in and reshapes textual structure. “Interpretation” is not a fixed outcome but an embodied and temporal response that emerges through the interaction between reading, listening, and physical presence.

¹⁸ Roland Barthes, *Image–Music–Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977).

¹⁹ Barthes, 25–26.

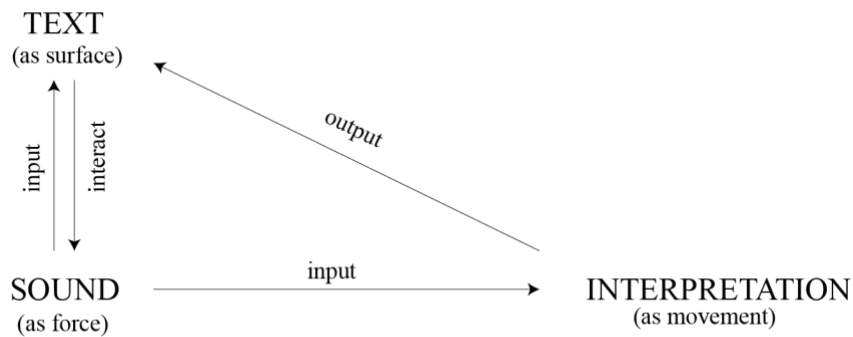


Figure 1 Model of sonic-textual transformation. Designed by the author.

In multilingual contexts, interpretation is never neutral or objective. Communication is filtered through lived history and bodily familiarity with sound. For those who move between languages, meaning does not simply blur. It shifts across phonetic, cultural, and temporal registers. Moments of hesitation, partial recognition, and misalignment become common. Instead of signaling communicative failure, these moments point to alternative ways of understanding. Language functions less as a system to be mastered and more as a field that must be navigated through listening and attention.

Translation further intensifies this instability. It is often imagined as a transfer of meaning from one language to another. Lived experience suggests otherwise. Language, content, and meaning do not align seamlessly: language provides form, content suggests what is being conveyed, but meaning emerges through interpretation, shaped by sound, memory, and context. Words may arrive first as sound before sense, or emotionally before logically or rationally. Something is always delayed, altered, or left unresolved. What is lost in translation is not merely content, but the expectation that meaning can ever be singular or complete. Without resolving these differences at the level of theory, this project carries them forward into a series of sound-driven rehearsals. In these works, languages are not translated directly into one another. They are

performed together within a shared system. Reading becomes a temporal act. Language behaves like a score. Meaning emerges through repetition, interruption, and listening, before language settles.

Contemporary Sound Studies

Music is structured through systems of pitch, rhythm, meter, and notation within Western classical traditions. These systems not only organize composition and performance, but also frame sound as ordered, intentional, and contained within formal boundaries. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, however, artists and theorists have challenged these assumptions, expanding the field of sound beyond musical convention.

A significant shift can be traced in the work of John Cage, whose compositions and writings reframed sound as an experiential and contingent phenomenon, no longer treated as a controlled musical object. Cage's *4'33"*, a performer sits at the piano without playing for the duration of the piece, typically divided into three movements.²⁰ What is heard instead are ambient sounds: breathing, movement, environmental noise, and the acoustics of the space. Listening itself becomes the compositional act. Through chance operations, Cage displaced authorial intention, allowing indeterminacy, environment, and temporal circumstance to shape musical outcomes. In doing so, he challenged the boundary between music and non-music, proposing that sound need not be organized through melody, harmony, rhythm, or score to be meaningful. Sound emerges as event, situation, and process.

This perspective informs the approach taken in this project, where language is not treated as a stable carrier of meaning, but as something fluid, unstable, and situational. Text behaves

²⁰ John Cage, *4'33"* (New York: Henmar Press, 1960).

more like a sonic occurrence that responds, fragments, and continuously reorganizes through interaction. The notions of indeterminacy, chance, and environmental influence central to Cage's practice thus extend here into the domain of language where meaning emerges through timing, and encounter.

Instead of extending indeterminacy as abstraction, artists such as Ryuichi Sakamoto approach sound through intimacy, material responsiveness, and improvisation. In his online concert *Playing the Piano for the Isolated*, recorded in Tokyo during the COVID-19 pandemic, Sakamoto collaborated with sound artist Hidejiro Honjoh in an improvisational work.²¹ While the performance includes composed piano works from Sakamoto's repertoire, a central moment emerges in their improvisational collaboration. During this section, both musicians depart from conventional playing techniques: Sakamoto strikes and scrapes the inner strings of the piano, while Honjoh bends, percusses, and destabilizes the tonal qualities of the shamisen (a traditional Japanese three-stringed instrument). The structure unfolds relationally, shaped by timing, listening, and subtle response between performers. Here, sound arises through interaction, material condition, and temporal presence.

Within contemporary sound studies, this expanded understanding positions sound as something that exceeds or resists stable linguistic meaning.

“A beyond language, or a language beyond meaning – these two states (to be more precise, states of statelessness), both impossible, both recurring in this book, find a kind of embodiment in the stutter.”²²

²¹ Ryuichi Sakamoto and Hidejiro Honjoh, “Improvisation – 20200402,” from *Playing the Piano for the Isolated*, online concert, April 2, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6td9KUZMfw>.

²² Christof Migone, *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body* (Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press, 2012), 22.

Compositional Typography and Graphic Notation

In modernist traditions of graphic design and typography, text has often been treated as a stable visual system, carrier of meaning designed for clarity, precision, and legibility. Rooted in the Swiss Style (International Typographic Style) as articulated by Josef Müller-Brockmann, this approach emphasizes rational grid systems, standardized typography, and visual neutrality as a means of achieving universal communication. These principles are formulated in *Grid Systems in Graphic Design*,²⁴ a foundational text in modern graphic design education.

Müller-Brockmann consistently insisted that design must remain legible, prioritizing efficiency and clarity over expressive ambiguity. His rejection of excessive experimentation summarized in statements such as “Can I read these messages faster? No! No!”²⁵ reflects a firm belief that typography’s primary responsibility is the clear transmission of information. “The design must be legible.”²⁶ Typography sits still, black ink on *blanc*²⁷ paper, waiting to be understood.

While the Swiss grid system seeks stability and transparency, it also provides a structural foundation from which later designers and artists begin to experiment. Poetic and compositional typography often emerges through stretching, bending, or breaking its rules temporarily without rejecting the grid outright. Structure does not disappear; it becomes expressive. Typography shifts from a purely informational system to a performative one, where layout engages rhythm,

²⁴ Josef Müller-Brockmann, *Grid Systems in Graphic Design*, (Verlag Niggli AG, 2008).

²⁵ “Josef Müller-Brockmann ‘Swiss Style,’” *History of Graphic Design*, 2013, <https://grapheine.com/en/magazine/graphic-designer-muller-brockmann-swiss-style/>.

²⁶ “Josef Müller-Brockmann ‘Swiss Style,’” *History of Graphic Design*.

²⁷ The use of blanc here is not merely descriptive. Within French poetic and critical traditions, *le blanc* signifies more than empty space; it functions as silence, pause, and suspension. White space becomes rhythmic rather than neutral, shaping how language unfolds in time. This understanding of typographic silence resonates with sonic practices where absence, breath, and pause are as meaningful as sound itself.

temporal experience, and spatial tension. An approach also seen in experimental graphic notation such as John Cage's *Fontana Mix*,²⁸ where visual elements function as open-ended scores. Notation does not prescribe exact sounds but invites variation, chance, and performer agency. Similarly, in contemporary typographic practices, text can operate less as a static carrier of content and more as a temporal and spatial event. Layout becomes something to be read over time, navigated, and experienced, rather than immediately decoded.

Book designer Yingchun Zhu, known for *The Designing Wordsmith*²⁹, explores typography as a form that follows the internal logic of poetry over external rules of layout. In this work, text does not remain fixed within conventional grids; lines may drift, fragment, or extend beyond the page, responding to rhythm, spacing, and poetic structure. Such approaches expand the possibilities of fluid text, raising questions about readability: when typography becomes random or deliberately unreasonable, does it help readers understand less clearly? Or does it create a different kind of readability?

Similar questions arise in the field of graphic notation. John Cage's *Notation*³⁰ represents a foundational moment in which musical scores are treated as visual compositions. Cage re-edited and reorganized the handwritten scores of 269 composers using chance operations derived from the *I Ching*³¹, dissolving fixed relationships between sound, instruction, and interpretation. *Notation* is not only a historical archive of experimental scores, but also a poetic act of composition through editorial arrangement. Chance or randomness becomes a method of

²⁸ John Cage, *Fontana Mix* (New York: Henmar Press, 1958).

²⁹ Yingchun Zhu, *The Designing Wordsmith* (Guangxi Normal University Press, 2011), <https://www.zhuyingchun.com/books#/thedesigningwordsmith/>.

³⁰ John Cage, *Notations* (New York: Something Else Press, 1969).

³¹ Bana Bissat, "John Cage: Experimental Composer," *Sound of Life*, <https://www.soundoflife.com/blogs/design/john-cage-experimental-composer>.

organization, transforming notation into a form of compositional typography in which layout and visual rhythm operate as performative decisions before prescriptions.

These approaches inform a broader understanding of scores as minimal yet compelling enough to invite further exploration. Musical scores printed on solid-colored paper are minimal, but they carry depth and narrative. “*Language moves within the line.*”³² This is evident in Raven Chacon’s *for Zitkala-Ša*,³³ presented at the 2024 Toronto Biennial of Art. Quiet sheets of paper are installed on the gallery wall, each inscribed with instructions. These texts function as scores inviting the audience to enact gestures and expectations through reading alone. Although the work does not rely on direct physical interaction or technological interface, it produces a form of participation through interpretation and enactment. In this context, the “scores” operate as a distributed compositional system, where authorship is embedded in instruction rather than controlled in execution.

As explored in projects such as *Score for Performing User*,³⁴ instruction-based scores operate at the threshold between text and performance. Written directives function as executable scripts, yet their realization depends entirely on the reader’s decision-making and their willingness to perform.

This lineage can be traced to Fluxus scores and event instructions from the 1960s. Artists associated with Fluxus, including figures closely connected to John Cage such as Yoko Ono, George Brecht, and La Monte Young, produced scores that could be enacted by anyone,

³² Zainab Aliyu, ed., *Software for Artists Book: In Poetic Coalition* (Brooklyn: Pioneer Works Press, 2023), 27.

³³ Raven Chacon, “For Zitkala-Ša,” <https://spiderwebsinthesky.com/for-zitkala-sa/>. Performance documentation, <https://www.sfu.ca/galleries/SFUGalleriesEvents/2019/ForZitkala-Sa.html>.

³⁴ Lauren Lee McCarthy, “Score for Performing User,” *The Recipe*, <https://criticalcode.recipes/contributions/score-for-performing-user>.

anywhere, often without a designated performer, stage, or conductor. As seen in the *Fluxus Performance Workbook*,³⁵ the score works written in text dissolve the hierarchy between composer and performer, replacing it with open-ended participation. The score and work do not require the physical presence of a conductor to function. Authority is distributed across the system itself: the written instruction and the reader's interpretation. Reading engenders a performative act, and performance unfolds as a temporal extension of typography. This understanding of the score as something that persists, loops, and reanimates itself through participation directly informs my use of compositional typography, where text is treated not as static content but as a set of conditions that invite action, repetition, and duration.

From these instruction-based scores, notation begins to shift from a single event toward repetition, circulation, and duration, opening the question of what it means for a score to loop, persist, and perform itself over time. On designer and developer Ezekiel Aquino's website, *Undulations in C, Op. 1 No. 1*³⁶ appears as a looping score in which musical phrases fold back onto themselves, allowing the composition to continue indefinitely. A similar logic is present in Donghoon Gang's *Encounter*, where the circular score eliminates a fixed beginning or end.³⁷ Performance here becomes perpetual, sustained through repetitive looping.

³⁵ Ken Friedman, Owen Smith, and Lauren Sawchyn, eds., *Fluxus Performance Workbook* (n.p.: Performance Research, 1990).

³⁶ Ezekiel Aquino, *Undulations in C, Op. 1 No. 1*, <https://ezekielaquino.com/>.

³⁷ Donghoon Gang, *Binary Composition for Two Cellos*, 2023–24, <https://www.donghoongang.com/binary-composition-for-two-cellos>.

Poetic Computation

“Poetic computation is when technology is used for critical thinking and aesthetic inquiry.”³⁸

“Poetic computation is both an aesthetic and affected experience of code.”³⁹

“Poetic computation is the decoding, encoding, and experimentation with the codes/symbols/language of everyday life.”⁴⁰

Emerging from traditions such as generative art and experimental digital literature, poetic computation extends earlier practices that engage rules, constraints, and chance as compositional methods. Within poetic computation practices, computation is not approached as a purely rational or procedural operation, but as a material for interpretation, play, and affective engagement. Poetic computation foregrounds the experiential dimensions of interaction, timing, and uncertainty. In this context, coding becomes a way of thinking about systems that allows ambiguity, instability, and subjective reactions to persist rather than be resolved.

Computation can be understood broadly as a process of transforming input into output through a set of rules or operations, while software refers to the layered systems of code that mediate this process and make it accessible to users. However, these processes are neither transparent nor neutral. As Wendy Hui Kyong Chun argues, software produces an illusion of readability and causality while operating through layers of abstraction and automation that remain largely opaque to users.⁴¹ Computation, from this perspective, is not a neutral executor of

³⁸ School for Poetic Computation, “poetic computation”, <https://sfpc.study/>.

³⁹ School for Poetic Computation, “poetic computation”.

⁴⁰ Aliyu, *Software for Artists Book*, 125.

⁴¹ Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, “On Software, or the Persistence of Visual Knowledge,” *Grey Room 18* (2004), 28–33.

intention but a system that actively shapes perception, agency, and meaning. Poetic computation emerges against this backdrop as a critical practice: without concealing the opacity of software, it exposes and mobilizes it as an aesthetic and conceptual condition. Uncertainty, delay, and indeterminacy are not treated as errors to be corrected, but as conditions that generate new forms of experience, interpretation, and textual behavior.

Graphic designer Halim Lee's work, along with projects emerging from Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), foregrounds computation as an expressive and experiential agent. In *Tools Upside Down*,⁴² a website developed for a Winter session course at RISD functions as an open, shared canvas. Users can type freely across the site, which was used interchangeably as a chat space, drawing surface, sign-up sheet, and forum for informal exchange. Computation here does not dictate a single function or outcome. The system remains deliberately indeterminate, allowing meaning to emerge through collective use, repetition, and even improvisation. Text floats, overlaps, and accumulates over time, shaped by the presence and actions of website users. The work foregrounds computation as a relational and poetic process in which language, behavior, and structure co-evolve.

A related sensibility toward computation as an interpretive system appears in Tiger Dingsun's *Reading Machines*,⁴³ a publishing platform designed for non-teleological reading.⁴⁴ In this system, text does not exist independently from its code; instead, the computational structure actively shapes how reading unfolds. In this system, text is dynamically structured through code:

⁴² Halim Lee, *Tools Upside Down*, 2023, https://leehalim.com/#filter_TUD.

⁴³ Tiger Dingsun, *Reading Machines*, 2021, <https://tdingsun.github.io/dp/>.

⁴⁴ Alif Ibrahim, "This month's Double Click brings you sites structured by ranks and files," *It's Nice That*, February 3, 2021, <https://www.itsnicethat.com/articles/double-click-february-2021-ranks-and-files-digital-020321>. The article discusses *Reading Machines*, a publishing platform developed by Tiger Dingsun.

readers navigate content through scrolling, hovering, clicking, and interruption-based transitions that reorganize what is visible on the screen. Within this environment, reader encounters fragments, shifts in layout, and unexpected transitions. Reading becomes an event, where meaning is continuously reassembled through interaction. Computation resists optimization and clarity, opening space for hesitation, misreading, and alternative modes of interpretation.

These practices position poetic computation as a way of working with code that emphasizes process over resolution and experience over efficiency. The word *poetic* is fluid, emotional, almost like floating water, while *computation* is structural and rational. Their combination creates a space suspended between two different dimensions.

Allison Parrish's "New Interfaces for Textual Expression"⁴⁵ further develops this understanding by framing computation as a system that mediates between gesture, process, and textual outcome. Instead of mapping inputs directly to characters, as in conventional keyboard interfaces, Parrish proposes interfaces that translate gestures into broader transformations of language and layout. In the section *Entropic Text Editor*, an analog pedal introduces increasing levels of randomness into typed text, altering the identity of letters as well as typographic features such as spacing and weight. As the pedal is pressed, the text gradually destabilizes, embedding the writer's physical gestures into the resulting form.

This perspective resonates with the approach taken in this thesis project, where code functions as a generative constraint. In this research, computational structures do not aim to clarify language, but to expose how meaning shifts through repetition, delay, and interference.

⁴⁵ Allison Parrish, "New Interfaces for Textual Expression", NYU ITP, 2012, <https://aparrish.neocities.org/>.

Variations: Past Works and Artistic Trajectory

The development of this thesis is grounded in a series of past artistic works that explore multilingualism, sound, and the material and performative dimensions of language. The present research builds upon earlier experiments in publication design, performance, and sound-based inquiry. These projects collectively inform an approach to language as a sonic and compositional medium. This chapter traces their evolution, examining how each contributes to the conceptual, methodological, and aesthetic foundations of the thesis work.

Tri-lingual Publication: *Among Polyphonic* (2024)

*Among Polyphonic*⁴⁶ is exploration of multiculturalism, identity, and emotion in trilingual contexts through editorial publication. Designing with Mandarin Chinese, English, and Korean, the project investigates how shifting between these three languages triggers emotional responses and reshapes communicative modes (see figure 3). The three languages are not treated as equal parallel translations, they are positioned as relational elements that overlap, interrupt, and transform one another within a shared textual space. Through the integration of Chinese Hanzi (汉字), Latin scripts, and Korean Hangeul (한글), the publication examines what it means to navigate between worlds, articulating a cultural liminality where one feels “I’m neither black

⁴⁶ Documentation of this work is available on the author’s personal archive: <https://linsherry.com/polyphonic-book>.

enough nor white enough.”⁴⁷ This sense of being in-between multilingual shapes the book’s inquiry to both define “WHO are you from.”⁴⁸

The theme of not belonging anywhere shapes the project’s inquiry into how identity is expressed and perceived across linguistic contexts. Instead of framing this condition as a void, the work approaches it as a dynamic and evolving state. The movement between languages revealing identity as something relational, situated, and continuously in formation.

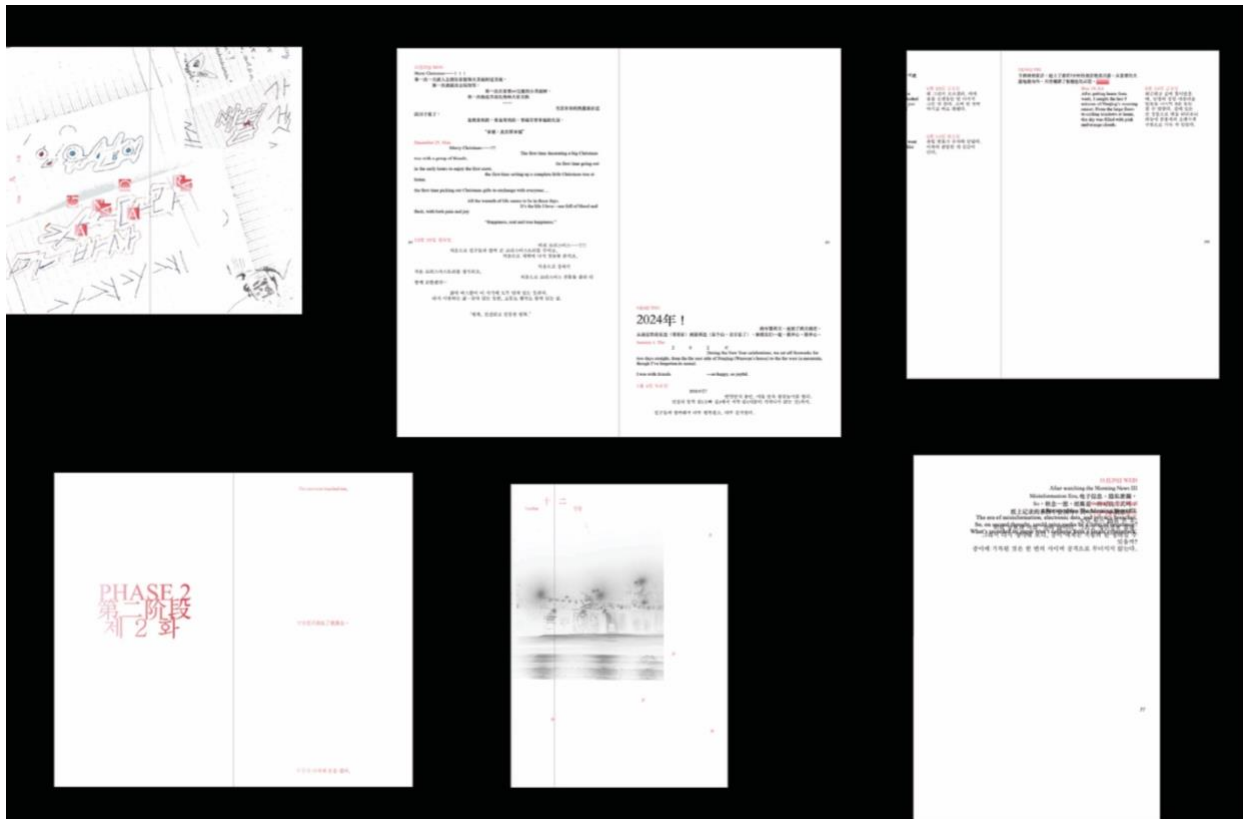


Figure 3 *Among Polyphonic* (2024). Editorial publication showing selected digital spreads. Designed by the author.

⁴⁷ *Green Book*, directed by Peter Farrelly (Universal Pictures, 2018). The line “I’m neither black enough nor white enough” is spoken by the character Don Shirley.

⁴⁸ Professor Herman Pi’ikea Clark, Directed Studio course, 2024. The phrase “WHO are you from” originates from this course.

Language as Music: L'Orchestra (2025)

My performance work *L'Orchestra*⁴⁹ explores the diversity of linguistic sound and questions what constitutes music beyond traditional notation (see figure 4). The work brings together participants from different linguistic backgrounds including speakers of Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Korean, English, and French, each reading aloud from a structured, multilingual script. The performance begins as a sequential dialogue where participants read translated variations of the same line-by-line script in their respective languages. In the concluding section, all participants read their scripts simultaneously, shifting the experience from a clear linguistic exchange into a polyphonic composition where semantic meaning is replaced by a collective sonic texture. By using a shared text as the foundation, the work demonstrates how rhythm and intonation can function as primary musical elements.

Can music exist without musical notes? Can language, when stripped of semantic function, become melody? The performance unfolds without a fixed musical score. Language itself becomes the material for composition. Speech is treated as sound, and reading becomes a form of performance. Listeners are invited to shift attention away from comprehension toward listening, experiencing language as rhythm, tone, and resonance.

By displacing both linguistic and musical conventions, *L'Orchestra* operates as an early exploration of sound as a compositional system. It establishes a framework in which language can be reorganized through listening, a concept that is further developed in the sound-responsive and computational works of this thesis.

⁴⁹ Documentation of this work is available on the author's personal archive: <https://linsherry.com/l'o>.

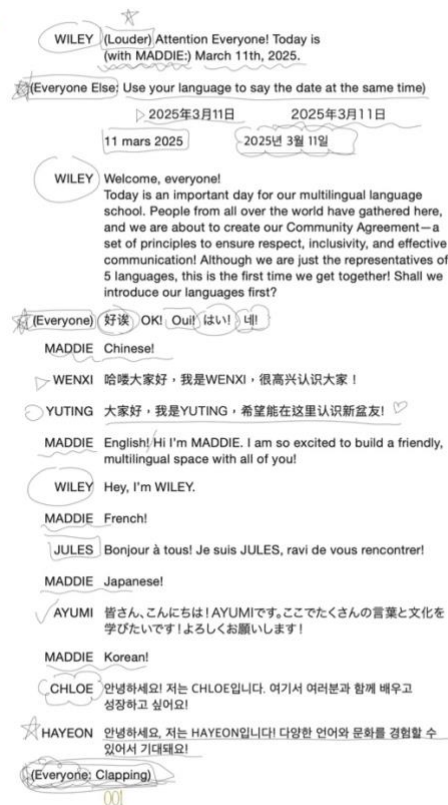


Figure 4 *L'Orchestra* (2025). A script page in multi-languages for the performance. Designed by the author.

Sound as a Research Subject: *Beneath, It Speaks* (2025)

*Beneath, It Speaks*⁵⁰ is a publication and experimental video design project that listens to the sounds of the city's underlayers (see figure 5). Subway tunnels, air-defence shelters, underground corridors, and empty parking lots as the city's subconscious spaces where machines, air, water, and concrete speak in their own "language". These mechanical, environmental, and non-linguistic sounds lack grammar, yet they form the hidden structure of urban existence.

⁵⁰ Yichen Zhu and Sherry Yuxuan Lin, *Beneath, It Speaks*, 2025. Documentation of this work is available on the author's personal archive: <http://linsherry.com/bis-2>.

This project positions sound as the primary subject. It begins with listening and recording. Field recordings were collected from underground spaces in China that are typically passed through, ignored, or perceived only in function terms. In these environments, sound operates independently of human intention or linguistic meaning, articulating rhythms and tensions produced by infrastructure, not human speech.

While earlier projects explored language as music and typography as rhythm, *Beneath, It Speaks* suspended language altogether, allowing sound to exist without textual anchoring. In doing so, it raised questions that continue to inform my thesis:

How can visual design engage with sound without subordinating it to meaning? What forms of notation, layout, or system can emerge when sound is treated as autonomous rather than illustrative?

This project establishes listening as a method and sound as a structuring base. Its attention to non-linguistic sound, spatial resonance, and the limit of translation directly informs the later development of sound-responsive systems. In subsequent works, sound actively reorganizes language, driving the movement, distribution, and transformation of text in real time, while destabilizing fixed modes of reading and legibility.



Figure 5 *Beneath, It Speaks* (2025). Sound Poster. Designed by visual designer Yichen Zhu and the author.

From Past Works to the Present Thesis

The progression of these past works reveals a gradual trajectory in my practice, from exploring multilingual identity through textual form, to treating language as sound, and finally to approaching sound itself as a research subject. Together, these works laid the conceptual and methodological groundwork for the present thesis. What remains unresolved across these projects is the interplay between sound and language once both are understood as unstable, temporal, and relational. Without positioning sound and language as separate or substitutive elements, this thesis treats sound as a compositional force that actively intervenes in language. Sound does not replace text; it reorganizes it, shaping its movement, legibility, and producing new modes of multilingual reading and listening.

Building upon the questions raised in these earlier works, the thesis brings sound and text into direct interaction through research-creation practices, interactive systems, and typographic experimentation. Meaning is understood from embodied, sonic, and spatial processes that unfold over time.

Score: Methodology and Research Approaches

Research-Creation

This thesis adopts research-creation as its primary methodological framework, positioning artistic practice as a mode of inquiry. In this approach, theoretical reflection and material practice are held with equal weight.⁵¹ I undertake this research not only to examine how multilingual text transforms when translated into sound, but also to uncover how sound and typography mutually shape one another: how text can vibrate, scatter, reorganize, or breathe alongside the sonic events that animate it.

Within this research-creation framework, making and thinking unfold together. As defined by Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, my methodology oscillates between research-for-creation and research-from-creation.⁵² In this process, writing operates alongside prototyping, where the act of coding or composing sounds directly informs the theoretical narrative. Conceptual reflection develops through material experimentation, as the resistance or “friction” encountered in sound-responsive software forces a constant re-evaluation of the underlying linguistic theories. This project approaches sound, text and interaction as interdependent systems that generate knowledge through use, repetition, and variation.

Drawing from process philosophy,⁵³ this research is an attunement to resonance where language and sound begin to listen to each other. The focus does not lie on the final work or conclusion, instead, on dwelling “in the midst” of the shifting relations between voice, breath,

⁵¹ Natalie Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 5.

⁵² Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, “Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and ‘Family Resemblances’,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 1 (2012): 13–15.

⁵³ Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), vii–ix.

and resonance.⁵⁴ As someone moving across languages and navigating the gaps between them, I embrace the non-linguistic forms of knowledge that emerge in this unstable, polyphonic space.⁵⁵

Furthermore, this practice opens onto what Natalie Loveless describes as the “uncanny” (unheimlich). By allowing text and sound to inhabit an unstable, “not-quite-at-home” relationship, the project resists the standardized, linear logic of traditional academic production.⁵⁶ The final exhibition functions as a critical site within this process: as an active environment where systems are tested, experienced, and reconfigured through audience interaction. Within this framework, methodology is understood as a generative process emerging from the specificities of practice. Research and creation remain in continuous dialogue, allowing systems and concepts to evolve together through iterative engagement.

research ⇔ creation

writing ⇔ making

system ⇔ concept

< Methodological Counterpoint >

Field Research and Listening Practices

Pauline Oliveros’s concept of *Deep Listening*⁵⁷ and Georgina Born’s analysis of sound, space, and social experience⁵⁸ inform this project by foregrounding listening as an embodied and

⁵⁴ Erin Manning, “Ten Propositions for Research-Creation,” in *The Minor Gesture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 31.

⁵⁵ Manning, 28.

⁵⁶ Loveless, 53.

⁵⁷ Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening: A Composer’s Sound Practice* (New York: Universe, 2005), 16.

⁵⁸ Georgia Born, *Music, Sound and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 83.

spatial practice. Oliveros emphasizes attention, presence, and the relational dimensions of sound, while Born examines how sonic practices reorganize public and private space through bodily and social engagement. Together, these perspectives position listening as an active mode of sensing that involves movement, proximity, and temporal awareness.

In 2025, I conducted recordings in multilingual and multicultural urban environments, namely New York (February), Seoul (April and July), Fuzhou (June), and Shanghai (July). The sound files capture a range of sonic conditions: conversations in cafés, splashes made by cruise boats on the river, street-performance music, subways arriving and departing, people walking their dogs in the Seoul Forest, unmoving trees, fountains beneath building façades... These recording files inform how different languages are articulated, fragmented, or reassembled in response to sound input.

An important shift in this research emerged through encounters with exhibition practices that foreground the body as a sensing instrument. At the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) in Seoul, South Korea, the exhibition *Looking After Each Other* *기울인 몸들: 서로의 취약함이 만날 때* presented works such as Christine Sun Kim's *Everyday Sign* *일상의 수어*⁵⁹ and Kim Eunseol's *Fading Sound, Lingering Sound* *흐려지는 소리, 남겨진 소리*⁶⁰. These works engage multiple sensory modalities, incorporating tactile, auditory, and spatial cues that invite bodily participation.

⁵⁹ Christine Sun Kim, *Everyday Sign*, exhibition introduction, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, May 16–July 20, 2025, <https://looking-after-each-other.neocities.org/pages/kimchristinesun>.

⁶⁰ Eunseol Kim, *Fading Sound, Lingering Sound*, exhibition introduction, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, May 16–July 20, 2025, <https://looking-after-each-other.neocities.org/pages/kimeunseol>.

“Our bodies are all different. We come to the museum with different bodies. How might we come together in a museum where different bodies gather?”⁶¹

This encounter clarified the role of the body as an active sensing instrument within this research. Sound, voice, text, reading, speaking, hearing, and looking converge into an interconnected sensory structure, where meaning emerges through their interaction. Such a framework informs my methodological approach, with listening extends beyond hearing to encompass spatial orientation, physical presence, and bodily response.

This perspective also repositions the role of the audience. While traditional modes of exhibition often presuppose a detached observer who perceives the work from a fixed, external vantage point, my practice situates participants as active nodes within the installation’s spatial and sonic logic. Their proximity to sound sources, movement through the site, and interaction with material components define the work’s realization. Space functions as a compositional element, and the audience participates in the unfolding of the system. This shift from observation to participation prompted a critical reconsideration of the audience’s agency. How is sound output constructed? What role does the audience play within it? Are they observers? Or participants?

Performative Writing

Writing in this research is inherently multilingual where diverse linguistic systems function as primary compositional materials that introduce rhythm, friction, and semantic

⁶¹ *Looking After Each Other*, exhibition Introduction, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, May 16–July 20, 2025, <https://www.mmca.go.kr/eng/exhibitions/exhibitionsDetail.do?exhFlag=3>.

slippage. Language is approached as a dynamic field in which multiple registers coexist and interact.

This approach is informed by works such as Ivetta Sunyoung Kang's *Unpublished Poems*,⁶² where writing operates as a polyphonic and unstable system. In Kang's texts, language drifts, fragments, and overlaps across linguistic and sensory registers. Korean, English, and transliterated fragments coexist without hierarchy. Variations in scale, spacing, and visual structure produce multiple voices within the same field, while meaning remains suspended. Writing unfolds as a durational and embodied process, not a linear argument.

Within this framework, writing can be understood as a form of notation beyond description. Text does not simply communicate ideas; it is an invitation to restructure experience. This understanding informs the development of the *Conductor's Journal*, which functions as a form of poetic documentation within this thesis. Without presenting a continuous narrative, the journal assembles reflections, fragments, and notational marks into a polyphonic composition. Multilingual text, visual arrangement, and temporal spacing operate together as a score that invites reading as an embodied and performative act.

In this sense, writing becomes a site of performance where instability is maintained as a condition of expression. This approach echoes Allison Parrish's conceptualization of textual interfaces, where the writer's physical gestures are embedded into the language through computational mediation.⁶³ Just as Parrish utilizes these rhythmic and entropic inputs to move writing beyond literal transcription, my practice allows meaning to emerge through the continuous accumulation, interruption, and variation of the text over time.

⁶² Ivetta Sunyoung Kang, *Unpublished Poems*, <https://ivettakang.com/>.

⁶³ Parrish, *New Interfaces for Textual Expression*, 3.

Embodied, Somatic, and Participatory Approaches

Returning to the exhibition space encountered in MMCA, which filled with bodies, voices and attentions, meaning is produced through presence. The shift from viewing to inhabiting the work resonates closely with Nicolas Bourriaud relational aesthetics, in which artwork is understood as an arrangement that only comes into being through the presence and actions of its “beholders”. Describing works by artists such as Félix Gonzalez-Torres, Bourriaud emphasizes how visitors are invited to “take up a position within an arrangement, giving it life, complementing the work, and taking part in the formulation of its meaning.”⁶⁴ Participation, in this sense, is a phenomenological condition inherited from Minimal Art, with the experience of the work necessarily includes the body of the beholder within a situation.

Instead of treating participation as a technological feature or an added layer, Bourriaud frames it as an embodied mode of engagement, which unfolds through movement, proximity, attention, and duration. Meaning emerges through being present within a spatial and sensory configuration. This understanding directly informs my approach to sound-based and typographic systems, where the audience’s physical presence, voice, and listening become integral to the work’s operation. Then, the transformation of the viewer into a participant is a condition that shapes how the work is activated, experienced, and completed.

Henri Lefebvre’s concept of rhythmanalysis further clarifies how such participation is lived through the body in space and time.⁶⁵ Lefebvre describes rhythm not as a fixed temporal structure, but as something sensed through variation and interruption in everyday life. Rhythm

⁶⁴ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Mathieu Copeland, Simon Pleasance, and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2020), 27.

⁶⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (London: Continuum, 2004).

emerges where bodies encounter environments through walking, pausing, breathing, and listening. Space is never static; it is continually produced through bodily movement and temporal flow.

Rhythmanalysis resonates with my attention to how audiences move through exhibition spaces, adjust their pace, linger, or withdraw, and how these bodily rhythms shape the experience of sound, text, and meaning. In this research, bodily proximity to language shapes how text is perceived, fragmented, and reorganized, through the visitor's acts of speaking, breathing, listening, and moving.

Intermezzo: Iterative Prototyping and Development

Building on the embodied and participatory concerns outlined in the previous section, this phase of the research turns toward the development of responsive systems capable of registering and transforming such experiences. Embodiment is translated into typographic behavior: voice, proximity, and temporal presence are mapped onto movement, dispersion, density, and variation within text. Interaction is structured through rules that govern how text appears, shifts, and reorganizes in response to sonic input.

This approach resonates with Sha Xin Wei and grace grace grace’s understanding of rhythm and temporality as textural phenomena which arises through interaction, accumulation, and variation.⁶⁶ Instead of functioning as fixed or measurable units, time is experienced through delay, repetition, accumulation, and interruption. Within the interactive systems developed in this research, temporality is enacted to shape how text unfolds, persists, and transforms.

A series of iterative typographic experiments were developed across Mandarin Chinese, English, and Korean, treating typography as a compositional field rather than a static arrangement. Influenced by improvisational practices in music, these experiments approach text as something that unfolds over time, accommodates variation, and responds to input. This method is referred to here as “compositional typography”⁶⁷ where layout, timing, and interaction operate together as dynamic structures. To move beyond the constraints of conventional graphic design tools, the research engages a range of computational and audiovisual platforms, including

⁶⁶ Sha Xin Wei and Garrett Laroy Johnson, “Rhythm and Textural Temporality,” in *Rhythm and Critique: Technics, Modalities, Practices*, ed. Paola Crespi and Sunil Manghani (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

⁶⁷ John Maeda, *Design by Numbers* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 25–33, 155. While “compositional typography” traditionally refers to the formal arrangement of static type, this research extends the term to encompass the temporal and algorithmic structuring of text, drawing parallels to musical composition and live coding.

Processing, p5.js, TouchDesigner, Max 9, and Strudel. Through testing, adjusting, and reconfiguring parameters of the prototypes, these experiments gradually developed into a series of interactive works culminating in the *Rehearsals* series, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Prototype I. note mapping (A-Z : 60-103)

The first prototype translates a multilingual poem into a MIDI composition through a direct letter-to-note mapping system (see figure 6). Chinese and Korean are first converted into Latin characters using pinyin and phonetic romanization, allowing all three languages to operate within the same alphabetic structure. Each letter from A to Z is assigned to a fixed MIDI pitch, and the text is parsed sequentially so that every character triggers a note. The resulting data is arranged in Logic Pro as three separate tracks for English, Chinese, and Korean.

This one-to-one mapping produces a mechanical sonic quality, as the system lacks rhythm, hierarchy, and relational structure. The three tracks do not align comfortably. Differences in linguistic structure become audible, with Korean appearing denser, Chinese extending over a longer duration with more notes, and English consisting of fewer sustained tones. Rather than producing harmony, this prototype reveals the limitations of direct translation between text and sound, and points toward the need for more responsive and time-based systems developed in later iterations.

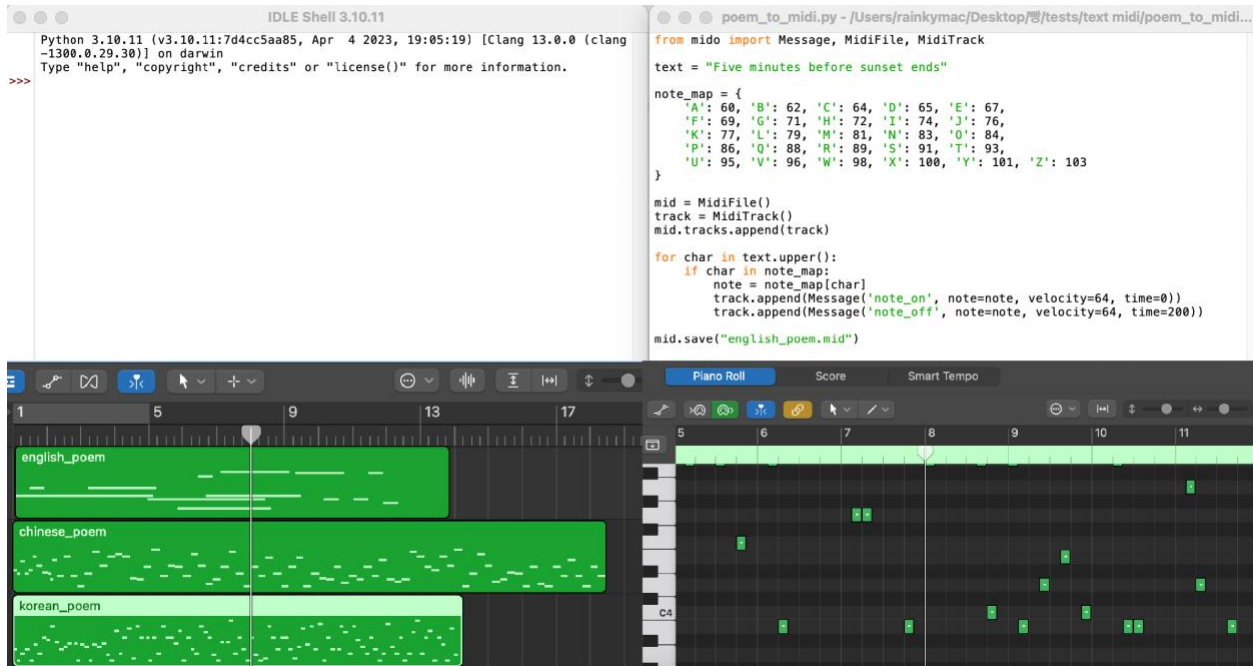


Figure 6 Prototype I. note mapping (A-Z : 60-103), translating alphabetic characters into MIDI pitch values. Screenshot captured by the author.

Prototype II. circular amplitude modulation

Prototype II, developed in TouchDesigner, explores the spatial behavior of text in response to sound amplitude (see figure 7). Words are arranged along a circular form, and their movement is driven by changes in volume, expanding, contracting, and distorting based on the input sound file. As the system responds to input, the text appears to be pulled toward the center or pushed outward, creating a tension between inward collapse and outward expansion. This experiment introduces text as a spatial and volumetric element, marking an early development of the project's concept of constructing a new spatial condition in which language unfolds through movement and sound.



Figure 7 Prototype II. circular amplitude modulation, where text movement responds to variations in sound amplitude. Video documentation available at <https://www.instagram.com/p/DVEVBsekRpk/>.

Prototype III. awakening from a dream

Developed by the program p5.js, Prototype III explores how sound can directly drive the movement of text (see figure 8). Using an audio file from a past work *Awakening from a Dream*.⁶⁸ the title phrase “a w a k e n i n g f r o m a d r e a m” is decomposed into individual letters distributed across the screen. Sound input activates motion, causing each letter to move in random directions. When letters collide, their trajectories shift, introducing interaction and variation within the system. As soon as the sound ceases, movement also stops, establishing a direct relationship between sonic presence and typographic behavior. This prototype marks a transition from static or pre-mapped systems toward responsive text, where sound operates as an active force that animates, disrupts, and reorganizes language in real time.

⁶⁸ Sherry Yuxuan Lin, *Awakening from a Dream*, 2025. Documentation of this work is available on the author’s personal archive: <https://linsherry.com/awakening-1>.

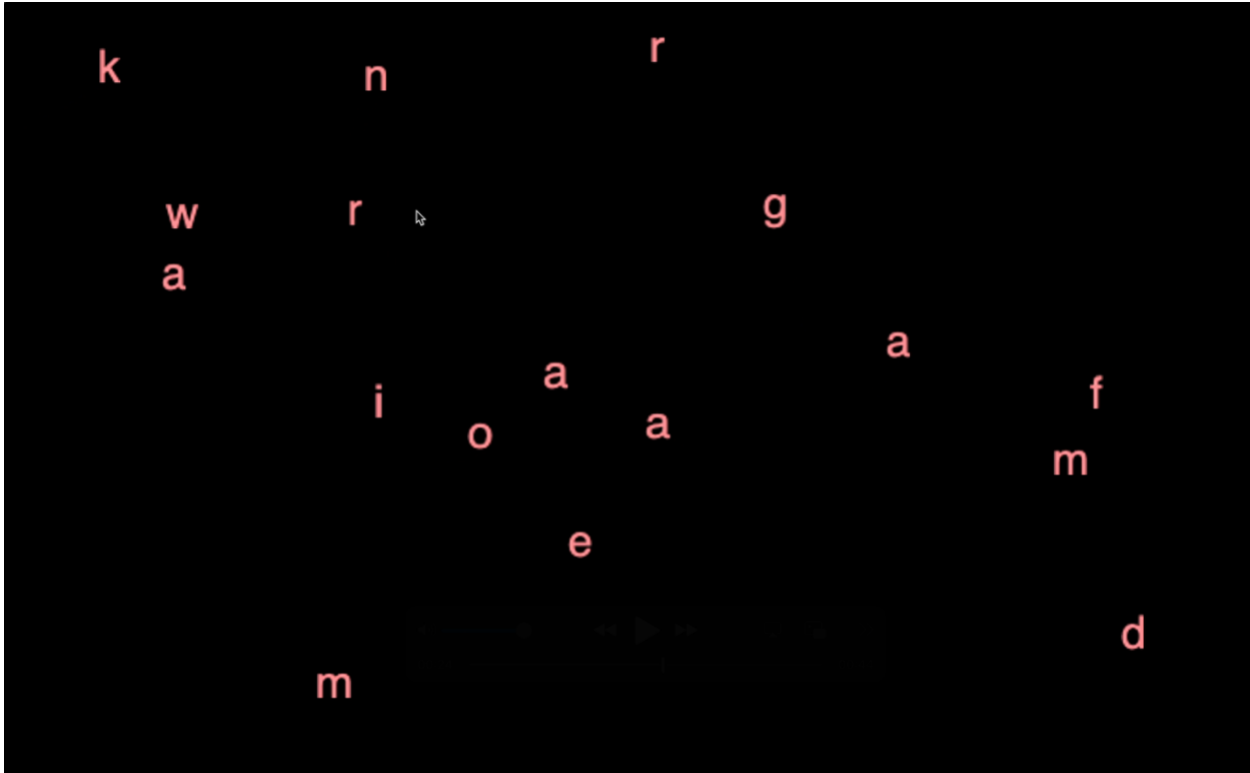


Figure 8 Prototype III. awakening from a dream. Screenshot captured by the author.

Prototype IV. rainy days

Prototype IV, also based on p5.js, introduces a simple interactive system in which text is generated and activated through user input (see figure 9). Random letter strings are initially positioned at the top of the screen. Each keyboard press triggers a new string to fall downward, with varying speeds assigned to each instance. As input increases, multiple strings accumulate and descend simultaneously, creating a layered field of motion.

This system does not represent language semantically; it treats text as a dynamic and generative material shaped by interaction and timing. The falling motion introduces a sense of gravity and temporal flow, while the randomness of the letter combinations disrupts readability. This prototype further develops the relationship between input and typographic behavior through real-time interaction.



Figure 9 Prototype IV. rainy days. From left to right: 0:05, 0:22. Video documentation available at <https://www.instagram.com/p/DU7LCoxkWSZ/>.

Prototype V. linguistic poem

Prototype V marks a significant transition toward the final *Rehearsals* by bringing sound, language, and typography into a unified framework (see figure 10). Using a field recording captured during a piano practice session on February 11, 2025, Toronto, the system generates multilingual words associated with sound. These words appear sequentially at a controlled pace, while the amplitude of the audio modulates their transparency, establishing a direct relationship between sonic intensity and visual presence.

Developed in p5.js and later transitioned to Processing to support full-screen projection, the system evolves from a linear structure into a more distributed composition. In the initial version, words appear in sequence along a fixed line, emphasizing temporal flow (left side of figure 10). In a later iteration, words are positioned randomly across the screen, creating a more organic visual field that better reflects the fluidity and diffusion of sound (right side of figure 10). This shift from linear arrangement to spatial dispersion introduces a closer alignment between

auditory experience and typographic behavior, laying the groundwork for the interactive and responsive systems developed in the *Rehearsals* series.

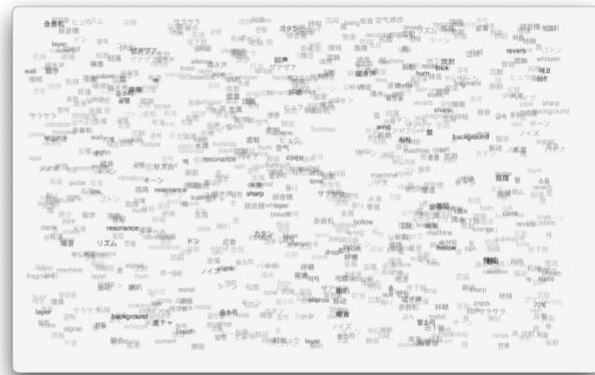


Figure 10 Prototype V. linguistic poem. Video documentation available at <https://www.instagram.com/p/DVHePqwERjv/>.

Prototype VI. 4am

Prototype VI explores the relationship between code, language, and sound through a compositional system developed in Strudel (see figure 11). Based on one of my poems “a sleepless night, rainy day, I woke up at 4am, look at the quiet outside, there’s a rosy-orange sunrise ready to turn the sky bright,” the piece translates textual imagery into a structured sequence of coded musical events. In this environment, sound is generated through code, where elements such as “f4” and “g5” denote specific pitches and are arranged into patterns that unfold over time.

The composition operates as a reinterpretation in which language becomes a set of parameters guiding tempo, layering, and tonal atmosphere. The code constructs a sonic environment through pulses, delays, and sustained tones, producing a reflective and ambient texture. Prototype VI extends the investigation from sound-responsive systems to code-driven

composition, highlighting how both language and sound can be structured through symbolic systems, and further reinforcing the idea of composition as a programmable and generative process.

```

1 // 1. set tempo (slow, reflective)
2 setcps(0.4)
3
4 // 2. soft piano chord pulses, like breathing in the early dark
5 $: note("[c4, e4, g4] ~ [f4 c5] ~ [g4 a4 b4 d5] ~").sound("sine").gain(2)
6   .attack(1.5).release(3).pan("<-0.3 0.3>").slow(2)
7
8 // 3. gentle high notes like raindrops on the window
9 $: note("<g5 ~ a5 ~> <~ b5 g5>").sound("sine").gain(0.2)
10  .attack(0.5).release(1.5).slow(3).pan("<0.5 -0.5>").delay(0.6)
11
12 // 4. low ambient undertone, distant thunder or sleepy breath
13 $: note("c2 ~ ~ g2").sound("sine").gain(0.5)
14  .attack(2).release(6).pan(-0.6).slow(4)
15
16 // 5. optional subtle rain texture with hi-hats
17 $: sound("[~ hh ~] [~ ~ hh]").gain(0.05).slow(2).pan("<-0.2 0.2>")

```

Figure 11 Prototype VI. 4am. Program interface with code-driven composition. Video documentation available at <https://www.instagram.com/p/DVAC9EwETf/>.

Prototype VII. 生活 life

Prototype VII, developed in Processing, explores the gradual emergence of legibility from dense typographic accumulation (see figure 12). Using a field recording captured on April 15, 2025, in a public urban environment, the system processes ambient human voices as input. At the initial stage, characters are densely layered to the point of illegibility, forming a compact visual mass. As the sound progresses, the structure begins to separate and disperse, allowing individual characters to become distinguishable.

This transformation from opacity to legibility is driven by the temporal unfolding of the audio input. Sound operates as a force that reorganizes the visual field, shifting text from an unreadable state toward partial recognition. The system stages legibility as a process that emerges over time, which further develops the relationship between sound and text by demonstrating how meaning can arise through gradual differentiation.

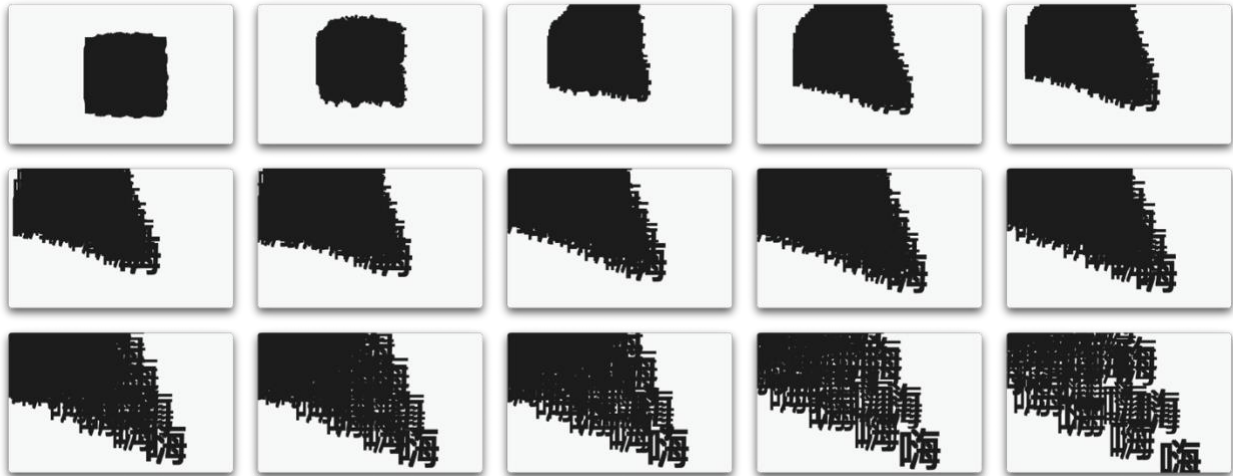


Figure 12 Prototype VII. **생활** life. The movement over time. Screenshot captured by the author.

Performance: Project Works and Exhibition Components

Rehearsals

Rehearsals is a series of interactive digital works, *Rehearsal Loop I–IV*, that together form an ongoing “composition” within the exhibition space. In these works, sound is treated as a compositional force that continuously deconstructs and reconstructs typographic structures in real time. Rather than presenting fixed texts or finalized layouts, the series operates as a progressive performance: an unfolding rehearsal in which language remains unsettled.

Across the series, typography functions as the primary visual material. Three languages – Chinese, English, and Korean – serve as the core linguistic components of the system, each appearing in its respective script: Chinese Hanzi (汉字), English in the Latin alphabet, and Korean Hangul (한글). The typographic system employs standard sans-serif fonts across all three languages. This choice is intentional by using commonly encountered, everyday typefaces, the work minimizes stylistic distraction and foregrounds the behavior of text beyond its aesthetic styling. The familiarity and legibility of these fonts support reading at the level of recognition, even as the system disrupts that process through movement and sonic intervention. In this way, typography operates as transparent yet responsive medium, allowing perceptual instability to emerge from the interaction between sound and language and maintaining a focus on systemic behavior over graphic ornamentation.

The textual content draws from my own multilingual writing practice, specifically from field-recording journals and a trilingual poem developed in an earlier stage of the project. These writings are produced in different contexts: the journals emerge from situated listening experiences, documenting sound environments during field recordings, while the poem originates as a composed text that brings together multiple languages within a single structure.

Bringing these materials into the system allows language to retain traces of specific moments, locations, and states of attention and introducing a more constructed, poetic form. Within *Rehearsals*, these texts are reservoirs of linguistic material that can be recomposed through sound.

Fragments of these trilingual texts circulate within the system and are subjected to sonic intervention. Translation does not occur through stable or one-to-one correspondence. Instead, language shifts occur through sonic triggers that move text across linguistic registers without guaranteeing semantic equivalence.

Sound drives these transformations at both conceptual and technical levels. Input from the microphone is continuously analyzed in real time, and specific sonic features such as amplitude (volume), bandwidth, and spectral variation are mapped to parameters within the code. Amplitude is used to control the rate of text generation, typographic scale, and opacity, linking louder sounds to increased visual intensity. Bandwidth and spectral variation are used to influence spatial distribution, movement, and dispersion, allowing different qualities of sound to shape how text behaves. These mappings are not intended to produce a direct visual representation of sound, but to establish a set of relational correspondences.

All works in the series are developed in the coding program – Processing, where programmatic rules establish a generative system for organizing text and sound. The code specifies conditions, constraints, and relationships through which the work can continuously reconfigure itself. While the system operates within defined parameters, it remains open to variation, allowing live sound input to introduce unpredictability into each iteration.

Each work within *Rehearsal Loop I–IV* explores a distinct configuration of sound-text interaction. Together, the series form a compositional arc that examines how language behaves when it is listened to, interrupted, and reorganized through sound.

I. Rehearsal Loop I, II, and III

Year: 2026

Medium: Digital projection, microphone

Dimensions: 1920 x 1080 pixels, various dimensions

These three sound-responsive systems are presented together as a single looping projection within the exhibition space. The works run sequentially in a programmed cycle: each loop performs for two minutes before transitioning automatically to the next. They are projected on one wall of the gallery and accompanied by a microphone that captures real-time sound from the surrounding environment. Voices, footsteps, conversations, and other ambient noises produced by visitors become live input for the system.

Within the code, sound amplitude is detected through the microphone and mapped to parameters controlling typographic behavior. The visual composition of text continuously responds to the acoustic environment of the gallery. Each loop therefore unfolds differently depending on the sounds produced in the space. While the three works share the same technical infrastructure, each explores a different relationship between sound and multilingual text. Together, they form a sequence of typographic behaviors: disruption, drift, and translation.

Rehearsal Loop I focuses on the disruption of readable language through sonic intervention (see figure 13). The textual content consists of excerpts from my personal field-

recording journal written during a visit to an underground air-defense shelter in my hometown (June 9, 2025). The text appears in three languages presented sequentially.

At the beginning of the loop, the journal entries appear as relatively stable paragraphs. The three languages occupy distinct segments, creating the impression of separated linguistic blocks. As sound enters the system, this structure gradually destabilizes. Characters and words that have already appeared begin to disperse and relocate across the screen. The intensity of sound in the gallery directly influences the speed at which new text appears. Louder sounds accelerate the generation of words and characters, while quieter environments slow the process. As the sound level increases, previously stable text fragments are displaced, overlapping with fragments from other languages.

This produces a paradoxical reading condition. Visitors attempt to read the text, yet the sonic environment constantly interferes with their ability to follow it linearly. Words shift positions, paragraphs fragment, and different languages intermingle. For multilingual readers, the experience becomes one of partial comprehension: the reader may follow a line in Chinese before losing it, then notice an English fragment elsewhere on the screen, then encounter a Korean word that interrupts the sequence again.

In this sense, reading becomes a discontinuous act. Language remains visible but unstable. Semantic continuity is repeatedly disrupted by sound. The work therefore stages a condition in which viewers can read but cannot fully read. The meaning is continuously reorganized by the acoustic conditions of the space.

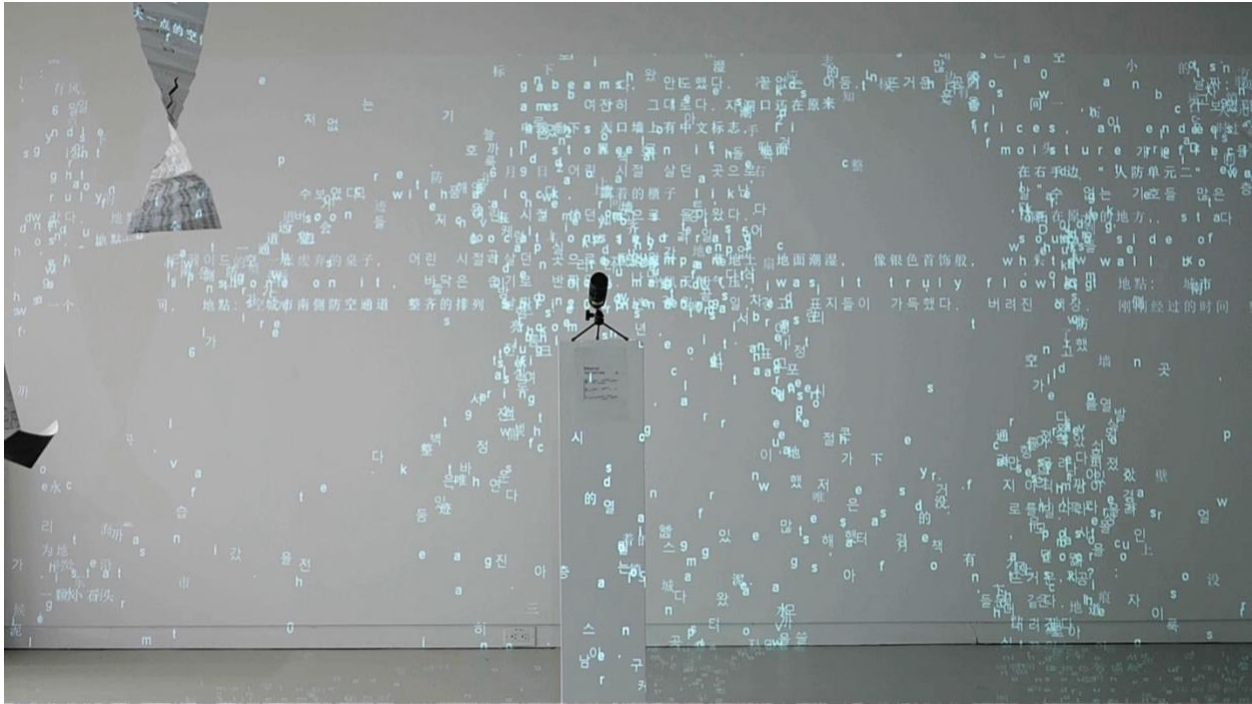


Figure 13 *Rehearsal Loop I* (2026). Interactive projection with sound-responsive multilingual text. Installation view.

Rehearsal Loop II explores the drifting and fluid behavior of text. In this work, typographic elements move across the screen in wave-like formations (see figure 14). The visual field resembles a shifting typographic surface, where words and characters appear to float and flow. The textual material draws from a small set of sentences in Chinese, English, and Korean. However, these sentences are not presented in stable grammatical form. Individual characters and letters are algorithmically rearranged and recombined, producing fragmented linguistic structures.

Sound again functions as the driving force behind these movements. The overall volume of the surrounding environment influences the speed of the wave-like motion. When the acoustic environment becomes louder, the typographic waves accelerate, causing text fragments to drift more rapidly across the screen. Sudden spikes in sound generate localized disturbances within the typographic surface. These disturbances appear visually as ripples moving through the field

of text. The ripples originate at unpredictable positions and subtly displace nearby characters and words, creating small shifts in their alignment and spacing.

The result is a visual condition where language behaves less like a fixed textual object and more like a tactile or fluid material. Text drifts, flows, and reacts to sonic energy in the environment. Instead of presenting a readable sentence, the system visualizes the dynamic relationship between sound and typographic structure.

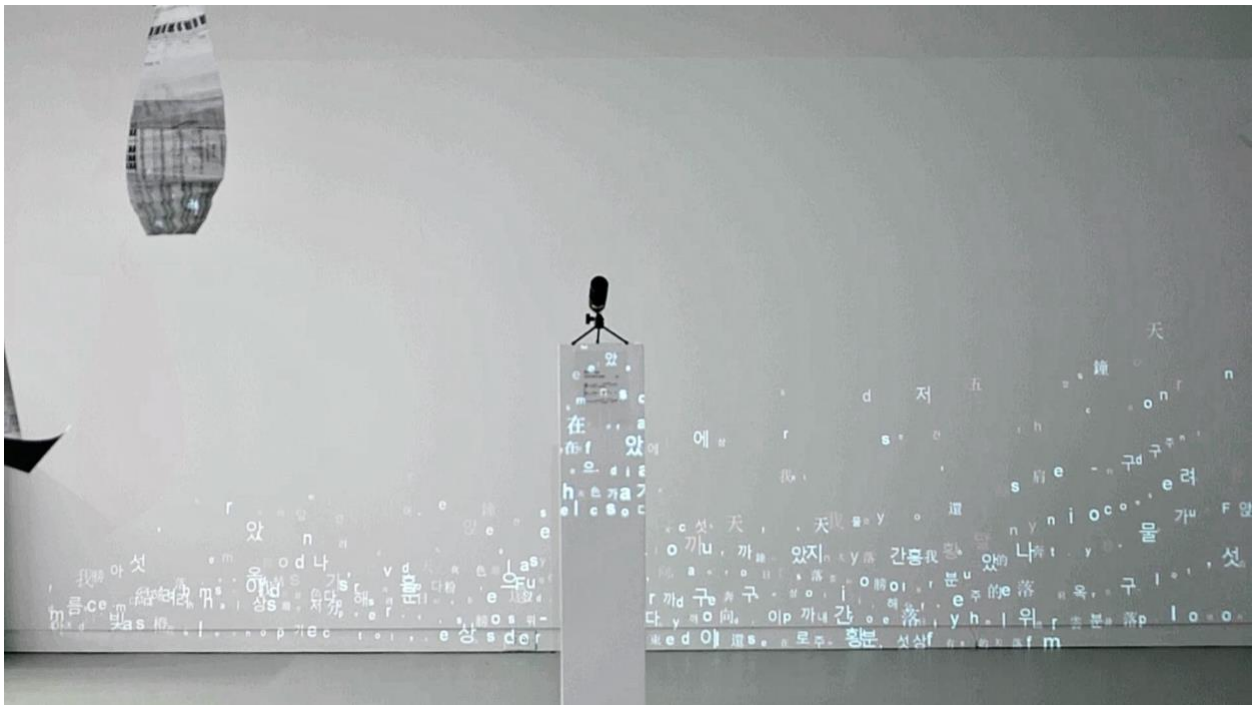


Figure 14 *Rehearsal Loop II* (2026). Interactive projection with sound-responsive multilingual text. Installation view.

Rehearsal Loop III focuses on the instability of translation. In this loop, multilingual words appear across the screen, resembling stars scattered across a night sky (see figure 15). Each word gradually brightens and fades, creating a field of luminous textual fragments suspended in space. As new words appear, they occasionally replace earlier ones occupying similar positions. However, these replacements do not function as direct translations. When a

word is replaced, it is substituted with a different word from another language. A Chinese word may be covered by an English word, which may later be replaced by a Korean word, but none of them are the correct translation. The substitutions occur algorithmically and do not attempt to preserve semantic equivalence.

This process creates a continuous state of “post-translation,” where language is always in the condition of having just been translated, but never accurately. Words overwrite one another across languages, producing shifting layers of linguistic traces. Through this mechanism, the work reflects on the experience of multilingual communication in which translation is often partial, approximate, or incomplete. Meaning emerges not through stable equivalence between languages but through successive substitutions and reinterpretations.

In the visual field of *Rehearsal Loop III*, languages coexist like constellations within a shared typographic universe. Words appear, overlap, and disappear, leaving behind traces of other languages that have momentarily occupied the same position. The work thus stages translation as an ongoing movement of displacement.



Figure 15 *Rehearsal Loop III* (2026). Interactive projection with sound-responsive multilingual text. Installation view.

II. Rehearsal Loop IV

Rehearsal Loop IV marks a shift in scale within the Rehearsal series from paragraphs and words toward the single character as the smallest typographic unit (see figure 16). It introduces a different scale of typographic interaction by focusing on the appearance of individual characters. While the previous loops operate through paragraphs, words, or clusters of text, this work isolates the single character as the fundamental unit of language.

The textual material is drawn from a trilingual poem that I wrote as part of my earlier project *Among Polyphonic*. Characters from the poem in Chinese, English, and Korean appear individually across the projection surface. These characters emerge one at a time, occupying the screen as discrete typographic moments. Sound again serves as the primary compositional driver. The system continuously analyzes the volume of the surrounding environment through the microphone. The detected sound level directly controls several visual parameters: the speed at which characters appear, their opacity, and their typographic scale. Louder sounds produce larger and more visible characters, while quieter conditions result in smaller, more transparent ones that appear more slowly. Through this mapping, the visual density of language fluctuates with the acoustic activity of the gallery.

Spatial installation also plays an important role in this work. The projection is installed in the southeast corner of the gallery, where two walls meet. As characters appear across the projection, they extend across both surfaces of the corner. This creates a subtle distortion in the typographic field: characters bend and shift across the architectural edge, occupying a three-dimensional spatial condition instead of a flat screen. This spatial configuration echoes the dispersed textual elements installed throughout the exhibition. Small textual moments appear in different locations across the gallery – printed fragments, suspended words, and typographic

traces embedded within other works. *Rehearsal Loop IV* functions as a concentrated version of these scattered moments, allowing individual characters to briefly surface within the corner space before disappearing again.



Figure 16 *Rehearsal Loop IV* (2026). Interactive projection with sound-responsive multilingual text. Corner view.

Conductor's Journal

If *Rehearsals* function as an ongoing “performance”, then *Conductor's Journal* serves as the “score”. It is the site where I assume the role of conductor, re-orchestrating the materials generated through the project to provide a framework through which the work can be read, activated, reinterpreted and performed by the audience.

The *Conductor's Journal* series consists of four printed works, *Conductor's Journal Op. 1–4*, emerging from personal journals over the past two years. These journals recorded fragments of thought, multilingual writing, poetic lines, and notations that developed alongside the research. As a form, the journal is inherently temporal and spatial: it accumulates, and shifts,

remains open-ended. At the same time, it is conductive. By positioning myself as the conductor of the project, the journal transcends its role as a static archive and becomes a set of instructions for visual and sonic resonance. These “scores” do not translate sound into conventional musical symbols, but register linguistic drift and compositional logic through typographic layout, intentional spacing, and tactile material decisions.

Although the journal originates as a two-dimensional printed object, its physical installation transforms it into a three-dimensional sculptural form. In the exhibition space, the pages are liberated from the flat surface of the table, allowing the text to inhabit the air and interact with the surrounding environment. Across *Conductor's Journal Op. 1–4*, each edition experiments with a distinct binding and hanging approach. Binding structures intentionally preserve voids and structural flexibility, refusing the enclosure or a final form.

By utilizing materials such as iron wire and nylon thread, different hand-binding methods are combined to generate rhythmic variations and specific special orientations. Pages fold, extend, overlap, or resist linear sequencing, demanding a physical engagement that transcends traditional reading. This spatial resistance is further activated through hanging and installation strategies that treat the exhibition gallery space as a site for architectural orchestration. Works may be suspended in mid-air, nestled into corners, or mounted at varying heights to challenge the viewer's eye level. These decisions are not fixed in advance but emerge through site-specific testing – a material dialogue between the printed object and the physical constraints of the exhibition space.

Within this environment, *Conductor's Journal* series functions as the primary graphic score, providing the visual and structural cues for the broader research-creation. Each opus introduces a unique material “voice”, contributing to a polyphonic arrangement of printed

language. By extending the logic of rehearsal into three-dimensional form, these journals transform writing and notation into an ongoing act of spatial composition.

The following sections provide a detailed examination of the material logic, structural evolution, and specific installation strategies employed across *Conductor's Journal Op. 1–4*.

I. Conductor's Journal Op.1

Year: 2025

Medium: Print

Dimensions: 16.5 x 23.4 inches

*soundscape studies lp orchestra bracket
l orchestra bracket project bracket
dash b period period*⁶⁹

Conductor's Journal Op. 1 (hereafter referred to as *Op. 1*) serves as a genealogical record of the project's early-stage thinking, capturing the synesthetic tension between auditory and visual memory (see figure 17). By positioning the work within a gallery corner bridging *Rehearsal Loop I, II and III* with other works in the *Conductor's Journal* series, the piece acts as a resonant surface for the *Rehearsal Loop* projection. The drifting multilingual characters of the projection illuminate, migrate across, and eventually vanish from the printed page. This cyclical interaction blurs the boundary between the "fixed" history of the research (the physical print) and the "fluid" movement of the present (the digital projected light). It established a compelling tension between stilled text and moving language.

⁶⁹ Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictée* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1. Style refers to the use of spelled-out punctuation as textual elements.

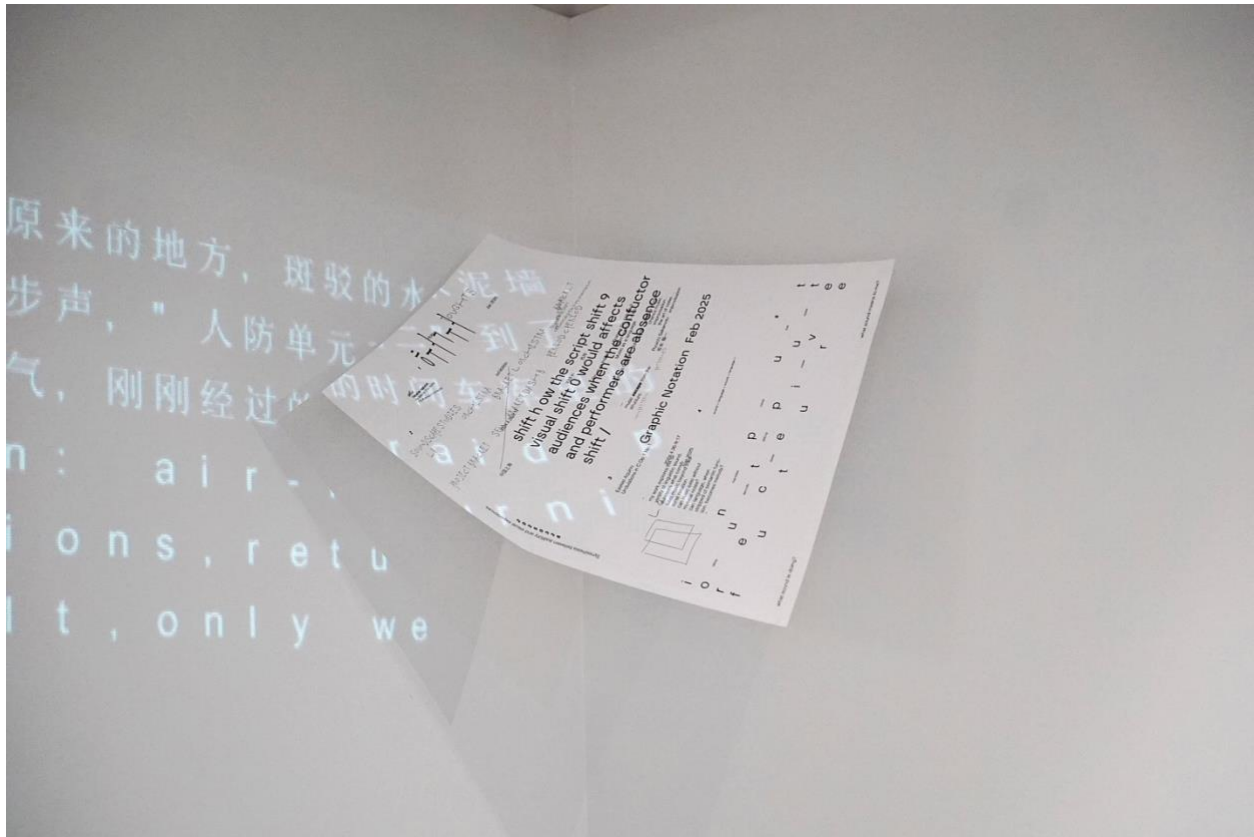


Figure 17 *Conductor's Journal Op.1* (2025). Suspended print with texts leakage. Installation view.

II. Conductor's Journal Op.2

Year: 2026

Medium: Print

Dimensions: 30 x 150 inches

Music,
Music, even
Music, even without
Music, even without melody,
Music, even without melody, without
Music, even without melody, without rhythm, without
without rhythm, without tonality without tonality or
or bar tonality or lines, or lines, can
can still be
still be music be music after all.
Or perhaps, from another angle, sound itself including language is already
from another angle, sound itself including language is already music in its own right.

Conductor's Journal Op. 2 (hereafter referred to as *Op. 2*) is the largest printed manifestation within the series, acting as an expansive cartography of the research mind (figure 18 and 21). Its content is a non-linear assemblage of personal reflections, fragments from theoretical essays, and spontaneous inspirations of this project. It is not meant to be read as a continuous narrative. Instead, the text operates as visual phonemes navigating across the 150 inches expanse.

By varying font scales, modulating the grey-scale tonal range, and manipulating the tracking between individual characters, the typography is transformed into a rhythmic notation. Some phrases dissolve into abstract line-work, mimicking the structure of a musical staff, directly embodying the concept of the “score” introduced in the previous series overview section.

The installation of *Op. 2* was a process of iterative improvisation. Through multiple site-tests (from February 22 to the final exhibition on March 4), the work's form remained in flux. I intentionally experimented with different hanging methods and scales to move away from the static poster and toward a sculptural gesture (figure 19 and 20). In its final state, the paper is not merely mounted; it waves and flows, responding to the invisible architecture of the gallery. This living quality is further activated by a strategic lighting design that casts sharp, intricate shadows onto the wall. These shadows effectively map the paper's sculptural undulations, creating an immersive architecturality that transforms the text into a multi-layered structure of light and void.

This inherent movement is amplified by the work's extreme sensitivity to the environment; due to its massive scale and delicate materiality, *Op. 2* responds to subtle air currents within the gallery, causing the paper and its corresponding shadows to flicker and dance as if the space itself were breathing. This autonomous movement is complemented by an explicit

invitation for tactile engagement, transforming the audience into co-performers. Whether through a gentle touch or by tracing the printed waves to create new physical undulations, the visitor's interaction continuously shifts the configuration of the shadows and the paper's form.

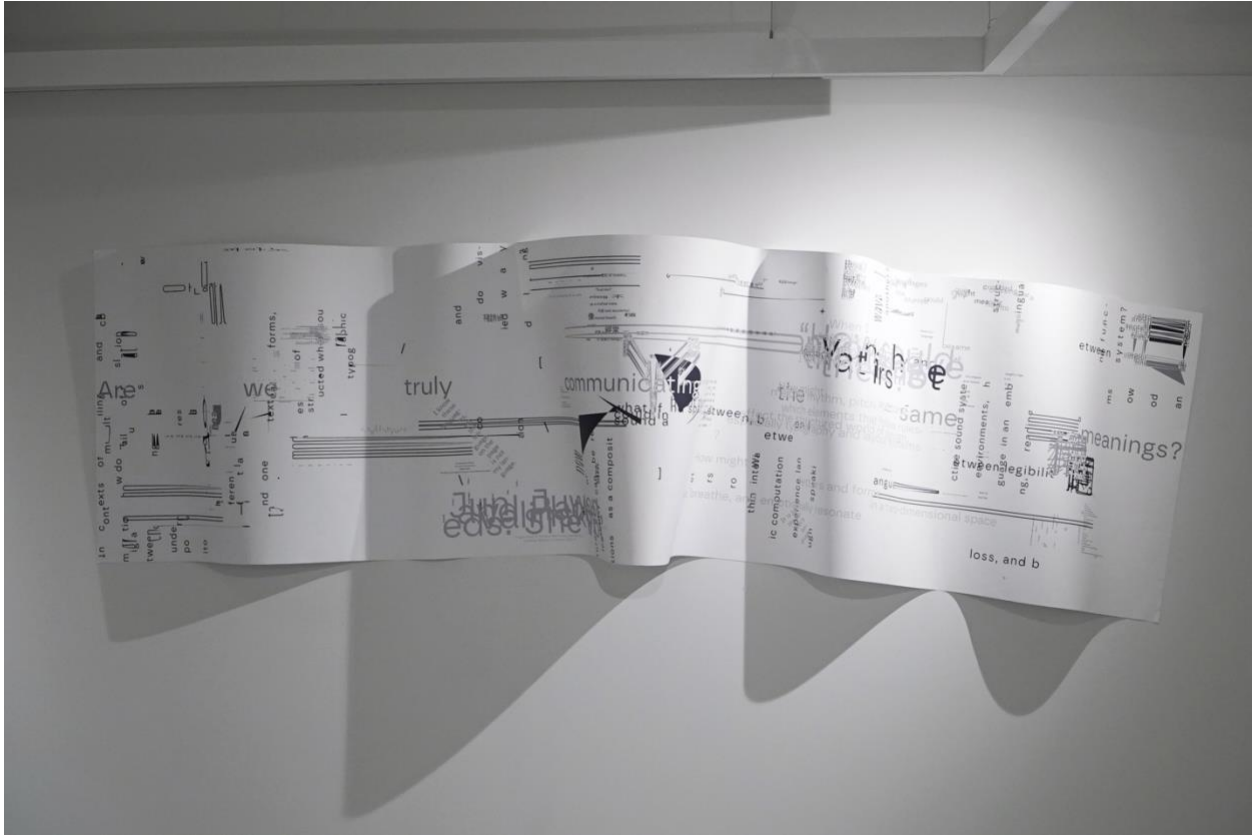


Figure 18 *Conductor's Journal Op.2 (2026)*. Suspended print with wave-like structure. Exhibition view.

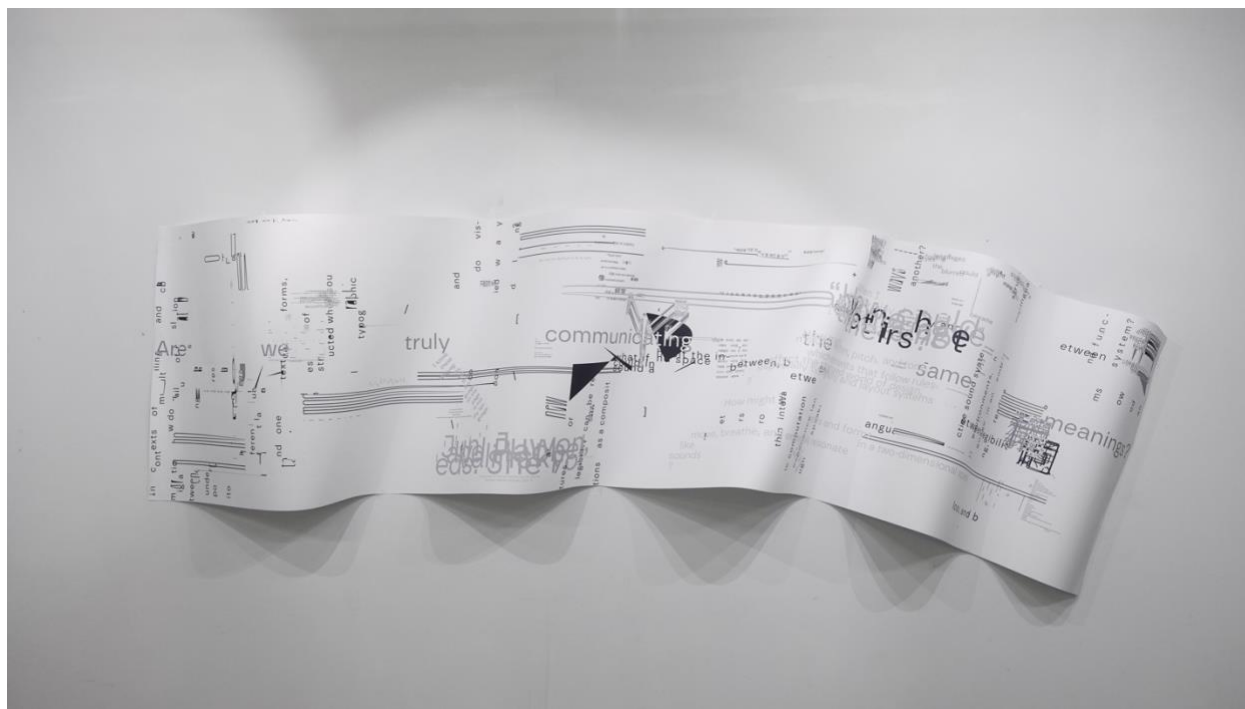


Figure 19 *Conductor's Journal Op.2 (2026)*. Test view 1. February 22, 2026.

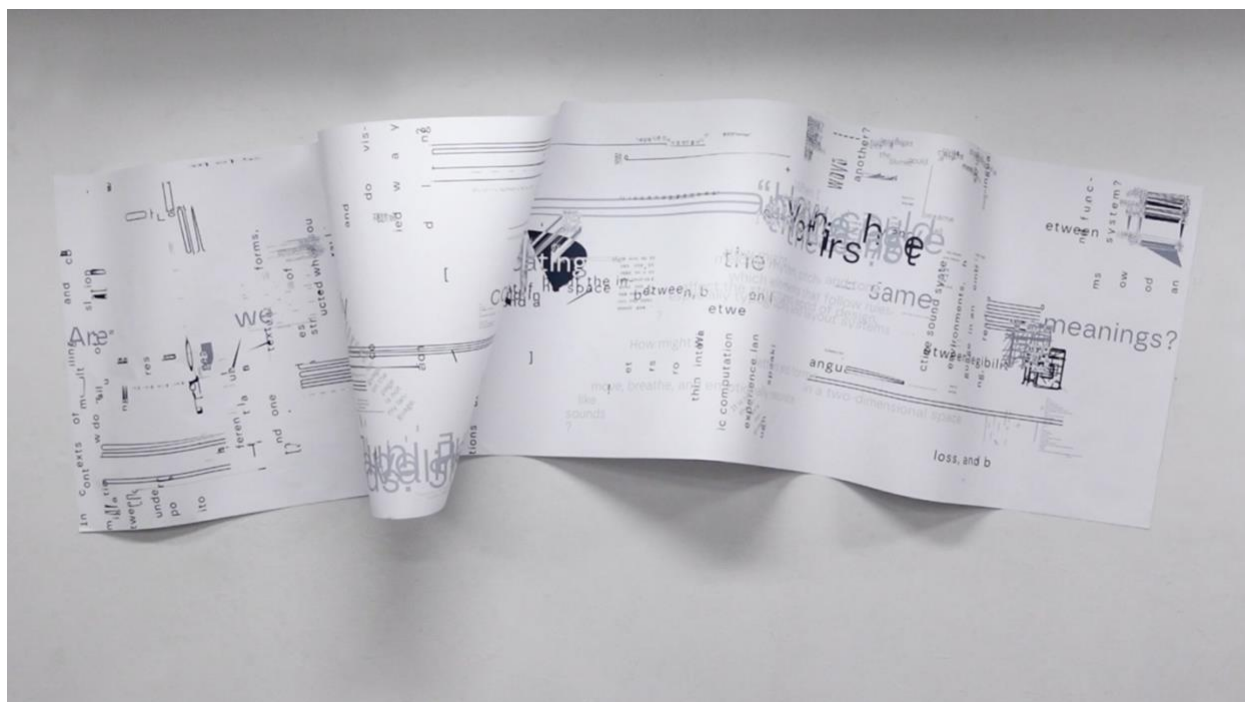


Figure 20 *Conductor's Journal Op.2 (2026)*. Test view 2. March 4, 2026.



Figure 21 *Conductor's Journal Op.2* (2026). Close-up view.

III. Conductor's Journal Op.3

Year: 2026

Medium: Print

Dimensions: 16.5 x 23.4 inches

gumida *sarameun* *nu* ?
 keu *gul* *kka*

Conductor's Journal Op.3 (hereafter referred to as *Op. 3*) presents fragments of thought recorded during field recording sessions, capturing moments of listening as they unfold in real time (see figure 22). The text consists of multilingual notations, including partial sentences, interruptions, and brief reflections that emerge alongside the act of recording sound. Visually, the

typography is dispersed across the page in a non-linear composition. Characters from three languages appear at varying scales and orientations. The layout recalls a suspended or interrupted notation system in which language behaves less like continuous writing and more like scattered signals. This fragmentation reflects the unstable relationship between listening and writing, as thoughts arise in response to sound but are already partial by the time they are inscribed.

The physical installation of *Op. 3* plays a central role in shaping its reading. The print is mounted in one wall of the gallery and allowed to bend outward from the wall, forming a gentle curve. This curvature introduces a three-dimensional deformation to the typographic surface. As a result, the text is never fully visible from a single frontal viewpoint. From below, the viewer encounters elongated shadows cast by both the printed characters and the curved paper itself. These shadows extend and distort the typography. From the side, the work compresses into a thin plane and partially conceals its content. From the front, the viewer encounters a dispersed arrangement of text that appears partially interrupted by the curvature of the paper, with certain elements becoming less legible as they recede into the bend.

This multi-perspectival condition transforms reading into a bodily negotiation with space. The visitor must shift position by approaching, bending, and moving around the work to access different fragments, as no single viewpoint offers a complete reading. Meaning instead emerges through movement, accumulation, and partial visibility. In this sense, the journal operates not only as a record of thought but also as a spatial structure that organizes perception. The bending of the page, the projection of shadows, and the fragmentation of text extend the logic of listening into physical form, where language becomes directional, contingent, and situated, unfolding differently depending on where and how it is encountered.

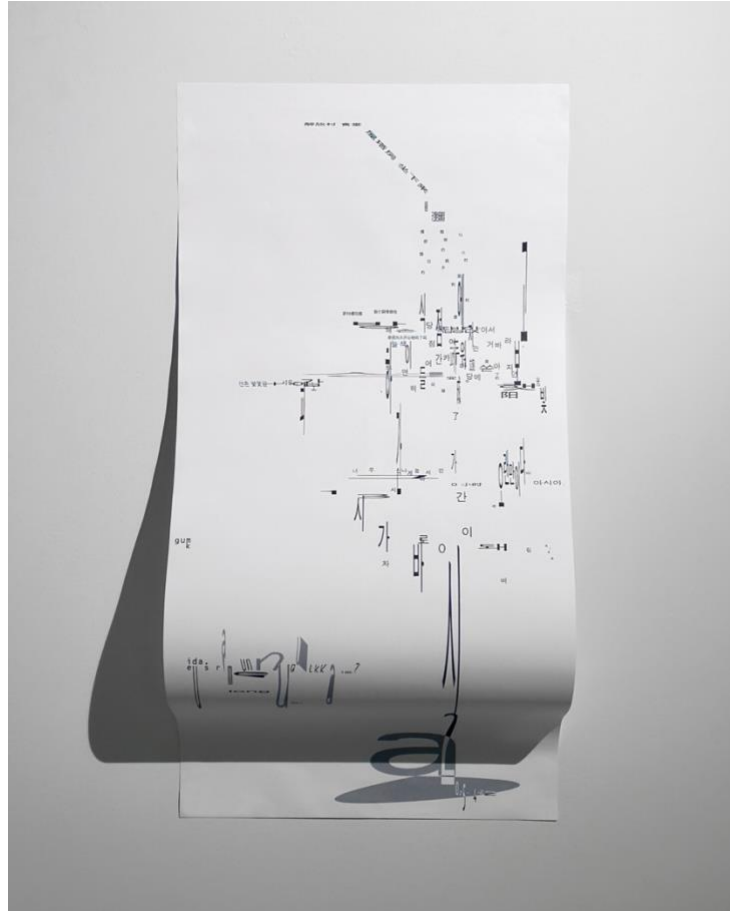


Figure 22 *Conductor's Journal Op.3* (2026). Installation view.

IV. Conductor's Journal Op.4

Year: 2026

Medium: Print

Dimensions: 12 x 18 inches

l
languagedjsdj
ll
lannnnngggg
djsdjjjj
sssss
nti
anqingxiedeshenti
gqingxiedeshentiangqingxiedeshenti
hdm

tjfh dmltjfh dmltjfh dmltjfh dmltjfh dml
l
wnl
wnldirgk adlwnldirgk adlwnldirgk adlwnldirgk adlwnldirgk
adlwnldirgk adlwnldirgk adlwnldirgk adl
dir
aksskfEo
gka
tjfa

Conductor's Journal Op. 4 (hereafter referred to as *Op. 4*) continues the use of journal-based textual fragments, drawing from multilingual notes and reflections developed throughout the project (see figure 23). In contrast to the more fluid and spatially responsive installations of *Op. 1, 2* and *3*, *Op. 4* focuses on the structural role of binding and folding. The print is manually folded into a faceted form, introducing a series of sharp creases that segment the surface into distinct planes. These folds do not simply alter the shape of the paper, they actively reorganize the typographic layout. Text is interrupted, displaced, and redistributed across the folded surfaces. Lines of text are broken at the creases, while characters shift orientation as they move from one plane to another. As a result, reading becomes discontinuous and directional, guided by the geometry of the fold rather than by conventional linear sequencing.

The folds also produce subtle variations in visibility. Certain fragments are partially concealed, while others become more prominent depending on the angle of light and the viewer's position. In this way, the physical structure of the work directly mediates access to language.

Through this exploration of folding, *Op. 4* extends the logic of the *Conductor's Journal* series into a more defined structural condition. The page no longer functions as a continuous surface but as a constructed form in which text is reorganized through material intervention. This shift toward folding as a generative structure also establishes a material and conceptual

foundation for the subsequent works in the *Instruments* series, in which folded paper becomes a recurring element that further develops the relationship between text, sound, and physical form.



Figure 23 *Conductor's Journal Op.4* (2026). Installation view.

Instruments

Instruments series operate as playable structures, functioning as objects that invite interaction, manipulation, and sound-making within the exhibition space. They are not symbolic representations of instruments, but material forms that can be activated through touch and movement.

Each piece in *Instruments No. 1–5* is constructed using folded paper as a primary structural element. The prints are open, reachable, and transformable. Viewers are invited to engage physically with the works by unfolding, pressing, lifting, or moving them, generating subtle sounds through these interactions. In this process, the act of reading shifts toward the act of playing. Conceptually, these works draw from my long-term engagement with musical

notation. Staffs, scores, and annotated music books from my early training in piano form an underlying reference. These materials record how I learned what I consider my “second mother tongue” – music. In *Instruments*, this history is translated into a different form of notation where text and layout function as expanded scores.

The visual presence of the works is developed through scanning and reprocessing archival materials, including my own notes and annotations from piano lessons. Through this process, handwriting, printed notation, and textual fragments are transformed into typographic compositions. Characters are separated into smaller units, rearranged, and reassembled into unfamiliar configurations, shifting their legibility and meaning.

Within the exhibition, viewers are invited to use these works to produce sound and to explore whether the meaning of the printed text changes through playing the “instruments”. As the paper is manipulated, both sound and form emerge simultaneously. Language is no longer fixed on the surface of the page but becomes contingent on interaction, unfolding through touch, movement, and time.

I. Instrument No. 1

Year: 2025-2026

Medium: Print

Dimensions: 49 x 9.5 inches

: i can
hear the sound of the snow falling
piano 练习结束后
 其实
gam
 못 찾겠어...
 相比冬天

...但又回到冬天了
熟悉的练习室
好久未见的钢琴

Instrument No. 1 presents a folded print structured in an accordion-like form, extending vertically along the edge of a plinth and inviting direct physical interaction (figure 24 and 25). Viewers can expand, compress, lift, or pull the paper, activating both its form and sound. The textual content is derived from musical scores that I have practiced on the piano, combined with handwritten annotations taken during lessons and rehearsals. These include markings, reminders, and personal notes inscribed directly onto the scores. In their original context, these notations function as precise instructions for musical performance. Here, folding reconfigures that function. The creases introduce a sequence of new planes that fragment the continuity of the score. Musical notation, staff lines, and handwritten text are distributed unevenly across the folded surfaces, interrupting their linear readability.

Through this process, the semantic clarity of the score is weakened. Instead of serving as a stable system of instruction, the notation becomes a responsive surface that changes through touch and movement. Sound is produced both by the viewer's interaction and through the material resistance of the folded structure itself.

Different modes of interaction generate distinct sonic qualities. Folding and unfolding the paper produces a compressed, rhythmic texture, while stretching and releasing it introduces tension and rebound. When the paper is moved along the edge of the plinth, friction generates a continuous, grain-like sound. Faster or more forceful gestures result in sharper, more percussive sounds. In this way, sound emerges as a direct consequence of both physical gesture and velocity.

These sounds are created by the viewers. During the exhibition, different participants approached the work in distinct ways, producing a wide range of sonic outcomes. In one instance, a viewer lifted the piece and moved it through the air using their entire arm, allowing the folded paper to expand and contract rhythmically. The movement resembled a form of dancing that the viewer's body and the paper became synchronized. As the structure responded to this motion, sound, gesture, and form became closely intertwined.

In *Instrument No. 1*, the printed score is reconfigured as a tactile and acoustic interface. Playing no longer follows the logic of reading notation, it emerges through embodied interaction where sound, movement, and fragmented text coexist and continuously influence one another.



Figure 24 *Instrument No.1* (2026). Installation view.

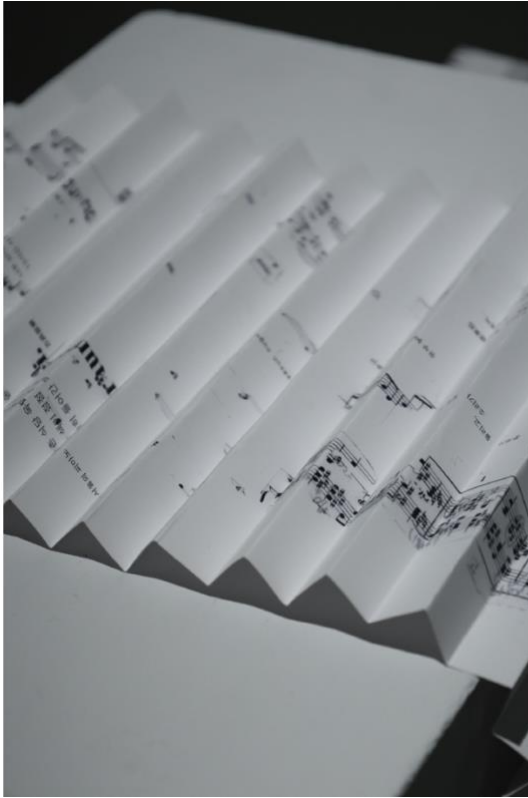


Figure 25 *Instrument No.1* (2026). Close-up view.

II. *Instrument No. 2*

Year: 2026

Medium: Print with iron wire

Dimensions: 8.1 x 31.5 inches

djssj
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§

Instrument No. 2 introduces a suspended structure in which a strip of printed paper is threaded through a curved iron wire (see figure 26). The work is designed to be held and manipulated by the viewer. By lifting the piece and moving the paper along the wire, the viewer can generate motion such as sliding, bouncing, and oscillation. The two sides of the print present different textual conditions. One side incorporates blank musical staff lines alongside fragments of reading notes and excerpts from sheet music that I used during my early piano training. The other side explores typographic arrangements in which language becomes unsettled, with characters dispersed, layered, and partially fragmented.

As the paper moves along the wire, the two conditions continuously shift in relation to each other. The wire functions as both a structural support and a point of tension, allowing the paper to pivot and rebound. This movement creates friction between the paper and the wire, producing subtle sounds while simultaneously altering the visibility and orientation of the text.



Figure 26 *Instrument No.2* (2026). Close-up view.

III. Instrument No.3, No.4 and No.5

Year: 2026

Medium: Prints with threads

Dimensions: Various dimensions

This
research is
not a sEArch for answerS
but
an aTtUnEmEnT tO rEsOnAnCe
the quiet interval
where l a n g u a g e A N D s o u n d
begin to lISTen tO each oTHER.

Instrument No. 3, No. 4, and No. 5 are a series of suspended prints, hung in space with threads at varying heights (figure 27 and 28). Extending the exploration of folded paper⁷⁰ introduced in the *Conductor's Journal*, these works shift the folded surface from a handheld object into a spatial and environmental condition.

Each instrument occupies a different vertical position. *Instrument No. 3* is placed lower, allowing viewers to look down onto its textual surface, while requiring them to bend or crouch to fully access the reverse side of the score. *Instrument No. 4* is suspended at a higher point, drawing the gaze upward. *Instrument No. 5* hangs at mid-height, elongated into a spiral form that unfolds vertically through space (see figure 29).

Subtle air currents in the space animate these suspended forms. Even slight movements of the body, such as walking past or leaning closer, disturb the surrounding air and set the prints into motion. They begin to rotate or twist gently, revealing different surfaces over time. The movement is gradual and continuous, making the transformation of the text perceptible but never fixed. Viewers may also directly touch or strike the instruments. Contact produces delicate, paper-based sounds that vary depending on the force, rhythm, and point of interaction. When displaced, the prints shift from their original positions, extending outward or spiraling off-axis. Yet, due to the tension of the threads and the weight of the material, they gradually return, swinging before settling back into a state of relative stillness.

In this process, the body, air, and material form a responsive system. The viewer does not simply activate the work through touch; even without contact, their presence reorganizes the

⁷⁰ Paul Jackson, *Folding Techniques for Designers: From Sheet to Form* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2011). The visual inspiration for the folding of graphic notation and textual space in this research is partially derived from this book's exploration of morphological transformation.

surrounding environment. Air becomes a mediator of movement, and the instruments begin to perform through a combination of proximity, interaction, and return.

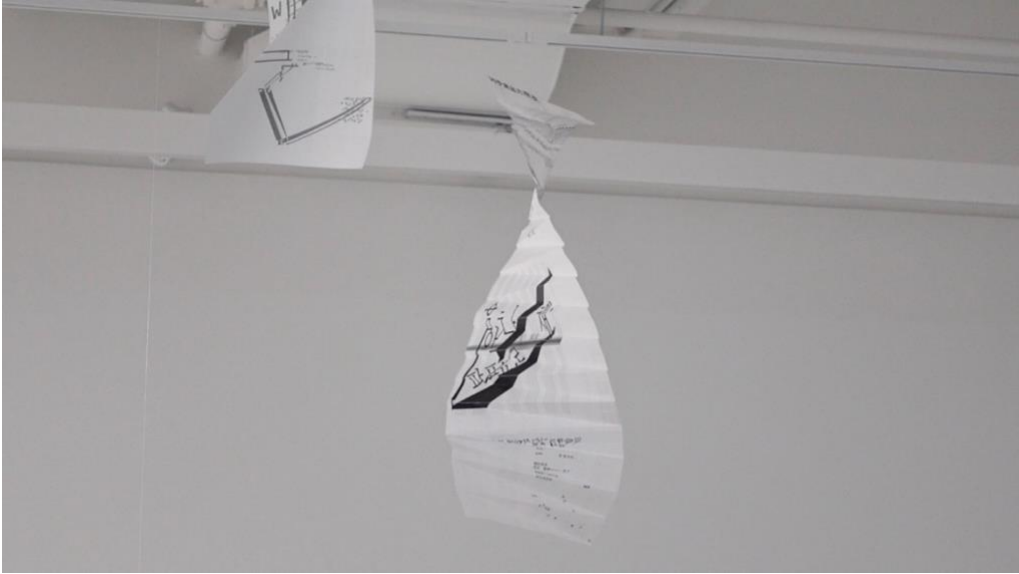


Figure 27 *Instrument No. 4 and 5* (2026). Installation view.

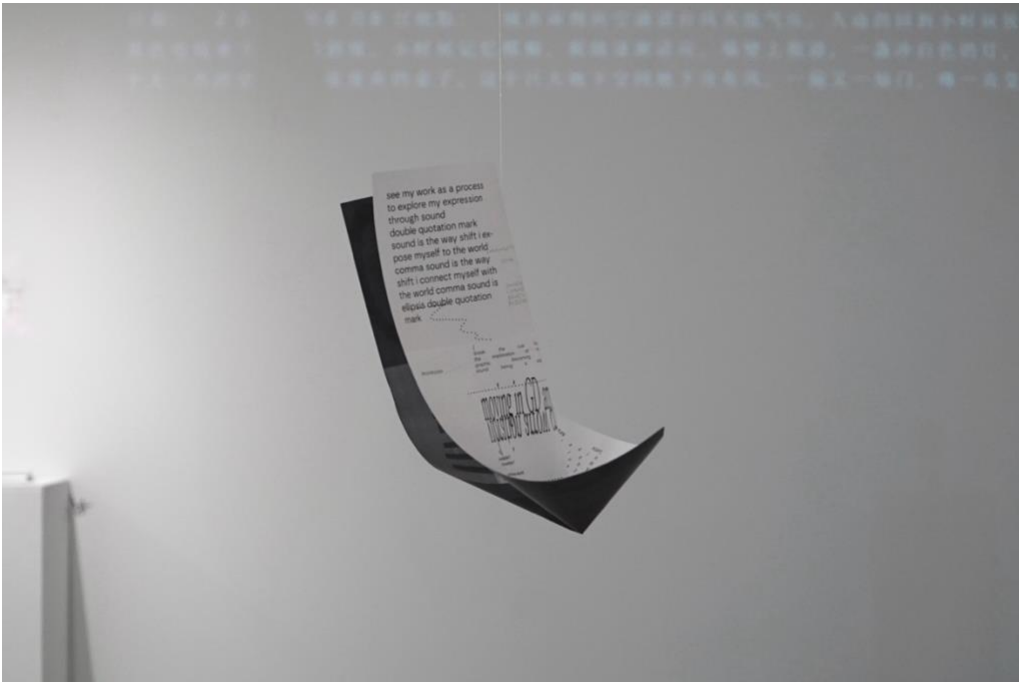


Figure 28 *Instrument No. 3* (2026). Installation view.

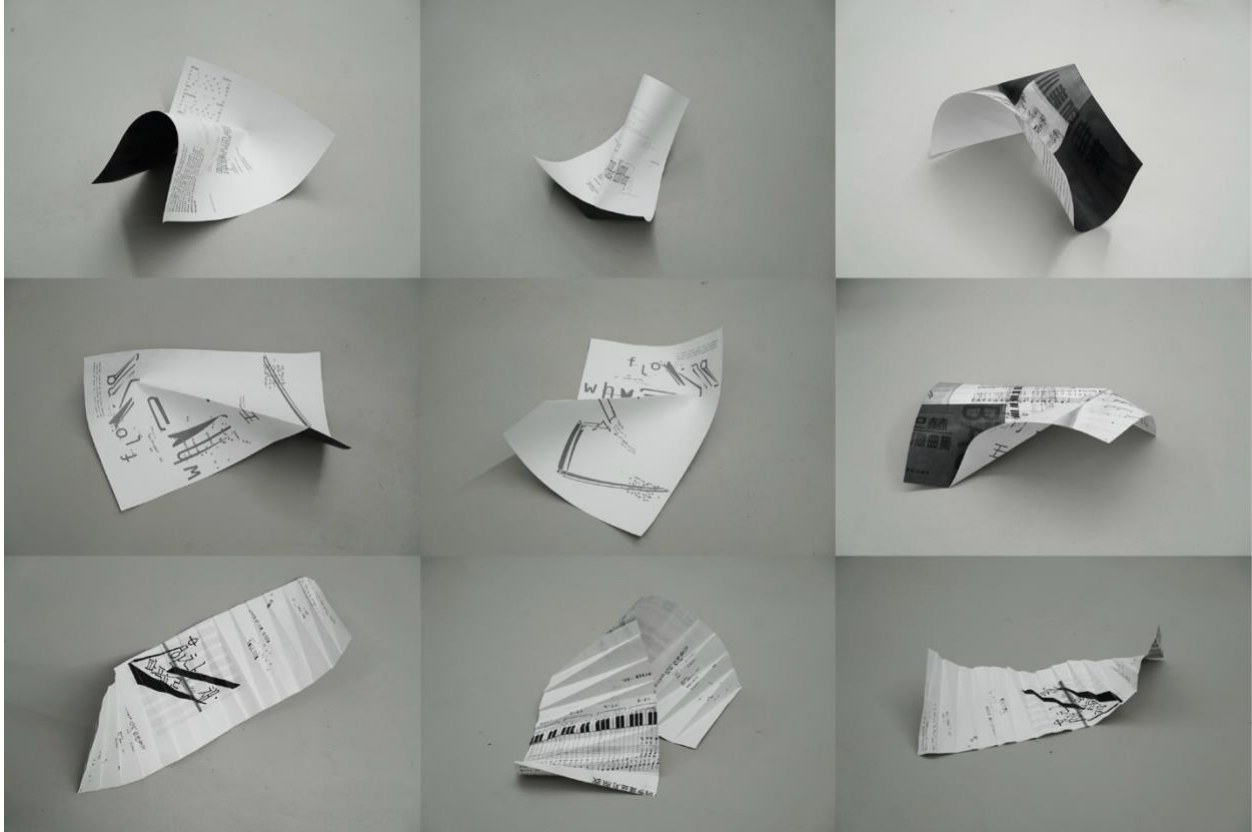


Figure 29 *Instrument No.3–5* (2026). From top to bottom: *Instrument No.3*, *No.4*, and *No.5*. Folding view.

Spatial Leakage of Language

In addition to the primary works presented in the exhibition, a series of dispersed typographic interventions extend language beyond the central structures of screen and print. These vinyl fragments (figure 30, 31 and 32) appear across architectural surfaces on walls, corners, floors, and ceiling edges, occupying positions that are often peripheral, transitional, or easily overlooked. They are operating as spatial residues that unsettle the boundaries of where language is expected to reside.

I refer to this condition as spatial leakage: the movement of language outside of its conventional containers and into the surrounding environment. They are not a stable object for

focused reading, instead, text becomes distributed, partial, and contingent. It emerges at the edges of perception, sometimes legible, sometimes fragmentary, and at times entirely missed.

This spatial strategy reflects the experience of multilingual interference described earlier in this thesis, where reading and listening occur simultaneously and often in conflict. Just as meaning fractures in the presence of overlapping linguistic inputs, these dispersed fragments interrupt the expectation of continuous reading. Viewers encounter language not only in front of them, but around them: beneath their feet, above their heads, and at the limits of their peripheral vision. Attention is constantly redirected, and comprehension becomes unstable.



Figure 30 Spatial leakage moments.

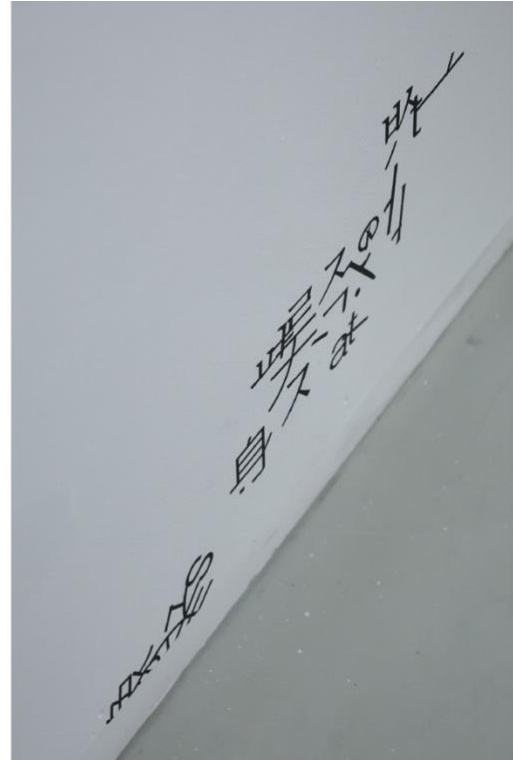


Figure 31 Spatial leakage moments close-up.

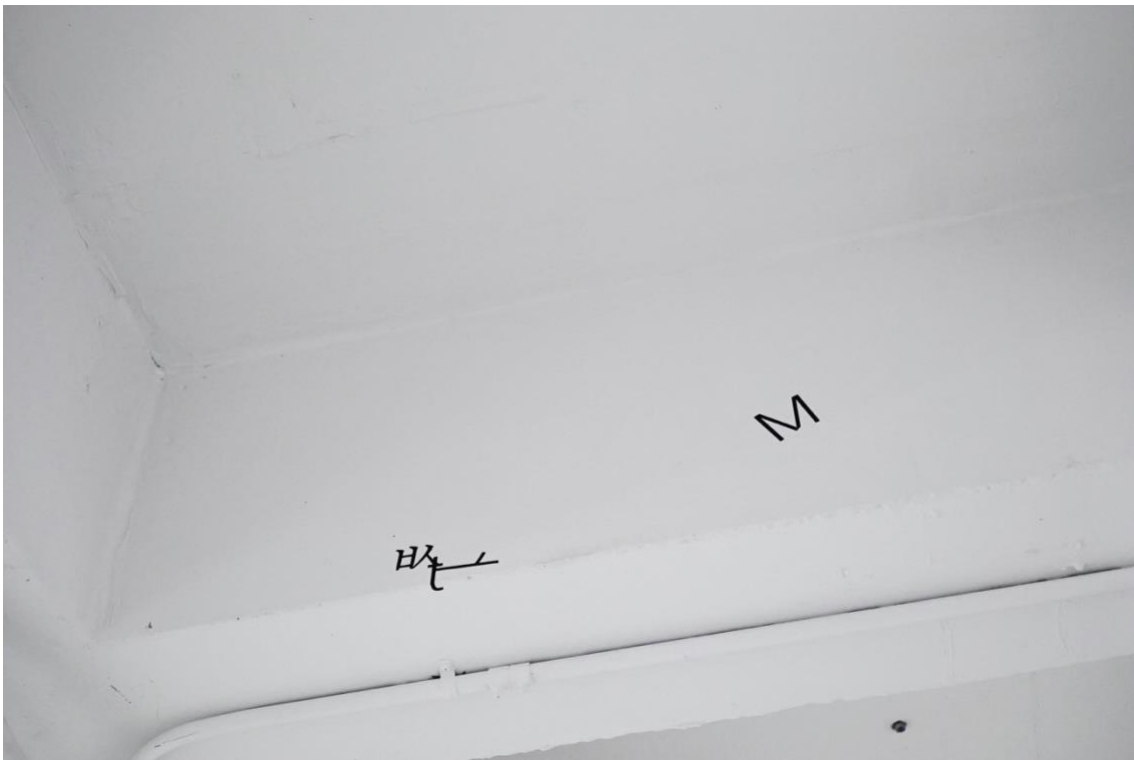


Figure 32 Spatial leakage moments on the ceiling.

The Embodied Experience

Input, ____, output.

What's lost inside?

What will come out at the end?

I. sound (the unsound)

Sound operates across multiple layers within the exhibition. At the level of input, the system receives live auditory conditions generated by the audience, including speech, footsteps, and incidental movements within the space. These are accompanied by deliberately introduced uncertainties, subtle variations and unstable sonic events that resist predictability.

In parallel, an ambient sound layer is continuously present. This sound file is composed from piano improvisations combined with field recordings collected in urban environments. It functions as a latent driver within the system. In moments of relative quiet, it activates and sustains the *Rehearsals* processes, ensuring that the system remains responsive even in the absence of direct audience input.

Sound also exists as output. Through interaction with works such as the *Conductor's Journal* and the *Instrument* series, the audience generates additional sonic events. These sounds feed back into the environment, forming a loop in which listening, action, and response are continuously intertwined.

II. space

The exhibition is situated in Ignite Gallery (east side), OCAD University, and is structured as a responsive spatial system. The layout organizes works along the perimeter of the

gallery, while leaving the central area open (see Appendix B). This arrangement allows visitors to move through the space while being surrounded by projections, printed works, and sound sources. The placement of the *Rehearsals* and printed works creates overlapping zones of visibility and interaction. As visitors circulate, they encounter shifting relationships between projection, text, and material objects. The open central area functions as a transitional field, where movement, pause, and redirection continuously reshape the experience of the work.

Lighting plays a critical role in shaping perception. Selected printed works, including *Conductor's Journal Op.1* and *Instrument No. 3–5*, are intentionally left unlit. Instead, the projected text from *Rehearsal Loop I, II and III* extends beyond the screen and spills onto these surfaces. This creates a condition in which text leaks into the surrounding space and material forms.

Through this spatial configuration, the exhibition produces a tension between containment and dispersion. Works are positioned within defined locations, yet their visual and sonic effects extend across boundaries. The audience navigates a field in which perception is continuously reconfigured through movement, proximity, and attention.

III. body: action & reaction & interaction

The exhibition unfolds through a sequence of actions initiated by the visitor. They speak, move, touch, or remain still. These actions are not directed toward a single interface, but distributed across the environment, including microphones, projections, and physical works. The exhibition sets conditions that invite engagement at different levels of intensity. These actions generate immediate and delayed reactions: sound input alters typographic behavior, movement shifts perception, and touch reconfigures the physical state of the works. Interaction is therefore a

continuous feedback process in which action and reaction remain inseparable. Meaning emerges through this reciprocity, shaped by time, proximity, and repetition.

Spontaneous and unanticipated encounters reveal the most meaningful moments within the system, where the audience moves beyond simple observation to active formation. For example, in *Conductor's Journal Op.2*, a visitor began to manipulate the suspended printed elements with a slow, sweeping gesture. This physical intervention transformed the static, vertical hanging into a flowing, wave-like motion, introducing a liquid-like dynamic to the typography that extended far beyond its original digital conception. In another moment, a visitor approached *Instrument No.1* and *No.2* by moving their entire body in a rhythmic, circular path around the gallery space. This movement allows the works to follow the rhythm of the arm and body, producing new visual and sonic states.

At the same time, certain intended interactions do not always occur spontaneously. Some visitors hesitate to touch the works or produce sound, likely influenced by conventional expectations of gallery behavior that prioritize distant observation. In these cases, interaction often requires subtle prompting. This gap between my design intention and the actual response highlights how interactivity is conditioned by audience habits and spatial cues as much as by the technical system itself.

Within this framework, interaction extends beyond explicit actions to include micro-adjustments of the body. Visitors bend to read, shift position, navigate around suspended works, or linger in response to sound and light. These small gestures accumulate, forming the temporal rhythm of the exhibition. Movement becomes a mode of reading, and perception is continuously reorganized through bodily presence.

Breath plays a central role in this embodied linguistic experience. Beyond literal respiration, breath is understood here as the systemic “engine” that mediates the transitions and rhythmic continuity between linguistic fragments. In the exhibition, this manifested as a shift in the environmental air, which is a metabolic change triggered by the physical displacement of the visitor. The body operates as both input and medium. As visitors entered and navigated the space, their movement modulated the density of the multi-channel soundscape, accelerating the typographic pulse of the projections to match the heightened spatial energy. This interaction transformed the gallery into where the presence of the audience “inhaled” new data into the system, and their departure allowed the environment to settle into a quieter, cyclical stasis. By framing these spatial dynamics as breath, the work grounds the abstract structure of language in the lived, temporal rhythm of the gallery environment.

Coda: Conclusion

The title *Before Language Settles* points to a condition that resists closure. Instead of arriving at resolution, this project has remained within a state of movement where language does not fully stabilize, and where reading, listening, and speaking are continuously entangled.

This fluidity became particularly evident during the exhibition, where the most meaningful moments emerged from the spontaneous participation of the audience. As previously discussed, visitors did not simply receive the work but actively participated in its formation, using their physical presence and gestures to modulate the rhythm of the typography and the density of the soundscape. In these instances, the boundary between body, environment, and instrument dissolved, allowing the air itself to become a performer within the gallery.

Conversations with visitors after the exhibition further expanded this understanding. When I asked a friend who regularly navigates between Korean and English how they experienced unfamiliar Chinese text within the exhibition, they responded that prior knowledge of equivalence between languages allowed them to intuit meaning even without full comprehension. In this way, understanding did not depend on direct translation but on a relational awareness of language systems. In another instance, encountering a familiar place name generated a sense of connection to the artist, suggesting that shared references can bridge linguistic difference.

Beyond these observations, the project contributes to several ongoing conversations in contemporary art and design practice. By inviting visitors to touch, move, and activate the works, it challenges the conventional “do not touch” protocol of the gallery and reframes the visitor not as a passive viewer but as an active component who co-produces the work. At the same time, the project proposes sound as a compositional force, extending typographic practice beyond the two-

dimensional surface into spatial and temporal forms. Together, these gestures suggest that typography, sound, and the body can be brought into a single relational field, one in which the work is completed by both the artist and each encounter that activates it.

Alongside these contributions, the exhibition also revealed a gap between design intention and actual outcome, offering critical lessons in the unpredictability of research-creation. While I envisioned a fluid, intuitive engagement, some visitors remained bound by traditional gallery conventions, hesitating to produce the vocal or physical inputs to activate the system. This reticence suggested that for some, the threshold of permission to touch or speak was not clearly signaled by the spatial cues alone. Technically, the system encountered performance constraints when processing high volumes of input within short durations, leading to a noticeable latency in the software's responsiveness. This computational lag meant that subtle sonic nuances, such as whispers, were occasionally overshadowed by the accumulated ambient noise of the gallery, which strained the real-time processing of the work. Additionally, the process of installation and exhibition introduced unforeseen conditions such as spatial adjustments, lighting decisions, and the removal of certain elements which reshaped how the works operated. In this sense, the project continued to evolve even after it was completed, remaining open to modification and reinterpretation.

Looking forward, what to be expected in the future direction is also something unsettled. The integration of real-time translation systems could extend the interaction between sound and language; expanding the range of languages involved may also introduce new forms of interference and resonance; future work could reintroduce semantic structures more explicitly, exploring how meaning shifts when interaction is tied to linguistic specificity, such as

homophones, polysemy, or tonal variation; the project may continue through sound-based improvisation, treating composition as an ongoing and responsive practice.

Language does not settle; it continues to move, overlap, and transform. In this unsettled state, meaning is not fixed but negotiated, not delivered but experienced. *Before Language Settles* exists not as a conclusion but an opening where language continues to unfold.

Appendices

Appendix A: Exhibition Visual Identity

I. Exhibition Poster



Figure 33 Exhibition poster.

II. Invitation⁷¹



Figure 34 Exhibition invitation in a mailbox.



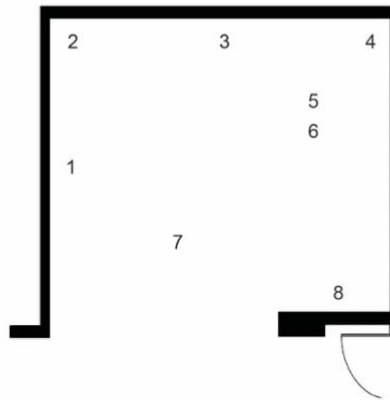
Figure 35 Exhibition invitation inclusions: a post card, an invitation folding card, an exhibition information bi-fold brochure, a business card.

⁷¹ Video available on https://www.instagram.com/p/DWXx4eFEX1Q/?img_index=1.

Appendix B: Exhibition Floor Plan

Before Language Settles

March 4 – 8
Yuxuan (Sherry) Lin



1. Rehearsal Loop I, II and III, 2026
Digital projection, microphone
1920 x 1080 pixels, various dimensions

2. Conductor's Journal Op. 1, 2026
Print
16.5 x 23.4 inches

3. Conductor's Journal Op. 2, 2026
Print
30 x 150 inches

4. Rehearsal Loop IV, 2026
Digital projection, microphone
Various dimensions

5. Instrument No. 1, 2026
Print
48 x 9.5 inches

6. Instrument No. 2, 2026
Print with iron wire
8.1 x 31.5 inches

7. Instrument No. 3-5, 2026
Prints with thread
Various dimensions

8. Conductor's Journal Op. 3, 2026
Print
16.5 x 23.4 inches



Figure 36 Exhibition Floor Plan based on Ignite Gallery east side.

Appendix D: Statement on Generative AI Usage

The author acknowledges the use of ChatGPT [chat.openai.com], Gemini [gemini.google.com], and Claude [claude.ai] as secondary tools for code polishing and debugging for Processing sketches documented in the “Rehearsals” section of the “Performance” chapter. Additionally, AI was used to assist with English language syntax and structural transitions. The final code and text remain the original work of the author, who maintains full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this thesis.

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