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Lines of Flight

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Can the act of gliding perform also as an act of writing? The sweeping movements of a glider aircraft through the sky already inscribe a range of transient, circular traces—an asemic script that is written at the intersection between wind, wing, and piloting ability. Can these gestures provide the basis for more complex acts of inscription, in which human and atmospheric agencies combine to parse the vital experience of flight into poetry? *Lines of Flight* is a series of volumetric poems depicting the entanglements of wind, wing, and flying technique that constitute the airborne encounter. This creative-critical piece visualises a number of tracked glider flights in three dimensions, and uses this tracking data to generate a lexical poem along the route taken. As a form of inscription enabled through a multitude of intersecting airborne forces and volumes, this project enacts a creative-critical exploration of what writing the air can tell us about human relationships with the more-than-human world.

Introduction

Lines of Flight is a sequence of volumetric digital poems exploring the entanglements of wind, wing, and flying technique that constitute the airborne encounter. These poems seek to depict the human and more-than-human registers of atmospheric flight from which they have emerged, while gesturing toward the histories, infrastructures, and media environments that entwine them.

Lines of Flight was inspired by my own perspective on the airborne encounter as a glider pilot, as well as an artist and an academic. The practical demands of reading and negotiating a fluctuating aerial environment has brought a range of visceral experiences into dialogue with my growing understanding of what it means to think *about* and *with* the atmospheric domain. These poems are an attempt at articulating these understandings—to crystallize them in a format that can do justice to the rich possibilities of thought and expression they suggest.

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There is presently no shortage of academic, artistic, and popular representations of aviation. Nevertheless, these accounts all tend to foreground (and often celebrate) the power of human agency and technical ingenuity, or concentrate on the wider martial, environmental, and social consequences of flying activities, rather than explore its actual immediacies as a worldly experience. In making *Lines of Flight*, I am thus attempting a different kind of aerial narrative, making space for reflection on the immediacies of piloted flight as a very particular negotiation with the more-than-human aspects of being.

Practically stated, *Lines of Flight* parses the circuitous routes of a soaring glider into volumetric poetry, employing a combination of technologies ranging from the aircraft itself, to GPS infrastructures, web canvas graphics, and an “aeolian language model.” The arcing flight path of a glider already inscribes an infinite range of transient patterns across the sky, tracing the material intersection of atmosphere, aerodynamics, and embodied skill. For *Lines of Flight*, I have visualized a series of my own tracked gliding flights over the course of 2023 and 2024. Recording these flights across three dimensions—latitude, longitude, and altitude—the generated vectors are taken up by a form of AI algorithm that assembles and plots a volumetric lexical poem along the rendered flight path.

While the detailed specifics of this arrangement are discussed within the extensive internal commentary that accompanies these poems, it is enough for now to characterize *Lines of Flight* as a mode of inscription carried through numerous human, technical, and atmospheric agencies—depicting the airborne encounter as a generative space of emerging potentials between them.

There are various ways of reading *Lines of Flight*, whether simply by tracing the visualized gliding tracks, as a form of asemic scripture, or by drawing out possible semantic associations between the constituent words of each generated poem, or to consider the collection in its entirety as a catalyst for wider critical reflection. I developed *Lines of Flight* as a way of expressing my own outlook on these critical potentials: as an apparatus for bringing into dialogue various concepts, practices, and attitudes that may typically be considered apart, but whose demonstrable resonances and connections can enrich our thoughts concerning all of them. Apposite to its volumetric premise, the effect is not a definitive vector, a distinct “answer,” regarding how we might conceptualize human and atmospheric relations, but a space of possible critical relations and refractions.

Notes for Reading

Lines of Flight can be viewed at the link below this introductory text. It is suitable only for wide-screen desktop browsing, and can only be accessed using such. On starting, it activates full-screen viewing and plays with an ambient instrumental prelude.

An extensive internal commentary accompanies the featured poems, outlining the concepts and inspiration behind the series, and there is a full set of bibliographic references.

<https://richardacarter.com/LOF/index.html>

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