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"Cuneiforms from Beyond": Ivan Stanev's *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*

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Yasna Bozhkova

- 1 *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian* is an ongoing online project by Ivan Stanev,¹ which creates a unique hybrid form on the verge between two media—poetry and film. The poems are published as part of a broader intermedial project called TTV,² broadcast "live from Todessa". In the portmanteau word "Todessa," the German word for death, *Tod*, is conflated with the name of the city of Odessa in Ukraine, and it thus becomes the locus of an imaginary poetic netherworld. A modern version of the Kurnugû, the Sumerian-Akkadian "Land of no Return"³, Todessa is the space "beyond", situated on an unidentified deserted beach, a liminal space between land and sea, somewhere between a remote past and a remote future, between the origins of civilization and a posthuman⁴ modernity. The film-poems broadcast live from this poetic "beyond" are conceived as intermedial clay tablets, on which surge fragments in a composite poetic idiom—called "posthuman Akkadian"—that hinges on a radical conflation of different forms of signifiers, mingling fragments of a multiplicity of ancient and modern languages in a Babel-like mixture. These film-poems telescope the history of writing and human civilization itself through a palimpsestic interpenetration and cross-fertilization of different strata. Thus, the poems create complex dialogues between different ancient and modern writing forms, systems, and surfaces—cuneiform signs traced in the clayey surface of the white cliffs of Todessa's deserted beach, an obsolete-looking typewriter with Slavic characters incongruously producing proto-Elamite signs⁵ on its white page, and the digital writing surging on the computer screen which is, in this case, superimposed on a film screen. Inspired by the hesitation between the pictorial and the abstract in the cuneiform script, which began as a system of pictograms, and in the course of a few millennia evolved into a system of completely

abstract signs, the project attempts to create a hybrid intermedial grammar which endlessly oscillates between word and image by bridging the gap between the language of poetry and the language of film.

- 2 This composite and intermedial poetic idiom situates itself at the crossroads between different thematic and aesthetic concerns in modernist, avant-garde and contemporary poetics. On one level, it explores the legacy of the Modernist turn to mythology, ancient cultures and the vestiges of tradition to reinvent the present (in the works of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, H.D., and others) as well as the poetic experimentation with signifiers belonging to different languages or media began by Pound. On another level, it resonates with more contemporary experiments in poetry, visual art, and performance which explore the notion of the "posthuman", prompted by the unprecedented rise of technology's power on human society and the irreversible changes it entails on artistic creation.⁶ Finally, in its attempt to bring together poetry and film, Stanev's experiment engages with the nascent genre of video poetry, yet brings the constraints of this genre to an unexpected complexity.⁷
- 3 This article aims to explore the proliferating strata of meaning created by this hybrid grammar combining apparently incompatible systems of signifiers, and also focuses on how this allows to create passages between remote temporal strata. *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian* creates a complex temporality which oscillates between the origins of human civilization and a posthuman modernity: the turn to the archaic paradoxically becomes a means to put in dialogue the spectral traces of human memory which haunt our contemporary age with the horizon of a future after the demise of human civilization. In order to explore how the dislocated temporality of this imaginary world becomes a way to articulate an extreme contemporary poetics, I draw on Giorgio Agamben's definition of the contemporary as a form of radical dys-chrony:

Those who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands. They are thus in this sense irrelevant [*inattuale*]. [...] Contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it [...] *through a disjunction and an anachronism*. Those who coincide too well with the epoch, those who are perfectly tied to it in every respect, are not contemporaries, precisely because they do not manage to see it; they are not able to firmly hold their gaze on it. (Agamben 40-41, his emphasis)

- 4 In the same essay, Agamben introduces the related notion of the "untimely", quoting Roland Barthes' reflection that "[t]he contemporary is the untimely" (qtd. in Agamben 40), which itself refers to Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* (*Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*). I will argue that *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*'s turn to the archaic is not to be interpreted as a form of romantic nostalgia, but as a means to create what Agamben calls "a singular relationship with one's own time", a strategic untimeliness which "firmly hold[s] [its] gaze on" the present by addressing it obliquely.

"Cephalopoetic relics": between hypermnnesia and aphasia

- 5 The project turns to the cuneiform script as a means to explore the origins of writing and collective memory as a whole. The smooth white surface of a clayey cliff on Todessa's deserted beach becomes a gigantic clay tablet, a *tabula rasa* of memory on

which the hand of an unidentified sole survivor in a posthuman world traces cuneiform signs. Gradually filled with a Babel-like mixture of other "cephalopoetic relics",⁸ this blank surface is eventually transformed into "the repository of all writing", as Roland Barthes puts it; it seems that the writing "is born from the surface itself" (Barthes 161-162). While English seems to be the main linguistic framework holding this inter-linguistic web together, ironically hinting at the growing importance of English as the language of globalization and the Internet, it is radically destabilized by incongruous intrusions of words and characters from a multiplicity of other languages and scripts, among which Sumerian, Akkadian, Proto-Elamite, Ancient Greek, Latin, Russian, German, French, Italian and Spanish. The very intrusion of the Cyrillic sign "э" in "cephalopoetic" is emblematic of this (con)fusion of different systems of signifiers. As the opening lines of the first poem called "Lullaby"⁹ suggest, the project works toward developing a new composite "posthuman" poetic idiom, which brings together the traces of a variety of ancient and modern languages, and radically puts poetic meaning in crisis:

Let me write a poem

/ прекрасная /

in posthuman Akkadian
or broken Alien

/ и очень грустная /

about the worAd bubbles
to come, about the cosmic
voids of expanding aphasia,

let me mix an ur-vocal track
with a high-end consumer hymn

- 6 Here, the main body of the poem is destabilized by the intrusion of spectral, haunting voices in Russian on the right, which describe the poem as "ПРЕКРАСНАЯ" (marvellous) but also "ОЧЕНЬ ГРУСТНАЯ" (very melancholy). The word "word" is split in two by the intrusion of the Ancient Greek letter lambda (λ, a letter which also exists in the Cyrillic alphabet), announcing the inter-linguistic and intercultural word-worlds that follow. These word-worlds systematically mingle not only different languages but also apparently incompatible linguistic registers, creating problematic links between poetic, scientific, and mainstream, popular discourse, as for instance in "lowcost myoma de amor", "epitaph-bestseller" or "bubblegum marche funèbre", to take but a few examples.¹⁰ The result is a poetic diction which verges on the unreadable, and whose jarring heterogeneity radically challenges the very possibility of meaning. The poetic voice lacks a clear origin and unified subjectivity, and ostensibly functions as the vehicle of an extreme collective hypermnnesia, ringing with spectral voices disconnected from their origins, "like a ventriloquist pregnant with / the bursting echo

↔ voices / of decomposed panegirici celebri".¹¹ On the other hand, the radical fragmentation and destabilization of meaning created through the cacophony of different languages and abrupt shifts of register seems to reflect the "expanding aphasia" of our contemporary age, the impairment of the ability of modern man to read and write poetry. The project questions the very idea of a poetic subjectivity in a "posthuman" future, and ironically plays with the idea that these disconnected poetic voices, part of a collective archive of human memory, are possibly generated through artificial intelligence or through chance operations like listening to a playlist in an arbitrary mode or, in the case of the images, zapping between channels. Thus, the poems ironically oscillate between the idea of an "ur-vocal track" and a "consumer hymn", between the archaic and the postmodern.

- 7 The poem “Clay Tablets”¹² is emblematic of this conflation of disparate languages and systems of signifiers to create a Babel-like confusion, a “Babylon-Blabla”¹³:

It happened in *Birūt Nārim*,
/ Mesopotamia dot com /
the melting pot
between Sumer, Akkad,
Aparl – Chad
and Boden – SSee –

The Rotten Sprachbund entre les fleuves,
The Brothel-Language-Federation.
Языковой союз
как кара,
как главный грех / см.: Трубцкой, Н. С. /.

- 8 As these lines suggest, the locus of the poems is somewhere between “*Birīt Nārim*” (an archaic name for Mesopotamia) and the inter-linguistic mishmash of the Internet (“Mesopotamia dot com”). In these multilingual clay tablets, English, German, French, and Russian coexist in the same line (“Rotten Sprachbund entre les fleuves”) and even in the same word (“АРАЛ-Chad”). This linguistic cross-fertilization ironically draws on the Sumerian-Akkadian “language union” (“Sprachbund” in German and “ЯЗЫКОВОЙ СОЮЗ” in Russian, another instance of the poems’ use of scientific diction), a linguistic term referring to the fact that both languages used the cuneiform script, but the Akkadian civilization, which came later in time, endowed the cuneiform signs with completely different phonetic and semantic characteristics.
- 9 “[M]ade from recycled afterlife”, these multilingual relics are advertised as “big-bang resistant” and “dark-matter-proved”:

INDEED, said I, we need

tuppu (m)

clay tablets
made from recycled afterlife,
big-bang-resistant,
dark-matter-proved
and polished with eternal stuff

/ Вселенная тоже смертная /

- 10 As the cuneiform fragments are intermingled with the idiom of contemporary science, the archaic tablets become survivors in a posthuman universe: a melancholy Russian voice again intrudes in the parentheses, adding “ВСЕЛЕННАЯ ТОЖЕ СМЕРТНАЯ” (the universe is also mortal). While the use of “also” leaves it strategically unclear who or what else is mortal, the poem oscillates between images of mortality and images of the eternal (“recycled afterlife”, “eternal stuff”), pinpointing the increasing lack of transcendence and eschatological vision in a contemporary world dominated by science, and suggesting that humanity’s strife to transcend its own mortality through science may lead to the demise of the soul and the poem as a way to express its subjectivity. Through the paratactic juxtaposition of incompatible systems of signifiers, the poems create an ironic sense of relativity: it is as though these semi-decipherable poetic relics are inscribed on an asteroid in outer space, and the fragmented lines in modern languages like English, French, German and Russian have become just as archaic and as difficult to read as the cuneiform for “clay tablet”, helpfully transliterated as “*tuppu (m)*”. Interestingly, to the contemporary reader lacking the scholarly knowledge to decipher this cuneiform, the shape of this cuneiform sign strangely resembles an antique architectural monument, a *camera obscura* or even a movie camera, which of course may be completely irrelevant in a study of cuneiforms *per se*, but becomes significant in a poetry that hinges on a form of radical postmodern “language union”, taking the signifiers out of their original context and endowing them with new significations.

The screen as a clay tablet: intermedial meaning

- 11 Adding the “language” of film to the language of poetry further complicates the “Babylon-Blabla”: as the project unfolds, the very space of the screen starts to function as a clay tablet. Crucially, the poems create an ambiguity between the computer screen (which increasingly displaces the white page as the space where poetry is written, published and read in our contemporary age of digital poetry) and the screen on which film footage is projected. The intermedial dimension of *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian* is rooted in the ambivalence of the cuneiform script itself: it began as a system of

pictograms and grew increasingly abstract over time, marking a transition toward the abstract signs that constitute modern alphabets. While Ezra Pound's famously turned to the Chinese ideogram to articulate his modernist poetics, and filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein also later turned to the ideogram in his essay "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram" to articulate his seminal theory of montage, no one has yet tried to actually explore the pictorial origins of writing by turning to the medium of film. Because of the evolution of the cinematic art into a lucrative industry in the second half of the twentieth and the early twenty-first century, it seems more problematic today to combine the media of poetry and film than it might have been in the era of the historical avant-gardes. *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian* make productive use of this tension: on the one hand, they return to the origins of film as an experimental and fundamentally poetic medium, recalling the proximity between Pound's modernist poetics and Eisenstein's montage techniques. On the other hand, the use of a "TV" platform for the publication of the works suggests that Stanev does not hesitate to explore the growing contemporary association of film with mass entertainment which makes it seem fundamentally problematic to combine film with poetry. The project explores this tension by playfully adopting the vocabulary of TV series: new film-poems are published as "episodes" and divided in "seasons". Nonetheless, on this TV channel, the "breaking news" are "always from yesterday":¹⁴ the old TV set stranded on Todessa's deserted beach and bathed by the waves functions as the receptacle of the "posthuman" "cephalopoetic relics" disconnected from their origins. This device, which "broadcasts" a poetic and mythological apparatus that is equally obsolete, ironically comments on the "aphasia" of contemporary humans who are constantly bombarded with images by the media, and raises with unexpected poignancy the pressing question about the very possibility of being "poetic" in an era which no longer is. Using experimental montage techniques, the footage shot by Stanev and his team is often combined with documentary and archival material sarcastically commenting on politics, historical and current events and past or present scientific discoveries. This contributes to the reader-viewer's growing impression that he or she is randomly "zapping" between channels in a collective archive of human memory. For example, in "Space Monkey" and "The President's Address", the two films that appear just before the beginning of *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*, Todessa's broken TV set unexpectedly broadcasts actual archival footage of a monkey sent to outer space, and then switches to a 1927 speech by Benito Mussolini, where he salutes Italian immigrants to the US who are "working to make America great", strikingly echoing Donald Trump's presidential campaign slogan in 2016. Thus, the seemingly otherworldly reality of Todessa is sarcastically endowed with an unexpected relevance to current events, which suggests that the "posthuman" world of the poems is possibly the result of an unspecified catastrophe brought about by the past and present hubris of political leaders and scientists among others.

- 12 While the poems taken separately, as texts,¹⁵ are challenging enough even for a reader accustomed to the experimental techniques of modernist and contemporary avant-garde poetry, adding the medium of film multiplies the proliferation of meanings, since the white spaces of the page are suddenly invaded by moving images, which triggers an endless crisscrossing and cross-fertilization between the techniques of poetry and the techniques of filmic montage. While at times word and image point in radically different semantic directions, at others they create correspondences or even ironic word-image "tautologies", as at the beginning of the poem "Pictogram", where the

white space between the poetic signifiers is superimposed with the image of a dagger that literally "unearths" meaning from the clay tablet of memory:

Fig.1 : Ivan Stanev, Frame from "Pictogram", *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*

The dagger here functions as a stylus, the tool used to incise the cuneiform signs in the clay, which also provided the etymological origin of the term "style". This image defines poetic writing as an archeological excavation of relics.

- 13 In the next frame, the ironic intrusion of a Russian "explanation" in parentheses makes it clear that the small rock plant that has just been uprooted by the stylus functions as a pictogram for "meaning":

Fig.2 : Ivan Stanev, Frame from "Pictogram", *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*

The Russian lines translate as "supreme meaning – that / is a primitive plant". If the poem is taken simply as text, the deictic "that" ("это" in Russian) clearly refers to the idea of "supreme meaning" just before it, but in the film-poem the gap between them is filled with an actual image of a "primitive plant" ("НИЗШЕЕ РАСТЕНИЕ"). Thus, the poems constantly create a tension between superimposed pictorial and abstract forms of "writing".

- 14 Although some frames create such ironic word-image tautologies, the images are never simple illustrations to the poems. Instead, they function as strata of meaning, creating a cross-fertilization between the poetic image and the film image: one constantly triggers, questions, qualifies or magnifies the other. Thus, the film version reads differently from the text version, since in the film version the reader can see only one or two lines at a time, slowing down the reading process, and the superimposition of the poetic image with the film image functions as a catalyst which sets both in motion. For instance, the opening line of the poem "Crab Nebula" is superimposed with a close-up view of an empty crab-shell surrounded by a "nebula" of swarming minute flies:

Fig.3 : Ivan Stanev, Frame from "Crab Nebula", *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*

Here, the use of the colon creates a direct causal link between the two layers, suggesting that this nebula of flies may be seen as a form of "proto-writing". In turn, this triggers the lines that follow: "I needed flying letters, / des mouches significatives / devant les yeux"¹⁶. Catalyzed by the film image, the meta-textual link between the flies and the poetic signifiers grows increasingly explicit:

Fig.4 : Ivan Stanev, Frame from "Crab Nebula", *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*

This frame suggests that the letters themselves should be seen as "mouches significatives" (literally "significant flies") or flying signifiers. The project thus takes to a new dimension Mallarmé's seminal idea of the "alphabet of the stars" (Mallarmé 216).

- 15 As these examples show, bringing together the media of poetry and film results in a radical slowing down of the reading process: often only a single line, word or even sign are shown at a time, and the shifts between them are delayed. This results in an extreme fragmentation of the poetic discourse, but it also forces the "aphasic" modern reader, used to action and speed, to take in each word and image. The result is a form of thinking poetry, where the fragmented poetic lines superimposed with the images on the screen impregnate the mind of the reader and seem to trigger the lines to follow. Collage techniques are also used within the frame itself, further complexifying the superimposition of different strata:

Fig.5 : Ivan Stanev, Frame from "Crab Nebula", *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*

In this frame, the black-and-white documentary image of a human embryo becomes another form of "proto-writing"—a "metaphysical emoticon" inserted in the crab's exoskeleton. Other film-poems employ specifically cinematic techniques like double exposure, like this frame from the poem "Kurnugû":

Fig.6 : Ivan Stanev, Frame from "Kurnugû", *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*

- 16 Here, the crepuscular view of Todessa's poetic netherworld is superimposed with a close-up image of the gigantic "transcendental / firefly squid" appearing in the text. In this palimpsest, the moon functions as the eye of the squid. The V-like shape of the text echoes both the form of the squid itself and the shape of the bifurcating branch which straddles the moon, and thus becomes an image for the "bioluminescent / vacuum arc" of the widening "time gap". The fade-in fade-out effect used in the double exposure may also be seen as a temporal V-shape, multiplying the formal correspondences between image and text.

"Backbone à écrire"¹⁷: writing between embodiment and abstraction

- 17 As the examples discussed above demonstrate, the film images never function as simple illustrations to the poetic image. Rather, they can be seen as embodiments of the thinking process (like the giant squid above), which create a perpetual hesitation between the pictorial and the abstract. In poem "The Eridu Genesis", the film layer superimposed with the poetic layer similarly draws the reader's attention to the visual materiality of the letters, playfully linking the modern abstract letters to the pictorial dimension of the cuneiform signs:

Fig.7 : Ivan Stanev, Frame from "The Eridu Genesis", *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*

- 18 This poem is superimposed on a close-up image of two worms writhing about on the beach before they are washed away by the waves. This beach scene telescopes several different allusions, such as the "Eridu Genesis" suggested in the title, a Mesopotamian myth in which the gods determine to destroy mankind with a flood, but also the famous lines from Shakespeare's Sonnet 60 of the waves broken on the shore, a quintessential image of human mortality: "Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore, / so do our minutes hasten to their end" (Shakespeare 125). What is important is that the visual configuration of the worms in the frame above triggers the idea of the letters themselves as "wandering larvæ", as suggested by isolating the sign "æ" between the two wriggling worms and reinforced by the alliteration between "larvae" and "letters". These wandering larvae-letters, which are also incarnations of the deathworm, are washed away by the waves, transforming the beach into an image of human consciousness as an endless *tabula rasa*, but then, as in the next frame these larvae-letters are superimposed on a frame from a black-and-white documentary scientific film about human reproduction, they suddenly become embodiments of the writhing shapes of human spermatozoa:

Fig.8 : Ivan Stanev, Frame from "The Eridu Genesis", *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*

In this frame, the visually isolated adverb "ashore" becomes the embodiment of the only spermatozoid which has managed to penetrate the walls of the ovum, the refuge that the spermatozoa are seeking to enter. The circular shape of the letter "o"—which carries the stress in "ashore"—reinforces this idea. While in the previous frame the writhing (death)worm curling up on itself is visually compared to a comma, here the final period of the poetic sentence finds its visual equivalent in the haploid nucleus of the gamete, thereby transforming the end of the sentence into a new beginning. Thus, as the play between word and image in the poem unravels, the beginning and ending of life and civilization as a whole are enmeshed in an endless cycle.

- 19 Another example of the omnipresent hesitation between embodiment and abstraction is the poem "Ninurta's Return", where an acephalous human body with a typewriter head, a strange castaway stranded on Todessa's deserted beach, becomes the modern reincarnation of the Mesopotamian god Ninurta:

Fig.9 : Ivan Stanev, Frame from "Ninurta's Return", *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*

Here, the "posthuman Akkadian" idiom turns to the use of Proto-Elamite symbols, which are among the few archaic forms of writing that remain undeciphered even today. The enigmatic Proto-Elamite characters are paradoxically both abstract¹⁸ and curiously rich in potential pictorial associations, which makes them function in particularly effective ways as they are radically reinterpreted in the film-poems. In the example above, the old typewriter with Cyrillic letters has seemingly produced¹⁹ a Proto-Elamite symbol which, to a modern reader, strongly recalls the shape of a backbone or fishbone:

With its pointed shapes, it also resembles the stylus used for tracing the cuneiforms in the clay as well as an antenna, suggesting that the human backbone should be seen as both a writing instrument and as a broadcasting device. Thus, this sign, whose original meaning is irrevocably lost, is "translated" as a "backbone à écrire" (a multilingual pun between a backbone and a *machine à écrire*, the French for typewriter), i.e. a stylus-antenna allowing the communication between remote antiquity and this "posthuman" modernity.

- 20 In "The Tablet of Destinies", two other Proto-Elamite symbols are used in a similar way, anachronistically "translated" as "DORN.SOLEIL" (a thorn-sun) and "SABLIER.KEIL" (an hourglass-wedge):

- 21 Through these multilingual puns, Stanev ostensibly plays with the pictorial resemblance of these signs to the human body: in the "thorn-sun" (left), the dark "sun" clearly resembles a human head, and in the "hourglass-wedge" (right), the head has been replaced by a Janus-faced sign that resembles an hourglass marking the passage of time. The V-shapes of the signs also recall the widening "time-gap" from "Kurnugû". Through its juxtaposition with these signs, the acephalous human body with a typewriter head, who seems to be the only survivor in Todessa's posthuman world, is also transformed into a composite walking signifier, a living embodiment of the sign:

Fig.10 : Ivan Stanev, Frame from "The Tablet of Destinies", *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*

- 22 Of course, seeing an "hourglass-wedge" in this Proto-Elamite sign is completely anachronistic since the hourglass as an object would not have existed at the time those symbols were conceived. Nonetheless, to a modern reader, to whom the original meaning of the sign is perhaps irrevocably lost, this association is undeniable, and through its modern reinterpretation the sign becomes endowed with an unexpected metaphysical dimension. This ironic gesture of finding modern "translations" for archaic symbols whose meaning has been lost replicates the Sumerian-Akkadian

"language union" (the fact that the two civilizations endowed the cuneiform script with different phonetic and semantic characteristics) and becomes a means of creative (mis)communication between remote temporal strata.

Conclusion: a "posthuman Akkadian" welding the shattered backbone of time

- 23 The acephalous human body from "Ninurta's Return", with its typewriter head producing enigmatic Proto-Elamite signs with anachronistic modern reinterpretations, becomes a striking embodiment of what Agamben calls the "fracture" or "broken vertebrae" of the artistic work that is truly contemporary:

This is the reason why the present that contemporariness perceives has broken vertebrae. Our time, the present, is in fact not only the most distant: it cannot in any way reach us. Its backbone is broken and we find ourselves in the exact point of this fracture. This is why we are, despite everything, contemporaries. (Agamben 47)

- 24 Agamben compares the contemporary age to a being with a broken back which wants to make the impossible gesture of turning around in order to "contemplate its own tracks", and continues: "The poet [...] is he who must [...] weld with his own blood the shattered backbone of time. [...] The poet, insofar as he is contemporary, is this fracture, is at once that which impedes time from composing itself and the blood that must suture this break or this wound" (Agamben 42-43, his emphasis).²⁰ This fracture or "essential dishomogeneity" (Agamben 52) is indispensable to a truly contemporary artistic creation because it functions as a "meeting place, or an encounter between times and generations" (Agamben 52), and has "the singular capacity of putting every instant of the past in direct relationship with itself" (Agamben 53). In Stanev's *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*, the undeciphered Proto-Elamite symbol with its modern translation "backbone à écrire" becomes the visual embodiment of this impossible poetic gesture, a stylus-antenna allowing to weld the shattered backbone of time. This image is emblematic of the poetics of the project as a whole, which is extreme in that it brings together radically different temporal strata and forms of signifiers and attempts to suture the fractures between them by creating hybrid intercultural and intermedial chimeras.

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NOTES

1. Ivan Stanev is an experimental poet, filmmaker and stage director, who works in several languages and is based between Berlin and Paris. For more information about his work see his website: <https://ivanstanev.com>.
2. TTV stands for "Totleben TV". Stanev's alias Totleben literally means "deadlife" in German, but in fact also refers to a historical figure, the Russian general Eduard Totleben, thus creating an ironic postmodern game around proliferating unstable meanings across languages in the age of globalization. The TTV platform may be found here: <https://ttv.ivanstanev.com/season-2/>.
3. Ivan Stanev, "Kurnugû", *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*, <https://ttv.ivanstanev.com/kurnugu/>.

4. The concept of the posthuman refers not only to the possibility of the extinction of the human race as a result of various apocalyptic scenarios, but rather, to the idea that humanity will eventually be transcended or eliminated through the advances of technology. It also includes artistic, scientific or philosophical practices reflecting this belief. The related concepts of transhumanism and technological singularity, popularized by the work of Ray Kurzweil among others, refer to the enhancement of the human by technology, to the point that artificial intelligence would eventually surpass human intelligence.
5. The Proto-Elamite script is an ancient script which remains undeciphered today.
6. To name but a few examples, one may quote visual artist Orlan's body performance poetics exploring the notion of a posthuman body augmented by technology. The problematic link between technology and artistic creation has also recently been explored by visual artists Sun Yuan and Peng Yu's piece *I Can't Help Myself*, presented at the Venice Art Biennale in 2019. In contemporary poetry, the use of automatically generated language or the language of social media as found poetry likewise explores the idea of a "posthuman" artistic creation. On this question, see for example Katherine Parrish's article "How We Became Automatic Poetry Generators: It Was the Best of Times, It Was the Blurst of Times".
7. The innovative genre of video poetry is becoming increasingly popular, promoted by online poetry journals such as *The Continental Review*: <http://www.thecontinentalreview.com>. Yet, unlike most video poems, rather than simply combining poetry and video material, Stanev's experiment is unique in that it seeks to create complex correspondences between the language of poetry and the language of filmic expression.
8. Ivan Stanev, "Crab Nebula", *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*, <https://ttv.ivanstanev.com/crab-nebula/>.
9. Ivan Stanev, "Lullaby", *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*, <https://ttv.ivanstanev.com/lullaby/>.
10. Ivan Stanev, "Lullaby", <https://ttv.ivanstanev.com/lullaby/>
11. Ivan Stanev, "Lullaby", <https://ttv.ivanstanev.com/lullaby/>
12. Ivan Stanev, "Clay Tablets", *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*, <https://ttv.ivanstanev.com/clay-tablets/>.
13. Ivan Stanev, "The Code of Hammurabi", *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*, <https://ttv.ivanstanev.com/the-code-of-hammurabi/>.
14. Ivan Stanev, "The President's Address", *Todessa Leader News*, <https://ttv.ivanstanev.com/todessa/>.
15. The text of the poems is published separately on Stanev's blog *Papyri*: <https://blog.ivanstanev.com/cuneiforms/>.
16. Ivan Stanev, "Crab Nebula", *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*, <https://ttv.ivanstanev.com/crab-nebula/>.
17. Ivan Stanev, "Ninurta's Return", *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*, <https://ttv.ivanstanev.com/ninurtas-return/>.
18. There is no indication that the Proto-Elamite symbols functioned as pictograms.
19. One may also note that the way in which the sheet of paper is inserted in the typewriter-head makes it strongly recall a tongue, ostensibly raising the question of how these undeciphered signs should be pronounced.
20. Agamben says this in a discussion of Osip Mandelstam's poem "The Century".

ABSTRACTS

This article focuses on *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*, an online intermedial project by Ivan Stanev, a contemporary poet, filmmaker and stage director who works in several languages. The poems function as multilingual and intermedial clay tablets in a composite poetic idiom, "posthuman Akkadian", which hinges on a radical conflation of incompatible forms of signifiers, mingling fragments of ancient and modern languages and bringing together the seemingly incompatible media of poetry and film. *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian* radically redefine both the act of writing and the reading process as they create complex palimpsests between word and image, inspired by the oscillation between the pictorial and the abstract in the cuneiform script, one of the earliest writing systems. Conceived as Babelesque relics of collective human memory, these "cuneiforms from beyond" are broadcast on the Web from a posthuman poetic netherworld. Drawing on Giorgio Agamben's definition of the contemporary as a form of radical dys-chrony, this article suggests that the poems' complex temporality, which oscillates between the origins of human civilization and a posthuman modernity, becomes a means to reflect on the meaning of poetry and art in our contemporary world.

Cet article se penche sur *Poems in Posthuman Akkadian*, un projet intermédial en ligne d'Ivan Stanev, poète contemporain, cinéaste et metteur en scène qui travaille en plusieurs langues. Les poèmes sont conçus comme des tablettes d'argile multilingues et intermédiales, écrites en « akkadien posthumain », un idiome poétique composite qui confronte plusieurs systèmes de signifiants incompatibles. Cet idiome mélange d'une part des fragments de plusieurs langues anciennes et modernes, et d'autre part, deux médiums au premier regard incompatibles – celui de la poésie et celui du cinéma. Dans cette œuvre multilingue et intermédiale, qui cherche à révolutionner à la fois l'écriture et la lecture, prolifèrent les palimpsestes complexes entre les mots et les images, qui s'inspirent de l'oscillation entre la dimension picturale et la dimension abstraite de l'écriture cunéiforme, un des premiers systèmes d'écriture. Imaginés comme des vestiges Babelesques de la mémoire collective de l'humanité, les poèmes sont diffusés sur le Web à partir d'un au-delà posthumain. En reprenant la définition de Giorgio Agamben, qui définit le contemporain comme une forme de dyschronie radicale, cet article se propose d'étudier la temporalité complexe de ces poèmes, qui oscille entre le temps archaïque des origines de la civilisation humaine et celui d'une modernité posthumaine, et qui se révèle comme une façon de s'interroger sur le rôle de la poésie et de l'art dans notre société contemporaine.

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