

Curator's Note + Artwork Description

CURATOR'S NOTE

A TALE OF WAYFINDING THE VIRTUAL by Iris Long

Topology-mancer: "Why can't you understand that I cannot draw you a map?"

Progress-tracer: "I don't request a detailed map, you only need to draw me a rough one, and then I can identify the paths myself."

Topology-mancer: "Isn't the world I live in built by you? All the connections, information portals, signal channels, cables, bricks, shortcuts, and encrypted pathways—this entire intricate digital palace was constructed with your hands. Why do you need me to draw you a map?"

Progress-tracer: "Our blueprint has been invalidated already. We built this place based on it, but now that construction is finished, we're trapped inside—it's like how the ancient aristocrats buried the workers who built their tombs."

Topology-mancer: "You just mentioned you're 'trapped inside,' so what's outside?"

Progress-tracer: "A place similar to this, but not entirely habitable. I only started to memorize the details of that place since I became confined here. This place feels like a mirror image of the 'outside'; perhaps the main difference lies in the density of time. Time here flows faster than my own blood—my skin overflows with it, and my mind is engulfed by its pulse signals... look at this place, how does it resemble the blueprint at all? There is no orientation, no coordinates, nothing like our crystal-clear plan!"

Topology-mancer: "Poor man. But I still don't understand why I need to draw this map for you."

Progress-tracer: "You are not like us. You were born here, and are indigenous to this place. Although we came into existence before you, you're more geographically 'authentic' than we are. Anyone who's seen the blueprint will be inscribed with a tremendous number of details of this place's alleys, pathways, and structures—we are human beings after all, and are genetically inclined to remember shortcuts and instructions, and to 'figuring out the environment.' This is the gift and curse brought by 'evolution.' Once we are inscribed with blueprints, we are no longer able to generate alternative maps; instead, we crave optimal solutions, but optimal solutions won't get us out from this place—blueprints are deadfalls in this world."

Topology-mancer: "You should know that... it's more difficult for me to draw a map than for you to find your way out on your own. I have no idea of orientation or coordinates... I can't generate a 'bird-view' from within my mind. Even if I try to draw you a map, I doubt you could read it. It's a pity that I've never been to the 'outside world,' otherwise I might just walk you out."

Progress-tracer: "Sounds like my ancestors. They used to walk through the jungles and wilderness."

Topology-mancer: "So what happened to them afterwards?"

Progress-tracer: "Then they invented a blueprint."

Topology-mancer: "Then?"

Progress-tracer: "Then... blueprints became everything. Everything passed through a blueprint, and was derived from one. Precise clocks, modelled furniture, accounting machines, electronic pets, cannon balls that fall 'on-time,' roaring rockets, financial transactions conducted in milliseconds, communication across continents... everything, including this simulated world."

Topology-mancer: "Your ancestors seem to be marvellous. I don't think I could ever invent a blueprint, since I can't even figure out the landscapes here."

Progress-tracer: "Ah, let's forget about the older generations and whatever stories they may have told. How about you just walk me around, as you know how it feels to wander around here. I somehow remember the intersection area of the two worlds... if we run into the brane borders, I can get us out."

Topology-mancer: "Sounds good, I know how to take a walk."

Progress-tracer can't remember how long they wandered in this place, but the endless walk inflicted pain on his skin caused by the fleeing signals. The voltage difference also felt more bearable as time moved on. Over time, he realised that their walk could not be measured by distance or even directions; instead, it was full of zigzagging, sudden pauses, and unpredictable trajectories. If they walked in one direction for too long, they would end up back at the starting point. He gradually found out that this world did not betray the blueprint, it only grew organically into a topological version of it. All the data points in the original blueprint were replaced by the relationship of planes, and hence, all shortcuts were invalidated—the only way to "figure it out" is to explore without a map. The moment of realization became the moment of escape, and he finally found his way home.

What about the Topology-mancer?

He never left his own place. He did not even go for the walk—all he did was become engulfed in a nice, long dream.

This story is a re-imagination of "shortcuts." Shortcuts are fast leaps across information scaffolds, and cartridges for accelerated time. Shortcuts imply lower costs, since they train us to become beings who are not used to staying still, pondering, or meandering. Shortcuts symbolise strategic success, and energy-saving efficiency. But, one reminder that we were given in the year 2020—a time of global uncertainty —is a new perspective on "what we shortcut into." The lesson is that perhaps we need to rethink our priorities, and develop an alternative blueprint that does not prioritize shortcuts.

The exhibition "The Long Cut" features works that investigate the remote, latent, and liminal space of technologies, and how this awareness can trigger alternative pathways and maps for our shared technological reality. More importantly, it investigates how artists navigate between the perspectives of the "Progress-tracer" and "Topology-mancer" in order to find their own way of living with the hybridity of the physical and the digital.

*The text is also inspired by Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's writing, "Breathing: Chaos and Poetry," which explores the relationship between the acceleration of cyberspace and the rhythm of mental time.

ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

The circle is a simple, intuitive, and common image. It possesses eternal secrets, like the transcendental number, π , the exact value of which remains as elusive as ever; we've used many ways to calculate it, but we've never managed to arrive at its precise value, however close we may have gotten.

"The circle" is an "absolute truth" lying right before our eyes. We have countless ways of approaching it: the cyclotomic method, infinite series and continued fraction, etc. Among these, the most incredible one was devised by the brilliant mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan, whose remarkable insight produced a series for π that seems irregular at first, but is both accurate and converges extraordinarily rapidly. Still, humans are not the only ones who have insight; an A.I. program developed by Google, the "Ramanujan Machine", can solve mathematical constants like π without any prior information, because it has the ability to reveal hidden mathematical structures to produce intuitive, Ramanujanian formulae.

I installed a Ramanujan Machine. I set it up, let it run, and came up with several formulae. Like Ramanujan's intuitive formulae, these A.I. formulae are called "conjectures", which are "shortcuts" to absolute truth. They say if I could prove one of them, they would name it after me.

It is fortunate that I could not prove these formulae; I will not obscure the miracle of mathematics with failed words and arrogant power.

I know that new shortcuts do not increase or decrease the infinites paths to absolute truth, that the symbolic poems we sing do not enhance or diminish the nature of truth.

I believe I can waste every single representation of existence.

Let them exhaust your seas in vain. Let them exhaust the sun, seen through Ramanujan's magical eyes, in vain.

As I perceive eternity.

All the formulas in this web program are found by the Ramanujan Machine. You can browse all the 81 formulas, and find your comfortable perspective to immerse yourself in the ocean of representation composed by "forms and concepts", doing nothing but feel it.