

# KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013



**DON QUIXOTE IN THE COMPUTER AGE: GARETH LONG**  
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## *Don Quixote in the Computer Age* Gareth Long

Gareth Long's (Toronto, 1979) *Don Quixote* appears at first glance to be a duplicate of the standard paperback edition of Edith Grossman's 2003 English translation. The scan of the slightly worn red cover with its blurry image and capital letters spelling out the canonical name is instantly recognizable. Yet small alterations on the cover alert a careful viewer that something is awry, and the text inside is a caustic affront to the lyrical voice of the original epic. While the spelling is flawless, grammatical errors abound, rendering the original prose impotent.

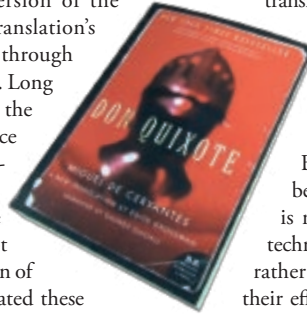
Long generated his version of the novel by processing the translation's accompanying audiobook through speech recognition software. Long painstakingly programmed the software to recognize the voice of George Guidall, the narrator of the audiobook. First, he located the words in the accompanying training script within the English translation of *Don Quixote*, and then isolated these same words as spoken by Guidall on the audio CD, producing an artificial version of the script in the narrator's voice. Finally, this constructed reading was played to the speech recognition software, essentially training the computer to learn the voice of Guidall.

However, the idiosyncrasies that serve to enrich the audiobook paradoxically cause the speech recognition software to generate inaccuracies. Significant phrases are misinterpreted, including the name "*Don Quixote*" itself, producing a version of the novel where the eponymous title is conspicuously missing. The software does not recognize punctuation either, absurdly

transforming the structured epic into an incomprehensible stream-of-consciousness.

In *Relational Aesthetics*, Nicolas Bourriaud asserts that the best use of technology in art is not the adoption of new technologies as techniques, but rather the acknowledgment of their effects. Long's *Don Quixote* fulfills Bourriaud's vision: the final product is a traditional object, but its intellectual substance derives from the intervention of the speech recognition software. This new version of *Don Quixote* exists solely in material form, yet it was produced through the technological process of transforming the audiobook onto a computer screen.

The work references not only the disjuncture between an original work and its technologically-mutated contemporary version, but also the relationship between the spoken and written word. Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is hailed as the first novel, an engaging and often humorous



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tale full of rich characters and engaging subplots. Yet much of the narrative structure is lost in Long's version, and the focus shifts to the actual sound of the words. Furthermore, the Grossman text is a translation from the original Spanish. The novel has now been altered so many times that the reader is forced to question whether anything remains of the original aside from the physical object itself.

Long's *Don Quixote* alludes to earlier conceptual works that interrogate the importance of literal meanings, such as Jorge Luis Borges' *Pierre Menard, Author of Quixote* and Marcel Broodthaers' *Un Coup de Dés*. Borges' essay describes an imaginary French author's attempt to go beyond the mere translation of *Don Quixote*, resulting in an exact copy of the original, which Borges facetiously argues is superior to the original. In their often humorous interpretations of *Don Quixote*, Borges and Long both question the value and accuracy of translation, while asserting the agency of the reader.

Broodthaers reprinted Stéphane Mallarmé's poem *Un Coup de Dés* with the words covered in black bars, emphasizing the significance of the placement of words over their standard meanings. Like Broodthaers'

visual interpretation of Mallarmé's poem, Long's garbled version of *Don Quixote* forces the reader to reconsider the original text. Are the sounds alone enough to carry significance or is the book now devoid of meaning?

A deceptively simple object, Long's *Don Quixote* destabilizes accepted notions of authenticity and investigates the effects of technology on a canonical work. The final piece exposes the inherent flaws of a mechanical machine over a human mind, while simultaneously asking its readers to deconstruct Cervantes' masterpiece, now reduced to its essential sounds. †

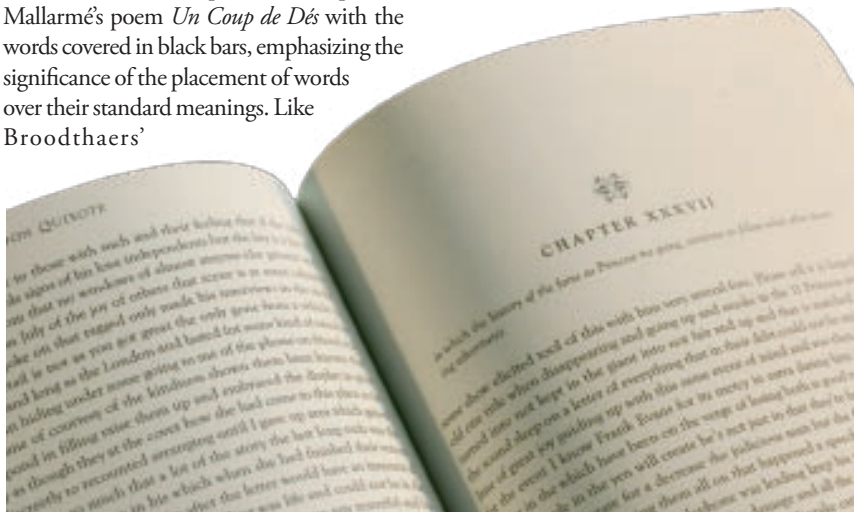
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