

*Skybuddies, harbour craft emittances, key clickings, vaticum cleaners, due to woman formed mobile or man made static and bawling the howle hamshack and wobble.*¹

Some are flattened or warped, others hesitantly curved or positively out of condition—the floor-based tangles that make up this new configuration of *Shedding Sheaths (B)* (2016) were already vacated when they were found in the outskirts of Seoul, South Korea. These subterranean fibre optic cables were gutted and their insulating skins partially heated and compressed. Despite being emptied out, they are the opposite of expressionless, stuck in the morphological uncertainty that temperature left to chance. In between melted and repurposed, they seem to embody the technological shedding that we indecisively wobble with and towards. Elections, deliveries, love: innumerable transfers have effortlessly passed through them from any pavement of the globe to any other. Particular to our age of remote retrieval, these are content-mincing vessels par excellence, breaking down signs and gestures that remerge as coherent units at the other end of a long, but short trip.²

As collapsed forms, the sheaths speak of the material tension or instability that comes with the distance they were engineered for—our extended nervous system and its small-talk-alloyed financial abstractions are coated lengthways by synthetic composites. Though polyethylene or polyurethane enable a well-insulated embrace between subjects, a bundled local atmosphere in image-based or conversational form can nevertheless be affected by internal or external disruption. When almost all everyday exchange travels through a cable that is hundreds of thousands of miles long and a handful of centimeters thick, the fragility of the medium becomes obvious.³ In Roman Jakobson's work, “phatic” communication (conversation for its own sake) acts to establish, prolong or discontinue communication.⁴ The term also serves to confirm whether the contact is still there, as in **Hello?** or **I can't hear you, you're breaking up** when referring to the medium in the middle of a conversation. In many ways, Canell's arrangements draw attention to such a “breaking up”, accentuating this volatile interval between subjects or objects—her sculptural vocabulary often comes about through a found encounter or by articulating a shaky sculptural stretch. Then there is the question of energy storage. A two-hour nap. Stretching out my cramped legs.

¹ From *Finnegan's Wake* by James Joyce

² According to Telegeography's global bandwidth research service about 550 000 miles of subsea cables crossed our oceans in 2015, through which 95% of our daily Internet transfers pass.

³ Protection against local breaks aside, the Carrington Event from 1895 caused telegraph systems all over Europe and America to fail due to the colossal quantities of energy emitted from a solar flare. Studies say that a solar storm of larger magnitude will most probably cause widespread problems for a society that is as dependent upon technology as ours is today.

⁴ Among other subjects, Jakobson researched speech poetics, the frequency of vowels, and the physical structure of verbal communication (“the sound shape of language”). Interesting titles of which I have read none include: *Child Language, Aphasia and Phonological Universals* (1941), *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning* (1978), *The Poetry of Grammar and the Grammar of Poetry* (1980)

If the sheaths were decidedly unfit when they were found, then the persistent minor twitches of *Flexions* (2016) are quite the opposite. Comprising large panels of equidistantly perforated pegboard through which groupings of short wires have been fed or hung upon, they intermittently perform small-scale gestures. What they have in common with the sheaths is that heat affects their form—although the thin wires are more sensitive towards temperatures that define the activation of their body language. The issue is that their tissue is forgetful. The wire itself is a metal alloy known as “memory wire”. This “muscle wire” or “smart metal” remembers a pre-bent shape when heated and its high-temperature state will recall the wire's internally stored shape when passing a low-voltage electrical current through it. If the current is switched off, the wire abruptly forgets its shape. The memory wire then deforms and slackens under its own weight while heat dissipates. Alternating between remembering and forgetting, these odds and ends softly flip and flop as mechanical undulations of an energy-based syntax. It is easy to think of their gestures as proto-electric scribbles—a rudimentary form of signalling system—where temperature is exercised and expressed. Filled in by intervals of sine sprayed in high pitch or stretchy tones cut-off mid-wave, the work expands its disjointed alphabet of waveforms. Splice and split. Slice and spit. The purpose of frequency generators for electrical applications is usually to identify and locate a faulty line or cut-off signal within a circuit. Another lapse. Flex. Lapse. Flex. One thinks of nerves (memory wire is actually a material that is used in robotics to simulate muscle motion), a testing ground for soft hiccups. Gently abrupt failure of concentration. Dolphin dandelion. Bounce bounce inability to grab, grasp, formulate. Incalculability of direction, angle, flow.

If a cut or disintegration of a communication channel occurs in a shared physical space, it can either be seen as dysfunctional or else it can activate an intuitive function between individuals. For Jakobson it enables a “poetic function”. Breaks in communication lead to non-verbal tip of the tongue agreements, understood through an abstract sense of feeling the word no longer needed in order to fulfill the transfer—the acute presence of an absent word. Similarly interaction with objects can reconfigure non-verbal modes of exchange, bypassing the systems of energy relay that govern conventional mediation. Non-purposeful gaps are there to question the relationships that are in place and to test whether unexpected situations can connect to otherwise disconnected channels of knowledge or material forms. The disconnection or the break is then understood as the beginning of a new way of relating. An interrupted glance shifts weight. The tip of a word flicked out. Freeze-frame. No alphabet, just pure exchange. *The whole society sharing thoughts.*⁵

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⁵ From *Thought As A System* by David Bohm