

Subtext (2008)

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"But the keystrokes of users on the Net connect them to a vast distributed plane composed not merely of computers, users, and telephone lines, but all the zeros and ones of machine code, the switches of electronic circuitry, fluctuating waves of neurochemical activity, hormonal energy, thoughts, desires..." - Sadie Plant, "Zeros + Ones" (1997)

The surface of a communications network such as the Internet conceals stratified layers of electronic interactions, invisible to the network's users. Each time we perform a task such as surfing the web or sending an email, we are triggering microscopic conversations between digital systems, interactions in which we are implicit but unaware.

Subtext (2008) is a generative excavation into these discourses, capturing the semantic content of a network message and transforming it into glyphs of light which, in sequence, form sentences corresponding to a complete electronic conversation.

Processes of "handshaking", error correction, flow control and fragmentation are captured and visually rendered at a rate legible to a human spectator. This creates a live text, bound by the network protocols on which we continually yet unwittingly rely.

The full source code and schematics for this installation are freely available under an open-source license, at www.erase.net/projects/subtext/

Key

	Handshake offered. TCP SYN		Who is in this group? IGMP request		Who has this address? ARP lookup
	Handshake accepted. TCP SYN-ACK		I am in this group. IGMP response		Are you there? ICMP ping request
	OK, exchange completed. TCP ACK		Please assign me an address. DHCP/BOOTP request		Yes, I am here. ICMP ping response
	Conclude conversation? TCP FIN		Here is your address. DHCP/BOOTP response		Do you have any public media? Apple iTunes/TV
	Conversation concluded. TCP FIN-ACK		What is this agent's address? DNS request		Do you have any public files? Windows NetBIOS request
	Conversation refused. TCP RST		This agent is at address [...] DNS response		Here, view my public files. Windows NetBIOS response

Network Archaeology

