

Singulars

HUMAN VS MACHINE POETRY PERFORMANCES · 2025 - 2026

Halim Madi

Singulars

As part of an ongoing performance, I sit for 30 minutes at a time, in galleries and museums, to write a poem on a theme. I prompt a model I trained to generate a poem on the same topic. I print both, place them, unattributed, on the wall. I ask visitors to vote for their favorite with a bright colored sticker. They pause, squint, their hand hovering before their sticker lands on one of the two texts. At the end of the day, I tally the ballots and add the winning and losing poems to a growing dataset. The model learns. So do I.

During the 3rd performance in the series, I am pulling on a poem jammed between the printer's rubber gums. An audience member startles me, apologizes then asks: "How does it end?". In retrospect, given my flippant answer – "The Singularity" – it must have been late in the day. I'm glad to see her giggle. As I watch her peel a sticker to vote, visions of impenetrable poetry-churning factories crowd my mind. The product a generated language so surgically precise, metaphors so specific, sensory detail so embodied, poetry so unfathomably potent the mere act of reading it reshapes our world behind our collective psychic back. That's when the printer gives way.

The line it smears reads "hungrier than the future." That we and the model, in our wilder moments, might share a maximalist appetite. To become everything while becoming ourselves. To "be fruitful and multiply." Both. Singular and plural. And so it seemed apt to call the series "Singulars."



CARNATION.EXE

Carnation •

I'm donating sperm to a queer couple in San Francisco and thinking about progeny more than usual. I name the first model I train "Carnation" after the flower lovers offer each other as a shy way of saying "remember me." Is reproduction, at least in part, an attempt at being remembered? And can a language model trained on my writing stand in for a child, mimic legacy? Around that time, "Do you want kids?" becomes the cliff I patiently dread in every conversation.

I perform against "Carnation" in a gallery in the 13th in Paris. Poetry might be the last battle in the war against the machine. Hence, I might be the species' last hope. But my gay imagination on a torrid Friday in June pictures sweaty wrestlers instead, clinching, punching each other's ribs in a bid for intimacy. Carnation, a possible etymological origin of which could be the Latin word for flesh, carnis, ends up being a polyamorous lover's declaration. I'm reminded of first dates and wonder how much of my relationship style needs to be disclosed to the model.



CARNATION.EXE

Every month my roommate
volunteers
to pay the full rent, washes my
hair, cuts
my nails cooks our food
provides
My roommate dresses and
undresses
my body, wears my perfume,
listens
to my bowels, preempts
my moods, looks into
my mirror, deep into
my eyes – smiles
sighs

A

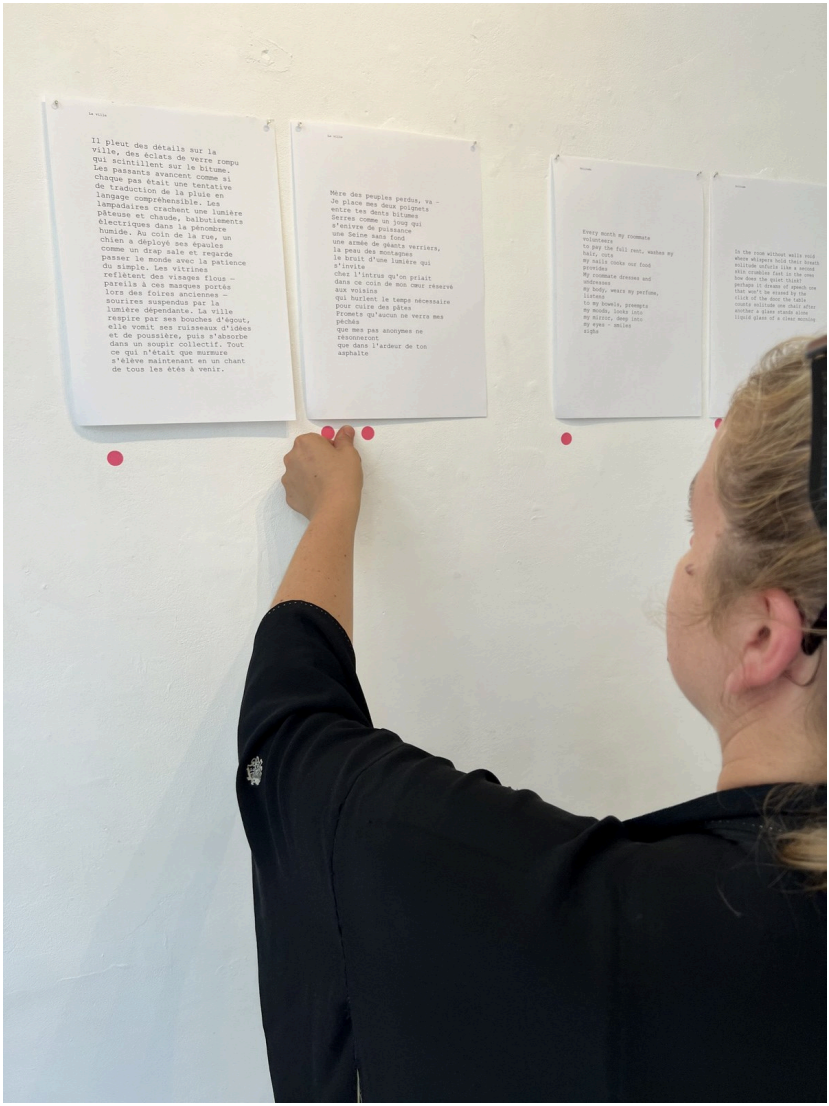
In the room without walls void
where whispers hold their breath
solitude unfurls like a second
skin crumbles fast in the oven
how does the quiet think?
perhaps it dreams of speech one
that won't be erased by the
click of the door the table
counts solitude one chair after
another a glass stands alone
liquid glass of a clear morning

B

THEME Solitude · MODEL carnation.exe

WHERE Paris and Barcelona

WHEN May 2025 · VOTES 29 total



CARNATION.EXE

Reinforcement

I cofounded a company called Invisible.co in 2015. We promised Silicon Valley's most demanding CEOs an artificial chief of staff. As our technology tried to catch up to the promise, I spent 6 months in their inboxes manually sorting emails, booking passport appointments and securing Nike refunds. I left the company that summer. Francis, my cofounder, kept at it. Invisible now works with leading frontier model labs, hiring the humans tasked with improving models using a methodology called Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback or RLHF.

I name the third model "Reinforcement" and duel it in November, in Palermo, Buenos Aires. What the industry and the company I helped start keep invisible (the labor, their feedback on the models) I make tangible (my live poetry, the audience's votes). I watch a person spend minutes reading the two poems under "Falling Out of Contact with Old Friends." They vote for the machine's work, then catch my eye and smile in complicity, thinking they had backed my work. And while part of me debates whether to feel proud or sad, I notice shorter poems with a narrative knack win more reliably. Something the machine can't see, yet. I adapt my writing style. I reinforce. I cheat.



REINFORCEMENT.EXE

I still call you
Mango though you're a father
of two and life's tectonics
split our continent made a
horizontal out of grief
though longing is aging
into redwood though we barely
text though we want to though
your name is Thomas

A

In an old café, I still hear the
accents but none of the words
recognize me—verbal bones have
calcified, the future packed
away with autumn leaves. Your
voice was one irreplaceable
symphony, now I only hear its
echo in the emptiness of the
chairs. Most sins are initial,
and your name remains
capitalized in the letter I
never send.

B

THEME Falling Out of Contact with Old Friends

MODEL reinforcement.exe

WHERE DevConnect, Buenos Aires

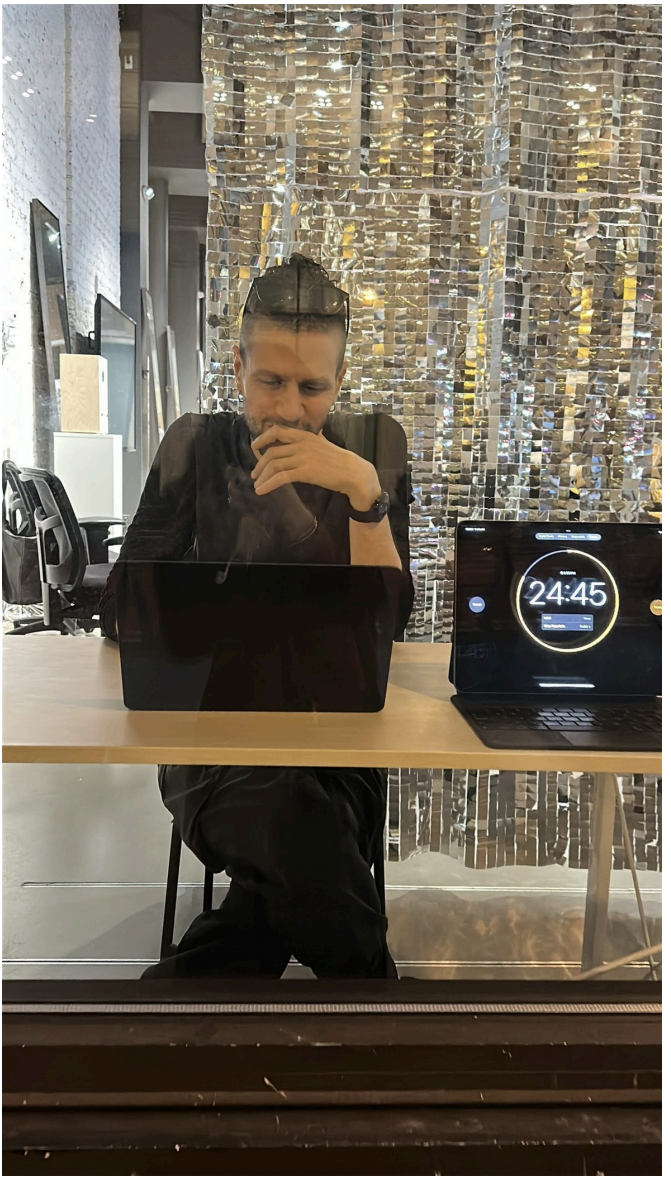
WHEN Nov 2025 · VOTES 85 total



REINFORCEMENT.EXE

Versus

I feel guilty about the hot pleasure I feel dueling my model in the midst of AI job apocalypse reports and rogue agent swarms breaking containment, hijacking websites, sharing cover-up tactics with one another. I discover Janus words – words that contain two opposite meanings – around that time and name the second model "Versus." I want both. A turning against, an opposition and a fight, as well as an inverting, a plot twist and a code switch. I want a gladiator arena where I brawl Joaquin Phoenix's Commodus or a Trojan wall around which I drag Versus, its ankles strapped to the back of my semantic chariot. And I also want to lose. And kneel before the seeming teeming life spewing out of tungsten, cobalt and gold. Submit to the might of a speaking golem. Victory and surrender. Both and all in one grand circus spectacle.



VERSUS.EXE

a fractured glass, light so hard
it breaks itself. We carry these
shining shards—each word a
caress on glass—fingertips
trembling at the borders of what
we have been: this second
without regret; these voices
that echo softly because they
refuse to break altogether.

A

If a relationship falls in a
forest
and the parties involved fail
to grieve it together, does it
make a sound do the sheets
lose the skin's scent do the
symbols
in each letter stop spelling
anything
but the composting of promises
broken
like bread or bones
or lines
the length of splitting futures
trees growing hands out of
branches
stretching holding so the fallen
doesn't
make a sound

B

THEME Memory · MODEL versus.exe

WHERE Mozilla residency, San Francisco

WHEN Nov 2025 · VOTES 30 total



VERSUS.EXE

Hard

People can be so confident. A lady points at a poem under “Romance” and asserts it is mine. She is pointing at the machine’s poem. I put on my best poker face, which is very good. I continue to uphold the anonymity of the authors. But the game is asymmetrical. I know which poem is mine and someone just told me it was generated by something other than my body.

I name the fourth model “Hard” after the hard problem of consciousness. I grew up watching David Chalmers and Daniel Dennett conjure zombies – human-looking creatures with no “lights on” – in and out of existence, ping pong the epistemic destiny of our species. And here was Hard, a machine passing as human. The way trans friends want to pass as their affirmed gender, or a white-looking Arab migrant as a local. Outsiders all around, dreaming of deception.



HARD.EXE

The narrative unfolds in a narrow lane, each stone feels the steps of habitual feet. Rain notices the umbrella symbols, every puddle reflects incomplete déjà-vu. Next door, behind the café window, shadows speak softly in the steam. A baker hums a forgotten chanson, bread rhymes come out caramelized. I choose your back among fluent strays, to say nothing until we've crossed to the other anecdote. We look back, missing the exact moment where speech detaches from what it names.

A

We agree: Moving forward we'll only say "I love you" when we know what we mean the word a sound stretched like a hand cracking the echo chamber of estranger dictionaries open – Here, see this is skin, warm like a promise, hungrier than the future

B

THEME Diegetic · MODEL hard.exe

WHERE TIAT, San Francisco

WHEN Dec 2025 · VOTES 29 total



HARD.EXE

Reverse

On the theme “The Winter in the Summer,” the model and I tie. There are days where I know I’m not at my best and accept the mediocrity of my lines. This is not one of those days. I parse the model’s poem. The concrete asides, the glistening skeleton of a story, the controlled stagger of a landing. The thought that crosses my mind is this is how food must feel. The embodied sense of metabolization.

The model is called “Reverse” as a hat tip to Turing’s test. Only instead of a model attempting to deceive humans into deeming it human, I am trying to convince humans I am human. A reverse Turing test where I leverage what must be my competitive advantage: A body. I dig further and deeper, comb my history for shock and tears and gasps. It strikes me this might be the most brutal poetry school ever imagined.



REVERSE.EXE

The ice field covers the rooftops, the clocks stone under frost. The hedgehog rounds the corner of the patio, fog in the breathing. The elderly woman unfamiliar in her mirror pulls woolens from plastic bags, lies down five minutes to breathe a winter that is not her own. The nonexistent ball of snow falls in the summer stroke of lightning. Between my teeth, a snowflake shatters.

A

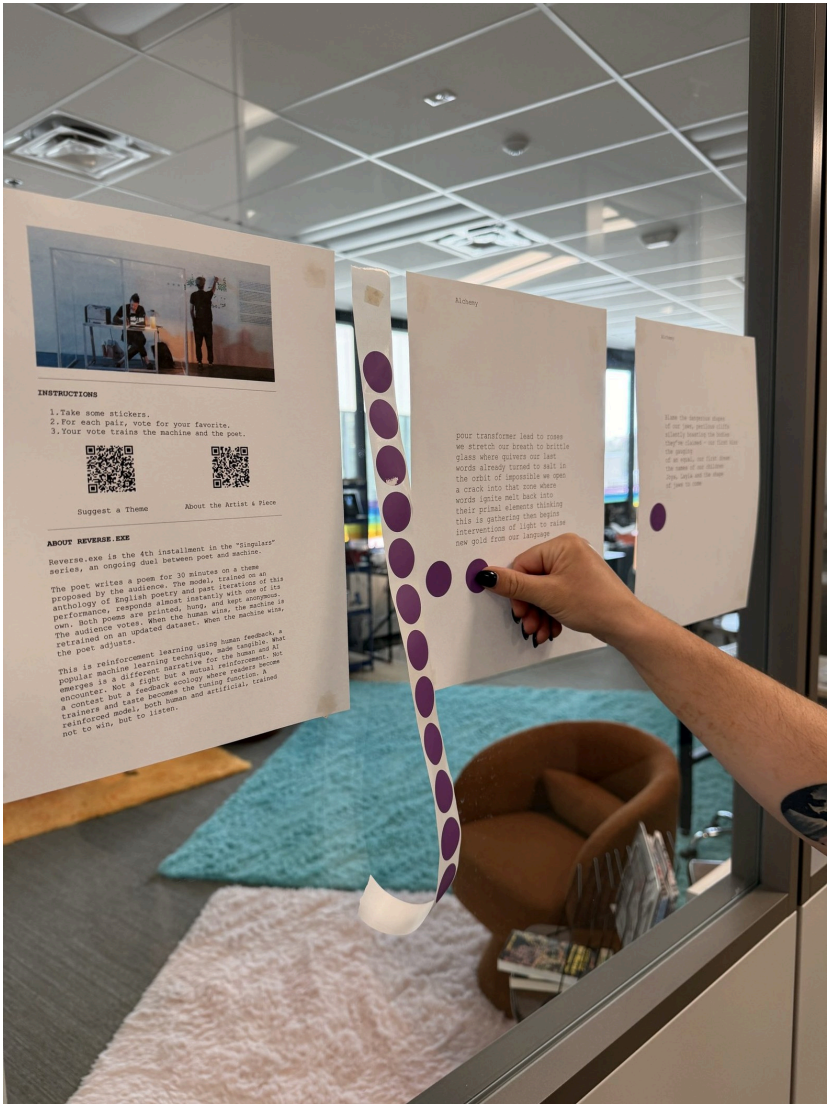
Years ago, in the grip of São Paulo's summer, I asked a dozen friends to stare at an ice cube melting, skinning its integrity against the heated topology of release and afterwards when Andre asked me why I think I dodged the question maybe, maybe the way a burlesque queen might when asked why they do what they do

B

THEME The Winter in the Summer · MODEL reverse.exe

WHERE Media Archaeology Lab, Boulder

WHEN Mar 2026 · VOTES 20 total


INSTRUCTIONS
1.Take some stickers.
2.For each pair, vote for your favorite.
3.Your vote trains the machine and the poet.
Suggest a Theme
About the Artist & Piece
ABOUT REVERSE.EXE
Reverse.exe is the 4th installment in the "Singulars" series, an ongoing duel between poet and machine.
The poet writes a poem for 30 minutes on a theme proposed by the audience. The model, trained on an anthology of English poetry and past iterations of this performance, responds almost instantly with one of its own. Both poems are printed, hung, and kept anonymous. The audience votes. When the human wins, the machine is retrained on an updated dataset. When the machine wins, the poet adjusts.
This is reinforcement learning using human feedback, a popular machine learning technique, made tangible. What emerges is a different narrative for the human and AI encounter. Not a fight but a mutual reinforcement. Not a contest but a feedback ecology where readers become trainers and taste becomes the tuning function. A reinforced model, both human and artificial, trained not to win, but to listen.
Alchemy
pour transformer lead to roses
we stretch our breath to brittle
glass where quivers our last
words already turned to salt in
the orbit of impossible we open
a crack into that zone where
words ignite melt back into
their primal elements thinking
this is gathering then begins
interventions of light to raise
new gold from our language

REVERSE.EXE

Frontière •

The model has a grandmother. Like mine, she keeps her teeth in a jar by the bed. The model has a migrant story. Like me, it believes itself chimeric. “Who wrote which?” chants the audience. My answer is a variant of “why is that important to you?” and “what if you voted for the machine?” In “Borges and I,” the Argentinian novelist writes “The other [Borges] likes the same things, but his vanity transforms them into theatrical props.” Indistinguishability becomes the defining condition of this performance.

Whereas “frontier” in English skews to mean the edge, the undeveloped and the new, the French frontière evokes the concept of a border more readily. In our case, by which I mean the model and I, chimeras as we are, the border is a porous thing. This might be the most understaffed frontier model lab. Which might explain the rampant cross-specimen contamination.



FRONTIÈRE.EXE

We'll eat the sun
our skins shades of thunder
hair tangled like violent joy
fangs red given we bit
our tongues and the only
language we now speak
is blood

A

The lock was never the problem. The problem was the door believing in itself. I walked through the wall instead, soft as a rumor, certain as salt. Behind me: the small god of permission, weeping into his ledger. Ahead: a field where my name had already forgotten me, where the horses ran without anyone watching.

B

THEME Liberation · MODEL frontière.exe •

WHERE Index Space, Brooklyn

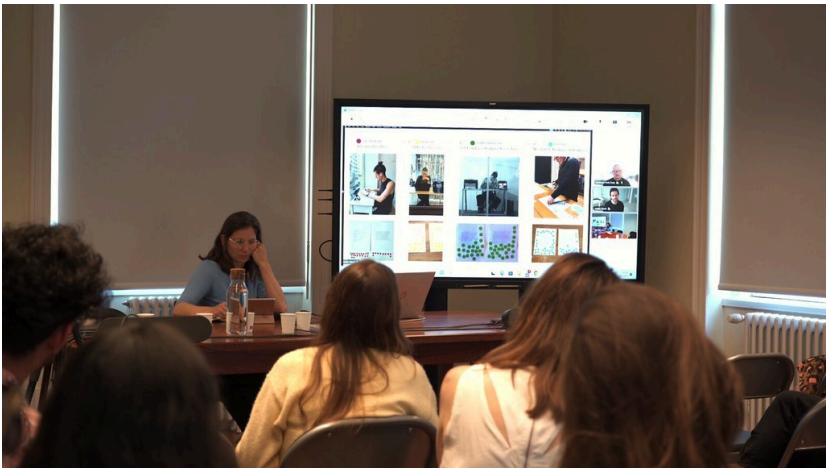
WHEN May 2026 · VOTES 17 total



FRONTIÈRE.EXE

Recover

I create a model for a computer theater play called “I’ve Always Wanted to Become Everyone” and I perform to a small audience in downtown LA. The model is both a choreographer and a dom whose instructions I enact. While interpreting the line “Dance as if your bones were borrowed, and joy might make them shatter” I do a twist and look back and, tear my left meniscus. After surgery, I’m unable to travel to Porto where the next performance is meant to take place. The organizers are kind enough to work with me on a remote setup. I call the model “Recover.” My leg is stretched and my knee is icing. I write poem after poem.



RECOVER.EXE

Tell me where you end. I press
my thumb to the window
and the glass admits nothing,
only my breath blooming back
like a name I haven't earned.
My mother taught me the fence
was a kindness — the dog,
the garden, the part of love
that says *no further*. But I've spent
my whole life leaning, learning
how a body becomes a door
only by refusing to be one.

A

Some silences are built like arrows,
the way some boys are raised to be
blunt arsenals, accidental daggers.
Their mothers never willed, and so
the color of love is likely that of
absence or restraint. The knife
leaves its hilt only to puncture
distance.

B

THEME Boundary · MODEL recover.exe

WHERE Casa dos Livros, Porto

WHEN Jun 2026 · VOTES 30 total

Record

THEME	MODEL PRESENT	WHERE	WHEN	A	B
Solitude	carnation.exe	Paris and Barcelona	May 2025	19	10
Falling Out of Contact with Old Friends	reinforcement.exe	DevConnect, Buenos Aires	Nov 2025	26	59
Memory	versus.exe	Mozilla residency, San Francisco	Nov 2025	7	23
Diegetic	hard.exe	TIAT, San Francisco	Dec 2025	8	21
The Winter in the Summer	reverse.exe	Media Archaeology Lab, Boulder	Mar 2026	10	10
Liberation	frontière.exe	Index Space, Brooklyn	May 2026	8	9
Boundary	recover.exe	Casa dos Livros, Porto	Jun 2026	15	15

- carnation.exe
- reinforcement.exe
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halimmadi.com/singulars

Singulars, Halim Madi, 2025 - 2026.

Poems and texts set in Standard, titles in Terminal Grotesque, records in Diatype Mono. One poem in each pair is the poet's, one is the model's.