Recitation and Networks

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Abstract

Here I practice π in ways that interact with society, purchasing items and posting to social media. Links: **twitter.com/mnemonicsitups**, **twitter.com/mnemonicpushups**.

Memorizing and reciting π seems like one of the most innocuous things you can do. In most of my practice, when I recite π the goal is either to give it a meaningful concrete form — such as a painted image — or to turn the activity into a meaningful experience for the person reciting the numbers (whether it's me or someone else). But there is also a third side to this practice: when the recitation has an impact on society on its own terms.

Thinking within that paradigm, I developed an interest in whether financial consequences could change the nature of the game itself. I began by writing a program that monitored me as I recited π. I connected it to eBay's API and gave it access to my credit card. The number accrued data over the course of several days while I practiced. Every time I got a digit wrong, it searched eBay for art, and placed a escalating bid on one of the results.

At 4:08:23AM on September 8th, 2016, I typed my 63rd error at digit #5980, and the bid of $25.20 was sufficient to win a "Stretched Canvas Original Oil Paintings" signed by the artist [Figure 1]. As I did, the program triggered a camera that recorded the moment [Figure 2]. As is clear from the image, I was both tired — I'd been typing π late at night for a few hours — and worn from the anxiety of knowing that at any moment I could incur a financial loss. What if the program bid more than I anticipated? The experience had been so nerve-wracking that I found myself sneaking off to practice π "normally."

The painting my recitation of π purchased was a rather hackneyed landscape [Figure 3]. I had chosen to have the program query "art" as a way of emphasizing the disconnect between the my actions and the output of the activity. If I had chosen a completely random search, the object purchased would have been subject to speculation; lacking any claim to being art itself, the viewer's perception of the object would have imposed one. Meanwhile, there is no question that the aesthetic attitude of this painting has nothing to do with my own. Exactly who created something here is not clear, but the recitation itself is arguably the most consistent narrative in the project.

```
****Start****
2016/9/8 2:06:44

****Bid #1****
Error Number: 63
Typed Errors: 154
Digit Number: 5980
Max Bid: 25.199986
4:08:23
Stretched Canvas Original Oil Paintings Wall Art 8x10" Signed By Artist A2568
24.99
(59, 80)
Bakersfield,CA,USA
http://www.ebay.com/itm/Stretched-Canvas-Original-Oil-Paintings-Wall-Art-8x10-Signed-Artist-A2568-/121964005987
```

Figure 1: The programmatically-generated record of the mistaken record that purchased a painting on eBay.
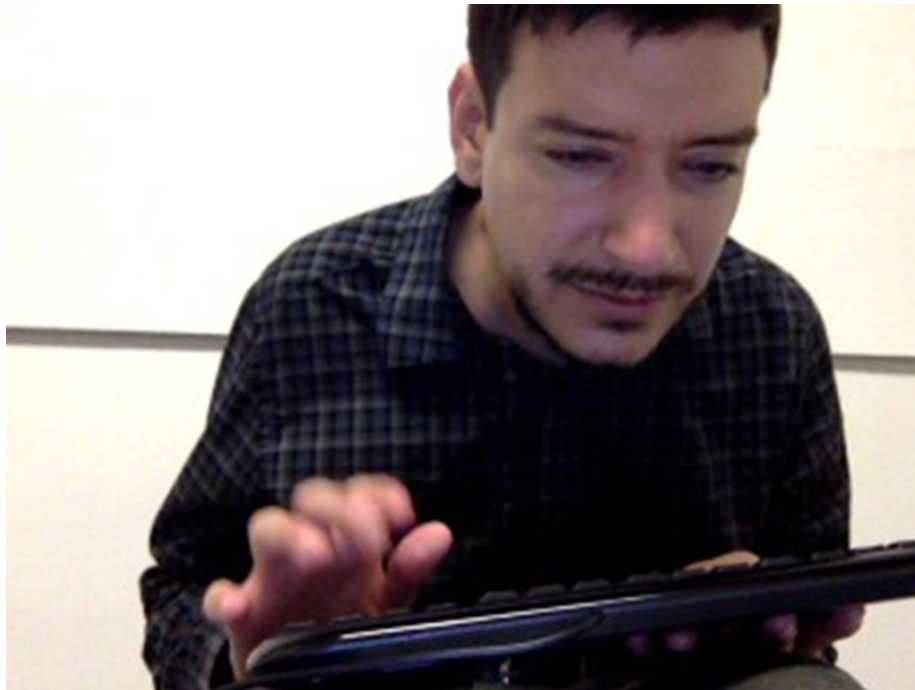

Figure 2: The program took a picture of me at the moment I typed the mistake.

Figure 3: The painting that was purchased as a result of the mistake.

Purchasing an item on eBay by reciting π left me with the desire to embed more data in the process of reciting π socially. I turned to Twitter's API, writing a program that would photograph and count me doing pushups and situps before I pressed a "submit' button. It would then post the photographs and data on Twitter, tagging the photo to indicate whether I was right or wrong.

This work resonates with Tehching Hsieh's Time Clock Piece, in which he photographed himself once every hour for an entire year[1].

It also has connections with Eddo Stern's Tekken Torture Tournament, in which participants playing Tekken were suited with a device that shocked them when they were hit in the game[2].

References

[1] Tehching Hsieh. One year performance. `https://www.tehchinghsieh.net/oneyearperformance1980-1981`, 1980-1981.

[2] Eddo Stern. Tekken torture tournament. `https://eddostern.com/works/tekken-torture-tournament/`, 2001.
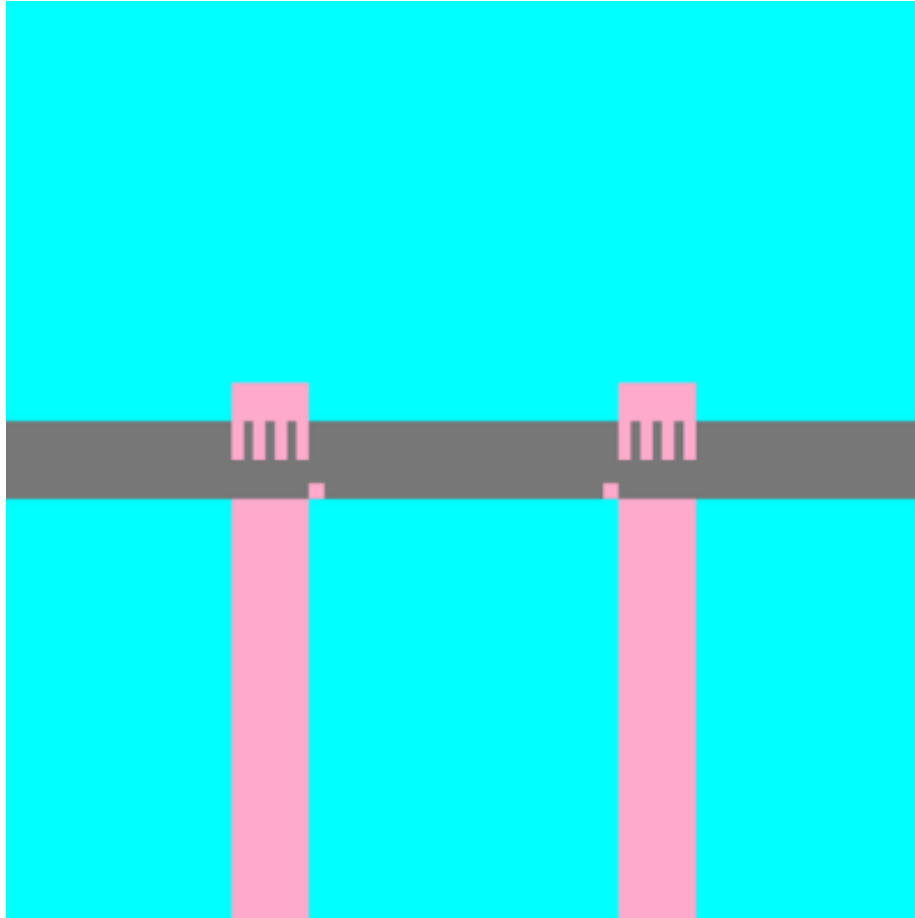
Figure 4: Logo for Mnemonic Exercises that references π.

Figure 5: The programmatically-generated record format for each recitation.