

ONCE
AND
ONCE
AGAIN

RUI
LIU

PRESS TO PLAY

INTRODUCTION

In this work, I attempt to propose a system of values that posits that value exists solely within the differences produced between the unconscious repetitions. Thus, to create value, one can only do so through constant repetition, whether conscious or unconscious. Furthermore, the result of repetition can only be considered as the medium of value, and must be placed within a system (or context) to carry value.

Simultaneously, I posit the existence of truth in the world, and truth and value are at odds with each other, as truth is repetition, and thus has no value. As ancient Western philosophy has proposed, "one cannot step into the same river twice." We cannot see two identical flowers, even if the particles composing them are exactly the same, as they exist in different spaces, not to mention that the past and future of the two flowers must be different, as our observation of them has already created a difference. In the context of the preceding discussion, our observation has already imbued value into the flowers, as our attention is limited, and therefore valuable. However, we must consider the bouquet of flowers before us as multiple repetitions of a "standard" flower, otherwise we will expend too much effort on them. Therefore, once we begin to recognize the uniqueness of each flower, we endow value onto their differences.

Furthermore, value is determined by people, and therefore it is not truth. Because truth cannot be changed, while differences must be observed by people and rely on people's observations, the process of recognizing and creating differences is the process of endowing value. Here, I must add that the paradigm of repetition also needs to be recognized by people, but this does not mean that truth also needs to be endowed by people, as repetition will inevitably occur, but recognizing the paradigm of repetition is only recognizing the difference between such repetition and alternative repetitions. Just as we recognize "flower" as a repetition of a flower, but when we recognize "flower," we recognize that it is different from "leaf."

The "Dao De Jing" states that "the movement of the Dao is the return," positing that cyclic recurrence is the way in which the Dao operates. I believe that we coincide with this view in some aspects.

Returning to the project at hand, "his" constant recollection is directed towards truth, and his repeated utterance of "once again, once again" is both a repetition of truth and a practice of truth. We must despairingly recognize that everything is repetition, whether we like it or not, but we must also participate in repetition, embrace repetition, because only in this way can we create value, or rather, create things that can carry value. At the same time, only through this can we make ourselves something that can carry value and differentiate us from others.

THEMATIC

The game *Once and Once Again* belongs to the branch project "Once and Once Again." this project is about the eternal repetition and the negative existential perspective of the world. All the works under this project are a repetition of the sign "Once and Once Again" from an experienced old person according to the story I wrote for this project, while at the same moment, the story is also an iteration of the repetition of "Once and Once Again."

STORY

Lost symbols are not uncommon, and even the stupidest old man knows that there must be more gone than left. Knowing this, you will not be surprised to learn that these are the emblems of a lost family from another world. These families, like the world, have long been broken, lost, forgotten, or perhaps never remembered. If I had never told you the story, you would understand that it had never existed, just as the world had never existed.

I learned it from the old man, in front of the old wooden house in the dilapidated country in the North. There are not many such villages left in the North, for the others have disappeared little by little. The people there never knew the village existed, and of course they do not remember when it disappeared, and if they return to the place, they leave only the ruins. No one will return to the site, though, because it never existed, and future archaeologists may celebrate their nothfulness by building campfires and holding a silent party to the long sound of the erhu.

The village was not yet up to that time, and people in thick coats swayed along the paths between the courtyards. All along the way, people are familiar to each other. Their wrinkled faces smiled without squeezing, and they nodded their heads slowly, which made no sense. Nothing here made any sense. But to outsiders, it seemed like a high-five to celebrate their friend's passing through the disaster, or a show off. The lorry driver smoked two or three cigarettes at the edge of the village and collected his load for the day. Wrinkles and paper money were mixed into the farmer's wide hands, which squeaked like dead wood as they clenched.

Before 5 p.m., as the sun sets over the village, the women spill the dirty water from their dinner into the backyard gardens and exchange greetings across the path, while the men walk home together from the cabbage fields. If you are a hungry old black dog, when you lie on your stomach, you will see the old man in the middle of the slow steps, his hands in the sleeves, never taken out, sitting on the doorframe, his body swaying slowly with the trunk of the old sophora tree in front of the door, the doorframe and the whole old house made a sigh like the old tree creak. You can't tell which will die first, you or him. The thin face was wrinkled like the rings of an old tree; the beard around the mouth, though trimmed, was as tangled as a cliff-side vine; the cheekbones were like gravel; the ridges on the forehead were like the clouds before a storm, folded and thickly enfolded with weariness. The only evidence of life was the eyes under the sinkhole, which, even when hidden in the narrow gap, shone uncomfortably through the whiteness. In his youth, he was probably the brightest eye in the village.

The old black dog was his companion, and when he came back to the village tired from his long journey, the old dog had just been born, and had been left in a corner, limping like a vine through a crevices in the earth. Through the dilapidated courtyards, he found the old house where he had played as a boy, now empty, so dilapidated that there was not even a skeleton to be found, and he had spent three years repairing it, three years as short as a moment in this village count in century, just long enough to repair it against the wind and rain, and the candlelight shivering in the night. His savings from years of travel have saved him from daily labor, and there is little worth spending in this village where locates on the edge of memory, where everything is born from earth and will return to earth.

On a snowy day when the candles could not be lit, night took most of his soul, and he was so ill that he almost did not survive the winter. His beard, which had been covered with snow, was never black again, and even in summer he dared not leave his jacket. With his hand in his sleeve, he guarded the faint warmth between his hands as an old dragon guards the keys to the treasure. It was also in that spring that wrinkles, along with the vines, covered his face and the old house. He was no longer capable of hard work, but there was no hard work need to be done. One summer in the third year after his recovery, he declared victory in his battle with the disease, knowing that this was the best he could do. For the past eight years, he has been standing in front of the old house day after day, closing his eyes, shaking with the house and keeps murmuring , "Once and once again."

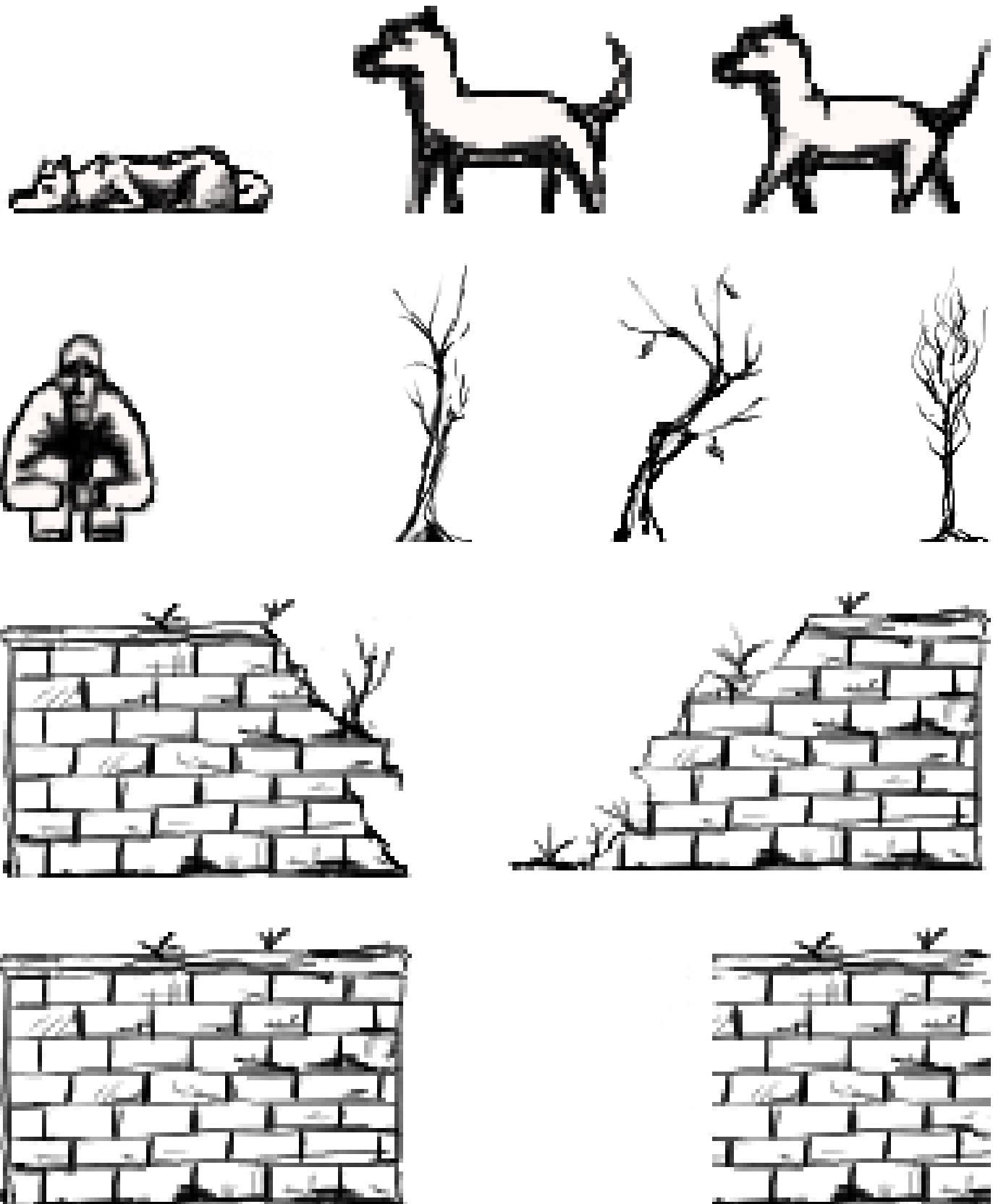
CREATIVE PROCESS

This creative process is divided into three parts: the gaming part, the art part, and the interaction part.

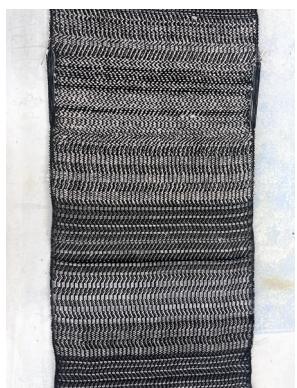
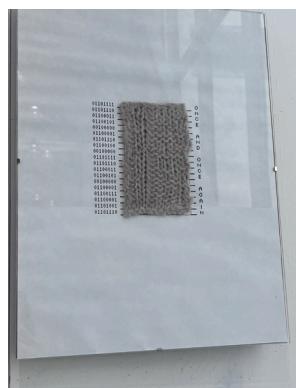
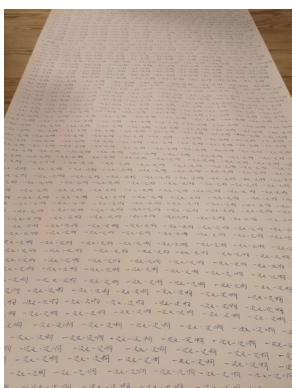
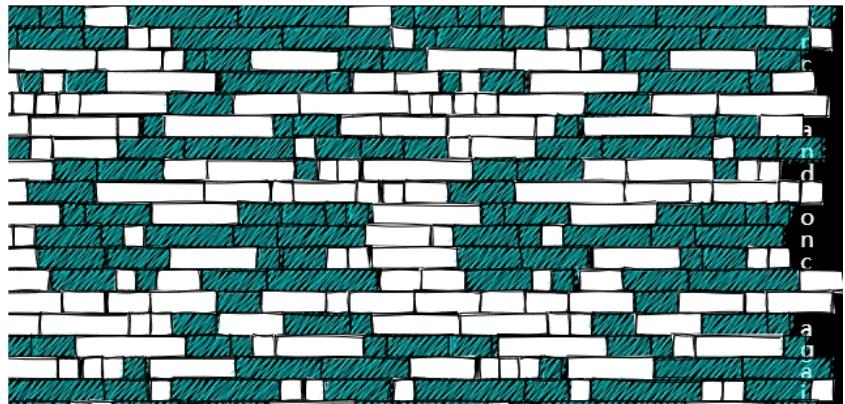
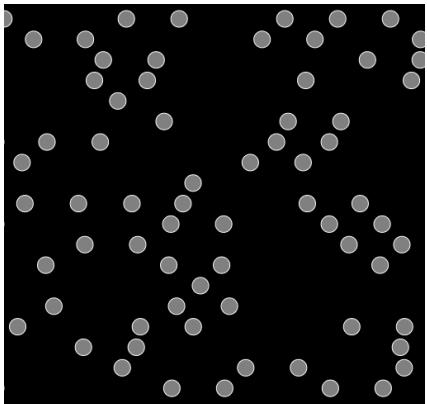
In the gaming section, firstly, this game serves as a practice for the Construct3 program, aiming to keep the initial stage as simple as possible. Secondly, concerning the game controls, the goal is to make them as user-friendly as possible. In terms of the game plot, I aim for simplicity; hence, there are not many designed operations. In the story, I adopted the perspective of "an old dog" to view this "old man," and in the game, I used the same approach. As a player, embodying an old dog, you traverse the dilapidated village and withering trees, eventually reaching the old man, hearing him utter the phrase "Once and Once Again" as the conclusion of the game.



The second part revolves around the art aspect. I noticed many game designs choosing pixel art as the primary artistic style for independent games. This drawing style is expressive, and the creative process is relatively more straightforward. From a personal perspective, my project has consistently aimed to connect with digital art. Additionally, pixel art, as a representative form of early computer art, carries a bit of a cyber wasteland aesthetic.



In the creative process, apart from the aforementioned interaction in the "old dog" section, the overall emphasis of this creative project is on the unity of form. Other projects related to "Once and Once Again" provide context, stories, AR posters, textile works, handmade books, p5.js works, etc., all contribute to supplementing the meaning of this piece. Simultaneously, this work serves as an explanation for other works collectively constructing it. If there is something that can be deemed the core of this piece, I believe it is the phrase in the title, "Once and Once Again."





INSIGHTS AND CONCLUSION

As a whole, "Once and Once Again" contains three layers of repetitive relationships. At the most foundational level, which can also be considered the topmost layer, repetition lies in the meaning of the name itself. Secondly, "Once and Once Again" is a repetitive relationship across various works. Each individual work is challenging to term as a complete piece, but in each separate work, there is a repetition from another material language, meaning that as a creator, the creative process itself is a repetitive one. Lastly, in each separate work, repetition takes the form of the work. In this gaming piece, houses and trees are repeated, and the dog's actions are also a repetitive cycle between frames. This pattern is present in other works as well. Through these levels of repetition, I hope to emphasise the core attribute of repetition in this work continually. As I mentioned earlier, it functions as a kind of "truth" that cannot be avoided.