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# BABEL 'S MONKEYS (2012)

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**Babel's Monkeys is an art work by Luís Sarmiento Ferreira that consists on the cyclical rewriting of the biblical episode of The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9 – King James Version) using words from the real-time stream of Twitter public feeds. The work is presented on a wooden plinth with a built-in monitor on its top face. The object evokes both the shape of a pulpit or lectern and the one of a reading table with a book rack. This relates to the religious nature of the text being displayed in the monitor and to the influence of Jorge Luis Borges' *The Library of Babel* to this work.**

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## 1. ORIGINS

In *The Library of Babel*, a short story by Jorge Luis Borges, a library is imagined which consists of books containing all possible combinations of twenty-five symbols (a twenty-two-letter alphabet, the space, the comma and the stop) “namely, all which it is given to us to express: in all languages.” (Borges, 2009, 71). This all comprehends everything that is possible: every historical fact and fiction; every prediction of the future, including the correct one; everything written in extinct or still to be invented languages as well as their translations. In his prologue to *Fictions*, Borges (2009, 9) points at the origins of a ran-



dom combinatory mode of thought, which in its turn cannot be dissociated from a timeless mode of thought about the origins of all things.

**Fig. 1** *Babel's Monkeys* (more media at <http://spiritbit.com/web/projects/babelsmonkeys>)



Borges' choice of Babel as the setting for a space with its limits in infinity is very probably related to the biblical episode The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9). This narrative tells of a human attempt to approach God by means of a tower designed to reach Heaven. God's reaction to this human enterprise takes the form of attributing different languages to the people and their dispersion over the whole span of the Earth.

An increasing portion of our time is spent nowadays clicking on digital device's keyboards, which continually generates a huge amount of short texts. This reminds us of the 'infinite monkey' theorem, which, in one of its many formulations, states that an immortal monkey pressing a typewriter's keys at random would eventually produce Shakespeare's complete works. The probability of achieving a significant text through a random combination of characters is so low as to be considered impossible by human standards. However, as one or more of the variables is made to approach infinity, the probability of obtaining such a text not only increases, but tends to inevitability.

That contemporary massive text production feeds a collective human memory, built of scattered fragments, lacking an index and often left unread: A memory of Babel, written in a potential infinite process by a massive amount of human beings and stored not in a library but in internet servers.

## 2. HOW IT WORKS

In Babel's Monkeys, Genesis 11:1–9's text is cyclically rewritten, using as a basis a continual flux of words and sentences collected, as nearly as possible in real time, from what is being written at any given moment in the public listings of the Twitter internet platform. The program is made in Processing using Yusuke Yamamoto's Twitter4j library.

pala sama bawah...

буквально

Я **And the** знаю, что ты **of** чувствуешь, потому что прежде, чем я

быть Marouane Fellaini's goals and assists have won Everton 12 Premier League points

this season. Absent. gila. **to** Tetapi satu perkara yang pasti: **to** saya gila cinta **make** dengan anda. Malah jika anda tidak **for** berasa ia. ▼ 星巴芬是我你的名字, 但我真的不喜欢写你的名字, 如何能沉得一个方向? 1 : 富貴也, 50%性器Boys, 想他們的時候, 沒有人能阻止 me.2.13.2

4 我覚得預, 我要玩個烏克列琴那么一點淋浴, 然後我幫 Tank ate Zoro's bone & now he's to looking for it everywhere. I feel a so bad. 私はそんなに又句ごめんなさい。私はそのちょうど天気予報を信じています。 **heaven;** の無い, その置った, それが私を作っているので付箋O.Oを感じる eu com **the** MUITO frio یرش وشمس یران نسا ایا

من أجل أن أظن أنا أحياناً. A veces me siento estoy dando menos a la vida .... 제기 나이 때 난 내 눈을 붙잡았다. 40 우리 가족 모두를 고려하는

것은 훌륭한 시력이 benim yüzük parmağı is hissedemdim i karpal tünel sendromu belirtir ve bulgulan **this** panikledim n yüzden Я все **now** еще можете получить в моей нижней стороне,

что ни черта не будет закрываться. Я бы с удовольствием зменных укусов, но, как **that** и я чувствую себя **not** слишком старым I know yh

sunday dinners be a challenge mash makes me feel sick when I'm hungover :). Não é drama, é dor. Não é ciúme, é medo. Não são

9 palavras, são sentimentos. junnnn :p me tenes que hacer una pizza jujuju

The Footy Fan **James**  
**Version**

1 **And the** a la was of one fortuna and of one (escuela)

2 **And it came to** saiu as they Gerrou from the east, **that they found** a I'm in the waiting of RT and they y' there.

3 **And they said one to another, Go to, let us make** yu and burn them kno **And they had y'** for i and love had they for when

4 **And they said, Go to, let us in us a city and a Daly whose top may reach** City nãr and let us **make us a name,** 聖聖이나 we be 聖기를 abroad 聖이든 the face of the whole earth.

5 **And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children** 너무

6 **And the päivittä said, mitään, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be koska from them, which they have silloin to do.**

7 **Go to, let us go down, and there ked'** their som they may not understand one skutočne speech

8 **So the chief nãive them eu from you dar the face of all the earth; and they left off to pro the city.**

9 **RT is the name of it called bro because the I'm did there 511 the then of all the I've and from told did the u before them ur 2Rt the face of all the directo**

The algorithm replaces, one by one, the displayed words of the text for the ones in newly collected twitter sentences. These sentences may be written in any language. Whenever, in this universe of words, a word appears that is also contained in the Genesis 11:1–9's text, the word is highlighted and stays unchanged and in its place. The “unfound” words remain in constant mutation. As time progresses, the number of words originated in twitter decreases as the words of the text that is being “written” slowly replace them. At the instant the last word is found, the complete Genesis' text disappears and is replaced by a new amalgam of twitter sentences that restarts the process of text construction. Approximately twice a day, Babel's Monkeys reproduces the Tower of Babel narrative in an infinite cycle.

## REFERENCES

Borges, Jorge Luis. “A Biblioteca de Babel” In *Ficciones*, Editorial Teorema, 2009.