The Pedagogical State of Metamorphosis (detail), 2012
silicon-gold microchip
1.0 x 2.0 x 0.2 cm
Courtesy of the artist
Perhaps the most important human technology is language whose intricacy, elasticity and efficacy remain superior to all other technological developments. In *Technics and Civilization*, Lewis Mumford argues that the latent purpose of language was to control, for better or worse, an individual’s own mental and emotional energies.\(^1\) The dialectics between the despotic and democratic characters of language are evident in the tensions between the ancient scripts and alphabets. Egyptian hieroglyphics and Mesopotamian cuneiform involved hundreds of symbols and their impermeable structure consisted of a classification system that prevented access to the uninitiated. The alphabet, on the other hand, reversed the logic of written language by subordinating the signs to their enunciation, thus streamlining the economy of communication.

Alain Badiou describes his concept of the “event” as that “which brings to pass ‘something other’ than the situation, opinions, and situated knowledges.”\(^2\) The invention of the alphabet was an unexpected Badiouian event that eroded the exclusive authority of script over language. It is believed the first known alphabet was marked on the walls of the turquoise mines in Sinai, Egypt, approximately thirty-five centuries ago. The authors belonged to Semitic tribes who had not been cultured into complete docility. Many linguists believe that these tribes developed a new code and defiantly used it to document their names and workdays as a separate accounting system parallel to the records kept by their worklords. In retrospect, this turn of events shaped the possibility for the emergence of philosophy, history and science, but not art. Ancient art and the art that came afterwards remained an integral part of the power structures as a deeper code closely associated with either the church or the state and impenetrable by the average person.

It was not until the emergence of the European avant-garde in the late nineteenth century that Western art initiated a properly utopian art. Similar to the incorporation of the alphabetic languages into the power civilizations of the ancient world, the avant-garde’s intervention was soon interrupted in the second half of the twentieth century by the rise of a new art system. While expanding the possibilities of artistic practice, this new systematization of contemporary art practices, through the codification of its visual and textual languages, tacitly regulated how works of art could be experienced, and gradually began to fold the avant-garde back into the larger culture industry.

Thus, the problem of post avant-garde contemporary art, which, at first glance, seems to be caused by the industrialization of its mode of production, is actually exacerbated by the growing cargo of denotation and connotation with which today’s art is bestowed. However, refusing the categories of meaning and representation, and attenuating art objects to their objecthood, is itself a non-option, since it essentially stops short of its liberating promise; by eliminating the role of language, it allows the fate of art to be “determined in the last instance” by the regime of the art market or the tantalizing procedure of studio practice.\(^3\)
Inspired by the philosophy of Alain Badiou, Ali Ahadi has been experimenting with various materials during the last two years in order to find a way out of the above obstacles or what he calls “the growing redundancy of politically engaged art.” In most cases, doing this has entailed using text or language to undermine the diametric relation between the art object and its meaning. He has, with considerable success, made a kind of art that is invested neither in signification nor in objecthood, but literally bends both principles to their breaking point. To this end, he has made several works pairing different forms of written language from books, text projections and designed typeface with other physical components, such as bookshelves, imaging equipment and now nails and a silicon circuit board. What unites these works is Ahadi’s insistence on separating the materiality of language from its signifying function, thus severing the links between the form of his works and their significance.

In Ahadi’s work, language is more than a visceral system of extreme complexity that escapes the will of those who use it. It is also a real situation in which the unlikelihood of an “event”—in this case the emergence of a new language of art—can unexpectedly become its very possibility through a material encounter with the physical object of language. As with the invention of the alphabet, the objectivity of language is a starting point for Ahadi to dissolve the association of a thing and its meaning by uniting them in the anticipation of the possibility of what could be eventual. This possible event should not be interpreted as Ahadi’s yearning for the return of a new form of avant-garde, but perhaps something unknown and similar to an insurrection with no prior contingency, a rebellion that, in the words of Andre Breton, can only be “its own justification.”

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5 *The Tempest*, Open Source Shakespeare, 1.2.517.