

return 0: An Audio-Visual Performance of Memory and Countermemory

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Abstract

return 0 is an audio-visual livecoding performance that thinks memory through deletion, recurrence, and machine-mediated voice in a hyper-reproductive media environment. Through the live act of activating, removing, and re-enacting code, the performance treats memory not as stable but as processual, turning livecoding into a fragile scene of recollection beyond a transparent technical process, one that contests the black-boxed present. The work fuses ambient experimentalism and arguably kitschy electropop, treating AI music not as simple generation but as mediated return: a voice produced from a human source, extracted, and made strange again. Thematically and lyrically drawing on poetic, media-theoretical, and popular-cultural references, and thinking the life cycle of text as traces and trash, *return 0* becomes a critical fabulation of technologically mediated and (dis)embodied memory, offering a posthumanist technoscience of embodiment and erasure where countermemory survives when the archive no longer preserves, but caches, deletes, and returns us otherwise.

1 INTRODUCTION: MEMORY AS RETURN

return 0 is an audio-visual livecoding performance about memory, forgetting, and machine-mediated return. Sonically, it fuses experimentalism with kitschy electropop. Methodologically, it is built through the repeated act of writing code, activating it, deleting it, and re-enacting it with an AI-mediated voice. Livecoding becomes both the method of the work and its central metaphor: code is not a stable technical script, but a fragile surface where memory appears, breaks, and changes form. The work treats memory as processual rather than stable, asking how embodied memory can be written, held, and reclaimed when digital traces are increasingly disembodied, stored elsewhere, and made difficult to delete. Against the fantasy of the clean archive, *return 0* performs memory as reconstruction, distortion, and countermemory: a return that does not restore, but reopens what has been erased.

2 PRACTICE FIELD: LIVECODING, CLOUD MEMORY, AND MACHINE FORGETTING

return 0 sits within livecoding, AI-mediated music practice, and sound art concerned with liveness, memory, digital waste, and the traces that accumulate in platform infrastructures that condition creative life and consumer life at once.

The work's concern with memory and forgetting is informed by Assmann's work on text, traces, and trash (1996). It asks what remains when memory is no longer scarce, but excessive. Under platform culture listeners and producers leave traces through searches, prompts, listening habits, uploads, drafts, and deletions. Digital traces can therefore become "data out of place,"

circulating as toxic residue within systems of storage, extraction, and reuse (Thylstrup, 2019). We generate data waste without knowing how to fully discard it. We are remembered by systems that remember us too much and too poorly at once.

To think this tension between embodied ephemerality and digital retention, the work turns to Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," especially its image of faces briefly appearing in transit (Pound, 1913). *return 0* rewrites this encounter through the line "apparition of the faces in the cloud in a ghost haiku." The shift from "crowd" to "cloud" preserves the rhythm of the original while moving the image into the computational present. The cloud is not a neutral elsewhere. It is the place where traces are stored, processed, and made available to systems that learn from us without being answerable to us. "Ghost haiku" refers both to poetic compression and to Anthropic's Haiku model, placing literary minimalism beside the naming rituals of contemporary AI.

A further reference point is *Person of Interest*, where "the Machine" appears as a fictional surveillance system that predicts and intervenes (Nolan, 2011–2016). The title *return 0* draws both from the final episode of the series and from the language of code, where return values mark execution, closure, and exit. In the work, the London Underground sound sample manifests the figurative Machine from *Person of Interest* and connects the piece back to Pound's metro (BattletoadOverload, 2024), while extending its concern with memory, ephemerality, bodily encounter, transit, and trash into an urban and platformed sound world.

Through these thematic references the work brings poetic tradition, popular media, AI infrastructure, waste aesthetics, and livecoded sound into contact. It asks how countermemory might work in a hyper-reproductive media environment, where content is generated, cached,

circulated, and abandoned faster than it can be lived with. In such a context, memory is not only preservation. It is refusal. It is deletion. It is the difficult labour of deciding what can return, and what must be allowed to disappear.

3 MAKING THE WORK: VOICE, PROMPT, EXTRACTION, RETURN

The piece was developed through lyric writing, AI-mediated vocal production, vocal extraction, and livecoded remixing. The lyrics, melodic line, and code were written by the artist. The vocal material was produced through Suno, using the artist's own voice as the source input. The prompt asked for an indie shoegaze and glitchy sound with a breathy female vocal lead. The arrangement was directed toward a dark witch house, ethereal, and post-punk atmosphere, at 113 BPM. The requested vocal delivery was airy and intimate, with close-mic proximity and light plate reverb.

After the vocal was generated, the artist extracted it in Suno Studio and remixed it in Strudel. This process is central to the work. The Suno voice is not treated as a finished AI output, but as material to be handled again. The voice therefore appears as both human source and machine-mediated return. It carries the artist's vocal identity but comes back altered.

The code becomes the medium through which this altered return is staged. In performance, the projected code forms both the visual layer and the conceptual architecture of the work. The sonic layer is produced through livecoding, the extracted AI-mediated vocal, and sampled sound. The screen is not just a technical supplement but where the audience sees memory being worked on. Deletion matters as much as production, because what disappears still shapes what follows. This method enacts the central claim of the piece that memory is not a stable container but a processual practice of return under conditions of loss.

4 MEDIATED RETURN IN A HYPER-REPRODUCTIVE AGE

In relation to AIMC 2026's theme, *The Generative Turn: Mediated Musicianship in a Hyper-reproductive*

Age, *return 0* approaches AI music as a practice of mediated return rather than simple generation. The work sits between electronic experimentalism and electropop, between popular feeling and high-concept practice. Through the fragile gesture of writing, sounding, erasing, and returning, *return 0* explores countermemory as an artistic method for feeling through the weight of context in an age of chatbots, prompts, cloud traces, and hyper-production, where voice, code, and memory pass through computational systems that can store, recombine, and forget beyond the artist's full control. Thematically and lyrically drawing on poetic, media-theoretical, and popular-cultural references, and thinking the life cycle of text as traces and trash, *return 0* becomes a critical fabulation of technologically mediated and (dis)embodied memory, offering a posthumanist technoscience of embodiment and erasure where countermemory survives when the archive no longer preserves, but caches, deletes, and returns us otherwise.

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