

TOIDY TOID AND TOID

A Public Art Proposal by Anna Pinkas

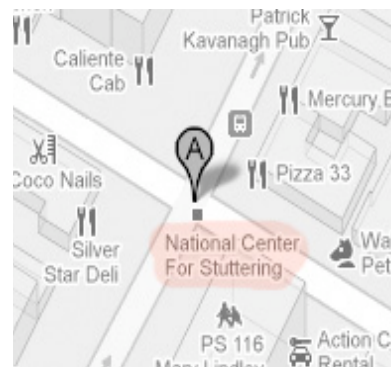
SITE



*“Down on the East side, on the East side
that's my home, sweet home.
Some people think it's the home of black eyes.
Just because guys don't wear collars and ties.
That's all the bunk, they just say that in fun.
Real East side folks is the best what come.
They'd give you their shoit only they ain't got none.
Down on Toidy Toid and Toid.”*

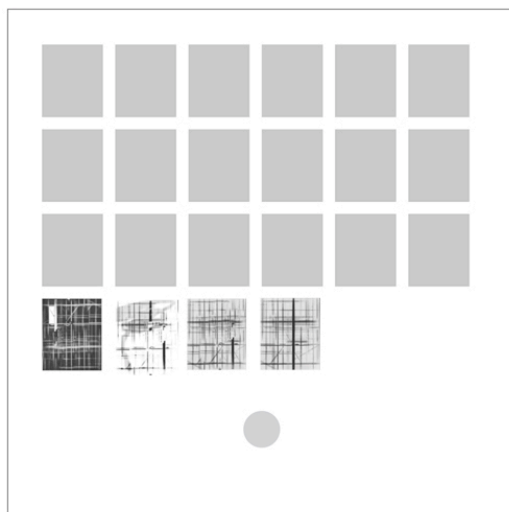
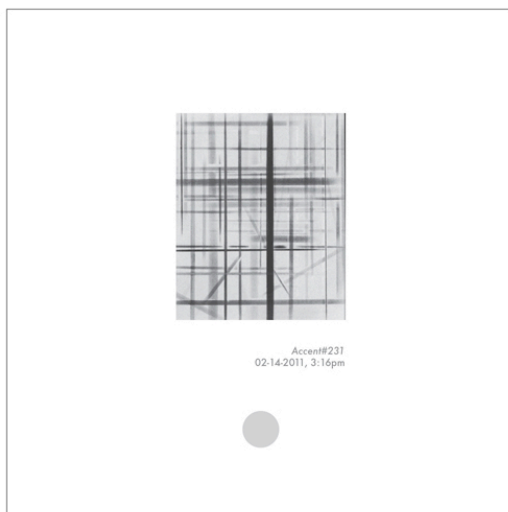
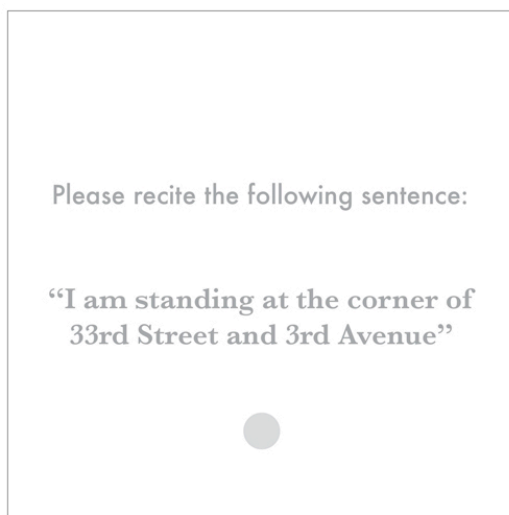
- Lyrics of Song by Ben Ryan, 1926.

33rd Street and 3rd Avenue isn't only close to many iconic entities, such as The Empire State Building, Penn Station and Macy's. It also stands as a quintessential example of New York's distinct accent. Although no early recordings of the address' idiosyncratic pronunciation exists, its use in a number of popular songs from the first part of the 20th Century has anchored it in the public conception of what a New Yorker sounds like. The site's important speech status is visually preponderant to this day: upon entering the address in Google Maps, *The National Center for Stuttering* is the closest label to be displayed. The site is very close to one of the busiest parts of town – full of commuters, tourists, foreigners, and residents – yet off-centered enough to allow for a comfortable interaction with the installation.



DESCRIPTION

A simple white cube stands at the corner of 33rd Street and 3rd Avenue, attached to the intersection's street pole. The title of the installation (1) is displayed until the viewer triggers the "Contribute" button at the top of the box. A short instruction page (2) asks the participant to recite the following sentence: "I am standing at the corner of 33rd Street and 3rd Avenue". Upon delivering this statement a visual abstraction of the speaker's individual accent (3) appears, including its number, date and time. 15 seconds later, the last 100 accents (4) are displayed in a grid. After 2 minutes the box returns to its "title page".



TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

A button triggers the system upon being pressed. The box contains a microphone hooked up to a voice-recognition software. The program first establishes whether the correct sentence has been uttered. If so, it transforms the pitch and rhythmic qualities of the audio data into visual components. The exact nature of the visualization yet has to be determined, but it will be an abstract image, reminiscent of a graphite drawing. The individual image is saved into a database and rear – projected (or ideally e-inked) onto the surface of the box. The last 100 entries from the “collection” are then displayed for 2 minutes or until the next speaker’s contribution. The entire database is also viewable through a simple web-browser interface.

CONCLUSION

“A product of scores of nationalities, thousands of occupations and millions of people in necessary and constant contact, of whom some never leave the city while others come and go in a day, the New York language reflects every facet of a multifarious environment”

- *New York Panorama*, The Federal Writers Project, 1938.

One of the most striking auditory features of New York City is its diverse and constantly changing array of human voices. While much debate surrounds the exact nature/origins/future of the City’s accent(s), it is directly rooted in the city’s migration history and socio-economical development. Accents are at once highly personal and bound to national and ethnic identities and stereotypes. As a foreigner but fluent English speaker, my own accent becomes at time an uncanny presence. I am usually unconscious of my French inflection and am always surprised upon hearing a recording of myself, of how much it actually is part of my outward identity. New York has come to represent home to me. My accent has become a part of the city’s streets sonic making, but it will also always remain as a reminder of my native citizenship. Audio data may seem like the best way of recording and comparing speech. However, a visual interpretation allows for a more concrete and less subjective examination. Furthermore, it permits a global view impossible with sound’s ephemeral nature. The “collection” doesn’t stand as a socio-scientific gathering, but rather evokes the tension between the city’s diversity, the individual self and cultural identities.