Students,

I'm looking forward to our workshop on Aleph Null 3.0 on February 19 (11:30-2:30).

Please bring two folders of images and a text

I'd like you to **please bring two folders of images**. Anywhere from 15 to, say, 200 images in each folder. Concerning the first folder, *the images should all share something in common*. Either a palette, or what the images are of, or that they are all textural, or architectural, or of faces, etc. Here's the sort of thing we're going to do with your images:

- http://vispo.com/aleph3/an.html?d=Jim%20Andrews samples from faces of Trump and his cabinet, top aides, and a few Republicans. The set of images in this case is of faces.
- http://vispo.com/aleph3/an.html#?d=Illuminated%20Manuscripts samples from a set of images of illuminated manuscripts.
- http://vispo.com/aleph3/an.html#?d=Regina%20Celia%20Pinto samples from images that are largely textural. The first folder of images will be used like the above sets of images are used: you will import that folder of images into an Aleph Null nib.

I'd also like you to **please bring a text**. You see how http://vispo.com/aleph3/an.html#?d=C%20Mehrl%20Bennett presents a text. And the text is filled with images. So I'd like you to bring a **second set of images**, only this set of images is to fill your text with, like you see in http://vispo.com/aleph3/an.html#?d=C%20Mehrl%20Bennett

Background on Aleph Null 3

I consider myself to be a poet. If you ask me, that's what I've been doing all my adult life. But my output is different than normal. I have created http://vispo.com (1996) rather than writing books, though I also have a couple of books. But vispo.com is my main output. It's a site of interactive, multimedia poetry, visual art, and sonic art. And a lot of essays on art and technology, on poetics. Also, I don't do readings anymore. I do presentations. I show the stuff I make for the screen and I talk about it. And perform some of it. And now I do workshops also.

Interesting that Coach House Books has suspended its publishing of books of poetry. And they say it's a philosophical decision. Perhaps they will start publishing multimedia, intermedia. Hybrid work. Fusions of arts and media. Yes, poetry is changing. How people read is changing. I've been saying it for a long time.

I've been working on Aleph Null since 2011. I created version 1.0 in 2011, version 2.0 in 2016, and version 3.0 in 2017.

Version 1.0: http://vispo.com/aleph
Version 2.0: http://vispo.com/alephTouch
Version 3.0: http://vispo.com/aleph3

Prior to 2011, (2004-2010) I created a different graphic synthesizer called dbCinema (http://vispo.com/dbcinema). I wrote it in Director/Lingo. Which became obsolete. Around that time, the HTML5 canvas emerged. Which was touted as a replacement for Flash and Director. So I amped-up my JavaScript and created Aleph Null 1.0 in 2011.

Aleph Null is an online, interactive, generative art work/tool I wrote in JavaScript/CSS/HTML. It's supposed to be fun and exciting.

The first two versions were instruments of colour music. You play them with the control panel via either the mouse and/or the keyboard. What's colour music and/or an instrument of colour music? I talk about it at http://vispo.com/alephTouch. Version 3, in addition to being an instrument of colour music, is also a graphic synthesizer. What's a graphic synthesizer? I talk about that at http://vispo.com/aleph3 . Just like an audio synthesizer uses sounds to synthesize other sounds, Aleph Null samples from graphics, mixing them together with dynamic opacity and global compositing operations. Some of the nibs in version 3 sample from images. You can import your own images in Aleph Null 3 for a brush to chew on.

Some might say that Aleph Null is primarily a visual art contraption and that it has little to do with poetry or writing. To me, the big picture is that my site vispo.com is a synthesis of arts and media—and that is important to contemporary poetry. Poetry isn't simply a matter of printed pages, anymore. Poetry has to go where language goes or risk being a quaint province of the merely Luddite. Vispo.com is a synthesis of poetry, visual art, sonic art and programming. Aleph Null is quite visual, interactive, and generative.

But it is not without relation to poetry. First of all, Aleph Null is a *written thing*. It's written in JavaScript, HTML and CSS, but it's written. Almost all of it is hand-coded. And that programming does some things that you won't find elsewhere. Secondly, there are a couple of nibs that deal with text, as we'll see. Also, in version 3 I invited mainly visual poets to send me sets of images. There are 18 participating visual poets in Aleph Null 3.0 such as Chris Joseph, Ted Warnell, Jim Leftwich, Dan Waber, Regina Célia Pinto, Stasja Voluti, Catherine Mehrl Bennett, Andrew Topel, Nico Vassilakis, Maria Damon, Karl Kempton, Brent Bechtel, Gary Barwin, and others.

The animation is done with the HTML5 <canvas>, which is touted as a replacement for Flash and Director. Flash requires a plugin, whereas the <canvas> is pure HTML/JavaScript. When mobile grew ascendant, plugins were eschewed because the ones such as Flash and Director weren't made for the smaller, slower, less powerful, battery driven computational environments of mobile.

In generative art, the artist gives up control of the process by which the art is generated, in some regard. Generative art doesn't have to be computer-generated. It can be, say, chemically-generated, or generated by the wind or rain, etc. In Aleph Null, I do part of the generation. You do some of the generation. And Aleph Null does some of the generation.

In Aleph Null, you create brushes with the "create" and "destroy" buttons shown toward top left of the control panel. The "c" and "d" keys do the same thing. In version 1, you can only have one brush at a time. In versions 2 and 3, you can have as many brushes at once as you like. The Aleph Null 3 control panel is shown below.

If you have created multiple brushes, you select which one you want to edit via the drop down menu at top right of the control panel. The below diagram shows that drop down menu expanded to display the names of 5 brushes (Dan Waber, Stasja Voluti, etc).

Each frame of the animation, each brush lays down at least one brush stroke. The shape of a brush-stroke is determined by the nib that the brush has. To give the editable brush a different nib, you click on the icon of the nib you want to give it. The scrollable list of nib icons is shown below.
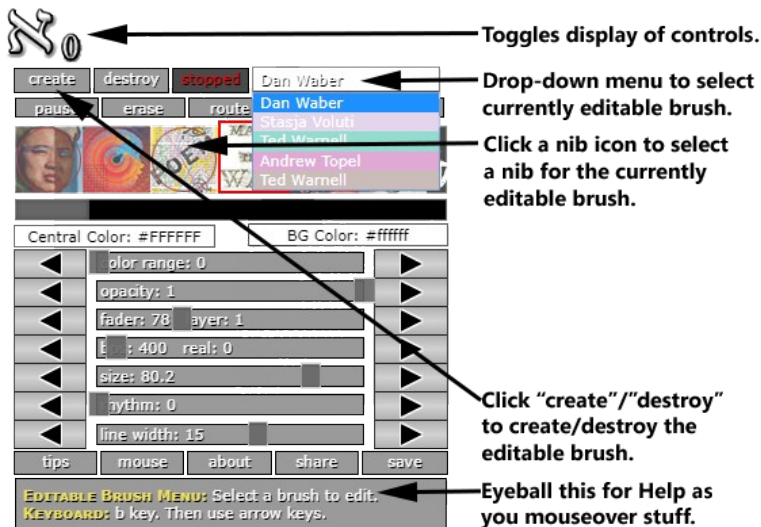
Illustration 1: Aleph Null 3.0 control panel

If you click a nib icon, such as the one to the left, that gives the editable brush the nib associated with that nib icon. If you click the already-selected nib icon again, that opens up the Nib Options window, shown below. You can also open the Nib Options window by clicking the "n" key.
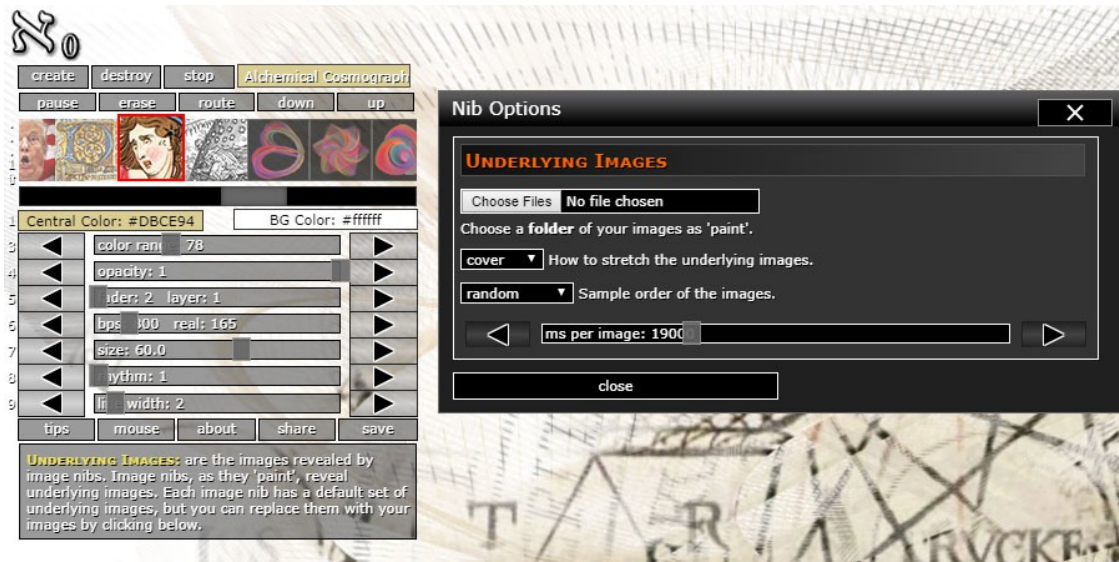

Illustration 2: Aleph Null 3.0 Nib Options window

The Nib Options window is where you can import your own images into the nib (click "Choose Files"). There are other options you can configure also. There's a video on how to import your own images at https://youtube.com/watch?v=hca9IDRQMSQ

In the workshop, we'll look at Aleph Null as a work of art and as a tool. It's a tool in that you interact with it to create images that probably don't look exactly like what anybody else has done with it. And you can import your own images into it, like you can with many other tools. But it's a work of art in that if you do nothing, it generates art on its own anyway. It is generative even if you are very active with it. So it's a kind of combo tool and work of art.

We'll look briefly at versions 1 and 2 and then dive into using version 3.

We'll spend some time checking out the four types of nibs in Aleph Null 3:

- Colour music nibs (the nibs that are in version 1 and 2)
- Graphic synthesizer nibs (the nibs that allow you to import your own images)
- The text nibs (where it displays text you configure and fills the text with your images)
- The video nib (where the brush samples from a folder of videos). This one doesn't work very well yet. It'll be mainly a version 4.0 feature.

I have also written about Aleph Null. There are essays on the different versions at
Version 2.0: http://vispo.com/alephTouch/slideshow/info.htm
Version 3.0: http://vispo.com/aleph3

Other work by Jim Andrews

- Arteroids is a shoot-em-up poetry game: http://vispo.com/arteroids
- Globebop is the premier web app for couch potato tourism: http://globebop.com
- Seattle Drift is the world's first DHTML poem (10997): http://vispo.com/animisms/SeattleDrift.html
- Enigma n is a philosophical poetry toy for poets and philosophers from the age of 4 up: http://vispo.com/animisms/enigman
- The Stir Fry Texts are interactive twitching texts: http://vispo.com/StirFryTexts