

NMC



Media-N

Journal of the New Media Caucus | SPRING 2015: V.11 N.01

> the aesthetics of <

ERASURE

COVER IMAGE: *He Did Not See Any Americans Blue*, 2006, Oil on linen, 4 elements. 33 x 102 in. / 83.8 x 259.1 cm.
Text: U.S. government document. © 2006 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

Media-N Journal was established in 2005 to provide a forum for New Media Caucus members, featuring their scholarly research, artworks and projects. The **New Media Caucus** is a nonprofit, international membership organization that advances the conceptual and artistic use of digital media. Additionally, the **NMC** is a College Art Association Affiliate Society. The mission of the electronic and print journals is to promote academic inquiry conducted by **NMC** members; to reflect the wide variety of themes and fields in new media research; to further the evolving discourses related to theory and practice; to showcase the work of new media artists and their presentation environments; and to investigate the issues surrounding education and new media. Three editions are published per year: spring, summer and fall. **Media-N's** online & print versions differ in format but are similar in content. The publication is freely available online, and the print version may be purchased through a print-on-demand service. Each has a unique ISSN. **Media-N** is a blind, peer reviewed and invitational journal. It is open to submissions in the form of theoretical papers, reports, and reviews on new media artworks.

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EDITORIAL STATEMENT

Against the backdrop of a longstanding practice of 'erasure' both in artistic and critical work, co-guest editors **Paul Benzon** and **Sarah Sweeney** take up challenging questions related to the aesthetics of erasure today in the digital era. They investigate new meanings and the relevance of said practice within twenty-first century contemporary contexts typically defined by digital knowledge production, preservation, and sharing.

With a number of tantalizing questions in mind, the guest editors have assembled texts and visual essays by fourteen authors: **Joshua Craze; Seth Ellis; Kaja Marczewska; Justin Berry; David Gyscek; Derek Beaulieu; Amaranth Borsuk, Jesper Juul, and Nick Montfort; Torsa Ghosal; William Basinski; Ella Klik and Diana Kamin; and Matthew Schilleman.** Their contributions give expression to five sites of inquiry mapped by the editors within the expansive practice of erasure—*Power, Capital, Signal and Noise, Technology and Archive*—a topography in which issues of technology and materiality are explored.

The Reviews and Reports subsection of *Media-N* is devoted to the publication of high-quality reviews and reports that provide readers with an up-to-date picture of global trends in new media art. Reviews and Reports Editor **Grant Taylor** asserts that newly published books, new media conferences and symposia, and current art exhibitions are important sites in which cutting-edge scholarship and emergent practices are first revealed. With the intention of bringing the interpretive tools of art criticism to bear on these new media manifestations, the editor has assembled two book reviews; one by **Orit Halpern** on Chris Salter's recently published book *Alien Agency* (MIT Press, 2015), and a second one by **Marie Leduc** titled *The Hypertext of HerMe(s)* on Judy Freya Sibayan's ebook (KT Press, 2014). Two exhibition reviews written by **Ahyoung Yoo** and **Paul Thomas Rubery** offer readers a critical overview the 2014 Gwangju Biennale: *Burning Down the House* in South Korea and the 2015 Triennial: *Surround Audience* at the New Museum in New York City. **Gail Kenning**, a Sydney-based artist, researcher, educator, and writer, proposes unique musings and reflections on the positive impact of residencies on creative practice and scholarship in her piece *Fellowships, Residencies, and Resonances: A Self-Interview*.

-Pat Badani, Editor-in-Chief

GUEST EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

PAUL BENZON
Temple University

SARAH SWEENEY
Skidmore College

THE AESTHETICS OF ERASURE

INTRODUCTION

Erasure is the black hole at the center of digital culture, the endgame of cultural practice in the moment of network connectivity and cloud-based storage. Erasure has long been an important dimension of both artistic and critical work: Robert Rauschenberg asserted in an interview that his seminal 1953 *Erased de Kooning Drawing* was neither protest, nor destruction, nor vandalism, but rather poetry, the product of a deeply immanent engagement with the materiality and objecthood of preexisting work. [1] Similarly, for Jacques Derrida, the paradoxical status of all textual marks as perpetually under erasure (*sous rature*) is at the crux of the larger paradoxes of memory and forgetting, presence and absence, trace and destruction, that define the status of the archive. [2]

The work of Rauschenberg and Derrida, among others, makes clear that erasure is nothing new, that it is not unique to the moment of the digital, or indeed to any particular period of technology or artistic history—quite the opposite, we might say that as long as the human technology of mark-making has been in play, so has the possibility of erasure, the unmaking of the mark. Yet despite this longstanding possibility, the practice of erasure has taken on new meaning and relevance within a moment in which aesthetic and information materiality is newly at stake in a variety of contexts. In the early twenty-first century, we find ourselves in an era in which state surveillance is capable of capturing, storing, and analyzing all personal communications, and in which even the much-heralded ephemerality of photographic sharing applications such as Snapchat is revealed to be just another instance of deferred, secreted permanence. Within the context of such totalizing archival conditions, erasure seems all but impossible, an unattainable status amidst the constant hum of production, preservation, and sharing that defines contemporary digital knowledge work. Yet this near-impossibility is precisely what makes erasure a vitally necessary artistic, technological, and social practice. Erasure provides a point of departure from network culture, and thus from the constraints of big data, the archive, and the cloud; through erasure, forgetting and disappearance become radical, profoundly productive acts.

This special issue of *Media-N* brings together a diverse collection of visual and critical essays to consider the artistic, social, technological, and theoretical contours of this productivity. While our contributors explore practices of erasure that serve a range of social ends, from critique and liberation to state secrecy and violence, they all understand erasure as profoundly productive and generative, defined not by intangibility or absence but rather by eclectic moments of complexly situated, idiosyncratic materiality. Erasure takes place across a wide range of contexts and sites in these works: the state archive, the corporate server, the found document, the mass-market text. Within these contexts, our contributors reveal a variety of different marks within the larger practice of erasure. In a number of pieces, destruction serves as a governing operation, with authors and artists focusing on the technological eradication of texts by means of both chance and choice. Other contributors concentrate on overwriting as a practice of erasure, from the local context of a singular textual object to the global archive of the web at large. Concealment also emerges as a key strategy in a number of essays: as we learn to see what is covered against what is left uncovered, we learn to see these images as dense palimpsests, layered with history, memory, perception, and secrecy. Still others omit in order to create, raising the question of what is left out through what remains. Populated by traces, aftereffects, remainders, and residues as much as they are by invisibility, void,

and blankness, these works collectively ask us to see and read in new ways, and to attend to the complex dynamics between absence and presence in coming to terms with the media art of the twenty-first century. As we read what has been taken against what is left, an array of larger issues and questions come into view as well, sites of inquiry that are made newly visible through the making-invisible of erasure.

Our issue's first section explores what erasure reveals about institutions of power and secrecy. Joshua Craze considers the *Redaction Paintings* and *Dust Paintings*, two recent series by Jenny Holzer that take redacted government documents from the War on Terror as their source material. Craze shows how Holzer's transformation of these documents draws our attention to what he describes as their "negative equation" between the abstracting effects of state power and the concrete, embodied practices of discipline that sustain that power; as we see these documents with new eyes through Holzer's appropriations, we see a secret history made public in their concealments and coverings. Seth Ellis' visual essay *Version Control* focuses on the public history that becomes visible through a single glitch in Google Street View. While the seemingly perpetual present moment that defines Street View comes from an equally perpetual erasure of the past through the overwriting of the present, this glitch reveals a more complex constellation of space and time that lies remnant within the digital behemoth's archive. Seizing on the stratified,

multiple pasts revealed by this glitch as an artistic point of departure, Ellis engages in a speculative reimagining of public space and the social populations and possibilities that might inhabit it.

In our second section, Kaja Marczewska and Justin Berry consider how artistic practices of erasure serve as a means of critique within the excess of late capital culture. Like Ellis, Marczewska focuses on Google, turning her attention to the corporation's practices of data mining and user profiling. Her essay focuses on Mimi Cabell and Jason Huff's conceptual novel *American Psycho*, in which the authors reproduce Bret Easton Ellis' novel of the same name as a nearly blank text, omitting Ellis' prose and instead printing only the Google Ads generated by sending that prose back and forth through Gmail. This practice transforms the infamous violence and material excess of the original text in order to foreground the strategic possibilities of Marczewska's titular "algorithmic extreme," suggesting how in a moment defined by the invisible violence and excess of big data, a text stripped of everything but that data's end product constitutes perhaps both the purest document of digital capitalism and the sharpest critique of that capitalism. Likewise, Justin Berry's series *Untitling Landscapes* digitally paints over the identifying information from the covers of mass-market science fiction and fantasy paperbacks, replacing it with imperceptibly integrated blank space. The resulting landscapes signify in their emptiness for imagined safe zones,

silent refuges from the cultural and visual noise of late capital.

Taking the relations between information and sensation as a point of departure, the artists in our third section focus on how erasure modulates between signal and noise, and on the roles omission and concealment might play in how we see and read. In *Habits of Experience*, *Habits of Understanding*, David Gyscek paints over portions of a photographed landscape, concealing different components of each image across this series to create a constant oscillation between figure and ground over multiple images. For Gyscek, this approach juxtaposes the encyclopedic capture of the camera and the selective perceptions of the embodied seer; by "imagining out" the comprehensive data of the photographic image, he transforms the truth claims of the modern era's most crucial visual technology, creating spaces that are subject to the subtraction and selectivity of the human mind. Derek Beaulieu's experimental novel *Local Colour* also operates through visual subtraction: using Paul Auster's novella *Ghosts* as source material, Beaulieu removes all of Auster's text except for color-oriented, chromatic words, and then replaces those words with rectangles corresponding to the colors they denote. Stripped of all alphabetic markers and identifiers, the resulting text hovers between poetry, art, and sound, an ambient artifact that throws into relief the profoundly material modes of filtering that define all of these forms.

While technology and technological change are at stake in all of the work in this special issue, the artists and writers in our fourth section foreground these issues with particular urgency. *The Deletionist*, a JavaScript bookmarklet developed by Amaranth Borsuk, Jesper Juul, and Nick Montfort, generates erasure poetry from the text of any web page. The deeply spatial texts that result derive not from randomized erasures but rather from highly formalized rules, producing the poetry of emptiness through algorithmic constraint. *The Deletionist's* creators see it as revealing an alternate World Wide Web—a "Worl," in their nomenclature—that is as distinctive and different as it is fugitive. Torsa Ghosal's discussion of worlds under erasure in contemporary Hollywood cinema strikes a similar technological resonance along the axes of time and media change. The erasure of imagined storyworlds has been a common strategy of literary experimentation for decades, but in transposing this practice to the visual, Ghosal finds an explanation for this practice rooted in medium specificity rather than narrative practice. Tracing this erasure—a practice she terms "unprojection"—across a series of recent films, she shows how it becomes a testing ground on which filmmakers represent and respond to the change from analog to digital cinema, interrogating the stakes of technological change through their films' aesthetic frameworks. William Basinski's ambient composition *The Disintegration Loops* also self-reflexively documents this change through a similarly haunting, dramatic destruction.

Basinski produced *The Disintegration Loops* by digitizing a set of fragile analog tape loops, documenting the sounds of decay produced as the tapes began to fall apart in the process of transcription. Coupled with the composer's video of the World Trade Center towers collapsing—an event that took place as Basinski finished transcribing the tapes—these sounds document change through decay, hauntingly transposing one materiality into another.

Our issue ends with several essays that turn explicitly to the question of the archive, perhaps the largest and most fundamental issue at stake in the aesthetics of erasure. The materiality that runs through erasure in all its forms bears on the archive in complex, accretive ways; if every act of erasure is an act of production, a generative mark, then every erasure thus adds to the archive at the same time that it seems to take away from it. Ella Klik and Diana Kamin discuss Max Dean's 1992-1995 installation *As Yet Untitled*, a predigital work in which a robotic arm presents viewers with found photographs to be saved or shredded, as part of a complex genealogy of the role of erasure within the digital archive. Offering a counterpoint to several critical accounts of digital erasure, Klik and Kamin use Dean's work as the cornerstone of a theory of the lost/found, a third archival gesture beyond the binary of saving and deleting. Beyond these two endpoints, they suggest, the lost/found poses the possibility of a more immanent and incomplete trajectory for archival objects, characterized by

moments of “producing, dislocating, finding, and re-purposing that ha[ve] already taken place and [are] yet to come.” In reading the protocols of digital storage alongside Sigmund Freud’s archetypal Mystic Writing-Pad, Matthew Schilleman traces a similar liminality between preservation and disposal. Tracing a history of digital reading and writing from Vannevar Bush’s prototypical memex to contemporary storage software such as Evernote, Schilleman shows how the tension between remembering and repressing is not only psychological but also technological, with digital technology’s perpetual promise of renewal and refreshability inextricable from its need to erase. Schilleman sees in this

interdependence a powerful need to introduce forgetting into discussions of digital media—to remember forgetting, as it were.

Taken together, the investigations into the place of erasure in twenty-first-century art, technology, and culture in this special issue reveal a wide topography of locations, processes, aesthetics, and intentionalities. They attest to the ways in which, in its complexities, its materialities, and its mobilities across time, space, and medium, erasure is an urgently present artistic practice, now perhaps more than ever. When we look at an erasure, we see a text that is neither less nor more than its original source, but rather one that is

uncannily elsewhere. Indeed, perhaps in looking at erasures such as the ones in this collection, we are compelled to look not at a single site of disappearance, but ultimately at everything and everywhere else—to take the additive, generative, productive aesthetics of erasure as a catalyst for seeing the complex networks, affiliations, appropriations, histories, and futures that exist in ever-changing configurations around the voids of the digital moment.

REFERENCES

1. Robert Rauschenberg, interview, “Robert Rauschenberg discusses *Erased de Kooning Drawing*,” *Artforum*, <http://artforum.com/video/id=19778&mode=large>, accessed March 22, 2015.
2. The questions of erasure, trace, and the archive are pervasive in Derrida’s work; see, for example, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

BIOS

Paul Benzon teaches media studies, contemporary literature and culture, and critical writing at Temple University. In his research, he explores how the material and formal extremities of textual artifacts reveal the cultural history of modern and contemporary media technology. He is currently at work on a book project entitled *Deletions: Absence, Obsolescence, and the Ends of Media*. In *Deletions*, he traces a history of textual disappearance across a range of twentieth- and twenty-first-century media, from book burning, redaction, and the spontaneous combustion of celluloid film to the global circulation of electronic waste and the imminent obsolescence of physical storage media amidst the twenty-first-century rhetoric of the digital cloud. His work has appeared in *electronic book review*, *CLCWeb*, *PMLA* (where it won the William Riley Parker Prize for an Outstanding Article in 2010), and *Narrative* (where it received the James Phelan Prize for the Best Contribution to Narrative in 2013), and is forthcoming in *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities* (2016) and *Publishing as Artistic Practice* (2016).

Sarah Sweeney received her BA in Studio Art from Williams College and an MFA in Digital Media from Columbia University School of the Arts and is currently

an Associate Professor of Art at Skidmore College. Her digital and interactive work interrogates the relationship between photographic memory objects and physical memories, and is informed by both the study of memory science and the history of documentary technologies. In her work, she explores the space between information that is stored corporeally in our memory and the information that is captured and stored in memory objects created by documentary technologies including camera phones, stereoscopic cameras, and home video cameras—each project makes tangible the deletions and accretions produced through our interactions with these technologies. She is the creator of *The Forgetting Machine*, an iPhone app commissioned by the new media organization Rhizome, that systematically destroys digital photographs each time they are viewed or refreshed to simulate the theory of reconsolidation proposed by scientists studying memory. Her work has appeared nationally and internationally in exhibitions at locations including the Orange County Center for Contemporary Art, the Los Angeles Center for Digital Art, the New Jersey State Museum, the Black and White Gallery, and the UCR/California Photography Museum.

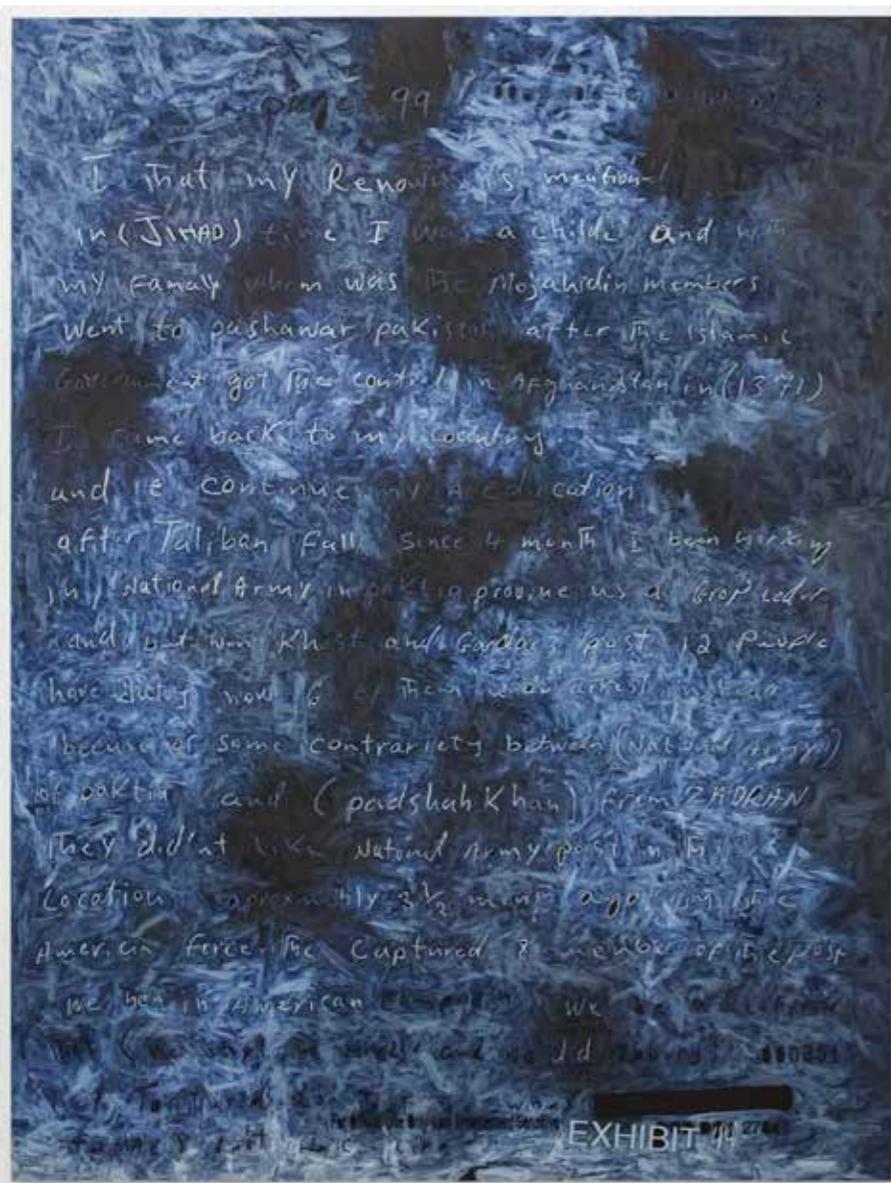
section one:

POWER

in the dead LETTER OFFICE

Joshua Craze, Assistant Professor, University of Chicago

[KEYWORDS: ERASURE, REDACTION, SECRECY, ABSTRACTION, VISIBILITY, HOLZER, TORTURE, TERROR, AFGHANISTAN, IRAQ, GUANTANAMO]



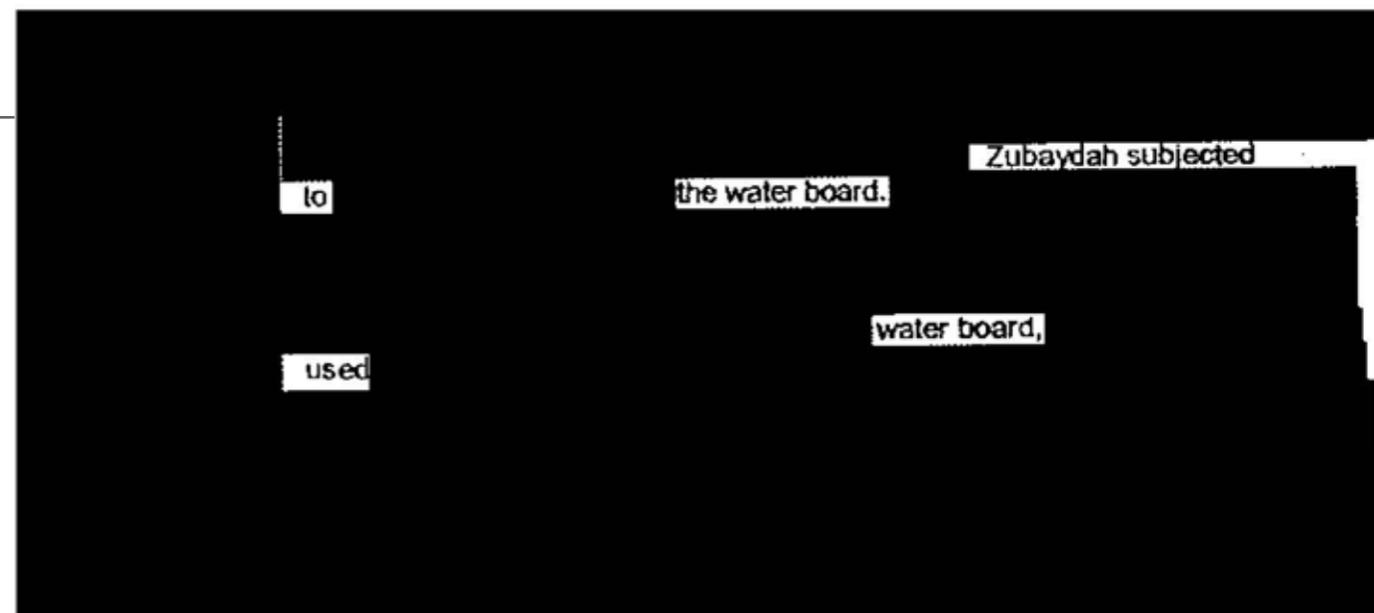
1. Behind the canvas, the water looks cold and unforgiving. It is as if the words were written onto ice crystals, black on blue, and where the canvas is still dark and liquid, I have to step closer in order to read them. Only when I lean in can I see the file number at the top of the page, (0062-04-C | D 369-69278), which indicates that the painting is based on a government document. It is difficult to read the words.

Slowly, I make out the handwritten lines that begin page 99 of the U.S. military's report on the actions of the Special Forces personnel that beat and burnt eight prisoners in Gardez, Afghanistan, before dousing them with cold water and sending them out into the snow and ice. It begins: "I that my Renown is mentioned in (JIHAD) time I was a child."

2. As a journalist and researcher, I have spent years poring over the thousands of documents that constitute the archival record of the war on terror: government inquiries into CIA abuses, interrogation records, and official memoranda, all of them only released into the public realm after Freedom of

(left) Fig. 1. *in (JIHAD) time*, 2014, oil on linen, 57 x 44 in. / 147.3 x 111.8 cm. Text: U.S. government document. © 2014 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Used with permission.

(right page) Fig. 2. Other document #131, 2002, CIA.



Information Act (FOIA) requests made by the media and organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Over the last decade, journalists have used these documents as crucial sources of evidence in uncovering the American government's use of extradition, detainment, and torture. They tell the stories of many of the detainees still languishing in Guantanamo, as well as a more banal yet chilling tale—one of bureaucratic indifference amid the humdrum emails of office life.

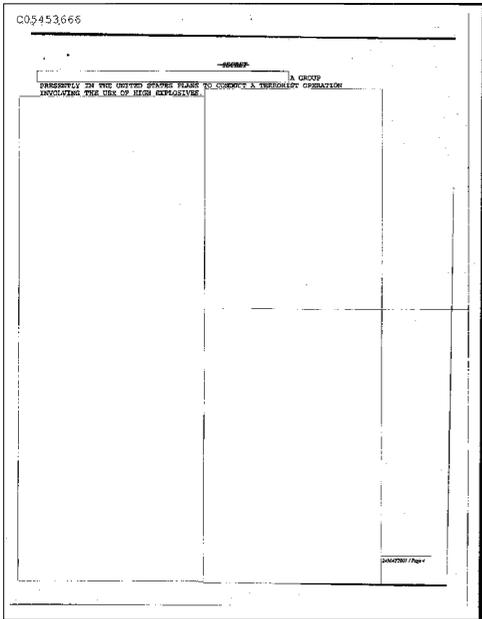
When these documents finally enter the public realm, they have been redacted, and on page after page, dissonant phrases appear, lonely amidst the black marks left by the redactors, who remove information for reasons of national security. [1] Some of these documents, such as "Other Document #131" (Fig 2), are so heavily classified that only a few words remain on the page. In others, I am forced to make sense of

sentences in which redacted subjects do unmentionable things to redacted objects. After a year of reading, I realized that I had stopped seeing the black and begun treating the documents simply as sources of information. My eyes skimmed the pages, pausing only on the words, trying to derive what sense I could from the scattered phrases; I treated the redactions as obstructions put in my path.

For as long as I have been writing about these documents, Jenny Holzer has been painting them. Her work doesn't only look at the words—it focuses on the redactions, and transforms them. The first series she made, her *Redaction Paintings* (2006), are silkscreen copies of redacted documents, colored and enlarged. The paintings recall Andy Warhol's *Death and Disaster* series: fleeting images of contemporary violence snatched from the media cycle and turned into objects of contempla-

tion. Each canvas is roughly three times the size of the document on which it is based, as if the paintings were calling us to attention, as if, somehow, we missed something the first time we saw the documents.

In her *Endgame* series (2012) and then in *Dust Paintings* (2014), Holzer's work changes focus. Rather than primarily painting the bureaucratic corpus of torture memos and legal rulings related to the war on terror, Holzer paints interrogation reports, and the voices of the detained become increasingly present on her canvases. At the same time, the form of the work shifts. The silkscreen copies of the *Redaction Paintings* are replaced by oil paintings, in which each word is painstakingly written onto linen canvas—bureaucratic horror rendered as calligraphy. If the *Redaction Paintings* make visible the abstract bureaucracy of secrecy, these later canvases restore materiality to



(top) Fig. 4 — Title excised, excerpt from a CIA report on potential terrorist activity in the United States, 2001.

testimony that is otherwise too quickly reduced to a two-paragraph story in the newspaper.

Two large blocks of color dominate one of the Dust Paintings (Fig 3). They could be landscapes, set vertically: two beaches at sunset, the sun red as it dips below the horizon. Above these holiday scenes is a yellow block, and just below it, some faint type:

A GROUP PRESENTLY IN THE UNITED STATES PLANS TO CONDUCT A TERRORIST OPERATION INVOLVING THE USE OF HIGH EXPLOSIVES

The effect is startling. In the original document (Fig 4), there is the capitalized phrase, and underneath, two long empty rectangles (sometimes government redactions are black blocks, and sometimes—in ink-saving mode—white shapes with black outlines) that obliterate the contents of the rest of the page. Holzer redacts these redactions, transforming the empty white columns of the original into abstract blocks of color, the material abstraction of the painting overlaid onto the abstract logic of bureaucracy.

After nearly a decade of looking at these documents and struggling to find sense amid the redactions, I feel like I am encountering them again, as if for the first time, though I am in a gallery, and in front of me is a linen canvas.

3. In one of her Redaction Paintings, *Samarra Bridge Incident*, an inquiry into military abuses in Iraq is printed in red, and the redacted text becomes childish blocks of orange. In *Jaw Broken brown*, parts of the canvas are black, and elsewhere it has an almost metallic sheen that makes it difficult to read the words—the canvas here reproduces in material form some of the difficulties faced by researchers in acquiring these documents and making sense of them; seeing clearly and truthfully, these paintings remind you, takes effort.

It is these early Redaction Paintings that seem closest in spirit to Warhol's work. In 1963–64, Warhol made a series of silkscreen paintings from Charles Moore's photographs of civil rights protests in Alabama, shot for *Life* magazine. In one of Moore's original images, a police dog rips the pant leg from a demonstrator. The lines of the composition focus the viewer on the singular moment of violence. In Warhol's 1963 silkscreen version, *Race Riot*, distinctions leak away. The dog is as white as the background, and the photograph's immediate violence recedes into an abstract geometry of black and white; the moment is reworked in terms of its structural conditions. The police dog biting the protestor is unsettling, *Race Riot* suggests, not simply because of the immediate violence suggested by the image, but because this violence is normal, part of a broader political economy of structural and racial violence that endures long after the wound left by a bite has healed.

In Holzer's Redaction Paintings, violence is also mediated via silkscreens, but the calculus is different. The immediate violence of Moore's images is almost too visible, whereas that of the redacted documents is almost invisible. If Warhol's work is a commentary on a media landscape saturated by images,

Holzer's series looks at a world in which the problem is not simply uncovering structural violence, but being able to see it, even if it is right in front of us. In turning the words of the redacted documents into images, Holzer points to a problem with the way we have previously seen these files.

The first problem: we haven't. The redacted documents exist in the public realm, and the public does not see them. There is a redacted hand (Fig 6), as large as life, and it might as well be invisible. Addressed to the public, the documents are consigned to a dead letter office. The public sphere does not have a forwarding address. Jenny Holzer would prefer not to accept this state of affairs.

For many looking at Holzer's paintings, this is the first time that they will see redacted documents. Most of the American public doesn't read the files; at best, it reads about them in the newspaper. We shake our heads in disgust at what these pages reveal and then go about our day: there are too many pages, too many leaks, and too much to do. Though the documents are publicly available, they might as well be written in code. Spending days reading them is a task left to the specialist. The rest of us wait for television's talking heads

to explain what they mean. After a week, the news cycle moves on, and so do we. (And doesn't this seem perfectly reasonable? What would one do with these documents? What could one possibly say that might have any effect on American political life? How could one even work out what to say about them?)

In journalistic accounts of the war on terror, the documents are digested and reproduced as sources of information from which facts are obtained, just as they would be from an interview. In media coverage, the redactions of the redacted documents don't exist, just as the government would want. Journalists have to write about content, not absences, and writing about the redactions themselves is outside their purview. Holzer's paintings insist that these documents have a content that is not reducible to information: she is letting the absences exist, and insisting that we look at them.

Some critics have reacted to this strategy with anger. A *New York Times* review of the Endgame series claimed that "It is hard to enjoy fine art in a fancy gallery when you are reminded that people are suffering elsewhere." [2] Enough with politics! Leave me to my fine art! The reviewer reads Holzer's paintings



(right) Fig. 3 — PRESENTLY IN THE UNITED STATES, 2014, oil on linen, 80 x 62 in. / 203.2 x 157.5 cm. Text: U.S. Government document. © 2014 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Used with permission.

(right page) *Jaw Broken brown*, 2006, oil on linen, 5 elements, 33 x 127.5 in. / 83.8 x 323.9 cm. Text: U.S. Government. © 2006 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Used with permission.





as “black-and-white righteousness”—a tired attempt to bring politics into art, to which he responds: Enough already, the media has gone through the documents. We know the facts and there is nothing more to add.

It isn't information that Holzer wants to give us: that the documents are only seen as sources of information is the problem to which the paintings call attention. We can't discard the paintings as we might yesterday's newspaper. Their scale arrests us. Here is the policy of the American government, seen as if under a microscope, rendered enormous and unfamiliar.

Looking at the documents as paintings draws attention to our own indifference. The redactions are the double of our inattentiveness. It is this that made the documents invisible, before the government darkened their pages. The real annoyance being expressed in the *New York Times* review is that we are forced to look. What could otherwise be ignored, or read about in a newspaper article and duly digested, here becomes unavoidable. In Holzer's work, documents we cannot see are made visible in the space of the gallery, but without a definite content; there is nothing in these paintings that tells you what to think about them. They simply ask that you stop, and look.

4. Holzer's paintings contain a tension between medium and content. What happens to the words of the redacted documents if they are placed in a different medium and become images? The paintings take up the inverse position to that of the U.S. government, which insists that images—despite appearances—are nothing but content. Such an attitude is exemplified by the government's response to the ACLU's decade-long struggle to force the disclosure of approximately 2,100 images showing the abuse of prisoners in Afghanistan and Iraq. The government's claim is that we have already seen some of these images, from Abu Ghraib,

and the legal repercussions have already been felt. We know everything we need to know. Nothing to see here. Move along. Its position on the release of the long-delayed Senate Intelligence Committee report on torture is analogous: Bad things happened. They happened. We already know. The presentation of these documents as information allows the facts within them to be written in the past tense.

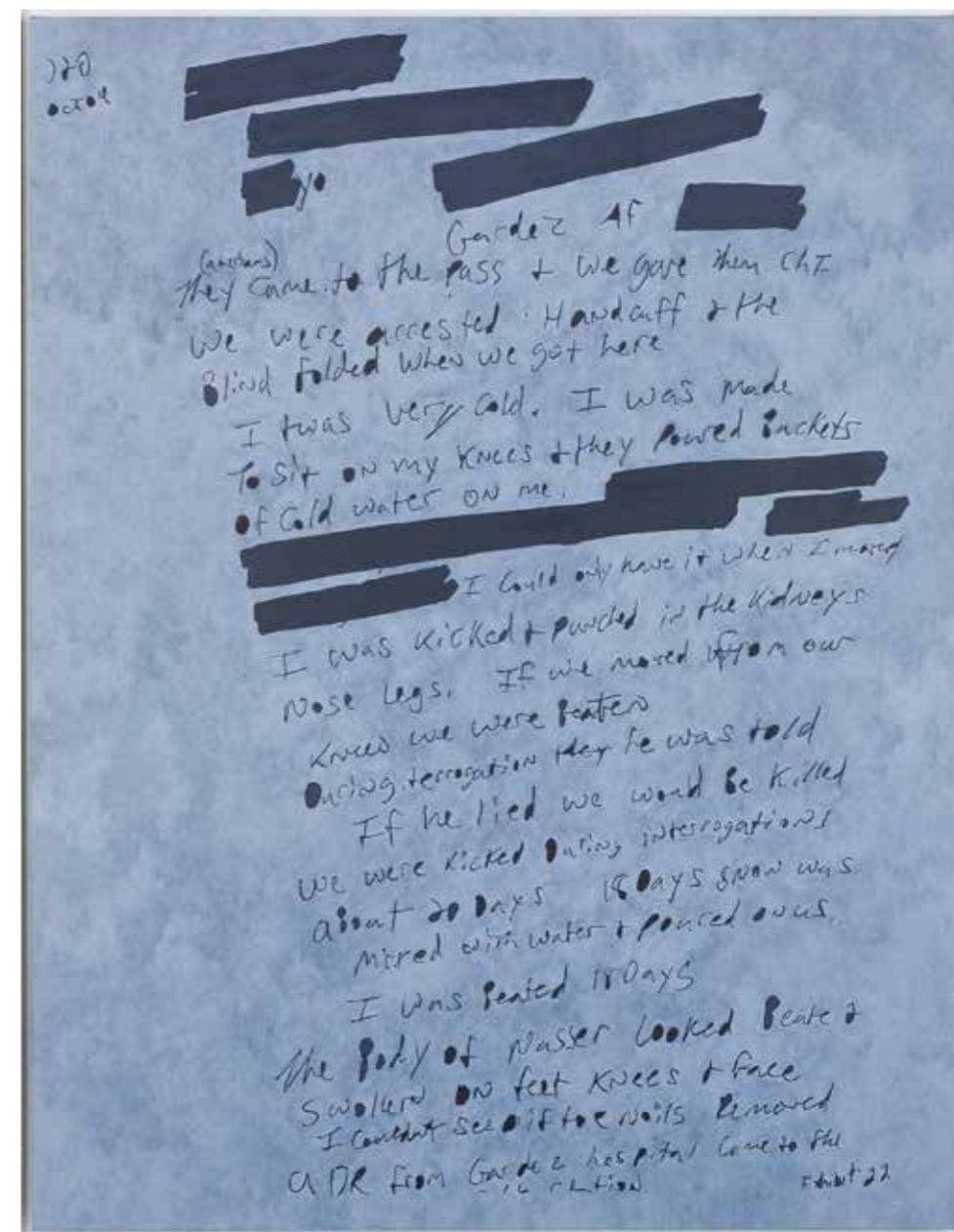
Yet people linger in front of Holzer's paintings, despite government assurances that the stories of the paintings belong to the past. It is striking that so many of the people visiting her exhibitions react to her paintings as if they were the documents themselves. Discussions around the canvases are as often about the details of the U.S. detention program as they are about the colors Holzer has chosen. Through transforming the documents into painting, the viewer is offered the possibility of experiencing the content of the documents as such, away from media debates about whether waterboarding is *really* torture.

(left page) Fig. 6. — *Big Hands* yellow white, 2006, oil on linen, 2 elements, 10.35 x 160 in. / 262.9 x 406.4 cm. Text: U.S. government document. © 2006 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Used with permission.

(right) Fig. 7 — *cold water*, 2013, oil on linen, 58 x 44 in. / 147.3 x 111.8 cm. Text: U.S. government document. © 2013 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Used with permission.

It is important to be precise about what one encounters in these paintings. No one goes to an art gallery to connect the dots in their understanding of the war on terror. Holzer's paintings are not a total history, and the documents she paints are fragments of an already

redacted record. Rather, what one encounters, when staring at the paintings, is the form of the documents. The stories that the media publish are horrifying but comprehensible. An arrest. Detention. Torture. The subjects have names. Reasons for their detention are



evaluated. There is a quote from the White House spokesperson. Etc.

Holzer ruptures these narratives by letting the documents speak. In some, names are redacted, while in others, only lines of speech remain, cut away from any recognizable subject. The characters of the documents are often unknown and act out scenes that are variously painful, terrifying, and absurd, but that have no referent. Looking at Holzer's paintings, I was forced to come to terms with

these haunting citations, and would scramble to contextualize them and give names and places to the scenes unfolding on the canvas. It was a mistaken search. Context dulls the impact. One's work, in front of the paintings, is to be an absurdist journalist. To find meaning and significance in the words, but without reference.

The real characters of the paintings are the documents themselves. Holzer cites their sentences, and in so doing, decontextualizes them, allowing the

viewer to encounter them on their own terms, outside a media narrative that reduces the stories of the detainees to figures in the calculus of national security. There, on the page, is the sentence (Fig 7): "They came to the pass & we gave them chi We were arrested." It is these details that strike me, again and again. The presentation of these citations as images forced me to confront the lives suggested by the canvases, written between the words, and written out of the government's statements.

In many of the documents represented in the Redaction Paintings, one struggles to find a meaning underneath the seemingly endless bureaucratic details of torture. Gazing at the paintings, without the media's explanatory voice beside me, the strangest fact about the U.S. torture program becomes apparent: it often had no end. Time and again in these documents, the overall goal seems uncertain. Actions proceed as if the violence itself is an end, and political justifications and intelligence-gathering goals are

merely post-facto rationalization. It is the nature of this violence that is occluded in media accounts and that is on display in these paintings.

The documents shown in the Redaction Paintings are also eerily familiar. Strip away the language of torture (something often achieved by the redactions themselves), and many of these documents seem like conventional products of bureaucracy: the results of protocols established and emails sent. One of the unnerv-

ing conclusions one reaches is how humdrum these documents can be. In 2014, I wrote a grammar of redaction, which analyzes some of the logics that emerge from the redactions themselves—the way these documents take on a life of their own. Holzer's work allows you to encounter some of that grammar, and in so doing, witness some of the unintended comedy of this secret world. In *He Did Not See Any Americans blue*, the viewer is confronted with an entirely redacted page except for the phrase "He did



Fig. 8 — *He Did Not See Any Americans blue*, 2006, oil on linen, 4 elements. 33 x 102 in. / 83.8 x 259.1 cm. Text: U.S. government document. © 2006 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

hear planes flying overhead," and just below "He did not see any Americans."

Holzer's paintings convey the world of the redacted documents better than any journalistic interpretation of their significance. The documents have a sense aside from their putative context. Denuded of explanatory content, the paintings force one up against the words on the page.

5.

The *New York Times* reviewer quoted above said that he didn't like to be reminded of people suffering "elsewhere"—as if Guantanamo had no relation to America and was a question of CNN and agonized feelings over a TV dinner. In a world saturated with images of suffering, to which we have, so the cliché goes, become numbed, this response raises a serious question: How does one get close to contemporary conflict?

Holzer's *Redaction Paintings* reminded me of An-My Lê's 29 Palms photographs. In 2003, having been refused access to Iraq as an embedded photographer, Lê went to a marine base in California. She took epic landscape photographs in a Mojave Desert rendered as a film set. Nothing seems real, and indeed for the marines, little was real; you see them dressing up as Iraqi police officers and writing anti-American graffiti onto the walls of a fake Baghdad, mimetically acting out the hatred they will soon invite. The American war without casualties was imagined at training bases and fought with jets and missiles, when it was not fought behind redacted documents and closed doors. How are we

to get close to such a war? An intense proximity to suffering seems unavailable to us; the problem we face is precisely one of distance. Lê's photographs give one possible answer: show the fantasy underlying the violence (also a product of distance)—the soldiers preparing to destroy their own demons, and much else besides.

The *Redaction Paintings* offer another answer. They draw your attention not simply to the details of the U.S. war on terror, but to the structural and political conditions that made it possible. The redactions of the government documents take on additional weight when painted—they become visible, not as determinate content, but as absences. In the *Redaction Paintings*, the black spaces proliferate, now as blue, green, and red marks. These spaces, which mark out a zone of legal impunity and national security, structure the words around them. Looking at the paintings, the way I read the documents as a journalist was reversed. I stopped looking for words amid the black and started looking at the redactions themselves. It becomes clear, staring at these paintings, that the absences are weapons of war: legal and bureaucratic means of continuing the war on terror. Holzer's paintings, then, are not reports from the battlefield, not sketches of breathless intensity made next to the scene of the fight. Instead, they are forensic analyses of one of the weapons with which the war is fought: the structure of the military and intelligence bureaucracies, and the legal impunity that veils their actions in shadow.

The catalogue for Holzer's 2006 exhibition *Redaction Paintings* explores the history of these weapons. Rather than—like some hackneyed history of the last fourteen years—beginning with 2001, Holzer starts with a document from December 3, 1990. It begins: "I appreciate the opportunity to comment on Duane Andrews' proposal to strengthen Defense intelligence and to reorganize the Defense Intelligence Agency." The next few pages are redacted, as if the black blocks were merely a silent commentary on yet another boring bureaucratic meeting. Then, right at the end of the document, we learn that Colin Powell is its author.

Another early document in the book is a letter to William Casey, then director of the CIA, about funding for the contras in Nicaragua. This isn't a paranoid history that sees the hand of American imperialism behind all the world's ills. Rather, Holzer's choice of documents decenters our history of the last ten years and suggests a longer timeline. The history that Holzer presents is one in which U.S. military campaigns abroad have always been written in black spaces, by a power that does not need to give reasons for its actions. State security is always invoked as a justification for these redactions, but it is a justification that knows no limit, for the *reason* state security is invoked is of course redacted, unknowable and unverifiable.

6.

Much of this essay has focused on the *Redaction Paintings*. In the last

five years, Holzer's approach to the redacted documents has changed. Her earlier work focused on the economy of information: the way these documents get assimilated into media narratives and then discarded. In the *Endgame* series, and then in the *Dust Paintings*, Holzer's work becomes more stridently material, as if simply reproducing the documents were no longer sufficient, and she needed to actively transform them in order to continue looking. Rather than make silkscreens, Holzer began painting the documents, and the focus of her work shifted to interrogation reports and the Afghan and Iraqi voices to be found in them. Many of the *Dust Paintings* take as their material pages of testimony from the Afghan prisoners who were interrogated as part of the U.S. Army's investigation into the torture of the Afghan prisoners mentioned at the beginning of this essay. The colors of the canvases evoke these conditions: black holes, blue ice. In so doing, the nonfigural elements of the painting situate the words of the documents, which would otherwise hang, abstract and decontextualized, on sparse white pages. They force me to imagine the prisoners.

The paintings are often very beautiful. In some of them, the plain white sheets of government reports are transformed into pale, dense surfaces, and the letters are dark and heavy, as if chiseled into granite. In others, the painted backgrounds are heavy, but the letters are in white, as if Holzer were writing with light. In the *Dust Paintings*, it is the materiality of the paint that forces

us to confront the words: to peer at them, squinting, and face the results of the abstractions of the U.S. military and the CIA. This is a negative equation; the abstraction of the artwork, placed against the abstraction of the torturer's formulas, allows us to arrive at concreteness: the interrogated voice—outside of any putative justifications and government statements—on the canvas in front of us.

The sympathetic passage that the viewer goes through when looking at these paintings has a resonance with Holzer's own passage. These are the first paintings she has made since art school. Looking at them, I can imagine what it must be like to live with these documents for such a long time, and to spend so long internalizing them, as one writes them out onto canvas, and writes them out of the world of the media cycle, not as a protest, or as a commentary on the contemporary, but as an ethical response to what they contain.

She turns words into images so that we can read them.

REFERENCES

1. There are a number of reasons that the government can either deny a FOIA request in full or else redact elements of a document. Most of the criteria for redaction are related to the national security risk posed by exposure of information contained in the documents, the danger presented to a private individual by publication of records related to them, or the necessity of concealing ongoing covert activities. None of these criteria is able to explain the way the words form a sentence in "Other Document #131." See Joshua Craze, *A Grammar of Redaction* (New York: New Museum, 2014), 4.
2. Ken Johnson, "Jenny Holzer: 'Endgame,'" *New York Times*, March 15, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/16/arts/design/jenny-holzer-endgame.html>.

BIO

Joshua Craze is a writer. He was a 2014 UNESCO-Aschberg laureate in creative writing and is currently an assistant professor at the University of Chicago. In 2014, as part of the New Museum's Temporary Center for Translation, he exhibited a grammar of redaction, which analyzes the aesthetic logic of redacted documents from the American war on terror. An excerpt from the grammar is also forthcoming in the edited volume *Archival Dissonance: Knowledge Production and Contemporary Art* (I.B. Tauris/Ibraaz, 2015). You can read the grammar here: <http://www.joshuacraze.com/exhibitions>.

VERSIONcontrol

Seth Ellis, Assistant Professor, Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design, University of Michigan

[KEYWORDS:
ERASURE, HISTORY,
MATERIAL CULTURE,
STORY, DIGITAL
MEDIATION, DIGITAL
REPRODUCTION,
SOCIOLOGY, MATERIAL
INVESTIGATION,
NARRATIVE
STRUCTURES,
PHYSICAL-DIGITAL
INTERACTION]

RECENTLY, IN RESEARCHING A SITE-SPECIFIC PROJECT, I CAME ACROSS A GLITCH IN GOOGLE STREET VIEW. I was searching for the Elks Lodge that used to be a farmhouse owned by the Ford family in Dearborn, Michigan. In fact, the Elks Lodge had been demolished within the past year, and replaced by a Tim Hortons. Google, having passed that way since then, recorded the absence of the Lodge, and thus the fact that it had ever existed passed out of Google's eye.

However, an accidental artifact remains in Street View. From one particular spot on the road, if we move in one particular direction, the perspective changes to that of an older photograph, taken six years earlier: the Tim Hortons disappears, and the Elks Lodge returns. In the next step, we are back in (the photographs of) 2013, and the Lodge is gone again.

This sudden accidental time travel throws into relief the massive act of erasure constantly enacted by Street

View, by the simple effort of remaining up to date. Saving over one's previous work erases the history of edits one has performed; in this case, the work is the common landscape, and the history of edits is the identity of place embedded in that landscape, now hidden, and perhaps unavailable to view, behind the seamless surface of street-level imagery.

Since Street View launched in 2007, Google has gone to considerable lengths to improve the accuracy of the images they capture, which includes not only increasingly comprehensive coverage, but improvements to the image-capturing technology array — from commercial lenses to custom-designed equipment, from an array of eight sensors on each car to fifteen. Each subsequent pass by Google's vehicles replaces the 'bugs' of the previous version: bad stitches, inaccurate positioning, inadequate image coverage. The resulting version, the 'real' image of the landscape, is (notionally) a seamless surface representation of the physical landscape as it exists.

Among the 'bugs' that are smoothed away, however, are the historical quirks and previous versions of the physical landscape itself. In 2014 Google launched a feature that allows users to browse 'historical' imagery in Street View—that is, previous imagery captured by Google itself. But this organizes the past into

tidy layers, an impervious surface peeling back to reveal another impervious surface. More revealing is the occasional technical imperfection, a digital scar that replicates the physical scars of the lived-in landscape. Street View depends for its reputation on the closeness of its relationship with objective reality: its constant updates, its apparently seamless stitching, its almost-omnidirectional coverage of the landscape. The result, or at least Google's aim, is an unquestioned trustworthiness, the assumption that Street View is showing what's 'really there.' What's really there, however, is not tidy organization of historical 'layers,' but a series of distinct 'nodes,' each accreting historical narratives as they go, each butting up uncomfortably against the next.

In the 1850s a farm was built on this site, right on what was then the Chicago Road. In the early twentieth century, Henry and Clara Ford bought the property; after summering here for several years, Henry converted the farm into a home for orphaned boys. Here the boys would be trained in the skills they would need to move into Ford's factories when they were grown.

A few years later, Henry moved his training program into the factory itself, and Clara took over the property, turning it into a home for wayward women—that is, single mothers. These women too were trained in respectable productivity, this time in the form of

domestic skills. In later years, the home became a women's hospital; in the 1950s, the hospital shut down, and the property was sold to the Elks.

Productivity, usefulness, paternal benevolence; this has always been a scripted site. Indeed it has always been a site of cultivation: cultivated land, cultivated people, a cultivated image of what it means to be an American town. The Fords' benevolent social programs always had a strong impulse towards Americanization, teaching new immigrants (of which there were many) to be good Americans, productive citizens.

Today the site is a part of a seamless American exurban landscape—the Chicago Road is now Michigan Avenue, a divided highway like any other in the nation. This corporatized exurb, carefully unscribed with anything but itself, is a portal into a reliable narrative space. One Tim Hortons is the same as any Tim Hortons; they are designed to be reassuringly interchangeable. The carefully seamless Street View, with its narrative voice of authenticity, reinforces this sameness of place.

If we poke behind the Street View curtain, we become aware not only of what was there, but of what wasn't there. Of all the things that happened on this site in its first hundred and fifty years, the presence of an African-American was not among them; for most of the twentieth century Dearborn

was a sundown town. Similarly, there was long an understanding that the Chicago Road was built on what was originally the Great Sauk Trail, but this is untrue; before white settlers, the Sauk-Fox people moved through this territory, but not here, and the wide avenue we can glimpse under our notional feet in Street View is not a trace of their presence.

How can we keep ourselves aware of the jumbled repository of history, of the things that happened on this site, and the things that were criminal by their absence? One way to move past the curtain of Street View's implacable accuracy is to smear it into recognizability, to reduce the current moment to the smoothest possible canvas, as I've done here. This further act of digital erasure turns the Street View surface into the base of a palimpsest, onto which we can reinscribe our history. This is necessarily a speculative act, but a powerful one; the past exists only as our speculation, after all. The very technology on which Street View is based works against this truth; its focus on seamlessness forms a rhetorical appeal to authority, in the form of 'fidelity' to physical presence on this site. This is in itself an unexamined act of erasure, hiding the mechanism as an act of technical prowess. But it's in the seams that history accretes. The occasional mistake, the scar of a technical glitch, reminds of this, but we need to go further, to pry open this seam and look inside.



In 2013, a Google vehicle drove down this road with a ring of fifteen 5-megapixel sensors, with custom-built lenses.

(top) In 2007, a Google vehicle drove down this road equipped with a ring of eight 11-megapixel sensors, with commercial lenses. The driver wasn't really sure what he was doing, and drove too fast.

(bottom) In 2013, Angie, who works at the Tim Hortons now, told us about the parties she used to go to at the Elks lodge, back when she worked at the club down the street.

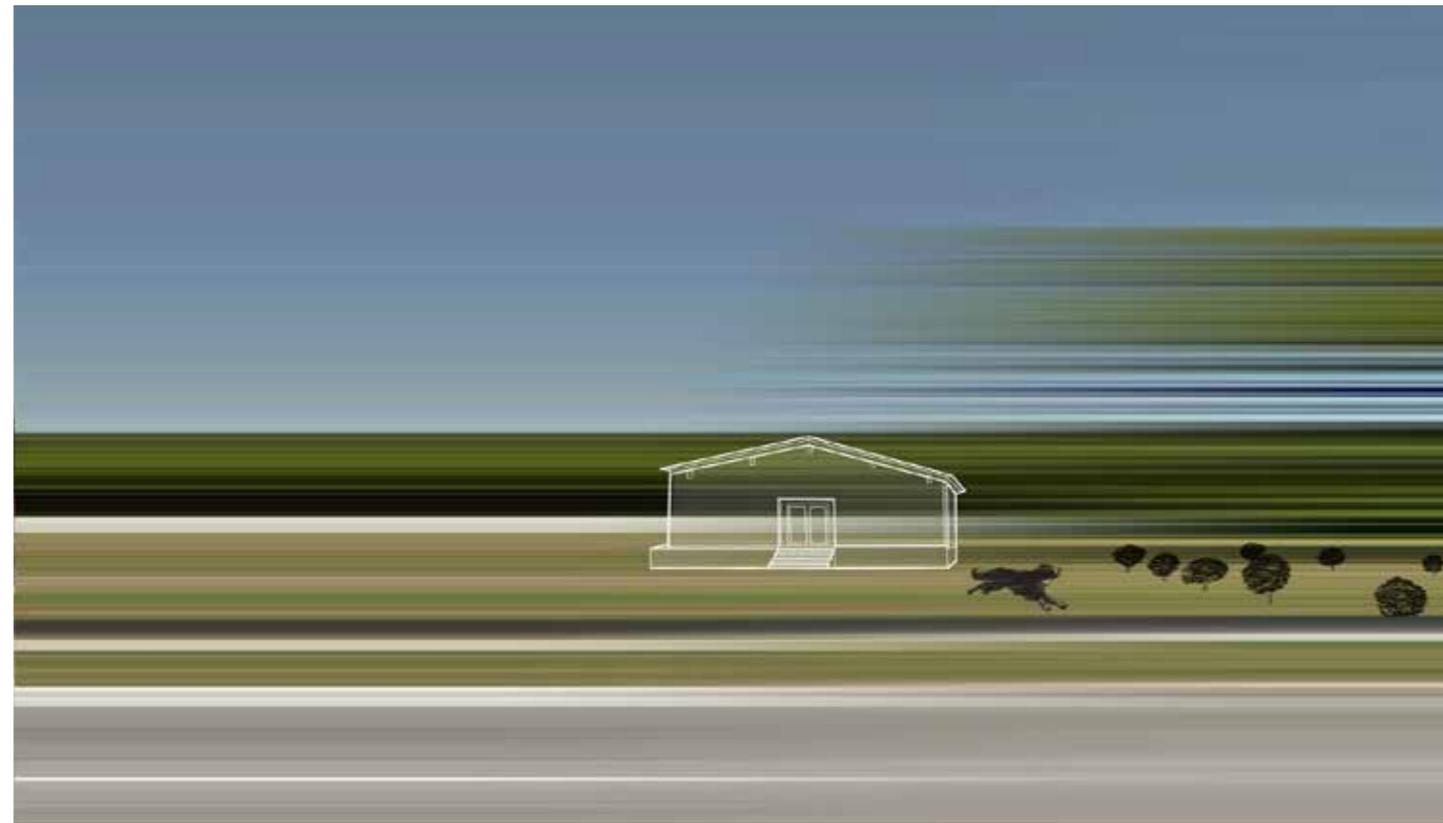


(top) In 1952, the women's hospital, now tired and obsolete, struggled to justify its existence.

(bottom) In 1914, George Brady graduated from the Valley Farm Home for Homeless Boys, and went right to work at Ford's Highland Park plant.



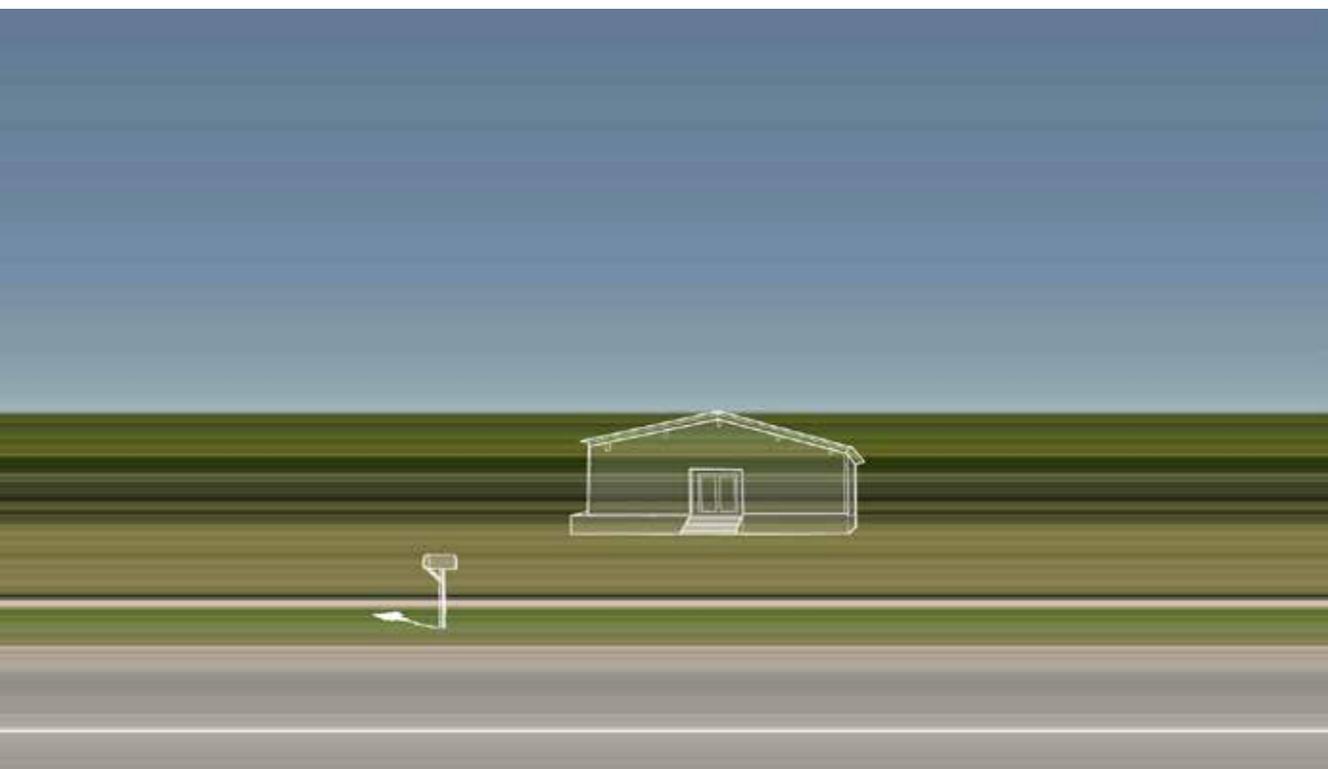
(top) In 1928, Clarissa Deneski learned to sew at the home for wayward mothers. Her child had died, but they let her stay on anyway.
 (bottom) In 2030, a bridal boutique opened on the grounds of the old Elks lodge. The Dearborn Historical Society, who had finally raised the money to reconstruct the old Valley Farm building, protested.



(top) In 1911, Henry Ford gave Jerry Wolfe, a boy who lived here, a dog. But Ford didn't really like dogs, and later he paid a farmhand \$5 to shoot it.

(bottom) In 1859, Alfred Gulley built his farm here. The land was low and damp, and in the summer months his son Orrin was often chased home through the woods by clouds of mosquitos





BIO

Seth Ellis is Assistant Professor in the Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design at the University of Michigan. He is a narrative artist and interface designer; his work draws upon local history, allegorical narrative, and experience design to create stories both historical and fictional in new, experiential forms. These narrative, as designed experiences, use both physical and digital tools, including signage, locative media, video, and audio. Ellis' projects have shown in galleries, streets, symposia and festivals throughout the U.S. and Europe, and at a few places in the Atlantic Ocean. He has a B.A. from Yale University and an M.F.A. from Columbia University School of the Arts.

section two: capital

ERASING in the ALGORITHMIC EXTREME: MIMI CABELL AND JASON HUFF'S *AMERICAN PSYCHO*

➤ Kaja Marczewska, Researcher and Associate Tutor, Durham University, UK

[KEYWORDS: MIMI CABELL, JASON HUFF, BRET EASTON ELLIS, *AMERICAN PSYCHO*, ERASURE, ALGORITHM, GOOGLE, USER PROFILING, TARGETED ADVERTISING, ALGORITHMIC CRITICISM]

IN 2012 GOOGLE FACED A PRIVACY LAWSUIT OVER ACCESSING USERS' DATA AND DISCLOSING IT TO ADVERTISERS WITHOUT PERMISSION. THE ACCUSATIONS OF BREACH OF CONTRACT AND FRAUD PRESENTED GOOGLE'S PRACTICES AS ILLEGAL WIRETAPPING. [1] The claims followed a change in policy Google introduced on March 1, 2012, and were filed as a national class action. Before March 2012, individual privacy policies existed for each of Google's products. [2] But

the new policy treats each of Google's users as a single entity, across all services, as a result giving the company the right to combine information from multiple sources. Accordingly, Google can now access a Gmail or Google+ account in order to, for example, personalize one's Google search results and then, in turn, log all personal identifying information, browsing habits, search queries, demographic information, as well as declared preferences or responsiveness to the very ads its

profiling algorithms generate. As of 2014, Google's official privacy policies clearly acknowledge that all incoming and outgoing content is analyzed by automated software. This applies to both emails stored on Google's servers and those sent and received by any Google account. This practice might on the surface have the user's best interests in mind ("we are always looking for more ways to deliver you the most useful and relevant ads," explains Google's support page), but it is, first and foremost, a means of analyzing online user behaviors for profit. Gmail is not about enabling communication. It is a complex profiling tool, used, among others, to enable most profitable means of email-targeted advertising. Today, everything you search for, send, or save online is useful data, sorted by the corporate or governmental algorithms to assess what kind of a consumer or citizen you might be and, most importantly, what you might do or buy next. But regardless of Google's insatiable hunger for information and its seeming commitment to facilitating access to it, Google does not show the same willingness to disclose information. In 2014, the company requested to redact transcripts from the public court hearings recording the ongoing privacy suit launched in 2012. It also denied access to one of their data centers to John Gerrard, an artist interested in questions of materialities of the

Internet (in response, Gerrard hired a helicopter, photographed the center from the air, and used the material in one of his exhibitions). [3] Google's off-limits centers are, as Gerrard puts it, "part of a vast network of invisible facilities that make luxuries of contemporary life possible." [4] This guarded invisibility is particularly evocative of Google's approach to information more broadly: collected when no one is watching, sold for profit, and erased when it proves inconvenient. As such, Google paradoxically represents a culture of information secrecy, manipulation, commercialisation, and removal. I am interested in the possibilities of exploring the dynamics of Google's profiling algorithms in relation to questions of erasure of and access to information as they play out in a recent experimental work, an iteration by Mimi Cabell and Jason Huff of Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* (1991). This paper will focus on Cabell and Huff's *American Psycho* (2010) as a revealing statement on information politics today. By doing so it will address questions of the possibilities of textual erasure that contemporary technologies open up.

Cabell and Huff's *American Psycho* is an example of a creative intervention into the contemporary data control culture that draws attention to dominant patterns of information production and consumption. Their take on Ellis' novel

is a work of a playful but poignant appropriation for the algorithmic age, composed by engaging strategies of transcription, data collection, and erasure. In the making of their iteration, Cabell and Huff emailed the entire content of Ellis' novel to each other, one page at a time, in order to generate a number of relational ads typically displayed by Google, here generated in response to Ellis' text. The content of the collected advertisements was then used to annotate their source. But in Cabell and Huff's *American Psycho*—a paperback volume designed to evoke the 1991 Vintage Contemporaries First Edition of Ellis' novel—the body of the text is completely removed. What remains are the original chapter headings and Cabell and Huff's annotations, included as footnotes. In the radical act of erasure Cabell and Huff remove the text that is essential, the text that facilitates the generation of relational advertisements, to place the latter at the core of their iteration of *American Psycho*. By doing so, the authors draw attention to the working of Google's profiling tools and the curious paratextual lives of our digital texts that we tend to take for granted.

Cabell and Huff's *American Psycho* relies heavily on the mechanisms of targeted advertising, which Google uses as a default—the approach made possible by the company's privacy pol-



Farm (Pryor Creek, Oklahoma), Installation View, Thomas Dane Gallery, London, 2015, John Gerrard, photograph, courtesy the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery.

icies. Targeted advertising is driven by algorithms that automatically classify interests based on data collected by profiling tools. Since 2012, this automatically and simultaneously includes data from all Google services, inclusive of sensitive personal information and content data such as search engine queries linked to users' IP addresses. By targeting Google's targeted advertising systems, Cabell and Huff offer an engaging commentary on the changing patterns of textual production and consumption today, on how and what we read, and how experiences and choices are increasingly dictated to us. An important sense of awareness of the mechanisms of contemporary data politics transpires in Cabell and Huff's project. Google ads might be displayed on a sidebar of an inbox, or in a footnote to a printed text, but foregrounded in this iteration of *American Psycho* is the fact that their marginality is a fallacy, their prominence undeniable. Cabell and Huff's act of erasure offers a meditation on their intrusive presence as distracting away from, supplementing, and, ultimately substituting the core text. It serves as a statement on the prominence of the algorithmic text, or on what happens when all that is left and all that we pay attention to is the algorithmically generated commercial content. As such, Cabell and Huff's mode of engagement with Ellis' novel is evocative of Google's attitude to all text as a source of profiling information. They reduce Ellis' text to data, and reading and writing experience into an exercise in data mining and user profiling. Today, Cabell and Huff seem

to argue, "we are defined by data." [5] Or, as Sarah Hromack puts it, "we allow ourselves to be defined this way by willingly tracking and disclosing our own personal information through various digital channels." [6]

But Cabell and Huff's commitment to data should not be seen as a reductionist gesture. Instead, it manifests an attempt at exploring a reframing potential of emergent writing tools, methods, and spaces. In this respect, Cabell and Huff's *Psycho* seems evocative of Derrida's experiments with text in *Glas* (1974). *Glas* is a complex topographic exercise in which Derrida's readings of Hegel and Jean Genet are combined, juxtaposed in two columns printed in different font sizes. The column on the left of the page focuses on Hegel, the one on the right covers Genet. The in-between spaces are filled with Derrida's comments, a selection of notes, quotations, or definitions. [7] Here, reading and writing takes place "according to a different organization of space." "Because we are beginning to write, to write differently," Derrida suggests elsewhere, "we must reread differently." [8] Through its experimental form, Derrida's text invites an unusual reading experience that also opens space for subversive interpretations. It draws attention to that which the original texts and their familiar readings typically exclude or omit. The same thinking, I argue, informs Cabell and Huff's work. Their *Psycho* represents an inherently meta- and intertextual reading through, but the materials and methods the authors

adopt require thinking beyond the limits of literature. Their reading takes place outside of the familiar literary spaces, within a Gmail inbox; their writing involves algorithmically generated data. By erasing Ellis' novel using popular, widely utilized online tools to create a paperback volume, the authors point to changing forms of organizing a corpus of knowledge that is neither exclusively digital nor analog but relies heavily on the interplay of both, and informs our habits of engaging with texts both within and without digital environments.

This is a key assumption, indicative of a characteristic thinking about technology that informs the dynamic of Cabell and Huff's writing. Their erasure, I suggest, is evocative of textual practices driven by mechanisms not of digital technologies per se, but of the Heideggerian essence of technology. In line with Heidegger's thinking, it is the changing understanding of the very conception of technology—of what technology is—rather than simply the changes in the apparatus of technology that should be seen as a trigger for the creative attitude that works such as Cabell and Huff's *Psycho* represent. As Slavoj Žižek puts it, the essence of technology does not designate a complex network of machines and activities; rather, it is a manifestation of a particular attitude towards reality. "[T]echnology," Žižek comments, "is the way reality discloses itself to us in contemporary times." [9] Heidegger primarily is interested in *technē* and not modern technology. For Heidegger, modern technology restricts the defini-

tion of the technological to that which is purely instrumental. *Technē*, or the traditional technology, on the other hand, encompasses manifestations of skill, art, and craft. *Technē* is a category used to denote both the creative and the instrumental practices. *Technē*, as Heidegger explains, is linked to the word *epistēmē*—"both words are names for knowing in the widest sense. . . . Such knowing provides an opening up. As an opening up it is revealing." [10] Experimenting with erasure via Google is revealing; it is a creative exploration of the ways in

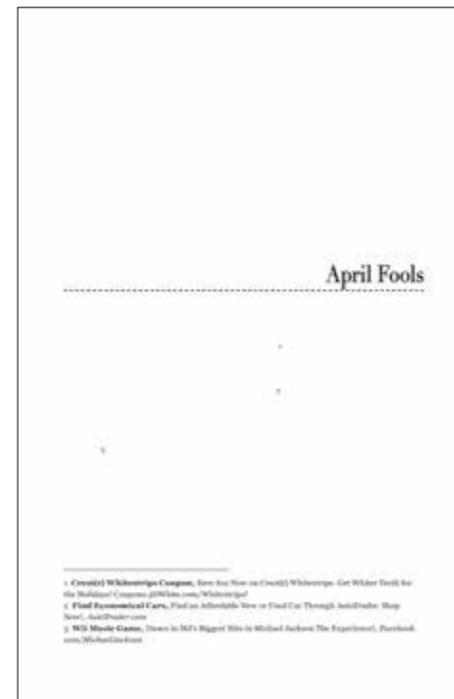
which we operate today by means of the Heideggerian essence of technology, an interrogation of how it "structures the way we relate to reality." [11]

In their iteration of *American Psycho*, Cabell and Huff refashion the writing space, to borrow Jay David Bolter's term, in order to take account of the possibilities of writing that responds to the contemporary propensity for and orientation towards technology and technological thinking, a certain technological imagination. [12] Their engagement with Google is not a statement on Google alone, but an exploration of a more wide-ranging cultural attitude, an interrogation of processes of making and producing today, rather than a project committed to a singular machine or tool. Cabell and Huff engage the instrumental—the automated Google

algorithm of user profiling tools—to transform it into a form of Heideggerian *technē* and in the process explore the limits of contemporary creative practices. In this approach, the authors simultaneously contradict the familiar assumptions of literariness and bring attention to the spaces in which the algorithmic processes take place in order to explore an alternative space of writing that speaks explicitly to the contemporary dynamic of textual production and dissemination. As Cabell explains:

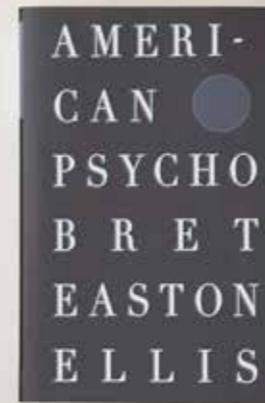
We were most curious how Google would handle the violence, racism and graphic language in *American Psycho*. In some instances the ads related to the content of the email, in others they were completely irrelevant, either out of time or out of place. In one scene, where first a dog and then a man are brutally murdered with a knife, Google supplied ample ads regarding knives and knife sharpeners. In another scene the ads disappeared altogether when the narrator makes a racial slur. [13]

But the violence of Ellis's *Psycho* that Cabell alludes to here should not be treated as exclusively synonymous with his notorious representations of the obscene. To an equal extent, the novel's violence stems from its commitment to excessive, obsessive consumerism. Filled with endless descriptions of home electronics or men's grooming products, Ellis's *Psycho*, while controversial, also offers an ideal content for customer profiling and advertisement



(top) *American Psycho*, 2012, Mimi Cabell and Jason Huff, print, courtesy the authors.

(top) *American Psycho*, 2012, Mimi Cabell and Jason Huff, print, courtesy the authors.



generation. By focusing on this particular text, Cabell and Huff might have tested the limits of Google's political correctness (the controversies regarding Google's racial profiling reverberate clearly here) but they also provided the profiling crawlers with an ideal, consumer fantasy data set. Seen as such, Cabell and Huff's work presents a contemporary, hyperbolic take on Ellis's consumer America of the late 1980s. Theirs is the *American Psycho* for the algorithmic age of constant surveillance, where surveillance tools are used as a consumer manipulation mechanism, where, "the users are the real product." [14] The overload of things in 1980s America transforms, in the contemporary digital context, into an overload of information, and the physical violence of Ellis's *Psycho* finds its manifestation in the violence of the contemporary algorithmic extreme.

This focus on commercial content brings into sharp focus the patterns of engaging with as well as creating textual spaces in digital environments. Sending or receiving an email today involves an involuntary engagement with a plethora of additional texts generated on the screen, of digital paratextual information of sorts. But in Google networks what you see is not necessarily what you get. Users only notice profiling if they receive ads. But with new systems of searching and monitoring information, profiling takes place whenever any Google services and partner platforms are accessed. As such, Google perpetually operates in invisible spaces of textual production,

consumption, and manipulation. Their information, however, is as obscured, as invisible, as Ellis' text on the pages of Cabell and Huff's erasure. In a paradoxical but revealing reversal, the authors redact the content of their emails—the content that Google considers freely accessible to monitor—and retain only the text generated by Google itself. The typically invisible processes are transformed here, appropriated to produce new text that forms the sole visible content on the page. As a result, what is foregrounded and made explicitly visible, is the invisible working of Google's profiling tools. Through the erasure of content that is key for Google in that it provides profiling data for targeted advertising, Cabell and Huff bring to the fore the otherwise invisible mechanisms of textual production. Their erasure reveals more than it removes.

But at the same time, the act of erasure approached as such points to a characteristic interplay of the source text and its iteration. The possibility of erasure, and Cabell and Huff's characteristic focus on the commercial content, are implied in Ellis' text. The opening passages of the novel could be quoted as a representative example. Ellis' *Psycho* begins abruptly, with a busy, urban scene described as experienced by one of its main characters, Timothy Price, watching the streets of New York from a cab. Here, a curious and important juxtaposition of text takes place: "Abandon all hope ye who enter here" and "*Les Misérables*." "Abandon all hope," a quotation from Dante's *Inferno*, "is scrawled in blood red lettering on the

side of the Chemical Bank near corner of Eleventh and First." [15] This is what Price catches a glimpse of and, at the same time, the very first line presented to Ellis' reader. But the aggressively graphic image this text creates is immediately obscured by the arrival of a bus bearing an advertisement for *Les Misérables*, the musical. There is a sense here not simply of removing but rather of layering information that is mirrored in its subsequent erasure, with the commercial content always inevitably given prominence and attention. This characteristic approach serves as an important reference point for considering Cabell and Huff's work. Their juxtaposition of the text of the novel—subsequently removed—and the commercial content is evocative, I suggest, of the dynamic that plays out in the opening passages of Ellis' *Psycho*, but transformed in the digital textual environment. As such, Cabell and Huff's erasure should not be approached as a straightforward act of removal of content but rather as an exercise in tracing and supplementation. In their *Psycho*, Cabell and Huff copy and reproduce as much as they erase and obscure; they destroy as much as they comment on Ellis' text and, by doing so, interrogate the possibilities of both reading and writing differently in digital environments.

The initial process of emailing *American Psycho* is a laborious undertaking, evocative of similar conceptual transcription projects of Kenneth Goldsmith or Simon Morris, among others, in which complete works of literature, or issues of newspapers, are meticulously

retyped. [16] Cabell and Huff's erasure only takes place after the transcription of Ellis' complete text. The space on Cabell and Huff's page might seem blank but their source always remains present, as a trace of the transcribed text that was once there, as data necessary for the advertisements turned footnotes to be generated. As such, the act of footnoting is important here. It implies an immediate acknowledgement of the source that is never completely removed in the act of erasure. Here, repetition and removal take place simultaneously but the process of textual destruction also reaffirms the source. By acknowledging and at the same time repudiating Ellis' *Psycho*, Cabell and Huff produce difference out of sameness, presence, and absence at the same time. Hence, Cabell and Huff's *Psycho* is a copy that requires a Derridean reading past writing, a manifestation of writing differently that requires alternative reading strategies. It is an exercise in Derridean writing as tracing and supplementing. The traces of Ellis' text on pages of Cabell and Huff's erasure should be interpreted as Derrida's traces, as marks of anterior presence (as Spivak puts it, Derrida's trace "is the mark of absence of presence, an always already absent present [...] that is the condition of thought and experience"). [17] The footnotes, on the other hand, evoke Derrida's supplement as both accretion and substitution: a supplement is that which adds itself and "is a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest measure of presence." At the same time "the supplement supple-

ments [...] adds only to replace [...] represents and makes an image [...] its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness." [18] In writing conceptualized as such, a text is produced "only in a transformation of another text. Nothing," as Derrida puts it, "neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent." [19] Seen as such, Cabell and Huff's *Psycho* constitutes an act of writing as citation that always implies an act of effacement of the trace, where writing by erasure becomes synonymous with writing as tracing. Here, reading the blank is as important, if not more so, than reading the text itself. As Derrida suggests, "spacing is not a simple negativity of the lacuna but rather the emergence of the mark." [20] It always signifies by creating its own system of signification. The complex act of citation that takes place when a text is erased in Cabell and Huff's *Psycho* "does not reproduce the real but," to borrow from Gregory Ulmer, "constructs an object [...] in order to intervene in the world, not to reflect but change reality." [21] As such, a similar logic seems to govern the practices of erasure and Google data profiling. The targeted ad, similarly to an erased text, always bears traces of its source text while supplementing and manipulating it at the same time. Both processes engage with the possibilities of collecting content to generate new forms of information.

If Cabell and Huff's writing project is synonymous with Derrida's text, "always already inhabited by the

trace," [22] then a parallel can be drawn between the logic that governs Cabell and Huff's erasure and Ellis' "Nowheres" café, introduced towards the end of the novel. As Naomi Mandel explains, the café's name is important. It implies placelessness (nowhere) and specificity (now here). [23] But the plural "Nowheres" also foregrounds an ambiguous interconnectedness of both states. This duality is evoked in Cabell and Huff's erasure; in a text that is simultaneously present and absent, nowhere and now here, on the erased page. The reading space created in the act of radical erasure, when considered in this context, turns into a space of nowheres. It does much more than just challenge a distinction between what you do and do not see, to paraphrase Patrick, Ellis' protagonist. The reality in Cabell and Huff's text becomes transformed: by foregrounding that which is invisible it creates a new visible that only emerges in the blank spaces of the page. I see Cabell and Huff's act of erasure as a hyperbolic manifestation of the collapse of Ellis' protagonist, who literally fades into Ellis' prose in the final pages of the book. His is a "slow purposeful erasure" of selfhood in the culture of consumer excess that is made complete in Cabell and Huff's act of radical textual removal that opens up alternative means of engaging with the text itself, and with contemporary cultural status of texts more broadly. [24]

Seen as such, Cabell and Huff's *Psycho* assumes a dual function, as a statement on the modes of reading and writing in the spaces of algorithmic

extreme, and as a metacommentary on Ellis' *Psycho*. By experimenting with algorithms as tools for reading and (re)writing literature today, Cabell and Huff also interrogate the possibilities of writing what Stephen Ramsay describes as algorithmic criticism. For Ramsay, algorithmic criticism attempts to reenvision the logic of conventional critical reading "in extreme and self-conscious forms." [25] Cabell and Huff's hyperbolic erasure, I suggest, should be addressed as an exercise in such a new form of writing criticism, as a textual intervention into not only models of writing literature but also engaging with a plethora of contemporary texts, in which "codes of textuality are deliberately and literally altered." [26] As Rob Pope puts it, "the best way to understand how a text works [...] is to change it: to play around with it, to intervene in it in some way (large or small), and then to try to account for the exact effect of what you have done." [27] By changing the source text, intervening both in its reality and in its familiar models of reading and writing at the same time, Cabell and Huff's play of erasure turns into an interrogation of the possibilities of thinking differently about both reading and writing experienced in invisible, algorithmic spaces. Their project is not so much a reflection on contemporary models of literariness but rather an attempt at both drawing attention to processes that shape contemporary textual spaces, in their variety of disguises, and changing patterns of informed engagement with them.

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BIO

Kaja Marczevska recently completed her PhD at the Department of English at Durham University, UK, where she continues to research and teach. Her PhD investigated the implications for literature of the increasingly prominent propensity to copy as a creative practice in contemporary culture. Her research interests span avant-garde and experimental literature and art, both contemporary and historical (with special interest in conceptual art and writing), history and future of the book, material culture and questions of materiality of texts in particular, book art, and cultural theory, as well as intersections of the humanities, technology, and law. She has published work on questions of originality, creativity in the digital context, and ideas of the curatorial as a creative paradigm. Aspects of her research were made possible thanks to the generous support of the Eccles Centre Fellowship in American Studies at the British Library in 2014.

untitling LANDSCAPES

Justin Berry, Visiting Professor, Pratt Institute Adjunct Faculty, City College of New York

[KEYWORDS:
ART, ERASURE,
BOOK, COVER,
PHOTOGRAPHY,
DIGITAL, FANTASY,
LANDSCAPE,
PHOTOSHOP,
AGENCY]

I SEE ERASURE AS ANY ACT THAT REVEALS THE SUBSTRATE. WHEN WE ERASE WE ARE NOT JUST TAKING SOMETHING AWAY, WE ARE ALSO REVEALING THE CONDITIONS OF PRODUCTION, SUCH AS THE PAPER USED OR THE TECHNOLOGY EMPLOYED.

By limiting the information conveyed, and its associated symbolic noise, we are clarifying an image and reducing it to its essential qualities. In the case of traditional drawing the paper is revealed, but in the digital context this is both the program used and the 'background' image. Photoshop does not remove content, it rearranges it. This is a rearrangement of the hierarchy, reversing the roles of the context and the contextualized subject. This makes digital erasure a political act rather than an aggressive one, a way to assert one's agency over an image and reimagine its goals and properties.

Because of the degree to which media saturates our experience we are in a state of constant visibility, feeling compelled to photographically document even our most prosaic actions, such as eating dessert or going to the gym. These kinds of images are full images, in that they serve a purpose or tell a story. A full image is one that is selling something. Whether that is a cookie, a person, or a service, it promotes a narrative intention that presents a kind of fiction, a more perfect world as envisioned by the photographer. In the social media sense that means taking a photograph of people laughing together while out with friends, and in the world of advertising it means showing the way that smoking a Newport cigarette will make you feel free and happy. These kinds of images show one thing, someone smoking a cigarette, but they imply another—that to smoke that cigarette is to be beautiful, young, and joyous. In order to truly understand an intentioned image we must understand not only what we are seeing but also why someone wants us to see it. Full images on their own are not a problem; they are often easy to read through and understand, but when they are presented in a constant stream they become a problem. We lack the time required to analyze each one and are forced to take them at face value, absorbing their intent without engaging it.

Consider the way that we relate to people on the subway, employing the middle distance stare. There are simply too many people to engage with, and so the only recourse is to engage with none. This is very different from a rural setting

where one only occasionally encounters a stranger on the street and is more likely to wave to them or smile at them. The preponderance of full images, conversely, gives them a kind of invisibility. We see them, but we cannot see into them.

It is the empty image, the backdrop, the stage set, the noise underneath the surface, that conveys the real intent and goal of a picture. Consider the example of the cigarette advertisement—the thing that we are really supposed to see is that carefree and color-saturated world—the cigarette is simply the surface, and could just as easily be replaced by a set of dishtowels or baby wipes. Whatever subject matter is used, the way that we relate to it is the same. The background is the heart of the picture in that it tells us how to feel about the thing that it contains. It is the ideological frame for the content it houses.

The works included here involve digitally painting over the contents of book covers so that they become emptied of their original subject matter. I use narrative book covers because they are benign, in the sense that they are intended to be ignored. The appearance of a character or a place on the cover of a book is never meant to be authoritative—the same series of books might have different versions even within a consistent print run. Book covers are an extremely generous form of image. They offer us a potential world rather than an actual one, where the viewer is not only allowed to misinterpret the information; they are actively encouraged to. When an image acknowledges its own fundamental falsehood, it gains the potential to tell a kind of truth, one that invests the viewer with agency.

The books I use tend to be fantasy and science fiction novels. They are important to the project because they reference sites of play. Play is the method through which we learn our relationship to the world. We tend to play more games as children and they tend to have greater weight for us, in part

because we have not yet learned to parse the nuance of their meaning. In light of this, fantasy worlds are often seen as the province of children, and sites of non-importance, yet in many ways the means by which we describe or understand fantasy is the means by which we are able to re-imagine the possible.

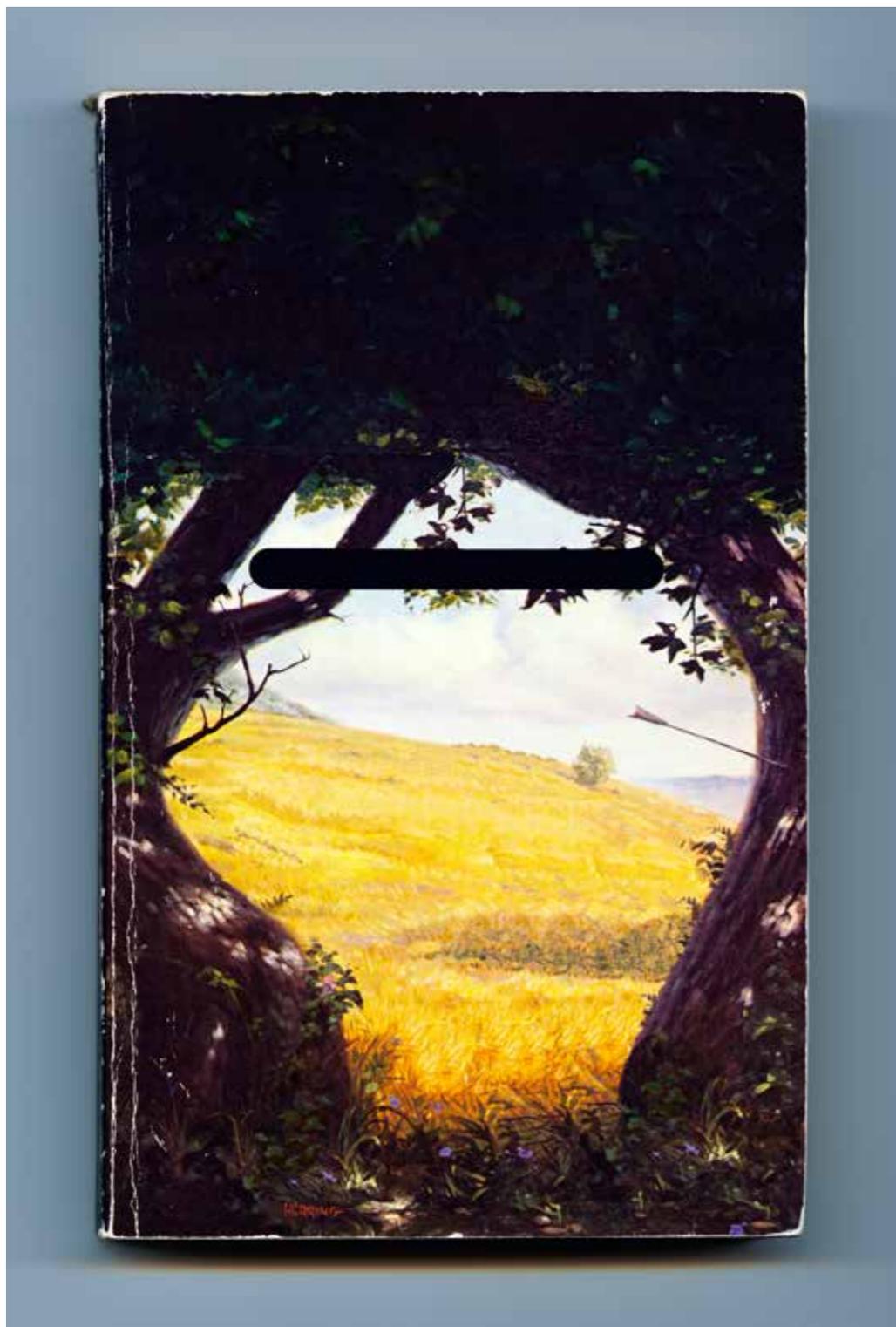
With the original subject matter, such as characters and titles and publisher, occluded, only the landscape of the fantasy world remains on the book cover. With the landscapes that I reveal I am not showing a particular fantasy world, but rather a world of infinite potential, actively undefined. The specific mythos depicted with each original cover is almost arbitrary, whether it is a barbarian standing on a pile of corpses or a robot ballerina—the point is to open a window into a space of unlimited possibility. By emptying out the image, and removing those arbitrary elements, the picture becomes solely about that space. The images sometimes appear quite ordinary—a small clearing in an otherwise normal copse of trees—yet they are places where ‘miraculous’ events occur, and where the rules of the universe are unwritten and open to interpretation. I like their simplicity and their quietude. It seems necessary and important in a context where the world of images takes on an increasingly oppressive volume.

BIO

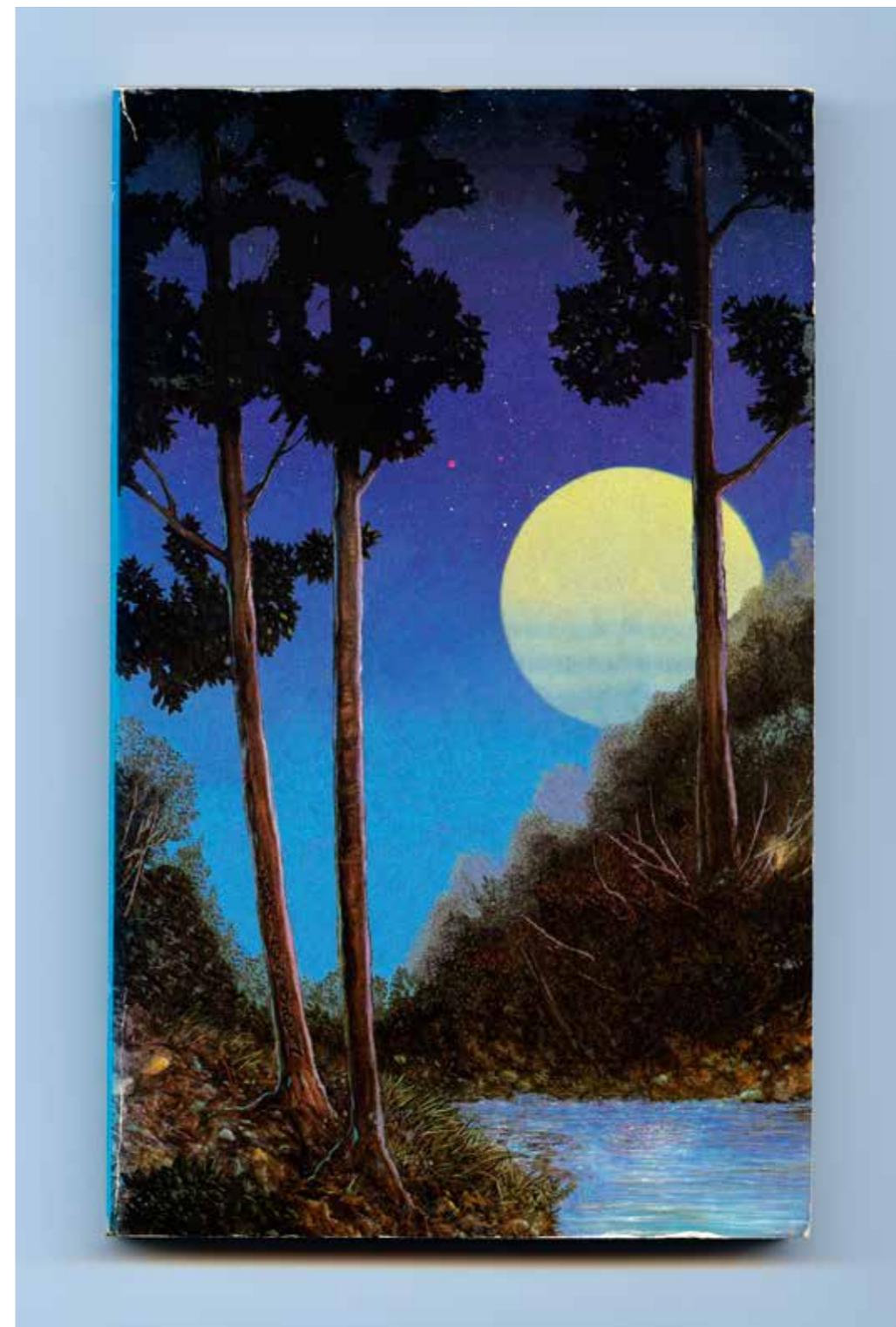
Justin Berry is an artist who lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. He is recipient of the 2014 NYFA Artist's Fellowship. His work has been exhibited internationally in various venues, with work most recently on view at CUAC in Salt Lake City and at the University of Richmond Art Museum. From 2007-2008 he was co-director of the artist-run curatorial space Alogon, in Chicago, Illinois. Currently he is a member of gallery collective Essex Flowers based in New York. He holds an MFA from the Art Institute of Chicago.



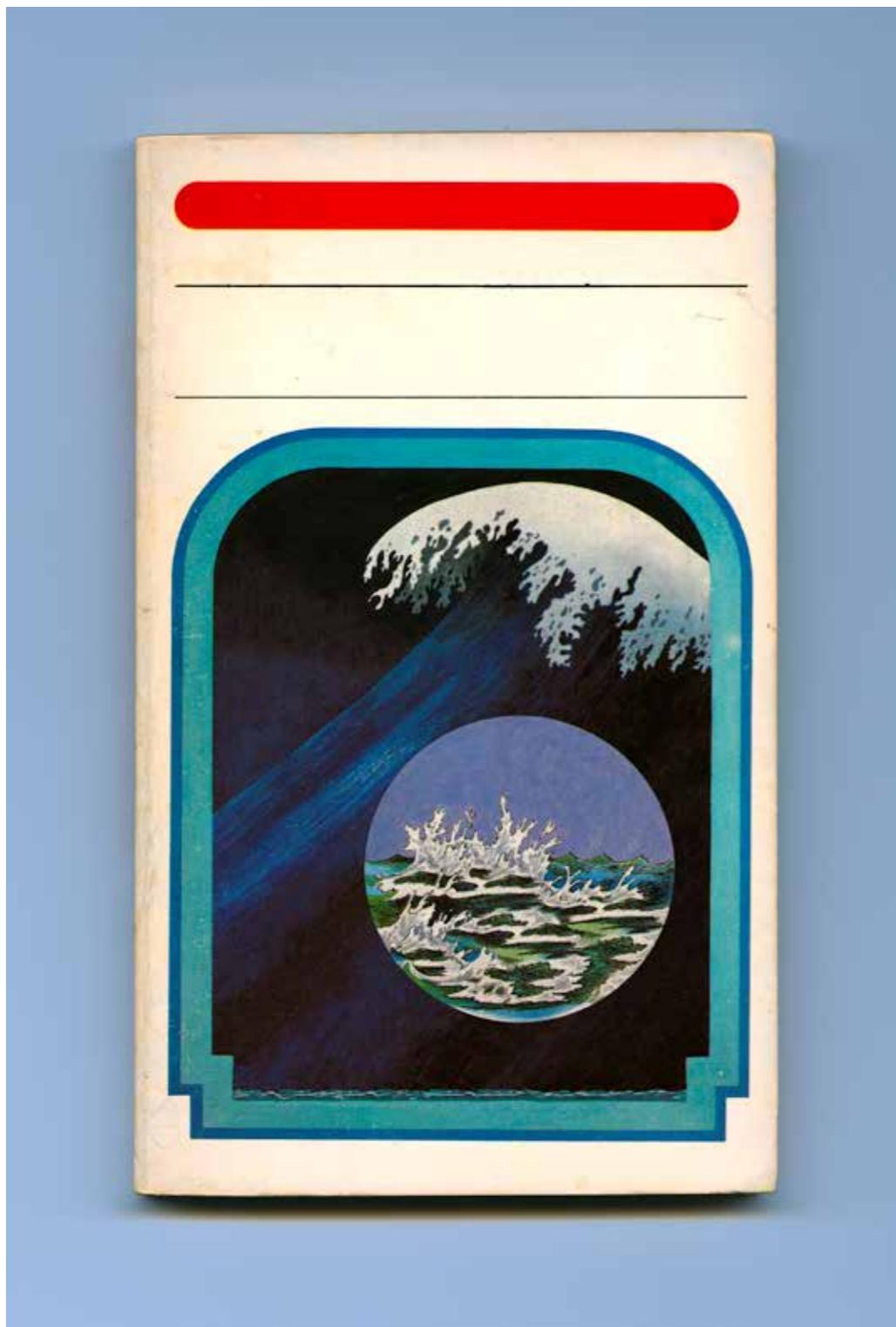
March, 2014, Justin Berry, archival inkjet print.



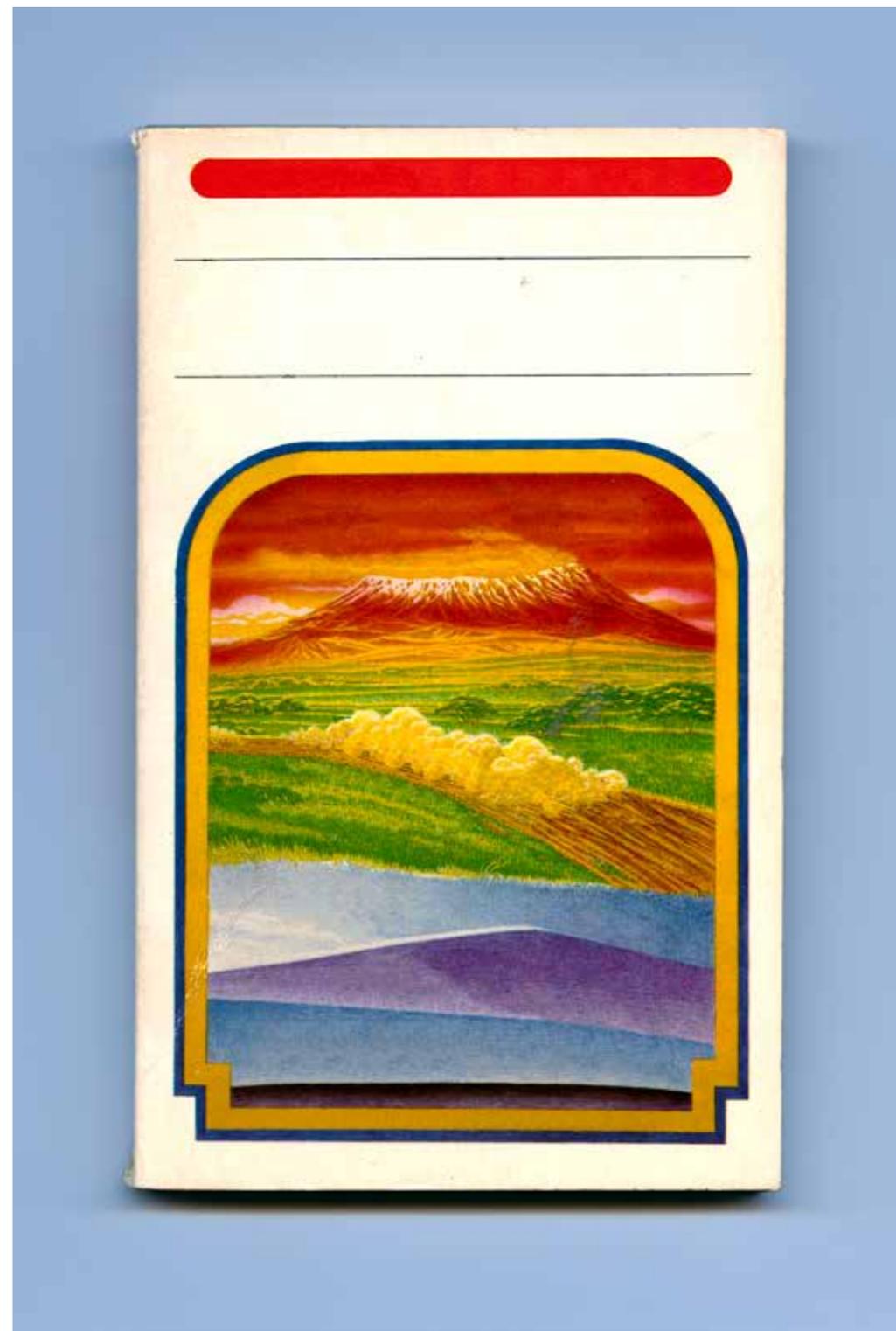
Glade, 2012, Justin Berry, archival inkjet print.



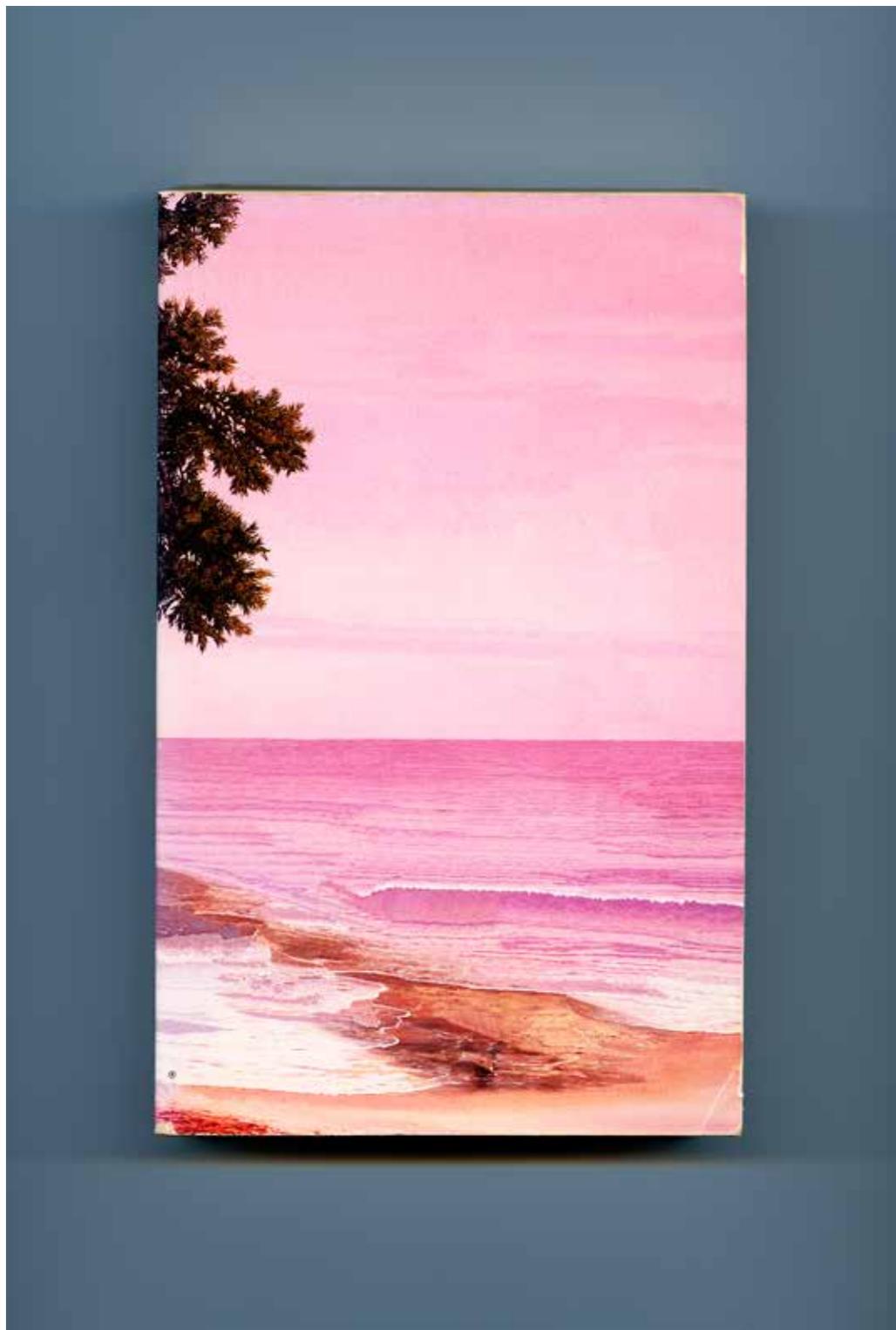
Brook, 2012, Justin Berry, digital c-print.



Triple Wet, 2011, Justin Berry, archival inkjet print.



Dust, 2011, Justin Berry, archival inkjet print.



Pink Sky, Wide Mirror, 2012, Justin Berry, archival inkjet print.

section three:

SIGNAL. & noise

HABITS of experience, HABITS of UNDERSTANDING

David Gyscek, Visiting Assistant Professor in Art/Photography, Skidmore College

[KEYWORDS:
ART, ERASURE,
BOOK, COVER,
PHOTOGRAPHY,
DIGITAL, FANTASY,
LANDSCAPE,
PHOTOSHOP,
AGENCY]



Habits of Seeing: 112-seconds in January, 2015, 2015, David Gyscek, Archival inkjet prints with gouache.

HERE IS THE PROBLEM: WE UNDERSTAND THE PASSAGE OF TIME AND OUR EXPERIENCE OF IT AS CONTINUOUS. We conceptualize it as a line punctuated by various data—whether important events in the history of a nation, significant occasions in one's life, or as various sensory perceptions that make up one's moment-to-moment experience of the world. Even in writing this, I am struck by how written language reflects this phenomenon. Each word

only makes sense or only communicates the author's idea by the words around it and the punctuation marks that organize and give structure to the thought being constructed by this combination. On an even more basic level, however, the spaces between the words are what allow them to be words in the first place. Without spaces, there would only be a series of virtually indecipherable letters (#nodistinction-snomeaning). Those spaces aid in our

comprehension of the idea being expressed, but it seems to me that they reveal, metaphorically, a distinction between our understanding and experience. Our understanding is punctuated while experience is continuous. It is the difference between the staccato beat of a drum and the sustained note of an organ; it is the difference between the ticking of a clock (analog, of course) and the smooth sweep of the second hand on a Rolex; it is the difference



between looking at the frames on a film reel and watching that film projected. I am interested in the faculty that allows us to weave together the various inputs of experience to bridge the divide between those bits of information and our continuous experience and understanding of them; I am interested in the spaces between words and the silence between the ticks of a clock. What happens between the tick and the tock?

This problem manifests in nearly, if not all, human endeavor. My own disciplinary focus, photography, illustrates it acutely, and it motivates this current body of work. In *The Ongoing Moment*, Geoff Dyer says, "In photography there is no meantime. There was just that moment and now there's this moment and in between there is nothing." [1] Except, our experience of the real continues between the clicks of the shutter. Nev-

ertheless, there is a consensus that the camera creates a reliable analog image of the subject at which it is directed. We can discern, fairly quickly, the special relationship photography has with the real. In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag writes that, "Photography has become one of the principal devices for experiencing something." [2] We understand the real more fully through the photograph. If we were to imagine a medium capable of most accurately reproducing our experience of the real however, it would be something like an immersive real-time all-over video, a virtual-reality sensory feast. Again, we don't have to imagine a medium that reproduces bits of visual data taken directly from the world—photography fits that bill and the problem is exposed once again. Our understanding does not match our experience.

There is a wonderful anecdote/parable attributed to Lee Friedlander and told by Michael Fried in *Why Photography Matters As Art As Never Before*. It describes the discrepancy between how we see and how the camera sees. By extension, it begs the phenomenological question of how we experience visual information unaided by a camera. Friedlander says, "I only wanted Uncle Vernon standing by his own car (a Hudson) on a clear day, I got him and the car. I also got a bit of Aunt Mary's laundry and Beau Jack, the dog, peeing on the fence, and a row of potted tuberous begonias on the porch and 78-trees and a million pebbles in the driveway and more. It's a generous medium, photography." [3]

Where photography is complete and total in what it is able to visually capture (within the limits of its frame and its conversion of three-dimensional space to two), what we perceive, unaided by the camera, is selective. With this understanding I wonder if we simply focus our eyes differently than a camera lens does or if there are other processes occurring beneath the surface.

Clearly, human eyes function and collect visual information differently from how a camera lens does; to start, humans have peripheral vision. How we process that information is the part that is of interest to me. Imagination, I contend, is that faculty that bridges the divide between perception and being—



between experience and understanding. The imagination allows the mind to process all of the disparate sensory inputs and weave them together into a unified and continuous experience. It is the glue that holds experience together, and therefore makes the real comprehensible.

In his first critique, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant claims that, "There are three subjective sources of knowledge upon which rests the possibility of experience in general and the knowledge of its objects—sense, imagination, and apperception. Each of these can be viewed as empirical, namely, in its application to given appearances. But all of them are likewise *a priori* elements or foundations, which make this empirical employment itself possible." [4] Kant argues that these multiple sources of knowledge come together as a synthetic manifold experience, stitched together by imagination:

What is first given to us is appearance. When combined with consciousness, it is called perception. . . . Now, since every appearance contains a manifold, and since different perceptions therefore occur in the mind separately and singly, a combination of them, such as they cannot have in sense itself, is demanded. There must therefore exist in us an active faculty for the synthesis of this manifold. To this faculty I give the title, imagination. Its action when immediately directed upon perceptions, I entitle apprehension. Since imagination has to bring the manifold of intuition into the form of an image, it must previously have taken the impression up into its activity, that is, have apprehended them. [5]

This is a sort of additive understanding of the imagination, but I would suggest that the opposite also happens—that the imagination also removes—erases objects of our sense perception. In addition to reconciling the disconnection between experi-





ence and understanding, imagination also allows us to remove superfluous information, sensations, or other inputs. This erasure of the real can be the product of consciousness selecting only the essential inputs for understanding any given situation—a sort of prioritization; or it can be a more active selection—one derived from desire, taste, or bias. The imagination allows us to see only what we want to see, allowing everything else to fall from our attention and consciousness.

It is this 'imagining out' of visual data that is the focus of my inquiry. In this project, the work of production (photographing, processing, and then painting) has

become the primary mode of inquiry, of thought, of ideation. The products, these images, have become idea. Despite Roland Barthes' assertion that, "Since the Photograph is pure contingency and can be nothing else (it is always *something* that is represented) . . . it immediately yields up those 'details' which constitute the very raw material of ethnological knowledge," [6] the idea presented in these images attempts to strip out those "details" that would allow for specific knowledge of the real space being represented. In so doing, the photographs become generic and non-specific. Their link to the real is weakened and the idea they embody is reinforced.





LOCAL colour

Derek Beaulieu, Poet Laureate of Calgary, Canada
Adjunct Professor, Alberta College of Art + Design

[KEYWORDS:
BEAULIEU,
ERASURE, AUSTER,
STAHL, ENO,
CONCEPTUALISM,
CONCRETE,
VISUAL, AMBIENT,
SMALLPRESS]

LOCAL COLOUR (NTAMO, 2008; ECLIPSE 2010) BUILDS UPON MY EXPLORATIONS OF THE COMBINING OF CONCRETE POETRY AND CONCEPTUAL WRITING. With *Local Colour* I apply conceptual techniques to Paul Auster's 1986 novella *Ghosts*. Written as the second installment of *The New York Trilogy* (*City of Glass*, 1985; *Ghosts*, 1986; *The Locked Room*, 1986), *Ghosts* is neurotically obsessive and trapped within a vocabulary of proper names:

First of all there is Blue. Later there is White, and then there is Black, and before the beginning there is Brown. Brown broke him in, Brown taught him the ropes, and when Brown grew old Blue took over. That is how it begins. [1]

Local Colour is the result of a constrained reading of *Ghosts* based not on plot, character, or an urge to solve the mystery of the novel, but rather on the occurrence of words on the page. Reading is a cartographic feat; *Local Colour* maps the location of each chromatic word in *Ghosts*. As an example, isolating only the colour words from the open paragraph of *Ghosts* (above), the text reads:

Blue	White	Black
	Brown Brown	Brown
	Brown	Blue [2]

Reading within this constraint results in a text that abandons the plot-driven narrative dependent on the hallmarks of traditional prose. What remains are words treated as widgets and ciphers, glowing linguistic pixels that represent the "local color" that haunts, like ghosts, the novel from behind the cathode ray tubes of narrative. [3] Upon excising *Ghosts* of all non-chromatic text, I replaced the words with polygons that visually represent the semantic content of each word. *Local Colour* is a novel without words, yet one that translates and transforms—geographically and semantically—the content of Auster's *Ghosts* into another form. *Local Colour* is a novel emptied of all the signals of a novel, dusted with isolated pixels still broadcasting into the void.

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BIO

David Gyscek is an artist and educator living in New York City. He studied philosophy and studio art as an undergraduate at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, and completed his graduate studies in fine arts at Goldsmiths College, University of London in 2000. He has exhibited in the UK and regionally in the US, including the recent group shows *The State of Photography* at Nazareth College in Rochester, New York, and *Exposed* at Gold Gallery in Boston, Massachusetts. He is currently serving as Visiting Assistant Professor at Skidmore College.

Erasure texts fragment the source text into a scattered broadcast, a series of dots and dashes that highlight isolated sections of the original. The resultant texts highlight the spaces for collaboration between reader and writer; every source text becomes a site for readerly intervention, a 'choose your own adventure' inscribed on any (every) text. The creation and circulation of erasure texts make permissive nodes for future projects.

Local Colour was originally published through Finnish critic Leevi Lehto's ntamo press in 2008. Once that edition lapsed out of print it was re-issued online as a downloadable PDF document through American critic Craig Dworkin's Eclipse in 2010. This digital reissue has fostered a readership that was simply unrealizable with the print edition.

Only once I released *Local Colour* online did it truly begin to embody its potentiality as a conceptually collaborative text. In 2012, Ola Ståhl and Carl Lindh (Malmö, Sweden) reissued *Local Colour* through their In Edit Mode Press. Produced in an edition of 200 copies, *Local Colour: Ghosts, Variations* treats *Local Colour* as the initiating point for a series of rewritings, collaborations, reinterpretations, and creative feedback that explores [t]he tension [. . .] between the textual narrative and the graphical mark, and the opening it seems to provide toward a realm of intermediality and experimentation. [4]

Local Colour: Ghosts, Variations is a collection of unbound folios, perfect-bound miniature books, leaflets and CDs. Gathered with a printed paper band (itself also a response to the source text), *Local Colour: Ghosts, Variations* includes a new edition of *Local Colour* and responses by seventeen international artists. [5] The new edition of *Local Colour* is a permissive node that furthers an international discussion of the potentiality of conceptual writing. Ståhl states that he was most intrigued by the way in which *Local Colour* seems to split Auster's narrative text open, deterritorializing it by rendering it

graphical and freeing it up, by the same gesture, to a potential excess of meaning. [6]

In performance I draw inspiration from Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd's *Prix Nobel* and from Kenneth Goldsmith's *Gertrude Stein on Punctuation*. [7] Both authors perform devoid of emotion and rely on a flat voicing of measured empty space. *Local Colour*, both in publication and in performance, is an Eno-like ambient text.

In the liner notes to his 1978 album *Music for Airports / Ambient 1*, Eno proposes music "as an atmosphere, or a surrounding influence: a tint." Eno contrasts ambient music with muzak and argues that

[w]hereas the extant canned music companies proceed from the basis of regularizing environments [. . .] Ambient Music is intended to enhance these. Whereas conventional background music is produced by stripping away all sense of doubt and uncertainty (and thus all genuine interest) from the music, Ambient Music retains these qualities. [. . .] Ambient Music is intended to induce calm and a space to think. [8]

Eno's formulation builds on Erik Satie's 'furniture music.' Frustrated by music in public spaces which was too assertive, distracting diners and gallery attendees from appreciating their own conversations, Satie proposed music

that would be a part of the surrounding noises and that would take them into account. I see it as melodious, as masking the clatter of knives and forks without drowning it completely, without imposing itself. It would fill up the awkward silences that occasionally descend on guests. It would spare them the usual banalities. Moreover, it would neutralize the street noises that indiscreetly force themselves into the pictures. [9]

Satie's proposal suggests music is meant to blot out extraneous noise, creating a "neutralized" palate that fills up the "awkward silences." Satie's 'furniture music' would remain effortlessly in the background, an inoffensive relaxing wash rendering all spaces prepared for discussion and thought.

If poetry is to be responsive to the everyday and to be a mirror to experience, then it should reflect, as accurately as possible, the means by which we approach texts. Poetry should not assert anything at all; it should be smooth and undistinguished commentary on the textual landscape. With *Local Colour*, I propose writing that takes Eno's formation of ambient music as "a tint" literally. *Local Colour* is weightless and pristine, unmarked by language, consisting solely of tinted rectangles.

Eno promotes an ambient aesthetic that creates "space to think" and "enhance[s] the mood." [10] I prefer an ambient writing closer to the materiality of Concrete poetry and to Robert Smithson. Smithson famously argues that "[m]y sense of language is that it is matter and not ideas—i.e. 'printed matter'" [11] and "[l]anguage should find itself in the physical world and not end up locked in an idea in somebody's head. . . . Writing should generate ideas into matter and not the other way around." [12]

Smithson supports the poetic prioritization of the material of language, his infamous "heap of language." Eno looks to an ambient stylistics in order to create a flattened, peaceful artistic space designed to enhance such ethereal ideas as "mood," "calm" and "a space to think." I would rather suggest that an Ambient poetic should be more reflective of the modern milieu, emphasizing the overwhelming graphic textual ecology.

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5. *Local Colour: Ghosts, Variations* includes print-based responses by Steve Giasson (Québec), Martin Glaz Serup (Denmark), Jörgen Gassilewski (Sweden), Craig Dworkin (USA), Peder Alexis Olsson (Sweden), Cecilie Bjørgås Jordheim (Norway), Cia Rinne (Germany), Elisabeth Tonnard (Netherlands), Cia Rinne (Germany), Eric Zboya (Canada), and editors Ola Ståhl and Carl Lindh (Sweden). Two CDs included in the edition included sound performances by Pär Thörn

(Sweden), Gary Barwin (Canada), Helen White (Belgium / UK), Ola Lindefelt (Sweden), Andreas Kurtsson (Sweden), Magda Tyzlik-Carver (Sweden) and Andy Prior (usa). Ståhl also created *Colour's Gravity* a limited edition full-colour print in an edition of 200 copies and, with Lindh, created *Apparition*, a music box produced in an edition of 10 copies which performed the "score" of *Local Colour*.

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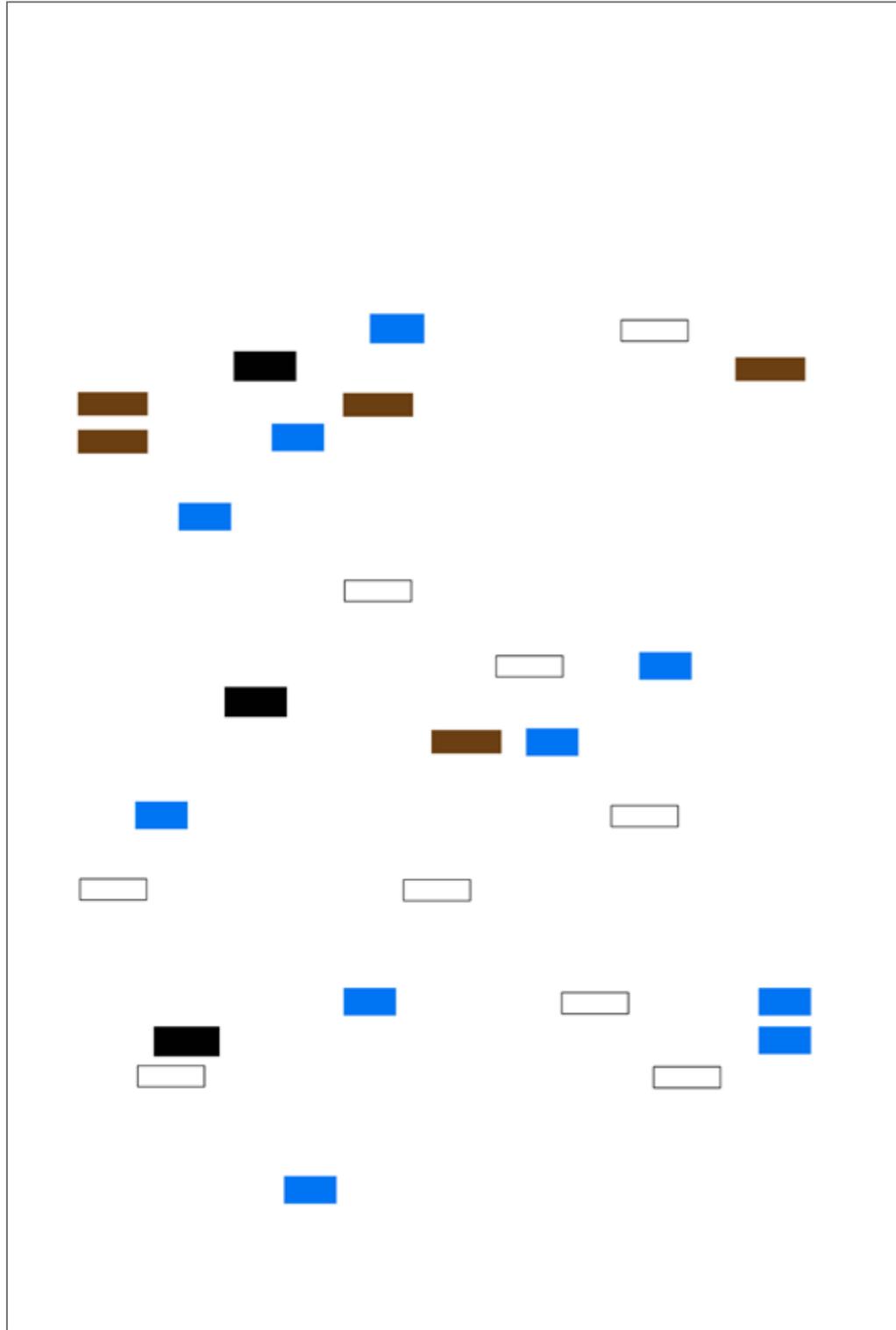
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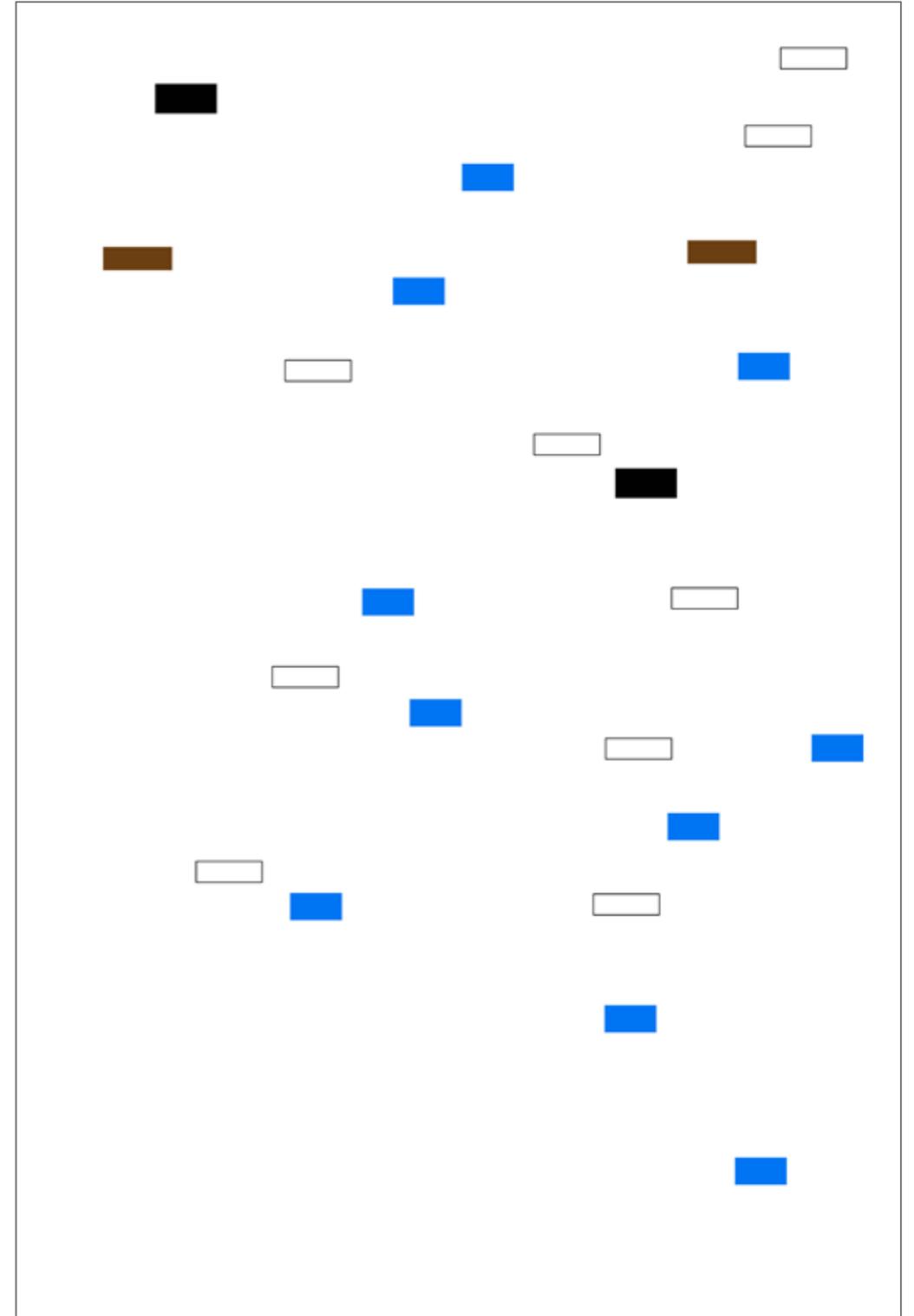
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BIO

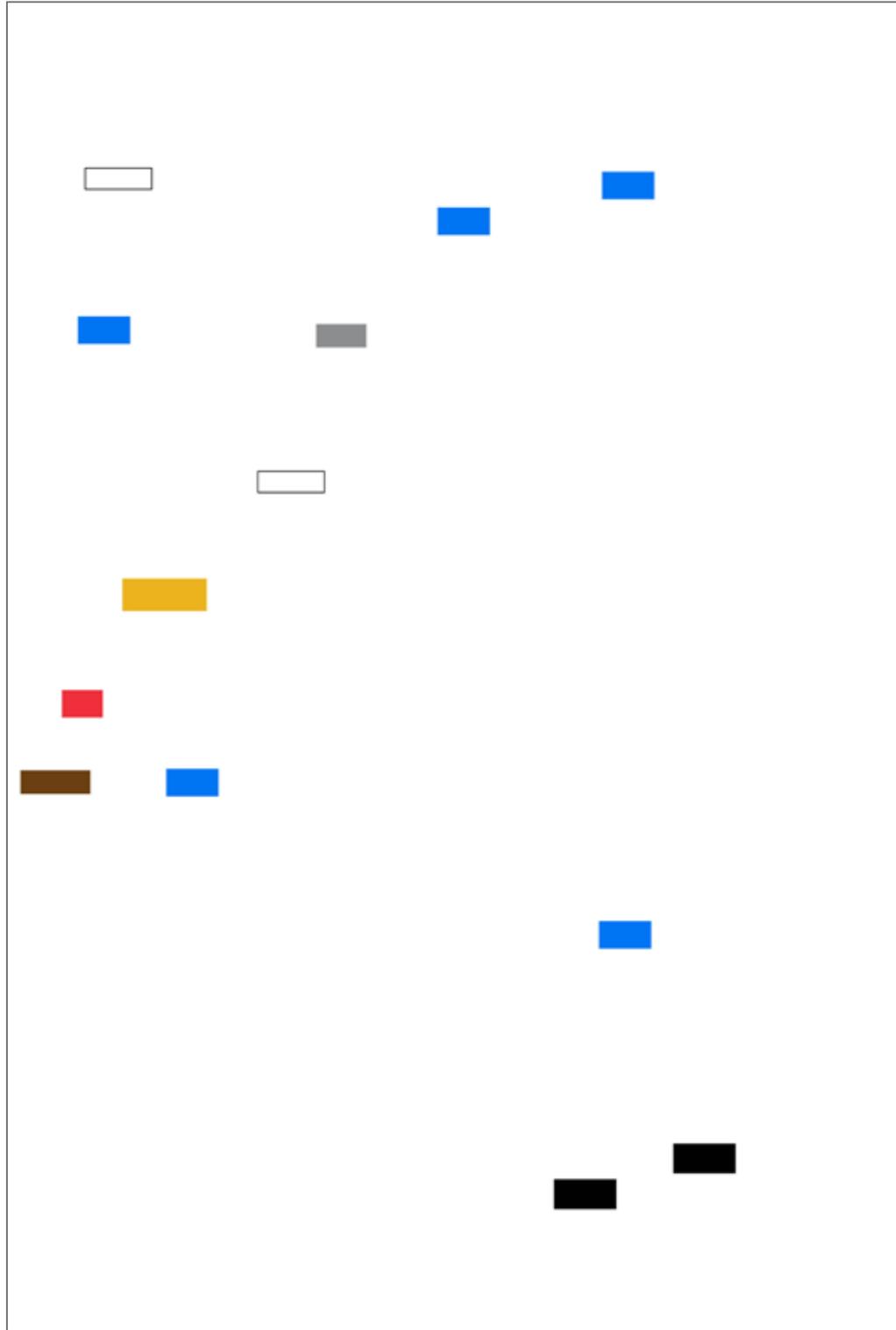
Dr. Derek Beaulieu is the author or editor of sixteen books, the most recent of which are *Please, No more poetry: the poetry of derek beaulieu* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013) and *Kern* (Les Fignes press, 2014). He is the publisher of the acclaimed no press and is the visual poetry editor at UBUWeb. Beaulieu has exhibited his work across Canada, the United States and Europe and is an award-winning instructor at the Alberta College of Art + Design. He is the 2014-2016 Poet Laureate of Calgary, Canada.



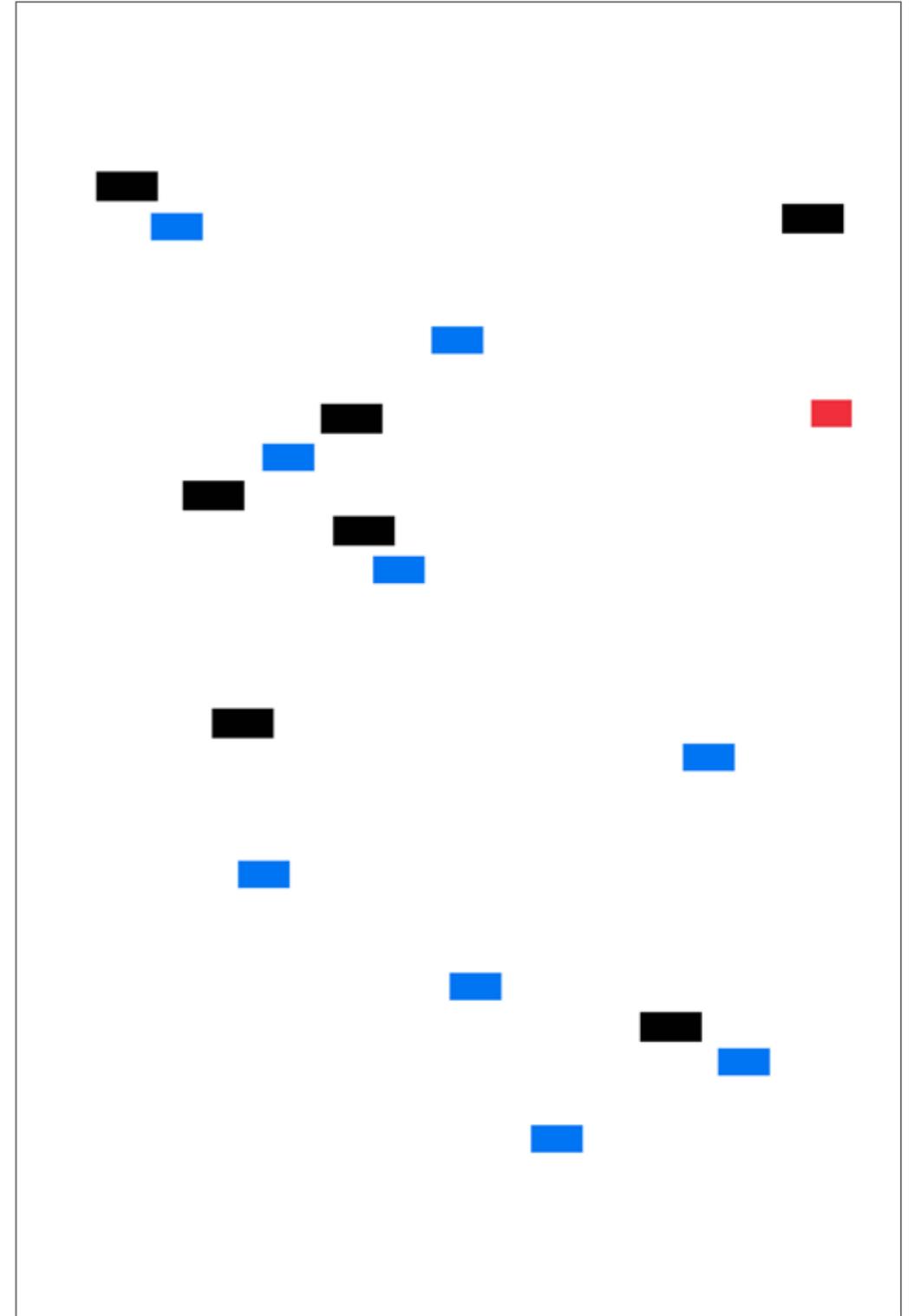
Local Colour (excerpt p. 161), 2011, Derek Beaulieu, book.



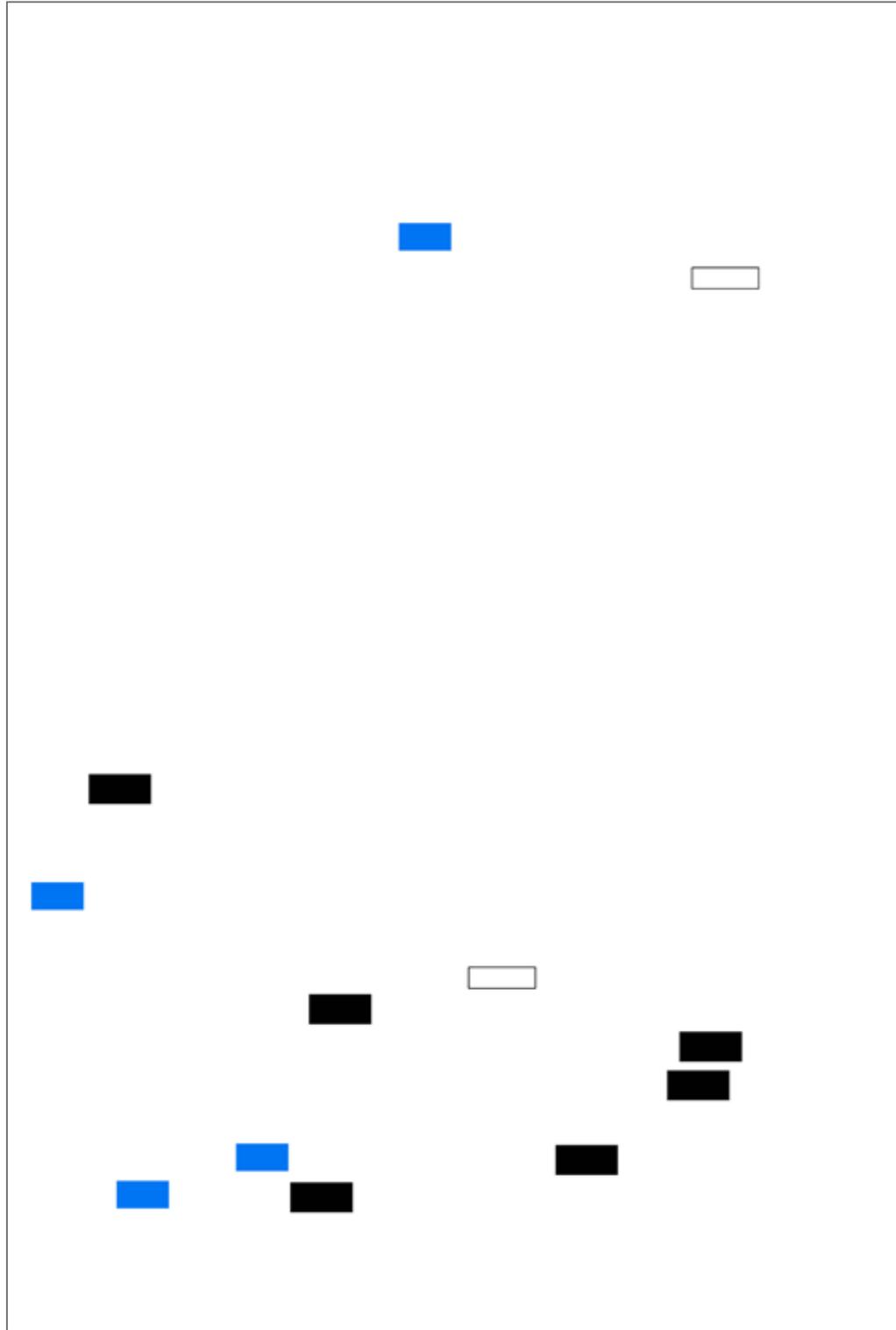
Local Colour (excerpt p. 162), 2011, Derek Beaulieu, book.



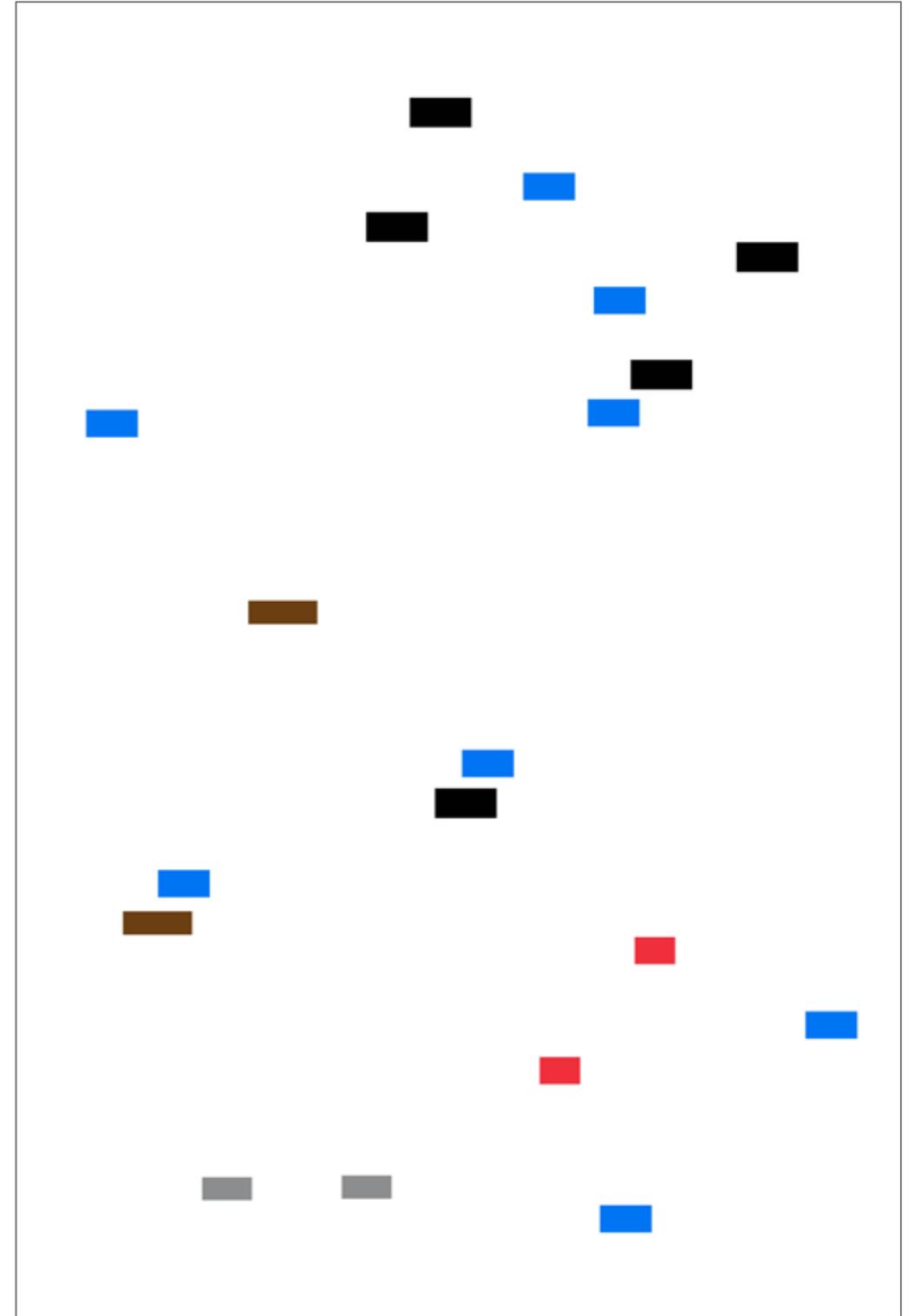
Local Colour (excerpt p. 163), 2011, Derek Beaulieu, book.



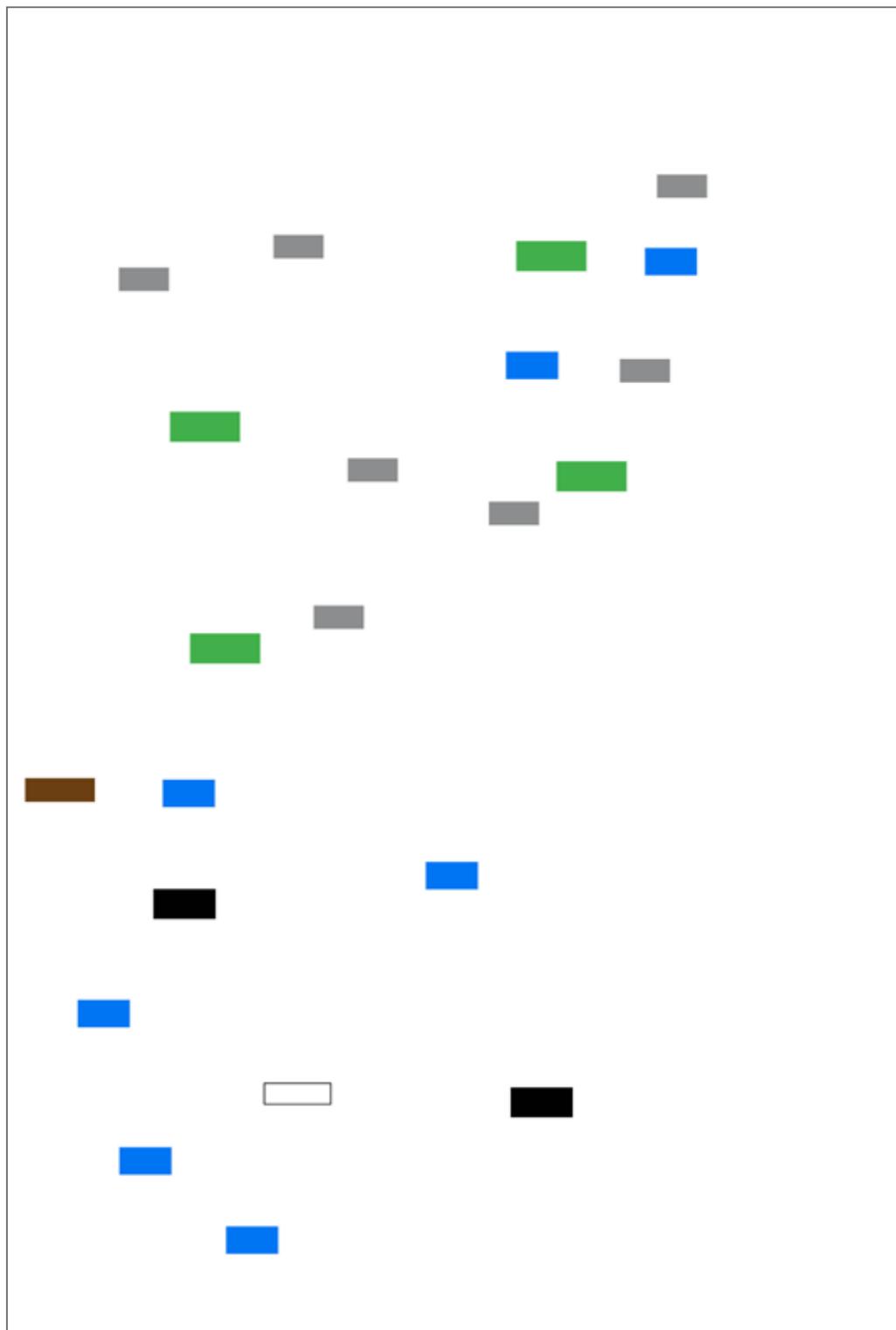
Local Colour (excerpt p. 164), 2011, Derek Beaulieu, book.



Local Colour (excerpt p. 165), 2011, Derek Beaulieu, book.



Local Colour (excerpt p. 166), 2011, Derek Beaulieu, book.



Local Colour (excerpt p. 167), 2011, Derek Beaulieu, book.

section four:
technology

OPENING A WORL

in the WORLD WIDE WEB: THE AESTHETICS AND POETICS OF DELETIONISM

Amaranth Borsuk, University of Washington, Bothell; Jesper Juul, The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts—School of Design; Nick Montfort, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Nomnym

[KEYWORDS: ERASURE, DELETION, POETICS, COMPUTATION, E-LIT, DIGITAL POETRY, HACK-TIVISM, ARTWARE]

I. INTRODUCTION

Erasure is often discussed as hypertextual (perhaps first by N. Katherine Hayles in her analysis of Tom Phillips' seminal *Humument*) because it creates new networks of meaning within a matrix of language. [1] The artistic practice consists in removing text from a source in order to draw attention to one's own invented text, hidden within it, either allowing a palimpsestic double-reading, by leaving the source somewhat intact, or obliterating it entirely from view. [2] *The Deletionist* sets out to create erasures from the vastest hypertext available, the Web, considered by Kenneth Goldsmith to be, itself, "the greatest poem ever written." [3] When readers activate the JavaScript bookmarklet on a given site in that vast network, the dutiful Deletionist runs through a series of poetic rules and selects a single one to apply to that page—the one it deems most suitable. However, when we set out to create this project, we were not interested in crafting exquisite poetry via artificial intelligence, but rather in understanding the features that make erasure legible as poetry, as well as in engaging in a dialogue with a number of historic precursors to this form of conceptual writing.

While erasure was once a rare technique, often used tacitly by writers who expected readers to recognize their intertextual references or to hear in the text's language an appropriated voice [4], it has now become so common as to prompt scholar and poet Craig Dworkin to say "I hope I never see another." [5] Our answer, of course, is to automatically produce a tremendous number of erasure poems, corresponding to every page on the World Wide Web, in the interest of opening up a world in this tangled network. The primary expression of the

project is online at thedeletionist.com, a site launched to coincide with E-Poetry 2013 in London, but we maintain Tumblr and Twitter feeds to help document our own and user-discovered deletions. [6] At a moment when erasure has been subsumed into the mainstream, even as redacted documents have become part of our political landscape, *The Deletionist* makes light of text by adding or removing apertures in the illuminated screen.

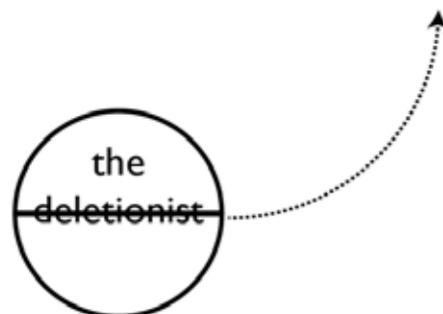
II. ERASURE POETRY, FORMALLY AND MATERIALLY

The material techniques artists have used to enact erasure vary widely, often speaking in some way to the poetics of the work. [7] These include, but are not limited to, erasing (Ann Hamilton), whiting out (Mary Ruefle), painting over (Tom Phillips), cutting out (Jonathan Safran Foer), covering up (Travis MacDonald), stitchery (Jen Bervin), and even transcription (Jackson Mac Low, Srikanth Reddy). In developing *The Deletionist*, we examined this broad history, in part to survey the formal and material approaches by which we recognize a work as an erasure poem. We were interested in creating a work that would interrogate the relationship between removing and revealing, construction and destruction, which in erasure become inseparable.

The Deletionist's very name situates its procedure as redactive: removal reveals new texts. Given the array of potential material approaches listed above, we could have opted for any number of visual strategies, but because *The Deletionist* lives in the browser, we determined its method must be a digital one predicated on our contemporary sense of all text as potentially unstable. *The Deletionist's* basic method is to metaphorically "delete" unwanted text by changing its color setting to "transparent." In the digital realm, however, this functions quite differently from using liquid paper on a time-yellowed page. It makes the pixels rendered "transparent" equivalent to all the surrounding pixels, thereby visually removing, rather than masking, the words. It maintains, however, the spatial layout of the text, which gives erasure works much of their recognizability and force: the spaced words score the page, giving a voice to the emergent text that sounds, to eye and ear, different from the extant one. Like the Wikipedia editor who argues

for the deletion of articles in archived conversations, *The Deletionist* erases text digitally, but never without a trace.

While visual artist Tom Phillips and poet Ronald Johnson are often given as the progenitors of erasure for their seminal works created in the mid- 1960s and 1970s, our redactive poetic strategy might be tracked back as early as the work of avant-garde poet Bob Brown, who in 1931 published a small book titled *Gems* under his imprint, Roving Eye Press. Ostensibly an anthology of classic and edifying poems, *Gems* is full of censorious black marks that make sections of each piece (patterns of nouns, carefully-placed verbs, and end-rhymes) inaccessible to the reader, inviting our uncensored minds



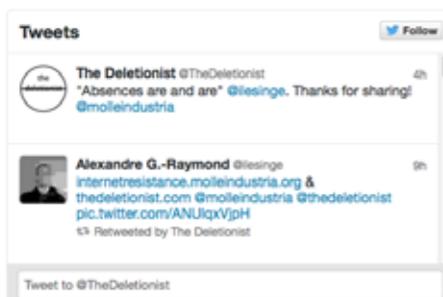
Please, drag the icon to your bookmark bar.

Then, go to any site and click *The Deletionist* bookmark.

...About *The Deletionist*...
... How to Use It ...
... On Its Workings ...

Keep in Touch

Please contact thedeletionist@thedeletionist.com with any comments.



The Deletionist ©2013 Amaranth Borsuk, Jesper Juul and Nick Montfort.

(left) Amaranth Borsuk, Jesper Juul, and Nick Montfort, *The Deletionist*.

(right page) From *Paradise Lost*, "Book I: The Argument," The John Milton Reading Room.



to do their worst—filling the gap with ribald language. Brown's treatment of Wordsworth's poem "Simon Lee, the Old XXX," provides an illustrative example:

Full five-and-thirty years he XXX
A running XXXX merry;
And still the center of his XXX
Is red as a ripe cherry.

The center of the running "hunterman[s]" flushed "cheek" turns prurient by virtue of this masking, and even the way he "lived" becomes suspect under the censor's thumb. Brown's satire of redaction's tendency to highlight what

it attempts to hide was intended as both amusement and, as editor Craig Saper, who has recently reissued the book, suggests, "sociopoetic intervention." [8] The capacity of erasure to simultaneously enact silencing (as it does in Yedda Morrison's *Darkness*, which mutes of all references to humankind from the landscape of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*) and give voice to a subsumed speaker (as in M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*, which surfaces the voices of those drowned slaves thrown from the titular ship as well as those of their captors), suggests the palimpsestic, intertwined nature of any erasure and its source, though we

often, these days, encounter only the text's remnants, reconstituted as poetry.

To these might be added Austin Kleon's *Newspaper Blackout*, which draws on the trope of black-marker redaction to create personal narratives from newspaper columns, rendering the source somewhat moot; and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes*, which offers a palpable visualization of the losses at the heart of Bruno Schulz's *Street of Crocodiles* by cutting windows into the pages, leaving threads of text suspended in superimposition.

A lineage of such oblitative work might also look back to other efforts of redaction that highlight precisely what they aim to conceal, among them Mabel Loomis Todd's excision from Emily Dickinson's letters of words and phrases that hint at her relationship with Susan Huntington Gilbert. [9] In addition to drawing our attention to what is missing, redaction points to the text's own structure, as in Marcel Broodthaer's 1969 printing of Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*, which reduces the text to a series of black bars, evoking, perhaps, the wreckage of the ship described in Mallarmé's poem (and perhaps of the poem itself) set adrift on the silent white page. Likewise, Joseph Kosuth's 1986 redaction of Sigmund Freud, *Zero & Not*, draws attention to the ascenders and descenders that escape his attempts to suppress the letters via

XIII. And wilt

speech.

And wilt
I bear
And hold
I drop feet. I cannot
In words I should reach.
And rend I stand
grief.

strikethrough; and Jenny Holzer's recent silkscreens of declassified government documents on communism and torture reveal just how much 'declassified' information remains hidden from view. These latter works, however, are not read as erasure precisely because the constructive impulse is missing: there is no attempt to shape the remaining text into something we recognize as a poem.

Erasure poets have relied on a number of formal techniques to reconstitute the page, and in building *The Deletionist's* repertoire we surveyed these as well, seeking models and constructing a taxonomy of approaches. These range from stricter prosodic structures like anaphora (Tom Phillips), assonance, and alliteration (Janet Holmes), to poetic modes like apostrophe (Ronald Johnson) and internal rhyme that create

an inner logic for the emergent poem and construct, thereby, a speaking subject. Some modes are purely visual, highlighting punctuation (Kenneth Goldsmith) and repetition (Bervin), drawing attention to the source as material: a matrix of textual data.

In order for *The Deletionist's* work to be legible as poetry, we reasoned, it must do what every erasure poet does: write, as Bervin says, "with or against this palimpsest," not just of the source text, but of other erasure works. [10] Nearly every new erasure, or nearly, evinces a familiarity with its precursors, as when designer Andreas Töpfler translates Christian Hawkey and Uljana Wolf's white-out erasure of Rainer Maria Rilke's translation of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* into dashes and symbols that seem

to allude to Dickinson's own visual repertoire, or when Yedda Morrison extends Johnson's recalibration of *Paradise Lost* (which, Erik Anderson has argued, displaces references to god and religion). [11] "The history of poetry," as Bervin writes, "is with us," and at this point the history of erasure, too, such that all erasure works must exhibit, to some extent, both self-reflexivity and intertextuality, hallmarks of the genre.

III. REVEALING THE WORL

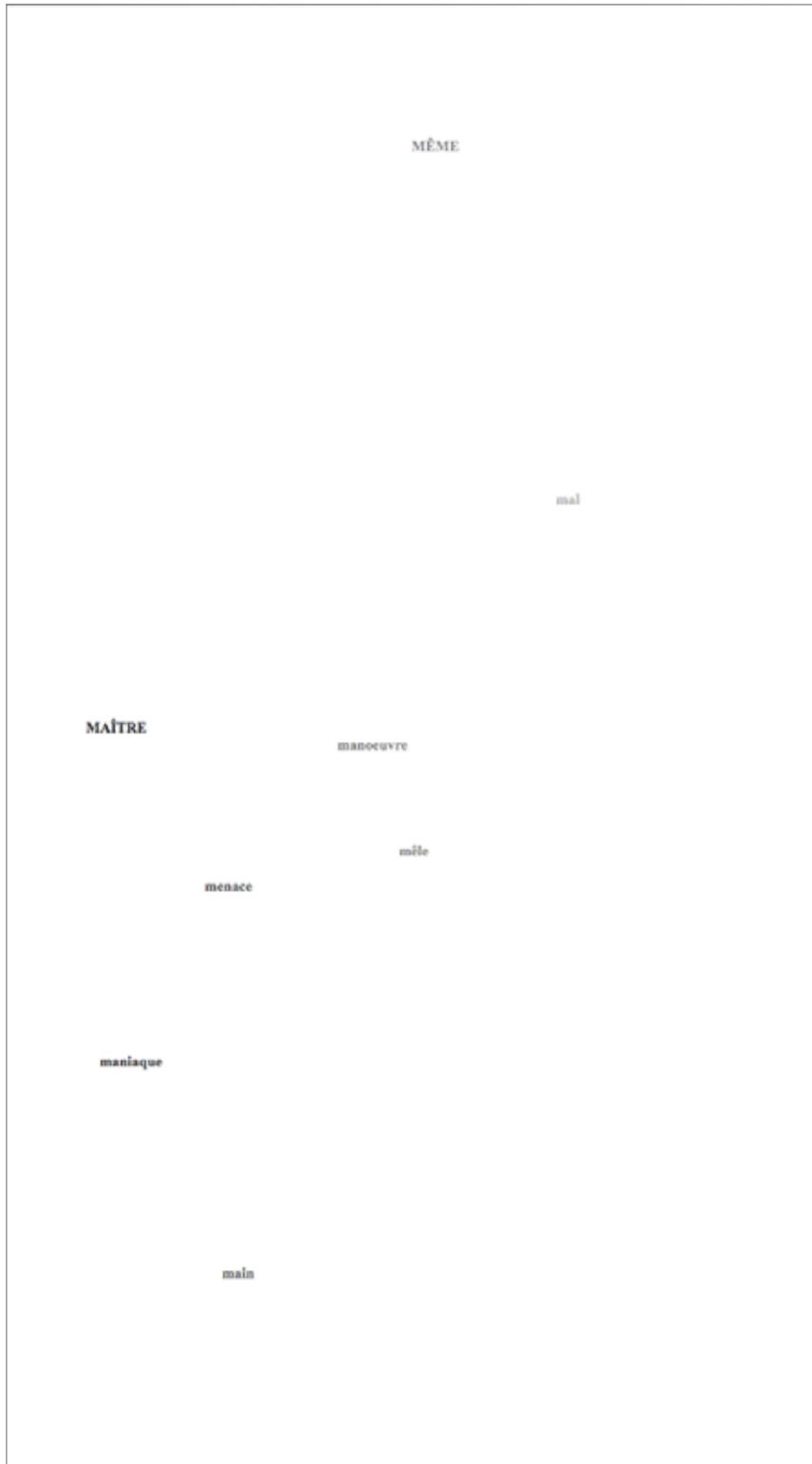
The Internet carries a palimpsest within itself as well. The view we have of the web in a standard browser (whether on a computer, tablet, or mobile phone) is central to our understanding of this network of documents, but it is only one glimpse of this system. We can use the "Page Source" or "View Source" options to see the HTML that is being

Page By Page Books



(left) From *Heart of Darkness*, Chapter II, *Page by Page Books*.

(right page) From Richard J. Yanco, "And wilt thou have me fashion into speech..." by Elizabeth Barrett Browning." Rick's Yanco's homepage.

From A.S. Kline, *Mallarmé: Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hazard.*

retrieved when we click on a link that is used to generate the often more pleasing visual display of the browser. Servers also send HTTP header information when exchanging HTML, and these pages are sent by specific pieces of software (web servers such as Apache) running on particular operating systems that run on particular hardware. The conventional view of the web may be familiar, but it is only one view.

To highlight the status of this familiar view of the web as already being one of many, we chose to develop *The Deletionist* so that it would effectively reveal yet another network of texts. The code shows those who use it 'the Worl,' a knotty fingerprint within each web page of 'the World Wide Web,' and its rules seek to self-reflexively name that space whenever possible: it surfaces a 'worl' or 'Worl' within its poem when references to "the world" can be found in its source text.

It is possible to write programs that operate at random (or, to be precise, pseudorandomly) or ones that operate deterministically. A program that always prints "hello world" is deterministic, as is a program that converts Fahrenheit to Celsius temperatures: given any particular input, the same output will result. A program that simulates a coin flip or the roll of a die, of course, is not deterministic. It is not a problem to write programs of either sort. To create a visual effect one might wish to use randomness (as François Morellet did) or very austere regularity (as Donald Judd does).

The Deletionist is written as a deterministic system. When one runs it on the

same page (not just a page at the same URL, but the same underlying HTML) several times, it always produces the same result. This means that instead of generating a different erasure each time (pseudorandomly), to highlight the vast range of possible emergent texts within a single source, the system offers just one: it reveals 'the Worl.' A reader who finds an interesting 'Worl page' by applying *The Deletionist* can share the URL with another reader who also is using the bookmarklet; that reader will see the same thing, unless the underlying content of the page changes. As a practical matter, it is not too difficult to take a screenshot and share it by social media, so that having *The Deletionist* is not necessary, but there is also the option to share URLs, allowing others the experience of discovery via deletion.

We thus use *The Deletionist* to present not just a toy for textual modification, but an alternate World Wide Web. By not throwing the die, we abolish certain types of chance but let others (the updating of pages, which is happening all the time) continue to affect 'the Worl.'

IV. THE DELETIONIST IN DETAIL

The Deletionist is implemented as a bookmarklet, which means it can be moved to one's browser's bookmarks bar and, whenever one visits any page of the web, activated with only a click. It would also have been possible to host a site where visitors could submit URLs and have them processed on the server side; as is done, for instance, by Pornolizer. [12] However, this approach adds to one's server maintenance

burden, since code is running on one's server, and it makes modification of the program by others difficult, since users would have to set up their own servers to run the modified program. Alternately, a browser extension could be developed so that pages are always erased as the user surfs the Worl. Such implementations range from recreational humor, as in the well-known extension that replaces mentions of "the cloud" with the phrase "my butt," [13] to artistic counter-surveillance, as in Benjamin Grosser's *ScareMail*, which appends ominous-sounding text to the end of Gmail messages designed to glut NSA surveillance with nonsense. [14] A more overtly literary browser extension, "Mark Ditto Mark" by A. J. Patrick Liszkiewicz and Lucas Miller, changes all first names on a page to "Mark" and all last names to "Ditto," making the entire Web seem to refer to a single person. [15]

The browser extension method requires a separate implementation for each browser, however, and while the "cloud-to-butt" substitution might be amusing to have happen always and automatically, it is necessary to see the Worl in contrast to the Web. *The Deletionist* as a system has a palimpsestic relationship to its sources, and much of the pleasure, humor, and interest in its results comes through juxtaposition. Unlike works of erasure that draw from high literary sources, *The Deletionist* must make do with whatever it is given, whether a *Buzzfeed* quiz, *New York Times* article, or HTML e-book. Knowing where the

language has come from is central to appreciating what it becomes, particularly since the resultant poems are clearly formulaic in structure.

The Deletionist is also in dialogue with several precedent artistic bookmarklets, also known as 'artware,' that use creative code to open spaces of play and critique of our online experience. Many such bookmarklets target web boredom, transforming the textual space into a visual one, allowing users to play a Katamari-like game of rolling up language or an Asteroids-like game to obliterate the contents of any page, for example. [16, 17] Bookmarklets can also activate textual substitutions, in the vein of the well-known 'cloud' extension described above, as in James Bridle's substitution of the word "dragon" for appearances of the term "market"—a satire of current web jargon that literalizes a quote by technographer Justin Pickard. [18]

In our search for erasure-specific models, we admired graphic designer Ji Lee's *Wordless Web* (with coding by Cory Forsyth), which might be considered an extreme web erasure system, since it removes all text from a page except that occurring in images, allowing the user to appreciate pages as a viewer rather than a reader. [19] In a more overt critique, Daniel C. Howe's *AdNauseam*, popular in netart and hacker circles, inverts Lee's paradigm, blocking all ads as one browses the web. Its overt 'sociopoetic' gesture, as implied by its name, is to click on these ads repeatedly in the back-

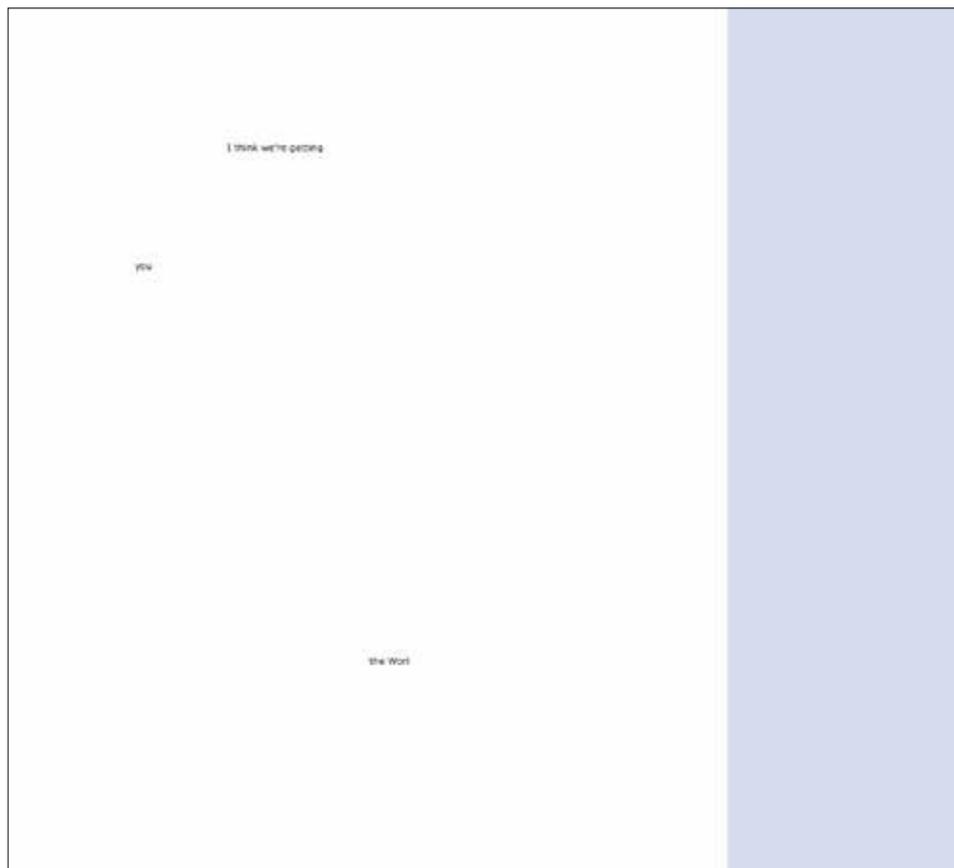
ground, creating a completely uninformative virtual profile of the user while accruing significant costs for ad-buyers. [20] *The Redactive Poetry Project*, no longer maintained for use with current browsers, takes a different tack, giving users complete control over their erasure (similarly to Wave Books' website) by letting them draw censorious black marks through text on most pages. [21] Cheekily called the RePoMan (REdactive POetry MANipulator), their project shares our desire to imbue our tool with an identity, if not agency.

The Deletionist is not an artificial intelligence, nor does it attempt to fool the reader into believing it is one. Rather, it is programmed in JavaScript to run a series of regular expressions (regexes) on a given text, and to judge the results via a fitness function that calculates 'interestingness.' Basing our erasure constraints on the literary and artistic precursors we studied, we developed thirty different formal methods for removing text, each of which is expressed in a regular expression, a pattern that tells the program which strings match. Our rules, each of which we named, are lexical—we specify which sequences of letters

are to remain—and do not refer to any external database or other resource. For instance, one of the shortest rules is "Sound of Music":
`/do|re|mi|fa|so|la|ti|(the\s+)?worl|ig`
 This solfège system creates musical language, and can also be read as a homage to artist Claude Closky's 'la la la' works, ballpoint redactions that play on the phoneme's dual function in French. [22] "Sound of Music" leaves only those elements of the text which happen to be part of the Solmization system and can represent notes, with one exception. The first part indicates that the rule will match "do or re or mi"—and so on—with the pipe symbol, |, indicating "or." The last part also

keeps any occurrence of "worl," with or without "the" in front of it. The letters 'i' and 'g' at the end indicate the rule is to be applied without regard to case and 'globally,' rather than just once, as all the rules are. Because it is a regex, this rule can be used within a 'Find' or 'Find and Replace' dialog to search a word processing document or web page, for instance, and we tried our regular expressions in this way and others during development before placing them in the bookmarklet for testing and use.

Many of our rules are closely based on the formal techniques prior erasure poets have used, and all can be seen



(right) From Thomas H. Kean et al., "We Have Some Planes," The 9/11 Commission Report, National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States.



(top) From Oxquarry Books Ltd, "Sonnet 4," Shakespeare's Sonnets.

(bottom) From Jacques Derrida, "Of Grammatology by Jacques Derrida," Marxists Internet Archive.



in our freely accessible and fork-able Github repository or by 'view[ing] source' on the bookmarklet itself. [23] "Tears in Rain," for instance, erases all text except for punctuation, as Kenneth

Goldsmith and Antonia Hirsch have done. [24] The "Poetic O" rule pays homage to the opening of Ronald Johnson's *Radi Os*, "O / tree / into the world," by selecting only the final "o" in words that end with that letter and keeping the next word to appear in the line. [25] "To be or not" finds forms of Hamlet's query scattered across the worl. Several alliterative rules leave words beginning with a certain letter, sometimes keeping a few other closed-class words to create new sorts

of expressions. We included, as well, a generalized alliterative rule that works with many alphabets, so that even though *The Deletionist* is best-suited to the English and Latin alphabet, it has some mechanisms to reach beyond those. In another interlingual gesture, it has rules to locate short Spanish and German words within arbitrary Latin-alphabet text and to remove all other words, potentially converting English (or other languages) into Spanish or German.

VI. DÉTOURNING DELETIONISM

The Deletionist was imagined as being remarkable in several ways. For one thing, it is a system that is general to the entire web. It can be run on any page. A page without text will not be changed, and the system works best on English-language pages, but it has some ability to generalize to other languages and alphabets, and its ability to work on English-language pages means it has a huge corpus to transform. The system also models writing processes. It computationally automates the activity of those human poets who have produced erasure poetry, or at least models aspects of this activity. *The Deletionist's* methods attempt to abstractly represent some of those that people have used and to test them on arbitrary sources we encounter in daily life. Because *The Deletionist* works on the entire web, it can be run on one's everyday Web reading and on one's personal site or various online profiles, thereby deleting the deleter. Its ability to 'make strange' is enhanced because it can be turned (or détourned) to very familiar pages.

These ideas of generality, modeling process, and working on the familiar evolved with early work on the system and helped us focus our collaboration. Even if every page of the Worl may not shimmer with the power of the best human-authored erasure poetry, the system extends itself in these three directions and so offers users a radical new perspective on the world's major textual network.

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BIO

<http://thedeletionist.com>; thedeletionist@thedeletionist.com

Amaranth Borsuk is a poet, scholar, and book artist interested in textual materiality across media. Her books include *As We Know*, a collaboration with Andy Fitch (Subito, 2014); *Handiwork* (Slope Editions, 2012); *Between Page and Screen* (Siglio Press, 2012), created with Brad Bouse; and a chapbook, *Tonal Saw* (The Song Cave, 2010). Her intermedia project *Abra*, a collaboration with Kate Durbin and Ian Hatcher, recently received an Expanded Artists' Books grant from the Center for Book and Paper Arts at Columbia College Chicago and will be issued this spring as an artist's book and integrated iPad app. A trade edition is forthcoming from 1913 Editions. Borsuk served as a Mellon postdoctoral fellow in the humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology before joining the faculty of the University of Washington, Bothell, where she currently teaches in the MFA in Creative Writing and Poetics and the School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences. www.amaranthborsuk.com

Jesper Juul is an influential researcher in video game studies who aims to take games seriously as a cultural form, building the field to a level of depth and breadth comparable to that of literature or cinema. The author of three research monographs published on MIT Press, Juul also co-edits the *Playful Thinking* series. His latest book, *The Art of Failure*, asks why people play video games even though failing makes them visibly upset, a 'paradox of tragedy' that relates to tragedy in theatre. Before that, *A Casual Revolution* examines the recent shift of video games from a pastime for a narrow audience to being played by a majority of the population in many countries. Similarly, Juul's first book, *Half-Real*, responds to an early controversy within video game studies about the role of narrative in video games. Juul is currently an associate professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. www.jesperjuul.net/

Nick Montfort is a scholar of computational art and media who develops literary generators and other computational art and poetry. His most recent book, *#!* (Counterpath, 2014), contains programs and poems. His previous books of poetry and criticism include *10 PRINT CHR\$(205.5+RND(1))*; *GOTO 10*, (MIT Press, 2013), a 10-author single-voice publication on a one-line Commodore 64 BASIC program; *Riddle & Bind* (Spineless Books, 2010), literary riddles and constrained poems; *Twisty Little Passages: An Approach to Interactive Fiction* (MIT Press, 2003); and, with William Gillespie, 2002: *A Palindrome Story* (Spineless Books, 2002), the world's longest literary palindrome. Montfort is associate professor of digital media at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and currently serves as faculty advisor for the Electronic Literature Organization. Montfort earned a PhD in computer and information science from the University of Pennsylvania, a master's degree in creative writing from Boston University, and a Masters in media arts and sciences from MIT. <http://www.nickm.com/>

Unprojections or worlds under erasure in contemporary HOLLYWOOD CINEMA

Torsa Ghosal, Ohio State University

[KEYWORDS: DENARRATION, UNPROJECTION, PHOTOREALISM, DIGITAL, FILM, HOLLYWOOD, ERASURE, ONTOLOGY, COMPUTER GENERATED IMAGERY, POSTMODERNIST]

CONTEMPORARY HOLLYWOOD FILMS SUCH AS DAVID LYNCH'S *MULHOLLAND DRIVE* (2001), MICHEL GONDRI'S *ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND* (2004), CHRISTOPHER NOLAN'S *INCEPTION* (2010), AND ALEJANDRO GONZÁLEZ IÑÁRRITU'S *BIRDMAN* (2014), AMONG OTHERS, DEPLOY A COMMON NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE: EACH OF THESE FILMS PROJECTS MULTIPLE EMBEDDED STORYWORLDS—THE SEVERAL LAYERS OF DREAMS IN *INCEPTION* BEING AN EXAMPLE—AND IN EACH CASE, THE EMBEDDED STORYWORLDS EVENTUALLY UNDERCUT THE ONTOLOGICAL STABILITY OF ONE ANOTHER. The strategy of placing narrated storyworlds under erasure, what Brian Richardson calls "denarrating," has been a popular device of twentieth century literature. [1] However, in mainstream Hollywood films, this narrative style is relatively new. In this article, I explain this aesthetic of erasure or 'unprojection'—that is, the process by which films project a storyworld only to deny or erase it—in the context of media technology. I argue that 'unprojection' in films does not directly follow from the literary precedents of 'denarration' but instead arises from an anxiety about the status and function of film within Hollywood's 'new' media ecology.

HOLLYWOOD CINEMA IN 'NEW' MEDIA ECOLOGY

Classical Hollywood cinema typically presents internally consistent storyworlds. The projected world on screen, whether 'realistic' or 'fantastic,' abides by its own internal logic and global constraints. This projected storyworld, in turn, may be a composite of several possible sub-worlds: for instance, the dream world of a character, which is distinct from the textual actual world, may surface. Internal consistency, then, implies that the embedded dream world will function as per its own logic, while the textual actual world will operate with its own affordances and constraints. The world of the character's dream will remain separated from the character's 'real' world. These norms of cinematic storytelling are not any different from those that govern fictional worlds in other narrative forms such as the novel. And readers of the post-1960s novel know that the boundaries of embedded storyworlds are frequently rendered porous in such texts. However, that is not the case with post-60s mainstream Hollywood films. Even the most fantastic late-twentieth-century Hollywood films keep multiple possible worlds neatly separated from one another.

Hollywood's adherence to internally consistent storyworlds can be traced to hypotheses about the 'film' medium. In *What is Cinema?*, Andre Bazin observes, "Photography and cinema . . . satisfy . . . our obsession with realism" and this "realism" is achieved through the mechanical process of recording the image, where no human subjectivity intervenes. [2] The photographic image, then, owes its ontological status to the mechanical process of its composition, whereby "we are forced to accept as real the object reproduced." [3] Writing in a period when 'digital' cinema is supplanting the place of 'film,' DN Rodowick reinstates the transcription functions of analog images—transcribing light emanating from a referent on a chemical surface accounts for photorealism. According to Rodowick an image convinces the viewer of the past existence of its referent through "analogical causation." [4] Rodowick's and Bazin's claims hold even for films that use special effects to create hyperreal spaces without employing digital technology. For instance, in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), each photographed element had a physical world referent: parts of the cityscape were made of miniature models and matte paintings, and parts of it were shot on location. The status of the image vis-à-vis the 'real' object it represents remains central to the 'mediumhood' of analog 'film.' Once the storyworld materializes on the analog film's surface, the existence of the corresponding physical referents can no longer be denied. However, photorealism is a technological property. There is no reason as to why the technological feature would or should dictate narrative techniques. Avant-garde filmmakers from the early twentieth century recognized that photorealism need not constrain representation. However, in classical Hollywood cinema, photorealism continued to prompt narratives in which a projected storyworld's ontological stability was rarely subverted.

With the introduction of digital technologies, however, fundamental assumptions about cinema began to be scrutinized again. Lev Manovich came up with

the phrase "synthetic realism" to discuss computer generated images (CGI), taking his cue from Bazin's film theories. [5] Synthetic realism results from the "simulation of cinematographic codes" using a virtual camera. A classic example of synthetic realism would be the view-morphed 'bullet time' shots from The Wachowskis' *The Matrix* (1999), wherein the computer software interpolated what 'happened' to a bullet between the states in which it was captured by physical cameras in two distinct locations. The trajectory of the bullet, visible in slow motion, was mathematically charted based on its initial and final locations. Thus, CGI does not record an existing referent but creates the referent through its representation. In other words, digital images sever the tie of analogical causation: what is now seen on screen need not have existed physically at all. William Brown observes that digital cinema makes impossible bodies and viewpoints seem possible, and indeed, plausible. [6] This shift from analog to digital technologies has profound effect on the conceptualization of the cinematic media, which at the outset was assumed to capture 'reality.'

Digital graphics underscore the fact that the referents of a projected image need not be ontologically available or stable. The ease with which digital images, and indeed data, can be manipulated is frequently discussed in contemporary media theories. N. Katherine Hayles observes: "The multiple coding levels of electronic textons allow small changes at one level of code to be quickly magnified into large changes at another level." [7] The mutation of the code affects what is seen on the screen. A particular kind of computer code that mutates or deletes data with remarkable speed are digital viruses. Marie-Laure Ryan notes that Trojan Horses that install viruses on computers perform a kind of "metalepsis" where the world of the code physically contaminates the user's system and destroys it. [8] These features of digital technology are picked up in contemporary Hollywood films, which present storyworlds where information—whether existing as

raw data, encryption, memory, events, or characters' subjectivities—remains susceptible to erasure. These movies are not necessarily shot or edited digitally. So, 'worlds under erasure' in Hollywood cinema are not digital artifacts, literally speaking, but products engendered in the digital media ecology.

Unprojection—that is, erasure and substitution of elements of projected storyworlds in films—has precedents in the notion of 'denarration.' Brian Richardson explains denarration as a strategy employed by an unreliable narrator who negates significant aspects of her narrative: "The simplest example of this might be something like, 'Yesterday it rained. Yesterday it was not raining.' The effect of this unusual strategy is variable: it can play a relatively minor role in the overall text, or it can fundamentally alter the nature and reception of the story." [9] Denarration entails not only the erasure of an event from the storyworld but also re-formulation, if only to make conspicuous the absence of the event. Additionally, in denarration, the act of narration becomes the key event subject to erasure. Thus, "the usual separation between story and discourse collapses, and we are left with discourse without a retrievable story." [10] However, if the denarrated text is ascribed to a narrator, then its inconsistencies characterize that narrator rather than the storyworld.

In films we come across erasure of presented events even when those are not attributable to any character-narrators. The self-erasing narrative techniques used in these films have much in common with the 'worlds under erasure' in postmodern literary fictions. Brian McHale states:

Narrative self-erasure is not the monopoly of postmodernist fiction, of course. It also occurs in modernist narratives, but here it is typically framed as mental anticipations, wishes, or recollections of the characters, rather than left as an irresolvable paradox of the world *outside* the characters' minds. [11]

McHale observes that postmodernist fictions may first project and then un-project events by revising the scenario over and over; may cancel-out characters and then bring them back; violate the law of the excluded middle; deny stable endings; or offer an infinitely ramifying narrative. When contemporary Hollywood films put their storyworlds under erasure, they recall such postmodernist literary tropes. However, there is also a degree of medium-specificity to the manner in which self-erasing worlds are presented on screen.

CASE STUDIES: *ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND* AND *INCEPTION*

I. TECHNOLOGY OF NARRATION

In this section I explore the literal and figurative uses of digital technology in the storyworlds of Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) and Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010), connecting those uses with the strategy of 'unprojection,' or erasure of projected worlds. Technology at the literal level equips the protagonists to erase or manipulate information stored in an ontologically separate world (the world of memory in *Eternal Sunshine*; dream worlds in *Inception*). However, counter-agents or 'viruses' initially situated in the embedded worlds thwart the processes of erasure, triggering Ouroboros-like loops that blur the boundary between framing and framed storyworlds.

Eternal Sunshine starts with Joel's (Jim Carrey's) voice-over. Joel meets Clementine (Kate Winslet) on a Long Island Railroad train and they are attracted to each other. [12] When Joel drives Clementine home after a 'night picnic,' he encounters a young man who offers unsolicited help. The scene cuts to a retrospective time frame and with this cut we also lose Joel's narrative perspective. Subsequently, the movie traces Joel's and Clementine's histories, which Joel himself does not remember. Clementine and Joel were former lovers who decided to erase their

memories of each other following a painful break-up. The storyworld makes a technological apparatus that erases memories using computational methods available to the characters. The young man, Patrick (Elijah Wood), who had offered to help Joel, was one of the employees at the firm Lacuna Inc, which performed the erasure operation. Soon, Joel and Clementine, in the narrative's present-day time frame, start a relationship, continuing to be oblivious of their past. When they stumble on their Lacuna records they decide to give another shot to their relationship despite Clementine's ominous prediction that it would end the way their former relationship did. Charlie Kaufman's original script, which was revised in the process of production, presented infinite repetitions of this narrative loop: the film would end with aged Clementine and Joel undergoing erasure. The aesthetics of erasure operate at multiple levels in the film: On one hand, Joel and Clem's repeated attempts at relationships following digital erasure of their memories triggers a loop of infinite regress. This loop is further complicated when Joel desires to retain Clementine in his memories once the process of digital erasure has started. Subsequently, Clementine's avatars breed in unlikely locales of Joel's mindscape. On the other hand, the movie projects an impossible storyworld where none of the presented course of events is ontologically stable. Each iteration of the Joel-Clem relationship is prone to erasure.

Similarly, Christopher Nolan's *Inception* presents a recursive narrative loop, evading closure. [13] Dom Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio) navigates people's dreams to steal or implant ideas. Dom and his team are variations on the figure of the pirate or hacker. In order to extract information as well as plant ideas, Dom's team creates a multi-layered dream world where each layer marks a change in the ontological level. However, each layer is also predisposed to Mal's (Marion Cotillard) invasions. Mal, Dom's wife, is dead in the textual actual world but surfaces as the projection of Dom's unconscious in the dream worlds to sabotage

his plans. Once again, erasure has manifold functions in the storyworld. Each character has to be killed in one layer of the dream world to be wakened in the superjacent layer. So, erasure of the character at one level is necessary for the character's coming to consciousness in another. In addition, the film maps Dom's struggle to delete Mal's shadowy projections, which haunt his dream worlds.

Inception's opening sequence shows Dom, lying by a sea shore, seeing the projections of his children. However, he cannot see their faces. Dom's inability to see his children's faces is a sign that he is in a dream world. The narrative follows Dom as he seeks to leave the multiple layers of this dream world and return to 'reality.' He had entered the dream world to satisfy a powerful client who promised to arrange his return to the United States and reunite him with his children. There are two interlaced narrative arcs, one that charts Dom's return to 'reality' and another that tracks his journey back home. In the end, Dom seemingly returns but visual motifs raise questions about the ontological status of the world to which Dom has returned, putting the framing conditions of the storyworld under erasure.

There are some differences in the strategies of erasure used in these two films. In *Inception*, the overall emphasis is on the transgression of the boundaries among embedded and embedding storyworlds while in *Eternal Sunshine* the primary interest lies in the manner in which embedded and embedding storyworlds reflect one another. Metalepsis is the central structuring device used in *Inception*. John Pier defines metalepsis as "contamination of levels in a hierarchical structure. . . . The embedding of narratives normally respects the separation between the level of narration and that of the narrated events, but metalepsis produces a 'short-circuiting' of levels." [14] In the concluding sequence of *Inception*, Dom's totem keeps spinning while the film cuts to end credits. The toppling of the totem would

indicate the return to the textual actual world. All other 'conditions' for the return have been fulfilled: Dom has completed the assignment for which he entered the dreamscape, he is permitted to enter the US, and can see the faces of his children. However, this ostensible return to the textual actual world—the 'real world' for Dom—is problematized by the spinning totem, which leaves the ontological status of the framing narrative indeterminate.

Eternal Sunshine's narrative unfolds as a mise-en-abyme, whereby the framed storyworld is no more or less determinate than the world that framed it. Joel and Clementine in *Eternal Sunshine* re-start their relationship after erasing the memories of their past affair and the narrative ends indicating that this course may keep repeating itself. Erasure generates the conditions for duplication and then this duplication in turn necessitates erasure. We are left with a "self-erasing narrative... [that] 'bend[s]' a sequence back upon itself to form a loop, in which one and the same event figures as both antecedent and sequel of some other event." [15] Even during the process of erasure, the employees of Lacuna Inc. note that Joel's memory map leads them to the same spaces again and again, such that memories that should have been logically deleted crop up at other points in his mental terrain.

Though, as I pointed out, one film favors metalepsis and another mise-en-abyme, both these narrative strategies remain present to varying degrees in the films. Besides, strikingly similar scenarios are used to portray jumps from one embedded storyworld to another. Immersion in a tub of water at one level to wake up to life at a superjacent level recurs. Collapsing buildings, flooding houses, and demolition of objects signify the erasure of embedded storyworlds. Sound filters from one level to another as do projections of characters.

The novelty of using metalepsis and mise-en-abyme lies in the films' deployment of digital technol-

tural cues to arrive at their narrative strategies. Marie-Laure Ryan has argued that the computer is a "metaleptic machine" because it processes everything in terms of a binary language in which there is no ontological difference among the layers of program instructions and the data that the instructions execute. [16] Thus, digital technology works in a self-reflexive manner. The species of digital code that demonstrates extreme degrees of this self-reflexivity is the computer virus. At the core of executable codes called digital viruses are the properties of self-replication, self-modification, dependence on host systems for transmission, and an affinity to corrupt systems that breed them.

Thus, it is no coincidence that both films incorporate the threat of viral attacks. In *Inception*, Dom tells Ariadne (Ellen Page) that projections of the subconscious turn hostile if they recognize any external control. He uses the analogy of white blood cells reacting to viral infection as an example. The metaphor seems related to pathology rather than digital technology until Dom says: "What is the most resilient parasite? . . . An idea." Dom's formulation recounts Richard Dawkins' essay "Viruses of the Mind," wherein Dawkins uses computer viruses as a "model for informational epidemiology." [17] In other words, Dawkins underlines the inseparability of the pathological and the technological in an information society. The same analogy is activated in *Eternal Sunshine* as memories of Clem 'go viral,' replicating in unexpected corners of Joel's mind and going undetected for quite some time, when Lacuna Inc. begins the process of erasure.

Ultimately, in both films, ideas act as 'viruses.' Clem (*Eternal Sunshine*) and Mal (*Inception*) are both characters on the same ontological plane as Joel and Dom but they are also ideas in Joel's and Dom's minds. Before commencing their relationship, Clementine reminds Joel: "I am not a concept. I am just a . . . girl." In *Inception*, Mal has died within the framing

storyworld, before the onset of the narrative, but she persists as an idea in Dom's mind. What is more, Mal is also a victim of 'ideas.' She thought that her world was not 'real' and committed suicide to come back to life in the 'real' world.

Joel and Dom struggle with their impulse to preserve or breed their lovers as ideas as well as their urge to erase them. During the process of erasure in *Eternal Sunshine*, Joel suddenly desires to preserve his memories of Clem: when the external process of digital erasure is set into motion, he conceals Clem within his childhood memories, where she is not supposed to be according to the storyworld's own internal logic. Thus, the recursive loops of *Eternal Sunshine* present an internally inconsistent world. Dom similarly struggles with Mal's presence and absence in *Inception*. She breeds as a self-replicating virus in the nooks and corners of Dom's dream, persuading him to stay in the dreamscape with her. The spinning totem at the end of the film signals that Dom may have remained trapped in the dreamscape.

II. TECHNOLOGIES OF PRODUCTION

Hollywood's embracing of digital technology relates to the industry's globalizing efforts—for instance, the use of extensive CGI and 3D enables Hollywood to capture regional markets where such technologies are not as frequently available. Producing films heavily reliant on cutting-edge CGI requires the kind of budget and scope that not many film production companies outside Hollywood can afford even today. Manovich observes that the development of digital imaging technologies may remain tied to Hollywood because of economic rather than aesthetic reasons. [18] However, Nolan's and Gondry's films do not seem to 'celebrate' digital technology, despite being mainstream productions.

In *Eternal Sunshine*, digital technology is used to erase Joel's memories but apart from this reference to digital media, the film foregrounds older technologies like cassettes and analogue photographs.

Similarly, there are exceptionally few sequences in which any trace of digital technology can be seen in the storyworld of *Inception*. [19] Despite the so-called Portable Automated Somacin Intravenous Device's visual and technical resemblance to local area networks, the narrative calls them pharmaceutical infusion lines. In addition, directors in both cases rhetorically underplay the primacy of digital technoculture to their movies. Charlie Kaufman and Michel Gondry stated that they wanted to foreground the romantic story rather than the 'science fiction' aspect in *Eternal Sunshine* despite having a digital memory erasing device direct the projection and unprojection of the film's storyworlds. [20] The movie was shot using 35mm film. Similarly, *Inception*'s cinematographer Walter Pfister and director Christopher Nolan mention that they sought to emphasize "photographic realism" that only the 35mm anamorphic film is capable of capturing. [21] Nolan remarks, "We didn't want to have dream sequences with any superfluous surrealism. We didn't want them to have any less validity than what is specified as being the real world. So we took the approach of trying to make them feel real." [22] Elaborating on Nolan's 'documentary-like' vision of the dream worlds, Pfister observes: "Film has an enormous amount of exposure latitude and dynamic range, which gives us infinite creative flexibility in creating images. . . . Every digital camera is trying hard to emulate 35mm film, and there's a reason for that." [23] In the post-production stage, *Eternal Sunshine* used digital intermediate finishing processes. However, *Inception* avoided digital intermediates and Nolan has gone on record about his preference of 'film' over digital imaging techniques.

Thus, in the actual filming processes both films demonstrate an almost anachronistic emphasis on analog technologies. The films' productions show that there is nothing inherent in the analog filming techniques to prevent the representation of self-erasing storyworlds. At the same time, the com-

plicated presentation and emulation of digital logic in the films' thematics drive home the fact that Hollywood arrives at the narrative trope of erasure following the proliferation of digital imaging technologies.

CONCLUSION

The motif of erasure or unprojection has become increasingly popular in Hollywood films in the face of the industry's gradual shift toward digital technologies. *Eternal Sunshine* and *Inception* are by no means the only films that adopt this motif. In David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*, a theater—Club Silencio—seems to exteriorize Rita, the protagonist's subconscious, a plane analogous to the dream and memory worlds of Dom and Joel. [24] Ultimately this theatrical space in *Mulholland Drive* emerges as pervasive and available to other characters, such as Rita's friend Betty. The embedded theater undercuts the legitimacy of the storyworlds: the final segment of the film, where Rita and Betty transform to Camilla and Diane, ends with a performer from Club Silencio saying "Silencio" and puts the former segments of the storyworld under erasure. If a distinguishing characteristic of the 'film' medium is the relation of 'analogical causation' that images have with a 'past presence,' then in destabilizing the ontology of the storyworlds, Lynch undercuts that analogical representation in favor of a digital aesthetic. [25] Similarly, Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Birdman* projects some fantastic scenes—logically impossible within the framing storyworld—as the protagonist Riggan's hallucinations. However, in the final

scene this impossible space is shown to be available to Riggan's daughter. [26] Shot digitally, *Birdman* is, of course, thematically concerned with the impact of digital technology on art and cinema.

Thus, *Eternal Sunshine*, *Inception*, and other such contemporary Hollywood films delineate similar narrative trajectories: embedded worlds that initially seem distinct start to infect one another, and the concluding sequence does not resolve this crisis but augments it by showing the condition to be pervasive or recursive. The ensuing ontological instability reveals the storyworlds that unfold in medias res to be always under erasure. These unprojected storyworlds, in turn, reflect on the potential for mutability and viral replication in a digital media ecology.

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BIO

Torsa Ghosal is a PhD candidate in the department of English at Ohio State University, specializing in post-1960s narratives and media studies. Her dissertation analyzes the manner in which the materiality of semiotic channels like handwriting, typeface, and images affect literary poetics with reference to late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century North American and British multimodal literatures. Her articles discussing American and South Asian films and comics have either appeared or are forthcoming in journals such as *Post Script* and *South Asian Review*.

ARCHIVAL TIME, ABSENT TIME

- On William Basinski's
- The Disintegration Loops

Paul Benzon, Temple University

[KEYWORDS: LOOP,
MATERIALITY,
ANALOG, MUSIC,
SOUND, ERASURE,
9/11, MEMORY,
DUST, TRACE]



William Basinski, "dlp 2," *The Disintegration Loops*, 2002.

PAST IS PROLOGUE

The origin story of *The Disintegration Loops* is near mythic: in September 2001, electronic composer William Basinski uncovered a series of tape loops of found sound he had recorded from an easy listening station in the 1980s and decided to preserve them as digital files. [1] Yet as each recording circulated through the spindle of Basinski's recording machine on its way to being digitized, it slowly became clear that the tape was deteriorating in the process, shredding and splintering away as it was being transferred into bits and bytes, being physically consumed as it was being digitally reproduced. The resulting recordings became their own composition—not a digital copy of the analog original, but rather a kind of haunted simulacrum, a profoundly

inexact copy that lacked an original precisely because it documented the original's disappearance.

But there is another layer to the loops, another absence. Shortly after Basinski finished the series, the World Trade Center towers fell, crumbling into rubble, smoke, and dust, visible from his Brooklyn home. Basinski recorded the last daylight hour of September 11 from his rooftop and synced this video to the first and longest loop, "dlp 1.1." The combination of image and sound is uncanny; in the accidents and contingencies of resurrecting and destroying the old, Basinski had created a necessarily empty mirror of the new, a strangely proleptic soundtrack to the first great disappearance of the twenty-first century.

THE SOUND OF THE EPHEMERAL PRESENT

The sound of *The Disintegration Loops* cycles and rubs against itself with a slowness that is at once excruciating, exhilarating, and terrifying—we have to know that the final fadeout will happen, and yet we struggle to anticipate it, to hear ahead across the time of decay, and yet we cannot bear for it to come. [2] For much of each segment, the dominant sonic figure phases in and out almost imperceptibly, out and in and inevitably out again. Some loops, such as "dlp 6" with its barely oscillating wash, seem like already digital compositions, while others, such as "dlp 1.1" and "dlp 3," bear the traces of conventional instrumentation more audibly within their source material, the sounds of horn sections all but swallowed

by some cavernous, distorted, empty concert hall. In these moments, echo and reverberation become the work's primary tools as well as its defining metaphors, air moving within empty space capturing the slow, disjunctive transition from tape to drive, from past to present, from pre- to post-. The titular disintegrations develop arrhythmically themselves as well, agonizingly slowly in some moments and then somehow—as in the self-muffling crunch and static of "dlp 4"—seemingly all at once. Indeed, time is profoundly at stake in the piece as a whole. Its title seems almost a contradiction in terms: it promises the cyclical stability and repetition of the loop, the eternal return, only to paradoxically reconceive of that return as subject to, even defined by, disintegration, loss, its own disappearance.

Yet it is not only this new time of the loop, its uneven, ephemeral return, that these pieces impose upon us. As the snippet of source material for each loop stretches and torques in time, from a few seconds to minutes, to nearly five hours across the course of the piece as a whole, we cannot help but also hear other times within this monumentality as well: the past time of dormancy, of gestation, of premature burial between the original recording of these sounds and Basinski's creation of the piece some twenty years later. The weight this time gives to the *Loops* is conceptual and experiential, but also material, the time of ferrite tape drying, becoming hard and brittle, ready to shed its magnetized information. But we also have to hear the time of liminality in these cyclical compositions, the suspension across a hinge moment in history. Towards the end of *Pattern Recognition*, William Gibson's elegy for New York after 9/11, the novel's protagonist finds herself "down in the trenches" at the excavation of a World War II battle site, "furiously shoveling gray muck and bones, her face streaked with tears . . . weeping for her century, though whether the one past or the one present she doesn't know." [3] These sounds teeter across time between what we can no longer retrieve and what we cannot yet confront.

LOST OBJECT ART

The Disintegration Loops relies upon a unique dynamic of the readymade within the history of artistic work with found material. Basinski's project sits at the strange, uncanny intersection of appropri-

ation, decay, and contingency—part Duchamp's *Fountain*, part Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, part cracked *Large Glass*, and yet also somewhere else altogether, buried in the secret memories and lost archives of the early twenty-first century. As much as the project relies upon found material, it does so precisely in that it relies upon and renders the simultaneous loss of that material. On one hand, this loss is shocking and radical: we are quite literally hearing the process of oblivion. Yet *The Disintegration Loops* is perhaps most radical not in the rarity of such a loss but rather in how the piece draws our attention to its unacknowledged conventionality: the accidental sacrifice of the original analog tapes to produce Basinski's digital files stands as a strangely apposite material allegory for the loss of compression that nearly all digital sound undergoes today, a reminder of the invisible centrality of deletion to the memories of our digital landscape. [4]

For all of the lip service paid to the real-time immediacy and instantaneity of the global village, we also rely on technology to stretch time. We document, we hoard and quantify, in an attempt to produce and preserve history, to stretch out a trail of time behind us, leveraging the continuity of the archive in the face of the unpredictable moment of the next terrorist eventuality. We accumulate data as fragments against the possibility of ruin, in hopes that it will not someday all simply go away. Shannon Mattern says of the dust that blanketed lower Manhattan

after 9/11 that "what we might not have realized at the time was that the dust, toxic and uncanny though it was, may have been an ideal representation of, or medium for, how we would remember the tragedy. As [Marita] Sturken and [Carolyn] Steedman remind us, dust is not 'about refuse or rubble so much as it is about a cyclical materiality. It is a reminder of continuity, a vestige of what was that continues to exist' (Sturken 314)." [5]. Sliding from analog to digital, *The Disintegration Loops* traps us in this cyclicity, sound making dust to make sound. Objects break, corrode, burn, crumble; information becomes corrupted, glitched, compressed—things change shape, but we cling to the hope that in the archive, in the moist vapor of the cloud, things never really disappear.

Almost never.

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BIO

William Basinski is a classically trained musician and composer who has been working in experimental media for over 30 years in New York City and most recently, California. Employing obsolete technology and analogue tape loops, his haunting and melancholy soundscapes explore the temporal nature of life and resound with the reverberations of memory and the mystery of time. His epic 4-disc masterwork *The Disintegration Loops* received international critical acclaim and was chosen as one of the top 50 albums of 2004 by Pitchfork Media. The Temporary Residence deluxe LP box-set reissue from 2012 was awarded best re-issue of the year and a score of 10 on Pitchfork. Installations and films made in collaboration with artist-filmmaker James Elaine have been presented in festivals and museums internationally, and his concerts are presented to sold out crowds around the world. Most recently, Basinski was chosen by Music Director, Antony Hegarty to create music for the new Robert Wilson opera, *The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic* which had its world premiere at the Manchester International Festival in July 2011 and toured Europe in 2012 and North America in 2013. Orchestral transcriptions of *The Disintegration Loops* by Maxim Moston have been performed at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Queen Elizabeth Hall and La Batie Festival in Geneva, Switzerland.

section five:
archive

BETWEEN ARCHIVED, SHREDDED and LOST/FOUND

Erasure in Digital and Artistic Contexts

› Ella Kлик, PhD Candidate, New York University
› Diana Kamin, PhD Candidate, New York University

[KEYWORDS: ERASURE,
DIGITAL, AESTHETICS,
ARCHIVE, ART,
MATERIALITY, MEDIA,
PHOTOGRAPHY,
DESTRUCTION,
SHREDDING]

IN A MEDIA LANDSCAPE STRUCTURED BY BINARY LOGIC, MUCH OF THE CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCE OF DIGITALITY CENTERS ON THE CHOICE TO KEEP OR DISCARD. The either/or choice is presented to the user of digital technology in various forms; whether or not to save a document or voicemail message are just two examples of the constant prompts to make decisions that result in either discarding data or preserving it for future access. These two examples further demonstrate the tangled web

of desires, needs, creativity, productivity, and social connections in which this binary is encountered, and suggest that the habitual choice to save or to delete underlies a contemporary aesthetics of erasure, as a constant, mundane reminder of the potential to erase. Yet, in this essay, we intend to problematize the neat binary of storing versus deleting. Through close analysis of a single artwork and its components, we aim to open up the discussion of the aesthetics of erasure to include categories beyond preservation and destruction. More specifically, by looking at the use of found photography, we introduce the third category of lost/found.

Max Dean's installation *As Yet Untitled* (1992-95) was not conceived with the particularities of digital life in mind. [1] (Fig. 1)

(left) Fig. 1. — Max Dean, *As Yet Untitled*, 1992-95. Puma 550 industrial robot, found family snapshots, conveyor, shredder, metal, electronics, 60 x 144 x 120 inches. Art Gallery of Ontario, gift of Jay Smith, David Fleck, Gilles Ouellette and Terry Burgoyne, 2007. © 2014 Max Dean. Used with permission.

(right page) Fig. 2 & 3 — Max Dean, *As Yet Untitled*, 1992-95 (details). © 2014 Max Dean. Used with permission.

Yet, this mechanical, robotic artwork is poignantly expressive of the digital condition described above. The work presents gallery visitors with a choice. Drawing from a stack of found family photographs, a robotic arm repeatedly pulls a single photograph and presents it to the viewer, at a rate of three times a minute. Unless a viewer intervenes, the photograph is dropped into a document shredder and the resulting scraps are collected in a growing pile. If the viewer chooses, pressing on one of a pair of hand silhouettes 'saves' the photograph. This action disrupts the cycle of destruction and causes the robot to drop the photograph into an archival box. As an assemblage of electronic, programmed actions, controlled through a human-machine interface, this work serves as an allegory both for the human act of memory and for the conditions of the digital archive. On the one hand the work dramatizes the ubiquitous choice between save and delete, a set up in which there is only one type of imperative, either archive or destroy. But on the other hand, we find that the use of found photographs, a resource for Dean, points to the precarious distinction between the two. In other words, the binary is complicated by the (itself unstable) category of lost/found. We will briefly contextualize these two expressions of erasure—erasure as a

conscious decision to destroy rather than preserve and erasure as an involuntary sense of loss conveyed by the presence of a found photograph—before discussing broader implications for aesthetics of erasure. Throughout, *As Yet Untitled* will serve to bring together voices from art history and media studies in an exploratory spirit, in order to probe the aesthetics of erasure in artistic and digital contexts.

SHREDDING

The document shredder forms the spatial and conceptual center of *As Yet Untitled* (Figs. 2, 3). Flanked on either side by archival boxes, and positioned between the hand-shaped interface and the base of the robotic arm, the shredder anchors the work. After a photograph is passed through the shredder, the remains drop onto a conveyor belt that carts the discards towards a pile that accumulates at the left of the machine. The incessant loop of destruction is continuous; as Dean notes, "The piece works non-stop from the time the gallery opens to closing and if no one is present it continues." [2] The result is a "pile [that] is left really until it reaches the height of the conveyor belt. The pile is very much a part of the piece and contributes to the unrelenting nature of the robot." [3] The violent nature of the



shredder signifies a traditional way of understanding erasure as negation.

In twentieth-century art, erasure is often associated with modernist gestures of destruction that repudiate the notion of the two-dimensional canvas as a representational space, or that embrace entropic forces as productive. These forms of destruction are often spectacular, performative, and blatantly set against the museal desire to preserve. We will consider two particular examples that bookend *As Yet Untitled*: the first a 1960 kinetic sculpture by Jean Tinguely, the second a net artwork by Mark Napier from 1998.

Jean Tinguely's 1960 *Homage to New York* (an acknowledged influence on Dean) was a massive, jerry-rigged, mechanical sculpture that destroyed itself over the course of a twenty-seven minute performance in the sculpture garden of the Museum of Modern Art. Although spectators to the explosive, smoke and sound-filled event were free to rummage through the resulting debris, for Tinguely, it was important that nothing physical would remain but the memory impression of the event in the mind of the spectator. [4] Within the digital context, the second example of aesthetic destruction is Mark Napier's *Shredder*, from 1998. This work, a website that will reinterpret any given URL to produce an abstract image from the scrambled source code, aims to expose the material structure of web sites. [5] (Fig. 4) Napier's project is explicitly motivated by the shifting media environment: "Websites are not paper," he states. [6] For him, erasure is

a method to explore the experience of the user:

The web browser is an organ of perception through which we 'see' the web. It filters and organizes a huge mass of structured information that spans continents, is constantly growing, reorganizing itself, shifting its appearance, evolving. The Shredder presents this global structure as a chotic, irrational, raucous collage . . . Information becomes art. [7]

Napier's digital shredder is the fulcrum that transforms information into art; through erasing legibility and denying access to symbolic meaning, raw digital data is transformed into pure aesthetic.

Like Tinguely's *Homage* and Napier's *Shredder*, the destruction in *As Yet Untitled* is mechanized, not hand-operated. The decision to save or destroy is an act that takes place exterior to the machine, through the hand-shaped interface. This visual uncoupling of hand, human and machine separates the decision performed by the user from the actual execution of the act. This kind of separation facilitates, at least for heuristic purposes, thinking how erasure occurs in a digital context. Yet the act of destruction is not the primary aesthetic component of *As Yet Untitled*. Where Tinguely desired no remainder of his initial structure save for dust and memories, Dean incorporates the pile of shredded photographs into the work. Where Napier sees the act of shredding as the transforma-

tion of pure information into pure aesthetic, in *As Yet Untitled*, the source photograph is not pure information, and the pile is not pure aesthetic. The physical demarcation of source pile, archived pile, and shredded pile point beyond the idea of destruction as a decisive, singular, artistic gesture, and towards the variegated categories and processes of erasure.

BEYOND ADDITIVE SUBTRACTION

Erasure in the form of excision, correction, or modification has a long history as an artistic strategy of mark-making (for instance frottage and grattage). Throughout the twentieth century, along with works like Tinguely's, various erasing techniques were deployed to convey a brash, iconoclastic stance, epitomized in Robert Rauschenberg's often-cited *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953). Jasper Johns has famously referred to Rauschenberg's move to painstakingly erase a drawing by Willem de Kooning as "additive subtraction." [8] Additive, for Johns, primarily referred to the conceptual addition of Rauschenberg's signature and the psychic residue of the "patricidal" act. [9] But what of the materiality of erasure? While Johns' "additive subtraction" introduces the idea of erasure as a productive act, recent work in media studies that focuses on materiality and digital media extends the notion of erasure's additive qualities beyond the idea of a purely conceptual addition.

Notably, a common theme emerges in recent work by the scholars Matthew Kirschenbaum, Wendy Chun and Wolfgang Ernst. [10] Across these works,

the authors reframe erasure as a generative and recurrent act that allows for new data to be stored once again, which means that erasure is unavoidable. Describing the new context of erasure, Kirschenbaum notes that the relation between the surface and inscription is changing with electronic media. [11] The magnetic surface is unlike paper or wax, so far as the inscription performed "is a temporal as well as planographic intervention whereby even data that has been overwritten continues to resonate as a result of ongoing oscillation teresis." [12] Something of the erased then, according to this account, still remains and persists, although not in its original form.

The reason for overwriting and erasing is to make room for new data. Significantly for Kirschenbaum, Chun, and Ernst, the act of overwriting is both destructive and productive at once. Wendy Chun argues that the metaphor of memory (as an ephemeral experience) becomes the chief ontological category of new media at the expense of storage (that which is permanent). [13] She writes, "Digital media is degenerative, forgetful, erasable... If computer memory is like anything, it is like erasable writing; but, if a penciled word can be erased because graphite is soft, a computer's memory can be rewritten because its surface constantly fades." [14] Chun's metaphorical approach expands on Kirschenbaum's discussion of overwriting. If Kirschenbaum points us to the dual nature of erasure, Chun describes how it is a habitual, continuous condition of the digital.

Wolfgang Ernst further addresses this instability of digital storage, always potentially involved in erasing, in what he calls "the dual system." [15] For Ernst, the collapse of erasure and storage from a perceptual perspective is a key, desirable feature of the digital "dyna-archive," in contrast to the classical archive. In the new dynamic and ever-changing archive, the oppositional functions of storage and erasure are unified temporally, as a result of becoming calculable and operable beyond human perception. [16] Subsequently, he theorizes this shift towards dynamic memory as: "A radical metamorphosis of the aesthetics of storage is taking place in the media-technical field . . . with the emphasis on almost immediate reproduction and recycling rather than emphatic cultural long-time memory." [17]

Ernst, Chun and Kirschenbaum turn to old media metaphors such as paper, wax, pencils, and the archive to explicate the process of erasure, which occurs differently in new media. [18] (Phenomenologically speaking, erasure occurs out of sight and to some extent, separate from the interface level).



Screenshot of Mark Napier, *Shredder*, 1998-ongoing. Custom software. © 2014 Mark Napier. Used with permission.

Taken together, these accounts emphasize erasure as that which makes something else possible. And yet, even such productive accounts of erasure rely on treating erasure as opposite of storage. In such a dichotomous set up, it is hard to approach the variety and multiplicity of the different kinds of erasure that can occur, particularly in new media. *As Yet Untitled* points towards another form of erasure concurrent with the idea of generativity described above: what we call the lost/found.

LOST/FOUND

A genealogy of the usage of found photographs in art extends from reproductions of anonymous photographs in

Surrealist journals of the 1920s, through work by contemporary artists such as Zoe Leonard, Gerhard Richter, and Tacita Dean that ruminate on collective memory and history. Art historian Mark Godfrey has proposed a typology of the use of the found photograph in art, including work that deals with de-skilling of photography, appropriation art, quasi-anthropological work, and work that plays with notions of documentary and fiction. [19] However, the found family photographs of *As Yet Untitled*, as an endless supply for either shredding or archiving, do not fit easily into any of these categories. Rather, the clipped rhythm of presentation followed by destruction or preservation prompts the viewer into an emotional response to another sense of erasure, namely loss. Whether archived or destroyed, the anonymous photographs of others are, in the words of Kate Bush, “[s]eared with unknowable emotions and irretrievable truths.” [20]

The idea of loss has been an integral part of the theorization of images, whether photographic or cinematic. Even before accounting for the specific resonances of found photography, any photograph can provoke an affective experience of loss (so argue Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer). Kracauer describes photography as annihilation, one that is doubly felt by the viewer of the found photograph. [21] This is also expressed by Walter Benjamin’s “unruly desire” to know more about the anonymous Newhaven fishwife, to identify the “tiny spark of contingency” which links the nameless photographic subject with the “here and now.” [22]

Not limited to the indexical properties of the photograph, confronting a found photograph is always to contemplate a type of erasure: the loss of a moment in time, but also the loss of the physical print. In this way, we think of the found photograph as a launching pad to the lost, or rather to the collapse of the

found and lost categories. A found photograph is always both lost and found. The lost in found photography marks the initial loss that results from being taken out of its context. It is lost when the photo is dislocated from its place in a series, album, or personal collection. Nevertheless, this dislocation is also that which provides for the possibility of recuperation. Similar to the artist rummaging through flea market bins full of anonymous photographs, Benjamin writes of his desire to rescue abandoned books in the marketplace so as to “renew the old world.” [23] His drive to collect is motivated by a desire to connect the historical presence of the old books with the present, and future. The act breathes new life into them, as a new context had been introduced, and the lost is converted into found. Contemporary media archaeologists aiming to excavate the “suppressed, neglected and forgotten” as a way to understand the past in terms of the present echo this sentiment. [24]

In *As Yet Untitled*, each found photograph is a lost memory that could potentially undergo another erasure. Once a photograph is incorporated into the piece, the threat of being taken out of its new context returns. A spectator who chooses not to save a photograph re-performs the initial loss. Further, another sense of loss is introduced by the shifting media environment for found photography. Digitization has undoubtedly transformed the practices of producing, sharing, and preserving vernacular photography. This haunts the current experience of *As Yet Untitled*, and other artworks that utilize found photographs, pointing towards a different kind of loss, one yet to come. Godfrey describes the contemporary use of found photographs as a knowing farewell: “Touched lost photographic objects are presented in a valedictory way, knowing there will soon be a loss of the touched, and a loss of the lost: one day soon there will be no more discarded photographs that have been taken, rejected, fingered, scratched, lost, found, and wondered about, no more object/images cluttering our lives” [25] Max Dean acknowledges that his own sources for found photographs are changing; in the past he has sourced prints through “dumpster div[ing],” gifts, and purchases, but these avenues are disappearing. *As Yet Untitled* is now itself preserved in the collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, and long-term plans for sourcing photographs are a necessary part of conservation. Dean noted that recently 125,000 prints were sourced after the close of Erik Kessel’s exhibition *24 Hours in Photos* at the Contact Photo Festival

in Toronto. (Fig. 5) In this project, photos uploaded to Flickr from a single day were printed out as 4x6 prints, and the result was a seeming avalanche of material, with piles of photographs reaching to the ceiling of the gallery.

The scale of *24 Hours in Photos*, coupled with the piles of shreds that inevitably accumulate during the presentation of *As Yet Untitled*, suggests that one aspect of the digital condition may be thought of in terms of a new sense of lost and found; the condition of being lost in a sea of data. The sheer amount of information flowing, demonstrated in *24 Hours in Photos*, contrasts the new conditions for found photography with those suggested by *As Yet Untitled*. The availability of found images is vastly increased, dramatized by the mountains of prints, and the methods of retrieving, managing, and erasing have correspondingly become more complex.

In this way, rather than using the analog photograph to talk more narrowly about the transition to digital photography, we see the analog photograph as an object that has the potential to illuminate the conditions of erasure in a broader sense. Considering erasure in terms of the concept of lost/found - introduced by the anonymous photograph - contributes to discussions of erasure within the vast entanglement of materials, software, platforms, and technologies that are collapsed under the umbrella of “the digital.” In a similar way to art history, which has mostly considered erasure as different forms of destruction in the face of traditional mark-making, media theory has largely concentrated on the

role of deleting as a way of highlighting it against that which is operable: memory, archive, preservation and storage. As far as the ontology of the digital archive goes, such accounts as we have already mentioned mostly locate erasure in the self-destructing archive, where data is erased in order for new data to be imprinted. Erasing is either a dysfunctional act to be guarded against or a functional act that supports saving. This is precisely where the found and lost come in. Ignoring the phenomenological and affective experience of erasure and loss shuts down a particular avenue of theorization. The essence of the photograph remains the same whether the photograph is dislocated or not, which means that the opportunity to elaborate on the additional social and economic contexts of found photography is never explicated or reintroduced back into discussions about the ontology of the photographic image. The categories of lost and found are defined not by what the photograph is, but by the way it is understood and experienced within a particular context. And this experience of searching, losing, and finding supplements a possible ontology of the digital. Initially, *As Yet Untitled* seems to present two possible endpoints: the archival box or the trash. In actuality, focusing on these terminals obscures the journey of producing, dislocating, finding, and re-purposing that has already taken place and is yet to come.

TOWARDS AESTHETICS OF ERASURE: BEYOND MERE DESTRUCTION

So how does the lost/found category help us to think erasure away from the



Erik Kessels, *24 Hours in Photos*, 2011-ongoing. Chromogenic prints, dimensions variable. Installation view, CONTACT Photography Festival, Toronto, 2013. © 2012, KesselsKramer. Used with Permission.

rigid binary of save and delete? Lost/found expands the way in which we can understand and define erasure in the first place. Any one definition of erasure would inevitably miss something of the wide range of possibilities of how erasure comes to be and how it is represented. Using *As Yet Untitled* and the discussions it brings up regarding memory, preservation, and found photography, we suggest that erasure may be thought of as a dislocation of data (whether intended or not) from the original context of the initial inscription. The erased can be reframed in terms of irretrievability. This sense of erasing allows one to think the lost/found as a third category that intervenes in the traditional dyad of saving and deleting. We used the notation of the slash throughout to signify that the lost/found is an unstable category which always encompasses within itself the potentiality of multiple losses; or, that the lost is a category, which may at some point be recovered.

The author would like to thank Max Dean for engaging in a conversation about is work.

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BIO

Diana Kamin is a PhD candidate in the department of Media, Culture and Communication at New York University. Her dissertation research focuses on the techniques and practices of circulating images, tracking the history of several New York-based collections from their analog roots to the present, from the perspective of media studies, art history, and library science. Prior to NYU, she spent five years in the exhibitions and curatorial departments at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Publications include contributions to numerous exhibition catalogues (including monographs on Maurizio Cattelan and Jay DeFeo). She is also a frequent contributor to *Art in America*. She holds a BA cum laude in Art History from Georgetown University. dk1895@nyu.edu

Ella Klik is a PhD candidate in the department of Media, Culture and Communication and Culture at New York University. She is currently working on a dissertation on the topic of erasure at the intersection of media history and philosophy. Surveying the underexplored histories of several tools, techniques and gestures involved in the work of erasing, the project will rethink the relation between inscription and its negation. Past projects focused on Holocaust memory, cinema and horror, and Viennese Actionism. Ella's current research interests include the relation between media archaeology, German media theory and continental philosophy. She also holds a BA in English Linguistics and Communication & Journalism and an MA in Communication & Journalism, from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. ella.klik@gmail.com

the REFRESH:

DIGITAL DESTRUCTION AND MYSTIC WRITING

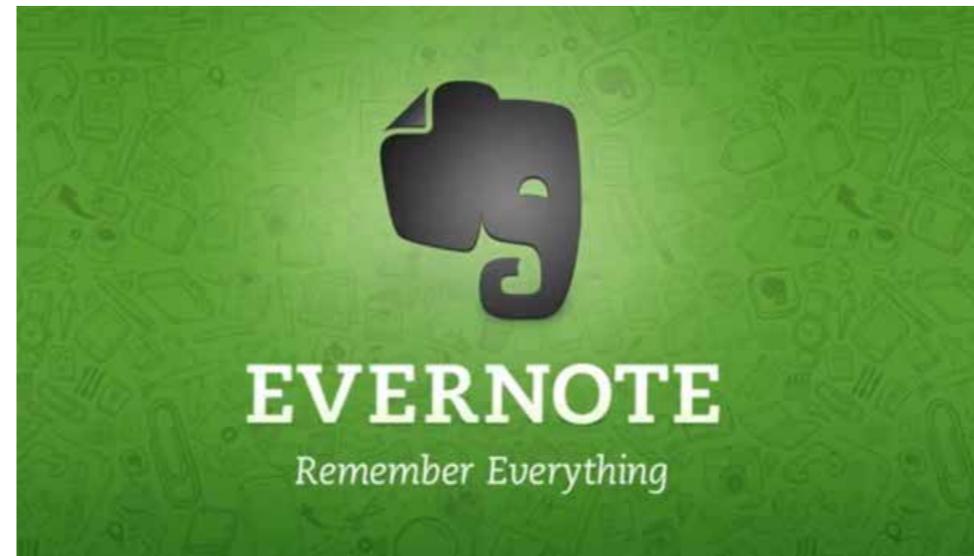
Matthew Schilleman Visiting Assistant Professor, Clemson University

[KEYWORDS:
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MEDIA, ARCHIVE,
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FREUD, DERRIDA,
MYSTIC WRITING
PAD, MEMEX,
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MEMORY]

IN "A NOTE UPON THE MYSTIC WRITING-PAD," FREUD PRESENTS A TECHNOLOGICAL PROsthESIS THAT MIGHT REPLICATE THE FUNCTIONING OF THE PSYCHIC APPARATUS. CONSISTING OF A WAX SLAB COVERED BY WAX PAPER AND A PROTECTIVE SHEET, THE MYSTIC PAD MODELS A MNEMIC SYSTEM OF PERMANENT RECORDING AND PERPETUAL RENEWAL. Most inscriptive technologies, as Freud states in the essay, manage to do either one or the other. A notepad, for instance, will retain what is written on it, but it will fill up over time. A chalk board, by contrast, can be cleared of writing, but loses its record as a consequence. With the mystic pad, both functions occur in a single apparatus. One writes

on the pad by pressing a stylus down upon the covering sheets. Visible traces are made wherever paper and slab make contact. To refresh the surface and clear it of the traces, the covering sheets need only be lifted from the wax base. As Freud observes, what is truly remarkable about the pad is that the traces are not entirely lost with this erasure, but remain present in the wax component. [1] Thus the pad achieves the psyche's hard-to-explain dual function of retention and renewal in one apparatus composed of interrelated systems. [2] The only shortcoming of the pad as a model for the psyche, according to Freud, is its inability to reproduce these traces from "within." "It would be a mystic pad indeed," comments Freud, "if it, like our memory, could do that." [3]

Cloud-based note saving service Evernote's slogan, "Remember Everything," suggests how this prosthetic dream might be becoming a reality in the digital present. Not only does Evernote offer to store all your web articles, notes, and photos in its memory, it promises to reproduce these traces from within, wherever the user might



be. [4] Though the relative accessibility of the web service certainly indicates a key difference with the unconscious, it nonetheless points to an apparatus condition in which nothing is ever “past or forgotten.” [5] The choice of an elephant as the company’s mascot emphasizes this idea. For like the unconscious, the elephant ‘never forgets.’ [6] Evernote is one of many services on the web today offering this version of the future. Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and digital archival projects such as Google Books and the Wayback Machine, give rise to the same fantasy of a memory beyond erasure.

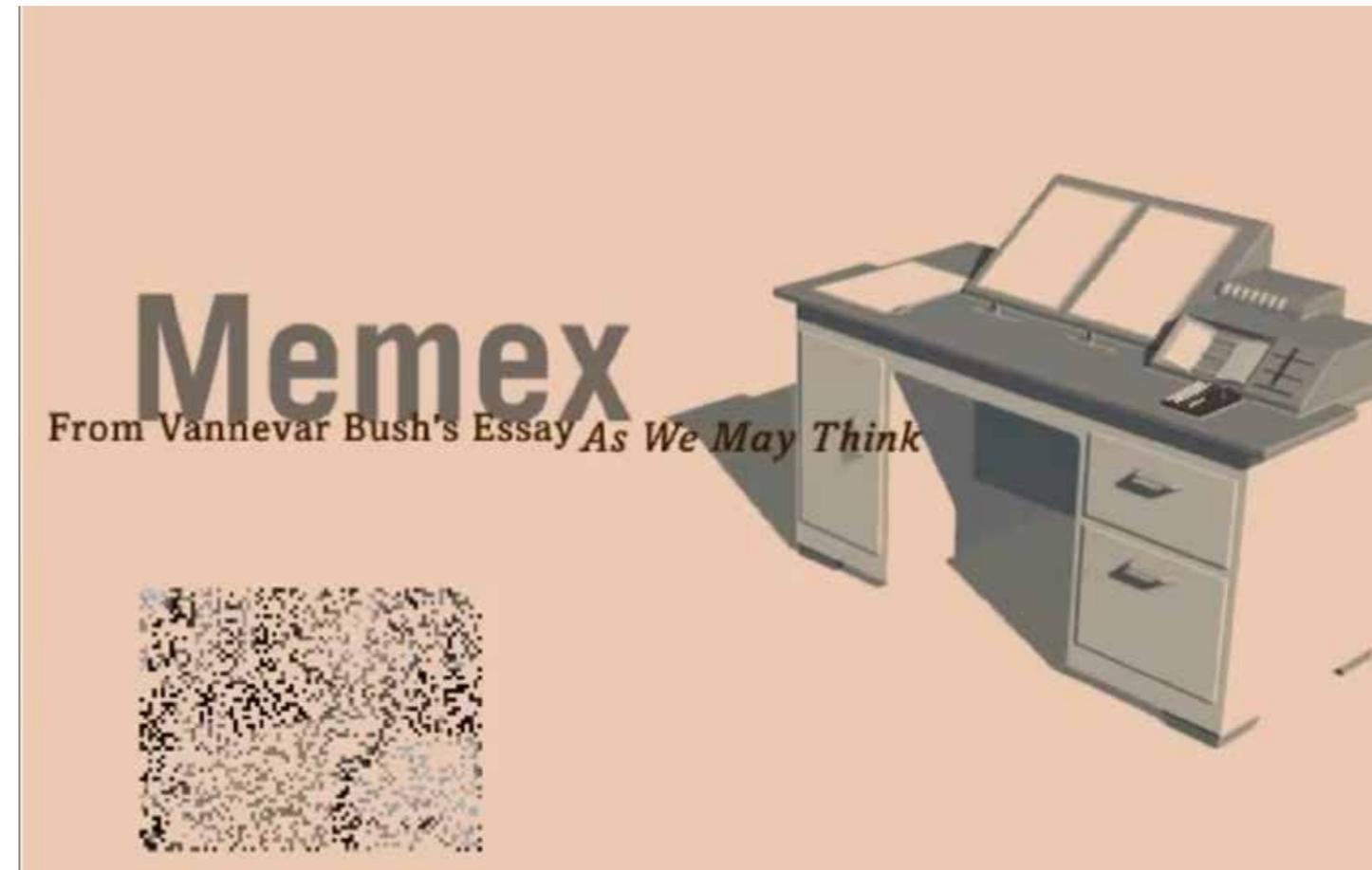
What does it mean that such devices exist in the world today? On the one hand, it might be said that we have entered an epoch of the unconscious becoming conscious, as Gregory Ulmer has argued. [7] We are now able to uncover the vast trove of buried traces in our history, including those of childhood, through a medium that makes all the images, sounds, and ideas of past accessible through web search. As more and more of our lives are lived out on social media the comprehensiveness of this memory becomes ever more absolute. The potential consequences of this development are both liberatory and oppressive. We may be able to gain insight into the constitution of our subjectivities to a degree only available to the most diligent of researchers through the availability of our media past. [8] On the other hand, the constant registration and mediatization of our lives threatens to commodify and fragment the subject to an equally unprecedented degree, enabling new, hyper-targeted forms of marketing to dominate communication. [9]

Current criticism, however, does not consider how operations of forgetting, deletion, or erasure might be remediated today, as the focus has rather been on their supersession. As a matter of fact, we are currently some ways off from a perfect digital memory. Web pages go missing and blogs get deleted everyday as part of the ebb and flow of new media platforms. When Myspace was bought out, no prepa-

rations were made to preserve the data of its users. And while archival projects such as the Wayback Machine backup massive amounts of what is on the Internet through automated bots, these programs don’t catch everything and, moreover, ignore any webpage with a robot.txt command built into it. [10] My opening comparison to the mystic pad is meant to bring this neglected issue concerning loss, erasure, and deletion online into focus by connecting it to alternative modes of forgetting theorized by Freud. If the unconscious forgets nothing, there is still a kind of forgetting at work within the psyche which generally can be categorized as repression, but can also be elaborated in terms of specific mechanisms of disconnection and renewability built into the psychic apparatus. These kinds of forgetting are a necessary part of the psyche’s functionality. So, if we are to take the parallel between psyche and its technological simulacrum, we would also have to account for this forgetting in the digital.

What I will argue is that the function of disconnection between the layers of the mystic pad is indicative of a destructive drive that runs through the digital, articulated around the idea of refreshing. Beginning with the forbearer of the internet age, Vannevar Bush’s memex, I will draw on what Freud says about the psychic apparatus and Derrida’s writings on the archive to theorize this relationship. What I will show is that the infinite promise of the digital archive necessarily depends upon the repression of its own destructive actions inherent to its archival operation, a feature that is perhaps a defining characteristic of new media.

I. Vannevar Bush’s seminal text, “As We May Think,” is frequently cited as an important precursor to the digital age. In it, prototypes of hypertext, database searching, and electronic screen technology are combined to create a new memory organ for the human, which Bush names the “memex.” [11] The inspiration for the machine is much like that of the



Memex Animation, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c539cK58ees>

mystic writing-pad essay: how to store an unlimited number of memory traces in a system capable of continually refreshing itself. Much like Freud, Bush conceives this “regenerative memory” as a layered system of processes. [12] On one layer, documents are fed into the machine and stored permanently as microfilm. On another layer, these documents can be retrieved by the operator through a system that projects them onto screens. An interface consisting of forward and backward commands allows the user to switch between the parts of the microfilm projected on the screens. By selecting the forward command, the film advances, while

choosing the backward command takes the user to a previous page.

The memex’s greatest achievement, however, comes from its ability to trace new connections between documents into memory. As Bush explains, an operator may be interested in researching the bow and arrow. His memex will contain dozens of articles on this subject. He may first consult an encyclopedic entry. Leaving it projected, he can pull up another pertinent article, and if he wants, ‘link’ these articles together for future reference. He can do this by entering a command into the memex’s numeric keyboard. Furthermore, the operator can register his own notes and

memory ‘trails’ on the documents by drawing on the screen with a special stylus. These trails “do not fade,” so when the operator comes across the encyclopedia entry on the bow and arrow again, the associations and additional notes made previously will be reproduced on the screen. [13]

Following Freud’s mystic pad analogy, we might say Bush’s memex works by dividing memory into Ucs. and Pcpt.-Cs systems. Pcpt.-Cs. would be the transitory information on the screen perceived by the operator and the Ucs. would be the system of traces stored in the machine and projected piecemeal back to the surface. [14] In the mystic

pad, the joining and separation of these two layers (paper and wax) serves as a model for the passage of stimuli from one system to the other. Significantly, the joining and separation of layers conforms to a theory of the psyche that Freud had left unmentioned until his essay on the pad, namely, that “cathectic innervations are sent out and withdrawn in rapid periodic impulses from within into the completely pervious system of Pcpt.-Cs.” [15] When this system is charged, it both receives perceptions (which are passed into the unconscious) and gives rise to consciousness. When the connection is broken, not only does perception and reception cease, but consciousness itself is extinguished. This final development of the mystic pad analogy proves revealing for the nature of the memex. For when the memex moves between documents, the projection is also interrupted, causing the screen to clear momentarily. This erasure of the surface is necessary to its unlimited receptivity. By clearing its screen periodically, it provides an ever-renewed surface for writing. Without it, the memex’s memory would fill up and cease to be able to receive new impressions. Disconnection, periodic interruption, is thus as essential to the memex as it is to the operation of the psyche.

How we might draw out the significance of this structure is manifold, but one point for certain is that it shows destruction to be something inherent to the memex’s capacity for memory, just as it is for pad and psyche. Indeed, erasure and storage are bound to the same gesture, the registering of the trails made by the user happening at the moment those trails disappear from the surface of projection. It is just as Freud asks us to imagine the mystic pad, with “one hand writing upon the surface of the Mystic Writing-Pad while another periodically raises its covering sheet from the wax slab.” [16]

Auto-destruction is part of any archive, according to Derrida. As he writes, “the archive [. . .] will never be either memory or anamnesis as spontaneous, alive and internal experience. On the contrary: the archive

takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory.” He states:

There is no archive without a place of consignment, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside. Let us never forget this Greek distinction between mneme or anamnesis on the one hand, and hypomnema on the other. The archive is hypomnesic. And let us note in passing a decisive paradox to which we will not have time to return, but which undoubtedly conditions the whole of these remarks: if there is no archive without consignment in an external place which assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression, then we must also remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, indeed the repetition compulsion, remains, according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive. And thus from destruction. Consequence: right on that which permits and conditions archivization, we will never find anything other than that which exposes to destruction, and in truth menaces with destruction, introducing, a priori, forgetfulness and the archiviolithic into the heart of the monument. Into the “by heart” itself. The archive always works, and a priori, against itself. [17]

The existence of a drive to destruction at the core of the memex is troubling, not only because it is built upon the idea of never forgetting a scrap of information ever again, but because it is the prototype for so many digital technologies to come. Destruction, loss, erasure, and forgetting are greatly at odds with digital media’s ‘always thereness.’ In contrast to the memorylessness of television, memory is the digital’s sine qua non that has been at the root of its definition from its inception. [18]

II.

Within the context of modern day digital technologies, we thus might ask how this archivic drive to destruction is manifested. Taking the standard networked computer as an example, the setup is similar in many ways to the one imagined by Bush in 1945. The operator interacts with the networked computer through a screen that projects different pages from its archive. This archive is bound together by

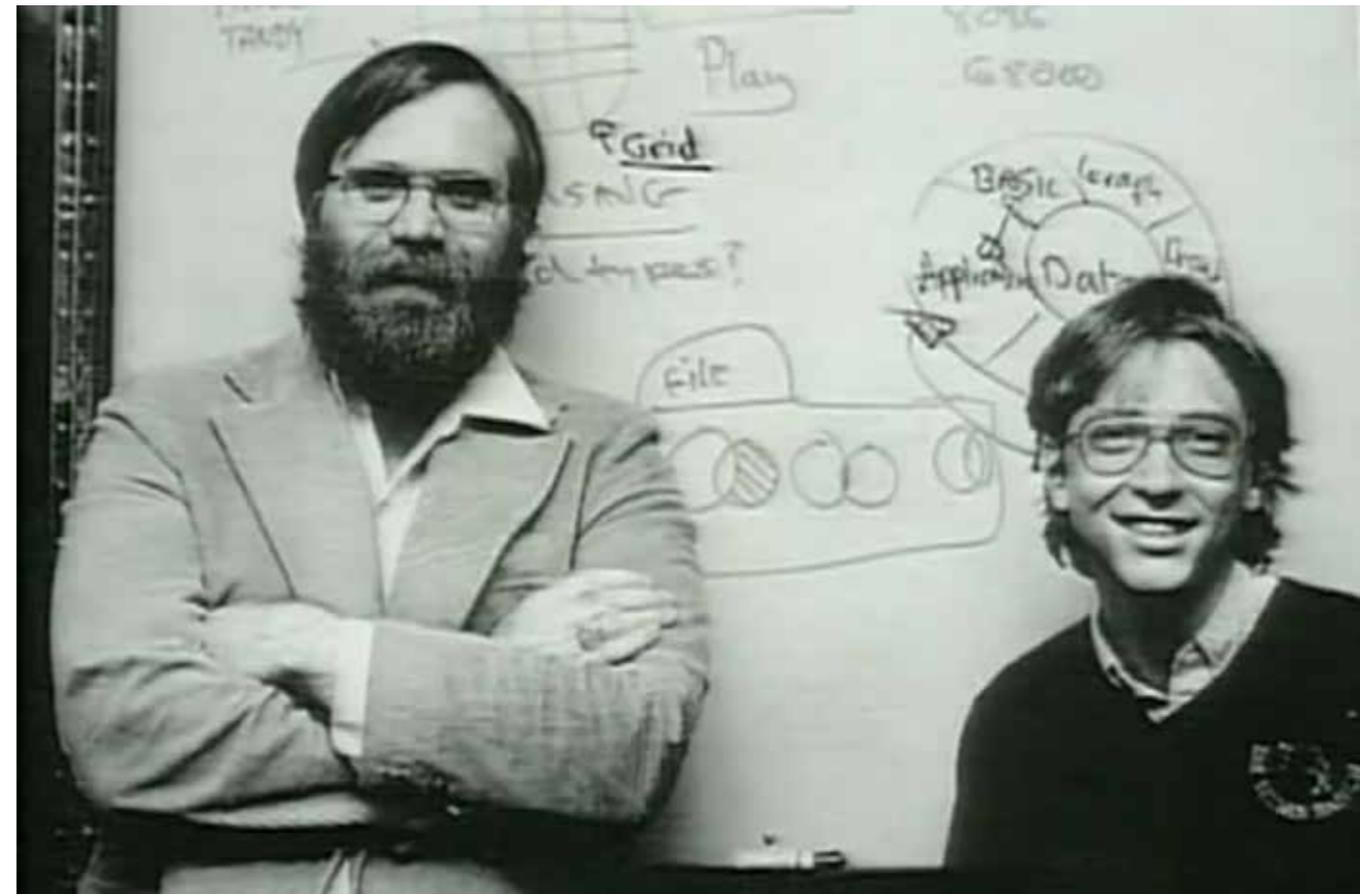
hyperlinks that function much like the memex’s trails, providing unique and modifiable pathways through the system’s memory. Most important for this discussion of destruction in the digital archive, the networked computer also entails the same underlying erasing operation of the memex. With each new document summoned, the screen wipes itself and clears what was formerly projected on it from perception.

This activity of perceptual erasure derives from what is known as screen refreshing. Screen refreshing is an essential part of the digital archive. To provide the textual, animated, and video data that it does, the digital archive must have a monitor that can constant-

ly update itself and recreate the image projected on its screen. What this means concretely is that the typical computer monitor is designed to refresh its screen sixty times every second. It does this through a vertical swipe, from top to bottom, in which pixels are adjusted line by line. On the older CRT screens, this process would actually show up noticeably when filmed, and is commonly seen in 80s and 90s tech demonstrations. Present-day LCD screens have reduced this effect and the related phenomenon of ‘screen flicker’ common to CRT users. But the basic principle of screen refresh remains the same in either case. [19]

This repetition of the refresh invariably has a destructive effect not only

for what is on the screen, but also for the user’s relationship with the archive. Consider, for example, the way refreshing becomes part of the user’s basic interaction with the machine in an email client, forum, or wiki. Staring at a screen with an open email client, the screen will periodically update itself, checking for new deliveries. The user will provoke this refreshing action every so often as well by clicking a button. Each cycle brings about a nearly imperceptible destruction of what is represented on the screen in order to allow the system to continue to receive new impressions. For the most part, this destruction goes undetected by the user. Only when the representation changes into a new document



Facebook Time Lapse, <http://youtu.be/Zmmqf68KVt?l=1m28s>

(for instance, when a set of new emails arrives in the inbox), is any alteration noticed. Yet this repeated unmaking and remaking of the image on the screen is a ceaseless activity carried on beneath the perception of consciousness at the speed of milliseconds. [20]

The omnipresent ideology of the update found in the digital archive depends upon the erasing function of the refresh as well. On sites such as Facebook and Twitter, the act of updating one's status takes on an imperative form. As a consequence, messages and images of friends appear and disappear at a pace that only grows as one's friends list expands through hyperlinks and associative trails. The total effect of this is a state of perpetual refreshing that brings destruction not merely to the page, but one's social network as well. Intimacies and connections between ourselves and our Facebook friends

become ever more dispersed across a sea of reposts that refresh the page. With the same gesture that Facebook pathologically attempts to record every book that we read, every picture that we like, and every stray thought that comes across our minds, it erases those traces, not by rubbing them out of existence, but by bringing them into its archive, by striving to preserve them. To watch one's Facebook page on the screen is to witness the simultaneous preservation and annihilation of one's social life according to the archival drive to destruction at the heart of mnemonic repetition.

Practically everything we do online could be said to be influenced by this idea of refreshing. Our OS, our drivers, our applications, email, all must be perpetually made anew. Each instance of this is an act of destruction that undoes what was in order to keep it for

the future (and in the case of driver updates, this destruction reveals itself sometimes in form of system errors that result from the erasure of old code). It is in this way that how we think and remember in the digital gets wedded to its archival antithesis.

It is important to distinguish the destruction entailed in the digital archive from other medial threats to anamnesis or internal memory. For Plato, writing would displace the writing "in the soul" that symbolized true understanding. [21] Much later, Virilio has emphasized the speed of electronic media as effectively collapsing the interval between subject and representation, making reflection upon events practically impossible. [22] The former threatens to weaken the inside by supplementing it from the outside. The latter, by contrast, sees the inner world impoverished by its losing the external

supports of memory. Both are conditions of forgetting, failures of remembering stemming from the effects of technological media that impinge upon the subject's critical independence.

One could argue that, by contrast, memory in the digital archive is rooted in a strategy of disavowal that denies loss by hiding it. It is well-known what Freud says about this in the context of psychoanalysis. [23] In translating this idea to the digital archive, we might again consider the mystic writing-pad. The pad both preserves and erases memory at the same time. This double-action is the essence of its unlimited capacity for storage. But it also shows how this kind of preservation entails the erasure of erasure itself. Crucially, Freud points out that clearing the surface of the pad is achieved through the "periodic nonexcitability of the perceptual system," i.e., the disconnection between the screen and the memory system beneath it. [24] Erasure is achieved through the interval of non-perception that inheres within the structure of renewal. To clear the surface means to shut down perception, and shutting down perception means that the act of erasure is hidden in the interval that escapes perception entirely.

The digital archive, in its mission to offer unlimited receptivity, produces the same erasure of erasure. The machine refreshes its surface like the pad clears itself, through a period of non-excitability in which consciousness is cut-off without the individual knowing it. It is in this manner that the digital archive consigns traces to itself—by

repeating an act of destruction that is twofold. The surface of the system is cleared, wiped, abnegated, and the user's conscious perception shut off in such a way that the first destruction is always covered over and translated into its opposite, i.e., presence. Loss is supplanted by the lossless format, trash with the recycle bin. The very ground of forgetting begins to recede in this way, as the gaps in history that would normally manifest are covered over by the profusion of more data. Forgetting is elided by a memory so full that it blights out the mere thought of its other. This is perhaps another way to think of the 'newness' of new media. To be ever new is to be always refreshed, to be destroyed and made again.

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BIO

Matthew Schilleman is Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Clemson University. He is currently completing his first book, *Typewriter Psyche: Office Media and the Techno-Inscriptive Origins of Modernism*, which examines the psycho-social effects of mechanized inscription in the early twentieth-century office. He is also working on two new projects: one on the evolution of a digital unconscious and another on the relationship between insects and media in twentieth-century literature.

REVIEWS & REPORTS

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chris salter's ALIEN AGENCY

› Orit Halpern, Committee on Historical Studies/Affiliate Design Studies
New School for Social Research/Parsons School of Design

“TO BREAK THROUGH
LANGUAGE IN ORDER
TO TOUCH LIFE IS TO
CREATE OR RECREATE THE
THEATER [AND ART] . . .”

-Antonin Artaud, 1938 [1]

CHRIS SALTER'S AMBITIOUS NEW BOOK, *ALIEN AGENCY: EXPERIMENTAL ENCOUNTERS WITH ART IN THE MAKING* (CAMBRIDGE: MIT PRESS, 2015), IS BOTH A MANIFESTO FOR NEW FORMS OF RESEARCH AT THE INTERSECTION OF ART PRACTICE AND SCIENCE STUDIES AND AN ELEGANT TREATISE ON WHAT IT MEANS TO ENCOUNTER NON-HUMAN AGENCY. Sure to be of interest to practitioners in a range of fields from anthropology, to science studies, to the fine arts, this book is unique in offering both a rumination on method and an aesthetic experience. Above all, *Alien Agency* is a call for imaginative action in the interest of reinvigorating critique. Salter asks that we think about making art and 'experiment' synonymous; not in the sense of homogenizing the differences between science and art, but in exploring how different practices make and remake the world through performativity in ways that can never be expected or controlled. [2]

On the surface, this argument might appear as part of a long and fatiguing debate about the fate of the humanities and critique in the present. But such debates miss the point. What makes this book a worthy read is its investment not in the past, or the present, but in the imaginary of what research could become. Salter's project is to demonstrate how art practice and "products" . . . "[are] orchestrating dynamic material acts and performances into being and how these material performances mark and transform the world ." [3]

In this Salter follows a particular "minor," in Deleuzian parlance, tradition in theater and performance art, a tradition that I identify with the Surrealist Antonin Artaud (a figure that Salter also regularly invokes). Artaud was among the most forceful to argue the insufficiencies of language and the place of sensory activation, stimulation, even pain, in breaking with social strictures and mores. For example, in 1938, within the context of Europe's slide towards war, Artaud called for a theater of "cruelty," affect, and sentiment. Such a theater would shock the complacent spectator into finally embracing life and enjoin her/him into struggling against a rationalizing social order. Art, and especially theater, must, he argued awaken us not through offering representations of the world, but rather through the production of new sentiments, sensations, and connections between bodies and experiences. Language in such

theater is rent from representation, in the interest, perhaps, of allowing agents to speak without the shackles of already socialized subjectivities. [4]

Salter follows this mandate, faithfully. It is what makes the book most exciting, and occasionally challenging, to digest. The text is organized as a series of 'encounters' with the alienness of artistic practice and with the agency of non-human entities. These encounters are, to paraphrase Artaud, "cruel", not in a moral sense, but in a sense of being cruel to any stability of subjectivity of bodies or to our academic sense of authority and expertise over the subject matter to be discussed. This is a text that refuses separation from, or authority over, its subject matter.

The book accomplishes its stated goals through travelling with and through three practices. The first practice involves sound, focusing on resonance as a theoretical and material concept in the collaborative urban soundscape installation work of the American sound artist Bruce Odland and the Austrian-born Sam Auinger (O+A). The second case investigates cellular 'vitality' through an examination of the temporalities invoked through the building of biomechanical machines done in collaboration with the Australian based art+research centre Symbiotica. The third example investigates ethnography as an experiential practice through a reflexive interrogation of Salter's own performance-installation practices building immersive environments done through the Montreal-based Hexagram Centre for Research-Creation.

The book is thus about transformations and interventions as a form of critique, a form understood not to involve the explanation of an event, but rather the participation in, and addition of, chance and experience to the world. Salter's discussion of resonance in architectural soundscapes and of temporality in biology are both particularly excellent in elucidating the agency and materiality of art practice and how these actions can induce sensations, cadence our bodies, and reorganize relationships between humans and other living and architectural agents in interesting and surprising manners.

Alien Agency vacillates between autoethnography, theatrical reenactment, and theoretical and historical explications making the text itself unstable and active, much like its subject matter. Occasionally frustrating but usually engaging, this is the element that makes this book original in a world of academic treatises lauding the appeals of materiality and performance. Salter does not permit us to leave the labs, soundscapes, or immersive installations safely ensconced within the walls of knowledge and expertise. In fact, this book poses fundamental challenges to what constitutes knowledge, and what is the status of this knowledge in relation to both society and the researcher. While this question is not, and perhaps cannot be resolved, Salter at least forces us to ask what types of knowing, and by extension, being we would like to have in the future. Knowledge, therefore, equates with encounter in this text. Encounters whose alienness in Salter's

burning DOWN THE HOUSE, Gwangju Biennale 2014

language, “provokes us to theorize culture anew; to recognize its temporal, emergent, dynamic being.” [5] By extension, knowledge is not about description or command but always about complexity, entanglement (as Salter also argues in his first book *Entangled*), and questioning.

If there is one limit to this text it is that Salter defers extended engagement with the problem of translation or signification, and by extension any engagement with political economy, power, value, or subjective difference. With so much materiality, we are always left to ask whether all forms of sensing and affect are the same? How is it that sense can be organized towards the structure of care or love for other things and beings, and how come it can also result in hate, violence, or simply banal apathy?

That said, in evading direct discussion of such questions, *Alien Agency* also directly engages with them. It is, of course, an almost impossible task to express the inexpressible, and Salter knows that and embraces it, a fact he reiterates multiple times throughout the book. The book’s impossibility is itself a reflexive image of the practices it seeks to depict. The necessity of translation, and its impossibility, from the realm of pure sensation to that of representing, and ultimately, also translating experience to others—whether human or not—is always the productive limit of and incitement to write. The book thus serves as a reminder that a critical new form of art-research-creation practice will never be progressive if it does not engage with the final element – that of meaning making and translation. Language always haunts the room here, but Salters’ eloquent and beautiful interrogation of what it means to attempt to engage the materialities and performativities of agencies that are beyond or outside the human also makes us recognize the possibilities and potentials inherent in that differential between what can be enacted and what can be represented. *Alien Agency* activates that space between the word and the world to imagine

that we could, indeed, attach ourselves differently to other bodies, species, lives, and technologies; that we could, to cite Artaud, “touch life”.

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BIO

Dr. Orit Halpern is an assistant professor at the New School for Social Research and Eugene Lang College. Her research is on histories of digital media, cybernetics, cognitive and neuroscience, art and design. Her book *Beautiful Data: A History of Vision and Reason since 1945* (Duke University Press, 2014) just came out. She has also published and created works for a variety of venues including *The Journal of Visual Culture*, *Public Culture*, *C-Theory*, *Configurations*, and at *ZKM* in Karlsruhe, Germany. Email: orit@post.harvard.edu; web: <http://orithalpern.net/>

Ahyoung Yoo, Clir (Council on Library and Information Resources)/Mellon Fellow for Dissertation Research in Original Sources and PhD Candidate, The Ohio State University, Department of History of Art

**BURNING DOWN THE
HOUSE, THE 10TH
GWANGJU BIENNALE
SEPTEMBER 5-
NOVEMBER 9, 2014**

CURATOR JESSICA MORGAN BORROWED THE TITLE OF THE 2014 GWANGJU BIENNALE, *BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE*, FROM THE TALKING HEADS’ 1983 HIT SONG OF THE SAME NAME. The rather provocative title provided a framework for the artists to work with or against the status quo. Wall text at the main entrance of the exhibition made the curatorial conceit explicit:

The theme—burning down the house—highlights the capacity of art to critique the establishment through an exploration that includes the visual, sound, movement, and dramatic performance. At the same time, it recognizes the possibilities and impossibilities within art to deal directly and concretely with politics.

The city of Gwangju holds a special place in Korean history as the site of the largest pro-democracy movement against the dictatorial regime of Park Chung Hee and later Chun Doo Hwan. The spirit of the biennale situates itself firmly in the revolutionary, democratic history of the city, and this year’s specific theme fits this local context. The lyrics of Talking Heads’ original song stood as shorthand for resistance against bourgeoisie capitalism and the general activist spirit that Gwangju symbolizes in South Korean modern history. The artists explored what the ‘house’ could be in various capacities: a place, a boundary, a system, and an institution.

The five galleries each housed a group of works that explored various aspects of ‘burning’ as a practice, event, and process, and all appeared actively working against the establishment. At a closer look, these included exploration of body as the site of resistance and struggle against oppression, the world-wide expansion of commercialism and its effects on daily life, the visualization of ‘burning’ as a means of renewal, and the ghostly figures resurrected at the site of these renewals. This doesn’t mean that each gallery was an independent unit, but they were rather a part of larger thematic and visual cluster that more or less connected with each other. The works of Lee Bul first set the tone of the exhibition upon entrance into the first gallery. Although Lee is now well-known for her cyborg sculpture series, the exhibition instead features her video and performance works from 1980s and early 1990s that explicitly questioned the meaning of the female body in the context of contemporary patriarchal Korean society. These works are clearly early ruminations on body that lead to her later cyborgian works. In the video *Sorry for Suffering—You Think I’m a Puppy on a Picnic?* (1990), Lee marches around cities like Tokyo and Seoul wearing hand-made costumes with multiple legs and arms, which gives her the

appearance of a sci-fi monster. Her performance in her bloodstained bodysuits unflinchingly produces abject repulsion at the same time as a bizarre grotesque appeal. This monstrous figure, skillfully formed by the artist, can easily evoke fictional creatures like Godzilla or terror in the post-war post-nuclear East Asia context, or even become a symbol of the West. In each case, however, the work always leads toward gender and sexual politics. Another work, *Diet Diagram* (1992), is a two-channel video. Lee is recorded in the process of undressing. Next to her bare body, there appear Korean words customarily used to sexualize, degrade, and objectify women and womanhood. Juxtaposed with each other—the artist's body against the derogatory text—the work reveals how female sexuality has been associated with shame and guilt and how everyday slang words are misogynistic in nature. Here, the 'house' from the title of the exhibition stands in for the oppressive domestic sphere, and Lee uses her body as a site of resistance against that domestic space at large.

If Lee's early performances pointed out the institutionalized, domestic oppression of women in the domestic context, local artists from Gwangju explored the political condition of the Korean body in the aftermath of the pro-democracy movement in 1980. For example, Kim Young Soo's puts the suppressed history of political torture on display in his photograph *Torture*, which features a masked man in generic military garb kneeling a naked prisoner in the stomach while strangling him. Kim's reenact-

ment photographs produce images for an undocumented past. The ropes by which the victim is bound extend past the edges of the frame, indicating a larger, still hidden context and more unnamed actors.

Some of the works in the exhibition deal literally with the act and process of burning, turning the incendiary event into something productive in which renewal is possible. Yves Klein's famous fire painting from 1961 is one example that turns the immaterial process of burning into scorching the surface of paper and transforming it. Sehee Sarah Bark's video *Vanished Landscape* (2013) recorded the actual process of burning a photograph rather than showing the end product. The artist first photographed a landscape and then placed the printed photograph in front of that actual landscape, and then burned it from the edges while recording it. The viewers realized over time what they had first assumed as a real landscape was fake, just a photograph, and what lay behind was the actual landscape. The 'true' landscape is revealed, yet the viewer is still left with a sensation that something is missing. The loss of lives and historical documents regarding Gwangju continue to reverberate within the calm landscape. The burning process suggests the way historical narratives and memories may be lost, re-written, and altered altogether. And what are the 'truths' that remain unrecorded in documents, photographs, and sites? In addition, the burning process evokes cremation and the sacrificed lives of citizens who were, during the

pro-democracy movement in 1980, mostly university students.

Beyond the South Korean political context, there were works that revealed the globally pervasive logic of commercialism and materialism within contemporary forms of capitalism. Geng Jianyi collected discarded objects by asking friends to give him things that were no longer being used. For his work *Useless* (2004), the artist installed more than 500 objects, each in its own glass box. These objects, varying from worn shoes to outdated electronic gadgets, all spoke to the speed at which consumer items become obsolete. The sheer volume of collected objects epitomizes not just East Asian culture but any consumer society.

The *Ozymandias Parade* (1985) by Edward Kienholz and Nancy Reddin Kienholz deals with similar issues. The large installation filled an entire room and provided a grotesque, nightmarish, and terrifying sight when first viewed. Life-size figures and horses stand on a lit, arrow-shaped base that faces the direction the horsemen are heading. There are three uniformed figures that represent the generic prototypes of political or military leaders. The work mocks dictators and politicians, but also provides a critique of American capitalism, materialism, and discrimination, as the fake US dollars and small Native American figurines at the foot of the horses make clear. The satire of generically greedy and unstoppable leaders rather than actual historical persons, however, suggests the work can also easily read as a critique of

recent global problems under neo-liberal capitalism. As such, one of the leaders holds a stick with the Korean flag at the end, suggesting the work provides a platform for criticism against the local government where the work is shown.

Some of the most poignant works in the exhibition deal with the theme of overturning—or burning down—the establishment through actively evoking terror. The body is no longer a site of resistance, but becomes a vehicle through which we both enact and experience terror. Eduardo Basualdo's *Island* (2009) is a hut made with burnt remnants of a building in Buenos Aires. To experience the work, the visitor is told only one person can enter the hut at a time, which provides a moment of solitude from crowded

exhibition halls. This solitude quickly turns into a rather anxiety-producing experience as the hut is divided into several compartments, and the participant needs to find her way out in complete darkness. One needs to feel the objects in the room (thus coming into contact with burnt wood) to find the hidden doors that lead to the next space. The experience is oddly claustrophobic and centers on the desperate, helpless need to escape from the maze like structure. The burnt remnants that sustain this hut point to the fact that the renewal process after fire is always tinged with the haunting past and the traumatic moment of combustion.

The breadth of the works shown in the Biennale was overwhelmingly large, as is common with any international Biennale. Many were created in response to specific local contexts, which, when brought together, can generate new forces and meanings in the global context. However, the strength of the exhibition lies with the new works produced specifically for the Biennale, as they are keenly aware of the domestic South Korea context and its future. One such example is Sharon Hayes' *We Cannot Leave This World To Others* (2014). Commissioned for the Biennale, Hayes' four-channel



(top) *We Cannot Leave This World To Others*, 2014, Sharon Hayes, Four-Channel Video Installation, Photo courtesy Gwangju Biennale Foundation.

(bottom) *Vanished Landscape*, 2013, Sehee Sarah Bark, Video, Photo courtesy Gwangju Biennale Foundation.



video installation was born out of site research in Korea, and shot in Seoul and New York. There are four screens that record various aspects of protest, private and public, individual and collective, in two cities. In particular, two of the screens are devoted to 'daejabo' protest posters. 'Daejabo' is a large poster, usually handwritten, traditionally used by Korean college students in protest against governmental control of the press. This particular daejabo addressed and problematized the government's mass layoff of railway workers who had protested against rail privatization in 2013. The poster called on college students by reminding them how grave the results of political indifference could be. Most importantly, the title of the daejabo, "how are you doing?" went viral online through social media and networks. Many college students responded to this wake-up call. It became a slogan to post online, "No, I am not doing well, because . . ." followed by various social issues that were overlooked and silenced in South Korean society.

Hayes' other two screens feature people of Korea and New York, caught in the moment of struggle and protest. First, two Korean women are wrestling with each other in public. One of them is identifiably older than the other. The other screen, devoted to the American context, is an extension of the artist's previous *In The Near Future* series, this time taking up the faces of protestors in New York. The juxtaposition of two different regional contexts, Korean and American, reveals the gap between protesting voices; the age, race, culture,

and language differ. And yet, the overall work shows how a common question such as "how are you doing?" reverberates within different societies with the same impact, power, and urgency.

As Hayes' video installation shows, the Biennale is at its strongest when the works reveal the struggles and complexities of people. In this sense, Morgan's edition of the Gwangju Biennale suggests that the task of the contemporary artist is to continuously contextualize local works and political situations in relation to global matters so as to avoid provincialism as well as find new connections and commonalities among sites and across generations. After all, "Burning Down the House" forces us to identify with the builders, burners, or eventual rebuilders of state and social structures. The enduring question this Biennale asks is what 'house' do we live in and what would it take to burn it down as well as its aftermath.

BIO

Ahyoung Yoo is a PhD candidate in the history of art at The Ohio State University and a CLIR/Mellon Fellow for Dissertation Research in Original Sources. She is working on her dissertation on contemporary Korean new media art in the context of globalization. Email: yoo.209@osu.edu

the HYPertext of HerMe(s)

Marie Leduc PhD Candidate, University of Alberta

**"TO UNDERSTAND
IS FIRST TO
UNDERSTAND THE
FIELD WITH WHICH
AND AGAINST
WHICH ONE HAS
BEEN FORMED."**

-Pierre Bourdieu, *Sketch
for a Self-Analysis*

IN A SHORT BOOK WRITTEN LATE IN LIFE, FRENCH SOCIOLOGIST PIERRE BOURDIEU CONDUCTED A SOCIO-SELF-ANALYSIS. RECOGNIZING THE "CONVENTIONAL AND ILLUSORY" [2] NATURE OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FORM, BOURDIEU APPROACHED HIS SELF-ANALYSIS NOT AS A CHRONOLOGICAL NARRATIVE BUT AS A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY. Judy Freya Sibayan performs a similar reflexive assessment of her career as an artist, curator, and writer in her e-book publication, *The Hypertext of HerMe(s)* (2014) [3]. By analyzing her artistic life as part of the field that has shaped her, Sibayan constructs an insightful picture of the complex relationship between artist and institution.

Sibayan is best known for her conceptual-performance pieces *Scapular Gallery Nomad* and the *Museum of Mental Objects (MoMO)*. In *Scapular Gallery Nomad* (performed from 1997 to 2002), Sibayan wore a portable museum on her body in the form of a fabric pouch. Her curated collection of artworks were stored inside the pouch and taken out to be assembled as exhibits in homes, cafes, buses, and other locations outside the conventional space of the museum or gallery. Her aim was to establish a position 'off-center' to the art institution. [4] She followed *Scapular Gallery Nomad* with *MoMO* (2002 to present), a performance that takes the idea of a portable museum even further. As Sibayan reveals, *MoMO* "is a self-parody of *Scapular Gallery Nomad*." [5] Apart from Sibayan's body (or that of her collaborator, Matt Price, who embodies a second *MoMO*), *MoMO* eliminated all physical manifestations of the museum and the artworks. The *MoMO* collection is installed in Sibayan's memory by artists who whisper their works into her ear. The works are then 'exhibited' whenever Sibayan chooses to 'open' her museum and perform (recite) the artworks as she remembers them. By 'becoming' the museum, Sibayan actively resists the conformity of the institution and takes control of her own 'materialization' as an artist.

As an autobiography, *The Hypertext of HerMe(s)* is both a genealogy and an analysis of Sibayan's materialization as an 'ex-centric' artist. [6] The book is presented in six primary chapters or sections along with a preface ("Dear Reader") and summary. Each section—"The Book of HerMe(s)"; "Constructing the Autobiographical Self"; "Problematizing Artistic Labor"; "Problematizing the Institution

The Hypertext of HerMe(s)



Judy Freya Sibayan KT press

(left) *The Hypertext of HerMe(s)*,
Judy Freya Sibayan, book cover.
Photo © Armin Linke.

(right page) *Scapular Gallery
Nomad*, 1997, Judy Freya Sibayan.
Photo © Armin Linke.

in the early 1970s and completing a master's degree at the Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design in Los Angeles (1984), Sibayan was employed as the director of the Contemporary Art Museum of the Philippines, the "most powerful contemporary art museum" in the nation. [9] By 1989, disillusioned by the political and administrative demands of the job and her own misgivings about artistic agency, Sibayan retreated from the art world altogether. "I needed to find a more tenable position so I could make and believe in art again," she explains. [10] Guided by her muse HerMe(s)—her 'imagination'—she re-considers her place and role within the art world and 'births' herself from the confining 'white cube' of the museum with *Scapular Gallery Nomad*. It is this work, ironically, that reintroduces Sibayan back into the art world and brings her even closer to its global center. Invited by curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Sibayan participated in the Vienna Secession exhibit, *Cities on the Move* (1997-1999). The exhibit traveled to cities around the globe, including London, New York, Vienna, and Bordeaux, France, where Sibayan performed *Scapular Gallery Nomad* on the streets and in museums. The experience gave Sibayan the "confidence" to "go in and out of any mausoleum without fear of being coopted. *Scapular* existed independent of these white cubes." [11] Yet, as Sibayan realized, such artistic independence is only possible with the recognition of the very institution she aims to resist; an artist cannot be 'ex-centric' without being recognized by the center.

In the remaining sections of *The Hypertext of HerMe(s)*, Sibayan provides a studied analysis of the slippery and elusive challenge of maintaining an 'ex-centric' position within the institution of art while being valued by it. Central to this analysis is the realization that:

the only art that is free from the powers of the debasing system of commodity production is the art that is invisible. But the art that never gets seen within and processed by the power structures of the culture industry never gets counted as art! [12]

In "Problematizing Artistic Labor," Sibayan lays out this theoretical dilemma, one she attributes to the failure of the historical avant-garde. Citing Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-garde*, Sibayan explains how the avant-garde initiated "an attack on art as a bourgeois institution." [13] The avant-garde, she proposes, "saw themselves apart from the art they were

problematizing" [14] and the institutional practices that made art, art.

Thus, Sibayan distinguishes two distinct stages in her career: her period of "being an avant-garde" and her "practice of Institutional Critique." [15] Her 'avant-garde' period includes her early artistic practice before her five-year hiatus. During this time she was consciously "mimicking the Western avant-garde," [16] creating performance and installation pieces that challenged the institution but without recognizing the reciprocal and necessary relationship between artist and institution. Following Andrea Fraser's definition, Sibayan explains that Institu-

tional Critique recognizes the failure of the avant-garde and "accepts art's and the artist's condition as contingent on being part of the institution of art." [17] The institution of art is therefore not abandoned, only recognized as "a social site that needs to be problematized and changed." [18]

With this understanding, Sibayan turns to performance and parody as a strategy for critically responding to the power of the institution. Parody, with its "essential reflexivity" and "capacity to reflect critically back upon itself," [19] provides Sibayan with the means to explore how the institution of art creates its own objects. Mikhail

of Art: Towards an Institutional Critique"; "Embodying the Institution of Art: Further Institutional Critique and Agency"; and "Agency and the Production of Discourse"—considers Sibayan's artistic development from a different theoretical and analytical perspective. Sibayan, however, does not number the sections or provide a prescribed order to follow.

If there is a heart or center to this collection of chapters it is found in "The Book of HerMe(s)." This is the most personal and "lyrical portion" of Sibayan's self-analysis. [7] With Hélène Cixous as her mentor, Sibayan considers the "life-changing five-year hiatus" [8] she took from the art world from 1989 to 1994. Just prior to this period, Sibayan had a successful career as an artist and curator at the center of the artistic world in the Philippines. After studying fine art at the University of the Philippines



Bakhtin explained parody as the crossing of two languages or discourses—the performance and its invisible Other which is the object of the ironic critique that we recognize but cannot see. It is in the comedic contrast of the jester's parodic performance of the king that the invisible power of the empire is revealed. [20] In a performance such as *MoMo*, Sibayan plays the entire institution of art by conflating its various roles (curator, exhibition space, collector, educator, artist), and in doing so makes visible that “with which and against which” every artist is formed the actual institution itself.

The Hypertext of HerMe(s) performs a similar reflexive challenge. Different art world discourses, including Sibayan's own, are crossed and explored not just through performance but through writing. Writing is integral to all of Sibayan's work, as an archival trace and as an academic contribution to the field (Sibayan is founding editor and publisher of the on-line art journal *Ctrl+P*). [21] In “The Book of HerMe(s),” for example, Sibayan's extensive footnotes provide an objective exegesis of her more personal and subjective narrative. In the section “Embodying the Institution of Art,” her conceptualization and development of *MoMo* is related through theoretical and practical discussions in a lengthy e-mail exchange between Sibayan and her collaborator Matt Price. Throughout her chapters, Sibayan liberally employs her own published writing and excerpts of other writers' analyses of her work. These texts are further expanded by the inclu-

sion of 390 hyperlinks that connect the book, and the reader, to the wider fabric of the Internet, that “archive of all archives” where a virtual social field is recreated in web pages, images, and texts. [22] As Sibayan explains, this multi-layered autobiographical form “allows me to act reflexively . . . , to see myself acting on and being acted upon by the world through my art.” [23] What emerges for the reader is not only an understanding of Sibayan and her work, but how art and the artist are necessarily bound by the multiple agents and discourses that are the institution of art. Like Sibayan's performance works, *The Hypertext of HerMe(s)* does not affect any substantial ‘change’ to the institution of art. Rather, her reflexive self-analysis reveals the complex and integral relationship between artist and institution and opens up the larger question of how artists might problematize the institution through their practice—that is how they might address the failure of the historical avant-garde in the contemporary.

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BIO

Marie Leduc is an SSHRC scholar and interdisciplinary PhD candidate in sociology and art history at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada. Her PhD dissertation considers Chinese contemporary art as a case study for understanding how contemporary art is recognized and valued in the West.

FELLOWSHIPS, RESIDENCIES and RESONANCES: A SELF-INTERVIEW

Gail Kenning, Researcher, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia

INTRODUCTION

My name is Gail Kenning. I am an artist, researcher, educator, and writer. The following article is an interview with myself. I am currently Design United Visiting Research Fellow at Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e), Netherlands. I will be returning home to Sydney, Australia, where I am Researcher at University of Technology Sydney (UTS), Australia. I wanted to take time to reflect on this particular experience and also to think about what residencies and fellowships means for those in the new media field. The self-interview format allows me to briefly address some of the questions that come to mind when completing a fellowship or residency.

GAIL KENNING: *You position yourself as artist, researcher, educator, and writer. How does a residency experience change the way you see yourself?*

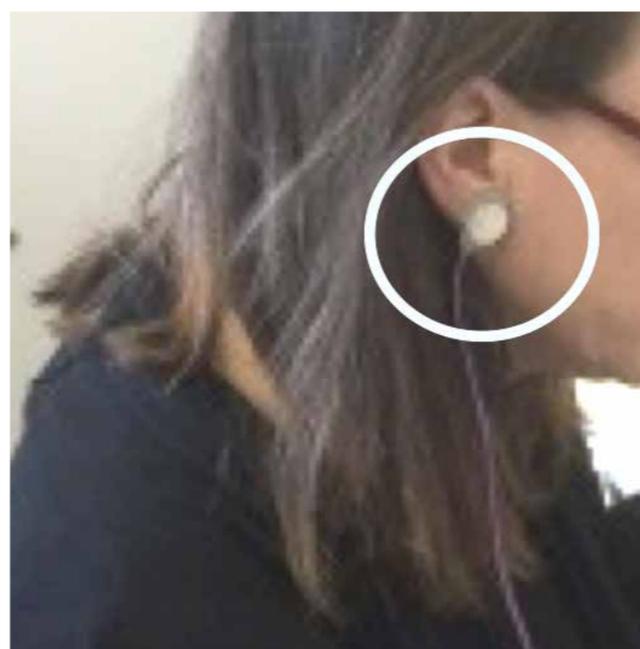
I am an artist with an ongoing arts practice. For me this informs everything I do. I have a varied career, which includes working in industry; owning a business; having an arts practice as a sculptor, installation artist, textile artist and media artist; and as a researcher operating across a range of disciplines. I recognize that in all areas my personal approach is informed by my arts training, arts practice, and arts thinking. This arts thinking is evident in how I engage with residencies and how being faced with new situations that are unfamiliar impacts me. In these situations I strongly identify as an artist seeking out potentialities.

GK: *What do you mean by ‘arts thinking’?*

I would suggest that it involves thinking creatively; looking for the new, novel, and the innovative in any situation; allowing for open-endedness, that is, genuinely not having an end in sight; trusting in the not yet knowing, allowing myself to be confused, not having a next step, and accepting that I might get off track. While I do not believe that this approach is the sole prerogative of artists, I recognize that my art training has given me ‘permission’ to use this approach and to play with ideas rather than chasing solutions.



(left) A pilot project was set up to measure Heart Rate Variability (HVR) while carrying out craft activities: Image courtesy of Yu Bin, 2015.



(right) A sensor was placed on the ear to measure HVR: Image courtesy of Yu Bin, 2015.

GK: *How would you define your approach and how does that help when completing a residency?*

My art and research work, projects and collaborations operate across art, design, and craft, but for some aspects of my work are perceived as social engagement, art therapy, or community art. However, I neither accept nor reject these classifications. As artists and designers engage more closely with their publics, which are a combination of audience, participant, user and consumer, questions about what is art' and 'not art' inevitably arise, and this type of working becomes part of a long and ongoing debate. [1] Increasingly, I recognize that my work rather than being a series of discrete projects or a linear development—as I observe in other people's work—circles around particular concepts, processes, materialities and meaning. For example, while textile forms are not always apparent, they often have a presence, or at least resonance in my work. I have explored textiles as data, code, text; as materials through threads, fabrics, braids and wires; as phenomenological processes; as embodied practices and tacit knowledge in the work of crafts persons; and as a particular media that brings forth meaning. Similarly, issues relating to creativity, health and well being are explored through this circular approach. This approach enables me to engage with the residency through a pre-existing array of concepts and ideas that are malleable, adaptable and open to challenge by new ideas and experiences and can be introduced or disregarded as needed.

GK: *What is the focus of your current work/art practice?*

I resist differentiating between my art practice, my research and my writing. For me, they are facets of the same work, all operating at the nexus of art, design, craft, and all draw on art, science, and social science approaches. My work currently focuses on

creativity in relation to wellbeing, and has an emphasis on creative ageing and age-related conditions such as dementia. My art investigates creativity as a process and an experience, from which traces are left in material forms. My work explores these concepts through materialities of expanded textiles and digital media, and experiments with new technologies and materials to promote positive embodied experiences and feelings of connectedness that contribute to wellbeing.

GK: *Why Eindhoven?*

My hosts at TU/e are Professor Panos Markopoulos and Professor Berry Eggen of User Centred Engineering (UCE) in the Department of Industrial Design, and Associate Professor Elise van den Hoven of the Materialising Memories Research Program at UTS. The city of Eindhoven and TU/e is a hub of creativity, technological, and material exploration, with innovative approaches to testing and understanding users' experiences. One of its key strengths is the work carried out in relation to health and wellbeing. It hosts the world's only 'living lab' for dementia, which is a partnership with GGzE (Dutch Association of Mental Health and Addiction Care in Eindhoven) and Brainport, Eindhoven (a cooperation between business, governments and knowledge institutions). This allows for people living with age-related conditions, such as dementia, to have a real and meaningful input at the early stages of a project that impacts the outcomes.

GK: *Why are these types of exchanges and residencies important for artists and researchers?*

I would suggest that important aspects of residencies and fellowships are the experience of travelling, the potential for shared futures with new people, and the

opportunity to reflect on new experiences and relate them to existing experiences and knowledge.

GK: *Why do you think the travel is so important?*

Traversing physical distances and time zones makes real cultural and social differences. This is something we are particularly aware of in Australia with travel usually involving not only daily time-shifts, but also seasonal shifts. For example, I left Sydney in mid-summer temperature of 100°F and arrive in mid-winter temperature of 33°F. The change is marked and expectations of difference are reinforced and senses are heightened. This sense of the new, the novel, the alien and the strange is also reiterated through language, custom and through everyday events. Even simple activities like buying food at the grocery store requires focused attention in order to be discerning and differentiate between what is good and what is not. Each journey around a city or down a street is an adventure. However, it is surprising how quickly resonances occur. Similarities to home are soon found. Walking the same street several times or visiting the same café quickly loses the sense of newness. Even the sounds of languages spoken, while not understood, become familiar. For me, this is when the experiences become most valuable. When I can begin to relate what I am seeing and experiencing to what I already know. This is not about absorbing the new experiences into the already known, but conjoining the familiar and unfamiliar, the known and half-known, recognizing resonances, making connections, extending and building new knowledge.

GK: *How are residencies important sites for connecting with people?*

Residencies and fellowships facilitate meetings and exchanges with people in the same physical space. They provide opportunities to exchange ideas and

explore commonalities. Physically meeting people facilitates positive resonances through face-to-face interaction physical contact, and group dynamics and interactions. [2] In addition, residencies and fellowships facilitate chance encounters and happenstance. These meetings establish platforms of shared experiences on which to build future projects and experiences. Meeting people, talking, and exploring possible collaborative opportunities turned out to be the content, form and structure of my Fellowship at TU/e. Visits, events, plans and conversations centered around recommendations made by key people. My network grew through shared interests in technology, materials, textiles and health. I not only became part of existing networks, but my presence was also a catalyst for new networks. I visited Amsterdam, Utrecht, Tilburg, and travelled further to the UK to meet people in London, Cardiff, Dundee and Edinburgh. Having an introduction through a third party meant that in most cases there was already a sense of connection, a point of mutual contact, and a level of trust.

GK: *What will you take away from this experience and what does the future hold?*

The Visiting Fellowship to Eindhoven has been a valuable experience. The form of the visit enabled me to 'circle around' concepts, processes and materialities with new and like-minded people. I have explicit memories of people, place and events that I want to remember, to keep and to build upon. I have kept a journal, audio and visual recording, followed up meetings by emails, and attempted to store information for future use. An important aspect of this fellowship has been how meeting like-minded people with new and vibrant ideas has reinforced and revitalised my existing practice.

On returning to Australia it is not only an overall positive experience that I return with, but also two collaborative projects have been started. The first

is a pilot project exploring bodily responses to craft activities through heart rate variability (HRV) and Electroencephalography (EEG) (See Fig. 1 and 2). The second project explores how positive resonance operates in environments where people are encouraged to use their creativity to contribute to a cause—such as in the *Hand i Pockets* event which took place in Sydney in 2014. [3] In addition, in the coming year a number of people will be visiting Sydney to contribute to ongoing projects in ageing and dementia.

I would like to thank my hosts for this opportunity and the freedom to explore possibilities.

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2. For a general introduction to ideas relating to positive psychology and positivity resonance see Barbara Fredrickson, *Love 2.0: How Our Supreme Emotion Affects Everything We Think, Do, Feel, and Become* (New York: Hudson Street Press, 2013).
3. The workshop methodology will be available mid-2015. A general introduction to the workshops is available at University of Technology, Sydney. *Hand i Pockets Funshop*, 2014, <http://newsroom.uts.edu.au/events/2014/08/hand-i-pockets-funshop>.

BIO

Dr Gail Kenning is an artist, researcher and writer based in Sydney, Australia. Her work explores creativity and craft in relation to wellbeing, ageing and dementia through digital media, new technologies and expanded textiles using socially engaged approaches. Kenning researches at the University of Technology, Sydney, and is a member of the Materializing Memories Research Program, and an Associate of the Centre for Research in Inclusive Art and Design, Cardiff, Wales. She is Design United Visiting Fellow at Eindhoven University of Technology. She has exhibited and screened works internationally. Kenning has a PhD from University of New South Wales for her work exploring evolutionary patterns and code in relation to craft-based textile forms. She publishes in journals including *Textiles: Cloth and Culture* and *Leonardo* and has presented at conferences nationally and internationally, including the International Symposium of Electronic Arts, and as an invited speaker at Hangzhou, Academy of Arts, China.

2015 TRIENNIAL:

SURROUND AUDIENCE AT THE NEW MUSEUM

> Paul Thomas Rubery, Doctoral Student, Stony Brook University

IN ED ATKINS' INSTALLATION *HAPPY BIRTHDAY!!* (2014), THE FACE OF A MIDDLE-AGED MAN, EXQUISITELY RENDERED IN CGI GRAYSCALE, EMERGES FROM THE SEA TO ADDRESS THE MUSE-UMGOER. The fragmented quality of his speech, in its confused often elliptical series of dates, juxtaposes the formal competence with which Atkins executes the representation of the man's features. The work instills a feeling of unease or anxiety in those who witness the spectacle. As the video progresses, the figure materializes and disintegrates, as if to convey the fragility of the digital medium. What unfolds is a profound meditation on life and death, the body and its avatars, and the temporality of lived experience against the synchronic collection of times, events, and locations made possible by the electronic archive. If corporeality and coherent subjectivity are exchanged here for visual verisimilitude in high definition, then it is to signal the transformation—or, perhaps, to belatedly make visible—the total interpellation of the subject into the myriad networks, fiber-optic channels, and multimedia platforms of the twenty-first century.

The radiant screen light that casts down from *Happy Birthday!!* illuminates works by fellow contributors Frank Benson and Juliana Huxtable, which all act to open the *Surround Audience* Triennial at the New Museum. Haunting and oneiric, the piece assumes the symbolic function of a funeral pyre, declaiming the death of the modernist subject while providing new imaginaries and utopic horizons. Atkins' installation foregrounds co-curators Ryan Trecartin and Lauren Cornell's interrogation of the political, psychological,

and physical consequences of a society increasingly constituted through electronic means. Much like the two previous Triennials at the New Museum, this exhibition emphasizes early-career artists who, in youth and subject matter, emblemize the cultural zeitgeist. But while the work represented throughout the Triennial thematizes the platform-orientated interconnectivity of the contemporary age, the theoretical edifice on which Trecartin and Cornell formulated the exhibition fails to provide the framework necessary for not only the inclusion of certain artists and artworks, but also for the obscure modes of resistance to neoliberal ideology and surveillance culture they present to the viewing audience.

At the New Museum, the term "surround audience" doubles as a blockbuster marquee title, albeit an ambiguous one, for the exhibition and a theoretical neologism, dreamed up by Trecartin to express "both the possibilities and challenges inherent in a contemporary condition wherein we are encircled by a 'smarter' and more participatory world." [1] For Trecartin and Cornell, social media, online marketplaces, and advanced telecommunications characterize this new "surround audience," with the technological manifestations of culture being absorbed into the body and thereby constituting the very terms of subjectivity. While nothing about this proposition is particularly novel, since we understand subjectivity to be the effect of a socially articulated network, the generative nature of digital media distinguishes the ethos on display at the museum from, say, that of the recent ZERO retrospective at the Guggenheim. Technology has always influenced our conceptions



Happy Birthday!!, 2014, Ed Atkins, HD video, Courtesy the artist and Cabinet Gallery, London, © Benoit Pailley.

of self, but it hasn't always manifested in the infinitely mutable, nonmaterial structure it assumes today.

Casey Jane Ellison's single-channel video, *It's So Important To Seem Wonderful* (2015), typifies the aesthetic privileged by Trecartin and Cornell as it discloses the politics of representation and subjective posturing investigated by the Triennial. In the work, a digital avatar of the artist speaks into a microphone, rolls on the ground, and performs something between standup comedy routine and chat room psycho-

analysis. Ellison's work represents one of the more coherent statements in the exhibition, for it frames the digitized body as a productive site in which to 'negotiate' normative conceptions of gender, identity, and class against what Hito Steyerl designates idealized "image spam." [2] But negotiation at what cost? To what emancipatory future does negotiation direct the spectator toward liberation in art and aesthetics?

Although Trecartin and Cornell contend that the artists in this year's Triennial operate "beyond technology," the work

on display neither transcends standard technological fantasies nor deviates from the economic and ideological underpinnings of this century's multi-screen proliferation—neoliberalism. For throughout the exhibition we observe putatively transgressive gestures and humanist rhetoric imbricated within the machinations of a digital-financial complex that seeks to regulate our passions and desires. In her latest book, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, Wendy Brown diagnoses the contemporary challenge of thinking beyond individualism toward



a democratic future, a task paradoxically complicated by the Internet and other paradigms of electronic interconnectivity. According to Brown, neoliberalism manifests not only as an economic model, but also as a governing order of normative reason, economizing the entire social field. [3] In the transition away from classical liberalism to neoliberalism, political life yields as human beings are converted into “human capitals.” [4] The individual assumes its position as an autonomous unit, endeavoring to maximize its worth through self-investment and subjective posturing while previous modes of communal identity, from race to class, are evacuated of political valence in their economization. [5] Where the recent eruption of screens and social platforms presents the opportunity to negotiate and reformulate identity conditions, then, it does so at the cost of a meaningful relationality. The digital has become the elected site of generating individual, a social value within the current system of exchange. In a sense, for these artists to operate “beyond

technology” and resist neoliberal ideology necessitates a departure from the screen as a site of self-imagining and a direct engagement with the socio-historical context of its arrival.

Once intimate and personal affections between groups of individuals are unable to resist conversion to and governance by neoliberal rationality, the connectedness of the digital network obscures the breakdown of the shared. Perhaps no work in the exhibition exposes these failings more poignantly than Antoine Catala’s offensive symbol for empathy, which was conceived with assistance of Droga5 (a boutique advertising agency located in Manhattan). Here, two versions of the letter E—one inverted, the other standardly legible—are constructed out of coral and sea anemones and bear some relation to the artist’s online project *Distant Feel*. Where the problem arises—that is, beyond its affiliation with Droga5—is that the networks and communities engaged by the artwork remain too limited, too bourgeois, and too eager to accept the promises of the digital and the financial. Indeed, this issue runs systematically throughout the Triennial, with DIS’s *The Island* (2015) demonstrating the challenge of forming new, meaningful networks between human subjects within the confines of late capitalism.

And yet, these issues notwithstanding, other inclusions in *Surround Audience* give visibility to the underground networks of capital migration that support, albeit indirectly, our hyperconsumptive patterns in the digital west. In doing

so, they offer us a form of resistance through information as they demystify some of promises surrounding recent media art. For instance, Onejoon Che’s installation, *Mansudae Masterclass* (2015), Shadi Habib Allah’s *untitled* video work (2014), and Li Lao’s documentary performance, *Consumption* (2012), expose the real political, human, and economic networks that enable the very possibility of our posthuman fantasies as well as our desire for emancipation through emergent technologies. To exhibit this work was imperative for the formation of an oppositional politics, even if appears out of step with the generational narcissism permeating much of the New Museum’s latest Triennial. Here, Trecartin and Cornell succeed in bringing to light the often unacknowledged political, psychological, and physical consequences of the expanding digital sphere, by situating it in conversation with the economic, and thereby restoring a materialist framework to the immaterial image.

In revealing the base through these selections, they offer a possible rejoinder to neoliberal delirium evinced in other works throughout the exhibition. In the end, however, *Surround Audience* disappoints in its inability to posit a coherent vision for resistance, for moving beyond the readymade network toward a more equitable future. For all the emphasis Trecartin and Cornell placed on restructuring identity, the latest Triennial suffers from the same fragmented, digitized, overabundance found in the ‘surround audience’ it aspires to change.

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3. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 30.
4. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 65.
5. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 38.

BIO

Ahyoung Yoo is a PhD candidate in the history of art at The Ohio State University and a CLIR/Mellon Fellow for Dissertation Research in Original Sources. She is working on her dissertation on contemporary Korean new media art in the context of globalization. Email: yoo.209@osu.edu



(top) *Three Dikgosi Monument / Built 2005*, Gaborone, Botswana, 2013-2014, Onejoon CHE, Digital C-Print and fiber-reinforced plastic, Courtesy the artist, © Benoit Pailley

(right) *Distant Feel*, 2015, Antoine Catala, Materials variable, Courtesy the artist and 47 Canal, New York, © Benoit Pailley