

Gene McHugh

# Post Internet

Notes on the Internet and Art  
12.29.09 > 09.05.10

## **LINK Editions**

Domenico Quaranta, *In Your Computer*, 2011

Valentina Tanni, *Random*, 2011

Miltos Manetas, *In My Computer – Miltos Manetas*, 2011

Gene McHugh, *Post Internet*, 2011

Domenico Quaranta (ed.), *Collect the WWWorld. The Artist as Archivist in the Internet Age*, 2011. Exhibition Catalogue. Texts by Josephine Bosma, Gene McHugh, Joanne McNeil, Domenico Quaranta

### **Gene McHugh Post Internet**

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## Editor's Note

### Criticism as Performance

One blog post is merely a version on a theme developed in an ongoing performance inhabiting “the several months and years.”

– Gene McHugh

*I'm really proud to introduce, here, what I consider one of the most relevant critical efforts of the last years. Post Internet is a blog developed between December 2009 and September 2010 by the New York based art critic Gene McHugh, thanks to a grant of the Creative Capital | Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant Program. I discovered it quite late in 2010, and immediately I subscribed to its RSS feed, using it as a reference point for some artists and artworks I was interested in. So, I was bitterly disappointed when, on September 10, 2010, I got a note in my RSS feed program basically saying that, since the grant's money were drying up, the blog wouldn't be updated anymore. I thought, com'on, you don't need money to make a blog! Blogging is something you do because you enjoy it, usually in your spare time, between one paid job and the other. Only a spoiled yankee (sorry, Gene) can stop blogging when the money run out.*

*Of course, this wasn't the point at all. I realized it a few days later, visiting the site and paying attention to its peculiar structure, and not just to some spare contents. Post Internet is a Wordpress blog located at the address 122909a.com. I spent some time thinking about this domain name before realizing what looks obvious now: December 29, 2009 is the date of Gene's first post. The final “a” still looks mysterious to me, but I'm fine with it, and I'll never ask Gene what it stands for. The interface looks pretty simple, also because Gene willingly kept using the “Kubrick” theme, “the WordPress default theme emeritus”. Except for the last ones, most of the posts don't have any title, the post date being the only separator between the posts themselves. The layout of each post is also kept as minimal as possible: no images, no links, little or no formatting. The posts can be navigated by “Archives” (arranged by months), by “Categories” (arranged by artist names), by tags or browsed with an embedded search engine.*

*For almost a year, Gene McHugh kept filling this folder with his personal notes. Writing and posting became a daily, regular activity, that sometimes produced many posts a day, sometimes long (or very long) texts posted at a slower pace.*

*However, Post Internet is not just a piece of beautiful criticism, as reading this book proves. It's also, in itself, a piece of Post Internet art in the shape of an art criticism blog. The central theme that Gene works through during the blog is the performativity of Internet Art. In an ocean of media, he claims, Internet artists and their audiences are responding not to individual works, but to a "net presence." He writes, "the artist's work is viewed as one on-going performance; the audience follows the artist as he or she performs the act of creating individual works. This performance is where audiences are nudged to qualitatively sort out and find meaning in artistic experience on the Internet." Only this framing allows us to understand the layout of the blog, the style of writing, and the endurance element implicit in the whole process. Only this framing allows us to understand the unexpected end of the writing process, which doesn't depend on the usual reasons why one stops writing about something (because he came to the end of his argument, because he is no more interested in the subject, or because the subject isn't interesting anymore), but was determined in advance. Only when viewed as a book, can we see McHugh's own impressive performance.*

*However, turning all this into a book is not an easy task, and I'm grateful to Gene for pointing out the things that should be kept and the things that could be left behind in this process of translation. But, still, it's a translation, that I hope will bring McHugh's experiment in performative writing to a new, if not broader, audience.*

Domenico Quaranta, Brescia, August 25, 2011



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I'd also like to thank Elan Bogarin, Ann Hirsch, my family, and all of the artists.



## Introduction

### 1

“Post Internet” is a term I heard Marisa Olson talk about somewhere between 2007 and 2009.

The Internet, of course, was not over. That’s wasn’t the point. Rather, let’s say this: what we mean when we say “Internet” changed and “post Internet” served as shorthand for this change.

So, what changed? What about what we mean when we say “Internet” changed so drastically that we can speak of “post Internet” with a straight face?

On some general level, the rise of social networking and the professionalization of web design reduced the technical nature of network computing, shifting the Internet from a specialized world for nerds and the technologically-minded, to a mainstream world for nerds, the technologically-minded and grandmas and sports fans and business people and painters and everyone else. Here comes everybody.

Furthermore, any hope for the Internet to make things easier, *to reduce the anxiety of my existence*, was simply over – it failed – and it was just another thing to deal with. What we mean when we say “Internet” became not a thing in the world to escape into, but rather *the world one sought escape from... sigh...* It became the place where business was conducted, and bills were paid. It became the place where people tracked you down.

### 2

Accompanying this change in what we mean when we say “Internet,” there was a change in what we mean when we say “art on the Internet” and “post Internet art” served as shorthand for this change.

On some general level, the shift of the Internet to a mainstream world in which A LOT of people read the newspaper, play games, meet sexual partners, go to the bathroom, etc. necessitated a shift in what we mean when we say “art on the Internet” from a specialized world for nerds and the technologically-minded, to a mainstream world for nerds, the

technologically-minded and painters and sculptors and conceptual artists and agitprop artists and everyone else. No matter what your deal was/is as an artist, you had/have to deal with the Internet – not necessarily as a medium in the sense of formal aesthetics (glitch art, .gifs, etc), but as a distribution platform, a machine for altering and re-channeling work. What Seth Price called “Dispersion.” What Oliver Laric called “Versions.”

Even if the artist doesn’t put the work on the Internet, the work will be cast into the Internet world; and at this point, contemporary art, as a category, was/is forced, against its will, to deal with this new distribution context or at least acknowledge it.

“Acknowledge” is key here. It’s not that all contemporary artists must right now start making hypertext poetry and cat memes, but rather that, somewhere in the basic conceptual framework of the work, an understanding of what the Internet is doing to the work – how it distributes the work, how it devalues the work, revalues it – must be acknowledged in the way that one would acknowledge, say, the market. What Guthrie Lonergan called “Internet Aware.” To not do this would not be a sin (obviously most artists don’t care about the Internet at all and won’t start caring anytime soon; similarly, most artists probably don’t want to consider the market), but it would be a shame – it would be too bad. Somewhere, on a *realistic* level, there would be an avoidance of the context in which the work appears and, if the 20<sup>th</sup> century did anything to artists, it made them care about context on a realistic level. Duchamp changed the game by acknowledging the context in which the game is played. And the game now is played in the project spaces of Berlin, Sao Paolo and L.A.; it’s played in the commercial galleries of New York, and the global network of biennial culture; it’s played in museums and auction houses, yes – of course (obviously) – but it is *also* now played through the distribution channels of the Internet.

To avoid this last point is to risk losing the game.

For alternative understandings of post Internet art, conducted in more depth, read *The Image Object Post-Internet* (2010) by Artie Vierkant and *Within Post-Internet* (2011) by Louis Doulas.

» **December 2009**

**Tuesday, December 29th, 2009**

From *Barefoot in the Head* (1969) by Brian Aldiss:

Take pictures of yourselves, he had said, pictures every moment of the day. That's what you should do, that's what you do do. You drop them and they lie around and other people get into them and turn them into art. Every second take a picture and so you will see that the lives we lead consist of still moments and nothing but. There are many still moments, all different. Be awake but inwards sleeping. You have all these alternatives. Think that way and you will discover more. Cast out serpents. I am here but equally I am elsewhere. I don't need so much economy – it's the pot training of the child where the limitation starts. Forget it, live in all regions, part, split wide, be fuzzy, try all places at the same time, indecisivize time itself, shower out your photographs to the benefit of all. Make yourself a million and so you achieve a great unilateral trajectory, not longwise in life but sideways, a unilateral immortality. Try it, friends, try it with me, join me, join in the great merry multicafe!

**Tuesday, December 29th, 2009**

Post Internet art, if it is even something that exists, can be defined in many ways.

This blog will try to cover some of these ways.

Here is one thought to start: Post Internet art leaves the Internet world. It goes to the art world and mutates itself to correspond to the conventions of the art world. It is art world art about the Internet. A deeper goal, though, is that as the work mutates from the conventions of the Internet to the conventions of art, the work catalyzes the conventions of art to mutate to those of the Internet.

For these worlds to meet on good terms, you can't simply snap your fingers. Each world enters a process, a series of adaptations in order to find its feet in the world of the other.

**Tuesday, December 29th, 2009**

In a March 2008 interview with Régine Debatty on the *We Make Money Not Art* blog, Marisa Olson suggests that, on the one hand, Internet art is going mainstream, but, on the other hand, contemporary art is going Internet.

**RD: You are also a curator, both independently and as part of your activities at Rhizome. Your curating often deals with new media art pieces. What are the challenges of curating and exhibiting works of new media art today?**

MO: I think that there is presently a very exciting turn happening in new media, with respect to both the art world and the context of “traditional media.” It used to be very important to carve out a separate space in which to show, discuss, and teach new media. Nowadays these spaces are sometimes seen as ghettos, but at the time, they were safe havens championing under-recognized forms. Things are more co-mingled now. Not everyone will agree with me about this, but I think it’s great that some people no longer even know new media when they see it. I know curators who turn their nose up at that phrase, but they love Cory Arcangel or Paul Pfeiffer. There doesn’t seem to be a need to distinguish, any more, whether technology was used in making the work – afterall, everything is a technology, and everyone uses technology to do everything. What is even more interesting is the way in which people are starting to make what I’ve called “Post-Internet” art in my own work (such as my Monitor Tracings), or what Guthrie Lonergan recently called “Internet Aware Art.” I think it’s important to address the impacts of the internet on culture at large, and this can be done well on networks but can and should also exist offline. Of course, it’s an exciting challenge to explain to someone how this is still internet art... If that really matters...



**Tuesday, December 29th, 2009**

In a 2006 *Time Out* magazine group interview conducted by Lauren Cornell, another crucial figure in the development of Post Internet art, Marisa Olson speaks about her work not being “on the Internet,” but, rather, “after the Internet... the yield of my compulsive surfing and downloading.” Here are some key exchanges between Cornell and Olson from the interview:

**LC: When artists started working online, the internet wasn't nearly as assimilated into everyday life as it is now. Popular culture is clearly influenced by e-mail, blogs, ebay and social software like myspace. Do you use these platforms in your work?**

MO: In between my jobs, art and personal life, I'm online nearly 24/7. I think my recent work and that of many of my peers puts this consumption on display. I frequently work in blog format. In *American Idol Audition Training Blog*, I documented my attempt to become a contestant on the TV show. I was simultaneously indulging in and critiquing media culture.

**LC: Does internet art need to take place online?**

MO: No. What I make is less art “on” the Internet than it is art “after” the Internet. It's the yield of my compulsive surfing and downloading. I create performances, songs, photos, texts, or installations directly derived from materials on the Internet or my activity there.

\*\*\*\*\*

Olson delineates Internet art from Post Internet art. Internet art is *on* the Internet; post Internet art is *after* the Internet.

**Tuesday, December 29th, 2009**

Here is one more excerpt from a Marisa Olson interview. This is one from July, 2008 with a Philadelphia blogger named Annette Monnier.

Olson is an interesting thinker as she brings acute knowledge from many fields including the cultural history of technology and art history, in order to show that, as fields, their boundaries are growing blurrier and blurrier everyday.

My favorite passage is when she brings in Thomas Kuhn's concept of paradigm in relation to technological paradigm shifts:

Marisa: Speaking of degrees, I don't really have a degree in computer science but in the course of working on my PHD one of my official field titles was "The Cultural History of Technology" so I have spent a lot of time studying the history of batteries, televisions, telephones, and video games...

**Annette: Is that like studying "the history and philosophy of science" or something?**

Marisa: Yeah. Exactly, it's very closely related.

**Annette: I always liked those kind of courses. That sounds pretty cool.**

Marisa: Yeah, me too. Thomas Kuhn is one of my favorite writers, "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions".

**Annette: Oh, yeah. I remember reading that in a class called something like "history and science of philosophy 101" or something.**

Marisa: I re-read it every single year. Twenty-four is my favorite page.

**Annette: I have no idea what that refers to but i'll look it up.**

Marisa: It's just this line about how science is trying to force nature into a conformed thought. It's all about how science as a field is trying to confirm existing ways of thinking, existing paradigms, and you have to wait until enough things don't fit into the box until you change the box. I dunno. I like stuff like that.

**Tuesday, December 29th, 2009**

Here is a passage from a March, 2006 interview between the artist Cory Arcangel and the Brussels-based curator Karen Verschooren:

Cory: [...] you can't just put a computer with a browser that's pointing to a website. You have to somehow acknowledge that it is in a gallery, for better or worse. Video, I think, started to do that [...] Paper Rad for example presented a huge sculpture, based on animated gifs. It wasn't necessarily Internet art anymore, but it was art that could only exist because the Internet exists. That is definitely some kind of solution [...] That is what is going to happen I think. It is not going to be pure strict Internet art, it's going to be art that exists because of the Internet or is influenced by the Internet or there was research on the Internet.

**Karen: That's almost everything in art. Almost all contemporary art is influenced by the fact that we live in a networked society.**

Cory: That's fine you know. It is going to be seamlessly integrated into everything else. Which is what it should be. But pure Internet art, I think, should stay on the Internet.

\*\*\*\*\*

Also:

**Karen: So, if i understand you correctly, you are saying that it is the responsibility of the artist to transform his internet art piece in that way that it fits into the gallery space. It is not the gallery that has to change its economic model of exhibiting because of their mission statement or whatever.**

Cory: Yes.

\*\*\*\*\*

Verschooren sums up this strategy as roughly “the art needs to change to fit the gallery, instead of the gallery needs to change to fit the art.” Arcangel answers affirmatively, but I wonder if it is this simple. One thing I think is that Post Internet art does not just bend itself to work as “art,” it also

changes one's conception of "art." Working in the confines of the white cube are not necessarily always limiting to artists. By playing with that history of what has been marked as "art" and successfully entering into that dialogue, these artists are changing what one thinks of as "art" in the same way that Daniel Buren, Michael Asher or earlier artists like Jasper Johns or (of course) Duchamp worked within the gallery to change what could be shown in the gallery and thus be reflected upon as "art".

**Tuesday, December 29th, 2009**

Dissolve the category of “new media” into art in general by creating work that has one foot in the history of art and the other foot in the experience of network culture.

Post Internet art is not about the Internet. It is not about art.

It is about both.

The Internet changed everything – that includes art.

Post Internet artists are, like Johns and Rauschenberg, ontological questioners.

They are philosophical.

## Wednesday, December 30th, 2009

Five ways that one can talk about “Post Internet”:

1. New Media art made after the launch of the World Wide Web and, thus, the introduction of mainstream culture to the Internet.
2. Marisa Olson’s definition: Art made *after* one’s use of the Internet. “The yield” of her surfing and computer use, as she describes it.
3. Art responding to a general cultural condition that may also be described as “Post Internet” – when the Internet is less a novelty and more a banality.
4. What Guthrie Lonergan described as “Internet Aware” – or when the photo of the art object is more widely dispersed than the object itself.
5. Art from the Internet world that mutates to the conventions of the art world. As the work mutates itself to become more like art world art, the work mutates art world art to become more like the Internet.

## **Wednesday, December 30th, 2009**

Behind technological change, there is anxiety.

When one thing doesn't work, the system is designed to come up with a new one that is supposed to work, but inevitably won't work. We don't typically mind if the technology doesn't work because it is all done in the name of Progress.

We are going somewhere.

The whole time, though, we think we're heading towards utopia and, in fact, we're headed towards The End. The addiction to technology and change blinds us to the effects of these changes on the Earth. Pollution derived from technological progress is gradually turning the planet into a trash dump. What our blind faith in these cycles of change and forced obsolescence may mean is an avoidance of the anxiety that there is no answer or that if there is, it's really, really difficult and requires a sacrifice. Every step of the way there are deeper anxieties about, say, death or dealing with other human beings in a serious way that are avoided.

**Thursday, December 31st, 2009**

David Horvitz interviews Marisa Olson for a show I curated at CCS Bard.

This is just one piece...

**DH: [...] Do you believe it is possible to be responsible while still invested in upgrade culture?**

MO: I think that's the question I'm trying to answer for myself. I don't know. My thought right now is that the upgrade cycle is one we all get locked into. No one's making me buy a new ipod, but then again, the US government's legally forcing producers and consumers of TV to upgrade, and they are competing with other countries to do so in a way that I think very interestingly mirrors the space race. I mean, the even bigger question is why we always feel so compelled to invent, buy, reinvent, and toss old models out. Why are so many of our fantasies and fears about the future invested in technology? If I can't save the world from ewaste and solve the problem of upgrade garbage, I at least hope to initiate these conversations in my work.



**Thursday, December 31st, 2009**

*Space Junk* by Marisa Olson is a black, monochrome square painting like Malevich or Ad Reinhardt or Wade Guyton, but when you look closer, you can see that it's not black – but a pattern of flickering stars whose aesthetic is appropriated from a web-native starfield wallpaper .gif (a now defunct trope of Web 1.0). The surface itself is wallpaper that Olson wallpapered onto a stretcher to make the monochrome painting.

So, there is a reference to an obsolete avant-garde painting style, as well as a reference to an obsolete Internet aesthetic.

When they combine, they each highlight each other's obsolescence. Or, perhaps they highlight the fact of obsolescence.

Part of what Post Internet art had to do was *get into* contemporary art, which – on paper – seems do-able, but in practice is incredibly difficult. Contemporary art people look at contemporary art. They have a sense for work that is adding something they appreciate to their world and they have an even stronger sense for work that is not doing anything but wasting their time.

This painting is “art” because it tells me something about art, about obsolescence in art. It is art (without quotes) because it tells me something deeper, too. Memento Mori.

## Thursday, December 31st, 2009

In the essay “Other Criteria,” the art critic and historian Leo Steinberg talks about the way that Rauschenberg “let the world in again.” He continues, “Not the world of the Renaissance man who looked for his weather clues out of the window; but the world of men who turn knobs to hear a taped message, ‘precipitation probability ten percent tonight,’ electronically transmitted from some windowless booth. Rauschenberg’s picture plane is for the consciousness immersed in the brain of the city.”

According to Steinberg, the “profoundest symbolic gesture” of letting “the world in again,” occurred when Rauschenberg took his bed (a surface for laying things upon) – and turned it vertical, thus, bringing his flatbed “picture plane” into what he describes as “the vertical posture of ‘art.’”

Post Internet art brings the network into the vertical posture of art.

» **January 2010**

## Friday, January 1, 2010

The main idea of “Lost Not Found: The Circulation of Images in Digital Visual Culture,” an essay written by Marisa Olson for LACMA’s *Words Without Pictures* essay series, is this:

### 1

After Web 2.0, the materials that form the foundation of the Internet – what Olson calls the “vertebrae” of the Internet – are all of the circulating found photographs and amateur videos contained in searchable databases and meme blogs. These vertebrae tend to be overlooked, though.

She writes:

Those split-second bloopers, acts of conspicuous consumption, and diaristic elevations of otherwise banal moments found on sites with names like FAIL (<http://failblog.org/>) and Ffffound (<http://ffffound.com>) comprise the backbone of contemporary digital visual culture. They are the vertebrae of a body that we otherwise seek to theorize as amorphous. We tend to overlook this proliferation of images, considering it as somehow anomalous and not yet part of the master narrative of network conditions.

\*\*\*\*\*

### 2

Because these anonymous images and video clips are not visible as the vertebra of the network, certain artists – she calls them “Pro Surfers” – working on Internet Surfing Clubs such as [nastynets.com](http://nastynets.com) are taking these materials “out of circulation,” and re-contextualizing them so that might be seen as more than disposable net ephemera. By doing so, they create “portraits of the Web.”

She writes:

(Pro Surfers) are engaged in an enterprise distinct from the mere appropriation of found photography. They present us with constellations of uncannily decisive moments, images made perfect by their imperfections, images that add up to portraits of the Web, diaristic photo essays on the part of the surfer, and images that certainly add up to something greater than the sum of their parts. Taken out of circulation and repurposed, they are ascribed with new value, like the shiny bars locked up in Fort Knox.

\*\*\*\*\*

These artists, then, are not merely playing art world games, but helping people *see* what the Internet looks like right now.

## Saturday, January 2nd, 2010

The critic Holland Cotter, in a *New York Times* review of Ryan Trecartin's first solo show at Elizabeth Dee Gallery, said:

[...] he definitely owes a debt to the Internet, where everything is allowed because you allow it, and where many people, including several of those in "I-Be Area," live full time these days. Mr. Trecartin takes something from all of this and adds something to it, something yet to be described or defined, but newish, and this is great.

\*\*\*\*\*

Not bad.

Trecartin brought the experience of the Internet world into the world of contemporary art. This is very difficult to do and he did it with fearlessness and a deep insight into what this technology and its associated gadgetry can do to the human mind. The depiction of subjectivity in his videos gets at the experience of being conscious in a totally synthetic, brand-driven hyperreality: manic and overwhelmed by experiential stimulus.

Furthermore, by exaggerating the sense of time in contemporary experience as drastically as he does, Trecartin allows the viewer to see (as if for the first time) what "normal" time looks like right now. The extremity of his vision nudges the viewer's mind to project their own image of how time functions in order to make a comparison.

## Saturday, January 2nd, 2010

I am sitting in my apartment and I am trying to watch Ryan Trecartin videos on my computer and I'm having a lot of difficulty doing it. They are simply too nutso. At first, I thought, "he's got to do something about that... I honestly can't even watch this for more than a couple of minutes," but, then, I realized that, in fact, Trecartin had latched onto something really smart about the way he makes his videos. They are not meant to work cinematically, where one starts from the beginning and watches the whole way through (well, perhaps, one could do it, but to my mind, the point lies elsewhere). His videos, rather, work much better in the world and language of contemporary art where the audience is going to come in at any time and watch for a minute or two, until they get the aesthetic or the point and, then, maybe stay and watch for longer (maybe stay for the whole thing), but, most likely, move on to the next work of art or the next gallery or the next whatever. The art occurs in the conception of the aesthetic, in reflecting upon the fact that this artist made something that works like this and the fact that he did it really convincingly, than it is in the pleasures of the narrative, *per se*. The fact that there *is* a narrative is simply part of the art (it's something you like), but the actual experience of the video as art lies in considering the fact that this thing exists in the world and you're actually watching it right now and "isn't that really weird/amazing/whatever?" In an interview with Karen Verschooren, Cory Arcangel talks about this in relation to video art's emergence into contemporary art:

You have a lot of gallery video artists now and things became less paced in cinema-time. A gallery will change the concept of cinema-time or narrative time. It doesn't completely erase it, but people can walk in at any point and people can leave at any point. So you're dealing with a different concept of time than with single-channel video art for instance.

So, one thing that those gallery video artists started to do was to take this into account. They also started to deal with questions like how does a video look, how is it installed, how is it projected, and so on. These are all things that brought video out of the single channel distribution model and into the gallery. We will also have to deal with this.

\*\*\*\*\*

However, after that consideration of the video within the art gallery context, what is there? What does the work tell you about itself now that you're acquainted? How does it reflect upon itself, how does it reflect upon its world (the world of contemporary art)?

In some ways, Ryan Trecartin's videos work better at a party, some sort of social situation where someone is playing a strange or unique video that is not meant to be watched beginning to end (it's too noisy, you're talking to people, etc.), than it is, instead, to be reflected upon as part of a social situation, as something that someone *would* play at their party, like as a lens through which to consider the party.



**Thursday, January 7th, 2010**

I feel like I have Seth Price's practice as an artist on the tip of my tongue and it gives me that feeling – sort of like trying to get a shit out – where I alternate between receding (letting it come out itself) and *pushing* it out.

But, it will never come out.

Did you ever receive a pleasure from simply experiencing the feeling of having a word on the tip of your tongue? Like the catharsis of getting it out would have been a disappointment?

That's maybe the first feeling to refer to when trying to come to terms with Price's practice. Perhaps one could say that Price's practice is *about* that line between memory and articulation. Perhaps.

But it would feel like a lie – like there would be so much else in the work that's being neglected.

Alternatively, saying that might feel like a lie because the work actually falls far short of such an ideal. It's "*just* an object, *just* a gesture," as Price puts it.

And perhaps *that* is what the work is about in the end. Perhaps.

Perhaps one should stop trying to over-think these things!!

But, then, that *pleasure* – that perverted love of the delay – is lost. Is that what I want?

Honestly, no.

Here's a confession:

Ever since I've become at all interested in the work of Seth Price, it's been one of the few things that "keeps me going."

## Monday, January 11th, 2010

The artist Cory Arcangel arrived at a strategy for inserting a conversation regarding virtuality/computers into contemporary art without making work about personal computing or contemporary art per se.

Rather, it is an investigation into the force that bridges those worlds.

Here is a passage from an interview Arcangel conducted with Petra Heck, a curator at the Netherlands Media Art Institute, where Arcangel explains the title of a show he did there called “Depreciated”:

[...] in software “depreciated” means something should be avoided and is no longer being updated or supported. In short, something depreciated has been replaced by something newer, but still continues to exist in a sort of state of suspense. This very much comes into play in my work. A lot of these ideas we’re talking about – structuralism, phasing, atonality – were once the vanguard of creative practice, but are no longer being ‘supported’, so to speak.

\*\*\*\*\*

He does a nice job here of connecting the term “depreciation” from the world of technology to the world of contemporary art, suggesting how the bridge between both of them is their objects’ inability to persist and stay relevant as time has its way with them.

**Tuesday, January 12th, 2010**

Distributed media has brought the world to me and brought me into a world.

On the one hand, the world is at hand: I am able to view the films of Abbas Kiarostami, the artwork of Cyprien Gaillard, the writing of Walter Benjamin; the world and its history are present to me in a way that is unprecedented in the history of human culture.

On the other hand, I have never been more deeply sequestered in the confines of one particular worldview and so utterly unable to empathize – to really *know* – another person's pain. I am in la la land.

But was I ever out of it?

Everything is always already filtered through endless degrees of interpretation and simulation.

Indeed, the only truly essential thing is that there is no other truly essential thing.

This is what the Internet tells me.

Google search rankings, for example, are *obviously* not the truly essential meaning of a term; rather what Google shows me is that there never was a truly essential meaning of a term – through its endless lists, it illustrates that that's always the case.

But is it the case?

## Wednesday, January 13th, 2010

If you were not acquainted with Cory Arcangel as an artist and you came across his YouTube video of U2's "Without or Without You" mashed-up with footage of the Berlin Wall coming down, it would read as a "normal" YouTube video. It seems like something that is native to YouTube and not to art.

We could say that it is a work, but not a work "of art."

Furthermore, it is a really good example of a YouTube video. There is something stirring about it – emotional even. And it seems as though Arcangel went to a lot of work to make it as good as it is.

However, Arcangel is an artist and anything creative he does will inevitably function as an artwork in an art context.

So, what happens when this video is thought of as a work "of art"?

It works as a readymade, illuminating the genre of YouTube video that it mimics – the mash-up.

In the end, though, the beauty of it is not that it works as a YouTube video or as a work of art. Rather, by doing nothing other than shifting context, it illuminates the bridge between the two.

## **Wednesday, January 13th, 2010**

This blog is dedicated to artists who use new media technologies but are not new media artists.

They are contemporary artists accounting for the effects of the Internet on the human brain and culture at large.

They are addicted to the same thing that brought Albrecht Dürer, Pablo Picasso, Eva Hesse, Hélio Oiticica, and Ai Weiwei inside.

## Monday, January 18th, 2010

In the introduction to his 2008 performance and lecture *Continuous Partial Awareness*, the artist Cory Arcangel claims that he lost his memory.

Well – actually, it wasn't that he "lost" his memory – the memories, he explains, were still there in his mind – somewhere.

Rather, he lost the ability to *retrieve* these memories. The best approximation for this was, according to Arcangel, "like being really lazy" – one knows that the memories are there somewhere, but the effort to search them down becomes such an incredibly laborious task, that one might as well have actually lost them.

Now, memory loss such as Arcangel experienced comes with consequences.

One's reliance on technology to manage one's everyday experience increases.

Arcangel's case was no exception. The creative process, for instance, undergoes a mutation: if one is struck by an idea for a project, one must record the idea through the use of some form of technology or risk losing it altogether.

Now, this technology could be anything – from pen and paper to an e-mail composed to one's self – it doesn't matter; just so long as the ideas are recorded somehow and slipped into a database.

What Arcangel realized, though, was that this externalization went beyond mere utility – it took on a life of its own. The juxtapositions of the ideas in his database created a sort of *surrealism* that became at least as intriguing as the individual ideas, themselves.

The more he fed the database in the hopes of remembering something, the more the database developed its own unique hunger – an evolving aesthetic form demanding a certain amount of tender loving care which would, in turn, dictate the type of ideas that Arcangel was compelled to remember in the first place.

After a while it becomes unclear whether or not he is recording his memories or creating a world.

Perhaps it's both.

**Tuesday, January 19th, 2010**

*Zodiac* was one of the best early 21<sup>st</sup> century art films. Obsessively appropriating the genre and stylistic tropes of the police procedural, *Zodiac* feels like it will come to a conclusion – the killer gets caught or we come away with a statement about San Francisco in the late 60s, or... something – something to hold onto... to take away with us as a reminder that things *do* come together. But *Zodiac* is perverse. It refuses. The plot gets overwhelmed with all of the data. Plot lines are lost. Things routinely hit dead ends. Information begins to refer to other pieces of information. Endless layers of memories of other memories of half-remembered bits of memory going nowhere forever.

Eventually the sense that a knife went through flesh is rendered obsolete because we're all too busy keeping up with the most recent information.

## Wednesday, January 20th, 2010

On the one hand, the artist Josh Smith makes one-liners – ironic conceptual art regarding the pretensions of *artistes* to express themselves. He does so by making his signature and the banality of his own name into the graphic focus of paintings that otherwise read as AbEx style abstractions.

On top of this, irony is generated by his massive output. Smith paints dozens of these abstractions at a time and one can read this, too, as a joke on the *naiveté* of expressing oneself after postmodernism.

On the other hand, though, it is through Smith's decidedly *unironic* dedication to his practice that he is able to introduce an element of sincerity and perhaps the sublime into his work.

Smith has figured out a way to continue the tradition of painting by activating not so much the canvas – which, it should be said, he does admirably – but rather, by activating *time*.

He knows that there is an *impossibility* to saying something in one painting. This is not to say that the paintings are not good – they are; amazingly so considering the level of output.

However, the art here is that he keeps making these paintings again-and-again-and-again-and-again so that a whole different type of thing begins to emerge – what Stanley Cavell might call festivity rather than festival, or religion rather than revelation.

The art here is in the process, in the dedication to daily practice and evolution.



## Friday, January 22nd, 2010

In 2009, Seth Price showed previously unaccounted for work that he originally produced in 2004.

He says: “Sometimes it’s good to go forward and then double back, and circle around again. To those who turned their feet around so that their tracks would confuse their pursuers: why not walk backward?”

This particular slip into Price’s personal history, though, is not totally arbitrary as the work, itself, is a set of 2004 calendars.

There are few things as worthless as an out of date calendar.

This irony is amplified as the calendar’s content is composed of pre-AbEx American painting and graphic design tropes dating from the early 1990s that read as “futuristic.”

Painters like Thomas Hart Benton, who was one of the most famous painters of his own time, are now only modestly well known.

The “hot” cursive fonts and gradiated neon backdrops read the same way: they are – for better or for worse – part of the dustbin of history, not unlike an out-of-date wall calendar.

By combining all of these obsolete elements, Price creates a portrait of obsolescence itself. The fact of obsolescence.

Memento Mori.

**Tuesday, January 26th, 2010**

In his statement for “Die Nuller Jahre” (which translates from German as “the zero years” aka 2000-2009 aka “the noughties”), a show of new works at Capitain Petzel in Berlin, the artist Seth Price says that he is attempting to “name” something.

He opens the statement writing:

Recently I’ve been reflecting on the last ten years. It’s arbitrary, and a little absurd, like a drunk noticing the time and abruptly sobering up for an appointment: time to figure out what happened. With the turning of the decade it’s hard to avoid: these disparate years swim together, waiting to be addressed as one, whatever we end up calling it. In any case, we want to generate a series of images to replace vague and unsettled feelings, and to arrive at names. Sometimes the process of understanding artworks feels the same way.

And he concludes with an intriguingly clear statement:

I wanted to yield to that impulse to be read, to generate a series of images that might replace vague and unsettled feelings, to arrive at names.

What he arrives at, though, is a series of vacuum-formed lengths of knotted rope, an image that destabilizes the meaning of any name.

The use of the knot, which both ties things together and tangles them up, is perhaps indebted to Eva Hesse’s hanging, knotted ropes dipped in latex.

However, whereas part of the art of Hesse’s knotted ropes is their *material-ness* and the fact that they will disintegrate and collapse due to gravity, Price’s knots are hollow, empty – shells of real material.

This seems to capture the zeitgeist of the decade.

Hollow knots.

The simulation of tying something together. Creating more knots.

## Wednesday, January 27th, 2010

Kevin Bewersdorf has said that art now is based, not on art objects or individual projects, but rather on “persona empires,” which are the brands that artists develop over time.

He writes:

Whether a net artist brands themselves with a sparse list of links on a humble white field or with loud layers of noise and color or with contrived logos in a bland grid, they are constructing their own web persona for all to see. They are branding their self corporation. I think this self branding can be done with functionless art intentions rather than functioning business intentions. All the marketing materials are just shouted into the roaring whirlpool of the web where they swirl around in the great database with everyone else’s personal information empires. I think these persona empires are the great artworks of our time, and they inspire me to keep building my own brand.

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Bewersdorf is an important post Internet artist because he realized very clearly that the quality of art on the Internet is not measured in individual posts but in the artist’s performance through time, through their brand management. On Facebook, a user is judged, not by one status update, but rather by their style and pace of updating. The same is true for post Internet artists.

## Thursday, January 28th, 2010

Writing about Kevin Bewersdorf's work prior to 2009 is difficult.

Bewersdorf erased his website, maximumsorrow.com, as well as all of the texts, photos, songs and documentation of sculptures that were housed on the site.

While there are scattered traces of his thought floating in various blogs, the ability to view the scope and meaning of it is greatly diminished.

If this work is to survive, then, one must attempt to translate it – piece together his project in one's own words, from one's own memories of it.

It's a difficult thing and it forces one to consider work in more depth than one typically would.

When art is on the Internet, there is a tendency to always put off viewing it or understanding it in-depth because it is always at-hand. The viewer knows that, without any real effort, she can view it tomorrow when there is more time.

If the work is taken off of the Internet, though, then the viewer must really consider it and try to understand it in a more serious way. It creates an urgency.

However, one question is: Why go to all this trouble? What would be worth this effort?

One answer is: Go to all the trouble when the work is, like a ghost in an attic, haunting.

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## Wednesday, February 3rd, 2010

Kevin Bewersdorf intentionally reduced his presence on the Web to a single image – a flickering flame sourced from a .gif of fireworks set off in front of a suburban garage. Over the course of three years, this flickering flame will grow smaller and smaller into a field of Yves Klein Blue.

It's called PUREKev.

As one returns to the work again and again and again – not daily (although, perhaps daily) – one views a mutation *in time* as the flicker goes deeper and deeper and deeper into the void.

The website goes in the exact opposite direction of most Internet production, focusing on slow, imperceptible change over the course of years. By doing so, it allows one to see (as if for the first time) what it opposes. The extremity of Bewersdorf's slowing-down nudges the viewer to project their own image of what "normal" time on the Internet feels like. It's the creation of the image in the viewer's mind that allows her to *see* what this time looks like.

There's something unsettling about viewing PUREKev and returning to it every now and again. It's always there – always going a little bit deeper, but never quite finishing. As the rest of the Internet is in a race to produce more and more, Bewersdorf's resolute focus on one thing – watching a flame die out in a blue void over several years – is sublime.

**Thursday, February 4th, 2010**

For Kevin Bewersdorf, what is of consequence in the sculptures he showed at the V&A gallery in New York is less the object and more the surf through data that led to the object.

He writes:

[...] most art consumers are very wrapped up in the material world of restaurants and nice coats and taxis waiting outside the gallery. I care very little about the material world, and I'm completely certain that the most profound experiences in life can't be contained by gallery walls, so the art object in "gallery space" for me can only represent a limitation, a disappointment. I try to deal with this by presenting the object itself as pathetic and mediocre, but the information it conducts as sacred.

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By reducing the sculpture's physical appearance to kitsch, but contextualizing it as the product of a "sacred" Internet surf, Bewersdorf is able to say something about art that goes beyond technology: the aura of an art object is often not its phenomenological properties, but rather its testimony to a creative process.

## Friday, February 5th, 2010

Cory Arcangel made several paintings employing simple actions on the Photoshop imaging software.

One of these is called *Photoshop CS: 72 by 110 inches, 300 DPI, RGB, square pixels, default gradient "Spectrum", mousedown y=1416 x=1000, mouseup y=208 x=4.*

From one point of view, the work is about obsolescence.

Arcangel maxed out the printing technology of 2009/2010 and is interested to see how this maximum level becomes obsolete in time. Also, in several pieces, he stamps a date onto the image as a way to mark it as indelibly tied-up with its own moment in time.

From another point of view, though, the work is about deskilling and automatization.

The object is beautiful due to his use of the cutting-edge c-print technology and the blurring of colors in the gradient, but it is depressing because the gesture is automatic.

Finally, from a third point of view, the title is to be read word-for-word as much as *Fountain* is to be read word-for-word.

It's not *Photoshop blah, blah, blah... a bunch of funny technical language.*

It's:

Photoshop CS:  
72 by 110 inches,  
300 DPI,  
RGB,  
square pixels,  
default gradient "Spectrum",  
mousedown y=1416 x=1000,  
mouseup y=208 x=4.

\*\*\*\*\*

Computation as readymade.



## Friday, February 5th, 2010

In the film *Camera Buff*, the eponymous protagonist begins to film reality.

The more he films reality, though, the stricter his criteria for “reality” becomes.

It is not enough for him to film events that are meant to be filmed.

He has to film the events that are not meant to be filmed, as well.

The catch is that as the camera buff comes closer to capturing something “real,” the farther away from his wife and child he grows until they are simply outside of his world.

Thus, his real life is destroyed and a new real is born.

What happened here?

The film’s answer is that in filming reality, the filming of reality *changed that reality*.

A world is gained.

A world is lost.

*Camera Buff*’s claim is that one cannot know if this gaining and losing is for the better or for the worse – all one can do is acknowledge it as change and give it significance.

**Saturday, February 6th, 2010**

From *Synners* (1991) by Pat Cadigan:

Rosa laughed a little. ‘You’re approaching my threshold for that kinda talk. I’m a hacker, not a philosopher.’

Fez turned to look at her. ‘Good choice of word, threshold. The way we all kept adding to the nets did exactly that, passed a threshold. It got to the point where the net should have collapsed in chaos, but it didn’t. Or rather, it did, but the collapse was not a collapse in the conventional sense. Because the net kept *accommodating* the demands we put on it – that was its purpose, after all, to accommodate data. When it reached the point where it was burdened to the limit, it had two choices – crash, or accommodate. It did both.

‘Going over the brink of catastrophe was the first stage. The second was recovery – since it was programmed to accommodate, it did. But the only way it could accommodate was to exceed the limit. Institute a new limit, and when that was reached, go over the brink of catastrophe again, recover and institute a new limit beyond that. And so forth.’

‘Ad infinitum,’ Sam said, expressionlessly. ‘Like a fractal growing from the bottom up instead of the top down. Triggered by catastrophe.’

‘It didn’t get a break while all this was going on, of course,’ Fez continued. ‘The information never stopped coming in, which made for quite a lot of turbulence. But chaos is just another kind of order, and so we have another kind of net now than the one we started out with. We woke it up.’

## Saturday, February 6th, 2010

In September 2009, as part of the AND Festival in Liverpool, Guthrie Lonergan presented an alternative version of the film *Groundhog Day* (1993).

*Groundhog Day* is a film about a man who re-lives the same day over and over and over again. Lonergan's version is a series of eighteen short videos, each composed of still-frame slideshows that represent scenes from the film's narrative.

These still frames are underscored by Lonergan's own first-person summarization of the narrative from the point of view of the protagonist, played by Bill Murray.

The number of videos corresponds (approximately – it's difficult to judge) to the number of days that Bill Murray re-lived the same day over and over and over again.

Lonergan also released these videos not all at once, but one by one, so that it became performative. By breaking the story up into the number of days that Murray re-lived the day and presenting the videos over the course of a couple of days, the viewer gets more of a sense of this endless repetition.

The story's eternal return theme, then, takes on a new air of uncanniness. The idea of endlessly cycling through the same day shocks you a bit more and allows you to see what this time would mean in a deeper way.

In one of Lonergan's poetic/philosophical asides, he captures this.

We view a still image of Bill Murray in bed at the end of his first full day of return.

As the image very slowly fades to black, Lonergan (as the protagonist) muses:

I'm pretty lost at this point.  
And I'm thinking about why this, why this is happening.  
And... about how I'm a, a *weatherman*.  
And this connection between you know weather and time and  
predicting things using patterns.  
And can weather have patterns... and maybe time, as well.

## Sunday, February 7th, 2010

Kevin Bewersdorf wrote a series of texts such as “The Four Sacred Logos” and “Spirit Surfing” which merged corporate motivational speaking tropes with a vision of the Internet as a spiritual space.

These texts are now lost – erased from the Web by Bewersdorf himself.

If one is to speak about them, then one must remember them.

The way I remember them is that they made a claim – the Internet is a space of spiritual movement – and then they cross that claim out by wrapping it up in a shtick which points to *loss* – loss of any hope one may have had for the Internet as corporations changed the Internet into a giant Wall Mart.

Bewersdorf’s use of the word “logos” in the “Four Sacred Logos” texts is an example of how this works.

It’s a pun.

On the one hand, there are “logos” (plural) as in branding devices such as the Nike “swoosh.”

Bewersdorf designed “sacred” corporate logos for each of his texts which are not unlike the corporate logos found in erectile dysfunction medication pamphlets at the doctor’s office.

On the other hand, there is also “logos” (singular) which is something like the primordial divine truth through which all creation emerges as described in ancient philosophy and theology.

Bewersdorf’s logos of the logos cancel each sense of “logos” out in endless loops of belief and skepticism.

## Monday, February 8th, 2010

Digital imaging software converges as much previous visual media as it can handle – painting, photo, film, video, animation, printmaking, newspaper, etc. – and creates automatic simulations of gestures that read as these media.

For instance, the “film grain” look or “sun flare” effect or the “spray paint” tool.

These digital effects, though, take on their own visual look that is distinct from what they imitate.

Similarly, digital imaging software has created to a suite of effects that are derived from analogical functions, but have gained their own uniquely digital feeling, such as the ubiquity of the “rounded corners” look familiar to users of Macs or Web 2.0 applications, or the jagged, hard-edged look that comes from a rough usage of the “lasso” tool in Photoshop, or the uncannily smooth, but hollow lines created in the Maya 3D imaging software.

With this in mind, Poster Company (the duo of Travess Smalley and Max Pitegoff) have created a series of digital paintings that throw all of these digital affects and effects – both in reference to functions analogical and digital – into a stew of action painting, untutored Photoshop fiddling, glitchy Quicktime files, 8-bit vampire castles, Matisse, Leger, Lichtenstein, soft film footage of lunar landings, *Terminator* 2-esque liquid-metal, Kandinsky, late 60’s psychedelia, “cheesy” public-access video effects, etc.

Each of these “posters” contrasts effects with each other, which allows the viewer of the work to see each of the effects as an effect. Typically, an effect or a digital aesthetic is viewed in the context of giving some other message. It is meant to disappear. Here, though, the effects are divorced from any context and allowed to be viewed as chunks of visual language bouncing off of other chunks of visual language. This is not to say that the posters are a mess. On the contrary, the artists are able to create powerful, often eye-popping compositions from these materials in the same way that an artist like Rauschenberg used the trash on the street near his studio to create his combines of the 1950s.

When they showed this work at Foxy Productions, the artists focused on quantity as much as quality.

The first thing one notices upon walking into the room in which their work was exhibited is that there are a lot of posters – too many, a surfeit.

However, it comes very close to working because they play this overwhelming output against the formal skill and care going into each individual image and the whole thing holds together.

One oscillates between the feeling of being overwhelmed – both inside and outside of the posters – and the focus on a particular image or gesture, which resonates and harmonizes the work.

I say “comes very close to working,” though, because there is something going on in their process which does not come across in the gallery show:

Performance.

If there is, in the end, a power to what Poster Company is doing, it resides in the project’s continuous devotion to daily production.

The question “what is a digital painting?” is here better phrased as “what is digital painting?”

The significance of their work lies not in the individual compositions, nor in the volume of output (although these elements are undeniably crucial for the full execution of the work to occur), but rather in the performance of the work.

I’m not sure how one would convey this in the gallery without being gimmicky, but it, nonetheless, seems to be a dimension of this work (and work like it by artists such as Harm van den Dorpel and Charles Broskoski) that needs to be explored.

## Monday, February 8th, 2010

Can one be bad at the Internet?

Can one use the Internet in such a way that it is objectively-speaking bad?

Well, yes, and no.

On the one hand, yes, I'm personally bad at the Internet because I don't know every trick to get free music.

I'm also bad at the Internet because I don't know \*that much\* about how the Internet works or its history or coding languages.

In a very real way, I'm bad at that stuff.

So, yes, one can be bad at the Internet.

I'm certainly bad at the Internet.

But, on the other hand, so is everyone else.

If you're good at understanding the legal frame of the Internet, you may not be good at understanding the cultural memes of the Internet – you may be bad at it.

If you've developed an elegant mathematical model of the Internet which accounts for every node, you may not understand the current security threats posed by hackers.

And so on.

In fact, we're all pretty wildly bad at using the Internet.

Perhaps that's why we cluster in circles, spinning our wheels amongst the same voices in a fit of future shock – it's a way to deal with the troubling fact of the human brain's limitations that the Internet makes obvious.

So, the problem is not whether one can be good or bad at using the Internet.

The question is badly stated.

Perhaps we can say “does one use the Internet with intention?”

## Tuesday, February 9th, 2010

Blackmoth.org is a website by Kari Altmann.

The content of the site is a relatively lengthy, vertically-scrolling display of approximately seventy still images and YouTube video players set off against a white background – no text.

That in itself is nothing new – artists have been making these types of heterogeneous found image displays for some time now and, as Seth Price points out in his *Teen Image* essay, the style is itself lifted from something print magazines have been exploring for at least fifteen years.

But what distinguishes Altmann’s project from what Price terms “hoardings” is the self-reflexive intentionality of her particular images.

She wants to show you something in particular: time, decay, built-in obsolescence. We see collisions of two themes: obsolete technologies of the “just past” such as compact discs or previous generations of flat-screen televisions as well as crumbling architectural details and rock formations of the ancient past.

In the most potent images, we see both at once – dialectically. The first diptych of images at the top of the page gets at this. In the image to the left of the diptych, one views what appears to be two fangs – the sort of relic one might see in a display of fossils and bones of pre-historic animals at a natural history museum.

However, there is a USB connection sticking out of the base of each of these fangs. Their power resides not in the prick of their tips, but in the information they store as little Flash Drives.

In the image to the right of the diptych, one views a broken slab of what, at first glance anyway, reads as an “ancient monument” – perhaps a temple – displayed behind a glass cube in a museum setting.

However, as much as one views the ancient slab, one views the rainbow colored reflection ring generated by the flash of a digital camera. The image is a collision between the ancient and technological.

As one scrolls-down through the rest of Altmann’s images, this tension is explored again and again and again. Through the repetition of the theme of technology and ancient ruins, Altmann creates a portrait of endless technological obsolescence.



## Wednesday, February 10th, 2010

*R-U-IN?S Catalogue #0001* is a zine and .pdf by Iain Ball, Sebastian Moyano, Matteo Giordano, and Kari Altmann, who initiated the project.

It consists of 95 pages of collaged photographic media depicting digital technophilia such as product shots of Sony flat screen televisions, computer-generated pornography, and portable memory storage devices, as well as crumbling geological formations in barren landscapes such as canyons, deserts, and beaches. In many of the images, these themes are combined as in, for instance, the product shot of a flat screen television displaying imagery of the Grand Canyon.

At first glance, this confrontation of the ancient and natural with the contemporary and electronic may seem arbitrary, but as one moves through the imagery, a provocative logic emerges.

The title of the piece gives one a clue as to where to go from here.

*R-U-IN?S*

It reads as both “Are you in(s)?” and “ruins.”

“Are you in?” mutated into the text message lingo of “R U IN?” brings to mind social status, cliques, peer pressure, coolness, fashions, and the latest technological gadgetry. R U in or R U out? It also reads as something aggressively temporary – something one knows will quickly lose its luster, but for the moment, is the only place to be.

“Ruins,” on the other hand, are the crumbled remains of what was once “in.”

Taken together, there is a fluid exchange between “R U In?” and “ruin.”

That is to say that the newest technologies are monuments to themselves before they are created. No one really believes that a piece of technology will last beyond a couple of years at most.

When one pages (or scrolls) through the *Catalogue*, one, then, sees less of a clear delineation between “new technology” and “old rocks” and more a continuous stream of dead surfaces: ruins.

In the text which appears on the final two pages of the *Catalogue*, the artists explain their intentions in similar terms.

They write:

*R-U-IN?S* is a project initiated by Kari Altmann using an archaeological approach (online and offline) to search the deteriorating surfaces, objects, and codes in the contemporary world. Topics of interest were addressed as ruined places and times in the database, from which artifacts and recordings were taken.

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Shortly later in the text, the artists make the point that because this “archaeological” investigation into the database is conducted in the very database it mines, “it became a study in and of itself.”

This suggests that, not only are all of the images and actions depicted in the pages ruins, but that the software and hardware one uses to view the images are always already ruins as well.

## Friday, February 12th, 2010

*Exotic-A* by Kari Altmann is a video of continuously fracturing digital imagery depicting a natural “exotica” of tropical flora and fauna.

Video documents move in, out, and through one another in a continuous flux. They are bound by both a static, “bedrock” background image, as well as a static, diaphanous foreground “gauze.”

The views shift in and out of focus and it all remains dreamy and illusionistic.

The work, thus, mirrors the indeterminacy of the natural world.

It is not a coherent form with an essential focal point; it is an ecology – in motion.

Altmann’s broader project works with these same ecological principals.

When one views Altmann’s website, most of her projects are listed, but not linked to as they are either works in progress, or research for future projects, or simply not available to be viewed.

But, go back to her site a month later and something’s changed.

Some of the work from the more distant historical past is made available, and some of the work from the more recent historical past is made unavailable.

Altmann understands her personal archive of work to be mutable, taking advantage of the instantaneousness and general ease of change in the digital, to place her own history in flux.

Projects are listed; projects are taken away.

All one can do is describe the view as it slips out of one’s grasp again and again.

## Saturday, February 13th, 2010

*Infinity Float* by Kari Altmann is a video animation depicting a missile.

Altmann's missile, though, never hits a target.

Rather, it draws infinity signs in the plume of its continuously billowing smoke again and again and again and again until one begins to watch the continuous delineation of infinity *as much as* the missile drawing this delineation.

What disturbs this pleasant vision of blissed-out endlessness, though, is the float of the infinity sign, itself.

Past.

As the sign rises slowly but continuously towards the top of the frame and finally *beyond* it, it ends up reading less as “up” and more as “out” – a memory.

And as one peers into the background upon which these memories were staged, one begins to delineate the background *as much as* the memories it provokes.

## Saturday, February 13th, 2010

Whereas once there were amateur photographers – hobbyists whose interest in the camera’s aesthetics led them to a love of privately displaying their pre-digital photographs – there are now what Ed Halter, in his essay “After the Amateur: Notes,” calls “sub-amateurs” – *users* whose interest in the camera’s functionality in communication led them to a need for publicly displaying their digital photographs.

Think: family album versus Facebook.

The same could be said for the world of amateur filmmaking (pre-camcorder) in relation to the world of YouTube.

The amateur filmmaker often embraced her 8mm or 16mm film camera out of a sincere interest in the technology; the sub-amateur YouTube user often embraces the functionality of the webcam out of a sincere interest in communication.

Halter writes:

The amateur enjoyed spending time with the camera, and thus could become caught up in its formal possibilities; the sub-amateur sees the camera in terms of pure and immediate functionality.

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A vein of contemporary Internet art has, according to Halter, emerged in accordance with the rise of sub-amateurism on the Internet.

He points to artists such as Guthrie Lonergan, Oliver Laric, Double Happiness, and Petra Cortright who conduct investigations into the functions of sub-amateur web usage in order to unveil these functions *as* functions rather than formal qualities.

They illuminate the function of the software default rather than a particular form so that we, the viewers of their artwork, may better see these default functions as conventions in the way we speak to one another in 2010.

## **Saturday, February 13th, 2010**

*Bootyclipse* (2007) is a YouTube channel by Dennis Knopf in which he freezes frames from “booty clips,” YouTube videos in which performers point their butts toward the camera and begin shaking them to the sound of dance music. However, the frames he chooses to freeze are all empty – only displaying the room in which the dancer will perform.

For Knopf, the moments before the performer enters the frame (after having turned the camera on?) are the secret key to these videos.

He holds on these empty moments in messy bedrooms and dimly-lit kitchens, looping them through the entire length of the original clip’s soundtrack, and, thus, providing the user with a peek into the world in which the performer lives.

They are a post Internet form of social realism.

## Monday, February 15th, 2010

*Whew! Age*, a performance by Marisa Olson at PS122 in New York, is about the twin concerns of chilling out and heating up and chilling out and heating up.

In a set composed of cardboard crystal shards outlined in dayglo duct tape and cheap-o Persian rugs sparkling with glitter and tinsel, Olson interacts with the video projection of a customer-service rep-slash-self-help guru (played by Olson, herself).

On the one hand, the guru character leads Olson inside herself on a mission to “chill out” and stop worrying about all the things she thinks she needs.

It’s a sort of pop-Zen-New Age stand-by: eliminate your desires to see yourself as a being blinded by desire.

To some extent, it works.

Olson comes to the stage in a translucent mask and the guru is able to get her to take the mask off (there’s a gag where after Olson takes the mask off, it reveals another mask, but the guru is sharp enough to have her remove *that* mask, too).

On the other hand, the guru is a sleazy con-man, convincing Olson to put on blinders – avoiding hope in more rigorously intellectual traditions such as empirical science, post-structuralism, and psychoanalysis.

And, in a musical montage in the middle of the show, the new age approach of the guru is marketed as a cheesy, 100% guaranteed enlightenment or your money back-style video series.

This tension between sleaze and truism is explored in a moment when the guru demands of Olson to put her finger in her mouth and imagine that her finger is a glacier.

Olson does so and the guru says to be as chilled as the glacier.

This starts to work, but then one remembers that the glaciers are *melting*.

And this melting – ostensibly due to climate change – is what created anxiety for Olson in the first place.

Between wisdom and bullshit, chilling and heating, going in to one’s self and back out to the world, is the space *Whew! Age* inhabits.

It is, the performance tells us, *after* the New Age of crystals and Enya.

The Whew Age doesn't profess to offer peace of mind through true enlightenment, but a piece of mind through its demonstrating the impossibility of true enlightenment.

In and back out, truth and illusion, in a pattern.

A spiral.



## Tuesday, February 16th, 2010

A functionality of YouTube is to automatically select as a given video's thumbnail the frame of the video in the exact middle of its temporal runtime – no matter what the frame's content or how much relevance it affords the theme of the video.

So there could be a video in which two old men are having a picnic in the park and the thumbnail could be some randomly blurred image of a bunch of grass which happened to be the exact middle of the video.

This convention's absurdity, which might be described as a Web 2.0 perversion of the movie poster, is regularly exploited by YouTube users who will insert a single frame of a girl in a bikini in the exact middle of a video in order to get more views.

At times, though, the default YouTube thumbnail has a certain unintended power in its own right.

When one uploads a webcam vlog to YouTube, for instance, the thumbnail is often an image of one's self which one would never think to choose as their personal online representation.

Perhaps one's eyes are closed or one is in the middle of an expression that distorts one's facial features in an un-becoming manner. This un-intended, un-becoming-ness might create an anxiety – it shows me what I look like – out of control; *not becoming*.

It is a portal to see how things look. A post Internet photography.

The light catches a bowl of rice in a living room filled with cigarette smoke; a family unloads a red bike from a station wagon as a blue bike whizzes by; a Scottish teenager's eyes catch the lens of the camera directly, allowing one to *see* her.

One of the unspoken dynamics of surfing through YouTube is that, by and large, most all interaction with video online is conducted through these secret messages, these unintended crystallizations, which afford one, not the theme of the video, but a random moment – a glimpse into a world which never agreed to be glimpsed in such a naked way.

## Wednesday, February 17th, 2010

*2001<<<>>>2006* by Guthrie Lonergan is, to begin with, composed of one smaller YouTube player embedded on top of – and, thus, foregrounding – the center of a second, larger YouTube player.

The smaller, foreground video is appropriated material.

It is composed of a rhythmic series of quick zooms into the center of still images – each of which depicts teenage boys mugging for the camera as they mess around with two default image effects.

These image effects are:

1. A “mirror” tool which vertically bisects the video, creating a series of distortions including an effect which allows the teenagers to resemble the doe-eyed, large-foreheaded cliché of the “space alien.”
2. A “swirl” tool which deforms the faces of the teenage boys into swirling spirals.

The soundtrack in this video consists of the Queen song “I Want to Break Free.”

The larger, background video is the scene in *2001: A Space Odyssey* in which Dr. David Bowman “breaks free” of the laws of Cartesian space-time as it is visualized in two motifs.

Those motifs are:

1. Traveling at high-speed in-between two vertically (and subsequently horizontally) bisected walls of colored light.
2. Slowly approaching evanescent cloud forms resembling high-powered telescopic imagery of distant galaxies and spiraling supernovas on his way to the dawning of a new evolutionary leap.

The soundtrack in this larger, background video is the film’s original musical score, which is dominated by the heavily atmospheric, collaged strings of *Requiem* by the composer György Ligeti.

When one plays both videos at once, the rhythmic zooms into the bisected center of the mirrored photos in the video of the teenage boys create a counter-point to the evenly-paced movement towards the horizon of the vertically-bisected walls of light in the larger, background YouTube player.

In addition, the pounding, danceable rhythm of the Queen song creates a counter-point to the experimental sound-scapes of *Requiem*, and, furthermore, as one continues to view the work, the rhythmic zooms into the swirled faces of the teenage boys counter-point the spiraling intergalactic imagery of *2001*.

These counter-points of imagery and soundtrack in *2001<<<>>>2006* are either a gimmick or a creative leap forward in the way appropriated content is re-contextualized on the Internet.

Perhaps it's both.

The disturbing thing about that baby at the end of the film is how simultaneously dumb and sublime she is.

**Friday, February 19th, 2010**

I use the Internet but hardly ever think about the fact that it is all code.

I know the code is there – if you ask me if it exists, I'll gladly tell you it does – but, it makes me anxious to see it there in front of me, despoiling my fun-land of uploaded pictures for family and friends.

The code is yucky and blunt.

Like a bloody finger, it reminds me of how *real* things can be.

So, I tolerate code.

I allow it to exist, but only if it stays in its own worlds – away from my freshdirect.com.

If I see it in my surf, we'll each acknowledge the other, but anxiously, tolerantly – unknown to the other – each assuming the other's world is unfortunately, but necessarily incompatible with our own.

We should each get to know the other better.

This is politics.

## Friday, February 19th, 2010

For 400 days, Charles Broskoski diligently worked his way through a downloaded torrent file of 356 .pdf files displaying computer programming books written in a highly technical language.

As he read through the books, Broskoski took daily notes compiled in .txt files, as well as a series of .jpg-compressed photographs depicting a list of the downloaded programming books.

In each photograph, he would cross an entry out every time he successfully completed a book.

This performance art is the bedrock of his work *Computer Skills*.

In the wake of the performance, there was an exhibition at the Chelsea Art Museum in New York in which Broskoski exhibited two trace elements of his performance:

1. A sculpture.

O'Reilly, the company which publishes the computer programming books read by Broskoski, agreed to send the artist physical copies of 250 of the books which he stacked in a grid of four columns – each column of the grid fit into the cut-out nook of a brick wall.

2. An epic poem.

Broskoski printed out and bound a book consisting of the notes and digital photographs he took during his performance organized chronologically.

Each page of notes in the book is framed by a pair of thin black lines which form a round-cornered box around the body of the text.

This framing allows one the opportunity to view the chronologically organized notes as something not noted, but *written*.

As the notes develop, the absurdity of his task mounts and the clarity of the notes themselves begins to devolve.

He asks existential questions and begins to view reading the books as laborious. But this labor gives him a thought:

He writes:

Honestly, the thing that resonated with me the most was the amount of times the authors thanked their significant others for letting them spend time on the computer while they were on their honeymoon.

I think what I gained is a heightened sense of how computers operate, and a better idea of the humanity behind all programming languages.

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With this in mind, one views the humanity of Broskoski's performance as well.

## Saturday, February 20th, 2010

Charles Broskoski paints on a computer.

However, he understands that by employing digitally automated “painterly” tools on a computer, he re-orientes the launching-off point for a consideration of these works.

In the current design of Broskoski’s personal website, the artist displays his most recent painting – in this case, a layering of long, wide, generally vertical “brushstrokes” in the airy style of the late de Kooning into the form of a primordial “ball” – a locus of energy, both budding and dying, aggressive and nervous, which calls to mind Philip Guston’s early abstractions (as well as a muddied take on the reds, greens, blues and blacks from Guston’s palette in these abstractions).

The bottom edges of this “ball” seem to “put the brakes on” in an act of inertia, curling in against a threat of pure formlessness.

And, at the top, the brushstrokes seem to be shooting upward (as in transcendence), but – in a reversal of the physics occurring at the bottom – suffer a smooching down (as in gravity).

The result is a stormy mass of energy simultaneously expanding away from its self and contracting into its self.

It has a kick.

But – as a painting – it also lacks a kick.

The painting is created on a computer with a mouse and a suite of digital “effects” rather than paint and canvas.

Also, it looks really nice, but it’s just one of the thousands of images that hit my eye through the light of a computer screen while I’m online.

So, where does this leave one?

A clue may be found in the caption to the work (the title to the work?) – a sort of clock reading “7 days ago...”

“7 days ago...” refers to the amount of time past since Broskoski uploaded the painting to his site.

Yesterday it read “6 days ago...”

The day before “5 days ago...”

Tomorrow it will read “8 days ago...” or perhaps “1 week ago...”

And so on until Broskoski uploads another work, thus resetting the clock.

What this counter adds to the work is a whole new type of meaning.

Like Josh Smith, Broskoski and artists such as Harm van den Dorpel are re-examining the possibility of a certain sincerity in painterly expression, but doing so not in the individual painting (well, not primarily in the individual painting), but as a performance – in time.

Broskoski is struggling with how to reconcile the tradition of painting with the computer.

As one returns to the site again and again and again and again, watching him upload new work, trying things out, performing his creation, one begins to see it.

It turns out that what the computer shows me is not space, but time; not the digital painting, but digital painting.



## Tuesday, February 23rd, 2010

The problem with *Shutter Island*, according to the film critic A.O. Scott, is that it tricks its audience into following a lot of leads and theories about what might be happening on Shutter Island, only to reveal that these leads are false – misdirections on the way to the film’s ultimate reveal – none of it matters – it’s all delusional.

For Scott, this bitter pill is a betrayal on the part of the film’s director, Martin Scorsese, ultimately declaring his vision “closed, airless systems, illuminated with flashes of virtuosity but with no particular heat, conviction or purpose.”

The reveal at the end of the film is, it should be said, very bitter.

There is no discovery of the missing girl.

There never was a missing girl.

Instead, we learn, the entire plot is a series of wacky ravings orchestrated by a man who did a terrible, violent thing and doesn’t want to come to terms with this terrible, violent thing.

He creates an elaborate fantasy in which he’s never been a violent man and if he can just figure out the mystery of the missing girl, he’ll get off of Shutter Island and ride into the sunset – a Hollywood happy ending.

The film, though, is not so much a closed, airless system as it is an open door to a more interesting question regarding the reasons we like the happy endings of Hollywood in the first place.

At the end, the protagonist is sitting on the steps of the hospital ward following a harrowing scene in which he “wakes up,” coming to terms with his own condition.

The doctors are skeptical, though, because he’s had flashes of insight into his violent past before and he always ends up regressing back to the elaborate fantasy world of good guys, bad guys, and happy endings.

This time is no different; the protagonist is right back in the thick of his private narrative.

The doctors are disappointed. But, in a great film moment, the protagonist turns back to his doctor and asks (almost winking):

Would you rather die a good man or live as a monster?

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In the tradition of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, *Chinatown* and *Mulholland Drive*, it's a real question raised by a Hollywood filmmaker about the making of Hollywood movies.

Is it better for Hollywood to die a good place or live as a monstrous one?

Perhaps this question is its own answer.

## Wednesday, February 24th, 2010

From *More Than Human* (1953) by Theodore Sturgeon:

It was quiet in the glass room.

For a long time the only sound was Gerry's difficult breathing. Suddenly even this stopped, as something happened, something – *spoke*.

It came again.

Welcome.

The voice was a silent one. And here, another, silent too, but another for all that. *It's the new one. Welcome child!*

Still another: *Well, well, well! We thought you'd never make it.*

He had to. There hasn't been a new one for so long...

Gerry clapped his hands to his mouth. His eyes bulged. Through his mind came a hush of welcoming music. There was warmth and laughter and wisdom. There were introductions; for each voice there was a discrete personality, a comprehensible sense of something like stature or rank, and an accurate locus, a sense of physical position. Yet, in terms of amplitude, there was no difference in the voices. They were all here, or, at least, all equally near.

There was happy and fearless communication, fearlessly shared with Gerry – cross-currents of humor, of pleasure, of reciprocal thought and mutual achievement. And through and through, *welcome, welcome.*

They were young, they were new, all of them, though not as new and as young as Gerry. Their youth was in the drive and resilience of their thinking. Although some gave memories old in human terms, each entity had lived briefly in terms of immortality and they were all immortal.

## Thursday, February 25th, 2010

*Painting (with mouse pad)* is a sculpture by Harm van den Dorpel consisting of:

1. A framed and matted print of an abstract digital painting (found by Van den Dorpel on the Internet) leaning against a white art gallery wall.
2. A vertically-inverted mouse pad depicting a cliché Chinese landscape painting resting on the top right edge of the painting's frame.

When combined, the painting and the fan don't seem to add up to anything. Van den Dorpel has talked about wanting to create images and image combinations that don't mean anything – that create a certain neutrality. This sounds absurdly simple, but, in fact, it's difficult. In an image-saturated world, almost every image ends up carrying some clear message or point or symbolic weight. In this work, though, the combination of the images ends up creating a double negative, an unsettling feeling of meaninglessness. The more the viewer tries to create some sort of connection, the more they get trapped in the middle of the work.

**Friday, February 26th, 2010**

*Untitled (The Birds without the birds)* by Martijn Hendriks is an ongoing performance in which Hendriks digitally removes every image of a bird from every frame of the film *The Birds*.

By taking the birds out of the film, Hendriks suggests that terror is psychological.

Terror is Tippy Hedren – the icy blonde with everything in control – being mercilessly stalked by her own fear of losing this control.

A key to the project is that Hendriks digital elimination of the birds is not seamless, but rather highly present. There are sort of digital scars that foreground the fact that something has been taken out.

Also, he didn't remove the birds from a single frame of the film (which he could accomplish in a day), but rather *performs* his removal of the birds from every frame of the film in which a bird appears – a performance he has been continually working through since 2007.

He writes:

[...] I've realized that I like this performative dimension best when it introduces a kind of questionable or unproductive element, so that I really need to believe in something to go through with it. Making an art work is also about believing in something enough to follow it through, to stick with it even when that something lacks all credibility or value.

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If the work was a one-liner dashed off quickly or with a tool that did it automatically, it would be less meaningful and I wouldn't want to follow it.

But I do find it an idea worth following because of this performative element and the sheer, absurd labor of it all.

It's the time implied in the work that makes it beautiful.

## Saturday, February 27th, 2010

*Parisian Love* is a television commercial created by Google.

Visually, the entire ad takes place in either the Google search field or in a series of Google search result fields.

One views the protagonist, an anonymous computer user, manipulating a cursor and pointer, searching his way through time – from, for example, “study abroad paris france” to “impress a french girl” to “long distance relationship advice” to “churches in paris” to “how to assemble a crib.”

Underscoring this narrative is a driving piano anthem collaged with sound effects such as an airplane taking off, a “How to Learn French” tape, church bells, and, finally, a baby laughing.

In each search, a dramatic tension rises as the user types in her queries word by word, performing the act of searching.

It begins when the user types in the word “study.”

Before typing in another word, however, Google instantaneously supplies him with a plethora of likely options such as “study island,” “study abroad,” “study Spanish,” “study skills.”

So, study what?

“study abroad”

Again, Google spits out an instantaneous list of “study abroad” options.

We’ve got “study abroad scholarships,” “study abroad programs,” “study abroad italy,” “study abroad australia.”

So, study abroad where?

“study abroad paris france.”

Is this what you were searching for?

It is.

Search it.

Google does so and the user moves his pointer around the first two search results:

1. “Study Abroad in France, Search Study Abroad Programs in France”

Or

2. “Study abroad programs in Paris, France – Study French in France – CEA.”

We cut in close as the protagonist is forced to choose between the two options.

Which will it be?

He’s unconventional, so he goes with the second one instead of the first.

The sound of an airplane taking off appears as the piano changes key and we jump forward in time as the user searches for “cafes near the louvre.”

A list of search results appears along with a question posed by Google:

“Did you mean: cafes near the louvre”

And so on and so on and so on and so on and so on until we are faced with a blinking cursor on a blank text field as the user spells out the query:

“how...”

“to...”

“assemble a crib”

Google it.

The next thing one views is the slogan – “Search on.” – (an updating of Nike’s “Just Do It”) as it cuts in over the sound of a baby laughing.

On the one hand, the ad shows us that our lives can be marked by Google searches.

But, on the other hand, on a perhaps deeper level, it shows one that life can be marked by endless searching, never doing it, but working towards it and changing it as one grows and learns.

As the user enters search queries, one views less the drama of action (just do it), and more the drama of evolution (search on).





» **March 2010**

## **Monday, March 1st, 2010**

*Showreel* is a video by Harm van den Dorpel.

He uses an intensified Ken Burns slide show tool to collage found images and screen captures he collected along with a handful of artist friends – Charles Broskoski, Constant Dullaart, Martijn Hendriks, Pascual Sisto, and Ola Vasiljeva.

There are three automatic functions that he uses in the editing process:

1. A slow dissolve into and out of a palimpsest of three to four (or more) image layers composed entirely of imagery appropriated from digital image archives.
2. A slow lateral movement over the majority of these image layers in both varying directions as well as varying rates of speed.
3. A slow zoom both into as well as out of approximately half of these image layers.

There are a lot of recognizable images, but generally it is abstract.

These layered, abstracted images function as an allegory of the time in which the image sharing took place.

It was not one event causing another event like a cue ball hitting an 8 ball into a corner pocket.

It was an overlapping, networked series of events.

It is a picture of shared time.

**Tuesday, March 2nd, 2010**

*50 50* by Oliver Laric is a version of the 50 Cent track *In Da Club* composed of 50 other versions of the song culled from YouTube user videos. In each of the videos, a user (or users) performs a homemade karaoke performance of a pop song in front of a home video camera or webcam.

Laric cuts these versions together to create a single, seamless performance of the track which has less to say about *In Da Club* and more to say about the fact that the world of images in 2007 – the year the video was initially uploaded – is composed of versions of *In Da Club* as much as it is composed of the original track.

When one searches for a pop song on YouTube, more often than not one will find versions of the track produced by rank-and-file YouTube users as opposed to an “original” version.

And if one does find an “original” version of the song, it will still be versioned anyway through the video’s visual component – say a slide show of thematically relevant imagery or a static screen of text and graphic elements advertising whatever it is that the user sells.

This ecology of versions is what *50 50* shows me.

## Wednesday, March 3rd, 2010

Watching feature length movies shows one “the two hours,” “the hour-and-a-half,” and “the three hours” and if one views enough feature length movies one begins to develop a picture in their own mind(s) regarding these lengths of time. “This is what two hours feels like.”

Thus, when a feature length movie is successful it perfectly corresponds with the picture in one’s own mind of “the two hours,” “the hour and a half,” or the “the three hours.”

(That is to say, it finishes at the same you do.)

But what about other lengths of time?

Well, television figured out that we could be trained to picture “the hour,” “the half-hour,” and “the thirty seconds” and it began to regulate these particular time-units vigorously.

Thus, the joy of good television is the spasm of correspondence between the episode or commercial’s account of “the hour,” “the half-hour,” or “the thirty seconds” and one’s own trained picture of “the hour,” “the half-hour,” or “the thirty-seconds.”

When one downloads an entire season of *Mad Men*, for instance, one begins to get off less on the content of the individual episodes and more on the rhythm of the individual episodes in succession as each one fills in “the 48 minutes” again and again and again and again as versions on a theme.

What time, though, does the digital network picture?

On the one hand, everything’s gotten shorter:

Blog posts are short, videos are short, news articles are headlines.

However, on the other hand, everything’s gotten longer.

One blog post is merely a version on a theme developed in an ongoing performance inhabiting “the several months and years.”

Does the digital network, then, polarize one’s desires for time – make you crave for both the instantaneous and the epic?

Make it schizophrenic?

## Wednesday, March 10th, 2010

*10 Seconds to Each Point*, a work of time-based Web browser art by Damon Zucconi, describes 10 seconds in the Web browser.

At first glance, though, one doesn't view the time of these 10 seconds, but rather, the movement through space of a small red orb with a white center – perhaps the “eye” of the Hal 9000 computer? – as it linearly bounces through and glides along the edges and intersections of a rectangular black plane.

One quickly realizes that the speed of the ball as it bounces between the walls, though, is not premised on physics (as in, say, Pong), but rather a uniform amount of time: 10 seconds.

The title of the work nudges you to this.

*10 Seconds to Each Point.*

That's what it says.

So one wonders:

Is it really ten seconds to each point?

Let's count.

“1 second”

“2 seconds”

“3 seconds”

“4 seconds”

“5 seconds”

“6 seconds”

“7 seconds”

“8 seconds”

“9 seconds”

“10 seconds”

(pop)

“1 second”

“2 seconds”

“3 seconds”

“4 seconds”

“5 seconds”

“6 seconds”

“7 seconds”

“8 seconds”

“9 seconds”

“10 seconds”

(pop)

“1 second”

“2 seconds”

“3 seconds”

“4 seconds”

“5 seconds”

“6 seconds”

“7 seconds”

“8 seconds”

“9 seconds”

“10 seconds”

(pop)

“1 second”

“2 seconds”

“3 seconds”

“4 seconds”

“5 seconds”

“6 seconds”

“7 seconds”

“8 seconds”

“9 seconds”

“10 seconds”

(pop)

Every time the orb “pops” – dictated by the time unit of ten seconds – one feels a pleasurable violation.

Pop.

Again, again, again, again.

(pop)

...

(pop)

...

(pop)

...

(pop)

...

It’s the rhythm one responds to.

And as one feels this pleasure, one begins to makes a picture of it.

10 seconds.

## Thursday, March 11th, 2010

In *Tinypic Video Thumbnails*, an 85 page artist's book and .pdf by Travis Hallenbeck, the artist explores the convention of the thumbnail – the still image representation of an uploaded video file (in this case, the thumbnails generated by the video hosting service Tinypic) – and re-presents his own subjective response to them through the display of over 5,000 appropriated thumbnails organized in 6 X 10 grids which almost completely fill all but the first and final pages of the book.

Perhaps the initial thing to be said about the project is that pouring over this massive volume of thumbnails in densely packed grids effectively conveys the sense of surfing through a video website – an experience premised on scanning through hundreds of thumbnails, critically resisting the urge to click on a single one, waiting for the “right” video to catch one's eye.

However, unlike the heterogeneous mass of thumbnails encountered in a conventional surf, Hallenbeck's images are:

1. All singularities in their own right:

One views a medium-wide framing on a ten-year old girl in faded blue jeans and a striped tank-top holding a brown clay bowl in the middle of a backyard garden in circa 1970s film stock; a medium-wide framing on a fist-fight between two young men in their 20's wearing baggy shorts in the middle of the woods shot on marginally pixelated digital camcorder imagery; a medium framing inverted 90 degrees on the sunlight pouring through a floral-patterned curtain illuminating a cat jumping over an armchair in an otherwise black room shot on relatively sharp digital video.

Each image resists being swallowed wholesale by the database as each one affords the viewer something to hold onto – Barthes may have called it a punctum – that which pricks one.

2. *Intentionally patterned* – there's a structural order that emerges from the chaos here.

Hallenbeck seems to have narrowed down the iconography of his surf to a few key themes, which appear regularly through the grid. Here is a representative sampling:

1. Young people getting fucked up at random times of the day or generally goofing off



2. Skateboarding video imagery
3. Pixelated digital imagery
4. Obsolete technologies
5. Minimal abstractions derived from glitches in technology
6. Swimming pools
7. Empty wide shots of natural settings
8. Empty baseball fields
9. Empty bedrooms
10. Empty living rooms

The first two themes – youthful goofing around and skateboarding – lend the pattern a light, often humorous, and positive vibe.

However, these positive images are generally surrounded on all sides of the pattern by the heavy, melancholic, and negative imagery identified in the subsequent categories listed above.

The result is, on the one hand, a bummer: it seems to swallow the hope and freedom associated with youthful debauchery and skateboarding up in the surliness of empty rooms, landscapes and technological glitches.

It's nostalgia for a past time, but a bitter nostalgia.

On the other hand, there is another relationship to time in *Tinypic Video Thumbnails*.

The work is a labor – a daily, almost religious, performance lived in the present of each moment, as Hallenbeck surfs, scans, and reflects back on the database.

One feels the volume of images, of course; but one also feels the volume of *time* spent sifting through images, the performance of the surf as an intentional work of art.

Perhaps one could say that the secret message of the book is this affirmation of daily web surfing.

**Thursday, March 11th, 2010**

Between the work *10 Seconds to Each Point* and the work *Lateral Crossings* Damon Zucconi leapt between one form and then another.

In *10 Seconds to Each Point* he describes a unit of time – 10 seconds.

In the course of viewing the work, one begins to view less the motion through space of a small orb and more the time of the orb's cycles between contact with one line intersection and then another – 10 seconds.

In *Lateral Crossings*, on the other hand, he describes a unit of time occurring within a broader spectrum of 16 concurrent units of time – each unit placed according to its location within the represented scale of chronologically-ordered time units in the spectrum.

In the course of viewing the work, one begins to view less the temporal rhythm of a single orb and more the simultaneity of multiple temporal rhythms framing the spatial motion of multiple orbs.

It's a more structurally complicated picture of time.

Now that said, I don't know if *Lateral Crossing* is "better" than *10 Seconds to Each Point* because both works are limited in describing temporal objects – they're just pictures.

Rather, if one was tasked to name the art of Zucconi's work here, one might say that it occurs neither in *Lateral Crossings* nor in *10 Seconds to Each Point*, but rather out (t)here on his personal website where one follows his leap from one form of life to another.

The leap – the artist's performed mutation – is the only thing that I know I viewed.

## Friday, March 12th, 2010

As the left video of *Sparkling I and II*, a video diptych by Petra Cortright, opens, one views a character in a lush garden world wearing sunglasses propped-up on the top of her head (played by Cortright herself) who nearly fills the frame.

Likewise, the right video of the diptych – opens with the same character in a (different but similarly lush) garden world, wearing sunglasses propped down on the lower-bridge of her nose as she – again – nearly fills the frame.

Within the first ten seconds of each of these videos an identical plot point, then, occurs:

After re-adjusting her sunglasses so that she views the world through their lenses, a jump-cut catalyzes all perceptually-realistic motion represented in the video to be trailed by an automatized “sparkle” animation in which plus-signs (+’s) and ex’s (x’s) flare up and down in flurries of syncopation which read as the sparkle of, say, light on water, light through trees, stars at night, or the Web-native “sparkle” of star field wallpaper.

The bulk of each video’s subsequent actions, then, occur through these automatically animated sparkle animations as Cortright, whose moving body is now trailed by sparkles, walks away from the camera towards a tree and begins to casually – poetically, but almost aimlessly – pull at its branches, run her hands through its leaves, amble through its shade, and generally interact with it in a *pas de deux* of sparkle showers emanating from both her body and the tree parts she performs with.

Cortright makes work that is often indistinguishable from vernacular forms of culture.

There are lots of videos of young people using a default effect and then acting silly.

She does it with a style, humor, and somehow very human sincerity that makes each of her works a very good example of whatever cultural form she is working in.

This piece is a good example.

For someone who doesn't look at it as art, it would be a pretty good example of an amateur video.

By putting it in the context of art and the context of her larger body of work, though, the video takes on a different meaning.

It works as a readymade almost, demonstrating for the viewer part of the visual language of the moment so that the viewer can see it.

What is more powerful, though, is that it doesn't do it in an academic way.

While being a work of art, it is also a work that is not "of art."

## **Saturday, March 13th, 2010**

If I encounter the work of a contemporary artist through their website or some other form of managed presence on the Internet and I do it again and again and again and again, then the evolution of their website or managed presence itself becomes a work.

That is to say, the more I view the artist's work as an ongoing chronological development accounted for in a database accessible on the Web (as opposed to, say, seeing an object first-hand and, then, relying on memories or reference books to account for the artist's previous body of work), the more I view a whole new type of first-hand:

A performance of the artist *as* an artist, moving in and out of positions and tempos, and, in some cases, picturing their own inhabitation of time.

## Monday, March 15th, 2010

Harm van den Dorpel's *Texture Mapping* works are minimal, starkly-outlined cube sculptures whose high-gloss surfaces each depict abstract images reading to the viewer as "painterly."

The "painterly-ness" of each image, though, is mutated by the de-texturing (or mapping of texture) accompanying one's view of their subject matter through the glossy "screen" of transparent acrylic which functions as the surface of each cube.

The result is less the experience of viewing a painting first-hand (as in, say, a museum) and more the experience of viewing a painting remotely (as through, say, the screen of a computer).

In the process of describing the experience of textural remoteness, however, van den Dorpel creates a short-circuit to a whole new type of texture:

That of virtual space.

He does so in at least two ways:

1. Van den Dorpel's technique in these works is to paint on the surface of the acrylic which – in the final product – will be viewed as the inside (as opposed to the, more traditional, outside) of the cube sculpture.

One's view of the painting process is, thus, reversed.

The first layers of paint applied to the surface are the most visible and everything else is masked through, not overpainting, but underpainting.

The virtual presence of this painting's absence is, thus, activated.

2. Similarly, the mobility of the relatively very light cubes and their subsequent malleability into almost instantaneous re-arrangement nudge the viewer's understanding of the work's physical "presence" away from, say, the mass and volume of Minimalist cubes and closer to the virtual 3D space of Second Life.

**Tuesday, March 16th, 2010**

Delicious.com is a social network.

Users publicly share url's, notes, and metadata associated with websites bookmarked by the user throughout the course of their own Web surfing.

This information, then, becomes the foundation for a useful search tool which often provides more productive (or at least differently productive) search results than Google.

Outside of its function as a search engine, delicious users manage a stream of their own bookmarks that are viewable to anyone that has become a “fan” of the user’s bookmarking.

In turn, the user can become a fan of others and view all of their bookmarks in a stream representing the entire network of others users that the first user has become a fan of.

The use of the term “fan” on Delicious – as opposed to, say, “friend,” “subscriber,” or “follower” – denotes a consideration of the social network as a game space.

This is an important shift regarding a social network’s description of its own functionality. In Delicious, social capital is gained through performance in a game.

While many users of the site are not particularly engaged with this game (for example, they bookmark for their own research and pay little attention to other users bookmarks), there are many other users who do play.

Some find a niche – say, computer science bookmarks or experimental music bookmarks – which become a key consistent note in the data flow of the bookmarking network.

Other users account for a potpourri of moves through the Web – from, say, a funny YouTube clip, to a news item on Internet security in China, to a Wikipedia entry on a scientific theory, to whatever else the user comes across – each of which adds (what one hopes to be) a harmonious note in the data flow.

And, finally, a small number of Delicious users – such as, for instance, J\_O\_D\_I – turn their performance through the cloud into a type of self-reflexive artwork in which bookmarking becomes about itself.

## Tuesday, March 16th, 2010

The art collective Jodi's *J\_O\_D\_I* Delicious account contains – as of the publishing of this blog post – 3,512 bookmarks collected between February 20, 2008 to the current day – March 16, 2010.

This averages-out to between 4 and 5 bookmarks marked by the artists per day – everyday – for the past 2 years or so.

Today *J\_O\_D\_I* has, thus far, bookmarked 16 sites.

Each site depicts images or conversations about images related to the archiving of imagery.

Whether it be in an online database, art collection, or photographic contact sheet, the thread running through the subject matter of each of these bookmarks is image archiving.

By making an archive of images that refer to image archives, they make a work of self-reflexive art.

As time goes on and one sees Jodi's bookmarks refer to the same theme again and again, one sees not bookmarks, but the apparatus of the entire del.icio.us platform: an archive.



## Wednesday, March 17th, 2010

Constant Dullaart's *suggesteddomain.com* is a looped series of 15 unique, link-generator websites parked on “empty” Web domains – domains that have no content other than whatever advertising is temporarily parked there.

These 15 automatically-looping Web domains are themselves each composed of two words separated by a period (or “dot”) which complete (in a close paraphrase anyway) a quote which is attributed to Marcel Duchamp.

It reads:

He(dot)took  
...  
An(dot)article  
...  
Of(dot)life  
...  
Placed(dot)it  
...  
So(dot)that  
...  
Its(dot)useful  
...  
Significance(dot)disappeared  
...  
Under(dot)the  
...  
New(dot)title  
...  
And(dot)Point  
...  
Of(dot)View  
...  
Created(dot)anew  
...  
Thought(dot)for  
...  
That(dot)object  
...  
Per(dot)iod

“He **CHOSE** it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object.”

By gradually unveiling Duchamp’s conceptualization of the readymade, Dullaart gives new life to the concept of the readymade itself.

The readymade is interesting not so much as a theoretical default, but more as a necessarily shifting ideal.

One way to read the readymade is to say that it shifts an ordinary object into a different context and, by doing so, allows the viewer of the work to see it for itself – divorced from any use value.

If the term were to be confined to physical commodities like snow shovels, then it might not be relevant in a world of both physical *and* virtual commodities – snow shovels *and* snow shovel websites.

**Thursday, March 18th, 2010**

*Phasing Dancing Stand Sculptures* by Cory Arcangel consists of a pair of “Dancing Stands.”

Dancing Stands are metallic commercial display-units whose shelves remain flat and parallel despite the steady flexing in-and-out of its hinges (it looks like the machines are swaying back-and-forth as in a dance).

The tempo of one of the Dancing Stands is modified to gradually phase its flexing-action further-and-further out of harmonious unison with its companion Dancing Stand.

This results in:

1. An “echoing” effect occurring between the first and second Dancing Stands.
2. A “reverse-harmony” in which the flexing-actions of each Dancing Stand become – for an instant – perfectly diametrically opposed.
3. A “reverse echoing” effect.
4. A re-linking-up-again in the original harmonious position from which one viewed the sculptures in the first place (before – again – falling out of unison and so on and so on and so on and so on).

This is “phasing,” a term Arcangel links to the avant-garde music of Steve Reich, in which the same phrase of music is played on different instruments in different tempos, resulting in a similar cycle of unison to echo to discord back to unison.

The effect is the gradual emergence of a new type of readymade – one having less to do with the objects in space and more to do with the phasing through time which they describe.

## Monday, March 22nd, 2010

Michael Bell-Smith, in his YouTube work *Better Bouncing Ball*, depicts the inevitability of artistic failure.

A ball bounces in twenty-four different ways – each slightly different; none are the “best” bounce.

As one views through the set, increasingly-complex graphic elements – such as animated shadows and glares – are gradually phased-into the animations.

So, on the one hand, one views change.

(Each bounce is a “better” representation of a ball bounce).

However, on the other hand, one also views non-change.

(None of the bounces – no matter how graphically complicated – are “the” bounce.)

An actor (represented here by a red ball) enters frame-left, bounces, and, then, leaves frame-right (they are born, they act, and, then, they die) in-and-out-and-back-again forever.

**Friday, March 19th, 2010**

From *Triton* (1976) by Samuel R. Delany:

The Web of possibilities is not simple – for either abstract painting, atonal music, or science fiction. It is the scatter pattern of elements from myriad individual forms, in all three, that gives their respective webs their densities, their slopes, their austerities, their charms, their contiguities, their conventions, their cliches, their tropes of great originality here, their crushing banalities there: the map through them can only be learned, as any other language is learned, by exposure to myriad utterances, simple and complex, from out the language of each. The contours of the web control the reader's experience of any given s-f text; as the reading of a given s-f text recontours, however slightly, the web itself, that text is absorbed into the genre, judged, remembered, or forgotten.

**Tuesday, March 23rd, 2010**

*Same Shit Different Island*, a sculpture by Joel Holmberg, is a thin, haphazardly bent-up metal beam supporting a rough chunk of concrete in the shape of, say, a long piece of petrified grey shit, which itself is held to the beam by a thin piece of fishing wire.

Also attached to this bent-up metal beam-armature are a small piece of wood and a second, relatively smaller metal beam element, which, in turn, each support a vertical leg of the larger metal beam-armature.

Before the sculpture is an object, it is – for the artist – a process which is designed to be replicated and reproduced through a broad spectrum of scales.

The work consists of the following 5 process-steps:

1. A beam is bent in three points, forming an armature.
2. Two wires span the uprights of this armature and a third, longer (and, thus, more deeply hanging) wire is suspended down the middle of the first two wires.
3. A tarp is stretched over the three wires, resulting in a hanging “hammock” form.
4. A cement mixture is poured into this hammock form.
5. After the cement dries, both the tarp and the outer two wires of the armature-form are removed so that a curved concrete shape (the piece of shit) is left suspended in air by the “third wire” which still spans the upright points of the beam.

One is, thus, provided with a blueprint for the creation of the “same shit” on “different island(s).”

As one evaluates the sculpture in terms of form, one evaluates it as a set of instructions as well.

It’s virtual art.

**Thursday, March 25th, 2010**

*Dreams from google 3d warehouse* by Guthrie Lonergan is:

1. The artist's re-contextualization of seventeen "3D" models – each of which are based on an individual dream of the Google 3D Warehouse user who initially created the model.
2. An accompanying commentary on the process of translating the memory of a dream to a 3D model provided by the dreamers/3D model-makers themselves (in conversation with Lonergan).

The work is viewed on two Web pages – each of which are hosted on Caitlin Denny and Parker Ito's [jstchillin.org](http://jstchillin.org) website.

On the first page, one views three lines of black sans-serif text extending the horizontal-length of the page.

This text reads:

This is a Piano I dreamed that I was playing, but its actually a tattoo that I want to do somewhere on my body... You can't really comment about it because i dreamed it and you didn't see it... Oh well...

\*\*\*\*\*

Positioned below this text is the 2D representation of a 3D model depicting a black piano keyboard which – when clicked – opens a Web browser tab displaying the 3D model's original Web page on the Google 3D Warehouse Web site.

On the second page of the work, one views a block of sixteen additional dream-text-and-3D-model pairings which are positioned above a block of seventeen lines of text which each (a.) list the 3D models' file names and creator/user names, as well as (b.) link to the models' original Web pages on the Google 3D Warehouse Web site.

The first of the dream memories-into-3D models displayed at the top of this page is prefaced by the following text:

i had the wierdest dream last night. i was walking downtown  
when a space ship landed in the street, naturely i dove for cover  
behind a bush. thank you to dj orion for the road

\*\*\*\*\*

Below this text is an initial view of the 3D model described above in which  
one views a low medium-wide framing on:

1. A grey figure running away from a large white craft emanating blue  
flames, which is labeled “space ship,” and
2. A second grey figure labeled “me” lying on the ground behind a  
rectangular box with a green marbled texture, which one takes to be the  
bush mentioned in the dream.

Below this view of the model, then, are three lines of grey text in which a  
question regarding the model-maker’s memory of certain details is posed.

It reads:

i’m curious if the blue flames from the jets on the spaceship were  
in the dream? also, there seems to be some sort of steering  
column inside of the spaceship, is this something that you  
remembered?

\*\*\*\*\*

And a reply, reading:

to answer your questions, yes there was blue flames from the  
spaceship, and yes, i do remember the steering column was  
something i remembered. i remember the aliens coming out and  
there was that steering column

\*\*\*\*\*

As one scrolls down the page, one encounters two more views of the 3D  
model – one into the cockpit of the space ship in which the steering column  
mentioned above is visible, the other a high wide-angle in which the  
steering column is – again – made visible.



Below these views are another question-and-response regarding the translation of dream memory into 3D model.

The question reads:

do you remember anything else about the steering column, like how it functioned, or anything else about it?

\*\*\*\*\*

And the model-maker responds:

i just remember the steering stick was like a big joystick, controlling the ship here and there

\*\*\*\*\*

One more view of the steering column is, then, displayed and the next dream model and commentary begins.

The remaining fifteen of these dreams involve similar science-fiction scenarios as well as relatively banal scenarios involving the architecture of, for example, factories and shopping malls.

Throughout the project, though, one theme remains constant:

As one begins to picture a dream, one begins to mutate the dream to fit the picture (until one can't say for sure if they remember the dream at all).

## Friday, March 26th, 2010

Since April 28, 2008, Joel Holmberg has posted one hundred and seven (and counting) questions to Yahoo! Answers.

If one skips back to the first of the chronologically-organized questions posed by the artist in early 2008, one views three general, relatively straightforward questions regarding the subject of coffee in a category termed:

“Non-Alcoholic Drinks.”

However, in his following (often funny, koan-like) questions posed throughout the course of his performance, Holmberg branches-out his performed investigation into multiple question categories such as, for example, “Other – Society and Culture,” “Laptops and Notebooks,” and “Other – General Health Care,” which each catalyze a different set of responses to the act of “answering” a question.

The “Philosophy” category, for example, is more logically precise than the “Religion and Spirituality” category which is more emotionally-charged than the “Etiquette” category which is more polite than the “Other – Internet” category which is more nerdy than the “Other – Visual Arts” category which is more artsy than the “Men’s Health” category and so on and so on and so on and so on.

Throughout his performance, Holmberg explicitly explores these categorical-discrepancies by asking the same question in multiple categories.

For example, he asks the question “How do you occupy space?” in the “Physics,” “Other-Environment,” “Other-Internet,” “Military,” and “Wrestling” categories.

In each category, one views a unique approach to language and the act of “answering” a question.

The work, in the end, may be less about showing one answers and more about showing one the different answer categories we constantly shift in and out of through our lives.

## Monday, March 29th, 2010

In the film *Greenberg*, Ben Stiller's character sees the world as false and meaningless and he's bitter about this, resulting in a form of nihilism.

In the same film, Greta Gerwig's character sees the world the same way, but, instead of bemoaning this or going on a quixotic quest for truth or certainty, her character seems to say you that you should rather begin with the knowledge that you're obviously, automatically just playing at reality and then *mean* that playing as if it was real.

By acting with conviction (meaning what you say to the best of your ability), your actions then *become* real and this is the only way to deal with things.

According to the film critic A.O. Scott, Greta Gerwig herself is:

embarked on a project, however piecemeal and modestly scaled, of redefining just what it is we talk about when we talk about acting.

\*\*\*\*\*

He says:

She will play – that's what acting is – but she will also mean what she says.

\*\*\*\*\*

In a key scene from *Greenberg*, Gerwig recounts a story, which is told like a dream, in which she and a friend play (or “like, are”) these “slut” characters who let themselves be picked up by random guys at a bar.

Her point (as broken and dream-like as it sounds) is that she is not really that girl, but when she played that girl like she meant it she became that girl because that's what happens when you mean the part you play.

As she tells this to Greenberg, she looks at him with equal parts longing and hysteria as if to say:

I'm sorry I'm telling you this, but this is – to the best I can tell – my situation – my un-real real situation.

\*\*\*\*\*

This is her philosophy.

NOTE: This post was inspired by Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (1971).

**Tuesday, March 30th, 2010**

From *Tea From An Empty Cup* (1998) by Pat Cadigan:

In the next moment, Tom was gone and she was staring at a regular-style reflection. Or as regular-style as a reflection in Artificial Reality could be, considering it wasn't really a reflection of something that wasn't really there in the first place. Or was it? Maybe reflections were sort-of reflections, subroutines dumbed-down to the point of the AR version of an automatic reflex.

## Wednesday, March 31st, 2010

The exhibition *READY OR NOT IT'S 2010*, organized by the Jogging collective and virally announced just one day ago (March 30, 2010), is an open call for artists to post work or link to themselves *en masse* through the stream of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's Facebook Wall right now (today – March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010).

The point of the show is to resist the hierarchical historicization and canonization of contemporary art by art museums and other art institutions.

In the words of the exhibition's announcement text:

[...] digital artists should take the task of historicization into their own hands.

\*\*\*\*\*

And:

The manipulability of art museums' Facebook walls allows artists the chance to wrest curatorial control back from institutions empowered by years of exclusionary practices.

\*\*\*\*\*

As one begins to view the exhibition, the impressively active and continually growing stream of art posts on the LACMA Wall by a broad spectrum of artists seems like an event – a “happening” right there in the virtual space of a collecting museum.

However, as one continues to watch, one might begin to grow anxious about all of this happening.

What *is* happening?

Is this *really* the emergence of a Web 2.0 resistance to art world gatekeeping?

Or is LACMA's authority is simply re-inscribed?

As one continues to view the exhibition, the artists and artworks may come across less as liberated individuals expressing their individuality and more as ammo – data – or, in Jaron Lanier’s lingo, “gadgets.”

This doesn’t mean that there’s nothing interesting happening here.

On the contrary, one begins to take-in an alternate point-of-view regarding the way in which art might work in the network:

That is, as a stream.

The art occurring on the LACMA wall right now is not found in the individual posts (as interesting as many of them are), but rather in the visibility of the stream of posts itself – the curatorial gesture by Jogging.

A stream.

In an interview on the *Counterfeit-Mess* Tumblr, Jogging’s most visible member Brad Troemel speaks to this very understanding of contemporary creative practice as an ongoing, publicly-visible, and remotely-followable stream:

A couple years ago when I became a Photographer-hater, I realized that you can’t possibly explain the world through a single tool. I feel that way now in regard to The Art Project, that 10 projects can’t explain everything or anything either. All you can do is have a constant engagement with art, trying to find meaning. On Jogging, we, the creators, are the art and artists.

\*\*\*\*\*

And:

Creating this way makes assessing/accessing our work on the whole difficult. There’s no fitting “grading rubric” for everything at once because the intent of the art is multiple. So, you can either assess every single work individually, or, you can assess us, ourselves, as the work.

\*\*\*\*\*

With this in mind, *READY OR NOT IT’S 2010* becomes another status update in Jogging’s own publicly-visible stream.





» **April 2010**

**Thursday, April 1st, 2010**

The age of digital information networks, according to the Jogging collective's text "Redefining Exhibition in the Digital Age," has so radically mutated the way information is distributed, that a revolution in the way artists exhibit their work is called for.

Jogging writes:

The internet offers a chance for art's users to experience organizational models of viewership in ways that are non-dependent and non-hierarchical. Allowing institutions to dictate the function of the Internet, be it through copyright, privatization, and/or the commoditization of information, simply digitizes pre-existing modes of viewership built upon problematic power relations.

To that end, Jogging has mounted two non-hierarchical exhibitions – *READY OR NOT IT'S 2010* and *AN IMMATERIAL SURVEY OF OUR PEERS* – in the past two weeks.

*READY OR NOT IT'S 2010* is an art action involving a word-of-mouth exhibition on the Facebook Wall of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in which hundreds of artists posted their work.

*AN IMMATERIAL SURVEY OF OUR PEERS* is a Tumblr of installation shots from the Sullivan Galleries at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in which the works depicted were digitally inserted into empty shots of the galleries to look as if they were installed in the physical space.

However, what one views when one views the exhibitions is not non-hierarchical resistance, but rather a hierarchical structure in which Jogging is the sun around which the other artworks orbit like planets.

The kick of *An Immaterial Survey of Our Peers* is not that it is a great way to exhibit the artists in the show (it's not), but that it is a work of art itself – by the Jogging.

What is interesting here is Troemel and Christiansen's gesture – that's where the aesthetic kick occurs.

This is just to say that Jogging is creating art, but not political art.

## Friday, April 2nd, 2010

Right now, on the main page of Charles Broskoski's personal website, one views paintings created with digital tools as well as clocks which read-out the amount of time passed since each artwork was initially uploaded to the site (in this case, for the more recently uploaded painting "2 days ago..." and, for the less recently uploaded painting "3 weeks ago...").

One, thus, views both the paintings and the paintings' built-in obsolescence.

The most recently uploaded painting, *Avocado*, is a token of a traditional painting genre – the still life with fruit; on the other hand – with its ghostly, blurred brush work which fights to keep from dripping down (to the past of the artist's painting) and up (to the future of the artist's painting) – the work is an allegory of painting on the computer:

Not present in space, but streaming through time, fighting for its life to be *there in the room* (on the screen) despite the inevitability of its passing.

That is to say:

1. A picture of avocados (they are there).
2. A picture of avocados blurring through time from future (an ideal) to past (a memory) (they're gone – ghosts).

## Monday, April 5th, 2010

Some of the key differences between magnetized (that is, pre-digital) videotape and celluloid film are the quantitative shifts in the following three categories:

1. Memory storage capacity.

Videotape, as a media storage device, holds more temporal information and affords un-interrupted recording.

2. Affordability.

Videotape is less expensive than celluloid film.

3. And mobility.

Video cameras are lighter than film cameras and videotape is more robust in more light conditions than celluloid film.

That is to say, automatic moving image reproductions were – with the onset of magnetized videotape in the 1960s – no longer quite as precious.

Just shoot – shoot a lot; shoot at your house; shoot at the park; shoot down time, not just up time – just shoot.

This change in the relationship of moving image technology to the representation of time became a point of interest to many artists.

Bruce Nauman, for example – in a particular series of videos from the late 1960s – pictures the artist not as one who represents an act of creation, but rather as one who (through the technology's ability to depict greatly extended units of un-interrupted time) represents creating.

One views Nauman stomp on the ground of his bare artist studio in a rigorous rhythm for approximately 60 minutes.

Or one views him adjust a piece of wood, never quite getting it right, for the same amount of time.

These projects can be read as allegories about creation.

The artist never gets it quite right; every stomp or every movement of the wood is a failure.

What is more important is the evolving process of creation.

In the wake of videotape technology, though, a further series of media storage mutations have come and gone.

The result is the end of material storage devices such as videos or hard drives and the birth of the virtual data cloud – the immaterial field of code transformed into information signage – both private as well as public – hovering in, out, and around one's physical locations in space.

Each one of these generational mutations, then, has necessitated subsequent mutations in the pictures artists draw of their own body performing actions through time.

Kari Altmann, for example, considers her work to be located not in individual works (as meaningful as they may be), but rather in her avatar inside the data cloud wherein one views her perform the excavation and molding of her own artistic archive in mutable cloud-space, cloud-time.

Sometimes she'll just add an image for research or edit an older project; sometimes she'll list, but not show new projects she's working on; sometimes she'll add a new video; sometimes she'll take a video away; and so on and so on and so on and so on in a plethora of permutations one follows the artist play with her own cloud data:

Change, evolve – not to “better” data, just different data – data occurring in an ecological network of additional data networks which are – as a whole – growing and becoming self-reflexive, becoming visible to themselves.

The performative focus here, then, is not on the physical body repeating an action, but rather on the virtual body mutating its own archival network.

**Tuesday, April 6th, 2010**

Kevin Bewersdorf was doing okay for himself.

1. He was a co-founder of the Internet surf club Spirit Surfers.
2. He was developing a prolific and popular collection of photography, texts, performance pieces, and music on his website [maximumsorrow.com](http://maximumsorrow.com).
3. He had (amongst other exhibitions of his physical work) a solo show at the V&A Gallery in New York, and a two-person show with Guthrie Lonergan at the well-known And/Or Gallery in Dallas.

In short, Bewersdorf was building an impressively dense archive of work with a strongly growing reputation both on and off the Internet.

(He had good “stats.”)

What, then, to make of his decision in early 2009 to take this archive of work off of the Internet, destroying it as well as whatever traces he could find of it left, and replacing it with a single work – an in-progress performance piece he calls *PUREKev*?

*PUREKev* is a highly-focused, three-year long performance in which Bewersdorf very gradually diminishes the size of his artistic avatar – a looping clip of over-exposed home video footage depicting a firecracker flickering – against an (International Klein?) blue field over which it flickers.

There’s something poetic about this idea which draws one to its premises and, then, carries one beyond the auto-destructive act which preceded it.

Still, though, what justifies the relatively extreme length of three years?

Would one, after a year, of watching Bewersdorf’s little light growing smaller and smaller, still care?

And, indeed, that’s the gambit of the work:

Bewersdorf made a wager that there is something to his gesture which – despite its simplicity – is intriguing enough for one to follow and keep following, each return a new wave of illumination into the work’s significance.

In my own experience of the work, this is – so far – true.

I can't say that I look at purekev.com everyday or even every month, but I do return to it every now and again on a somewhat regular basis (as in a pilgrimage) and, when I do so, I never leave satisfied or dis-satisfied, but, rather, pleasantly held in suspension – not sure where to put my finger, but interested in fingering it nonetheless.

When I go to the site today (April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2010), I – at first – don't view the flickering light at all.

Rather, I view a blue void through which I scroll to – then – find the little, flickering light at the bottom of the page, surrounded by blue.

As I've followed Bewersdorf's performance, its value to me has begun to reside less in the tracking of his flickering light and more in its tracking of the field upon which it flickers.

## Wednesday, April 7th, 2010

*Rumble (1993)* is a work created in 2009 by Kari Altmann.

She plays a YouTube clip depicting hand-held, date-stamped camcorder footage of a rumbling Malaysian landslide dating from 1993 through the yooouuuuuube.com video mosaic effect generator.

(Yooouuuuuube.com is a tool wherein one enters a YouTube url and a “size” for the video referenced in the url which results in – first – the creation of a domino [or rumble] effect of multiple “screens” – each of which plays the video just a hair off of the time of the one preceding it – and – second – the eventual filling-in of the entire screen with these streaming, out-of-sync video ripples – each of which contains several to dozens to hundreds of the original videos in an ongoing mosaic flicker through the run-time of the video.)

A point to note is that the artist included the date of the original landslide video, 1993, in her title.

This isn’t something that artists typically do.

So, what makes the date 1993 worth including in the title?

Well, what happened in 1993?

For one thing, CERN (the same Swiss organization behind the Large Hadron Collider) announced that the World Wide Web would be free to enter for anyone with an Internet connection.

In much of Altmann’s work, she equates the Web database with an archaeological site or a landscape that one can sift through.

In 1993, this landscape came into being with a rumble.

That’s what the work shows me.



## Thursday, April 8th, 2010

The *Continuous Line Drawings* series by Damon Zucconi consists of (what is displayed to date, anyway) fifty-four short loops (at the most a couple of seconds per loop) – each of which consists of a single action – a jagged line being drawn.

These line drawings, though, are not representations of the artist's hand painting in a studio or over a pane of glass (as in the films on Picasso and Pollock).

Rather, they are representations solely of the line itself being drawn over a field of black as if they were a screen-capture from a digital painting program (which they're not – on the contrary, they were created with a tablet and a piece of custom software which captures, plots, and plays-back the drawing gesture).

The lines in each loop begin to fade away as soon as they are drawn, resulting in a “ghosting” effect (in this sense, they look like hyper-complicated representations of the heart beating as it rises and falls in a classic EKG monitor).

However, the rigorous looping combined with the very short run-times of each loop results in the continuous retracing of each line's path so that just as a point in the trajectory of a given line drawing is about to completely fade away, the drawing of the line from the following loop picks up the slack, breathing new life into the line and sustaining an afterimage of a full shape drawn by the line.

When one views these elements as a whole, then, one views both:

1. An un-changing object (one *does* see a static shape outlined through the looping drawing of the line).
2. As well as flux (the continuously executed temporal event of the line being drawn).

Each work in the series thus plays with this tension between the work as a spatial object and the work as a temporal object (or alternatively, an understanding of an artwork as a creation and an understanding of an artwork as creating).

To that end, Zucconi alters the frame-rate at which he records the drawing of each of his lines.

So, in drawings with relatively high frame-rate recordings (say, sixty frames-per-second), the action appears “fast” and, thus, the “object-ness” of the shape drawn by the drawing-action is rendered more legible and vice-versa.

When one views through each work of the series, then, one begins to picture the differences between each drawing and between each drawing-time.

Additionally, when the artist projects these works in physical space, his objective as an artist, then, becomes to create a harmony (or dis-harmony as the case may be) between the physical architecture and the frame-rate of the drawing.

The work becomes site-specific.

**Friday, April 9th, 2010**

6312414236 by Damon Zucconi is in dialogue with his *Continuous Line Drawings* as the same technologically-mediated drawing technique is employed and the resulting work projects the sense that one is viewing both a drawing as well as the continuous creation of a drawing.

As it turns out, the numbers are, in fact, Zucconi's own mobile phone number – (631) 241-4236 – as it is displayed on his artist's website.

The body in the network is there and not there – one has an idea that one knows where it is, but if one is asked to grasp it, the body in the network changes its context (and keeps changing – always just out of reach).

In Zucconi's own words:

[...] it's a method of extending a line in space that connects to my mobile body. Connecting to where I am now; a present-tense...

**Tuesday, April 13th, 2010**

In the film *Avatar*, the audience may be responding less to special effects or political messages and more to the dramatization of the following uncanny phenomenon:

1. The inhabitation of a different form-of-being accompanied by the immediate rejection of any preliminary advice or testing concerning the operation of this form; aching to run wild.
2. The accompanying understanding that when one inhabits an avatar, one is, then, burdened with responsibility because – as it turns out – one simultaneously inhabits a broader spiritual network of avatars – each of which exists through both their “avatar bodies” as well as this network.

One is not free, but rather cast from one political context to another. A tension here is that, while the film makes this phenomenon into the stuff of science-fiction myth (like a wise old man’s warning about a world wherein this experience *could* occur, but, thankfully, hasn’t yet), the drama of *Avatar* is a very actually-occurring phenomenon requiring a thorough exploration of the ripples it sends through daily experience.

*Avatar* is the daily grind of logging-on-to the Web, negotiating the management of one’s virtual persona as well as this persona’s relation to the databased network. The problem with the idea of dramatizing these phenomena as if they were an actual part of “real life,” though, is that the pictures one has in their minds of “realism” doesn’t include the Internet or virtual experiences.

“Real life” is the alcoholic mother, the lonely small-town basketball coach, not the Internet avatar.

In the history of literature, though, certain authors have developed a “third way” in-between what looks to the viewer like a work of “realism” and what looks to the viewer like a work of “science-fiction”.

*Crash* by J.G. Ballard, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* by Hunter S. Thompson, and *VALIS* by Philip K. Dick; they double as a form of literary stream-of-consciousness sci-fi and sharp-eyed, stick-to-the-facts reportage of the contemporary scene; and as the reader shuttles between these understandings of the work, the understandings themselves may blur as mutated pictures of what one means when they say “realism” or “science-fiction” emerge.

## Wednesday, April 14th, 2010

At Light Industry in Brooklyn, the artist Paul Slocum recently exhibited a re-constructed 1966 *Dr. Who* episode which long-time fans of the series feared was “lost in time” following a spat of sweeping reductions from the BBC’s entire television archive during the 1960s and 70s.

The BBC’s discarding of this particular *Dr. Who* episode was not personal, but economic – they were looking for a way to save money on media storage.

In the current epoch of media storage technology, though, the data cloud affords ample room to archive and database this or any other *Dr. Who* episode.

And, indeed, in response to this hunger, fans of the show and, eventually, the BBC itself have subsequently played the role of the “time-lord,” travelling back in time and re-constructing several of these lost episodes.

As one views-through this particular episode re-construction, which was conducted by the BBC, one listens to an original audio track and views two key visual elements:

1. The first is the rough-hewn re-construction of the episode itself which consists of explanatory text as well as black-and-white production stills and video footage scraps depicting low-budget sci-fi sets and costumes intermingling with actors frozen in time.

There’s a surrealistic, dreamy quality to the visual rhythm here and the lack of clear connection between the images on the screen to the soundtrack reminds one of, say, the Chris Marker film *La Jetée* which is, likewise, a time-travel story told through an audio track and a series of black-and-white still frames.

2. The second key visual element in the re-construction, though, is the shifting background of solid colors intermingling with random number and letter strings under which this episode re-construction plays-through.

This shifting background imagery reads as “tech” or “sci-fi future” or “futurity”; however, it does so in a notably different way than those same words would find their meaning in the imagery of the episode re-construction – (they read here – not as better or worse – but simply as if from a different era – perhaps the mid-1990s [there’s something *Gattaca*

about the background's look] – in any event, equally historically dated – dead).

At the end of the episode's narrative, the Doctor (one vision of the future) “dies” and is – then – re-generated into an entirely new Doctor (another vision of the future) with an entirely new take on the role of the “time lord” who will, nevertheless – play-out an old story:

Like the Doctor before him – this new Doctor will die and be re-generated and, then, *that* Doctor will die and be re-generated and so on and so on and so on and so on.

Slocum's further re-contextualization of the episode re-construction itself provides an even deeper layer of re-generation:

One views here neither the obsolete imagery of the episode re-construction nor the obsolete imagery of the background of the re-construction nor the collision of the re-construction and its background, but rather an endless chain of dead re-generations of the future extending forever.

## Friday, April 16th, 2010

*Avatar in 3D* by Artie Vierkant is a slowly-spinning animated 3D sphere.

On the surface of the sphere, the entire one hundred sixty-two-minute runtime of the film *Avatar* has been warped and stretched-out in order to cover the total surface area of the sphere.

By turning *Avatar* into an image object – a “thing” – the work illuminates how *Avatar* itself is not just a movie, but a gigantic meme, an entire world, extending well beyond the runtime of the film.

One of the most significant developments in film history is George Lucas’s recognition that *Star Wars* is not just a movie, but a franchise that fans can wander around in via all of the extra media and merchandise that surround it.

In a hyperreal world of endless media unreality, consumers have the desire and now the ability to amble through metaverses, consuming media franchises in ways that diverge from simply sitting in a theater and watching projected light for two hours.

The slow, painful death of movies is a testament to this as consumers now prefer the scope of entire television series or massively multiplayer game universes like *Halo* or *World of Warcraft*.

In the event that someone wants to go to the movies, it’s to see a new installment of a franchise that expands the world of the characters; in the event that someone wants to read a book, it’s to read an installment of a series like *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, or George R.R. Martin’s *Game of Thrones* books.

Films are still on some level stretches of time told through cinematic language, but they are now also, perhaps primarily, things, objects expanding through the Internet and culture at large.

This is what Vierkant’s work shows me.

An avatar for *Avatar*:

**Monday, April 19th, 2010**

From *Return from the Stars* (1961) by Stanislaw Lem:

The Coronation was quite a simple matter. They put a man in a suit, took him up into orbit, and at an altitude of some hundred thousand kilometers, where the Earth shines like the Moon enlarged fivefold, simply tossed him out of the rocket into space, and then flew away. Hanging there like that, moving his arms and legs, he had to wait for their return, wait to be rescued; the spacesuit was reliable and comfortable, it had oxygen, air conditioning, a heater, and it even fed the man, with a paste squeezed out every two hours from a special mouthpiece. So nothing could happen, unless maybe there was a malfunction in the small radio attached to the outside of the wearer. There was only one thing missing in the suit, a receiver, which meant that the man could hear no voice but his own. With the void and the stars around him, suspended, weightless, he had to wait. True, the wait was fairly long, but not that long. And that was all. Yes, but people went insane from this; they would be dragged in writhing in epileptic convulsions. This was the test that went most against what lay in a man – an utter annihilation, a doom, a death with full and continuing consciousness. It was a taste of eternity, which got inside a man and let him know its horror. The knowledge, always held to be impossible and impalpable, of the cosmic abyss extending in all directions, became ours; the never-ending fall, the stars between the useless, dangling legs, the futility, the pointlessness of arms, mouth, gestures, of movement and no movement, in the suit an earsplitting scream, the wretches howled, enough.



**Tuesday, April 20th, 2010**

“Hydrate and Perform,” one part of a two-part solo exhibition of the work of Tobias Madison at the Swiss Institute, features sculptures and prints which function as synthetic visions of the natural world.

The sculptures in the exhibition are divided into a pair of categories:

1. Translucent horizontal cubes which are filled with a variety of colors of Vitamin Water.

In approximately half of these tanks the artist has placed artificial bamboo shoots which poke out of the tops of the tanks.

The effect of these bamboo shoots is to both frustrate the strict cubic linearity of the sculpture and compound the sense of artificiality introduced into the work through the use of the Vitamin Water.

2. Translucent vertical cubes which are filled top-to-bottom with claustrophobically-confined, paint-splattered artificial plant arrangements.

These cubes are supported upon minimal vertical bases – the surfaces of which are combinations of various faux wood patterns.

The prints in the exhibition, likewise, are divided into a pair of categories:

1. A series of large, framed scans of compact discs which have been digitally-manipulated to appear as though they have melted and spilled down the page like paint spilling down a canvas.

2. Several un-framed prints of similarly digitally-manipulated imagery which is no longer legible as the representation of any particular object – it reads not as a melting CD, but rather as the melting effect itself.

In combination, these sculptures and prints frame not just the artificiality of natural elements and phenomena, but – through their aestheticized / fetishized presentation – frame the *desire* for artificiality itself wherein artificial water is more desirable than actual water and the effect of “liquification” overruns the effect’s functional representational application.

However, there is another (perhaps unanticipated) formal element occurring here which is worth mentioning.

In the tanks of Vitamin Water, one views blocks of colorful, über-artificial water – yes; however, one also views the accumulation of dust and debris which has gathered in the corners and walls of the tank, disrupting the vision of total, almost evil, artificial cleanliness.

This trace of naturally-occurring entropic process is, like the dust “breeding” on Duchamp’s *Large Glass* as photographed by Man Ray or Smithson’s vision of crumbling cinematic apparatus, a death mask – a reminder that even the hyper-virtualized quality of contemporary experience is always already a ruin.

## Wednesday, April 21st, 2010

*Glass House*, a photo series by James Welling on-view at the David Zwirner gallery in New York, consists of sixteen large-scale framed prints and six smaller framed prints.

Each of the prints depicts either the Modernist “Glass House” residence designed by Philip Johnson in 1949 in New Canaan, Connecticut or further architectural and sculptural elements located on the forty-seven acres of the House’s grounds.

In each digitally-captured image on view through the gallery’s white-walled rooms, the artist experiments with a wide range of lens filtration techniques, resulting in lushly-saturated colors grading over the figure of a giant glass cube (or similarly Modernist iconography) in the midst of the pastoral Connecticut landscape.

Despite the presence of varying seasons and light conditions portrayed throughout the photographs, though, the project as a whole projects a feeling of day-dreamy late-afternoon melancholy and reads in dialog with certain late 1960s psychedelic album covers or the lens flare effects favored by certain European cinematographers of the same era.

Digging a bit deeper into the work, though, one begins to view the significance of these images beyond their somewhat nostalgic sensual power.

First of all, the key technical variable is the variation of filters between the artist’s camera lens and his subject matter.

As one views through the twenty-two photographs on-display here, one begins to view their filters and their filtering (as they are the primary agent of change between the individual photographs in the series) as much as one views their subject matter (the Glass House).

The decision to photograph this particular building is decisive as it illuminates a framework around which to view the process of filtering.

In a project picturing various filtrations on the landscape, the “transparent” glass of the Glass House becomes visible as just one more of these filters – one more obstruction between one’s self and “reality.”

This becomes more intriguing when one considers that the Glass House, in particular – as an idealized model of Modernist ideology – sought to provide a neutral, objective, totally transparent space through which one could look out onto the world.

However, as history has demonstrated, the Modernist vision of objective transparency is hardly without a point of view; it is, indeed, a wildly distinct lens through which to filter one's view on reality – no better nor worse than any of the varieties of filters employed by Welling through the series (which is fine [it's not as though there's something that would be *more* objective]).

Finally, with all of this in mind, the work offers one more (unintended) kick.

Moving through the gallery space, one views the photographs – yes; but one also views the glare of the glass filter between themselves – as viewers – and the photographic print:

A “neutral, objective, totally transparent” window reflecting back one's own contextualization in the “neutral, objective, totally transparent” space of the white cube in which all of this is occurring.

**Friday, April 23rd, 2010**

*Dialectics in February* by Martijn Hendriks consists of two elements:

1. An inverted royal blue flag with a circular hole cut-out of the middle.
2. A piece of the flag placed on the ground directly below the hole.

As one digs deeper into the work, one understands that the flag from which the hole has been cut is, in fact, the European Union flag.

The power of the work, then, is the erasure of the flag's power: a European Union whose only rallying cry is that the entire notion of the "European Union" is literally empty – nothing.

Self-annihilating ideas such as this have been explored by artists before, but the use of the flag is particularly effective as the flag – as a symbol of symbolism – short-circuits all meaning directly back onto itself; its impotency becomes – as a flag – to literally wave for itself.

## Tuesday, April 27th, 2010

The subject matter of “Liquid Door,” an exhibition of work by Isola & Norzi on-view at Art in General in New York, is the screen (and the desire to transcend the screen) between the human mind and the natural world.

One views:

1. { *salt water [ fresh water ( distilled water ) fresh water ] salt water* }, an aquarium tank filtering between salt water, fresh water, and distilled water.
2. *Platonic Aquarium*, the schematic model of an idealized Buckminster Fuller-esque underwater domicile.
3. *Bated Breath*, a series of matted photographs depicting the artists’ attempts to re-create the “liquid door” of Jacques Cousteau’s “Starfish House” (a “door” which emerges due to the air pressure of the water colliding with the air pressure at the threshold of the House)
4. And *Large Glass*, a video documenting the *pas de deux* performance conducted between a scuba diver and the large transparent glass screening him from the public space of the Coney Island Aquarium.

Throughout the viewing of these works, one’s attention is nudged further and further away from the form of life occurring in the water and closer and closer towards the screens which separate one from this very form.

Indeed, there’s something *anti-aquatic* about it – *not* beautiful, *not* flowing, *not* majestic; claustrophobic, mirrored, alienating.

This is not necessarily a problem, though; in fact, if one spends enough time in the show an intriguing (if not bitter) quasi-philosophical thought might enter one’s mind:

In one’s search for a “closeness” to nature, perhaps these efforts have only increased one’s dependence-on and desire-for the screens which separate.

This thematic crystallizes as one views *Anemonia Mirabilis*, a projected video loop (one screen from nature) depicting vintage film footage (another screen from nature) of Cousteau and his colleagues smoking cigarettes in their underwater home (a third screen from nature) which the artists have re-filmed through the “transparent” water (a fourth “natural” screen from nature) of a “transparent” aquarium tank (a fifth screen from nature) and contextualized in a space marked for “art” (a final screen from nature).

**Thursday, April 29th, 2010**

The world of Christopher Priest's novel *Inverted World* is literally moving forward.

Indeed, the world is, one learns, a large mechanical sphere moving on continuously built-out tracks which are plotted by people such as the novel's protagonist, Helward Mann.

Mann's only job, as a "Future," is to survey ahead of the track-work, making sure that the world's journey towards what is referred to as "optimum" is as smooth as is reasonably possible.

The reason the world engages in this peculiar activity is the oft-mentioned fear of a centrifugal force in the natural world which, as Mann can attest to, would suck the mechanical world into a Hellish entropic spiral – a void.

(Mann *saw* this).

Now, this would be fine were it not for the fact that this world – in its endless march towards "optimum" – is overrun with mountains of its own feces.

One can hardly look around the world without viewing its own crumbling mechanical apparatus, its own genetic aberrations, and its own unapologetic human exploitation and warmongering – all conditions contingent upon the world's progress in one way or another.

But, surely – as Mann would argue – there is simply no other option – one must keep going.

Indeed, Mann, as a professional surveyor into the future, would know – he has, after all, seen it:

If Man(n) stops working, Man(n) goes to(ward)s Hel(l).

(This is what Helward Mann *saw*.)

For Mann, one must choose the lesser of two evils and march on into the future.

The problem with all this, though – as the novel's foil to Mann, Elizabeth Khan, demonstrates – is not that Mann is wrong per se, but rather that his question is badly stated.

It's not that there is a binary between going forward towards the Truth and backwards towards Hell (as if time were a piece of string); but rather that there are a plethora of radically incomplete goings – never forward (as if towards “optimum”), but simply “on.”

All one can do here, then, is be reasonable and present to what is in front of one; that is to say, *see* things.

In the case of the world of *Inverted World*, the paradigm of seeing must shift or the world will drown in the endlessness of the ocean (in a sort of reversal of Mann's own understanding of the void).

Again – it's not that Mann is “right” or “wrong” here but that his vision is for better or for worse in ruins.



**Friday, April 30th, 2010**

*Ancient Artifacts* by Brad Tinmouth consists of a series of four product-shot style photographs depicting down-market kitsch sculptures of, respectively, a “Pharaoh,” a “Buddha,” a “Cat Goddess,” and a “Krishna” over each of which the artist has applied a layer of clear resin.

In each case, this layer of clear resin “spills out” beyond the bottom edges of the object, thus creating, not just a synthetic “sheen” to the object’s surface, but an expanded surface area to the object’s base composed of the dried resin, as well.

Due to this ejaculatory marking of his own objects, one views both:

1. Mass-produced objects which are the synthetic versions of once-unique objects (appropriated kitsch gods).
2. As well as a series of unique objects in their own right (the serial mutations of appropriated kitsch gods).

Each work’s totemic power resides here, then, not in either (1.) nor in (2.), but rather in the oscillation between (1.) and (2.) from original to version to original to version and back again.



» **May 2010**

**Monday, May 3rd, 2010**

From *Past Master* by R.A. Lafferty (1968):

“New dimensions of pleasure are achieved daily and almost hourly,” the precis machine played. “All live in a constant ecstasy. We are all one, all one being, the whole world of us, and we reach the heights of intense intercommunication. We come to have a single mind and a single spirit. We are everything. We are the living cosmos. The people of Astrobe do not dream at night, for a dream is a maladjustment. We do not have an unconscious, as the ancient people had, for an unconscious is the dark side, and we are all light. For us there is no future. The future is now. There is no Heaven as the ancients believed; for many years we have been in the only after-life there is. Death is unimportant. By it we simply become more closely integrated into the City. We leave off being an individual. In us there is neither human nor programmed, but we are all one. We verge to our apex which is the total realization of the world-folk. We become a single organism, ever more and more intricate, the City itself.”

NOTE: This passage features a “precis machine” explaining to Thomas More the world of the future which his book *Utopia* helped create, despite the fact that it was a meant to be satire.

## Wednesday, May 5th, 2010

I like to walk around in a particular park.

This park isn't huge, but it's not small either (about a mile around) and it has some tennis courts, as well as a series of hills.

On the largest of these hills is a large vertical monument to a military exploit around which a lot of fit, physically attractive people hang out.

And on one of the smaller of these hills are a couple of small, dying trees around which a group of sickly, goth teenagers hang out and role play vampire fantasy scenarios.

Writing about Internet art makes me compare everything I see to the Internet, so, after seeing this group of kids on a regular basis for long enough, I began to think about the relationship between vampires themes and what it's like to be online.

Here are some thoughts:

1. Vampires are unable to exist in the light of day:

The teenagers don't seem to fit into the world of daylight.

Multiplayer online gaming in a dark, musty basement is better for them and they would appear more at home there.

2. Vampires are able to exist in an endless duration:

The Internet is a vampire world in the sense that online time is premised less on the rhythms of day and night (the seasons changing through the "real" world) and more on those of the endless twenty-four hour data stream (the endless "now" of the virtual world).

The endless time of the virtual world seems more appropriate for these teenagers than natural time.

In the synthetic, role-playing milieu of virtual worlds, it is the vampire kids who seem relevant and cool, not the physically-fit people who hang out near the military statue.

It should be said, though, that the recent popularity of vampire mythology is not fundamentally bound up with sickly teenagers hanging out near dying trees.

For example, I walked into a large, chain bookstore yesterday and was frustrated to find myself shuffling through hundreds of yuppies, suburban “moms,” and other assorted mainstream people who were packed standing room only to hear Charlaine Harris, the author of a series of elaborately-realized vampire mystery novels, speak.

In fact, this group was almost identical in appearance and demography to the one I (again accidentally) found myself swimming through who were on hand to hear Candace Bushnell, the creator of *Sex and the City*, speak at the same bookstore – a population less Hot Topic than Gap.

This is not to pass a value judgment either way, just to say that there is something about the thematics and atmospherics of the vampire myth which speaks to an audience of “indoor kids” beyond the goth teenagers in the park.

## Thursday, May 6th, 2010

*Battleship Potemkin Dance Edit (120 BPM)* by Michael Bell-Smith is a twelve-and-a-half minute video in which the artist condenses the shots of *Battleship Potemkin*, a 1925 silent film directed by Sergei Eisenstein, to one half of one second each (one hundred twenty cuts per minute).

He, then, underlays this “sped up” footage with a stripped-down 120 BPM dance music beat which matches the cuts of the image in perfect synchronization.

At first glance, it creates a strobe effect.

However, after a few moments, the flow of the narrative becomes followable due to both the original film’s heavy-handed graphic symbolism (silent films, of course, relied largely on pointed imagery to advance narrative) and the contemporary mind’s training for such rapid-fire editing techniques at the hands of MTV, Web surfing and whatnot.

One views, then, in a Cliffs Notes version, the famous montage elements and the revolutionary propaganda techniques for which the original film, *Battleship Potemkin*, is deservedly famous.

On the one hand, that’s great – the viewer gets to check out a film with aesthetic, intellectual and historical importance and is able to do so without the “boringness” of sitting there “forever” watching a really old movie.

(“History written with lightning” as Woodrow Wilson put in regard to another landmark silent film – *Birth of a Nation*.)

But, on the other hand, can one say that they have actually viewed *Battleship Potemkin*?

That is to say, even though the narrative sequence of the film is more or less legible, is there some missing “purity” to the film which is lost in the sped-up translation?

The goal of the film was to awaken in the viewer a sense of class consciousness through montage editing (shot A + shot B = Synthesis C; the aesthetic answer to the dialectical method of history explored in Marxist theory).

Is this effect, or the ability to even appreciate this effect, lost?

Perhaps what one can say they see in Bell-Smith's version of the film is this, a new type of synthesis:

The mesmerizing, almost sinister mechanical regularity of one image colliding into another image resulting in an intellectual synthesis of images again and again and again and again without ever achieving "pure" synthesis (like an endless, un-changing dance beat).



## Friday, May 7th, 2010

The most recent post on “Schumacher,” a Tumblr of Ben and Louie Schumacher’s sculptural work from mid-2009 to the present moment, displays a series of views on an assemblage sculpture entitled *Champfleury* in which a (most likely faux) marble plinth supports the following three elements:

1. A framed line drawing (in the style of, say, Matisse) depicting a nude woman paired next to a vase of flowers.
2. A series of approximately twelve small, white rectangular objects which one assumes to be the “12 rapid prototypes of iphones found on google 3d warehouse” listed in the work’s media.
3. An unfinished maquette depicting a figure roughly rendered in plaster.

Additionally, outside of this plinth, one views an un-adorned wire dress-form which is hung on the wall in the background.

Now, a place to begin to understand the interaction of these elements is the work’s title:

*Champfleury*.

“Champfleury” is the pen name of the 19<sup>th</sup> century French art critic Jules Fleury-Husson who notably defended the “realistic” paintings of Courbet depicting beggars and other previously un-represented (or un-representable) subject matter.

His defense of Courbet rested not on politics, but rather on Courbet’s unique ability to paint what he sees in front of him in the world.

Now, if one views these particular sculptures through the lens of an art critic associated with “realism,” a paradox occurs as the sculptures assembled here each work through and around ideas of mediation between real models and virtual simulations, not “reality” itself or at least not reality as Courbet taught Champfleury (for one) to view it.

Models of ipods, models of sculptures, models of garments, models of drawings of nude models and vases; in each of these cases, one is presented a synthetic portal in-between a “real” thing in the world and the creative representation of that thing.

This paradox is only worked through if one is willing to think through the idea that reality may have mutated from Courbet's day (which could be a terrifying idea to think through).

The work – here – involved in a new type of “realism” – a realism premised not on distinctions between real and virtual, but on the mixed reality thresholds between the two.

## Monday, May 10th, 2010

On the one hand, *Trash Humpers* by Harmony Korine is a mildly hip take on *Jackass*.

Korine and his co-conspirators dress up as crystal meth tweakers and generally cause trouble throughout Nashville, Tennessee while being filmed through the retro lens of the VHS camcorder.

“Transgressive.”

On the other hand, the film transcends hipster posing through Korine’s sincerity as an artist and the sense that he is invested in giving the film a certain depth.

(“Make it, make it, don’t fake it!” Korine’s own character implores throughout the film.)

So, with that in mind, what is going on here?

As the film opens, the predictably weird and stylish antics described above are in full effect.

One views the protagonists smashing televisions in abandoned houses, humping plastic trash cans, taking shits in front of automated garage doors, giving mock blow jobs to the branch of a tree, etc.

It’s all funny enough and the super softness of the VHS imagery combined with the perpetually humid, “almost-about-to-rain” milieu in which these actions were documented makes the whole thing feel less like the pounding sharpness of *Jackass* and more like a Sunday afternoon nap.

But, what else?

Where is all this going other than towards a certain vague *Vice* magazine style “artsy-ness”?

Well, to begin, a symbolic motif develops:

One views a succession of ratty, plastic baby-dolls with which the humpers oscillate in response from either maternal love to abject destruction.

The baby-doll calls to mind both the organic fragility of a “real” baby as well as the durable artificiality of plastic in a single image.

(Or, alternatively, the hope for a new life and the dismissal of old garbage.)

Is *this* baby, then, one the world loves or one the world destroys?

And as *Trash Humpers* unfolds:

Sometimes plastic baby-dolls are loved.

Sometimes plastic baby-dolls are destroyed.

And one can't accurately anticipate when these sea changes will occur.

The resulting blur between these two poles then becomes something in-between creation and destruction:

Call it fornication.

Humping.

(From chaos, to order and back again until The End [“the money shot”].)

(In an ending rivaling *2001*, the sight of a humper lovingly coddling a *real* baby sparks a horrifying question – the baby is coddled by the humper now, but [when] will the sea change?)

This thematic is expanded through the reading of another character's poem in which the only thing left to do with all the garbage of technological progress choking one's world is neither creation nor destruction, but endless fornication (this character is later murdered by the humpers).

Again and again, the humpers manipulate the abject, obsolete “trash” mounting in the wake of progress, sometimes destroying it, sometimes preserving it, mostly doing both at once.

Pulling out (or in) a couple of degrees, then, Korine's approach to his own medium of obsolete analog VHS adds a further layer to one's understanding.

VHS (trash) is – here – neither destroyed nor created, but (perhaps one could say) loved, humped – manipulated in such a way (not too fast, not too slow, just right) as to elicit its own secret virus *out* into the air (as if to infect [and mutate]).

**Tuesday, May 11th, 2010**

From *Galaxies Like Grains of Sand* (1960) by Brian Aldiss:

For a long minute, Jandanagger was silent, searching for the key phrases of explanation.

“You have learned as much as you have very rapidly,” he said.

“By not-understanding and then by well-understanding, you have made yourself one of the true citizens of the Galaxy. But you have only taken leap X; now you must take leap X<sup>10</sup>. Prepare yourself.”

“I am prepared.”

“All that you have learned is true. Yet there is a far greater truth, a truer truth. Nothing exists in the ultimate sense; all is illusion, a two-dimensional shadow play on the mist of space-time. Yinnisfar itself means ‘illusion.’”

“But the clawed thing...”

“The clawed thing is why we fare even farther ahead into the illusion of space. *It* is real. Only the Galaxy as you previously misinterpreted it is unreal, being but a configuration of mental forces. That monster, that thing you sensed, is the residue of slime of the evolutionary past still lingering – not outside you, but *in your mind*. It is from that we must escape. We must grow from it.”

More explanation followed, but it was beyond Farro. In a flash, he saw that Jandanagger, with an eagerness to experiment, had driven him too far and too fast. He could not make the last leap; he was falling back, toppling into non-being. Somewhere within him, the pop-thud-pop sound of bursting arteries began. Others would succeed where he had failed, but, meanwhile, the angry claws were reaching from the heavens for him – to sunder, not to rescue.

## Thursday, May 13th, 2010

“Nothing To Blame But Gemini” is an installation of fourteen works by Whitney Clafin now on view at Real Fine Arts in Williamsburg.

The installation is composed of one-half modestly-sized abstract paintings produced by the artist and one-half similarly-sized glossy posters printed-out by the artist which themselves each depict an abstracted detail of one of her own abstract paintings (not – it should be noted – the paintings in this particular installation, though).

The first thing to say about the installation is that one isn’t immediately sure which of the works here are the paintings and which of the works here are the posters as they’re each roughly the same size and they each depict iconography which one reads as “painterly” – drips, slashes, goopy brush strokes, etc.

(If one were to view the works through a computer screen [or a printed-out checklist], it would be effectively impossible to differentiate them via their media [rather, the “take away” message – in that case – becomes the sign of “painting,” or, alternatively, of “art.”])

However, as one spends time with “Nothing To Blame But Gemini” (as in the case [if one goes for this sort of thing, anyway] of spending time with a person born under the sign of Gemini), what at first glance appears to be singular, gradually reveals a strong duality.

The key variable of difference between these works is their materiality as objects – the paintings are sculptural, tactile; the posters are flat, glossy.

In the paintings, one views onto a surface molded by the artist – that is to say, a phenomenological space – the action occurred “here”; in the posters, one views into a surface automatically printed-out by a machine – that is to say a conceptual space – the action occurred “out there.”

Going one step deeper, the surface of the paintings calls to mind production as the location of the work (present tense), while the surface of the posters calls to mind both pre-production as well as post-production as the location of the work (past and future tenses).

And, at this point, if one is willing to go this far with the work, another layer emerges wherein each individual image harnesses these very tensions between “the hand of the artist” and “automatic effects.”

For example, in the painting works, collisions emerge between, on the one hand, the application of objects (broken ceramic, pieces of canvas, newspaper, string, glitter, etc.) which automatically produce iconographic elements and, on the other hand, the artist's application of paint which manually produces iconographic elements.

And in the poster works, collisions emerge between, on the one hand, the data of the photograph which automatically produces iconographic elements and, on the other hand, the artist's digital manipulation (using "painterly" effects in an image editing software) of the photograph which manually produces iconographic elements.

Finally, the painterly gestures in the works themselves (be they conducted with paint or pixels) point one in the direction of these dialectical tensions as they reveal an indeterminacy – a hesitation to settle anywhere for certain.

One views wiggling lines and almost haphazard juxtapositions of iconography and media; things never quite coalesce.

However, if one is willing to think of the work occurring here as located less in the individual objects, and more in the dialectical tension pictured by the installation as a whole, then suddenly a strong, singular point of view reveals itself.

**Friday, May 14th, 2010**

“3 weeks ago” Charles Broskoski uploaded a diptych of images, each of which depicts a still-life composed in a painterly style.

One views, in the image to the left of the diptych, a vertical composition composed of an open door that itself frames an arrangement of fruit situated on a small end table and the obstructed view of a window.

These figurative elements are each carved out in chunky, geometrically-legible units of color.

In the image to the right of the diptych, one views a similar composition whose differences with the first are localized to shifts in color and re-considerations of the given shapes of objects (perhaps most notably in the cubist-inspired centerpiece of the fruit arrangement).

Now, one might say that Broskoski’s model here is not necessarily an arrangement of objects in space, but rather, a painting style – say, Fauvism.

And these particular works are apt studies of the style; they’re well-executed and have a certain aesthetic appeal.

But, that said, whereas the Fauves (“The Wild Beats”) were notorious for depicting objects in space in an un-realistic manner (or, alternatively, mutating their own definition of “realistic”), Broskoski’s paintings lack that sort of “shock effect.”

They are not wild, but tame.

The fact that these images do not catalyze the shock effects that, say, Matisse’s work catalyzed in its own time should not be surprising.

After all, Matisse’s work was once contemporary, but is now safely at home in Ikea or Pier One Imports; it’s been absorbed and neutralized into the flow of commodified signage.

So, where does this leave Broskoski?

Well, to start, this diptych – as it is displayed on his website, anyway – is situated directly below another diptych which itself is housed under a heading reading “2 weeks ago...”

In the lower-most image of this second diptych, one views iconography reading less as painterly or in reference to any other art historical style than



it does digital and “new.”

One views what might be taken for a 3D “metal fence” (3D in the sense of digital “3D animation” not *trompe-l’oeil*) through which undulating chunks of lightly-shaded colors which might be taken for “stingrays” pass through and intermingle with small, concentric circles of color which might be taken for “eyeballs.”

And, in the upper image of the diptych, one views a similarly surrealistic arrangement of iconography; however, in this case, the icons do not read solely as “painterly” or solely as “digital,” but rather as a collision between the two.

The background and immediate foreground here are composed of graffiti-like scribbles created with a tool that automatically re-produces this “real world” effect, and the middle-ground of the image is composed of a series of “3D” representations of what one might take to be “vertebrae” extending not in a straight line (as in a spine) but in a wild swirl throughout the space of the image.

It should be said, though, that as with the images in the diptych mentioned above, these more digitally-inflected images are themselves each well-executed and sort of privately powerful, but perhaps lack the bodily shock effects which the various avant-gardes of art history are interested in.

Which would be fine – perhaps Broskoski isn’t interested in that sort of thing – were it not for the fact that, if one is up for it, there’s another way to view what’s going on here with its own unique shock:

When the artist places these paintings in conjunction with one another and in the context of an ongoing stream of paintings which a viewer might follow (as in a performance) on his website, the viewer’s lens on the work here is nudged away from each of the individual images and closer towards the legible pattern of filtration through which the individual images stream.

The shock of shifting one’s lens from such simultaneously well-executed and differently well-executed images creates a space of indeterminacy – a sort of surrealist heterotopia picturing less space than movements in time.

## Monday, May 17th, 2010

In “Free Art,” a text by the Jogging, it is suggested that the Web’s economy of re-blogging and fast-paced communal interaction creates its own economic model and, thus, its own best practices for understanding how value around work is accrued.

Furthermore, it is thought that the art world – even if it did acknowledge this work – would not know what to do with it as this online economy is alien to its own – premised as *it* is on the exchange of materially sensual objects for amounts of (financial) capital unavailable to all but the most wealthy members of society.

Jogging writes:

In the lives of contemporary artists, Free Art is a place to find one’s self through the existence of others – to individually reclaim the ability to self-mythologize and empathetically pick from your peers for influence. Thus, Free Art is marked by the compulsive urge of searching (or, surfing) to connect with others in a way that is not dictated by profitability, but found and shared charitably among individuals based on personal interests.

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A couple of thoughts:

I’m not sure that the Web is any less tainted by economics than the art market. The re-blogging format preferred by Jogging did not appear out of nowhere; power relations are alive and well (t)here as one might say that all of this activity is ultimately in the service of market research for corporations.

Meanwhile, the world of contemporary art is obviously not perfect, but it’s not entirely dominated by auctions and abusive gatekeeping, either.

And if one is interested in placing their creative endeavors on the Web in both the most critically sympathetic as well as the most critically astute environment possible (the environment in which it will be judged as more than style alone), one can’t so easily dismiss the art world as it has been thinking about these questions very seriously for a very long time.

Furthermore, the work *will* (if it is as good as it thinks it is) end up back in the art system as salable objects; the question here, then, is how much control does the artist exert over this entry into the system.

This is just to say that the conversation occurring inside the art world is worth taking a second look at before one abandons it outright.

Also, Jogging's reference to the immaterial or de-materialized quality of the work is problematic.

For the sake of argument (and it *is* debatable), let's say that – yes – a virtual .jpeg of a sculpture is immaterial – free of the problems of aura and material commodification which the sculpture depicted in the .jpeg itself affords.

But, what about the hardware displaying this content?

The notion that the Web has accomplished some sort of Hegelian transcendence is precisely what, say, Steve Jobs wants consumers to believe:

Go on, keep chatting with your friends, watching videos, listening to music – it's all fluid and immaterial now and that's great – just so long as you do so through the iPad.

These devices which display the work which Jogging thinks of as lacking aura, are, in fact, highly susceptible to aura or, from a slightly different angle, fetishism.

One can't wait to get home and log-on to their machine, touch it, ride the time of computing cycles; anytime the threat of boredom creeps in, one can immediately start fingering their iPhone, dexterously running their hands all over it in the hopes of generating more immaterial content.

Indeed, perhaps one could think of the endless stream of a blog as lubricant – sweet nothings in one's ear, easing one's entry into a more rhythmically sustained fingering of their device.

This is just to say that the materiality of digital culture is worth taking a second look at before one denies its presence outright.

Now all that said (and on the other hand), there's another consideration which comes into play here:

“Free Art” was posted on the Jogging Tumblr on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

In the five days which have passed since the 12<sup>th</sup>, Jogging has posted six additional unique works – each possessing their own unique power and each propelling my own following of their posting (as in an on-going performance).

As a matter of fact, this immediacy and performative enthusiasm is relatively more exciting (to me, anyway) than most things happening in most of the shows advertised via, say, e-flux.

Which is precisely the effect which Jogging describes in their text.

An anxiety arises:

I have some issues with the idea, but I'm compelled to follow it nonetheless.

That is to say, it can't be dismissed outright as the artists demonstrate it for me, placing it directly in front of me, demanding my acknowledgment.

And through this acknowledgment, I may never quite decide for certain if the idea of Free Art is naïve or pioneering (or both), but I may be infected by it, nonetheless.

## Wednesday, May 19th, 2010

*No Fun* by Eva and Franco Mattes (aka 0100101110101101.org) is an approximately sixteen minute video depicting a diptych of video images.

In the video to the right of the diptych, one views a young man who has (it appears) hung himself to death.

In the video to the left of the diptych, one views a continually changing series of random computer users who are responding to the sight of this hanging man.

More specifically, the video is a documentation of the Chatroulette interface in which one of the artists (Franco Mattes) performs the role of the hanging man and leaves it up to the algorithms of Chatroulette (and the pool of Chatroulette users online at the time) to generate the bulk of the video's subsequent content.

The first thing to note is that one's focus through the duration of the video is nudged further away from the video of the hanging man and closer towards the video of users' varied reactions to the sight of the hanging man.

What one takes away is the picture of a virtual public responding to the possibility of a real suicide.

In most cases, a legible pattern forms in which, first of all, a shock occurs where the user confronts the image of the suicide and exhibits a strong reaction.

The sight of a suicide online or off is obviously going to be unsettling, but, there's something about placing a suicide in this context which is unsettling in a very particular way.

For example, the hanging man here is "live" in the sense that their virtual persona is functioning, but the user (the actual hanging man, himself) is "dead" in the sense that his biological body is no longer functioning.

So, can one really say that he's definitely *not* there?

(Like a ghost, his presence in the bedroom is palpable.)

But, can one really say that he *is* there?

(Of course not, he's dead.)

So, one asks one's self:

Is a dead body the same thing as the real person?

And, then:

Is the online persona of a person representing themselves as their own dead body the same thing as the person?

Furthermore, the body here is suspended in the air – both floating, free from the laws of gravity and falling, on the precipice of physical collapse, which only adds to this confusion regarding its location.

After this initial shock effect, then, a range of reactions occur from apathy, to pondering, to sexual excitement, to denial, to the need to take a picture of the screen with a digital camera, to amusement, to vicious insulting, to hilarity, to confusion, and, in one case, to calling the police.

Some people assume it's a joke, some people think it might be real, and most people aren't quite sure.

Within this range of reactions, though, there is one underlying theme which remains as constant as the presence of the hanging man himself:

The question:

Is this real?

That is to say, first of all, is this really a dead body or is it rather a clever fakery perpetrated by, say, a performance artist?

And, second of all, is this *real*, as in is this the sort of real human situation wherein I – as a real human being – am ethically called upon to really act (whether it's real or whether it's fake)?

That question is by far and away the most common theme brought up by the users throughout the video's runtime.

Is this real?

NOTE: This post might be read in conjunction with the essay “A Rape in Cyberspace; or How an Evil Clown, a Hatian Trickster Sprit, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database into a Society” by Julian Dibbel (1993)

**Thursday, May 20th, 2010**

In *You As In User*, an academic text on Web 2.0 economics, Dennis Knopf (aka Tracky Birthday) explains the way in which large social networks such as Facebook thrive on the sale, not of network space, but rather of information culled from network users.

Facebook, without this data, is worthless.

Value here is traded through its users' voluntarily offered likes, dislikes, pictures, keywords, ratings, and other personal information which advertisers can, in turn, use to micro-target clusters of audiences, maximizing the ratio of advertisement signal to advertisement noise in each user's daily media diet.

For some, this is seen to be progress – a “win-win” situation in which the consumer is afforded the freedom to seek out their most intricately individualized desires and the corporation offering this service is afforded the freedom to transform all of the data traces left by users into streams of financial capital.

But think of what this does to the potential for shared experience.

As one's consumption becomes more and more individualized, does it perhaps decrease one's ability to personally connect with other people consuming other sets of media?

And, furthermore, think of the existential dilemma posed by the ostensibly infinite choice of networked consumption.

As one's initial mania for endless novelty wanes, is there a point in which this enthusiasm transforms into a dread regarding the possibility of endless fun consumption, endless deference of “true” satisfaction?

What exactly *is* the consumer getting out of this deal?

Knopf (following a thoughtful, not to mention substantial, presentation of research) writes in his conclusion:

The myth of complete consumer freedom and the seeming focus on giving users the chance to express their individuality is to be questioned. Web2.0 has opened up a world of opportunities and introduced technologies that have changed our relation to media.

But as long as strategies like the walled gardens and the segmentation of media are just to construct differentiated, homogeneous audiences then the world of Web2.0 is not much of a democracy.

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That said, though, what is the user supposed to do here?

Perhaps one severs their relationship to digital media in disgust and starts reading Hegel all day.

Perhaps one says, “the Hell with it,” leaping head first into the void of novelty, hoping to burst through to some other realm.

Knopf’s own suggestion takes a different path.

Effective counter-culture – here – aims to inform users of their exploitation in the system; he points to the practice of “culture jamming” in which the content of, say, an advertisement is designed to alienate the viewer of the ad from the ad’s message, thus catalyzing the viewer’s criticality towards not just this ad, but (ideally) all ads.

What would it mean to confront these conditions in contemporary art?

How does the contemporary art audience become conscious of contemporary art’s own involvement with these very economic models in which information is more valuable than material?

One place to look for an answer to both of these questions is the artist Ben Schumacher’s *Immaterial Labour* works.

In *Immaterial Labour 4*, for example, one views three beach towels inverted to hang on a wall.

Printed on each of the towels is a black and white photographic image of, respectively, a young woman, a man reading art books in a room filled with other art books, and another young woman.

It turns out that these images were not created by Schumacher, but rather were appropriated by him from the Facebook pages of users who identified that they were going to attend *that* show in which the towels were first exhibited.

Schumacher selects the image he wants to display, prints it onto a towel at Walmart, and, then, when the user attends the event, he or she sees themselves transformed into a work of art.



In each work, what one is viewing, if one is to follow the title's lead, is not necessarily a person, but a concept – immaterial labour – the post-industrial labor of, for example, data sharing, the service industry, intellectual consulting, etc.

For an artist, particularly a young artist working in a networked culture, the capital they manage, before it's financial capital, is social capital which can be quantified in terms of, for example, how many other Facebook users (and which Facebook users) acknowledge that they are going to attend *your* show.

If a ton of people indicate that they're coming and a ton of people the artist desires, in particular, to indicate that they're coming, then his show is, all of the sudden, worth something which might result in financial capital down the road.

Schumacher – in these *Immaterial Labour* works – transports this very process of others conducting free, immaterial labour for him into the eye of the art space.

What one views here, then, is, on the one hand, a towel whose face value (like Facebook's face value) is negligible; and, on the other hand, a towel containing information (like Facebook's user information) which is worth something.

It's culture jamming. The product is a self-reflexive critique of its underlying economic function.

**Friday, May 21st, 2010**

*Pre-Sensation* by Hayley Silverman is an approximately four minute video in which one views a laser pointer track over the projected image of another video which itself depicts rhythmic hand-held camera movements over sculptures representing “natural” forms and abstracted nude bodies.

The motion of the laser pointer here is composed of improvised, arcing motions which reflect the improvised, arcing motions of the camera over the sculptures depicted in the projected video.

Additionally, the video is paired with an improvised jazz score by a band named “Willendorf” and is also intercut at one point with several shots of a male sculptor as he washes the dirt from one of his sculptural tools and, then, from his hands.

Silverman’s movements with the laser pointer are legible as a sort of pre-intellectual, pre-sensational sensuality harmonizing with the shapes of the sculptural forms.

The fact that she is pointing her laser beam and her camera lens all over *these* sculptures, though, is not a neutral gesture.

Rather, the aggressive scopophilia on view here in which the laser and camera ogle over representations of breasts, thighs, penises, and asses is an act of primitivist othering which mirrors and, thus, brings to the forefront, these sculptures’ own participation in this process.

That is to say, as one views the laser pointer and camera scope-out these sculptures as if they were sexual conquests, one feels, perhaps, empathy with them as in – hey, you’re basically raping it with your eyes instead of considering the object as an equal being.

In turn, the sculpture’s own problematic relationship to idealizations of otherness is, then, almost unavoidably brought to the forefront of one’s view on the work.

The history of primitivism in 20<sup>th</sup> century art, after all, (of which the sculptures depicted in this video are in sincere dialogue) is (it is widely thought) premised on an illusion in which non-Western cultures are presumed to be closer to nature and, thus, more pure than self-loathing technologically-tainted Western cultures.

What was intended as praise for these cultures, is received – in reality – as the worst kind of imperialism in which anyone outside of Western culture is reduced to a myth or a symbol of purity – that is, non-existent (or if existent, then existent only in order to serve as a reflection for Western culture).

Now, it's important to emphasize the fact that the performance here is intercut with images of a white, male sculptor (ostensibly the sculptor of these sculptures) as he washes the dirt of the sculptural process off of his tools and hands.

By including this particular footage, Silverman both upsets the rhythmic flow of the performance, as well as nudges one's view on the work towards the fact that the sculptures here were created by a white male artist as an instance of primitivist art.

Additionally, the fact that the name of the band who scored the video's improvisatory jazz score – “Willendorf” – is presumably taken from the twenty-four thousand year old nude sculpture, the *Venus of Willendorf*, also nudges one in this direction.

As such, the performance's physicality and sensuality activate one part of one's mind, while the artist's careful critical framing of this very physicality and sensuality, activates another part, a counterpoint, calling into question its own premises.

## Wednesday, May 26th, 2010

“The ink wasn’t dry yet on their divorce papers before he was shacking up with you-know-who.”

In this sentence, there’s an idiom – “the ink wasn’t dry yet” – which does a nice job of creating a picture of a temporal event – a relatively short temporal event – by thinking of this event in terms of observable material phenomena – ink drying on paper.

One could say, “It didn’t take that many days after their divorce before he was shacking up with you-know-who,” but, in so doing, one loses the image of time as material; it lacks the bite of the previous sentence in which time is given the same oppressive materiality as an object in space.

Here’s another example:

“We’ve each said things we don’t really mean, so let’s let the dust settle and talk this over in the morning.”

Again, one could say here, “We’ve each said things we don’t really mean, so let’s wait a couple of hours and talk this over in the morning,” but, in so doing, one might lose something of the imagistic power which the idiom “let the dust settle” affords the sentence.

All of the sudden, that stretch of time becomes an object – an accumulation of dust following a confrontation – and, thus, becomes more dynamic than a reference to the passage of time through standardized time units – minutes, hours, etc. – which are decidedly more difficult to picture concretely.

The idioms in which time is pictured as an entity with its own materiality and its own objective weight on one’s experience are often powerful because they nudge one towards the intuition that time is as much a material as space (albeit a very different kind of material).

In Damon Zucconi’s *Grey* series, which consists of (as of right now, anyway) eight images created using a digital scanner and varying amounts of naturally-occurring dust and light leakage into the scanner, the artist invests himself in a similar experimentation with the material representation of time.

As viewed through his website, he presents, to begin with, a series of four images composed of dark shades of grey, accented by bursts of horizontal white bars, and pools of off-white specks that remind one of the scratches, hairs, and other noise of poorly preserved celluloid films.

In the fifth instance of the series, one views a similarly dark grey field which, likewise, contains traces of light leakage and dust and, then, an additional bright burst of orange/tan (almost fleshy) light which extends vertically in the upper right corner of the work.

In the following two instances of the series, a dark grey to black field is crossed by a series of rhythmically ordered straight horizontal lines of varying colors.

And, then, in the most recent instance of the series, one views another dark grey to black field upon whose entire right edge bursts a bright white streak of (almost cosmic) light whose own inner edge is a shade of bright green.

Now all that said, in each of these instances, one views the varied constellations of formal elements just mentioned – yes – but one also views something else – a unique picture of materialized time.

One views the changing amounts of dust and light recorded in each particular image which, in turn, are records of particular lengths of time.

Each formal variation here is due to an experimentation with time – whether it be the amount of time allotted to accumulate dust on the bed of the scanner or the amount of time allotted to accumulate light flares of varying degrees of strength.

Thus, as one reflects on a given formal element in the work, one is nudged towards reflecting on the time which each of these elements records.

**Thursday, May 27th, 2010**

From *The Penultimate Truth* (1964) by Philip K. Dick:

Below, a wide river like wet silver wiggled from north to south, and Joseph Adams leaned out to view the Mississippi and acknowledge its beauty. No reconcrews had accomplished this; what glistened in the morning sun was an element of the old creation. The original world which did not need to be recreated, reconned, because it had never departed. This sight, like that of the Pacific, always sobered him, because it meant that something had proved stronger; something had escaped.

**Friday, May 28th, 2010**

*Surveying the American Cultural Habitat* by Hayley Silverman is a video composed of a short clip appropriated from a Bollywood musical which the artist slows down, plays in reverse, plays in forward motion again, and, then, in reverse again in an endless loop.

The action of this slowed down, reversed, and endlessly looped clip involves a South Asian woman holding a video camera in front of her face as she slides horizontally into the middle of the frame, removes her eye from the camera viewfinder (which is pointed directly at “us,” the viewers of the clip) and, then, smiles at “us” in a sort of half-awed, half-patronizing gesture of approval.

Also, the soundtrack of the video is a piece of music which is itself slowed down, played, reversed, and looped, resulting in a low, ominous undercurrent to this otherwise brightly colored and happy imagery.

As one begins to view through this loop, perhaps the first thing one tries to do is rationally understand it – to deconstruct all of these elements described above and, then, piece them back together into a satisfying story.

For example, the collision of the anthropological-sounding title – *Surveying the American Cultural Habitat* – with imagery involving a South Asian woman pointing a video camera back at “us,” the viewers of the clip, might lead one to say that the work is in some sense, anyway, inverting the practice of “othering” back out to the “American” viewer who is watching the clip.

It is not the “American” who is surveying her cultural habitat; but she who is surveying the “American” cultural habitat.

Perhaps.

But, as one continues to view through the repetitions of the loop, one may realize two additional things:

1. First of all, as one watches the repetition of the clip, one’s understanding changes each time – each repetition involves the present experience of the clip – yes – but also both the viewer’s ever-increasing past understandings of the clip as well as their future predictions for their understandings of the clip.

Thus, each time one views through the loop, one experiences a different

clip with a different understanding which it affords.

2. And, second, due to this continuous change in understanding, it becomes difficult to assume that any effort at rationally understanding the clip will ever come to any ultimate fruition.

Every time one thinks they understand it, the next time one views through the loop, that understanding is mutated by the experience of comparing the understanding to the actual viewing of the clip.

And, at that point, one might catch on to another level of understanding in the work:

What the viewer is shown to be othering here is (in its own way) the video itself.

By looking at the work in the hopes of decoding it, dissecting it like a forensics report, one is going to miss it every time as it continuously slips out of one's grip.

As such, one's attempts to understand the work must then be conducted with a certain humbleness – an automatic understanding that no understanding is final.



» **June 2010**

**Tuesday, June 1st, 2010**

Economics, politics, sociology, anthropology, national defense, law, cognitive science, and myriad other fields are increasingly focusing their investigative energies onto the ramifications of the ever updating financial flows, communication paradigms, sub-cultures, social norms, personal security concerns, and general experiential phenomena emerging in relation to the growing public usage of the Internet.

That said, it would really be something for the rarified air of the contemporary art world to not follow suit.

But, nevertheless, that is largely the case.

Contemporary art, for a variety of reasons, chooses to bypass or ignore the opportunity to reflect on these technologies.

Stroll through the kunsthallen of Europe or the galleries of Chelsea (to name two prominent examples), and one would be hard-pressed to find any indication (outside of certain for better or for worse ghettoized new media spaces) that the constellation of technologies surrounding digital networked computing have any influence over one's relationship to space and time.

It's like it doesn't exist.

Which seems like a problem (if, that is, one believes that art, as a "humanity," is pressed to reflect on the condition of being a human).

Perhaps I'm making a mountain out of a molehill, though.

After all, I spend a lot of time on my computer and while it seems to me like my own life is radically different than it was before I started logging onto my friend's Prodigy Internet provider when I was a kid, that doesn't necessarily mean that other people are quite as hooked.

In fact, most people don't spend nearly as much time on-line as I do.

Let's say, for the sake of argument, that the opposite is actually the reality – most people are luddites who are actively *not* engaging with these technologies – they write letters not e-mail; they read books not blogs; they read *The New York Times* not nytimes.com; they have big family dinners not social network updates.

Even in this case, though, the actions just mentioned are conducted in explicit reaction to the phenomenon of the Internet.

A world of “not Internet” still presupposes the existence of Internet – be it an existence worth celebrating or problematizing.

To go out of one’s way to not use the technology, the technology still impacts one’s actions.

But still, it might be argued, that’s obscuring the problem here.

It’s not that there is a world of Internet and not-Internet, but that most people in the world have never even thought to think about these technologies because they’re too busy breaking their backs in manual labor and, as such, it’s imperialistic (not to mention petty) to suggest that anything so wild as the Internet is worth taking seriously.

Fair enough, but even if, for the sake of argument, most people in the world will never interact with these technologies (or choose not to do so), their lives may very well be effected, nonetheless.

With the proliferation of n.g.o.’s and transnational corporate interests into parts of the world where Internet access is limited, the livelihood of all but the hardiest human beings is in one way or another dependent upon capital which is now streaming through and enabled by digital computer networks.

But, perhaps, that, too, is missing the point.

Perhaps it’s not that the art world doesn’t think these technologies are on some level “worthy” of inclusion into the contemporary art discussion, but that it’s never really been the job of contemporary art to automatically start wringing its hands over new technologies.

In this reading, it’s not that the art world doesn’t understand the Web, but that the Web doesn’t understand the art world.

Neither Internet art nor art about the Internet actually partakes in what’s interesting about the contemporary art discussion and, as such, makes it difficult for themselves to be included.

For better or for worse, contemporary art is a world and (as worlds tend to do) it spends a lot of time reflecting on its self.

If the artists can’t figure out a way to connect the development of the steam engine or the television to contemporary art, then why would contemporary art have to automatically reflect on the steam engine or the television?

They might be important technologies (no one is arguing that they aren't), but it's simply not the job of contemporary art to account for them just because somebody outside of contemporary art demands that it be so.

Besides, that's what new media art spaces or art & technology journals like *Leonardo* are for.

Related to this argument is the question of quality.

Again, it's not that contemporary art is automatically predisposed to reject the inclusion of art made about these technologies or with these technologies, but that, *entre nous*, there just hasn't been any good examples of this type of art.

The proof is in the pudding and one can't expect artwork that's at best working at an undergrad level of sophistication to just waltz right in and take over the conversation.

This might be the most powerful argument against the notion of contemporary art's embrace of work explicitly made on or about digital computer networks.

However, I believe it's an argument which is ignorant regarding the work that *is* actually out there – the proof in the pudding so to speak.

From one view, the artists I've written about on this blog, for example, are working very creatively in the wake of (again, from one view) early video art, "the Pictures generation," painters like Christopher Wool, and on through the Guyton, Price, Smith, Walker crowd.

From other views, other genealogies could be posited and, if one is willing to put aside their own embarrassments concerning the computer, then one might see how these connections aren't forced, but are rather logical and even obvious.

That's not to say that this is the most astounding work ever made, but that at the very least it's positioning itself in ways that seem like they should be intriguing for a contemporary art audience to reflect on.

Now, in contemporary art's defense, it's not so easy to just up and change its whole game plan.

First of all, there's the problem about how to create financial value around this type of work and, thus, circulate it through its own well-oiled economy.

But outside of that, there's another anxiety.

Contemporary art, to my mind, is in the business of asking "what is contemporary art?"

If contemporary art were pressed to say “contemporary art exists in the digital network as much as it does outside of the digital network,” then contemporary art would all of the sudden be operating from radically different premises.

The “white cube” paradigm (as the site where contemporary art occurs) would be threatened from within.

The “where” of “where the art occurs” would be altered as the simulation of the physical work through (primarily) the Web archive would be understood to be art’s arena.

To my mind, work which successfully bridges the worlds of the digital computer network and contemporary art is work which, on some level, implicates contemporary art into this very network.

It’s not work about the digital computer network, it’s work about contemporary art’s own entanglement in the digital computer network.

And for contemporary art to acknowledge this, it would demand that contemporary art changes the way it sees itself.

As such, contemporary art wouldn’t be taking in an orphan, but a virus.

That’s a lot to ask, but, nonetheless, there’s an urge to start asking.

## Wednesday, June 2nd, 2010

*Apples and Enamel* by Lance Wakeling is a series of fifty-five process sculptures – each of which consist of a rotting apple covered in gesso and, then, glossy white (and in two instances, glossy yellow) lead-based enamel paint.

They are process sculptures in the sense that one views each of the apples as an individual art object – yes – but one also views the processes of gravity, entropy, and decay.

These processes are pictured through the artist’s use of the gesso and enamel over the apple’s surface which allows it to flexibly compress without cracking as the apple itself rots away from the inside (one might think of the look of certain Claes Oldenburg “soft” sculptures from the mid-1960s – *Soft Toilet*, for example).

Thus, the form of the sculpture is in a continual state of transformation.

Eventually, the surface of the apple will compress to the point that it has nowhere else to go, but, at that point, the form of the apple reads as a sign of decay as much as it does a solid form and, as such, one is nudged towards continuing to think of the sculpture in terms of the time of its decay which continues unabated from the inside.

What significance, though, does the apple as the locus of this decay afford the work?

What does an apple do here that, say, a peach or roast beef wouldn’t do?

Well, one could think of the apple as bound up with the Apple corporation – a sort of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* meets the iPad.

That’s one possibility. Another would be that on art historical / iconographic level, the apple is perhaps best known to be “forbidden fruit” – desire incarnate as described in the story of Adam and Eve.

And if one is to view the works in the context of the white cube art space on either a pedestal or in a vitrine (which would each mark the work as capital-A-Art), then this reading makes a certain amount of sense.

One could say, then, that the work pictures the glossy white sheen of desire incarnate as much as it pictures this desire’s ongoing decay.

**Thursday, June 3rd, 2010**

Internet surfing clubs are blogs authored by multiple users in which short, visually immediate posts, each of which often involve re-mixed or readymade material appropriated from elsewhere on the Internet, are shared in on-going conversation.

The pace of posting on, for example, the clubs Double Happiness, Loshadka, Nasty Nets, Spirit Surfers, and Supercentral was, several years ago, much more active than it is now, but, generally speaking, the pace currently ranges from several times a day to several times a month (in some cases less than that or simply not at all).

In the heyday of the Internet surfing club phenomenon, one of the contested theoretical topics hashed out on the message boards of new media art sites like rhizome.org, was the question of what separates material found on an Internet surfing club from very similar material found on a vernacular imageboard site like 4chan.

People seem to generally agree that *something* is different, but that something is difficult to account for (if it's not itself an illusion).

For example, if one is to view two images whose iconography is exactly the same – one of which appears on 4chan and one of which appears on Nasty Nets – in one sense, each would look identical to the other and, yet, in another sense, each would look very different from the other.

One account for this difference is premised on the distinction between the world of the vernacular web in which material on 4chan is arguably framed and the world of art in which material on Nasty Nets is arguably framed.

A given image – let's say that it's a funny picture of a cat – would, on 4chan, be viewed against its relationship to other funny cat memes and judged as such, while, on Nasty Nets, it would be viewed against its relationship to an alternative category – the artworld discourse of, for example, the Readymade or Appropriation art (or some such) – and judged as such.

These modes of viewing are, of course, not dogmatically valid – obviously viewers of 4chan say “this is art” and viewers of Nasty Nets say “this is funny” in regard to the material on each respective site – but, nevertheless, one would seem to nudge one in the direction of the vernacular Web world and one would seem to nudge one in the direction of the artworld.

(Some works, such as Cory Arcangel’s *Drei Klavierstücke op. 11*, are intriguing because they straddle both worlds.)

This discrepancy is related to what Arthur Danto refers to as art’s “transfiguration of the commonplace” in which the simple re-contextualization of a commonplace object into art transforms the way one views it.

For Danto, viewing contemporary art doesn’t involve what the eye sees, but rather what the eye sees plus the theory and history of art surrounding what the eye sees.

His famous example is Warhol’s *Brillo Box* which, he claims, “ended” the history of art by shifting the burden of the work’s working from the visible (a Brillo Box) to the invisible (a Brillo Box plus the theory and history of the readymade and pop art which together allow the Brillo Box to be legitimately viewed as art).

Danto writes in his essay, “The Artworld”:

To see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld.

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As such, the difference between material on an imageboard and an Internet surfing club is – through this lens, anyway – a question of what is made formally visible to the eye – yes – but what is made conceptually visible to the mind, as well.

The fact that there is art theory and the positing of art historical connections in relation to Internet surfing clubs is itself the mechanism which makes a funny cat picture function as a work of art on an Internet surfing club and not on an imageboard site in which different theories and histories are in play.



**Tuesday, June 8, 2010**

From *Beyond the Blue Event Horizon* (1980) by Frederik Pohl:

Of course, even Albert did not use all sixty billion gigabits all the time. For one thing, they were not all shared. Even the shared stores were occupied by tens of thousands of programs as subtle and complicated as Albert, and by tens of millions of duller ones. The program called “Albert Einstein” slipped through and among the thousands and the millions without interference. Traffic signals warned him away from occupied circuits. Guideposts led him to subroutines and libraries needed to fulfill his functions. His path was never a straight line. It was a tree of branching decision points, a lightning-stroke of zigzag turns and reverses. It was not truly a “path,” either; Albert never moved. He was never in a specific place to move from. It is at least arguable whether Albert “was” anything at all. He had no continuous existence. When Robin Broadhead was through with him and turned him off he ceased to be, and his subroutines picked up other tasks. When he was turned on again he recreated himself from whatever circuits were idle, according to the program S. Ya. had written. He was no more real than an equation, and no less so than God.

## Wednesday, June 9th, 2010

In *The Society of the Spectacle (Now in 3D)* by Pascual Sisto, one views a version of Guy Debord's 1974 film *La Société du Spectacle* in which the film's original black and white images appropriated by Debord from pre-existing mass media are, then, themselves re-appropriated by Sisto.

He adds a layer of images tinted blue and a layer of images tinted red – each positioned slightly off of the original image – so that they resemble a 3D image requiring cheap 3D glasses.

(In fact, it doesn't work as actual 3D imagery.)

This is ironic because it was Debord himself who was one of the great theorists of image appropriation and re-contextualization – he called his own strategy *détournement*.

*Détournement* is “to divert,” “to distract,” or “to re-direct” – the artist appropriates a media image and re-contextualizes it in order to negate its value as a fetishized commodity.

Debord saw the world increasingly mediating all of its social interaction through media imagery, e.g. quality time between lovers is spent flipping through magazines, watching television or going to the movies; and, as a reaction to this, he sought to create a form of auto-destructive artwork in which media images are appropriated and re-contextualized in order to unveil their operations as the increasingly universal mediator of human interaction.

*The Society of the Spectacle (Now in 3D)* is a textbook example of *détournement*:

An artist appropriates a piece of media and re-contextualizes it in order to negate it and refute its claim.

Sisto's version both breaks apart the original imagery as well as points out its own spectacular tendencies by making his version 3D, the contemporary sign of spectacle in the wake of *Avatar* and other recent 3D blockbusters.

But, there's a paradox here as the original film is executing the exact same operation.

Can one detourn a *détournement*?

Before getting tangled up here, though, it should be said that Debord himself provides an answer in his text “A User’s Guide to Détournement.”

He writes:

The literary and artistic heritage of humanity should be used for partisan propaganda purposes. It is, of course, necessary to go beyond any idea of mere scandal. Since opposition to the bourgeois notion of art and artistic genius has become pretty much old hat, [Marcel Duchamp’s] drawing of a mustache on the *Mona Lisa* is no more interesting than the original version of that painting. We must now push this process to the point of negating the negation [...] It is in fact necessary to eliminate all remnants of the notion of personal property in this area. The appearance of new necessities outmodes previous “inspired” works. They become obstacles, dangerous habits. The point is not whether we like them or not. We have to go beyond them.

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What Debord is saying here is that the history of the avant-garde is not so precious for it to be above contemporary critique.

Duchamp was once radical, but is now safely absorbed into the fables of academic art history – the point is not to fight against this unfortunate reality, but to carry on the fight into the future, responding to one’s own time.

Looking back at Debord’s career and his careful framing of his own work reveals him to be a great showman – his polemical texts and romantic tilting at the windmills of post World War II media culture is today as easily sentimentalized as Duchamp’s *L.H.O.O.Q.* was in Debord’s day.

That doesn’t mean, though, that his ideas are suddenly irrelevant.

On the contrary, while Sisto negates Debord’s claims, he carries them forward.

**Thursday, June 10th, 2010**

Parker Ito asked orderartwork.com, a Chinese company which makes oil paintings on-demand, to create a series of paintings based on a single image which would be broadly familiar to Internet users – a stock photo depicting a smiling, blonde female wearing a backpack which (amongst its other usages) a “parked domain” company called Demand Media employs to catch the eye of Web surfers who accidentally click to the sites it owns.

The resulting work – *The Most Infamous Girl in the History of the Internet* – exists as both these made-to-order paintings as well as a heavily re-blogged Web meme.

In regard to the paintings, they might be considered in relation to Warhol’s *Marilyn* series of silkscreened paintings.

Both Marilyn Monroe and “the parked domain girl” are icons of emptiness.

Monroe was a blank slate for sexual desire, the parked domain girl is a symbol of sites without content.

Furthermore, both painting series automate the painting process which, then, further amplifies the sense of an emptying-out of content.

And, finally, in both cases the artists are each interested in depicting the process of their own making as much as they’re interested in depicting the icon being processed.

For example, one views Warhol’s rough usage of the silkscreen technology as much as a legible image of Monroe, and one views the hands of the different painters Ito employs to create the painted images as much as a single painting of the parked domain girl.

However, at this level – the level of a process being depicted – Ito’s series takes a departure from Warhol’s own that allows it to exist as an intriguing version of pop art rather than an imitation of it.

What fascinated Warhol was the way that “real life” stars like Monroe developed a life of their own in the sphere of reproducible images.

Ito, though, picks up on the fact that an icon like the “parked domain girl” is not even based on a “real life” star – she’s an icon who short-circuits the previous paradigm of stardom.

In the wake of the Internet, pop culture is something consumed and lived amongst; there is no need for pop to reference a real world as the real world is to a great extent pop.

A model posed for the photograph, yes, but that model is anonymous; the parked domain girl's identity is entirely native to the sphere of pop representation on the Web.

By hiring a company to create hand-made oil paintings of the parked domain girl, Ito brings her into the realm of "real life" for the first time.

His work is thus meaningful not for depicting the automated painting of a "real" icon, but for depicting the outsourced hand-painting of a "fake" icon and, in so doing, bringing Warhol's joke full circle.

## Friday, June 11th, 2010

Parker Ito's recent solo show at the Adobe Books Backroom Gallery in San Francisco, entitled "RGB Forever," featured eleven unframed paintings and one video.

Of the eleven paintings exhibited, one of them was *The Most Infamous Girl in the History of the Internet* (which is discussed in the previous post) and the remaining ten comprise a series of digital prints on canvas which (1.) each depict a wide range of subject matter and (2.) over all of which the artist applies an acrylic texturing gel in order to give the surface a more tactile, painterly feeling.

At first glance, it's difficult to see how the varying images in the series converse with one another.

One views, for example, the stock image of a bowl-of-fruit still life, a photorealistic portrait of a woman photoshopped to blur at the lower edge like a *tableau vivant*, broad squiggly lines which read as "digital" over a background of paint blobs which themselves read as "painterly," a cliché image of messy abstract brushwork, a wheel of radiating digital color, an "animal portrait" foregrounded by LOLCATS – style text graphics, a collage of varying pictorial strategies from the history of art placed in a grid, nude models covered in paint, a digitally drawn rendering of a Hudson River school style landscape, and, finally, a rigid formal pattern composed of a tactile material (in fact, it's a close angle on the texture of the same canvas material Ito used to print the images in the series on).

So, as mentioned, there is a heterogeneity in subject matter here which is initially disorienting.

However, as one continues to view through this wide variety of imagery, taking the show in as a whole, one theme begins to emerge as a constant variable:

A collision between the physical act of painting and the simulation of the physical act of painting.

In each instance, a pictorial strategy or "effect" drawn from the history of painting is input into a computer, simulated through digital tools (where it gains its own currency as part of digital culture) and, then, re-output as paintings which were automatically "painted" by a digital printer.

On Ry David Bradley's *Painted, Etc.* blog, Ito is quoted as calling the works in this series not paintings, but "painting objects."

He writes:

[...] these "painting objects" were simulating hand made things, but also referencing modes which have been typically associated with the reproductions of paintings. The whole premise of the body of work was approaching painting as "found", so I selected jpegs that referenced genres/history of painting (sorta based on wikipedia). The work is very involved in painting history and an awareness of that history, but I also believe the jpegs I selected reflect on other issues that are not so specific to this history, and are more specific to Internet culture.

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With that mind, the kick of the paintings is similar whether one views them in person or on the Web.

In both cases, what one views is a painting straddling each of those two worlds.

## Monday, June 14th, 2010

*Plato with biometric overlay* by Daniel Keller and Nik Kosmas of Aids-3D is a work of inkjet print and acrylic on canvas depicting two elements:

1. The photo of a Greek sculptural bust.
2. A formal pattern of intersecting pink lines and “stars” at each of the intersection points that together map out the facial features of the figure depicted in the Greek sculptural bust.

At first glance, one views the contrast of the relatively smooth lines and monochromatic color palette depicted in the photo of the sculpture (which read as “ancient” – the photo comes across as signifying the era of Ancient Greece more than a particular artist or subject), with the rigidity and dayglo color-scheme of the lines and stars (which themselves each read as “artificial” – they create a pattern reminiscent of graphic iconography from the *Transformers* cartoon show and film series).

So, there’s an immediate collision between two starkly differentiated iconographic elements – each of which pull one in an opposed direction.

The title – *Plato with biometric overlay* – points out for the viewer where to go from there.

In the context of the philosophy of art, Plato is perhaps best known for his “mimetic theory” of art in which art is an imitation of an imitation of a real thing; there is – here – a higher level of idealized, capital-F “Form” (an abstracted, immaterial idea of a bed), an imitation of this ideal (an actual material bed based on the idea of a bed) and an imitation of an imitation (a drawing of an actual bed based on the idea of a bed).

Biometric overlay, on the other hand, is a surveillance strategy employed by security professionals in order to create an abstracted, immaterial representation of a person’s facial features which can be digitally stored and cross-referenced in a computer network in order to, for example, quickly see if the subject’s facial features match those of anyone on a terrorist watchlist.

When the biometric overlay is placed over the face of Plato, a collision occurs in the work between one vision of idealized Form and another – one vision of Form as the transcendental space outside of the “cave” of “normal” consciousness and another vision of Form as the nightmarish



acceleration of Biopower in the wake of the military industrial complex (or some such).

In their own commentary on this work, the artists lay out a similar reading.

They write:

The form has become the Form – There is no longer a need for a distinction between the particular and the universal. Plato's 'faceness' has been quantified and digitized and his biography, stress levels, horoscope, download queue, credit history and criminal record have all been cross-checked for potential threat-patternage. Are the laser lines a symbol of magic and wonder or of cold totalitarianism?

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With this in mind and as one continues to view through the work, the biometrics overlay, with its diamond-like rigidity, becomes aggressive, confronting Plato's face like a muzzle or the "facehugger" alien from the *Alien* films.

However, against this pressure, the eyes of the philosopher – emptied out of content in the classical style – are able to momentarily resist, extending beyond the biometrics, pointing towards (without naming) something seemingly outside of any representation.

## Thursday, June 17th, 2010

*Sand Saga* by Shana Moulton, a ten-and-a-half minute video with a family resemblance to Moulton's own *Whispering Pines* video series, is the story of a vision quest through a landscape involving not the traditional natural environment of the Native American vision quest, but rather a mishmash of the natural environment, new age kitsch, mirrors, vaginal Georgia O'Keefe iconography, archetypal myth, psychoactive skin creams, digital effects, time travel portals, and an extended hallucinatory state.

The narrative opens with two views of Moulton's alter ego, Cynthia, viewing her own represented reflection in, first, a large bathroom mirror, and, second, a small personal mirror which (due to its ability to magnify facial details) morphs her face, stretching it and compressing it into bizarre forms.

Cynthia, then, returns to her reflection in the larger mirror as she applies a brown-green facial mask while, in the meantime, various objects in the bathroom – a Georgia O'Keefe “cow skull” poster as well as masks and sculptural busts depicting mythological figures – look on.

After putting on the finishing touches, she turns over an hourglass and, as the sands of time drip away, Cynthia – continuing to stare into her own reflection – watches the facial mask transform into a portal which itself leads to a lush landscape in which a shamanic figure drips sand onto a Native American sand painting (perhaps there is a Jackson Pollock reference here).

The shaman, represented to Cynthia as herself wearing an O'Keefe cow skull mask and a red jump suit, directs her to lie down on the painting as she applies consumer-quality massage gadgetry and polished black stones to Cynthia's back.

Through the stages of this ritual, the shaman is able to extract both symbolic representations of blockages to Cynthia's chakras as well as a contact lens from her eye – actions which, then, set off a cathartic, carnivalesque montage composed of dancing figures wearing mythological masks in the midst of a blissful void space composed of imagery from O'Keefe's flower paintings.

This montage, accompanied by rhythmic new age music, continues for roughly three of the video's ten-and-a-half minutes and, then, in a final scenario, Cynthia returns to her bathroom as "a new woman" and proceeds to eat her facial mask, taking what was initially a synthetic cover to her face and ingesting it, symbolically destroying it by absorbing it into herself.

Now, on the one hand, *Sand Saga* is a *bildungsroman* in which a young, seemingly dissatisfied character gains confidence through a mystical journey into the archetypal depths of herself.

On the other hand, though, the constant, knowingly jokey references to borderline quackery, "cheesy" special effects, and sham new age commodity culture casts the sincerity of this vision quest thesis into doubt – like, oh, it's all a joke.

So which is it?

Well, at a recent artist's talk at E.A.I., Moulton made several references to the television series *Twin Peaks*, citing it as an inspiration and ironically claiming that her own best video was a remake of the "Black Lodge" scenes from the final *Twin Peaks* episode which she made as an adolescent (unfortunately, that tape is now lost).

The appeal of *Twin Peaks* at the height of its meteoric rise in the 1990s was its tone of, on the one hand, absolute vulnerability and sincerity, and, on the other hand, absolute detached coolness and irony.

The viewer of *Twin Peaks* is invested in following the case of "Who Killed Laura Palmer?" not because they intrinsically care about Laura Palmer nor because they care about the show's detached hipster humor, but rather because of the satisfactory collision between these two elements in which it's impossible to tell which one is the true *Twin Peaks*.

Similarly, Moulton's videos are perhaps best considered as operating in the cracks of a collision between sincerity and irony and a lot of that has to do with Moulton's skills as a performer.

Like Kyle MacLachlan in the role of Special Agent Dale Cooper before her, if one views Moulton's character enough, it doesn't matter if she's serious or goofing or if the truth will ever be revealed; the pleasure is in following her figure it all out for herself.

## Friday, June 18th, 2010

*Still Available* by Oliver Laric is an ongoing list of Web domain names which are still available to be taken.

Laric's work *Taken* is an ongoing list of all of those domain names listed in the *Still Available* series which have, in fact, subsequently been taken (at present, almost seventy domains are now taken from the over three hundred listed over the course of the series' five installments).

In the earliest iteration of *Still Available* – *Still Available 17.10.08* – approximately one hundred thirty-five potential domain names are listed, each of which refers to keywords rich in value relevant to that particular historical time period regarding, for example, politicians, political theorists, luxury commodities, pornography, artists, art theorists, art world events, physics, pop culture, or cities.

These domain names are often funny and perceptive in the way in which they pinpoint strategies employed by “parked domain” companies who buy up domains in bulk using keyword strategies not unlike those employed by Laric himself.

So, for example, he lists domains which have no value other than a speculative one regarding the future of value-rich keywords such as elections2032.com, documenta13.com, and beverlyhillsninja3.com; or domains which combine vaguely-related value rich keywords at that particular moment in historical time such as putinpalin.com, gucciprada.com, and platinumclit.com; or else domains which just sound as though they *could* be actual domains such as botoxbros.com, divorcebattle.com, or thenewsocialism.com.

Likewise, in the following four iterations of *Still Available*, a similar method is employed.

In this way, Laric creates a portrait of the practice of domain naming as an increasingly complicated and speculative enterprise which, in turn, results in a Web consisting of as many empty, “parked” domains awaiting potential owners as it does active ones – a portrait of the Web as a space undergoing not exploration, but relentless colonization into the predicted value-rich keywords of the future.

The *Taken* list of domain names underlines this understanding.

On the one hand, it's true that some of the domain names from the list are taken by "normal" people or small not-for-profits such as the artist Billy Rennekamp taking [billyrennekamp.com](http://billyrennekamp.com), a modest Amon Düül fan site taking [amondüül.com](http://amondüül.com), the "Frankly My Darling..." blog run by a middle-aged woman taking [13dimensions.com](http://13dimensions.com), or the breast milk donation info hub taking [breastmilkdonation.com](http://breastmilkdonation.com).

However, most of the domains were taken by Web-based companies in the business of parking on domains in order to cybersquat or provide advertising space (my favorite example is [steaksonaplane.com](http://steaksonaplane.com) which was taken by the Godaddy.com company to advertise its own services).

With all of this in mind, what one views here, then, is the way in which this increasingly colonized landscape is different from the geographical landscape of Earth in the sense that its potential space for expansion is itself continuously expanding as world events, and memes both high and low open it up to the contingency of the moment.

**Monday, June 21st, 2010**

In *High Fives-Apple Fingerworks Multitouch Patents Sheet* by Kari Altmann (a part of Altmann's ongoing *No Glove, No Love* meme), one views a series of smeared, blood-colored handprints slapped to the surface of black & white printouts of x-y graphs.

Each of these x-y graphs contains a representation of seemingly arbitrary numbers and undecipherable technical language around a set of black streaks.

The direct indexical imprint of the biological body over an array of technical data creates a collision; each instance of the series suggests either a paint-crazy toddler run amok with their older sibling's physics homework or a 1980s corporate-office slasher film in which the maniac killer slices up a victim at the copy machine.

The title of the work – *High Fives-Apple Fingerworks Multitouch Patents Sheet* – points out for the viewer where to go.

Each of the diagrams over which the artist places her blood-colored handprint is, it turns out, the schematic diagram of a touchscreen computer technology (a touchscreen computer technology being, for example, the touch responsive interface of the Apple iPhone).

With this information in mind, one can, then, read the “black streaks” described above as the representations of handprints which are labeled with accompanying data.

What one views here, then, is not a collision between Altmann's blood-red handprint over any old data, but rather over virtual data representing the human hand.

It's a “high five” – the physical trace of the artist's handprint colliding with the copied and quantified representation of an anonymous user's own handprint.

What's important to reiterate here is that the immediate impression of each of the iconographic elements colliding in the space of the image doesn't favor either the technical representation of the handprint in the background or the messy, bodily handprint in the foreground; rather each are roughly equivalent in graphic power.

This equivalency is meaningful when one considers that as touchscreen technologies become increasingly mobile and responsive to the physics and ergonomic constraints of the human body in the physical world, they simultaneously become increasingly influential in directing the control of the human body towards the ubiquitous usage of these very technologies.

It's great that the interface of the iPhone opens up possibilities for greater bodily freedom in the use of computer technologies, but is it great that this interface also nudges human beings to spend all of their downtime hunched over, tapping and rubbing away on a little computer?

Regarding this point, Altmann writes:

In *High Fives* the idea is to use red finger paint to represent fake blood, and provide a handprint on this map of flesh and touch interaction being controlled by the interface. Resembling the handprints some of the earliest cave dwellers left as a mark of their civilization, this handprint in blood is a way of leaving a mark on the infrastructure being created by these systems of power and product – the virtual “cave” that technology often expects us to live in more and more, filtered from direct experience. It's also a way of meeting every interface confrontation with an unexpected and human reaction.

\*\*\*\*\*

Altmann's handprint, then, is a sign of the human body confronting the technology which influences its control – yes – but, through her choice of blood-red for the color of the handprints, it becomes something more intense, as well – a sign of *aggressively* confronting the technology which influences its control.

## Tuesday, June 22nd, 2010

Chris Coy's contribution to Contemporary Semantics Beta, an art show curated by Constant Dullaart at Arti et Amicitiae in Amsterdam, consists of two elements:

1. A pair of large, printed images hanging beside one another on the wall.

The first of these images depicts a straight-faced young man in a red t-shirt holding a completely blank, white rectangle vertically (as if it were a painting). The second depicts a group of enthusiastically smiling young people in business attire holding a similarly blank, white rectangle horizontally (as if it were a novelty-size check).

In both of these images, it seems as though the white rectangle should contain some sort of signage which would relate it to the rest of the given scenario, but it doesn't.

As it turns out, these are appropriated stock photographs whose original intention is to provide either (1.) a clean, broadly cliché "stock" image of a person or group of people holding a generic sign which, for example, a corporate client could easily digitally insert their own chosen signage into the white space; or (2.) a visual equivalent of the phrase "blank slate" which could be used in the off-chance that a magazine or advertising campaign need communicate the idea of "blank slate" in a single potent image.

It's not the artist who subtracts from the original image here, but the original image created by a stock image company which subtracts from itself; the artist merely points this phenomenon out.

2. The second element in the work is a large, completely blank, white rectangle which is placed on the gallery floor, leaning against the wall below the prints mentioned above.

This white rectangle functions the same way that the white rectangles in the stock photos do:

It is meant to be an open space for something that another person could insert; in this case an artwork.

Coy knows that the installation will survive as a digital photograph. The white rectangle completes a loop – from the mutable digital image on the computer, to the art space, and back again.



## Wednesday, June 23rd, 2010

Guthrie Lonergan created two videos composed solely of the a cappella vocal tracks of famous pop songs mashed-up with appropriated stock footage clips.

Both of these videos are titled *Acapella*.

In the first video, one views, to start, stock footage with burnt-in time code depicting an hourglass spinning on a pedestal in front of a blue background, which is itself probably designed to be used as a generic “bluescreen” in video postproduction.

The blue background in the clip, though, is creased and wrinkly which would make it difficult to use for a seamless bluescreen effect.

Also, the lighting is generally harsh, casting an entire half of the blue background in darkness, again defeating the point of bluescreen as an even, unchanging field of blue which can be easily keyed out in a single gesture in post-production.

Each of these qualities give one the impression that this is an amateur production, perhaps a single person hoping to sell cut-rate stock footage from their bedroom.

Following this introductory shot, the soundtrack opens with an a cappella rendering of the Police song “Message in a Bottle” as the view on the hourglass itself zooms in, focusing closer and closer on the sand dripping from the top of the hourglass to the bottom.

The viewer watches these sands of time drip away as Sting sings:

Just a castaway, an island at sea, oh  
Another lonely day, with no here but me, oh  
More loneliness than any man could bear  
Rescue me before I fall into despair, oh

\*\*\*\*\*

It should be noted that as an a cappella version of “Message in a Bottle,” these lyrics become simultaneously more isolated and more rawly emotional than they would come across in the original song; and,

furthermore, despite the seeming incongruity of the hourglass imagery and this raw vocal track, they begin to quickly make some sort of emotional sense together as they're each sparsely produced and they each reference a certain threat of being alone in the world.

As the song continues, this hourglass imagery dissolves to a shot depicting a man (whose slicked back hairdo is visible in the bottom of the shot, incidentally) holding his hands above his head, demonstrating the idea of “growth” by placing his palms close together and, then, spreading them far apart over and over again.

At this point, the chorus of the song kicks in:

I'll send an S.O.S. to the world  
I'll send an S.O.S. to the world  
I hope that someone gets my  
I hope that someone gets my  
I hope that someone gets my message in a bottle, yeah...

\*\*\*\*\*

When the man's hand motions are juxtaposed with these lyrics, the viewer can, then, almost read them as themselves an “S.O.S.” – a ritualistic signal to a distant viewer, asking to be saved (or at least acknowledged).

This becomes poignant when one considers that – again – this particular stock footage is amateurish and naïve – one more drop of water in the ocean of non-professional or semi-professional user content on the Web, one more person expressing themselves in an environment of endless amounts of other personal expressions.

This is the problem of trying to express oneself in what Lonergan has termed “The Big Database” in which even what would otherwise be “amazing” content is flattened out; expressions (any expression – the videographer's, Lonergan's, my own) are consumed and, then, almost instantaneously forgotten.

As such, anyone trying to get their ideas heard in Internet-land is a sort of castaway.

Related to this point, Sting sings:

Walked out this morning, don't believe what I saw  
Hundred billion bottles washed up on the shore  
Seems I'm not alone in being alone

\*\*\*\*\*

What work like this video by Lonergan does, though, is start from the idea that everyone working on the Web is sending out their own S.O.S. and, by self-reflexively picturing *that*, a different lens and set of criteria for thinking about work in The Big Database might open up.

In Lonergan's words:

[...] Something very real struggling beneath a heavy and ancient structure of corporate software defaults and cultural banality...

## Thursday, June 24th, 2010

*Acapella*, one of two videos by Guthrie Lonergan with that title (the other was discussed in the previous post), opens on a stock video clip depicting a direct point-of-view shot in which the camera smoothly banks through white clouds in an otherwise sublimely blue sky.

Almost immediately after this imagery appears onscreen, an a cappella version of the Oasis song “Wonderwall” emerges on the soundtrack and, then, almost immediately after that, an identical “Wonderwall” vocal track appears, creating a harmony.

The lead vocalist of Oasis, Liam Gallagher, in harmony with himself, sings:

Today is gonna be the day  
(Today is gonna be the day)  
That they're gonna throw it back to you  
(That they're gonna throw it back to you)  
By now you should've somehow  
(By now you should've somehow)  
Realized what you gotta do  
(Realized what you gotta do)

\*\*\*\*\*

At about nine seconds into the video, a ray of sun peeks through the clouds and the video clip suddenly loops back to the beginning while the song continues normally.

The video clip then continues looping while the song continues playing.

There's something blissful about it.

The shot is generic, but somehow beautiful in its simplicity and the harmony created from the a capella versions of “Wonderwall” only adds to the sense of this.

However, as one watches, one may wonder if it's *too blissful* – after all, artists who work in a conceptual vein (as Lonergan does) often use aesthetic beauty ironically or to make a broader point about art.

So, one scans through the image, on the hunt for clues or a punchline.

But, there doesn't seem to be any goofing going on here – it's not like it's all a big joke.

Eventually, though, the song ends and the viewer is left only with the endless silent looping of the video clip.

There's an unsettling quality to just seeing the video clip without the song; it's not "silent" as in a silent film, but rather "quiet" as in a person who *could* speak, but chooses not to.

At this point, one can either leave the work or follow it through this new phase.

Now, all that said, a strange sort of question pops up:

Is *Acapella* a narrative video with a beginning, a middle, and an end, or is it an infinite loop?

Is the piece done when the song finishes or does it just go on endlessly?

To put the question in practical terms, how would one show this in a gallery?

At the opening do you play it through with the song once and, then, for the duration of the exhibition just let the loop cycle through itself in silence or does the curator or gallery assistant just occasionally go over and start it up again based on either whims or an arbitrarily regulated schedule?

Perhaps that's missing the point, though.

Maybe it only works as Web art in which the user is free to control their own personal experience of the work, viewing for as long as they choose, reloading as frequently as they choose.

## Friday, June 25th, 2010

*Brandnewpaintjob.com*, an ongoing blog by Jon Rafman, is composed of (as of today, anyway) almost forty posts.

Each of the posts is itself composed of either (1.) a digital image depicting a 3D model, or (2.) a digital image depicting a 3D model as well as a short video clip in which a “camera” moves around the 3D model as if it were filmed in physical space.

The models Rafman uses are appropriated from Google 3D Warehouse and altered by him so that the “texture” or outer surface of the model reflects the style of (in most cases) a canonical Modern or contemporary artist.

So, for example, in the first post of the blog, *Motherwell Elephant*, one views an elephant whose surface reflects the rough confrontations between the colors black and white in paintings by the abstract expressionist Robert Motherwell; and, in the most recent post, *David Hockney Studio Apartment*, one views a modern studio apartment with natural light, expensive furniture and a flatscreen television in the color palette and iconography of David Hockney’s *A Bigger Splash*.

In-between these examples is a series of similar collisions between a particular painting style and a particular 3D model such as *Warhol Commodore* (a Warhol self-portrait over the 3D model of a Commodore 64 computer) or *Parker Ito Condo* (Parker Ito’s *The Most Infamous Girl in the History of the Internet* over the 3D model of an expensive looking condo apartment).

At first glance, these collisions may strike one as somewhat arbitrary postmodern one-liners; however, if one continues to view through the blog or follow its development as it happens live, then one begins to appreciate the way the posts function in greater depth.

Take, for example, *Pollock Tank*.

Pollock’s infamous dripping style serves here as a formal equivalent to the camouflage designs normally associated with the surfaces of a tank.

However, there are other things happening.

The aggressively armored shell of the tank nudges one towards viewing Pollock’s persona and his paintings as “tank-like” – excessively private and explosive – while this very explosiveness of Pollock’s canvases nudges one

towards viewing the tank as itself wildly explosive (as opposed to defensive or keeping the peace).

In each of the cases presented through the blog, a similar collision between the 3D model and the painting style creates a two-way street of meaning in which the painting style says something about the model and the model says something about the painting style.

In regard to this point, Rafman writes:

A conversation is going on between the surface and the underlying structure. In this way, the clash of the cultural weight of a high modernist paintings and a mass produced vehicle is not simply another example of the blurring of the distinction between high and low culture.

\*\*\*\*\*

It's often not immediately clear what the connections are leading towards, but this very wiggle-room in interpretation benefits the project as a whole by maintaining a certain ambiguity to each post.

For example, I'm not sure exactly what *Lewitt Blue Whale* or *Morris Louis Penguin* have to say about each of their respective collisions off of the top of my head, but in seeing the actual models, each case does make some sort of sense and part of the pleasure in the work is in thinking through why that sense may or may not exist (why *is* Sol LeWitt like a blue whale; why *is* a penguin like Morris Louis?)

Finally, when the blog is viewed as a whole, an interesting theme is demonstrated:

When viewed as digital images, canonical works from the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century painting are inevitably going to lose whatever phenomenological power they possess in the physical space of the museum.

A .jpeg of a De Kooning is not going to afford one the phenomenological "De Kooning effect" which one would experience in a traditional art space.

However, what does afford one a certain phenomenological effect on the Web is the way that, over time, it's not the style of the famous paintings that serve as art, but Rafman's performed exploration of them.





» **July 2010**

## Thursday, July 1st, 2010

*Google Street Views*, a body of work by Jon Rafman consisting of an ongoing Tumblr blog, a book published in conjunction with Golden Age in Chicago, a photo essay on the Art Fag City blog, and a series of glossy c-prints, is – in each of these versions – a collection of images found by Rafman while surfing through the “Street View” feature of the Google Maps application.

(Street View is a massive venture sponsored by Google in which vehicles armed with multi-lensed cameras drive all over the world, taking automatic and indiscriminate street photographs which are themselves, then, composed into 360 degree panoramas which can be virtually navigated through on the computer.)

In each case, one views a landscape (any landscape, rural, urban, suburban, whatever, just so long as it’s a view from a street) depicting either a figure or a group of figures, architectural details, empty vistas, or camera glitches.

It should be said, though, that the bread-and-butter of the project is the series of images depicting a figure or group of figures in isolated settings, suggesting a sense of loneliness or alienation.

For example, in Rafman’s *Sixteen Google Street Views* book, one views hikers dwarfed by a sublime, snow-covered landscape, a man taking a secret photograph of a group of teenagers in a public square, a small girl sitting by herself to the side of a street, an arm sticking out of the window of a white building, a naked woman staring into the ocean, a man staring into an empty landscape of the American west, and so on and so forth.

In each case, Rafman isolates a view on human action in which that human and their actions are viewed as insignificant or lonely.

When these images are taken by themselves, they often border on the sentimental, but when they are paired with the iconography of the Google copyright and directional compass arrows familiar to users of Google Maps, they take on a new significance.

The Google-ized images, after all, are produced without any moral, humanistic point of view.

In regard to this point, Rafman writes:

Google Street Views present a universe observed by the detached gaze of an indifferent Being. Its cameras witness but do not act in history. For all Google cares, the world could be absent of moral dimension.

\*\*\*\*\*

The driver of the Google vehicle pauses every ten to twenty meters so that the automated cameras can take a picture – the objective is to map out geography photographically (*à la* Borges’ map of the world at a 1:1 scale), not intentionally suggest anything in particular about that geography.

As such, these images are all but devoid of the human hand in their production, going beyond even Ed Ruscha’s book *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* in which Ruscha turned on the street photography tradition of, say, Cartier-Bresson by cataloguing “every building on the Sunset Strip” in Los Angeles with an identically wide, frontal framing in every shot, that, then, compounds the endless, lonely sameness of the L.A. landscape.

There are no “decisive moments” in Ruscha’s project as every image is meant to be banal and stricken of any point of view.

In the case of the Google street view camera, this connection between the human hand and the representational image is even further separated, underlining the increasing disconnect between human beings and lived experience – even taking a photograph is more efficiently executed by a machine than a person.

However, whereas Ruscha’s project is anti-aesthetic and largely conceptual, demonstrating a certain deskilling of the artist’s hand, Rafman’s project comes full circle in a way, re-introducing a mode of skilled artistic craftsmanship not, in this case, in taking the photographs, but in searching through Street View and choosing unique images to isolate and re-contextualize.

Rafman writes:

Despite the often-impersonal nature of these settings, the subjects in these images resist becoming purely objects of the robotic gaze of an automated camera. For in the act of framing,

the artist reasserts the importance of the individual. This altering of our vision challenges the loss of autonomy and in the transformation of our perceptions, a new possibility for freedom is created.

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Without ever intending to do so, the totally automated, impersonal Google Street View camera often picks up stray moments, off-hand glimpses of human personality.

Rafman's vision of street photography hearkens back to Cartier-Bresson by tracing the (virtual) landscape, seeking out these rare gems – the “decisive moments” accidentally caught by Google – which tell the viewer something particular about where it is they exist.

## Friday, July 2nd, 2010

*The BAMF! Studies* by Chris Coy is a YouTube playlist consisting of fifty-three videos created by other YouTube users (almost all of which are teenage males) in which a character or a group of characters disappear in an inky vapor cloud, only to, finally, reappear in a similar vapor cloud a moment or two later elsewhere in the same physical space.

In each case, the disappearing effect is meant to mimic a similar effect produced by the Nightcrawler character in the *X-Men* comic book and film series.

“BAMF’S,” as these mimicries are often called, take their name from the distinctive sound made by Nightcrawler every time he disappears in the *X-Men* films – something in-between slamming and suction.

Taken individually, these videos, which generally run from a couple of seconds to between ten and twenty seconds, to, in some cases, over a minute, are moderately interesting – some videos are more dynamic than others; some videos are funnier than others; generally, though, it’s difficult to read anything into them as they’re fairly self-explanatory.

When re-contextualized in a sequence of videos though, a different picture emerges. Again and again one views teenage boys amidst the trappings of a moderately comfortable suburban life – nice lawns, athletic clothing, family pictures, sofas, outdoor decks, etc.

And again and again, one views these teenage boys in the act of escaping this milieu.

The escapes occur in the form of, on the one hand, the demonstration of the teenager’s supernatural control over his own body in space, and, on the other hand, the execution of an action on a computer.

There’s something pathetic about these forms of escape, but, when viewed as a genre with its own conventions, one might pick up on something more to these videos, as well. In Coy’s words:

[...] an understanding of the vastness of the need to broadcast a coping mechanism to others; like a shared frame in a comic book...

## Monday, July 5th, 2010

*AfterSherrieLevine.com* is a website by Michael Mandiberg.

It consists of scanned versions of Sherrie Levine's *After Walker Evans* photographs (which themselves were appropriated versions of "original" Walker Evans' photographs) as well as a section of texts, including a statement by Mandiberg, and a series of appropriated texts written by or involving Levine.

The titles of the individual photographs refer to their url (e.g., *AfterSherrieLevine.com/1.jpg*).

In each one of these photographs, one views, at first glance, a black & white, Great Depression-era documentation of either a figure, a group of figures, an architectural detail, or a barren landscape in a rural, economically-distressed area.

These images were initially created by Walker Evans and received attention for providing documentary evidence of the way in which the Great Depression impacts "the common man" as well as creating a myth around the figure of Evans as a roving, Whitman-esque bard of the photographic medium.

However, in the context of Mandiberg's website – *aftersherrielevine.com* – one views another layer to these photographs, consisting of Levine's intervention into them.

As photographs of photographs taken by Levine, their value resides less as the documentation of poverty or as a sign of the mythology surrounding Evans and more as empty simulations of these qualities.

In the perceived wake of Modernism, the heroic potential of autonomous artists or autonomous works of art was challenged as artists such as Levine sought to demonstrate the impotence of these ideas in the wake of the massive increase in social image consumption due to technological reproduction.

She writes:

The world is filled to suffocating. Man has placed his token on every stone. Every word, every image, is leased and mortgaged. We know that a picture is but a space in which a variety of images, none of them original, bend and clash.

\*\*\*\*\*

Photographs which are framed as “of photographs,” it is thought, demonstrate this very condition of an “image world” and, as such, contain no illusionary cult value in and of themselves; on the contrary, they demonstrate the negation of this value.

Now, of course, Levine’s re-photographs are not purely theoretical objects; they exist in major museum collections and are widely exhibited, thus, complicating any claim to Levine’s negation of the idea of the “artist as genius” or of the original work of art.

And this is where Mandiberg’s intervention into Levine’s work comes in.

By scanning the photographs from the same Walker Evans book which Levine herself used, uploading them to the Internet and marking them as “After Sherrie Levine,” Mandiberg demonstrates that the very self-mythologizing and cult-value which Levine ostensibly critiques is, in fact, highly present in her own work.

Though her work was a critique of the authority of the hero-artist as produced by art history, this critique is arguably as well known in contemporary art discourse as Evans’ original work.

As art discourse paralleled the accomplishments of postmodern artists, these artists and their works paradoxically become art historical landmarks

It should be said, though, that Mandiberg’s insight here was not lost on Levine herself.

Several years after the production and exhibition of her *After Walker Evans* series, Levine suggests in an interview with Jeanne Siegel (which Mandiberg turns into a one-act play available to read on [aftersherrie-levine.com](http://aftersherrie-levine.com)) that her own thinking about the work is transformed.

She claims:

In the beginning, there was a lot of talk about the denial in the work and I certainly corroborated in that reading, but now it's more interesting for me to think about it as an exploration of the notion of authorship. We do believe that there are such things as authorship and ownership. But I think at different times we interpret these words differently. It's the dialectical nature of these terms that now interests me.

\*\*\*\*\*

This dialectic of critique and confirmation is further developed in Mandiberg's project as he includes with each of the high resolution images in the project a printable "certificate of authenticity" which is to be signed by the person who printed it out.

This gesture allows Mandiberg to acknowledge his own images' potential for cult-value while also distancing this value from economics as the person viewing the work is free to print out and "officially" certify it by their own hand.

By versioning Levine's work on the Internet and self-reflexively accounting for the fact that his own critique is itself subject to objectification and fetishization, Mandiberg's project expands the picture drawn by Levine – one not of a struggling farmer, but rather of the process of image dissemination.

One views here a version of a version of a work of photography which is itself a version of another work (say, of portraiture or landscape in 19<sup>th</sup> century painting) and one views this version not as an endgame, but rather as one more notch in a chain of versions extending into the past and the future.



**Tuesday, July 6th, 2010**

*Ray Gun* by Mike Beradino is a 1960s plastic “ray gun” toy in which the artist installed components of a 48X speed DVD burner.

The DVD burner projects a red laser point from the barrel of the ray gun with a non-negligible impact.

In video documentation of the gun’s use which is viewable on Beradino’s personal website, the artist points the gun at a black balloon, initiates the DVD laser, focusing the laser’s point on the surface of the balloon, until – POP – the balloon explodes due to the degree of concentrated heat generated by the laser point.

Now, on the one hand, this work is funny in a one-liner way in that it turns a child’s toy into a working weapon.

On the other hand, though, there’s another level of meaning to the work as, according to Beradino, before the DVD burner was installed into the ray gun toy, it was “broken.”

The broken DVD burner, unable to fulfill its intended function as a reliable inscriber of digital code on the surface of a DVD, is obsolete trash – a bunch of useless plastic and screws.

By re-purposing this broken technology, Beradino breathes new life into it.

In this way, it is in dialogue with the 1960s ray gun – itself a technology, or an idea of a technology, which once heralded a new vision of the future, but is now obsolete.

Furthermore, one could say the same thing regarding fully-functional DVD technology which was also once futuristic and cutting edge but is now in the process of being replaced by digital streaming and download.

It’s all the same process – a technology emerges, promising to bring one closer to one’s desires; it’s consumed; and is, then, replaced by the next technology and the next round of promises.

In no case does the technology definitively answer any of one’s questions or bring one definitively closer to one’s desires.

On the contrary, it always raises more new questions and more new desires.

The collision between the ray gun toy from the 1960s and the broken DVD player creates an impact, then, in the sense that it can pop a balloon, yes, but it can also crystallize one's awareness of this process.

Two visions of the future – each pointing out the other's obsolescence.

By doing so, the work creates a portrait of the fact of obsolescence.

## Thursday, July 8th, 2010

*Watching Martin Kohout*, a work by Martin Kohout recently exhibited on jstchillin.org's year-long "Serial Chillers in Paradise" online exhibition space, is a YouTube channel consisting of (as of the current date) four hundred and thirty uploaded videos.

Kohout began uploading videos to this channel in April 2010 and is still actively doing so.

The content of each of the videos on the channel consists of (in all but a few cases) a webcam capture of Kohout as he himself views another video on YouTube (some of which are his own earlier videos from this very series).

Each video acts as a sort of loop from YouTube to Kohout back into YouTube (and sometimes looping back out to Kohout again if, as just mentioned, he chooses to watch one of the videos of himself watching another video).

In a gallery setting, the playlist would presumably be run through chronologically (although not necessarily); however, for the viewer of the work on a personal computer, there are any number of ways to engage with it.

I, personally, began by viewing the most recent video – *Watching Liam Crockard – Hugh Scott-Douglas – ABSOLUTELY @ CLINT ROENISCH*.

In this particular video, one views Kohout – whose distinctive physiognomy is anchored by a pair of glasses with large, rounded frames – looking down towards the webcam and the computer screen which displays the video he's watching.

Because he's looking down to the webcam, a source of tension in each of these videos is the way in which Kohout's gaze *almost* meets the viewer's own.

It's sort of like being on the side of a one-way mirror which allows one person the ability to look directly at the other without the other's ability to look directly back.

As the video goes on, Kohout's eyes scan over different parts of the screen with a dead-pan expression; at one point, he fidgets and, then, smirks; a bit later, something catches his eye out the window; and near the end, he gives

a little smile before again returning to his default dead-pan.

Generally, though, there is only very little variation in Kohout's performance (he's just watching the videos) and this minimal, vaguely uncanny fascination persists through the playlist (or at least through the eight videos I personally viewed in full and the four videos I viewed in part).

As one views through multiple videos, the lack of variation in action nudges one towards elements outside of the central action documented in the videos including a heightened awareness of the shifting architectural scenarios, slight changes in Kohout's hair style and clothing, and, finally, reflective thought regarding the conceptual apparatus of the work.

His seemingly unaffected performance brings up a source of tension in the work regarding the degree to which what one views here is, in fact, an unfiltered view on Kohout as he naturally watches the video or else if it's a performance of someone *as if* he was naturally watching the videos.

Kohout knows that his watching is being recorded and is destined to be uploaded to YouTube as part of an art project – does this fact preclude one from saying for sure that he's naturally watching the videos, and, furthermore, is there a normalizing process in which Kohout's awareness of the recording process diminishes as the actual naturalness of the performance increases?

Additionally, as one views Kohout responding to the videos, to what degree does the viewer participate in the viewing of the videos he watches (particularly if the viewer is familiar with the content of the video)?

Is one just watching Kohout or is one to some extent watching a version of the video viewed, as well?

To the work's credit, there aren't any concrete answers to any of these questions.

What one views here, then, is perhaps a self-portrait demonstrating the ways in which the lines between being and being watched are increasingly blurred.

**Friday, July 9th, 2010**

From *Diaspora* (1997) by Greg Egan:

[...] He turned to Paolo, his expression suddenly, painfully naked. "I know I'm not flesh and blood. I know I'm software like everyone else. But I still half believe that if anything happened to the polis, I'd be able to walk out of the wreckage into the real world. Because I've kept faith with it. Because I still live by its rules." He glanced down and examined an upturned palm. "In the macrosphere, that will all be gone. Outside will be a world beyond understanding. And inside, I'll just be one more solipsist, cocooned in delusions." He looked up and said plainly, "I'm afraid." He searched Paolo's face defiantly, as if daring him to claim that a journey through the macrosphere would be no different from a walk through an exotic scape. "But I can't stay behind. I have to be a part of this."

**Monday, July 12th, 2010**

## **Tom Moody**

**1**

Tom Moody is best known today as commentator on the net art scene and a member of the animated GIF and meme sharing community on dump.fm. However, he is also an accomplished painter and a pioneer in employing consumer-quality paint software applications in a fine art context. Throughout his career, his works have provided mesmerizing DIY optical effects balanced with thoughtful considerations of the impact of technology on image production, particularly in regard to the tradition of painting. This text is an overview of some of his work.

**2**

Tom Moody was born in Texas and attended high school in Northern Virginia. He received a BA in English Literature and Studio Art in 1977 from the University of Virginia, did a year in the BFA program at the Corcoran College of Art and Design in Washington, DC from 1977 to 1978, and, following his year at the Corcoran, a summer semester at the School of the Visual Arts in New York City. Following his education, Moody returned to Dallas, Texas as a painter.

A successful early body of work from 1979-1980 is a series of black and white photorealistic portraits of his male high school friends. Photorealism was an established movement by the time Moody made these paintings, but his facility with the technique (they could be installed comfortably with Chuck Close's *Phil* from 1977) and his embrace of the banal photographic portrait as his subject matter point to his interest in the movement's conceptual underpinnings. By laboring to create hyperrealistic photographic effects and employing banal subject matter, the work opens the door to a deeper subject – photography itself; or the use of paint to demonstrate for the viewer what photography, divorced from the photographic print, *looks* like. This interest in exploring the formal aesthetic of an imaging technology is a strategy that Moody continues in his embrace of the lo-fi digital affects embedded in the Microsoft

Paintbrush, Microsoft Paint, and Adobe Photoshop tools.

Another key work from this period is *Wired Self Portrait* (1978), a black and white photorealistic self-portrait depicting the artist wearing bug-eyed novelty sunglasses and standing in front of a bank of electrical meters. The painting is connected to a piece of “hardware” (a white machine about the size of a home printer or fax machine with rows of black knobs whose function is unclear) via two telephone cords inserted into Moody’s neck. This imagery recalls *Frankenstein* and *A Clockwork Orange* and anticipates the cyberpunk movement in literature. Additionally, the depiction of the painter as a cyborg can be thought of as a harbinger of sorts for the direction Moody’s involvement with painting will take.

### 3

By the early 1990s, Moody had developed a brand of optically-charged abstract painting, developing his own style and visual vocabulary. Many of the motifs present in his computer-based painting such as concentric circles, serialized rows and columns of illusionistically-rendered spheres he calls “atoms,” and graphic depictions of molecules as networks of nodes and edges are present in his painting from this period.

As Moody developed this brand of abstract painting, he began meeting other painters from Dallas and Houston who were also exploring abstract effects. These painters, including David Szafranski and Jeff Elrod, became grouped into a movement that *Art in America* covered in a 1995 article by the art historian Frances Colpitt.

What set Moody’s work apart from the other painters in this scene, though, was his approach to the ground of the paintings. Instead of painting on canvas, Moody painted directly on, on the one hand, the packaging of consumer goods such as cereal boxes and promotional-size Advil boxes, and, on the other hand, computer print-outs of his own art criticism, rearranged to disrupt the narrative or argument of each piece, that he would then tape together into grids. These gestures add an explicit layer of conceptual meaning to Moody’s work. In regard to the works painted onto his own art criticism, the abstract imagery *does* work on a purely formal level, but this formal level is complicated by the layer of jumbled art criticism upon which it rests. The paintings are, in part, about the making of abstract paintings, including the complicated legacy of Modern art discourse.

It should also be noted that the application of paint in these works is often

crude, the method of taping-together the computer print-outs of the writing lacks polish, and the consumer-quality of the paper itself is not sensuous in the way that canvas is, giving the paintings an over-all lo-fi, rough-around-the-edges quality. However, at the same time, the paintings' embrace of this rawness is both intentional and self-aware. Part of the aesthetic becomes about a sort of garage rock DIY-ness.

#### 4

Just as the *Art in America* article was released and the painting scene Moody was involved in began to receive national attention, though, many of its members, including Moody himself, had left or moved elsewhere. In Moody's case, he moved to New York City, taking a clerical temp job with plenty of downtime.

With all of the downtime he had at this job and his interest in situating himself somewhere in the New York art world, Moody began to think of this office as an art studio. The computer consoles at the office employed out-of-date versions of Microsoft Windows and the paint software application, Microsoft Paintbrush, which, even by the late 1990s, was itself out-of-date. Moody embraced the banality and technological obsolescence that these tools offered, creating pixelated iconography that he would then print-out onto shades of yellow, pink, blue, and white copy paper. He would also, in some pieces, create signal distortions from his console to the office printer, resulting in jagged, pixelated lines along the paper that add a further level of formal pattern. Moody then cut these print-outs up into asymmetrical shapes and re-combined them into a painting using linen tape on the back surface of the paper.

When displayed at a large-scale (as they were in Moody's solo show at the Derek Eller Gallery in 1998 and the "Post-Hypnotic" exhibition that traveled from the University Galleries at Illinois State University to multiple venues between 1999 and 2001) the patterns of the cut-up paper, punctuated by the simple black icons printed on their surface, resist the humbleness of their materials and give off a mesmerizing optical pop.

Additionally, the slight crinkle of the manipulated copy paper and the patchwork re-assembly of the cut-up pieces create a "quilted" effect on the surface. The reference to a quilt has a particular resonance for Moody. As a metaphor for the way the Internet works, the quilt takes on a different set of characteristics than would the "web," "network," "cloud," or "information superhighway." For example, the quilt is highly tactile and often associated with femininity. In a 2005 interview with the artist Cory Arcangel on



*Rhizome*, he comments on this, stating:

In the late '90s I was impressed by the writing of cyberfeminist Sadie Plant, who opened up for me a whole organic, non-analytical way of looking at computation. She traces digital equipment back to one of its earliest uses, as punchcards for looms, and talks of the internet as a distributed collaborative artwork akin to traditionally feminine craft projects. At the time I was drawing and printing hundreds of spheres at work and bringing them home, cutting polygons around them, and then taping the polygons back together in enormous paper quilts.

There is also an embrace of lo-fi digital imaging in these works in which the rasterized pixel is not cleaned-up as one would find in contemporary imaging software, but rather visible as an indexical account of digital processes. The sight of these digital traces in the imagery demands the viewer to consider the *fact* of the computer in the process of image-creation. What appeals to Moody about this is an embedded acknowledgment that new media technologies are limited; always already on their way out the door. This doesn't make them useless as a tool for art creation, though. On the contrary, the aesthetic or medium of an obsolete technology can be beautiful precisely because it understands its own inevitable obsolescence. As he writes in his artist statement, technology is "a tool, not magic, and possesses its own tragicomic limitations as well as offering new means of expression and communication."

What is also interesting to consider about the way Moody made these works is his clandestine re-purposing of the technologies around him at his bland office job. He was making objects, yes, but also re-thinking the place of the traditional painting studio and perhaps even creating a portrait of the Gen X-era, mind-numbing corporate milieu in which he was situated. The curator Richard Klein picked up on these aspects of the work, curating him into the "Ink Jet" exhibition at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in 2000. As did the painter Michelle Grabner, who showed this work in the "Picturing the Studio" exhibition she co-curated with Annika Marie at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2010.

## 5

During this period of Moody's career, he also created a controversial series of portraits on the Microsoft Paintbrush application depicting physically

attractive women whose images he found in print magazines. In each of these images, Moody would “perfect” the features of the already idealized women using the digital tools at his disposal, bringing the eyes closer together or further apart, making the nose smaller or bigger, etc. There is something uncomfortable about these images as they were carefully studied, drawn in a piece of software, and digitally “perfected” by a male artist without the female model’s knowledge. One is provided a sort of unfiltered access to the male gaze. Furthermore, the black and white, pixelated images provide an un-realistic, clearly computer-created look to each of the subjects, which makes them not erotic, but unsettling. The women’s bodies are even further abstracted, even more on view as commodity objects than they are in the print magazine. Like the artist Richard Prince before him, though, Moody walks a fine line in these works between purely fetishizing a woman’s body and providing a self-critical portrait of this very act. Perhaps their success as artworks is the inability of the viewer to reach a synthesis or conclusion in regard to which side of that line they exist on.

## 6

Through the early 2000s, Moody would continue to work in many different veins, both on and off the computer, in most cases combining processes occurring in both locations. One of his most familiar icons, the molecular model, is an apt metaphor for this approach to artistic process between virtual and physical space. The molecular model is a unified structure composed of at least two discrete parts that is itself part of a larger structure. One work, style, or location of work can be thought of as one node or one atom in a larger network or molecular structure. Taking a cue from the artist Gerhard Richter, the heterogeneity of this larger network is, in part, where the art in Moody’s project occurs. His serial patterns of spheres or atoms, in which the focus is on a multiplicity of atoms in a larger pattern as opposed to a single atom, can be thought of in a similar way.

Within this rhizomatic structure, though, one of the modes of production Moody returned to quite often is the one he developed in his temp office job – creating imagery in a piece of software, printing (and often re-printing... and further re-printing) the image out onto relatively inexpensive consumer-quality printer paper, cutting it up into asymmetrical shapes, and finally re-combining these shapes using linen tape on the back surface into large, optically-charged rectangular paintings.

As this body of work developed, the patterns became more varied and

visually maximized, developing into intense compositions with echoes of Russian Constructivism and late Kandinsky. Additionally, the paper he worked with became increasingly white in color – a reference to his own vocational shift from the corporate office to the home office.

## 7

At around the time that these works achieved a level of self-consciousness within Moody's project, though, he began to focus elsewhere, exploring the animated GIF file as a robust Internet-native art media. Moody had long posted digital drawings and paintings onto his blog, but with the GIF he found a more immediately powerful tool to make paintings expressly for the screen.

GIFs are short, looping animations, composed of a relatively small amount of frames and file size. They have been a part of the vernacular visual lexicon of the Internet since the earliest days of the World Wide Web and have recently seen a surge of interest amongst digital natives on platforms like Tumblr and the website dump.fm. Part of the appeal (or, for some, lack thereof) of GIFs is the sense that they are aggressively, endlessly instantaneous and, hence, work well for communicating lowest common denominator images and ideas. However, this very crudeness also makes them particularly robust files to distribute socially, giving them a potential political efficacy that resonates with Walter Benjamin's understanding of photography and cinema in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Moody's embrace of the GIF came through the use of his pioneering art blog (that itself was the subject of a 2007 exhibition, "Blog," at artMovingProjects in Brooklyn). He found that, as an Internet native media, GIFs, in a way, effectively cut out the middle man to showing paintings online. A photograph of a painting is often a poor substitute for the phenomenological impact of a "real" painting. If one's painting is going to be viewed far more often in the context of a website or blog (as Moody's work was) than why not make digital paintings? Furthermore, why not make those digital paintings move, catching the hyper-wandering Internet surfer's eye? And, finally, why not use a file type associated with viral Internet meme culture, providing the paintings with a dynamic life outside of the artist's website? With these points in mind, Moody began to experiment with GIFs.

Like his ink jet painting works, the GIFs embrace visual immediacy, pixelation hearkening to a form of technological obsolescence, and a rigorous economy of materials that result in a certain roughness in

appearance. One of his most widely-viewed GIFs (and, if not the first, among the first GIFs to be purchased explicitly as a work of art), is *OptiDisc* (2007). This is an eighteen-frame animation depicting concentric circles that alternate at uneven intervals in color from black to red to blue to white, creating a crude, but hypnotic effect. The work resembles a target, a Modern art favorite famously used by Jasper Johns and Kenneth Noland.

However, while Moody's target possesses the same sort of visual punch that these others painters generated, there is also an embedded commentary about progress, be it technological or artistic, occurring here. Through the use of pixelated imagery, a pointedly small file size, and the uneven temporal intervals of the circles' alterations in color, *OptiDisc* is at once both dynamic and pathetic, visceral and antiquated. This tension is what makes it interesting to think of as a work of contemporary art. The critic/curator Paddy Johnson, in her commentary on the work in the "Graphic Interchange File" exhibition text, writes that the GIF's "emotive qualities last only as long as Moody allows a reverence for technology – in Moody's world modernism is only an afterimage, its spirit eventually replaced by mechanical functionality."

## 8

Recently, Moody has continued to work with GIFs and also created a series of large glossy prints made with Paintbrush, Paint, and Photoshop. These prints feature complex layers of abstract iconography, much of which is created with a "spray paint" tool, as well as the representation of a crudely-drawn brick wall that functions as both a reference to the Modernist grid and to a wall tagged with graffiti.

This blurring of the polish of Modern art and the rough, democratic aesthetic of street art is a fitting description of Moody's artistic project in general. One of the acknowledged inspirations for his painting process comes from cyberpunk literature. As Moody describes it, cyberpunk inherited the British New Wave's dystopian, yet hauntingly beautiful, near-future science-fiction vision, mixed it with a dose of cutting-edge computer science, and threw in the science-fiction novelist Samuel R. Delaney's "street kid" protagonist, resulting in a scrappy form of visionary pop. One can see Moody, then, as a breed of cyberpunk artist – critically exploring the new, avoiding pretension, and approaching authenticity.

**Friday, July 16th, 2010**

**Marisa Olson: Recent Work**

**1**

The Internet enables anyone with a connection to publish and share their artwork on a global scale. In many ways, this is a triumph of democratic thought as the barriers to creative expression are open much wider than they were twenty years ago. This pleasant vision becomes complicated, though, when one considers that because of this very democratization of cultural production, the landscape of cultural reception transforms, as well.

The viewer or receiver of cultural data is now presented with a seemingly infinite amount of novelty and amateur cultural ephemera to sift through. Because of this, the viewer's relationship to media becomes one not of audience member to media work, but rather of "prosumer" to media unit.

In the ocean of infinite media novelty, the media viewer is nudged towards, on the one hand, consuming media the way a cable television "zapper" surfs through television, and, on the other hand, producing media in the hopes of providing another surfer with good, quick zappable content. This surfing/consuming/producing model is, in general, not conducive to deeper modes of reflection or engagement with media. On the contrary, it is conducive to shallow skimming, scraping the surface of works. The pleasure of consumption in an ocean of media is the leap from one drop of media to another to another as opposed to a deeper engagement with a single drop. The media which are most attractive are fast, funny, and immediately clear. They need to be, otherwise the prosumer will grow bored and surf to the next article or the next image or the next whatever of media. The result is that media requiring a relatively greater degree of depth of thought are lost in the shuffle.

Now, with all of this in mind, an artist might grow anxious.

What is the point of making anything and casting it out to this ocean of media if it's just going to be at best buzzed through or at worst completely ignored? It's great that the Web allows anyone to put their own production into the sphere of public consumption, but at what cost? For the contemporary artist especially, whose motivation is ostensibly to create culture with a greater depth and preciousness than a "Fat Kid on Roller

Coaster” video, it would seem absurd to even participate in this dog-eat-dog system.

Still, though... would anyone earnestly desire for everything to return to the pre-Internet model in which only a handful of individuals are able to put their ideas out there into the world? No, probably not. Fifteen minutes of fame are better than none.

What to do then?

How can an artist participate in this system which is in many ways preferable to the prior model without feeling as though their individual works of art are on some level meaningless?

## 2

The artist Marisa Olson’s recent work is not illuminating in the sense that it has any concrete answers to this question, but is rather *therapeutic* in the sense that it seeks to quell the desire for answers to this and similar sorts of questions by focusing instead on what is creating the anxiety in the first place.

For example, *Whew! Age* (2010), a performance at PS122 in New York, dramatizes a hallucinatory therapy session in which the patient oscillates between a search for meaning and a cynicism regarding the very idea of search for meaning.

In a set composed of cardboard crystal shards outlined in dayglo duct tape and cheap-o Persian rugs sparkling with glitter and tinsel, Olson’s character interacts with the video projection of a customer-service rep-slash-self-help guru (played by Olson, as well). On the one hand, the guru character leads Olson inside herself on a mission to “chill out” and stop worrying about all the things she thinks she needs. To some extent, it works. Olson comes to the stage in a translucent mask and the guru is able to get her to take the mask off (there’s a gag where after Olson takes the mask off, it reveals another mask, but the guru is sharp enough to have her remove *that* mask, too). On the other hand, the guru is a sleazy con-man, convincing Olson to put on blinders – avoiding hope in more rigorously intellectual traditions such as empirical science or psychoanalysis. And, in a musical montage in the middle of the show, the new age approach of the guru is marketed as a cheesy, 100% guaranteed enlightenment or your money back-style video series.

This tension between sleaze and truism is explored in a moment in which

the guru demands of Olson to put her finger in her mouth and imagine that her finger is a glacier. Olson does so and the guru says to be as chilled as the glacier. This starts to work, but then one remembers that the glaciers are *melting*. And this melting – ostensibly due to climate change – is what created anxiety for Olson in the first place.

Between wisdom and mass-produced wisdom, chilling and heating, going into one's self and back out to the world, is the space *Whew! Age* inhabits. In the process, it produces a therapeutic effect by nudging its audience towards neither one pole nor the other but rather towards an acknowledgment of the inevitable contradiction between the two.

Another example of Olson's recent work is *Double Bind* (2010), a two-channel video first exhibited at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley, California. The work is composed of two YouTube videos – one a “response video” to the other. In the first video, one views Olson dressed professionally in a black suit with make-up and styled hair as she wraps her head in hot pink vinyl bondage tape until it's completely covered. In the response video, one views Olson unwrap the pink tape from her head.

So, in one video, the artist is tying herself up in bondage tape; in the other, she's releasing herself from this bondage. As they play in a loop side by side – not in perfect sync as the runtime of one video is roughly twice as long as the other – the viewer is presented with two contradictory messages – liberation and submission – each competing with the other and in neither case allowing the two messages to coalesce into a synthesis.

The title of the work, *Double Bind*, refers to the artist's binding of herself and unbinding of herself with the bondage tape, and it also refers to a term developed by, among others, the anthropologist/psychologist/cybernetician Gregory Bateson, referring to a condition in which two contradictory pieces of information negate one another. This negation creates an anxiety in a patient in which he or she cannot settle on one piece of information or the other. For Bateson (following, to some extent, ideas explored in Zen Buddhism), the discussion of the double bind underlying these sorts of contradictions possesses a therapeutic value for the patient by demonstrating that the desire for solution or synthesis is not a pressing human concern due to its logical impossibility.

In *Double Bind*, the phenomenon of “double bind” is demonstrated, thus creating a way to confront the anxiety by pointing out the incommensurability of the information in conflict with one another. Through this demonstration, the subject struggling with the choice of either/or is released from the need to even make such distinctions.

Furthermore, as curator Richard Rinehart points out in his statement regarding the work, an underlying theme of *Double Bind* is Olson's own oscillation between digital culture and the world of contemporary art. By presenting her work as a YouTube response video replete with the design elements and user comment structure familiar to users of YouTube and placing *that* in the context of the white cube art space, Olson engages in another double bind – the push and pull between the democratic culture of the Web and the elitist culture of contemporary art. Without definitively aligning herself in either realm, Olson presents this very conflict between democratic culture and art culture as a subject of the work.



**Friday, July 23rd, 2010**

## **Performance**

The democratic culture of the Internet (blogs, YouTube, Wikipedia, etc.) is increasingly a part of daily life. If somebody wants their voice heard, they can do it with a couple of clicks. However, as this democratic culture creates more instantaneously available media on a daily basis than anyone could possibly consume in a lifetime, a tension emerges in which each of these individual units of media is transformed into noise. In this scenario, both Proust and pornography flatten out in value to right around zero – each just a drop of water in a continuously expanding ocean.

Information theorists like Claude Shannon and Norbert Wiener discussed this problem in the early days of cybernetics research. Information is a ratio of signal to noise. The more noise – or entropy – in a system, the less clear the information. On the Internet, there is so much culture that it becomes like what Wiener, in a different context, called a “Niagara of entropy.” There are so many people shouting in the room that one voice cannot be heard clearly.

For a contemporary artist, this scenario poses an interesting problem. In prior models of media dissemination it was difficult for an artist’s work to reach large public audiences, critics, or curators without the artist being based in one of a handful of cities or receiving support from a commercial art space or a not-for-profit art institution. The democratic culture enabled by the Internet, though, allows for anyone and everyone with a connection to have their work viewed by both casual audiences and international arts professionals. This means that an aspiring young artist is now able to radically disseminate her work. The flip side of this situation, though, is that the meaningful value of this work becomes relatively minuscule because it’s now just one drop in an ocean of other works. As an artist uploads a work to the Internet, the chance that it will be viewed by more than a handful of people or reflected upon for more than a couple of minutes is minuscule due to the massive amount of other media through which it’s competing against. The artist, then, is left in a tangle: what’s the point of making anything if, at best, the work becomes a viral meme for a couple of hours and, at worst, is completely ignored by anyone other than the person that uploaded it? For some, I guess, this is the dream of the Internet in which the postmodern death of the author is made official and

all culture just swirls around as anonymous memes. For others, though, it may be frustrating.

One artistic stance in response to this question takes an ongoing, constructive approach to creating meaning on the Web. This stance sees that, if there is meaning in this context, then it is accrued through the ongoing performance of an artist making individual works through time – less the individual work and more the ongoing exhibition of multiple instances of work.

Before continuing, a step back in time:

Pablo Picasso began to consider the location of his art as residing in his entire ongoing practice – one action after another after another. Picasso wrote, “Paintings are nothing but research and experiment. I never paint a picture as a work of art. Everything is research. I keep researching, and in this constant enquiry there is a logical development. That is why I number and date all my paintings. Maybe one day someone will be thankful for it.” For Picasso, who pictured himself as a blind minotaur crashing his way through a labyrinth in many of his paintings, the work occurs in the cumulative effect of his ongoing search for meaning; each individual painting functioning as a piece of “research” conducted in the name of this search.

As Leo Steinberg demonstrates in his long essay “The Algerian Women and Picasso at Large,” Picasso’s medium is not even painting at the point in his career in which he made the “Algerian Women” paintings, but, rather, “the artist” – in this case, the artist performing an allegorical quest for a “realistic” two-dimensional representation of three-dimensional perceptual space. It is, for Steinberg, only through the catharsis of following this performed myth wherein the most powerful meaning of Picasso’s work is realized for his audience. As such, Steinberg takes it upon himself to critique the performance as a whole, subjecting Picasso himself to the lens of “the work of art.”

In re-constructing the historical drama of a myth surrounding Picasso, Steinberg painstakingly re-constructs the order of historical events, giving the viewer a sense of Picasso’s evolution. One can surmise that the essay was something of a labor of love for the author to construct due to, if nothing else, the raw amount of time consumed in traveling to see these dozens of works in dozens of museums and other collections all over the world.

And that's the wager of Steinberg's analysis – it operates on a highly privileged scale and, as such, describes things that are effectively impossible to view for anyone but an academic art historian with an expertise in that particular field. For almost anyone else, be they casual art fans or enthusiastic ones, access to Picasso's work is limited to the handful of art museums one has the ability to visit firsthand in the course of one's lifetime. Because of this limit, Picasso's audience cannot easily appreciate the work as an ongoing performance.

Viewed through the lens of the Web, though, this distance between dramatic stage and audience is dramatically squashed. When an artist uploads a work, anyone with an Internet connection can view it. Furthermore, the vast majority of work – from artists working both on the Web and outside of it (such as painters [even dead painters like Picasso]) – is now viewed in the context of the artist's chronological development as it is displayed on a Web page. That is to say, the idea which Steinberg is at pains to describe in regards to Picasso – the artist's self-authoring performance of the role of “the artist” in time – becomes, on the Internet, automatic.

The artist's website, as a publicly accessible database, may be followed by a public interested in the artist's work. As an artist continues to create work, this creation is knowingly performed – one views the drama of an unfolding practice in which each “move” is in dynamic dialogue with past practice as well as a navigation into future practice. If I encounter the work of the contemporary artist through their managed presence on the Internet and I do it again and again and again, then this managed presence itself becomes a performative work.

There are many examples of this type of approach to making work in the context of the Web. One of those examples is Poster Company by Travess Smalley and Max Pitegoff.

Poster Company is a Flickr page consisting of over two hundred paintings produced between July 2009 and May 2010. In this project, the artists, first, focus on collisions between automatic effects which read as either “painterly” or “digital,” and, second, shift the focus of their labor in the work from the production of the individual painting to the performance of producing many paintings over the course of months. As such, their work is in dialogue with the painter On Kawara's *Today* series and Josh Smith's influential painting project – each of which are meaningful when considered as reactions to the automatic reproducibility of images as well as an ongoing, long-form performance.

The question “what is *a* digital painting?” (a noun) is here better phrased as “what is digital painting?” (a verb). The significance of Poster Company’s work lies not in the individual compositions, nor in the volume of output (although these elements are undeniably crucial for the full execution of the work to occur), but rather in the *performance* of the work.

In many ways, digital technologies and the Web make life easier for those who use them. This ease, though, frustrates the sense of accomplishment and meaning involved in laboring over something. When everyone can easily broadcast themselves on the Web or create a modern art masterpiece with a few clicks of a mouse, these actions become meaningless. In the face of this quandary, some artists have conceived of art production less in terms of the creation of a single work and more in terms of the performance involved in creating multiple works over time which an audience may follow live.

**Friday, July 30th, 2010**

## **Performance 2**

### **1**

In “The Present Age,” an 1846 essay by Søren Kierkegaard, the author lambasts his own age for its passionless stance towards the world in which everything is sort of interesting and sort of boring at the same time and, as such, nothing is worth loving or dying for. Kierkegaard felt that the massive quantitative increases in information which emerged in relation to the rise of the “public sphere” of the nineteenth century were a disaster because they leveled out the sorts of experiences one could have. When everyone is encouraged to be opinionated about everything, no one knows anything with any depth and, in turn, no one really cares about anything with what could be called love or the sense that one would sacrifice themselves for that one particular thing. According to Kierkegaard, a reliance on consensus, daily newspapers, and scientific expertise to define the course of human life is a sure way to create a world in which sacrifice is unnecessary and love is almost impossible. When nothing stands out as any more qualitatively interesting than anything else, it becomes difficult to say that one “loves” anything and really mean that word. In other words, it was a prototype of the age of “whatever.”

About a decade ago, the philosopher Hubert Dreyfus compared Kierkegaard’s vision of the “present age” to the rise of the Internet in his own contemporary moment. According to Dreyfus, the qualitative leveling-out of all experience at zero which Kierkegaard describes in relation to the public sphere is “perfected” on the World Wide Web and, furthermore, that Kierkegaard’s proposal for a risky, unconditional commitment or “leap of faith” in the face of this leveling out is made almost impossible. This impossibility is due to the technology’s simulated and anonymous experiential reality which, according to Dreyfus, demands no commitment to any particular decision.

For a contemporary artist who believes or at least wants to believe that what they are doing is more than a vague combination of “interesting” and “cool,” the prospect of making work in the type of world described by Kierkegaard and Dreyfus is a daunting prospect. Why sacrifice one’s time to making art if no one cares, including oneself?

One response is that one could simply not participate in the online arena, at all. That certainly seems plausible – the artist Tino Seghal, for example, goes to all sorts of great lengths to avoid new technologies. But, even by not participating, one is still highly engaged with this media environment by going out of one’s way to avoid it. That is, it’s still, at the very least, a source of anxiety. So, if one is going to directly participate, how would one do that and maintain any belief that their works of art are meaningful?

For the art critic and historian Leo Steinberg, that question is based on a faulty premise which will always inevitably bog one down. For Steinberg, an individual work should not be thought of as a “good investment” in meaningfulness. One work will always be a hive of contradictions and limitations. And, furthermore, anytime an artist becomes anxious about the meaning or lack thereof in regard to a given one of their works, that anxiety won’t be resolved by reasoning one’s way to its meaningfulness. What’s meaningful – or at the very least a way to cope in the face of all that novelty – is to, following Kierkegaard, make a “risky investment” – a “leap of faith” – going into each and every new day with an openness to experience and to the shifting of criteria in one’s world, and, then, making meaning out of *that*.

In what follows, I’ll discuss in greater depth the relationship of the Internet and making artwork on the Internet in relation to Steinberg’s ideas regarding the potential for meaningfulness in art.

## 2

The pop star Prince, has, since 2007, been at war with the Internet in regard to, amongst other claims, its users’ ability to distribute his music for free. A recent highlight of Prince’s feud with the Net came several weeks ago when Prince declared that “the Internet is over.” According to the artist, “The Internet’s like MTV... At one time, MTV was hip, and suddenly it became outdated.”

Contrary to Prince’s analysis, though, while it’s debatable whether or not the Internet is hip anymore, it’s not necessarily “over.” In fact, the amount of time people spend consuming media online is only increasing. And, according to a study conducted by the Kaiser Foundation which was reported in *The New York Times*, young people in the United States are consuming an eye-popping seven and a half hours of electronic media a day – basically every waking minute outside of school – which actually increases when one considers the layers of media involved in multitasking (for example, surfing the Web while listening to music), pushing the figure

up to eleven hours of media consumption a day. According to Donald F. Roberts, one of the study's authors who was quoted in the *Times*, "In the second report, I remember writing a paragraph saying we've hit a ceiling on media use, since there just aren't enough hours in the day to increase the time children spend on media. But now it's up an hour."

One reason why it's possible to spend that much time consuming media, is that there is now an effectively unlimited amount of instantaneously available, free media through which one may consume twenty-four hours a day as well as the devices through which one can execute this consumption. It becomes plausible to just sit and consume all day, popping from one interesting thing to another interesting thing to another – all of them different and equally interesting. For instance, while I don't remember the actual circumstances in which I read the article about Prince, I'm picturing a typical scenario in which it would have been crammed-in amongst thirty other news items and a half-dozen advertisements on a Web page, which is itself nestled-in amongst four other tabs on my browser – all of which contain other interesting media. No matter what the actual circumstances, though, I almost instantaneously forgot about it in my rush to continue consuming other interesting media.

I bring all this up, though, to actually sympathize with Prince and with every other person creating all of these hours of free media which are consumed at these astounding rates. How, after all, is one supposed to make a living as an artist in this scenario? And, perhaps more importantly, how is one supposed to find any meaning in participating in this scenario? That is, how is one supposed to find any meaning in one's work when it's competing to make a little noise in an endlessly noisy room? Even if one's work is fortunate enough to receive fifteen minutes of fame, will that fifteen minutes be enough to provide one with a sense of meaning in regard to what one is producing? I recently read something the filmmaker Harmony Korine said about his own frustrations with producing anything in the cultural context of the media explosion engendered by the Web. He said:

[...] at a certain point everything becomes noise. I find it increasingly difficult for movies to have a lasting emotional resonance, the way they did when I first started watching. You would see something and it would live with you forever and could change the way you thought about things. There seems to be this shift where now it is just about consuming them. Even the movies that people say they love for the most part they forget the next day.

There's a paradox to democratic culture in which all media is accessible, but, because all media is accessible, it all becomes equal in value to zero – like fifty almost identical brands of shampoo in a super market.

### 3

This concern is related to the “plight” of contemporary art which the art critic and historian Leo Steinberg describes in his 1962 essay “Contemporary Art and the Plight of its Public.” In this essay, Steinberg describes a contradiction in the very idea of Modernism in which the Modernist imperative to continually overturn the hard fought insights of the generation of artists just historically prior to one's own, compounded by the ever-narrowing cycles of these generations, results in the absurd situation in which no one – no matter who they are – feels secure in the knowledge that any individual work of art they produce or any artistic breakthrough they accomplish will retain any meaning for anyone in more than a year or two, most likely in less time than that. When faced with this reality, how can an artist believe that what they're fighting for or fighting against has any meaning? This contradiction creates, for Steinberg, an anxiety. He writes:

I know that there are people enough who are quite genuinely troubled by those shifts that seem to change the worth of art. And this should give to what I call “The Plight of the Public” a certain dignity. There is a sense of loss, of sudden exile, of something willfully denied – sometimes a feeling that one's accumulated culture or experience is hopelessly devalued, leaving one exposed to spiritual destitution. And this experience can hit an artist even harder than an amateur.

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For Steinberg, this anxiety is bound up with both the quantity of new art pumped out every month in the contemporary art system as well as the speed in which this system seems to be moving since it became aware of the demands placed on it by both the art market and the art magazines hungry for “the next big thing.” That is, all contemporary art comes with what, in a related essay, Steinberg terms “built-in obsolescence.”

Thinking of these anxieties in the context of the Internet, then, this situation is further compounded as the surfeit of art through which to sift through is by now greater and the cycles of built-in obsolescence are by now narrower. This is especially true in relation to the history of artists working



directly on the Internet. The “net.art” generation of artists in the 1990s and early 2000’s, for example, seem, for better or for worse, like distant art history and even Internet Surfing Clubs which created buzz in the net.art community for a couple of key years seem like a hazy memory which is too difficult or embarrassing to remember in the face of keeping up with RIGHT NOW. Furthermore, if the words you’re reading right now are at all “interesting,” that interest will be long gone within a month – you won’t even remember reading this.

Perhaps this was always the case, though. Perhaps artists have always dealt with this and it’s besides the point to even bring it up because it’s so obvious. But the particularly disarming element of the contemporary moment which Steinberg presciently noticed in his own time is that the rate of turnover at present is so accelerated that it rubs this built-in obsolescence in one’s face and doesn’t allow one a decade or two of breathing room in which to pat one’s self on the back. No one can even *pretend* to love an individual work of art anymore (another’s work or one’s one) because one knows that that love will be obsolete almost as soon as it’s proclaimed.

So, why even do it? Why even participate in this system if one’s work is going to be chewed up and spit out without much serious reflection?

The way Steinberg addresses this anxiety in the essay is to quell the need one has for each individual work to be thought of as anything like a “good investment” in terms of either financial or art historical capital. As long as one focuses their desires on the worth of an individual instance of one’s ongoing art practice instead of on the ongoing evolution of the art practice itself, one will always inevitably run into these anxieties. Steinberg’s goal here is not to reverse the situation or to reason himself away from it, but rather to come to grips with this loss of one’s ability to love a work of art, identify it *as* an anxiety and propose a way forward. What he comes to is that for the contemporary artists or the contemporary art lover, a shift in focus is needed in which one focuses their attention away from investments in individual works and towards an ongoing, daily *practice*.

What’s potentially horrifying in regard to this, though, is that it requires, for Steinberg, following Kierkegaard, a “leap of faith” with zero logical certainty in regard to the value of this potential evolution in daily practice. At least with the individual work of art, it’s there, you know it’s done, it’s something concrete which you can evaluate. What comes next in one’s ongoing practice or “each day’s gathering” as Steinberg calls it, is completely anybody’s guess. If one is to follow his argument, though, it’s the only way forward for both artist and art lover if they are to overcome the anxieties of “the present age.”

In response to Hubert Dreyfus, then, who was concerned with the impossibility of a meaningful sacrifice or “leap of faith” in the solipsistic worlds of the Internet, we can offer Steinberg’s interpretation of the “leap of faith” in relation to problems inherent in late Modernist art. The sacrifice here comes not from one single decision or “leap,” but rather from a deep engagement with time – the development of an ongoing practice, in which the only hope for meaning emerges through a daily-ness and openness to receive what comes along that day and every day until the end.

#### 4

Although perhaps lacking the existentialist *angst* which Steinberg describes, many artists working on the Web right now, particularly younger artists working on Tumblr blogs and sites like dump.fm, have come to a similar conclusion: no single instance of a work which is thrown up onto the Web is going to be very meaningful. What could be meaningful, though, is a discernible *shift* in the object of inquiry from the individual work to the ongoing performed practice of creating work.

I, personally, became interested in this idea through my experience of watching “Internet Surfing Clubs” around 2007 and 2008. Internet Surfing Clubs are blogs authored by multiple users in which short, visually immediate posts – each of which often involves re-mixed or readymade material appropriated from elsewhere on the Internet – are shared in ongoing conversation. The Surfing Club I was aware of first and to this day have the most affection for is *Nasty Nets*.

Before I became acquainted with Surfing Clubs, I wasn’t particularly interested in art and only moderately interested in Internet culture. I came from a background in film production and, while I was still watching certain filmmakers, generally speaking, I had hit a brick wall with film on a creative level. This led me YouTube where my interests were rekindled.

On YouTube, the attraction, at first, was to surf through the archive, finding weird stuff that I watched as a child in the 1980s, television news bloopers, “mashups,” etc. Eventually, though, I became particularly interested in following regular YouTube users who talk into their webcams everyday – sometimes to large audiences of people. Many of these personalities were genuinely intriguing and I began to pick up on the fact that it didn’t matter if what they were saying was logically incoherent or creatively limited, I loved the fact that they kept going, they kept performing everyday and, in the best cases, they kept transforming themselves. And you could watch this transformation happen in real time. For me, this was revelatory: the

individual movie was sacrificed for the performance of daily moviemaking over time. What becomes valuable is the performance of it – the fact that the person will be there, improvising, talking, interacting with the network of other users and they’ll do it (almost) every day. To my mind, this is where the energy of cinema was going – focusing on the improvisatory authorship of cinematic objects, as opposed to the cinematic objects, themselves.

Shortly after this, I became aware of Surfing Clubs and, in particular, *Nasty Nets* through “The Year in The Internet 2006” which was a series of “best of” lists by people interested in Internet culture and Internet memes. It was edited by the artists Michael Bell-Smith and Cory Arcangel, who also made a similar list the year before.

On *Nasty Nets*, the same principles applied except, in this case, there was a level of meta-criticality in regard to what was being shared. It was Internet culture about Internet culture, and, in some cases, it was about the history of conceptual art, as well. Once again, though, the point, for me, was not to spend too much time asking whether or not the individual posts were good or bad, but to simply follow the stream, day after day, every day. And, just as in my experience on YouTube, in the process of following these streams, the posts began to differentiate themselves and different performative voices began to emerge. I didn’t know anybody that was on a Surf Club or have any idea what their backgrounds were, but, all of the sudden, certain surfers on *Nasty Nets* became, to me anyway, the most relevant, significant artists that I knew of – period. If one watches this type of work, one quickly realizes that the meaningful art on the Internet is accrued through “each day’s gathering” as Steinberg calls it, following the performing of the making of art on the Web.

## 5

When faced with a leveling-out of all individual units of culture to right around zero, both the artist and the art-follower are presented with a choice: either drown or surf. The work which one views on the Internet which retains a sense of meaning and the possibility of inspiring further work by artists and further following by art followers is, more often than not, produced by those who surf.



» **August 2010**

**Friday, August 6th, 2010**

### **Performance 3**

#### **1**

Brad Troemel, an artist perhaps best known for his work with the Jogging collective, claimed in a 2009 interview with the Counterfeit-Mess Blog that:

A couple years ago when I became a Photographer-hater, I realized that you can't possibly explain the world through a single tool. I feel that way now in regard to The Art Project, that 10 projects can't explain everything or anything either. All you can do is have a constant engagement with art, trying to find meaning. On Jogging, we, the creators, are the art and artists... Creating this way makes assessing/accessing our work on the whole difficult. There's no fitting "grading rubric" for everything at once because the intent of the art is multiple. So, you can either assess every single work individually, or, you can assess us, ourselves, as the work.

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The artist Duncan Alexander recently wrote a blog post which made a similar point regarding certain artists working on the Internet. Before making that point, though, he divides current net art practices into two (admittedly) very broadly sketched camps – on the one hand, those artists making work on the Internet in conversation with art history and, on the other hand, those artists making work on the Internet in conversation with the cultural history of the Internet itself. He, then, claims that for the “net historical” camp:

What matters... is not so much the individual artwork as the artist's oeuvre and net presence. This is one reason why these artists don't receive as much coverage – you can't pin a work down as easily. Where most camp one works are one-way in terms of links (and this appears to be a strategic move), camp two relishes hypertext and cross-platform performance. Their work spills across the social networks that the artists inhabit.

Alexander's division of the current net art paradigm into two broadly sketched camps is perceptive and works well as a shorthand. To my mind, though, the work of *both* camps is most potently experienced in terms of what he calls ongoing "net presence" as opposed to through an individual work. For example, Ryder Ripps, who (if we are going to follow Alexander's "two camps" framework) is a member of the "net historical" camp, has created important work which explicitly embraces a plurality of production occurring in time; but the work of Jon Rafman, who is a member of the "art historical" camp, is also, for me, anyway, more meaningfully experienced when considered in terms of ongoing presence – even if this presence is less pronounced. *Google Street Views* and *Brand New Paint Job*, for example, are memes he's actively improvising with in time; they are knowingly performed and are responsive to the demands placed on them by both general Internet culture and the history of art.

In the two previous posts on this blog, I've tried to work through a similar idea; namely, that the "aura" of an individual work of art in the age of the digital media network is, for better or for worse, not eliminated, but rather relocated. Instead of associating cult value with an artifact, one associates it with the live performance of the artist as he or she creates individual works of art and uploads them to the data cloud in sequential order. Following this publicly viewable sequence as it happens live is where meaningful artistic experiences are happening on the Internet. There are, of course, interesting individual works of art on the Internet, but that's all they can be – "interesting." Each individual work of art in the context of the incomprehensible amounts of artistic media on the Internet is leveled out in value to right around zero. For example, both the avant-garde music of Arnold Schoenberg and humorous videos of cats playing the piano are equally "interesting" – one no more qualitatively valuable than the other when viewed through a computer in the context of all of the other media one is able to consume on the Internet. The result of this is that those invested in reflecting on works of art in the context of the Internet are nudged towards following the artist's live "presence" as he or she disseminates work in time. These live performances are where one is able to draw qualitative distinctions.

That said, there are a number of clear objections to this idea. One of those objections is that the use of the terms "performance" and, especially, "live performance" are problematic.

For example, for the performance theorist Peggy Phelan, the ontology of live performance is divorced from image reproductions and involves the co-presence of a limited number of bodies in the same space. Likewise, in

the performance historian Chris Salter's book *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance*, Salter refuses to include a discussion of performance on the Internet even though he does so for many other "entanglements" of performativity and technology. For Salter, performance is necessarily "situated" meaning that, even if the stage is filled with technological gadgetry and television monitors intermingling with live bodies, the audience and performers need both be situated in the same physical space for the same amount of shared co-present time. The disembodied quality of Internet experience is beyond the pale of what one could call "performance."

Before going any further, I should say that this aggressive line-drawing between what is real performance and what is not real performance makes a great deal of sense to me. There's always going to be something more visceral about the sharing of physical space that needs to be preserved and honored. For example, jumping up and down and slamming into other sweaty bodies for an hour and a half while listening to loud, deliriously pounding rock music would be more exhilarating than the experience of watching the same music through a live stream on the Web. Similarly, physical contact during sex is not something that you could hope to reproduce on the Internet. I'm not interested in arguing against these obvious facts or diminishing the value of these experiences.

What I am interested in thinking through, though, is that there may be multiple ways to talk about a body which include both the experience of the body in a dance club in "natural time" as well as the body online, surfing through the Internet in "Internet time." Again, I am not in favor of one conception of the body in time over the other; I do think, however, that it's possible for one to seriously conceive of their bodies as being in two (or more) places at once.

In what follows, I'll discuss several theories of performance working around these issues.

## 2

What is liveness? One way to approach that question is to ask, first, "what is *not* liveness?" For example, if one views video documentation of a live performance, is what one views really "live"? I personally don't think that it is. Here's an example:

Joy Division, the British post-punk band best known for its sparse sound and vocalist Ian Curtis's baritone renderings of his own moody lyrics, was,



for me, a band whose sound I liked, but had to be in a very particular head space if I was to be infected by it. That changed, though, after I viewed live concert footage of the band performing and, in particular, after I saw Ian Curtis performing.

As individual records, the songs are so dark and hermetic that they could easily lull one to sleep late at night; however, as live performances, they take on an opposed set of attributes – they're charged and vital. For example, in a performance of "Transmission" broadcast from a BBC television studio, one views Curtis begin the song in a deep focus – he stands awkwardly, his eyes are almost closed, and he grips the microphone, holding it next to his mouth – as the tempo escalates and Curtis's vocals follow suit, though, he moves the mic stand out of the way and begins making spastic movements – choppy running in place, circular motions with the index finger he's pointing to his head, *pushing* the finger away as if pushing something out of his mind, and swinging his forearms in semi-circles. He goes deeper and deeper, doing what he can to get the words out the way he means them to sound, ending up in positions resembling Christian revivalists or the seizures of an epileptic (as a matter of fact, Curtis would occasionally go into epileptic seizures while performing).

There's something unsettling about watching these performances as they go beyond irony – it's not as if he's joking. In a 1979 interview with the Northern Lights Cassette Magazine, Curtis spoke about this seriousness of intention in his performances, claiming, "Instead of just singing about something you could show it as well, put it over in the way that it is, if you were totally involved in what you were doing."

If one is to view the depictions of Curtis by actors in the films *24 Hour Party People* and *Closer*, and, then, compare those depictions to the mania in Curtis' eyes when he's in the grips of his performance, there's really no comparison; it only makes sense if the artist is present, totally involved in what he's doing.

But, all that said, is the video footage I viewed of Curtis on the Internet really what one would call a "live" performance? Despite all my enthusiasm for the liveness of the band, did I even witness anything "live"?

The OED defines "live" as, "Of a performance, heard or watched at the time of its occurrence, as distinguished from one recorded on film, tape, etc." Similarly, Peggy Phelan claims that the ontological character of live performance demands that it disappears as it is enacted, that it only exists in the "now" of its performance. She writes:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction, it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology.

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Phelan's argument around this ontology of liveness is complex and astutely weaves through dense theoretical terrain involving Lacanian psychoanalysis, speech act theory, and feminist critiques of representation. She takes a polemical stance not as an angry conservative reactionary to the forces of technological reproduction, but as a believer in the possibility of cultural experiences which resist commodification, simulation and the male gaze. For Phelan, live performance's "promise" is its automatic tragedy, the fact that as one views the work, the work slips from one's grasp, resisting representation and unable to be accurately reproduced, commodified, or otherwise "marked." The video of the live Joy Division performance, then, would be missing the point of the performance as it tries to preserve what, by definition, cannot be preserved.

Perhaps what the video affords is the *idea* of the performance – the *idea* that the band was doing something other than playing music on well-produced albums; the *idea* that the band only makes sense when viewed "live." With this idea in mind, I was able to appreciate Joy Division – an intellectual response rather than a bodily one. To actually be in a pub in the north of England in the late 1970s watching Ian Curtis perform would be powerful for precisely the reasons which Phelan suggests – it would be un-reproducible, demanding my bodily engagement in the moment. I'll never be able to watch Joy Division perform live which is precisely what makes the live performance valuable for those who did view it – its mortality, its preciousness not as an object but as a stretch of unique time. Nothing like that occurs when I view the video – again, it's the intellectual idea that Curtis did perform this way which I respond to in the video, not the performance itself.

### 3

This ontologically "pure" understanding of liveness has been criticized, though. For example, the performance theorist Philip Auslander has critiqued Phelan's understanding of liveness, suggesting that there's really

no such thing as what Phelan describes as “live performance” because almost any performance in “mediatized cultures” is a jumble of liveness and media effects. Think of the fans at a baseball game watching the Jumbotron television screen rather than the actual players on the field or even something as simple as a microphone and amplifier which create a layer of technological interpretation of a live performance. Furthermore, think of the “live” television broadcast of the six o’clock news or the multimedia performance art of Laurie Anderson or Ann Liv Young. Don’t these performances involve both “live” and re-producible elements?

It’s not that Auslander is saying that there can be nothing like what Phelan describes, but that the actual condition of live performance as it is practiced in the contemporary moment is endlessly hovering between both pure liveness and a technological mediation of this liveness and, therefore, the idea of defining a fixed definition based on its separation from technological reproducibility is admirable, but ultimately futile. He writes, “Much as I admire Phelan’s commitment to a rigorous conception of an ontology of liveness, I doubt very strongly that any cultural discourse can stand outside the ideologies of capital and reproduction that define a mediatized culture or should be expected to do so, even to assume an oppositional stance.”

I agree with Auslander that the “friend or foe” lines drawn by Phelan in regard to technological reproduction sets up unrealistically high standards given the massive amount of cross-pollination there actually is between live and reproducible elements in a given work of performance. However, I believe that liveness as a disappearance, as Phelan defines it, is, nevertheless, still possible, still, for better or for worse, uncommodifiable, and, in fact, (and probably to the horror of Phelan) occurring on the Internet. What is my experience of, for example, a surf club or a Tumblr blog or dump.fm if it’s not the unfolding of a live performance, un-reproducible as itself – a sense of presence to a unique stretch of time?

#### 4

A point of contention here revolves around the word “body.”

For Phelan, this would be the biological body co-present to its audience in situated space. She writes, “Performance honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward.” There is something crucial to performance in that one must *go* there and be co-present to it in the same “specific time/space frame.”

Similarly, in his book *On the Internet*, the philosopher Hubert Dreyfus discusses the phenomenological differences between live performances and live reproductions of live performances. He contends that live actors “are, at every moment, subtly and largely unconsciously adjusting to the responses of the audience and thereby controlling and intensifying the mood in the theater.” Dreyfus’s dedication to embodied co-presence is not based on a whimsical prejudice against computers, but rather a deeply held belief, following Merleau-Ponty, that the *risk* and continuous re-adjustment process in which one seeks to get a “grip” on the reality in front of one’s eyeballs, is what gives this reality a sense of meaning. He writes:

Not only is each of us an active body coping with things, but, as embodied, we each experience a constant readiness to cope with things in general that goes beyond our readiness to cope with any specific thing. Merleau-Ponty calls this embodied readiness our *Urdoxa* or ‘primordial belief’ in the reality of the world. It is what gives us our sense of the direct presence of things. So, for there to be a sense of presence in telepresence, one would not only have to be able to get a grip on things at a distance; one would need to have a sense of the context as soliciting a constant readiness to get a grip on whatever comes along.

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Dreyfus is skeptical about the possibilities of ever getting a “grip” on a world in which one is only present to via telepresence. His practical concern actually has less to do with performance than with “distance learning” – say, a simple lecture conducted via videoconferencing or a doctor teaching medical students how to perform surgery via a camera mount attached to his head.

I agree with this. I agree that Shakespeare performed on an empty stage to an audience of computer users is an embarrassing idea. I also agree that doctors cannot responsibly teach surgery to medical students remotely. These are human practices that need to occur in space and need to be preserved and honored.

My interest, rather, is in thinking through the possibility that as people begin to, for better or for worse, spend more and more of their lives on the computer and as certain specific relationships between these computer users and the ocean of cultural media which they consume becomes more and more a part of banal daily life, is there a way to have a new type of live performance, a live performance which creates new types of risks, new types of grips on the world? Is there a type of live performance whose

actions are not imitations of those in physical space, but rather live performances of actions which could only be conducted through computing?

Could one perform Internet surfing through Internet surfing?

Or is that just nonsense?

## 5

One way to think about this perplexing question is this:

Through the course of one's day, one moves through all sorts of different moods which define one's relationship to reality. Sometimes one is anxious, optimistic, sexually aroused, quietly reflective, whatever it may be. None of those moods are absolute, but they each have a devilish power over one which creates the illusion that that one particular mood is, in fact, what is true. So with that in mind, on the one hand, if I'm in a mood in which I picture my body's boundaries ending where the skin meets the air, then these performances on the Internet are not anything that I would ever be present to; on the other hand, though, if I'm in a mood in which I picture my body's boundaries extending outside of my skin (say through various online representations), then these performances on the Internet are something that I may be present to.

**Sunday, August 15th, 2010**

## **Performance 4**

### **1**

According to the computer science guru David Gelertner, the increasing migration of digital information from personal hardware to data clouds necessitates a shift in the picture one refers to when visualizing the Internet. The Web – as in a relatively static network of data nodes – is out; the lifestream – as in continuously mutating network of data clouds – is in. He writes:

The Internet's future is not Web 2.0 or 200.0 but the post-Web, where time instead of space is the organizing principle – instead of many stained-glass windows, instead of information laid out in space, like vegetables at a market – the Net will be many streams of information flowing through time. The Cybersphere as a whole equals every stream in the Internet blended together: the whole world telling its own story.

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For some artists working on the Web, this principal applies as well. Creativity is – again, for some – not evaluated on the basis of an individual work of art, but rather on the basis of the artist's ongoing, performed net presence. For better or for worse, a week ago an artist may have created a masterpiece work of art which in previous epochs would have been discussed for decades or even centuries; in the age of the CVS Pharmacy Twitter feed, though, the artist's masterpiece will be quickly forgotten, at best sentimentally recalled or academically cited, but no longer *felt*. What will be *felt*, though, is the artist's ongoing engagement with time – the molding of the NOW.

It should be said, though, that Gelertner is ambiguous about this obsession with flow and the NOW. He writes, “The effect of nowness resembles the effect of light pollution in large cities, which makes it impossible to see the stars. A flood of information about the present shuts out the past.” Furthermore, focusing on an endless NOW, can be oppressive for an artist's

creative expression. Part of what it means to be working in the tradition of the history of art is to work against the demands of one's own time; or at least working in relation to it from a skewed angle, keeping everyone on their toes. The Puck-ish delight the artist has in convoluting expectations is frustrated in this grinding system which demands one to endlessly perform, endlessly produce ever newer novelties if one is to remain relevant as an artist. Nothing becomes shocking when there's a new revolution every week and, thus, any avant-garde action becomes neither here nor there – it's like whatever.

In what follows, I'll discuss this performative approach to art making and look at the artist Seth Price's response to some of the anxieties which it brings up.

First, here is an example of how an artist may come to think of their work as performative on the Internet:

An artist has a website. At first, this website is, depending on the artist, either a handy novelty or a frustrating necessity of the digital age. Either way, it's not that super-important. One makes a work – be it digitally-created or handmade – and one, then, uploads a photograph or some other form of representation of this work to their website to serve as a second-hand reference for curators, collectors, critics, and the general contemporary art audience.

An artist maintains this website. Gradually the artist comes to realize just how handy and how necessary this tool is for the dissemination of their work. As newspapers, mainstream culture, an exploding amateur culture, communication with friends, banking, and a host of other day-to-day activities are increasingly conducted via the Internet, the artist realizes that not only do people greatly prefer, and even expect, the ease of viewing the work through this website, but the once-obvious line between the actual work and the representation of the work is becoming oddly blurry. For many members of the artist's audience, including curators, critics, and other arts professionals, the image of the work on the website is good enough. This is exacerbated by the increasingly global nature of contemporary art, perhaps best represented by Biennial culture.

All of the sudden, the way the artist thinks about their work is at least as much dictated by how a .jpeg of the piece looks in the context of their website as they are by how it would look in the physical art space. This is what the artist Guthrie Lonergan calls "post Internet" art – the art after the Internet changed the way that art reaches an audience.

For many younger artists who, by historical accident, came of age without ever really experiencing the “pre-Internet” relationship between artist and audience, this is not a novelty, but an obvious fact that almost goes without saying. Even if one works in traditional media, art is primarily experienced on the Internet.

The art/curatorial collective VVORK curated a show called “The Real Thing” which was based on the idea that, as members of mediatized cultures, most of their own knowledge of art was not accrued through the original, but through art history books, lectures, conversations, and, of course, the Internet. In other words, through “versions.” In their statement for the show, which was held at MU in Eindhoven, they write:

Some of our favourite works have only been described to us, unsurprisingly as the majority of our art experiences have been mediated in one form or other. The majority of works presented in this show have been selected through written commentaries, verbal descriptions and jpegs found online. In fact most of the works presented at MU are the type of manifestations mentioned above: stories, descriptions, translations and interpretations, all understood as primary experiences.

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One of VVORK’s cited inspirations for the show is the following Seth Price quote from *Dispersion*:

Does one have an obligation to view the work first-hand? What happens when a more intimate, thoughtful, and enduring understanding comes from mediated discussions of an exhibition, rather than from a direct experience of the work? Is it incumbent upon the consumer to bear witness, or can one’s art experience derive from magazines, the Internet, books, and conversation?

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Now, when the primary experience of art is legitimately conceived in this way – as an endless series of versions – there are going to be effects. For example, the glut of information through which media consumers are presented nudges the consumer to *surf* through this media, including contemporary art, rather than engaging deeply with any one particular unit. The artist Chris Coy recently described this phenomenon in terms of the



way the computer urges its users to view images in sequences, as in, for example, thumbnails. In an e-mail interview conducted for the SFMOMA website, he claims:

A computer screen is very much a sequential image-viewing device. Which is significantly reshaping the function of the image in my life. I have become a very adept surface skimmer – gliding my way across glossy roll over buttons, tumblr blogs and Google image searches and stock photo sites... which means hundreds, if not thousands of images pass before me on any given day. Imagery is being totally integrated into our vocabulary – I mean you can shoot, edit and upload video from an iPhone now. Even the core function of the phone is changing as technology facilitates this hypermediated kind of ubiquitous computing thing.

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This understanding of the computer as a “sequential image-viewing device” necessitates a decrease, then, in the preciousness around a single instance of artwork.

This is not the end of the story, though. What one sees happening in some corners of the Internet is a new type of temporal activation – a “net presence” in which the artist’s work is viewed as one ongoing performance; the audience follows the artist as he or she performs the act of creating individual works. This performance is where audiences are nudged to qualitatively sort out and find meaning in artistic experience on the Internet.

There is, though, a dangerously romantic appeal to this idea. It seems to advocate for a “survival of the fittest” scenario in which the future is an endless, regularly-scheduled assembly line of novelty and only those art workers who keep up with the administered pace of production get a gold star. Performance here sounds like “engine performance.” This is obviously not the sort of situation which would be in the artist’s favor. It’s not exciting for an artist (or an art theorist, for that matter) to follow a theoretically pre-prescribed pattern which was dictated by the pressures of the market, the audience, or the curatorial/critical apparatus around the work’s reception. Furthermore, in an endless rush for new change and novelty, it becomes increasingly unclear as to what the point is or where all this performing is headed.

In many of Seth Price’s works, for example, *8-4 9-5 10-6 11-7, For a Friend, and Poems*, the anxiety surrounding endless performance and

novelty is considered. *8-4 9-5 10-6 11-7*, for example, is a downloadable, eight-hour electronic dance music mix. It was created in the downtime from Price's work over the course of several years. As one begins to stream the mix, there's something polished about its fun – it feels really open and cool and one appreciates the labor of the mix's *flow* as much as the individual tracks themselves. As the stream continues, though, an anxiety arises: What's all of this polished labor flowing for? An hour has passed – it's still going – endlessly, relentlessly upbeat. Two hours have passed – it's still going. Three hours – still going. Now, one might grow tired and leave the work's mix mid-stream or one might keep up with it as the editorial power and taste level of the mixing itself continues unabated. But – still – in either case, one may wonder, where *is* this “going” going? Will it ever change or is it just endless tasteful funkiness? A hint is provided by the work's title – *8-4 9-5-10-6 11-7*. These numbers can be decoded as the eight hours of the daily work day: 8:00-4:00; 9:00-5:00; 10:00-6:00; 11:00-7:00. The eight hours of music is at once both powerfully upbeat and nightmarishly endless. The same could be said of creative labor itself, of the eight-hour work day which blurs into the twenty-four hour work day, the intermingling of “on the clock” and “off the clock” – an endless streaming of data into an already well-clogged database with seemingly no justification other than to produce more endlessly fun content.

Similarly, in *For a Friend*, a pair of friends engage in a seemingly endless conversation filled with reasonably interesting observations, but, ultimately, never progressing forward. The conversation begins with an amateur philosophical discussion concerning a journalistic trope in which a writer begins an article with a mention of the date in which the events described in the body of the article take place. However, meaningful as the content of their question may be (and there is something interesting about it), this meaning is neutralized in the text by, first, the factual inaccuracies and misspellings embedded into the examples of the trope raised by the friends, as well as, second, the illogic of the discussion which follows. The friends go from the trope of dating the events described in the beginning of a journalistic article to the rise of personal computing and network usage, hacking, personal consumption choices, obsolescence, personal charisma, looking at everything versus seeing structure, puberty, Zen, anarchy, revolution, mythology, architecture, bare life, progress, and, finally, “self-annihilating question(s).” Each development of the discussion raises a true-ism regarding structure, but each true-ism is itself situated in a wildly flimsy structure. The result is that, the text becomes its own “self-annihilating question,” picturing its own limitations – its own endless series of true-isms never getting anywhere real.

And in *Poems*, Price presents a series of fragments scribbled in notebooks. Snippets of pseudo-intellectual conversation networking into nowhere; analyses of philosophical thought without clear points; calls to political action lacking in direction; lists that only make sense if one rationalizes them. Occasionally, phrases seem to summarize what the poems are about. One that got me was titled “Fantasy of History.” We see a post-it note attached to a piece of paper, reading, “The idea of trying to remember something and getting it wrong – But embarking successfully on a quest from wrong information.” Unfortunately, though, one remains unsure of whether or not this, too, is just another dumb idea in a notebook full of dumb ideas. One of Price’s most powerful effects is his ability to draw one deeper and deeper into thinking they have a handle on something – anything – and then – bam – pulling the rug out from under one’s feet. What one is left with is an *image* of something that *seems* like it might be about this or that theme, but whose meaning will be endlessly deferred.

Through his career, though, Price has developed strategies which resist these anxieties. Two of those strategies are delay and re-versioning.

In Price’s text *Dispersion*, he discusses “delay.” He writes:

Slowness works against all of our prevailing urges and requirements: it is a resistance to the contemporary mandate of speed. Moving *with* the times places you in a blind spot: if you’re part of the general tenor, it’s difficult to add a dissonant note. But the way in which media culture feeds on its own leavings indicates the paradoxical slowness of archived media, which, like a sleeper cell, will always rear its head at a later date. The rear-guard often has the upper hand, and sometimes *delay*, to use Duchamp’s term, will return the investment with massive interest.

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His work with the Continuous Project collective, for example, is dedicated to public readings and illegal publishing of historical art (and occasional non-art) texts. By distributing these archival works *as* contemporary works, they are given a new lease and sense of relevance.

Similarly, in 2009, Price exhibited for the first time a set of calendars that he originally produced in 2004. In the press release for this exhibition, he writes, “Sometimes it’s good to go forward and then double back, and circle around again. To those who turned their feet around so that their tracks would confuse their pursuers: why not walk backward?” The calendars’ content is composed of a collision between pre-AbEx American

painting and graphic design tropes dating from the early 1990s which read as “futuristic.” WPA-era painters like Thomas Hart Benton, for instance, are – for better or for worse – best known, not for their own work, but rather for paving the way for an artist like Jackson Pollock, who was a pupil of Benton’s. The “hot” cursive fonts and gradiated neon backdrops read the same way: they are – for better or for worse – all but forgotten – depreciated – not unlike an out-of-date wall calendar.

I don’t believe that in either the case of Continuous Project or the calendar pieces, Price is dedicated to the idea that the delayed effect of a given work re-introduced into the art system will ever necessarily solve anything or become all *that* meaningful. Perhaps what they each do accomplish, though, is to create meaning through a sort of quietism, serving as *memento mori* – a reminder of one’s own finitude and the inevitable obsolescence of any new novelty in art and visual culture.

The other strategy Price employs is to re-version his own work. For example, *Dispersion* is a text which, for Price, is a mutable document, continuously open to change and alteration. And his artist lecture, *Redistribution*, is likewise open to further revision. By re-versioning an older work, it is re-inserted into the cultural system and given a new opportunity to create an effect.

These strategies keep the past alive by erasing it, introducing false memories, and avoiding a static personal archive of work. As mutable digital code, the artist’s archive is just as open to continuous revision as anything else displayed on the Internet.

The art critic Tim Griffin argues that as Price disappears through a continuous re-tracing of his own personal archive, he is able to successfully elude calcification at the hands of the art world, but at a significant cost: the evacuation of any memory or stable sense of meaning of this personal archive. In Griffin’s words: “He behaves as a kind of filter, continually reintroducing a sense of this loss in his work, this emptying of memory, in order to mine the effects and affects of such depletion.”

There’s something sacrificial about Price’s work, then – killing it in order to preserve it. However, at some future date, Seth Price will himself die and will no longer be able to go back and confuse his pursuers by introducing false memories and histories, and a reading of his work will become crystallized and the galleries and museums will sum it all up and show something that stands in for it the whole thing.

Perhaps, though, one can think of Price’s project not as an endgame, but as a sort of therapy for the knots one gets into when conceiving of art as endgame. It’s a method for future artists to keep going.

**Friday, August 20th, 2010**

The cultural theorist Walter Benjamin is perhaps best known for his observation that the mechanical reproduction of unique works of art eliminates the “aura” or ritualistic cult value around these works. He writes: “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.” A mass-produced photograph of the *Mona Lisa*, for example, is not going to call for a ritualized pilgrimage to see it “in-person” and take-in its aura in the same way that the original is able to accomplish every single day at the Louvre. Instead of bemoaning this withering-away of aura due to mechanical reproduction, though, Benjamin turns on the point, suggesting that both the religious undertones and the focus on the individual which are suggested by aura are, in fact, a tool of fascist politics and that reproducible media, especially film – with its radically more dispersed and instantaneous modes of reception – open the door to an art conducted in the name of communism.

In this widespread reading of Benjamin’s theory of media, though, there is no clear-cut understanding of what it is exactly that Benjamin means by “aura.” As commentators such as Miriam Hansen have pointed out, Benjamin’s writings seem, at times, to celebrate the demise of aura, and, at other times, to demonstrate a certain nostalgia for it, if not suggesting that aura still, in fact, exists – albeit through very different means – in reproducible media such as photographs of people who are now dead. Likewise, there is a certain murkiness surrounding the ways in which Benjamin defines aura, both in the “Work of Art” essay and beyond it.

One way to understand his use of the term is that it denotes a quality which does not emerge from within the work and emanate out, but is rather accrued in time through both the work’s testimony to history and the trajectory of its social transactions through this history. That is, the aura around a work is not beauty or a magic which originates from the inside of the object, but a conceptual field around the work accrued through time as it reflects back upon its own history as a material object. In what follows, I’ll discuss Benjamin’s use of the term aura in these terms and, then, briefly consider its relevance to digital media reproduction.

Benjamin's earliest usage of the term "aura" occurred during one of his writing experiments while under the influence of hashish. He describes it here as an "ornamental halo, in which the object or being is enclosed as in a case." What one can gather from this description is that it is something external – "ornamental" – to the object; there is nothing magical *inside* the case of aura; the aura is generated by the case itself.

Later, in his essay "A Short History of Photography," Benjamin considers the influence of *time* on this "ornamental halo." He describes aura here as "a peculiar web of space and time: the unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be." There is a suggestion in this description that aura involves not just the space of the physical object, but an invocation of linear time. This interest in the effect of time in the experience of a work puts Benjamin outside of many other theorists of the phenomenology of the art experience. For example, it contrasts with what Michael Fried, in his essay "Art and Objecthood," terms "presentness" or a sort of atemporality in the work of art. Whereas, for Fried, the most powerful art objects exist outside of time (and, thus, outside of theater) – continuously re-creating themselves anew every moment – the auratic work of art, for Benjamin, creates a sense of distance around itself by actively invoking a continuum of time (a continuum which would be eliminated by mechanical reproduction).

In one line of thought in Benjamin's writing on the subject, he discusses the experience of time in the aura of a work of art in relation to the materialist history through which the object has existed.

He points to this in "The Work of Art" essay, writing:

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object.

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The auratic authority around an object, then, is – again – not generated by something *inside* the object as if it were magic, but rather through an "ornamental halo" accrued through the object's testimony to a period of history. The fact that the object was there in a certain corner of historical time is what affords it any more authority than an identical object which did

not experience that history, much less a reproducible photograph of the object.

Related to this is the idea of provenance or the history of ownership of a work of art. If a particular painting has been passed through the hands of famous collectors for centuries, what one would find auratic about the painting is not the alchemical effect of the artist's application of paint to canvas, but rather the series of transactions from one historical figure or collecting institution to another over time. For example, if one can say that the *Mona Lisa* possesses any sort of aura for its viewers at the Louvre, it is not necessarily because they find it to be a particularly beautiful painting, but rather because of its history and prominence in the museum's collection. Art historians and aficionados may be entranced by its formal qualities, but the aura of the work for the public is, in Benjamin's terms, accrued through the painting's testimony to its history.

Benjamin also relates this to collections of objects other than works of art. For example, in his essay "Unpacking My Library," Benjamin discusses the value of the books in his collection in relation to their historical testimony and provenance. He writes, "The period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former ownership – for a true collector the whole background of an item adds up to the magic encyclopedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object." This relates to the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's understanding of commodities as having a "social life" in which value around the object is accrued and lost depending on how it is socially transacted. For example, one of my favorite t-shirts belonged to my father when he was roughly the age I am now. When I see that t-shirt, it possesses, for me, a ritualistic value – an "ornamental halo" related to the transaction which led from my father's wardrobe to my own. If I had purchased an identical t-shirt at a retail store or even a thrift shop, my entire relationship to it would be different; its provenance would be a mystery to me and, thus, diminish the t-shirt's aura.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century modernity which Benjamin experienced, he saw this sort of aura to be withering away as the mechanical reproduction of images diminishes the relationship of the mass public to unique works of art bearing traces of historical time. On the one hand, there is something bittersweet about this rupture, but, on the other hand, it presents a window – not on an artistic level per se, but on political one. All authority in the object which could be potentially utilized by the forces of fascist politics is challenged, opening the door to a new relationship of art and politics, one based on dispersion and the communication of communist political ideas.

In the age of digital reproduction, which would seem to even more radically destroy the possibility of aura, though, there is, paradoxically, a form of aura which persists not in relation to objects, but to information.

On social bookmarking sites like delicious.com, for example, works of net art become valuable based on the way in which the link to the work is transacted. If an artist produces a work and shares it through the Internet, the work can either stop there and be ostensibly forgotten or it can be bookmarked by another user, re-blogged elsewhere on the Web, or generally digitally dispersed. Additionally, the work can be re-versioned – meaning that it is appropriated, changed, and further re-circulated through the Internet as a mutation of the original. As all of this dispersion occurs, the “original” information on the Internet gains a certain aura – an “ornamental halo” or “a peculiar web of space and time: the unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be.” Additionally, this aura is enhanced by the particular provenance of its trajectory through the Internet. If the information is collected and re-circulated by Internet users who have been bookmarking and re-blogging for long enough to have developed a proven “track record” as opposed to a user lacking a proven track record, then the aura of the information is further increased.

I recently viewed the original YouTube video which inspired the widespread “Double Rainbow!!” meme. In the video, an apparently stoned man – YouTube user Hungrybear9562 – is looking out onto a beautiful mountain landscape in which two rainbows are in the sky. He’s so profoundly moved by the site of the “double rainbow” that he begins an emotionally overwhelmed ramble in which he shouts “Double Rainbow!! Oh my God!!” and generally expresses his stoned enthusiasm for the vividness of the rainbows. Prior to my viewing of the original video, I had only come across versions of the video created by other YouTube users. When I did view this original video, the information it contained possessed an aura based on how widely the meme it inspired had been virally spread through the Internet. If the video had not been so widely dispersed, then it would have lacked that “ornamental halo” around the information it contained. For works of net art, this principal applies, as well, but with a slightly different emphasis. The aura of a work of net art is not necessarily based on its dispersion through mass culture, but through the a combination of both mass dispersion and dispersion through the smaller community of net artists and fans of net art.

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For Benjamin, aura is a complicated term. One way to understand it is that it is, first, not synonymous with beauty. Aura is something placed onto the object by history as it is travels through social transactions. He believed, or at least advocated for, the idea that when objects with this aura around them are photographed and re-distributed, the aura is necessarily lost and that, furthermore, this loss of aura around the way works of art are received in culture creates an opportunity for an art based not on ritual, but rather politics. However, in the contemporary moment in which culture is radically more technologically reproduced than it was even in Benjamin's time, a sense of aura in terms of the social transactions around the work persists, for better or for worse, in the form of memes.

**Friday, August 27th, 2010**

## **Feedback**

In *Feedback: Television Against Democracy*, the art historian David Joselit explores the idea that all commodities, including works of art, are figured as commodities against the ground of networks, including media networks such as television and the Internet. In relation to works of art, that would be to say that the ground against which works of art are to be evaluated as units in a broader economy is no longer just the physical space of the art institution; e.g., the white cube art museum; but, instead the networks of interrelated *flow* through which both actual commodities and the capital surrounding those commodities now exist and disperse. For Joselit, art can no longer be thought of as a static object which one gazes upon, but instead as a “transjective” object, continuously networking between multiple fields of objects and subjects, which one *follows*. He brings up the fact that Wall Street quants have conceived of incomprehensibly complicated models for dematerializing and dispersing bundles of capital and, as such, it is incumbent upon anyone interested in the relationship between a work of art and the broader economy to appreciate the fact that works of art – as commodities – are also dematerialized and dispersed.

When viewed against this networked ground, Joselit discusses artworks which create viral paths, leaving trails of “feedback” between themselves and this networked ground. This feedback functions as noise, disrupting its own flow as a commodity and illuminating the ground upon which it circulates.

In what follows, I’ll discuss the television series *Mad Men*, suggesting that, on the one hand, the actual episodes of the series create a disruptive feedback loop between themselves and the television network; but, on the other hand, that the series’ branded image avatar, which is perhaps more widely culturally dispersed than the actual episodes of the show, lacks this disruptive feedback loop between itself and the Internet network.

*Mad Men*’s protagonist Don Draper is known to be ruthlessly effective at selling things to people. Time after time, the campaigns he engineers for a host of invariably silly products are able to exploit an emotion or a desire lurking beyond the product’s practical usage. And while these products may

themselves be silly, the desires Draper creates around their advertising are often complex and psychologically astute. For example, an automated slide photo projector developed by Kodak is not the “Wheel” – Kodak’s name for the device – but rather – in Draper’s pitch – the “Carousel”; that is, it’s not an efficient way to display a loop of slide photographs, but a way to go around and around “and back home again” to something fondly remembered from the past.

However, Draper knows that these desires which people seek to satisfy through products like the Carousel are not ever going to be satisfied; desire is endlessly deferred – always trying to re-capture something which one thinks used to be there, but never really was and certainly never will be again. This principal is, through one lens, how capitalism operates: it depends on the endless impossibility of satisfying desire to keep selling ways to satisfy desire. In the finale to the series’ third season and in the wake of the assassination of John F. Kennedy (“the day America lost its innocence”), Draper explains this to his protégé, Peggy Olson. Here’s the exchange of dialogue between the two:

Don: Do you know why I don’t want to go to McCann?

Peggy: Because you can’t work for anyone else.

Don: No. Because there are people out there – people who buy things – people like you and me – and something happened; something terrible. And the way that they saw themselves is gone. And nobody understands that. But you do. And that’s very valuable.

Peggy: Is it?

What he’s getting at is that there was a picture of what it meant to be a consumer in America, but the assassination of the President made even the pretense towards living that image even more absurd than it ever was. That absurdity, though, will not stop people from endlessly trying to *be* this image (if anything, the grisly reality of the event and the trauma it inspired severs the emotional possibility of ever getting back to “reality”) and this is what good advertising creatives understand. Olson’s “Is it?” at the end of this exchange, though, reveals the tension at the heart of these characters: their insight into the emptiness of consumer desire is “very valuable,” but it’s also their own tragedy. What Draper sees in Olson is the same emptiness he sees in himself. Indeed, “Don Draper” is not even the character’s real name. Through an accident in the Korean War, the actual Don Draper was killed and a fellow soldier named Dick Whitman took Draper’s dog tags and commenced pretending to be him. “Don Draper” is, thus, nothing – an outer sheen through which someone who used to be

“Dick Whitman” haunts the world. This awareness of his own nothingness makes Draper/Whitman a great “Ad Man,” but makes it difficult for him to participate in the very rituals of capitalism he sells, including monogamous suburban love and the nuclear family. The same could be said for Peggy Olson. Her through line is premised on the fact that she’s a lapsed Catholic who underwent an abortion in-between the first and second seasons of the series. This abortion (in extremely crude terms, an “emptying out”) traumatized Olson and, since then, she hasn’t been able to participate in the flow of sexuality and day-to-day, mindless chit-chat demanded by corporate-sanctioned urban existence. And, so, instead of living it, Draper and Olson sell it.

What is particularly powerful about the series’ explorations into advertising, though, is the fact that they are occurring on commercial television. The entire ground upon which this content rests is mass media advertising. When one watches the show and follows its explorations into the emptiness of desire, the mechanisms of advertising, and, in particular, the mechanics of television advertising, these thematic explorations collide with the actual television advertisements which allow for the show to exist in the first place. Some viewers, then, may view *Mad Men* and – armed with concepts provided by the series – reflect critically upon the advertisements which surround a given episode.

The result is a variation on “culture jamming” or the sort of “feedback” which Joselit discusses. As mentioned above, feedback, for Joselit, is an effect accrued through an artwork’s dispersion in which the artwork creates a disruption in the trajectory of itself as a commodity. He writes, “If a commodity’s meaning results from its *circulation*, it is possible to develop a politics whose goal is not to abolish or “critique” commodification (objectives that are utopian and inefficacious by turn) but rather to reroute the trajectories of things.” Joselit gives the example of African Americans feeding back images produced by their own community into television in the 1960s and 1970s as a way to develop a more accurate representative presence in the mediascape. He also discusses a television commercial created by Andy Warhol for Schrafft’s restaurant chain, the content of which is, in the artist’s words, “all the mistakes they do in commercials.” What one views in Warhol’s commercial is the image of a Sunday with a cherry on top which is drowning in video noise, thus selling the technological ground of the video image as opposed to the actual Sunday: it’s feedback, designed to reroute the trajectory of the commodity. The same could be said for *Mad Men*: by picturing the ground of advertisement and capital which it circulates in and out of on television, the series tangles up the clean circulatory flow of the series as a commodity in the television network.

However, the network *Mad Men* circulates through is not *just* television. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it lives and circulates on the Internet and myriad other forms of media, as well. For example, I've never viewed an episode on television, but, as a follower of the show, I've viewed every single episode released so far through a combination of DVD's, iTunes, Limewire, and "Freemium" sites like megavideo.com. Additionally, the way in which the show is largely dispersed through culture is not even through these episodes, but rather through images of the show's sex icons on blogs, magazines, online versions of magazines, Facebook chatter, banner advertisements on blogs, bus ads, gossip mills, and, in general, the branding of a full-blown retro-chic style which celebrates dapper young metrosexuals with slicked-back hairdos. That is to say that even though the episodes of the show create an interesting level of feedback distortion in relation to television, the way they circulate as a brand through the broader networks of interconnected digital ephemera is actually fairly harmless – it's just another thing to sell.

As mentioned above, one of Joselit's intuition's is that commodities are not static, physical objects; rather, they are, in the wake of networked communication such as television, animated and in-motion media viruses, traveling through all avenues of life from the living room to the water cooler to the bedroom. Effective counter-culture, then, does not stand outside out of these animated commodities, but rather reroutes their trajectories through feedback.

With this in mind, the trajectory of *Mad Men* doesn't stop on Sunday nights at eleven o'clock EST on the AMC cable network. In fact, that one hour a week is a small piece of the pie surrounding the show's "social life" as a commodity circulating through the broader networks of digital communication. The episodes of the series could be Shakespeare or Thomas Mann, but it wouldn't matter when the meme of *Mad Men* – the way it travels virally – has very little to do with a critique of advertising and a lot to do with developing a brand.

A final note: On the one hand, Joselit's book, which is about television and sticks largely to examples of 1960s and 1970s art history and visual culture, would seem oddly out of place for an audience interested in understanding the relationship between works of art and digital networks connected through computers. However, the virus he's trying to spread is relevant and challenging. Artworks and the evaluation of artworks in the wake of media networks, be they television or Internet networks, require one to refocus the entire framework through which one usually thinks of an artwork. *Mad Men* is not about the themes of the show, but the trajectories in which the themes of the show circulate.



» **September 2010**

**Sunday, September 5th, 2010**

## **Painting**

### **1**

Painting is a meme.

What is a meme?

*Meme* is a term coined by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene* to refer to units of cultural data which act like genes – replicating, spreading, and mutating in response to the selective demands of the culture in which they develop. Many things count as memes – political slogans, film dialogue, emergent philosophical perspectives, technological breakthroughs, advertising brands, economic principals, fashion trends, viral YouTube videos, the very idea of a meme itself, the list could go on. What matters is that it is an idea which has the power to replicate itself from one mind to another to another and sustain itself through a stretch of cultural time.

So, if one is to take the history of painting as a meme spreading from mind to mind through its history – from cave paintings to Piero della Francesca to Thomas Gainsborough to Nancy Spero and beyond – each iteration in the history of the meme mutating itself in response to its own context – then what would it mean to extend the painting meme into the context of digital computer networks? That is, assuming that painting did not, in fact, die sometime in the early 1980s, what would it mean to respond to the continually evolving painting meme in the context of ubiquitous computing in 2010? How would the painting meme be translated when a painting is still an object, but an object dispersed through the network as a mutable digital photograph, as well? This is not to say that all relevant painting must take this question of the network into consideration, but that it could be a pressing and fruitful intellectual question for at least some painters.

One way to think through an answer to this question is provided in the art historian David Joselit's recent *October* essay "Painting Beside Itself." In this essay, Joselit suggests that recent painters such as Julia Koether, Stephen Prina, and Wade Guyton have developed practices which allegorize their objects' own "transitivity" or continuous in-between-ness as they shuttle from one node of the network to another – from object, to



photograph of object, to source material for another artist's appropriation and re-circulation, and back again, in an ongoing circulation. Works of art – here – are never situated in a static context; rather they are situated in continuous state of *passage* between contexts in a broader network of multiple contexts.

An alternative response to the question of the painting meme's life in the network is being developed by young artists working on or around the Internet. For these artists:

1. The computer screen is the primary surface on which painting will be viewed and, because of this, a new suite of phenomenological effects occurring between painting and viewer are opened for exploration.
2. The rate of speed at which paintings travel is atrophied when uploaded directly to computer networks and this increase in speed allows one to, then, view the flow of painting in time.

In what follows, I'll say a few more words about the relationship between painting and the computer, describe a recent trajectory of the painting meme amongst a group of Internet artists, and, then, focus, in particular, on the work of the PAINT FX collective.

## 2

It's possible that an "actual" Abstract Expressionist painting produced in the 1940s and a "fake" Abstract Expressionist painting created through the application of digital effects in a piece of software could be effectively indistinguishable when viewed through the light of the computer screen. With this in mind, some painters have shifted their concerns from those native to the paradigm of the white cube to, instead, those native to the paradigm of the computer screen. This shift has repercussions, though. For example, the phenomenological effects of painting shift from the materiality of paint on canvas to the light spilling from a computer screen. This bias towards the surface of the screen, then, nudges artists towards exploring different types of bodily shock effects. The relationship of the body to the computer screen after all is different than that of the body to the physical painting in space – computers are open circuits in which cybernetic feedback relationships between computer databases and users allow users to actively shape the mediascape they inhabit. These cybernetic relationships create a desire for clicking, scrolling, and following – dynamic motion premised on sifting through an accumulation of data rather than gazing for very long at a single pattern of light. The Internet painter,

then, begins to think in terms of multiplicity, the aesthetics of the surfeit, and, crucially, a strong temporal element which transforms painting into a variation on performance art. Furthermore, jpegs, as digital files, are mutable, meaning that they can be radically transformed instantaneously at the level of code. If one wants to merely touch up a single brush stroke or slap a picture of a sea shell on the top layer of the painting, the technology is agnostic in regard to the amount of variation each of these types of alterations suggests. This mutability means that once it is part of the network, other artists and non-artists, as well, are given free reign to appropriate the image and alter it themselves, re-disseminating the mutated image through alleyways of the network which the painting's original creator could not anticipate. In other words, paintings here are a network of versions; a stream of evolving memes.

### 3

The meeting of painting and the computer is not new. MS Paint, for example, has long been mined for painting effects. In the context of the Internet, the artist Tom Moody (a former “actual” painter) has built an important practice at the interface of painting and the computer screen which has evolved into making animated gifs and placing them on his own blog and sites like dump.fm. This is not meant to be an authoritative history, though, so I'll focus on the life of one strain of the painting meme as I've witnessed it over the past two or three years.

I first began to notice artists working on painting at the tail end of the surf club phenomenon. Artists like Will Simpson, Thomas Galloway, and Travess Smalley on the surf club Loshadka, for example, were moving away from appropriated content derived from Internet surfing and towards original content created in painting software programs.

Around this time, the artist Charles Broskoski began increasingly focusing his work away from conceptual art pieces to a painting practice premised on volume, performativity, and innovations in presentation which were native to the computer screen. The artist Harm van den Dorpel was working on a similar project, in which he straddled the borders between a computer model of a work and a work in physical space and allowed that very tension to become illuminated *as* the work. Along the way, he raised an interesting set of questions regarding artistic deskilling and the borders between hand-made effects and automated effects. In short, the “hand of the artist” was, on the Internet of all places, becoming an interesting area to explore. Soon enough, there seemed to be an internal logic and momentum to this digital

painting meme and the Supercentral II surf club and Poster Company by Travess Smalley and Max Pitegoff, pushed it further, actualizing what was in the air. A slightly younger generation of artists working on the Tumblr platform and the emergence of a body of critical reflection by artists such as Ry David Bradley on his PAINTED, ETC blog continued to sustain the evolution of the meme, polishing certain presentational elements and building a community of people interested in these ideas. Painting in the network was about fast-paced collective dialogue and mind-bending abstractions. It was also about *painting*. The imagery of these works are often collisions between digital gestures and painterly gestures, but, generally speaking, the concern is with the tradition of painting – pre-Internet – as opposed to the animated gif scene whose roughly concurrent rise (in the net art context) posed as a nice counterpoint to the painting meme.

If one was watching, one could view the evolution of the meme as it started in a sort of experimental phase, gained some steam, developed a community, and achieved some sort of level of self-consciousness about itself. The meme here takes on its own form of life which one can watch live on the Internet.

#### 4

Recently, the PAINT FX collective composed of Parker Ito, Jon Rafman, Micah Schippa, Tabor Robak, and John Transue, have developed a new mutation of the painting meme. Looking closely at what had been accomplished in the work mentioned above and also ideas at the intersection of photography, sculpture, and performance which the Jogging collective (Brad Troemel and Lauren Christiansen) was working on, PAINT FX designed an environment to both experiment with performative voices as painters and develop micro-versions of the painting meme in one ongoing stream of paintings.

Although the paintings are not explicitly associated with particular artists (there's no supplementary text on the site, at all), one can view unique voices develop as each painter builds a vocabulary of specific paint effects he's working with. One views both the development of these effects and the exploration of their usage through these unique voices. Additionally, one views both the artists engaged dialogue with the other members of Paint FX collective and the flows of specific memes threading in and out of the broader image stream.

There are, to date, just under three hundred paintings posted on the collective's very lengthy single web page – paintfx.biz. One can experience this body of work in multiple ways. There is this performative element – a fast paced call and response game in which the members of PAINT FX evolve memes. There is also the trace of this performance which exists as a totally different type of effect. The artists chose to not divide their archive up into multiple pages which one would have to click through, but instead as one very long scroll. What this choice nudges the viewer to do is consider the flow of images as an ongoing development – a long poem, say. This effect, though, is open to further versioning in relation to the type of device one uses. So, for instance, scrolling through Paint FX on an iPhone is going to be a different type of effect than scrolling through it on a flat screen computer monitor in the comfort of one's living room. PAINT FX, though, has created a platform robust enough to be dynamically experienced in a multitude of viewing contexts.

There are also other variations in how the work will be experienced which are dependent on the user's context. Let's say that one chooses to let the entire page download and start at the earliest painting, scrolling up to the most recent. One could, on the one hand, just hold the scroll button down and watch the paintings zoom by like objects outside the windows of a moving car. The style of the paintings and their sequencing on the page are instantaneously visible enough to provide an ongoing series of shock effects which increase as one continues to ride out the scroll (which lasts for several minutes bottom to top). By rapidly scrolling through this way, one gets a broad overview of the way the voices of the artists, the various vocabularies of painting effects, and various bursts of smaller memes each develop. On the other hand, though, one could also go through and carefully consider each painting. This, too, can be effective as the paintings are not merely eye candy. They are generally each labored over and carefully considered from multiple points of view before they are uploaded. Also, oftentimes, the phenomenological effect of looking at a static image on the site for a more extended point of time can be powerful. Through the practical experience of simply looking carefully and observing their own reaction to consuming images on computers, these artists have become discriminating in relation to the types of effects possible through the light of the screen. In turn, they have developed unique skills for crafting particularly optically-charged images.

Finally, the project is also a robust space for painting memes to accelerate and disseminate in the most efficient possible modes. On PAINT FX, the viewer watches the lifeform of memes develop in a sort of real time. On the one hand, this is frustrating because one can't hold out much hope for an individual painting to maintain a level of qualitative power after a few days and weeks as it becomes swallowed up in the flow of the entire project. On the other hand, if one refocuses the way they view the project in terms of following this flow, new categories of aesthetic experience are opened up.

## 5

On the Internet, the meme of painting has developed ways in which to increase the efficiency and acceleration of the dispersal of its own versions. Keywords here are “speed” and “immediacy.” A question which the Internet hasn't effectively explored as of yet, though, is related to the ethics of this acceleration. Now that one can view painting in motion, a question and a way to perhaps further evolve the meme may revolve around where this acceleration is headed and why.



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