LEARNING TO LIVE IN THE THICK INTERFACE

Jonathan Hanahan
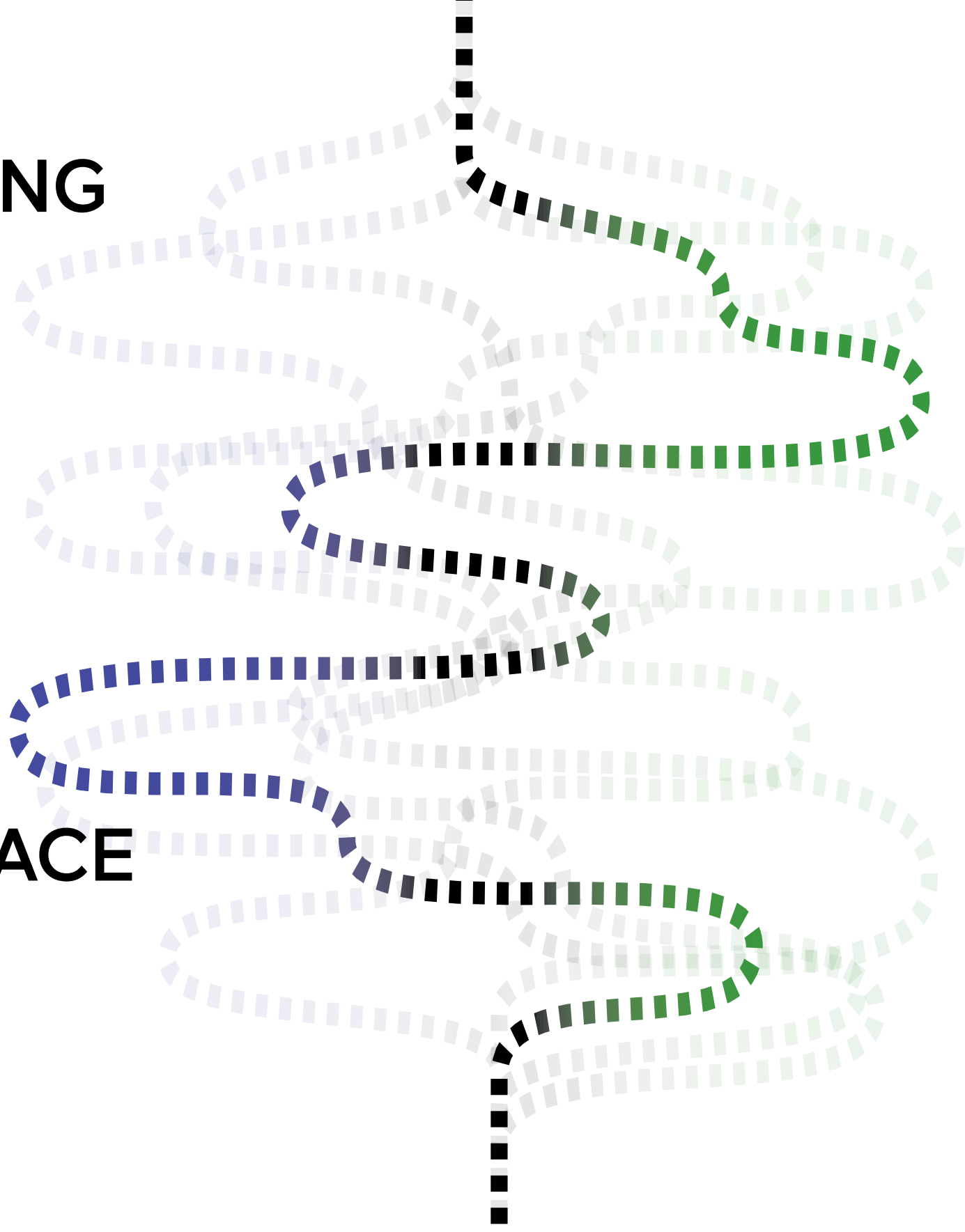Rhode Island School of Design
MFA Graphic Design
2014

As media platforms shift towards more dynamic interfaces, the separation between user and content grows infinitely. While advertised as thin, light, and seamless, these platforms mask a thick and complicated space in which society must navigate. This is what I call the "Thick Interface." The Thick Interface is the portal we use to toggle back and forth and through which we communicate. It is solid and porous, physical and digital, enhancing and diminishing. It may also be a combination of these things simultaneously, or none at all. My work highlights—rather than masks—the complexity of this space through interaction, participation, and analogy. I visualize and reveal the relationship between the decisions we make in contemporary media platforms and the ramifications of those decisions. Throughout this thesis, slowness and disruption are valued over speed and invisibility.

Inside the Thick Interface, I argue that the most valuable tool is not a specific software or markup language; it is the glitch. The glitch is the moment where the thickness of the interface is revealed. Defined as a temporary disruption that provides resistance, has materiality, and leaves a residue of its existence, the glitch agitates the entanglement of our digital and physical experiences. Through designing for and expanding glitches, my work enhances and uncovers the materiality of the surfaces and spaces with which we interact. Offering alternative methods for graphic design thinking, it facilitates understanding of the relationship between tactile and virtual moments, crafting experiences that migrate between environments and add layers of interference to reveal that which goes unnoticed.

The graphic designer is more than just a stylist of the edges, the data, and the periphery of these systems. He is an interface in his own right, visualizing the reality of the systems themselves. In this context, the practice of graphic design expands beyond the page as a position of establishing frameworks for how we see, clarify, understand, and interact in evolving environments through narrative, tactility, and spatial metaphors.

Space,_____, and the Internet

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The cloud is not this...

UNMASKED

Good evening. During the past year, I have shown you how some of magic's most famous illusions are secretly performed. I have done this under the guise of a masked face and an assumed name. This has lead to a great deal of speculation as to who I really am. Well tonight, the time has come for me to remove the mask because I have something very important to share with you.

There isn't enough time to tell you the whole story, but I will say that the journey here has been amazing. I am not revealing my identity because of all the controversy surrounding these specials or because of the pressures I am receiving from my fellow magicians. I face you tonight because of my love of magic and to tell you why I chose to reveal these age old secrets.

In recent years, magic has taken a backseat to movies, video games, and other forms of high
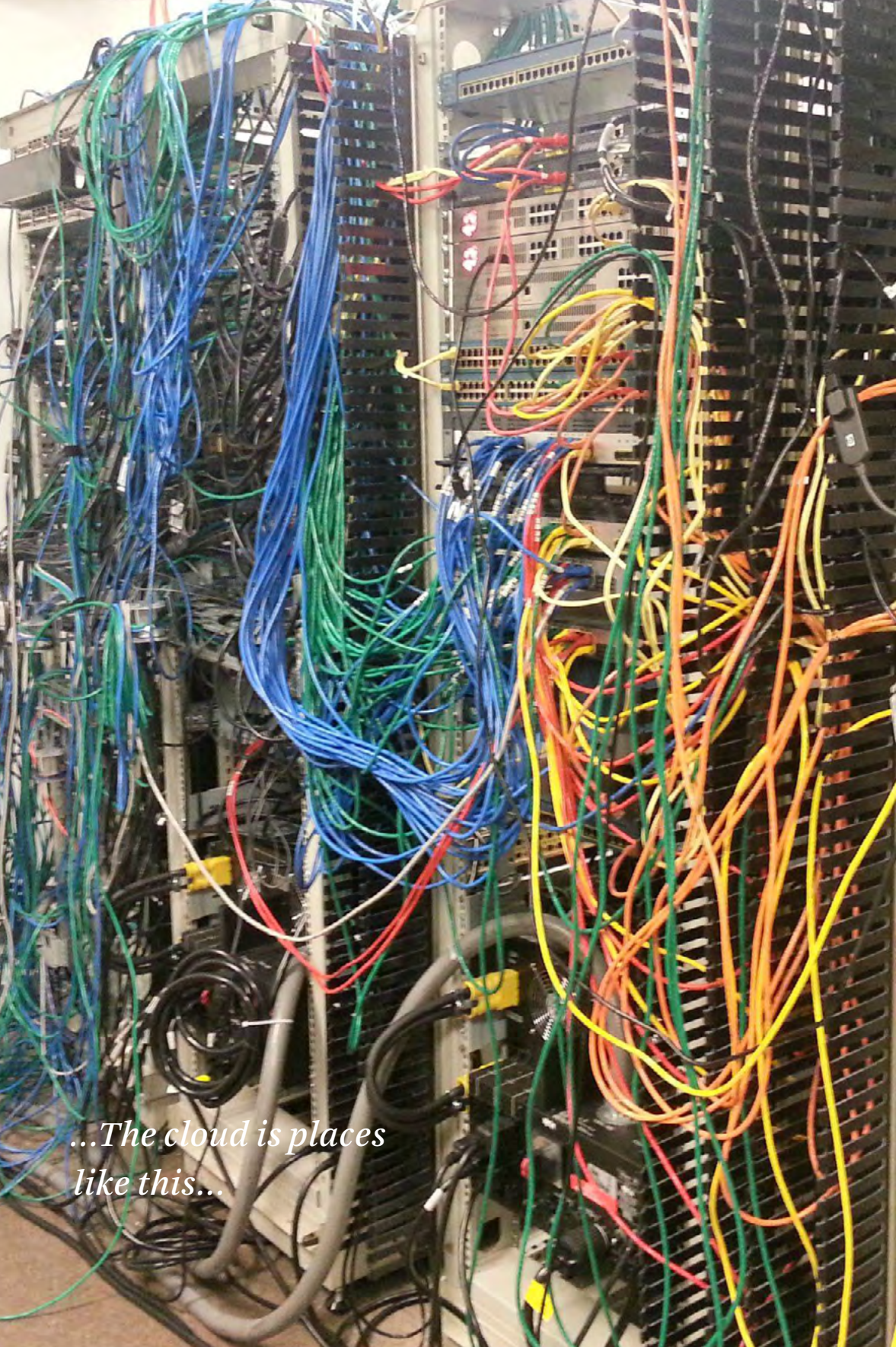
...The cloud is places like this...

tech entertainment. I was afraid that magic was going to be forgotten. I wanted to do something about it. I wanted to rekindle that sense of wonder we all felt when we saw our first magic show. I wanted to get people excited about magic again.

Do you remember our first television special last year? The next day, at work, at school, and around the dinner table people were buzzing with excitement. For the first time in a long while magic was center stage again.

I began to work professionally when I was just 13 years old. I put on magic shows for kids in nearly every school in town. In these performances, I didn't just perform magic. I showed them how to make their own tricks, and they loved it! I discovered that knowing a few secrets made kids love magic even more. It made them feel apart of it. Did I hurt these kids by letting them in on these tricks? I don't think so. Can you honestly say that you have been hurt by watching these television shows? The truth is,

...And this. These are places that we occupy every day through our digital interactions.

you probably love magic even more now than ever before. Now you feel a part of it too.

It doesn't hurt the art of magic when the audience is in on a trick. Because the secret is a small part of it. The real magic is in the performance. The best magicians like David Copperfield, Lance Burton, and Penn & Teller are the true artists. They lead their audience through a wide range of emotions; from laughter, to fear, to sheer amazement. Every magician aspires to be that great. Including me....Valentino, The Masked Magician.

Before I go, I would like to leave you with this thought. It is my belief that the art of magic is for everyone. Not just a select few who call themselves magicians, but for every single one of you; and especially the kids! Because it is you kids who are the future of magic.

I am happy to report, that as a direct result of these specials magicians everywhere have been letting go of their old tired tricks and moving forward, creating bigger and better illusions, and taking magic where it has never gone before.

3:13/4:28

Now it is time for me to move forward too. The next time you see me, I will be performing new and exciting illusions that have never been seen before. Illusions that will thrill and amaze you. I hope I have contributed in some small way to your enjoyment of magic. So until we meet again, remember that the magic is in all of us...

…Thank you, and goodnight.

FOREWORD

In 1997, the Fox Broadcasting Company premiered a four-part series titled *Breaking the Magician's Code: Magic's Biggest Secrets* Finally Revealed. The show's premise focused on a masked figure who, without compromise, unveiled to the world magic's highly deceptive art of illusion. Though the Masked Magician, later identified as a Las Vegas entertainer named Val Valentino, is widely despised by the magic community, the show was an instant hit, generating more than 26 million views.

When I was twelve years old, watching from my parent's suburban living room, I despised the Masked Magician. For me, he represented everything wrong with the world of magic. He destroyed the spectacle for the performer, the audience, and me. Now, nearly twenty years since Valentino took the stage, technological transportation commands sleight of hand. Even the conjurer himself (Valentino) references his fear of the technological take-over of illusion and wonder. On the final episode of *Breaking the Magician's Code*, in which he revealed his true identity to the world, Valentino signed off with the announcement, "In recent years, magic has taken a backseat to movies, video games, and other forms of high tech entertainment. I was afraid that magic was going to be forgotten."[1] Valentino's fear was confirmed; technology was a new illusion unto itself. This new illusion of access right before our eyes masks a not so mythical underbelly that is physical, hardwired, massive, and intensive. It is a complexity that has roots in far less innocent realms than deception for entertainment. It is a deception about identity, privacy, access, and power; hiding activities that have personal, political, and infrastructural ramifications. We gawk at our 'pictures under glass.' Yet as a society, we are largely separated from these by the sleight of hand embedded in our slick interfaces.

Behind the absurdity of this reference lies a set of maneuvers that are part theatrical unmasking and part performance. The designer, like the magician, is a gateway between the illusion and truth. We both create experiences which transport audiences to unexpected places. Often, the designer uses the same sleight of hand and deception to mask the reality of how that transportation takes place. In our increasingly complicated world, the designer is tasked with maintaining the veil over this compounding digital space. What happens when we challenge the expectation to hide the reality and use our position as translators to reveal the ramifications of our digital experiences? What happens when we are no longer magicians who deceive, but masked magicians who reveal?

My work focuses on creating unexpected moments, interruptions, and experiences which enhance our ability to inhabit landscapes of new media. This thesis develops ways to explain the complexity of contemporary society to those who subscribe

to a relationship with digital culture, yet may not grasp the reality of that identification. It provides points of access to understand, challenge, and participate in these systems in digestible and engaging ways, before returning to the everyday experience. In this context, I am part theorist who unmasks and part magician who performs. I challenge designers to revolt against the practice of only surface and form and advocate for a practice of sculpting dialogue by revealing the reality underneath those surfaces and between users and content.

This reveal is not about ruining the magic, but helping to ground an audience to the performance and experience that much more. Following Valentino's manifesto, "It doesn't hurt the art of magic when the audience is in on a trick. Because the secret is a small part of it. The real magic is in the performance."[2] This thesis is about reintroducing the materiality and messiness to these technological experiences. It reveals, through interaction, the true relationships and consequences of our daily activities that often wash over us. It roughens the smooth edges which cloak our realities. As the 21st Century Masked Magician, I peel the layers apart and reveal the illusion underneath the spectacle.

This space I continue to reference, where our digital and physical experiences are increasingly intertwined and indistinguishable, I have come to call the "Thick Interface." It is here that the reality of our experiences with digital interfaces is expanded to reveal what happens in the moment between clicking on an app, submitting a payment, highlighting a passage, or saving an image that the outcomes are explained. In that instant, the guise of technology creeps in. It knows our face, our social security number, our friends and family, our habits, and our secrets. That said, this methodology is not a challenge against technology. It is not a proposition that we should become Luddites and return to an age without technology. The hold of technology is inevitable. As James Bridle states, "The robots are going to take over, which is ok, as long as we start to think quite seriously about what happens socially, and politically, and legally around them… which we have not done yet, because currently these technologies are obscure."[3]

The Thick Interface in design and art is not necessarily new. Many artists including Bridle, Aram Barthol, Adam Harvey, Julian Oliver, and others have explored these relationships under the term "The New Aesthetic." I challenge the formal and surface treatment of the New Aesthetic. While I appreciate its potential as a means of artistic pursuit, I argue that its current representation and definition does not go far enough. Where the New Aesthetic defines a style, the Thick Interface defines a space. The Thick Interface challenges the New Aesthetic to expand beyond its passive archivist pursuits. It is not solely about what this overlapping world looks like, but what it says and who it speaks to. Within the Thick Interface is embedded an activity of experiential visualization—a key component to this thesis—in which I argue for the use of spatial, experiential, and tactile methods of explaining complexity within our everyday lives, beyond the traditional tools of graphic design; typography and image. The Thick Interface argues how the relationship with these technologies and the ability to communicate through intimate and digestible methods is of the utmost

importance; the role of the designer in the Thick Interface is to actively communicate and potentially criticize the reality of technological investment in our lives. It is here that the designer as masked magician has a special and elevated role in the growth of technology. We above any other profession have the skills—narrative, storytelling, interactive design, etc.—to illustrate and visualize to an audience the realities of these experiences. We are in a position to truly sculpt the dialogue around the political, personal, social, and cultural realities of technology in our everyday lives. This argument is taken up at length in an interview I conduct with artist Curt Cloninger. Within the interview we discuss the role of the glitch in contemporary society, what the New Aesthetic is and could be, and the balance of practice, teaching, art, and design in both our lives.

When I was twelve years old I loved magic, and spent much of my childhood hanging out in places like this.

So how do we go about breaking down the barriers we have worked so hard to build? We do so ephemerally. The graphic designer as masked magician does not destroy these walls, he disrupts them momentarily. In this case, the glitch becomes far more than just a formal result of a computer error, it becomes a narrative tool. In the Thick Interface, glitches are multi-directional. More than just a physical invasion into a digital world, the digital also invades the physical. The push and pull of the entanglement of spaces and the possibility of both digital and physical glitches, allow the nimble designer/magician multiple access points to establish these reveals. The designer should no longer be required to hide and destroy glitches, but design them outright, crafting intentional disruptions to experiences as means to reveal and understand their ramifications. Reevaluating the role of the designer is expanded on in an interview with Tim Durfee and Anne Burdick from the Art Center's Media Design program. In the discussion we explore the role of foundations in hybrid practice, and the role of naivety, humor, and absurdity in tackling the complex and often scary nature of our networked world. This book is spawned from a 2014 lecture given in defense of these explorations.

Distributed throughout is a series of projects, experiments, case studies, essays, and interviews which present, support, and engage the conditions outlined above. The book is broken down into the three key sections—The Thick Interface, The Digital Glitch, The Physical Glitch—these overlapping voices narrate the development of a methodology to design and explore these complex environments. Tying all the elements together is a visual language of symbols, used to define and refine what the Thick Interface and the both glitches are. This language represents the polemic expectation of these worlds along with their simultaneous entanglement. These marks and passages taken directly from the lecture summarize the examples and work to represent what is and is not the Thick Interface.

This thesis is not about simply about making something anew. It is not about shifting the foundation of what we as designers and artist do, but specifically skewing the perspective of how we experience our everyday environments, both physical and digital. This thesis presents a method of vibration, revealing through the flicker how we navigate back and forth between these worlds. It encourages users to engage in uncommon activities. By remaining in motion, pushing forward and then retreating, this vibration becomes apparent. It is not about blazing through to an alternative place, it is about balancing the back and forth between these two simultaneous and parallel worlds; the world of the real, and the world of the virtual.

[1] "Masked Magician Unmasked." YouTube video, 4:29. Posted by "Anna Tang," August 15, 2010. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtNAq5m2LSg

[2] Ibid.

[3] "James Bridle - Meet The Artist." YouTube video, 1:14:07. Posted by "Lighthouse Arts," May 14, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watchv=Lza-ZC7UCPk
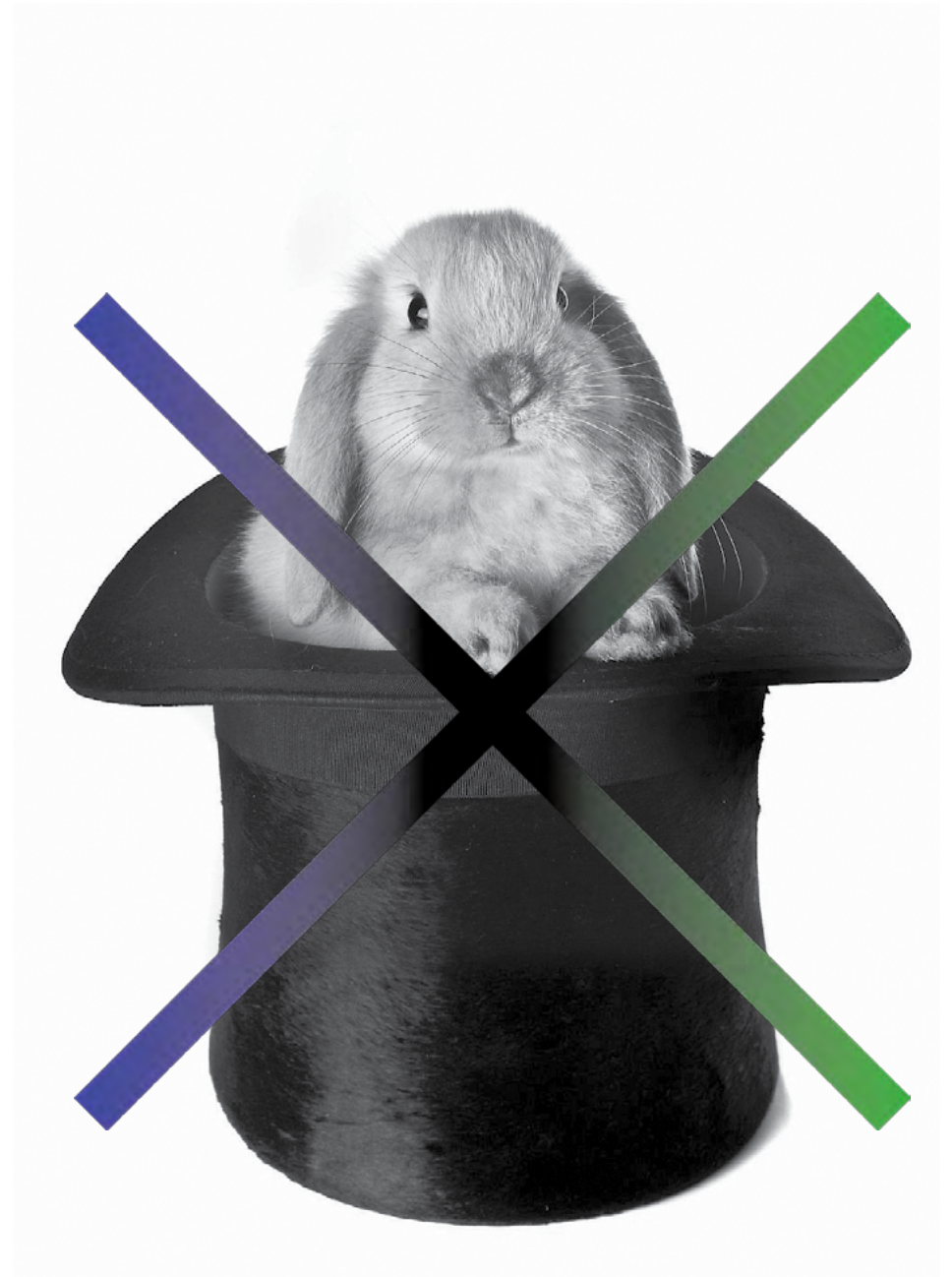
Not a magician who deceives, but a masked magician who reveals.

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Artist Aram Bartholl claims that the most relevant contemporary portrait is a persons top ten hits in a Google search. Searching for my name, 'Jonathan Hanahan,' this portrait takes the first ten image results and superimposes them on one another.

THE
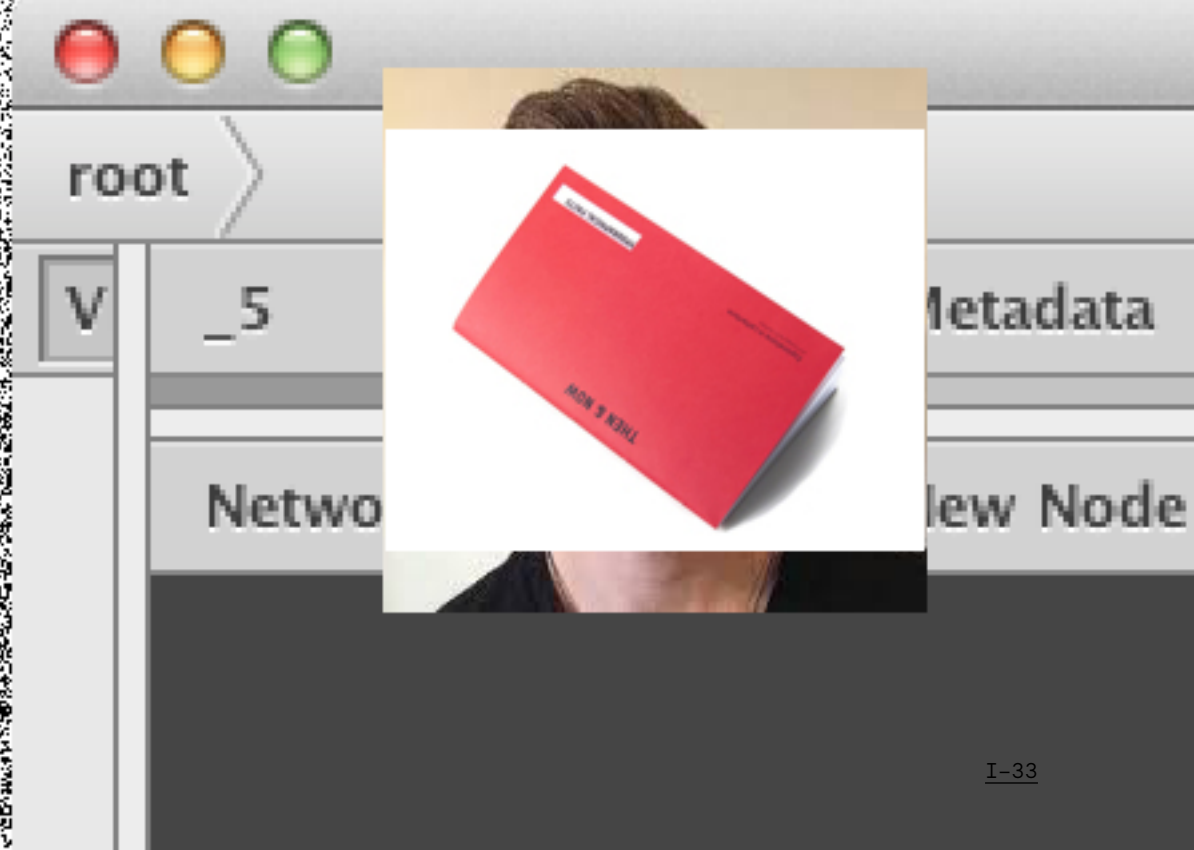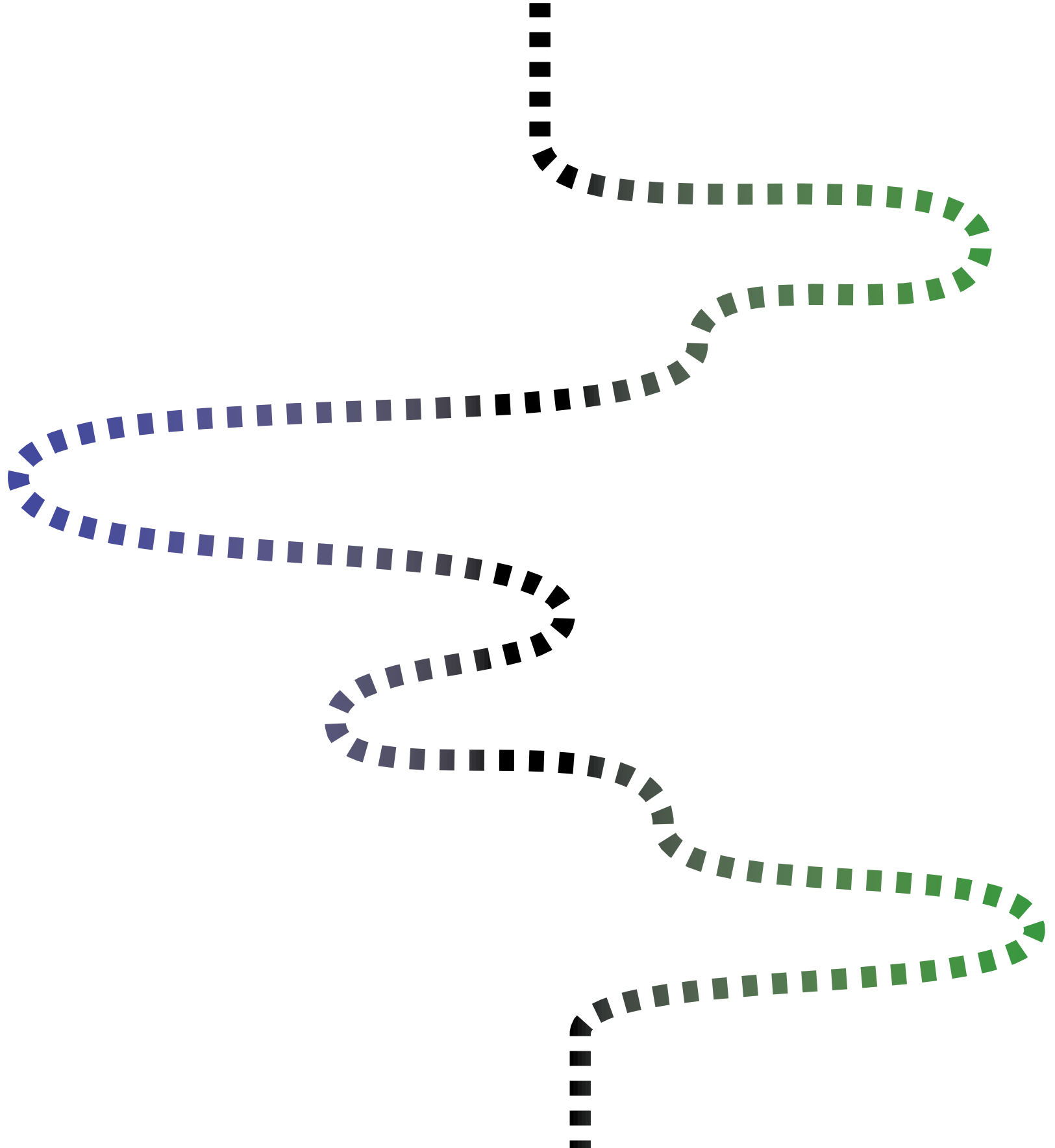
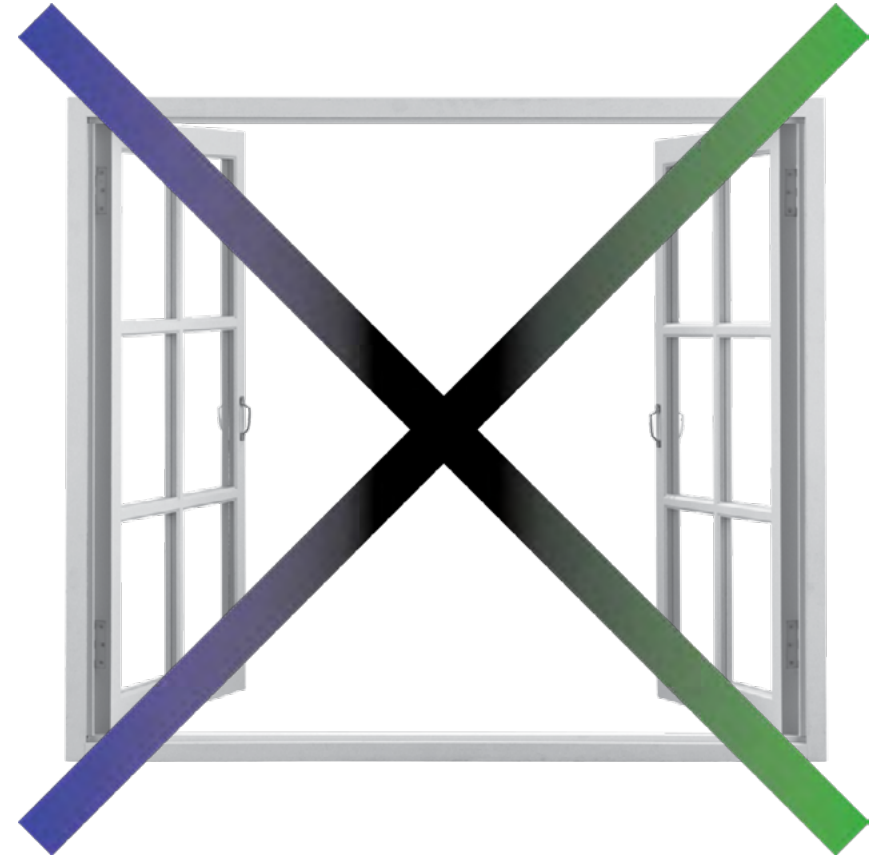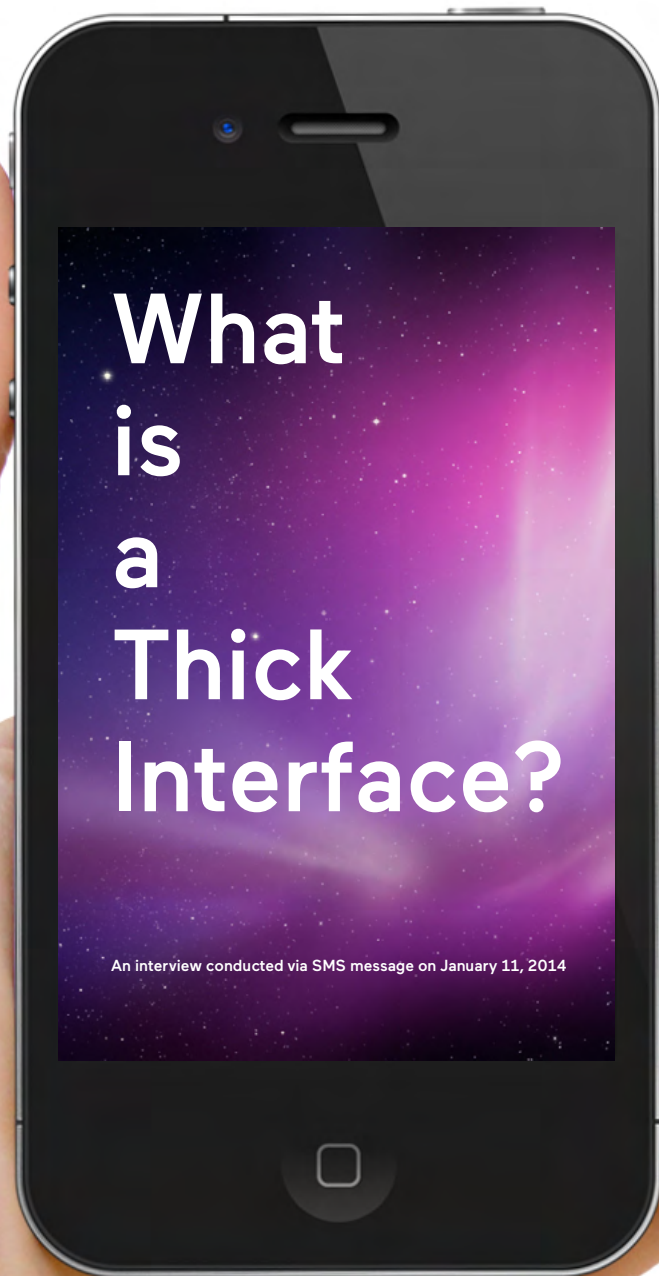# THICK

INTERFACE

"We live in a world that really isn't magic, but appears as magic."

—James Bridle, WRITER, ARTIST, PUBLISHER, AND TECHNOLOGIST

The Thick Interface is not simply an invisible window into a digital world.

What is a Thick Interface?

An interview conducted via SMS message on January 11, 2014

Hello Thesis Advisors. Welcome to the 'thick interface' chat. JH

The first question I would ask you to respond to is, "What is a thick interface?" JH

CF It seems appropriate to answer this question in the spirit of the media. e.g. make it 'text-y'. Stream of consciousness.

CF I guess to answer a question of 'what is' I try to pry apart the constituent parts. Thick only exists in relation to thin; a relative judgement. Is thickness an essential quality at all?

Yes please do! That was my hope from this exercise. JH

CF To acknowledge the interface at all is to grant it a sort of thickness, as a Jony Ivy 'thin' interface strives to disappear completely.

To me thickness becomes vital because it implies space, and specifically physical space that thin interfaces mask.. JH

CF To recognize the interface at all is to grant it thickness I suppose.

So: thick in this case, seems to imply 'recognizable,' or CF 'implicit'

CF For me, physicality is a bit o a leap.

Maybe more material... Something that provides resistance, is additive, considers time and distance JH

CF what is the difference between 'interface' and 'division'?

CF Is it just a recognition of the space between two entities. right?

I think division implies permanence, a wall, where interface is permeable. JH

And to me it is also not just a transitory state but something occupiable JH

In a certain sense I see the entire physical environment as a thick interface JH

But this is why I pose the question to you, my advisors. I am curious what your implications of it are beyond my bias or projections JH

I guess to me division is just the invention of many, rather than one. the Dyad. The interface is the negative space between.   CF

A possibility, but not a conclusion.   CF

Can it also be positive?   JH

I guess I'm not thinking about as positive or negative. Just abstractly. Its nature is betweenness. Established by the existence of division.   CF

Yes. Agreed   JH

I read once about some indigenous Amazonian culture who don't count. So they don't know the difference between one and two. No division intrinsic in their culture. The concept of interface may be inexplicable to them. But I digress...   CF

So if there is no between, what is that space? The Amazonian still need to exist somewhere   JH

I dunno, I guess maybe the concept of space is way different. The 'oneness'... Maybe you need to get into New Age   CF

Different than what?   JH

Space vs.......?   JH

that, I guess, is precisely the question.   CF

Hi Jonathan and all. I'm moving this group txt to my iMessage on my laptop for ease of typing.   LH

thick interface: I go immediately to the idea of being thick as in obtuse, unintelligent. 'Don't be so thick headed"...also thick skinned as in tough. Not easily wounded.   LH

Interface is a word I don't respond well to, although I use it often enough. A thick interface seems to me to be something that is an obstacle to clarity and connection. A thick interface is rich with distraction. Complex and layered, it is slightly oxymoronic. Interface is about the tool or manner for connecting. Thickness prevents it. Or slows it down. Or makes its motion more slow, more deliberate.   LH

images / associations: thick as a brick. thick skinned. thick headed. a thick book. Or when you're sleepy or drunk your words are thick in your mouth. Interface: In Yer Face. Intergalactic. Inter(nal). Interpret. Face

off. Face your fears. Inward facing. Between faces. Between surfaces. Thick Surfaces. Skins   LH

I like all these descriptors that sound like negatives. Because to me they are really positives, ways to recalibrate our world   JH

I have been thinking about Rem Koolhaas's term 'junk space' which referred to all the aspects of architecture which make the buildings work, the guts, the spaces we don't think about. In some sense I hope the thick interface can prove analogous to this. The junkspace of the Internet or the digital environment   JH

Yea and I don't mean them to be negative, but its this stream of consciousness thing that texting does thats what came out. So many thick things are excellent: thick paper and thick slices of bread and a thick narrative or story that requires some gnawing on.. Thick honey that needs a knife for spreading. Thick slice of cake. But when you want to talk with some one and the obstacles and disconnections and miscommunications are too many, then it feels like a thick membrane is between

you and the other person.   LH

Hey all... Joining late with some random thoughts   CV

Thick makes me think of infra-mince: Duchamp's word for the least possible difference that changes the nature of something   CV

I think he wanted his art to operate in that thinness- the least possible difference   CV

So thickness might be the greatest possible difference   CV

Which could be interesting for interface and metaphor: CV

What's the 'most different' metaphor? One that barely holds together? One that is almost nonsensical?   CV

What is the most different interface that still holds together?   CV

Don't know why I'm thinking of 'the clapper': making sound to produce light.   CV

Though the clapper still makes sense.. Because I'm used to it? Because of the catchy jingle?   CV

Also, re: the interface we are using- I've had a hard time Figuring out who is who in

CV this conversation because I don't have everyone's numbers stored. Feels less like a dialogue than stray thoughts… A Constellation maybe

CV Also, my phone is producing summaries. Only displaying the first 140 characters until I open it n the message window

JH It's interesting to think about establishing a situation where these systems usually so clean and direct start to make a huge mess. What happens when the system steamrolls itself and expresses it's inner complexity?

JH For example the way this conversation is organized, I too am struggling through it. I feel like not until all the pieces are pulled apart will the conversation start to make more sense

JH PS thank you all for participating.

LH also (LH here) when you're 'in the thick of thing's you're right in the middle; in a rich good meaty place. If interface is the means for connection or tools for users, hen a thick interface is like being in

LH (Sorry) then a thick interface is like being in the middle, the best part, of a thing. the middle of the connection.
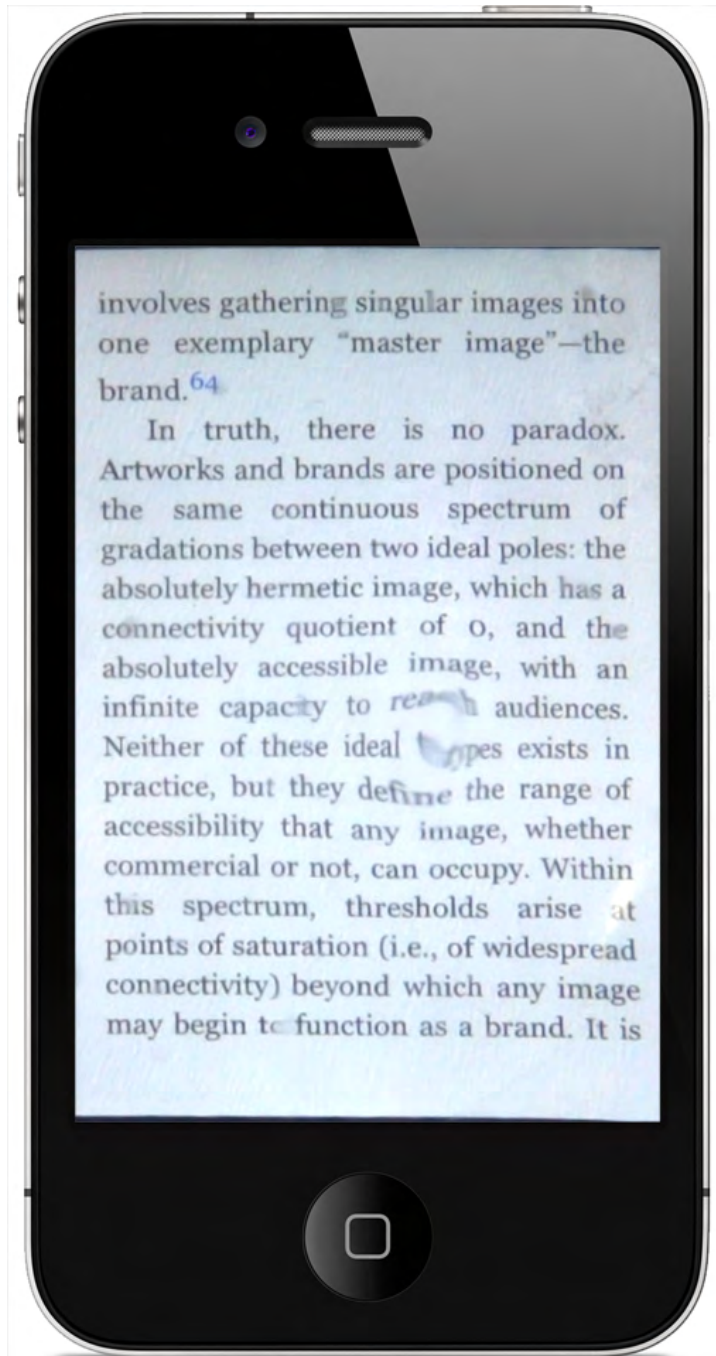
LH ok enuf for tonight. bye.

****

JH: Jonathan Hanahan
CF: Colin Frazer
LH: Lucy Hitchcock
CV: Clement Valla

"Making visible material out of technological infrastructure is the first step towards understanding it. What we cannot see, we cannot critically evaluate."

—Timo Arnall, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, BERG

EVOLUTION, SPEED, & THICKNESS

A Mini-Manifesto

"Graphic Design is *(not just)* a creative process that combines art and technology to communicate ideas for a client."

Evolution

Graphic Design is defined as "a creative process that combines art and technology to communicate ideas. The designer works with a variety of communication tools in order to convey a message from a client to a particular audience."[1] The tools of type and image may be its foothold, but the foundation is in constant flux due to the evolving distribution methods of information, specifically in the last twenty years. In reality, these tools are no longer the sole property of the practice. Access to softwares and platforms like Photoshop, InDesign, Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram, Lulu and Blurb have established new opportunities for individuals to customize their information and distribute it accordingly, a task historically owned by the designer who functioned as a liaison between the content and the distribution.

Graphic design is no longer about simply creating these documents, it has evolved into a role of explaining how these systems work to those who use them. Graphic designers reside in a privileged role within society. We live in a middle ground between high and low culture. Our most prized skill-set is not simply the ability to make things visually appealing, but to understand complexity and translate it to those without the ability or tools. It is our role to connect these two worlds. We are the interface with which contemporary society is experienced and understood. In the words of artist and designer James Bridle, "The network is inherently illegible, it tends towards seamlessness and invisibility, from code to 'the cloud'. Those who cannot perceive the network cannot act effectively within it, and are powerless. The job, then, is to make such things visible."[2]
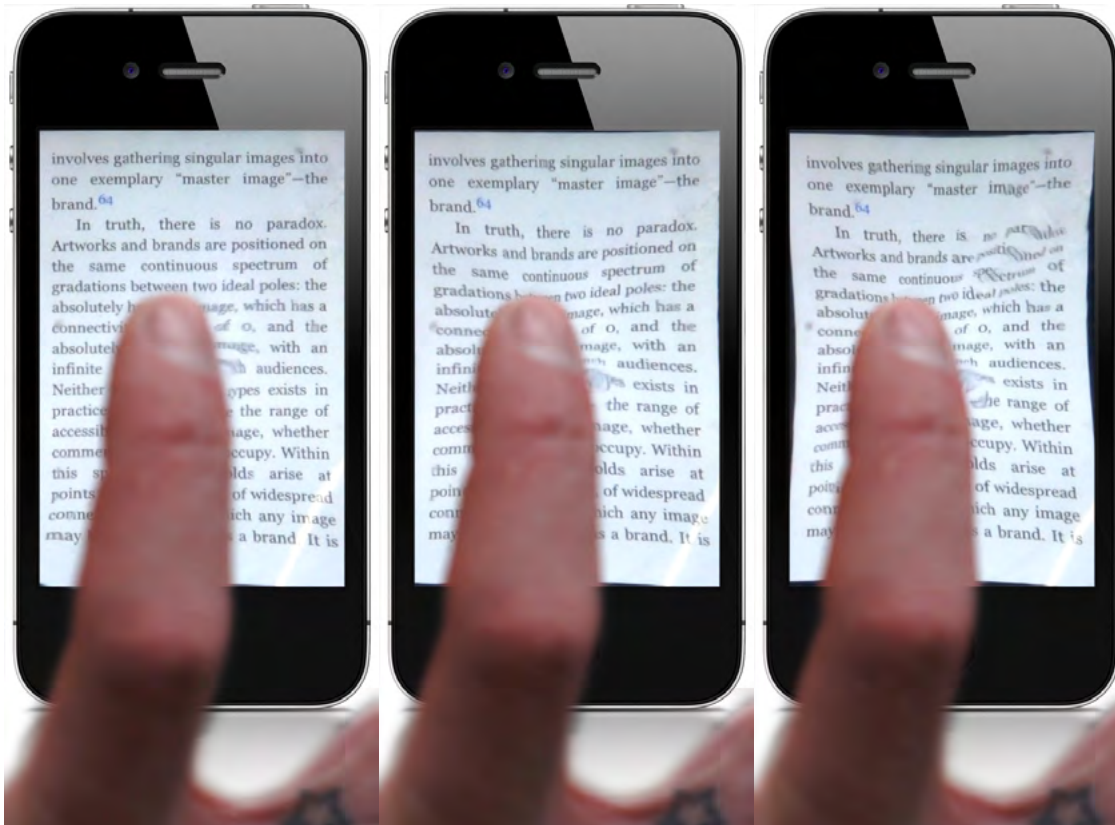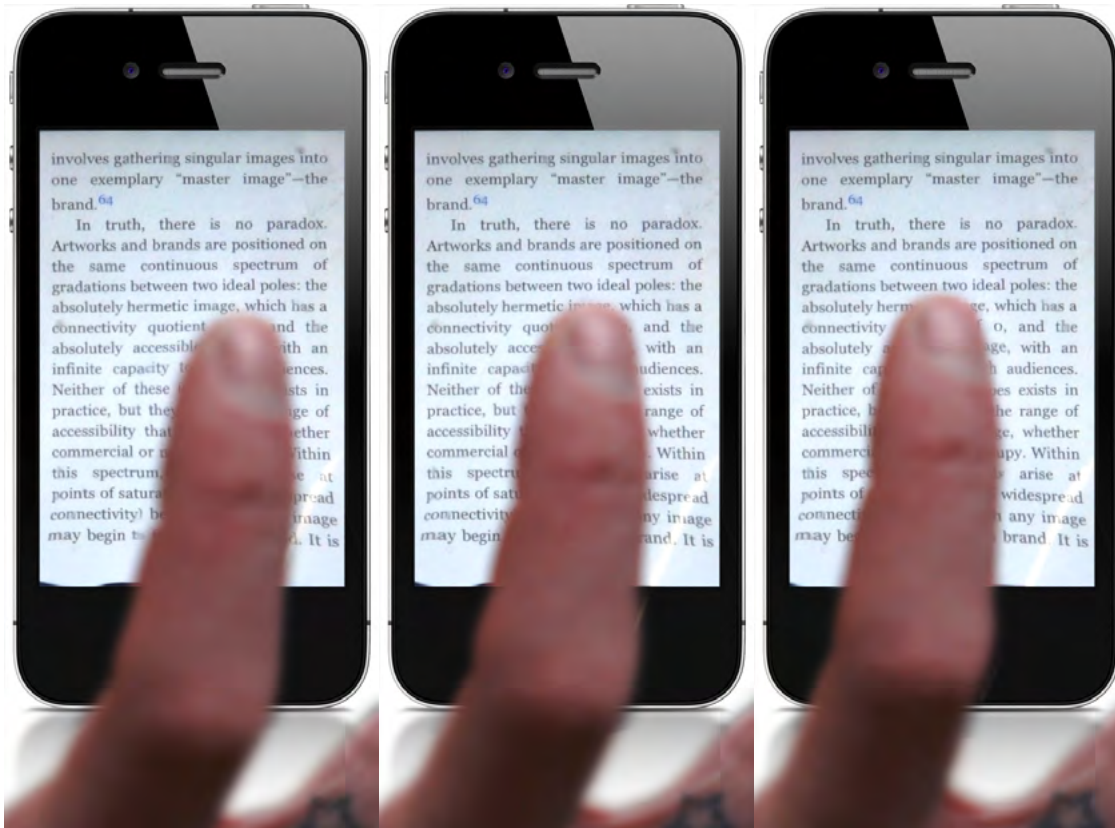
"Hacker culture is all about being able to learn and experience and interact. It takes an 'anything goes' approach to altering reality."

Speed

The driving forces in this evolution of the practice of graphic design are speed and technology. Speed has changed not only the mediums we communicate through but also how we communicate. Consequently, the expansion of tools and languages has forced the designer to be in a constant state of catch-up. It is impossible to master all elements which live within the potential tool chest of the designer. We are no longer the craftsmen of the past, focusing on the exquisite art of a specific task. I argue that the attempt to master such crafts translates the graphic designer into something else entirely, a technician. The role of the designer is not to present mastery, it is to acquire a working knowledge, a familiarity with a great deal of potential solutions. In this instance, the designer takes on the role of the hacker. They accept the ability to understand, and clumsily speak in numerous ways. "Hacker culture is all about being able to learn and experience and interact. It takes an 'anything goes' approach to altering reality."[3] The designer must be multi-lingual and analogous to a world traveler, someone who is not an expert in any specific place, but comfortable and willing to embrace, learn from, and adapt to their environment.

Design professionals are expected to be just that, professional. But I challenge this expectation. Yes, the designers work should be elegant, beautiful, and polished to the standard of the content, the client, and the audience. Here, the foundation of type and image are still at play. However, when we begin to engage new mediums, new contents, and new problems we must realize that success comes from the collaborative dialogue with the technician. The designer must be willing to embrace the naiveté of not knowing as a means to open up new potentials for dynamic outcomes. If the designer remains locked in their comfort zone, their solution is permanently trapped in that world and loses all opportunity to push boundaries. By maintaining a naive approach, the designer has the freedom to ask questions and propose solutions outside of their realm of knowledge. With this naiveté comes the responsibility to be entrepreneurial and willing to seek out the answers to those questions. It also opens the door to failure, something that a naive approach renders in a positive light. These works are about finding solutions, not necessarily the final solution. Therefore, the designer acts as an organizer, seeking out the technicians with the skills and expertise to make said proposal possible. In this role, the designer is the team leader, bringing together dynamic participants which encourage unexpected outcomes.
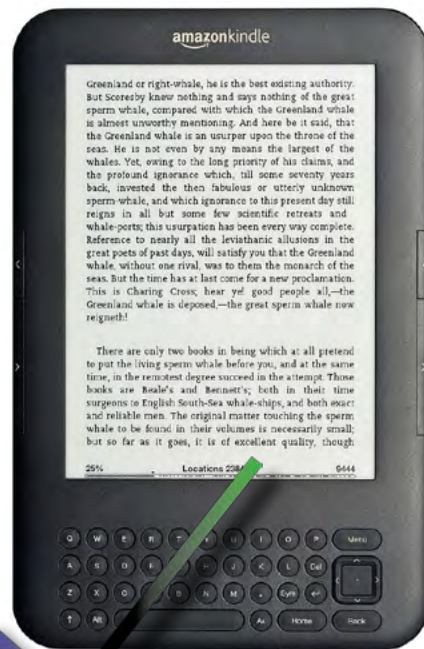
Gutenberg Bible, Thin Interface

+ Pool, Family Architects and Playlab


Amazon Kindle, Thick Interface

A prime example of this is *+Pool* by Playlab and Family Architects. The project was instigated with a simple desire to swim in the polluted Hudson River in New York City on a hot summer day. The teams—lead by Dong Pin-Wong, Archie Lee Coates, and Jeff Franklin—willingness to not disregard the initial desire outright has lead to a multi-million dollar project and an international team of designers, engineers, scientists, and fabricators to develop a pool which filters the water from the river to create a clean environment for the city of New York to swim in. When this project was proposed, the solution was far from clear. Having the foresight to see the potential embedded within the project and maintaining a willingness to not give up when matters become complicated, to seek out individuals who could help make this solution possible, pushed this project from fantasy to reality. I argue that as the problems designers are tasked with investigating grow with complexity, a willingness to ask dumb questions and explore unexpected solutions with childlike wonder is a means to keep the doors to innovation and insight open.

"Every time we interact with technology, we are committing something of ourselves and our experiences to it, and becoming part of the larger network of it."[4]

Thickness

As mentioned previously, the second force dictating the evolution of the practice of graphic design is the growth of technological potential within communication. We can argue that the birth of graphic design was thanks to a technological innovation, the Gutenberg printing press. With the creation of this tool, dissemination of information was feasible on a massive scale and thus required a facilitator to sculpt how that knowledge was interacted with, i.e. the graphic designer.

That initial relationship between the page and the reader guided graphic design for upwards of 500 years. In this relationship the separation between the user and the content was very simple and thin. The users interaction with the page was one-one and personal. There was nothing that came between that experience and no outside forces that also participated. But in the evolution of contemporary society we are now reading, consuming, and experiencing content through a multitude of new platforms. Content has translated from static and two-dimensional to dynamic, interactive, and ubiquitous. Platforms have changed from paper and ink to televisions, computer screens, digital tablets, and wearable devices. These new platforms are
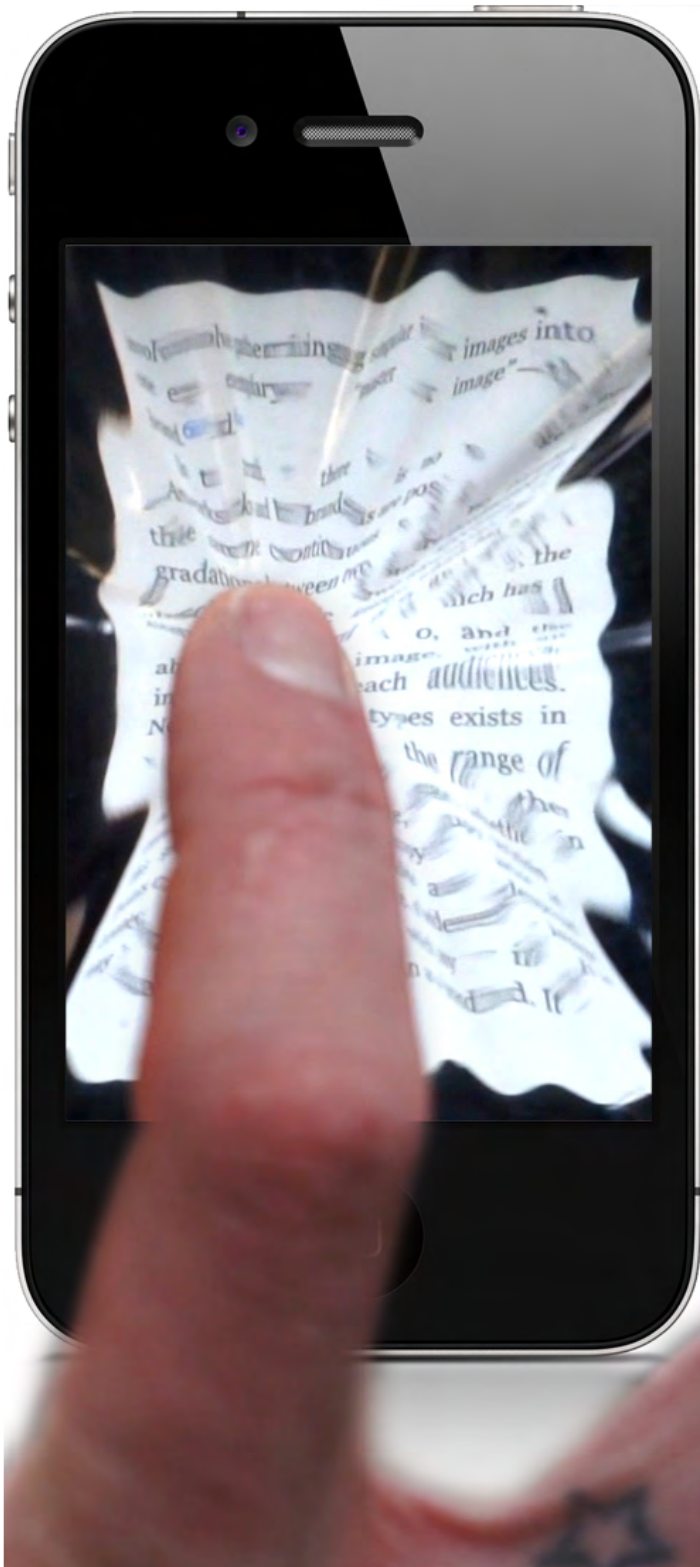
advertised through language like 'invisible, sleek, light, fast, and integrated.' The newest version of the Apple iPad is highlighted as "The Power of Lightness" and self-proclaimed 'cyborg' anthropologist Amber Case states, "The most successful technology gets out of the way, and lets us live our lives."[5] However, these statements mask the reality behind these devices. As our technology increases, the separation between user and content grows. While the physical device may be small, light, engaging, and open up opportunities previously unavailable, the content being engaged is distant. This experience is often described as 'touching photographs through glass.' The technology may make it feel close, telling you it is invisible and it lives in the 'cloud.' This cloud is not a magical entity floating around us at all time. It is a large, cumbersome, energy intensive infrastructure established in remote locations all over the world. Due to this, our decisions to interact with the content, to request it, to select it, to touch, like, or save it implies a multitude of additional steps not associated with traditional experiences. Embedded in these steps are a great deal of ramifications that often go hidden from the sight of the users. For example, to highlight a passage in a paperback novel is an intimate and personal experience. It is an act for that specific user to remember for themselves, something they found valuable and important. Yet when we highlight or take notes in alternative reading platforms like the Amazon Kindle, that information is stored, saved, and shared. In the Kindle, an intrusive typographic anomaly takes place in this instance. The user may come across a dotted underline indicating specific passages which have been highlighted by others within the Kindle network. These are moments where that Thick Interface is revealed, when personal and private decisions are expressed to a networked society. Often, these activities are innocent in nature, the goal of the Kindle popular highlight being to inform the user of the value of a specific piece of information so they might consider if it is valuable to them. It is important to recognize that this dist-inction, this space, this thickness within our interfaces is at play, as a result the role of the designer should be to express these ramifications to an uninformed user. The work that I am proposing is not a political declaration encouraging users to stop engaging and utilizing these tools. It is simply an attempt to present the reality of these experiences and allow the user the opportunity to understand and contemplate further technology's role in their everyday lives. The designer thus reveals the thickness, creating unexpected and jarring representations of this reality. Again, in the words of James Bridle, we need to "Look more carefully at the way (we) behave with these things and think very carefully about how and what it is we want to be doing with them."[6]

[1] "What is Graphic Design?," The American Institute of Graphic Arts, accessed May 4, 2014, http://www.aiga.org/guide-whatisgraphicdesign/.

[2] James Bridle, "Under the Shadow of the Drone," Booktwo.org (blog), October 11, 2012, http://booktwo.org/notebook/drone-shadows/.

[3] David Dawkins, "Read a Five-point Guide for a Better Internet," Dazed Digital, July, 2013, accessed October 8, 2013, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/manifesto-theory-%E2%80%98new-aesthetic%E2%80%99.

[4] "James Bridle: A new aesthetic for the digital age." YouTube video, 6:37. Posted by "TEDTalentSearch," July 5, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z84EDsnpb4U

[5] "Amber Case: We are all cyborgs now" YouTube video, 8:23. Posted by "TED," January 11, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1KJAXM3xYA

[6]"James Bridle: A new aesthetic for the digital age." YouTube video, 6:37. Posted by "TEDTalentSearch," July 5, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z84EDsnpb4U

The Thick Interface:
Where our everyday physical and digital experiences are *indistinguishable* and *intertwined.*

The Thick Interface recognizes that reality no longer registers a distinction between physical and digital. There are only ruptures to their co-existance, moments where each invades and disrupts the other. Most importantly, it is a spatial place, it is occupiable, it is a space we live in, a place we are in right now.

"The world is going to continue
to get magical and strange,
and people will be confused
and fearful. Designers have to
do what they do best, helping
people to understand the
world and the way they live in
it—and make the tools that
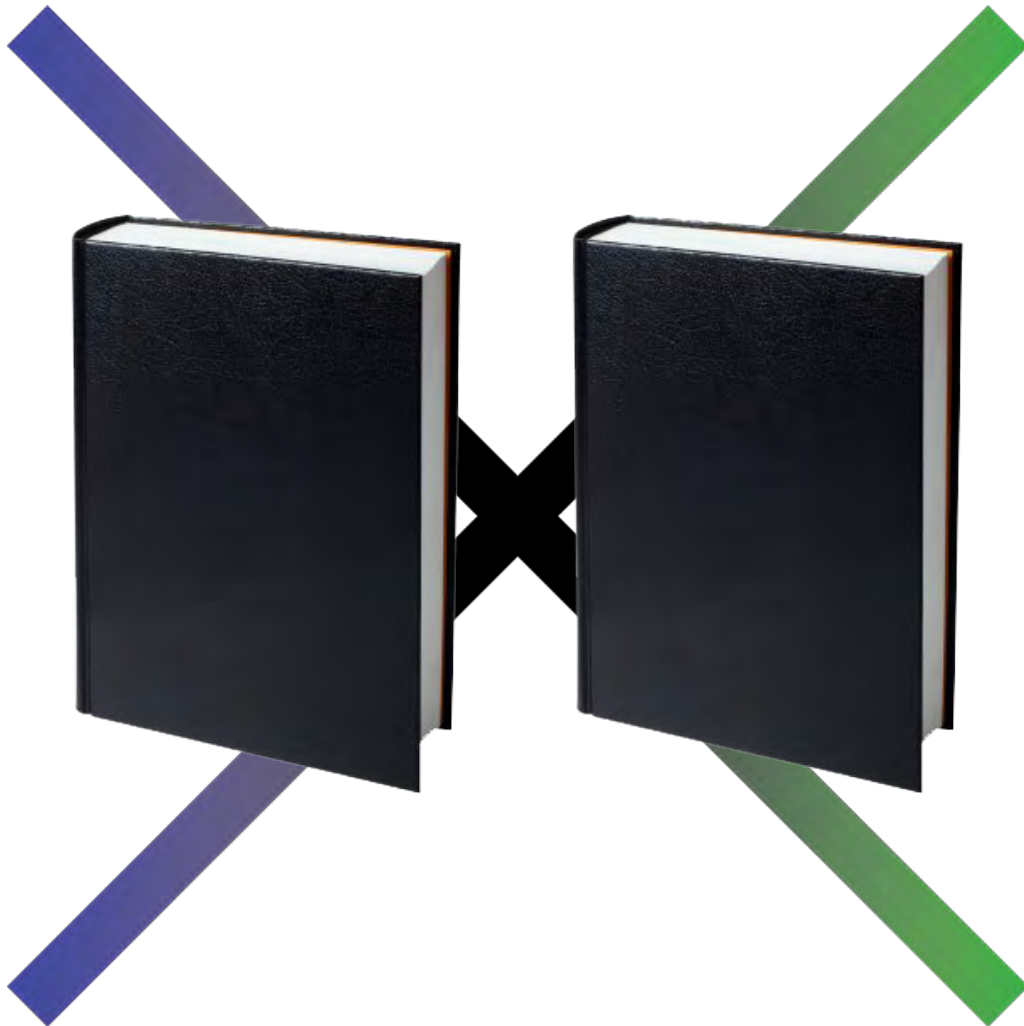people can use to shape their
own lives."

—Chris Heathcote, CREATIVE LEAD AT GOVERNMENT DIGITAL SERVICES CABINET OFFICE
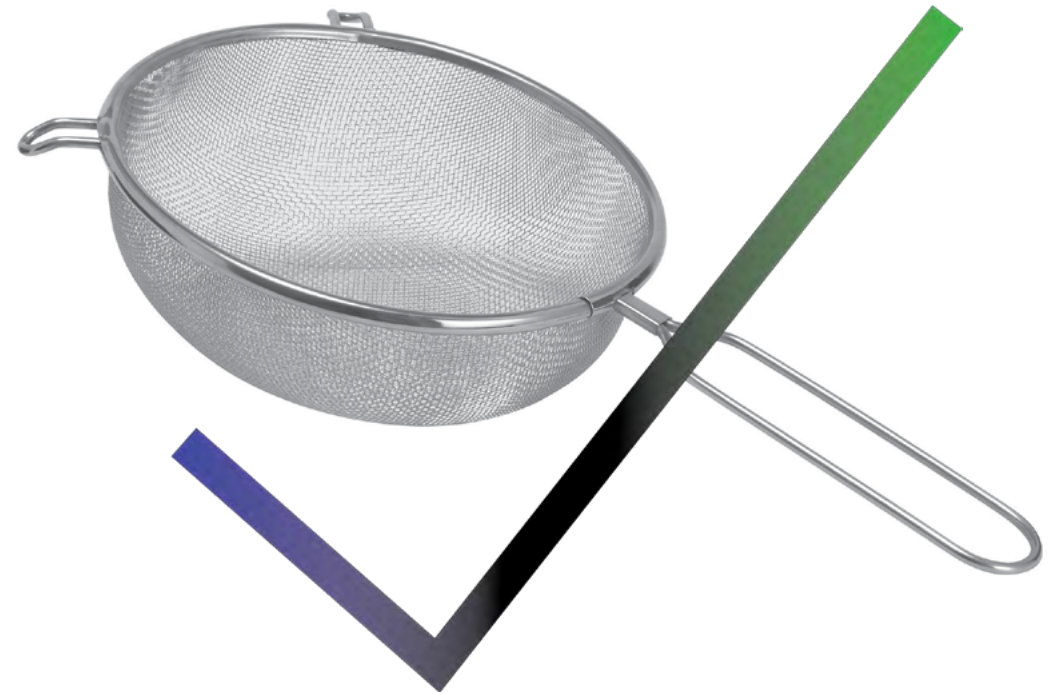
*The Thick Interface is an active participant. It
has materiality, it morphs, provides resistance,
and leaves a residue of its existence.*

TWO DICTIONARIES

2014, Book, 6in×9in, 304 pages.

The polarization of our media driven experiences has caused us to form overlapping and bisecting associations for exploits in each realm. We use familiar language and metaphors to stand in for complex happenings in new virtual worlds. The more familiar and associative the digital event, the more willing and less fearful we are to engage in it. In recent correspondence with Rob Giampietro, he stated, "Engineers make digital pointers, Designers make mice."[1] The role of the metaphor and language in the design realm is ever apparent and infinitely important. As these metaphors become so engrained in our lives, as children grow up with technology so much so that they touch screens and expect activation, the metaphor fades and our associations shift. *Two Dictionaries* explores this evolution of language and association across the interface and into our digital environments.

Over the past year, I developed a collection of homonyms specifically comprised of relics from both the physical and digital realms. The project bisects and separates the relationship of language along these divides to challenge and reveal this distinction. Here, the Google Search becomes an interesting juncture to visualize the new associations media has engrained in us. We can see how history has shifted the implication of these words and how words— so tied to real and tactile moments—now take on vastly different connotations based on our digital associations. This project reveals and expands on the simultaneous

Worm
Surf
Cookies
Rip
Stream
Mouse
Scroll
Home
Icon
Browser
Pirate
Crash
Ram
Buffer
Window
Virus

Worm
Surf
Cookies
Rip
Stream
Mouse
Scroll
Home
Icon
Browser
Pirate
Crash
Ram
Buffer
Window
Virus

distinction of these words and worlds.

To compound this distinction, the book is split into two sections. The verso page is dedicated to the analogue, and the recto to the digital. This polarizing move is to highlight these environments and allow the audience to locate themselves in each, individually and simultaneously. Subtle shifts in typography and color are also used to brand each zone. The analogue takes inspiration from the origins of media and
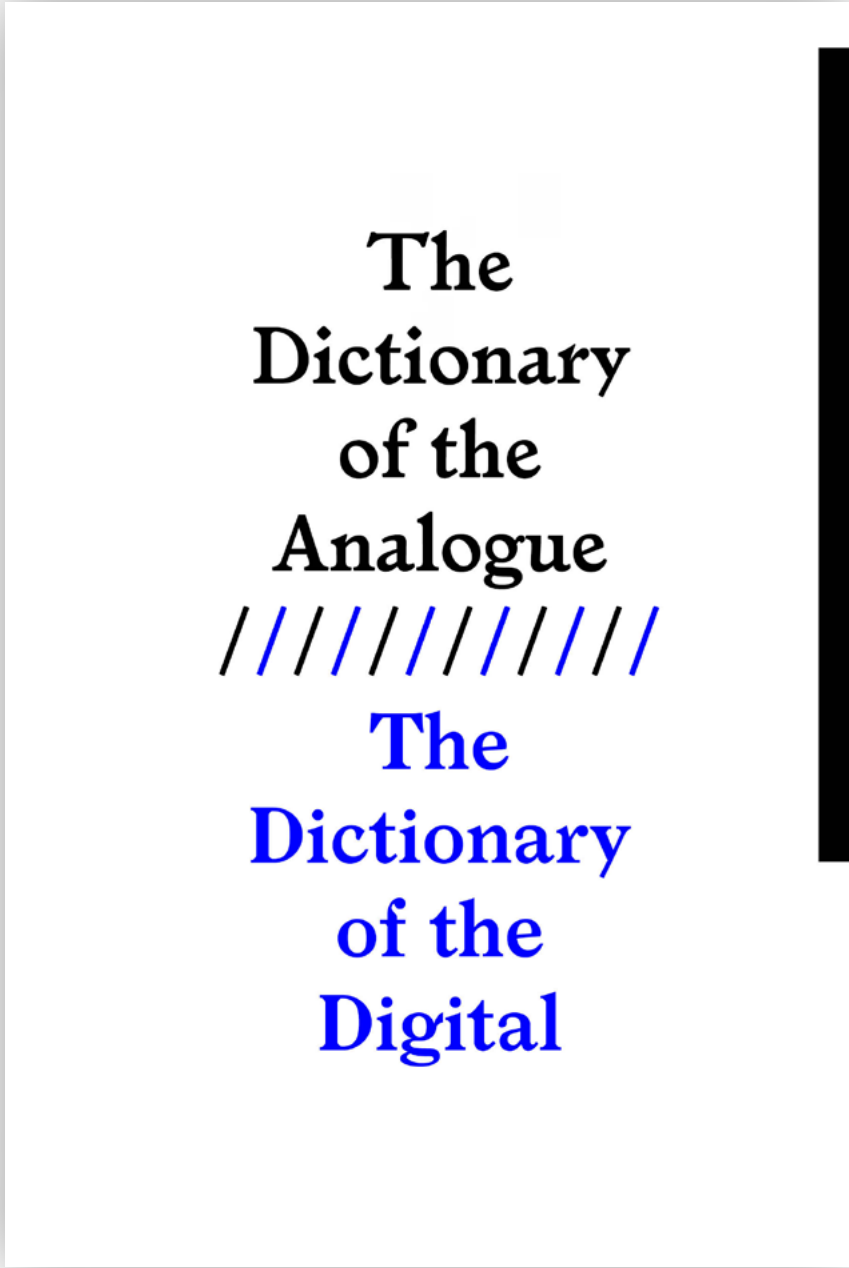
I have grown quite interested in the words and metaphors that have infiltrated the digital world.

	Phonetic	Physical Image	Search Image		Physical Definition	Virtual Definition	source	Actual Search(Analog)	Actual Search(Digital)	page number
ccess	æksὲs		x	x	a means of approaching or entering a place	the action or process of obtaining or retrieving information stored in a computer's memory (Access Code)A secret series of characters that enables a user to access a file, computer, or program. On multi-user systems, each user must enter his or her password before the computer will respond to commands. The password helps ensure that unauthorized users do not access the computer. In addition, data files and programs may require a password.	http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/A/access.html	velvet rope	microsoft access	2
crobat	ǽkrəbæt	x	x	x	an entertainer who performs gymnastic feats	A suite of programs developed by Adobe Systems, Inc. for creating and distributing electronic documents.	http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/A/Acrobat.html	circus acrobat	adobe acrobat logo	2
ddress	ǽdrὲs	x	x	x	the particulars of the place where someone lives or an organization is situated	A name or numeral that designates a particular location in computer memory.	http://www.bluestonegarden.com/oval-address_plaque.html	house address	web address	2
pple	ǽpəl	x	x	x	the round fruit of a tree of the rose family, which typically has thin red or green skin and crisp flesh. Many varieties have been developed as dessert or cooking fruit or for making cider.	An American multinational corporation headquartered in Cupertino, California, that designs, develops, and sells consumer electronics, computer software and personal computers.	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apple_Inc.	apple fruit	apple computer logo	2
rchitectu e	árkətὲktʃər	x	x	x	the art or practice of designing and constructing buildings.	a set of disciplines that describes a computer system by specifying its parts and their relations.	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computer_architecture	architecture	computer architecture	2
rchive	árkὰjv	x	x	x	a collection of historical documents or records providing information about a place, institution, or group of people	a repository that stores one or more collections of **digital** information objects with the intention of providing long-term access to the information.	archivemati.ca/2005/11/08/digital-archives/	archive	server farm	3
rtifact	ártəfǽkt	x	x	x	an object made by a human being, typically an item of cultural or historical interest	Unwanted visual anomalies or defects generated by an input or output device, or by a software operation, that degrade image quality.	http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/64/Mycenaean_stirrup_vase_Louvre_AO19201.jpg	artifact	glitch	3
ssembly	əsὲmbəl	x	x	xx	a group of people gathered together in one place for a common purpose	Combining numerous files to produce a finished product. Commonly used to describe the process of combining line work and continuous tone images into a final layout.	http://umbcbreakingground.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/sanitation-workers-assemble-in-front-of-clayborn-temple-for-a-solidarity-march-memphis-tn-march-28-1968.jpg	assembly	computer assembly	3

knowledge dissemination. Printed in black ink, and using the typeface Larish Alte by Radim Pesko, it references the tradition of metal type printing. The digital is slightly shifted. The ink is a process blue, referencing the television or computer screen, and the typeface is Larish Neue, a more mechanical and contemporary version of its traditional cousin. The verso represents the human, the recto the machine. This subtle shift highlights the vibration between environments and also emphasizes that while they are distinct, they are also parallel, influencing and mimicking one another.

The first section of the book focuses solely on the words. Each is displayed in alphabetically order, but doubled to represent both analogue and digital definitions. The terms are represented in

The
Dictionary
of the
Analogue
///////////
The
Dictionary
of the
Digital
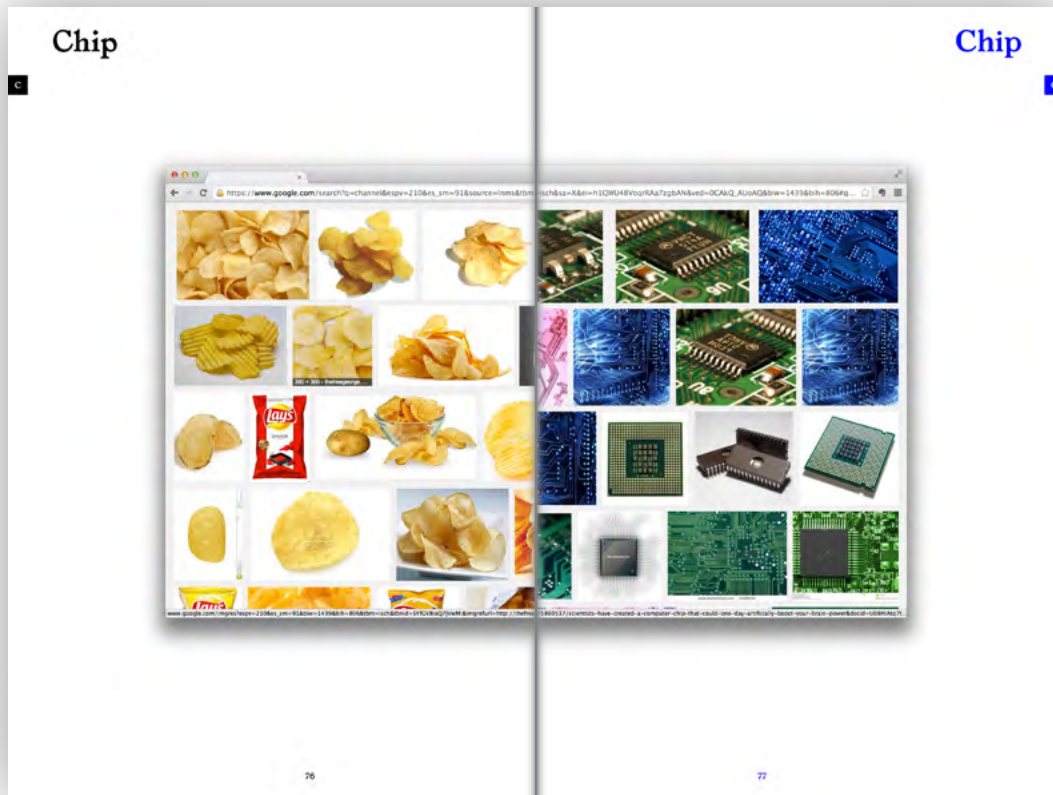
The Google Search is reinserted into physical form. Meeting in the gutter, two worlds mirror the original search, but isolate their environments. The gutter acts as a seam which blurs the distinction but also maintains the continuous and singular frame.

sync both visually and verbally. Presented with the written terms first, the viewer may form their own mental associations to the potential visual result.

In the second section, the visuals are introduced. Here, the theme of the Google Search is then reinserted into the physical book. The browser frame traverses the gutter, yet the visual search results remain within their respective environments. The gutter acts as a seam which blurs the boundary but also maintains the continuous and singular frame. Throughout this section, different patterns erupt to comment on our verbal distinctions in alternative environments. Sometimes, as is the case with the term 'archive,' the bisection is almost nonexistent. The formal nature of the images are consistent, yet the artifacts within them change. Other times, as in the case of 'icon,' this evolved association is amplified. The word takes on vastly different

FORM+CODE IN DESIGN, ART, AND ARCHITECTURE

The Dictionary of the Analogue // The Dictionary of the Digital

THE ELEMENTS OF TYPOGRAPHIC STYLE — ROBERT BRINGHURST

A PRIMER OF VISUAL LITERACY — Dondis

ARCHITECTURE DEPENDS — Till

McCullough

UNCORPORATE IDENTITY — MH

THE ANTI-AESTHETIC

Blue Monday

sensorium

TAVARES STRACHAN

Juan Downey: The Invisible Architect

MUTATIONS

The Electric Information Age Book

The Medium is the Massage — McLuhan Fiore

ARCHITECTURE DEPENDS

BUILDING UP AND TEARING — REFLECTIONS ON THE AGE OF ARCHITECTURE — PAUL GOLDBERGER

THE TEN BOOKS ON ARCHITECTURE — VITRUVIUS

A—Z

Information Design — Jacobson

lovemarks

MOKUM

BEYROUTES | A GUIDE TO BEIRUT

Show

LINTON PORTFOLIO DESIGN

RCB 11

Sometimes, these bisections are almost non-existent, where the formal nature of the images are consistent, yet the artifacts within them change.

Other times, the words take on vastly different connotations which reveal how our mental associations have shifted in the digital age.

connotations which reveal how our mental associations have shifted in the digital age. In the case of 'icon,' the analogue definition seems the most foreign.

To round out the bisected event, the last section of the book reveals the actual search terms used to split the Google Search along its digital and physical divide. This reveal, similarly to the definitions, visualizes the contemporary resting place of many of these terms. The single word is often obviously apparent in either the digital or physical environment, but in order to generate its inverse, more detailed and often absurd searches were necessary. In the case of 'icon' again, the digital search remains simply 'icon(s),' while the analogue requires

The book also maintains the distinction by separating the definitions from the visual results. This way, when the reader explores the terms, they are able to form their own mental model of the images,and when viewing the images, may recall their own associations and definitions.

the addition of 'religious icons' to specify a collection of visuals isolated from our more common contemporary association with mobile buttons.

The goal of this project is to slightly vibrate our associations with language in contemporary society. By isolating the traditional bonds with these particular homonyms, the book shows multiple aspects of our contemporary relationships with language in both analogue and digital environments. First, its mass—304 pages—reveals how much of our language translates across the interface boundary. Second, it reveals the power that our digital occupations have on our everyday lives. Words evolve and their innuendo within the bisected homonym shifts drastically. This vibration is about revealing that while the distinction between the two associations may be vast, the experience of their use is far less polarizing. In reality, these associations

and uses happen simultaneously. We are in both worlds at once and thus, the interface is no longer a gateway to another place. It is a place unto itself.
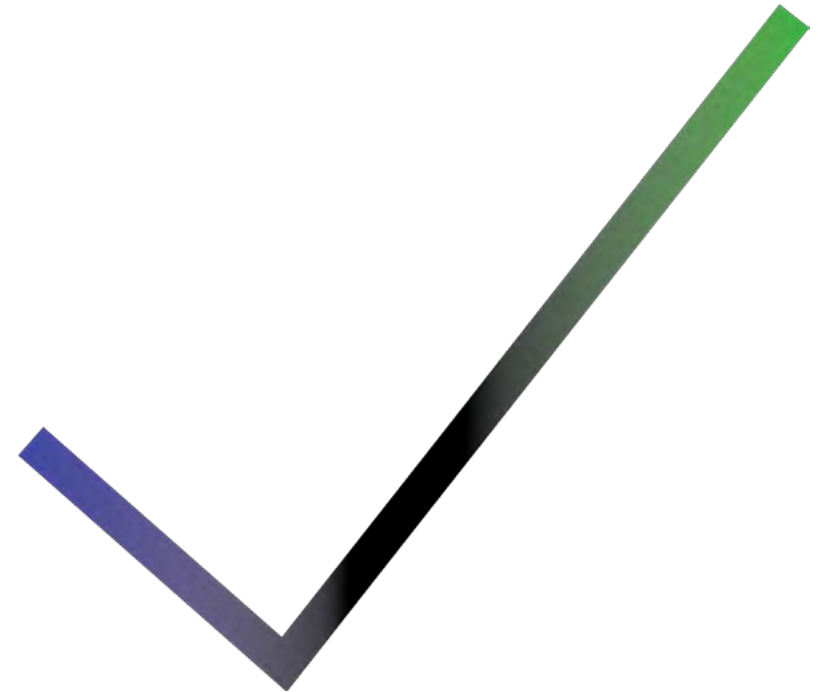
[1] Rob Giampietro, e-mail message to author, April 24, 2014.
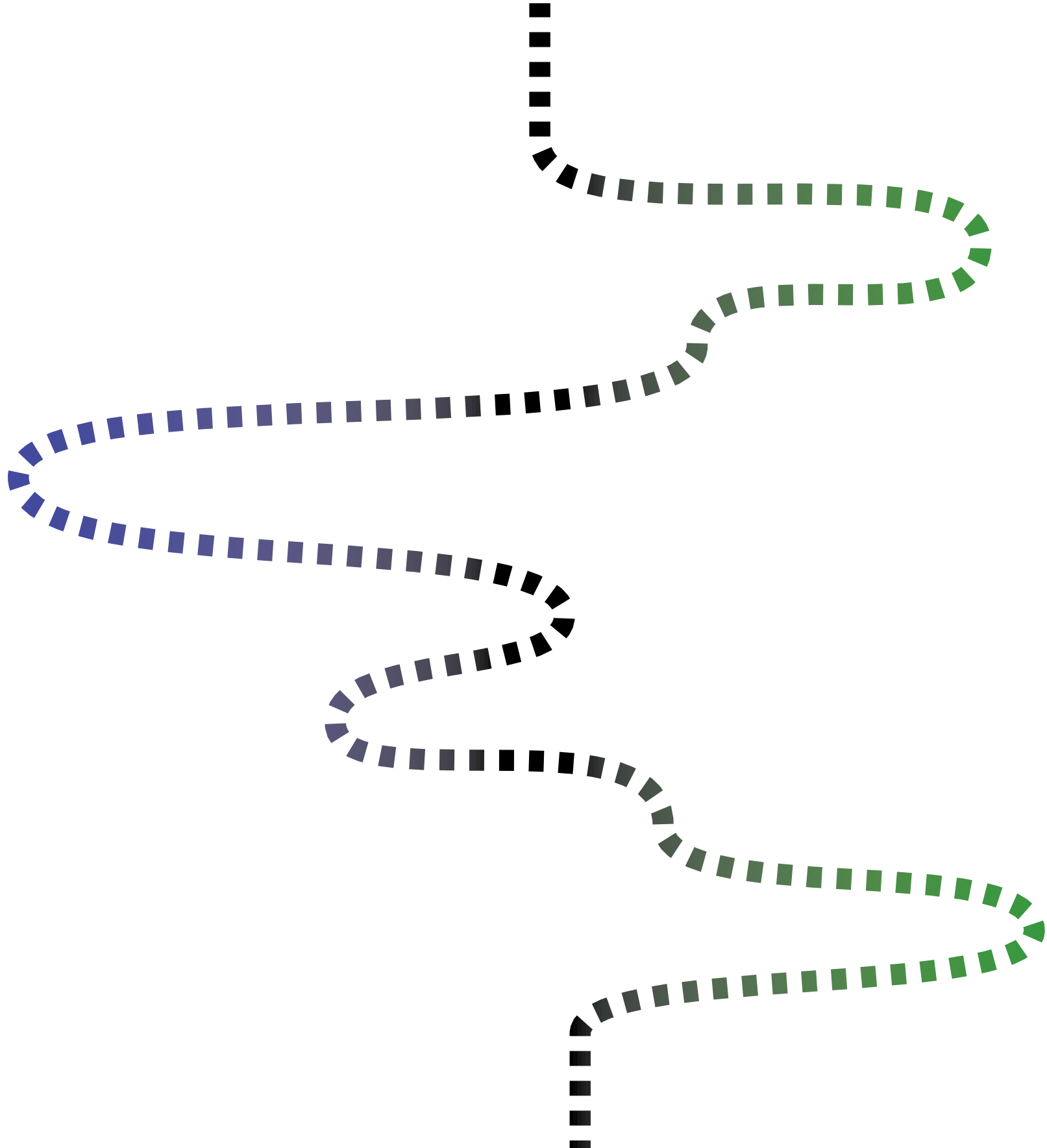
THE DIGITAL GLITCH

Glitches are more than just the formal results we typically associate with computer errors, a glitch is any temporary disruption to an expected experience.
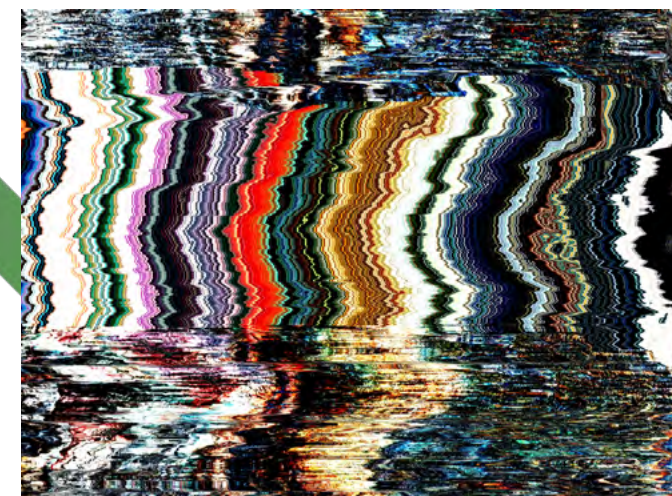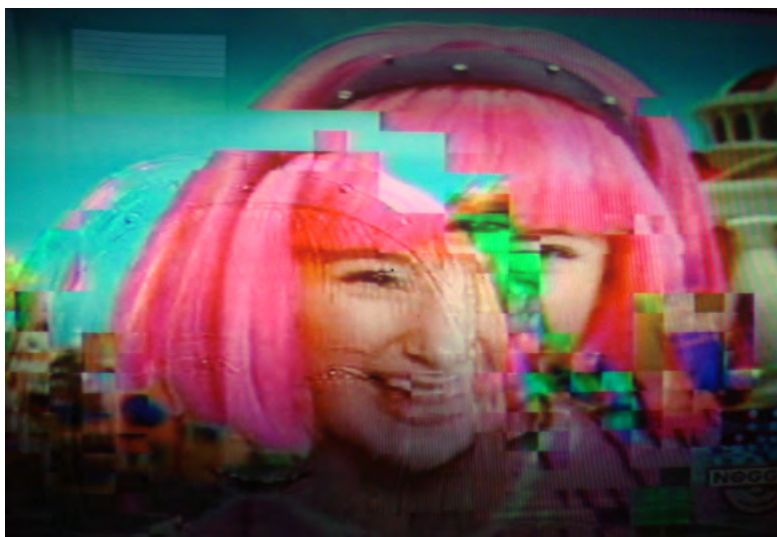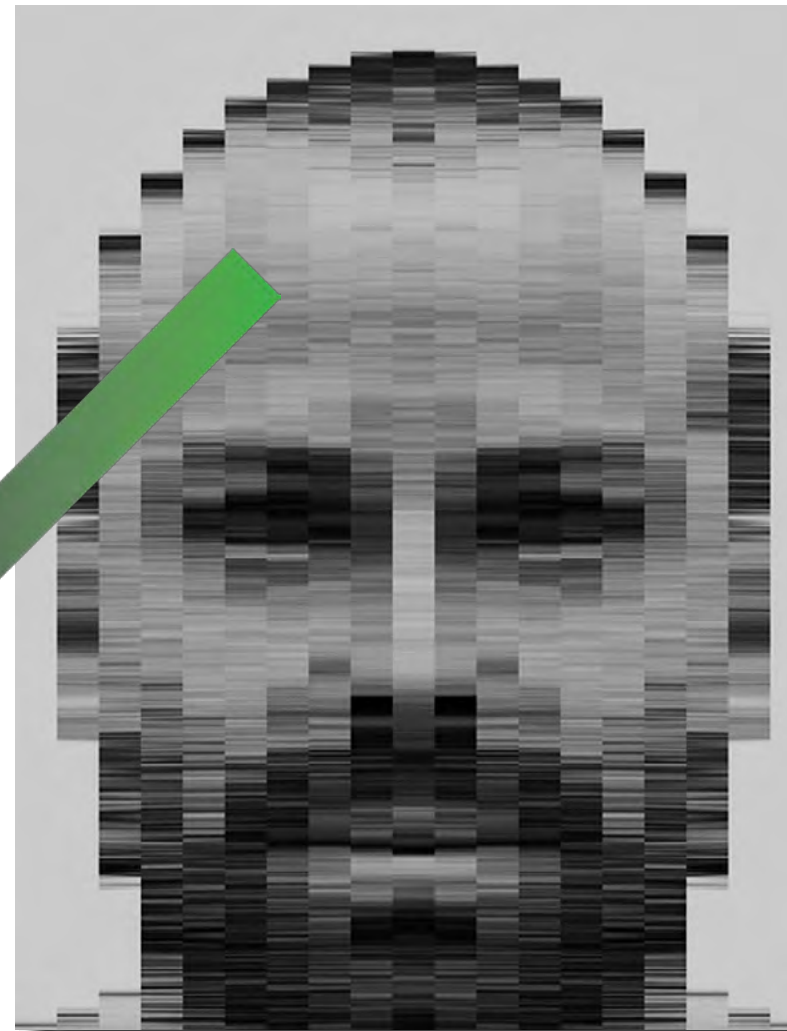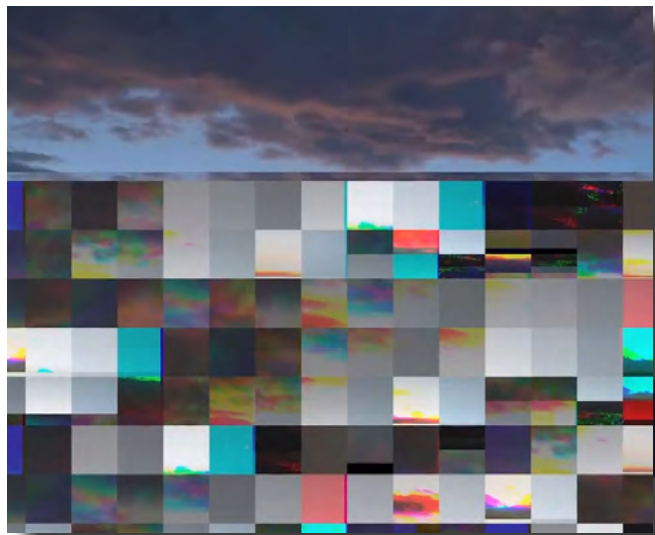
Glitch:
A sudden *short-lived irregularity* in behavior.

This definition is the foundation of these thesis explorations. My work is about creating momentary ruptures to our expected and everyday experience which cause us to question the ramifications of our interaction with these systems.

"Without hope, anticipation, and expectation, without a sense of rightness and the way things are supposed to be, there is no glitch."

–Curt Cloninger & Nick Briz, NEW MEDIA ARTISTS

SETTING TRAPS

An Interview with Curt Cloninger

March 28, 2014 via Skype

JH The first question I just wanted for you to introduce yourself a bit. First your history in art and design and how you would describe your work and interests?

CC I got interested in art initially through being in garage and punk bands and 4track recording as a technology. Though I did take some art courses in undergraduate I was more an English major and an Art minor. Then I got into the Internet through hacking, or computer intrusion and since that was illegal, I turned to web design since that was the next most interesting thing, and was legal. So one of my first uses of the Internet was breaking and entering, exploring through telnet like UNIX machines, then web design. Then through rhizome and other experimental web design communities I got into Internet art, which in turn got me back into Art art and so thats the way I went through all those things. I taught English and literature to middle school students as a day job. Then programming to technical college students. Then I got a job as a web designer at a company and started teaching web design and Internet art, and now I teach new media, mostly art and theory but still some design. That was the how I came to it part.

JH And how would you describe your work?

CC My work is about exploring language as an affective force in the world rather than a removed way of describing things that are already happening. I use my art and media, sometimes performance and sometimes it is not performance, to make language unsay itself in ways that leave one standing in a field of possibilities which could lead to more fruitful living.

JH The first aspect of your work specifically that I am interested in are pieces that deal with duality, distance, and performance across the media platform and ones which expands and contrast that digital experience. It is what you described in Manifesto for the New Aesthetic as 'Pan-Experientialism'.

CC Ya that is an object oriented ontology thing where they are trying to get at the thing itself.

JH Exactly. I am interested in is this idea of visualizing that experience within the network and the system that plays out through some of your work. The first thing I really wanted to ask about is the piece titled: Again (I Wish I Was A Fool For You).

CC Sure. I started doing these endurance performances where I was blindfolded and I would repeat a phrase from a pop song for a long period of time, playing the
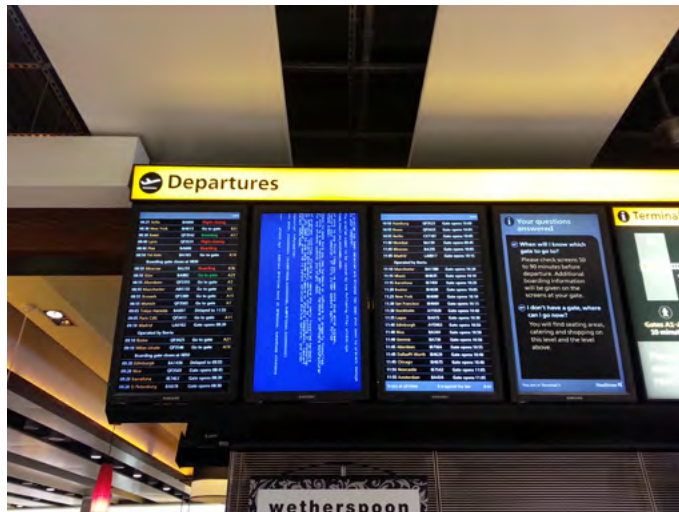
guitar and singing the same phrase over and over again. Do you know this Richard Serra piece he did with Nancy Holt called "Boomerang?" In that piece, Nancy is in an echo chamber with a microphone and is describing the experience she is having. She says "I am sending my voice away and it is coming back to me," because she can't hear herself in real time. Similarly I filmed my wife singing the part of a duet for ten minutes blindfolded. Then I projected her ten minute thing in the performance space and stood next to it. So the scale was right that she was the right height that she really was, and I was my body, so I was the height that I really was. And then I played a guitar blindfolded and performed a sort of duet with her for three hours. Mine was live, and hers was of course pre-recorded and looped.

JH For me, what I am really interested in that piece is this subtle shift between the recording and the reality of you in the performance space. There are these moments where you can not really tell that she is a projection and you are real. Here the line of distinction is very blurry and I think that is a really interesting moment for me.

CC I had that experience too where a friend documented the performance and then showed it to another friend who thought we were just both performing in the same space. In the end the experience that a person had in that live space was a different kind of uncanny experience than the experience that someone has watching the documentation because of course we are all folded back into media

again. My wife's mediated presence, for lack of a better word, is less uncanny as documentation because she was already mediated. And of course my body gets mediated so there I am in mediated space with her. But the more uncanny experience I believe, although the documentation experience is not illegitimate, it is not an unintended part of the piece, I don't think the piece ended and then this was just documentation because indeed only a handful of people (maybe 150) actually saw the piece in the real space. The experience that they were having in that physical space is different because she was brought from the machine into the space.

I've found that it has been useful to use networks, computers, and media to massage things in and out, like in a figure 8. Because I don't live in New York or Chicago, so much of the audience for anything I do had to be on the Internet. Even when I do a performance in one of those places, everything is always pre-loaded with this awareness that more people are going to see the documentation more than the live performance, which I am sure is also true for any famous performance artist. It is not this mimetic idea that media imitate the world, and there is some hermetically sealed space inside the machine that is a platonic projection space. There is this real space over here that is the live performance. But when you stream from the projector into the space, what gets projected is real. It was real in the machine and it was real when you put it in the machine. So in a sense I think some people get into the virtual as if there is this idea of the real and the virtual where one is sort of an analogous representation

of the other one. I am interested more in the fact that both of them are real, but they are just different.

JH I am really interested in doing work which reverberates the relationship between real and digital. Work which teases out that these realities are constantly overlapping and interacting. I am interested in work that takes that cover off mediated experiences for a moment, and then puts it back. That moment is something I see very prevalent in your work which is not necessarily about this permanent move from one place to the other, but about this constant back and forth. In the Again piece, this idea of layers is very interesting. Where it is a projected recording and a person in the space, that is then re-recorded. Like you said, that infinite loop teases out questions of where in that loop we reside.

CC Ya and just listening to you talk, I think that there is a moment where our language is skewed focus on stuff rather than time. And so you have these philosophers of time, this thread from Henri Bergson, to Alfred Whitehead, to Deleuze, to Massumi. I find that I am interested in duration because I think uttered language is durational, even if you read a book, it takes time to read the book. In a sense what I realized with another performance (Double Blind Love) with Annie Abrahams in France that even though she was there and I was here, we were in a when. The more you dematerialize or problemetize the where the more you wind up with the when. So

we are all in a virtual space called time. A lot of computer systems were built based on ways of living in the world that were not necessarily definitive. Just because someone builds a computer system with the belief that there is a second life inside of the machine, or that I could upload my soul, or whatever they believe and claim about the systems they are building that might not really be what is happening. And so a lot of new media art like you were saying is about getting something real into the virtual world. And if you wanted that, you can do it, claim that you have done it, claim that was all there ever was to be done. It is like someone trying to prove a certain model of car is unsafe by constantly wrecking it into the wall every time they drive. Then it is like well maybe you are just a bad driver. Maybe this is my love of seventies minimalism but there is always something much cooler about doing normal stupid things with technology than doing really amazing, technical things with technology because the normal stupid things, as you were saying, foreground the permeability of these things that we have thought were divided.

JH This metaphor that lives over that environment; the cloud, invisibility, thinness, speed; is a moment of masking the fact that this stuff is not magic, it is an everyday experience. Thus the momentary reveal, the glitch, and then a return to the expected is a really fascinating tool. I wanted to ask you about the idea of the glitch as an event and something that is not necessarily just a visually exciting thing but actually a narrative opportunity. How do you

(c) Rudi Imbrechts

Please keep your belongings with you
Unattended luggage may be removed or destroyed by security staff
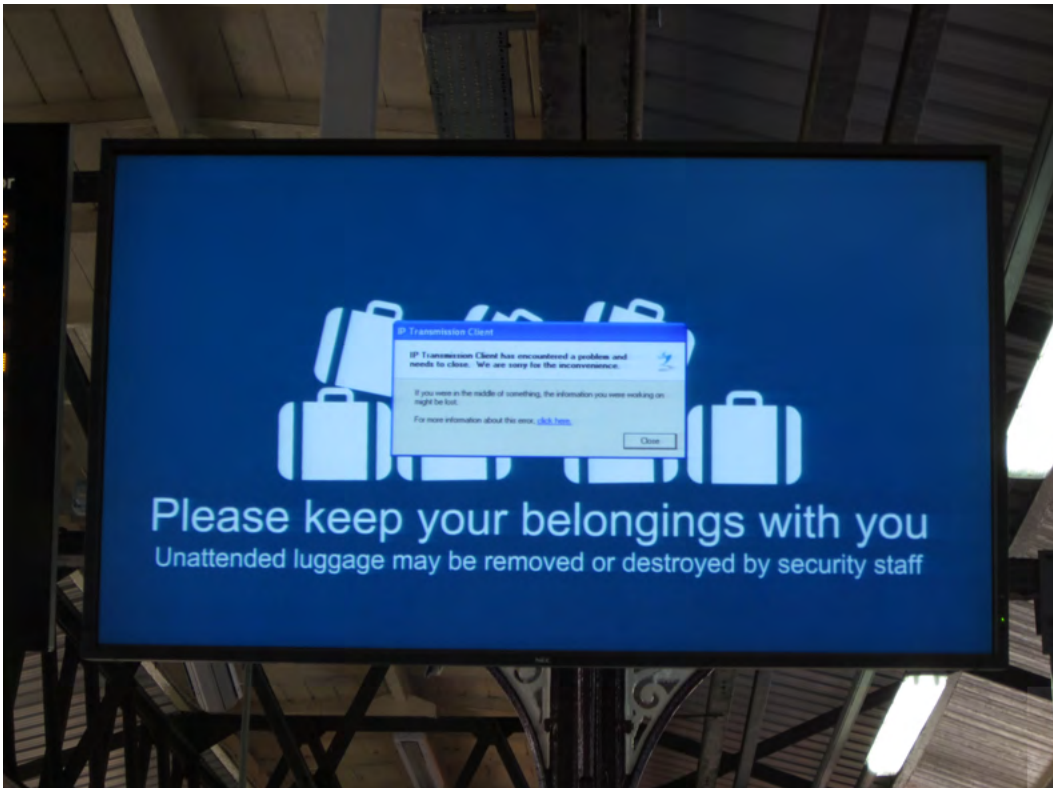
think about the glitch in your work, is it something you can design for or something you just end up with?

CC There is a part in this piece I wrote called Glitch Linguistic where I talk about how there is always affect in the world that colors language. The analogy is if you are talking to someone and the wind blows through their hair at a certain time, the wind moves their hair to their face which colors what they are saying at the time. So, in the machine, everything can be accelerated. And so the analogy would be if instead of a light breeze suddenly moving someones hair a big hurricane force wind came and blew them half way across the space. But in two seconds that wind went away. Similarly, if I am talking to you via Skype and you start to glitch your body will freeze or you will get pixelated and spread all across the screen. But if I am talking to you in a restaurant no one is going to come with a butter knife and spread your face across the restaurant for two seconds. I understand it is your mediated face, it is not your physical face. Daniel Temkin talks about how really to the machine, there is no glitch other the binary fail. To the machine the glitch is the broken JPEG icon that it returns to you when it can't even give you a glitch. But when it is glitched it is not broken; it is not even freaked out. It does not expect anything and it is returning what it able to return at that time. So the glitch happens on us, the human side. The last mile of all media art is analogue wet ware, and the glitch happens between what we expect, what we are set up to expect, and whatever happens. Before new media artists would really have to force or tease out a glitch.

The result would be this artificial thing which didn't happen a whole lot in the world. But now glitches have become so normal. I just have to start using systems in the world and I can't not make glitch art. There is this one group that does these multi chat performances, where there is about ten of them in different locations, some of them on cellphones walking through a park using 3G. They are talking back and forth while one of the performers in the room with an audience. They just use it and then they push it and it simply reveals its limitations. They don't have to artificially add a filter to it. There is just too many people using Skype at the same time. So it seems to me things have gotten to a place where it is less, as an artist, something where you stage these systems because if you staged them. It would be the difference between me taking some fake blood and putting it on my arm and saying 'this represents blood, do you see that humans bleed.' And just getting a knife and cutting myself. Now it is just the fact that these systems are set up, and they are setup in the real world, they are not set up to glitch. They are set up to represent the real, built on that old platonic paradigm. These experiences are mediated now mediated yet systems developers attempt to make it seem as if your conversation is with a person in the room. So one approach to reveal language as a force in the world rather than some metaphysical moot virtual way of talking about the real world is to just push all the systems that are supposed to mimetically represent the real until they start acting as they are in the world, this material system sending pixels and then you see the pixels and you say "oh."

JH There's this desire to pretend that curtain does not exist, it is not really there. That moment of the glitch is just about, "Remember, this is a different thing than being in the room with each other."

CC Always, and not an unreal thing or a fake thing. I think you have these two people, this is what Bruno Latour says, "We've never been modern," so anyone who's post modern and complaining about how crappy modernism is, Latour would say, "Well, you're still modern." The modernism is you'll have a flying car and post modernism is, "Dude, where's my flying car?" But if I was still complaining about the lack of a flying car, I somehow thought that perhaps that was going to deliver, so I think, as far as the curtain goes, you have this one group of people who are Luddites saying, "We want to stay real. Beware of that mediation it's evil." Well then you have these other people who are Extropian Techno-fetishists or Accelerationists, they want to upload their soul. They want to escape the fleshly bonds of the real and happen where everything is so great in this mediated world. Both of those approaches depend on faith in that divide. It is not there except in their minds. So what really is happening is something really a whole lot more entangled and strange. Latour says this. He says that faith and modernism leads to the proliferation of hybrids. If I believe that physics is over here and ethics is over there, because modernism compartmentalizes everything, then I can make a nuclear bomb and drop it on people. But ethics was always right here next to physics, next to Japanese

urban architecture, next to airplanes, aerodynamics. Then when that bomb drops, maybe that's the glitch where we all step back and go, "Oh, it was all together all along. Oh, we can't just drop a bomb on a bunch of people and expect that that's not going to haunt our nation for 100 years." What Latour says is in Medieval times they wouldn't change the plow technology lest the new plow tricked up demons out of the ground. They thought everything was connected and they were very careful about their technology. But once we believed that it wasn't connected, it allowed us to proceed really quickly and to create a world that was amazing in some senses but nonetheless entangled. But we had to pretend it wasn't entangled in order to have the faith to move forward to push it into these weird places. Now here we are.

JH For me, the question is even the way they should describe the explosion of the bomb, it's the glitch because it makes us realize. It says, "Oh yes, this is entangled, oh yes, we're being mediated."

CC I think it's a moment in which we're all implied. It's more than an educational moment for the people who got it dropped on them. Their bodies are dead and their children have birth defects for generations. So it's more than even like an object lesson, which then is still mimetic. Like, "Oh, that was something that happened and we can learn from that as a symbolic thing that teaches us a moral lesson." Suddenly we are connected to those people in Hiroshima. And yeah, it's at least educational but it's beyond that even, I think, if we allow it to
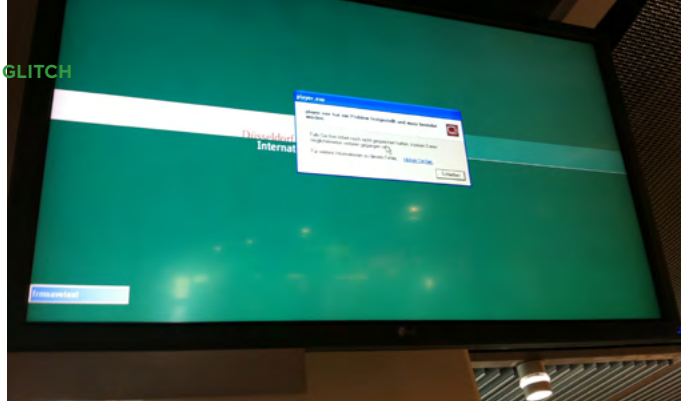
be. It ethically implies us to deal with the world we've made. We feel ourselves as part of a world that we've made that we didn't think we were responsible for and now we're in it and we feel that being in it.

JH Going back to that analogy too, the glitch is an "after," it happens at the end. But can it also be something that happens at the beginning? For me, this idea of the reminder is really interesting. It's like, "Remember this thing is here, remember this thing is connected."

CC This is where Derrida's, "always already useful" is valuable. The glitch is always already imminent, it just hasn't manifested itself and when you see it in the glitch event, that's an utterance event that is a manifestation of, I'm getting all philosophical—virtual in the Whitehead sense, not virtual in the Oculus Rift sense. That there's always, in the world we made, certain things that can come together in real time and get actualized. And so because of the world we made, at any time a glitch can happen, but until it happens, then Deleuze would say, "All of those things are there in the virtual real. The virtual is not unreal, it's just not historically actualized." It's just a cloud, if you will. But not a cloud of stored data or 0's and 1's, it's just a cloud of affective possibilities that could concretize, could come together and then become part of history, which is the actual. So the virtual getting actualized, let's say that's this glitch and then what remains is, back to Derrida, a trace. That's what glitch artists want to call a glitch. It's really a trace of a glitch. If you have a glitch JPEG, the glitch happened after you data-bent the text file

and opened the image in software which displayed the bent text file as visuals. That is the glitch event. But I don't think there's anything wrong with a trace or a residue. That's cool. Like you're saying, I don't think that the end. It's a deferred glitch. You created the glitch it in the text file. There it is stored, waiting to be revealed. Then it is opened in Photoshop and printed. Then finally it is put on a wall waiting to glitch someone's body when they walk past it in the gallery. It's like sending an event through media over time and then the last mile of media that gets glitched is a human body. It's not unrelated to a Trojan horse virus or something. Maybe it's waiting there to run. But the whole world is like this now, unless you live in the woods. Our normal is so dependent on these systems now that these things happen a lot more frequently.

JH I think what's interesting is this idea of the thickness implies there is a materiality. These experiences—though mediated through technology—are not clean, slick, and magical. There's reverberations and there's residues and there's materiality and that idea of the glitch not only just as a result but also an intended experience. That is where the reality of the virtual is interesting, in that it isn't just 1's and 0's. It has materiality and it lives in these places and there is energy and there is time embedded in them. The glitch reveals and then returns.

CC I would say that 0's and 1's in a machine charging silicon, philosophically, that's the actual real.

The virtual to these philosophers is something that hasn't been actualized yet, that has no materiality. It's not that all things are possible at any given time. These things are contingent on history that's happened. These things haven't come together as an event yet. This is back to the wrong models of computing, that we had thought that what was happening inside of the machine was the virtual and was this immaterial thing. It's a weird kind of actual but it's still real and here with us the same way language is still here. I think it was easier to believe that these things didn't have materiality when they were less in control of our world, or less entangled in our world. That's the James Bridle move. He's saying, "Hey look, these things that you thought were removed." Instead of it glitching your screen and then going away, the trace wound up on your street or in your building or in your food." Then the dividing line is less neat.

JH I think that metaphor of the division is still really prevalent and held onto in society and this work I think is interesting because it's really just about saying that separation doesn't exist, that this is right here.

CC I think that this is the critique that some in the glitch community have had, of what they'll call *glitch surface effects* or *glitch as a filter* or *glitch as an aesthetic*. The goal, at least in the glitch politics thing, and with my work is to reveal things that are already there. It's just the fake blood again. If I artificially construct a situation that's supposed to show you something real, It just turns into, "Do you see how real my fake real is?"

JH What's important is that the formal result is not really the glitch. The glitch is the activity or the event, that triggers all of this, right?

CC Yeah. I think so. It also gets tricky. Even in the theatrical realm, where there's a mimetic representation of something. There is still real affect happening. So even when someone sees, the digital print of the glitch art that someone used a Photoshop filter to make. When that person looks at that art, that may be a legitimate glitch event. Even if, you know, the systems that made it were fake, that person gets fooled into having that experience. That's where it gets fascinating to me. Because in a sense, there's little to distinguish an authentic glitch, from a glitch-alike. In the end, if they both look pretty much the same, and they're both presented in a similar space, there is no rules that say, oh you didn't have a legitimate experience, because we know that glitch was not legitimately produced.

JH That context is what becomes really important. It doesn't matter what it looks like. It's the context in which it's experienced.

CC As in all art, but I do think there's a danger of saying the process of production was in-authentic, therefore, the experience that someone is having is illegitimate or artificial. It is no more or less artificial, than the experience they are having if the process was a wild glitch.

JH Right. So do you think that the glitch can be something that, was

designed as intended, or does it have to be an unexpected result. Does that define the authenticity, versus the in-authenticity?

CC I think those are semantic questions. I mean, it doesn't matter what you call it, or how much you want to include. Rosa Menkman thinks of it in terms of how to define it in a way that keeps a community going. She is the steward of that (Glitch Art) community. She's keeping everyone together. And so in a sense, she's thinking how to define it in a way, that makes the community robust enough to proceed. And I think that's a great pragmatic question to ask. Do you know The Lightning Field by Walter De Maria? So when in a sense, you'd say, "Well is that art just the natural systems? Or did that artist artificially stage something?" The whole point of that work is to confound that work. The artist created a field, literally a field of potentially where he knew that the lightning was going to strike a lot in that particular part of the world and he made a field where it was very likely to strike but he can't make it happen without weather systems. So it's part him and it's part foregrounding the weather systems. So I'd like to make work that is like hydraulic management, like diverting rivers or something.

JH You are setting up frameworks to let things play out.

CC And you're letting your agency interfere with the refracting systems and entanglements that are happening right now. I think that these systems and entanglements have happening now in a way to allow companies to make money.

Not to be too terribly cynical. Probably they'll make more money if glitch affects are filtered. Just because everybody's expecting the thing to work and what "to work" means is that the curtain is maintained and we're not aware of the effects of it. If I wait around for those systems to reveal their duds, they will. It's always going to be there but you just have to wait a little longer for it so the impish idea is that perhaps you could intervene in these systems to really cause them to refract wildly. That type of art is land art of networks where you say, "Okay, all of this stuff is already there in the world, so what I need to do as the artist is to make certain moves that cause things to really trick out and erupt and then those moves cause those eruptions to connect to humans in an uncanny way." But it doesn't stop there. Then that uncanniness makes them curious and they're able to follow the trail of the eruptions back into the world. Then they're implied. That's the implicit moment where they say, "Not only did this just trip me out, but that happens to me all the time when I'm skyping my granddaughter." Or, "Oh, then that means CNN is theater." They have this maybe not even intellectual experience but they felt it in their body in some way part of these systems. They feel, "Oh, that's weird but it's not so weird that I don't know what it is because…"

JH It is familiar.

CC And then, "Oh, that's part of the subway I'm going to get on to go back home. I'm living in this and everybody's showing me either some sort of staged re-presentation of this."
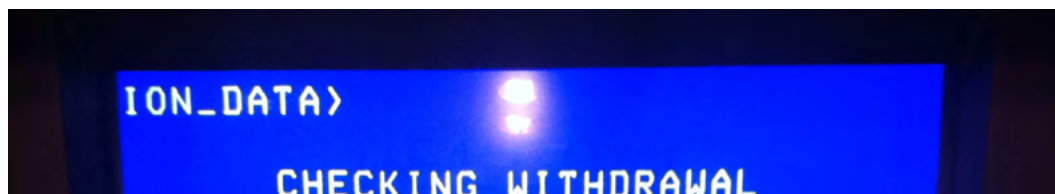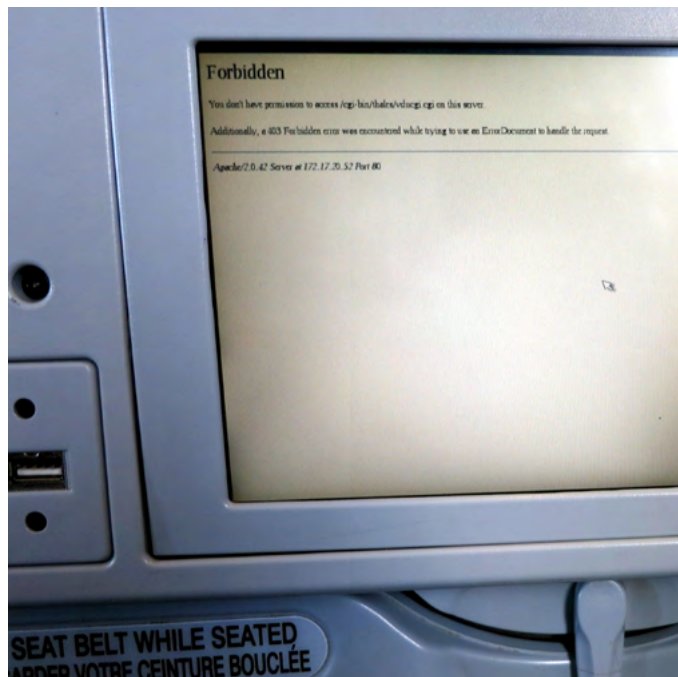
JH I think what's great is the glitch is expected like an eruption, this blunt, jarring thing. But in reality I think the glitches that last, that are really powerful, are those more subtle moments that just reveal what I think what you called these "Oh shit moments" where you say, "Wait a second, this is temporary but it changes my whole world."

CC And then maybe the gallery is not the best place for that to happen because when you go to a gallery, the context is set up to expect something that's going to blow your mind. So everything in there better be pretty darn mind blowing because you're going in to have an art experience. But that's what fun about Internet art is that on the networks, people expect to check their bank statement or whatever. Then if the glitch can happen there, you know. For example, my playdamage.org site. I didn't go out of my way to make it seem confoundedly paranormal, but just the fact that it exists in the same space as somebody's blog or somebody's ad-sponsored news feed or whatever is enough to make people have some sort of uncanny experience with it. I think that there's a way that glitches are filtered and re-presented back to us as technical difficulties and we're not supposed to notice that part. This is what Derrida does with texts. This is de-construction. An author says "This is important." An author marginalizes the thing that would undermine their thing that they're saying is important, so they put that little caveat or exception in a footnote and they say "This is the real point, pay no attention to the footnote behind the curtain," and Derrida takes

the footnote and spends three chapters about the footnote and how the footnote does not undermine the main point, but how the main point is dependent on the footnote. In a sense, that's valuable and it makes the text richer and it helps us understand better what language is doing. I think the more persuasive our dependence on all of the media or the more normal they become, then the more normal that glitch experience becomes. Critics of glitch art would say "Don't you see, this is just the system making glitch normal so that the next time somebody sees a glitch they say 'oh look, how quaint.'" Then you really have to have some crazy eruption for anyone even to pay any attention to. But I don't think it has to be an extreme eruption. It can be real subtle but just at an important fulcrum.

JH Exactly.

CC But what those are, that's artist as Meme Engineer or something like that, like to look for those places where you could find something. I think Clement (Valla) found it with the split between the flat maps and the bump maps. Then now that you found it, how do you foreground the difference? What is your art? Now we're talking about art. This is just how it is when artists take the concepts they're interested in and make art.

JH I'm actually interested in coming from a design perspective. I'm interested in the glitch as a design tool and not necessarily just an art. How it might shift itself in the functional role of a system.

CC Do you know The Interface Effect by Alex Galloway? I think then you get into questions about interface design that are ethical questions. This goes back to Jakob Nielsen (web usability consultant). He thought that because everybody was used to blue-underline links the best design gave everyone blue-underline links, because that was the default browser way. What he was saying was that if the system starts off broken but that's the system people are used to then the better way to do interactive design is just to capitulate to the system they're used to. I say, "No, or we could just design a better Web." There would be a learning curve where people would have to change how they thought about our interfaces but in the end we would have made the world better. It's like a marketing thing where you don't want to be the first one and you don't want to be the third one but you might want to be the second one to market. If you're ahead of the curve no one's going to get it. If you're behind the curve someone will have already gotten it, so from a marketing perspective you want to be a little late but not too late. But from an ethical perspective, you just want to change it. So I think many of the ways that interfaces are designed are based on these platonic presuppositions. The idea that there's a split, that there's a physical, and then there's a transcendental. I do think then that people decided for whatever reason that what was happening inside of the machine was part of that metaphysical world and what language was part of that metaphysical world. So that when you design interfaces you can design according to that paradigm and people will probably get it.

JH Thinking in terms of design, it almost goes back to the beginnings of the web where designing these interactive things was entirely experimental and you simply enter and figure it out as you go. Yet now in the design world, as this stuff gets more and more complicated, it's basically just given up on the middle and says, "We're just going to design on the edges. We're going to make those really clean and that's what everybody knows." I think the design world needs to take inspiration from the art world of getting back into the middle.

CC I agree. I think those are affordances of use and they're conventions and that everyone knows. I wrote a couple of books back in the day on web design, sort of encouraging those communities to be more experimental. About the time I stopped getting asked to talk at web design conferences was the time I started phasing in performing art and talking at art conferences and stuff. To me personally, I understood the realistic mechanisms of these production processes. If someone is paying you to do some in all good conscience, you have to give them something that's going to benefit them and I get that. Whereas art, you don't. I think there's something admirable and cool about design because it leads out into the world. For example Vito Acconci, he follows his practice from poetry to video performance, to installation, to architecture and so now he's got an architecture and clothing firm. To me, if one can figure out a way to do these things and design under those auspices, you have a lot more opportunity

to impact more of the world in a more affective, lived way.

JH Traditionally, you would say that because it's in a more commercial environment, design needed to function and be a productive aspect. But is there's also an opportunity to comment on itself and be part of the dialogue? That dynamic I think is needed and is more interesting.

CC I think it's exciting but I do think it's a little stranger, although it's exciting. There are architects that are, let's say more academic architects, who are changing the way that normal buildings are getting built, from that theoretical place and from the place of a model. You'd want it to be a combination of both because the more pragmatic the field, the harder it is for theory to prevail. It's so easy for someone to say, "I read your paper. I saw your wire framed diagrams. Have you done this anywhere? Did you get a grant to do this? Did a city pay you to do this?" I do think that's the tension that an artist doesn't necessarily have to overcome. There is no rubber meeting any road. I could make art until the cows come home and it's all just a big provocation. Even if I could get something to happen at all, then that can have an effect because when someone sees it as art, they do the leg work and bring it the rest of the way into their life. But with design, they're almost like, "Yeah, that's great but now my toaster doesn't work." I'm just saying that these are the things that I found personally challenging about experimental design. There was much more of this annoying, American pragmatic skepticism out of the box.

I just didn't have the patience for it but I didn't have the patience for freelance clients either, so maybe I just don't have the patience.

JH I also wanted to ask you about the role of writing and teaching along with your practice.

CC For me, this worked out well because I think I'm wired to teach. I stopped teaching for a couple of years, worked at a company, and was getting paid well, but was surprised at how I just knew I needed to get back to teaching. I'm an introvert, but if I'm not in a classroom of people for any amount of time I'm not happy. I do think that's a challenge. In our department, there's some students who just want to get a job. The academia, the administration is always concerned about money. In the end they like don't care what we do. Because if we get press for our art, they're happy. If we get press because our students got a job, they're happy. They just wanted to get press to make money, you know. I think that what I'm offering as a teacher is valuable, but to whom? I don't want to hi-jack our program and our students, to convince them it is valuable to them. I also don't just want to cop out, and go somewhere, like an art school where everybody already has it figured out. There of course they're going to like what you are teaching, they're in art school. Where I teach is, there is the potential to take students who didn't go to school at the Art Institute, but are actually pretty cool artists, if provoked in the right way. Hopefully that type of provocation, coupled with other things from other teachers in our department, makes them a better commercial
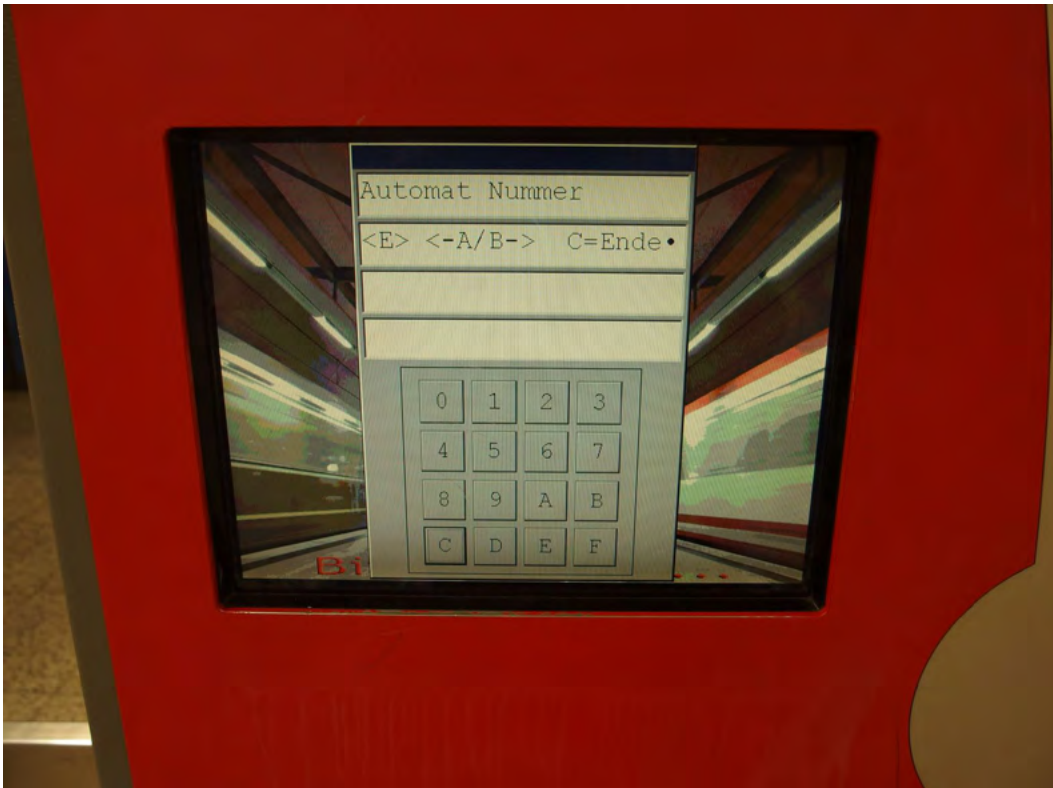
designer. There is a quote, I don't even remember where it, where it comes from, that says, "I want to teach in such a way, that if my students decide to go on and be plumbers, they'll be great plumbers." I teach in a liberal arts context. The students have a core curriculum, and then they are taking history, and I'm teaching theory courses, art courses, and some design courses. For example, I am teaching Max MSP in an upper level. But what good is that for someone wanting to get an emphasis in interactive media and is going to go get a job as a web designer, I have to believe, it's going to make them a better web designer. Even though they will never use MAX to code a website, and they'll never get up and perform in front of anyone at their work. In a way it's a gamble. I think to be an artist is a speculative venture, because pragmatically, unless you're Jeff Koons, you are not making, money. To teach is also a speculative venture. You get paid, but there's no real objective way. Everybody in academia is always trying to, quantify the quality. They want you to give some assessment, but it's all a gamble.
I think about my MFA professors that were at that school for a short amount of time. They were so radical they couldn't last, now they're elsewhere as artists, being experimental. But these two guys in particular they had an impact on my life. They were doing really well. They were all in and it mattered to me.

JH I see how it may affect your students but how does it affect your work?

CC Game Designer Mary Flanagan, who was a part of my graduate experience, said you need to, "figure out a way to teach things that are going to make your writing and your practice better." So I've got to figure out a way to make it work for the students, granted, but I've also got to figure out a way to explore things that are personally interesting to me and I have to believe that is going to make it better for the students. Like with Internet art, it's almost cheating because I assign certain assignments that you want to see worked through that I don't have time to personally work through. By assigning it to the class you get twenty people failing in all sorts of wonderful ways. I'm amazed at the inventiveness of my students, at least, and I assume humans, because of the same constraints but the variability of work that's produced at the undergraduate level.

JH There is something really powerful about naivety.

CC I think so…

JH For me, the contemporary designer should never try to be an expert or completely fluent. By becoming an expert, you become a technician. The designer needs to live in this world where they need to understand how the systems work but not master them because mastering them then limits the potential of how they can be manipulated.

CC I agree. I always think that anything that you've mastered has probably been reduced to such a state that you're

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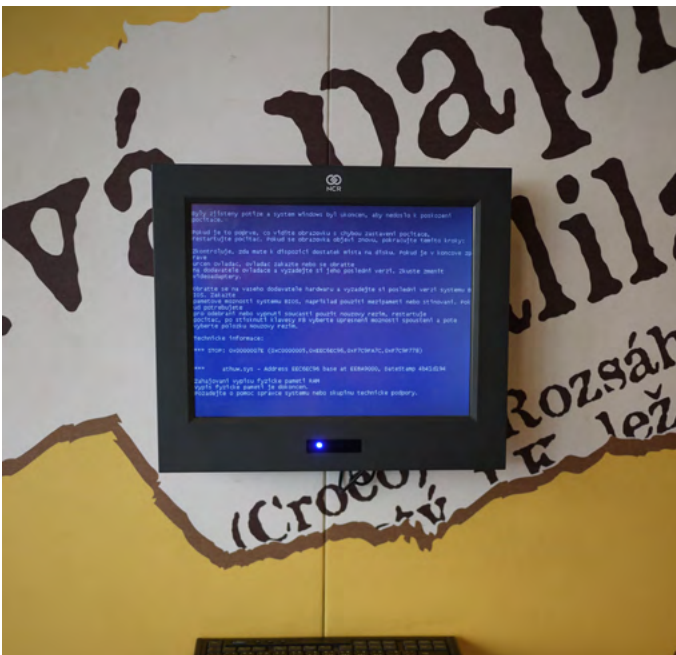
mastering something other than what's actually happening in the world. This is just modernism - in order for me to master something, I have to edit all the things I can't master and call them "non-essential" whereas the experimental naive novice might just jump right in. But even to get a thing that had been declared non-essential 60% right, then all of a sudden it starts doing something in the world that the experts can't understand because they think, "Well, how can you quantify what that's doing?"

"I can't but it sure is doing something, isn't it?"

"Well, we don't like what you did. There's no way we can compete with that because we can quantify it."

In teaching, I never tell the students, "I've never given this assignment before and you probably won't be able to do it and it's almost impossible and I have never seen anyone succeed at this." I just say, "Here is the assignment. It is due in 6 weeks." I'm doing it right now in an Internet art class where the assignment is a non-linear narrative that's compelling. I've never experienced any compelling non-linear narrative. It's like a Holy Grail of new media. But hypertext literature just puts me to sleep. But then the students do really cool stuff. They just think "Well, everybody knows how to do this, I better figure it out."

JH Which is a really great relationship. It's about that dialogue, not only between just the teacher and the student but really between your work, the dialogue that comes out of the questions of the students, etc. We talked about the infinite loop before. Here it is again.

CC It feeds into the students. Do you know Jacques Rancière's book called The Ignorant Schoolmaster. That book changed my world. It's so important to me. To me, it's really provocative experimental pedagogy. He says that really what a teacher does is set a trap for the student to escape and that a teacher assesses the student escaping the trap. He assesses the student's application of their energy and their application of their intelligence. If I know how to set a trap that is provocative enough and I'm able to assess and give feedback on the student's attempt to get out of that trap then I'm going to get a bunch of work that's not derivative of my practice. It will be a bit, but it's not that I teach someone what I know and just simply say, "Here's the thing, here we go." When I give feedback it is not a matter of, "Did you like it or did you not like it?" That's the dumbest question I've ever heard, I'm not going to answer that question. The question should be, "What is the work doing?" You threw something out into the world that is now beginning to connect with the world. Is it connecting with ways you thought it might? Is it connecting with ways you never thought it would? If the latter, are you okay with those unexpected ways? Do you want to claim them as your own and see where they lead? Or is that totally out of bounds and you're not interested in pursuing those things? But back to materials and integral networks. The idea, I know this is not new, that material has agency and when you begin to dialogue with materials, that is the artist's way of dialoging with the way because if the materials has a history in the world then the agency that they have is a result of the ways that they have been

in the world. If I want to learn something about the world that I didn't know before, I better not just bend the materials to my will. How is the material dialoging with the direction? Like wood grain. Cut against, if you want to just get ready for it to fracture.

I suppose it's over-simplistically a difference between a modernist approach to art and an a-modernist approach to art where you're letting the material have its own agency. So in this case, your material happens to be your students. To me, in the end, after teaching for a fair amount of time, one way that I can direct it is just the avoidance of boredom because I just don't want to spend the rest of my life teaching people how to kern typography. It's important, I get it, but I'd rather somebody else teach them that. My hope is if I am pursuing things that are continuously interesting to me, my students will be continuously interested and they will somehow benefit from my avoidance of the things that bore me. Doesn't that sound like a real sad, unethical, selfish mojo? But in the end it's just pragmatism because you're the one that has to wake up everyday and what kind of life do you want to live?

JH You are essentially a glitch in the student's life, you're this singular moment and they are going to go out and do whatever they want to do. You are just a disruption. I'm not afraid to admit, for me, teaching is a selfish pursuit. I love the idea of being in the classroom and the dialogue that comes with it but it also is the opportunity to do the things that I want to do on a regular basis.

CC It's a way to make money. I think that's a great constraint too. Money connects us to the world. I understand that there are a million different ways to make money and spend money. But I don't mind that. People don't always like the glitch and so your teaching evaluations may not necessarily be as good as someone else's teaching evaluations who is giving them what they had expected but that's the gamble.

JH As a teacher, our job is to provoke a question. It's similar to this art and design dynamic because as a teacher it's not my responsibility to give you this checklist of skill sets. I am going to push you to navigate that world and ask questions about that world in an interesting way.

CC And set interesting traps.

JH I love the idea of the trap.

CC I used to go into discussion classes with notes and now I just go in with questions. Before I'm through with asking all of the questions, anything that I had wanted to say was said and 30 other things were said that I didn't even know were going to get said.

One of the things that we say or I say on the program is, "What's the difference between art and design?" Of course, that's a fun thing to talk about forever, but in one way is a designer starts with a preloaded problem and the artist has to make their own problem. Yet once the artist has made their problem, perhaps process-wise, the artist and the designer are pretty similar. But the artist can always modify the problem. If the
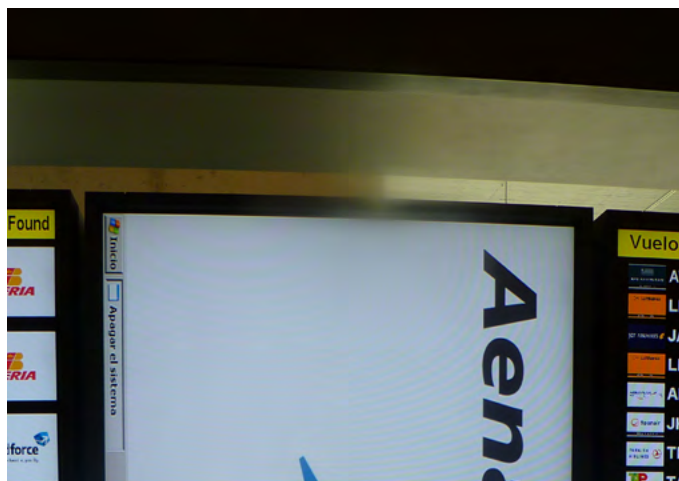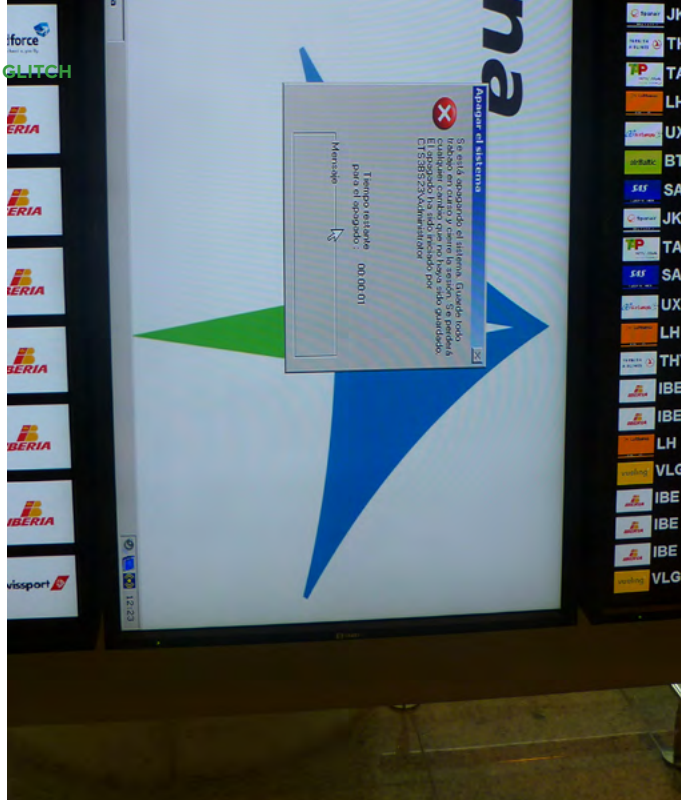
The preceding images were collected from
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Errors Pool*.
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designer starts modifying the original creative brief, then the client says, "Well, we agreed. You can't do that."

I do think that there's a way, even as an experimental designer, to set it up a process and not necessarily an outcome. If you can get the client to sign off on it then you've got better PR skills than I do. I think that the value of asking good questions is that people get muscles in their brain. This is the presupposition of the Rancière (and Jacotot) method, the emancipatory teaching method. He says that all intelligences are equal and he says when you get up and start lecturing, according to the lecture method, the first thing your student learn is that they are dumber than you are. An emancipatory method is to say, "I hope you are smarter than me because I'm good at tricking out your smarts. I'm not good at being smarter than you, although I may be that too, but that's incidental to teaching. I've been practicing how to get you to be real smart and I know you've got it in you because you're wired that way and here we go."

So you begin immediately by enabling someone rather than by putting them down. That's the theory. I don't know whether it works with teaching rocket science or brain surgery. It might, but I don't know. I think it works teaching art and I've enjoyed it more than the other way.

> JH I could ask you a million more questions but this has been really, really great.

CC No, I enjoyed talking. Thank you.

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Curt Cloninger is an artist, writer and Assistant Professor of New Media at the University of North Carolina Asheville, USA. His art undermines language as a system of meaning in order to reveal it as an embodied force in the world. He maintains http:// lab404.com, http://playdamage. org and http://deepyoung.org in order to facilitate a more lively remote dialogue with the Sundry Contagions of Wonder.

Mute

MANIFESTO FOR A THEORY OF THE 'NEW AESTHETIC'

By Curt Cloninger , 3 October 2012

Art / Computing / Posthumanist

Image: Image enacting the uncanny valley. This image is a New Aesthetic image. (Clement Valla, from Postcards from Google Earth, 2011)

At this high-point of high-tech, machines are producing aesthetic experiences for us as never before. Should we respectfully thank them and consider ourselves their peers? Curt Cloninger suggests something more irreverent

Aesthetic experience is always asymmetrical; it needs to be posed in terms of a subject, as well as an object.
– Steven Shaviro

What Is the 'New Aesthetic'?

If, according to Debord, 'the spectacle is capital accumulated to such a degree that it becomes an image', then the New Aesthetic is technology accumulated to such a degree that it becomes an image. The New Aesthetic (NA) image is a special kind of image – an image which is bodily, affectively sussable by humans. The NA image is not merely (or even) an image to be intellectually pondered by humans. You 'get it' before you understand it (if you ever even come to understand it).
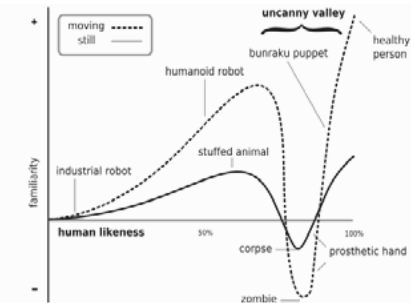
Image: Graph explaining the uncanny valley. This graph is not a New Aesthetic image

'Things' don't affectively suss the NA image. Only humans 'get it'.

The New Aesthetic is not new (or it has always already been perpetually new). The fact that the NA has recently hit some sort of pop-meme coagulation tipping point (and acquired an ontological name) is merely evidence that technology has finally accumulated to the point of being easily and widely recognised as a collection of Tumblr *images* without needing to be supported or explained by any underlying *theory* whatsoever. (Indeed, James Bridle's Tumblr launched the New Aesthetic meme, and Bruce Sterling's journalistic blog dispersed it.) The New Aesthetic has been intuited by hands-on coders for decades (perhaps centuries). It has been discussed by media theorists for at least as long. This is why old school media artists like Mez Breeze and old school media theorists like Simon Biggs (on old school listservs like NetBehaviour) are left fairly unimpressed with the current 'gee whiz' enthusiasm about the New Aesthetic. 'The future is already here — it's just not very evenly distributed' (William Gibson, in some places as early as 1993). The future is (always already) in the process of becoming ever more evenly distributed.

When a meme (like 'the New Aesthetic') is initially introduced and received, it is arguably fruitful to leave off theorising about it and avoid trying to codify it. Let speculation and confusion reign and see where things lead. This approach works fine in the beginning; but after a while, it leads to the worst kind of lowest-common-denominator, self-referential, reblogged intellectual sludge.

The 'New Aesthetic movement' exists only in the imaginations of a group of bloggers promoting an agenda for which I have no sympathy whatsoever: actor-network theory spiced with pan-psychist metaphysics and morsels of process philosophy. I don't believe the internet is an appropriate medium for serious artistic debate; nor do I believe it is acceptable to try to concoct an artistic movement online by using blogs to exploit the misguided enthusiasm of impressionable graduate students. I agree with Deleuze's remark that ultimately the most basic task of art is to impede stupidity, so I see little artistic merit in a 'movement' whose most signal achievement thus far is to have generated an online orgy of stupidity. (Ray Brassier, in a 2011 interview for the Polish journal *Kronos*)

I have taken the liberty of replacing 'speculative realist' with 'New Aesthetic', 'philosophical' with 'artistic', and 'philosophy' with 'art'.

The New Aesthetic is not a single aesthetic. Drone technology produces its own visual aesthetics. Google Maps produces its own visual aesthetics. Generative Processing code produces its own visual aesthetics. Glitches across various media, compression algorithms, and hardware displays produce their own visual aesthetics. These myriad aesthetics are each as singular and unique as the entangled culture/nature histories which led to the development and deployment of these various technologies and their gradual accumulation into human-sussable images.

The term 'New Aesthetic' is similar to the term 'New Media'. When your descriptive adjective is as vague as 'new' (or 'modern' or 'contemporary'), then all ontological constraints are off. Your movement is open to embrace 'what's happenin'' in the [future-]now.

The speculative playing field of the New Aesthetic is even broader than the speculative playing field of New Media; because 'media' are still indebted to the technical, formal, material constraints; whereas aesthetics (even 'old' Kantian aesthetics) have always been philosophically malleable.

Those less theoretically inclined might argue that since the New Aesthetic begins with an affectively intuited image, that's where it should end. Yo Bros, I'm really happy for you. Imma let you finish, but...

The New Aesthetic is not a new flavour of aesthetics. At best, and properly understood, it is a new way of understanding aesthetics altogether, one that renegotiates the relationship between human-subject and non-human-object. Perhaps we need a less historically-encrusted word for this 'new' relationship than 'aesthetic'. But lets keep

'aesthetic' for now. It forces us to revisit Kant, Schiller, Freud, Heidegger, and Whitehead; and those guys had a lot of Tumblr followers back in the day.

'I'm lost in the dark / Lend me your teeth.' (Devendra Banhart, 2002). Post-Media theorist and curator Domenico Quaranta says the New Aesthetic will never be a critical criteria for art unless it grows some theoretical teeth. Currently, it is too preoccupied with surface sheen and not concerned enough with cultural analysis. Agreed. So let's try to grow it some teeth and see what happens...

A Process Without a Singular 'Aesthetic' Intentionality

The New Aesthetic image is like outsider art incidentally created by systems.

The New Aesthetic is indifferent to mimesis. The NA image is not the re-presentation of an object. The NA image is the incidental visual residue of the performance or enactment of a process. The process never intentionally alters itself in order to achieve the 'goal' of the NA image. The NA image is a trace, a remnant, a remainder, a residue, a (potential) clue. The 'subject' of the NA image (when sussed, aright) is the process itself. In this sense, the New Aesthetic is akin to process art, if we substitute 'world' for 'studio' and 'human/non-human entanglements' for 'artist'.

Images above: Traces of historical forces – Tim Knowles, *Larch (4 pen) on Easel #1*, 2005

Image: Traces of different historical forces: Tim Knowles, *Oak on Easel #1*, 2005

The New Aesthetic image is a Leibnizian 'texture'. It reveals more about the processes and systems that 'produced' it than it does about itself.

Technology was never *evolving toward* the production of this or that NA image. Beware of teleology! Technology was never *trying* to make this or that NA image. Beware of anthropocentrism! (Especially beware of the kind of anthropocentrism committed in the name of overcoming anthropocentrism.)

The difference between Pollock and Cage: Pollock's process is still *heading toward* the production of an aesthetic art object (as judged by his inherited idea of aesthetics). Cage's process is *heading toward* whatever it winds up being. For Cage, chance operations become a vehicle to escape inherited notions of aesthetics. New Aesthetic images are produced by processes that fall somewhere between Pollock and Cage. NA images are not produced solely by randomness, nor are they produced in order to conform to a pre-conceived human aesthetic. NA images are produced by entangled nature/culture systems. Thus, human will is always partially involved in their production, but it is rarely an aesthetic will *heading toward* the production of NA images. Usually, it is the will to make more money, modulated through complex technological entanglements which have accumulated to such a degree that NA images are incidentally (although not arbitrarily) produced. To fetishise the NA image as a mere 'aesthetic' object is

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to conveniently ignore the ethical ways in which we are implicit in its production. To fetishistically credit 'machines' as the primary agents behind the production of NA images is to conveniently ignore the ethical ways in which we are implicit in their production.

The New Aesthetic image, in-and-of-itself, *in stasis*, is kind of cool. Cooler yet is the way in which the NA image reveals the historical forces that have come together to 'produce' it *in stasis*. Coolest is the way in which the NA image reveals how things are currently coming together *in process*; and how things may possibly come together in the near future.

New Aesthetic images aren't representative, analogous, archetypal, emblematic, or symbolic of any thing else. They are the actual traces and residues of processes and relationships – traces that have arrived in the visual realm and have entered humans via their eyes. NA images don't symbolise or represent the processes that have led to their creation. Instead, they are incidentally thrown into the world by those processes. The way backwards from the images toward the processes themselves is much more complicated that simply intellectually thinking about what these images look 'like'. We initially apperceive NA images bodily and affectively. They are freaky. They trip us out. Only later are we able to reflect on them analytically, letting their own systemic contours and folds guide our theoretical thought.

Because NA images are apperceived and explored along affective lines, submitting these images to pre-existing modes of critical theory (Marxism, feminism, post-humanism, futurist journalism) may not be enough. What escapes may be more fruitful than what is captured.

Which thinkers are most relevant to the development of a New Aesthetic theory? Deleuze starts to become pragmatically (not just speculatively) relevant. (This might turn out to be 'his century' after all.) Bruno Latour becomes increasingly relevant. Benjamin and Debord remain relevant, but less for their Marxism than their moxie. Baudrillard is a wild goose chase (but then he always was). Graham Harman is a bit of a detour (leading to a dead-end overlooking a noble vista). Whitehead is spot on (but then he always was).

We are not merely left to choose between cyber-utopianism and cyber-dystopianism. Because, like modernism/postmodernism, utopia/dystopia are two sides of the same teleological coin. As Bruno Latour rightly asserts, we have never been modern, we just fooled ourselves into thinking we were. When the truly new emerges, if it is indeed properly new, it won't look like utopia, dystopia, modernism, or postmodernism. It will look (and feel) monstrous and uncanny. 'The future can only be anticipated in the form of absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, presented, as a sort of monstrosity.' (Derrida, 1967).

New Aesthetic Images are Affectively Sussed *By Humans, Not by Things*

> An overdub has no choice / an image cannot rejoice'
> – Carole King, 1968

It bears repeating: 'Things' don't affectively suss New Aesthetic images. Only humans 'get' NA images. There is no machine 'aesthetic', no robotic 'vision'. Humans invent aesthetic theories regarding the interpretation of machine-generated images. Machines do not invent aesthetic theories regarding the interpretation of circuit-generated images. Likewise, no rock ever invented an ontology. Humans develop ontologies which include rocks. Humans may even philosophically speculate what ontologies rocks might invent. But rocks-themselves do not invent rock-centric ontologies. Nor do rocks-themselves philosophically speculate what ontologies dirt might invent.

If there were a clear dividing line between humans and things, then the 'aesthetics' of the New Aesthetic would lie *mostly* on the side of humans. Between humans and things, there is no clear dividing line.

The New Aesthetic is not just about intellectually 'getting' it when it comes to technology. Heck, Paul Simon 'gets it' as early as 1986:

> The bomb in the baby carriage was wired to the radio... The way the camera follows us in slo-mo. The way we look to us all. The way we look to a distant constellation that's dying in a corner of the sky. These are days of miracle and wonder... And the dead sand falling on the children, the mothers, and the fathers, and the automatic earth... Medicine is magical and magical is art... lasers in the jungle somewhere... Staccato signals of constant information. A loose affiliation of millionaires and billionaires.

Simon's lyric reads like a (much more poetic) version of any number of summative lists recently offered to catalogue the underlying technologies of the New Aesthetic. And that's *Paul Simon* in *1986*. Yes, we all get it. We have gotten it for some time now.

The most intriguing thing about the New Aesthetic is that we all now 'get it' affectively via NA *images*. Our human bodies have a way of 'getting it' before our human intellects do.

Image: Jon Rafman, from 9-eyes.com, ongoing. Artist/curator/human Jon Rafman 'gets it', The 9-eyed, vehicle-mounted, Google camera apparatus does not

New Aesthetic images can teach us humans a New Aesthetic. But as we listen to this New Aesthetic, what we are hearing is neither the *pure* voice of nature nor the *adulterated* voice of machines. We are listening to systems in the world – a world that we are co-creating, a world of which we are always already a part (never apart).

Down With Pan-Psychism!

Pan-psychism is the idea that all things in the world (rocks, animals, predator drones, weather systems, Hello Kitty lunchboxes) have consciousness. The pipe dream of Artificial Intelligence is related to pan-psychism. Pan-psychism is the played-out rabbit trail of the New Aesthetic. 'It's a trap!' (Admiral Ackbar). Just because we've finally come to recognise that things and systems have their own agency and are not merely passive and inert, this doesn't mean that things and systems have consciousness.

We humans have become so enamoured of honouring 'the other' that we have come to equate self-denigration with ethical behaviour. Not only do we see ourselves as sexist and racist (which we are), we have come to see ourselves as species-ist (animals are people too) and thing-ist (things are people too). The irony is, as we seek to honour things-in-themselves (thus nobly overcoming our anthropocentric narcissism), we extend to things the highest honour we can imagine – humanness! To imbue things and systems with a kind of consciousness is actually the epitome of anthropocentrism. The conquering European must first dress the native up in civilised clothes before she can be treated as an equal. And now we extend the same ridiculous, narcissistic 'courtesy' to things.

It is not enough that we seek to elevate things to our level; we feel as if we must lower ourselves to thing level. We humans are now no better than things. We are actually mere things ourselves (or mere systems of micro-things, depending on your scalar preferences). And the rocks bow their heads as we pass by, in deference to our enlightened humility.

As a result, we humans are hubristically tempted to attribute the uncanniness of New Aesthetic images to the pan-psychic agency of AI technology. 'Gee, these systems must be sentient (in a way that we humans are sentient), because we humans sure didn't invent these crazy new images.' This response is half-right and all wrong. We humans had a 'hand' in inventing these images, but ours was not the only 'hand'. Systems, materials, things, assemblages co-invented these NA images with us.

Up with Pan-Experientialism!

Pan-experientialism is the idea that all things in the world experience 'being' over time. Forces and events in the world ingress into things in a way that is experienced by those things.

Few things have the same qualitative types of experience. Rock-being-ness isn't human-being-ness (and human-being-ness isn't what it used to be). Alfred North Whitehead puts it like this: experience is the base of all being; consciousness is the apex of all being. So although rocks don't think like humans (indeed, rocks don't think at all), at some base level of being, humans and rocks both experience.

Furthermore, humans don't consciously 'think' everything that we 'experience'. We affectively and bodily experience all sorts of things we don't ever think at all. Only a fraction of our human experiences ingress into our conscious (or even subconscious) awareness.

Pan-experientialism means that humans are a little more like things than we thought, and that things are a little more like humans than we thought. It doesn't mean that humans are mere rocks, or that rocks have consciousness.

We need to understand things as vector forces enacting within networks, not as anthropomorphised objects. Yes,

thing have agency, but their agency is altogether thingy. Emergent systems (a.k.a. things made up of things) exercise all sorts of funky agency: flocking behaviours, attraction to strange attractors, radical modulations at state-change thresholds. Yes, non-inert behaviours; but not sentient behaviours. A painter enters into a kind of pragmatic dialogue with the viscous and luminous behaviours of her paint. She need not speculate about its withdrawn essence.

New Aesthetic Images: The Uncanny, the Present-At-Hand, the Sublime

> Kansas, I've a feeling we're not in Toto any more
> – Dorothy (chopped & screwed)

Aesthetics are related to both experience and consciousness. Aesthetics are born in experience and arrive at consciousness. No consciousness at which to arrive, no aesthetics. So when we talk about aesthetics, we're mostly talking about humans. (Unless we want to radically re-define aesthetics, in which case we should probably use a different word.)

Beginning with **Freud**: New Aesthetic images are uncanny (*unheimlich*, un-homelike). If NA images were totally familiar, we would read them as family photos. (They are our new family photos.) If they were totally alien, we would read them as so much white noise. Instead, New Aesthetic images are somewhere in-between, in the Uncanny Valley: that disturbing interzone where something 'non-human' is almost human enough to seem 'human', but not quite. We recognise ourselves in NA images, but also something other than ourselves; or rather, still ourselves – but ourselves complicated, enmeshed, othered.

We humans are developing new, more purposefully affective ways of reading these new images.

> The only way to read is acrobatically, fast and with lots of background noise (disco music or television), for that encourages more speed and more rapid processing of the information that cannot be processed except as a function of peripheral seeing and distracted absorption… To read poetry carefully and slowly is to miss the point, which is the blur.
> – Tan Lin, *Cabinet Magazine*, Issue 1, 2000/2001

On to **Heidegger**: Graham Harman interprets Heidegger's *vorhandenheit* (presence-at-hand) as an eruption of the thing out of its normal function in the world (its normal function is *zuhandenheit*, 'readiness-to-hand'). The thing was *there* all along; but we never saw it *this way* until now. This eruption is a useful way of understanding NA images. NA images are visual eruptions of everyday functioning systems in the world, systems humans never saw *in this way* until now. Like Heidegger's broken hammer – the carpenter only stops to reflect on it once it stops working as expected.

New Aesthetic visuals don't necessarily 'reveal' a hidden 'truth'. It's not as if readiness-to-hand is false and presence-at-hand is true, or vice versa. They are just two simultaneous ways of being in the world. (Heidegger's genius – his 'sleight of hand' – was to draw our attention to readiness-to-hand without turning it into presence-at-hand.)

As per Bruno Latour (and with Heidegger turning in his grave), our current systems have proliferated and hybridised beyond our ken to strange and complex degrees. New Aesthetic images strike at the heart of the modernist myth that man is master and measure of all things. Something much more trippy is actually happening. We are caught up in a proliferation of hybrid hammers ever breaking.

From Heidegger to **Kant**: New Aesthetic images are more sublime than beautiful. They are sublime because they affectively impact humans in ways which imply the subterranean, ongoing operation of assemblages which have not yet been resolved, and may never resolve; assemblages beyond human mastery, yet in which humans are implicated and entangled. The affective feelings NA images evoke in humans confound Schiller's attempts to reconcile the sensuous and the formal in 'play'. NA images are neither human 'art' nor non-human 'nature'. They were not created to address a static conception of human nature, nor to dialectically overcome preconceived contradictory drives within human nature. Neither were they created by extra-human forces in order to provide human 'subjects' with 'natural' objects for aesthetic contemplation. Instead, NA images are residues that result from current ways of being in the world, entangled ways in which humans are 'always already' implicated. At their best, NA images challenge humans to re-imagine 'humanness' 'being' and 'the world' altogether.

Four Summaries, Three Quotations and a Closing Exhortation

Matter matters. Things (light, networks, economies, rocks, paint, pixels) have their own agency. Things are already in the world, in dialogue with the world, forming and being formed by other things in the world. Indeed, according to Heidegger, things in relationship with other things make up 'the world'. No things; no 'world'. Things don't consciously 'know stuff' about the world, but... things behave in ways derived from their history in the world and from their current entanglements with the world. Things are caught up in the world (of other things), and the world is caught up in things.

'What might things make of the New Aesthetic?' is not a very useful question. 'What might humans make of the New

Aesthetic once we realise that we have been entangled with things all along?' is a more useful question. Bruno Latour says that modernism was simply a time when humans thought we weren't entangled with things, when actually we were. What we made of that time unawares was an even bigger entangled mess (Latour's term is 'a proliferation of hybrids') – atom bombs as inverted guardian angels, global warming debates as orthodox scientific catechisms. At this point, it seems unlikely that we are going to avoid further complex human/thing entanglements, so trying to avoid them is probably something we should try to avoid. On the other hand, we should also avoid passively sitting around, techno-fetishistically dazzled by these 'spectacular new developments', blithely watching a real-time documentary of ourselves watching a real-time documentary of ourselves. Probably, we should spend some time figuring out how these systems flow and function so we can more effectively modulate them (or sabotage them), hopefully for reasons other than making more money.

All of this stuff is cool. Does it mean that objects have souls, psyches, withdrawn essences, or intelligences? No. Does it mean that humans are merely one thing among many things, no more or less endowed with agency? No.

It does mean that humans are recursively entangled with things and forces in increasingly problematic ways (Bruno Latour told us this in 1991.) Furthermore, it means that humans affectively experience all sorts of things in the world prior to (and often without ever) cognitively becoming aware of these experiences; it means that things also affectively 'experience' forces in the world; and it means that systems, ideas, networks, entanglements, forces, events, technologies, animals, humans and objects are all 'things' in 'the world'. (Whitehead told us this in 1927. His word for 'things' is 'entities.') The fact that a bunch of people are currently talking about all this stuff online simply means that our technology has accumulated to such a degree that it has become an image – an image we can all (tech geeks, object oriented philosophers, sci-fi journalists, tumblr-ing graphic designers, twenty-something net.artists, ~~rocks~~) affectively suss.

*

'I have no doubt that in reality the future will be vastly more surprising than anything I can imagine. Now my own suspicion is that the Universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose.' (J. B. S. Haldane, 1927).

'There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons.' (Gilles Deleuze, 1990).

'Be very very quiet / Clock everything you see / Little things might matter later / At the start of the end of history.' (Steely Dan, 2003).

*

Do carry on funking & wagging, but with rigour. Little things might matter later.

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Dear josie@metamute.org,

I recently read Curt Cloninger's article "Manifesto for a Theory of the 'New Aesthetic'" and must applaud the critical commentary this article posits in regard to the 'New Aesthetic' debate. I have found that the argument revolving around the New Aesthetic, coined by James Bridle in 2011, resides in two distinct camps— neither of which accurately represent the issues at hand. The first, is full of those thoroughly enthusiastic about the visual splendor of all things NA(New Aesthetic), the second, those unhappy by its lack of theoretical basis and traditional presentation as a critical position. In the words of Ray Brassier, "I don't believe the Internet is an appropriate medium for serious artistic debate; nor do I believe it is acceptable to try to concoct an artistic movement online by using blogs to exploit the misguided enthusiasm of impressionable graduate students." [1] Brassier resides in group two.

My concern is the presence of a third category which often goes unmentioned and may provide a more appropriate location for many of the wallflowers in the first two categories. This third category is of those who do not understand. In Cloninger's manifesto he takes the torch of this middle ground and I commend his willingness to define the New Aesthetic in an appropriate manner. Over the past year, since James Bridle's 2011 provocation, the term 'New Aesthetic' has come to encapsulate anything that references digital culture, i.e. anything that looks like pixels. Like Cloninger, I see the problem with the mass hysteria of interest in NA. While this debate is young, its immediate hype has spread the term far beyond the reality of its practice, and the medium of Tumblr, for example, as its battle station only fuels this. Anyone can post anything and the quality of discourse has degraded significantly. This has lead the argument to being about only the aesthetics and the frameworks, not about the works themselves.

Thankfully, Cloninger re-centers us and returns the conversation to where it should be. He goes back to NA's roots and defines where this type of work came from and what it truly represents. He outlines how the NA image "is the incidental visual
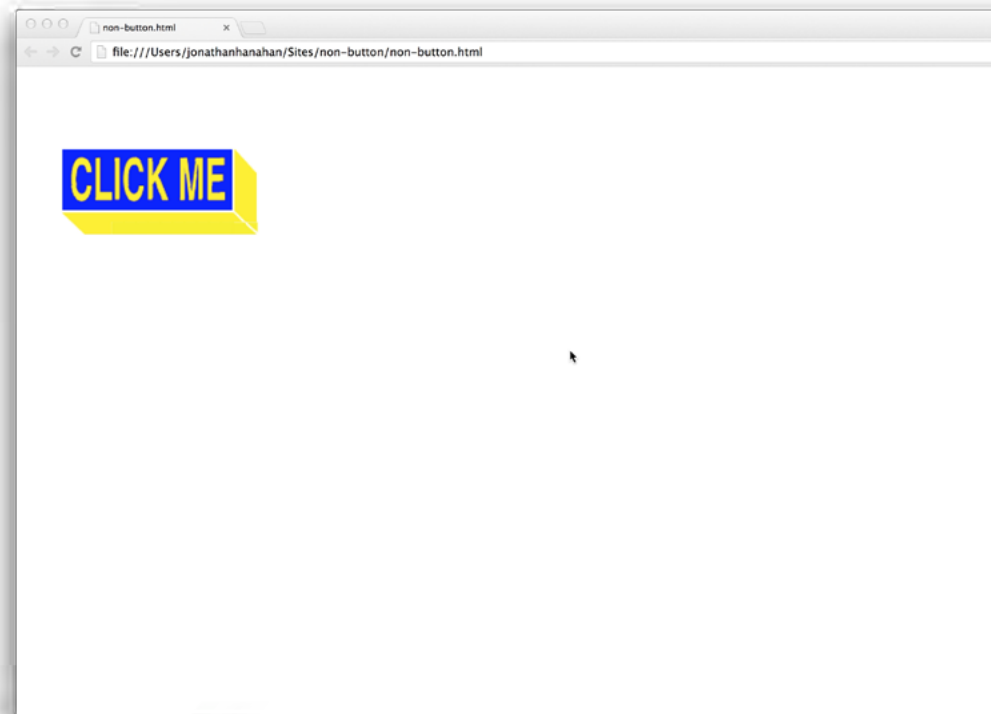
residue of the performance or enactment of a process…The NA image is a trace, a remnant, a remainder, a residue, a (potential) clue. The 'subject' of the NA image (when sussed, aright) is the process itself."[2] The value in this statement is that the New Aesthetic is not something artists and designers strive to make, it is the sawdust and scraps of the contemporary process of making that creates these moments, and therefore makes them interesting and valuable. We, as creators, should not be striving to simply make NA images. The New Aesthetic is a step on the way towards something else, something of value, something which helps us understand and navigate contemporary life; it is not an end point. The merit of admitting that the NA lives in a world of question marks is what makes the works' potential so enlightening. If we learn to evaluate these works as tools for understanding, rather than just pretty artifacts, the debate can evolve beyond a surface value argument and move into a more critical and productive debate.

Cloninger approaches this work with excitement but also skepticism and I feel his second summary represents his (and my) statement perfectly. He states, "At this point, it seems unlikely that we are going to avoid further complex human/thing entanglements, so trying to avoid them is probably something we should try to avoid. On the other hand, we should also avoid passively sitting around, techno-fetishistically dazzled by these 'spectacular new developments', blithely watching a real-time documentary of ourselves watching a real-time documentary of ourselves. Probably, we should spend some time figuring out how these systems flow and function so we can more effectively modulate them (or sabotage them), hopefully for reasons other than making more money."[3] Mostly, I value Cloninger's willingness to embrace the naïveté of the now and his position that this debate, the Tumblr, and the discussion are the first steps towards a larger discourse. In his voice, I can feel his excitement about the potential to define a field of practice that will guide the role of art and design in the coming years. He maintains a passive mentality that encourages us to resist the temptation to dive into the unknown and simply enjoy the today, the reality of these
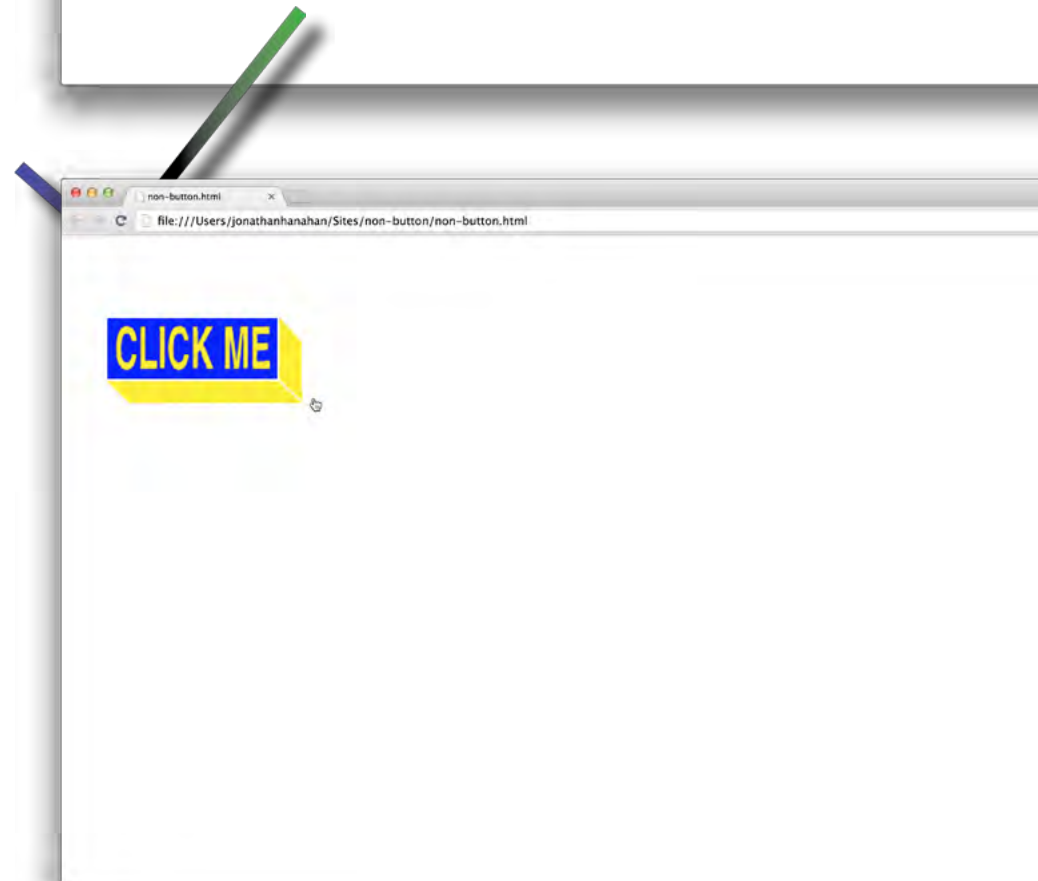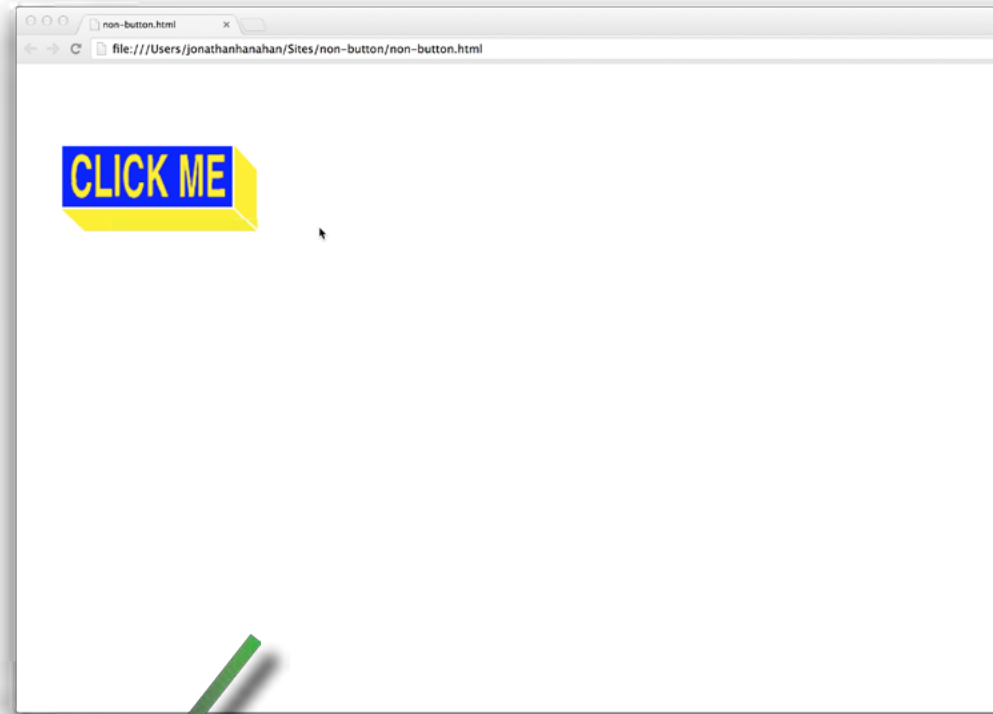
images, what they mean, and what they teach us. In the end, the NA is about educating the public regarding our evolving invisible world. I feel Curt Cloninger is the first one to publicly acknowledge the unknown and resist the temptation to become a New Aesthetic image himself.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Hanahan

[1] Ray Brassier, in a 2011 interview for the Polish journal *Kronos*, quoted in Curt Cloninger, *Manifesto for a Theory of The 'New Aesthetic'*, (*Mute*, October 3, 2012), 2.

[2] Curt Cloninger, "Manifesto for a Theory of The 'New Aesthetic'," Mute, October 3, 2012, accessed September 24, 2013, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/manifesto-theory-%E2%80%98new-aesthetic%E2%80%99.

[3] Ibid.

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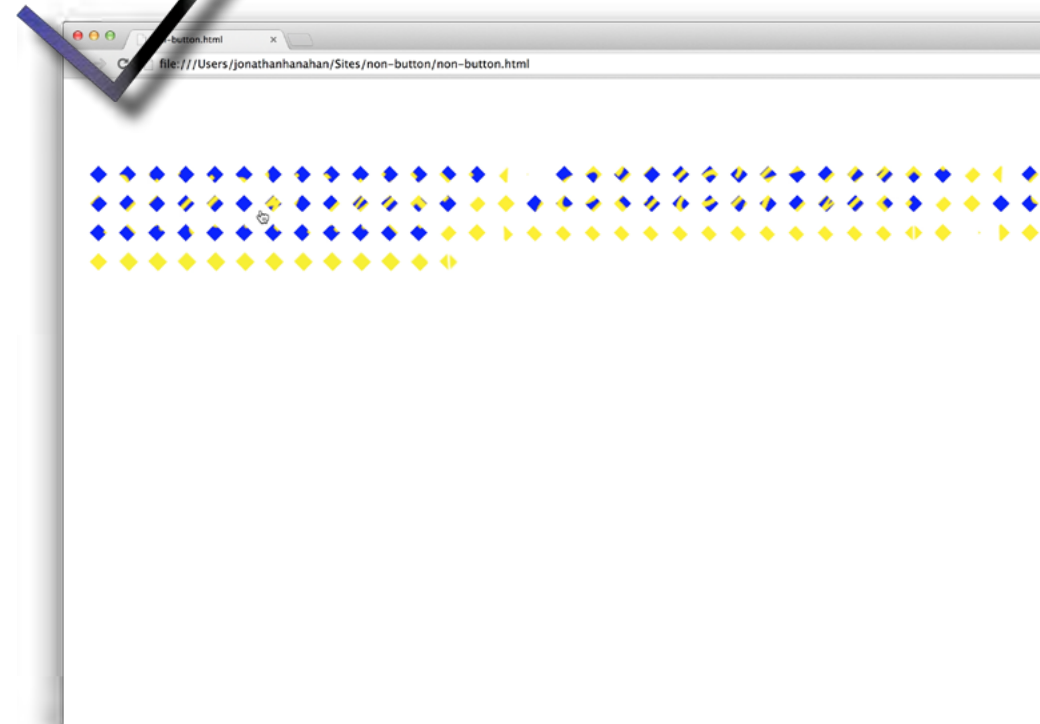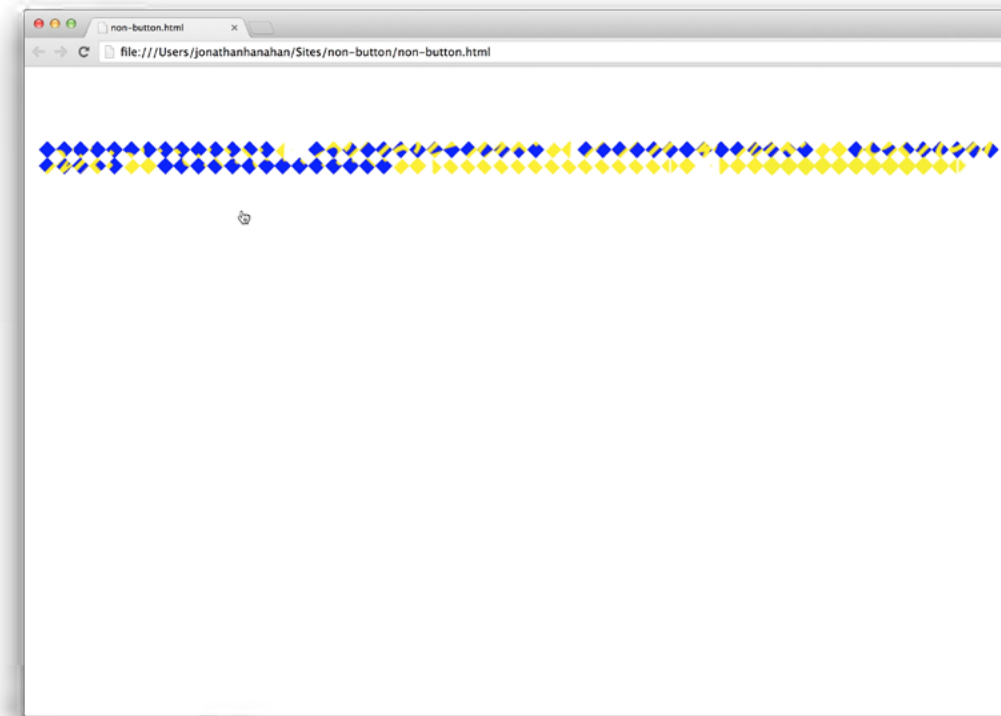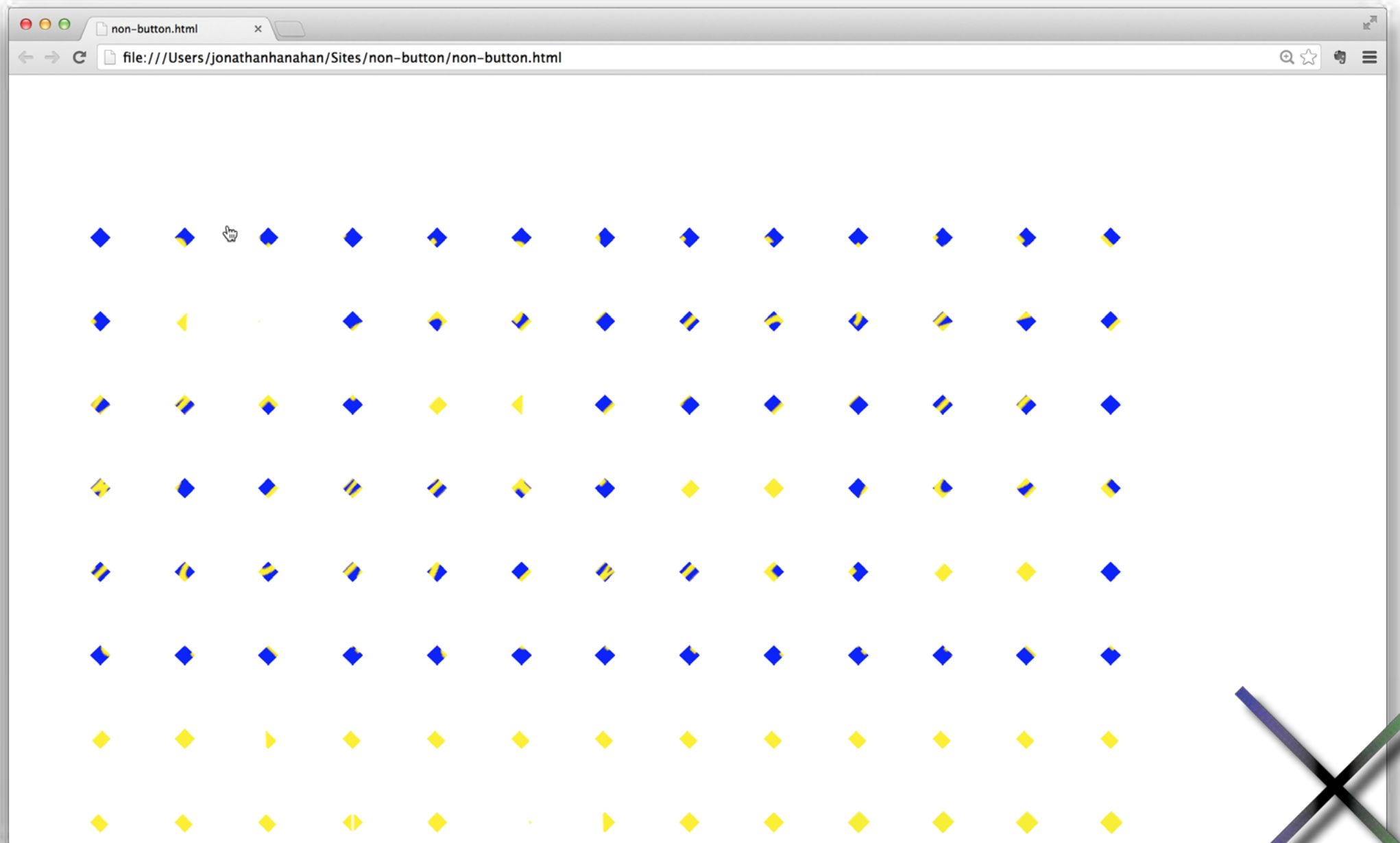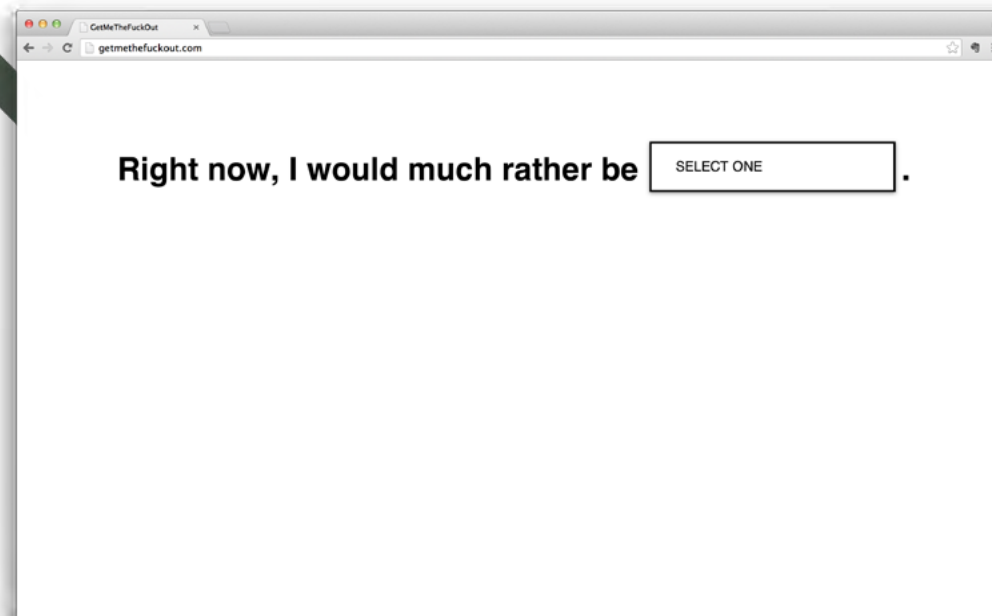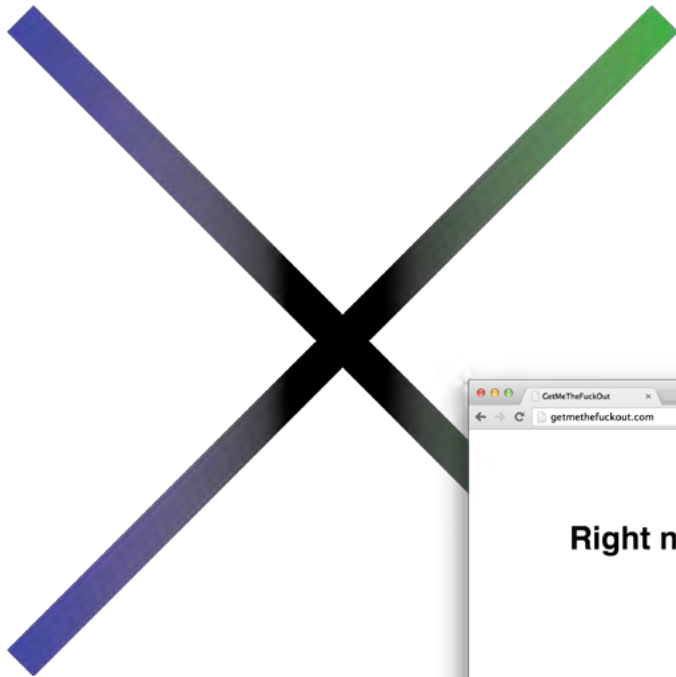
I am interested in how our digital systems mimic their analogue counterparts.

Specifically, how non-verbal communication is also able to traverse the vastness of these systems.

GETMETHEFUCKOUT.COM
2013, Single Serve Website

This project experiments with using Google Street View API's to explore a virtual escape compared to a physical one, and to challenge an audience's expectation of physical presence and location.

This work was inspired by projects which utilize the potential of the Internet as a habitable medium for transportation and reoccupation. Specifically, the works of OKFocus, a creative agency specializing in social web applications, which amplify the interactive experience of the web browser to create unexpected connections. In this context, *getmethefuckout.com* pushes the boundaries of what Google means in our everyday lives. Traditionally, this powerful database is used to find the nearest store,

Right now, I would much rather be SELECT ONE .

Welcome Screen, Escape Portal

or the fastest route to a destination. By reshaping the framework for how we interact with the database, and focusing on purely emotional desires for exploration and wonder, *getmethefuckout.com* opens up a portal for mental escape.

Through a simple fill in the blank interface, this single serve website transports a visitor out of the everyday and into another location by answering questions about activities opposed to destination. Destinations were chosen for their extreme qualities. They are places we most likely would never have the
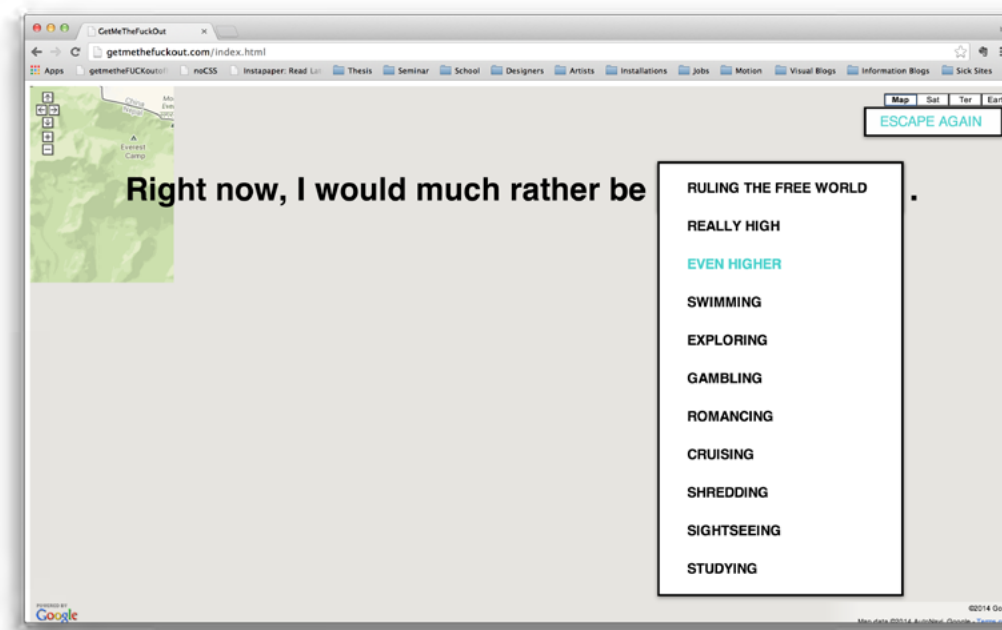
In Transition
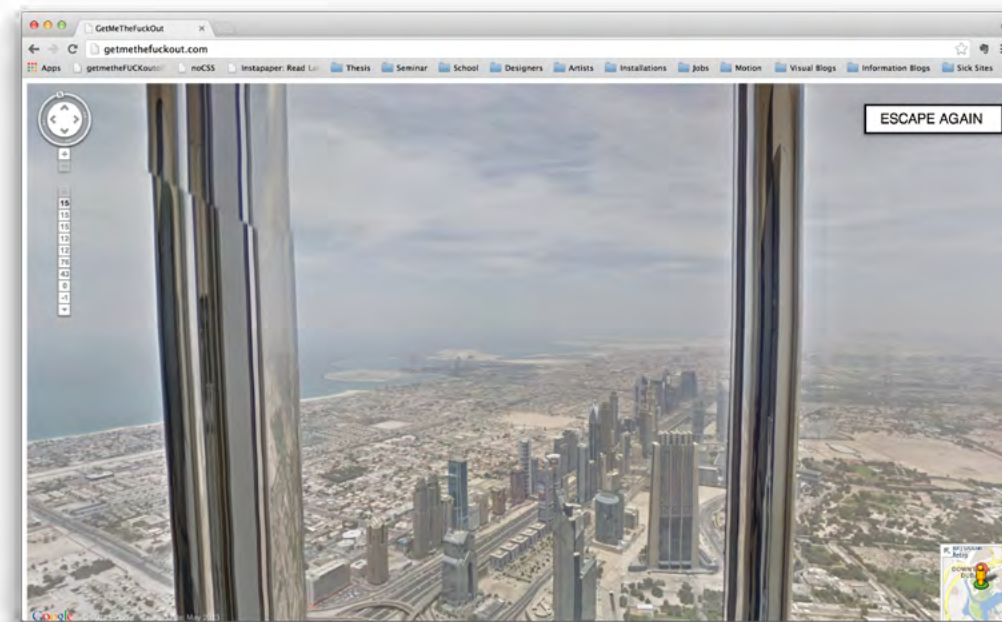


Really High, Burj Khalifa

opportunity to visit without the help of technologies like Google Earth. Simultaneously, they are places we may have visited in the past, but now see through the fresh, yet mediated, eyes. We are free to explore the dangerous, precarious, and profound spaces without the baggage of the real world. Through this platform, we can momentarily transport ourselves out of the everyday and into some-thing entirely different. The success of this escape, is that it is mom-entary. It is a fix, a drug, a distraction to the boredom of our physical environments and a

commentary on our need for instant gratification in contemporary society.

Expanding its reach beyond just the web browser, *getmethefuckout.com* was also installed in the exhibition *Arc of Alchemy* at the Sol Koffler Gallery in Providence, RI. Here, the site was rendered on a large format screen mounted to the gallery wall. This installation forced the participant to engage with the screen far more intimately than they typically would on their personal computer. It turns the screen into a window to another world and the escape becomes even more
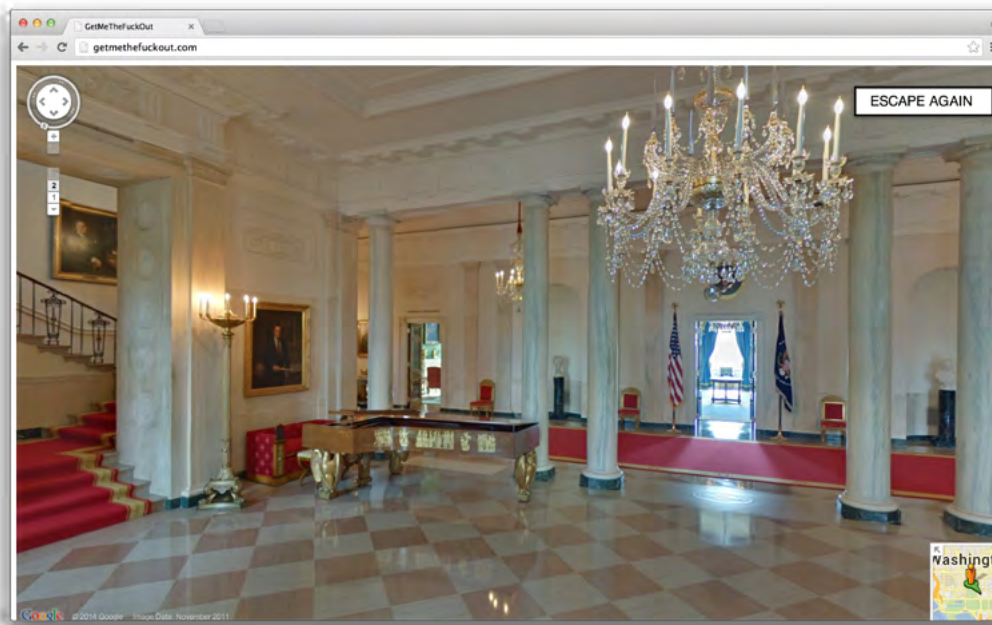
Ruling the Free World, The White House
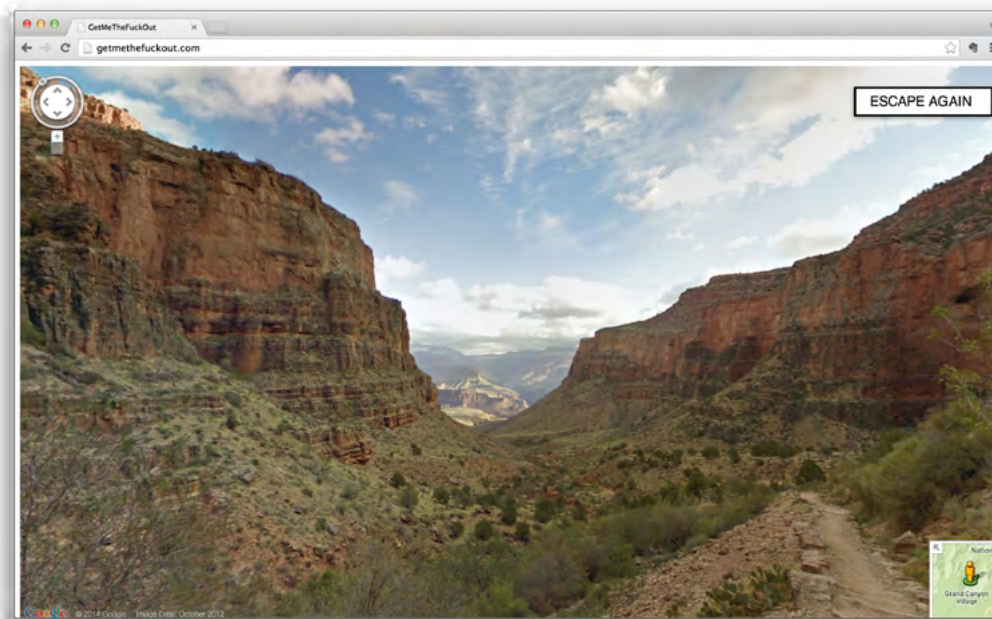
Sightseeing, Grand Canyon

immersive, pulling people not only out of boredom, but out of another physical exploit altogether. It simultaneously reverses the expectation of a physical and digital escape. In the end, these extreme experiences are grounded in the immediate desire of the escape and the project is designed to capitalize on the instant gratification of teleportation. By asking the user to respond to a single question with a gut response, the transportation is that much more powerful. We may not know where we end up, but we know it is better than the current reality. Experiences of intoxication,

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Swimming, Great Barrier Reef

speed, flight, leisure, and adventure are encouraged. Who wouldn't rather be 'really high' than sitting in an office cubical? In the moment between responding to the question and arriving at the destination the mediation creeps in. The jarring transition between worlds is ever apparent and the audience is met with unexpected schisms as they await their escape. It is here that the distinction between physical and digital escape is called into question. In the case of the gallery, the sudden transition into the project is also met by the abrupt

transition out. When the user turns around, they are greeted by a vastly different world. They are not alone and the drop back into reality is as disruptive as the escape from it.
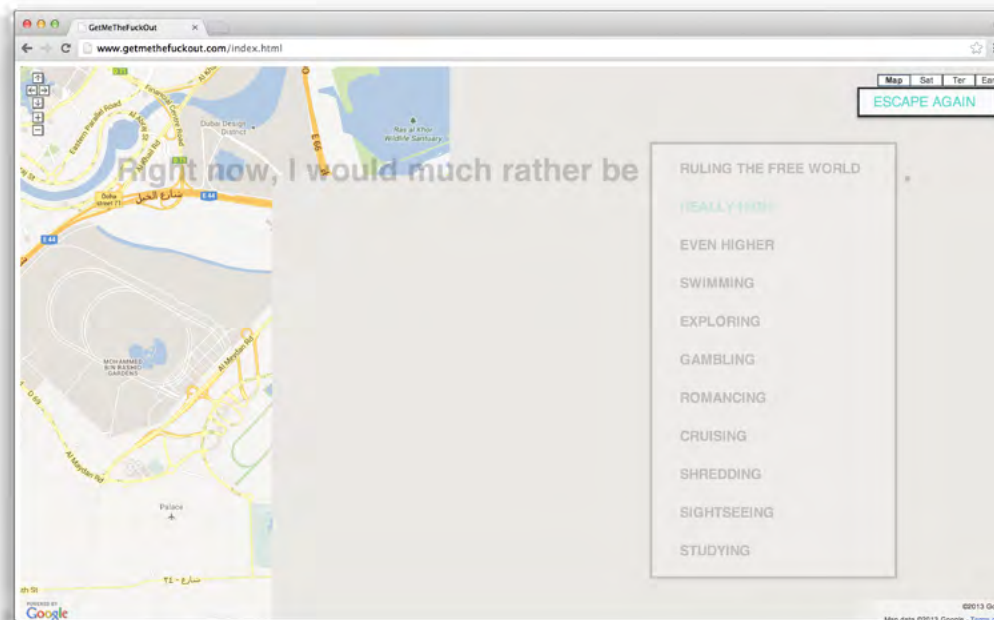
A Jarring Transition

But always, the jarring transition between worlds is ever apparent and the journey is met with unexpected schisms. It is here that the digital and physical distinction is called into question.

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Arc of Alchemy, Sol Koffler Gallery,
Providence, RI
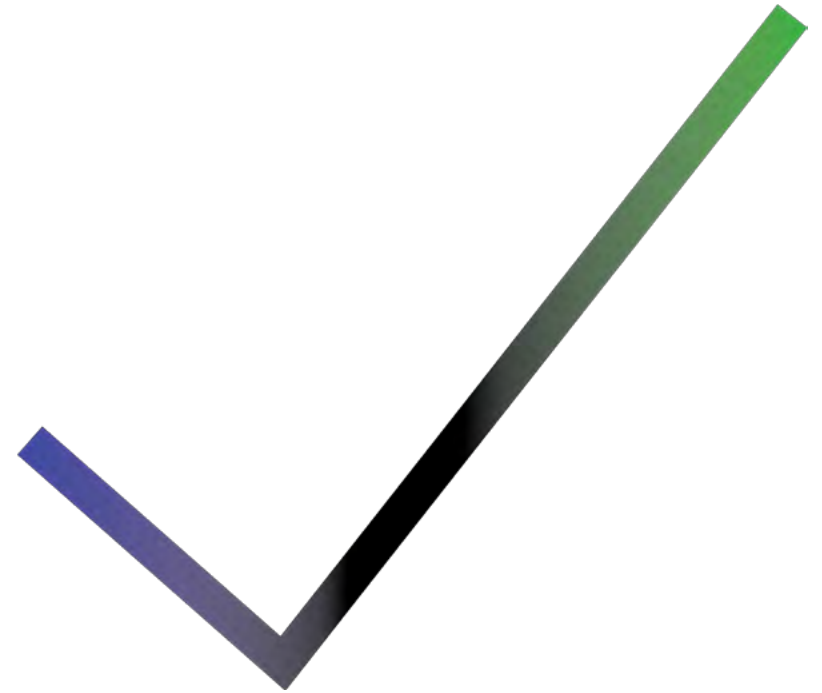
*The work pulls people out of the gallery's
social context and into somewhere
else, while simultaneously reversing the
expectation of a physical and digital escape.*

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We attempt to use technology to recreate moments of intimacy. Technology becomes a tool to connect at a distance, but also interferes in proximity.
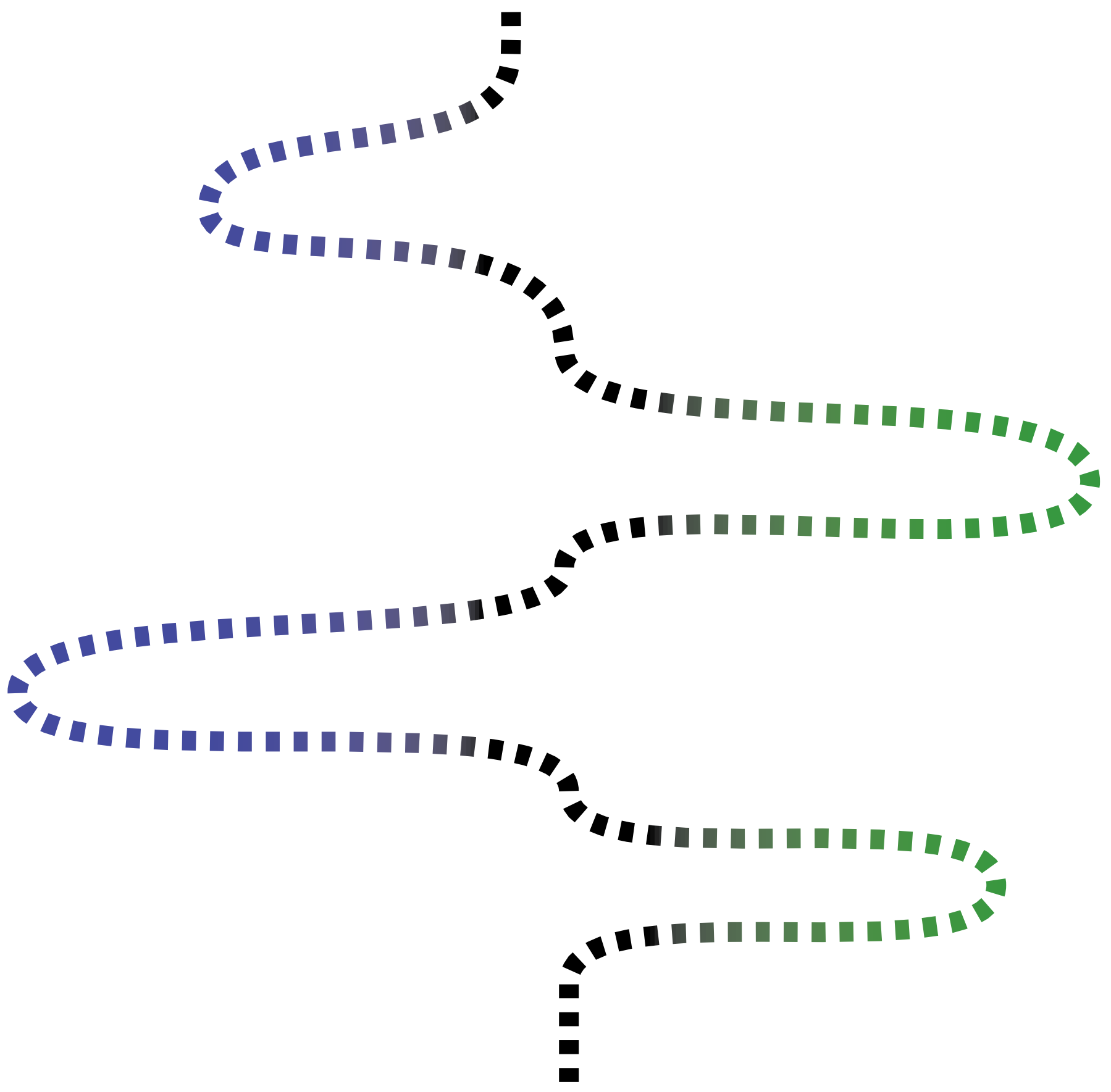
THE PHYSICAL GLITCH

Opposed to just applying new technologies on top of the existing world, these glitches alter our everyday experiences as a means to momentarily reflect on what that experience entails.

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"The glitch becomes personally political at that very moment when the human experiencing the glitch feels herself implicit in the entangled systems that give rise to the glitch. This is the moment of personal onus, of personal implication, of personal responsibility. Beyond the initial 'a-ha' revelatory moment of uncanny tripped-out-ness, and on toward the subsequent 'oh shit' moment of personal implication."

—Curt Cloninger & Nick Briz, NEW MEDIA ARTISTS

SCHOOL OF THE ABSURD

An Interview with Anne Burdick & Tim Durfee

March 31, 2014 via Skype

JH What I wanted to do is update you on what I've been doing and what my thesis is about. The title of the thesis is "Learning to Live in the Thick Interface." It revolves around this idea of revealing those invisible moments within media platforms that are masked under our thin screens and sleek devices. The work is about pulling the metaphor apart to represent the reality and the messiness that happens between the two (physical and digital). What I hoped to talk to you both about was how your individual work and practices alongside the evolution of the media design program as a new pedagogy for communication design academic platforms. So first off, could you both introduce yourselves, your backgrounds, and your individual practices?

TD I identify as an Architect and I guess I have to say it that way because I do a lot of other things as well. Since the beginning of my upper level education I have osculated between pushing against or embracing the aspiration of doing a little bit of everything. In college I studied English but I'd always been interested in architecture and design. I ended up studying architecture and taught in architecture programs for about fifteen years. During that period, I also was doing exhibition design work and this quasi-

experimental interface stuff, all of it at the intersection between ideas, information, communication, and culture and I guess architecture. I see architecture was the hardware of the city and understood we needed an equally robust discipline for the software of the city. The beautiful thing about architecture is that it is an enduring discipline and there's trade skills and discipline that are handed down. There's also a lot of history because it just hangs around; it layers, it doesn't disappear when people die. But now the mediascape has developed an equally ubiquitous quality and so it seemed to be me just to make sense that there would be people starting to study both of these things with an equal degree of commitment. Full disclosure, I still feel like it's a process of personal growth and evolution to figure out what the heck that actually means, but I think I've been comforted in the last decade or so to realize that a lot of people feel a similar degree of disorientation because the landscape has changed. That's no longer really a debate, that just is. My practice is now comprised of occasional building projects, occasional exhibition and installation types of work. There's a big expanse beyond that as well that I'm really interested in. Often times it involves a hybrid model where sometimes it's done obnoxiously just because I think it helps bring out ideas. I've been asked to write articles for publications before and

have struggled with (writing the ideas) and then ended up coming up with a bunch of drawings that seem to be saying what I want. I guess part of that, to me, has to do with the faith in what design is all about, is that it says things differently than what words can do. So I just felt like that seemed like an opportunity.

I see every project as being an opportunity to question what is the appropriate response. How does one even respond to it given the fact that we all traffic in this incredibly, to use your term, 'thick' zone of all these mediums at our disposal. I'm really interested in the inquiry or the question about which tools, how, and when, and not just questions that I found orbiting around a lot of architecture programs which have to do ultimately with style (even though they'll never say that out loud). It has to do with an interesting but nevertheless very insular conversation involving form and, to me, that just closes the door culturally outside and is uninterested in everything else.

JH Anne I will ask you the same question, but I think what Tim just brought up about this idea of form and style in the context of graphic design something I've been struggling with. I come from a spatial background as well and am trying to tease out the guts of things versus just the edges, which I feel a lot of pressure to reside in at a strictly graphic design program. So maybe you can talk a little bit about your background in your work?

AB Graphic design, don't get me started. It's always so interesting listening to Tim talk. There's a really interesting analogy there to me. My relationship to graphic design is about words and language. The way Tim talks about the city and things that endure. I would say there's sort of a similar thing within graphic design, which is books and books as these kinds of units of knowledge that are great and amass into being libraries, which are these structures that define what we can think or who thinks what way in what situations. So for me, I would say that my work is really parallel to Tim's, only the context that I'm working within, around, and against would be the structure which constitutes the landscape of knowledge. The issue that I have with graphic design, or the thing that I went in search of beyond graphic design, is really for how to think about the design of language and ideas. It's not about forming content is such an impoverished kind of way of thinking about it for me. It's really about structuring ideas. Setting up relationships between parts is a really simple way of putting it. I don't even know what to call what I do anymore because it's definitely different from graphic design. I guess it might be considered media design but it is definitely more. What I'm interested now is the design of conditions, situations, and relationships between parts that enable new ideas to emerge. That could be in interface or database, structure, an environment for doing scholarly research, or it could be a graduate program. I see them all in parallel. I haven't been making a lot of actual design work—other than just stuff for the program —in the last two years. The thing that I have been doing is spending a lot of time thinking about framing of our department. The work that I've done, say, with literary scientists and

corpus linguistics is not that dissimilar from the work that I do as the Chair of the Media Design program, which is setting an infrastructure for activity to take place and getting all the right parts in relation to one another to nurture and encourage something interesting to come out of it.

JH I think this is such a great conversation because this is exactly the moment where I'm living right now. I can't put myself in any of those buckets so my work has really been living in this weird middle space of defining what the designer's role is in an evolving mediascape and how our role becomes about sculpting the interface (in itself) which builds relationship between content and the people that access that content. My work has been very much about a relationship of physical space, overlapping all of these zones but still holding on to that architect in me. The next thing I just wanted to ask you about the Media Design program at Art Center specifically.

TD The program was really from New Media (there used to be programs of that term and that's outdated thankfully), but it's come a long way. My sort of narrative of it is partly also to explain my involvement in it. A while ago they had put together this idea of curating thesis committees with people from different backgrounds. That's one of the things that first officially brought me to the school. I just though that was an amazing idea to do it that way. Frankly for me, coming from architecture, where they're notoriously studios about "film," but the panel would all be architects. So it's super

smart and there's all sorts of interesting things going on, but there's not actually a filmmaker who's like, "Well, actually we don't do it that way."

AB "We built that wheel twenty years ago."

TD Anyway, I've personally come to the idea that it's an MFA for advanced design. That is a very vague term, but the idea being that people come into the program already having a background in something, probably design, but maybe not. It could be biology, it could be geography, it could be something else. But the point is they do come from something, and that we meet in this middle place. No one is just gray in terms of always vague and not having a past, if you will. I don't think it's an appropriate structure for an undergraduate program. I think it's a graduate program. Generally speaking, we look at contemporary issues.

AB The cultural...

TD We added this funny word 'practices' to the end of it, Media Design Practices. I have to admit, personally I think it's a weird name, but I think in a good way and hopefully productively weird that forces people to fit their head around it and the "practices" in the title bring to the foreground what the real issue is. I think of design as, in 2014 where fine art as an academic study was in 1970. Where schools like CalArts, in their Fine Arts Program, decided not to call majors painting, or ceramics, or print making, but rather fine art. You're an artist, right. Welcome to the world of being an artist. You inherit the socialization process, like you become what an artist is.

Michael Asher's definition of art is, "work made by artists." Its recognized as the emphasis on the practice, the emphasis on a personal decision to engage the world a certain way. I feel like design has reached that point now where, we paid our dues historically learning how to do stuff. Graphic Design is a discipline. Architecture is a discipline, There are things, rules that you inherit and pass down,those are no less important. But there is a new thing now, which is graduating to being a Designer with a capital D. The same spirit as it might of been with an artist in the 1970s. Academically speaking, I feel there needs to be a place where that open discussion can happen for design. If they review at a good art school, like UCLA or where ever, they just sit there and they sit in front of the artist for a hour before they say anything. They find where they're going to meet and its hard work, that's because its not about the medium, its not about, oh lay your ink incorrectly, its a different conversation. I think there needs to be a place for that in Design. Frankly, I think architectural schools have been good at that. The problem in architecture schools though is that ultimately, the conversation has to be about architecture. Even though the conversation can go anywhere it wants and it does It is under the aegis of a certain disciplinary tradition, and I think there needs to be a place where that's not expected or required.

JH I am really interested in this evolution away the medium specific practice to more of this collaborative entity. To move away from medium specific work to processes which address problems. For me, that's

where this type pedagogy of a program is really interesting. In returning to graduate school in another discipline, I thought I was trying to escape architecture. But I've realized that the foundations of architecture–space and interactivity– and the foundations of graphic design—typography, metaphor, etc— are just ways to attack problems and not necessarily the end product.

JH You both mentioned it a little bit in your introduction, but maybe summing up really quickly, what the decision to be a part of a place like this, the Media Design Program, versus teaching at a tradition architectural school or a communication design school?

AB I can tell you what I hear from a number of different faculties and from my own experience is departments can be mono-cultures. I think, everyone of us here has multiple faces, multiple interest, and hybrid practices. I think that here there's not only a permission or an encouragement, but almost a band aid to be exploratory with your own practice. In terms of being in dialog with multiple other disciplines and the interesting new things that come out of that. I was just meeting this morning with Elizabeth Chin, who is an Anthropologist. She's been with us now for three years and it is so cool to see how her thinking about anthropology has shifted, dramatically. For everyone one of us, there's the part that's facing into this shared space within the program but then we have to shift and turn outside and face other disciplines that we work with. The need to move back and forth like that can be

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really productive. It lets you know where you stand, as a maker, a collaborator, an instructor. I think with that shifting gears with different communities of practice is really productive.

JH **Tim, do you have a follow up?**

TD No, that's good.

JH **How has the dialog from within this space shifted your own work over time?**

AB For me, I'm not naturally a tech interested person. In that way for me its a really productive context to be in, because I am constantly made aware of things that I would not naturally go investigate on my own. I feel like I'm always able to be kept abreast of what new and interesting, and what's emerging on the horizon even before its generally recognized at a larger cultural level. It allows me to be always swimming in an environment of new, emerging technologies and ideas. Also watching how my colleagues practice, has really pushed me to think differently about the work I do and has allowed me to approach techniques to build out new projects in which I operate in a different way.

TD There's not a clear one to one like all of sudden I am now doing all software work. I sometimes wonder myself why not, in a way. But I do have to say that I feel more at liberty for projects to be multivariate in a way that feels authentic. Its an irony, because its probably pretty evident from what I said earlier, nobody wants to be thought of as a Dilettante, right? Its not about doing everything actually. Its about still doing something well and

thoughtfully. Its about that thing your doing happens to be something where you're opening up the process to a whole range of issues and factors. Its funny, because I think technology is really just a word that happens to be a disruptive, powerful, and transformative evolution right now. In 10 years, maybe even sooner than that, technology as it were may have already caught up. Another 70s reference, like some women's study programs would say, "We're starting on a women's studies program, the idea is that we're not going to need one in twenty years." Not that our work is equally urgent, in terms of the state the world . But the thing that is similar is just the idea that technology, is not interesting in and of itself to me. But at the same time I would undeniably say that a designer would be irrelevant if they just thought of it as a tool or just thought of it as this thing that is not at the foreground of whats propelling society and culture right now. I'm interested in the idea that there's a space to occupy that's not being a Techno-fetishist on one hand or a Luddite on the other hand. There's somehow a different relationship to it and I just can't put my finger on what that relationship is. I'm sure there is something equivalent in something like music, like Electronica people that are totally into one thing, and then there are experimental people, and then there are people who find a way to where its organically incorporated into their work, because they're interested more in work then just playing folk guitar. Because, that wouldn't sound the same as it did in 1860, so why not let everything in?

JH **I think there's a point where the antagonistic prospective of one side or the other is irrelevant, because**

its so ingrained in our everyday life, right? Its inescapable and that's something we've just come to accept. This is how the world is and the question within design that I think is most interesting is how we help navigate that space. How we as thinkers and makers start to build those tangents between the systems, between people, and between the realities of those things. Because they are obviously not going anywhere. Its just a question of how we participate in them, right?

TD Right.

AB Yeah. Definitely, I think that's really true.

JH A lot of the work of the students within the program at Art Center is obviously super vast and really rich in all these areas. But I think there is this over arching theme of how technology ingrains within our everyday and how physical computation, and interaction, and experience become narrative elements as opposed to just the foundation of the background where people are coming. Something I've been thinking about a lot is this idea of the designer as a naive entity. As not a technician or someone who is super proficient in one thing, but, by holding onto this ability to be a naive participant in lots of different areas, there's actually sort of a rich moment to exploration and discovery. That is one thing I see within the Media Design program is people from different places exploring news ways of interacting with stuff and to

engage the content. I'm interested in your thoughts on how that plays out within the space, in terms of the content that students are specifically investigating and then how their processes are shifting from where they would expect them to be.

AB That's great. That's really interesting, I love what you were saying about the naive participant. I've been thinking a lot lately about the role of absurdity or whimsy in our students work lately. I think what most of our students have in common is a really deep fascination with people and culture. That is where the work comes from and I think that the better projects are the ones that reveal, through a very curious and fascinated way, how society does things a certain way and the project expands on the richness of the idea. That comes to me before (the technical aspect), "this Arduino does x or y." I think that culture is really at the heart of all it. This aspect of narrative that you had mentioned, this really important scenarios in fiction, like playing out how ideas, design, and things play out in peoples lives is really the interesting question. More so than what is technology and what it does. I think that some of things that technology does are funny, and some are scary, and some efficient. Ideally, the most interesting thing might be all three of those things in one, right. I think culture, and complexity, and humor are all things the we view very highly. I was thinking the Design Interactions programme at the RCA (Royal College of Art) and how there is a particular tone that a fair amount of that work there has. Our work has a very different feel. I want to write about the role of absurdity in our projects, because at first glance

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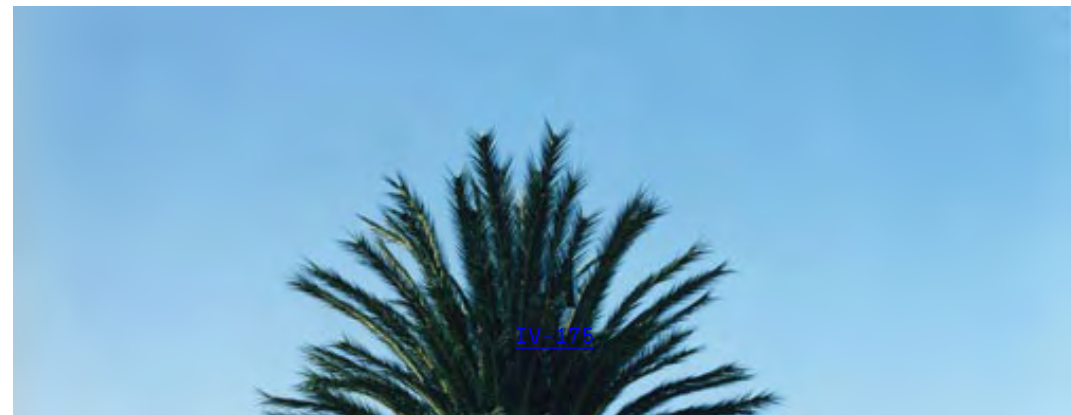
they could all seem to be just, oh ha-ha that's weird or that's crazy. But, I actually think its a really good way of investigating what is happening in our relationship between culture and technology.

JH That is something that's come up a lot with me here (at RISD) dealing with these questions of culture, and context, and the everyday. The subjects are very scary, but the comments about my work is often that they are very funny projects. They're funny and terrifying at the same time. I like that. By using humor, and not always intentionally, it actually makes that dialog more approachable. I'm smiling while I'm interacting with this, but when I think about it I'm also freaked out at the same time.

TD Just quickly I was going to say that this friend of mine, Filmmaker Rene Daalder has said that in the last decade and a half or so we're basically in the age of the engineer. It's all about Google, it's all about engineers. That's been amazing, it's given us all these amazing things, but I must add something to that. We've lived in a supremely capitalist period so there have been two mandates. One is the mandate of the engineer, which is—especially American engineering—about efficiency and debugging, it's a certain model of thinking. Humor is about the last thing that enters that process, if it ever enters it. The other, of course, is the unstoppable logic of capitalism.

AB We're liberals.

TD Now the wall's down, we're all friends and now there's no viable alternative

in the world to this model and there's something horrifying about this logic playing itself in every possible scale. The scale of your genetics to the scale of space tourism and so who's gonna speak up for everything else other than the pure, economic logic of profit or the pure debugging logic of an engineer? So, in a funny way, there's what design has become. This advocacy for everybody else. That's where it also becomes, whether you want it or not, political because even if you're not a politically-oriented designer, as we said, even the act of being naive to the logics of pure capital or naive to the debugging perfection of the engineer, that's where becoming a fine artist is an act of socialization. They don't teach you art, they teach you how to be an artist. Part of this is learning how to be someone who's not driven by the capital mandate and not driven by the engineering mandate, but sort of in the middle. Anyway, it's a long answer again, but I do think part of it is being a bit of a prankster. Saying, "I'm going to turn things upside down, I'm gonna do something that doesn't conform." Like, "this will never be a product."

JH That's another question that I'm interested in too. Traditionally that was the place of art. Because art didn't have a client or a budget.

AB Or a use.

JH Art could be antagonistic, or could comment on culture itself. Design, in the most generalized sense, lived on the edges and was just about packaging that stuff but not participating in it, necessarily. I think there is this moment, this

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shift now, where design is becoming more a critic of itself and of society the same way art does. That's a really interesting idea, but can that become commercially viable? How does that play out in a larger scale when those restrictions still come back into play?

TD I think that's where the architecture model becomes interesting again. Because frankly, if you live in a purely capital-driven city, there are gonna be no public parks. There would be privately-owned public parks that can kick you off when you decide to protest something. There becomes the necessity, people would argue, for that messy stuff that is what cities generate with just everything else. I guess my answer is that it's all on a continuum, because as you said earlier with form and content, these divides aren't clear anymore. To say that art isn't about making money, yet a massive percentage of the world financial market now is about art. The real reason for that is because we've now started to regulate the Swiss banks, so you can't hide money in a bank. How do you hide money? You buy art. It's the unspoken secret that art is now the means of laundering massive amounts of money. It's a perversity that people have always sort of chuckled about, but now it's big time and now it's a different thing. It's not fashion, it's oligarchs. It's the fact that there's money. What's this slushy weird thing? Well, it's art. In a weird way— the use versus viability of something as a product versus something just being a distraction, that's also slushy. The next thing that's going to blow people's minds in social media or the next huge company, I don't know this, but I would guess one is going to have nothing to do with commerce. It's

just going to be something that hits the mark for what really is about the everyday, what really is relevant to people. It may be given away for free, it may be open source to just emerge organically. Once a company has become too commercial, it gets rejected. Facebook is as ubiquitous as the pavement on the sidewalk, it's the wallpaper on your screen now for a lot of people. It will kill itself if it becomes too commercial, so there's some self-regulation. What I'm saying is that those divides are becoming less useful. I think it's the spectrum that's interesting. This is also a very personal question for me because for a long time I've always wrestled with that "what is art/ design" thing. Sometimes I think, "Oh, it's stupid, who cares." Then other times I think, "You know what, it totally makes a difference and I'm totally strong about that." My opinion will probably change tomorrow, but my current opinion is that they are different. They are different way of existing in the world. They have different mandates and agenda. With that said, there are times when design is greatly improved and benefits through an artistic process and in conversations that are engaged in the art world. It can be extremely serious and extremely rigorous from a conceptual, political standpoint in a way that often types of straight-up design conversation can't. So there are times when that's a really powerful and really important conversation to have, and totally vice versa. We've seen that in the last ten years. Artists who have taken on design as their thing. If you look at it as design, it's shitty design. Yet if you look at it as art it's interesting because it has to do with the fact that art can be about anything, and art can be about the idea of furniture from last year in your

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living room. Anyway, I'm getting off-topic, it's just to say that my latest status on that question is that I'm interested in the difference but I don't think there's a divide. If you're thoughtful about it, crossing it can be super interesting, cooperative, useful. I could say the same thing about the productization of things, I could say the same thing about engineering. They're all divides that exist but can be navigated constructively.

JH And I think that the melding point of these academic environment and these new approaches to the academic environment are where that dialogue is playing out in very interesting ways. It is the question of how those two things start to overlap, and then how they go out and influence the bubbles that they usually reside in.

AB So the thing that I've been thinking about for a while and that we grapple with here is using design to do something other than produce a commercial product, to antagonize or provoke. I would call that research. In research and academia the issue for me is that we have not yet cracked the nut about where experimental design lives. What happens to so much of it is it gets put into the art gallery, which is not the context that it's designed to respond to. Then the question is what context is the right context? I just still think that there's the need for some environment to have that good, rigorous, theoretical, philosophical debates that the work brings to the floor. The closest thing I come up with is the grad school crit room. That's where work gets taken seriously, read, and interrogated in a certain way. That

interrogation does not happen elsewhere. So we've been experimenting with different kinds of events, or exhibitions, or installations, to help foster that culture. It's an ongoing issue for us here at AC—how do we nurture that research culture amongst the faculty and create the events and environments where the conversations can happen? I'm not saying we've succeeded completely but I'd say that that's a challenge for you as a new up and coming faculty member, to think about how collectively amongst all of the programs you nurture and make that happen.

JH The last thing I wanted to ask was really about honing down on this idea of the interface. I'm interested in how each of you would define the interface and then, what is its role in your work?

TD So the interface is a term I return to all the time and I felt that it's an idea you hear a lot about because you hear people saying that architecture is an interface. Another thing that I research a lot is the book Interface Culture by Stephen Johnson. It's an old book at this point but he makes the argument about different mediums for communication across history and how they came forward as being relevant and reflective of that period. For example, the novel emerges in the nineteenth century. It had been around before but it was the great form of that century and people have linked that to a whole range of different factors, anywhere from the rise of the city and the whole idea of the other and the complexity of that social reality, and also the industrial revolution and the leisure class and all that. He makes a link to

the idea of the interface as being not as a question of UX terrain that's just two pixels to the left or two pixels to the right, but rather as a cultural phenomenon. His argument was that the interface historically will be looked at as a territory for inquiry or cultural expression no less significant than the novel in terms of its emergence through a huge range of factors—cultural, social, political, and economic. My only thing against the interface is that a lot of people think you're talking about something else. When I say, 'Oh, it's another interface,' they just think UX in that simple, and once again, commercially defined task. I think it is an interesting territory. It's vague enough that—I love the idea that a city could be an interface, or a book an interface. In the end, it does have to do with communication from one entity to another. It also has to do with translation of noise into signal or un-useful information into something useful. There is that sort of idea that it's our frontier, mediator. As a term, that's exciting, because then you realize, 'Okay, a building mediates from the outside to the inside.' A software interface mediates HTML code into a visible, readable form and it's sort of a useful term to represent that phenomenon. Once again, I am incapable of a short answer.

AB That's a really hard question. I tend to think in terms of interaction as opposed to interface, where the things that become interesting to me lately is the idea of a human-machine interface as opposed to just a human-computer interface and then you can start to put kind of anything in that equation, like human-animal interface. When I think human-machine interface, I think about

the limb and the prosthetic and the point at which they connect. There's a thing called the hand-brain complex, which is a thought experiment about where your hand ends and where your brain begins. The reality is that your brain develops a certain way because of the input that your hand gives it and your hand develops a certain way because of the brain and the nerves go all the way up to your brain to your hand. So actually is it the idea of controlling? Is it the actual physical form of the thing? It's really difficult to say that these are two separate things. They are intertwined. So the interface is a flat thing—then there's this other thing behind it—is a difficult thing idea for me to bite into. Even if it is the touch-screen on the surface of your iPhone, that's not all it is. There are endings that go to the network, the nervous system, that makes the whole thing interlock.

JH Absolutely, and that's exactly where this thesis has been. It's been about getting away from that metaphor of the 'thin-ness' or this idea that the interface is just the thing that we touch, but the thickness that actually happens between you touching something and getting to the thing that you're trying to access. There's so much that happens in that space that is intentionally ignored. The UX/UI graphic designer may think about that surface, but often ignores the depth. I'm really interested in thinking about occupying the depth, experiencing it, and revealing what is actually there.

AB I think that depth goes in both

directions. There is the surface of the thing, but by the same token it doesn't end right there at the tip of your finger. It is your memory, it is your cognitive functions, it is your muscular skeletal system, it is all these other things on the human side. To me the book and writing was our first ability to offload memory. Even a piece of writing can be seen as an extension of the human brain. So there is this world of these things around us and they're all part of the network of our brains going out to the world. The bigger the repository becomes, the more you've offloaded yourself into the environment around you. I think it is not just the interface to the system, but it is the interface to the human too.

JH Exactly. That's great.

AB I could go on and on about this for days, we all could!

JH I know, I know. Thank you so much, this has been great.

AB Yeah, our pleasure.

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Anne Burdick is a regular participant in the international dialogue regarding the future of graduate education and research in design. She designs experimental text projects in diverse media and participates in the nascent field of the Digital Humanities. Anne received a BFA and MFA in Graphic Design from the California Institute of the Arts.

Tim Durfee is an architect and partner of Los Angeles-based Durfee|Regn. His work includes exhibitions, urban sign systems and interfaces. He was formerly director of Visual Studies at SCI-Arc. Tim received an MArch from Yale University and a BA in Literature and History from the University of Rochester.

The preceding images were collected from www.waymarking.com and a 2012 posting on www.twistedsifter.com titled '25 Cell Phone Towers Disguised to Look Like Something Else."

ENCODE/DECODE

`2013, Encryption Kit & Poster`

This project asks a simple question. In our media rich environment, full of the constant bombardment of messages, how do we assign value to individual communications? It asks rather than fast, more, and constant, could slow, less, and distorted actually enhance our experience by forcing us to become an active participant? As designers dictated by technology, disruption is so often avoided and hidden. This project begins a journey of asking could these disruptive moments actually enhance our interactions in contemporary society and temporarily question what it means to participate in it?

The project began by analyzing the historic use of symbol languages and encoded typographic systems which traditionally add layers of distortion to communication. These systems force audiences to participate in additional steps of deciphering their meaning in order

ABCDEFGHIJKLM
NOPQRSTUVWXYZ

Apercu Mono

Nautical Flag Signals
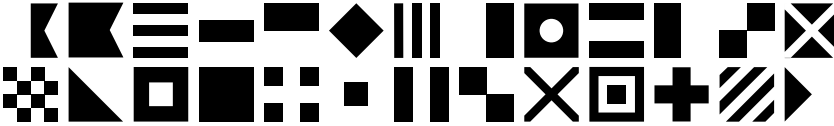
Morse Code

Braille
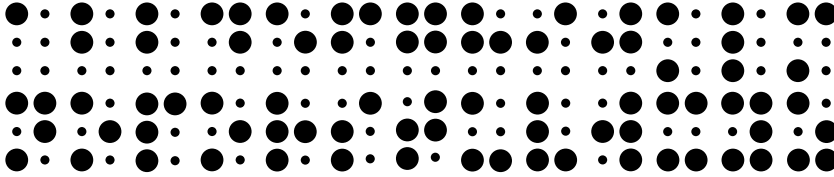
Existing Hybrid

Braille Solid V1
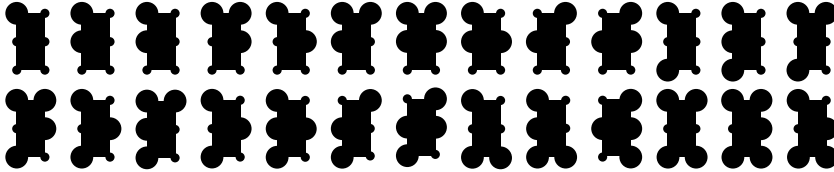
Braille Solid V2
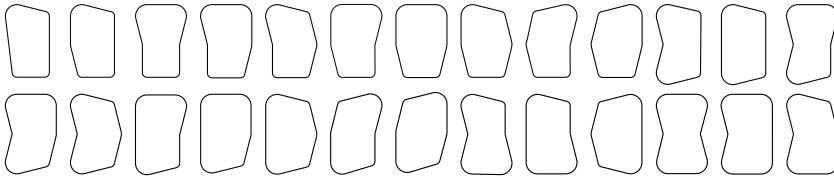
3x4 Point Grid,
No Edge Correlation

to communicate. By forcing additional engagement, the reward of participating is enhanced. Using the rules abstracted from these systems and the geometric relationships of letterforms, a new 26-character alphabet was developed which became the basis for an encryption kit housed in a two-sided box. This box consists of 26 two-sided stamps, an ink pad, and a series of pre-formatted message cards. To operate, the user would flip the box to the appropriate side and use the corresponding stamps to create or translate a message.

To expand on the duality of this relationship, from letter form to encoded system and from encoding a message to deciphering one, 3-D printing technology was utilized to develop the formal nature

The project began by analyzing letterforms and historic symbol languages, then translating them into a new system of geometric letterforms.
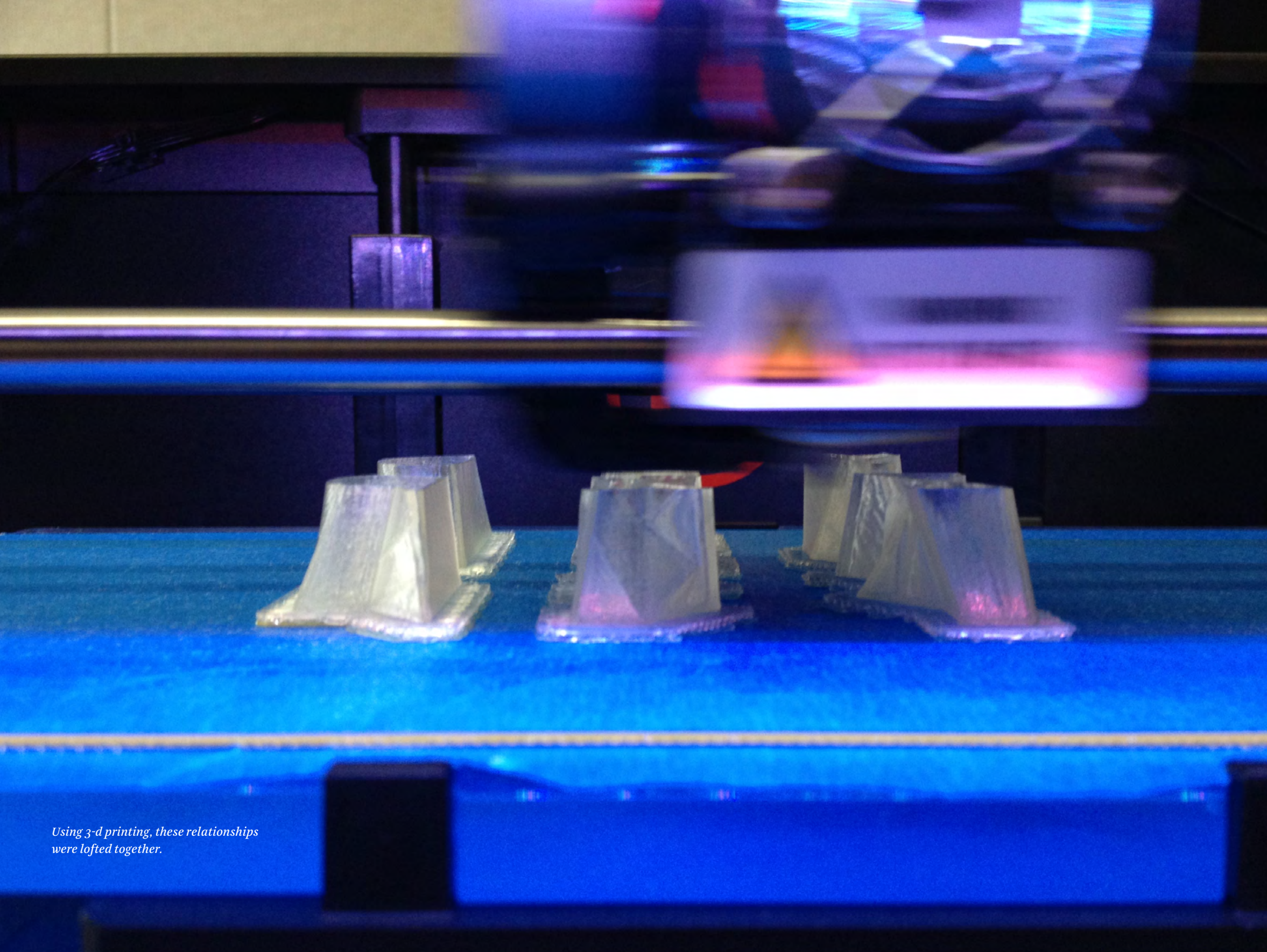
Using 3-d printing, these relationships were lofted together.

of the stamps. The two symbols were lofted together to formally translate the letterform on one side, to the new symbol equivalent on the other. The formal quality of these extrusions symbolically represented the new distorted layer within the translated communication, moving away from the veil of clear communication to a new experience entirely.

The last stage of the project was a testing ground for the viability of this system. The modular system allowed for a form of visual camouflage, enabling the ability to embed messages in abstract patterns. This representation challenges the potential of meaning in our contemporary environments. Do textures, patterns, pixels and information within our environment have embedded meanings we are unable to comprehend? If so, what does that say about the sincerity of our encounters with dictated media? If not, might this provide

The letterform on one side is translated to its new symbol equivalent on the other.
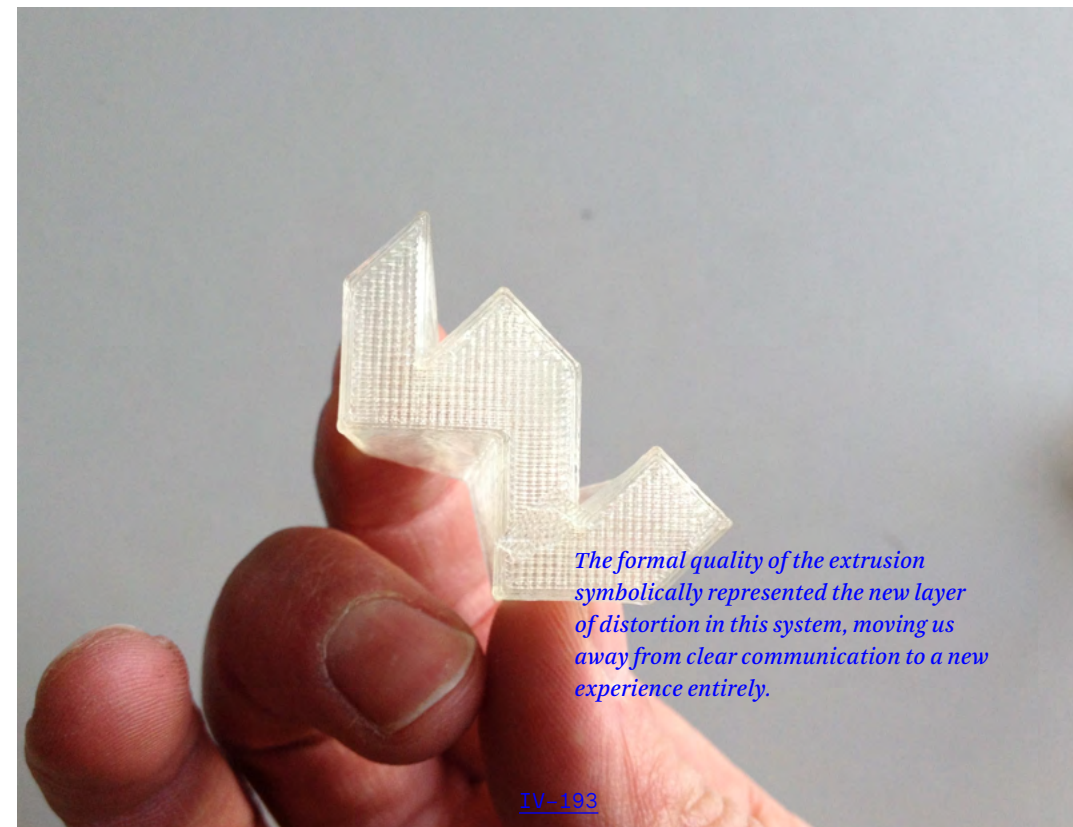
The formal quality of the extrusion symbolically represented the new layer of distortion in this system, moving us away from clear communication to a new experience entirely.

a place for more in depth and participatory occurrences?

The role of this project is to temporarily disrupt our everyday comm-unication platforms. In doing so, we are able to look back on those platforms with new appreciation. Upon using these systems again, how might the disrupted event influence our understanding and participation in the mediascape?
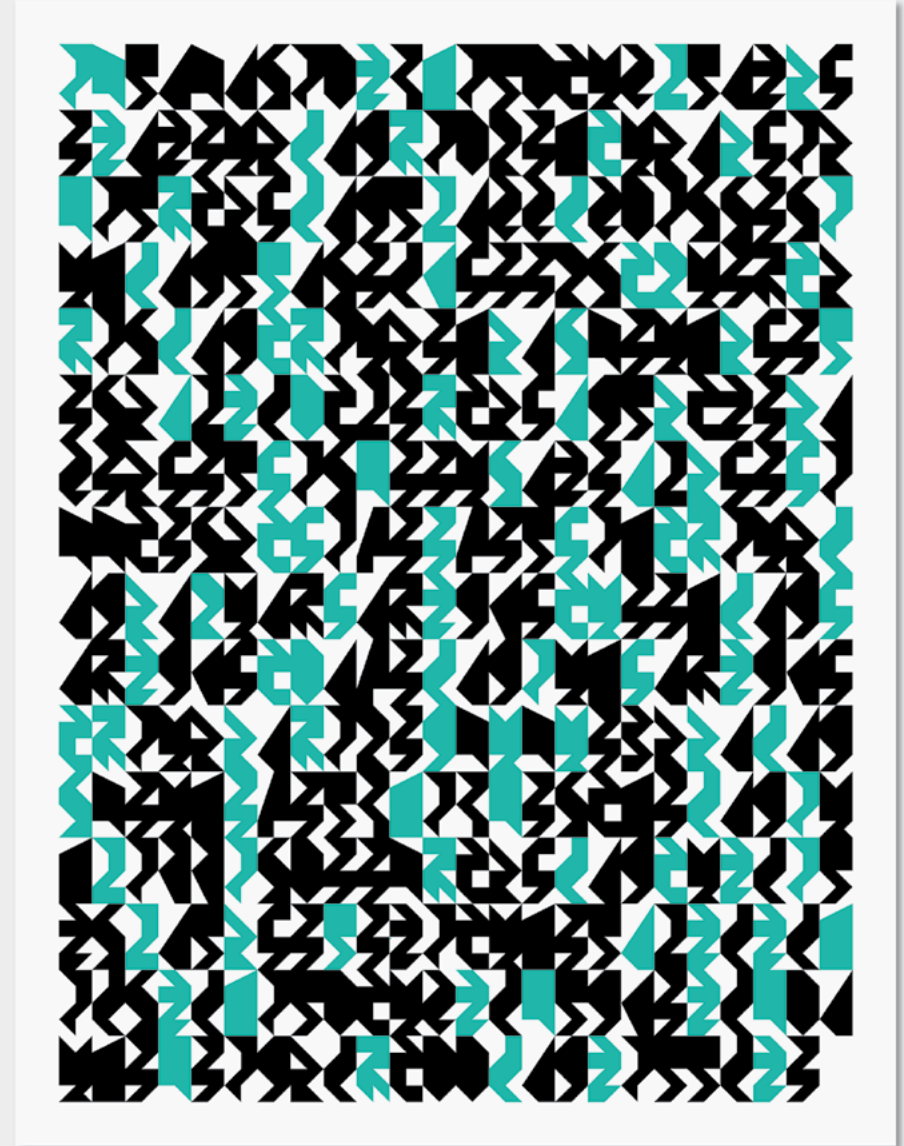
The user may flip the box to the corresponding side and use the ink pad and the pre-formatted message cards to either write or decipher a message.

Encode +

Decode (Reverse)

THEMONEYISINT
HECOOKIEJAR
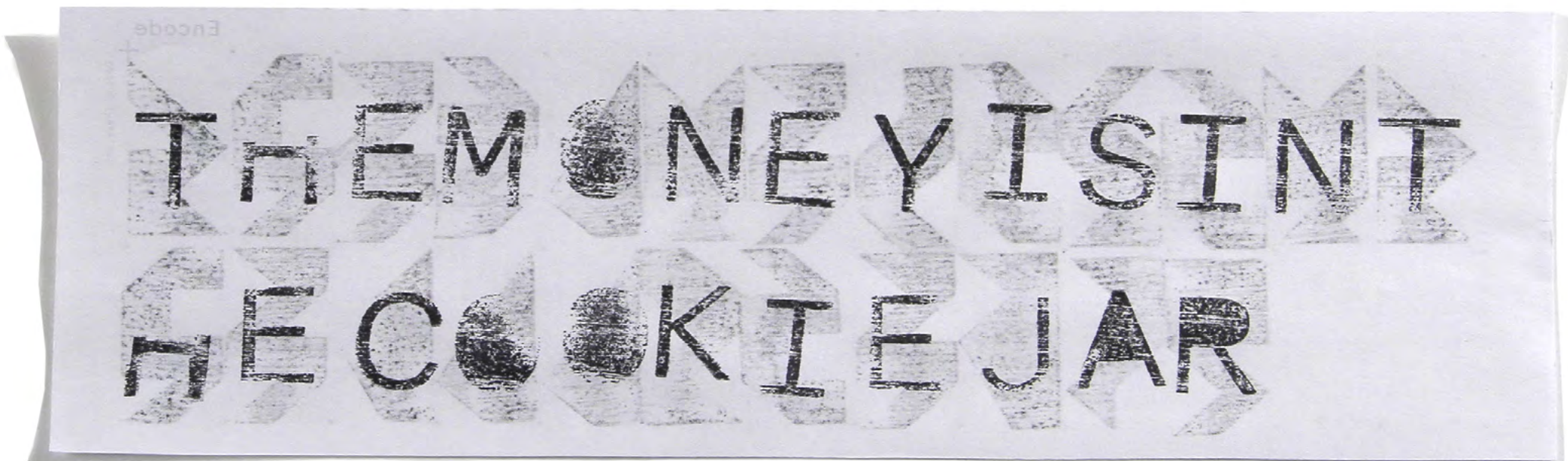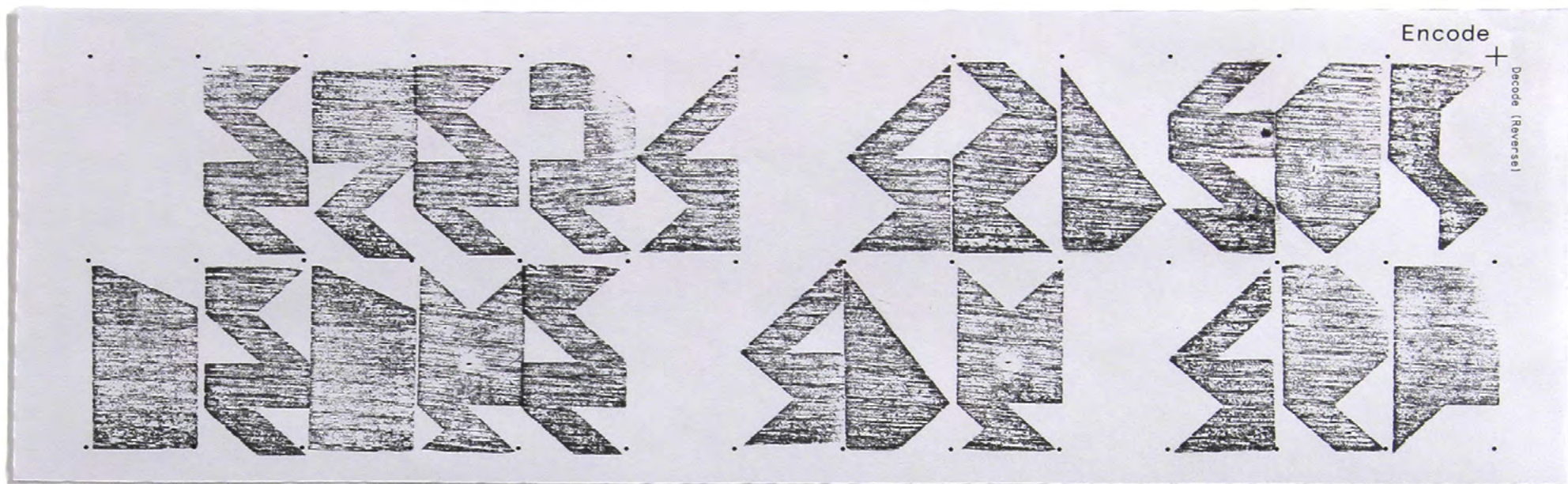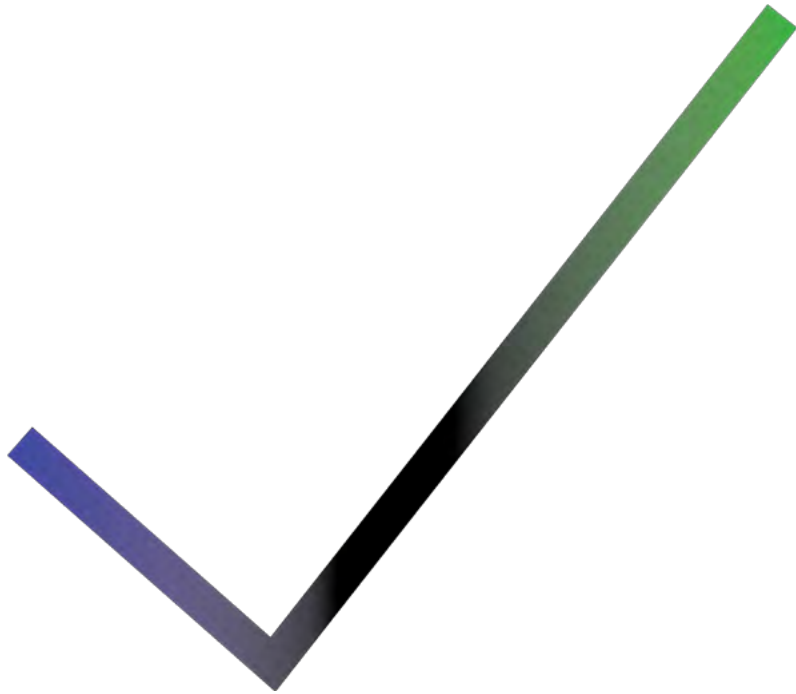
This opens up a new way to think about embedding and masking messages in patterns and images. The poster attempts to test just that, a pseudo-camouflage.

MOON ANALOGIES

2013, Interactive Installation, Website
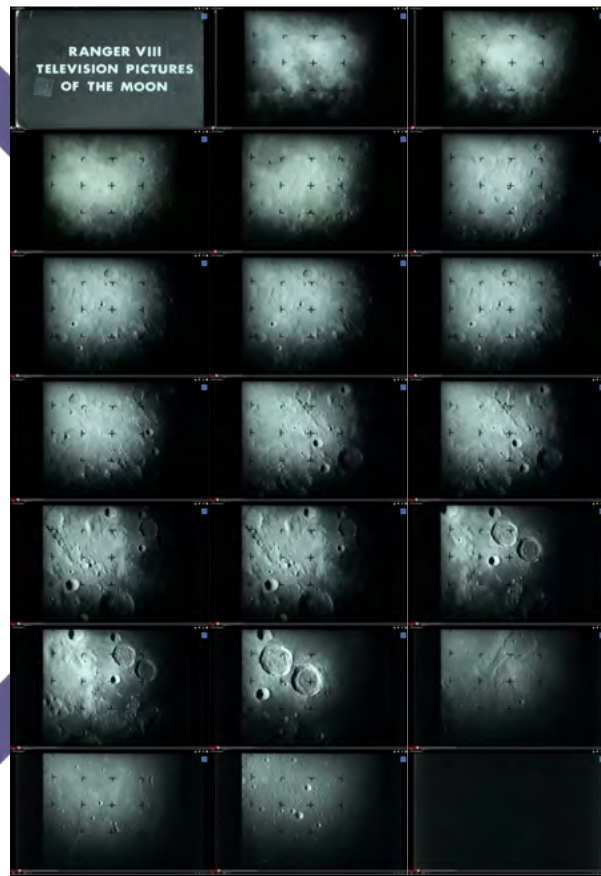
Moon Analogies is an interactive installation residing in both physical and digital spaces simultaneously. The project began by viewing a specific lunar mission from here on earth. The Ranger 8 mission flew a satellite mounted camera directly at the moon in a research endeavor to find viable future landing sights for a manned mission. Scientists then took as many photos as possible until collision with the lunar surface. I realized in studying this documentation that understanding the vastness of this event was impossible. I desired to comprehend its extreme distances, speeds, temperatures, etc., but realized that simply visualizing it the way I had in the past—by making a provocative data visualization—did not provide me the opportunity to truly understand it. A data visualization so often is only another veil of complexity. It may be a beautiful veil, but not necessarily a productive means to actually

understand and relate to the material. I desired an empirical way to experience the mission and relate the vastness of outer space to myself and my personal space. This project explored ways to tell these complex narratives, which allowed and forced the visitor to activate from a personal level, in the hopes that the encounter would change their understanding of outer space in their everyday lives.

To expand on this desire, three large scale representations of lunar missions were abstractly rendered in different spaces throughout Providence, RI. These were spaces I was familiar with, places I visited often and could understand in relation to myself. Visitors were invited to explore these scaled representations with no prescribed description of their creation. The abstract nature of the pieces allowed the audience to form their own expectations and conclusions based on their personal

interaction with the space.

Concurrently, the space was documented from above and the imagery acted as the backdrop for a website. After their initial experience, visitors were invited to explore the digital counterpart. Here, the space became concrete, the information visuals, data, and video were accessible by clicking through the space the visitors were just in. These two separate interactions then allow the visitor return to the physical space with the embedded knowledge of what that space means on a larger scale and what their
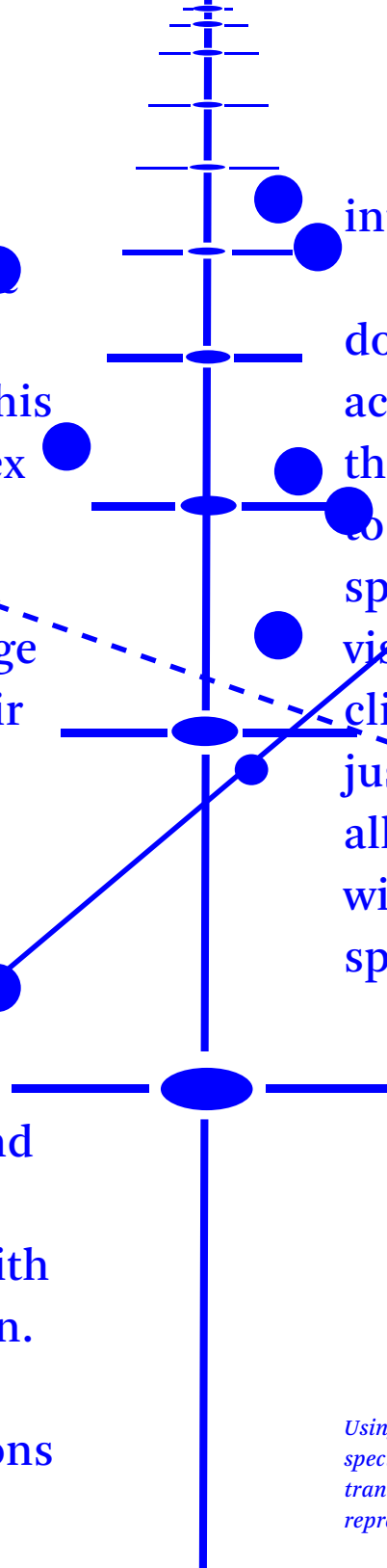
Using inexpensive materials, specific lunar missions are translated into scale representations.
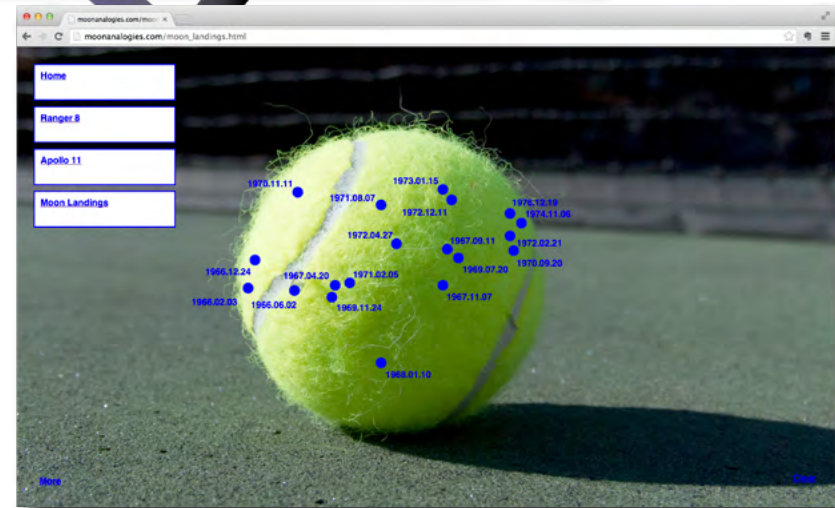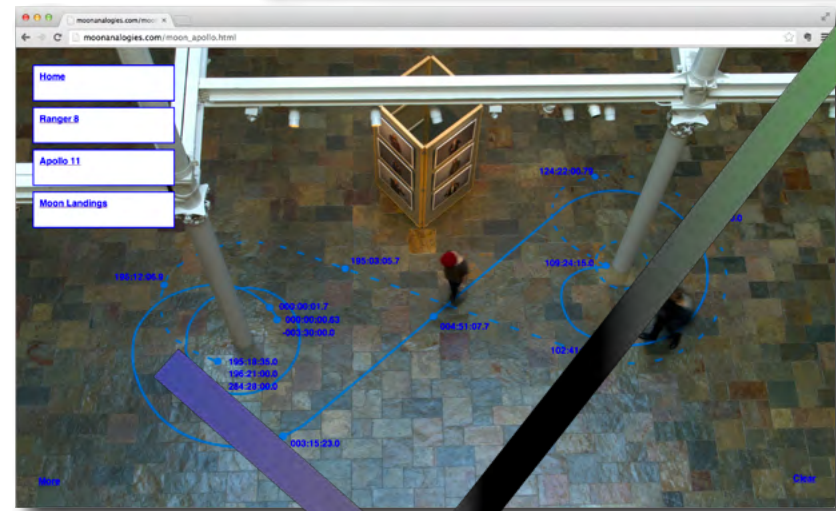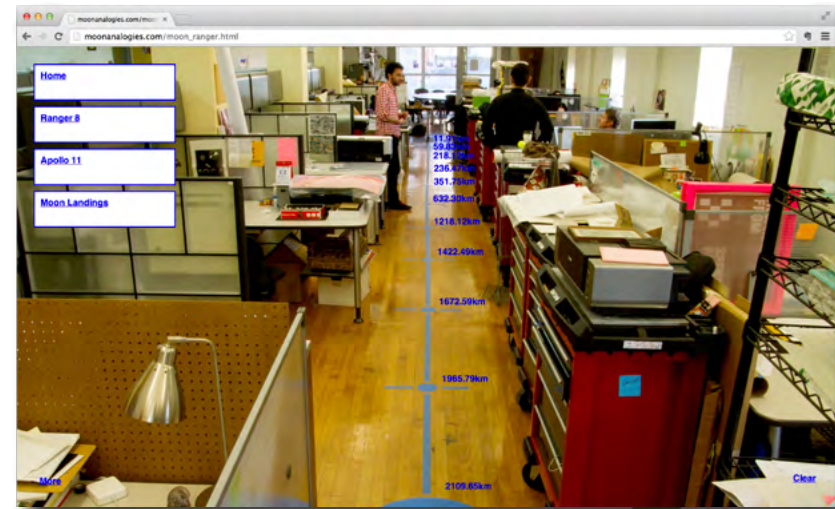
moonanalogies.com/moon ×

moonanalogies.com/moon_ranger.html

Home

Ranger 8

Apollo 11

Moon Landings

11.91km
59.83km
218.12km
236.47km
351.75km

632.30km

1218.12km

1422.49km

1672.59km

1965.79km

2109.65km

More

Clear

moonanalogies.com/moon ×

moonanalogies.com/moon_landings.html

Home

Ranger 8

Apollo 11

Moon Landings

1970.11.11

1973.01.15

1971.08.07

1976.12.19

1972.12.11

1974.11.06

1972.04.27

1967.09.11

1972.02.21

1966.12.24

1967.04.20

1971.02.05

1970.09.20

1969.07.20

1966.02.03

1966.06.02

1969.11.24

1967.11.07

1968.01.10

More

Clear

personal spaces imply in larger settings.

The project challenges the expectation that addition is the only way to augment. By separation and compart-mentalization of information, rather than simply adding additional layers, more memorable and informative experiences are possible. It also questions the potential relationship between real and virtual. In this state, the threshold is solid, augmen-ting by absolute separation. It explores how memory and physical relation trans-lates each step and proposes the importance of personalization in data driven repre-sentation and visualization.

By comparing the individual events and physically curating the narrative and data, the visitor now holds on to that analogy. They understand the scale relationship on a personal level and they take that with them. The distance between

them and a friend is no longer about feet and inches, it is about light-years, snapshots, landing sites, and more. The data is engrained in their experiences, not simply layered on top.
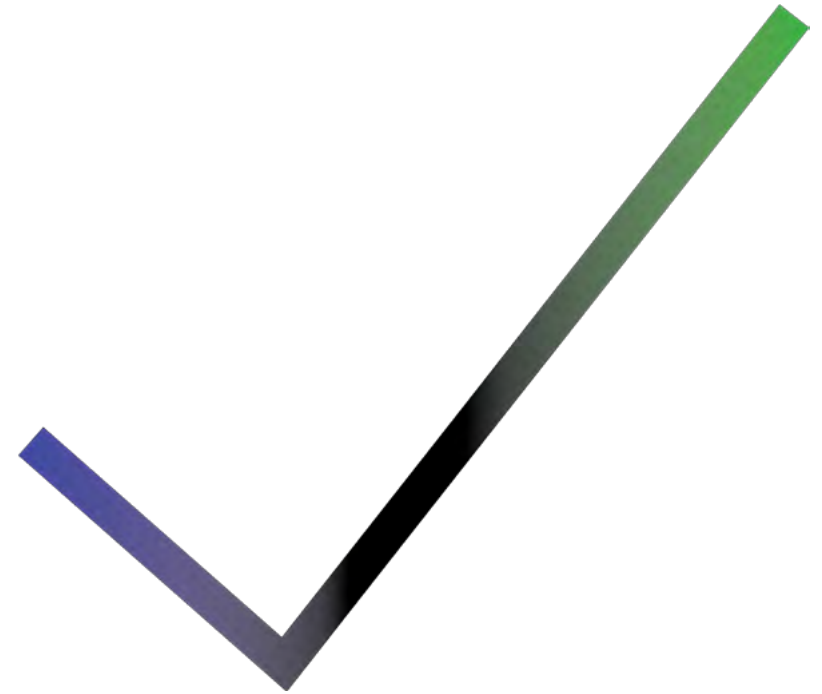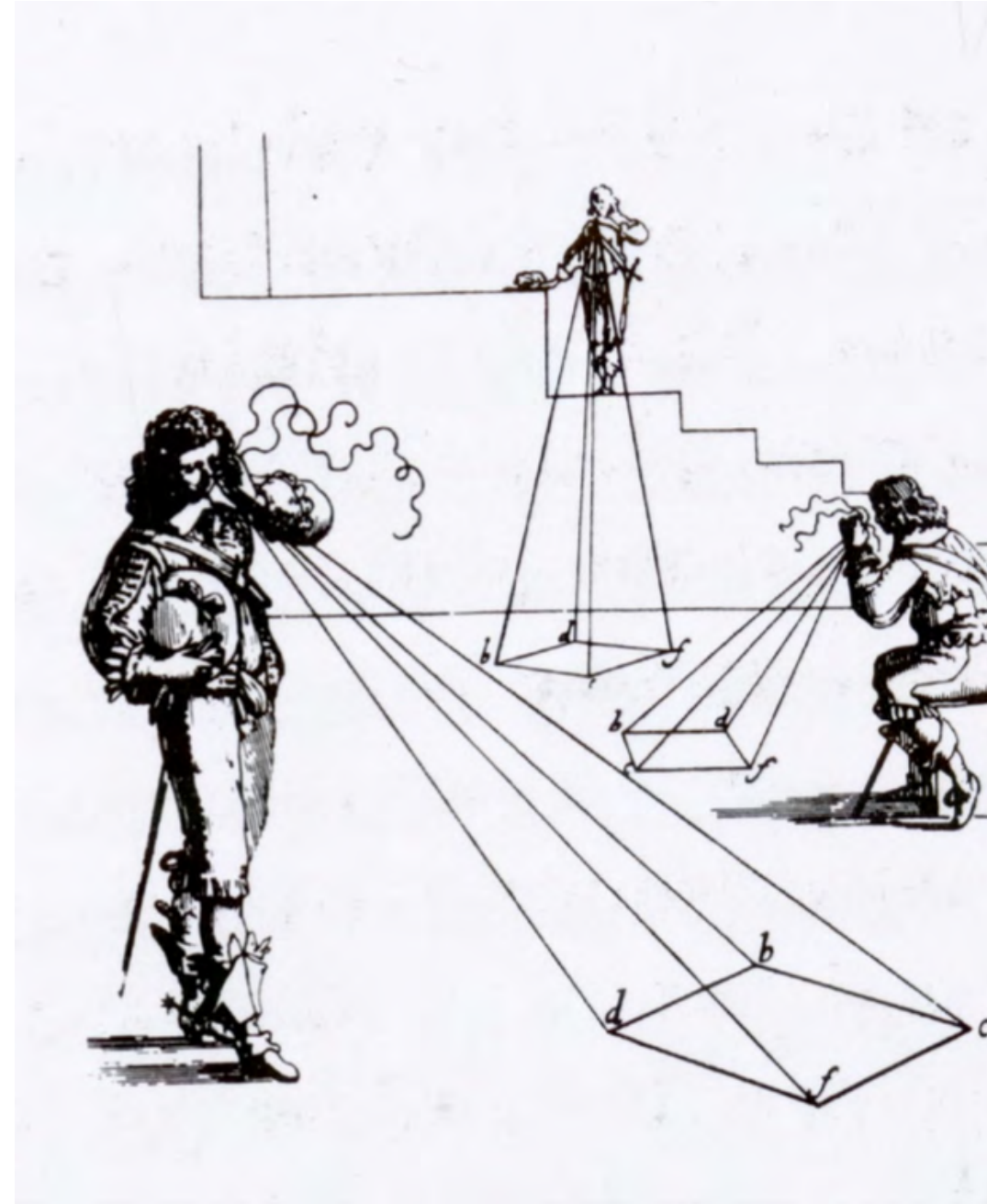
I AM A PIXEL

2014, Artifact, Website, Poster Series, Interactive Installation

I am a Pixel is a multi-media interactive installation exploring the personal and experiential aspects embedded within aerial photography, specifically that of Google Earth. It highlights the complexity and politics embedded in the now everyday, nonchalant, and subconscious experience of exploring surveillance tools, and encourages a new contemplative approach to our participation in it. This approach questions the dialogue between the watcher and the watched while divulging the realities embedded in its invisibility, revealing the relationships between the machines that view us and how we are viewed. Experiments in mediums including print, physical artifacts, websites, film, and spatial installations investigate approaches and readings, coalescing in a new understanding for the audience which translates the complexity and vastness of aerial photography into digestible, relatable events. The relationship between physical

artifacts and digital interactions expand on previous works in this thesis, that explore analogy and metaphor as means to understand scale.

Through two overarching themes inspired by the evolution of directional gaze as an act of wonder, from an upward gaze to a downward gaze, the localization of the everyday spaces we reside in are explored. Historically, looking up into the sky was a moment of fascination, contemplation, and wonder. Yet as technology allowed for greater reach of what we as humans see, the reversed gaze of looking down onto ourselves has taken over as our most common view. We look down into our devices which look down onto us. This project attempts to reveal this shift and allow for moments of reversal. These two views are explored in isolation, to challenge that which views and that which is viewed.

Ways of Seeing, John Berger, p. 17.

To reestablish the human relationship between the things that look at us and how we are looked at.
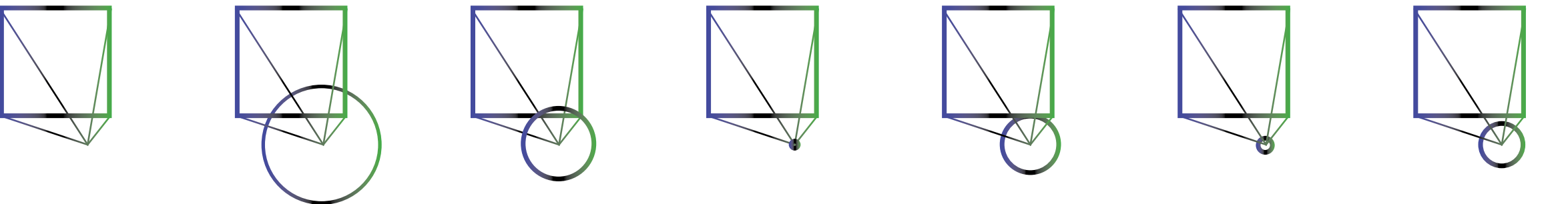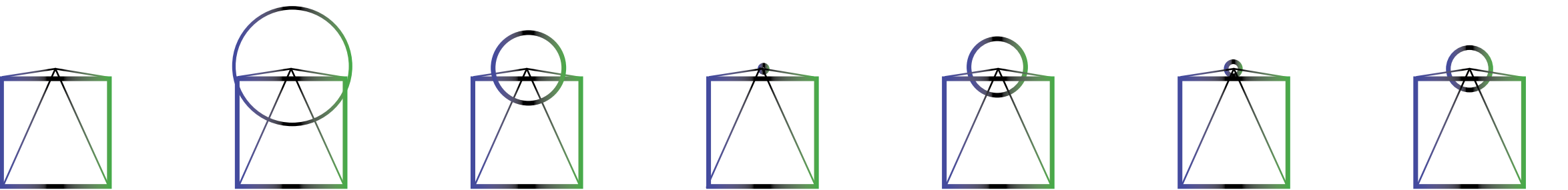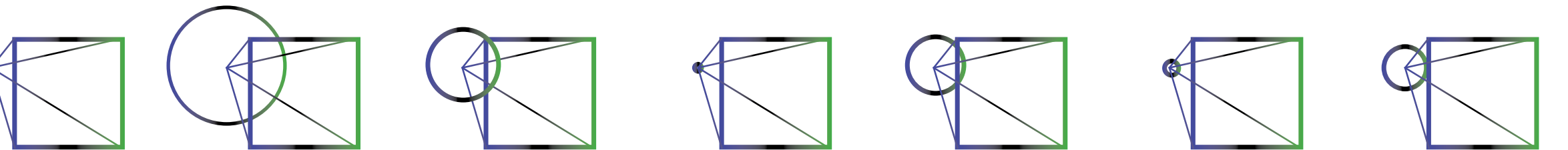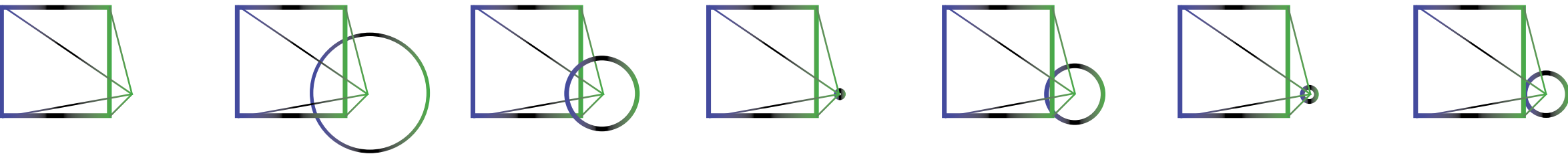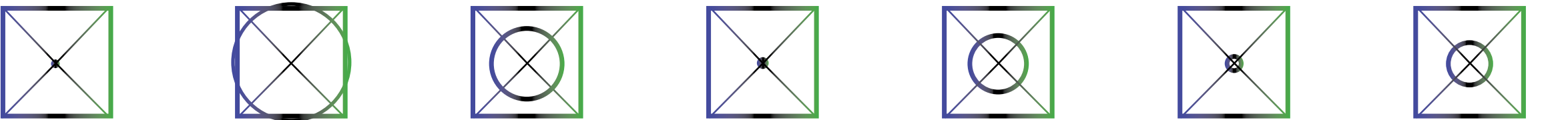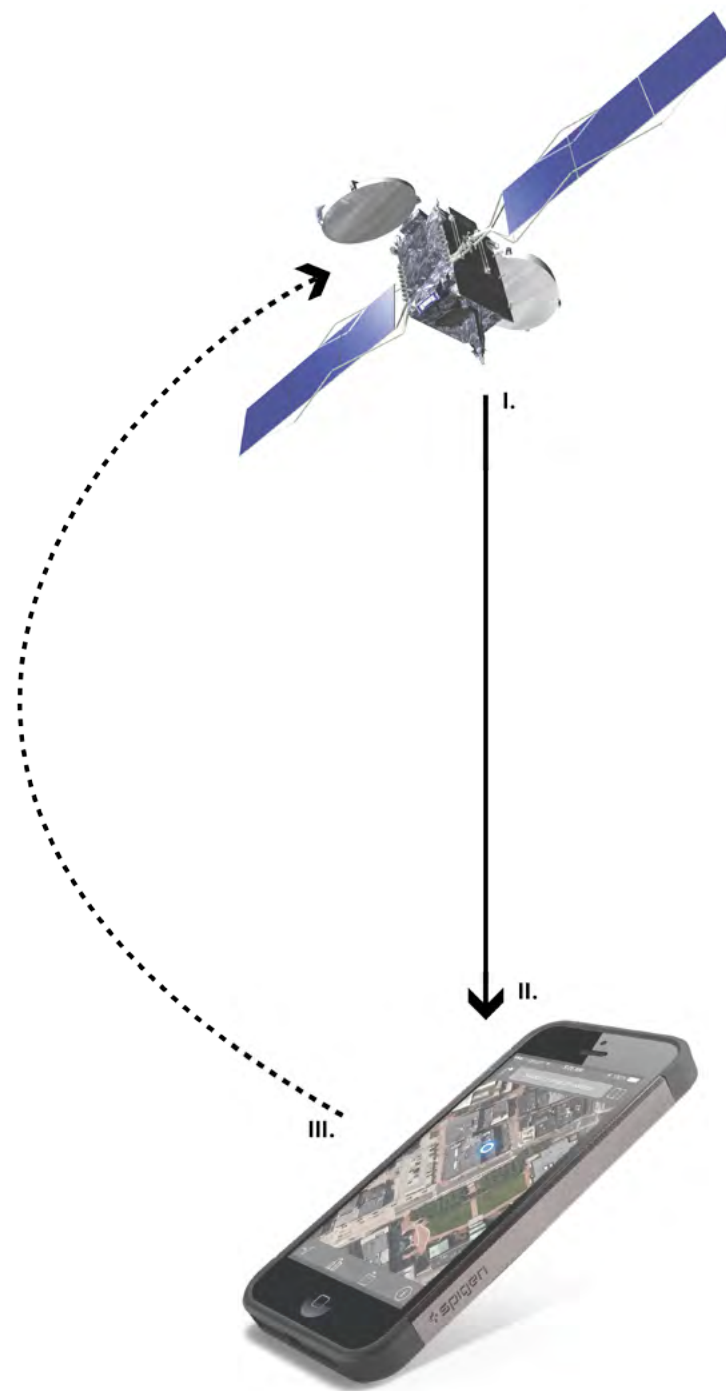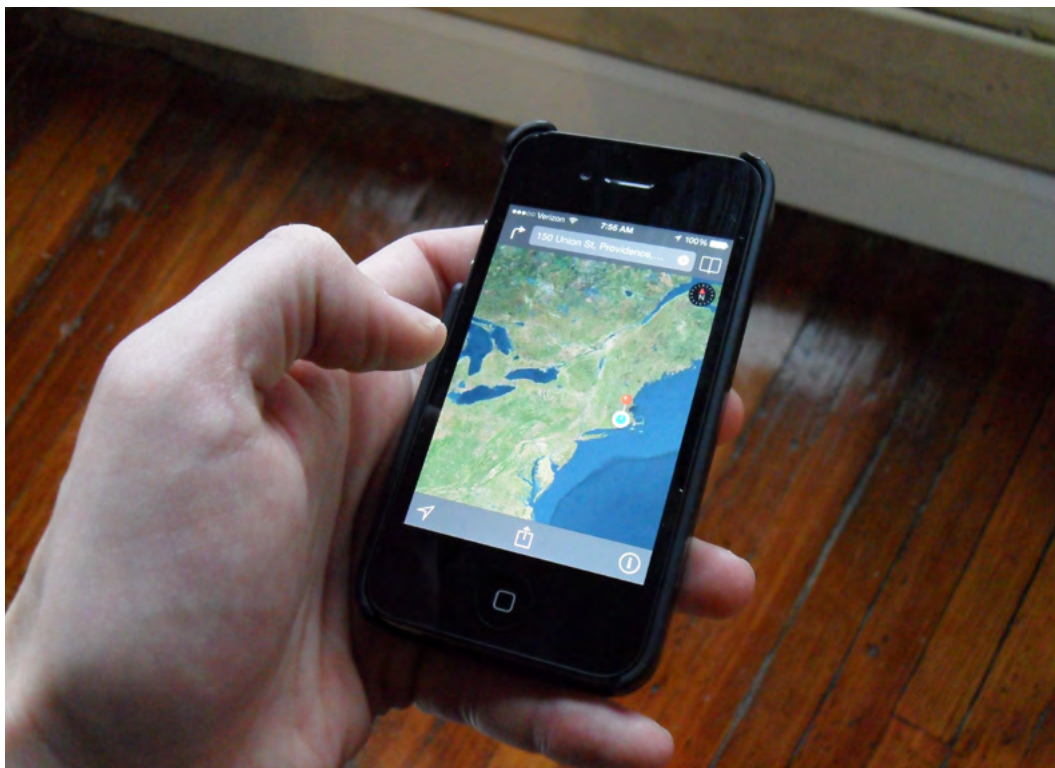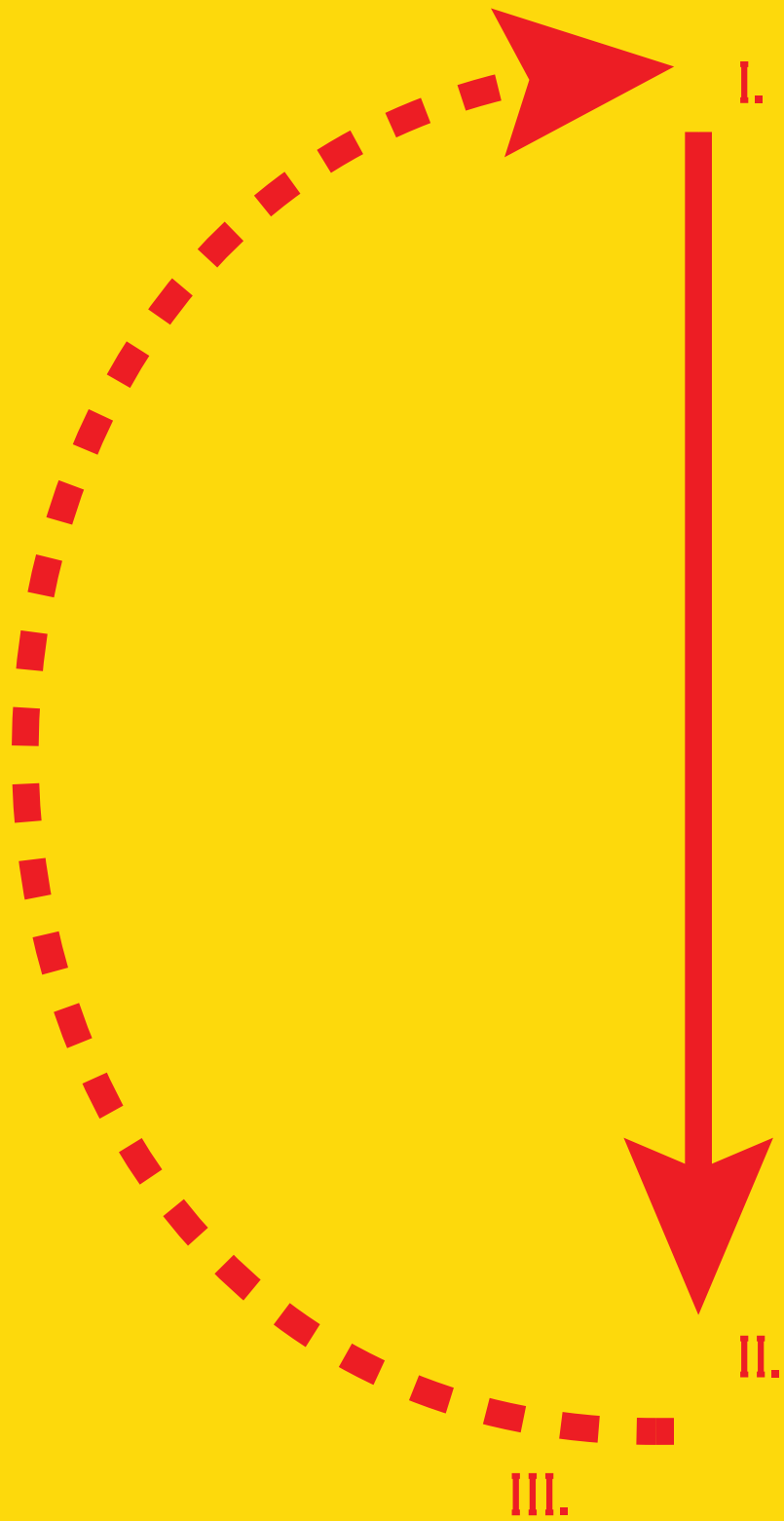
Throughout history we often looked up into the sky as an act of wonder. Now, we simply look down into our phones, which look down at us.

This infinite loop is a really powerful system worth considering. I wanted to find a way to understand where in this infinite loop we exist and live.

I.

II.

III.

I.

II.

III.

I. Look Down
II. Look Down
III. Repeat

While this project analyzes this relationship from the poles—looking up and looking down—both gazes focus on a specific moment in the Google Earth interface. At 2525 ft. above the surface of the earth the complexity of a human being is translated into a single pixel. To highlight this moment, the multiple experiments of this project tease out and reveal their invisible nature of what it means to be represented and reside in these mediums and what we might do to stake more of a claim. The project also attempts to counteract this forced downward gaze by attempting to reinsert a human element back into the sky. By building a personal satellite and releasing it into the sky, this relationship between the camera and the pixel is compounded. Standing on the

2525 ft. above the surface is the exact moment before the complexity of a human being is translated into a single pixel. It represents this last fleeting moment of identification.

To document people from this vantage point, a small ad hoc studio was set up. The square on the floor represents 2 sq. ft., the average square footage of a human being.
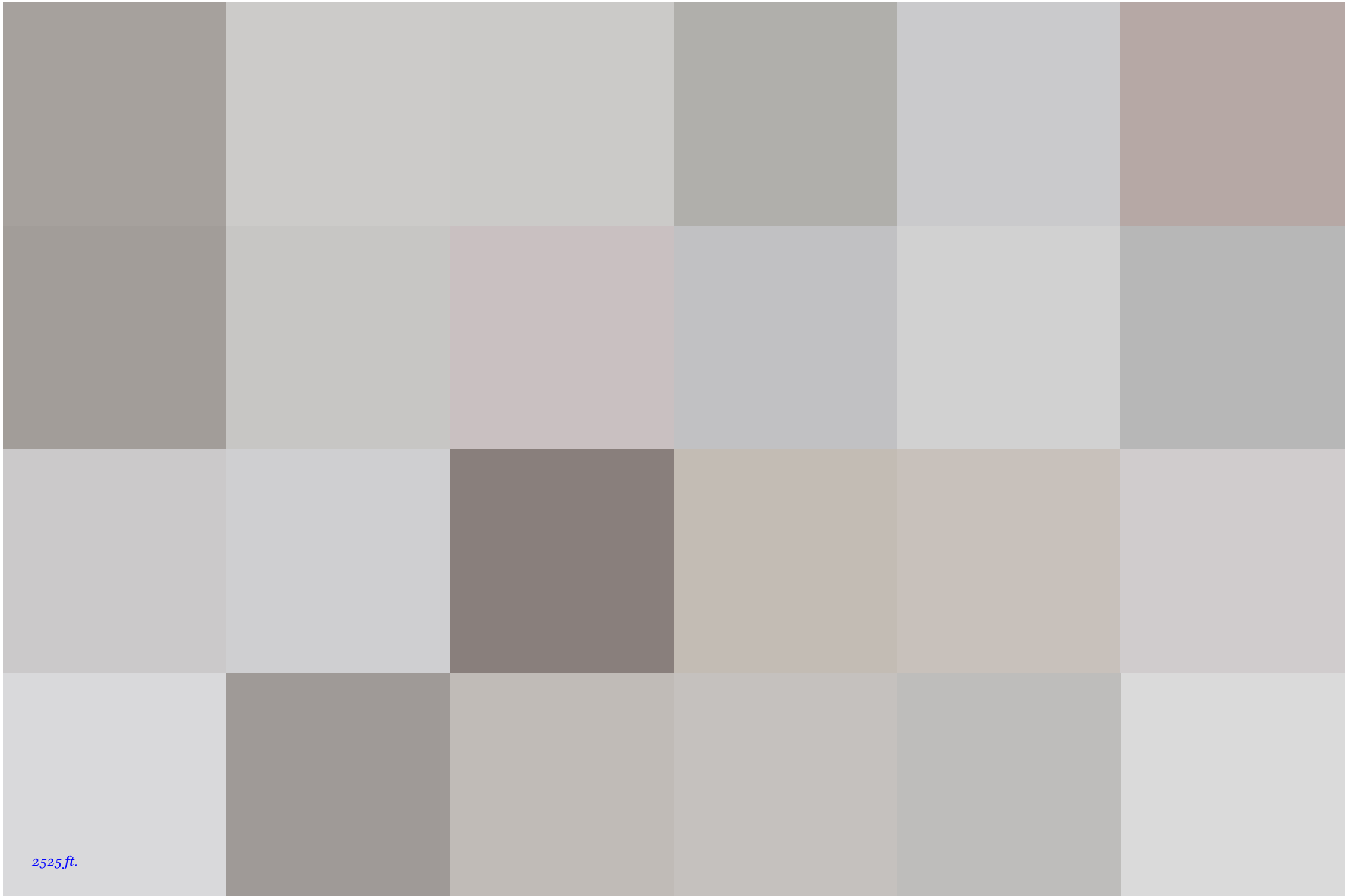
IV—231

0.5 ft.

673 ft.

2020 ft.

2188 ft.

2525 ft.
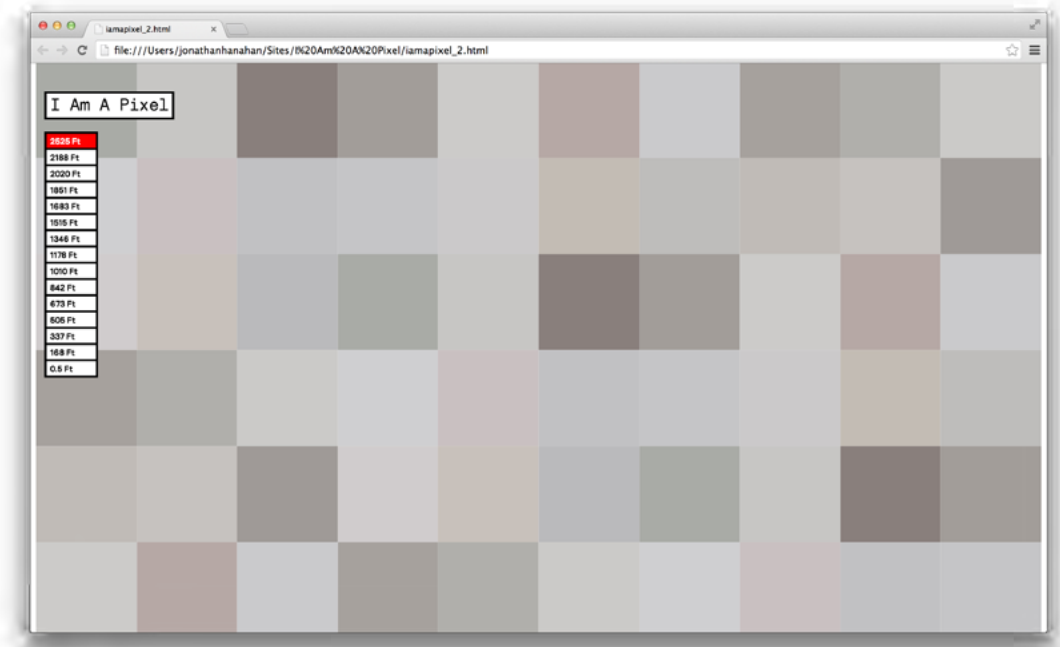
This resulted in a website which takes the imagery of people from above and pixelates them based on distance, mirroring the way the satellite would, only this time, scale is constant. The proportion of the person remains to build an abstract pattern.

platform and viewing the satellite released to its extents, the audience is encouraged to look up and evaluate their relationship with the invisible systems around us.

This work was inspired by projects that explore scale in public space. Specifically works like James Bridle's *Drone Shadows* and Helmet Smit's *One Dead Pixel* visualize digital ecosystems at full scale. *I Am a Pixel* differs in its attempt to re-humanize these ecosystems, reinserting the presence of the human being which often goes unnoticed and overlooked. While the world of Google Earth looks familiar, it does not feel like the world I reside in. These explorations attempt to visualize that notion, reinserting the humanity of an image, therefore questioning our existence in the infinite loop of looking down onto ourselves
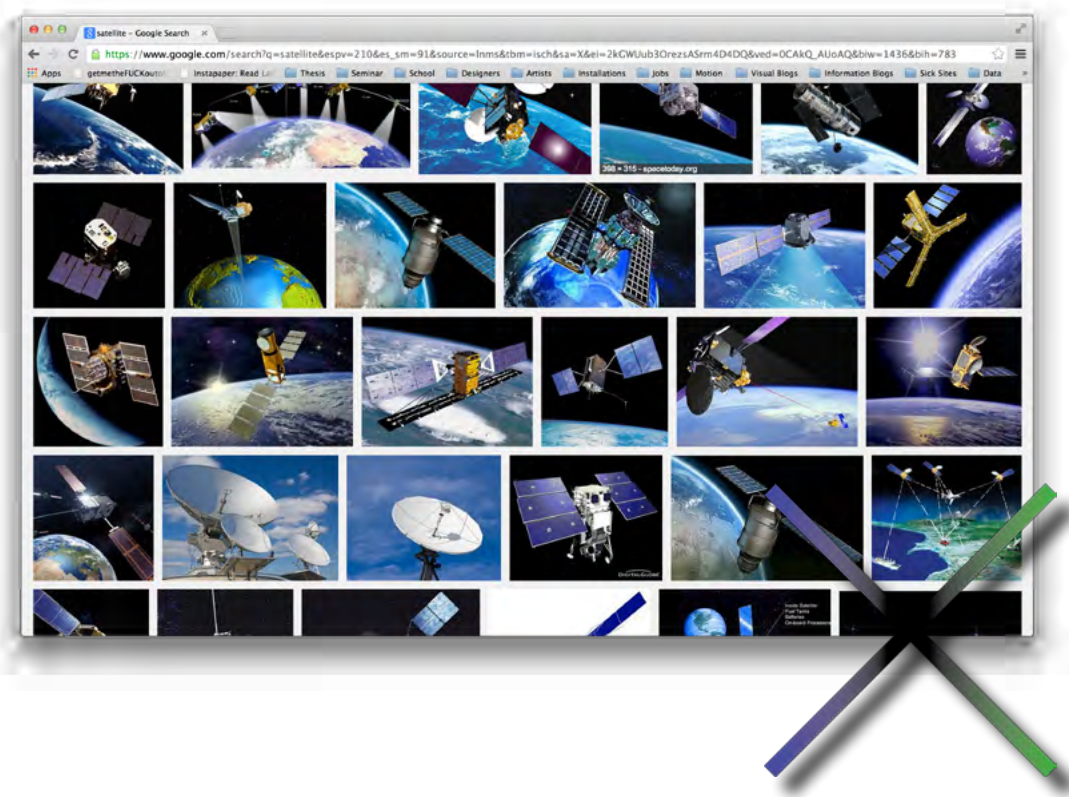
A Google Search for 'satellite' returns very few 'real' images.

through the mechanical eye of the satellite.

This project attempts to conclude the complex journey with a simple result. It is not necessarily a data visualization—representing a beautified version of large numbers which still mask a complexity—but engages an experiential form of visualization which encourages an audience to simply walk outside, look up, and contemplate their existence in this invisible world.

The relationship between the person standing on the square and the balloon floating above would mirror that perfect relationship between satellite and pixel.

Eventually we took the satellite out of the gallery and released it into the atmosphere.

IV—251

IV—253

IV—255

IV—257

IV—259

ALL
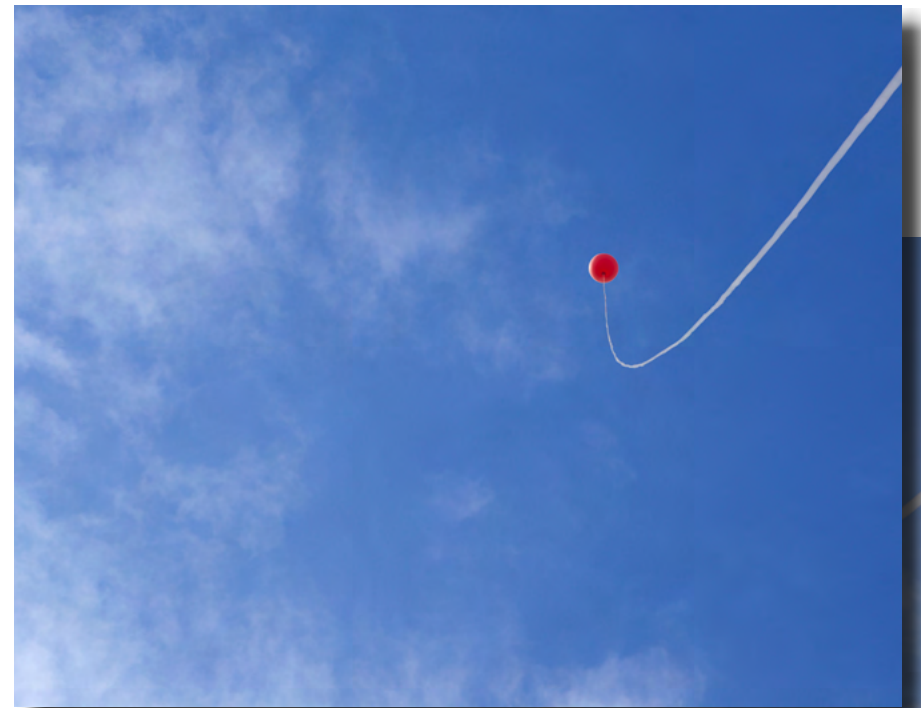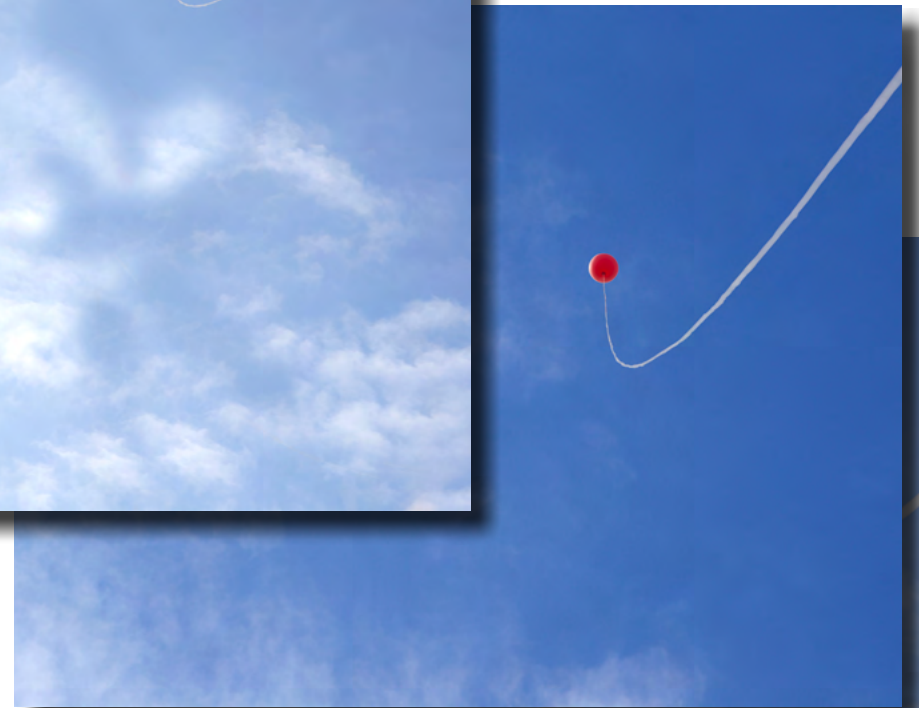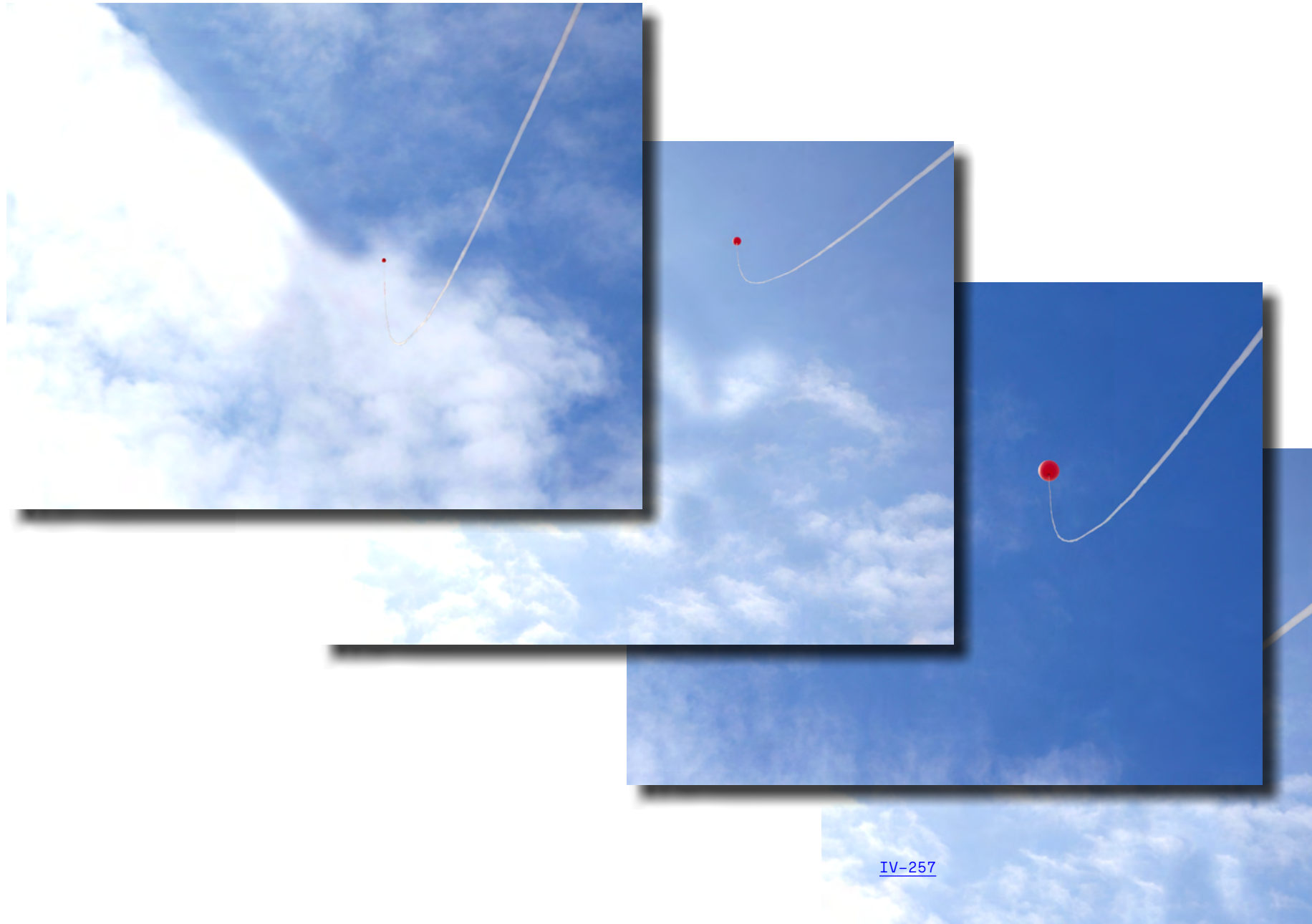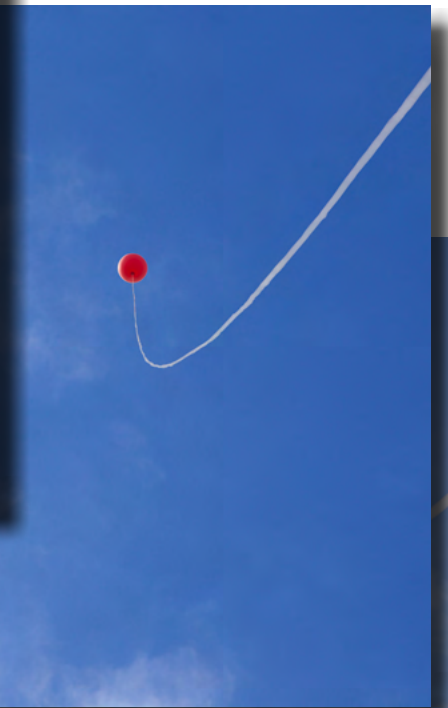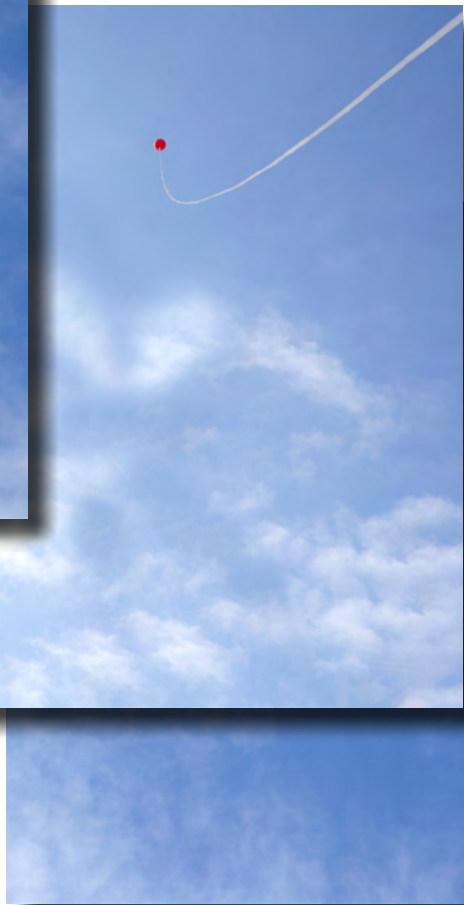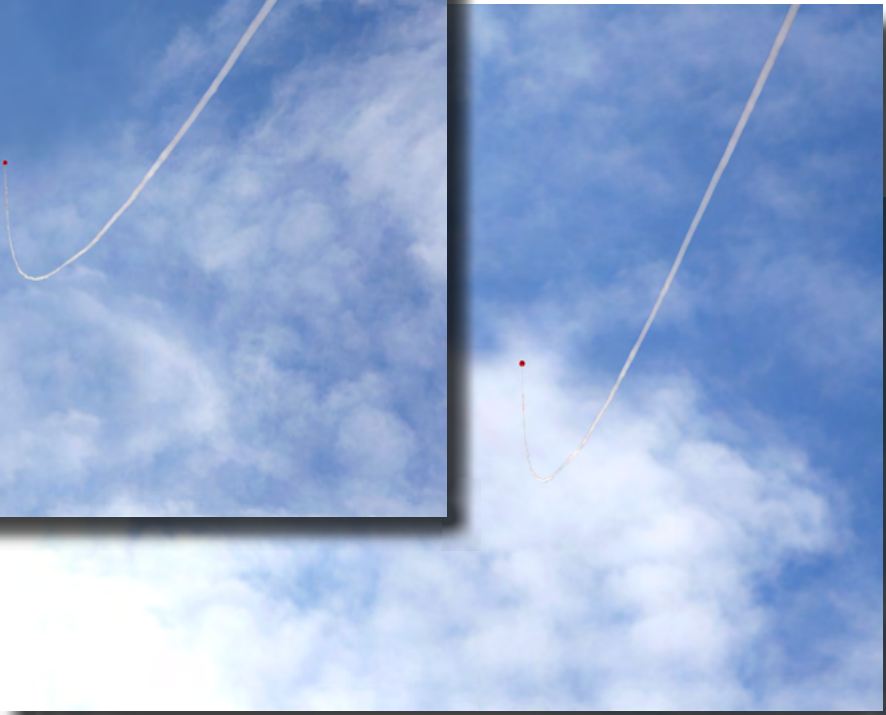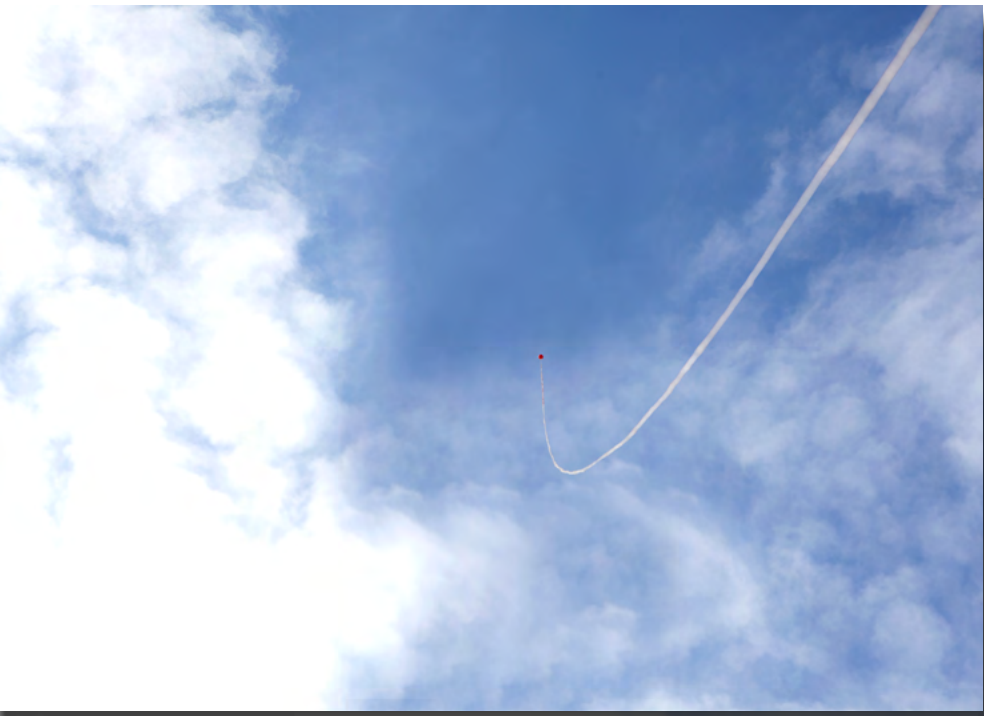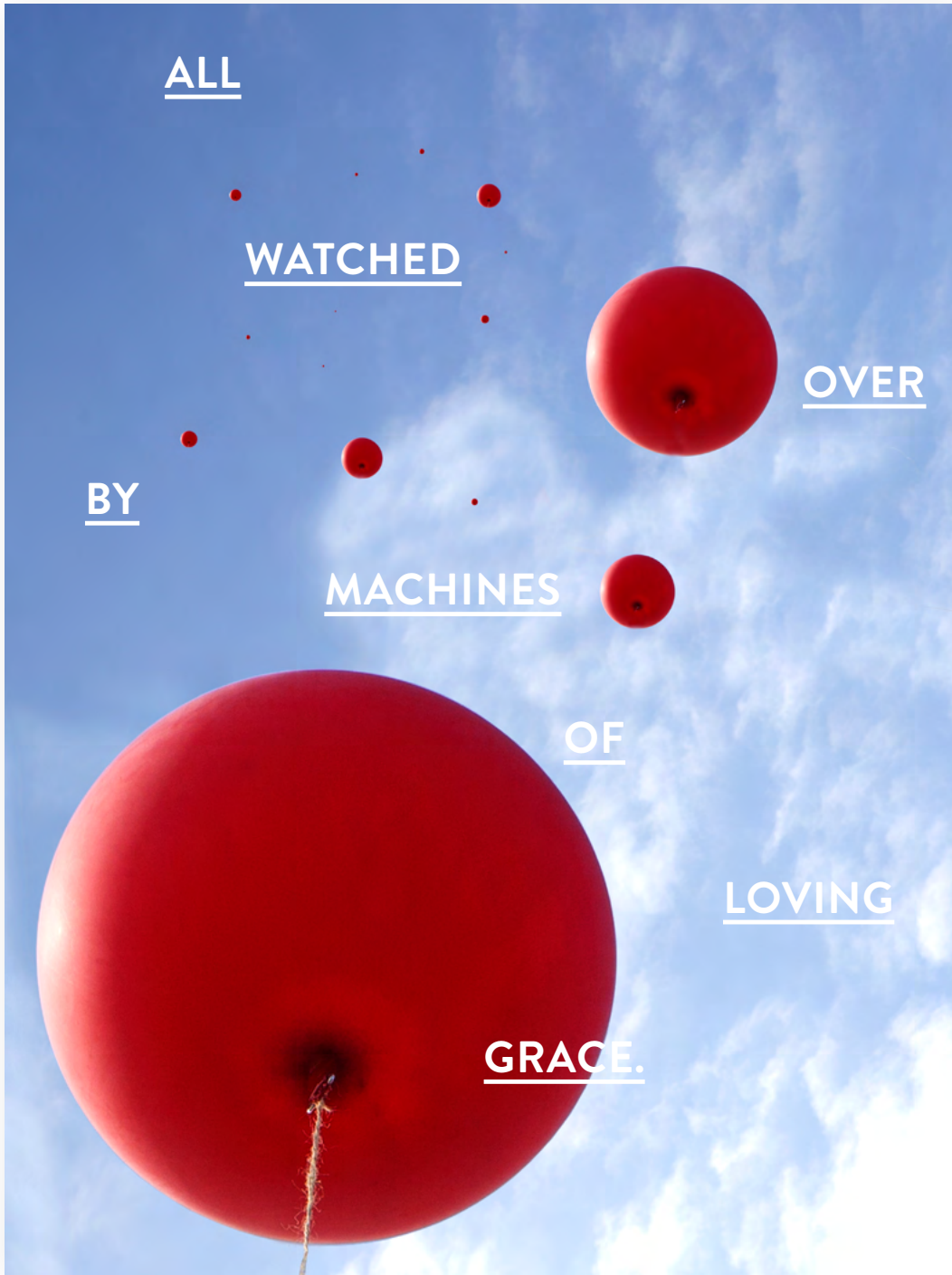
WATCHED

OVER

BY

MACHINES

OF

LOVING

GRACE.
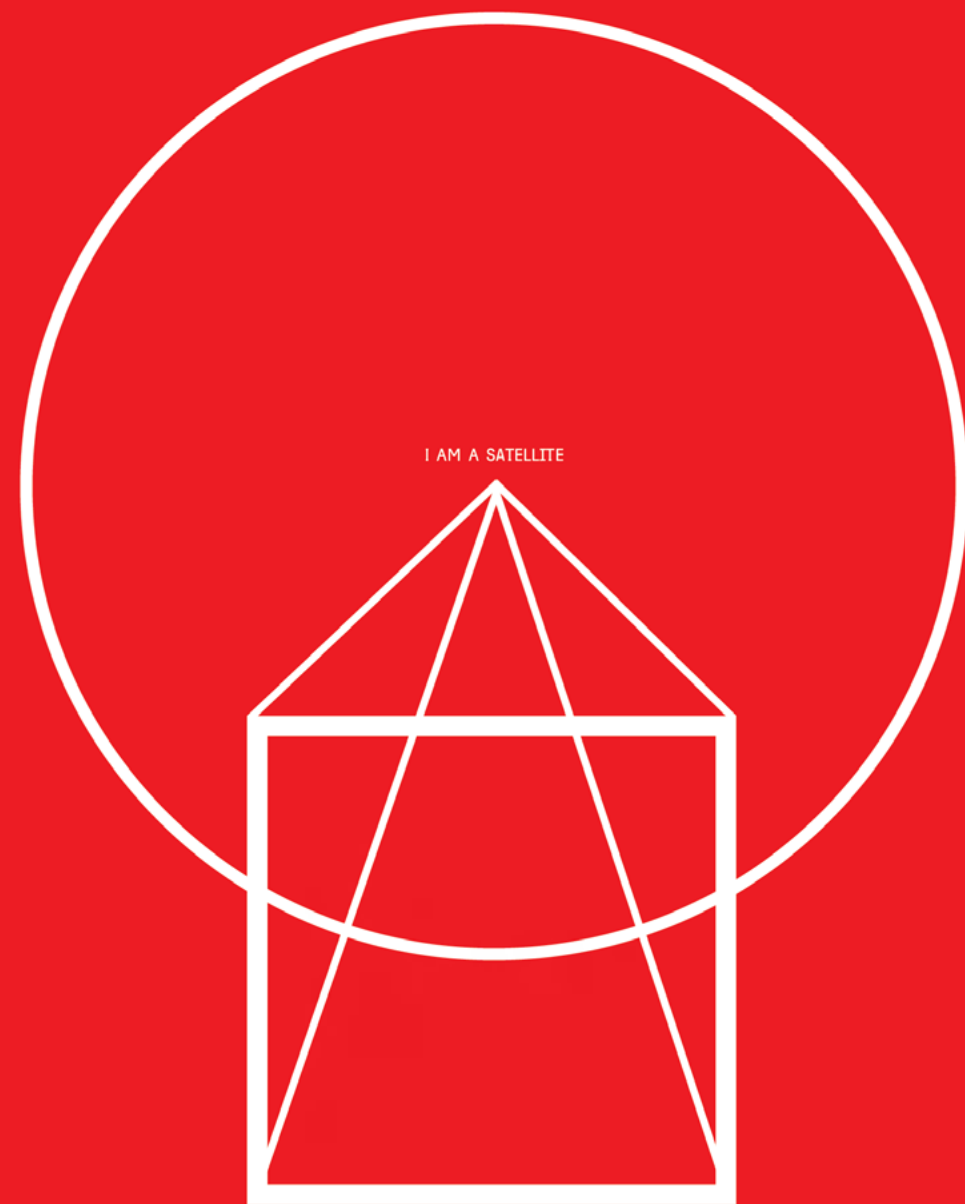
I AM A SATELLITE

I AM A PIXEL

THE ZONE OF DISAPPEARANCE
At a height of 2,525 feet above the earth the resolution of a human being is dissolved to its smallest tangible digital form, a single pixel. If the complexity of human life can be simplified to such a basic representation in the eyes of the technology engrained in our daily experiences, what does it say about the role of that technology and the relationship we have with it? This project is intended to instigate those questions, to push us to consider the physical ramifications of our digital experiences and contemplate how we subscribe to them.

The last piece was a video installation presented on two vertically mounted screens. As the satellite fades away, the person slowly pixelates. This simple question that lead to this complex and circuitous journey of different experiments results in a very simple conclusion.

"'Graphic Design' is misleading as a term as it is about surface. I'm interested in how graphic design can be de-materialised away from the aesthetic to a process – it seems that now people are interested in re-investigating graphic design that's more than making surfaces."

—Daniel Eatock, FORMER GRAPHIC DESIGNER

It encourages anyone viewing the work to simply walk outside, look back up, and contemplate their existence in this invisible world. The glitch is this temporary reverse of wonder.
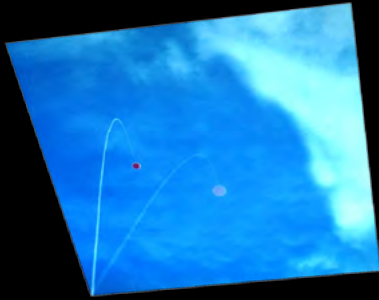
FROM A-HA TO OH SHIT

From Graphic Design to Glitch Design

Previously, I have talked about the role of the 'Thick Interface' in contemporary design practice. In brief, the Thick Interface is what I describe as the space between user and content. Space that has grown vast, complicated, and consequential through the evolution of society and technology. This space began its growth at the infancy of our practice, the Gutenberg press, but has grown exponentially in recent years to encompass a space that is occupied and lived in. Starting at the Gutenberg press instigates that the practice of graphic design was born out of technology and is married to its advancement. The growth in scale and complexity of the interface affects all of professions and all of society, but I would argue that it affects graphic design the most. After all, it is our role to sculpt society's relationship with content and to narrate and disseminate the information used to guide us through our complex environments. When we design interfaces—books, posters, artifacts, websites, etc.—this thickening space in the middle is not only vital, but also a powerful communication tool worth utilizing as a means to understand and relate to the complexity of these engagements.

"The most important tool of the contemporary graphic designer for communicating this complexity, is not Photoshop, Indesign, Processing, or HTML; it is the glitch."

So how do we activate this Thick Interface? Traditionally, the graphic designer has been tasked with hiding, masking, and distracting from errors. It is our job to clean up content, provide a happy, productive, and inspiring experience with it, an interaction devoid of distraction, disturbance, and clutter. In todays media landscape,

So often, the only way we know a connection exists is this subtle flicker of activity.

IV–267
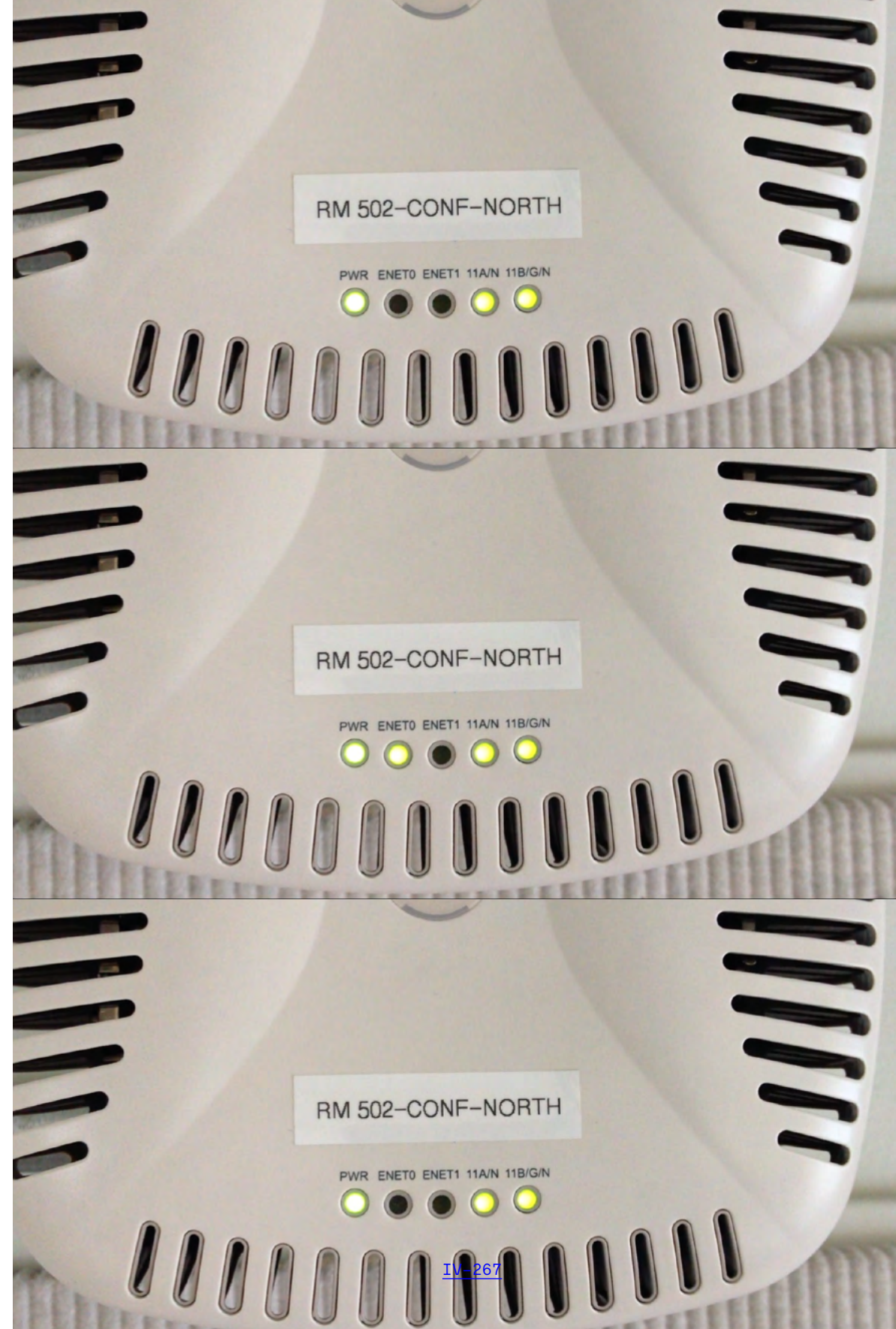
designers must also consider how we not only explain content, but also explain the complexity of our experience with it. As the space within the Thick Interface becomes increasingly more extensive, confusing and disorienting, the steps designers take to hide the thickness also grow. We are using new softwares, technologies, languages, etc. as a means to encourage an audience to forget this space exists. So what happens if we stop trying to hide the errors and embrace them? As we seek to visualize the complexity, I argue that the most important tool of the contemporary graphic designer for communicating this complexity, is not Photoshop, Indesign, Processing, or HTML; it is the glitch.

"An 'a-ha' moment is when an expected visual responds in an unexpected way."

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a glitch as, "a sudden short-lived irregularity in behavior." The glitch has traditionally been viewed as a computer problem, when a machine makes a mistake. While often glitches are cumbersome burdens since they represent an unexpected outcome, usually at the most impromptu time, glitches also have an aesthetic within the art and design community about which many of us are fascinated. They are pixelated, noisy, and nostalgic. They are dynamic, unexpected, and edgy. These formal qualities are what Curt Cloninger and Nick Briz call an 'a-ha' moment in our interaction with technology[1]. An 'a-ha' moment is when an expected visual responds in an unexpected way. For example, Kenneth Goldsmith—in his book Uncreative Writing[2]—tells a great story about how during a transatlantic flight his seat-back monitor shifted from visualizing a map of the plane over the ocean, to a sea of computer code, only to return to the map after a DOS re-boot. A collection of similar images stored in the Public Computer Errors Pool Flickr group can be seen earlier in this book. In this instance, the glitch reveals a mild unexpected and unplanned interruption. The viewer is momentarily aware of the underlying system that makes that map happen and the glitch provides a quick access point into the Thick Interface,

While we subconsciously assume a WIFI signal is limitless because of our constant connection, an individual signal can only travel 1000 ft. before a new relay needs to be established. Thus, we rely on the physical infrastructure far more than one might assume.
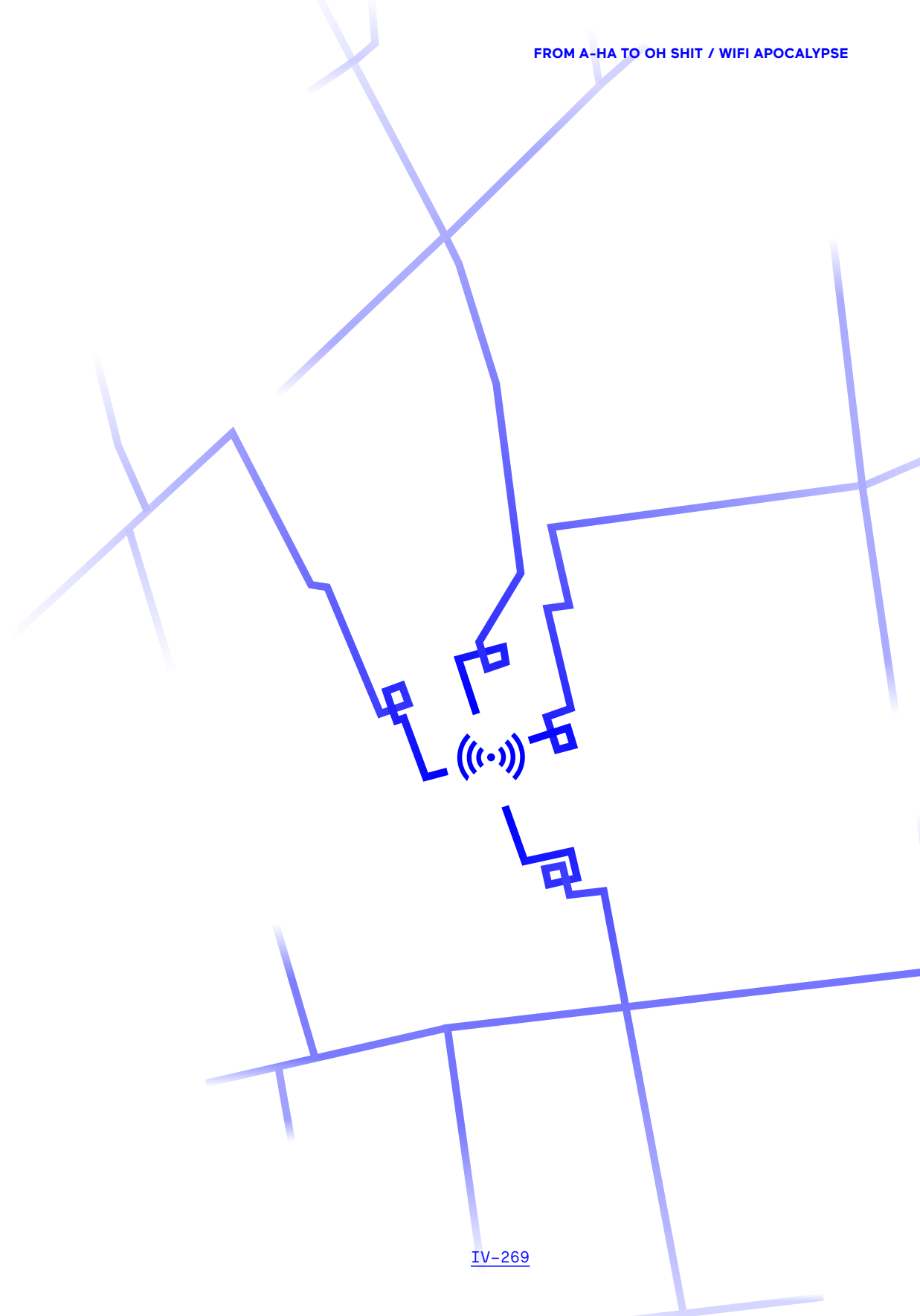
To understand what 1000 ft. of connectivity truly meant, I purchased 1000 ft. of ethernet cable and began to map how far I could take a signal.

revealing its inner structure. These glitches, opposed to the forced glitch typically associated with Glitch Art are possibly the most intriguing digital glitch in the reveal of the Thick Interface. They take place in the worst possible situations: airports, signage systems, ATM machines, etc. These are spaces where we have a very specific agenda, usually one dictated by time and money. Here, the glitch disrupts our goals and compounds distress. Yet the heart of a glitch is its temporarily, it always retreats from this 'a-ha' moment back to the expected experience. If we are able to relax and appreciate what is happening, an opportunity to understand and learn more about the thickness of our interfaces is right in front of us. Obviously, these examples are unintended moments. These interfaces were designed to work perfectly and these reveals were never intended to be seen by anyone. As designers, we so often fear the glitch. But this experience of appreciation sheds light on their potential. What if we as designers utilize the narrative potential of the glitch in our everyday experiences to not only translate information, but comment on that information?

> ## "Grunge typography came in as a backlash, very much like how punk music came in. It was almost like a societal complaint...everything was getting too clean."

The glitch is nothing new in graphic design. Grunge typography, among other disruptive typographic experiments throughout history, is a very close cousin to the contemporary idea of the glitch. Popularized in the 1990's by the likes of graphic designers David Carson, Neville Brody, and many others, this form of typographic expression was driven like all other examples of graphic design innovation. It was a direct result of technological advancement. More importantly, it signaled graphic design's potential to not only simplify content, but also to participate in the conversation of that content; to open up the content even more, and to comment on the world in which the content resides. Here, the interface began its thickening. It was no longer invisible, but increasingly material, both formally and conceptually. Grunge typography was as much about its time in history as it was about the technology. The nineties were a world of anger, resentment, and confusion following the end of the Cold War. As Carlos Segura

Starting at the router, I proceeded to unravel the cable in all cardinal directions until it reached its limit.
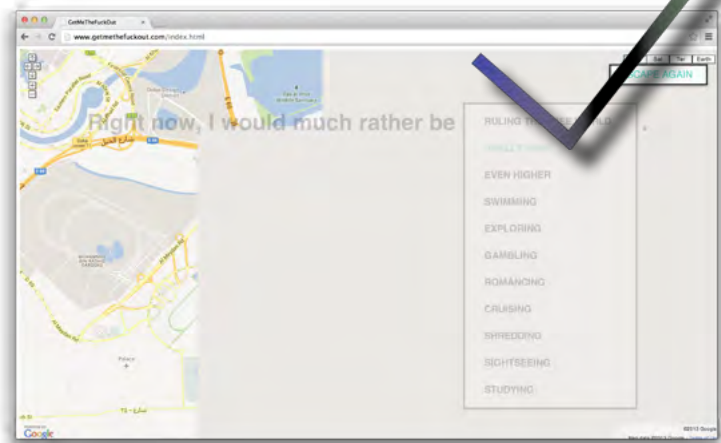
DOS Reboot, A-ha Moment

The Glitch Revealed, getmethefuckout.com

The Glitch's Stylistic Cousin, David Carson

I Am A Pixel, Oh Shit Moment

put it, "Grunge typography came in as a backlash, very much like how punk music came in. It was almost like a societal complaint...everything was getting too clean."[3]. These stylistic moves added layers of disruption to the reading experience. David Carson's most famous example is his treatment of an article on Brian Ferry which he set entirely in Zapf Dingbats, rendering the text completely illegible. Here, the designer makes his statement and politicizes his work as a means to alter the expected experience of a reader and a magazine. More than twenty years later, the glitch resides in a similar situation. The world of today is formally similar yet exponentially more complicated. The complication exists in the invisible systems and networks surrounding our urban existence. What has changed since the days of grunge is that we have become far better at cleaning up the edges and surfaces of contemporary complexity, and the containers we design in are deeply more magical. In the nineties, the interface, while thickening, was still relatively thin. Today, that interface is vastly thicker and the glitch is the tool which serves the role that grunge type once did, activating the content, while also experimenting with the technology. The glitch is not only an access point to the Thick Interface, but also a statement about societies position within it regarding privacy, security, power, etc.. Yet still, grunge is only a cousin of the glitch because for the most part it is still purely a stylistic move. Grunge typography may be related closest to glitch art, where the aesthetic of error is utilized to formally make statements. The glitch, I argue for, has far more reaching powers than the visual splendor of anxiety. It has an opportunity to alter the experience and the perception of an audience as they participate in the world.

"Computers don't make mistakes, people do."

In the expansion of complexity and the Thick Interface, graphic designers have—more often than not—retreated back to the role of stylist or technician of these new interfaces. We do not clean up the thickness itself, but rather the container it lives in so society does not need to concern itself with what is under the hood and how it works. This is very much dictated by a client driven business model. These opportunities have thrived in the art world for many years but rarely venture into the design world. Clients want—and pay for—work that promotes a specific agenda to their audiences. The stereotype of errors is that they negate and interfere with this curated strategy. But if we stop thinking about glitches as simply computer problems to solve but as opportunities to disrupt expected experiences, the narrative potential of the glitch is infinite.

Sure, the works of glitch typographers, artist/designers, and even contemporary practitioners like OKFocus, Metahaven, etc. have experimented with disruption and glitch in traditional graphic design practice. I still feel we have only scratched the surface of the potential of interference in design methodology. Where the intrigue of the glitch has the potential to go further is embedded in the growing thickness of our interfaces. Here, the physical and digital are intertwined and the glitch is no longer simply a physical disruption to digital systems but digital systems also invading our physical environments. These glitches are no longer one-way systems and two-dimensional visuals. When the digital invades the physical glitches may shift to experiential, participatory, and interactive moments in our everyday environments. This brings us to Cloninger and Briz's second glitch moment; the 'oh shit' moment. Here, they point out that the glitch is not a computer problem but a human problem. They state, "Computers don't make mistakes, people do. If all variables remain the same, given the same input, a computer will always render the same output; however, often times a programmer slips...These slips result in entirely predictable, yet unexpected output. We tend to place the onus on the computer and call this moment a glitch."[4] This statement points to the glitch as something we can control and utilize, not simply something to which we are subjected. They go on to say, "A glitch is experienced when a human mis-expects one thing and winds up with something else. Without hope, anticipation, and expectation, without a sense of rightness and the way things are supposed to be, there is no glitch." [5]

"The designed glitch takes us from the playful and surface 'a-ha' moment, to the deep, rich, engrained, and sometimes terrifying, 'oh shit' realization of what our experiences in the Thick Interface actually imply."

The journey—and its aftermath (following image)—represent how the signal is only the last leg of a vastly complicated connection.

Hope and expectation drive our everyday lives. We expect our technology to work. We expect it to help and to enhance our lives. Since the glitch is so dependent and so effective in these moments when expectations are high, designing disruptions are an enticing opportunity in the toolkit of the contemporary designer. The glitch can start to shape, frame, and alter the way we experience complex content. The glitch provides the designer the opportunity to not only reveal the thickness, but to explain it in new, relatable, and memorable ways. Additionally, when we remove the glitch's tie to its formal stereotype of pixels, shifts, and error on a screen, it can become anything—physical, digital, both, or neither—which momentarily disrupts an expected experience. It is this rupture that provides the graphic designer great freedom and potential in how we tell contemporary stories.

As contemporary graphic/glitch designers, it is no longer our task to simply beautify the edges of our complex contents and societies, it is our job to thoroughly explain the systems themselves. The glitch becomes the access point to chronicle these complexities; through time, space, and experience. Cloninger and Briz often define this as the 'glitch event'[6] which prefaces that the glitch is an interactive and participatory entity. The designed glitch takes us from the playful and surface 'a-ha' moment, to the deep, rich, engrained, and sometimes terrifying, 'oh shit' realization of what our experiences in the Thick Interface actually imply. As graphic designers continue to attack more complex and consequential problems, the glitch opens up our interfaces, not by simplifying, but by providing a vantage point to understanding and a new lens to observe and evaluate our evolving media landscapes.

[1] Curt Cloninger and Nick Briz, "Sabotage! Glitch Politix Man[ual/ifesto]," *Tactical Glitches* (blog), January 24, 2014, accessed February 20, 2014, http://www.tacticalgl.it/ches/txt/sabotage.html.

[2] Kenneth Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age* (New York: Columbia UP, 2011) Kindle edition.

[3] Sharan Shetty, "The Rise And Fall Of Grunge Typography," *The Awl*, August 21, 2012, accessed February 28, 2014, http://www.theawl.com/2012/08/grunge-typography.

[4] Curt Cloninger and Nick Briz, "Sabotage! Glitch Politix Man[ual/ifesto]," *Tactical Glitches* (blog), January 24, 2014, accessed February 20, 2014, http://www.tacticalgl.it/ches/txt/sabotage.html.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

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QUOTE COLLECTION

ANALOGY AS NARRATIVE

"The glitch becomes personally political at that very moment when the human experiencing the glitch feels herself implicit in the entangled systems that give rise to the glitch. This is the moment of personal onus, of personal implication, of personal responsibility. Beyond the initial 'a-ha' revelatory moment of uncanny v, and on toward the subsequent 'oh shit' moment of personal implication."
—**Curt Cloninger, Nick Briz, Sabotage! Glitch Politix Man[ual/ifesto]**

"The essense of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another."
—**George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By**

"I have this fear that as a culture, we are not feeling enough. There is this kind of anesthesia, throughout America at the moment. We have lost our sense of outrage, our anger, and our grief. Our cultural joy is no where to be seen. One of the causes of this, as we all try to build this global view and educate ourselves about the enormity of our culture, the information we have to work with is these gigantic numbers, that our brain doesn't have the ability to comprehend. We can't make meaning out of these statistics. To take them out of the raw language of data into the more visual realm that can be felt. My feeling is that if we can relate to these things ore then they will matter more to us than they do now."
—**Chris Jordan, Turning Powerful Stats into Art**

"The common point between all the things that we include within the umbrella terms of "work of art" lies in their ability to produce a sense of human experience (and point to possible trajectories within this chaos called reality)."
—**Nicholas Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics**

"For our understanding of technology, our mental models of it,how we visualize it, is increasingly as important as the technology itself."
—**James Bridle, The Rendered World**

"Experiences are memorable events that engage individuals in an inherently personal way. Transformations are effectual outcomes that guide customers to change some dimension of self"
—**James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine II, After Art, pg 46-47**

"How we can access computational things, but in more analogue perhaps abstract ways"
—**David Hedberg**

"Trying to be less narrative, but to reach into an emotional landscape. I want people to experience more in emotion than just a simple narration."
—**Pierre Huyghe, Romance, Art21**

"Human attempts to understand phenomena extending beyond human experience invariably produces 'a fallacy of composition'—what confounds human minds when trying to insensibly picture things significantly, even infinitely, larger than the mind that attempts to contain it."
—**Alfred North Whitehead**

NEW AESTHETIC/THICK INTERFACE

"In the media art world, where the novelty of the tools is the basic starting point rather than the goal, the projects that deploy Google's apps tend to raise questions about the legitimacy of technologies penetration into our lives, with issues of privacy and dystopian corporate control dominating the scene."
—**Nicola Bozzi, Notes from the Textural Wasteland**

"We live in a world that really isn't magic, but appears as magic"
—**James Bridle, Meet the Artist`**

The New Media object consists of one or more interfaces to a database of multimedia material. If only one interface is constructed, the result will be similar to a traditional art object but this is the exception rather than the norm.
—**Lev Manovich, Database as a Symbolic Form, pg. 414**

"It seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbors in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows"
—**Nicolas Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics**

"The New Aesthetic is not superficial, it is not concerned with beauty or surface texture. It is deeply engaged with the politics and politicization of networked technology, and seeks to explore, catalogue, categorize, connect and interrogate these things."
—**James Bridle, The New Aesthetic and its Politics**

"The distinction between physical and digital, the real and the virtual are essentially meaningless and we must continue to talk about these things as a communality that we are all involved."
—**James Bridle, Network Tense**

"The robots are going to take over, which is ok, as long as we start to think quite seriously about what happens socially, and politically, and legally around them... which we have not done yet, because currently these technologies are obscure."
—**James Bridle, Meet the Artist**

"If we have the will and the stamina to keep from sliding back into habitual ways of (not) seeing – back into a world held up by invisible strings – then this fantastic, specific, bizarre world is always available to us."
—**Jenny Odell, Satellite Views**

"Painting as an object rather than painting as a window on the world."
—**Frank Stella**

"The Network = The Internet AND us."
—**James Bridle, Network Tense**

"Making visible material out of technological infrastructure is the first step towards understanding them. What we can't see, we cannot critically evaluate."
—**Timo Arnall, Immaterials**

"Synthesizing the real and the virtual" –It tries to reinforce this sense that they are actually bound to each other. it is not a software layer on top of the physical world, like a screen on top of architecture, if you take the line away those things clustered together don't mean anything."
—**Matt Cottam, Tellart, Reams of Paper**

"As we come to understand that the network isn't in computers but inside everything we touch, we learn that 'form' isn't what we see, it's what we use. Every day there's a new surface to interact with. But, underneath these surfaces lie familiar human needs, desires, habits and hopes."
—**Tellart.com**

"It is up to us as beholders of art to bring [unforeseen associations] to light, to judge artworks in terms of the relations they produce in the specific contexts they inhabit"
—**Nicolas Bourriaud, Postproduction**

"In the world of secure (and insecure) networks, the act of spoofing entails faking data to take advantage of network insecurity."
—**Eric Berger, Texas Students Fake GPS Signals and Take**

Control of an $80 Million Yacht

"At this point, it seems unlikely that we are going to avoid further complex human/thing entanglements, so trying to avoid them is probably something we should try to avoid. On the other hand, we should also avoid passively sitting around, techno-fetishistically dazzled by these 'spectacular new developments', blithely watching a real-time documentary of ourselves watching a real-time documentary of ourselves. Probably, we should spend some time figuring out how these systems flow and function so we can more effectively modulate them (or sabotage them), hopefully for reasons other than making more money."
—**Curt Cloninger, Manifesto for a Theory of the 'New Aesthetic'**

"The new aesthetic stands for not the artifacts of this technological progression, but the experience of living in a world where our cultural objects are spread through all the devices we have, where our memory is outsourced to the network and partially retrievable but is also just kind of out there and formed after everything."
—**James Bridle, A New Aesthetic for the Digital Age**

"Look more carefully at the way you behave with these things (and think very carefully about how we it is we want to be doing with them"
—**James Bridle, A New Aesthetic for the Digital Age**

"The advent of 'operationalized' images is upon us."
—**Trevor Paglen, Safety in Numbers**

"Everytime we interact with technology, we are committing something of ourselves and our experiences to it, and becoming part of the larger network of it."
—**James Bridle, A New Aesthetic for the Digital Age**

INTERACTION

'All Graphic Design is Interaction Design'
—**Erik van Blokland, @letterror**

"My work is like the light in the fridge, it only works when there are people there to open the fridge door. Without people, it's not art–it is something else–stuff in a room"
—**Liam Gillick**

PHYSICAL/SPATIAL EXPERIENCE

"Whenever possible, I avoid using CMYK in the graphic design of books. The techniques with which one can mix any color with cyan, magenta, yellow and key black suggests reality can be simulated. I far prefer using a palette whereby the reader stays astutely aware of the fact that he is holding a printed reproduction."
—**Joost Grootens, I Swear I Use No Art At All**

"The real always is a matter of construction, a matter of 'fiction'."
—**Jacques Ranciere, Paradox of Political Art**

"Physical encounter is of more importance and easily overlooked in the era of the screen."
—**Adam Harrison Levy**

"If we used consumable materials, sharpie on paper, etc... we would use more than 10 million pieces of A4 paper, 20,000 reams of paper. There is something really nice about the idea of making the Internet nostalgic and physical, an archive of physical stuff, but this is the reality of it, 20,000 reams of paper, If you draw in sand, or on dry erase, and you erase them, you not only save all that paper but you also say something about not storing peoples private information, your giving them a sense that it is ethereal, that they alone get to keep it and access it."
—**Matt Cottam, Tellart, Reams of Paper**

'Physical objects are useful props in debates like the (Iraq war): immediately illustrative, and useful to hang an argument and peoples' attention on.'
—**James Bridle, The Value of Ruins**

The problem is not to make the world more technological, the problem is to make the world more humane again."
—**John Maeda, My Journey in Design**

"In the cultural sector, a script is a story applied to a space "
—**Kevin Walker, Hackinstance**

"At Local Projects we're really focused on what we call experiential learning. So looking into taking information and ideas, and translating them into experiences...Our studio seeks to focus on that .9 or .5 percent that is interested in making experiences out of things, or communicating deep or complicated topics through experiences."
—**Jake Barton, The Future of the City**

"Actually, computing and curating are not so different: in both cases it's the enactment of content in a particular environment. "
—Kevin Walker, Hackinstance

A CRITICAL PRACTICE

"The network is inherently illegible, it tends towards seamlessness and invisibility, from code to "the cloud". Those who cannot perceive the network cannot act effectively within it, and are powerless. The job, then, is to make such things visible."
—James Bridle, Under the Shadow of the Drone

"We live in a world shaped and defined by computation, and it is one of the jobs of the critic and the artist to draw attention to the world as it truly is."
—James Bridle, The New Aesthetic and its Politics

"Here, the designer is not the starting or end point of a finished product but, to use Bourriaud's term, a 'semionaut' who connects new spaces, new narratives. For him, 'The "semionaut" imagines the links, the likely relations between disparate sites."
—Part of the Process, Eye Magazine, 2006

"The world is going to get magical and strange, and people will be confused and fearful. Designers have to do what they do best, helping people to understand the world and the way they live in it – and make the tools that people can use to shape their own lives."
—Chris Heathcote

"'Graphic Design' is misleading as a term as it is about surface. I'm interested in how graphic design can be dematerialized away from the aesthetic to a process – it seems that now people are interested in re-investigating graphic design that's more than making surfaces."
—Daniel Eatock

"We prepare designers for a world in which virtually anything from sensor networks to interactive surfaces to entire cities may be the next medium or platform of communication. We offer an educational experience for individuals who relish a complex challenge."
—Anne Burdick, Chair, Media Design Program at Art Center

"The Internet aesthetic is all about piling on the drama to get noticed and that means being bold, colourful and often a little brash. If you add in a dollop of controversy, all the better."
—Laura Tan, The Internet Aesthetic: How the Web is Changing the Clothes We Wear

"How can design be used politically and socially for the codification and de-codification of people's thoughts? What is a graphic design that is inherently secretive? How can graphic design reinforce privacy? And, really, how can the process of design engender a proactive attitude towards the future — and our present for that matter."
—Sang Mun, Making Democracy Legible: A Defiant Typeface

GLITCH

"Political glitch art must always involve the machine; it is etymologically and culturally a technical occurrence in a biological world. It is no more the corrupted file than it is the device interpreting the file than it is the person who is interpreting the device's interpretation of the file. It exists between these things. Glitches didn't exist before machines and they will cease to exist when the distinction between people and machines collapses. A glitch is of the times, and can only be political in the moment."
—Curt Cloninger, Nick Briz, Sabotage! Glitch Politix Man[ual/ifesto]

"Political glitch art passes through the systems of the world, and in so passing, it exposes, resists, problematizes, confounds, and ultimately transforms the way in which the systems of the world function."
—Curt Cloninger, Nick Briz, Sabotage! Glitch Politix Man[ual/ifesto]

"The machine can't recognize a glitch. Only humans recognize a glitch as a glitch. A glitch is experienced when a human mis-expects one thing and winds up with something else. Without hope, anticipation, and expectation, without a sense of rightness and the way things are supposed to be, there is no glitch." –
Curt Cloninger, Nick Briz, Sabotage! Glitch Politix Man[ual/ifesto]]

"The initial 'a-ha' is a given. The implicit 'oh shit' takes some doing on the part of the artist. The goal of the "political" glitch artist is to stage/wire/infuse/ pre-load her glitch event so that it purposefully unfolds from 'a-ha' to 'oh shit.' The 'political' glitch artist (eventually) seeks to glitch out shit in ways that lead to an implicit awareness of our human/system entanglements, and an implicit onus on the part of the 'viewer' to move those entangle-ments higher up and further in. Political glitch art means to endow its 'viewer' with a feeling of her own agency and the heaviness/obligation that accompanies it."
—Curt Cloninger, Nick Briz, Sabotage! Glitch Politix Man[ual/ifesto]

"My work is about trying to push vision and perception as far as they can, usually to the point that they break down. By investigating these limit cases of vision, we can create a vantage point to then look back at ourselves with different kinds of eyes."
—Trevor Paglen, Six Landscapes

"We initially perceive NA images bodily and affectively. They are freaky. They trip us out. Only later are we able to reflect on them analytically, letting their own systemic contours and folds guide our theoretical thought."
—Curt Cloninger, Manifesto for a Theory of the 'New Aesthetic'

"There is no 'real world' that functions as the outside of art. Instead, there is a multiplicity of folds in the sensory fabric of the common, folds in which outside and inside take on a multiplicity of shifting forms, in which the topography of what is 'in' and what is 'out' are continually criss-crossing and displaced by the aesthetics of politics and the

politics of aesthetics. Within any given framework, artists are those whose strategies aim to change the frames, speeds, and scales according to which we perceive the visible, and combine it with a specific invisible element and a specific meaning. Such strategies are intended to make the invisible visible or to question the self-evidence of the visible; to rupture given relations between things and meanings and, inversely, to invent novel relationships between things and meanings that are previously unrelated."

—Jacques Ranciére, The Paradox of Political Art

"Hacker culture is all about being able to learn and experience and interact. It takes an "anything goes" approach to altering reality."

—Metahaven, David Dawkins, 5 Points to a Better Internet

"New Aesthetic images are residues that result from current ways of being in the world, entangled ways in which human beings are 'always already' implicated. At their best, New Aesthetic images challenge humans to re-imagine 'humanness' 'being' and 'the world' altogether."

—Curt Cloninger, Manifesto for a Theory of the 'New Aesthetic'

ARCHITECTURAL FOUNDATIONS

"I could say that everything I know about art, I learned as an architect. As an architect, I give myself a program, taking into account a specific space. Space is not just physical. It's also social, cultural, political. Studying the space, I try to reach what we call the essence of the space. Then I combine that with the

essence of what I am trying to say. All these elements are incorporated in the program, in which I have an objective." -

—Alfredo Jaar, One Million Finnish Passports

NEGATIVE PERSPECTIVES

"The most successful technology gets out of the way, and lets us live our lives"

—Amber Case, We are All Cyborgs Now

"The surface is what actualizes a work of graphic design."

—Eric Hu, Form Upon Platform, Platform Upon Form

ETC.

"Goodbye," said the fox. "Here is my secret. It's quite simple: One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eyes. . . . It's the time that you spent on your rose that makes your rose so important. . . . People have forgotten this truth," the fox said, "But you mustn't forget it. You become responsible for what you've tamed. You're responsible for your rose. . . ."

—Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, The Little Prince

"By removing our knowledge of the glue that holds the systems that make up the infrastructure together, it becomes much more difficult, if not impossible, to begin to understand how we are constructed as subjects, what types of systems are brought into place (legal, technical, social, etc.) and where the possibilities for transformation exist."

—Matt Ratto, Ethics of Seamless infrastructures: Resources and Future Directions

"We are all accustomed to believing that maps and reality are necessarily related, or if they are not, we can make them so by altering reality."

—Jane Jacobs

"Each graduate thesis is an attempt to define what we know to be 'Graphic Design.'"

—Bethany Johns

"About how we negotiate the formal, aesthetic and conceptual relationship of art and its effects after the ubiquitous rise of the Internet."

—You Are Here, Art after the Internet

"Comedy and humour as an interface for information that is hard to read."

—Joi Ito, @joi on @baratunde #medialab #sciencebrother

"Good design is less about what's added than what's subtracted."

—Steve Jobs

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