

Doppelgängers

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Abstract

This paper explores a series of artworks entitled *Doppelgängers*, wherein found objects are paired with detailed copies. Within this body of work I duplicate a range of scrap papers including envelopes and short notes with distinctly torn edges – exhibiting haphazard and idiosyncratic features that are not likely to occur twice. Each original object within these pairs is explored as a document and a site where various forms of information reside – from written text on its surface, to the material information revealed by the condition of the physical object itself. Each small mark is copied stroke-by-stroke, approximating appearance and informational content as a means of exploring the limits of sameness and the potential for difference between two like objects. The notion of copying is explored as a process-based phenomenon integrating careful observation and making.

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Introduction: Verisimilitude

In the winter of 2015, I was invited to exhibit my work during Reed Arts Week, an annual event at Reed College in Portland, Oregon. I participated in a group show entitled *Might Now*, which brought together work by six artists addressing traces and the material results of research and process. I contributed three newly completed works from a series called *Doppelgängers* (Fig. 1). Each work in this ongoing series situates detailed copies of scrap paper notes next to the originals they mimic. At first glance the objects that make up these pairs appear to be identical – but upon closer inspection subtle differences become evident. A doppelgänger by definition elicits a double take – prompting observation of a pair that is remarkably similar but not exactly the same. Doppelgängers are an unanticipated double, sameness resulting from unrelated circumstances.

Each set of *Doppelgängers* I exhibited at Reed College began with a found object, a seemingly inconsequential document including a tab pulled from a poster advertising an apartment for rent, a note that had fallen underneath a desk, and a scrap of lined paper containing two phone numbers found on the sidewalk. These objects were collected over a number of years and stayed with me across time, cities, and new apartments before becoming a part of these artworks. Although they might be considered insignificant, their form and details represent the habits of their makers and the moments of their making in subtle ways. Each piece of paper I chose to duplicate contains distinctions that reflect how we record information for temporary use – uneven edges, wandering scribbles, nebulous and uncategorized content.

Through the act of collecting these found papers I removed them from their trajectory as objects “disposed of,” and in doing so I valued them in a way that is not evident in their appearance. As artworks they were disguised as garbage, and ironically this is where they ended up – mistakenly discarded for seeming to be what they mimicked. At the end of the exhibition, when the artworks passed from the hands of the curators to a campus employee responsible for packaging and shipping they crossed a boundary. The status of these objects as artworks, both the original papers and their copies, was assured within the gallery space where all things are suspect of value or purpose. However, once they were removed from the vitrines in which they had been displayed, the work entered into an uncertain category, not necessarily identifiable as artworks given their verisimilitude. The vitrine is a device designed to protect and preserve, but like the gallery itself, it is a temporary space from which artworks are removed. How we encounter objects has a great deal of bearing on how they are interpreted. The circumstances of this loss serves as a reminder that *meaning* is not static or fixed, it fluctuates as objects move.

This paper will explore *Doppelgängers* as a body of work, and salient microcosm of my art practice at large, which explores copying as an activity entangled with making, collecting, auratic experience, and observation. In this body of work my doubling is overt, the copy is always in physical proximity to the original. The direct and unavoidable relationship created between original and copy asks their viewer to evaluate and compare. Thus, the act of setting original and copy next to one another generates tension, compelling viewers to confront the purposes, possibilities, and limits of reproduction. The copying I undertake is an exercise in examination wherein I observe with utmost attention the given object’s material presence, physical state, content, and construction.

667-3948
660-5565

667-3948
660-5565

Cab to airport
2886

Cab to airport
2886

Apt. 116
For 825
Rent 1068
416
636
0622

Apt. 116
For 825
Rent 1068
416
636
0622

Fig. 1: *Doppelgängers (Phone Numbers)*, 2014

Found paper note, relief print on torn lined paper

Doppelgängers (Cab to Airport), 2014

Found post-it note, relief print on torn post-it note

Doppelgängers (Apt. For Rent), 2014

Found paper tab, relief print and inkjet print on bond paper

Papers: Lost and Found

Each set of *Doppelgängers* begins with a *thing*, a point from which I work outwards. I am particularly fascinated by paper, and brief documents of fleeting consequence. Paper catches my eye. It is familiar, it is meant to be touched, held, and carried. It is capable of being both precious and disposable. My art practice revolves around paper as an object, a form of material culture that is intimately related to the production and reception of information. I collect small pieces of paper slowly and sometimes without thinking. I gravitate towards papers that are lost, or in some sense separated from their intended purpose. I look for torn edges, markers of place and time, brief and idiosyncratic writing and mark making. I am interested in the limitations of interpreting these objects as they move spatially and temporally beyond the reach of their creators and direct referents. The physical and figurative parameters of each object in the *Doppelgängers* series are equally the subject and content of my work.

People are evidenced on paper throughout their homes and across their personal and professional lives. We keep paper intentionally and as the result of laziness – not wanting to cull piles and undertake the work of sorting the necessary from the superfluous. In his novel *The Rings of Saturn* W.G. Sebald describes the office of a literary scholar named Janine Dakyns that is overcome by paper. Janine is described primarily through her relationship to documents and their role in the construction of her environment. Her relationship to paper provides Sebald with a means to illustrate how people accumulate information in their personal spaces.

... in her office there were such quantities of lecture notes, letters, and other documents lying around that it was like standing amidst a flood of paper. On the desk, which was both the origin and the focal point of this amazing profusion of paper, a virtual paper landscape had come into being over the course of time, with mountains and valleys.¹

One can easily visualise this scene, wherein layers of paper accumulate like strata, indicating the distinct moments at which they were produced. Quantities of paper are reason for pause – each piece has the potential to hold information, to *mean* something. However, personal papers are often kept according to idiosyncratic organizational systems (or a lack thereof). Within the space of her office Janine can function uniquely in the paper world of her making, locating documents and thus information amongst her things in a way no other can.

... the apparent chaos surrounding her represented in reality a perfect kind of order, or an order which at least tended towards perfection. And the fact was that whatever she might be looking for amongst her papers or her books, or in her head, she was generally able to find right away.²

The eccentric system according to which Janine accumulates paper illuminates the border between personal recordkeeping and the standardized controls of social and corporate information management. The increasing prevalence of standards and classification

1 W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, trans. Michael Hulse (New York: New Directions, 1999), 8.

2 Ibid. 9

systems for information processing from networked library catalogues to online banking reveal with stark contrast the subjective classification applied to personal filing cabinets, desktops, and the documents folder on one's personal computer. I am drawn to objects that allude to the idiosyncrasies of personal recordkeeping. Each object selected as a starting point within my *Doppelgängers* series points to unknowns, or what might be termed *privileged information* that is only discernable to its author. The objects that I cull from the sidewalk and the recycling bin have been disconnected from their original context to varying degrees. As such, I do not track precisely when and where they are found. I prefer to let these things float between contexts, allowing them to maintain some element of their lost-ness. Not knowing makes me look more carefully. Gestures as unassuming as scribbles, or the way a piece of paper has been torn or cropped points the unintended reader outside of the object, to a moment that is evidenced but no longer accessible. The papers I select propose logics and methodologies for their exploration – I can only glean and interpret what information is available to me.

As objects transition between distinct eras of use they have the capacity to discard and generate new meanings, a phenomenon anthropologist Igor Kopytoff described as the “biography of things.”³ Kopytoff proposes that objects have the capacity to accumulate experiences, which inform their interpretation and the processes of meaning-making people bring to them. The *Doppelgängers* I generate participate in this evolving “social life of things” reflecting both the past and current contexts of the objects they contain.⁴ By choosing to copy the papers I collect rather than integrating them into collage or

3 Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of things: Commoditization as process,” in *The Social Life of Things:*

Commodities in Cultural Perspective, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 77.

4 Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)

assemblage, I aim to generate circumstances for their observation – pointing to the physical and informational limits of a particular piece of paper as a means to explore its construction. I am interested in highlighting objects’ ability to “... compress the past and present without the mediating element of photography, or a computer screen.”⁵ In doing so, I am questioning what makes each thing distinct, different than others like it? Viewing things that share our physical space, rather than their representations, brings into conversation scale, dimension, and texture in a haptic way.

What drives humans towards things, to collect them, as Umberto Eco has said with “a taste for accumulation and increase ad infinitum?”⁶ Jane Bennett’s theory of vital materialism provides one answer to this inquiry. She suggests that nonhuman things are vital actors in the world.⁷ At the core of this theory she stresses the interconnectivity of the human and non-human body asserting that: “[w]hile the smallest or simplest body or bit may indeed express a vital impetus ... an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces.”⁸ Finding, acquiring, and collecting all necessitate an interaction with objects, a movement of things between spaces and times – a literal and figurative path between the biography, contexts, and potential significance of things and people. Humans are compelled by the affective vibratory force of things, or what Bennett calls *thing-power*, which she defines as the “strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness...”⁹ I

5 Ala Rekrut, “Material Literacy: Reading Records as Material Culture,” in *Archivaria* 60 (2006), 31.

6 Umberto Eco, *The Infinity of Lists: An Illustrated Essay*, trans. Alastair McEwen (New York: Rizzoli, 2009), 165.

7 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

8 Ibid. 21

9 Ibid. xvi.

conceptualize my work as the result of, and a generator of, this *vibrancy* of matter that draws us in.

Discarded materials inhabit a precarious space, they can be appropriated into new contexts or disappear entirely. Ancient garbage heaps, for example, are often a primary source of information about the everyday life of past peoples, yet in contrast “the contents of the household garbage of our own time ... remains largely a mystery.”¹⁰ Archaeology as a discipline is greatly concerned with the *limits* of information – determining what is known, and what this might imply about the unknown. Archaeologist Victor Buchli has observed, “[i]f prehistory is often characterised by a dearth of material with which to understand past social processes, the experience of the twentieth century and the recent past is confronted with an equally obscuring excess of information.”¹¹ The contemporary past is still unfolding, it is temporally contiguous yet inaccessible. The contemporary detritus I collect has a force propelled by its ability to be both revealing and perplexing, simultaneously familiar and obscure.

The found materials I engage with are *ephemeral*, the transient and minor documentation of everyday life unfolding.¹² Each of the objects I select was initially produced for temporary use, and has surpassed its intended lifespan. The sheer quantity of ephemera that has escaped the garbage heap and remains present in markets for collecting

10 William Rathje, “Garbage and History,” in *Rubbish! The Study of Garbage in Archaeology*, ed. William Rathje and Cullen Murphy (New York: Harper Collins), 45.

11 Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas, “The Absent Present: Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past,” in *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past*, ed. Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas (London: Routledge, 2001), 14.

12 Maurice Rickards and Michael Twyman, *The Encyclopedia of Ephemera: A Guide to the Fragmentary Documents of Everyday Life for the Collector, Curator, and Historian* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

from eBay, to flea markets, and trade fairs is fascinating.¹³ Historian David Lowenthal has observed that since the nineteenth century the scope of collecting has expanded to include even the most mundane materials, suggesting that “[o]ur predecessors saved only grand heroic treasures; today everything – the typical as well as the unique ... is saved for many new motives.”¹⁴ Motivations for collecting are innumerable; every collector is compelled by the force of different things for distinct reasons. Kopytoff suggested that when one finds value in the mundane “the individual is often caught between the cultural structure of commoditization and [his or her] own personal attempts to bring a value order to the universe of things.”¹⁵ The familiar has a power to appeal to our sentiment.

There is one object I have copied that is known to me, although still not my own. The original object in *Doppelgängers (Harris)* was taken from my own context, an envelope addressed to my partner by his grandmother (Fig. 2). There is evidence in the relatively unconscious choices they each made in relation to this object – how to address it, and how to tear it open. I know that the careful script and the quickly torn, uneven edge of the envelope reflect the habits of those responsible for its present state. It is because I can observe known traits about the people who made marks on this particular envelope and other ephemera within my own life that I make assumptions about the objects I find. I can speculate that found papers for which I have no specific context, are capable of equal revelations for the right person(s).

13 An exploration of the monetary value of ephemera is outside the scope of this paper. However, an expanded discussion surrounding the intersections of individual and social valuation can be found in Igor Kopytoff’s essay “The Cultural Biography of things: Commoditization as process.”

14 David Lowenthal, “Material Preservation and its Alternatives,” in *Perspecta* 25 (1989): 68.

15 Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of things,” 77.



Fig. 2: Detail of *Doppelgängers* (Harris), 2016
Found envelope, relief print on torn envelope

Copying Stroke-by-Stroke

Copying is a process of production with material and performative implications – equally documentation of events, actions, and objects. Gestures embodied in material culture allow us to learn and remember through observation and imitation. When I make a copy I spend a great deal of time looking at the original object as evidence of processes to be repeated. Bernard Stiegler has suggested that material culture has the capacity to act as a *vector of memory* that empowers observers to learn by imitating human actions evidenced in physical form.¹⁶ He writes of early flint tools as the first vectors of memory: “a piece of flint, for example, takes shape through the organization of inorganic matter: the technician's gesture ingrains an order transmitted via the inorganic, introducing for the first time in the history of life the possibility of transmitting individually acquired knowledge in a nonbiological way.”¹⁷ Stiegler suggests that material culture is a form of evolution outside of biology – capable of remembering, communicating knowledge, and advancing human culture through information as a physical form.¹⁸

The objects that I duplicate in the *Doppelgängers* series always dictate what materials I use, what marks I can make, and at what scale. I adhere to a degree of exactitude normally accorded to the realm of forgery, going above and beyond a degree of specificity required to communicate the information carried by each piece of paper. In *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles* cultural historian

16 Bernard Stiegler, “Memory,” in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*. ed. W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 73.

17 Ibid. 74

18 Ibid. 73

Hillel Schwartz differentiates between two modes of copying, those that duplicate *stroke-by-stroke*, and those which duplicate an entity in its *entirety*.¹⁹ Copying stroke-by-stroke allows one to approximate the actions that produced an original, by engaging in a sort of re-staging. Alternately, copying an entity in its entirety generates a complete copy all at once using mechanisms such as photography or xerography. Engaging a stroke-by-stroke methodology to construct my *Doppelgängers* enables me to mimic not only content, but also the processes that occurred during the creation of the found objects I copy.

Once I've selected something as the source object for a new work, I tend to carry it with me in the pocket of a folder or my sketchbook. I need to have it on hand in order to compare it to the new materials I will use as components of its copy. For example, in order to fabricate a copy for *Doppelgängers (Cab to Airport)* I searched through many brands of post-it notes before finding a pad that was pale yellow rather bright yellow. For a period of time, I stopped at each office supply and stationary store I passed until I found something that felt right. The materials I use need not (and frankly cannot) be exactly the same – I work to acquire the best available approximation. As I search for paper substrates and other materials required to make my *Doppelgängers*, I have never lost an object. Although, I have often thought about what this would mean, a work in progress incapable of being completed. The loss of my work by Reed College made this hypothetical scenario visceral in a context I had not anticipated. Once a work is completed it generally becomes more precious, kept safer, held with gloves rather than bare hands. Loss is not only a phenomenon that brings objects into my practice, but also a risk against which I fight while making work.

¹⁹ Hillel Schwartz, *Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles*, rev ed. (New York : Zone Books, 2014), 185.

There are many hidden processes that occur in this act of doubling. Among the most labour intensive of the *Doppelgänger* works are those in which an original object contains script written in ballpoint pen. It is important to me that the line generated by the stroke of the pen remains as it was created by the author of the original object. In an effort to maintain the characteristics of existing penmanship I opt to reconstruct it using relief printmaking rather than transcribing it with a pen. Relief printing is a technique that allows me to effectively copy the form and texture of handwritten script – another means of making marks with ink and pressure on paper. Not only does the ink spread and spill in a similar manner, but the plate creates a faint embossment much like a ballpoint pen pressed against a surface.

To create the copy for *Doppelgängers* (#32 *Bus*) I scanned the original object and captured a digital image (Fig. 3). The hand written text was isolated in Photoshop by zooming in and locating the edge of each mark pixel by pixel. Once the text was isolated I produced a negative transparency, which was used to expose a photosensitive magnesium plate. The plate is etched into raised relief, in the manner of a woodcut or letterpress type. Oil-based ink is then applied to the plate using a brayer. I hand mix my ink from varying quantities of ultramarine, black, transparent base, violet, and red to best to mimic the colour found in the original note.

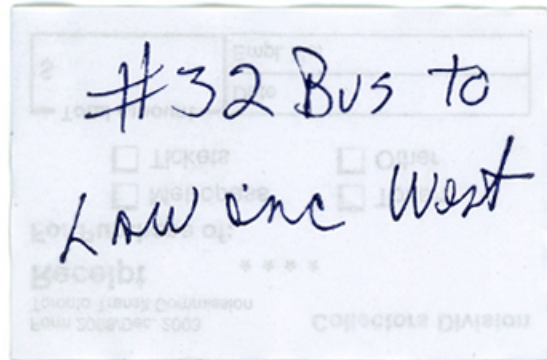
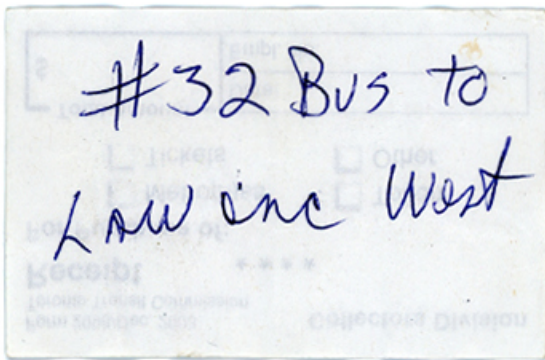


Fig. 3: *Doppelgängers (#32 Bus)*, 2015
Found paper, relief and inkjet print on paper



Fig. 4: Etched magnesium relief printing plate

Correct registration is critical to each work in this series – whether it involves printmaking or other techniques. Registration is a process used in printmaking to ensure that each print in an edition is identical, and that layers of ink fall on top of one another with precision. However, I use registration as a means of ensuring the script I print falls onto its substrate in the correct location in relation to an original object. For example, the found note featured in *Doppelgängers (#32 Bus)* contains text on both sides of its substrate, blue hand written text on the front and a xeroxed form on the back. When fabricating my copy it was important to ensure that the printed penmanship fell into position accurately overtop of the subtly revealed xerox, which can be seen through the thin copy paper.

Many of the found objects I select have torn edges. Ripped paper has a distinct ability to represent a gesture that does not result in the same outcome twice. In order to duplicate the shape of a spontaneous tear I must exert a great deal of control. To copy the form of torn paper I carve a 1:1 template out of wood that is used as an edge against which I can tear new paper in the same manner as its model. Although at first glance the forms I create appear identical, there is evidence of difference in the minute material reactions of each piece of paper when examined closely. Paper that is torn slowly reacts differently than paper torn quickly – the fibres at the edge of my copies are broken sharply against an edge when their referent was not – material resistance indicating a predetermined gesture and cautious hands. While an original tear or mark might have taken just a few seconds, I require weeks of production to recreate it. Although not acutely visible in the finished work, this labour is at the heart of my practice. Regardless of my meticulous stroke-by-stroke approach, there will always be difference between two marks authored by different

hands, at different times. I see the production of my copies as an attempt to explore past moments and gestures through the physical process of making, as well as an action engaged with the impossibility of a perfect double.

I have been aware of the discrepancies at stake in the labour of copying for almost as long as I can remember. As a young child I scrutinized the worksheets designed to teach me how to print the alphabet. I recall examining the letter *S*, with its symmetrical curves and tidy serifs, followed by guidelines to structure the height, width, and length of its reproductions. Tasked with generating a quantity of my own *S*'s I brought pencil to paper but could not mimic the typeset character exactly as it was. Wanting my letter *S* to be a perfect copy I erased it and tried again, until my mother, seeing that the paper was wearing thin under repeated erasures, prompted me to move on. I think there is something in this moment that each person encounters in one form or another. This early realisation of the difference inherent in copies and the work of copying has informed much of what I do and how I look at things. The copy in each set of *Doppelgängers* is the result of trial and error. Sometimes, in an effort to generate one copy I must make many, even though only one will enter into each artwork. Repeated attempts to duplicate still characterize the nature my work.

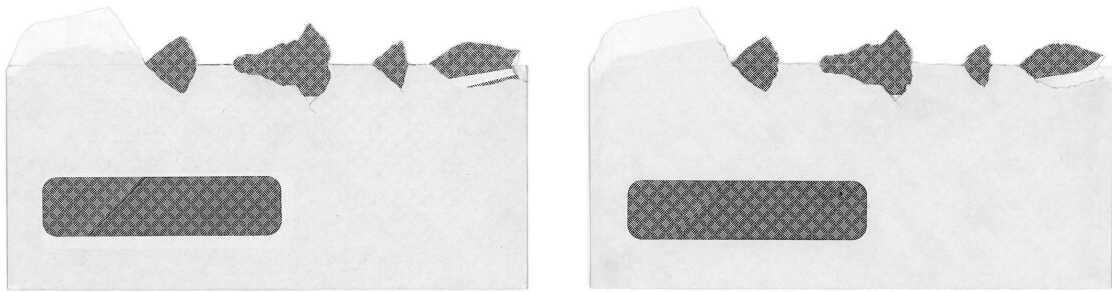


Fig. 5: *Doppelgängers (Security Envelope)*, 2015
Found security envelope, torn security envelope



Fig. 6: Hand carved template for tearing paper

Observing the Infra-thin

The border between sameness and difference in each pair of *Doppelgängers* is faint but important, and might best be described using Marcel Duchamp's notion of the *Inframince* or *infra-thin*. Duchamp conceptualised the infra-thin as an extrascientific measurement for the immeasurable gap between two things, at stake in the subtlest of differences.²⁰ Although Duchamp considered the notion impossible to define outright, he listed many examples of the infra-thin in his notes including; the difference in an object at one moment and then one second later, and the difference between two mass-produced objects taken from the same mold.²¹ It would seem then, that Duchamp had productively abandoned the idea of perfect sameness, calling into question the notion of the copy all together. Marcus Boon has suggested that the infra-thin constitutes a minimal unit of difference between the most identical of copies. He notes that any two versions, let us say for example a copy and an original, occupy different space "and thus their relationship to their environment must be different – they cannot be identical. Also, they cannot be composed of exactly the same physical matter – the molecules of which they are made are not the same."²² Regardless of the most perfect resemblance, a copy is always distinct from its original in time, space, and matter. At the very least, there is an immeasurable infra-thin gap between my copies and their referent.

20 Thomas Deane Tucker, *Derridada: Duchamp as Readymade Deconstruction* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 66.

21 Marcel Duchamp and Paul Matisse, *Marcel Duchamp: Notes*, trans. Paul Matisse (Boston: GK Hall & Company, 1983), note #7, np.

22 Marcus Boon, *In Praise of Copying* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 193.

Thomas Deane Tucker has suggested that the infra-thin can be used to describe the immaterial difference between a found object's simultaneous status as a discrete thing, and its existence as a component of an artwork.²³ This is an interesting implication to consider in relation to the *Doppelgängers* series, given the physical juxtaposition of original and copy, as well as their shared status as an artwork. Although the found object in each set of *Doppelgängers* has been absorbed into a pair, they do not cease to be singular or shed their individual biographies. A kindred impulse to generate and identify instances of the infra-thin through the labour of doubling can be observed in recent work by artists Tom Friedman and Vija Celmins. To make the work *Untitled (Pick-up Sticks) (1990)*, Tom Friedman threw a set of pick-up-sticks in the air. He then laid down an identical kit, carefully reproducing the form created during the initial haphazard distribution. He has also doubled crumpled sheets of paper in this same manner – forming one and then another modeled after it.²⁴ A crucial difference in parameters exists between these works and my own. While Friedman doubles things he has created specifically for the purpose of copying, I double objects that are not my own. While I approach my objects as a collector observing evidence of privileged information, Friedman performs controlled experiments using the same materials to make two things in quick succession. However, the largely uncontrollable act of tossing pick-up sticks into the air and crumpling paper do not allow Friedman to map out the initial form as he makes it. He too, is forced to observe each original as a heretofore unknown form before engaging in reproduction.

²³ Tucker, Derridada, 67.

²⁴ Friedman's doubled paper works include *Untitled* (1990), wherein two new sheets of white paper are crumpled and then partially flattened out.

In her work *To Fix the Image in Memory* (1977-82), Vija Celmins engages an approach that is very much parallel to my own. Within this work she situates eleven small rocks gathered during a trip to New Mexico next to cast bronze copies. Over the course of five years she carefully painted the surface of each copy using a pointillist technique to add colour and pattern (a feat of admirable concentration and precision).²⁵ Her copies are arranged in a group, all twenty-two objects set out in varying compositions for each subsequent exhibition. Celmins' pairs are not set down side by side, but distributed in a strange constellation that causes one's eyes move around the group while attempting to locate doubles and struggling to find their difference – slowly recognizing their material distinction in the qualities of paint and stone.

There is a similar strangeness in the duplicity at play within *To Fix the Image in Memory*, *Untitled (Pick-up Sticks)*, and the *Doppelgängers* series. Each work facilitates a moment of realisation that asks its viewers to read objects through a shifting set of criteria where the original and copy are set forth and yet they are not necessarily identifiable. Furthermore, each of these works challenges its viewers to distinguish between like objects in order to encourage the contemplation of details normally overlooked. The viewer is asked to observe evidence of the artists' act of observation, which is documented in the conspicuous labour required to make a copy stroke-by-stroke.

²⁵ Stuart Morgan, "The hard way," in *Vija Celmins: Works 1964 – 96*, ed. James Lingwood (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1996), 76.

Aura and the Copy

The vital materiality that draws people towards the things they observe, consider, and interact with has much to do with *aura* - the intangible attributes that derive from an object's authentic relationship to time and place.²⁶ In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin famously mourned the copy as means of deteriorating the aura of an original.²⁷ Herein, he suggested that viewing a copy, in order to access the content of an object, devalues the experience of the singular original. Benjamin implies within this argument that the copy itself is devoid of aura. However, I would like to suggest that it is more productive to acknowledge a fluid definition of aura, which can be applied to any object. Miriam Hansen has produced a seminal study of aura as it was discussed across Benjamin's scholarship. She argues that the term aura is most productive when considered as a product of his oeuvre, rather than as it is most famously defined in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, which she considers to be its narrowest definition.²⁸ Benjamin put forth the notion of aura as a means of articulating the phenomenon of *experience* and the affect of *encounter* during a time of intense technological change. According to Hansen's analysis aura need not be situated in opposition to the copy, and can be applied to the discussion of any and all objects,

26 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn, 217-52, 5th ed (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 221.

27 Ibid.

28 Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura," in *Critical Inquiry* 34 (2008): 337.

originals and copies alike.²⁹ Regardless of its relationship to an original, a copy is still a material thing in its own right with a distinct biography.

Aura is (in part) the sensing of an object's biography. Hansen has suggested that aura "...is a medium that envelops and physically connects – and thus blurs the boundaries between – subject and object, suggesting a sensory, embodied mode of perception."³⁰ The aura then is in flux and occurs in a particular time and place, arguably distinctly for each observer. Likewise, Miranda Marvin describes aura as the affect resulting from the personal and cultural contexts that inform an individual's encounter with an object. She recalls an encounter with the ancient *Venus de Milo* (circa. 3rd -1st centuries BCE) in order to illustrate her argument: "[w]e see the gulf of time that separates our era from hers. She is a visitor from another world. That is a very powerful experience..."³¹ The Aura is not embedded within an object but unmoored, adrift between the various human and non-human entities involved in an encounter, and contingent upon their contextual relationship with one another. In the *Doppelgängers* series, I am experimenting with the potential of aura generated by the space between originals and copies, as well as the coexistence of auras attributed to each object individually. There is a distinct auratic experience to be had when engaging with copies, and the infa-thin or immeasurable gap between proximate copies and originals can be a powerful spot from which to see the aura at play.

29 Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura," 375.

30 Ibid. 351

31 Miranda Marvin, "In the Roman Empire an Aura was a Breeze," in *Multiples in Pre-Modern Art*, ed. Walter Cupperi (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2015), 33.

The Document as Genre

The history of documents and their use can be contextualized through *diplomatics*, a discipline developed to differentiate authentic documents and forgeries. In 1681, Benedictine Monk and Scholar Jean Mabillon set out the first iteration of diplomatics in his manuscript *De re Diplomatica*, suggesting methodologies for the systematic study of a document's physical and intellectual form.³² Diplomatics is an elaborate process of observing the typology of documents and their intrinsic elements such as script, style, composition, and substrate.³³ The observation I undertake in order to duplicate objects in the *Doppelgängers* series shares aspects of diplomatic analysis, although its outcomes are the opposite. I invert the diplomatic process in order to duplicate precisely what makes each object unique, those forms and qualities of an object that would never occur twice. My visual process of reverse engineering allows me to identify the materials and actions that make up a document. I am not generating forgeries per se, but something akin to them. While forgery implies some form of deceit, the deliberate relationship I construct between the copy and the original lies outside of the scope of forgery. While there is some uncertainty as to which object in the pair is original and which is the copy, there is no denial as to the status of the copy as such.

32 Luciana Duranti, "Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science," In *Archivaria* 28 (1989), 13.

33 Ibid.

From its Latin root, the word *document* means “to teach or show.”³⁴ Documents provide evidence that can be used interpret to the past. As archivist Kenneth Foote has noted, “collections of documents and material artifacts [are a] means of extending the temporal and spatial range of communication. They help to transfer information – and thereby sustain memory – from generation to generation.”³⁵ The durability of documents, relative to human bodies, enables them to act as vehicles that transmit information beyond the bounds of interpersonal contact. How we define the qualities and limits of *documentation* has a long history, which is closely tied to the range of methods and materials we use to record information as well as how we index and access those sources. In 1951, Suzanne Briet, a librarian and scholar working at the Bibliothèque Nationale France set forth a manifesto on the document entitled *Qu'est-ce que la documentation?*. Herein she describes a document as material evidence, suggesting that the most essential definition of *document* is physical “proof in support of a fact.”³⁶ Breit argues that in the act of framing an object as evidence (textual, graphic, material, or otherwise) it becomes a document. She questions:

Is a star a document? Is a pebble rolled by a torrent a document? Is a living animal a document? No. But the Photographs and the catalogues of

34 Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 1.

35 Kenneth E. Foote, “To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory, and Culture.” *American Archivist* 53 (1990), 378.

36 Suzanne Breit, *What is Documentation?: English Translation of the Classic French Text*, trans. and ed. Ronald Day, Laurent Martinet, and Hermina Anghelescu (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 9.

stars, the stones in a museum of mineralogy, and the animals that are catalogued and shown in a zoo are documents.³⁷

Thus, any object can be a document if it is utilized to glean information – from my scraps of paper, to Breit’s catalogues of stars, and Steigler’s flints. It is the particular combination of tangible form and intangible content that cumulate to determine an object’s capacity to communicate meaning. A document is not a medium but rather a genre of objects, which goes far beyond text on paper.³⁸ However, there are typical types of documentation embedded in our everyday activities that act as archetypes – from notes and memos, to reports, photographs, and letters.

The scraps of paper I duplicate in the *Doppelgängers* series enter the genre of document though the process of examination I undertake to make each work. And, many of these papers were evidently used as documents within their previous contexts. Although scraps of paper tend to present themselves as provisional or unimportant there is much that can be gleaned from ephemeral papers and notes. For instance, the scrap paper notes found in the archives of many artists and writers have been reproduced and transcribed within lavish publications of their work. A recent book of note exploring scrap paper as documentation is *The Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson's Envelope Poems*, edited and compiled by Jen Bervin and Marta Werner. An entire section of this publication is dedicated to the visual categorization of Dickinson’s envelope fragments according to the shape of their paper substrate. Images of individual pieces of paper are set out in neat rows – one page is dedicated to unfolded envelopes shaped like “arrows,” another dedicated to

³⁷ Breit, *What is Documentation?*, 10.

³⁸ Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge*, 1.

“flaps and seals,” another to envelopes turned diagonally, and so on.³⁹ This exploration insists that the substrate, along with the spatial composition of written words and marks are integral to the reading of Dickinson’s envelope poems. The nature of the paper itself is given equal footing in relation to the text it carries.

Paper, a longstanding medium for recordkeeping, is at once becoming both precious and redundant in the present digital context. Although documents can take any number of physical and virtual forms, paper is of particular interest to me for its status as both stable and fragile, as well as its portability and pervasiveness. Paper and digital documents are constructed and stored in vastly different ways. Digital documents are machine-readable and require complex assemblages of hardware, software, and electricity. Alternately, paper documents have the capacity to remain accessible (albeit imperfect) without much intervention. My interest in duplicating ordinary papers has much to do with the nature of paper itself. Despite the vulnerability of paper to its surroundings, the complexity of storing and accessing digital documents across relatively short spans of time makes the preservation of digital objects infinitely more precarious. Scrap paper, despite its apparent ephemerality, is almost contradictory in its potential to outlast the newest forms of documentation.

Paper as a substrate is explored in each set of *Doppelgängers*, but perhaps most explicitly in *Doppelgängers (Manila)*. The original object in this pair is a long piece of manila paper with distinctly textured edges. Devoid of text or other indexical marks the evidence it provides is, to a great extent, about its own materiality. I can discern that it has been hewn from a roll of paper – at one edge with a blade, and at the other torn, actions

39 Jen Bervin, Emily Dickinson, and Marta L. Werner, *The Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson’s Envelope-Poems*. (New York: Granary Books, 2012), 227-240.

revealed by sharp and soft lines. It is clear the dimensions of this paper did not need to be exact, its the edges did not need to be careful or parallel. In addition, the colour of this piece of paper is no longer uniform. Subtle shifts in its yellowing tone are the result uneven photodegradation, patterns of light damage illustrating where it has been exposed or left in shadow. Its surface is spotted with marks that document the minute deposits of lactic acid transferred from the hands that have held it – mine and those before them. In addition to weakening the structural integrity of paper, these changes incurred from exposure to light and physical contact also constitute visual information, which document its history. Paper is more or less vulnerable to deterioration, given the formula of its manufacture. Widely used contemporary papers such as newsprint and copy stock are highly acidic and not made to last. A by-product of incorporating these acidic papers into my artwork is physical preservation. The *Doppelgängers* are protected against loss and physical deterioration through mechanisms of display including frames with glass coated to block damaging ultraviolet light, and archival housing for storage.



Fig. 7: *Doppelgängers (Manila)*, 2016
Found paper, torn manila paper

Conclusion

The act of copying things within the *Doppelgängers* series is not undertaken with the goal of achieving “perfection,” but rather realize a sameness that acknowledges difference. Pairs provide an occasion to perform direct comparison – to move back and forth between one object and the other. What initially appears to be an opportunity to observe likeness transforms into an exercise in locating difference. Within the act of sustained attentive observation the relationship between original and copy fluctuates, instances of sameness and difference become apparent. The copies I generate are not presented in the guise of their original, but in conjunction with it. Here, the copy is not produced to deceive or to disseminate, but to *accompany* the original. My objective is to link the copy and its referent in order to generate tensions between the affective and auratic experiences of each.

Contemporary understandings of similarity and difference are often tied to mass production, and the history of photographic, xerographic, and digital imaging technology. Art historian Walter Cupperi has suggested that “... our interpretation of the similarity between [two objects] strongly depends on our conceptualization of their authorship and our reconstruction of their production process ...”⁴⁰ Today, copying is easy. Copies are encountered constantly as mass-produced multiples and digital content that has not been imbued with the singularity of the physical object. And so, within the *Doppelgängers* series I am posing the question, what does it mean to make a copy the difficult way and

40 Walter Cupperi, “Never Identical: Multiples in Pre-Modern Art,” In *Multiples in Pre-Modern Art*, ed. Walter Cupperi (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2015), 7.

how does it feel to observe a copy made stroke-by-stroke? Copying objects slowly and laboriously brings to the fore the minutiae of their materiality and the affect located in the gestures of their construction.

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