CONFESSIONS OF AN ONLINE STALKER
The following text *Confessions of an Online Stalker* is my critical reflection on a 3-year research project titled *Future Guides: From Information to Home* carried out between 2010-2014 within the Norwegian Artistic Fellowship Programme, and around the Bergen Academy of Art and Design. A final exhibition of my artistic research, *Your Revolution Begins at Home*, took place at the USF Gallery and Cinemateket in Bergen, September 4-14, 2014. Throughout my artistic research project, I have been blessed with a succession of engaging discussion partners who have provided invaluable assistance in the development of my research. The generosity of their time and readiness to talk things through have helped me to develop and reflect on the artistic research methods used to carry out this work. The following texts take the form of a series of conversations because the creation of the work takes place through a long process of discussion, debate, negotiation and reflection. As I refer to a statement made by Deleuze in my introduction, “Creation is all about mediators which means that you are always working in a group, within a dialogue.” Therefore, I would like to acknowledge the many interlocutors who contributed throughout this long process. They are and in no particular order of importance: Ellen Roed, Frans Jacobi, Magnus Bärtä, Suzanna Milevska, Lina Selander, Marcos Garcia, Marta Peirano, Fré Sonneveld, Brendan Howell, Sadic Plant, Amanda Steggell, Jeremy Welsh, Pedro Gomez-Egaña, François Vallee, Carol-Ann Belzii Normand, Dull Janiell Hernandez, Lena Seraphin, Behzad Koshravi, Pedro Salguero, Peter Grevstad, Mei Szetu, Fábio Malini, Margarita Padilla, Tina Madsen, Diana McCarty, Lars-Henrik Ståhl, Honor Harger, José Luis De Vincente, Rosa Pera, Mika Hannula, Franziska Kleiner, Andrej Slavik, Marc Herbst, Ada Colau, Carlo Ginzburg, Anne Helen Mydland, Alain Ayers, Daniil Vasiliev, Luca Massari, Duc Rumbak, Tao Sambolec, Hildur Bjarnadóttir, Signe Lidén, Amber Frid-Jimenez, Anke Bangma, Anne Marthe Dyvi, Bergljót Jónsdóttir, Cecilia Gelin, Eamon O’Kane, Ole Jørn Jensen, Gillian Carson, Heide Nikolaisen, Hilde Haun Johnson, Heli Rekula, Patrik Entian, Ville, Scott Rettberg, Hito Steyerl, Annette Schaefer, Miles Chalcraft, Siri Hermansen, Synne Tollerud Bull, Trond Lossius, The Devil’s Advocate, Jill Walkert Rettberg, Brandon LaBelle, Talan Memmott, Ahmed Abbas, Jussi Parrika, Esther Leslie, Manu Luksch, Renee Turner, Irene Montero, Manuela Cuello Rodriguez, Rosario Alcántara Torres, Gladys Cerna Dávila, Maria Dolores Ramos Chavero, Drew Hemment, Elisabeth Nesheim, Juan Martin Prada, Kathy Rae Huffman, Minna Tarka, Elena Veljanovska, Daphne Dragona, Ivana Hanacek, David Rych, MediaLab Prado, the Microhistories Research Group, the Psychosocial Impact Team of the Truth Comission and PAH Madrid.

Michelle Teran, Québec City, December, 2015
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The scene is a small gathering in an apartment in Berlin, more specifically, in a small, but cozy kitchen with a table with three chairs and a sofa that seats two. Through the window one sees a balcony, a folding table, two fold out chairs, containers of frozen plants, leafless trees, a large open area, and a block of apartments in the distance. It is a cold grey early morning in winter. Michelle, the artist-researcher, an intense looking woman in her 40s, sits at the kitchen table, taking the middle chair, facing the wall. To the left is the Devil’s Advocate, stylishly dressed, with arms folded and looking smug and confident. The right chair is currently empty, but could potentially be taken up by different people throughout the course of the day. There is a variety of people milling around the room, almost too many to fit in such a small kitchen. Some people have not arrived yet but will arrive at certain points during the day. Sadie, a writer, stands by the wall, with a half-smile on her face. Frans, a performance artist, appears very conservative if not for the playful look in his eyes that suggests trouble. Esther, a professor of political aesthetics, seems confused to be in the room and ready to bolt. Jussi, a media theorist, looks like he didn’t expect to be in such a small room with so many people when he received the invitation, but is still smiling. Magnus, an artist and writer, is exceedingly tall and appears quite comfortable in his skin. Honor, a curator of digital art, as per her predilection for enthusiasm, eagerly anticipates the exchange. Manu, a filmmaker, has turquoise hair and wide, friendly eyes, and is cradling a small dark-haired, two-year-old girl, also with wide, friendly eyes. The Steering Committee stands by the entrance to the kitchen, peeking in, holding a clipboard. A group of electronic literature practitioners consult with one another by the door leading to the balcony. Brendan, a reluctant engineer, is wearing very nice socks and smoking outside on the balcony. There is a rather large congregation of media theorists, scholars, programmers, a pirate, a film historian, a moving image archivist, a metadata librarian, a sociologist, a data cruncher and a new materialist scholar shoved against the washing machine and the kitchen sink. The data cruncher and metadata librarian are, in fact, currently sitting in the sink. Paul John has dark hair, glasses, and is seated on the sofa, looking around the room. Apart from Magnus, he doesn’t know anybody here. Steve is far too tall for the room and stoops down to avoid hitting the lamp hanging from the kitchen ceiling. Carlo, a microhistorian with a heavy Italian accent, has not arrived yet. Were he to be in the room, he would also have preferred the sofa. Andrej, also a historian, is quiet yet attentive, and has also not arrived. If he were in the room, he would prefer to be sitting next to Carlo. Vilem, a theorist, is used to being in many different situations and is happy to offer insight whenever required.)
INTRODUCTION

MICHELLE AND THE DEVIL’S ADVOCATE

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –How do you want to begin?
MICHELLE: –I will begin with the end.
DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –And where does it end?
MICHELLE: –It ends up with me traveling on a metro with three women, somewhere in Madrid. It is the journey I end up taking.
DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –Traveling on a metro?
MICHELLE: –Yes! Three women are standing in the metro, singing loudly, shouting out slogans to anybody who will listen. I am following these women, on the metro. It is chaos: you have this feeling that something crazy is about to happen. We are heading towards another part of the city, towards a home in a time of crisis. It is a journey towards rupture. A young couple with two children are going to be evicted from their home.
DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –Do you know these women?
MICHELLE: –At this point, yes. It doesn’t seem odd to be traveling with them on this metro. When we arrive at the couple’s apartment, we are going to spend the night there.
DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –Why?
MICHELLE: –So when the police come the next morning, at around six, we will be waiting for them. We are going to try to prevent the eviction from taking place.
DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –But how?
MICHELLE: –By forming a wall of bodies on the steps leading to the apartment. I will be the one filming the next morning when police roughly pull away the activists sitting on the stairs, one by one, until nobody remains.
DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –Are you going to start by telling us why you decided to fly to Spain and join the fight for the rights of evicted people? Why you became so interested in this topic that you became an activist yourself?
MICHELLE: –No, not yet.
DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –So how do you want to begin?
MICHELLE: –I want to begin with another end. It ends with my exhibition at the USF gallery in Bergen, September 2014. I will describe the exhibition through seven different vantage points located throughout the gallery, which I will refer to as storytelling stations:
Storytelling Station 1 (Mariló): A LCD computer monitor, placed on the floor, leans against a cardboard box. An 11-minute video plays in which a woman—Mariló—takes you on a tour throughout a squatted supermarket—now turned cultural centre—in the district of Carabanchel, Madrid. The tour includes visits to a children’s nursery, a communal kitchen, a library, a schoolroom and a workshop area. She says, “I’ve had a lot of different experiences, sorting out my problem and helping others too. I often come here on a Thursday to sort out an issue. Looking at all the different cases and trying to resolve them, it’s been very intense”. There is a pile of books on top of the cardboard box. The cover shows a picture of a woman, around 50, in the middle of a protest, shouting through a microphone. The title of the book is Mortgaged Lives. To the left of the monitor, in the distance, is a grey canvas chair, a birch colored square coffee table, a bright red wall, and a large wallpaper print of an IKEA catalogue cover. White adhesive vinyl, covering the floor, marks out the floor plan of a house. A white line close to the LCD monitor marks out the border between the interior and exterior of the house. To the right of the floor plan is another wall completely covered in a wallpaper of a flowchart. Directly in front of the LCD monitor playing the video are two tables painted grey—one rectangular, one square—propped up using wooden A-frame stands. There are five black chairs placed around the table.

Storytelling Station 2 (The Private Room a.k.a The Gentleman’s Room): A rectangular cardboard archival box is placed on a light birch LACK coffee table from Ikea. Attached to the top of the box is a photograph of a yellow house. On the inside cover is a list of everything contained within the box: a book, photographs from Ole’s blog, stills from the YouTube video of The Little Yellow House, an email to Ole, a blog post (written in Danish) titled “Performance”, a satellite map with a yellow house icon, a satellite view of Denmark with the location of The Little Yellow House, a YouTube video, a satellite view of the area with blue marker, a satellite view of the house with red marker, and a news story of Ole’s work as a Death Vigil volunteer. There is also a blog post from 13 February 2012 about his brother-in-law’s death, a flowchart printout of everything Ole writes about in his blog, a floor plan of The Little Yellow House, and a walking map from the USF gallery to The Little Yellow House. The photos inside the box are of a yellow
house, seen from various perspectives. One of the photographs is of a light birch LACK coffee table, similar to the table within the USF gallery, but covered with plates of food. There is also a photo of a bearded man, seated outside at a table, drinking a glass of white wine. To the left of the box, on the floor are the words “Private Room a.k.a. The Gentleman’s Room”. Next to the words are outlined drawings of a pipe, a cell phone and a cat, rendered in white adhesive vinyl. There is a large glass wall that provides a transparent barrier between the gallery space to the outside parking lot. On the floor, to the right of the coffee table, are outlines of two chairs, placed next to each other and next to the glass wall that separates the gallery space from the outside parking lot. On the bright red wall, next to the outlined drawings of the two chairs, is a wall-sized wallpaper print of an Ikea cover (Spanish version) with the words written “Tu revolución empieza en casa”. The English translation of the catalogue text, “Your revolution begins at home”, is written in black, and placed to the right at the same level of the original text of the catalogue.

**Storytelling Station 3 (The Kitchen):** On the floor is the word “Kitchen”, which is placed directly in front of a large flow chart that spans the entire length of the wall. On the top left corner of the wallpaper are the words, “OJJ’s Blog 5th March - 7th June 2012”. Scanning the wall, the following text stands out: The Little Yellow House, A private room, Rummaging through personal belongings, Look through the windows, The Hidden House, Impolite Strangers, A Public Blog, A glimpse of longing, The Ordinary, The Personal, the “Intimate”. To the right and looking into an adjoining room, a small black box theatre houses a lecture space: a dark grey carpet, several rows of black, plastic fold out chairs, a small rectangular table with a microphone, what appears to be a desklamp and a projected
Storytelling Station 4 (Manuela): A bound document, titled Manuela, lies on a grey table, the color of grey used for computer screen backgrounds. There are other assorted items on the table: a printout of a screenshot from a YouTube channel and a stack of printouts, both listing various evictions in Madrid, and a black and white printout of a Google Map with the title “Evictions in Madrid Source PAH Madrid.png”. There is a small pile of red buttons that say “STOP Desahucios” (STOP Evictions), a well-used book titled Vidas Hipotecadas by Ada Colau and another copy of the book Mortgaged Lives, similar to books piled against the cardboard box, behind the table. To the right of the stack of papers is a digital picture frame, on which is cycling a series of photographs of Manuela’s house. There are four more scripts to the left and directly in front of Manuela’s script. The script next to Manuela’s reads Gladys. Directly below and on the floor, next to the unfinished wood A-frame legs of the table, are several lines and other markings showing the doorway of a house, rendered in white adhesive vinyl. On the wall, in the adjoining room, are a grid of photographs, mounted on the wall, though it is hard to see what they depict.
from this distance.

**Storytelling Station 5 (The Lecture Table):** A small book lies on a dark brown wooden lecture table. The cover, a grey-blue color, says “Michelle Teran, Folgen, A City Novel”. The photograph on the cover is of a fragment of a hand gripping the handle of a bicycle while riding somewhere on a paved road. There are two projectors, placed on small black plinths, to the left and right of the first row of chairs, facing the lecture table. The projector nearest to the lecture table is turned on. Next to the lecture area is an installation of photographs, arranged in a grid on the left wall, like a storyboard. There is a YouTube “play” icon on top of each photograph. Some of the images—those not hidden by the column which divides the room—are readable: a man standing on the platform of a metro station; a gravesite; a child standing on a bed of grass; a large, muscular man standing in front of a red wall; a smiling baby; a bottle of beer; a dining room cabinet; a man’s foot; a parade; the bottom part of somebody’s leg at the bottom of some stairs; an old woman sitting at a table; and a man smoking a cigarette.

**Storytelling Station 6 (The Lecture Audience):** A 16:9 screen with a projection of a small book is positioned directly behind a small dark brown wooden lecture table. To the right and left of the screen are two walls, painted dark grey, that reach to the middle of the lecture area. A section of dark grey felt carpet covers the entire lecture area. There are several rows of black plastic folded chairs. To the left of the lecture area is a map of Berlin, wedged between two pieces of Plexiglas and mounted on the wall. Several bright orange and green circles mark out different areas of the city on the map. A black line, drawn on the map, fences in a section of the city, creating an irregular border with no clear meaning. To the right of the lecture area is a 10 x 6 grid of unframed photographs, mounted on the wall. Some of the images—those not hidden by the column that divides the room—are readable: a child wearing a pink winter jacket; a young boy playing in the grass; a dining room cabinet with several crystal glasses placed on top of it; a bearded man with a huge muscled chest posing in front of a bright red wall; a man smoking on the bed next to an x-ray; a man wearing tight latex pants and standing alone on an empty street; a smiling baby; and a gravestone. Directly at the back of the room and behind the last row of chairs is an LCD monitor propped up against an unpainted wood plinth. The video shows a man shouting through a megaphone on some street in some city. He shouts,
“This is about a humble family”. On the floor, nearest to the plinth, are the words “Living Room”.

**Storytelling Station 7 (The Storage Room):** A Google map, titled “Ole’s Village Map”, covers one entire wall of the gallery storage room. The map shows a single road—Ishøj Bygade—that runs diagonally through the map. The road starts at the bottom right-hand corner and ends at the top left corner of the map. There are several markers on the map: one for The Little Yellow House; one for HC (his neighbour); the golf course; the village church; the graveyard; the oldest house in the village; the hairdresser; the bus stop; and a sign for the entrance to the village. The storage room contains several unused items: lights; chairs; plastic bubble wrap; cardboard boxes; and a ladder. On the floor are written the words “Ceramic Fireplace” in white plastic vinyl. In the other room, seen through
the doorway, is a lecture area which partially hidden by two columns and a fake wall that extends halfway to the lecture area.

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: – Am I allowed to interrupt?

MICHELLE: -I’m finished.

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: – Sorry for being the Devil’s Advocate, but I was at that exhibition. I found it extremely difficult to distinguish one work from the other and to separate or connect disparate elements that are part of one body of work. The physical experience of the exhibition remained fragmented, laying out bits and pieces of works without a clear indication if the viewer was supposed to connect them or not. Your presentation was sloppy: from the visual communication in the press text to the mismatched fonts, even the taping on the floor. Why couldn’t you get stickier tape? Why did you not provide any indication of formats, credits, timing and years of production in the press text? Why couldn’t you even be bothered to match up the fonts?

MICHELLE: – Not to spend too much time quibbling about such things, but why would I match up the fonts if all the different elements using text came from different sources?

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: – Okay, but many elements in the works and the exhibition were repeated in several forms and ways that become pedantic and simply redundant more than coherent and self-explanatory. Rather than offering storytelling stations, what I was given instead was an exhibition space that oscillated between a reading space, an archive, a theatre, a research centre, an information hub and an editing table.

MICHELLE: – (thinking to herself) But isn’t all that being mentioned here really what makes up “storytelling stations”?

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: – Even your supposed interest in archive is suspicious. Your superficial and outdated appropriation aesthetics does little to expand or inform a coherent and self-explanatory narrative. Rather than offering storytelling stations, you were given instead a space that oscillated between a reading space, an archive, a theatre, a research centre, an information hub and an editing table.

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EVIL’S ADVOCATE: –Because people don’t understand them.
MICHELLE: –No, not just because they don’t understand them but because their criteria for evaluating what makes sense and what does not make sense are different. They not only say ‘What does this mean?’—they say ‘This is gibberish.’ But it is up to me to describe what are the procedures and standards for developing the criteria. It is the purpose of today’s gathering.

EVIL’S ADVOCATE: –This is the purpose of this discussion?
MICHELLE: –Yes, it a discussion, or a series of discussions, of mapping out the process of the work. Throughout these discussions, I hope to map an artistic research method, which is a methodology of following. How does one do this? How does one practice and theorize following?

EVIL’S ADVOCATE: –So I should just let you explain away your gibberish?

(The gathering of people in the kitchen shifts around a bit, some exchange glances)

MICHELLE: –Yes! I want to go back to the USF gallery. What is happening in the gallery is a space that is functioning as a database, in which nothing makes sense alone, but together you can start to make connections, depending on where you stand. Changing positions creates new associations and storylines through the data, but with no pre-determined or fixed meaning. If you change positions, the line changes. The artworks flow into one another and are difficult to distinguish from one from another. However, making this distinction is in fact completely irrelevant. It is an exhibition of zones, but zones composed of fragments, ambiguities, or overlaps. There are ambiguous borderlines in which different encounters between the personal and the public, the home and the outside world, occur. It is an experience of disorientation and an approach to mapping related to the experience of being online, with the chaos and trying to orient oneself within it. It is also the experience of being dropped on a street corner in some unfamiliar place and trying to find some orientation that begins with yourself and what you experience around you.

EVIL’S ADVOCATE: –But isn’t it rather confusing?
MICHELLE: –Yes, but I would say in a positive sense. The exhibition is an experiment of how to present process over time that shows the ambiguities and shifting of positions and subjectivities that I am working with here. There are multiple subjectivities at play and not just my own. There are storytellers present. These are deliberate attempts of taking this material and looking for an exhibition format that is appropriate for the material. The gallery is a kind of mind map: a movement is a form of editing. To think about this in terms of a white cube exhibition completely misses the point. I am not particularly concerned about how shoddy my floor taping was, or whether the fonts matched. Perhaps this is an experiment that leads to failure, but also points to the classic dilemma of how to publicly present the final results of artistic research by also including parts of the research process that could as easily remained invisible to the public eye.

(The Steering Committee looks up from their clipboard)

By isolating the performances that take place in the exhibition space, you ignore the other aspects that suggest the potential for performance and the position or role that you take when you enter the space. Therefore, I want to defend the exhibition, but not have it be the focus of the remaining conversation. However, there are several questions that arise such as: What does it mean to tell a story today? What is the role of a storyteller? Why is it important to shift positions and subjectivities? How do these shifts also involve processes of translation, between context and scale? Is much of my work dealing with the threshold between public and private? How does material guide me? Why do I use "old media"—book, film, archive box—in a “new media” environment? How to do I use tracking, guiding, following and stalking as artistic methods in my research?

EVIL’S ADVOCATE: –A lot of questions. Too many perhaps? I do insist that you address this archive question. You have already contradicted yourself. You started talking about online archives, but now you just described the exhibition as a database. Which is it? To what archival discourse do you refer? What strategy or method are you appropriating from the archival investigation?

MICHELLE: –Yes, that seems like a good place to start. There are several people currently present in the kitchen who can help me with this. There will also be conversations occurring throughout the day about the development of software, an analysis of the installation and lecture performance Folgen, a discussion about microhistory and my (final) exit to Madrid. Throughout the day, I will also be introducing some artworks produced during my research project. Some works will take the stage, while others become annotations, more like stepping stones, in the development of an artistic research method. But let’s continue with the first discussion after coffee.

CONVERSATION ENDS
(The group breaks for coffee. Or so they hope. The artist-researcher realizes that she, in the rush and demands of organizing today’s gathering, has forgotten to buy the most vital thing: coffee. Since it is Sunday, she will need to travel to the nearest open store, which is Real supermarket near Treptower Park. No problem. It isn’t that far away. No, wait. It only opens at 13.00, and it is just past 10.00. Everybody in the room is giving her frantic or even hostile looks. No problem. She can simply go to Rewe at Ostbahnhof, which is farther away. It will just take a bit longer to get everything. Maybe she can get some cookies while she is at it. Or even better, some Turkish pastries, she thinks, grabbing her coat and rushing out the door. The gathering in the kitchen thinks about waiting for her. But then the media theorists, media scholars, programmers, pirate, PhD student, film historian, moving image archivist, data cruncher, sociologist, new materialist scholar, meta-data librarian, media studies professor and analyst decide that they can get along without her and decide to continue. At least they can take up some of the seats around the table. The Devil’s Advocate, feeling a bit crowded, decides to move and sits on the washing machine instead.)
CONVERSATION #1

MOVING-IMAGE ARCHIVIST #1: Maybe we can begin by stating that YouTube is not itself an archive. Preservation is neither its mission nor its practice. But what good does it do us to insist on this point? When hardly anyone remembers the distinction between film and video; when a soon-to-be-majority of younger people has grown up in an environment where video is born digital; and when degraded, low-resolution and immersive, high-quality media coexist without conflict, the fine points of archival definition disintegrate in the noise. So why bother even dragging on with this point?

MEDIA THEORIST #3: In fact, we could say that we no longer watch TV or movies, we watch databases...

MOVING-IMAGE ARCHIVIST #1: But even with the understanding that YouTube is not an archive, let me continue by saying that YouTube has become the default online moving-image archive. By summer 2008, a little over three years after co-founder Jawed Karim had posted the first YouTube video, titled “Me at the zoo”, YouTube had over 140 million videos online and morphed into a mainstream cultural phenomenon. Who knows how many there are now?

THE ANALYST: Firstly, we should know how much data YouTube actually stores. Approximately 76 PB of video data is stored in YouTube every year. Figuring out how

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much data is saved in computer systems is a daunting task in itself and in 2011 scientists estimated there were 295 exabytes stored on the Internet, desktop hard drives, tape backup and other systems in 2007. An exabyte is the equivalent of 50,000 years worth of DVD video. A typical new computer comes with a terabyte hard drive so one exabyte is the equivalent of a million new computers.4

THE DATA CRUNCHER: −201120102009200820072006Videos Added Per Minute(hr)482412631.5Videos Added Per Minute(min)288014472036018090Video Data Size per min (MB)333333Data Size of video added per min(MB)86404320216010805402700Data Size of video added per day(TB)12446223.111.560.780.39Data Size of video added per year(Petabyte)4.54.271.40.570.280.142012Total(petabyte)8.94.3

MOVING-IMAGE ARCHIVIST #1: −(looking annoyed by the Data Cruncher’s interruption)− Online video became a mainstream possibility in the early 90s with the introduction of Quicktime software, but completely exploded when YouTube came along and suddenly everybody was putting everything you could possibly think of onto the YouTube platform. Without any special permission or credentialing, anyone could put a video on YouTube, as well as watch videos that other people were publishing as well. You could tag, link to, comment on, download, or remix other people’s videos, etc… making YouTube as much a social platform for its networking capabilities as the default media archive that it became (at least in the public eye). Meanwhile, the archival world lost its sense of mission while reiterating what seem to be eternal cultural divides between access and openness, between control of records and proliferation, and between casting archivists or archival users as central figures in archival practice. Worries about copyright holders (whether known, unknown or suspected), about “losing control” of collections, and about the qualification of members of the public to see and use archival materials kept most archives from offering materials online. If they took steps to make collections accessible digitally, they were usually baby steps.6

THE PIRATE: −(rolling his eyes)− Look, new technology always scares the establishment. The fact is that we upload more material on YouTube every day than the whole history of television and cinema.7

MEDIA SCHOLAR #4: −I too would put forward the argument of YouTube as a sort of archival practice. YouTube is the world’s largest archive of moving images. Basically what it offers is the media storage and distribution model of the future.8

MEDIA THEORIST #1: −(becoming animated)− Excuse me, but shouldn’t we start by establishing what an archive actually is? An archive is not an arbitrary quantity, not just any collection of things can be an archive. The archival regime of memory is not an idiosyncratic choice but a rule-governed, administratively programmed operation of inclusions and exclusions that can be reformulated cybernetically or even digitally. You can’t just throw out a term like that and hope to get away with it.9

THE NEW MATERIALIST SCHOLAR: −(smiling serenely)− Broadly defined, the traditional archive is an ongoing intellectual effort to categorize, classify, organize, store, and preserve certain historical narratives, based on principles of acquisition and appraisal of archivists.10

MEDIA SCHOLAR #3: −I would actually use the term “archive” to point towards the collection of audiovisual material that is stored and can be retrieved through appropriate search operations, rather than, for instance, in the more epistemological sense in which Foucault uses it…He can talk about how the archive represents the memory of a certain discourse all he wants, but I am not having any of it.11

THE PHD STUDENT: −(looking earnest)− Clearly, YouTube is an archive. YouTube is not a peer-to-peer sharing which links individual computers together in an ad hoc network; there are central servers which hold the video content that users have uploaded. YouTube does not produce any content of its own, only the frame in which content appears; all of the content is provided by third parties and is either intended for use on YouTube or is recycled from existing media content. I argue that the most adequate way to interrogate this object is as an archive, a sort of digital wunderkammer. But who will be the curators of this digital wunderkammer?12


THE MEDIA STUDIES PROFESSOR: – My folder of commercials is now swelling with videos downloaded from YouTube, many more than I have watched in archives. But of course YouTube is an archive, and increasingly it is the archive. It's a dangerous fallacy to assume that everything is online now, but it's also important to recognize how much public value there is in easily accessible materials that have only existed for a short time. I find myself in tension between these two kinds of excitement: finding so much on YouTube, but also finding the really good stuff that is not on YouTube.\textsuperscript{13}

MEDIA SCHOLAR #1: – When I think about search and retrieval, I think about amateur curators who use YouTube as a media archive by scanning the media environment, search for meaningful content and bringing them to a larger public (through legal and illegal means).\textsuperscript{14}

MEDIA SCHOLAR #3: – Yes, in this case the term “archive” is associated with the general possibility of storing data collections and does not refer to the traditional understanding of archiving as an institutionalized practice. Online data collections labeled “archives” could in fact be better characterized as perpetual transmission rather than permanent storage.\textsuperscript{15}

MEDIA THEORIST #1: – With the emergence of social media, traditional archiving practices which had been restricted to authorised archivists and users change towards appropriation and migration of moving-image records and generate new forms of moving-image archives—be it artistic or non-artistic. The emphasis shifts from the storage imperative towards transmission and circulation. It is in fact debatable whether im-

(Figures 10.3–10.5). In this sense, YouTube can be seen as an interesting and novel way of getting close to visually presented social practices and everyday situations of bodies-in-culture as they are situated in their specific historical contingencies.

Using the slogan “Broadcast yourself”, since its launch in 2005, YouTube has developed from one of the first mass popular sites for user-created video content to the largest user-generated video sharing website on the internet (Burgess and Green, 2009; Lange, 2007). YouTube can, according to Burgess and Green (2009), be understood as a disordered public video archive visibly reflected in a public arena, and can accordingly be perceived as a practice whereby users publicly create and negotiate different social networks (Cha et al., 2007, Lange, 2007).

In this chapter, I consider two aspects of learning from YouTube: what we can learn from using YouTube as a visual archive for data collection in physical culture studies and how we can explore aspects of learning by investigating clips from YouTube. A sample of video clips from two hundred and eighty-five physical education lessons from twenty-seven different countries (Quennest and El 2012) will be used to illustrate what we

MOVING-IMAGE ARCHIVIST #1: – Why don’t we refer to it as a library instead of an archive? An archive (‘archos’ — ‘first’) is charged with the permanent preservation of age portals in the Internet represent an “archive” at all. Is YouTube an archive or rather anarchival?\textsuperscript{16}

MOVING-IMAGE ARCHIVIST #2: – I would have to agree with you. I don’t see any evidence that YouTube is attempting to undertake long-term preservation of any of the material it hosts, which is surely a core function of an archive; one which distinguishes an archive from other types of document or media collection. Indeed, it’ll be interesting to see what happens to the less frequently viewed content once YouTube’s server capacity is filled. If nobody watches a video, does it disappear? As far as I can see, YouTube is essentially an infrastructure for the distribution of video content for end user viewing.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{flushright}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Onision Archive & is essentially the re-run channel. I take videos from all my other channels and give them one last hurrah before they become just another Archive video. & \\
\hline
The terms of these videos include gaming, animal, blog & various other categories. It's quite the mixed bag. & \\
\hline
For business inquiries: View email address & \\
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\textsuperscript{15} Kesser and Tobias Schafer, 2009, pg 276.


original documents, whereas a library simply exists to make copies available for access.18

THE META-DATA LIBRARIAN: --(looking smug) Nice try, but you are bringing up yet another important aspect that is lacking in YouTube, namely rules and regulations, that is ethics, with regard to the material aspects of a document that govern the work of archivists and librarians alike. Libraries are oriented around a code of ethics […] and a core set of values. These provide communities with comprehensive access to both information and entertainment resources, not entertainment resources only that lack selection criteria, principled organizational methods based on over 100 years of practice and tradition, and a high service orientation.19

MEDIA SCHOLAR #3: --Maybe we should stick to a more neutral term “repository” then.20

THE META-DATA LIBRARIAN: --Suppository?

MEDIA SCHOLAR #3: --(sighing) No “repository”, to mean “ a place, building, or receptacle where things are or may be stored”. But even this falls short of covering the specific ways that video-sharing functions. Maybe we should just stick to the technological foundations of the platform and just call it a database.21

The New Materialist Scholar: --Look, before you completely jump ship on this can I say this: the Internet has transformed our conceptual relationship to the archive: as a space that can be entered, visited, perused, and where objects can be touched, seen, and experienced. To some extent, the qualitative time/space dimensions that defined that archive have been superseded by the qualities of speed, access, and online networking capabilities. Many of the archive’s foundational concepts are being reassessed: value, access, and preservation are not only re-conceptualized in light of online media, but are disrupting the meaning of their offline counterparts, too. In other words, the focus lies not in the material/immaterial binary, but in how the digital online invariably disputes and challenges the definition of the archive.22

MEDIA SCHOLAR #3: --Yes, you can look at preservation, and referring the statement that was made before, YouTube is pretty unstable. Videos are indexed, labeled and filed in such an incoherent and unorganized manner and you never know if the video that you saw the other day will be taken down tomorrow (whether it was removed by the person who posted it originally, or it was deleted by YouTube staff members for violating the terms of use).23

(Media Scholar #4 suddenly stands up frantically looks for coffee, then realizes that the artist-researcher has gone out to buy some and is no longer in the kitchen. He quickly jumps back into the conversation, eager to make his point, lest the others completely take over.)

MEDIA SCHOLAR #4: --(saying in a pointed manner) Sorry to have to play the Devil’s Advocate here (the Devil’s Advocate looks over), but are you actually aware that it is more or less impossible to erase a hard disk? Every digital inscription leaves a trace—if only at the nano level. Also, who is not to say that somebody, somewhere made a digital copy of the video which can potentially pop up somewhere else, which can also leave dozens of copies of itself as it makes a lightning fast journey through the Internet’s networks. It’s as slippery as a greased pig.24

18. Post by Rick Prelinger, ibid.
19. Post by Andrea Leigh, ibid.
MEDIA THEORIST #1: –Thinking about disorder… Maybe, instead of thinking of the archive in terms of order by classification, we have to think entropically, that is, allowing for a certain amount of disorder, which contains, according to communication theory, a higher measure of (possible) information. In a 1884 lecture under the title “The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century”, Ruskin implicitly replaced the museum-like concept of classification by a theory of an archive in motion, a kind of steady-state. Instead of the order of things attributed to culture within the well-known Victorian museums, Ruskin found in the weather a thermodynamic phenomenon which brings forces into play that radically alter ordinary mechanistic representation of nature: order by fluctuation, a form of order understood as process rather than state. Entropy - the conceptual enemy to the traditional archive as authority of tradition - thus is not just the negation of order but rather its alternative, “an organizing principle of disorder.” Essentially, this nostalgia for archival order is of course a phantasm surviving from the age of print. The alternative is a media culture dealing with the virtual anarchive of multi-media in a way beyond the conservative desire of reducing it to classificatory order again. Data trash is, positively, the future ground for media-anarchaeological excavations.25

THE FILM-HISTORIAN: –(mumbling to himself) Argh! The heat-death of meaning, the ennui of repetition and of endless distraction; in short, the relentless progress of entropy that begins to suck out and drain away all life…26

MEDIA SCHOLAR #3: –(suddenly perking up) Ha! You said data! Why on earth are we still going on with this business about archives? Can we step away for just a moment and simply start with the technological foundations of the platform, that is, its being a database? The YouTube database, however, does not only consist of video files, but also contains titles, brief descriptions called “info”, tags, hyperlinks to the uploader’s site or to related material, as well as user comments of variable, but sometimes quite extensive, proportions. In addition, it stores data concerning the number of views, popularity ratings, flagging rates, recursive links, and other kinds of statistical information. In fact, video retrieval and management depend fundamentally upon such user-generated input provided as text. People upload videos, but there are other forms of participation—tagging, commenting, viewing, flagging, linking, embedding—all forms of information management which feed into the database. Participation by the users is actually implemented into the software design.27

MEDIA SCHOLAR #4: –The digital archive is by nature a database. What is being described here is a specific type of interaction that is between humans and machines. Since moving-image files are not machine-readable—meaning that the program cannot identify the semantic content of this kind of file-information management relies on metadata that names, describes, or categorizes whatever there is to be seen…28

MEDIA SCHOLAR #3: –This is an essentially hybrid constellation since users provide semantic input, which the machine then processes algorithmically, producing different types of clustering…

MEDIA SCHOLAR #2: –…With a corresponding organization of video files and metadata…

MEDIA SCHOLAR #3: –…Ultimately, this technological infrastructure can be seen as a specific affordance enabling new forms of media practice…

MEDIA SCHOLAR #2: –…In a way, thus, understanding YouTube means describing it in terms of a “hybrid interaction”…

MEDIA SCHOLAR #3: –…where humans, machines-users and information management systems are inextricably linked.29

THE PROGRAMMERS: – (interrupting) In case any of you might interested in what those technological foundations are: The YouTube database consists of 10 different splits, which are called “folds” here (to be consistent with the LFW database). In each fold, 9/10ths of the database are used for training, and one for evaluation.

this implementation of the YouTube protocols, up to 7/10ths of the data is used for training (groups='world'), 2/10ths are used for development (to estimate a threshold; groups='dev') and the last 1/10th is finally used to evaluate the system (groups='eval')\textsuperscript{30}

MEDIA THEORIST #2: –(ignoring the programmers) It is extremely important to understand that the database is a crucial aspect of digital media. It is a cultural form that follows its own logic and exceeds operations such as the storage and retrieval of data. After the novel, and subsequently cinema, privileged narrative as the key form of cultural expression of the modern age, the computer age introduces its correlate—the database. Many new media objects do not tell stories; they don’t have beginning or end; in fact they don’t have any development, thematically, formally or otherwise which would organize their elements into a sequence. Instead, they are collections of individual items, where every item has the same significance as any other.\textsuperscript{31}

MEDIA SCHOLAR #3: –And this differs fundamentally from the activity of zapping from channel to channel on a traditional TV set, since the various television programs are not linked to each other by any semantic relations and are simply related by the fact of their being broadcast simultaneously. YouTube actually consists of navigating from one video to other, related ones. This practice is not confined to the YouTube.com domain, but has been implemented into many other web services and websites by means of open APIs that allow users to stream contents from the YouTube database into different applications, and where every viewing leads to a list of related clips.\textsuperscript{32}

MEDIA THEORIST #2: –We no longer watch TV or movies, we watch databases.\textsuperscript{33}

THE FILM-HISTORIAN: –This, for me, also points to the changing function of narrative, a narrative that follows other rules: a database logic. The function of narrative is to insert a coherency: subject position, addressing to somebody (reader) about the “here”, the “now” and the “me”. In YouTube, the construction of narratives are guided by random factors… Keywords or tags, tag clouds or semantic clusters, embedded links, users’ comments and of course, one’s own free associations. What scripted or spatial narratives does YouTube offer, once a user engages with the site’s dynamic architecture, sets up a few ground rules and then lets him/herself be taken to different sites, spaces and places: not by the logic of an individual character’s aims, obstacles, helpers and opponents, but by the workings of contiguity, combinatorial, and chance? I did an experiment where I tried to follow a semantic trail of the terms collapse, instability, chain reaction, etc., to see where it would take me. I eventually decided to start with a two-minute British advertisement for a Honda Accord car, which led me links to various “making of” videos, to videos of the DB5, Bond’s famous car; to another French mashup of the same scene but with this time quite different references: Bob Marley; Rastafarians; rolled joints… Before taking a turn and ending up with a Fischli&Weiss film “Der Lauf der Dinge”. The cultural references, genealogies and associations connected to these videos—alluding to “homage”, “remediation”, “pastiche”—rather than coming from critical essays, were suggested by the YouTube tags and user comments. In essence, a “narrative”: a totality in the making, however amorphous or blob-like it may appear in its early stages of formation…\textsuperscript{34}

MEDIA SCHOLAR #3: –Navigating the YouTube database is therefore also intrinsically related to the activities of the numerous other users providing the necessary meta-information for efficient information management…\textsuperscript{35}

MEDIA THEORIST #2: –The hunt for (and among) moving images becomes just as important as looking at the search results. What does it mean that our attention is being guided by database systems?\textsuperscript{36}

MEDIA THEORIST #1: –This could be seen as a guide to the indexical order of these moving images that implies a kind of writing that is not just written language, but more algorithmic. The algorithm is the storyteller.\textsuperscript{37}

MEDIA SCHOLAR #5: –(suddenly interrupting) Sorry to disrupt this intimate, technologically-driven talk about archives, databases, and algorithms, but what is missing for me here is desire. How does one select? What does one seek? Where does one go? What about desire? One function of YouTube might even be to teach users how to select from an ever-growing field of information and sensations. The selection is normally driven by diffuse desires. A good friend of mine visits YouTube just to see if he can find video clips from the 1980s of which he has diffuse memories. Thus, he uses the archive to actualize his memories.\textsuperscript{38}
MEDIA THEORIST #1: —This would involve a methodology that implies looking not at single objects, but at datasets... 39

MEDIA SCHOLAR #3: —But can I add that talking about YouTube in terms of a database is without a doubt an adequate description of the technological basis allowing users to upload, search, find, and retrieve moving-image files on the site. This, however, is not the only conception users (or scholars) have of YouTube, and probably not the one that intuitively comes to mind, as the digital objects that one deals with are in fact perceived not as data sets, but rather as films, video clips, TV shows, etcetera... 40

THE SOCIOLOGIST: —...YouTube is a continuously evolving time capsule, where new cultural “memories” are stored both as they happen and on a retroactive basis... I am wondering about the actual intrinsic cultural value of the average YouTube video. Does the short video of the cat of a given YouTube user really have any relevance? 41

MEDIA SCHOLAR #5: —(looking exasperated) Did anybody just hear what I just said? For me “desire” is a critical point, one important aspect of YouTube. You are the tube and the tube is you—permanent additions to the heterogeneous audiovisual material is the second basic operation. It is only secondary because users are not required to add material, but “you” always have to make a selection.

But I need to insert a critique about desire... By adding that YouTube implies not only a continually selecting subject, but also a subject which should “freely” express him/herself. It presupposes that everyone wants to express his/her personal desires in audiovisual form. Much like Deleuze’s critique of the hegemonic “image of thought”, we can find here a hegemonic “image of audiovisual desire”. In a market economy it is a permanent duty to express one’s own desires. Confess “your” wishes and we will fulfill. One could say that “in the age of electronic information a principal frontier of capitalism is the unconscious”—that YouTube is an effective machine for mirroring audiovisual desires. 42

THE WRITER: —Oh goodie! Are we going to talk about self-performance and feedback now? 43

MEDIA THEORIST #1: —(looking exasperated) Yawn! Look, don’t get all fancy on us. We are simply trying to work through here whether YouTube is an archive or a database.

MEDIA SCHOLAR #4: —Okay I am just going to stick with this... For the past few years, the “archive” has appeared as a kind of guiding metaphor for the contemporary digital landscape. (looking at Media Theorist #1) You even said that it is one of the most essential metaphors “for all kinds of memory and storage capacities”. Media archive websites such as YouTube are symptomatic of the way in which the Web is recasting today’s media forms in an archival direction. 44

MEDIA THEORIST #1: —Perhaps I can end with this: the emergence of multimedia archives has confused the clear-cut distinctions between the (stored) past and (the illusion of) the present and thus is more than just an extension of remapping of well-known archival practices. I said it once and I’ll say it again, the archival phantasms in cyberspace are an ideological deflection of the sudden erasure of archives (both hardware and software) in the digital world. According to Jacques Derrida: the twentieth century, the first in history to be exhaustively documented by audio-visual archives, found itself under the spell of what a contemporary philosopher has called ‘archive fever’, a fever that, given the World Wide Web’s digital storage capacities, is not likely to cool any time soon. 45

CONVERSATION ENDS

44. Snickers, 2009, pg 303.
(The artist-researcher having finally returned from her coffee-finding mission arrives just as the conversation is ending. The participants from the previous conversation, having said what they came to say, are now heading out the door. Everybody seems to be in good spirits, and they will continue the conversation at the local pub. It is now just past 11:00. The kitchen is noticeably less crowded, or at least, there is a little more breathing space than before. Brendan opens the door to the balcony to let in some fresh air, but really to go out and smoke. The rest descend on the coffee and pastries like there was no tomorrow. Brendan stands on the balcony, which is filled with the detritus of summer growth. A stoic sage plant resolutely clings to life and awaits the arrival of spring. He looks out at the open courtyard, dusted white from last night’s snowfall. There is a row of bicycles, abandoned strollers, a solitary crow perched on a chimney. One of the neighbours is unceremoniously dumping his collection of empty wine bottles from last night’s party into the recycling bin in the courtyard: the sound of broken glass shatters the silence. The solitary crow perched on the chimney tries to mimic the sounds. Brendan finishes his cigarette and tosses it over the balcony. Shutting the door to the balcony, he returns to the kitchen and the now-diminished group, who are chatting amicably. The artist-researcher has taken the seat to the right of the table. Brendan takes a seat to the left so that he is facing her. There is a steaming, hot cup of tea waiting for him, just like he requested. She prepared it for him while he was out on the balcony, smoking. There is one empty chair at the kitchen table, but nobody makes a move towards it, giving some space to the two people at the table, who will be the next discussants. Those who have been sitting on the sofa are now standing. Some who have been standing are now sitting. Suddenly, Honor realizes that they can use the two chairs on the balcony and collects them from outside. Everybody now seems to have a seat—if you count the kitchen sink, that is.)
MICHELLE: -I think we can begin now. Before we start talking about how we developed the StadtArchiv software together, why don’t we start with you describing your background?

BRENDAN: --Okay. I am an artist and a reluctant engineer: not that I don’t like doing engineering work, it is just that I am not so wild about the applications of it. It is always exciting when I can have a chance to work on a project where it is not something purely commercial.

MICHELLE: --A “reluctant engineer”? What do you mean by this?

BRENDAN: --A reluctant engineer, because an engineer is for me something that came about as part of the Industrial Revolution as people started to discover natural sciences… Some guy at the coal mine said, “Hey Mr. Scientist, this is really interesting, it would be really interesting if I had that thing you invented to pump water out of my coal mine.” And the scientist said, “I am already done with that, but I know somebody who can put that together.” And so that is what the engineer ended up being: somebody who could take scientific principles that had already been discovered and make them reliable.

MICHELLE: --How would you see your relationship to technology?

BRENDAN: --To begin with, any technology is first and foremost cultural. A stereotype of engineers is that they have no interest in this: technology is something that just runs. Thinking critically of whatever it is that you are building is the most interesting part: what kinds of tools you are using, for example. It suddenly becomes an interesting question about social life.

MICHELLE: --In my case, I am using online material—YouTube videos—stored on corporate-owned servers. You can publish your personal videos on this platform, but then you relinquish some… A lot of control over what happens to them. There is an option to make the videos private, however very few people decide to opt out: they want other people to see their videos. It becomes a double-edged sword: you have a wider audience, but you have less control of what happens to the video, where it ends up, how it is used, how it is interpreted, how it is seen. The fact that I can download, copy, assemble, order, distribute and visualize this data reveals the underlying design philosophy of the platform: accessibility. That we were able to build our data mining software shows us that the platform design incorporates practices of sharing, compiling and remixing. These are even desired functionalities within the system. Yes, one can start to think
about the cultural and political implications of what we are working with here.

Brendan: —I guess it is a mix of things. I mean you have… All the tools that we used were built up on free libre open source.

Michelle: —Free/libre open source software…

Brendan: —Without these tools, we would still be operating on a very primitive level. Or we would have had to spend a lot of money on some very fancy stuff. But that was one of the things that allowed us to get started. Another one was this thing which, I mean in some ways this project… I guess the code hasn’t changed too much since we created it, over two years ago. We did some small changes and reinstalled it on other computers, but otherwise, I think what we were looking at, at that point in time, was a peak in which notion of open data and open interaction between different platforms was being pushed. People were getting excited about the possibilities of YouTube providing an API that would allow us to build our software application. Of course, YouTube and Google would still have control over the database because they still essentially own it… They don’t claim ownership to the copyrights but, in a pragmatic sense, they own it. They had a high level of control, but it was still emerging as a model that looked interesting, and there were other things happening with open standards. Now these institutions are consolidating their power a bit. YouTube and Google, in general, are starting to put a tap on it.

Michelle: —When was the first time that we met or even started working together?

Brendan: —I think that we met a few times casually in the workshops that Martin and Kathy ran.

Michelle: Yes, at Pickled Feet, Martin and Kathy’s apartment on Linienstr… 59? The workshops they hosted, each Saturday. Afterward, there was always food and plenty of beer; people would hang out. It was a casual but nice space to hang out. Warm and friendly. There was junk piled up everywhere: wires, circuit boards, electronic parts, old VHS cassettes, an eclectic mix of books, jars of pickled pigs’ feet (which they offered up for sale), and other paraphernalia. It created an interesting social environment to build up friendships and alliances. It was an important space for me to be at the time.

1. In computer programming, an application programming interface (API) is a set of routines, protocols, and tools for building software applications. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Application_programming_interface

2. Pickled Feet was an independent media lab running out of Martin Howse and Kathrin Günter’s apartment on Linienstr, in Berlin from 2007-2008. Each Saturday they would invite their friends to give workshops for each other around their area of expertise. There were workshops in object-oriented programming in Python and Pure Data workshops, learning how to work with SuperCollider—an open-source software for real-time audio synthesis and algorithmic composition—or even how to build circuits, such as FM transmitters or white noise generators. http://www.1010.co.uk/workshop_archive2.html

3. Bootlab was an independent media lab operating in Berlin, with a membership consisting of cyberfeminists, culture radio enthusiasts, hacktivists, copy-left activists and pirates. Yes, I was around Bootlab as well, although a couple of years earlier. For me, these autonomous spaces and independent gatherings were important for building up communities. It made it possible for many things to happen quickly and for different people to pass through without the need for extensive financing or long-term planning. I think it would have been more difficult to build up these connections and networks if the situation were more fixed or “institutional.” It opened up opportunities for innovation, but not of the industry startup and university lab variety. It pointed to the heterogeneous practice of hackers, artists, and activists who were operating on the margins, and very much engaged in network culture.

(Brendan takes a sip of tea)

Brendan: —So… If we could go back to your question… I could say that we started to work together because you had some ideas that had something to do with YouTube and mapping. You didn’t know how you were going to get it to work, but it didn’t seem too complicated… At the beginning at least. (laughs)

Michelle: —It was coming at a time when I made this discovery… Within my work, after several years working on various projects about surveillance. What I was doing at that time was not super complicated… At least not in a technical sense. I would consider it more along the lines of social hacking: working within existing technological infrastructures but finding ways to use them other than originally intended, simply by changing the context. When we started to have more focused discussions rather than just casual meetings, I was interested in the potential for using geo-tagged video, or videos with locational data, as artistic material. I was working with these geo-tagged YouTube videos, which I could easily access via Google Earth.

Brendan: —This was the bus tour that you did…

Michelle: —Yes, the tour that I did in Murcia, in 2009. In Buscando al Sr. Goodbar, passengers on a bus embarked on a physical search for the locations and authors of various YouTube videos produced in the city. I started with a basic question about
location. If I was looking at something on YouTube—for example, a video of somebody playing guitar in a kitchen—could I somehow find this place? Where was this kitchen? For this project, I exploited the process of geotagging or attaching spatial coordinates to pieces of data, such as video clips or photographs. Whenever any such YouTube video disclosed the geographical coordinates of where somebody recorded it, the video became tagged onto Google Earth, creating a map populated by YouTube videos. This allowed me to look at Murcia via the YouTube videos produced by some of its citizens: mostly of informal performances taking place in private throughout the city. I spent a part of a summer “visiting” Murcia, looking through videos made by different people—mostly young nerdy men—enacting a myriad of performances in private and public places throughout the city. There were videos of Murcian citizens playing piano, playing guitar, performing hip hop, breakdancing, practicing parkour in front of city hall, singing, drunk, headbanging, playing pool, smoking marijuana, practicing Arabic, doing Tai Chi, giving a speech, etc.

Brendan: But it didn’t just stay there… You did something else with it.

Michelle: Yes. After building up a collection of videos situated in and around Murcia, I set out a task for myself to create a storyline using these videos, which then became the itinerary for a bus tour. On the bus, there was a monitor installed at the front of the bus where our movements through the city could be followed virtually on Google Earth. As the bus approached areas in the city where videos had been recorded, then these videos played on the monitor. At certain points during the tour, we got off the bus and met some of the authors of the videos who reenacted some of the performances we had just been watching. Luis, a law student, living in a student housing complex in the city center played piano for us. Baltor, who studied astrophysics, and lived with his mother near a former farming area on the outskirts of Murcia, showed us billiard tricks in his bedroom. Reenactments from the original videos were therefore performed in front of the audience, bringing an invisible online public back to the original sites of production. In writing about this event, theorist Anna Munster put forth the following question: how did this conjunction produce an unfolding of relations—between the Google Earth map, social media, the urban landscape, and a city’s inhabitants, opening onto novel modes of imagining urban socialities as multiply networked and lived events? Where were we during this tour: on the bus, in Murcia, on YouTube, on Google Earth?

BRENDAN: –But wasn’t this process of creating storylines and making tours out of intercepted video also related to your other work with surveillance?


BRENDAN: –Yes, those performances that you were doing around the time that we met. You would dress as these nomadic figures and walk through different cities carrying a video scanner; using it to intercept live surveillance transmitting from public and private spaces. People going on these tours through the city were shown an alternate view of the city and its inhabitants, created by these anonymous and unofficial broadcasts. A city depicted through surveillance. You visualized these live images on a mobile display, a shopping trolley, a wooden cart, a suitcase…6

MICHELLE: –Which was another example of performing social hacks on technological infrastructures and other people’s information… In this case surveillance video… Accessing wireless surveillance cameras within public and private places that used the unlicensed 2.4 GHz frequency band, and were relatively easy to access. Here you have a person that plugs in a wireless surveillance camera (in his store, office, apartment hallway, child’s bedroom, etc) and who (unwittingly) becomes a broadcaster of live video. This video doesn’t stay within the confines of the room and the walls containing the room but spills out onto the street.

BRENDAN: –Which totally questioned the limits between the public and private space as they were traditionally defined—inside (for example, a home) and outside (the street)?

MICHELLE: –Yes, but if we insist on revisiting these past projects, I would rather have a discussion about method. I could talk about, for example, how I discovered my first video by accident—black and white, ghost-like apparitions, people in aprons, emerged intermittently from the white noise—coming from a restaurant kitchen in Amsterdam. It was a surprising discovery for me, but it piqued my interest, and I wanted to find more. I started wandering around Amsterdam with my kit—a video camera, battery pack, video receiver and some cables—and found quite a few interesting things. I intercepted video transmissions coming from coffee shops, parking lots, local pubs, entrances to apartment buildings, bedrooms… It was quite addictive, this searching. After that I started to walk through other cities—17 in total. I did these walks using a method based on exploring and wandering, in which I did not not have a particular direction or final destination. When I turned on my “kit”, the first thing that I would usually see was a bit of interference or noise on the LCD screen of the camera: I used the camera to view the videos, but also to record any of the surveillance videos that I found during my walks. It was a bit like fishing. If I “caught” something on the camera monitor, I would move around, trying to see if I could get a better signal, clearer video. I found that I had to be quite close to where the security camera was installed to see it. 7

BRENDAN: –This was because of the limits of working within this unlicensed frequency, such as the limits imposed on the design of the technology.

MICHELLE: –Absolutely. This particular CCTV camera could legally transmit at distances of 100 m. However, the 2.4 GHz microwave frequency was prone to interference: things like walls, doors, and other physical obstacles could significantly reduce its range. When the video signal was at its strongest, it meant that I was also close to where somebody had installed the camera. It created a relation (for me) between what I saw on the camera screen, the surveillance video, and where I was standing in the city. I might be in front of somebody’s house and looking at surveillance video of an unmade bed, or standing on a street corner and looking into an empty office. The surveillance videos guided me through the city and along unplanned routes. I might start in one direction but would suddenly find myself somewhere else: a walk that started on a busy street might end up in an unmarked alley. To borrow from Michel de Certeau, unplanned movements and itineraries, detours and shortcuts became ways for me to experience a city.9

BRENDAN: –I can see how these initial works informed your methods of exploration: exploring information, exploring cities…

MICHELLE: –I was also thinking about how de Certeau portrays walkers as producers of “urban text,” created by their movements. How the myriad of journeys and itineraries they take in their daily wanderings become the material for the stories they create together. I started to see these videos and wanderings as methods for producing “urban text” that became these surveillance walking performances that I ended up doing.

BRENDAN: –But aren’t these works also connected to locative media art: a sub-genre of media art which emerged at the beginning of 2000, in which the relation between information and place formed the interrogating point for new forms of locative narratives, in which information started to take on a spatial dimension? Locative media was connected to the development of new technologies—mobile and wireless technologies, as well the Web 2.0. It created a shift in thinking of information as being placeless and floating somewhere around the Internet, to being geographically situated, in which information is incorporated into a geographical landscape. The exploratory movements of locative art were situated somewhere between a networked media art practice and the artistic practice of urban or environmental exploration… Often attributed to the Situationist practices of détournement and the dérive.12

MICHELLE: Although I participated in many exhibitions on locative media art, as well as my work being included in several books and published texts on the subject, it is something that I never quite connected with. Perhaps it was because there was a certain technological determinism—proof-of-concept pieces—driving much of the art produced during that period. The result (much of the time) was a disoriented participant walking through the streets, squinting at a small screen washed out by the sunlight. I know I am reducing the field in a somewhat irreverent manner. However, I, myself, had too many of these experiences and was (for the most part) not particularly impressed by the results. Many of the works were lacking too much in the social and didn’t adequately take into account that we were also in the city. There was too much focus on the screen. I would consider the work I was doing more of the concept of public art and the presence and influence of so-called “new media,” rather than trying to situate it within a “locative media” moniker. I would align my practice with, for example, the electrical walks of German artist Christina Kubisch (2004) who used a system of electromagnetic induction embedded into headphones to trace the electromagnetic fields of urban environments. Using these headphones, one could listen to sounds of technological urban infrastructures: light systems, wireless communication systems, radar systems, anti-theft security devices, surveillance cameras, cell phones, computers, streetcar cables, antennae, navigations systems, automated teller machines, wireless internet, neon advertising, and public transportation networks.13 Or Gordon Savicic’s Constraint City — The Pain of Everyday Life (2007) which visualized the invisible infrastructure of WIFI through physical pain. Using a specially designed corset, Savicic took daily walks, making “pain maps” through the wireless networks along each route: as he approached a wifi access point, the corset tightened up until it was difficult to breathe.14 Or even Anab Jain’s Yellow Chair Stories (2004), in which she enacted a simple intervention in front of her house by placing a yellow chair and a sign announcing free access to her wireless network. Through this simple intervention, she illustrated how “wireless technologies could become interfaces to recreate transient spaces for conversation at the threshold of the public and the private, the physical and electronic.” In addition to offering this free service to neighbours and other passersby, she started to curate the content of the shared

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10. Ibid.
folder on her computer by offering free music, recipes or even invitations for tea.15

BRENDAN: Speaking of tea, mine is getting a bit cold, and we have strayed a bit from the original point of our discussion: why we decided to create software together. This is enjoyable, a bit nostalgic perhaps, but I don’t have endless amounts of time.

MICHELLE: –Yes of course, yet at the same time perhaps necessary to lay out a bit of background context to my research. To rephrase…After my initial experiments working with geo-tagged video, I decided that I wanted to develop it into a longer-term research project, one in which I looked at the potential for using geo-tagged video as artistic material. Using this method, my project intended to investigate how the framework of relationships could be reconfigured when personal information—sometimes intimate in nature—became part of the public domain (viewable by anyone and anywhere) and when these YouTube videos became bound to a physical location. It would also involve encounters with different people, the makers of YouTube videos. The project proposed to explore the spatial and social constructions of the relationships between private and public, which would look at how a narrative language could emerge through a relationality that arose through the overlapping between different types of mapping: between online video, video author, and physical location. I thought I would continue using the same method as I had used for the Murcia project. However, I was no longer able to search for these videos on Google Earth: everything had disappeared. The videos I had been looking at were no longer there: the map was empty. When I made a query about this to Google, I received the following response:

“Thank you for your query on the YouTube videos which disappeared from Google Earth.

The disappearance of these videos occurred around December 2009. At that time we stopped displaying videos on Google Earth which are rated low (or not at all) by YouTube users. The purpose of this change is to exclude poor-quality videos, and thereby increase the overall quality of what we show on Google Earth. This filtering was already used in the Google Maps YouTube layer, so the change also improves consistency between the two products.”

Everything changed overnight (laughs). They could control what I could see and what I couldn’t see. Whatever Google considered “poor-quality” or of a “low rating” were videos that should disappear from the public eye. Of course, the data was not erased, but if nobody was looking at it, then it became less important… Invisible… I found this quite interesting: when and how things disappear from the public eye.

BRENDAN: –The people that maintained these databases, you could see—as with any of these big cloud providers—that they are essentially database gatekeepers. That is what their product is: a big database. And the more fields they can have that are distinct and searchable, the better. Even if there are only a few people who use it, if those few people say, “Oh this is cool, what I can do with it.”, then they’ve got them. They have managed to lure them in. And so I think that the geo-tagging was one where maybe it wasn’t a huge majority, but it certainly attracted a large enough group that became interested… And technically it costs them almost nothing.

So they want to get you in. At the same time, at some point, somebody decided that it wasn’t profitable. And that was it. If you look at a lot of these cloud services where people build their communities and online identities suddenly the company says they are going to shut down this service in two months. And people are really sad, but in the end, it is because somebody decided, “No, it is not that profitable.” It is boring, but I don’t see any other reason for it other than just running a cost-benefit analysis and saying, “Turn those servers off.”

MICHELLE: –There was even a hacktivist practice of geo-bombing that emerged, which activists used as a method for highlighting human rights and political issues by associating them with specific locations through the concentration of YouTube videos on Google Earth. They conceived geo-bombing as an effective way of highlighting—through digital media and mapping—the social and political issues within the very physical

16. https://productforums.google.com/forum/#!topic/youtube/vh8YnAHuAg
areas where these issues were taking place, which might only be relevant but still highly important for a particular neighborhood or community.17

Brendan: I think that another thing was that Google was also moving and continues to do so towards this idea of regionalization. I mean this idea of contextualizing searches is really important for them, although it is only in the last two years that it has started to become more criticized. You don’t realize that this is happening, and you end up being presented with a very limited search bubble in which you only see the results that are tailored to your interests and location.

Michelle: By this, are you referring to what Eli Pariser refers to as the “filter bubble”, in which an invisible, algorithmic editing occurs on the Web as a result of what you look at, what searches you perform, or which links you click on? How the Internet shows us what it thinks we want to see: how it creates “filter bubbles” that become our universes of information, mirroring back our desires?

Brendan: –Creating universes of information based on sameness, which eradicates difference.

Michelle: –And the crazy thing is that you are not even aware that this is happening. This editing process is not transparent. It shapes your world view and who you come into contact with.18

Brendan: –Yes, but it is also related to location. If you are an “x,y,z” kind of person and you are living in Germany, and we think you speak German, but you also speak –

Michelle: –I remember the discussion that we had on Skype before your coming. Meanwhile, for some administrative reason, you were not allowed to use the guest flat that is usually provided by the Academy and were forced to stay with me in my tiny apartment. It caused a bit of stress. We were together 24/7 for two weeks…

Michelle: –Let’s leave that for now.

Brendan: –(smiles) Okay… What were our priorities?

Michelle: –Well, we knew that we had a limited amount of time, two weeks in Bergen, where you could come and work with me. This was partly due to budget and also your work schedule. We had two weeks…

Michelle: –So it was tight. I remember when I said, “Look we can try but I don’t want to make the kind of hobby project that drags on for months and you are annoyed because I keep on promising you some stupid thing, and I never had time to do it.” Because of this, we decided that we should just sit down for two weeks and see how far we could get.

Michelle: –Meanwhile, for some administrative reason, you were not allowed to use the guest flat that is usually provided by the Academy and were forced to stay with me in my tiny apartment. It caused a bit of stress. We were together 24/7 for two weeks straight. And we are not married.

Brendan: –Which was fine because then we decided, “We are going to work for two weeks, and whatever we finish after two weeks is the software.”

Michelle: –A sprint coding session.

Brendan: –Yes, definitely. It worked pretty well.

Michelle: –I remember the discussion that we had on Skype before your coming, where we were sketching everything out. It seemed pretty clear… To me at least (laughs) However when we came together in Bergen, it seemed like we were talking about two completely different things. There were plenty of misunderstandings. We had to start from scratch, resketch everything out, to understand what was completely neces-

17. Geo-bombing was first described by Global Voices Advocacy, a project of Global Voice Online, which sought to build a global anti-censorship network of bloggers and online activists throughout the developing world that was dedicated to protecting freedom of expression and free access to information online. An oft-cited example was one carried out by Tunisian activists from the collective blog Nawaat.org, which linked video testimonies of Tunisian political prisoners and human rights defenders to the Tunisian presidential palace’s location on Google Earth. When you flew over the Tunisian presidential palace on Google Earth, you would be able to see the same videos about civil liberties which Ben Ali was trying to prevent Tunisian Netizens from watching online. (http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/wp-content/uploads/gbombing.pdf) This action pointed to the role that online activists were playing in the Jasmine Revolution. In President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali’s ongoing battle with “Takrizards” or “Taks”, a hacker group founded in the 1990s, he repeatedly denounced their efforts and made efforts to block their online presence. Many of them went into exile, while still maintaining close contact with those still remaining in Tunisia and becoming highly innovative in their use of mobile communications technology.


ecessary: what we needed the software to do. After our brainstorming session, I taped our work plan on the wall directly in front of us, between where we were sitting, side-by-side: you were on the left side of the brain, I was on the right. It was quite intimate. Like a therapy session, or a battle plan.

BRENDAN: (smiling) So with our software, the StadtArchiv software, we needed to build an archiver web application in which we could get a good spidering code—something that would work on the YouTube server-side—and then pull information from there. For the back end, we had some Python software that was written using the main web framework called “cherrypy” that we were then plugging into. It would allow us to build our web application, in much the same way as any other object-oriented Python program.19 I think we were using “sqlalchemy,”20 which is something that makes it nicer to use an sql database. In our case, we were using sql lite, but we ended up going to mysql because at some point the database got so huge that it was dragging down your computer every time you did a search. So we had to optimize a bit. I tried to put that off as much a possible, but eventually, we did it.

And then we had to do other things because the API for YouTube was not totally… Let’s say we had to trick it in a few ways to get more results out of it. We ended up using a library called “scrapy,”21 which is for web scraping—the process of extracting data from one website and saving them to a different place—but if you gave it HTML or XML, or whatever structured data, it could extract certain things that we could put into a database. This would be the meta data. We set certain parameters within our scraping tool, for the things we were looking for.

MICHELLE: –Yes, by using some of the parameters provided within the YouTube API, we were able to give each saved video the following attributes: an id number, name of video, coordinates, author, date, video summary (provided by the author), thumbnail URL and video URL, which were displayed next to the video. Actually the fact that YouTube provided a public API was what made it relatively easy to build up our software.

BRENDAN: –We were talking to their API, but we had to use a few tricks. The big thing is that YouTube likes to limit the number of results. The main idea there is that they want to keep you from wrapping up their API and stealing their database. If they could limit the number of results, then they could force you to go through their legitimate channels, or with certain features to use their interface. You would have to go back to using the YouTube browser. Usually, you only get 50 results at a time, but we managed 1000 results.

(Brendan looks around the room and notices that some are paying attention while others seemed to have drifted off)

Maybe I am changing the topic, but the front-end interface ended up being really impor-

20. SQLAlchemy is the Python SQL toolkit and Object Relational Mapper that gives application developers the full power and flexibility of SQL. http://www.sqlalchemy.org/
tant, or at least for me. In the beginning, I didn’t even understand what you wanted to do (laughs) Also, neither of us understood technically, what was possible or how difficult certain things would be before we started...

MICHELLE: -(smiling) Yes, we ended up displaying the results as a grid—like a photographer’s contact sheet—of video stills as search results. It made it easy to scan quickly over each dataset. It was not an overwhelming amount of data. We are not talking about weeding through millions of results that one cannot even begin to enter into and decipher without some computational (algorithmic) sorting process. It was manageable.

BRENDAN: -Yes, viewing 1000 results at a time is quite acceptable, within the constraints of human perception.

MICHELLE: –But my project is not really about data visualization or is it?

BRENDAN: –Do you really want me to answer that?

MICHELLE: –No, I am just thinking out loud. Go on.

BRENDAN: –Okay… I built the front-end interface using just straight HTML and a few components from a JavaScript library called “jquery,” which was one of the more popular ones and some little UI\(^2\) elements. It was a very simple interface. Now it is starting to look dated (laughs), which happens to any GUI\(^3\) stuff… Concerning functionality, there were two things you could do: you could either do searches or look through and organize collections of the results. You could do these searches, and once you got a result that you liked, then you could save it in the database, making it into a dataset.

MICHELLE: –The way it was laid out, in this grid, was very simple, but at the same time quite important: this grid of stills, assembled according to my search criteria. I could do a search of any geo-tagged video within a 1-20 km range around a specified longitude and latitude, and assemble a collection of videos produced around that area. I was experimenting with creating datasets of cities.

BRENDAN: –Yes, it is quite simple in fact… The interface I mean.

(opens up the software)

BRENDAN: –See, here...

(the small group in the kitchen gathers around Brendan’s laptop)

BRENDAN: –Here is the location field… you can put in the name of a city, a street, or just the longitude and latitude. Then you can specify the radius, from 1 km to 20 km if I remember correctly.

MICHELLE: –I think that is about right.

BRENDAN: –Then select which category of videos you are looking for… The same categories that YouTube uses.

MICHELLE: –Followed by the date. Are we looking for every video ever made, videos made within the last month, or the last week…

BRENDAN: –Then you can refine the search but putting in specific keywords, as well as the author...

MICHELLE: –Yes, these were the basic parameters. It was the tool that we needed to build so that I could work on my research project. This should be considered as one of the innovations of my research project, building software that is unique.

BRENDAN: –While we are on the subject of the front-end interface… I think that the ability to perform searches based on “author” within the software, became a critical feature. It was not part of our original design, but rather something added through the discussions we had during those two weeks together in Bergen.

MICHELLE: –Absolutely. This aspect of the “author” became a critical element in how I used the software. I could locate personal archives of different people living in a city, then be able to develop profiles and personal histories about them based on their digital traces and wanderings. The original plan for my research project was to do surveys of 15-20 cities and then, based on the outcome, select 2-3 cities from these initial surveys. However, my tendency, from the very onset, became less about overviews and more about the particular, about specific people. I would scan over the “mass” and then dis-

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22. user interface.

23. graphical user interface
cover this weird detail of something someone did and ask myself, “What is that?” If I
saw something happening more than once—the same action performed multiple times,
or perhaps the same person appearing in other searches in other parts of the city—then
this triggered a curiosity and desire to find out more about what and who I was looking
at. It became more about the author, the individual, than the crowd.

BRENDAN: –There was also the choice of metadata that we decided to display next to
the video.

MICHELLE: –The author’s name, video summary, location, etc… Which had the effect
of influencing a form of storytelling based on micro stories of certain individuals. Using
this data, I started to develop portraits of different people: who they were, what they
did, where they lived.

BRENDAN: –It’s funny, because in terms of software development, we did it all wrong.

MICHELLE: –I think that my point is that… We set up this system for designing soft-
ware: one that involved working within constraints... Constraints of time and con-
straints within YouTube. We worked through this together. What I didn’t know was
how much the design of the software would influence how I looked at the data and the
direction that my research project would take.

BRENDAN: –Absolutely. For example, if you look at traditional software engineering
concepts of how you should organize a software project. To be successful, what be-
comes the most important is how one manages the specifications. If you have only a
vague idea of what you want, then you are going to get a bunch of vague results, which
probably won’t work because (laughs) if a software is vaguely defined then it can’t be
reliable. Coming back to this notion of engineering and how it came out during the pro-
cess of our exchanges: I was constantly pushing you by saying, “Okay, we can do that,
but let’s nail it down to exactly this.” Or, “Let’s see if it is possible”, or “How easy it
is to add to this field, that’s easy, we can… It will only take me a half an hour”. It was a
very interesting way to develop because it wasn’t about starting with a perfect specifica-
tion: we were constantly negotiating that idea of what was possible.

MICHELLE: –It also led to another stage in the software development, which emerged
from looking at these collections. How many ways could one look at the same set of
data? We were able to export different versions of the same dataset: Excel spreadsheets
that became lists and maps, compilations of images, video archives. Separating the data-
set into different visualizations—both image and text-based—had the effect of creating
different relationships between image and text which influenced the work that I devel-
oped in the end.

BRENDAN: –How much do you think the arrangement of data influenced the work that
came out and how it was presented?

MICHELLE: –I think it very much influenced the work, particularly in the Folgen pro-
ject, in how I started writing these short stories and the way that I combined them
together. The way in which I wrote and combined these stories together very much mir-
rored what I could glean from the online information provided to me. How much could
I know about a person from one minute of video? What biographical information could
I take away from metadata? What did it mean for something to be geolocated? The ma-
terial was very fragmented and discontinuous; the stories became that way as well. The
challenge for me seemed to be: how could I pull together these fragments in ways that
dealt less with narrative continuity and more with discontinuity, ambiguity, and rupture?
How could I build up a narrative about a type of plurality that has become even more
pronounced through electronic media? How could I build up a story from this? Howev-
er, by asking these questions, I am revisiting and reflecting on a process. I certainly had
no conscious idea of what I was doing at the time. The way the methodology emerged
was processual and guided by the material.

BRENDAN: –For me, I read it as a way of reclaiming human agency within that data-
base view of everything. It was always exciting the first few times… I remember seeing
these huge tables with hundreds and hundreds of images, all arranged in this grid. Wow!
That’s cool! (laughs) But at the same time, there is no sense of what it actually is: it is
the database sublime. The idea of having the view of your kingdom, high on the moun-
tain, or on the balloon, or whatever. What came out of it, instead, was you taking…
I don’t know… I think about somebody reciting a statistic like, “one in 720 women
suffers from bla bla bla, once in her life.” But instead of having this statistic, which is
“He’s hardly a criminal genius, is he?”

“I’m not suggesting he planned anything, boss. Maybe even that he knew about anything. Specific. But you don’t think he knew who took his van? Or that they were going to do something?”

I wagged my head. “You didn’t see him.” I pulled the tape of his interrogations out of my pocket. “Take a listen if we have a half of time.”

She drove my computer, pulling the information she had into various spreadsheets. She translated my muttered, vague ideas into charts. “This is called data mining.” She said the last words in English.

supposed to cover everyone to reveal some level of vulnerability, or not, your approach becomes, “let’s talk about this one woman.” And this is what you do. You take this huge thing that chops everything into similar pieces of data and arranges it in this grid, and then you pull the one out and examine it. It no longer exists as something on a grid. It exists as a narrative, in and of itself. For me, this is about this sense of agency. Even if it is small, it is still important.

MICHELLE: –However, I don’t think it is quite like that. For one thing, this one thing recognition and anomaly detection. Although these could be conceived as epistemologically, there are two approaches to analyzing and understanding global data sets: that of pattern overview (generalization) and the particular (individual). According to Pasquinelli, as you can get, but he does refer to a way of understanding this distinction between the overview (generalization) and the particular (individual). According to Pasquinelli, there are two approaches to analyzing and understanding global data sets: that of pattern recognition and anomaly detection. Although these could be conceived as epistemological opposites, they are in fact “two sides of the same coin.” Let’s start with patterns: patterns are generated through regularities, through repetition, from which generalization or normativity occurs. Looking for patterns is looking for something meaningful within the meaningless sea of data, finding meaning within the noise. By performing algorithmic analysis on large amounts of data, one can start to detect and predict certain behaviors: search queries, shopping habits, financial trends, weather patterns, etc.21

RENDAN: –So, algorithmic analysis which is based on pattern recognition would be about detecting generalizations within the data.

MICHELLE: –Yes. Then if we move to the particular—the one thing that you pull out and examine—this happens when there is something that stands out, doesn’t fit into the pattern: an anomaly. An anomaly is about encountering the improbable, which you only detect if there is already an established pattern. Regularities are needed for irregularities to be detected. Pasquinelli describes an interview with Edward Snowden where he outlines an artificial intelligence system put into practice by the NSA, used to monitor internet traffic for anomalies to detect and prevent cyber war. This program is designed to “fire back against the source of malicious attack without human supervision.” In another example, a company called PredPol uses an algorithm to detect in which block in Los Angeles petty crimes could occur. PredPol claims that the algorithm can guess twice as well as a human. Through the algorithmic eye, to detect an anomaly is to detect something that is psychologically dangerous and a threat to humanity. It is an aberration, an oddity, an outsider. And the computer gets to decide what this is.

By making this distinction, Pasquinelli draws attention to these two approaches to sorting through the same data set. Pattern recognition is about the mass, the overview, while the anomaly is about the individual, the particular… Which is, in his example, some aberration or threat.

RENDAN: –But how is this related to what you are (or were) doing?

MICHELLE: –Perhaps this point is going nowhere and has nothing to do with Pasquinelli is saying. I am not using computer vision to carry out my analysis. However, it does lead to some questions: what constitutes an encounter with the improbable? What is an aberration? What is considered a threat? Who or what is an outsider? It also makes me think about these two methodological approaches to studying datasets, for entering the data. When you study data, how do you enter into it? By trying to detect the patterns or by finding anomalies? By going straight for the generalization, the overview, or starting with the individual, the particular? Does the choice of method—studying patterns


or pulling out and examining that one thing—bring different results? How does one find meaning in the noise?

BRENDA: –I would say not only the how but the what. What do we (as artists) find when we start to look?

MICHELLE: –You mean when artists become data trash pickers, dumpster divers of the information overload, what are we doing exactly? It reminds me of the curatorial statement made by the team of the Transmediale Festival in Berlin in 2014, when they said: “The revolution is over. Welcome to the afterglow”. This statement signaled that the “once utopian promises of high-definition audiovisuals, real-time electronic communication and infinite storage possibilities” were now being met with the party aftermath in which big data was also about mass surveillance, the ‘cloud’ was made out of precious resources being mined out of the earth, and digital information was being produced at an unprecedented scale, that hovered somewhere between “trash and treasure.” In this present state of post-digital culture, could the sifting through the digital aftermath be the key to a new phase in critical practices within digital culture?

BRENDA: –However when they referred to the post-digital, they didn’t mean that we had moved past the “digital,” that it had become irrelevant…

MICHELLE: –Far from it. In a text preceding the festival, writer and theorist Florian Cramer described the digital aftermath of the post-digital as a “messy condition of art and media after digital technology revolutions.” Post-digital doesn’t mean that the digital age is over. You can understand it in the same way that postcolonialism might be used: not speaking in terms of something being finished, but more something that undergoes cultural shifts and mutations. Using the term post-digital implies that there is no longer a distinction made between “old media” and “new media”, but in fact, a situation where old and new forms are brought together to re-investigate and re-use the waste products of the digital aftermath. During the 90s, and into the millennium, you might have seen a lot of “media art” works at media arts festivals in which artists worked with pushing the creative limits of emerging technologies. Virtual reality environments, motion capture systems, biotechnology, robotics or telematic experiments using high-bandwidth streaming—many of which required very expensive equipment that was difficult to access without institutional support (such as university labs). The post-digital critically responds to these ideologies of technological innovation, in which the idea of progress is making more impressive and flashier technological infrastructures and gadgets.

BRENDA: –If you look at all the different genres within media art practice, you can see that they emerged because they were tied to specific technologies.

MICHELLE: –Exactly. However, the current artistic practice that works with digital media counteracts this term “new media”, with its historical and ideological associations around technological advancement and innovation and moves towards the post-digital. Digital information technology, no longer seen as revolutionary or avant-garde, is ubiquitous and commercialized. For the artists working with digital media, this also implies moving away from the term “new media” and its historical and ideological connotations of newness and innovation and working in a way where the distinctions between “old” and “new” media no longer apply. A post-digital work can use analog media, or digital media, or even a bit of both. Cramer describes it like this: culture that became the mainstream with digital media networking ends up being applied to the production of analog and post-digital media objects… Often they resemble older (which could even be considered outdated) media practices but apply processual, interaction-oriented ways of making. You can have “old” media—things that you wouldn’t consider being within the realm of the digital—that become post-digital media. Paper print-outs replace websites, zines replace PDFs, artists’ books take the place of blogs, an online picture gallery becomes a box of photographs, a live voice replaces a MP3 file, etc. They are produced in response to the prevalence of digital media and what digital media lacks, but because they respond to digital media, they become post-digital objects.

BRENDA: –By saying this, he is also referring to this issue of human agency that is symptomatic of a systemic crisis: this inadequacy of social, interpersonal exchange and our attempts to reclaim this through the use of “analog” media…

MICHELLE: –Yes, a bit weird, don’t you think? That we spent all these years floating around in cyberspace and suddenly everybody goes “old school”. But it doesn’t mean that suddenly it is all rock, paper, scissors. I just mean that everything gets very mixed up and hybrid.

BRENDA: –I would also say that he is not the first one to be saying this…

MICHELLE: –Obviously, but he is certainly part of a continuing discourse about the relation between technology and society. We could even make the link to Bell and Dourish’s “proximate future” argument…

BRENDA: –Which is?

MICHELLE: –“Proximate future” alludes to a certain techno-utopic vision of the future found in ubiquitous computing research in which computing will be ubiquitous and...

seamlessly integrated into the urban landscape. It puts homogeneity and erasure of differentiation at the forefront; as something yet to be achieved but which will eventually come to pass… That is, with the right technology and infrastructural implementation. Unfortunately, this vision is of an infinitely postponed future: it is always just around the corner. We just need to fix the bugs, introduce new updates, make even newer and better technology. William Gibson even jumps in the proximate future argument when he states: “The future is already here; It’s just not very evenly distributed”.30 His point is that ubiquitous computation is already embedded in the practice of everyday life—social engagement, managing the home, state surveillance, contemporary revolution, online dating, artistic expression, etc.—it is just taking on an unanticipated form. We are currently living in ubiquitous computing’s vision of the future, but not how its pioneers imagined it. Instead of seamless operability and consistency, we can look instead at messiness, improvisation, instability, uncontrollability, fragmentation—a future cobled together into various spatial arrangements and certain social and cultural practices. Where is this information? How do we see this information? It involves a total rejection of innovation narratives and more a focus on the impacts of living with these technologies. How are we living with these technologies?31

Brendan:—So going back to the art. What would be an example of a post-digital artwork? Apart from yours, of course.

Michelle:—We could think about Erik Kessels’ 24 HRs in photos: an installation of all the images uploaded to Flickr in a 24-hour period, which are then printed out as photographs and fill an entire room. The sheer excess of photographs, “over a million images”, gives an immediate physical impact of the amount of images that end up on Flickr within just one day. It effectively shows not only how much we are consuming, but also how many private photographs become part of the public domain the moment people upload them on the Internet. In his installation, individuals get lost in the post-digital clutter. But it is not about what each photograph depicts. His work is about showing the delirious effect of online image production during a single day, creating a claustrophobic situation of digital—now rendered physical—clutter that fills an entire room.32

Brendan:—He is creating a digital trash heap…

Michelle:—Exactly. Then there is Christopher Baker’s large-scale audiovisual installation, Hello World! or: How I Learned to Stop Listening and Love the Noise, in which he uses 5,000 video diaries culled from YouTube, each video featuring a person speaking from his or her private space (bedroom, bathroom, kitchen). He juxtaposes these together, making an immense video wall in which individual voices get immersed in a cacophony of everybody struggling to be heard. According to Baker, the installation explores the way in which those who speak, represent themselves.33 By approaching the installation, one can also listen to individual stories that emerge from the babble of many voices. My experience of the work, however, was that it stays within the cacophony. If everybody talks at once, then we get nothing but noise.

Brendan:—But isn’t the point of the works? Visualizing the babble?

Michelle:—Yes, and we are left at the surface. Like Kessel’s work, Baker’s installation is an experiential work that focuses on the quantitative effects of the public revelation of information. It is visually provocative, but meaningless… At least for me. There are works by other artists that I, personally, find much more engaging. They are the works in which the storyteller and storytelling are more present.

Brendan:—Such as?

Michelle:—For example, the multi-channel video installations of Nathalie Bookchin in which she works with large collections of video diaries taken from YouTube, however using a more qualitative rather than quantitative approach. In her work Testament, Bookchin creates a multi-channel video installation composed of hundreds of fragments of vlogs found online. Performing searches of videos on YouTube based on specific topics—sexual identity, joblessness and depression—Bookchin takes pieces from the hundreds of monologues being performed in front of cameras throughout America and meticulously assembles them together as a polyphony. In Testament, Bookchin, like Baker, also focuses on the “collective longing to be connected”.34 However, unlike Baker, her work is not about the babble, but rather processual, subjective interventions into the dataset in which meaning emerges by studying the fragments. Testament becomes a carefully arranged conversation that emerges through continuously shifting bodies and viewpoints, an unfolding conversation filled with discordances, repetition, and synchronicities. What begins with an individual voice, moves towards a plurality of subjectivities, creating a situation in which she gives each voice a chance to speak, and to be heard.35

London-based artist duo Thomson & Craighead also work with digital “trash” archives to develop participatory artworks that incorporate multiple subjectivities. In A Short Film about War; they developed a narrative documentary work—together with

31. Bell, Dourish, Ibid.
34. Ibid
writer Steve Rushton—made entirely from information found on the internet. The two-screen gallery installation takes viewers around the world to several war zones, as seen through the collective eyes of the online photo sharing community Flickr and eyewitness reports of military and civilian bloggers. The artists created the work using images, blog fragments, digital maps, and GPS data. On the right screen, different narrators read the dramatized reportage of different events occurring around the globe that we experience through the images. At that same time, a text log listing the name, author, source and geolocation of each image appears on the screen to the left.36

Finally, I would like to mention Miracle in Tensta (Theoria).37 It is a film by Swedish artist Magnus Bärtås about a (supposed) miracle that occurred in a Stockholm suburb. On August 22, people in Tensta reported seeing a Virgin Mary appearing in the sky, which was again witnessed the following evening as people gathered in the Syriac Orthodox Church. For the film, Bärtås constructs an exchange between seven protagonists—representing seven interpretations of the supposed event—which he has pieced together from different chat rooms. The film enacts the testimonies found on the Internet, which are cut together with other information that he has culled from online sources: a photo which was taken by the girl who witnessed the Virgin Mary miracle, which she posted on social media; and a YouTube video of the event within the church. The staging for the film is minimal: the readers sit in rows reading from laptop screens.

Each reader represents one point-of-view about the event, which consists of a montage of different conversations that took place in each chat room. The readers speak in whispers, which reduces any discernable qualities of each voice, placing emphasis on the text, and not the authority of the reader. The reader seems, in fact, to be inconsequential and could easily be replaced by another. Most of the film is about the reading of testimonies of some people who were present and some who have only had second-hand access to the event through social media. In fact, we see very little of the miracle: a brief glimpse of the “miracle” cloud and video of the event in the church. The minimal use of the archival footage and focus on the discussion seems to emphasize that it is the speculation and interpretation that provides the biggest experience of the event, rather than the event itself.

BRENDAN: –Can I just play the Devil’s Advocate for a second here by saying: isn’t there something that needs saying about the ethics of using other people’s information without their permission? Are these people aware that they are participants in these artworks?

MICHELLE: –Yes, there is. And, no, mostly they are not. What I am trying to describe here are artistic strategies for working with digital trash “archives”: how we, as artists, sort through it, visualize it, follow its traces, create narratives from it, and include other people within the artwork. It is a practice of the mining of digital “trash” archives—images, text, videos, sound—found on social media, which become the material for the production of artworks. And this mining of digital trash leads to a particular genre of participatory art practice. I would like to refer to something that Manuela Naveau and Gerfried Stocker posed in their curatorial statement for the *TEA/Collective Wisdom International Techno Art* exhibition, which took place at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts in Taichung. When artists are mining through the “archive, that is the Web”, what this leads to is a digital participatory art practice made possible by the “unconscious or inadvertent participation by individuals, who willingly and unwillingly participate in the production of the artworks. Artists take advantage of the lack of adequate structures to enforce copyrights and people’s lack of awareness about the concept of authorship on the internet to demonstrate to us how we deal with the public revelation of information.”

BRENDAN: – So who are the storytellers?

MICHELLE: –And what does it mean to tell a story today?

(Brendan checks his watch that is his phone and suddenly realizes the time)

BRENDAN: –If we could go back to our software. One thing that I always find interesting is when artists decide to make their own tools. It is why it was particularly interesting for me to work with you on this project. You realized what was available to you, but you needed something else and made this decision to build your own tool.

MICHELLE: –This was a turning point for me in this research.

BRENDAN: –It is where, well especially when you use sophisticated digital techniques, you need to be able to question what it is that you are working with. I guess there are some people that get too obsessed with their tools and do not think about what they are saying. But this creative process of building tools is something that I like, and well, it is a conversation that will never end.

(The rest of the group sitting in the kitchen are wishing the conversation would end)

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38. *TEA/Collective Wisdom*—2012 International Techno Art Exhibition is organized by the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts. It was jointly curated by Shu-Min Lin, Gerfried Stocker and Manuela Naveau, curators from Ars Electronica. The theme, “Collective Wisdom”, was intended to explore the phenomenon occurring in the era of social media, whereby in addition to the creative shifts in how messages are delivered. It also looked into how participants of art have expanded from being individuals to becoming a virtual unit. Furthermore, with continuous public participations, the collective wisdom is able to let art to become communal and action-based. Participating artists were Amy Hoy (U.S.A), Thomas Fuchs (Austria), Ars Electronica Futurelab (Austria), Christopher Baker (U.S.A.), SENSEable City Lab (U.S.A.), Michelle Teran (Canada), Aaron Koblin (U.S.A.), João Henrique Wilbert (Brazil), Nova Jiang (New Zealand), Peter Edmunds (Australia) Scott Draves (U.S.A), Egret Culture and Education Foundation (Taiwan) Alessandro Ludovico (Italy), Paolo Cirio (Italy), Kyle McDonald (U.S.A.), and Cho Li-Hang, Lee Chi-Ying, Lin Ting-Ta (Taiwan) http://tea.ntmofa.gov.tw/en/index.html
MICHELLE: –At the same time, maybe it is uninteresting and even banal to stick with
the information about how things work. Should we even be having this conversation?
Was it even necessary to have this conversation about the software?
BRENDAN: –Well, how do you feel then about the division of labor between the pro-
grammer and the artist? How does that work for you? That you never get your hands
dirty with the programming?
MICHELLE: –Why? Do you feel used and abused?
BRENDAN: – (laughs) No, not at all. I think that for me, at some point… I guess the
problem that I had earlier—though not with us—was that there was not a willingness to
recognize that I needed to play a particular role in a project. I do find that the question of
attribution is one of the main issues around collaboration.

(Their stomachs are starting to grumble in hunger)

MICHELLE: –I will just say this outright: I will never be a programmer. I know how
much time it takes, and I put my energy elsewhere. Some of my projects have been quite
large and complex. I often work with different contributors and participants. If I could
talk specifically about our experience, I never imagined it as being a situation where I
would tell you what I wanted and then come back two weeks later, when you had fin-
ished working, to see the results. It was always more of a negotiation for me, an ongoing
conversation. And not just with you. I have had other experiences with other people as
well.
BRENDAN: – (laughs) Yes, I remember that we even had arguments. Over theoretical
things, which weren’t even totally related to the software, but still we needed to have
them somehow.
MICHELLE: –I think that happens whenever you get into a dialogue with somebody. Not
everybody is always in agreement. If everybody was in agreement, then it ceases to be a
dialogue and becomes a monologue. It is something that microhistorian Carlo Ginzburg
also once mentioned. A conversation, for him, involves a clashing together of things.
There are different voices involved. And through this negotiation, something emerges.39

CONVERSATION ENDS

39. This text uses extracts of a conversation that took place between Michelle Teran and Brendan Howell at
Buchhandlung, 25.11.2014, Berlin. Brendan had a tea, Michelle had coffee. They shared a piece of cake.
The group breaks for lunch, heading over to the nearest café, which is run by a gregarious but slightly grumpy 30-something man originally from Jordan. While they feast on Flammkuchen sprinkled with a generous helping of za’atar, followed by huge slabs of carrot cake slathered in creamy icing, he regales them with tales of the neighbourhood, occasionally stopping to call out to different people who pass by the window of the café. Afterwards, blissfully satiated, they amble back to the building where the artist-researcher lives, climbing the three floors up to her apartment. When they reach the doorway to the kitchen for the next session, they notice that she has somehow managed to install two projectors, cabling, and other assorted gear into this small room. She even managed to hang a piece of black plastic in front of the balcony door to block out the light. She sits on the left side of the table, with a small book in front of her. She has placed her laptop computer on the seat next to her. On closer scrutiny, the “desk lamp” is connected by a VGA cable to one of the projectors and is, in fact, being used to project live video of the book currently on the table. The computer on the seat connects to the second projector, which is currently projecting a black screen. The group tentatively enters the kitchen, careful not to trip over the cables. A collective decision is made to move the sofa from against the wall and put it against the balcony entrance. Manu, with the friendly eyes and turquoise hair, takes a seat on the sofa, balancing her daughter, also with friendly eyes on her knee. Vilem, looking around to see if anybody minds, takes the seat next to her. Manu’s daughter is immediately drawn to his long white beard and reaches out to grab it. Vilem doesn’t seem to mind the attention from the two-year-old. Esther decides to take her place on the top of the washing machine. Frans stands to the right of Esther, leaning against a large, white vertical cabinet, next to the sofa. Sadie moves towards one of the chairs by the kitchen table, the one to the right of it, angling it slightly for a better view, and then takes a seat at the table with the artist-researcher. Magnus, always the gentleman, offers the remaining kitchen table chair to Honor who, being ever so polite, offers it to Jussi who, also being a gentleman, suggests that perhaps Esther would be more comfortable sitting on this chair rather than on the washing machine. Esther finally acquiesces. Magnus decides to stand next to Frans, leaning against the washing machine. Honor and Jussi decide on the folding chairs from the balcony. Steve leans against the kitchen sink. The members of the ELO cram themselves into the space around the doorway entrance to the kitchen, using the sideboard that the artist-researcher uses for her dishes and glasses for support. Brendan has already left, so he doesn’t need a seat. Paul John and the Devil’s Advocate sit on the floor. The Steering Committee are left standing behind the ELO group who are now blocking their view. Unable to see anything, they decide to go home. Nobody notices them leave.)
A woman on a bicycle follows the traces that people have left in the public sphere of the internet, which lead her to different places around the city.

A performance of her "city-novel", a multiperspectival portrait of Berlin, drawn from voyeuring public YouTube videos.
— @cityofsound

Michelle Teran’s "Folgen" at Manchester Art Gallery. Insane storybook lecture set in Berlin based on YouTube clips.
— @anthonymobile

It’s difficult to articulate just how special Michelle Teran’s Folgen is. Uncomfortable, thoughtful, utterly moving - a masterpiece. #futr
— @honorharger

What a bizarre, creepy, beautiful performance of folgen by Michelle Teran tonight @FuturEverything @mcrartgallery
http://www.ubermatic.org/?p=2060
— @SonicAffective

@SonicAffective @futureeverything @mcrartgallery I loved it. Strangely gripping and extremely memorable.
— @Anne_L_Kershaw

The lives of others: Michelle Teran (awardee VIDA8.0) explores in Folgen the tension between public and private.
http://ow.ly/pMdzf
— @VIDAAwards
Folgen
Originally published in Berlin, 2012

All characters in this book are non-fictional, and any resemblance to fictional persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

This book was set in 10 pt Bembo Std.

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Dear JoschiWeLobe,

I want you to know that I’ve been following you.

I watched all your videos, every last one of them. I thought that if I watched you long enough, I would start to know you better. Eventually I decided that I wanted to see if I could find you. That is when I stood up from behind my computer screen and entered into the city.

I decided to follow in your footsteps, using your memories as guides. I tried to imagine how you would experience the city, by looking at it through your eyes.

Why? Because you told me where to go.
You gave me this information.

How? Because you told me how to go.
You gave me this information.
You see, we live in interesting times, where information and cities are woven together in very complex ways. In these times, thoughts and memories become images and images make maps of worlds. This creates a reality that I follow.

The multiplicity of possibilities of looking at an image means that it can be interpreted in other ways than originally intended. History, even a personal one, becomes a type of fiction. Movement through the city is also a process of creating a fiction, writing sentences, assembling narratives.

So I’ve collected you all together, and so we begin...
Alone at home smoke
Wartenburgerstrasse 5
DEAR ARUMHCARSLOP/ AKA PAINTER BOY
The first time I saw you, you were at work. It was one Wednesday morning, March 2010. You painted a room of an apartment undergoing renovation on Wartenburgerstrasse 5. You had placed the camera in another room, at the end of a hallway. You were dressed completely in white, a dark handkerchief wrapped around to protect your hair from the falling drops of white paint. You were already painting, somebody else must have turned the camera on. I could hear sounds of construction, it was clear that you had company. You painted a ceiling, a simple action, really; dipping the roller in, then making long sweeping strokes from the left to the right, repeating the same action until you had reached the opposite wall. At the same time it was quite mesmerizing, graceful even. The whole process took a little over a minute, more like 1:48 to be exact. As you walked back towards the camera smiling, brushing a bit of paint off your shoulder, I noticed the beginnings of a goatee.
Later, one year later, you lay in the back of a 4 x 4 minivan, driving somewhere out of the city. Head propped up using a blue denim jacket, you observed yourself in transition. The screen acting as a mirror of how you come to imagine yourself, a young, ruggedly handsome man in his 20s. You passed the camera over to your friend who pointed it out the window, a passing terrain of rotating windmills. Outside, the sky was grey, the clouds heavy with the promise of rain. It reminded me of another view from a moving car, another road trip you made on a summer afternoon, traveling from your home town in Poland towards Berlin.

The videos of yourself at work, as well as at play, have the feel of a newcomer. Of somebody, who upon arrival, starts building his own social map of an unfamiliar city, building up his own itineraries and personal histories.

Work seems to function for you like this.

One day, in the silence of a summer morning, you finally completed a large project, a row of villas, in the countryside by the lake. You gave a guided tour of a couple of the villas, showing all the rooms. The walls were cream-coloured, the ceilings a delicate shade of orange. You caught your reflection in the hallway mirror on the way out and made a gesture to yourself that was both cocky and a bit sweet. I found it quite appealing, that small gesture. It made you seem very sympathetic and I guess I started to like you more then and decided to follow you.

Your colleagues waited outside, impatiently smoking, wondering why you always insist on filming everybody and everything. Still I can understand why you might want to do this. Soon it’s time to leave and you’ll all drive back together, back to the city, back to your own homes and spaces, probably never to return. And if you don’t possess that moment, it’s as if it had never happened. It’s an impulse to capture and hold onto something before the amnesia takes over. Even if you never looked at this video again, at least there is evidence that it took place, that you exist. This becomes your time capsule.
Dear Joschi
DEAR JOSCHI This is my first experience of you. You lie on the floor on a mattress, covered in a bright orange sheet. Your face has a flushed pallor, not a healthy-looking glow, but a feverish, mottled look. Your hair is glossy and sculpted stiff. You have your eyes closed. Someone holds a small snake, with beige and copper stripes and dangles it above your head. It’s a feminine hand. I can tell by the slender fingers and the way it grasps onto things.

She lowers the squirming snake, tickling your nose a bit, until the snake takes over and starts to makes its way across your face. Then she moves back a bit to watch. You look up, your eyes blank as doorknobs. Defiant.

Maybe you are not even aware that this moment still exists as a recorded memory. You probably barely remember it happening. It’s buried so deep under so many others now, invisible, forgotten. But not for me.
If you looked at this now, perhaps you wouldn’t even recognize yourself. Do you think you would? Do you remember her? Would you like what you saw? Do you like what you see now?

For the most part I don’t.

It would be a complete understatement if I said that we had quite different political views and ideas. If we met, we probably wouldn’t like each other that much.

You’re 33 years old, photographer, raver. You make your political views very transparent. Don’t tell me when you list your hometown as “Reichshauptstadt Berlin” that you mean this in any other way than how it should be interpreted. Or when you filmed that burning car, in June, 2011, calling all leftists, antifascists and environmentalists dirty people and that they should all go to hell.

I refer to you as Neo-nazi boy to my friends.

But I want to talk about the trains. Seventy two videos of trains, recorded around different spots in the city as well as outside of Berlin. Videos where you, still as a mouse, wait patiently, sometimes for hours in the middle of winter so you can catch but a few seconds of a passing train.

There’s something that is so disturbing and sublime about them. They take me places. So I have decided to stick with you a bit and see where you will take me, although I might not want to go there.
Streichkonzert
am Alexanderplatz
id: 20901

**title:** Streichkonzert am ALEXanderplatz

**summary:** Zum Feierabend, eine kleine Konzert, am ALEX...

**author:** arumbCakstoP

**url:** http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTIXX-pMqq0&feature=ytbue_gdata_player

**coords:** 52.52230453491211 1
3.414092063903809
DEAR PAINTER BOY. Today I decided to make a trip to the Alexanderplatz although I was here so many times before. I wanted to stand in the same place that you had when you watched the string trio play Mozart. Actually, was it Mozart? I was trying to place it. You stood so still watching them play while everybody else passed by continuing on. But you gave them time, you barely moved. I felt close to you, even though I knew that you were no longer there.

I was standing where you would have stood if you were there. I was standing where you would have stood if you were listening to the music. I was breathing the same air.

You were standing on the steps in front of the Galeria Kaufhof.

It's the same spot where that punk girl is living now, passed out. Her leather jacket is black, covered with sharp needle-like
spikes, a large spike juts out of her chin as well. Around her pierced navel are tattoos of snakes and skulls. She’s lying on her back, passed out, in her doc martin boots amongst all the scattered flyers and beer bottles. She looks so vulnerable, so peaceful, so oblivious to the people walking around her.
Mit Stäbchen am Alexa
MANNE EATS NOODLES with his grandson by the Alexa shopping mall in the Alexanderplatz.

He's having difficulty eating with the chopsticks. He lets his grandson Oliver poke fun at him. They eat at a beach bar in front of the Alexa shopping mall, a devastating place. He enjoys the briefest of moments together with his grandson. He realizes that he is getting old. He surrounds himself with his family and all the people he loves, together who help create the memories that he so methodically collects and archives. When was the first time that he looked into his wife's face and realized that they were no longer young, that their lives were slipping away from them?

Oliver looks through the camera. There is loud music playing in the background.

Grandpa Manne is eating with chopsticks, part one, Oliver says.
What do you mean "try". I repeatedly tried, Manne answers. Without the fork! Oliver says. Well, the peas fall through . . . well, one pea I will get for sure. Come back in a half an hour, Manne answers.

Oliver turns the camera on himself.

Watch the pro, Oliver says. Well it's easy with noodles. Well, I guess it works, Manne answers.
Dear Devilcengizz
Hakke sein nach
Sonne schrei’ Teil 3
Dear MatureMuscles4U
Spectacular

CHRISTIAN, A BEAUTIFULLY awesome man, always works towards perfection. He’s a man of few words, but when he does speak, he just wants to talk about how big and hard he is. It’s exhausting to constantly have to slave his body, his skin becomes quite irritated. Sometimes, when nobody else is around, he lifts his shirt up, grabs one of his breasts and then savagely punches it. When he’s super excited, he traces a finger along one of his protruding veins, then makes a slow circle around his nipple, without ever touching it. Then he puffs out his glorious pectoral muscles until they swell out into voluminous balloons. He gets so immersed in what he’s doing that he doesn’t even hear the telephone ringing. One day he might try just wearing a speedo and black cycle boots.
Raging Werewolf

Christian is muscle power personified. He is a raging werewolf, a big sexy man that loves to be watched. He is a hot, hairy wolfman. He’s hard working and determined, despite his diabetes. However he doesn’t really know how to pose well.

He is a masterful, masculine, muscular work of art, bringing so much joy and excitement into people’s lives. He has incredibly big breasts, big and hard as coconuts. If he wanted to, he could break your fucking nuts.
Hot and sweaty pecs 4 u

Christian, one of the most handsome, humble men in the network, stands sweating in the back room of the shop where he works. He moans in pleasure while he moves his strong, beautiful, masculine, nice-fingered hands over his beefy, malleable pectorals. The way in which he slaps his hefty pecs over and over again is so incredibly hot, especially with those glorious nipples. He shows such great muscle control that anybody watching would never get tired of looking at him.
Ready to crush you

Christian often puts his camera on a shelf in the backroom of a bodybuilding shop on Karl Marx Allee where he works. He tries to make a quick video before a client comes in. He is a 47 year old man who is trying his best in the gym, but can't compare with such huge guys. He's sexy and down to earth, likes to dominate with his rock hard muscles. If anyone came to visit him in Berlin, he would wear his guest down and dominate him in a long, sweaty, pro-style wrestling match. Or even a big bear hug if somebody walked into his shop.
Dear ManyTyBy
Ulcus Cruris 26

Today is the 26th of June. I was released from the hospital on the 24th and the doctor says it is all very good, almost closed. I cannot see anything positive about this, but they are experts and I hope they are right. Today they pulled off the bandage with pincers, or at least part of it. The doctor eventually stopped so as not to torture me anymore. The nurse and doctor say that some people have their whole leg open all the way from the knee down and they would not complain as much as I do. But it hurts pretty bad, as if somebody poked my leg with a knife and then twisted it around in there. The traces of the bandages are still visible. There is the scar from the club foot I had when I was 12. Fifty two years later, one can see clearly those traces. Earlier there were many more red dots, but they faded. Here it’s all red and super sensitive when I press it. It hurts like hell. On the third of July I am supposed to go back to the hospital. The doctor thinks that by then the wound will be closed. Well, her word in God’s ear. Until then.
Traute öffnet Walnüsse

Manne stands in a darkened hallway listening to the sounds of banging coming from the kitchen. It's just before sunset. He decides to enter.

Traute, taking a walnut out of a yellow bucket, places each under a tea cloth and opens the shell using a hammer. She's dressed in black, reading glasses perched on the edge of her nose. She's a reserved and silent little woman in her 70s who speaks little but always seems to mean more than she says. Always scrutinizing, always present, letting him take the stage and run amok with his perpetual boyishness. She still has all of her geo-patterned mini-skirts from the 60s, which she occasionally takes out and wears at parties.

Manne approaches her.
Who is this angel standing there? What are you doing there?, he asks.
I'm playing, Traute answers.
What's under the cloth? he asks.
An iron, she answers.
A what? he asks.
An iron. Yes, she answers.
What are you doing there with the ironing board? And what are you going to do with the nuts? he asks.
I'm secretly going to eat them all, she answers.
Are you going to make a nut cake? he asks.

Perhaps, she answers.
For Gisela and Adam, and for others too ... for Oliver? he asks.

She doesn't answer or look up at him.

A pause.

Isn't that a bit boring? he asks.
No. Work is never boring, she answers.
Okay well, have great success with that then, he says.
Thank you, she answers.
DEAR JOSCHI: I'm at Ostkreuz station, one of the places where you go to watch the trains. When I arrived I walked around the station and filmed the trains a bit, but was actually more interested in the cops.

Today it's Sunday. The police are out in full-force and the street is lined with police vans. The police seem to be in good spirits, even a bit bored. They are eating cake and ice cream. In the park nearby, all the punks and anti-fascists are sitting together and drinking beer. There's kind of a parallel picnic going on.

I take a seat in a nearby café to eat a salad and watch the police better. One of them is actually quite good-looking; dark hair, tall, slim, eyes that crinkle up when he smiles. He is number 233. He wears a bullet-proof vest and has an ear piece. Sometimes he says a few words into the microphone. When he does, I can hear his voice coming out of the police van.
I think they know I’m watching them.

I finish my salad and walk towards the park.

Now the cops aren’t eating cake or ice cream anymore. The mood has shifted. In fact, the police are standing all around me.

He’s standing right next to me. Number 233. He doesn’t have a wedding ring on. I wonder if that means he’s single. I try to look him in the eyes, but he doesn’t seem to notice me. His fingernails are neatly clipped. He doesn’t bite them, like I do. Now he’s no longer smiling and his left hand is clenched.

All the police are now checking everybody’s bags in the park, or anybody that looks remotely leftist; a guy with a red mohawk, somebody wearing sunglasses, two girls in black hoodies. They go through the bags and check for weapons, pull out black t-shirts and scrutinize each logo. Each person pretends the cop doesn’t exist and continues to joke with his friends.

Suddenly somebody parks a van in front of Ostkreuz station and puts on some loud punk music. A woman using a megaphone asks everybody to join her. Out fly the black t-shirts, nylon bomber jackets and sunglasses. Everybody assumes formation around the van. Then I see number 233, with his ear piece. He’s the team leader. He’s in front of his squadron, his eyes focussed straight ahead with a serious look on his face. He runs right by me then he’s gone.

Now I’m in the demonstration. We head into the neighbouring district of Lichtenberg to make a tour of all the Nazis living there; the store owners, people living in apartments, a school teacher. I walk with all the others, listening to all the chanting.

“Nazis Raus”

Now the cops are behind me. Suddenly I find myself on the sidewalk walking right beside a large column of police in full riot gear. Then he’s there, number 233. Now he notices me.

He comes up to me and says, “Why are you so interested in the police?”
Dear Manne
Libauerstrasse

DEAR MANNE. Today I decided to try to find the apartment building where you live. It’s a place where so many things happened: birthday celebrations, holidays, dinners, everyday moments around the home, watching the FUCK parade from the balcony, the fireworks on New Year’s Eve as well.

I watched your videos so much that I started to turn them into scripts, using them to perform all the different dialogues between yourself and the various people in your life; your walk with Hannah, talking to Traute in the kitchen, dinner table conversations with your family, all those times with Jannis, Stanley and Stuart in the skatepark. I tried to understand the importance and meaning of these everyday moments, moments that could just as easily go by unnoticed.

I performed them so much, that everybody started to became characters that I created.
I came here today, because I was looking for evidence that you do exist. That's why I sit now at a café across the street looking up at your balcony, knowing that you could at any moment appear and I would really see you.

This morning, when I first arrived, I walked up to look over the list of names by the doorbell and saw your name on the door. It's exactly where you marked it. It's a bit startling to find your name on the door. I didn't expect to find it that quickly. Your name is typed out in small crisp letters. It looks like it's been there for awhile. These small crisp letters, they have a feeling of permanence. You live here. You have lived here. You will live here, until...

Actually that's another reason I'm here. The last video you posted was on January 1, 2010. You pointed the camera at the computer monitor, showing a row of photo albums and then went to the balcony to film the fireworks. It was a bit dark and I couldn't see anything. I just heard the loud explosions. You stood there for a bit and then returned to your computer, saying that in few days you would get a bigger hard drive. Then that was it. I never saw you again. After four years and 515 videos later, you a 74 year old pensioner that grew up in the GDR, decided to stop.

Can I just say that from everybody, you are my favorite?

I look up at the balcony. The geraniums are in full bloom. This means that Traute is still there. She always has such nice flowers on the balcony. Then suddenly I see her. She is walking down the street. She looks so much younger than I thought she would.
Dear Manne

DEAR MANNE Yesterday I made a trip up to Weißensee to try to find the cemetery where your father is buried. He was an anti-fascist freedom fighter.

To prepare, I spent the entire day before yesterday watching every single video you made of your visit to your father on his 101st birthday, 14th July, 2009.

I found a nice spot in the library by Hallesches Tor where I carefully scrutinized each video, repeating segments, replaying them over and over again until I had memorized every gesture, every comment, every feature. These are the experiences that I carried with me on the journey towards the cemetery.

I started off cycling in the morning from my apartment in Kreuzberg: first heading towards Köpenickerstrasse, then to Alexanderplatz and finally up Berliner Allee.
I usually begin these trips around the city, following the footsteps of others, with a bit of hesitation. Maybe it’s the uncertainty of what I will find or why I am doing it at all. Why should I be interested in somebody else’s life? Is it a drive to understand how one marks out one’s place in the world?

However it usually happens that I find myself go away and something else takes over; when I let myself go and start living in the present... via somebody else’s past. As I cycled north, I became aware that I was leaving my place and entering your domain. You became my guide. I was in your hands.

It took me awhile to find the grave site. Actually first I went to the wrong cemetery and only after trying in vain to find the statue of Jesus located at the crossroads did I realize that I was at the wrong address and the wrong cemetery. The one I was looking for was just around the corner. I parked my bike again, entered the cemetery and instantly recognized the Jesus statue.

I started to feel a bit odd again, not really knowing what I was doing there. I walked around a bit, checking out the names on the gravestones, trying to remember where the grave was in relation to the statue. Apart from the groundskeeper I was completely alone, just like you were that day. I got a bit disoriented, no longer trusting my memory from the previous day. I must have walked around the same area three or four times before I finally saw it, “BERNARD GARLING 1908-1978”. I must have walked by several times without seeing it. Strange.

The grave site was as neglected as when you first found it. I tried to imagine when was the last time you visited him. What did you think of when you arrived at the cemetery and realized that his grave site was so... forgotten?

Did you also imagine yourself in his place? Did you think about when you would cease to matter?

Is this what you were thinking when you made that trek alone to the grave site and then quickly went looking for the garden shears and rake to clear away all the weeds? Was this on your mind when you went to the florist by the cemetery entrance to buy fresh flowers?

Is this why I also decided to go to the same florist at the entrance of the cemetery to try to buy the same type of flowers and place them at your father’s grave?

By the end of the day it was starting to get cold, with rain imminent. I tried to follow the last steps that you made through the cemetery before getting on the bus, heading back to your wife. This was the last thing I did before heading back to the loved ones as well.
Folgen
MICHELLE: –I would like to start by thanking everybody for taking the time to be here, and for participating as discussants in my artistic research project. For this session, what I wanted to do is get as close to the work as possible, which is why I started with a performative lecture of Folgen, which will be the main focus of this session. The idea is to have a flow between your various viewpoints and fields—electronic literature, digital culture, critical theory, curating, media archeology, performance, media art, film and visual art—to talk about the development of a method that constitutes my way of performing artistic research. There are so many things to discuss together. I am not exactly sure where to start, but perhaps if there are any immediate comments?

MAGNUS: –Perhaps I can start. You use online video as a source material for mapping out cities, which is the basic starting point. And this involves digital mapping, social media, a study of the urban landscape and some particular individuals in this particular city, which is Berlin. And you also visit, or maybe, let’s say, revisit some places over a period. So we automatically enter the field of autobiography here, and self-portrait. The staging of the self. And seeing this material, I think, it is so… I get reminded of how wrong Guy Debord was when he predicted in the Society of the Spectacle that the future of the human being will be a passive consumer of television. Here we can see this active staging of the self and how we write about ourselves in real-time, somehow. This is about the marvels of ordinary life, I think.

ESTHER: –For me, it was very unlike… I don’t know what my expectations were, but from the word “Folgen,” I just assumed that there was some form of results or consequences, or there would be some quite dry output. By the end, I understood the connection to this “following”. It’s so much more processual. I’m shocked by something that, of course, I already know, but the extent to which one is pulled into these processes. The way it’s set up. It’s this strength of the reactions that one has to these different presentations and mediated to these relationships to these different men who are all performing, performing themselves in very different ways. It’s quite a shake up for me. I think I am also allowed to ask you questions? I mean, regarding what kind of arc is this moving towards? The old man in the end, an end of things? So the question is: did it come about as you made it or was that a narrative arc that you just decided on?
MICHELLE TERAN

CONFESSIONS OF AN ONLINE STALKER

ELECTRONIC LITERATURE ORGANIZATION: –Perhaps we would also like to start with a question related to the narrative arc, but concerning the writing—in terms of writing and watching the videos, and preparing a text. We just witnessed a lecture performance of you reading from a book, a short novel. It is a performance of you reading and playing back different YouTube videos that you use to accompany the text as well as, what would appear to be, other videos that you have shot in the city.

MICHELLE: –To enter into your questions, I can start by describing how I began with the process. It began with me just looking, looking for something of interest. In the late spring, 2011, I started parallel research of two cities—Zagreb and Berlin—using the Stadtarchiv software that I developed together with Brendan. Around this time, I received two invitations to develop and present new works, which provided opportunities to explore different areas of my research. In Zagreb, BLOK, a non-profit and non-governmental organization, invited me to develop a work for the Urban Festival. In Berlin, I was invited to be part of Tracing Mobility, a group exhibition taking place at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt.

It might seem strange to be directing my research project at the whim of external instigating factors. However, each (timely) invitation provided opportunities for experimenting with two different approaches for critically investigating the relationship between the informatic and the city.

MANU: –(interrupting) At the same time, it is so good that one of the projects takes place Berlin, since you have lived there for ten years now, if I am not mistaken? Usually, it is

1. Regarding the invitation coming from Zagreb, the curators were interested in “exploring the experiences and changes in the use of the city, its memory, architecture as social space, the hypertrophy of the symbolic aspects of Zagreb’s skyscrapers, their relationship to the ideologies of the past, the transformative processes oscillating between public and private, always tirelessly exploring possible strategies of resistance to the constant trend of disappearing public space.” They opened up this question me, Dutch artist Jonas Staal, Serbian artist Dusica Drazic and Serbian architect/artist Dubravka Sekulic. I have devoted an entire chapter to the project I developed for the Urban Festival. In Berlin, I was invited to be part of Tracing Mobility, a group exhibition taking place at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt.

2. The curators for Tracing Mobility were Trampoline, an agency for Art and Media founded by artists Anette Schäfer and Miles Chalcraft in 1997. Trampoline is based in Nottingham and has run a second office in Berlin since 2000. The organisation supports and develops artists working at the critical edge of emerging technology and digital culture. The exhibition presented the positions of 16 international artists who trace the shifting terrain of global and local mobility, and virtual and material movement. Exhibiting Artists: Frank Abbott (UK), Aram Bartholl (DE), Neal Beggs (UK/FR), Heath Bunting (UK), Janet Cardiff / George Bures Miller (CAN), Miles Chalcraft (UK/D), Simon Faithfull (UK/D), Yolande Harris (UK/NL), Folke Köberling & Martin Kaltwasser (DE), Landon Mackenzie (CAN), Open_Sailing (FR/JP), plan b (Sophia New & Dan Belasco Rogers) (UK/DE), Esther Polak & Ivar van Bekkum (NL), Gordan Savicic (AT/NL), Mark Selby (UK), Michelle Teran (CAN/DE)


something of interest.
ELO: *(thinking)* What would constitute something of interest?
MICHELLE: I know what you are thinking. Why is something interesting and another thing not? *Folgen* started with me looking at everything on the grid and then pulling something out and examining it: anything that caught my eye. Different things that people did, people living in Berlin, and what they captured on video. It started quite simply. One of the first videos that caught my eye was of a lone man painting the ceiling of an empty apartment undergoing renovation. We can start with this. He was painting the ceiling of a home that was not his.
ELO: How do you know this?
MICHELLE: Because he filmed himself working. It was obvious that he was one of the painters, but not the homeowner. He used the camera to portray the home, but it was not his home. Why would he film himself doing this? He didn’t say a word, yet this process of performing an everyday act, of transforming an empty room; it seemed that by transforming the space, that he was also part of this metamorphosis.
HONOR: Which gives it a transcendental quality, where you understand something is happening beyond the content of someone painting the ceiling. And you give it that quality. I am trying to remember the famous artwork, that famous piece in the 70s of the artist painting the room and then getting to the end of painting the room and then painting it again. I can’t remember who it is. But watching that guy painting, and your narrative connected to it, it looks like an act of artistic performance art. That’s the context and narration that you validate out to something, something other than it was intended to be.
MICHELLE: *(nodding)* But then he filmed himself in other situations around work. He filmed himself in a minivan with his workmates—all men in their 20s—sitting languidly in their paint-splattered overalls, driving somewhere outside of the city. In another moment, he proudly displayed a recently painted villa, and gave a tour of all the freshly painted rooms. Other times he was at a football game, he watched a live band in a bar, or filmed a string quartet in the Alexanderplatz. Somewhere in between these videos of work and non-work, there was a video of him in a Polish nightclub, one year before his arrival in Berlin. I realized that he was a newcomer, from Poland. I began to think of his method of using the camera to track his movements through the city—both at work and at play—as being of somebody who, upon arrival, starts building his social map of an unfamiliar city. This is how I describe what he is doing in the text I just read.
ESTHER: You move through this fairly innocuous experience—of this guy painting the ceiling—but then you start to imagine or reveal that this is a migrant laborer. This is a Polish person who is working on houses he could never himself inhabit.
MICHELLE: By documenting himself, by creating his itineraries and personal histories, this was his way of laying claim to this new city. He would never live in this house, but there were other ways of inhabiting a place. There were other ways of belonging. Work seemed to function for him in this way. Documenting himself at work seemed to be his attempts at belonging somewhere, of finding his place, within a city of strangers. At the same time, by being a newcomer and finding himself in a new city, he was also documenting what it meant to be pushing one’s boundaries: by leaving home and entering somewhere that was less familiar to him. Within these videos, I experienced his attempts at capturing the destabilizing sense of self, one set in motion, such as when he films himself in the minivan, traveling on the highway. He leaves his home but gains the potential of creating new identities or other ways of belonging in other places that a more familiar place would never allow. Within these videos, what I felt that he was showing me was his process of expansion.
ESTHER: So the poignancy one feels about the recording... Yet at the same time about him being marginalized in some way, and the way that you present that. For example, this sort of enigmatic element that you describe that moment of catching of the self in the mirror.
MICHELLE: The moment when he encounters his reflection in the hallway mirror at the bottom of the stairs, by the door entrance. It is so unexpected that he does this... For me, for us, but perhaps for him as well: Who am I? Where am I going? What have I done? When he makes this cocky gesture to himself, he mirrors back not only his gaze, but ours as well. I take it as a standing invitation to enter into the life of this person. He
acknowledges our presence. He wants others to witness his journey. He wants us to join
him in his process of expansion: to come along for the ride.

MAGNUS: –Can you respond a little bit to that “standing invitation”? What triggered
you to start this project?

MICHELLE: –I think it is based on my interest in these small things, things that I pull
out of the grid because, although they are small, they seem to be important. But within
these small things, (like the moment in the mirror), the same questions seem to be
asked: Who am I? Where am I going? What have I done? They are all about journeys.
How do the videos that different people produce track these journeys? And what hap-
pens when I start to follow these journeys? For example, the following scene that I
discovered from within an apartment in East Berlin:

On a kitchen table was a collection of recently acquired items from an afternoon shop-
ing trip, purposely displayed. A man teasingly listed everything he purchased on the
shopping trip. I couldn’t see his face; I just heard his voice. He bought a liter of milk, a
bag of candies, a big piece of Jägerspeck, some sprouts, two types of Kvass, and some
good Russian baked goods. To this, he added some cranberry juice, borsch, green toma-
to salad, five bottles of beer—both Ukrainian and Russian—a sturgeon filet, a mackerel
and some smoked chicken. He asked a woman called Traute if she was happy. She was
the one who sent him out shopping, but only for a liter of milk and a bag of candies. She
answered, “Yes.”
At the same address, I found a video of a close-up of a foot covered in an ulcer, then of an older woman, in her 70s, cracking open walnuts on a kitchen table and putting them in a yellow bucket. There were views of his living room: a well-trodden carpet and worn light blue sofa, an embroidered cloth covering the coffee table. A heavy oak mantelpiece was home to an assortment of objects—crystal vases, goblets, candy dishes and a few postcards. Through the window looking towards the balcony, there were geraniums in full bloom. Next to the balcony, photographs of children hung on the wall. Typing in his name into the “author” field of my data-mining software, I found 155 more videos made by the same man. Most of the videos documented events that took place within the same home but also within a three-block range around the building where he and his wife lived. There were a few other locations around Berlin as well. However, he made most of them around where he lived.

HONOR: –I think what’s really interesting is not just that YouTube exists, it’s the collection. It’s the fact that there’s this 70-year-old man that is putting over 500 clips on YouTube. This is partly why the piece is so uncanny because you’re… They appear to be just regular people.

MICHELLE: –Manfred Garling, or Manne for short, worked for many years as an interpreter (French to German) before his retirement, and has lived in the same apartment in Friedrichshain—a district in the former East Berlin, now overrun with students and tourists—since the late 80s. Traute was his second wife. He had several children and many grandchildren. In 2006, he filmed a sudden rush of water—his first video—coming down the steps and onto the platform of Zoologischer Garten Station. The doors of the train where he was sitting closed just in time, sparing the passengers from getting wet feet. After this event, his video making became a daily affair, where he would document different aspects of his life and the people around him. He always talked within his videos, providing a voice-over for what we should be looking at. He would film things taking place inside the home. He took us around the apartment, showed us all the rooms. He filmed guests coming through the front door. He documented all the dinners and celebrations. He took us down into the courtyard and into the cellar, where he made an inventory of everything on the shelves. He filmed the buskers who played just below his balcony. He made short excursions in the neighbourhood. He spent hours walking around his neighbourhood in Friedrichshain, making note of all the new bars and restaurants that had opened in the past two years. He frequented the local skate park with his grandsons. He filmed his wife sitting by herself on a park bench. He made repeated visits to Oberbaumbrücke, the bridge separating his neighbourhood from Kreuzberg: the neighbourhood that was just across the water. The bridge gave him a good vantage point from which he could document the changes and gentrification happening in the area. From the bridge, he filmed the day after the opening of O2 world—a massive stadium that emerged out of a former wasteland. He commented that there were as many police as protestors present commemorating this event. For him, these changes in his neighbourhood were neither good nor evil, but something that happens. He recorded the changes taking place not only in his city, but within his personal life as well. He documented his 48-year-old son’s last stages of his life, and then his final death after a long battle with a terminal illness. He even reflected on his mortality. He spent one day in the cemetery where his father was buried. As he looked for the gravestone, he filmed his shadow in movement.

ESTHER: –By the time it gets to that point... Because it is all about “What are our lives, what have we done, what happens to it all, did any of it “matter”?”

MICHELLE: –This ghostly image… It had the same feeling as the Polish painter when he caught himself in the mirror. Who am I? Where am I going? What have I done? At first I thought that he was making these home movies because maybe somebody taught him how to do this and he had plenty of time on his hands, but then I witnessed the intensity of how he filmed everything. When he was in the home, when he circulated around Berlin, he created traces of his movements, but intentionally. It was very easy to find where he lived and the places he had been. He had geo-located everything. He was on the move, but with a drive that took on such urgency. The videos for him seemed to be about preservation, his fight against the relentless progress of entropy. He didn’t want to disappear. So, to go back to your question, Magnus, about this “standing invitation” and what triggered me to start this project.

(Magnus looks over at Michelle)
MICHELLE: –For me, these online video archives that people create, and the traces they produce by creating them, become portrayals of their living environments: how they relate to their sense of home, identity, and belonging. Who are they? Where are they going? What have they done? This becomes my main interest. How do different people map out their spaces for living? Some seem to stay in one place, building something up over time, while others seem to be in continuous circulation, and lay claim to the city in this way. The Polish painter works very much like this for me, but his is not an isolated case.

One guy I found, for example—a tall, slim Turkish man—seemed to be less concerned about permanence, and more interested in the potential of circulation. He had over 500 videos of himself, wearing different combinations of a selection of fetish gear, which he used to stage one-minute performative interventions in different areas around Berlin. Some took place in highly visible areas and landmarks, such as the Alexanderplatz or in front of museums where many tourists frequented. Others seem to happen during early morning hours and on empty streets, with no witnesses. Not even many people were looking at his videos on YouTube. According to my calculations, he was doing around 1-2 of these short performances each day. He seemed to spend his days in constant circulation around Berlin. What did his movements trace out? One day, I discovered that all of his videos had disappeared, that he had deleted everything. It was an end to something, but to what exactly?

MAGNUS: –I guess that this question has been there before, probably a common question concerning choosing individuals as research subjects. Why these people, these particular people? There are seven people, right?

MICHELLE: –Concerning my selection, I decided that out of all the people I had been looking at in Berlin (I think there were about 15 or 16…) I would choose individuals as research subjects, based on the size of their geo-tagged collections. If I could go back to the example of Manne, it started with the single video of the shopping trip. However, the fact that he had 155 geo-tagged videos meant that there were many other things that I could look at. It worked this way with the six other people as well. The more stuff they had, the more visible they became to me. If I could think of everybody that I followed, I could say that I ended up working with certain caricatures or stereotypes of Berlin: a Polish migrant, an East-German pensioner, a Turkish fetishist, a homosexual bodybuilder, a chain-smoking 40-something club boy, a yuppie father and a Nazi. However that each of them personified Berlin, in such a stereotypical way, was not the reason I chose these individuals as research subjects. These more stereotypical aspects of each of my “subjects” emerged after I started to dig more into the lives of these people. The more clichéd aspects of themselves weren’t the first things that attracted me to them, yet these aspects of their life stories eventually came out. My first encounter with the Nazi, for example, was of him on a mattress in a bedroom somewhere in Berlin, which is what I write about in my text. It was a strange image. But then he made all of these videos about trains: antique steam engines, 75 in total. Trains that he filmed on their journeys, trains as they passed by him. He filmed them in Berlin, but in the countryside as well. One winter morning, he was in the countryside somewhere, silently waiting for
the arrival of a train that he wanted to film. There was nobody else there but him. It was strangely poetic that he would patiently wait like this. But then he was on the platform in the Alexanderplatz U-Bahn Station, shouting at and harassing some guy standing in front of him. On his YouTube channel, he listed his city of residence as “Reichshauptstadt Berlin”. I realized that I was following a Nazi. He was 33 years old. He was into photography. He had a Fetlife account. He liked Breakcore.

ESTHER: –I lived in Berlin for a couple of years, so I have a certain sense of recognition in what you show me. I’ve been in the anti-fascist demos. So there’s that re-finding of myself in there. But what if one comes from fully on the outside of that? Does it seem like that sort of mythic realm of Berlin: where it is all so Nazi or anti-Nazi, so political, almost like a cliché of Berlin? Yet it is not. And it repeats itself there (in the videos), and there it is. It is Berlin. It is marked, on the city, on its terrain, on its buildings. The remaining bullet holes on the squats...

So watching it, you are positioned in a relationship to a whole body of material, a whole body of memories that are public, historical, and now. But at the same time, you are entering it through these very particular stories.

MICHELLE: –They become views of the city entered through the individual...

ESTHER: –I suppose the question within the context you are working in could also be whether the videos just become markers of memory for an individual who is trying to hold onto them—or whether they enter the commonality of this pool?

MICHELLE: –Don’t you think they have already entered it? That I can access this material shows me this: this movement from the personal to the public. This exponential surge in the production of online video and its migration from private to public archives was relatively recent, but it happened quickly. The availability of affordable cameras, bandwidth, production, and distribution technologies also made it relatively simple to create, publish and distribute moving images online. In a very short time, YouTube became the default moving-image archive.

ESTHER: –And then they make themselves available to this collective public memory, and they can be drawn upon, re-constellated, and annexed to our sense of things and our projections and rejections of how the world is.

MICHELLE: –Yet at the same time, I wonder about these ways of our making sense of things… These life stories and projections of the world (and rejections of it). These particular stories: what is present in these stories and how the individual responds to the forces that shape his or her life? What are they projections of… What do they project?

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personal space, in which (according to architect Witold Rybczynski) “bourgeois values of privacy, intimacy and ‘home’ could flower.”

MICHELLE: –This reminds me of something you mentioned earlier, Esther, when you described Baudelaire’s poems and how they chronicled the transition to Capitalism in 19th century Paris, and an emerging bourgeois class.10

We see how the total redesign of Paris, by Baron Hausmann and Emperor Napoleon III after the revolution of 1848, defined by the building of straight, wide boulevards, was used to promote the flow of people, traffic, and commerce. But this was also undertaken to control the working class, assert the power of the state through monumental architecture and “celebrate the values of the new bourgeoisie by prominently housing this class along the boulevards.” 11

David Harvey describes this sorting out of the working class poor and the newly emerged bourgeoisie in a scene of one of Baudelaire’s poems. A couple sits in a new cafe, on a new boulevard—still littered with rubbish but already proudly displaying its unfinished splendors—while a poor man holding a small boy looks through the window “with great saucer eyes,” unable to enter. The poor family is excluded from this space, yet can neither “evade nor ignore it.” The scene according to Harvey “depicts the contested character of public space and the inherent porosity of the boundary between the public and the private… But how it generates a sense of space where ambiguities of proprietorship, of aesthetics, of social relations (class and gender in particular) and the political economy of everyday life, collide”12

What this created was a fundamental change in how public and private lives were both lived and perceived. On one hand, the “right to the city” was defined as something for the bourgeois class, who shopped in department stores, sat in cafes whose windows faced the street, and strolled down Hausmann’s expansive boulevards. Public spaces were therefore redesigned to promote a certain type of display and a homogenous mix of people, and to make it very clear that some individuals did not belong to the new “public”.13 At the same time, when faced with a complete erosion and radical shifting of the parameters of public life, you see the development of the private, middle-class, home, increasingly seen as an idealized refuge, a protected domain of domestic intimacy from where the first “real” relationships originated. It becomes a morally superior space compared with the impersonal and threatening outside world of strangers.14

PAUL JOHN: –Rybczynski’s Home: A Short History of an Idea (1986) also talks about this as well, in which he argues that shifts in the design of domestic space in places like 17th-century Protestant Holland led to “the emergence of something new in the human consciousness: the appearance of the internal world of the individual, of the self, and of the family”. However you read it, there is a connection that occurs between consciousness and domestic space, between person and property, one that has been constant in thinking about individualism from the 17th century to the present.15

STEVE: –(interrupts) This seems a bit silly to talk about these “internal worlds of the individual” and “domestic intimacy” when we increasingly use media to police ourselves, maintain ourselves, judge ourselves against others, regulate our behaviour, measure ourselves and measure others… New technologies of self-control have grown to replace this intervention, as a greater part of our lives is taken up with the “work of watching” and the “work of being watched”.16

ESTHER: –There’s this kind of collapse of the public and the private being wrestled with and formed and articulated.

MICHELLE: –(thinking to herself) Perhaps this is even silly to think about the concept of the home; namely these distinctions between the private and the public; physical thresholds. We’re not really talking about this, are we? Hasn’t the Internet changed our concept of home? What is a home? Homes are connected to the electronic world: connected to friends, acquaintances, strangers, with whom we share our most intimate lives. We are encouraged to think about our spaces on the web as our homes. Home is ‘in the cloud’: an online archive is a home.

PAUL JOHN: –However, these technologies of surveillance and self-control were already an issue in the late 19th century. Now, a century later, new technologies are again altering the conditions under which selves can be displaced and privacy maintained. The Internet and the World Wide Web are creating radically new opportunities for self-presentation, and perhaps, some observers think, new modes of selfhood as well.17

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13. Harvey, quoting Richard Sennet, pg. 4.
15. Eakin, 2008, pg 91-92
STEVE: --...which is predicated on the idea of feedback. As a consequence of all this, we can no longer say we live in 'the society of the spectacle.' We are everything but passive consumers of products; we live in a society of self-performance in which we constantly present ourselves and excite the interest of others in what we do, and this self-performance is a commodity that has a price. I don’t think I’m straying into the realms of science fiction if I suggest that contemporary media have created a form of immediacy in which human subjectivity is the principal object of production and consumption, or that media serve to facilitate this production and consumption.15

MICHELLE: --Eric Gordon also refers to this notion of feedback when he talks about how social personality functions within social media, which he ties to Marcel Proust’s ‘pre-internet’ description of the social personality and the extended self. Proust refers to a social personality as being a creation of the thoughts of other people: how we appear to others. Even the simple act that we describe as “seeing someone we know” is to some extent an intellectual process. All the thoughts, ideas, and experiences about this person, or what that person represents, get packed into the physical form of the person that we see. In fact, we already form a picture of that person before we even see him or her. A social personality is therefore composed of tiny bits of information stored in the minds of the multitude of people we come across, making the idea of an objective self totally impossible. This is compounded by digital social networking in which we are not only active producers of subjectivity (private thoughts, public actions, or private–public thoughts, private actions in public, etc.) but in which each personal action creates different traces to be taken up and experienced by other subjects (human and machine) which become materialized in the network in a myriad of ways.19

PAUL JOHN: --I would also like to pick up on this idea of the extended self and how it connects to narrative. We tell stories about ourselves every day: to other people, or even in our heads. It is a stream of consciousness; but it is episodic, in loose narrative fragments... Ephemeral bits and pieces of stories we tell about ourselves every day. What we are doing when we tell these stories is constructing and living a narrative, which becomes our identity. It is not just that we talk about ourselves, but that we talk ourselves into being. This process of self-narration starts at childhood: there is a special emphasis placed on the relation between self-narration and childhood development, in which children are trained to place a special emphasis on a certain modality of selfhood—the extended self. 

MICHELLE: --And, as you well know, this term ‘the extended self’ is also coming from psychologist Ulric Neisser. For Neisser, this constitutes “the self of memory and anticipation, the self—existing continuously across time that is the primary subject of autobiographical discourse.” Children, from the age of three, become conscious that they exist out of the present moment: there is the past and there is the future. An element of time becomes part of the development of the child’s identity. Narrative, therefore, becomes a particularly adept device for accommodating these newly formed relations with time. “Who am I? What have I done? Where am I going?”10

PAUL JOHN: --Therefore, the relation between narrative and identity is not just telling stories about ourselves, but a constituent part of the self.

As a result, the extended self takes the form of a narrative identity, and these identities become means of displaying different aspects of the self through our daily encounters with others. These stories that we perform are used to establish ourselves as normal individuals within these interpersonal encounters. However, these daily utterances are in fact guided by very strict norms and rule systems, drawn from the particular cultures that we inhabit to shape them. There is a critical element of ‘social accountability’ that sets the ways that we should be talking about ourselves, to attain a certain legitimacy within the cultural dimension in which we are operating.2 As Esther just mentioned, “They are individual markers, which are already entered into the commonality of the pool.”

ESTHER: -(thinking to herself) These fragments, these tiny bits, the myriad of logging.

MICHELLE: --Going back to the question of agency, what is this exchange between the individual and the social structures? Do we have any say in this? Are we simply the products of whatever (political, economic or cultural) environment where we might be living?

PAUL JOHN: --Well, I would like to think of it as being less deterministic...

MICHELLE: --More of a dialogic give-and-take process?

PAUL JOHN: --Yes, it can’t be, as Foucault would have it, a one-way account of this relation in which the individual has no say in the matter.22

MICHELLE: --For example, there is the field of microhistorical research in which the agency of the individual opens up a historical process rife with conflicts and negotiations, with the possibility of several outcomes. As Levi would have it, “All social action is seen to be the result of an individual’s constant negotiation, manipulation, choices and decisions in the face of normative reality that, though pervasive, nevertheless offers

20. Eakin, 2008, pg 66-68
21. Ibid.
22. Eakin, 2008, pg 100
many possibilities for personal interpretations and freedoms.”

MAGNUS: –(suddenly interrupting) Maybe I could switch gears a bit. It is also very clear for me that one of your methods is reenactment—I don’t know if that is exactly the term you should use here—but rather, maybe ‘pilgrimage’, which is the term used by, perhaps, Chris Marker in this work Sans Soleil when he speaks of pilgrimage as an artistic method, which means “traveling in the footsteps of text and film”. In his example, he is a fan of Hitchcock, and he goes to all the places in Vertigo. Not only had he seen the film 17 times, but he also went to visit all the places. And he says that this is also the way to experience the film: through the spaces and places. Maybe you can comment on that method, or methodology, of revisiting.

ELO: –This is the part that we also particularly liked during the reading, where you go to the places and reenact their lives, or parts of their lives, in the places. How did this come about?

MICHELLE: –In approaching the writing, I decided to try a little experiment in reduction. What would happen if I took this material—digital information culled from Internet research—out of its original environment and context and used the writing of prose as a method for analysis?

ELO: –...A process of reduction; a process of extrapolation, and then reduction to a textual experience...

MICHELLE: –Exactly. I wanted to see how far I could take this process of reduction: removing any immediate indications that these were YouTube videos, then slowly bringing back in the aesthetic elements that would point to where the material had originated. I imagined a certain style of writing that would be about observing what was taking place on the video, but with very little interpretation or self-reflexivity on my part.

ELO: –Why would you want to do this?

MICHELLE: –For me, it was a method for slowing things down. We are so used to scanning over information on the Internet. We quickly consume it, then move on to something else. Perhaps writing could be used as a method for slowing down this process of consuming information. I wanted to use it as a method for reflecting on the material. I wanted to describe the person, the action, the location, but I didn’t want to include myself in the narrative. Yes, I was present—there was somebody who was doing the watching—however, my presence was implicit, but not plainly visible. Literature provides many references for how to do this, and writers are extremely skilled at situated storytelling. I searched for examples that would provide suitable references for how to approach my work. I became interested in Alain Robbe-Grillet’s novel Jealousy. In his novel, Robbe-Grillet uses the repetition of details, and the juxtaposition of different perspectives and temporalities to extrapolate a meaning of an event that might (or might not) have occurred, and which could have potentially harmful effects on the domestic intimacy of the protagonist’s home. Did the protagonist’s wife have an affair with the neighbour? The novel, which takes place on a banana plantation in an undisclosed location, consists of the protagonist experiencing and re-experiencing different events that occurred throughout the house and evaluating whether they might provide clues to infidelity: a conversation that occurs over cocktails during sundown, an overnight shopping trip into town, a dinner that takes place in the dining room of the house, or him watching his wife write a letter. There is very little drama in the narrative in regards to the use of affect. Robbe-Grillet creates a drama by describing events and rooms in the house with a considerable preciseness: sometimes by describing the entire scene, but other times just concentrating on small details.

ESTHER: –I find that fascinating. I was—I think it was Brian McHale—thinking about this postmodern literary aesthetics that tries to talk about the ways in which we imagine spaces when reading. If you tried to reconstruct a space that you’re reading about in a book, for example, the author doesn’t tell you how high the walls are. So you have this fuzzy environment that the characters are moving through... This kind of imprecision. It’s a vague notion of positionality. With the Robbe-Grillet approach, it’s that effort of really pinning it down and locating not just that space but where you would be standing were you within the space, and so on.

MICHELLE: –Here is Robbe-Grillet’s approach: these fanatical moments of recall, bordering on obsession, are the actions of a jealous husband, trying to locate the moment of transgression. Sometimes people are present, but many times they are not. However, he uses different starting points and different methods for combining a reduced array of elements to understand what is insinuated within the blank spaces of what is not immediately discernable. By bringing these small details into such intense focus, does this also offer new details and information that were previously unclear? He returns, for example, to the stain on the wall of a centipede, killed during the dinner in which Franck (the neighbour) and A (the protagonist’s wife) decide to take a shopping trip into town alone together. “Suddenly the creature hunches its body and begins descending diagonally toward the ground as fast as its long legs can go, while the wadded napkin falls on it, faster still.” Robbe-Grillet repeatedly returns to the stain on the wall left over from the centipede: “The image of the squashed centipede then appears not as a whole, but com-


26. Ibid.
posed of fragments distinct enough to leave no doubt.”26 From a distance, it is a blurry shadow, but scrutinizing the stain at close range offers new details and information.

Robbe-Grillet even makes several temporal shifts within the same passage, showing that he is not replaying back an event in a chronological sequence but trying to derive meaning from an event by looking at it from different times, scales of observation and positions in the room. In one passage, for example, he shifts from the moment that the protagonist is examining the stain to the moment when the centipede is making its ascent up the wall. He then jumps to the moment the centipede is killed, and the protagonist notices a letter that he had observed his wife writing now peeking out of the pocket of his neighbour’s jacket. The neighbour, Franck, is the centipede: the foreign invader who creates a disruption in the home. The centipede, according to the protagonist, is supposedly mortal, but not venomous, indicating that this disruption will cause some difficulties within the home but will not destroy it in the end.

This is what the entire novel consists of, this revisiting of events that have taken place throughout the house that might be significant, and the maniacal attempts of a jealous husband to make sense of it all. The curious thing for me is: it is a novel told from the perspective of the husband, yet you know very little biographical information about this person. He is present only through what he observes, and where he might be standing or sitting at that particular moment. It is a novel told in the first person, without the implicit use of “I”. I think that it was about halfway through the book that I realized he was writing a first-person narrative, but without ever using the word “I”.

ELO: –Why is this important?
MICHELLE: –Because, taking away the “I” yet remaining within a first-person perspective meant that I become that “I”. I am that person. I am standing at a door entrance and watching what is happening. I am sitting at the table. It becomes quite a strange experience, but I think this is quite a critical tactic that he uses. If he were to use the word “I”, then I think there would be more of a separation between myself and the protagonist, in which I would be acting more as a witness or audience to his experience. However, because the “I” is absent within the first-person perspective, it means that I start to inhabit his body, his point of view. I become him.

Since we are talking about situated storytelling, Georges Perec, another French novelist, also comes to mind, because of his attention to detail and the spatiality of his writing. For example, his novel *Life: A User’s Manual* takes place in a fictional apartment building on a fictional street (11 Rue Simon-Crubellie) in Paris. The narrative moves like a knight in a chess game: each move is a chapter devoted to one room and the occupants of it, which is told using various means. The novel goes chapter by chapter, room by room, in which we encounter different residents both past and present. The novel consists of inventories of objects, actions, and characters; there are moves between different temporalities and spaces. Many times there are no people present: Perec focuses his attention on the domestic artefacts, which give shape and distinctive character to the individual who lives there.27

By taking up a position in the room and trying to describe it in the utmost detail, he attempts to map out the presence of places and the people who inhabit them. Perec uses a similar method of embodied, situated research when he spends one weekend in October 1974 sitting at several cafe windows located around Place Saint-Sulpice, trying to document everything that passes by within his field of vision. He plants himself in one cafe for several hours, then moves to another one. Using a similar inventory approach as *Life: A User’s Manual*, he starts his research by dividing what he see into categories: things strictly visible (letters of the alphabet, conventional arrows, numbers, fleeting slogans), trajectories (the 96 goes to Montparnasse station, the 84 goes to Porte de Champerret) and colors (a blue bag, green shoes, a green raincoat, a blue taxi, etc.). Perec doesn’t stick with one thing, though; his methods change each time he switches locations. Ordered lists become streams of consciousness. He makes himself present at around 3.20 pm in the La Fontaine Saint-Sulpice, “I went up to the second floor, a sad room, rather cold, occupied only by a quintet of bridge players, four of whom were in the middle of playing three clubs”. The next day (October 19, 1974) he starts the day wondering, “What has changed here since yesterday?”28 With his experiment in recording the everyday, the non-event, he also starts to monitor the subtle changes in the urban environments that he has been observing.

ELO: –Is this how you wanted to write?
MICHELLE: –Yes, I had these ideas in mind when I started to write about these people who I had been following online. I wanted to map out the presence of places and the people who inhabit them. But I wanted to keep the “I” out of it, a Robbe-Grillet approach. I completely failed in this. In any case, Perec only lasted a day, before he needed to talk about himself, making his presence known in La Fontaine Saint-Sulpice…

ELO: –When did this occur?
MICHELLE: –I was having trouble writing… Look, I am not even a writer, I had no idea why I thought it was a good idea to go in this direction…

ELO: –(laughs) There’s some nicely written prose in your book, which qualifies you as a writer.

MICHELLE: –If I could return to what you briefly dropped into the conversation awhile back: to this process of reduction, the process of extrapolation then reduction to the textual experience. To begin with this process of writing, I wanted to see how much

I entered the building and who exited it. I wrote quickly, making an inventory of things about me sitting at this cafe, looking at the apartment building entrance, observing who were inside, what this person looked like, what kinds of actions took place there. I wrote about the apartment, or what I remembered of it: the layout of the rooms, what kinds of objects knew he lived—or at least this was the address that he had given me. I wrote about the street where one of the men I had been observing lived: the smoking 40-something club boy. I parked my bike, took a seat at the cafe directly in front of his apartment building, ordered a bitter lemon, pulled a paper notepad out of my rucksack, and began to write. It was a stream of consciousness of anything and everything that occurred to me as I was sitting in front of the building, and directly in front of the apartment where I had been working for weeks.

As I was riding, I realized that I had arrived at Potsdamerstrasse, which was the street where one of the men I had been observing lived: the smoking 40-something club boy. I took a seat at the cafe directly in front of his apartment building, ordered a bitter lemon, pulled a paper notepad out of my rucksack, and began to write. It was a stream of consciousness of anything and everything that occurred to me as I was sitting in front of the building, and directly in front of the apartment where I knew he lived—or at least this was the address that he had given me. I wrote about the apartment, or what I remembered of it: the layout of the rooms, what kinds of objects were inside, what this person looked like, what kinds of actions took place there. I wrote about me sitting at this cafe, looking at the apartment building entrance, observing who entered the building and who exited it. I wrote quickly, making an inventory of things that were visible to me and things that were not, anything that occurred to me as I sat there, at the cafe. Where was I at this moment? Was I in the apartment? Was I still on YouTube? Who was he? Who was I? I realized that by changing my position (by sitting at this cafe) but staying with the same source material (the YouTube video) I had started to reconsider and rethink the ways I should be approaching my writing and approaching this project. Afterwards, I decided that I would use what was left of the summer to make pilgrimages to all the places where all the videos were made. Each day was a different journey. I did this methodically: I followed one person then, when I had finished visiting all the places he had marked out, I started with the next person. I went on these excursions and used them as a method of writing—writing as I circulated around Berlin, mapping out the stories as I was mapping out the city. But I was not simply making pilgrimages to the places these people had been to before. Each morning, the moment that I crossed the threshold of my apartment building, I tried to enter into the space of that person: through the video, and wherever that video took me in the city. I was in front of an apartment, I was in an apartment, I was on a playground, I was in a park, I was at a cemetery, in a club, on a subway platform, in front of a railway station, in a large public square or on some empty street, in the early morning. My journeys were to places that these people had been to before. Mirroring their movements and actions, was also my attempt to inhabit the space of that person by trying to experience the city through somebody else’s eyes. What did it mean to become somebody or something else for a moment? I found myself oscillating between trying to imagine or relive events that had taken place on the video, through that person, while at the same time engaging in a self-reflexive dialogue of what it meant to be going on these journeys. I wasn’t quite his “I”, but neither was I fully my “I”. It was a moment of becoming “I”, but several “I”s… Which occurred simultaneously. The project became something else at that point.

ESTHER: —What is so bizarre is that you constructed the mode of working and thinking of Alfred Doblin’s Berlin Alexanderplatz, or even Benjamin’s Berlin Childhood, which is again about trying to return to the sites of original memory, of projecting that forward, which is also Doblin as well, isn’t it? There is this point in which Franz Biberkopf comes out of prison and it’s like swirling around; this sense of the city that makes you and crushes you. But it is delicious and opens up all of these possibilities. I always find that quite thrilling, that sense that one is going to a space in which various people are traversing, or that you could go and stand in the very same spot where someone else has stood and had an experience and filmed something that brings up all of those psycho-geographical moments. Hubs in the city that might generate particular energies and how you might channel some of them.

ELO: —If we could throw in another reference, there is the wandering rocks section of Ulysses, which was the section where Joyce is moving through—we forget how many—
but probably 1000 different consciousness—in a way that is about tracking a rumor, and then things get... An idea of moving through people. We just thought about that, given the fact that it’s a novel about being, consciousness, the discourse of an entire city. But there is the part in the text where you go to Ostkreuz and end up taking part in a demonstration that doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with your political beliefs... Or not? We don’t know. But at that point, it is no longer about being. We like when you say that you are present in someone else’s thoughts.

MICHELLE: –Yes, when I went to the train station to film the trains, but not to try to find the Nazi. I knew he would not be there, but I wanted to make a journey to that place in the city where he had been before and open myself up to possibilities to whatever might happen when I got there.

ESTHER: –I found it very self-exposing or shocking to have that moment of articulated desire toward the policemen.

MICHELLE: –It didn’t seem that surprising that the moment that I decided to enter into the Nazi’s territory, at Ostkreuz station, the police and anti-fascists were there as well.

ESTHER: –Exactly. This set of oppositions need each other to make sense of the whole situation, and to mark out their territories in these urban spaces, and it’s part of this occupation and dance. It’s ongoing and as destructive as it is mutually gratifying. In a sense this relates to your admission of this line of attraction to the policeman. That meeting of it, with the line that you quote him saying, “Why are you so interested in the police?”. It closes that circuit that he’s acknowledged your interest. There is a kind of circuit of glances going on there. I suppose that’s the weird thing within the structure of this. Your glance isn’t met by the people you have been observing.

MICHELLE: –That is the only time that somebody is aware of what I am doing.

ESTHER: –Which is what has been missing up to that point... That someone sees that you are seeing them.

MICHELLE: –It speaks about the power that’s activated once you start to observe... I mean really observe. What kinds of things start to unfold once there is a focused awareness, a presence, or a different intention for entering a space. This is the first, and only time that somebody calls me on it.

ESTHER: –It makes one feel that the act of seeing is not this passive act, but that it instigates things, and it changes things and brings things into motion. As does reseeing or replaying through another consciousness these traces of film. It reconstellates them. It makes them available to something else, even though they, in their own integrity, haven’t changed. It is a whole montaging, constellation aesthetic that is producing relationships as it runs things alongside each other.

MICHELLE: –There is an element of opening myself up to these situations of contingency, of chance. These moments, once you step out and activate a space... Even if you go somewhere that is familiar to you...

ESTHER: –You step forward and...

MICHELLE: –Become present and open to whatever happens... Which makes the experience quite uncomfortable, what I am doing. I want to have this discomfort... To have the possibility of sitting at a cafe and writing about what it would be like to see the person I am writing about, and then suddenly see his wife walk down the street. This is exactly what happens when I see Manne’s wife and start to film her.

ESTHER: –It’s mad, isn’t it?

MICHELLE: –And once I reach that point, that I start to record her, she becomes part of my work.

ESTHER: –And then you are thrown into a position of the stalker, the psychotic. So the next moment you get a knife and stab her to death.

MICHELLE: –(laughs uneasily) Or when I finally visit the graveyard, where Manne’s father is buried, and I end up trying to follow his exact footsteps, mirror the same actions that he recorded from that day. I buy the same yellow flowers that he bought and then placed at the gravestone. I try to follow the exact route that he took when he made the final exit out of the graveyard. This is the final video that you see: me filming my laptop, replaying his video, and trying to mirror his actions. Is this also about me encountering the improbable? This is my final excursion, and it becomes the final story that I read from the book during the performance.

ELO: –And within the travel that you set out for yourself...you’re forced into a new you, or the narrator is, becoming a private agenda with a private agenda. That’s interesting.

MICHELLE: –So part of my travel is to traverse through the city as if I were somebody...
else making the journey, and throughout this process, I want to feel this discomfort of this destabilized sense of the self. Who am I? What am I doing? Where am I going with this? This movement drives the writing, which is at the same time disjointed and rambling because I am “in the process of thinking through new or old environments and thinking of self as a different environment”.

Corrigan writes about excursion as a form of travel, in which the qualities of essay writing are linked with the rambling experience of an excursion. There is an element of discontinuity within this experience. The journey is unstructured but so is the traveling subject. On one hand, you have the excursion that has a beginning as well as an end—you start out from somewhere and end up somewhere else. However, what happens in between, rather than being particularly goal-oriented, has more the qualities of a “rambling digression whose tour often appears more about the movement in space rather than a goal (which frequently becomes moot)”. At the same time, the person on the journey, by being on the move, is in a “state of continual displacement” and one that becomes “fundamentally altered and destabilized” by the travel.

ELO: This act of following that you do, these pilgrimages to places of events you have witnessed through these videos... There is one point where we start to feel queasy. When you were following... What do you call him... Nazi boy? Because it’s not... When you... are reading a novel, there might be something that can disturb you. But to observe a situation where you might be observing somebody committing an act of violence—would that be something that you would feel comfortable about? Where do you cross the line?

MICHELLE: Yet I only witness this feigned act of violence on a video and never on the subway platform where it occurred. I think that is why I wanted to include that moment within my text, that moment on the platform when the neo-Nazi pretends to smash the bottle over the head of one of the guys waiting for a train. And when I say “include that moment in my text” what I mean is that I play the video during my performances without commenting on it. The only text you see from the book is the title of the video, “Hakke sein nach Sonne schrei’ Teil 3”, which acts as the chapter heading. In the video, there is a potential for violence that isn’t followed through. He never hits the man. But I want to be totally clear: I find him so distasteful, everything that he does. Here I am looking a person who I don’t like very much, and I hope that I never have to meet him. Yet I still invest a lot of energy looking at him, and this isn’t always pleasant. Whether I find a person sympathetic or not, I still have to put the same amount of energy into that person.

SADIE: There is this couple I met, this Israeli couple from Belgium—Effi Weiss and Amir Bornstein—who made a very interesting film called Same River Twice. They did a

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kind of road trip, following the River Jordan from its source. They travel along the river, which was the basic structure of the film, and they just spoke to all the people that they met along the way, which included these bizarre right-wing nut cases. It was so inconsequential in the end, but the last shot was just of this cow looking at the camera. Then after a very long time, it just went, “MOOOOOOO” and just walked off, and that was it. But the general drift of just following this river: there was no point of revelation, no turning point, no drama, except for the drama of following the river.

MICHELLE: I could also think about Agnes Varda’s (2000) film, *The Gleaners and I*, which is a ‘wandering road documentary’ about gleaning practices—the practice of harvesting the leftovers after the harvest, living off the leftovers of the others. In her film, she travels to urban and non-urban areas throughout France, speaking with different people who practice gleaning: potato harvesters, garbage pickers, people who pick up vegetables at the end of the market, etc. She talks to people, listening to their stories, and then begins to make connections between these individuals based on what they have told her. It is very intuitive how she does this: her excursions to these different places and exchanges with the different people she meets at different stages of the journey, are her method of making the film. *The Gleaners and I* begins with a definition of what she wants to learn about—different approaches and ideas about gleaning—but then she opens herself to contingency and chance to guide her to the places at which she ends up and the people that she meets. One day, she spots a man collecting potatoes in a field and then follows him back to a caravan where he currently lives, within a small community of gypsies living nearby who make it clear that “they are different than us because of the economic gulf.” He used to be a teaching assistant. When people find out that he has a Master’s, they tend to assume he is vegetarian, so he gets most of what he needs there. He eats a lot of apples. He studied biology. He used to be a teaching assistant. When people find out that he has a Master’s, they don’t understand why she sells street papers or magazines to make a living. Eventually, she follows him to the shelter where he lives; where 50% of the occupants are illiterate. He arrived at the shelter eight years ago and has for several years been volunteering to teach people living there how to read and write. This is the moment that impresses her the most: this process of following him and ending up at this nocturnal and benevolent activity in the basement of the shelter. Varda uses following as a method of constructing the narrative: building up a collection of stories and approaches to the way different individuals regard the things that other people overlook. Their different approaches to trash vary: from personal responses to basic needs, to political acts of resistance, to the logic of consumption and ownership, in which the city is reimagined as a commons. These are all methods and approaches for reclaiming things that are often disregarded and passed over. Varda ties the film together through her voiceover: adding her reflections to what she encounters along this journey, but also reflections on how she places herself within the film. The traveler (in this case Varda) is homeless. Varda circulates all over France. The use of the voiceover or the written script, according to Corrigan, becomes a method for making a space “h Habitable and knowable” for the traveling subject. The “implicit dialogue of interlocutors” is one of the main qualities of essayistic travel, and it takes on many forms: letters to home, journals, or even self-reflexive dialogue.

At one point during the film, she reflects on her gleaning practice as a filmmaker or how she uses the camera to mark her own passing of time. While filming a row of trees from a moving car, she states, “On this type of gleaning, of images, impressions, there is not legislation, and gleaning is defined figuratively as a mental activity. To glean facts, acts and deeds, to glean information. And for forgetful me, it’s what I have gleaned that tells me where I have been.” While traveling along the highway, she turns the camera on herself, to record the age spots on her hands. Back at home, she records herself in the mirror, making note of the grey roots sprouting from her hair, tinted black. She uses the camera as a method for self-reflection, but for estrangement as well. By following herself in the same way that she follows these strangers, Varda needs to become homeless: she must destabilize herself, step outside of her cozy state of selfhood, to reflect on what she has become. These are critical moments for me: this act of gleaning as being a physical one but a mental activity as well.

VILEM: (interrupting) But I would say that what you are talking about is experience.

MICHELLE: What do you mean?

VILEM: Well, there is this assumption that experience is based on this idea of moving forward, which is predicated on ideologies of progress. It could be seen as something quite straightforward: we have two eyes, we have two legs that, once they start moving, take us in a forward motion. We follow our noses. Or, if you want to be totally literal

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33. Corrigan, 2011, pg 112
about it, time moves forward and we will certainly at some point, meet our death. It is inevitable. Along the way, on this life path, we meet obstacles that we either deal with, leap over, or try desperately to avoid. This encounter between ourselves and things is what we call experience.

MICHELLE: –So that is straightforward then. Time moves forward, and we do as well. We are walking towards the future. We are walking towards our death.

VILEM: –One might think so, but it is not as simple as that.

MICHELLE: –(thinking to herself) Is anything ever?

VILEM: –We are in fact not moving forward so much as oscillating back and forth. You get up in the morning, get some coffee into you and then exit out the door of your apartment. Later on, you will return home through that same door. Put another way: we go out into the world to experience, and we lose ourselves in the process; we then return home to find ourselves again, and we lose the world that we experienced. Experience is not a steady progress towards something, but an oscillation between the familiarity of being at home and the upheaval of being out in the world, of being homeless. But you can forget about the future, it has nothing to do with experience.

MICHELLE: –I prefer not to think the future, it makes me sleep better at night. But do go on.

VILEM: –Try and imagine a deeper meaning of experience: to do this, we must imagine that we are not moving from the present to the future. Doing so is an existential impossibility, because wherever we are, we are in the present. We cannot escape the present without having relinquished ourselves. To the contrary, the future comes to meet us in our present, and this is precisely what the German word _Zukunft_ implies.

MICHELLE: –Which means “future”.

VILEM: –If you look at the etymology of the word _Zukunft_, you will find that it breaks down into “zu” or “to” and “kommen” or “to come”. _Zukunft_ means that you don’t move towards the future, but the future moves towards you. We are always in the here and now, and the future advances toward us in our here and now, from all directions. In other words, we don’t follow our noses but rather move in and out, and our path through life is not one of progress but one of swarming. The model we are patterned on is not so much the lone coyote that follows his prey to experience it, but rather an anthill.34

MICHELLE: –I don’t completely agree. I was following these people, obsessively. I scheduled my days around them. I involved myself with these people.

VILEM: –But they could have just as easily been somebody else. Was it so important that you follow these particular people? Was this such a critical situation? Did you follow

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MICHELLE: –Perhaps you mean that to follow something in such a focused manner, with the intensity of a hunter, becomes more goal-driven. There is a linearity to it. What Varda does with these people she follows; it is random. Of course she has a plan, she is making a film. But she is not sure exactly what the outcome is going to be, and opens herself up to improvisation. She swarms around France. It is only at the end of her filmmaking journey that she ties it all together, turns it into a linear narrative. She imposes a linearity to the narrative in the end, but when she is in the moment, the way that she follows is not so goal-driven as the hunter. Each person has a story. Each person is interesting in his or her way. She kind of rambles around, and I do as well. I (she) followed these people, but she (I) could just have easily followed other people.

VILEM: –Of course, even within this infinite swarm of perspectives, we simply cannot experience any one of them fully, no matter how many perspectives we try to see it from. We can photograph a human face from a thousand angles, light it in a thousand different ways, and even turn the camera and the face itself in a thousand directions, but we still won’t even have begun to nibble at the number of possibilities for experiencing it. But this is not our fault really, it is just the concrete relationship that we have with the world. 35

MICHELLE: –Yet it is already clear that I limited my perspectives. The idea was never to explore all the number of possibilities that could be available for experiencing each person.

FRANS: –Exactly. The fact is that you never met these people. You still have a distance. You cut yourself off from the possibility of experiencing these people in other ways.

MICHELLE: –Which was an artistic decision that I made, at least in this Berlin project, to never meet these people. Everything that I experienced came from online information, from which I tried to extrapolate meaning by approaching the same dataset from different perspectives: a video, a fragment of text, an address, a photograph, a website, a satellite map, my bicycle, a notepad, a table at a cafe. As Esther already pointed out: a Robbe-Grillet approach, that effort of really pinning it down, and locating, not just that space, but where you would be standing in that space… But with data. I am still experiencing that moment through data, other people’s data. This was my method… No, it is my method of trying to locate something. This is my method.

JUSSI: –Perhaps this might be an appropriate moment to talk a bit about the folding of the informatic. You touched on this briefly when you reenacted Manne’s final exit from the cemetery, by playing back his video on your laptop and trying to mirror his movements. You talk about “creating fictions, assembling narratives”… Or perhaps even before that “information and the city”… Yes, that informatic, data city, constantly narrativized and unfolding, by you and in a special way. It is a way that is enjoyable for you, because you take that into the narrative very early on, that informatic aspect. When you are in Alexanderplatz, calling out the data, reading out the URL, this puts another twist to it. It points back to the database approach, regarding aesthetics, which is good.

ESTHER: –Exactly, there’s this weird moment when you are talking about the painter boy filming the string quartet, and you give the coordinates, and that language you use becomes a sort of data sound poetry. The URL, the coordinates, the GPS stuff—they can’t mean anything to us—and yet that’s a machinic system of location, of precision.

MICHELLE: –This folding of the informatic is something implied throughout the text: the way I include a digital map in the book, read out the names of people by their YouTube names, or how I oscillate between outside views from the street, looking at the apartment buildings, and then enter inside the apartments through the YouTube video. Even the way that I use the YouTube video titles as chapter headings brings in this folding of the informatic. But it is at this particular moment, with the string quartet in Alexanderplatz, that I make it most conspicuous, by bringing several mapping systems together: I read out the metadata, I describe the video, and I make observations of being in the same place that this person, the Polish painter, has been before.

ESTHER: –It’s interesting when you read it because reading it out, it can’t help us to understand that location—what it would mean to stand in that spot that painter boy stood. It is a mismatch of mapping systems, or what it would mean to find a location. I suppose, you say this jumble sale of a city, in a way, is all around—it’s the faith that the random cut through can let you access the whole. A holographic sense of things. Any small moment is thoroughly saturated with time and place and affect; with some universal element that, through it, we can come to an understanding, rather than just brushing it off.

JUSSI: –Therefore concerning your methodologies: my observation is that when you do are looking and watching, it is not in a representational sense. Looking and watching becomes for you a methodology of tracking. Your watching is tracking which involves an online tracking that leads to spatial tracking, which also involves being “inside the skin” in a narrative sense. This could be, for me, one strong way of thinking about it. How to conceptualize it? How do you “do” tracking? You do it by tracking.

MICHELLE: –(thinking) Or stepping outside of my skin to be inside the skin of another?

JUSSI: –And if you end up with a spatial ghostly layering, this seems to be emphasizing this methodology of tracking, but tracking as a metaphor or concept for online presence, related to the military, the geo-location history of tracking. So it becomes double-fold tracking: in the informatic sense, but also tracking as an aesthetic thing that you do. One thing that immediately comes to mind is Thomas Elsaesser’s text, which is also a

MICHELLE: –Yes, Elsaesser’s YouTube experiment in which he attempts to construct a narrative that is guided through other rules, a database logic. In his YouTube experiment, he opens himself up to a narrative that is guided by other factors: keywords or tags, tag clouds or semantic clusters, embedded links, users’ comments and one’s free associations. Following the semantic trails, he builds up connections and associations between the videos, which come about by him following and ending up in places that he never anticipated. What starts out as something almost annoyingly “amorphous or blob-like”, eventually forms a certain discourse: however not from critical theory, but from YouTube tags and user comments. Elsaesser’s example clearly points to what Gordon refers to as the logic of data: that each action leaves a trace, and that the ordering and interpretation of these traces becomes one of the main undertakings when we engage with online information. However, data is not fixed. It is something that can be ordered and reordered, in line with particular interests and needs. “Each act of consumption is premised on the ability to access a seemingly infinite dataset of images and references while having the impression of being able to assemble that dataset to meet the immediate needs of experience.”

It is not that particular piece of data per se, but where it ends up, how it relates to other data, and what kinds of meanings can be extrapolated by bringing certain things together as a collection and examining them—or by following a trace of something to see where it leads. The data I follow, the people I follow, have many selves and occupy multiple places. Their data can be combined and recombined according to certain desires and needs. Following or tracking trails of data becomes the method for constructing stories. This takes places when I am wandering through social media, but the same logic occurs even when I enter the city. I could consider it as my way of mirroring a similar method that Varda does when she embarks on her “wandering road documentary”, and we could simply conclude by saying that what I am doing is one of the primary methods of excursive travel. If I could rephrase, this is my “process of thinking through new or old environments and thinking about self as a different environment.” Yes, this is what I am doing. However, I would take it even one step further by saying that even when I am in the city, I approach my movements with a similar logic to how I might move through data.

This “creating fictions and assembling narratives” that combine “information and the city” that I do, they follow a certain logic, a logic of data: guided by random factors—keywords, links, user’s comments—combined with my free associations. My method combines these two methods: excursive travel and data travel. But this is not too surprising to me, that I should be doing this. If we spend so much time online, developing a method for assembling narratives according to our everyday navigation patterns (data narratives according to a data logic), then does it seem so surprising that we should adopt a similar method of extracting meaning in our daily wanderings through the cities where we live?

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –What’s with this “we”? Perhaps this is just your quirk. You actively seek it out.

MICHELLE: –Okay, agreed, it is something I do deliberately. I am totally conscious of it. However, I think that this folding of the informatic and the city works for me this way, as well as for others. My experience is not that unique, I just act on it more and take it further than others would consider doing.

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –This logic of ordering and reordering things?

MICHELLE: –Yes, and not only that. There is also this aspect to… It’s probably too commonplace to even go that much into it, but perhaps I can briefly summarize. The fact that (basically) everybody continually accesses digital networks through their smart phones that they carry around in their pockets everywhere is an everyday reality. They are always online: posting things on social media, browsing, chatting. The traces of these online habits become the “building blocks of digital environments”, and of cities as well, becoming as much a part of the urban environment as any building, street, or person. These invisible online traces are part of the urban environment, so it makes no sense to even attempt to separate one thing from another. People engage themselves in the everyday actions that form the building blocks from which digital environments are composed—posting, tagging, linking, commenting, searching—and these become as much about urban navigation as putting one foot in front of the other. To follow the digital trace of something while I am in the city is related, as you mention Jussi, to this geo-location history of tracking. But it is an aesthetic thing as well: this notion of pilgrimage, reenactment, excursion and ghosting… Things already mentioned.

HONOR: –There is also a new interest in surveillance, but from a different perspective. For example, Timo Arnell’s Robot Readable World. It’s really interesting in relation to your work. It’s a whole bunch of designers and creative technologists who are reap-

38. Gordon, 2010, pg 195
40. Gordon, 2011, pg 198
41. Ibid.
propriating all of these motifs of media, but particularly surveillance, and interpreting them in a very particular, contemporary way. Because a lot of what we were doing (and not doing) with media art in the 90s, was speculating on a future that is here now. It’s just normal reality. These designers are trying to interpret and understand that. And a lot of work that is coming out of these design studios and think tanks is looking at machine surveillance and the fact that it is not people looking at us: there are no people involved, just machines. And there’s this beautiful, beautiful video, which tries to show us the way that machines would look at the world. It’s like this ‘eye’. It’s all of us. It is a collective reading that is completely… We didn’t see that coming. It is really powerful.

MICHELLE: –Well, we live in interesting times…

HONOR: –What is so strange is that there are not many people who perceive it as such. I think we live in an amazing, fascinating moment right now. I think there’s a perception—particularly from people who are about our age—that we have lived through that already, and now we’re just living with the effects. But, in fact, it’s the effects that are really interesting. This work could not have happened five years ago.

MICHELLE: –Ten… Eight… Five years ago? Five years ago, it could have happened. But probably not ten years ago…

HONOR: –That’s the thing that must feel so hard about your ethical position.

MICHELLE: –Yes.

HONOR: –Because you there is… Just because the material is out there doesn’t mean that it is okay to take what you want. A lot of your work has been dealing with that.

MICHELLE: –Yes, for years.

HONOR: –So, how do you square yourself with that?

MICHELLE: –Well, someone’s got to do it. Someone’s got to watch it. Why is it there, otherwise? I know this is probably a terrible answer but…

HONOR: –I think it is a cool answer.

MICHELLE: –You can think of it in some insidious manner, but it is a little more complex than that. I am also drawn to this uncanniness: of being an outsider, not quite comfortable in my skin, or being in someone else’s.

HONOR: –But this is also where the power of the work lies. It is the moment where you become incredibly uncomfortable beyond the content of what is going on. It is a weird three-way thing of you being present. There are three levels of reality, and you are watching all of them, and then moving through them.

MICHELLE: –So this would be moving through the informatic, moving through the city, and then moving through my reading of it.

JUSSI: –Yes, by the situated storytelling, by focusing on a person it becomes apparent that these people mesmerize you. This comes out. But still, the situatedness is a funny thing: it is shifting. I mean you go places, but they are no longer there. So the situation becomes another situation as well… Without the people. In the end, I am left thinking about how much you fictionalize it as well.

MAGNUS: –For example, when you say, “you are breathing the same air” at Alexanderplatz. Obviously you are not breathing the same air, but you are there at least.

MICHELLE: –To share that space with someone… To be cognizant of certain events that have taken place there, things experienced.

ESTHER: –For me, it is also about the places where you end up when you follow these traces… There’s this kind of collapse of the public and private being wrestled with and formed, and articulated. And I find it moving to the point of upsetting. By the time that it gets to that point… With the doorstep and then finally to the gravesite…

HONOR: –There is a very peculiar atemporality—as William Gibson calls it—that we are in right now, where we don’t really ‘get’ this world. We don’t know how to deal with the strange public/private situation that we have to build for ourselves. We assume that no one cares about what we are putting online, and, therefore, we put everything online. And we’ve never thought about the possibility that there could be somebody out there going through all these things.

These clichéd kind of ethical questions of “what if someone who has ill intent receives that material”? But the thing that’s never asked in those half-knit conversations about oversharing and surveillance is: what if it is just somebody who is interested? How do we feel about that? Because in a way, that’s a much more disturbing turn of events than if there was some state-sanctioned reason to be looking at all of our material. What if somebody just found it really interesting and became obsessed with us… Not in a stalkery way.

MICHELLE: –It is in a stalkery way.

HONOR: –But it is a good stalk.

MICHELLE: –Benevolent…

HONOR: –That’s the weird thing because that’s why the most uncomfortable moment is when you go to their homes. But at the same time, we are really fascinated.

MICHELLE: –Of course you are. You want to watch.

ELO: –(interrupting) If we can get back to the writing: the piece starts to develop a narrative arc, in which there starts to be different connections between the characters, but of course from your focal point. How does that fit into what you have just been talking about?

MAGNUS: –Yes, and for that part… Also, there’s a book here, and you are reading: the reading situation. There is a strong resonance to literature: how we also enter literature, although the performance is an event. So the transformation to text is interesting to me

42. http://www.elasticspace.com/2012/02/robot-readable-world
in this work. And I wanted to ask you something about that. There are methods here, as we understand it, when we see how you use text. Because you don’t treat the people in the same way, textually. For instance, when we come to the body builder… What’s his name again?

MICHELLE: –His name is MatureMuscles4U.

(Everybody laughs)

MAGNUS: –For him, you have almost a cut-up technique where you use comments on his YouTube page, right? And you sort of, in a lustful way, are reusing… I guess some kind of transformation of this material. From this material, you create the text. Whereas, in the case of Joschi, the neo-Nazi guy, you address clearly, as a dialogue, from your position to his position. And so you have another way of talking to him.

MICHELLE: –I wrote the texts following the same logic as I used when I followed data. I was being guided by this online information—what I chose to follow, where I ended up—but it guided my writing, as well. For example, Manne, the East-German pensioner, constantly talks within his videos, which suggested either monologue, or dialogues. Therefore, the texts for his stories became the English translations of whatever was said in the videos. For MatureMuscles4U, the huge muscular guy who worked at a body building shop on Karl Marx Allee, I used a cut-up technique for the writing, by combining all the comments made by his ‘fans’ below the video, which became a heightened—to the point of absurdity—expression of masculinity and sexuality. I found it quite awkward to read out the desires of all these men, his fans, during the performance.

ESTHER: –This is the part where I start to feel the most uncomfortable about the mismatch between what he might be thinking and the way in which you are re-showing it. You make it seem more ridiculous, or the opposite of what he might imagine it to be. I found that uncomfortable.

MICHELLE: –In other texts, I tried to emulate the cadence I found within each video: for example with the Turkish guy who performed in fetish wear, I tried to write short sentences and reduced descriptions. These texts became an inventory of actions that he performed on the street that mirrored the brevity of action and the video that documented it. There were also moments, such as when I arrived at Alexanderplatz to find the spot where the Polish painter filmed the string quartet, in which it became important to reflect on, what Esther referred to earlier, “a mismatch of mapping systems of what it would mean to find a location.” This is one of the moments when I am in direct dialogue with somebody, in which I establish a direct relation with that person and what it means to be standing in that spot. But this occurs in other moments throughout the text as well. They are moments of self-reflection within these new environments, and my role within this particular journey I am taking.

I don’t think it is necessary to go into detail with each example of writing, but I think it perhaps suffices to say that the style of writing, as well as how I put it together, is disjointed because it was guided by the material: by the videos and the metadata surrounding each video. It became quite exciting and surprising for me, in terms of what kinds of texts came out. It becomes a multivocal text. There are very abrupt transitions from one voice to another. I do not feel that the narrative follows a smooth narrative arc...

ELO: –Yet there is a narrative arc. It is fragmented, but you lead us in a particular direction.

MICHELLE: –Yes, of course. We begin with the unfinished home, with the painter painting the ceiling of a home that he will never live in, and we end up at the cemetery where Manne’s father is buried and where he will eventually end up.

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –(thinking to herself) Which is perhaps too literal?

MICHELLE: –However, the way I assemble the stories, between these beginning and end points, is according to my own desires: how I think these stories should fit together. I impose a linearity in the end, I put the stories together in a certain order, but these stories could just have easily been assembled in other ways. It is not about following a person’s story from the beginning to the end, but dropping somewhere in the middle of it, writing about it, bringing it to the surface, and then seeing how this moment relates to the other stories and people that I make visible.

ELO: –Then you have this book that you read from. An old-fashioned book. Why this book?

FRANS: –Yes, can I ask about the book because… It is peculiar that you choose this very old-fashioned media in the book and even the way that it is designed as a reference to a certain style of the 50s or 60s, I don’t know. But at least it is a kind of ‘past aesthetic’ that you introduce through the book, which is very different from this online media.

ESTHER: –I was quite fascinated by the performance, seeing your hands on the page and your ring. There is something in that mediation of the flesh as well. Where your fingers go in the book, and your careful turning of the pages, all of that also seems quite intimate, like a close-up? But that’s coming up through mapping. Do you think the book could stand on its own?

MICHELLE: –I think this is taking us to another point in the conversation: my choice of form. It is not a straightforward answer. The choice of material reflects on something that Brendan and I discussed this morning: a method for addressing the inadequacy of social, interpersonal exchange by bringing in the use of ‘analog’ media. Therefore, the choice of form reflects a desire to give weight to the online material and the stories that people are trying to tell about their lives, as well as my associations to the information they provide me. The choice of form must also convey the intimacy of the way I relate
to these people. The use of the voice, my voice, is one of the results of this thinking process. However, I would like to talk about the first way that I presented the research before arriving at the book.

(Michelle brings up a slide on her computer. Everybody in the kitchen gathers around the screen)

MICHELLE: –Here is an overview of an installation I created for the Tracing Mobility exhibition, at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, in Berlin. It is of a table in two pieces, constructed out of MDF, 6² meters in total, that is meant to emulate a map of Berlin, but an unconventional one. The table is a mapping system. The boundary lines of the map are the cut off areas where the images stopped appearing on the Google Map I made during my research. It is quite a large surface. When you approach the table, you can see that I have printed out all of the YouTube stills, which I have also mounted on MDF. If you pick up one of the pieces, you can see that there is metadata for each video attached to the back. Everything is piled up, like a jumble shop, but there is a logic to it as well. I have piled the videos around the places where they are geo-located on the table “map”. However, they are not carefully ordered, but something to pick through and discover. The single sheets of paper, which are the stories, look like pages torn out of a paperback novel. There are also illustrations drawn directly on the table of the different places that I visited in Berlin, during my journeys. Everything on the table is very tactile: people can wander around the table, pick things up, look at the images, and read through the texts. They can start at whatever point around the table and piece the stories together. People can follow their own trails.

Through the table, I aimed to create a hybrid environment, between the online domain and physical urban space. The surface emulated the Google Maps I generated from the dataset, represented by the piles of images on the table. There were the (video still) images, the texts, the drawings, but no actual videos… Just the metadata.

During the Tracing Mobility exhibition, the only times the public could access the videos were at certain times of day during the first week of the exhibition, when I did public readings of the texts, and played the YouTube videos on the screen above the table. After the first week, the documentation from the performances was played back on the same screen for the rest of the exhibition’s duration.

ELO: –How would you connect this installation with the table and what you just read, which is very linear? Where you chose which trail for us to follow? Do you think it worked?

MICHELLE: –Not in the way that I imagined. And, if I can be totally frank, the sheer
bulk of the material made me feel quite ill. It was the same kind of feeling I had when encountering Kessel’s immense piles of photographs printed out from Flickr. I usually don’t like working with such a quantity of material. It is heavy, and uses up a lot of material, not to mention the storage concerns. But I wanted to try it out, as an experiment. It seemed to make sense in this huge exhibition space, but it was something that I would never repeat. In any case, I created this installation, but, it was only when I read the stories out loud that the work really came together. I had made this table where people could choose their own trails, which mirrored this logic of ordering and reordering things, following trails. However, many people found it quite confusing. Many found it difficult to enter into the work. The ‘map’ table didn’t quite work in the way that I imagined. People got lost in the map, but not in a positive sense. Many needed more guidance. The storyteller needed to be more present.

Therefore there was this daily performance, in which I constructed a storyline out of the material on the table. I created a trail for people to follow. I thought that the reading of stories was one element of the entire work, but it was something that took over and became the dominant part. The mapping system that I designed within the table is an intermingling of several mapping systems, of what it means to find a location. There are the YouTube video stills, the metadata on the back of each video still, (URL, geocoordinates, author, title, etc), my texts, my own images and videos from the journeys, which all together try to communicate this folding of the informatic: data city, city data, data logic, information as city, city as information experience. However, these mapping systems—or mismatching of mapping systems, as has already been commented on—are contained within the texts themselves. Therefore, I decided to try something else out, and see if a book, specifically a novel, might be a suitable format.43 However, not a book as a stand-alone object, but as one used within a performance. A live reading of a book, projected next to the YouTube video and my own videos, which would be described within the novel.

ESTHER: –I think about the jewel elements of that kind of reading, and the wonderful voice reading this very beautifully written material that draws you in. It’s like, “What is this going to be”? And very quickly, you get drawn in. And then you start to understand and start to see the intimacy presented through your experience of it and your writing of it, and what is being shown on the screen as well.

MICHELLE: –In fact, the presence of the storyteller (me) becomes an integral element. The book is a mapping system, and so are the videos. It is a mismatching of mapping systems. The storyteller becomes the mediator for entering in a dialogue with these different mapping systems. The intermingling of these different mapping systems is

mediated through her... Through me. My voice creates links between them during the live reading.

ELO: –What is interesting about this whole project—and a lot of recent cross-media electronic literature works—is that you start with a pool of materials and then end up with the production of different cultural forms and different kinds of artifacts at the same time. But you could also think about it regarding documenting the software; I mean, you have this software that accomplishes and executes these spatial concerns, and this particular project is an instance of how you used it. You put down a nice text, and it functions well. You can say that this is a consequence of an instance of the use of the software.

MICHELLE: –It goes full circle for me then. The table installation shows the entire dataset; it is a presentation of the research as raw data. The city novel and the performance is a more carefully curated format, in which I construct my storyline out of the material on the table. The one-hour performance doesn’t include everything on the table—all the stories, all the images, all the places I visited—but only, if I remember correctly, 20 stories. Not everybody makes an appearance in the novel: some just appear as a name in the letter at the start of the book. Or as a short video that plays on its own, with no commentary. The performance works that way, and the book functions only in a performance. It is meant to be read out loud and with the videos playing alongside it. If you were to take it away and read it, you would only get part of the experience. To complete the circle of this research, I decided to make another book, which contained the dataset from the table, plus other artifacts from the research process. It is a 264-page full-colour hardcover book, which includes many different kinds of research material: photos, texts, video stills, websites, maps, and Excel spreadsheets. This book is my method for documenting the software.

JUSSI: –I was wondering if you might comment on what would be your implicit focuses in relation to your critical reflection? Which are going to be coming through: is the focus on Berlin, the datasets, the methodologies for assembling it, or is your focus—the gravity point—on situated storytelling? Or is it something even more conceptual, something that might come out of the work? What are the gravity points? Is it database/situated storytelling and tracking?

MICHELLE: –I think that it is possible to include all the things that you mentioned. They are different anchors, or, “gravity points”, as you refer to them.

JUSSI: –How do you imagine pulling all this together?

MICHELLE: –I had this idea to bring some people together to have a series of discussions, just to see what might happen. The results of these conversations would be the text. It seemed more appealing than having to talk to myself or at others all the time.

MAGNUS: –Earlier in this discussion, you referred to the term “microhistory”. And that
is a term used in the history of science. It is a term coined by a group of Italian historians—Carlo Ginzburg is one of the most well known of them—in the University of Bologna in the 80s. I think this term is starting to be used… It is an open term in many senses, but we can say that it is the study of the detail, the overlooked, the exception rather than the rule. One might speak about microhistory as history from beneath. It is also closely connected to literature, and it has its roots in literature. It is often traced back to the work of Raymond Queneau and Georges Perec, the French Oulipo school of experimental literature, and it entered Italy by the way of Italo Calvino.

MICHELLE: –Yes, they are all on my bookshelf. (reaches for one) For example, Carlo Ginzburg’s *The Cheese and the Worms*, which is about Domenico Scandella, also known as Menocchio, a miller living in 16th-century Italy who is on trial for heresy. Ginzburg pieces together a biography of that person—based on the court transcripts of his testimony—building up a portrayal of the social, economic and political environment of this individual’s reality. So in thinking about how Ginzburg creates a “microhistory” about this one “insignificant” man, I have started to consider the work that I am doing with this online information as being microhistorical.44

JUSSI: –My background is in history. And in cultural history and all sorts of stuff that we did, was cultural history and microhistory. So what you add is an interesting layer. And what is interesting about microhistorians like Carlo Ginzburg, is that he—which is not always the case with historians—he also conceptualizes his position of ‘microhistorian’ regarding what kind of epistemological figure that is. And microhistorians have that idea that they work as a kind of detective. The work that you are doing would contribute now to what people are thinking about within historical circles about online oral histories, storytelling methods, and future histories.

MICHELLE: –Perhaps we can leave this for the next conversation. Carlo Ginzburg is due to arrive in the next 10 minutes. This seems like a good time for a coffee break. 45

CONVERSATION ENDS

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45. I constructed this dialogue from eight different conversations that took place in offices, meeting rooms and studios from Spring to Fall 2012. During these sessions, I performed the text, which later became a book, for small groups of people or even just one person and then asked them to respond to the reading. One of the sessions occurred in my Bergen studio during “Interrogating Methods”, a two-day seminar, which I organized with Ellen Røed under the auspices of the fall seminar of the fellowship programme, hosted by the Bergen Academy of Art and Design, October 2012.
The group breaks for coffee. It is now just after three in the afternoon. The artist-researcher takes down the piece of black plastic hanging over the balcony door and realizes that, although it is still early, dusk approaches. The sky is now a noticeably darker shade of grey than it was two hours ago. The fading of light seems to trigger a fading of enthusiasm in many people in the kitchen. Many appear to be restless. It is a small kitchen, and there are only so many hours that one can stay in such a confined space. Suddenly, there is a choir of voices with a myriad of excuses for departure. Manu needs to buy some mangos before the store closes. Vilem exclaims he wants mangos as well and decides to share a cab with Manu. Steve needs to pick up his son. Esther has another appointment. Honor has to fly to Singapore this evening and needs to pack. Paul John wants to catch the exhibition at the Hamburger Bahnhof before he flies out tomorrow. The ELO say they have other engagements but, in fact, what they want is beer. As the group issues their apologies and goes into the artist-researcher’s bedroom to collect their coats, the newcomers are just arriving. Carlo, a microhistorian, enters the kitchen and takes a seat on the sofa that is still in the same spot as the last session: in front of the balcony entrance and to the left of the large white vertical cabinet, next to the washing machine. He sits with his arms crossed and a friendly, but curious, look on his face. Andrej, also a historian, is quiet yet attentive and sits next to Carlo. The artist-researcher decides to remain where she is and stays seated on the chair to the left of the kitchen table. Magnus also grabs one of the kitchen chairs and sits between the artist-researcher and the sofa where Carlo and Andrej sit. Suddenly, the artist-researcher walks over to where Carlo and Andrej are sitting and turns on an orange ceramic lamp that she found in a flea market, which is hanging on the wall to the left of the balcony door. The lamp produces a warm, cozy glow in the room. Satisfied with the effect, she decides that the ceiling lamp is unnecessary and walks over to the entrance of the kitchen where the switch is to turn it off. Jussi, Frans, the Devil’s Advocate, and Sadie decide to stay and listen. They distribute themselves accordingly throughout the, now quite spacious, room.)
ANDREJ: – Well, as we agreed when you arrived, let’s start with some questions about yourself so we can test your memory, regarding your background. And I thought, because when we approach the past, we invariably do so from our point of view in the present: so instead of beginning at the beginning, whatever that would mean, I thought we could follow an inverse chronology, and backtrack, step by step. So the first question that I would like to ask you is simply… If you would answer the question “Who is Carlo Ginzburg?”, what would you say?

CARLO: – I am Italian, Jewish. I recently retired. Well, I retired several times from different universities. Now I am free to travel, and am probably busier than I was in the past. Still seeing students, time to time. So everything became more informal, in a sense, but my life didn’t change so much in the last few years.

ANDREJ: – Just because you retire doesn’t mean that you stop working. (laughs) Or stop living.

CARLO: – (laughing) So this would be the beginning. I like to travel. I like to see different places, meet unknown people, people of different ages, different orientations.

MAGNUS: – Have you always travelled a lot? Within your career?

CARLO: – I think I started to travel in the early 70s. In a way it was a kind of turning point. It was my first visit to the States. And this was Princeton. I was invited to be a fellow, to spend a few months there at the Davis Centre for Historical Studies. This was in 1973, so I was 34, so not so young… I mean I had already published books and so on, but this was a turning point in terms of learning. Because I learned a lot from that experience, especially in terms of how to debate with other people. There was something about the debating technique that made me feel very naive. There was a typical American seminar… On the contrary it was very British in terms of the director Lawrence Stone. He came to Princeton when he was already a well-known and famous historian. And the strategy was extremely British, meaning extremely aggressive… I never saw anything like this elsewhere. No personal resentments, but an aggressiveness, like boxing. And I liked that. So, how to dissect and argument, for example. How to look for a weak point in an argument put forward by somebody else. Not as a form of personal resentment, but to develop the discussion. Then I taught for short periods several times in Paris, nearly every year for some time. And then several places in the States, and then I started to teach at UCLA. Eventually I realized how unusual that debating style was.
CARLO: – I was there in Pisa, as a student, and there the teaching technique was unusual to other Italian seminars. Seminars, let’s say, were in a German style. So, sitting around a table, working on a text in a very… I was there as a beginner and only after a few weeks came a very famous historian, David Cantimoro who later became my teacher in a sense, but not in a formal way. So he came and we… He said, we are going to work on a text by Jacob Burckhardt. There were maybe 20 students. Not everybody around the table could read German, maybe two of them. And so he said that we were going to compare different translations between different languages and so on. We started and it was a one week seminar, meeting every day for maybe three hours. And at the end of the week we had read, maybe, 20 lines? That was amazing for me. So I discovered slow reading.

Much later, I discovered the expression, “Philology is the art of slow reading.” I came across that quote in an essay by Rowan Jacobsen, but he was quoting somebody else, a Russian philosopher, who was in turn quoting Nietzsche. So Nietzsche, when he was still a philologist, was defining philology as the art of slow reading, in his inaugural lecture in Basel. This was amazing, a real discovery: like entering a new world. I had already read, in translation, Auerbach’s *Mimesis*, which is based on that technique. In other words, the technique of picking up a segment, a fraction of a text and then reading that small segment in a very intensive way. Retrospectively, I can see how I came to microhistory with this kind of drive. Microhistory has been a joint project and everybody involved in the project has different backgrounds: all of them being historians, a group of Italian historians, but with slightly different backgrounds. But with striking convergences as well.

ANDREJ: – When you look back on what is by now a very long academic career, you always describe it as a very complex story: a long winding tortuous path. And there is a kind of contradiction there at least… The research that you have been pursuing, at least in the beginning of your career, is actually very close to the research interests of Cantimoro. And you have also said about your first work about the Benandanti that was basically the starting point, and everything else has proceeded from that choice. So in that case the whole thing would be quite predictable.

CARLO: – I wouldn’t say so. Cantimoro was extremely important in terms of teaching a reading technique, that close reading that I was talking about before. Cantimoro was looking at this fragment of the inquisition trial in the archives in Dublin. Then I decided to start working on witchcraft trials, as a student. I made a sort of triple sudden decision, it was in Pisa, in the library of the Scuola Normale and I remember thinking, okay… three things: trying to become a historian, working on witchcraft trials, and trying to work on the trials’ victims… Which was very unusual at that moment, even from Cantimore’s point of view. Although when I mentioned this project to him; I went to Florence and had a conversation with him and told him that I wanted to work on witchcraft trials. And he said, “Aunque tú… You also”. Which was a kind of recognition of ‘working against the grain’. I thought, “What an idea I have!” And he said, “So, you also.” But there was a subtext, because there was an article that had been published by a former student of Cantimoro but from a completely different perspective. Actually it was about the so-called ‘witch craze’; working on the persecution of witchcraft. My point was different: trying to rescue the voices of the victims.

MAGNUS: – We are always curious about this period of time in Bologna, in the 60s. The political climate at the time, the tensions. This was the time when you started to actively work with the term ‘microhistory’.

CARLO: – Well, in a sense. I came to Bologna in 1970. And the moment of turmoil was in 1977. And certainly there is an essay of mine which was published before the emergence of microhistory as a term: or more or less at the same time. This was an essay on clues. Now this essay was, in fact, given as a seminar. When I started teaching, and this was in a sense Cantimore’s teaching, I would say that what I was going to do was share with the students some unfinished project, so some project that I was currently working on. And actually I published with a fellow historian who is a friend, Adriano Prosperi, who published a book which is called *Giocchi di Pazienza* (*Puzzles*) which was a seminar. There was a subtitle: “un seminario sul ‘Beneficio di Cristo’”. This was a seminar that we gave in Bologna in 1974… We published the book in 1975, so probably we gave it in 1973. It is a book which has never been translated into any language. And at a certain moment we said, “This is probably the kind of book that is unreadable.” Because the idea was to give a kind of unclean, unsanitized version of what a piece of research is. So with all the mistakes left in and described in detail: the false routes, assumptions, biases, disapprovals, etc. So the book is in fact the prehistory of what we did. Because we also published a more conventional essay about that 16th-century text. But this book was something else. It was about the prehistory of writing, and all the discussions with the students.

MAGNUS: – How was that textually manifested in the book? Was that through transcripts of conversations, or…

CARLO: – No, there were no tapes… No notes. We worked together, Adriano and myself. It’s not a detailed record of what took place in the class. There is a retrospective description of what we did, emphasizing the fact that when one starts with hypothesis,
which is an essential starting point, there are a lot of biases: I have been working on this much more recently, on this connection between biases and hypothesis. I gave a lecture in Zurich about this. So I cannot claim that it is a sort of faithful account, but more a self-reflection which tries to unveil some aspects of historical works which are usually not shared with the readers, simply because only the final result is important, or supposed to be important. I think that we had just one review, which was extremely critical, and that was it.

(everybody laughs)

MAGNUS: – It sounds, in a way, very contemporary, in the way that you try to create some kind of transparency towards the process and also want to let those things stay within the text: the mistakes, and maybe ambiguity, and all this.

CARLO: – Anyway, in Bologna, going back to your question, we gave that seminar and later on, two years later, I gave a seminar on the work I was doing on clues. And it was funny because there was this idea of the fingerprints, because everybody was talking about the police and about the communist party as having its own police. There was kind of this collapse of the Bologna myth of the “red city” because a student belonging to a far left group Lotta Continua was murdered 200 yards from here (my apartment). I remember that there was a… This is a digression.

MAGNUS: – (laughs) And we love that...

CARLO: – March, 1977. So this student was murdered by the carabinieri… There was a demonstration, there was a big manifestation in Rome. So I took a train and I went to Rome. And there I met the leader of the group Lotta Continua, because he was my friend, Adriano Sofri. I remember that as I went towards him, there were two rows of heavily protected soldiers, also with weapons. So I went there, and he was there. And so there was this big rally, and guns. For some of the people attending the demonstration this came as a kind of shock, because it was a kind of apex of that movement. I, myself, was shocked. There was a destructive side of that movement. I never idealized ’68. I was probably a bit too old for that. But I was certainly sympathetic with the far left at that moment. And I had a personal relationship with Adriano Sofri, which went back to my years in Pisa. But I remember that he was extremely worried about that rally in Rome. So the morning after, I took a train back, back to Bologna, back to my apartment. And I had to show my I.D. because there was an armoured tank in front of my house. So this was quite a shock. In a way one could say that the communist party in Bologna never recovered, because there was this idea that those kinds of things cannot happen in Bologna. But they did.

And so I was giving a seminar on clues, fingerprints. I remember that there was quite a political reading of my essay. It has been read in many ways. I thought that some of those political readings were crazy. So there was something about this topic. A couple of years ago I was asked to write a new introduction for an American edition of that collection of essays, and so I mentioned the context. This is something that I did quite often in recent years. It is maybe related to old age, but it is not about autobiography. I am not interested in autobiography, my own autobiography. But I am interested in trying to make sense of what I did, and trying to understand how invisible forces impinged upon me. And so, how limited my freedom was.

ANDREJ: – You are a historian after all so…

CARLO: – Yes. So I was using myself, using myself to try and make an experiment, which is what I did several times. Moro’s was kidnapping the year after.

ANDREJ: – So it was a very turbulent time. Also, you had some very personal connections, for example your friendship with Adriano Sofri. But you still kept political activism at some distance…

CARLO: – I never became militant, although I wrote a few pieces on the Lotta Continua. And I had a continuous conversation with Adriana Sofri, and a lot of disagreements, which are still going on until today. But I never became militant: I regard this as a limit. However, there was certainly an emotional involvement, a political closeness.

MAGNUS: – But at that time the terms were quite a bit different, I mean, to become militant at that time, meant becoming Brigada Rossa or… I mean there were extreme terrorists on both sides: the right and the left. They were militant, and what was the meaning of that in the 70s?

CARLO: – Okay, let’s say this. In Italy there was certainly state terrorism. The bombing in Milan, in 1969, was a big shock. The culprits were identified with the anarchists, in the Piazza Fontana. I never believed that. I still remember that the day after there was a big headline, no, three days after, because it was there that they listed who was allegedly responsible, Valpreda, an anarchist. And I remember the headlines in the Correio da Serra, il Mostro, and so on. And I remember that there was a strike. I was living in Rome, and I had to take a bus, or sharing a taxi with somebody else, going to the university: probably not for teaching but to be involved in some rally. And I remember that I had a conversation with some people because we were going to share a taxi. Nobody believed the official version. But I mean, they were just people, picked up at random on the street. They didn’t believe it. I think that idea of conspiracy: which is something that I worked on later, as a historian, in my book The Conspiracy of the Lepers, inspired by the Jews and the Muslims in Islamic history— I mean, it is certainly related to that experience. In other words, the idea that there are conspiracies.

MAGNUS: – And they are real.
ANDREJ: –This theme of conspiracy is something that you also had to address at a later point in your book on the Sofri case.

CARLO: –Well the book was not written by a militant person. It was related to my friendship with Adriano Sofri, on the one hand. On the other hand, it was related to the fact that I was absolutely certain that he was not responsible for that political murder. He was innocent, and I was trying to help him in that circumstance. I remember that the occasion was this: the friend that I mentioned before, Prosperi, after the first trial against Sofri, sent a letter along with other people to La Repubblica, the newspaper, saying that this has been a witch trial. And I thought that I had been working for so many years on witch trials, so I have to do something on this. And so I received the transcripts of the proceedings of the trial: 3,000 pages of the trial against Adriano Sofri.

I worked on the evidence, on the judicial evidence, trying to interpret it and so on and so forth. I remember I made a footnote about the punctuation, because I am obsessed with punctuation. And I was struck by the way that the punctuation was carefully edited in those transcripts. And so it was a book in which the aim was to do something for my friend, and to reestablish his innocence, and I failed. I failed completely.

My book, which failed, in that sense, was also a reflection on the relation between the judge and the historian. There was a strange element in the book, which was completely unplanned: that book was published in 1991 and at that moment… It was before the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the availability of the Stasi Archives, these judicial archives from formerly socialist countries. And so the issue of how to deal with judicial evidence became important. But this was completely unplanned. Completely unplanned.

ANDREJ: –So the microhistorical method travelled, transposed into the field of contemporary history in a way.

CARLO: –Yes, although… I mean, a microhistorical method, one could say, well, this is a historical method.

ANDREJ: –Or a philological method.

CARLO: –Okay, now one could say: what does this mean, ‘microhistory’? And I think the emphasis should be… There is a possible misunderstanding, of ‘micro’ as related to the real or the symbolic dimensions of the object. This is not the case. I mean the ‘micro’ is related to ‘microscope’. So the intensive approach is possible in any topic, and then there is the tricky element, meaning generalization. So it is not the individual case, per se, which is important, but how you can extract something larger. And this is really difficult, and there are no blueprints.

I remember that I was invited years ago in Cambridge, England to speak about microhistory and I started by saying “Microhistory is about generalization,” which was a kind of unexpected point, to a certain extent, but I believe in it. In other words, generalization is a sort of practice which is under theorized in historians’ work. So if we assume that generalization is something that cannot be taken for granted, and which is different from case to case, then we have to reflect upon it.

MAGNUS: –Can I ask you what you believe about that process? Where does the generalization come in? Is there an idea about generalization already from the beginning? That would be very much like a hypothesis. Or is generalization the moment when the general is extracted from the micro level? Is it something that comes later in the process of work?

CARLO: –I would say that it comes out at every level. At every level there is generalization. I made a similar point about the narrative dimension of history. Even a hypothesis is put in a narrative way, in a narrative shape. You may say the same about generalization. As you said, a hypothesis as a sort of generalizing aspect, but then it is related to a specific case. So there is this interaction. And then the hypothesis can be disproved. And so we have to start again, looking for another generalization. Then at the end, or nearly at the end, we can start with new generalizations about, about what: questions, answers? Who knows? (laughs) I mean, it is really sort of an under-theorized element. And I think that microhistory is basically about this.

In other words, it’s about working on case studies, trying to build up more convincing, more fruitful generalizations. Now this notion of case studies can be, regardless, more or less synonymous with microhistory. Actually a few years ago, there was a collection of essays published in French by Jacques Revel… Thinking by Cases. And at a certain moment they mentioned my piece about clues as something that was going in that direction. So I mentioned Auerbach’s Mimesis*, which I certainly read as a book based on case studies. But in the same vein I would say that I also read when I was that age, when I was 18, Freud’s Case Studies. One could say, and this is really part of Freud’s approach, that every case is at the same time inexhaustible, and related to some kind of generalization. So, inexhaustible and deeply individual.

But what does it mean? An individual?

So I wrote a little piece on shame. I mean, that the individual is the point of intersection between multiple sets, that is something that seems obvious. So one could say, starting with myself, I am a member of a specific animal species, male, then another

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set which is more circumscribed, let’s say, retired Italian professors… And then there is one set where there is just one member: which is related to my fingerprints. But that the idea of the individual is related to his or her fingerprints, period, only makes sense for a policeman. But otherwise there is this interaction between individual and less-individual elements, and the result is what we usually call an individual, which is largely not individual. Let’s say that what is individual is the interaction… Okay, this is maybe obvious. I was interested in this because I was trying to make sense of something which struck me, meaning, I felt ashamed of Berlusconi: not for Berlusconi, but of him… Okay, I mean, he is horrible, but why should I feel ashamed of him? And so there was some kind of continuity of which I tried to make sense. For instance, us both being Italian, which is not so easy to define. This idea of belonging seems to me something which should not be taken for granted. My definition of history is a way of teaching that nothing should be taken for granted.

MICHELLE: – Can I ask you a question? This is also going back to this notion of generalization and approaching it with a certain hypothesis, but looking at the particular, looking at specific cases. Why would you choose one case and not the other case? Why this one and not the other?

CARLO: – This is absolutely crucial. You may say, “This is promising.” I was concerned with this question in teaching. The point is to teach students why a case looks promising. I think there are no blueprints. Let’s say, there’s possible convergence of different kinds of evidence. This could be a sort of vague orientation. But sometimes this is not true. In other words, even if there is this convergence, the result could be not particularly interesting.

MAGNUS: – Isn’t there an element of desire also?

CARLO: – Yes, there is… Actually we talked about this in the book on the seminar, using this word, “desire”. And I think that there should be an effort to control this. In other words… Actually the metaphor I use is “sterilizing the instruments”. Because, on the one hand, without desire and without hypothesis, and so on, research would never take place. And we would be unable, literally unable, to discover anything. But at the same time we have to keep this under control. Otherwise, let’s say, if there would be no disapproval, our animal species would have not survived, because we would have started to eat stones, driven by desire. So there is feedback. Now this is not so obvious because as we tried to show in our book on the seminar, there are subtle attempts, including unconscious attempts, to prove something against the evidence. I mean, you may do this in very subtle ways. And so there’s the idea of controlling this desire.


MICHELLE: – In your essay Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I know about It 1 you speak about the anomalous versus something that is identifiable and familiar. And the way something can emerge as familiar, something that you can identify with, is through repetition. So there is this tension between something that you cannot immediately put your finger on, something that is out of place and therefore stands out, and then something that is already part of a recognized pattern. I was wondering if you could talk about that a bit more.

CARLO: – I think that actually the anomalous cases are more promising, but some cases are more promising than others, to quote Orwell. So, there is a kind of flare—I refrain from using the word intuition—but it’s something which you cannot teach. But it is certainly true that anomalies are cognitively more rewarding than normal cases. But what does it mean, “a normal case”? Do they exist? Possibly one could say, even a so-called normal case would not look so normal, if we look at the case at a close distance.

MAGNUS: – If we look at normality in that sense, it becomes very strange.

CARLO: – Then there is this notion of estrangement which I also worked on, which is “making things strange”. So how to make a normal case abnormal or anomalous. There are techniques. But it’s true, I can imagine 20 witch trials and myself looking at them, and saying “Okay, let’s start from this, this looks more promising… But why?” I try to work on this. In other words, I try to make explicit some elements which were driving my choices. In the case of the Benandanti that you mentioned before, I mean this was sort of an anomaly, which I immediately realized as an extreme anomaly. Just because, in that case, the inquisitors were unable to make sense of what the defendants were saying, which is something that I had never come across before, not even later. So that was extreme luck, and also an extreme case. And I must say that I have a sort of propensity for extreme cases. So the most difficult cases are in principle the most promising.

ANDREJ: – So on the one hand we find that anomalous cases are basically everywhere. It depends on how closely you look, perhaps. But at the same time, generalization is already at work, on all kinds of levels. And of course that could even go for the whole notion of ‘the case’. The policeman would say that it is about the fingerprint. And if we go back to another piece that you wrote in the 70s that was also co-authored with Carlo Poni, the article on The Name of the Game. In culture, in general, the name is the placeholder that serves to normalize what is actually an entire life’s course, full of different events and different circumstances, into a single thing that we come to think about as a personal identity… Or something like that.

CARLO: I completely agree. Actually, I think that my favourite example about this, I mean showing the fact that generalization starts with language, is a chapter in Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, that island in which people don’t trust words, so they take objects on their shoulders. Instead of saying table, they show a table. That table. So to speak about “table” or a table, or the table, is already using a generalization.

MAGNUS: –Talking about names: let’s talk about biographies, the genre of biography. When you speak about generalization and the way we choose our subjects, and the research subjects, for instance. Biographies: normally we think that they are mostly about famous people. Whereas in microhistory, there’s something of a potential that we direct this genre towards ‘non-famous people’ so to speak.

CARLO: –Sometimes. Yes, this a possibility. Yes, but I would not set this as some kind of exclusive feature. Because, for instance, I mean that, I think that one of the first books that we published as microhistories was a book on Piero della Francesca, one of the most famous painters in the Western tradition. But it is true… But I interrupted you, you were going to say something about biographies.

MAGNUS: –The fact that they can deal with normal people, or non-famous people, that opens up this connection with literature. Within literature and fiction we can find these people, everyday people, within that field of discourse. In what field of historical practice can we find these people? Is this the connection to literature, for instance, with historical practice?

CARLO: –Let’s say… I myself wrote a book, *The Cheese and the Worms*, on a completely unknown person. My friend Giovanni Levi, who was one of the co-founders of microhistory, published a book, as an experiment, on a completely unknown Exorcist in Piedmont. This was translated into several languages: English, French, and so on. And Giovanni Levi wrote a piece which was published on the uses of biography. I think that biography is extremely promising as a field of research in so far as… Apparently, something that is taken for granted is the biological continuity of an individual, woman or man. But then how can different contexts, both in time and in space, interact with that given biological entity: this is open to experiments. How are we going to deal with this? And there, obviously, literature has a lot to teach us—think about Joyce or Proust—as a genre, as a long prehistory or a long history. But it can also be developed in many different, unpredictable directions.

ANDREJ: –I think that at this point it would be interesting to go back to a detail in that article that you wrote with Carlo Poni, and actually it is a term that I am not sure how to translate into English. In Italian it is *scienza delle vissuto*. You speak of a kind of history, whether that is microhistory or not, but a kind of a history that you would like to write. Did you borrow that term from someone? How would you translate it?

CARLO: –Probably “of lived experience”.

MICHELLE: –(thinking to herself) The science of lived experience…

CARLO: –One has to unfold the implications of this expression into English, otherwise it will not make sense. It is a lived experience, but still inarticulate. So this is the oxymoron quality: science, but science that is in a way inarticulate because it is so close to the experience. And so there is a tension...

ANDREJ: –Could literature also be a *scienza delle vissuto*?

CARLO: –Well in a sense, in so far that there is a cognitive quality in literature which I find extremely challenging. My work in the last 20 years, maybe 30… Is fighting against the neo-skeptics: those that argued that were no rigorous boundary between fictional narratives and historical narratives. Now I think of this as… I mean, it is wrong, has bad consequences, is unattainable. But instead of saying, “no, no”, I thought that the strategy should be different. Actually, my model was a metaphor used by Antonio Gramsci in the notebooks that he wrote in prison where he spoke about *guerra di movimento* and *guerra di posizione*. So talking about revolution in Europe, he said that there is *guerra di posizione*, which is trenches, the First World War. So you dig a trench and you are in there and you stay there. And then there is *guerra di movimento*, in which you attack. And so you go into the enemy’s field. And so he was using this as a metaphor for contemporary events, but I took it as a metaphor for intellectual strategies. So for instance, I, against those neo-skeptics, I would say first rhetoric. They said, “History is rhetoric.” My counter argument was, “Yes, but which rhetoric?” Let’s look at two different traditions: Aristotle’s rhetoric which implies applied proofs—so Aristotle, Quintilian… And then Nietzsche’s anti-Aristotelian rhetoric, and then Foucault and epigones. Foucault was already an epigone of Nietzsche. So that is the real bifurcation. So the idea of counteracting—attacking—the enemy and using his weapons against him. So much for rhetoric. And then in a more general sense, maybe literature. So saying, okay, you are focusing on literature, saying “Everything is literature,” and so on. Involving everything as fiction is very much a Nietzschean argument: in his early pieces, he talks about the lie and truth, in a non-moral sense. And then I would say, okay, there’s been a fight between fiction and history for how to know and to represent reality. So there have been interchanges. I focused on the interchanges: how historians talk about a standard challenge to historians. Balzac’s saying, “I will be the historian of the 19th Century.” And so on and so forth. So, following the migration of and the reuse of different devices: having a cognitive potential, that seems to me crucial. But my argument was sort of a ‘ultra-radical’ argument saying, “Okay, but why should we focus only on the final product?” We have to look at the procedure and the trajectory. We will

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find that at every stage, there is narration. So, if you say this, including the possibility of testing this statement—narrative at every stage—one could say against the narrative argument of the neo-skeptics, that is my own ‘hyper-narrative’ argument against them. And also literature, well in a broad sense, so far as in telling a story is something that is part of our technology as a human species. So, yes, telling a story.

CARLO: –That’s interesting. In fact I think I have the same impression about Foucault. I would say that he is afraid of an interlocutor. So he tries to prevent any kind of interaction except according to the rules that he is dictating. So style as a constraint over the reader, that would be my description of Foucault’s attitude: which is very interesting in itself, as a move, as a strategy.

But I have been developing this idea called the dialogic dimension, so I was interested in your comment. Style… Well certainly my mother as a novelist, as an example, was an influence, and a challenge in a sense… I mean, I was very much aware. And actually my father translated Tolstoy, so… He translated Anna Karenina as a young man.

AGNUS: –But in the beginning of your career, the idea of a historian as a writer was I guess not totally accepted.

ANDREJ: –But I imagine that, considering your family background, both your parents were writers, your mother especially after the war became, I believe, one of the most celebrated writers in post-war literature in Italy. With such an intimate acquaintance with literature from an early age, it couldn’t have come as a shock for you, person-celebrated writers in post-war literature in Italy. With such an intimate acquaintance were writers, your mother especially after the war became, I believe, one of the most somewhere in between.

I am fascinated by translation as a phenomenon, and I used to say that translation is the most powerful argument against extreme relativism. Because translation is possible but it always limps (laughs). So there is no correspondence, mirror correspondence. There is a gap, but translation is possible.

So the inadequacy of all relations, in a sense, is a challenge; but there is a possibility of translating from one language into another, and also from words to images and from images into words. But it is a sort of challenge.

MICHELLE: –I was thinking about the situation that you were describing before: about the experience of working on this text within a seminar, however only two people in the group knew the language of the original text. The whole seminar seemed to be about negotiating the translation of the text.

CARLO: –I wonder… If everybody would have been familiar with German, with the German original… The pace would have been different. I am not sure. In a way, we focused on crucial words, and most of those words, even in German, are basically Latin words, or can be immediately translated into a Latin equivalent, such as Italian. So there was a lot of conceptual work involved. Certainly, translations can imply a slowing down of one’s reading, but only to a certain extent. Because one can imagine other ways of slowing down, even of the original. And I am very much interested in this slowing down process because I am usually too quick, quick in making judgments about people, so I have to correct myself. Or quick about allegedly finding a relevant point in a text. So I am very sceptical about this quickness and try to counteract it. And this is the reason why I am so interested in the slow reading attitude.

AGNUS: –These are kinds of methods to correct yourself, or to go against yourself, your impulses in a way.

CARLO: –This is the Devil’s Advocate argument. Actually I had a long interview with a French historian and anthropologist and the final title was The Historian and the Devil’s Advocate. Because this was again the title of my lecture in Stockholm. In other words, I am fascinated by the deconstruction of this figure in the colonization process, excuse me, in the trials in the Catholic Church, in the early 17th century. There is a trial, a real trial, concerning the alleged sanctity of a person, and then there is the Devil’s Advocate, an institutional figure, who makes objections, the most challenging objections. I think that historians and researchers, maybe everybody, should interject the Devil’s Advocate figure. The idea of having an endless conversation with the Devil’s Advocate who tries to put you in a corner. I think this is a challenging idea.

AGNUS: –And how were they trained, those Devil’s Advocates?

CARLO: –Think of one of the ongoing beatification trials, about Pope Pius XII. Obviously the Devil’s Advocate would say, “But what did you do about the Jews in WWII?” I mean a difficult question. And then the people who are involved in the beatification trajectory would say, “Well, but…” And so on and so forth.

I remember that from when I started to write The Cheese and the Worms, because
I had come across this document related to Menocchio and the two trials a long time before, when I was working on the Benandanti.

It was like a ‘book of dreams’, actually it was about dreaming people. And so I was looking at this list and then I came across a reference to a peasant who said, “The world emerged from rotten matter.” I remember that I was extremely impressed, and so I made note of the number of the trial. Seven years elapsed, and I remembered that there was this reference, and then I checked the trials again: because in the meantime I had been about to work in the ecclesiastical archive. When I started to write, I thought that maybe I would do an experiment like Queneau’s *Exercises of Style.* So each paragraph could be written in different styles. One as a parody of some kind of history… Then I… I don’t know whether I started, but then I thought, “That’s frivolous, no, I cannot do that.” It would be unethical, so I forgot about it. But I think that some of that idea is still in the book: the idea of having those sections with clear-cut transitions, or sudden transitions. For example, there is a passage that involves a dialogue in which there is only the questions and answers, no comments.

**MAGNUS:** –We were also discussing before about your relation to history, materialism and especially the time in the 70s here in Bologna. That strand was quite dominating in the schools here, in many ways. In the context of generalization, somehow in the history of matter and materialism, there is always a structure and also a kind of answer to the history… There are patterns. How do you relate your deeds in microhistory in relation to the history of materialism?

**CARLO:** –I must say that I was not so affected by the debates in the 70s. First of all, there was a previous filter, which was Antonio Gramsci. And so, Gramsci… I started reading Gramsci in the late 50s, early 60s. And then even my reading of Marx was affected, not directly affected, but it came later, after my reading of Gramsci. But it’s true, as you say, historical material was all over, so certainly there was… I’m trying not to distort my perception because nowadays I would say that… My main point of interest in Marx would be in historical materialism: the relationship between morphology and history. So the morphological element, in Marx, which are forms, forms of modes of production. So the tension between forms and historical development. This would be my main interest now. May I say that my interest in morphology was also affected by reading Marx more than Gramsci’s reading of Marx, because Gramsci was not so much into the morphology… But now I am hesitating. The Devil’s Advocate looked at me sternly because Gramsci was trained as a linguist and so certainly he was interested in morphology. I mean, there was this huge project that dominated the great minds in the 19th century; meaning historical morphology. So let’s say Darwin and Marx, and actually Engels reading Marx through Darwin, or … But this is something else. But the idea of having a tension between the forms, and the relative fixity of forms, and then the strain of history. And so how the two elements interact: I think this is absolutely at the core of my interest in history. And even when I was interested in… I wrote on connoisseurship, Morelli, and so on… You had forms, morphology in a strict sense. But then you have an artist, let’s say, developing a trajectory and being exposed to different tensions.

I am fascinated by this kind of tension which seems unsolvable between pessimism and optimism. You could say that this is a kind of avant-garde element, the emphasis on montage. The sudden transition. I am fascinated by montage, by the sudden transition which obviously has cognitive elements and juxtaposition. A solution must be found, but at last as possible. As late as possible in so far as, as sort of quick solution could be an easy compromise. So what I love is the explosive nature of contradiction. It must be there, unsolvable, and then… Let’s fight. So this would be the optimism. But I think that after all, the idea of pessimism of knowledge, if we look around at the world we live in… It’s not so absurd.

**ANDREJ:** –There is good reason to be pessimistic, even though you are not in prison like Gramsci was.

**CARLO:** –Exactly. So you can rephrase that motto, looking at different kinds of reality. But it still works.

**ANDREJ:** –I also think that your interest in a figure like Montaigne, or a figure of thought like that of the grotesque, can be related to this discussion. I mean the grotesque is also… I mean, you have this combination of… It’s like a kind of balancing act, with Montaigne turning his attention on himself. He wants to paint according to nature, he doesn’t want to embellish or doesn’t want to see anything out, but still he says something like, “There’s an element of respect for the public.” So he’s not after the effect of shock.

**CARLO:** –Yes, but, first of all, this junction, this juxtaposition… This is very much in Montaigne’s spirit. So he stresses an element which is just the opposite of a continuum, so against seamless transitions. He stresses the transitions. And I think this is very much about the essay as a form, which opens up the possibility of sudden transitions. And also the possibility of having a compression, in a short space, of different topics… So there is this element of discontinuity.

**MICHELLE:** –But this conversation that we are having is being driven by questions. And so this is an important aspect of the essay as well: that it is driven by questions where the answers are perhaps never arrived at; an ongoing questioning.

**CARLO:** –Yes, so there is this questioning attitude. That’s true. I think this is absolutely crucial in any aspect of Montaigne.

**ANDREJ:** –So you not only write essays yourself, and perhaps increasingly so, but a fair

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share of your essays are dedicated to exploring that essayistic tradition, from not only Montaigne, but also other figures in the Renaissance. I mean, they were not writing essays in, perhaps, the strict sense of the word, but people like Thomas More or Erasmus: it is very much the same mentality, the same kind of world view.

CARLO: But certainly the essay as a form is fascinating. When you mentioned your experiments with film as an essay (looks at Magnus), I thought about Eisenstein who, as we know, had a project of turning Marx’s *Das Kapital* into a film. There is this line which (laughs) I started thinking about it… How is it possible?

ANDREJ: –Speaking of cinema and the relation between cinema and history. I think it is in… It might even be a reference in that article you wrote on microhistory, *Two or Three Things*, which, by the way, is an obvious reference to Godard. But you refer to the posthumous work of Krakauer, and it also might be your article on Krakauer… But somewhere you write that Krakauer’s book on history is actually the best introduction to the microhistorical perspective, although you didn’t know about that work at the time, in the 70s.

CARLO: –I am trying to remember: probably in the late 80s, I was especially fascinated with his comparison with montage. But then I think I used the argument… I mean, this is something which I developed in different contexts without reference to Krakauer, but the idea that… I mean you don’t have, sometimes one doesn’t have direct access to somebody’s work. But then it comes from a different chain. And I am very interested in this for two reasons: subjective and objective. Subjectively, because I realized that I had been, for instance in this case, affected by Krakauer through Adorno, one more writer whom I read when I was 20. So, he was sort of an early fixation. And again, *Minima Moralia* pointed retrospectively, I would say, to something like microhistory: the aphoristic element…

ANDREJ: –Hm. So you have the notion of montage in Krakauer and you also have this idea of the close-up.

CARLO: –Indeed, yes… So, if I am thinking about this, my earliest encounter with this, on the screen, was in the last episode of *Paisà*, Rossellini’s *Paisà*. I remember there is a long shot—at the very end, people are shooting and there is the battle and the passages of the battle are seen as a long shot. I remember, there was an interview with Adriano Sofri and I remember… A long interview… Which was translated into German as well. This was, I think, in the early 80s. And I remember that I made a comparison between this episode, this moment in Rossellini’s *Paisà*, and a marvellous painting by Pieter Breugel in Vienna, which is called *Dark Day*. You are confronted with a ‘crosscut’ of

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the world: there is a man urinating against a wall, then somebody fighting, and then you go on and on and there are woods: dark sky, then a sea landscape, but just a fragment, then a ship which is overthrown by a storm. So this idea that we have everything at once, I could say it is a kind of synchronic translation of something which should be translated as a sequence, implying a generalization. So instead of having, let’s say a case study with a generalization, you have a ‘crosscut’ section in which everything is there.

ANDREJ: –History as a kind of eternal present.

CARLO: –One could say… Okay, time is always involved. In other words, even in a synchronic image, we have to look around, and so on. There is time, like in music or in poetry, and so on. But I still believe that the tension between images and words should be kept. In other words, that seems to me an easy solution to saying that time is always involved. Time is always involved because we are decaying animals, but still I have the idea of keeping those two poles…

CONVERSATION ENDS

10. This text uses extracts of a conversation that took place between Carlo Ginzburg, Magnus Bärtås, Andrej Slavík, and Michelle Teran. The conversation occurred in Carlo Ginzburg’s apartment between 24.10.2014-25.10.2014, Bologna. We conducted the interview under the auspices of the project *Microhistories*. *Microhistories* is a research project led by Magnus Bärtås, an artist, writer, and professor of fine art at Konstfack in Stockholm. *Microhistories* gathers knowledge from artistic practice/artistic research and the field of history. The objective is an investigation of how a mutual exchange can come about between the historical perspective/approach used in microhistory, and visual art, especially the video essay genre. The project explores how this science can be linked to the video essay, as well as to artistic practice in a broader sense. *Microhistories* includes Magnus Bärtås, Mika Hannula, curator and theoretician, Suzana Milevska, curator and theoretician, Behzad Khoosravi Noori, visual artist, Lina Selander, visual artist, Lena Séraphin, visual artist, Andrej Slavík, historian, Lars-Henrik Ståhl, architect and theoretician, and Michelle Teran, visual artist. http://www.konstfack.se/en/Research/Research-projects/Microhistories/
(Night has fallen. The group seems drained of whatever physical and mental resources they had left. A silence descends on the room. Carlo declares he needs to leave to meet his wife for dinner at a restaurant somewhere in Mitte, and asks if somebody could call him a taxi. Andrej and Magnus decide to leave as well. Since the group seems to be dwindling rapidly, the artist-researcher suggests that the group resumes the conversation on another day. The members of the group nod their heads in agreement, except Carlo, who was only here for the one session. Carlo grabs his coat and heads out the door. The others grab their coats and say their goodbyes as well. A week passes, then another, then another. Months go by. Eventually, everybody forgets about the promise of a scheduled appointment and continues on with their lives. One day, a package arrives in the postbox of everybody present from that day in the kitchen. Inside is a stack of papers and some photographs. The stamp on the envelope shows that the package came from Madrid.)
May 6th, 2015. I spot David, walking through the crowd, by the entrance of the Reina Sofia. His hair is longer now, not the faux mohawk look from two years ago. He catches my gaze then, smiling widely, walks towards the platform that I am standing on. I bend over and embrace him. He hugs me tightly back.

I haven’t seen David since we did the interviews in September 2013, with the four women who participated in the pilot project set up by the Psychosocial Impact Group of PAH Madrid. A group of young researchers—mostly psychologists and social workers—started an investigation of the psychosocial impacts of the eviction crisis in Spain brought on by the 2008 financial crisis, when people lost their jobs and were no longer able to pay their mortgage to keep their homes. The researchers were young and educated, but with few job prospects in their fields. They were instead applying their skills to social movements. I participated by filming the entire pilot project process: the group discussions, interviews, and analysis of material carried out by the team. We shared the recorded material: for them to use for their research, and me to make a film, text and performance.

A crowd has gathered to listen to the five mayoral candidates for the upcoming municipal elections in Madrid, Barcelona, and other cities as well. The desire to eliminate corruption and restore dignity to the institutions through its people unites all candidates. Ahora Madrid—a horizontally orchestrated citizens’ initiative comprised of a confluence of various political forces and activists of social movements, 15M groups, and Podemos—have put forth Manuela Carmena, a left-leaning judge, as their mayoral candidate. Ada Colau is the mayoral candidate for Barcelona en Comú, in Barcelona. She is one of the founders of the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (Mortgage Victims Platform, or the PAH), a formidable and, by now, internationally renowned right-to-housing movement operating throughout the country. For five years, Colau was the most visible spokesperson for the anti-eviction movement before making a deliberate (and public) decision to step down and enter into the mayoral race for Barcelona. Like Ahora Madrid, Barcelona en Comú is made up of a network of many social movements, work groups, and associations involved in grassroots city politics, and follows the horizontal forms of organization and decision making developed over past few the years. The polls suggest that Colau is going to win the election. She is both well loved and respected in Barcelona and throughout the country. The other candidates on the stage represent this new wave in municipal
politics as well. What happens during these elections could influence how successful the new left-wing political party Podemos is in the upcoming federal election this December. There are people of all ages here. There is an atmosphere of warmth and generosity here, and of anticipation.

David climbs up, joining me on the platform, and gives me an update on what has been happening since I was in Madrid last. Our psychosocial impact research group hasn’t been so active since the whole election thing took off, and now suddenly two of the members—Irene Montero and Ione Belarra—joined the citizens’ council of Podemos. Standing next to me on the wall, he starts to give me an update on the group:

“But Irene anyway, you know that she is completely involved with the whole thing now. I mean, you see her speaking everywhere: in Puerta del Sol, on the television debating with hardcore economists and political pundits. That girl has no fear at all.”

I nod in agreement. “Yes, I saw her speaking live, during the Podemos gathering a couple of months ago, from Berlin. I was in my kitchen, listening to the live stream, when suddenly I heard her voice. I turned around and saw her speaking, in front of 140,000 people in Puerta del Sol. She was so articulate and confident, despite her age. She didn’t waver at all. What must it be like to be speaking in front of so many people?”

We stop talking and listen to Ada Colau who is now speaking on the stage.

“How are we going to win? We don’t want to have this politics of fear. We don’t want this fear. But what we want is respect, hope, for each of us…Within all the neighbourhoods, we want the same treatment. Equal treatment, equal conditions. We demand respect and hope. We want respect, but we don’t want charity. Often, when people are in power, they think that they can dangle a little offering in front of us: some kind of social assistance, but with sacrifices. But we say no, we don’t want your charity…The people that govern, they abuse the citizenry…They often tell us that they don’t have the money for basic needs…There is no money for schools, for our children, for our public hospitals…But billions of dollars go towards bailing out the banks. They say there is no money for speculative real estate practices. They say that we don’t have any experience (to govern): yes it is true, we don’t have experience, your experience, but we have our experiences, lots of experiences, with all of our work in the social movements…We have the experience of thousands and thousands of people in their daily lives, daily miracles, that somehow make it possible to make it to the end of the month. The experience of misery, of the cuts, of criminal politics, this suffering. I have seen people at their very lowest somehow manage to get up again. I have seen people regain their dignity and fight for their human rights. I have seen women and men confront the banks, the institutions that they thought they couldn’t face; they thought they couldn’t do anything…I have seen these people, who thought they couldn’t do anything, how they got up again, and got their rights back. This is what I have seen and this is what our experience is.”

(Loud applause)

The crowd chants. “Si se puede! Si se puede!” (Yes we can, Yes we can)

David looks at me, beaming. “But this all begins with us. This is we. This is Irene. This is Gladys. This is Mariló. This is Manuela. This is Charo. This is the group. This is all the things about housing. This is what we have become.”

Has it already been two years since I took my first flight to Madrid, ending up in that basement, attending my first PAH assembly?

April 2, 2013. I am in the basement of a squatted cultural space in the district of Vallekas, immersed in a group of strangers. As I shift uncomfortably, not knowing exactly where to stand, I wonder if somebody will notice that I am here. Do I belong here? How will this begin? How did I get here? What am I doing here exactly? I am alone in the city. A man seated next to where I am standing looks up at me and offers me his seat. Otherwise, nobody seems to take any notice of me. A woman with long dark hair and a white shirt enters the room, folds out a long, horizontal paper with a timeline sketched out in black marker and begins to speak:

“I am going to explain through this timeline what you should expect to happen from the first moment you realize that you can no longer make your mortgage payments to when they finally evict you.”

The woman with the long dark hair and white shirt explains the entire process, which doesn’t just happen suddenly but can drag on for two years. She begins with the moment that you stop paying, when you start receiving the letters from the bank, in which demands are made to pay back the mortgage loan in full. She moves onto the auction stage in which—if the auction goes through—the house no longer belongs to the owner. She then continues along the timeline to the final moment of eviction. She carefully explains how you can negotiate with your bank, at each stage of the process, to stay in your home. Anything to avoid the necessity of using an anti-eviction blockade in which bodies block the entrance to the building, to prevent the bank commissioner and police from entering
and carrying out the eviction. She emphasizes that nobody is alone in this: everybody is here to help each other. If you help somebody with his or her housing issue, then somebody will help you as well. The PAH is here to build up solidarity and support.

There are families, many mothers with fidgety children, and a few single men, all crammed into this small space. Most are clutching large stacks of papers; some stuffed into plastic shopping bags, others carefully organized into plastic folders. After the speech, each has a turn to speak about their problems. The atmosphere is chaotic: phones constantly ring, people discuss their cases amongst themselves while others admonish those talking to quiet down so that everybody can hear and be heard. The woman with the long dark hair and white shirt continually pleads with people standing on the stairway leading to the basement to get off, lest it falls from the weight of the bodies. I listen as each person takes their turn: to tell their stories, to ask their questions, or just to try to formulate what their question might be. It seems most are trying to articulate their confusion of being immersed in a life-altering process of impending homelessness. This wasn’t supposed to happen. This wasn’t part of the life plan. Stories of visits to disparaging bank managers, of receiving obscure documents in the mail that they don’t fully understand, of their houses being auctioned off, despair, intimidation, abuse. For some, it becomes apparent that it is their first time in the basement, and they appear tentative. Others show more confidence and speak freely. I sit quietly and listen to the stories. Afterward, I walk back in the rain towards the metro stop and return to my temporary home; trying to understand what just happened, and knowing that I will return to the same space the following week.

April 9th, 2013. I am back in the basement for the second week in a row. Rita, the woman with the long black hair and white shirt, is once again reciting the steps of the eviction process, pausing only to tell people to get off the stairs, lest it falls from the weight of the bodies.

In the time between the last meeting, I have been reading *Vidas Hipotecadas*, a 216-page book, written in 2012, by Ada Colau and Adrià Alemany, two of the founders of the PAH. The PAH began in Barcelona in 2009 and now operates within 230 nodes located in cities throughout the entire country. The book, written in Spanish, is divided into three parts. It begins with an analysis of the conditions leading up to the real-estate bubble and the 2007-08 financial crisis when the speculative bubble burst. The book then moves on to describe the emergence of a social movement focusing on housing issues. It concludes with a step-by-step user’s guide for how to fight against your own eviction. Reading the book is like reading something between a manifesto and how-to manual for a citizens’ movement, written to develop the necessary tools and strategies to deal with a society in crisis. It is a cry for a radical citizenry, transforming individual problems into a collective struggle. Through the process of making intimate issues public, private misfortunes (and with them feelings of personal failure and shame) are transformed into social issues to be publicly voiced and openly confronted. This collective struggle is a process of organizing those affected to build up solidarity, and ultimately to win the right to housing.

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As I read, Ada tells me stories:

“In 1957, José Luis Arrese, the first Minister of Housing in Spanish history, in a speech to the Parliament where he presented a series of proposals to address the problem of the proliferation of slums emerging from new waves of migration from the countryside to cities, uttered a phrase, which over the years, has become famous: “We want a country of property owners not a country of workers.” This sentence marked a turning point and constituted a guiding principle for a new housing policy during the late Francoism years. The home ownership project from the dictatorship served a dual purpose. On the one hand, it avoided potential sources of conflict between the State, owners of social housing and tenants, workers, and other sectors of the population: conflicts that ran the risk of becoming entrenched and posed a real challenge to the regime. On the other hand, property ownership could act as a mechanism for social control, converting insubordinate spirits into more disciplined, moral individuals.

This line of action was not, however, a unique commitment made by the Franco regime, nor made only within the country’s borders. Turning a society of workers into a society of property owners also became an objective for Margaret Thatcher within a turbulent, political England to diffuse the revolutionary tendencies of a disaffected working class. This was a brilliant strategy to align the interests of a discontented working class with the conservative elite. Whoever owned property also had something to lose, concrete interests to defend and little time left for conspiring.

At the end of the 20th century, Spain’s incorporation into the global economy facilitated public access to credit. Widespread indebtedness was a new form of social governance. In a bid towards fast and easy growth, Spain devoted itself to the real estate market over many years, constructing more homes than Germany, Italy, and France combined. But this overproduction did not translate into greater accessibility: housing prices continued to rise, making the cost of living in Spain one of the most expensive in the European Union. Low interest rates and deregulation of credit also allowed banks to loan as much money to as many people who wanted it, which they did for a long time. At the same time, millions of homes were left empty for purposes of speculation and without any penalty.

Based on this model, the State facilitated the confusion between the right to housing and the guarantee of access to credit, which drove the impulse towards private property beyond reasonable limits and put a better part of the population deep in debt. For almost a decade, the Spanish population was subjected to, by land, sea and air, an avalanche of messages that reinforced one idea: if you were not a property owner, you were nobody. The housing bubble didn’t exist, the prices of houses would never go down, for the cost of renting you could be a property owner, and the purchase of a home was the best option for retirement.

With 40-year mortgages and monthly payments, the public, in order to fulfill his or her mortgage obligations, had no other option but to accept the impositions placed on them by the labor market. In many situations, members of the public were forced to work under precarious conditions and in low-paid jobs. Also, banks, knowing the risks involved, demanded guarantors for the mortgages and demanded that people get other family members—parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, etc.—or even strangers to guarantee the mortgages using their houses as collateral, connecting to the mortgage to two or more homes. This meant that if the mortgage owner could no longer make the payments and defaulted, then, in a perverse domino effect, others were at risk of losing their homes as well.

The PAH was launched in Barcelona on February 22nd, 2009 in the face of the growing difficulties of a citizenry deeply in debt which, first with rising interest rates and later unemployment (through the onset of the financial crisis), were unable to make their mortgage payments. However, for a long time, the PAH was operating in a bubble. The growing mortgage drama, faced by thousands of families, was barely discussed in the media in proportion to the dimension of the problem; neither was it discussed in government. Thousands of families lived in silence and complete isolation. The cry by the PAH, about the impending eviction crisis, was more like a cry in the desert.

The campaign against evictions, however, experienced a quantum leap with the outbreak of the 15M movement. On May 15th of 2011, inspired by the Arab Spring, thousands of outraged citizens organized themselves and went out into the streets to demand a true democracy. In one sense, this produced a perfect encounter between the PAH and the 15M movement. The PAH experienced significant growth (creating new PAHs connected to the assemblies of 15-M), and the efforts to stop evictions strengthened in number and force. The dissemination of calls through social networks multiplied. After the initial public cry of outrage, the 15M movement wanted to take the next step by solidifying its objectives. The PAH’s previous work, focusing on the concrete problem of housing, provided a good focus for the movement.

One of the clearest examples of integration between the indignados movement and the PAH happened in Madrid. The spread of the movement, which began in Puerta del Sol—a public square in Madrid and ground zero for the movement—was the key and gave the necessary push for PAH Madrid—formally established only just before the 15M—to begin moving forward. The first eviction, Tatiana and Anwar’s, was stopped on June 15th, 2011 in the Madrid district of Tetuan. This was carried out in collaboration between the PAH and the 15M, and involved more than two hundred people who blocked the court entourage’s way, before a strong media presence. This victory marked a turning point for PAH Madrid, sealed the alliance with the 15M, and catapulted the
May 10th, 2015. I spot him just as I am reaching the top of the bright yellow steps of Medialab Prado, a lab for digital culture that looks at innovative approaches to open-source technologies within social and political contexts, focusing on transparency and collaboration. Marcos Garcia, the artistic director, smiles and comes over to me.

“What a pleasant surprise. I didn’t know you were coming.”

“Yes, I always seem to come in May.”

He smiles and nods. “If you have some time, I want to introduce you to Fábio Malini, from Labic, a lab in Brazil, who does many projects in data visualization, working within activism and hacker culture as well.”

Marcos brings me over to a friendly looking man sitting at a nearby table.

“Michelle is currently doing a lot of research on the social movements here in Spain, on 15M and Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca, the PAH.”

Fábio nods his head vigorously then proceeds to show me some of the projects developed at his lab. They are different experiments in taking raw data, which is scraped from the Internet, and making stories with data. Labic uses different visualization strategies to look for meaning within large datasets by creating more legible ways of looking at data. Several projects that the lab has carried out involve different visualizations of the social movements in Spain. This for them is part of a series of projects about mapping protests transmitted by social media, which also takes into account the issues raised by networked communication. To this end, their interest is to show the design and complexity of the networks emerging from online debates.

In Rede de hashtags do #15M on Twitter (Hashtags network of #15M on Twitter), developed during the 3rd anniversary of 15M, Ladic researchers looked at all hashtags connected to the 15M Twitter hashtag. The hashtag was used for the third anniversary of 15M (2014), but was also associated with the anti-FIFA World Cup protests happening in Brazil. The visualization that Ladic created was a relational map about resistance: how an original spark produced other movements and nodes of activity that continue to grow, change, transform, pollute, and mutate. It is very much a living entity that shows the design and complexity of social movements and also networks; the sharing of information, how it moves, how it is interpreted and transformed into action. His visualization reminds me of Mutaciones, Proyecciones Alternativas Y Confluencias (Mutations, Alternative Projections and Confluences) a map created for the fourth anniversary of 15M showing the many visible effects and results coming from May 15, 2011. In the center of the map is a huge, bright yellow sun with the words “15M”, from which radiate the hundreds of initiatives that are the results of 15M. There are neighborhood assemblies and work groups, urban farms, campaigns, coops, platforms, political confluences, food banks, time banks, cultural centers, the Stop Evictions movement, and the PAH, among others.

“Since you have spent time around Medialab Prado, surely you must also know about the 15m.cc project,” I say, “It’s an umbrella for a cluster of 15M projects whose purpose is to document and raise awareness about the movement and its rich ecology.”

“Of course I do. It is such a good example, of how scraping—scraping the Internet for data—is a form of resistance and recuperation of memory: taking back our information, building our archives and our forms of representing it; constructing our stories.”

May 2011. Videos, made by different people and posted on YouTube, are starting to pop up in Puerta del Sol. From my quiet studio in Bergen, I monitor how Madrid is becoming populated by videos of revolution. Many videos that I encounter are of different people standing in different spots throughout Puerta del Sol and filming panoramas. Each person uses the camera to scan the square: starting from the left, then moving to the right. Watching these videos, which come from so many different sources, it strikes me how different people use this gesture of reading: using horizontal movement to create a certain legibility of events happening around these individual bodies. Bodies become fixed way-points, markers on a map, engaged in an uncoordinated—yet collective—choreography of documenting their position in the square, and their relation to the multitude of people who are standing around them. The cumulative noise of the crowd is palpable, more like a vibration that moves through bodies. In other videos, people use the camera to trace out different areas in the square: moving through the Peoples’ Kitchen, the media center, the library, the networks of tents in the sleeping area, the public assemblies. People are pulled out of the crowd and asked questions: “Why are you here? Tell me your story.” Others make on-the-spot testimonials, turning the cameras on themselves: “Why am I here?” These are the ways in which contemporary social movements are documented, transmitted, mapped out and archived. By following these different perspectives—different moments happening within the square—one can start to trace out the emergence of a new social and political movement.

The Spanish word huella has many meanings. It means footprint, mark, track and trace. Two journalists/bloggers and a programmer—Stéphane Grueso, Patricia Hornillo, and Pablo Soto—decided to use the data generated on social media by people in the square (in Madrid and other locations) to create an archive about 15M. They used data scraped from the internet, coming from many individual sources, to trace out the emergence of a social revolution and its many impressions imprinted on the public consciousness. Using “Spiders”, a web crawling software, they collected 19,546 Bambuser streams, 771 videos on Vimeo, and 12,110 videos found on YouTube. The 15m.cc archive also has images coming from Flicker, Twitpic, Yfrog, audio from Soundcloud and podcasts, text from books, posters, blog reports, manifestos, and tweets. The amount of data is almost too much to comprehend. However, the developers tried out various strategies for more legible ways of looking at it. One way is to organize the material according to date. You can see, for example, whatever audio, images, videos, streams, and other things were produced on May 15th, 2011. It is a public multimedia archive, made by the public, whose objective is to facilitate the maximum number of stories about 15M, and maximum ways of interpreting 15M. “Everyone can have your 15M.” Like the movements themselves, 15m.cc is composed of many different individuals and experiences, and it continues to grow, change, transform, pollute and mutate.
You asked me once, how I got here. Why I decided to hop on a plane and come to Madrid. Perhaps it was because of all these videos that I was watching of the protests in the square, but I think it was because of the video that I found of a young man, in his early 20s, sitting one night alone in his bedroom, on March 2011.

In the video, he sat in a black leather office chair, staring straight into the camera. I could see a single, made-up bed in the background. His hair was a bit ruffled; he looked a bit pale. He had flushed cheeks and wide, solemn eyes. He made three videos—HARTO DE ESTA BASURA DE SISTEMA—(fed up with this garbage system) part one, two and three, during the course of an evening. He watched himself, collected his thoughts, then began to speak:

“It has been awhile since I have done this. I have spent a lot of time thinking. Is it worth doing this? Is this just being ridiculous? I suppose it is totally ridiculous, but at the same time I think it is necessary. I think it is necessary that each one of us, even if it is at home, show your frustration. There are many people who will say, what’s the use? What difference does it make if there is nobody listening? Evidently, nobody can do anything. The question is how to be more than just one person, alone. It has been about three years, more or less, since we started to talk about this crisis. The financial crisis, the capitalist system… This crisis that they told us didn’t exist. Do you remember? I remember. I remember what they told us on the television. What the media told us. In those three years since the beginning of the crisis, the crisis has gotten much worse. So now let’s fix ourselves in March 2011—the present: there are 5,000,000 people out of work. They have taken away our basic rights… I am simply expressing the frustration that I am feeling. Each day that I go out onto the street, it is the same drama. There are desperate people. There are people who are grateful just to have any work, any job, despite their qualifications. It is hard work, with barely enough pay to even eat, but they keep on doing it because at least they have a job. I see people crying, wondering how they will make it to next week. They have nothing. People that live on a subsidy of 400 euros because they have not been able to find work. I see this, and I think, “How on earth are they going to feed their children?” Entire families, people that five years ago had jobs and were good workers.

(He grabs a beer bottle, takes a long swig from it, then resumes talking)

“But I need to be able to say that people are desperate. The economic situation here now is total shit. It is total shit. You have highly educated people, with good degrees, but nobody hires them. Why? Or they pay you a shit wage because you are 22, 23, and 24 years old, and you shouldn’t expect anything better. Right? I was looking for work for two years. I didn’t find anything. Nothing. Or I could if I was willing to make 500 euros a month for working 42 hours every week. You need to be a slave to be able to work. So what do we do?”
“(End of the second video, the camera runs out of battery)"

“Like I was telling you, the people can only take so much of this until they start to rebel. We can’t deal with any more exploitation… In working conditions, in public cuts, how much more garbage. They leave us with garbage. I know that 25% of us believe the same. People the same age as me. We are made to feel ridiculous, stupid. I am unemployed because there is no work. Half of my friends live with their fathers and mothers; their brothers. There are no jobs. What is happening? They have done nothing for us. We have to do something, anything, even ridiculous videos like this on YouTube. Say something on Facebook… We are all going to hell. If you think that this world is shit, if you think that this system is shit, at least show that one more person has had enough of this and that people need to know about this. Perhaps this video doesn’t do anything…”6

Two months later he was no longer in the late-evening lonely solitude of his bedroom, his parents probably fast asleep in the room next to him, but in a boisterous plaza, jammed with people. He was standing on top of the Pez de Cristal (Glass Fish), one of the most recognizable monuments in Puerta del Sol, shouting. He positioned the camera to show his face and the tens of thousands of people that filled every bit of free space in the square behind him. He looked directly at the camera—his face animated—and began to speak.

“Hi there. Two months ago I made a video complaining that we were not doing anything. That it seemed that we didn’t care one bit about the future. I don’t know if anybody saw or listened to me… I don’t know if anybody knew that this was going to happen, but I am so happy to be here. Like you can hear right now, this is total madness. This is the fourth day… No, wait, this is the fifth day that we are here. And it’s incredible, our whole country, all the people, we are here every day… Today is Thursday and it is the fifth day. And truly, I mean, fucking hell, people are fighting for this. People want to change. I am really happy to have been totally wrong in trusting everybody… And I am sorry for this. It has been incredible. There is no stopping this. Everybody came here in his or her desperation. I never thought this would happen. The PP [People’s Party] and PSOE [Socialist Party] are trying to negate something that only belongs to us. It is ours. Like-minded citizens. Fed up people. Parents, children, students, the unemployed, people that brought their children here to protest. Don’t overlook this opportunity. This is what there is, and this is ours. Fighting for our fucking rights. For once, they cannot tell us that we are apathetic. For once, people can’t tell us that we didn’t do anything. If this doesn’t amount to any-


I arrive in Puerta del Sol, three weeks after he made the video. I am in Madrid for a week to attend a seminar on urban visualization,8 taking place in Medialab Prado, just a 20-minute walk from Puerta del Sol. Most of the people working around Medialab Prado have just spent the last three weeks in the square. Some even helped set up the communication infrastructure in the square, setting up the open WiFi network, which allowed people to send live streams, Tweets, and upload videos on YouTube.

The protesters emptied the square a few days before my arrival. People in the square made a collective decision to take the protest to the local neighborhoods: using the energy generated by the occupation of Puerta del Sol to put forth change in their local environments. However, some remnants of the former camp remain. There is still the library, the kitchen—although much smaller than before—and an info point distributing up-to-date information about the upcoming demonstration happening on the 19th of June. There are also some remaining tents, and a general assembly area where meetings are still taking place. Around the info point, I scan over Twitter hashtags hastily scrawled on pieces of paper and makeshift banners listing YouTube channels: this is how activities in the info-
sphere come together with events in the square; how information transforms a city and how a city transforms information. This is the face of revolution in a post-digital world.

Marcos shows me a map of Puerta del Sol, created within the first 48 hours that people occupied the square, and made by the people themselves. It is an A4 paper printout: an amateurish illustration of a bird’s eye view of Puerta del Sol, showing a system for mapping an occupation, a temporary city-within-a-city. On this map, there are zones for every type of activity: zones for internal coordination, work groups, communication media, childcare, lost and found, a respect zone, an infirmary, a feminist commission, communal kitchens, cleaning area, zones for public assembly, and a sleeping area where people put their tents. The map is a conceptual visualization of a collective desire for new models and strategies for living. The map fascinates me. It is an amazingly simple plan, but it clearly shows how the projected desires for communal living are spatially manifested: as places for learning, discussing, listening, eating, and resting. It is an urban laboratory, a relational map for collective struggle. Did the people in power anticipate such an anomaly in the system? Did they know this was going to happen? In response to being totally cast off by the system, these were models for new homes, communities and families.

I spend the week moving between the different presentations at Medialab Prado given by researchers who discuss their projects about urban infrastructures—food flow networks in Madrid, a visual atlas of innovation in Spain, consumption processes, monitoring contamination, sustainable food production. Between these presentations, I also walk the 20 minutes to the square to see how ways of envisioning urban infrastructures manifest in the square. Many discussions taking place within Medialab Prado revolve around the occupation of Puerta del Sol: the discussion on urban infrastructures happening in the lab becomes a strong lens into what had taken place and is still happening in the square. This is for me an experience of movement (by literally walking) from theory towards a praxis—or from a praxis towards a theory—an oscillation used to create a movement towards a new narrative, through the continuous shifting and reflexivity between these two positions.

April 16th, 2013. I am still attending the weekly meetings, but now I have started to film them as well. It feels strange to film. I don’t know why I have started to do this, started to film. Perhaps it is to play a role here. There seem to be three kinds of people present in the room: the activists, those with the eviction problems, and then the journalists. There is always somebody present there with a camera. Since I am not an activist, and I am not going to be evicted, I decided to bring my camera and film as well. I scan the room and follow the conversations unfolding through my camera, zooming in on faces and hands. I use the camera as a method for tracking, tracking through the screen. I use it as a probe for understanding, for finding meaning in the crowded room. As I scan around the room, watching the faces, hands clutching at papers, listening to the stories, Ada’s stories from Vidas Hipotecadas continue to perform a voiceover and guide to what is taking place in the room:

“Contrary to what one might think, people who come to their first PAH meeting are, more often than angry, morally dejected and resigned. Disoriented and depressed, neglected by the public administration, threatened by banks, the foreclosure process acts as a shredder that destroys anything put in front of it. Families feel guilty for the situation which they find themselves in and attribute it to personal failure: feelings made even worse if the individuals have children in their care. Anguish, constant tension, and
You asked me once, how I got here. Why I decided to hop on a plane and come to Madrid. It might have been about all those articles that kept on popping up in Spanish online newspapers about evictions in Spain and a growing right-to-housing movement. There was a particular article that I had read in El País. It was about a group of families who had made a decision to squat a residential development of luxurious chalets. The developers, unable to sell the property, became bankrupt and disappeared. They even disconnected their phone number. Of the 70 chalets, 67 were vacant. The “squatters” decided to take them over. This story stuck out for me: it suggested such a radical form of rupture and shift in a narrative of people who identified themselves as the middle class, but were suddenly doing things that they identified with other more radical, marginalized members of society. This wasn’t part of their life plan. They were once well-behaved citizens, and now they were squatters. How did this happen? A statement by one of the ‘squatters’ to the reporter stayed with me:

“We don’t want to rob anybody, but the thing is that we don’t have any place to go and these chalets are empty: it is totally crazy. We are encountering people living here, that we used to know. We are so embarrassed.”

May 6, 2013, 7:00 am. I am standing in the doorway of an apartment building, at Santuario 70 in the Madrid district of Usura. Pilar, her partner, parents and two children, ages three and eight, are about to be evicted. They are both unemployed and living on social assistance. They have been subleasing the apartment from the renter of the property, whom they paid 450 euros monthly with the belief that he was the property owner. Now they were squatters. How did this happen? A statement by one of the ‘squatters’ to the reporter stayed with me:

“We don’t want to rob anybody, but the thing is that we don’t have any place to go and these chalets are empty: it is totally crazy. We are encountering people living here, that we used to know. We are so embarrassed.”

What does it mean to become something else?

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There is nothing happening at the moment. People are milling around the front of the building, chatting amongst themselves. Some of them wear green t-shirts with the PAH logo. Occasionally a police car drives past us. Apart from that, there are no other police in

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As I am waiting, wondering what will happen next, the front door to the apartment building opens and several people exit. One of them holds open the door so that others can enter. I make a spontaneous decision to enter with them, following them up the stairs in a slightly disoriented, dreamlike state, not sure what I am doing, just following, following the bodies moving up the stairs. I follow them into the apartment, and suddenly I am in a stranger’s intimate space, in a private home, in the middle of a crisis. A family is going to be evicted. I go through the front door of the apartment and straight into a living room, filled with a small group of people—the woman being evicted, other family members, and a few activists—sitting on the sofas and chairs. I am expecting somebody to confront me—ask my name and what I am doing here—but nobody seems to notice (or at least consider it strange) that I am there. I feel like a ghost. I greet Pilar, giving her a kiss on each cheek, first on the left then the right and then join the group, taking one of the seats in the living room.

Early morning is the time that most evictions take place. It is that time of day when you are not quite awake, and you are the most vulnerable. Historically, most invasions happen in the pre-dawn hours, to catch the enemy unaware, when they are the least able to fight back. The United States and Afghani special forces use a technique known as night raids in Afghanistan, in which they burst into the homes of sleeping families, wrenching them out of their sleep and safety of their beds, lining them against the walls of their homes, in the search for the hidden enemy. This destabilization process means that one is never safe, never secure, never at rest. There is no escape from potential violence, from home invasion, which can occur at any moment. If destabilization can occur at any moment, then you are already destabilized. You are never at ease. Mariló, one of the participants of the research carried out by myself and the Psychosocial Impact Group of the Truth Commission of the PAH, described it this way. Mariló, who currently works as a municipal civil servant, took on a mortgage with a variable interest rate from Bankia, to buy a small two-bedroom apartment. After the city reduced her salary for the third time and the interest on her mortgage payments kept going up, she realized that she could no longer continue making her payments and went into default. The bank eventually evicted her, but with the assistance of the PAH who fought for her case, she negotiated an affordable rental agreement (30% of her income) with the bank, which allowed her to remain in her home for another five years. She was already into her second year and had no idea what would happen when the five years were up. She had bought some time but didn’t have a permanent solution. Even though the bank evicted her, she still had to pay off the debt remaining from the loan she had taken out: the Spanish Mortgage Law stipulated this. In the process leading up to Mariló’s eviction—which did not happen immediately but dragged on for almost two years—she had everything packed in boxes and waited in restless anticipation for the moment when she would have to leave. Her life was in limbo. She told me that if she wanted to read a book, she would have to search through all the boxes to find it. While she read, ate, watched television, went to work and even slept, she was conscious that she would eventually lose her home. During this time, she was still working and had a double life: that of a respectable functionary for the city, and the secret life of an evicted woman. Eventually, she received the final eviction orders, the exact date and time when she would hand over the keys. In anticipation of the final event, she moved all of her belongings out of the apartment and into a storage unit. On the morning of the eviction, her house was empty. She had to ask the neighbour downstairs for a couple of lawn chairs so that a couple of Chinese journalists could interview her, and everybody in China could see a Spanish woman being evicted. During the group discussions with the psychosocial research team, Irene asked her if she felt that the house was no longer hers the moment that she finally emptied it. Mariló gave her first a look of surprise and then realized that this was the moment when the feeling of having a home, of ‘being at home’, had irreducibly changed for her.12

Perhaps it is at these particular times of day, during the early morning hours, that the most interesting shifts in thinking and acting occur. This not-quite-lucid state of being neither asleep nor awake allows for other cognitive links or acting on things before you are fully aware of what you are doing. If you are acting before you are fully awake, perhaps you are acting before the fear sets in, and the rational self takes over. Is this how social movements also emerge? How revolutions are born? If people sleep in the same space together, can they also wake up to a new reality, created through their collective dreaming? Is this a method for encountering the improbable? The 15M movement started on the 15th of May when 40 protesters, following a demonstration that ended in Puerta del Sol, spontaneously decided to spend the night there. When the police came in the middle of the night to violently evict them from the square, the news spread through the

Plaque installed in Puerta del Sol (we were sleeping, we woke up)

12. My translation. Transcript from the group discussion as part of the research carried out by Psychosocial Impact Group of the Truth Commission of the PAH.
social networks. Within 48 hours, there were 25,000 people in the plaza who refused to move and made the decision to live there: this gave birth to the Spanish revolution.

There is a knock on the door. A lawyer from the PAH enters. She is very young, wearing a snug leather jacket and smoking a cigarette. The family hands her a stack of papers, then provides her with a makeshift table so she can study the documents better. She doesn’t seem to mind me standing over her, looking over her shoulder, filming her as she picks over the information within the stack of papers, trying to find something of value, something that she can work with, to negotiate with the bank. She takes a draw on her cigarette and says:

“Two children, under the age of 10.”

For the next two months, I begin to structure my waking times and movements throughout the city around evictions. The PAH website contains a calendar announcing the dates, times and locations of all of their events. Additionally, Twitter feeds, Facebook postings, and WhatsApp groups provide a continuous stream of information and ways of coordinating civil disobedience. Between the announcements for general assemblies, bank group meetings, and skill-building workshops (how to detect abusive clauses in your contract, tactics against police intimidation, etc) there are listings of evictions. The PAH uses the calendar as a channel of information for encounters around paperwork and bureaucratic strategies for dealing with banks and other governmental institutions, but it also a way of organizing bodies for direct action and resistance: the times and places for assembling in front of an apartment entrance, to prevent an eviction. The calendar, therefore, functions as an ongoing itinerary of activity but also helps build up a growing archive around civil disobedience and resistance in the face of social and economic crisis. Movements and actions throughout the city create archives, but movements and actions also create maps: emotional ones, about people, about homes. The activists have created a system for mapping out living spaces in situations of trauma. The addresses on the website that I follow are to homes in the city. They take me to places I have never been to and to people I have never met before. With each journey, I follow the same process: I arrive at the front of an apartment entrance, to prevent an eviction. The calendar, therefore, functions as an ongoing itinerary of activity but also helps build up a growing archive around civil disobedience and resistance in the face of social and economic crisis. Movements and actions throughout the city create archives, but movements and actions also create maps: emotional ones, about people, about homes. The activists have created a system for mapping out living spaces in situations of trauma. The addresses on the website that I follow are to homes in the city. They take me to places I have never been to and to people I have never met before. With each journey, I follow the same process: I arrive at the front of the building, wait until the door opens, and then follow people up the stairs. It is a very strange experience to wake up very early in the morning and then suddenly find myself in another part of the city, in a home of a stranger who is about to be evicted. It is very strange to enter into such an intimate space and intimate situation. As I move through the city, I am building up maps of trauma, maps of pain. By following the information laid out by the activists, I enter into the living spaces of the hidden, the marginalized, and the negated. I encounter the faces and hear the voices of the victims of the economic and social crisis. However, this is not an invasion of privacy. It is a form of home invasion, but a welcome one. The public is allowed to enter. There are other people present, and other cameras as well: some are independent journalists, some working for (left-leaning) mainstream press, while others seem to be simply trying to document what is currently happening in their city—the unthinkable events.

The people and cameras present in the homes act as witnesses but also a protective barrier to other, unwanted, invasions: the (bank) officials who come to carry out the final administrative step in the eviction procedure; the police who intend to do so but with brute force instead of paperwork. The bank has already invaded the home, and other external forces as well—government institutions, mainstream media—who, taken together, push through the message that home ownership is the only option; forcing people to take on huge debt, or squeezing away what little resources are available to people who are in desperate need. Occasionally, I pull some people out, ask them to tell me their stories, tell me what is happening. But mostly I film other things in the room: objects in the kitchen, the bedroom, toys, pictures on the wall, furniture, hands wringing. Andres, a photographer originally from Argentina and working for the Associated Press, eventually confronts me and asks:

“During the eviction, you are never filming the main action, but look at other things. What exactly are you looking at?”

I find that I am often getting in the way of the journalists, who all take the same position. They form a wall of cameras which face a woman crying on the sofa; capturing the face of a woman at her most vulnerable moment. This is the image the press must capture, to convey the trauma of the event to members of the public: the human face of crisis. But I haven’t come here just to see a crying woman. They admonish me, because I take another position, by breaking the fourth wall between the journalists and the scene of the crying woman. I interrupt the frame so I can observe and interpret from another position and, perhaps, ask other questions: what constitutes a space for the living? What do these four walls contain? What are people trying to preserve? What do they stand to lose here?

You asked me once, how I got here. Why I decided to hop on a plane and come to Madrid. There was this moment, sitting together with Ville, on his bed, in his tiny apartment
in Helsinki. I was visiting the city at the invitation of m-cult to develop a project for the inaugural Media Facades Festival event of Connected Cities. For my project, I interviewed different people, seven in total, who had made videos about living in Helsinki and posted them on YouTube. The videos had something to do with the city but represented different aspects of it. One person, originally from Hungary, made videos about his (growing) family and life in Helsinki. Another made short videos about ‘urban glitches’: signs with letters missing that generated different meanings, strange hums, flickering lights, and other things that he encountered while walking around the city. Another made videos that documented change in the city: buildings going up, buildings coming down, etc. The idea was to go to the homes of different people and conduct interviews from their private spaces. I would ask each of them to play a few of their videos and, as we watched them, ask them questions: what were these videos about, why were they made, and for whom? Through my searches, I also came across somebody who had been making video reports about different protests and political actions happening around Helsinki. The production team at m-cult made several attempts to try to contact him and, at the point that we were giving up, he finally emailed us back. Of the seven, he was the most resistant about meeting and particularly about me coming into his home. I assumed that he wanted to protect his identity because he was a militant activist who didn’t want his face revealed to the public. Imagine my surprise when he finally said yes, we could visit him. When we met him, Ville, at the apartment building entrance, I was greeted not by a typical activist type (which if I could offer a stereotype, would have dreadlocks and piercings), by a rather conservative, unassuming looking guy with short, crew cut hair. We climbed the four flights of stairs, entering into his tiny, immaculate apartment; a carefully made single bed with a printed seersucker bedspread was positioned at the wall farthest from the door and, in front the bed, there were three large flat LCD computer screens, arranged in a horizontal row, on a table. On the shelves were several books organized according to subject matter. I was particularly interested in his collection of books about security systems. There were also books on filmmaking techniques and weapons manuals. The apartment had the feeling of somebody who liked to be in control and who carried out his existence following strict protocols and rules. It turned out that he worked for a well-known security company, whose name he didn’t want to reveal. He also wanted to keep his private space just that: private, without any details of his life going out in public. As we sat on his bed, side-by-side, looking at the computer screens, he started playing a video of a man who was the complete opposite of the man sitting on the bed next to me. The video was of somebody, looking very confident and relaxed, sitting in a car and casually speaking into a microphone. He had an unruly mohawk, and his beard was divided into three ponytails that protruded from his chin. As we sat together on his bed, watching the video, the conversation went a bit like this:

15. For the final presentation of the work, I made seven video portraits of the people I interviewed. I included them in an installation at the Lasipalatsi gallery, with photographs and video projection that played back the YouTube videos from the seven people I interviewed.
“Well, I just browsed the Internet and found this guy. There was a schedule that he was going to be in front of the parliament at a demonstration. I walked up to him and asked if I could interview him.”

“And he was very receptive?”

“Yes, absolutely. Yes, there was a guy in the van in front of the parliament house, doing a hunger strike for the ground water. So I thought that was pretty extreme. So I just went there and put the camera on his face. And the rest is history.”

I watch the video. “But it could have been anybody else, why him in particular?”

“Well, this guy—Marko Sihvonen—he was so outspoken, and he is very passionate about his cause. And his cause is ground water. So Finland has one of the cleanest ground waters in the whole world, and the government is trying to sell it, outside of the country. And this guy is trying to get attention for this cause.”

“Is he somebody wellknown?”

“He is not known… Okay, here he is talking about some future demonstrations and future endeavors, and things that he might do in the future.”

“So, how do you start? What is the first thing that you do when you meet somebody?”

“Well, I don’t ask questions. I just put the mike into the face and ask him to say something. Because I am very poor at interviews. So Marco is great, and he can talk for hours.”

Ville puts on another video.

“I believe this video is on a different day. And everybody else is pretty silent, but Marco has this megaphone and he is yelling at the MPs.”

“This is also of the same day, isn’t it?”

“No, this is the very first video. This is early in the winter. In the following videos, there is less snow, it has already melted.”

“So you followed him over several months then.”

“Yes, over a span of three months.”

“Are you sometimes surprised with what comes out?”

“Yes, but these are passionate people, they want to tell their story.”

“What made you decide to follow people into the city, point the camera at them and ask them to tell their story? How did it start?”

“Maybe I am just interested to see how there are a lot of different kinds of people. And we Finns tend to be pretty closed up people, so these are a very rare type of people that go and make these kinds of public demonstrations. The whole experience is extremely nice, and there are so many different kinds of people, but they are all connected with their passion, and their drive for their cause.”

“Who do you think these videos are for?”

“I think they are for a general public, and people who are interested in local themes and local stories. And local people. It has nothing to do with politics, but it has something to do with the city.”

“Tell me your story.”

In summer 2012, I found a short video of a small, yellow farmhouse in a village just outside of Copenhagen. At the invitation of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde, I was commissioned to develop a work for Net.Specific, an online exhibition of networked art.16 I decided to do a search on homes around Roskilde. Following my experience in Helsinki—in which videos found on YouTube had led me to people’s homes—in Roskilde, I decided to start with images of the home and see where it would lead me. There were several videos of homes that I found in the area; however there was one in particular that stuck out. It was of a yellow farmhouse in deep winter, in a village outside of Copenhagen. The video began with a black screen with “snow around the little yellow house” written in Danish in a simple sans serif script. As the black faded away, I could see a cut-off view of a large tree trunk and a snow-covered roadway leading off into the dis-

16. With the exhibition platform Net.Specific, the Museum of Contemporary Art seeks to expand its exhibition space to include the Internet. This is achieved both by involving net art as an art form and by using the Internet itself as an exhibition space. The museum hopes to take full advantage of the possibilities that contemporary art can yield by making a museum-based online exhibition space available for this Internet-specific art. http://netspecific.net/en/netspecific/about-netspecific
The brilliant yellow color of the house provided a stark contrast to the drab, muted colors of winter. The video was shot from different angles and perspectives, showing all the details of the farmhouse, then finally ended at the front entrance. The hand holding the camera was a bit unsteady, giving the entire scene an erratic, hallucinating quality. At the end of the video were the words: “Created by Ole Jørn Jensen. Created with ArcSoft MediaImpression www.arcsoft.com”. This particular house interested me: its brilliant yellow walls, how it looked from different vantage points, its stillness. What might it look like if I was walking along the road towards it? Out of all of these other homes, this was the only video in which no people were present. Who was the man who lived in this house?

After some Internet browsing, I found his blog, some photographs, several local news stories about him, and other digital traces on social media platforms such as MySpace, FaceBook, and Google+. Using this information, I started to piece together a somewhat fragmented narrative about his life, based on the information that he posted online. At first glance, he seemed like a completely normal, if not somewhat boring, man: a retired dentist, married and with three grown children, all living in Denmark. He was a religious man who liked to take long solitary walks in the countryside. He was a frugal man who didn’t like to spend his money on useless items and was always happy to find a bargain; a humble man who didn’t like to brag too much about himself. He was a private man who couldn’t quite decide whether he should voice his thoughts out in public, or simply “keep his writings in the drawer”. The yellow farmhouse in the video was his home.

He had many photographs of his house, which he had posted on his blog. The views that he presented to the public were the embodiment of conventional, cozy domesticity. The living room was a luminous, calm space with the sun streaming in through the window and a cat lying in a straw basket. It was furnished and orderly, but lived in: a small tarnished Buddha seated on a shelf attached to the wall; a desk cluttered with papers and books; a small square bookshelf with a cluster of different objects on top of it (three coffee cups, one filled with pens, a board game and a deck of playing cards); a small vase with white flowers placed inside; a red, orange and white striped oval throw mat thrown over a polished light beige linoleum floor. He would sometimes have lunches with his wife Jytte in the living room in which they sat together around a small square coffee table, nibbling away at slices of cheese, salami, cake, and bread, carefully arranged on several white plates. In the same living room, he took a picture of Jytte, barefoot and smiling, swinging around a hula-hoop. He would often sit in the kitchen and make comments about what he could see through the window: a bird feeder that was currently colonized by a rather aggressive squirrel, the magnolia tree that he planted during his youngest daughter Marie’s confirmation, a round table in the garden where he would often take his lunch, the 400-kilo headstone for his parents, a bench that sat two, a small stone bird bath, a ceramic stove, and the herb garden in the back of the property. His writings seemed to be about observation, of mapping out his living space, tracing out the slow, subtle changes happening around him.

Yet there was another side to this man. In 2009, he spent five days at the bedside of a dying neighbour: a man in his mid 90s who had become socially isolated over the years, and spent most of his time alone. He stayed by the bedside of this man and even adopted his cat after he was gone. After this experience, he started working as a death vigil volunteer for the Red Cross. At any given moment, he could receive a phone call. After that he would pack some basic items—a bit of food, his Bible, and perhaps a change of clothing—and travel to the house of a stranger, to the bedside of a person who was dying.

He started his blog shortly after this experience, not by talking about his volunteer work with the Red Cross, but instead speaking about the death of his brother-in-law, who was the person he was the closest to and had known the longest. One could say that the death of somebody close to him was the impetus for starting to speak about death in public, bringing death into the public eye. He spoke about one experience of going through the belongings of his recently deceased brother-in-law, looking for anything of value (letters, photos, documents), something that he should keep. He moved around alone in his brother-in-law’s apartment, going through all the corners and nooks, rifling through

17. http://olebolebum.dk/blog/
papers, folders, pictures, strange boxes in the wardrobe, the pockets of nice jackets, purses and bags—every place where something important might be. Although this is what he was supposed to do—to sort through the remains of the recently deceased—it still felt like he was stepping into somebody’s private space, where he was not welcome.

I was intrigued by his volunteer work: his willingness to enter into strangers’ homes at their most intimate moments. What could be more intimate than dying? It seemed like such a vulnerable time to enter into somebody’s home. At the same time, I started to realize that every detail in his writing—even the ones in which he exalted the daily experiences of the living—were his ways of meditating on the passing of time. By making observations on the living, he was meditating on death and dying. I tried to get in contact with him, with the idea of making a visit to his home. He refused my invitation, yet immediately posted about our exchange in his blog, after doing some extensive searching of his own—browsing the Internet to find out more information on me. I had stalked him. He had stalked me in return.

“Yet he was the one who confused me the most. Why should I care about him? I was looking at him and thinking about him. Writing and rewriting. Toiling away and toiling away... The uncertainty of it all. I thought I should stop, but yet I needed to reach a conclusion.”

“And is your confusion because he is the one that you get closest to?” he asks.

“Perhaps.”

“Giving that one person all that attention is kind of, close to sick...” he says, laughing.

“It is! But it is very... Uncomfortable.”

“Yes, the uncomfortable thing about the stalker is being shown as one. But this is perhaps also good that you show this. I managed to get halfway through the text, and I was kind of shocked with the part when you out yourself as a stalker. But after a while I liked it. Because it situates you, what your role was.”

“I thought it was quite necessary. During this process, I started to do a little more research on digital stalking. I was looking through different stories and news reports, and I found an article that started by saying, “My name is so and so, and I am a stalker. No, I haven’t boiled any bunny rabbits lately. My particular brand of stalking has nothing to do with my romantic life, although it is all about desire. You see, I don’t stalk ex-boyfriends or old high school friends—at least not that often, and never without a few glasses of wine in me first. I do, however, regularly stalk strangers.””

“So the text is taken from that.”

18. http://oleboleum.dk/blog/?s=Performance
“Yes, then she continues, “And by strangers, I specifically mean people I consider to be mentors… Their successes are an inspiration for my future successes. Their failures are lessons I learn for myself. And, their blogs, tweets and posts about these topics are the conversations that keep me learning and growing from their example…”

I liked this idea of mentors because I realized at that point that the reason I was following people was that I was searching for mentors. People to teach me things.”

“But I also think that the very strong thing is that he rejected meeting you. Because that makes the whole thing so… There is something wrong, somehow. Because he didn’t want to meet you, and that is maybe the good thing about it, which is on the edge of what we are supposed to do.”

“Exactly.”

The notion of following is formalized in social media, giving everyone the potential of becoming online stalkers. I follow you, but you can follow me as well. I consider myself a stalker but with good intentions. It is curiosity that drives me.

After his posting of my email to him on his blog, I emailed him again. Perhaps he had changed his mind. He hadn’t, but he gave me permission to look further, to rifle through his things, looking for something of value. The process dragged on for months. It didn’t make any sense to put so much energy into one person. I made a list of every time in his blog that he made a mention of somebody dying. I made a Google Map of all the places in his local surroundings that he frequented. I took a ‘journey’ through his village using Google StreetView. I made satellite maps of bird’s eye views of his house. I pieced together a floor plan of the house based on any information that I found online that described the house. I made a flow chart of every single blog entry he made since he started the blog on the 5th of March 2012. I tried to understand which were the pivotal events during that period that inspired him to write. There were (many) points when I would get frustrated at the banality of his writing, the slowness of his thoughts. I felt stuck in a vortex of the mundane. However, there were moments where certain treasures within the detritus of his digital information made me curious. His many attempts to bring death to the public eye kept me hooked. But it was also his writings about walking and distance—the views of the distant horizon from the hills around where he lived: how they related to longing and unfulfilled desire. His views on death and views into distant horizons were views into the unknown, the unknowable: his desires and searches for, perhaps unachievable, answers.

Neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp refers to desire as “the SEEKING system”, something that is amiless yet still drives one forward towards unforeseeable outcomes. Panksepp writes: “Although the details of human hopes are surely beyond the imagination of other creatures, the evidence now clearly indicates that certain intrinsic aspirations of all mammalian minds, those of mice as well as men, are driven by the same ancient neurochemistry. These chemistries lead our companion creatures to set out energetically to investigate and explore their worlds, to seek available resources, and to make sense of the contingencies in their environments. These same systems give us the impulse to become actively engaged with the world and to extract meaning from our various circumstances.”

October 28, 2012. I set off on a walk toward this little yellow farmhouse and towards somebody who I would never meet and who never wanted to meet me. I was in Copenhagen for a couple of days, for the opening of the exhibition in Roskilde.

In the morning, I jumped on a train, following the line towards Ishøy, the town clos-

19. Extracts of a recorded conversation between me and Frans Jacobi. 07.11.2013.

22. For the final presentation of the research for the Net-Specific exhibition, I offered up stories about the little yellow house to 50 people. If they filled out an online form, giving away personal details about themselves, they would in turn receive a package of documents, maps and stories about the house and the man who lived there. In exchange for this gift, they were asked for information about where they lived, their body type, relationship status, religious beliefs—information most people are used to giving away—mixed in with other questions: were they afraid of death? What did they have for breakfast? What was the view outside of their kitchen window? Several people signed up for the opportunity, including Ole himself. I asked several recipients to send documentation of the sent packages within their homes. Five people replied.
est to Ole’s village, and arrived in front of a shopping mall. In the shopping mall, I found a map, showing the location of Ole’s village. I crudely sketched out the first two street names of the village in my notepad, and then traced out a line about how to get there. What would be the qualities of the journey if I followed this line?

As I walked by the farmhouses and villages that were not his, I wondered how many people inside were people that he might eventually visit. How many people in these homes were dying and in the need of company? I was following his footsteps, but not in an exact sense that I was mirroring the places where he had been. I was mirroring his method of movement—the slowness of movement as an almost radical act of resistance against the rapid flow of information and time. His awareness of his obligation to the people and spaces situated around his home, augmented my perception and experience of the surrounding landscape.

He interrupts.

“…At the same time, it also puts a light on the Madrid film. When he sits by the bedsides of dying people, he is a humanitarian in a sense. And then you going to these evictions, this has that element too. Because in a sense, how he… Those people he is sitting beside when they are dying; his relationship to these people, him sitting next to dying strangers is just as strange as your relationship with him.”

“I think it would be such an intimate thing. To be witness to somebody who is in the process of dying.”

“I read that newspaper article in Danish that was written about him, and it is a strange thing, that he does that.”

“You receive a telephone call, you grab your bag, you go to a stranger’s house, and suddenly you are having such an intimate experience with a person you have never met before, sitting by their bed.”

“And even if it doesn’t involve the Internet, it is still like a network, these people that phone him. They have a list of people on their computer. This is a kind of networked reality. Have you considered this?”

“Yes, but what I am also connecting with is this strange relation between death, intimacy and the home. This is what is what happens when I enter into private homes at the moment when people are being evicted; I am witnessing a death… A social death. Ole creates his emotional maps around death; I do as well. Death is so intimate. To have this type of experience with a stranger… There is something odd about that. This dismantling of the self, of the home and everything that happens afterwards. It is a very odd feeling about going into… Suddenly finding yourself in such a fragile situation with somebody you don’t even know. You are entering into their lives; you are inside their living rooms, their bedrooms. You are in somebody’s home. The public comes in. The public is even welcome. To be sleeping on the bed, or a sofa, of somebody you’ve barely met, waiting for the police to arrive the next morning. I view these as parallel things. I can see the connection. People are losing their homes and everything connected to the notion of home: family, intimacy, stability… Identity. There is a dismantling of the self; the loss of a social identity. I am witness to this dismantling. Who is this person? How did I get here? I become a death vigil volunteer, just like what Ole is doing.”

“However, in this Spanish project, when you are in Madrid, you have left the idea of geotagging and this Internet-based mapping of a city or space.”

“Yet at the same time it is part of the development of my research project and artistic method of following. One could say that this aspect of geotagging becomes irrelevant, but what I do within this research is start to bring in other mapping systems in addition to the geotagging mapping system that I initially proposed to use within this research project. Geotagging is how I found the video of the young man speaking from his bedroom. At the same time, other methods of localization take its place. What unites these mapping systems is that I use them for trying to pin down a location. What is this place? What does it mean to be here? It is a methodology of following that I refine over time, following these traces. It is a methodology of gleaning, and I look at how other people do it as well.

“To glean facts, act and deeds, to glean information”, to quote Varda. It means that you end up in places you never thought you would be and with people that you never anticipated you would meet. But I also think about Ville’s encounters with passionate people within the closed-up Finnish society and Ole ending up at the bedsides of strangers. This is a disorienting process. We need to lose ourselves for a moment, to enable ourselves to look or experience things from another point of view. In a sense, we are all looking for guides, looking for mentors to keep us learning and growing from their example.”

“In any case there is this notion of ‘the turning point’: that is the point in the project that you turn away completely and go in another direction. This is not only allowed but expected. I would say that your project changed when you came to Madrid. This would be the turning point… Maybe you should write a text where you track this. There is also something with your engagement… That you have become more engaged in the people, much more than the first ones. I don’t know, to me it seems like in Berlin, with Folgen, you are still at a certain distance, and these people are freakier.”

“Yes, but still you are looking at them from the outside. And with him (Ole) you are looking at him and from the inside of the house… But what is strange is that you cannot get in there. He won’t allow you.”

“You have provided me with enough information that I am already inside the house. Why would I bother going even further? I have already crossed the threshold.”

“Yet he provided me with enough information that I am already inside the house. Why would I bother going even further? I have already crossed the threshold.”

“Yes, you are in, but… It is a tricky thing. But with these women in Madrid, you are very close to them, and they also want you to be there. It is much more direct somehow. Do you think that in Madrid that there is this sense that your presence is needed? That you have a function there?”

June 2, 2013. I am standing on the threshold of an entrance into a small meeting room. I have followed an announcement on the PAH Madrid website for a workshop on “mutual support and empowerment” to this address in Lavapies. There are about 10 people present. As I stand at the threshold, 30 minutes late for the meeting, all heads turn to look at me. After an uncomfortable pause I say:

“I am here for the workshop.”

The workshop is led by Irene Montero, a young woman just finishing her Master’s in Psychology. She is the same woman that I have seen at many of the PAH assemblies.

Irene set up the workshop over a year ago. While other assemblies, workshops and workgroups deal mainly with the bureaucratic logistics of how to negotiate with financial institutions, Irene’s workshop provides a space for people to come and talk about the psychological effects of eviction on their personal lives. Over time, the workshop has become a space for people to come and voice their feelings and emotional experiences. People who come to her workshops feel alienated, depressed, there are conflicts within the family, some even have suicidal thoughts. Her workshop is an intimate space, similar to the experience of entering into a private home and witnessing something that perhaps you shouldn’t be seeing. At the same time, you are welcome. I am welcome.

After the meeting, I approach Irene.

“I have been here in Madrid since the beginning of April, filming everything. I am interested in somehow documenting all these different things that the PAH is doing.”

“Yes, I noticed.”

“I know that this is a space where people are talking about very sensitive issues, but if it is possible, I would like to come back in two weeks and film the session.”

“It would depend on the group. You have to ask them. I would propose that you come back with your equipment and see what happens.”

June 16, 2013. I am back again two weeks later, this time with my camera. The discussion begins with a general question: how are you today? What happened this week? My water got cut off this week. We have started to skip meals so that at least the children have enough to eat. I have been having difficulties sleeping; I started to take the pills again. I left my husband because he beat me. My husband blames me for what happened. I refuse to feel this guilt. I wear makeup every day, trying to look my best. My husband wonders if I am having an affair, but I refuse to step out the door looking like somebody who is about to be evicted. I don’t want to feel like a victim. I have always worked hard, always done everything right. How on earth did I get here? Irene listens to each of the comments and then asks: It seems that this discussion is about violence, shall we try and focus on this more? What Irene is trying to do here is locate the effects of structural violence by mapping out the psychological and emotional state of the people present in the room. This is also a method of trying to locate something, by locating the pattern of structural abuse. How does structural violence manifest itself within the domestic space? Like the evicted homes I visit, this is also a space of trauma. The people in the room, through their personal testimonies, are together creating emotional maps of spaces in crisis.

24. Extracts of a recorded conversation between me and Frans Jacob. 07.11.2013.
July 8th, 2013. Irene introduces the first session of a pilot project by the Psychosocial Research Team of the Truth Commission of the PAH.

“I am going to tell you how we were thinking about working. What we are going to do is a discussion group. During the next hour, we are going to talk about our experiences of being affected by the mortgage crisis. We intend to document, first amongst ourselves, and then later with other people affected, what has been the psychological impact of everything that has to do with eviction. This forms part of the work of the Truth Commission, and also the PAH. This workshop is a test. The idea is also that after...if you want to become part of the team so that you are not just participants...To also help other people talk about their experiences, within future group discussions.”

Irene is sitting to the left of four women who will be the participants in this project. I will be recording all four sessions. I have two DSLR cameras mounted on tripods and two Sennheiser directional microphones attached to the mount on top of each camera that connect to an external audio recorder. There are two other people present who observe and take notes: sitting to the right of me and outside of the frame of the camera.

At Irene’s request, I have started to make short films of her workshops, which she has been showing internally to PAH Madrid, and also for a state meeting of all PAH nodes, which recently took place in Andalusia. After that, she invited me to join the research project. Within this research study, she proposes to carry out an analysis of the psychosocial impact of eviction. This requires a qualitative methodology, based on content analysis of the stories of people affected by eviction within a group discussion. Within this discussion, the participants will be asked to describe their experiences of how they are living with eviction, and the psychological consequences produced within their personal situations.

This process of collecting evidence through personal testimony—to make visible the societal effects of living within a neo-liberal regime—is something that I keep seeing around the PAH and other social movements focusing on housing. The Tribunal Ciudadano de Justicia 15M (15M Citizen’s Court), focuses on the fraudulent crimes committed by banks, appraisers, promoters, and politicians. The Tribunal Ciudadano de Justicia 15M collects evidence of fraudulent practice contained within mortgage contracts—over-appraisals of property, abusive clauses, use of guarantors—research that the government should be doing. At set times, and at cultural centres around Madrid where the PAH operates, individuals can bring their mortgage contracts to the court, where volunteers read through them, looking for signs of fraudulent activity that they collect as evidence.

In early 2015, PAH Madrid with Vivero de Iniciativas Ciudadanas, created Madrid Desahuciado (Evicted Madrid), a map of evictions throughout the city, using data provided by Stop Desahucios (Stop Evictions) and PAH Madrid. They compiled this data from the anti-eviction actions, 781 in total, carried out by the activists between 2012-2014. This data only represents 2-3% of the total evictions being carried out in Madrid, and only cases taken on by PAH Madrid. If this map showed all the evictions happening in Madrid, it would probably show a completely evicted city.

The four women participating in the pilot project are regular attendees of Irene’s workshops and are politically active in the PAH. After coming to the PAH with their housing problems, they became activists themselves and now dedicate much of their time and energy to helping others. The pilot project is being used to test out certain methodologies, to build up a set of methodologies for future research. Research methods will focus on four group discussions—one each week for one hour—in which the person leading the discussion (Irene) will introduce a different topic for each session. The initial proposal for the discussion themes (according to the working document put together by the team) will be broken down into the following areas: who were you before; how are you living with eviction; how did you arrive at the PAH; how do you see yourself in the future?

When Irene invited me into this project, I immediately agreed. The group is made up of a...
multidisciplinary team of professionals and researchers from various fields such as social work, psychology, art, and political science. I will document these sessions, and we will share this material: the recorded material will be used by the team for analysis and I will use the material to produce different artistic results. Besides having the recordings as material to work with, I am very intrigued to be part of the development of this particular research: does the way that the team carries out their research correspond to the way I do mine? Are there any parallels? Am I entering into a situation in which my artistic research integrates into an interdisciplinary research that might (or might not) have comparable methods? Would this be considered a turning point when I am no longer a “stalker” and have now solidified my role as an active witness?

“Yet it took me awhile for me to get to this point.”

“Why do you think that is? Why did you just sit there and watch without doing anything at first? Why did you not participate more in the beginning… Be more of an activist?”

“But what is activism for you?”

“I don’t know. Not just observing, but participating more. Making comments, suggestions, participating in actions.”

“Yet it took me awhile for me to get to this point.”

“Why do you think that is? Why did you just sit there and watch without doing anything at first? Why did you not participate more in the beginning… Be more of an activist?”

“But what is activism for you?”

“I don’t know. Not just observing, but participating more. Making comments, suggestions, participating in actions.”

In his book Pedagogy of Hope, Paulo Freire gives an example of a workshop on health that he gave to a group of peasants in Guinea. One of the participants, an old man, was always silent. He didn’t participate in any of the exchanges put forward by the coordinators of the workshop, but stayed in a corner, completely quiet during the entire three weeks. However one day, at the end of the workshop, the participants were asked if each could come up with a “generating word.” When it came to him, he suddenly stood up and said, “Health is freedom because one associates health with the freedom of man.” He then proceeded to do a very extended analysis of what had taken place during those weeks. Everybody in the workshop said, “But you never spoke, we thought that you were mute, you never made a single sound or participated in anything.” He answered, “No, I was silent, but it was an active silence.” Within this example of “active silence”, Freire gives his position on participation and its real significance: there are moments in which one must internalize oneself in “active silence”. This is a form of participation in which you are also listening to what people are saying, and not just waiting for a break in the conversation as an opportunity to put forward your point of view. I think Freire’s “active silence” ties to what Carlo Ginzburg refers to as the process of “slow reading” in which he looks for ways to slow down a reading of something because he often jumps to conclusions and is too quick in making judgments about people. As a person who gleans meaning by what other people say—in a text, that is—he is often too quick in allegedly finding a relevant point in a text. So he is very skeptical about this quickness, and tries to counteract it.

“I have this tendency first to listen to something before I decide to step in. I find it sometimes a bit arrogant to act before listening first. I need to look first, to understand what I am looking at, to understand how to act. Then by acting, I learn even more. At least, it works that way for me.”

“Yes, but at the same time, you haven’t told me why you are interested in this? Why are you here?”

“I find it fascinating how the activists develop different strategies and guides to creatively confront social and economic crisis. It occurs in the way they conduct meetings, how they direct and implement direct actions or even the continuous activity of creating and distributing their many propositions and how-to manuals that circulate around the

Internet. How do these instructions and recipes for living circulate (in the infosphere, mouth-to-mouth) and manifest, in a physical sense, into direct action? I am interested in how this social movement utilizes different mapping systems for bringing the everyday effects of the crisis to the public eye, which incorporate very sophisticated post-digital practices. For example, how they use methods of tracking in an informatic sense, using other people’s data to understand a location. Understanding that each action leaves a trace, they utilize the traces left by digital activity to their advantage. They do this by using information scraped from the internet to build up archives that don’t exist in an official sense: making stories, but their stories, their maps. The interpretation of these traces and the way they engage with online information is a battle over agency. Creating visibilities to what would otherwise be invisible to the public eye is a form of collective empowerment. This battle for agency, in bringing private experiences to the public consciousness, also occurs through oral storytelling. I can start to see microhistorical methods put into action, in which the views of larger issues of what is actually at stake here are being told through the voices of individuals. The stories of many individuals build up a knowledge framework, developing different strategies and proposals for building up new narratives and patterns for living. I think it is important to learn about and share these models. And this is why I ended up staying and why we are having this conversation right now.”

“Yes, but would you consider what you are doing as research?”

“If we can speak of a continuous, self-reflexive movement of questioning the situation then yes, this is part of artistic experimentation.”

My methodology of following, following information, following people, is also my way of understanding and relating to the methods of following used within the social movement. This methodology has led me towards different disciplines and communities—from the field of media art towards microhistory and now into activism—which allows me to develop work and discuss working methods within different publics and contexts. Flusser writes: Before the German word Schau became synonymous with the English show, it described that inside looking out whose instrument was the window. One could peer outside without becoming wet. The Greeks called that theoria: knowledge without danger or direct experience. Today we can poke instruments out the window and gain experience without being endangered. The epistemological question is this: are experiments inappropriate to the extent to which they are carried out through a window (from theory)? Or is it necessary to walk out through the door to gain hands-on (phenomenological) experience?

Windows are no longer reliable instruments. Even though the researchers within the psychosocial impact team are approaching the pilot project as scientific research, it still has this feeling of the assemblies; in which individual stories and experiences contribute to a conversation from which develop different theories and models for actions. Theoretical discourse emerges through praxis. This is how I feel that I can enter into this situation and also contribute and participate in some way. I have walked out through the door.

CONVERSATION ENDS

31. A semi-fictionalized encounter between an activist from PAH Vallekas and me, 29.05.2015
MORTGAGED LIVES
the story of your home, for example, and how it’s different to the others.

20 Calle Nicolás Usera is facing another eviction because of Bankia,
they wanted to steal small amounts throughout the whole loan.

We're stopping an eviction.
It’s not mine, it belongs to BBVA bank. They took it from me.

But this trauma, or crisis, is relatively new,
RUPTURE SESSIONS (Pilot project)

Original recordings in Spanish
English translation

July, 2013
Madrid

Grupo de Impacto Psicosocial
de la Comisión de la Verdad,
PAH Madrid (Psychosocial
Impact Group of the Truth
Commission, PAH Madrid)
FADE IN

INT. OFFICE SPACE DAY

An office space somewhere in Madrid. IRENE, a psychologist sits with MARILO, MANUELA, GLADYS and CHARO. It is a hot late afternoon in summer. IRENE sits to the far left, the other four women sit in a semi-circle around her. All five women are wearing "Stop Evictions" t-shirts.

IRENE begins the session.

IRENE: I am going to tell you how we were thinking about working. What we are going to do is a discussion group. During the next hour, we are going to talk about our experiences of being affected by the mortgage crisis. We intend to document, first amongst ourselves, and then later with other people affected, what has been the psychological impact of everything that has to do with eviction. This forms part of the work of the Truth Commission and also the PAH.

This workshop is a test. The idea is also that after...if you want to become part of the team so that you are not just participants...to also help other people talk about their experiences, within future group discussions.

The first thing, because Marilo is suffocating from today’s heat, we want to do a couple of minutes where we relax a bit. Loosen your feet a bit. Your arms. Make sure you are comfortable in your seats, so that we can be a bit relaxed. Close our eyes and concentrate on a peaceful place, like a beach, where we are alone.

MARILO: We can't stay there or I will fall asleep.

Everybody closes their eyes except for Irene.

IRENE: We are not going to stay there long, you will not fall asleep. Just until we are a bit relaxed. Try to feel the stress leave your arms. Move your shoulders a bit. Feel this tension and feel how it leaves the body. Think about a place that relaxes you. Like a beach with the breeze blowing. Pay attention to your breath. The stress is going away from your arms, your hands. Okay, we’ll slowly open up our eyes. A little calmer now.

Marilo, Gladys, Manuela and Charo open their eyes again.

IRENE (cont’d): Okay, the theme that we wanted to propose to you today is that we talk about how we were before.

Marilo, Gladys, Manuela and Charo look at Irene.

IRENE (cont’d): How was your life before you knew you were going to be evicted? Before you stopped paying for your mortgage? How did you feel? What ideas did you have for
the future? To open up the discussion, in order to talk about this, the first question would be to say two or three adjectives, characteristics, of what others saw in you. For example, me, Irene, I would say that two years ago my best friends saw me as a girl, student and good friend.

Irene looks at Marilo.

MARILIO: Okay, I guess I will start. Truthfully I will tell you one thing. I was special, really I was. I put a lot into everything. (Slightly smiling) I did my university studies on a scholarship. I bought and renovated a house by myself, including the stones that I placed in the kitchen. I fought a lot for everything. I was excited, happy. I had a lot of projects. I was more accepted within the nuclear family and society because I had followed a standard that society had laid out for me. I prepared for a career. I got a stable job. I felt like a girl who was perfectly following the social ideals. Did my studies, got a house, stable work. And suddenly everything just vanished. I am not the same.

Marilo brushes hair off her face.

MARILIO (cont’d): I am not the same person, because now I have to go to the bank with a red face, even though I am a young professional. Suddenly the bank hates me and does nothing but call and pressure me like I am a... My family turned their backs on me. To the point where I started to isolate myself socially. This is one of the steps into the shit...sorry for the camera that’s recording this...that I myself started to feel this sense of shame that the situation generates in you. To the point where I isolate myself. But this way of isolating myself, during the time which I lived through this problem, also affected me at work. I work like before and my bosses are happy, but I am much more anti-social now, with my colleagues, than I was before.

IRENE: We’re going to try to stay in the "before", okay? Try not to compare it with the "now" so it doesn’t get mixed up. Try and stay in the past.

MARILIO: Yes, happy, with excitement and interest in involving myself with everything. I didn’t even want to watch television. Study, build up the home, all of this... But I don’t recognize myself that much. I’ve lost a bit of happiness within my heart and soul. I have to try and bring it out again.

Irene looks at Gladys.

GLADYS: In my case, when I came to Spain in 1997, I came here with a lot of excitement. I have always been a fighter. This was the idea that I always had of myself. This was the criteria that I always had for myself as a
person. I always fought. Always. Always. Although I might fall down 10 times, each of the 10 times, I would get back up again, stronger. But before I had something more, an excitement. I had work, an income. I saw that I could restart my life here in Spain, economically speaking. In Peru, the economy was very low. Here I was improving my quality of life. Like any human being wants to do.

But everything went down with this mortgage loan. This totally changed my life. Before I was happy. I have always been, like Marilo said, very considerate. I am not a professional, but I did courses, small courses. I didn’t go to university, but I did courses. I have always been quite sociable. I was always the kind of person who liked to get involved in things. I adapted to whatever circle of people I found myself in. I felt good because I was accepted by other people. I got...I don’t know, support, happiness. Positive responses from people. And this I passed onto my family. I was emotionally and economically well. It was a very good time for me.

Irene looks at Charo.

CHARO: When I came here, in 1999, I came with the excitement of working. To work, to have something. Before in my country, no, but here in Spain, it seemed possible to buy a house. So I said to myself, "I am going to have my own house that I couldn’t have in my country." I came here, I worked, and for what? I was another person. It is not like you see me now. I was happier. Always out with friends. I had money and with the illusion of having something of my own here, and work to move the family forward. But everything ended after we took out the mortgage loan. It all went downhill. Because I wasn’t like this before. I always thought about working and giving money to my daughter for her studies. But this ended. We immigrants always have the idea of moving forward, to do something here. But look at what happened. We went down.

Irene looks at Manuela.

MANUELA: Okay, I will tell you as well. I have been a fortunate person in life because I had four people working for me: my parents and two brothers. I had my house. I went on vacation. My daughter had her first communion. She got married. And later the excitement of my grandson, who was my life. Economically, I have never been...But lived very well. My life was my children and grandchildren. Above all my grandson, who I cared for, and my daughter too. I was very festive. When I arrived in the village my parents would say, "We know there’s a party because Manuela is here!"

I could spend the entire night dancing and singing with my ex-husband. My parents gave me everything. When my parents died, I took refuge in my grandson. My two brothers died, the daughter of one of them as well. I took refuge in my
grandson and daughter and overcame it. With a lot of effort, but I did. I had all my neighbours. Everybody loved me. I didn't study. I am a dressmaker. I sewed for everybody. People loved me. I think that now that I received my first eviction order, from the mortgage that I took out with my son-in-law, I started to become more isolated from the people around me... Although I am now starting to recover a bit. I went through a very bad phase. I don't know if it was me or other people. I have this feeling that when I go out on the street, they are looking at me.

I was never lacking anything, thanks to my parents, who always worked hard. I just worked at home...taking care of my children and grandchildren, like gold. Until the eviction, that made my life turn completely bad. On an economical and emotional level, and everything. It radically changed my life.

Manuela shakes her head slightly.

IRENE: What was an average day for all of you in this moment? Before getting the mortgage?

CHARO: My average day was work and being peacefully at home, with my family, without this feeling of having to think about this...Just the thought of having money to send to my daughter who was in Peru. But I lived peacefully. I slept peacefully without any disturbances, during this time.

IRENE: What was your line of work?

CHARO: In Seville, I worked as a maid. I worked and sent money to my mother and I was at peace, not with the pressure that I have now. When I came to Madrid and got involved in this mortgage, my life went downhill. It went completely downhill. I had to deal with a very hard thing. And with all the abuse I received...

Everybody in the group nods.

GLADYS: You have this lie that money gives you peace of mind. You feel at peace and get along better with the family. That it is essential. But it is superficial in the end. Until you have something happen that affects not only you, but your entire family. It’s something that drags your whole family down. And on top of this, you don’t know if the people around you accept you or not. Like Manuela said, you don’t know if you are isolating yourself or if it is they who are rejecting you. You don’t come to any conclusions. Things emerge from this problem. A moment arrives when you lose any excitement. You have to take so much medication...You have to put yourself in the hands of professionals.
I could not control my mood...because of being unable to pay back the bank...I could not control my emotional state. I had to see a professional. I wanted to overcome this, but I couldn’t. It was, for me, the hardest blow and the biggest mistake that I have ever made. Because you always have this guilt, even though we shouldn’t have this...This feeling. You arrive at a moment where you say, “What did I do, what did I do to my family?” Why did I decide to do this? Everybody was worried even though I wanted to deal with it alone. To not talk about it, but I couldn’t avoid it. The family eventually learns about it, because they see you in such a deplorable state. I didn’t put on makeup, my hair turned half gray. I didn’t get dressed. I was totally depressed. I was taking pills and my family was worried to see me like this. And they suffered like I did.

It is very hard to be emotionally and economically okay where everybody around you accepts you, and then make this radical change. We have to realize that we human beings are egoists. So when you are no longer this generous, communicative person, because of money, you are no longer this accepted person by those around you. For this reason you isolate yourself, because you feel rejected. It always blocks you. You have negative feelings about your life, negative ideas. You go through a few years wondering if you will ever overcome this, or, “What do I do?” Or, “I can’t go on.” Or, “Will I come to a moment where everything gets solved?” You are totally blocked.

CHARO: It’s that sometimes we come here with the illusion of having a home. I remember that when I bought my house I said, “Wow, I can start to buy my things that I could never buy in my country.” I bought a big mattress, a big bed. (Becomes more animated) I bought everything for the kitchen and with such excitement of setting up my own home. To see now that they are going to take it away from me. I worked really hard. Because we came to Spain with the illusion of having our own home. In Peru I couldn’t have one, I lived in my parents’ house. And now I had my own home. I was buying dish towels, setting up everything. This dream of having my own home. It all went down.

IRENE: You have all talked about some feelings. For example, you were talking about peace. I was at peace. How was that life?

MIARLO: It’s that I don’t recognize that person. I have changed a lot. It has been a radical change, but this doesn’t mean that everything has been bad. I have also lived through different dimensions of myself. But now I see myself and ask, “Who was that happy girl filled with excitement?” But what happens Irene...and perhaps everybody will verify this. This period when everything collapses, you experience such anxiety and fear inside you. There’s such a space of fear and anxiety that’s created inside of you. That is the word for it...anxiety.
It's that for two full years, I would arrive home in the evening with all my things already packed in boxes. I was waiting for two years for all the court documents to arrive. I was alone, waiting, with my boxes packed. If I wanted to read a book, I had no idea which box it was in.

I mean, really, look at the violence in this process. So this fear and anxiety and all the harsh feelings. It is really hard for me to remember these moments that I lived through. I am another person now. I have good moments now, with a lot of peace too...also very beautiful, but different. It's hard to recall that phase in my life. The dream is over. To arrive at home, during those two years, with fear in your stomach, this anxiety. You disconnect from the past, and also the future. I think that what you learn from this is to live in the here and now. I am in the present and don’t want more. Because what use has it been for me to think about the future?

IRENE: Did you think about the future?

MARILO: I focused on my future, of course I did. I have friends that have gotten their university degrees and then had to leave the country and work elsewhere: because there is no work here in Spain. My interest has always been stability: to create a future with my partner, my studies, my house...I wanted to make something of my life. Not sit and wait for what comes to me. I spent four years of my life studying for my career, my poor boyfriend waiting for me. Me, eating, because I was nervous and getting fat. My poor boyfriend downstairs, waiting for me. My intention was to sacrifice some of the now towards the future.

Marilo Brushes hair off her face.

MARILO (cont’d): Now the future doesn’t matter to me, I tell you this sincerely. And now my father is in the advanced stages of cancer. And I think about how tomorrow we won’t be here and that it becomes important to live in the now and fight for my well-being, and good state of mind. So this happy girl with dreams...yes, I remember her, but I don’t recognize myself in her. Because now I don’t work anymore for some kind of messianic vision. I am not capable of working for a dream. Having the dream of buying something, or that in three years I can have this...I am not capable. I am just here, sharing this moment. It’s like this.

Charo nods and smiles.

GLADYS: Because you are following a line. This is the dream that I had when I finally acquired the mortgage. Now I am going to have a future. And if I couldn’t pay for it, then my daughter could. We would have a home. But there’s this line and this line breaks. And this is when things go down. It was a dream...A dream within my ignorance. They played with our dreams and took advantage of our
The right to housing has been systematically violated: difficulty in accessing housing, despite being a fundamental right, now holds back hundreds of thousands of families who demand a fairer mortgage system.

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Prologues by Gerard Pisarello and José Coy

MORTGAGED LIVES
From the housing bubble to the right to housing

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MORTGAGED LIVES
Dedicated to our son Luca who, with only eleven months of life, has followed the frenetic rhythm of the assemblies, the demonstrations, evictions and the long heated debates without ever losing his smile. Dedicated to all the fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers that try to teach their children and grandchildren about the values of social justice. Dedicated to Ernest Marco, Lucía Martín, Lucía Delgado and Guillem Domingo who, since 2009, when the PAH was nothing more than a small idea, have never stopped believing in it nor stopped working until it became a reality. Dedicated to all the PAHs and all the people who selflessly give their time and the very best of themselves in the defense of the right to housing.
Preface

It's a pleasure presenting the English translation of *Vidas Hipotecas* by Ada Colau and Adrià Alemany, an analysis and accounting of the housing crisis and right to housing movement in Spain. Throughout the book, you will find the term *dación en pago*. I've left it untranslated because it is a term so specific to Spain that it is difficult to translate.

*Dación en pago* means literally “to give” (dar > dación) “as payment” (en pago). *Dación en pago* therefore means a repossession procedure whereby the owner gives back their house’s keys to the bank and in exchange the bank fully discharges their mortgage debt, allowing the former owner to start again with no debt. In Spain, as described by Ada Colau and Adrià Alemany in this book, when a bank repossesses a home, the former owner not only loses their home but is required to continue paying the outstanding debt. It is very difficult to start over. This idiosyncratic feature of Spanish mortgage law distinguishes it from neighbouring countries within the EU and other parts of the world. The fight for *dación en pago* is one of the key points over which the battle lines for the right to housing are being laid down by the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (PAH).

As a Canadian artist living in Berlin, I have been following both the 15-M movement and housing crisis in Spain, since 2011. In April 2013, I traveled to Madrid with a quite undefined plan; I would spend a couple of months attending and filming PAH assemblies and conduct a few interviews. On April 2nd, the day after my arrival, I descended the stairs...
of CSO Seco (a squatted cultural centre in Puente de Vallecas district) and experienced my first clamorous and chaotic PAH assembly. Inspired by their varied and exquisitely intelligent tactics, I continued attending meetings, and delayed my departure from the city. I formed deeper alliances, finally joining the Impacto Psicológico Comisión de la Verdad, a psychologist’s research team composed of PAH activists and other collaborators that investigates the psychosocial impacts of eviction. This research analyzes social rupture of homelessness and its psychological impacts on present and future generations.

I started reading Ada and Adrià’s book *Mortgaged Lives* around the same time as my first visit to CSO Seco. Ada and Adrià’s words performed a narration to what I was seeing and hearing, it provided context to the questions, conversations and commentaries that occurred during these PAH meetings. After finishing the book, I decided to translate *Mortgaged Lives* into English. What you have in front of you is the results of my work.

I was inspired by the book’s approach, a first-person account which situates itself as a manifesto and how-to manual for a citizens’ movement in order to develop the necessary tools and strategies to deal with a society in crisis. I felt it could also serve as a useful resource for a non-Spanish speaking audience. The translation was carried out with the assistance of Jessica Fuquay, an art student from the United States who came to Berlin to spend a summer as my intern but ended up traveling with me to Madrid. During the sweltering month of July, we worked through the bulk of the translation.

This process has made me deeply mindful of the role of translator as being an ethical one and of how the translation process is an intimate act. Translation is never an unmediated flow of words from one language to another, but rather translation processes are influenced by differences in language. Each time a text is translated into another language a new perspective is reached from which the original thought can be viewed. Ideas are therefore developed through repetition. Deeply sensitive to this, I have tried to be as true to the original text as possible while still acknowledging my intermediary role within the translation process.

I would like to thank Marc Herbst, Yaiza María Hernández Velázquez, Fré Sonneveld, Marta Peirano, Alba Jaramillo and staff at Medialab Prado for their various contributions throughout this process. I thank the members of PAH Madrid for their warmth, courage and strength and for making me feel welcome and even loved. I would also like to thank the Impacto Psicológico Comisión de la Verdad, made up of mostly young researchers coming out of 15-M who are doing extremely important work for both present and future generations. Lastly I thank Ada and Adrià for writing this wonderful book.

Michelle Teran, artist and PAH activist
(The artist-researcher is out one summer morning in August. She takes a walk in the park near her apartment. She returned from Madrid just the night before and is now enjoying the exercise and early morning Berlin weather. As she walks by the canal, suddenly her phone rings. It is the Devil’s Advocate. She tells the artist-researcher that there is something that she would like to discuss with her. She is in the area, and would she like to meet for coffee. They agree to meet at a nearby cafe, a 10-minute walk away from where the artist-researcher is. If they are lucky, they can even sit at an outside table.)
CONVERSATION # 6
MICHELLE AND THE DEVIL’S ADVOCATE

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –I feel like I need to bring up the question of translation. I am still not sure what your position is as a translator.

MICHELLE: –But don’t you think I have made this position quite clear throughout our conversations? Wasn’t it enough, how I described my role in the preface of Mortgaged Lives: the English translation of Ada Colau’s book?

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –We could start with that. You did the English translation?

MICHELLE: –Yes. I translated the book then used the same title—Mortgaged Lives—for my film. In the film, I analyze the psychosocial experience of eviction through three perspectives: psychological analyses, personal testimony and an actual eviction. Discussions and gatherings take place in offices, and meeting rooms. These moments are intermingled with traumatic events that take place each day: people are being evicted. Do you want to see the film now?

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –This is not necessary. We already saw the film. Let’s go back to this translation. Why did you undertake such an arduous process?

MICHELLE: –Translating Ada’s book was my way of researching a topic well: a method of (to borrow Ginzburg’s phrase) slow reading. When I first arrived in Madrid, I didn’t know that much about the PAH. Reading the book helped me learn more about the movement. As I was reading the book, I was also going my first PAH meetings. I had the sensation that Ada was whispering in my ear, providing simultaneous translation to what I was observing in the room, and my induction to the movement. Later on, after I spent more time there, I used translation as a method of distancing myself from what was becoming a very intense, personal experience: to take a step back and critically evaluate what I was seeing and experiencing. I did this by revisiting and testing the logic of the book by translating it another language, English. I asked myself: what did this book say? Did it translate into other contexts? Was it something that other people could relate to as well? Translating the book was also a way for me to make a contribution to the movement. I was made to feel welcome, I wanted to give something back. There are quite a few articles in English about the PAH: written by journalists and academics who offer their perspectives of what they think the PAH does. There is, however, very little written in the first person, from the voices of people directly involved in the movement, like this book is. I wanted to have the authors’ voices heard.

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: As one the PAH’s founders, Ada Colau is a well-known, highly respected figure within activist circles and even the mainstream press for her
efforts at bringing this housing issue to the public eye. You are not fluent in Spanish, what makes you think you were the ideal candidate to take on a huge task such as translating her book?

MICHELLE: –It is definitely something I considered halfway through the process, but then nobody else was doing the translation—I confirmed this with Ada—so I thought: if not anybody else, then why not me? I took the task very seriously. The process became very intimate, similar to being in all these intimate spaces in Madrid: in the homes of people being evicted; or in the sweltering hot room where I listened to and recorded the conversations carried by Manuela, Mariló, Charo, and Gladys, during the pilot project with the Psychosocial Impact Team. I translated these conversations into English as well. I see all of these actions—the book translation; the recording of personal testimonies with the psychosocial impact team; or even the method I use to circulate around Madrid, collecting the material I use in the film—in terms of translation. They are “movements of deciphering”.

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –Movements of deciphering?

MICHELLE: –I am directly appropriating Vilém Flusser’s translation method here. Born in Prague in 1920 into a wealthy Jewish family, he was forced into exile when the Nazi’s invaded Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1939. He managed to flee to Brazil, but his entire family was wiped out in the concentration camps. After many years in Brazil, he moved back to Europe, to France, where he lived until he died tragically in an automobile accident in 1991. I do think that these personal experiences with displacement (some forced, some chosen) influenced his writing.

There is never a fixed position within his texts. In his writing, his thoughts are in continuous movement. He is a nomadic thinker. He circles around subjects: ideas form contradictions. For Flusser, to translate meant not to be faithful to the original, but to “movements of deciphering”.

1. The book is available as a free PDF, but also a printed version, which people can buy for a low cost. The Journal of Aesthetics & Protest agreed to publish the book and help with the distribution. Traficantes del Sueños at the Anarchist Book Fair in London in September 2014. Ana Mendez from Traficantes del Sueños, Marc Herbst from Journal of Aesthetics & Protest, the Radical Housing Network, PAH International and myself participated in a one hour presentation of the book. Mortgaged Lives is for sale at different bookstores and being read by housing activist, and right-to-housing networks throughout the UK.

whereby switching the point of view produces a new standpoint which does not leave the other behind, but incorporates the previous one within the one that is newly introduced.

MICHELLE: –Yes, something like that, and I use this approach in several ways throughout my work. I use it when I switch between spoken language, media (text, image), location (maps, videos, city corners), and subjectivities. These become not unique positions—I was standing here and now I am standing there, a text is in one language then it is in another, I was looking at a map and now I am at a doorstep, somebody speaks and then another responds—but ways of understanding a standpoint by introducing another, which enters into a dialogue with the one before that. This method is a guide for the editing process in how I assemble the material: how I write, how I create the lecture performance in *Folgen*, how I edit the film *Mortgaged Lives*.

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –There seems to be an essence of not one or the other, but a mix between the two. What happens when something is difficult to translate? Is there such a thing as something being untranslatable?

MICHELLE: –Okay, now you are bringing in something that Riceour talks about, when he refers to the problem posed by the act of translating: either in the strict sense of the transfer of a spoken message from one language to another or even within how something becomes interpreted even when everybody speaks the same language and should be understanding each other.¹

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –So if we would focus on the first aspect: that of the transfer of a spoken message from one language to another.

MICHELLE: –It is kind of basic really. People have always translated,¹ and not just the professional translators. Many people speak other languages besides their native language. You certainly do.

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –Isn’t that statement rather mundane?

MICHELLE: –Yes, that is what I just said. But what happens when we encounter such a diversity of languages? For Riceour this either leads to a “radical heterogeneity”, in which case translation is completely out of the question, or we might try to find the “original track”, the original source from which all languages arise.⁶

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –So either translation is totally impossible, or it is a simple fact.

MICHELLE: –Yet I am more intrigued by this ongoing tension of (un)translatability: there is some possibility that something will not be completely understood through the transfer of one language to another, from one standpoint to a new one. I am reminded of something that Ginzburg also mentioned when we were in the kitchen: that translation is possible, but it always limps.

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –Perhaps instead of sticking with these translatability/untranslatability dialectics, we could think about “faithfulness versus betrayal”.⁷

MICHELLE: –Why would we want do that?

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –Well, if you insist on taking on some of Riceour’s ideas, it is because of this point that we seem to continue to harp on about: that seamless translation is impossible...

MICHELLE: –Essentially, even if we wanted to make a perfect translation of something, this would be totally impossible. There are too many divisions between linguistic systems that prevent us from doing do. Basic things like, for example, how time (present, past, future) is performed. Or how words are used to connect two meanings together. I think about Riceour’s example of the French word *bois*; which refers to wood as a material but also a stand of trees.⁸ In other languages these meanings would not be connected together. In Spanish *esperar* means to wait but also to hope. You can even think about how languages impose a certain world view. There are many studies that suggest that we think differently in different languages. So, yes, there is the impossibility of a perfect translation. Perhaps we should be instead talking about the role of the translator: the task that the translator needs to take on.

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –You mean that the translator is always in the middle, and by taking this position, must try to be mindful of the original version while bringing it to the new one.

MICHELLE: –Perhaps we could think about it in this way. Let’s focus on her. It is a huge responsibility. In order to do a good job of it, there has to be a strong element of desire: the “desire to translate.”⁹

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –You want to kiss the words?

MICHELLE: –In a way, yes... But desire in the sense that there is something that you don’t know that much about, but you would like to know more. Desire is a learning process. Translation is a learning process. I translated Ada’s book, because of my desire to learn something new. This desire is intrinsic in every aspect of my research. This desire to translate is not only intellectual or practical work, but ethical as well.

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –Seriously, ethical?

MICHELLE: –Yes, absolutely. I would even venture further to say intimate. What could be more intimate than taking in somebody’s information, absorbing it... *Comiendo palabras*... And then spitting it out and transforming it into something else? This pro-

6. Ibid.
MICHELLE: –Who is your audience?
DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –Yes, the discourse is woven into the choice of words… How things are being said.
MICHELLE: –This is where narrative comes in. If the story doesn’t work in one way, we can always try to tell it another way.
DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –However, sometimes you don’t want to change the story, for example, in arguing. The things we do in moral philosophy, law, politics. This is where rhetoric comes in; it is more about the art of seduction, of persuasion, or even intimidation. 11
MICHELLE: –Which would go back to Ginzburg’s use of Gramsci’s guerra di posizione and guerra di movimento as a metaphor for intellectual strategies: either you dig the trench and stay in that position, or you establish your position and then try to attack the other position. But I would also like to return to Flusser’s use of umschreiben—to rewrite, transcribe, transfer, adapt, reshape—which is to try tell the story in another way, by shifting positions. Raymond Queneau applies such a method in Exercises in Style, 12 when he uses 99 ways of telling a story about the same event: by bringing different details to the foreground, or even changing storytellers by a deliberate play with subjectivity through the use of language. The meaning is never fixed. This is Ginzburg’s translation method of “slow reading”. This is what the psychologists were doing as well, in Madrid. Maybe this is why I connected so much with their methods.
DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –What do you mean?
MICHELLE: –Because the psychologists are also translators. A psychologist offers analyses by repeating something that has been said, but by posing it as a question. This is a method of rethinking something, by having something repeated back to you, in another way. Like what you are doing now. I was also quite excited by their use of timecodes.
DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –I am sure you will tell me what you mean.
MICHELLE: –After we completed the pilot project, I spent months listening to the conversations, making rough translations into English. I would listen to the audio recordings in Spanish, and then rewrite the conversations into English in a notebook, marking the time codes whenever I felt that something relevant was being said.
DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –What do you mean by relevant?
MICHELLE: –Of course this is totally subjective, but, as I was listening, I would mark down whenever I detected the emergence of certain themes. I started to break the information down into categories: time (are they speaking about the past, present or future),

identity, emotional states and moments of rupture. I did this without thinking too much, just letting patterns of meaning emerge by listening to the conversations. It also seemed important that I write by hand. It was more intimate that way: to have the sound flow through my body and come back out as ink on paper. At the same time that I was doing this work from Bergen, the psychosocial impact team met up and analysed the recordings in Madrid. They produced a word document of their analyses and posted it to a Dropbox folder that we shared. When I read through the document, I discovered that they had been working in a similar manner as I had: breaking down the material into time codes, categories and themes. Perhaps this is only interesting to me, but I found it intriguing how parallel our working methods were.

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –What were the results of the research?

MICHELLE: –Apart from the film, I made an English transcript of the four group discussions. I used this transcript within a staged reading, which was performed during an entire day, by myself and four women living in Bergen. I read the part of the psychologist, the others read the parts of the four participants of the pilot project. It was an un-rehearsed performance. This was an act of the witnessing of the reading of real dialogues, which were not theatrically staged, but re-read and resituated in a different reality… Neither here or there, but a hybrid situation in passing. The women were different, the voices were different, but they were just regular women, not actresses. It showed the awkwardness and fragility of the situation. The choice of using non-actors created links between the women in Bergen and the women in Madrid, in which one space, voice or text, did not replace the other, but, as Flusser would say, rather formed a many-layered space, an endless “movement of deciphering”. What were we reading together? What did it mean to be a reader? What did it mean to be a witness to the reading? To relive or resituate a conversation in another place and context?

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –But why did it have to be so long? Why the entire day?

MICHELLE: –Because I felt that taking time to hear them out was important. It showed that the everyday experience of eviction, of homelessness, is something that gradually infiltrates every aspect of your existence. It was exhausting because what these women, and many others, experience is exhausting.

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –And what about the psychologists? What did they do?

MICHELLE: –They produced an internal document for PAH Madrid, from their analyses. It became part of the research incorporated into the PAH and it helped create other mutual support and empowerment workshops in other PAH centres throughout Madrid.


MICHELLE: –Perhaps we can get out of this guerra di posizione. Are these labels so important? I could, however, offer this observation or evaluation from this experience:
| 13.30 a 14 | Charo | “Quería progresar, ser algo acá” | Proyecto migratorio- proyecto de vida. |
| 14 a 14.30 | Manuela | “Mi vida eran mis hijas y mis nietos” | Proyecto de vida: nietos e hijos, comunión y bodas, comodidad. El proyecto de vida y la ilusión. |
| 14.30 a 15 | Manuela | “Era muy fiestera, me pasaba noches bailando” | Proyecto de vida. La importancia de la familia |
| 15 a 15.30 | Manuela | | Proyecto de vida. Supera obstáculos duros (muerte familiares) pero esto tiene continuidad en su proyecto de vida. Era querida por los vecinos. ** No hay ritual social para tramitar el duelo de perder la vivienda. Para la pérdida de familiares sí lo hay |
| 15.30 a 16 | Manuela | “La gente me adoraba” “Yo sola me he ido aislando” | Aislamiento. Desestructuración familiar. |
| 16 a 16.30 | Manuela | “Ya no sé si era la gente o soy yo. Sentía que la gente me iba mirando” “De tener una vida muy bonita a no tener nada” | Ruptura proyecto de vida. Centralidad del problema. Inseguridad social. ** Se rompen los parámetros sociales, buscas atribución causal del problema y no sabes quién es culpable. |
| 16.30 a 17 | Manuela | “Lo del desahucio desgració mi vida por completo, a nivel económico, emocional y todo” | Ruptura |
| 17 a 17.30 | Charo | “Un día era al trabajo, con mi familia, tranquila, sin presión” | Tranquilidad (antes del desahucio) |
| 17.30 a 18 | Charo | “Vivia tranquila, sin sobresaltos” “Cuando me vine a Madrid cambió mi vida” | Tranquilidad (certidumbre y control sobre la propia vida) Sin sobresaltos. |
LIFE PROJECT

SOCIAL DEATH

HOME

FAMILY

WORK

LIFE PROJECT IS ECONOMICALLY DRIVEN

SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE AND SUCCESS IS DRIVEN BY HOUSE AND WORK

CAPITALISM

CONTROL

STABILITY

ILLUSION

SOCIAL IDENTITY

HAPPINESS

PEACE

RUPTURE

THE SENSATION OF HAVING LOST SOMETHING

PERSONAL CHANGE COMES FROM OUTSIDE SOURCES

INSTABILITY

A HOME IS THE FRUITS OF YOUR LABOR

HOMELESSNESS

MOVEMENT IS TRAUMATIC

HYPERALERT STATE RELATED TO A PERCEPTION OF INJUSTICE, NEVER AT REST

ISOLATION (FEELING ALONE)

CHANGES FOR WHICH THE MIND IS NOT READY FOR

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

GUilt

SHAME

FEAR

THE LACK OF SOCIAL TOOLS

QUESTIONING THE SOCIAL MANDATE TO THINK IN THE FUTURE

INTEGRATION OF TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE

RECONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

THERE IS NO SOCIAL RITUAL FOR LOSING A HOME BUT FOR A LOVED ONE YES

THERE ARE NO TOOLS FOR DEALING WITH THE SITUATION

CONSTRUCTION OF THE HOME

SACRIFICING THE PRESENT FOR THE FUTURE

RUPTURE IN IDENTITY

ROLE OF VICTIM

TRAUMA
CONCLUSION

DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –Is this how you want it to end?
MICHELLE: –What do you mean?
DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –What you said before. How your methodology of following led you towards different disciplines and communities—from the field of media art towards microhistory and then activism. Where does this leave you? Where are you now?
MICHELLE: –How about I sum up my methodology and we leave it at that. If I could start by going back to my initial research question: how does one practice and theorize following?
DEVIL’S ADVOCATE: –Go on…
MICHELLE: –If I could try to follow a line, it would start with the methodology of gleaning, in which I use various methods and approaches for reclaiming things that are disregarded and passed over. It is a method of pulling just one thing out and examining it. I started describing this methodology as a post-digital practice of searching through the digital aftermath: looking through digital trash archives for something of value, trying to find meaning in the noise. As I have already explained, there are two methodological approaches for data analysis: pattern recognition and anomaly detection. Understanding that patterns (the search for normativity) and anomalies (that one thing that stands out), although epistemological opposites, are in fact two sides of the same coin, my method focused on starting with the individual, the particular, to see where it would take me.

My research project began with experimenting with creating datasets of cities, in which I used geo-tagged video to investigate how personal information—sometimes intimate in nature—became part of the public domain (viewable by anyone and anywhere) and when these YouTube videos became bound to a physical location. To carry out this research, I needed to develop the StadtArchiv software, which I used to scrape the Internet for data, allowing me to create the datasets that I used in my artistic projects. One of the main artistic results was Folgen, in which I focused on seven individuals living in Berlin, following the digital traces they had left on the Internet to different locations in the city. I combined two methods of travel: excursive travel and the logic of moving through data. These are both rambling, discontinuous experiences. They are unstructured journeys, in which I, the traveling subject, am being guided by factors outside of myself and am therefore in a continual state of displacement. It becomes a method of making connections between the locations and individuals that I come in contact with,
in which excursions to different places and exchanges with the different people I meet are the method for making the work.

This process of following individuals through their personal information led me into other areas. I started to look at methods within microhistory, which is a history from beneath. It is the study of the detail, the overseen, the exception rather than the rule. As Carlo Ginzburg mentions in our conversation: “micro” is related to “microscope,” meaning the intensive approach to any topic, but in which one arrives at a generalization through the individual. So it is not the particular case, per se, but how can you extract something larger. This method requires the study of individuals who become case studies. They are not necessarily ‘famous people’, but more along the lines of everyday people, people often disregarded and passed over. At the same time, who or what makes an ideal subject is because they are in some ways anomalous cases and, therefore, more cognitively engaging subjects. But what makes an unusual case? This brings in what Ginzburg describes as “making things strange”, in which there is the potential for making any typical case abnormal, or anomalous, if you only look at it closely enough. Therefore close observation, looking and something at a close distance, has the power of transforming a normal subject into an exceptional one.

I also became interested in how Spanish activists were compiling and working with datasets. I started to observe the ways in which they were scraping the Internet for data (videos, texts, audio, images) to build up their datasets as methods of representing and constructing their own stories of the changes happening in their country. The construction of these stories came from the uncoordinated, individual yet collective activity of documenting the anomalous event of the Spanish revolution, which occurred in Madrid, May 2011 and then quickly spread throughout the country. The arriving at a generalization through the individual was something used by the housing activists (PAH), in which the sharing of individual stories of personal experiences with crisis became the building blocks for a collective struggle. They became views of a public issue entered through the sharing of individual stories of personal experiences with economic and social crisis is also the process of localizing the space of trauma, which is the home. By following the digital traces left on the Internet, I have often ended up on the doorstep of a stranger’s home, and many times inside the home. It occurred at various stages through my artistic research project, but it was in Madrid when I started entering these homes in moments of crisis that the question of what a home is became the most critical. What is a home? How does one create a home? What happens when you lose it? These questions come to the foreground the moment when destabilization of the home occurs, the moment when members of the public enter, some welcome and others not. There is a collapse of the public and private being wrestled and formed and articulated. At the same time, by entering these homes, I needed to become temporarily homeless; leaving my home to end up in the homes of other people. I need to destabilize myself, to follow others.

Traveling through data while I travel through the city very clearly shows how the folding of the informatic is part of the reality in which we are presently living. One of the mapping systems that I used quite frequently within my research project—one that I initially proposed as my primary method—was one of geo-tagging information to location. It is a method of online tracking—which leads to spatial tracking—that is related to the military geo-location history of tracking. Rather than put my focus on this particular line of inquiry, I instead focused on this question of location: this effort of pinning down and locating, not just a space, but where I would be standing in it. This method of trying to establish where I am through data, other people’s data, is my way of attempting to locate something. What is this place? What does it mean to be here? This question of location brings in other notions related to tracking—pilgrimage, excursion and ghosting—which appear at several points throughout my research project.

Following a digital trace of somebody and seeing where it leads, is taking a journey to places that other people inhabit. Mirroring their movements and actions is also my attempts to occupy the space of that person, by trying to experience the city through somebody else’s eyes. It becomes my method for constructing stories. I started to look at other systems for mapping, which eventually brought me to situated storytelling methods found within literature. It is a process of embodied, situated research, of trying to describe in the utmost detail, what it would mean to be standing in that place. By combining these methods of pinning something down—the machinic precision of location taken with other methods of trying to understand where you are currently standing, or somebody else has stood—I create a mismatching of mapping systems of what it would mean to find a location. This generates multiple readings of being present somewhere.

Through this process of trying to locate something, I have found myself shifting positions and subjectivities, but also changes in context and scale. It is something that Flusser refers to as the “infinite swarm of perspectives”: the number of possibilities for experiencing the same thing, by trying to see the same thing from different angles. This method of attempting to extrapolate meaning by approaching the same thing from different perspectives is a process of translation. Switching between one position to the next is a way of trying to understand a standpoint by introducing another, which enters into a dialogue with the one before that. It is attempting to find different ways of telling the same story: by bringing different details to the foreground, or even changing story-
The use of storytelling in my artistic research leads me to look for storytellers other than myself. These I refer to as mentors. People to teach me things, whom I follow to gain knowledge. The search for mentors, for people to teach me things, is based on desire. Desire is a seeking system, something that is aimless, yet drives me forward towards unexpected outcomes. Desire is also something connected to translation. The desire to translate, to experience something another way, is the desire to learn. Desire, therefore, is a learning process. This desire to seek, to learn, to follow eventually led me to fly to Spain, where I ended up traveling on a metro with three women, somewhere in Madrid. It is the journey I end up taking. This is how it ends.

CONVERSATION ENDS
reviewers, this book offers “the first rigorous and far-reaching theorization of the subject” and “places new media within the most suggestive and broad ranging media history since Marshall McLuhan”.

His research lab Software Studies Initiative (2007-) pioneered computational analysis of massive collections of images and video (“cultural analytics”). His lab was commissioned to create visualizations of cultural datasets for Google, New York Public Library, MoMA, and other institutions and received support from Twitter, National Science Foundation, National Endowment for Humanities, and Andrew Mellon Foundation, among others.

Henry Jenkins (Media Scholar #1)
Henry Jenkins III is an American media scholar and currently a Provost Professor of Communication, Journalism, and Cinematic Arts, a joint professorship at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and the USC School of Cinematic Arts. Previously, he was the Peter de Florez Professor of Humanities and Co-Director of the MIT Comparative Media Studies program with William Uricchio. He is also author of several books, including Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide, Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture and What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic.

Frank Kessler (Media Scholar #2)
Dr. Frank Kessler is professor in media history. His teaching includes the course ‘Film and Television in transition’ in the MA Film and Television Studies. He also teaches courses and tutorials in the Research MA Media and Performance Studies.

Kessler has been the director of the Institute of Media and Re/presentaion and then Head of Department Media and Culture Studies. From September 2011 until June 2013 he was director of the Research Institute for History and Culture (OGC), since then he is the director of the Research Institute for Cultural Inquiry (ICON).

Mirko Tobias Schaefer (Media Scholar #3)
Mirko Tobias Schäfer is Assistant Professor for New Media & Digital Culture at the University of Utrecht and director of the Utrecht Data School.

Mirko studied theater, film, and media studies and communication studies at Vienna University (A) and digital culture at Utrecht University (NL). He obtained a magister (Master’s) in theater, film, and media studies from the University of Vienna in 2002, and a PhD from Utrecht University in 2008.

Mirko’s research interest revolves around the socio-political impact of media technology. His publications cover user participation in cultural production, hacking communities, politics of software design and communication in social media. He is co-editor and co-author of the volume Digital Material. Tracing New Media in Everyday Life and Technology (Amsterdam University Press, 2009). His book Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production (Amsterdam University Press 2011) has been favourably reviewed by peer-reviewed journals and was listed as best-seller in the computer science section of the Library Journal. In 2012 and 2013 he was appointed research fellow at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, where he is affiliated with the Artistic Technology Research Lab.

Pelle Snickars (Media Scholar #4)
Pelle Snickars, Professor of Media and Communication Studies, specializes in digital humanities. He received his doctorate in film science in 2001 from Stockholm University, with his thesis Svensk film och visuell masskultur 1900. After receiving his doctorate, he worked with investigative assignments at the Swedish National Archive of Recorded Sound and Moving Images (SLBA), where he also took on a managerial position at a later date.

Jens Schröter (Media Scholar #5)


Rick Prelinger (Moving-Image Archivist #1)
Rick Prelinger is an archivist, associate professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, writer and filmmaker, and founder of the Prelinger Archives, a collection of 60,000
advertising, educational, industrial, and amateur films acquired by the Library of Congress in 2002 after 20 years’ operation.

Rick has partnered with the Internet Archive to make over 6,000 films from Prelinger Archives available online for free viewing, downloading, and reuse. With the Voyager Company, a pioneer new media publisher, he produced fourteen LaserDiscs and CD-ROMs with material from his archives, including *Ephemeral Films*, the *Our Secret Century* series and *Call It Home: The House That Private Enterprise Built*, a laserdisc on the history of suburbia and suburban planning (co-produced with architect Keller Easterling).

**Leo Enticknap (Moving-Image Archivist #2)**

Leo Enticknap is an independent historical researcher, educator and archivist specializing in audiovisual media.

Enticknap’s two monographs, *Moving Image Technology: From Zoetrope to Digital* and *Film Restoration: The Culture and Science of Audiovisual Heritage*, have established themselves as standard texts on postgraduate film archiving education programs worldwide. In addition, he has produced 18 peer-reviewed articles and chapters and 39 conference presentations since 2000, as well as numerous periodical articles and DVD sleeve notes written for a more general audience, and several ‘subject expert’ media appearances, a selection of which can be found on his website. He was also a member of the board of directors of the Association of Moving Image Archivists from 2008-12.

Enticknap left the University of Leeds in 2013, and emigrated to the United States to join his wife. He currently lives in Colton, CA, and is working as a freelance writer, educator, archival and technical consultant.

**Thomas Elsaesser (The Film-Historian)**

Born in Berlin in 1943, I was educated at Heidelberg University and the University of Sussex (U.K.), where I received a B.A. in English Literature in 1966, and a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature in 1971. After working as a film critic in Brighton, then London and editing the international film journal Monogram, I taught European Romanticism and Literary Modernism in Comparative Literature at the University of East Anglia from 1972 onwards. In 1976 I initiated Film Studies at the University of East Anglia, chaired Film Studies until 1986, and was in charge of the Master’s and Ph.D. programme in Cinema from 1980 to 1991.

Appointed to the University of Amsterdam to build up an undergraduate and graduate programme in Film and Television Studies (the first in The Netherlands), I was from 1991-2001 the Chair of the Department of Film and Television Studies (now Media and Culture), which has approx. 1,200 students majoring in Film, TV, and Digital Media. During that period I was also director of a one-year international M.A. Programme in Film Studies and Visual Culture. From 2001 to 2008 I was Research Professor, and responsible for a PhD Programme ‘Cinema Europe’, offered in conjunction with ASCA, the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis, of which I was a Founding Member and on the Executive Board until 2005. In 2008 I took mandatory retirement as Emeritus Professor and have since been teaching as Visiting Professor at Yale University (2006-2012) and Columbia University (since 2013). I am also General Editor of the series Film Culture in Transition, published by Amsterdam University Press, and distributed in the US by University of Chicago Press. Forty-five volumes have so far appeared under my editorship.


I also edited and co-edited some twelve volumes on Early Cinema, Quality Television, Digital Cinema, Harun Farocki and New Hollywood Cinema. Books of mine have been translated into German, French, Italian, Czech, Hebrew, Hungarian, Korean, Chinese, Japanese and Lithuanian.

I have published over 200 essays in multi-authored volumes, and have articles in American Film, Cinema Journal, Cinetracts, Discourse, Film Comment, Framework, *Hors Cadre, Iris, Kinoschriften, Medienwissenschaft, montage a/v*, *New German Critique*, October, Persistence of Vision, Positif, Screen, Sight and Sound, *Trafic, Wide Angle,* as well as in several other foreign language journals.

**Mel Hogan (The New Materialist Scholar)**

Mel Hogan works as an Assistant Professor of Communication at IIT in Chicago. She teaches environmental media and graphic design, and other courses in digital media.

Her current research, recent publications, and conference presentations look at internet materialities, archives, and surveillance — how infrastructures are made material, visible, and are embodied. As a practitioner, other issues of digital culture are addressed through media arts interventions and research design projects.

She is also a co-editor of the online and p.o.d. journal of arts and politics, nomorepotlucks.org; a research design consultant for material; and directing the Humanities and
Technology Speaker Series at IIT. She completed a 6-year mandate on the administrative board of Studio XX and was a founding member of the Fembot collective.

Andrea Leigh (The Meta-Data Librarian)
Andrea Leigh is the head of the Moving Image Processing, Library of Congress, Packard Campus for Audio Visual Conservation. Her B.A. is in Theater Arts, and MLIS from UCLA. Leigh has published articles on the description and cataloging of archival moving images in a variety of publications; comments and consults widely on metadata standards for the description of moving image resources; and is active in AMIA, SAA, and ALA. Previously she was Catalog and Metadata Librarian, UCLA Film & Television Archive (2000-2008).

Peter Sunde (The Pirate)
Peter Sunde Kolmisoppi (born 13 September 1978), alias brokep, is a computer expert with Norwegian and Finnish ancestry. He is best known for being a co-founder and ex-spokesperson of The Pirate Bay, a BitTorrent search engine. He is an equality advocate and has expressed concerns over issues of centralization of power to the European Union in his blog. Sunde also participates in the Pirate Party of Finland.

Robert Gehl (PhD Student)
I am: an associate professor in the Department of Communication at The University of Utah, as well as an affiliated faculty member in the Department of Writing & Rhetoric Studies at Utah.

I teach: critical studies of communication technology, new media theory, software studies, basic Web design, and political economy of communication.

I research: network cultures and technologies, alternative social media, and the Dark Web.


Academic publications: in Social Text, Lateral, The International Journal of Cultural Studies, New Media and Society, Television and New Media, Computational Culture, and First Monday, among other journals.

Journalism/Op-Eds/Essays: The Week, The New Inquiry, The Salt Lake Tribune, Culture Digitally, and RedThread. You can also see more of my writing on my fancy “weblog.”

The Python Group (The Programmers)
groups
The groups to which the clients belong; one or several of: (‘world’, ‘dev’, ‘eval’)
subworld
The subset of the training data. Has to be specified if groups includes ‘world’ and protocol is one of ‘fold1’, ..., ‘fold10’. It might be exactly one of (‘onfolds’, ‘twofolds’, ..., ‘sevenfolds’). Ignored for group ‘dev’ and ‘eval’.

world_type
One of (‘restricted’, ‘unrestricted’). Ignored.

Michael Z. Newman (Media Studies Professor)
I am Michael Z. Newman, associate professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. I wrote Indie: An American Film Culture (Columbia UP, 2011) and Video Revolutions: On the History of a Medium (Columbia UP, 2014), and co-wrote Legitimating Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status (Routledge, 2012). I’m working on a book about early video games. Contact me at mznewman37@gmail.

Brad Bainum (The Sociologist)
Well I certainly was blessed this past year. Reflecting back, 2013 was a good one. Matt graduated and is settled in a great school. I was in several shows, all of them hits including, “Ladies Swing the Blues”, “Company” and now open to rave reviews, “Gypsy.” We recorded and released another new album, Simply.” But most importantly, I have a wonderful family and circle of friends.

I always find it a little hard to start writing that new-year date for the first month or so. It always reminds me how quickly time passes from one year to the next. But looking ahead this year will bring some other exciting things: another graduation, this time for Brad who will graduate in May from Bowdoin College, extended time in LA this winter, and who knows what other adventures are out there for my career.

That last part is a big unknown—but I remain upbeat and positive in general. After all, I always have my guys, my health, my friends and family!

We are having a great time with GYPSY. The cast is brilliant, led fearlessly by Sheri Edelen, who is such a lovely person off stage and a tour de force on. Maria Rizzo is a gorgeous Louise and the audiences are eating it up! It’s nice to be in a hit!

The week is filled with lots of activities: New Year’s Eve Gala, Funders Opening Gala, Pride Night, our first Understudy rehearsal! I’m tired just thinking about it.
I wish you all a glorious 2014! May it be filled with health, joy and love!

Happy New Year!

Be safe!

Sandy

askaskme.com (The Data Cruncher)

Quora.com (The Analyst)

Quora’s mission is to share and grow the world’s knowledge. We want to democratize access to knowledge of all kinds—from politics to painting, cooking to coding, etymology to experiences—so if someone out there knows something, anyone else can learn it. Quora makes it easy to get your questions answered, share your own knowledge, and browse the most interesting information people across the world want to share.

CONVERSATION #2

Brendan Howell

Brendan Howell was born in Manchester, CT, USA in 1976. He is an artist and a reluctant engineer who has created various software works and interactive electronic inventions. Currently, he lives in Berlin, Germany. He has done research and led courses at the Muthesius Kunsthochschule, Merz Akademie, Fachhochschule Potsdam, and the Kunsthochschule Berlin, Weißensee.

CONVERSATION #3

ELO (Electronic Literature Organization)

The Electronic Literature Organization was founded in 1999 to foster and promote the reading, writing, teaching, and understanding of literature as it develops and persists in a changing digital environment. A 501c(3) non-profit organization, ELO includes writers, artists, teachers, scholars, and developers.

The Electronic Literature Organization was initiated by electronic author Scott Rettberg, novelist Robert Coover, and internet business leader Jeff Ballowe. Realizing the promise that electronic media offered for literature but the lack of a supporting infrastructure, the three assembled a board of directors that included writers, publishers, internet industry leaders, and literary nonprofit experts, founding the organization in Chicago. In the fall of 2001, ELO moved its headquarters to the University of California, Los Angeles, where ELO received generous assistance from the UCLA English Department, SINAPSE (Social Interfaces and Networks in Advanced Programmable Simulations and Environments) and the Design Media Arts Department. After five productive years at UCLA, in the summer of 2006 ELO headquarters came to the University of Maryland, College Park. ELO was housed at and sponsored by the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH). The summer of 2011 marked ELO’s move to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, thanks to support from the Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies and The Trope Tank.

ELO has grown to be a vital part of the electronic literature community. In 2001 the Organization ran the Electronic Literature Awards program, still the only one of its sort, that recognized exemplary works of poetry and fiction and rewarded winners with substantial cash prizes. ELO also undertook the PAD (Preservation, Archiving, and Dissemination) project from 2002-2005, which involved a conference, eX)literature, at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and resulted in the publications Acid-Free Bits and Born-Again Bits.

Landmark events in the organization’s short history have included the launch of an acclaimed database-driven Electronic Literature Directory maintained by scholars and visited by thousands of readers; readings and outreach events in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Seattle, and the Washington, D.C. area; the publication of two volumes of the Electronic Literature Collection, each with about 60 works of electronic literature and each edited by a different editorial collective; and a conference series that has run from the State of the Arts Symposium at UCLA in 2002 to the 2013 conference in Paris, Chercher le texte.

Honor Hargar

Honor Hargar is the Executive Director for ArtScience Museum at Marina Bay Sands. A curator from New Zealand, she has a strong interest in artistic uses of technologies and in science as part of culture. Honor brings with her over 15 years of experience of working at the intersection between art, science and technology. She is responsible for charting the overall direction and strategy for ArtScience Museum. Prior to joining Marina Bay Sands, she was the artistic director of Lighthouse in Brighton, United Kingdom, from 2010 to 2014. In that role, Honor curated projects which showed the cultural impact of scientific ideas, such as Laboratory Life, Invisible Fields and Solar System.
She also organised exhibitions by artists such as Trevor Paglen, Timo Arnall and David Blandy, commissioned new work by Semiconductor, Hide&Seek, The Otolith Group and James Bridle, and co-founded Brighton Digital Festival. Through her career, Honor has held several key appointments in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia, and has curated many international exhibitions and events around the world.

From 2009-2010 she was guest curator of Transmediale, an international festival of art and digital culture in Berlin. From 2004-2008, she was the director of the AV Festival, the UK’s largest biennial of media art, film and music. She was the first webcasting curator for Tate Modern in London from 2000-2003, where she also curated events and concerts on art and technology. Honor has also worked for Radio One and Artspace in New Zealand, and the Australian Network for Art and Technology in Australia.

Esther Leslie

Esther Leslie is Professor of Political Aesthetics at Birkbeck College, University of London. A prominent radical thinker, she has devoted an extensive part of her work to the analysis of modernism – notably in her 2002 book, Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-garde. Another important of her research deals with the interaction between theory and material culture, engaging specifically with the conception of fashion in critical theory, for example in Marx’s work.

Esther Leslie is a lecturer in English and Humanities at Birkbeck College, London. She is the author of Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism and sits on the editorial boards of Historical Materialism, Radical Philosophy and Revolutionary History.

Paul John Eakin


Vilém Flusser

Vilém Flusser (1920–91) was a media philosopher and writer born in Prague. He held Brazilian citizenship and wrote most of his work in German and Brazilian Portuguese. Flusser’s work notably elaborates a theory of communication, theorising the epochal shift from what he termed “linear thinking” (based on writing) toward a new form of multidimensional, visual thinking embodied by digital culture. For him, these new modes and technologies of communication make possible a society (the “telematic” society) in which dialogue between people becomes the supreme value. Flusser draws from Martin Buber, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Thomas Kuhn, among others.

In 1939, Flusser emigrated together with his future wife Edith Barth from Nazi-occupied Prague via London to São Paulo (1941). Later they lived in Rio de Janeiro (1950-72), Meran, Italy (1972-75), south of France (1975-81), and Robion, Provence (from 1981).

Sadie Plant

Sadie Plant is a British philosopher, cultural theorist, and author. She earned her PhD in Philosophy from the University of Manchester in 1989 and subsequently taught at the University of Birmingham’s Department of Cultural Studies (formerly the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) before going on to found the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit with colleague Nick Land at the University of Warwick, where she was a faculty member. Her original research was related to the Situationist International before turning to the social and political potential of cyber-technology. Her writing in the 1990s would prove profound in the development of cyberfeminism.

Sadie Plant left the University of Warwick in 1997 to write full-time. She published a cultural history of drug use and control, and a report on the social effects of mobile phones, as well as articles in publications as varied as the Financial Times, Wired, Blueprint, and Dazed and Confused. She was interviewed as one of the ‘People to Watch’ in the Winter 2000–2001 issue of Time.

Frans Jacobi

Frans Jacobi is a visual artist who lives and works in Copenhagen and Bergen. Jacobi works with performance, text and images. His performances and installations are often large scale scenarios with multiple participants addressing a range of political and societal issues. Using a kind of urgent aesthetics the temporality and presence becomes a point in themselves.

Jacobi is professor in timebased media / performance at KHiB, Bergen Academy of Art & Design since 2012. He completed his PhD ‘Aesthetics of Resistance’ at Malmö Art Academy/Lunds University in 2012. In 2014 Jacobi established the artist-group SYNMSKASKINEN. The group works as a platform for the artistic-research project ‘SYNSASKINEN: 7 fields of contemporary crisis’ based at KHiB, Bergen Academy of Art & Design. Simultaneously SYNMSASKINEN works as a platform for various other projects.

Jussi Parikka

Jussi Parikka is a media theorist, writer, and Professor in Technological Culture & Aesthetics at Winchester School of Art (University of Southampton). Parikka has a PhD in Cultural History from the University of Turku, Finland and in addition, he is Docent of Digital Culture Theory at the University of Turku, Finland.
Parikka has published widely on digital culture, media theory, and visual culture. His work on media archaeology has gathered a lot of positive international attention and awards. Parikka’s books include (Koneoppi, in Finnish, on “cultural theory in the age of digital machines”) and his Digital Contagions: A Media Archaeology of Computer Viruses was published by Peter Lang (2007, 2nd. edition forthcoming 2016). Parikka’s Insect Media (2010) won the 2012 Anne Friedberg award for Innovative Scholarship (Society for Cinema and Media Studies). The third part of the media ecology trilogy, A Geology of Media, came out in 2015 with University of Minnesota Press as well.

The co-edited collection The Spam Book: On Viruses, Porn, and Other Anomalies from the Dark Side of Digital Culture was published by Hampton Press (2009), and Media Archaeology came out with University of California Press (2011). The work on media archaeology was continued in Parikka’s 2012 monograph What is Media Archaeology? In 2013 he edited a collection of Wolfgang Ernst’s writings, Digital Memory and the Archive.

**Steve Rushton**


He has collaborated with artist Rod Dickinson as well with the artists duo, Thomson & Craighead. Currently a PhD. Candidate at Leiden University, School of Humanities, Leiden, NL 2013 and on-going post-graduate research, theory, Jan van Eyck Academy, Maastricht, The Netherlands, 2001 – 2002. BA Hons Fine Art, Sheffield Hallam University, 1977 -1980.

**Magnus Bårtås**

Magnus Bårtås is an artist, writer and Professor at Konstfack, the University College of Arts, Craft, and Design in Stockholm. In his work he has mainly focused on biographies, storytelling and architecture. He presented his dissertation You Told Me – Work stories and video essays at Gothenburg University 2010. His film Madame & Little Boy won the first prize at Oberhausen International Film Festival 2010. Magnus Bårtås is represented at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, among other institutions and his work has been shown at international film festivals and exhibitions, such as the 9th Gwangju Biennale 2012 and ABCDEFGHI at Marabouparken 2013. Together with Fredrik Ekman he has published three volumes of essays. Their latest book, Alla monster måste dö (“All monsters must die”), was nominated for the Swedish August prize.

**Andrej Slávik**

Andrej Slávik is an historian. He earned his PhD in 2011 with a dissertation on the aesthetics of postwar composer Iannis Xenakis and currently holds a post-doc position at Chalmers University of Technology, where he attempts to chart the introduction of the kind of computational methods that Xenakis pioneered in contemporary architecture. In addition, he has taken an interest in the relationship between artistic and humanistic research in general and in the relationship between film and history in particular—investigations that have led towards the field of microhistory. Apart from his research, Slávik has organised seminars at the intersection between art and the humanities, acted as opponent on artistic conferences and researched forms for history writing in close proximity to artistic practice (2012, through a video piece by Farhad Kalantary). He currently serves as chairman of the Swedish Ernst Cassirer Society.

**Carlo Ginzburg**

Carlo Ginzburg is a noted Italian historian and proponent of the field of microhistory. He is best known for Il formaggio e i vermi (1976, English title: The Cheese and the Worms), which examined the beliefs of an Italian heretic, Menocchio, from Montereale Valcellina. In 1966, he published The Night Battles, an examination of the benandanti visionary folk tradition found in 16th and 17th century Friuli in northeastern Italy. He returned to looking at the visionary traditions of early modern Europe for his 1989 book Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches’ Sabbath.

In The Night Battles and Ecstasies, Ginzburg traced a complex path from certain European witch persecutions to the benandanti and a wide variety of practices which he describes as evidence of a substrate of shamanic cults in Europe. His 1999 work, The Judge and the Historian, sought to expose injustice in the trial of Adriano Sofri, but failed to win a new trial. His book was not only about Sofri, but was also a general reflection on the scientific methods used by a historian, and their similarity to the work of a judge, who also has to correlate testimonies with material evidence in order to deduce what really happened. Thus, he explains how the judicial model of early historiography made it focus on easily verifiable facts, resulting in studies that centered on individuals or on what Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch called in the Annales d’histoire économique et sociale an “evenemental history.”
LIST OF WORKS

Illica #1
lecture performance and bus tour, 2011

Production: Urban Festival, Zagreb, the Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme and the Bergen Academy of Art and Design
Curator: BLOK

Folgen
installation
6 m x 6 m MDF table, photographs mounted on MDF, illustrations, text, projector, screen. 2011

Interface design: Fré Sonneveld
Data mining software development: Brendan Howell
Table construction: Folke Köbberling
Production assistant: Jack Gross
Curator: Trampoline
Production: Trampoline, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, the Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme and the Bergen Academy of Art and Design
Presented at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt within the Tracing Mobility exhibition.

Folgen
lecture performance, 50 minutes
artist book, video
2012

Presentations:
Your Revolution Begins at Home, USF Visningsrommet, Bergen, 2014
Agera Digitalt, Göteborg, 2014
Norwegian Telecom Museum, Oslo, 2013
Manchester Contemporary Art Gallery, Manchester, 2013
A Day of Microhistories, Konstfack, Stockholm, 2013
Screen City Festival, Stavanger, 2013
Medialab Prado, Madrid, 2013
Museum of Contemporary Art, Roskilde, 2012
Interrogating Methods Seminar, KHIB, Bergen, 2012
Tracing Mobility, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2011

**Folgen Archive**
264 pages, full colour, hardcover, dust jacket

Book design: Fré Sonneveld

**Urban Takes Helsinki**
installation, 2012
7 short films played over 7 monitors, video projection and printed photographs

Commissioned by: m-cult for Media Façades Festival Helsinki
Production: Helsinki Festival, Aalto University / City Sets, and Lasipalatsi Media Centre, and realized with support from the EU Culture programme, the Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme and the Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Helsinki Cultural Office and AVEK.
Production assistance and editing: Saija Salonen
Presented at Lasipalatsi gallery during the Media Façades Festival in Helsinki, August 22-25th, 2012.

**The Little Yellow House**
installation and limited edition artist book
2012

Presentations:
MFSK_Online, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Roskilde, Denmark, 2012
Your Revolution Begins at Home, USF Visningsrommet, Bergen, 2014
Curator: Tina Madsen
Production: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Roskilde, the Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme and the Bergen Academy of Art and Design

**Mortgaged Lives**
film, 42 min
2014

Director: Michelle Teran
Camera: Michelle Teran, David Rych, Jessica Fuquay
Edit: David Rych
Post Production: David Rych
Audio Mastering: Malte Steiner
Translation: Marisa Petit

Featuring:
PAH Madrid
Psychosocial Impact Group of the Truth Commission
Manuela Cuéllar Rodríguez
Rosario Alcántara Torres
Gladys Cerna Dávila
Maria Dolores Ramos Chavero

Presentations:
The Age of Catastrophe, group exhibition, Actual Gallery, Winnipeg
La Chambre Blanche, Québec City, 2015
Buenos Aires Festival of New Cinema, 2015
Athens International Film and Video Festival, 2015
Mexico International Film Festival, 2015
Cinematheket, Bergen, 2014
ThoughtWorks Werkstatt, Berlin, 2014

Awards:
Silver Palm Winner of the 2015 Mexico International Film Festival
Winner of the 2nd prize in the Feature Documentary Category, Athens International Film and Video Festival

Production: The Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme, Bergen Academy of Art and Design and Canada Council for the Arts
**Mortgaged Lives**
book, 216 pages b/w softcover
2014

Publisher: Journal of Aesthetics & Protest  
Cover design: Fré Sonneveld  
Inside design: Michelle Teran  
Translation: Michelle Teran  
Production: The Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme, Bergen Academy of Art and Design and Canada Council for the Arts

**Rupture Sessions**
Staged reading, 2014

Production: The Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme, Bergen Academy of Art and Design and Canada Council for the Arts

Presentations:
USF Visningsrommet, Bergen, Norway, 2014  
Microhistories, Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm, 2014  
La Chambre Blanche, Québec City, 2015