

COPY THAT

Aesthetics Within a Series of Tubes

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	3
INTRODUCTION	4
I. Language: What's in a Word?	5
II. Typographic Aesthetics	7
III. Information as Absence	9
IV. Tactility and the Analog	11
V. Self-Publishing as Self-Reliance	14
VI. Personal Encryption	18
CONCLUSION	21
Addendum	22
WORKS CITED	23
WORKS REFERENCED	25
LIST OF FIGURES	26

ABSTRACT

My thesis work explores the impact of contemporary technology upon language and personal connection, as well as its influence on the use of encoded and encrypted systems. I argue that modern means of communication have resulted in a previously unseen breakdown of language and comprehension. In this written thesis, I navigate previous eras of printmaking technology in relation to my work, which focuses on specific systems of obscured and coded language and advocates for the experiential quality of handling a physical book. I address how my practice of utilizing outmoded communication technology such as letterpress printing and Xerox image-making is a response against living within a screen-focused society. Through this lens, I will discuss the work I have created during my time at the University of the Arts, while contextualizing my practice through specific works by Leah Mackin, Keith Smith, Dean Dass, and others.

INTRODUCTION

The average viewer will spend approximately six to ten seconds on any individual webpage. This is equivalent to the estimated amount of time individuals take to view singular artworks within museums, which often happens behind a digital device or camera (Reed 12). We have become accustomed to immediate gratification and fatigued by looking, unless the source is backlit or reflective. The search engine and corporate conglomerate Google lists the amount of time it takes to seek information and display results following an individual query. According to present data, most searches take approximately 0.2 seconds to display, after Google utilizes 1,000 computers to seek the requested information. As a contemporary example, Googling the phrase “google it” resulted in approximately 16,360,000,000 results, which were delivered in 0.49 seconds (Internet Live Stats). The digital age has anesthetized our relationship to anything other than the immediate; it is no small wonder we suddenly find ourselves so impatient (Lohr).

My work is informed by communication technology and coded systems of language. I was first trained as a letterpress printer, whereby the time-intensive method of choosing and setting individual pieces of type by hand was an essential part of my process and served as a reaction against the sped-up world outside of the print shop. In my practice, language is crucial and words are paramount: anyone who enters a letterpress print shop has access to the same 26 letters, and the goal is the transmission of ideas.

Although print technologies constantly place a priority upon speed, my emphasis is slow art: slow creation and slow looking. I look at technology and insular language systems through the lens of nostalgia and communication in order to contextualize our present era. I seek to challenge the viewer and bring them out of a passive experience when encountering an artwork.

The prevalence of the internet as well as the invention of smartphones has allowed for unrivaled connectivity. Within the digital era, physical objects are eschewed and viewed as suddenly cumbersome. The same could be argued for personal memory and ways of learning information. Why remember anything when an ad-sponsored answer is at our fingertips? In his collection of essays, *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan asserts that “our co-presence everywhere at once in the electric age is a fact of passive, rather than active, experience” (248). The constant barrage of daily information has strained ideas of connection and presence while causing a breakdown in the way language is transmitted, viewed, and understood. This unfortunate trend fuels my work and research, and drives me to validate the absolute necessity of the book and print within the modern era.

I. Language: What’s in a Word?

With the invention of the telegraph in 1844, communication technology took an electrified form for the first time. Preceding the invention of the telephone by more than three decades, the telegraph relied on electronic pulses to transmit information, which were transformed into a new schematic called Morse code. This system of dots and dashes could be transcribed into alphabetic or numeric form by skilled operators, and vastly changed the timetable previously required for transmitting information over great distances (Crowley and Heyer 133). As such, the telegraph is a natural predecessor to the computerized landscape we find ourselves in today and influenced how later systems of information came to be formed.

My initial use of a coded system of language within a printed work was with *I Still Think of You*, a letterpress printed book created in 2018. Within this piece, transparent pages overlay and interact with imagery on opaque pages, which allows for a secondary visual effect and places an emphasis upon the separate but parallel narratives within the book. One utilizes the Roman

alphabet and is easily read, while the other contains Morse code, which must be decoded letter by letter if it is to be fully understood. While technically this is possible, it would take immense effort on the part of the reader, which affords the passages of code a veil of relative inscrutability. The Roman passages take a macro view on a situation to outline the narrative of the book, while the lines of Morse zoom in and relate only to a specific individual. Effectively, the coded text is in plain sight, but its meaning is meant to remain hidden. The pages with Morse code play further into the system's own internal lexicon, with specific phrases related to opening and closing a conversation with another user, as well as Q codes, three-letter abbreviations that would read as nonsense when translated unless the translator had some familiarity with this system.

In her artist book *Transparency, Reflection, Light, Space: A Response*, created in 2017, Leah Mackin uses a 1971 interview from the minimalist Larry Bell as a challenge of translation. Although Bell had answered the interviewer's questions, he subsequently omitted all vowels from his transcription, simultaneously obscuring his responses and creating what amounted to a guttural series of sounds. Using tracing paper and a light box, Mackin transcribed the missing vowels back into Bell's responses, and included this new string of letters as a separate response. Bell's originally obfuscated responses are included in this piece, but the complete transcription of his interview is never recreated in full; rather, the separated vowels offer a new sense of absence and obscurity. In this way, both pieces are more concerned with the process of transcription and deciphering rather than the content of the original interview. Mackin fused Xerox, letterpress printing, and transparent overlay into her work, and ultimately leaves further interpretation up to the individual viewer (Scudier). *Transparency, Reflection, Light, Space* was pivotal for my own explorations regarding the possibilities of integrating imagery between

multiple sheets of transparent paper and brought up ideas regarding the potential for presenting multiple narratives within a single work.

II. Typographic Aesthetics

In deepening my familiarity with the history of print as well as the standards of alphabetical form, I sought information from type designers regarding the operational reasoning behind various typefaces in the early twentieth century. Alongside a production team that could include calligraphers, punchcutters, and foundries, type designers played an integral role in creating the visual cadence of the alphabet during this era. Many were approached by type foundries in need of designs for composition casting and commissioned to create new type forms or revivals of classic typefaces (Baines 7). In the time prior to machinated punchcutters and photosetting, individual letterforms contained nuance that more specifically pertained to the size and style of the type (Chappell 225). Having grown up largely alongside digitized type forms, my desire was to engage with source material from a pre-computer era. Means of production aside, my interest began with the individual names behind the type forms that have endured the march of time in order to better understand their personal approach and vision.

This search eventually brought me to *The Alphabet* by Frederic Goudy, the opening line of which is: “A letter is a symbol, with a definite shape and significance, indicating a single sound or combination of sounds, and providing a means, through grouping, for the *visible* expression of words – that is, of thoughts” (Chappell 209). *The Alphabet* is effectively a treatise on typographic form from the creator of Goudy Old Style, Deepdene, and Copperplate Gothic, amongst others. This introductory line brings into succinct and sharp focus a higher contemplation of a set of symbols that is typically taken for granted or not considered at all.

The inspiration for creating a broadside from this quote was discovered between two polarized fields of thought: Goudy's regard for the letter and its purpose in his original introduction, and the degradation of words and meaning within our current epoch. The reverence that exists for both language as well as individual letterforms within this single introductory line is nothing short of astounding when compared to the present discourse of misinformation and temporary headlines. Using a manual Vandercook 320 and vintage wood type, I sought to create a print in order to deconstruct Goudy's introduction through singular, overprinted lines of type. Rather than overprinting as an exercise to explore unexpected layers within color combinations, my purpose was to see how far I could push the former legibility of a single sentence, and find other forms that might be created by the negative space between each layer. Through this, the focal point becomes the space between the letters rather than the letters themselves, offering a visualization of Goudy's premise while simultaneously obscuring it (fig. 1). This broadside became the first in a series called *Texting Myself*, which was my attempt to interact with adages from historic type designers while also upending their point.

Another print in this series explores color alongside a quote from the Swiss typographer Jan Tschichold. To wit: "The speed with which the modern consumer of printing has to absorb it means that the form of printing must also adapt itself to the conditions of modern life" (Tschichold 115). Using a combination of navy ink, maroon paper, and unconventional spacing, the letters become difficult to immediately perceive and therefore the words must be slowly pieced together instead of promptly read at once. This goes against Tschichold's statement regarding the speed and ease of printing in relation to modern life, and ultimately results in a print that would have greatly offended his sensibilities.

Another reason behind this series was to test the patience of viewers when presented with obscured Roman letters in place of coded text. Each print provided a different obstruction, so that the viewer could find a recognizable entry point, but they would ultimately have to decide whether or not to go beyond a cursory read. Some were willing to engage with the print and spend time with it, while others regarded the information as purely visual and moved on. In the end, viewers were far more willing to attempt to detangle the quotes presented within the broadsides, whereas with coded text (such as presented in *I Still Think of You*), there existed an expectation for a direct translation to be included. Given how viewers had previously responded to coded text, the willingness to interact with Roman letters was surprising. This brought up other ideas for me regarding perception that went beyond spacing and color, such as how little information is needed in order to see and properly interpret a single letter. The presentation of information in either case clearly aligned with the viewer's own familiarity with the visual representation of what was being presented.

III. Information as Absence

During a weeklong typecasting intensive at the Bixler Type Foundry in Skaneateles, New York, I experienced firsthand the process of coding a Monotype ribbon to be fed into a typecasting machine in order to create a form or fount of type. Through this process, a specific font schematic is placed into the keyboard, the desired text is keyboarded, and the keyboarded letters then take the form of circular perforations made directly onto a paper ribbon. While the process is similar to typing on a typewriter, the information transmitted relates directly to a specific font schematic, which in turn aligns with a character matrix. The resulting paper ribbon is then fed into and read by a casting machine, which recognizes the individual perforations in relation to a specific letter to be cast from the matrix. In other words, something that is optically

perceived as having no presence can be read by the machine as information. A similar method of reading information through absence can be found as early as 1804 with the invention of the Jacquard machine, a mechanized loom which used punched cards in order to create specific patterns on fabric. These early cards are reminiscent of both Braille and computer tape but precede the former by decades and the latter by over a century. Another commonplace example comes from the early 1900s, when player piano rolls were individually fed into mechanized pianos, negating the need for a live performer or knowledge of how to play a particular song.

Within the computer era, this method was extrapolated into punched computer cards and tape, as well as binary code. Binary utilizes a schematic of zeroes and ones in groups of eight in order to transmit numerical and alphabetical information on a computer. Much like the Monotype machine, computers can read where information is present or absent, and decode it accordingly. The absence of information becomes counter-intuitive, in that while this void is still considered information, we do not view it as having a presence.

This development of basic, translatable code is an important step within computing history, given its effects upon simple decision-making technology and early yes-no mechanisms. Much of early computer programming and development can be viewed under the umbrella of three words: AND, OR, and NOT. This is based upon Boolean algebra, created by George Boole in 1847, which extrapolated some of the basic principles of binary equations first put forth by Gottfried Leibniz in 1689. Leibniz had initially sought to create a purely mathematical form of language based upon logic (“Binary Code”). Nearly three centuries later, the work of both Leibniz and Boole would be further synthesized by Claude Shannon, who expanded Boolean algebra into a model system of communication that responded to the various queries first put forth by binary – e.g., yes-no, on-off, true-false, et al. Shannon’s work became the basis for

digital circuitry, and influenced much of the computer technology still in use today (“Claude Shannon”).

Many people suffer from decision fatigue, given the number of choices any individual is expected to make in a single day. This is, of course, one benefit of computer technology: machines are built to respond to innumerable queries without pause. The above research was on my mind when creating a single-page zine, *Get Lost*. Printed on both sides and folded to create a small booklet, this publication addresses the combination of insomnia and decision-making through a depiction of self-portraits on the scanner bed of a Xerox, a list of handwritten sleep aids, and imagery of literal sleep aids (e.g., Benadryl), all contrasted with short spurts of ASCII binary code. The increased decision-related demands placed upon individuals caused me to look toward binary code to translate basic thoughts, as well as include Shannon’s schematic for information theory, in order to both represent and contrast exhaustive personal decision-making versus the purely logical role of computers.

IV. Tactility and the Analog

The place and pertinence of the physical archive has been contorted by the relative ease of digital access. For as many institutions that have benefited from the space and organization that online resources allow, many more individuals have abandoned in-person research in favor of a casual online search. In her investigation of the archive, artist and writer Susan Howe acknowledges how drastically our everyday encounters with language and memory are becoming transformed by technology. Howe places this idea into practice by viewing and handling historical ephemera firsthand instead of relying upon a static computer screen image. Through spending more time within the library system myself, I was reminded of how vastly different the

act of discovery can be within a physical space. The serendipity of finding an unknown title within library stacks is not easily replicated through online methodologies.

My renewed interest in the library coincided with a continuation of work on another relative relic: the Xerox. In relearning how to use this machine through *Get Lost*, I was again surprised by how tentative others were in approaching it due to a lack of familiarity. The Xerox offered the allure of vibrant colors and an immediate image. In a literal sense, it created a plasticized object through the use of toner, which is made from granulated beads of plastic that are then fused to the page using a heat mechanism. In place of computer mockups, I could set objects directly onto the scanner bed of the machine and have a physical printout seconds later. This allowed for elements of chance in the manipulation of imagery while scanning, as well as the ability to adjust various settings and color levels in order to emulate offset printing.

In researching other xerographers, one name came up constantly: Pati Hill. Working in the late 1970s, Hill managed to secure a sponsorship from IBM, which leased an IBM Copier II model for her to use at home (Sellers). This afforded Hill the capability of modification beyond what would be allowed at public copy shops – e.g., over-scooping her own toner and placing unstable objects on the scanner bed. Hill's copier work affords everyday objects a surreal noir quality through isolating specific imagery, typically rendered in stark black and white, whether it be something as mundane as a cracked egg or as curiously romantic as a dead swan (fig. 2). My investigation of Hill also led me to Barbara T. Smith, a copier artist whose work largely focused on family. Smith began her xerographic work after being rejected by a lithographer and realizing that she had the means to take production into her own hands (Wolf 74). Both artists thrived from the ability to create in the privacy of their own homes, without restrictions placed upon their imagery. While Smith's creations take on an ethereal quality through light lines and a pastel

palette, Hill dove into the opposite realm of deep contrast and a focus on achieving the right blacks. Hill's investigations led me to wonder what other substrates could be employed in copy art, which in turn resulted in the creation of a new book: *Link in Bio*.

Created using single color channels on a Xerox Color C60, various substrates were employed in order to fully test the limits of the format, including vellum, handmade paper, silver mylar, and Yupo. The Color C60 model includes a bypass tray, whereby the user can insert their own paper. As long as the correct dimensions and weight are inputted into the machine, the Xerox will typically run it through as though it were a standard sheet of copy paper. All told, *Link in Bio* includes a dozen varieties of substrate, all of which were used in order to both enhance the imagery and surprise the reader. Inspired by my experience in the library, *Link in Bio* emulates the structure of library bindings, which are typically oversewn single-sheet bindings covered in buckram, a special book cloth coated in acrylic to help ensure its longevity. *Link in Bio* became a way to collect and present the various examples I had encountered that emulated the idea of information as a type of absence or void, such as Monotype ribbon, computer tape, binary code, and outdated software, in a way that pointed out their relationship to one another across time (fig. 3). The constantly changing tactility within the book is used intentionally to slow down the reader and make them newly aware of turning the page, as well as how to turn a page, with variations in size and texture forcing an irregularly paced paging experience. Many pages also utilize transparency and overlay in order to create new images or present previous spreads in a new light.

Link in Bio pays homage to data systems of the past, while offering a consideration of our current means of online connection and disconnection, questioning the future of these omnipresent yet ultimately unstable devices. Taking an Instagram-specific colloquialism and

giving it new context, *Link in Bio* points out the futility of present-day casual internet capitalism and attempts at connection while also speaking to how we personally relate to one another on the basis of generational familiarity with technology. Visual references to equipment and technological eras allow for either nostalgia or confusion, depending upon the age of the viewer. The hope of *Link in Bio* is to offer new meta-context to our digital daze, allowing readers to slip away, if momentarily, from the pressing attention of their screens.

Link in Bio was pointedly created entirely with a Xerox machine. My personal sympathies regarding the longstanding hierarchies of print align with artist Marianne Dages, who stated and summarized: “I don’t think a letterpress print holds any more value than a photocopy” (Buechler, 6). A print is created by utilizing a matrix which is transferred to a substrate, and anything that achieves this goal is of equal and worthy value.

V. Self-Publishing as Self-Reliance

Within the book world, no other artist was at the forefront of desktop self-publishing more than Keith Smith, who has created and distributed his own instructional guides and artist books since the late sixties. Smith recognized early on the benefits of being his own independent publishing house through the freedom and relative autonomy it afforded, and quickly learned the requisite software necessary to create his books. Although trained as a photographer, Smith also played the role of educator through his work in book theory and instruction. Many of his instructional works are hundreds of pages long, which was no small feat in the 1980s, especially for work created on a personal computer.

Through being an early adopter of these technologies, Smith made work that is uniquely of its era through the pixilated, patterned imagery that the software of the time could provide.

Many of Smith's works are unique one-offs or centered around photography, but the artist books *Overcast* and *Bobby* stand out as separate from his oeuvre, both being publications created in collaboration with Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, NY (fig. 4). Although VSW printed these creations, Smith is entirely responsible for the content. Not unlike the previously mentioned xerographers, Smith gravitated to art that could be created within the privacy and comfort of his own home after being considered somewhat of an outlier – *Overcast* in particular addresses this perspective.

Another example of the early days of desktop publishing can be found in *Zen & the Art of the Macintosh: Discoveries on the Path to Computer Enlightenment*. Created by Michael Green through his own imprint, Running Press, *Zen* was a true feat of the individual in 1986. Taking the reader on an exploration of digital technology through digital technology, Green presented a vision of what was possible with unfettered access to image-creation software. Although the pixilated illustrations now appear nearly primitive when compared to modern standards, Green was prescient in his enthusiastic and honest presentation of a user's complicated relationship with their personal computer as they appear to meld into a single entity.

Smith and Green's respective practices were changed and invigorated by these advancements in technology, and both used their enthusiasm of the new imaging tools available to prove what was possible on an individual level. This new wave of desktop self-publishing was completely novel: previously, all text would have to be either typeset or pasted-up before being handed to a printer. With personal computers, much like xerography, this creation could happen within a more private sphere, resulting in uncensored, unedited work that was more pointedly personal. Although enamored with these possibilities, both artists also acknowledge either

directly or obliquely the power that these new digital tools hold, as well as the importance of retaining a foothold within the physical world.

When first introduced to the various appeals of offset lithography as a process – such as large sheets and printing en masse – I was inclined to make an object that focused on scale in relation to the volume of pages as opposed to its overall size. Thus, *Inchy* came to be. Made from a single sheet of paper, *Inchy* is small in stature, large in page number, and can function as either a flipbook or a traditional codex. Though the initial idea was to make a one-inch book, the final product is slightly larger (1.75x2.5”) due to size limitations of the guillotine used to trim it. With a poem by Adrienne Rich on the left and simple imagery on the right of each spread, *Inchy* offers a visual accompaniment to the text while taking the reader on a small journey alongside an existential inchworm. The final copies were collated, sewn with a link stitch, glued, and re-trimmed, with these additional steps of labor matching the emotional labor represented in the poem. Inspired in part by Bruno Munari’s *Nella Notte Buia (In the Dark of the Night)*, my hope was to make a children’s book for adults, wherein readers could choose to engage with levity or its opposite when reading. While *Inchy* does not represent the software mechanics of its era outright, it does attempt to engage with the viewer on a private level through scale, allowing for a more individualized experience when viewing. Additionally, it offers a counterpoint to the focus on how large a publication can be when printing offset.

When contemplating a new offset project, I began to consider the vast amount of new terminology and slang specific to computing technology that has collectively been set to memory over the past few decades. Constant advancement means constantly evolving linguistics regarding these various digital tools and their resulting effects. This led me to compile a brief snapshot of this terminology, contained as a floated and contorted cloud of information within

Lexicon.exe. Designed as a small accordion, *Lexicon* presents the modern dilemma of keeping up with technological phases and slang through lists of words set in an intentionally pixilated font that have been manipulated on a scanner bed, resulting in cascading and duplicated imagery (fig. 5). The size of the book is meant to emulate a pocket dictionary, with its accordion-folded pages set within a wrapped cover that imitates a standard manila file folder. While the majority of *Lexicon* was taken from personal recollection, a small portion was crowdsourced; the idea being that the list should be compiled through the memory of individuals rather than a rote Google search or copy/paste. Although this project was initially intended to be produced using offset lithography, it was ultimately outsourced and created using a Risograph due to quarantine measures taken in the spring of 2020.

A contemporary example that places technological advances in a more unsettling light is *Ultrices*, a collaborative book between the artists Marianne Dages and Leah Mackin made in 2016. The focal point of *Ultrices* is a modified source text from Sigmund Freud, which has been fed through Google Translate and Optical Character Recognition. The resulting text effectively resembles nothing from the original essay and reads like an absurdist poem, including nonsense phrasing such as “To better mnezik.” The artists’ pamphlet combines unique letterpress printing methods with the reimagined text, and was created as a variable edition, with no two copies exactly the same. Poking at the reliability of these technological systems, Dages and Mackin point to the fallibility of placing all trust in an algorithm while also pushing against the ideal of a perfectly editioned publication. *Ultrices* also begins to consider the relative impermanence and instability of information when one is reliant upon computer intelligence that is constantly being tweaked and updated.

Lexicon.exe and *Ultrices* both borrow from computer technology, while also making the point that to rely upon computers and internet technology is to rely on a sometimes-unstable media. In his essay, “What is an Apparatus?”, Giorgio Agamben posits that there are effectively two groups: living beings, and the apparatuses “in which living beings are incessantly captured” (13). To further this point, he specifically calls out the cell phone, or *telefonino*, and how it has “made the relationship between people all the more abstract,” a prescient observation that continues to reflect aspects of society many years on (16). Ultimately, Agamben believes that the power of the apparatus lies in exploiting the human desire for happiness. This argument presents a stark change from where this technology began to how it is used today, and how it continues to affect our daily lives while alleviating past concerns.

VI. Personal Encryption

Dean Dass explores the idea of what is unique or reproducible in print in his book, *The Age of Partial Objects*. Through xerography, letterpress, inkjet, gouache, and more, Dass’ focus is on fragmented knowledge in relation to the psychologist Melanie Klein’s phrasing of “partial objects” as a clinical term. Dass makes clear what is possible within the space of a book through an exploration of tactility, surprise, repetition, and alteration of materials. *Partial Objects* is an encyclopedia unto itself, utilizing recurring shapes, motifs, and multiple sets of imagery in order to explore an individual idea. Further, it pushes the tension between what is considered high (lithography, letterpress) and low (xerography, inkjet) within the print world, combining all processes to great effect and allowing the physical medium to speak as an equal with the images.

This piece had a quiet but steady influence on my work over the course of the past year. While Dass’ creation is a monument to process, my most recent work, *Cipher*, is a consideration of fractured moments in digital time, partly inspired by Dass’ ability to synthesize a multitude of

materials and create his own visual prose. The work behind *Cipher* began with an investigation of secreting words into code, a process known as cryptology.

Cryptology has existed since the days of Julius Caesar, who used methods of ciphertext in order to transmit messages related to war (Hulme 24). While his methods were simplistic, the trend continued for both the state and individuals, becoming increasingly more intricate as time went on. Eventually, polyalphabetic substitution came about, wherein two-letter combinations replaced each individual letter in a coded text, making it more difficult to decipher. With the invention of computers and the transition to an increasingly prominent amount of textual information being transmitted online, the need for further privacy and security again surged, which resulted in new methods of machine-based encryption.

Seeking something beyond a straight symbol-to-letter translation brought me to modern-day encryption, wherein computer technology makes it possible to replace individual letters with a multitude of letters and symbols in order to make them more difficult to decrypt. This method of encryption can then be re-encrypted multiple times, so that the final batch of symbols resembles little to nothing of the original text and has greatly expanded in size. This also places a Dada-esque meaning upon individual letters by extrapolating them into what appears to be nonsense code and gibberish.

Memory is a metaphor for the forgetfulness of digital phases, as well as the collective amnesia that our constant connectivity fosters. *Cipher* takes the seemingly cold world of code and offers a reflection on aspects of technology past and present. In tandem with more personal dialogue, *Cipher* considers the physical movements that we have become accustomed to in the smartphone era (such as swiping or scrolling), and questions how our lives have been affected by this constant connectivity, which often replaces common human traits and idiosyncrasies with a

disconnected digital version. Finally, *Cipher* fuses xerography and letterpress methods of printing, utilizing inkwipes as a background to imply static information while creating imagery that cannot be perfectly replicated (fig. 6). Inkwipes are made by running a sheet of paper through the rollers of a press that has had solvent added to loosen and dissolve the structure of the ink, creating an image that speaks to both the presence and deletion of information.

In researching cryptology as well as looking at various books created during the early computer era in the 1980s, I realized how much my own life has been impacted by the development of these various technologies. More than impacted, it created a sense of disappearance when considering how much of the early ways of technology storage have since been lost. New and purportedly better equipment comes along to replace the older version, and a collective transition is made toward whatever is faster and more efficient. Floppy discs were, at one point, the pinnacle of digital storage technology. Then came the CD-ROM, the minidisc, external hard drives, various flash drives, and eventually, nothing at all (“the cloud”). Technology speeds along in a way that makes its predecessors immediately obsolete: even if the data within can be accessed, the programs that one would use to open them are no longer viable. It becomes a technological catch-22 of keeping up with an impossible personal archive of information. We have come to view the digitized object as more secure and archival than the physical object. While digitization comes with its attendant benefits, this perceived security is occasionally a convenient misnomer.

With technology, the goal is forever to become more compact and cheaper – consider early versions of the USB, desktops, et cetera. The same is true of language in our era of connectivity. With unfettered access to one another, our bandwidth expands socially and contracts linguistically. According to philologist Hans Robicsek, “every language can, as it were,

be regarded as the cipher of every other” (Gerstner 27). This seemingly simple line points to a global vantage point of interaction, translation, and code, one which gets smaller every day as our capacity to reach each other increases.

CONCLUSION

In 2010, Artie Vierkant claimed that “mass media and the world of ‘the screen’ *is* our communal space” (5). Separated as we may be, we dwell online, where the pervasive advent of social media has afforded a newfound invasiveness into our daily lives and interpersonal relationships. When the Turing test was first invented in 1950, its purpose was to determine whether or not a machine was capable of passing for a human through a simple test exhibiting its ability to respond to questions. In our present era, through a relatively ironic twist, we now rely on computers to determine whether or not the entity interacting with a website is a machine or a human through what is called a CAPTCHA.

It is impossible to move forward without looking back in order to better understand the overall context and influence from one event to another. As discussed, cryptography and cipher-texts easily lend themselves to a discussion of encryption and decryption, which in turn relate to algorithms. The use of such algorithms continues to evolve and take on different meanings and usages. Algorithmic thinking – as seen more recently within social media – can be viewed as an extrapolation of control, commerce, and a reinforcement of an extant echo chamber. Further, as we continue down our digital path, we more often encounter the entropic status of changing URLs, servers, wikis, and various information that – while wonderfully available worldwide – is constantly in flux, in tandem with our own relationship to it.

Addendum

At present, the city of Wuhan, China, has begun to emerge from its lockdown due to the coronavirus outbreak, and new measures are being implemented in order to ascertain the health and viral risk of its citizens. This new normal involves invasive biometric procedures, such as frequent temperature monitoring and the implementation of personal color-coded Q-codes that must be displayed in order for an individual to be allowed to travel (Chen et al.). In Australia, a new phone application utilizes Bluetooth technology to track individuals who may have contacted someone carrying the virus (McGowan). Personal metadata that was previously outward and static – birthday, hometown, name – is being extrapolated to address the human body in real time, opening the door to a new avenue of previously unseen data collection and tracking measures.

As of April 2020, we are looking at screens and digitized versions of one another more than ever before. While we experience the pandemic collectively, we can simultaneously become more isolated through lockdown measures, and ever-more reliant upon both the internet and social media. Our present state of nationwide quarantine brings up issues of access and privilege in a different light, while placing a new urgency upon documenting the times we are living in and through by any means possible.

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LIST OF FIGURES



Fig. 1. Sarah Moody, *Texting Myself #1 (Goudy)*. Letterpress print, 20x26", 2019.

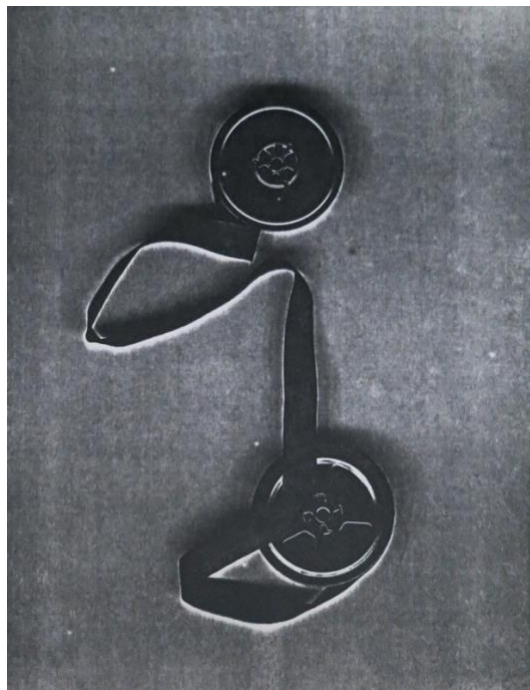


Fig. 2. Pati Hill, *Alphabet of Common Objects (typewriter ribbon)*. Black and white copier print, 8.5x11", c. 1975. Image courtesy Estate of Pati Hill, via *Hyperallergic*, www.hyperallergic.com.



Fig. 3. Sarah Moody, *Link in Bio* (detail). Xeroxed artist book, 17.5x11" (open), 2019.

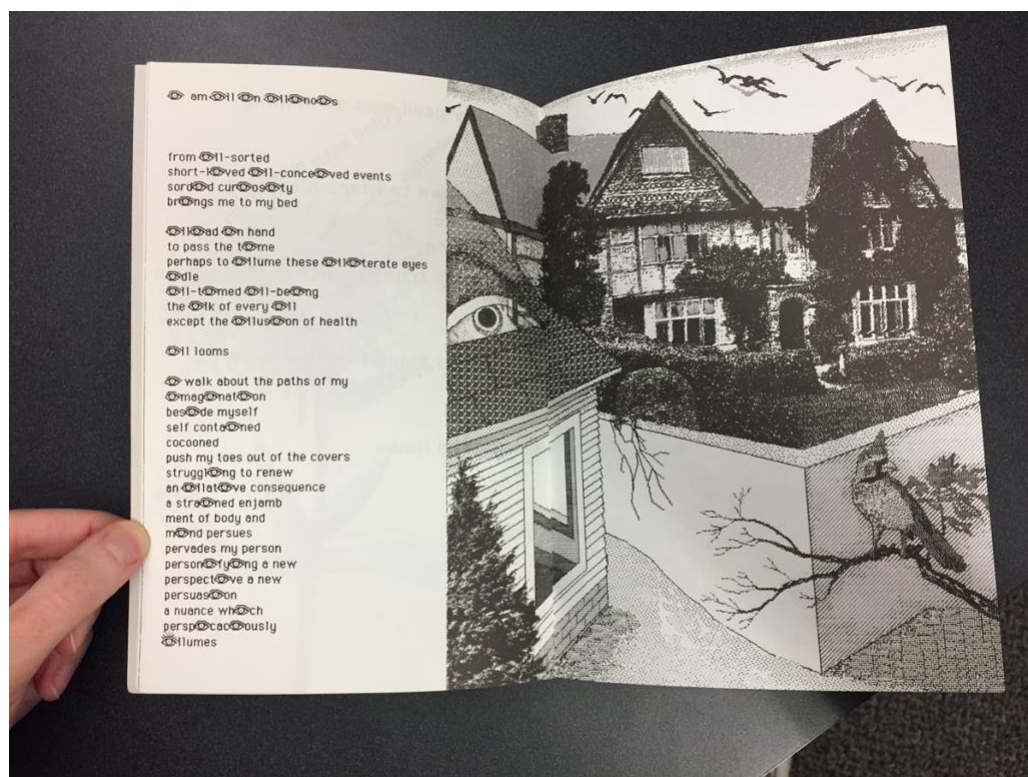


Fig. 4. Keith Smith, *Overcast* (detail). Offset lithography, dimensions unavailable, 1986.



Fig. 5. Sarah Moody, *Lexicon.exe*. Risograph, XxX” (open), 2020.



Fig. 6. Sarah Moody, *Cipher (detail)*. Letterpress and Xerox, XxX” (open), 2020.