Reframing Poetic Consciousness through Deconstruction and New Media

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Generic Escape: Reframing narratives and breaking code

It is dark and stormy, and you switch on the television in the 1990s. The cable signal is out so what do you see? Often times you will receive a signal that looks like a bunch of coloured bars. Other times, all you get is an electronic noisy image. Today, this noisy visual effect is often intentionally produced by manipulating, distorting, or blurring the pixel structure of an image with photo-editing software. The accidental or unintended outcome of the technological errors that produce these images somehow speaks to our subconscious need for a break from the reality of well-defined narratives and circumscribed modes of interpretation (Kane, 2016).

The intentional use of photo noise confounds our expectations of a traditional picture by existing as a contradiction to the reductive aspects and well-defined narratives of modernism. Art during the modernist period (though sometimes quite experimental and tradition-breaking in itself) tended towards a progression of aesthetic reductiveness, featuring clean lines while engaging in the functionality of minimalism. Philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard describes how postmodernism, however, carries a diversity of intellectual approaches in contrast to the totality of modernism (Loschek, 2009). This diversity is evident in most digital or computer-generated imagery and photography, as code and unseen processes that operate in the background to create what we see on the page or screen. If a digital image is meant to convey a coherent story or produce a deliberate effect on the viewer, breaking or manipulating the code of the image would produce a different vision or understanding. Kane (2017) states, "if code, signal processing, and network flow have become the dominant tropes of our time, then it is perhaps only through error, failure and breakdown that one may find a temporary reprieve" (p.5).

Glitch art then is the logical frontier for artists to assault the typical yet satisfying image and skew it into an often disorienting but more liberating set of forms, colours, and imagery. It

happens when the artist intuitively, accidentally or deliberately manipulates the code that creates

the image. The result is rife with visual error, interruption, pixelation, and compression –in other

words, a loss or rearrangement of data that has the potential to create new narrative forms.

The following set of images portrays the process of creating a glitch image: an automatic

self-portrait was taken using the Macintosh computer program *Photo Booth,* the image is saved

as a .jpeg file *(photo, left)* that creates a set of image code data *(right).* So long as this data is

preserved, the image remains the same. When the code is altered, it creates a glitch on the image,

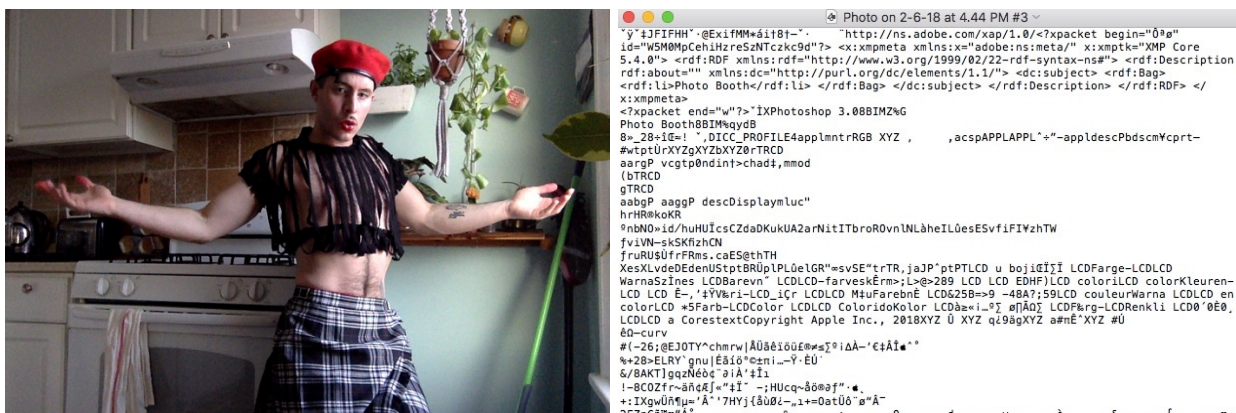as seen in the bottom photo, which I used as a final result in my book entitled *Generic Escape.*

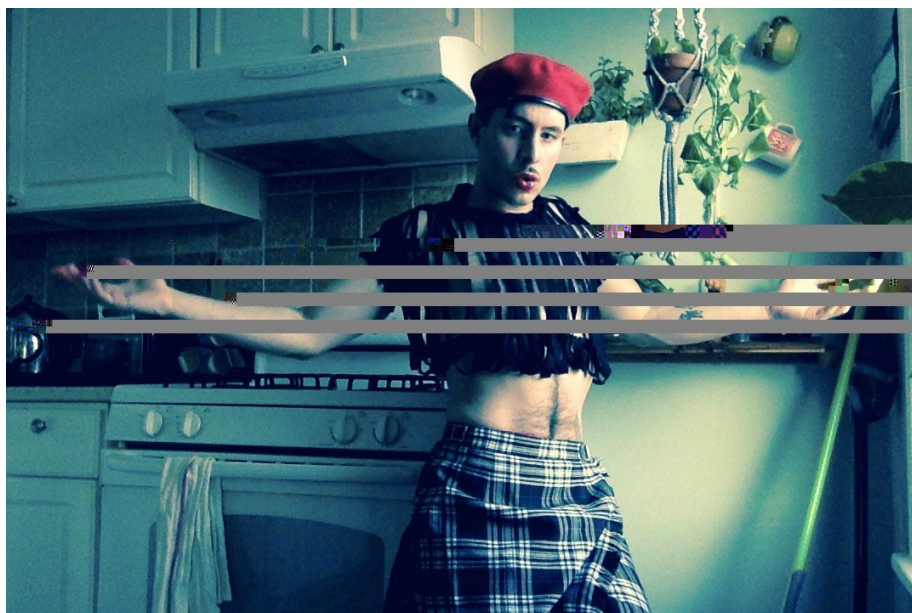*Figure 1.* Original Photo (Self-Portrait of Patrick)   *Figure 2.* Image Code

Figure 3. Glitched Photo, used on page 14 in Generic Escape

Both photo noise and glitch can be discussed as critical acts of *deconstruction*. Deconstruction, or deconstructivism, is a philosophical concept that was mainly developed by Martin Heidegger and then adapted by theorists such as Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida in the 1970s. Several French feminists have also used deconstructivism to offset the deep male bias embedded in the European intellectual tradition (Holland, 2018). Essentially, the importance of this theoretical method of deconstructivism is to focus or reveal what is *not* being said or represented: "deconstruction registers what is asserted in order to concentrate immediately on all the things that this assertion fails to state, omits and negates. According to Loschek (2009), it directs the focus towards what is not said" (p.178). Even though this might seem like a frustrating break in our expectations or desires, it can disclose where there is a potential for dissent, discontinuity, paradox, or any kind of contradiction or break that could prove fertile for entirely new ideas. Deconstruction adapts but ultimately reveals what is irrational and inconsistent about our accepted conventions and codes of thought and behaviour. There are no happy endings or neatly packaged messages in deconstruction: what we are left with, however, is a lack of closure, destabilization, and I would argue, infinite possibilities in order to pave the way for new understandings.

Deconstruction proliferates through different forms of language, cinema, literature, and design. Its effect on design holds great promise in changing our way of actually being in the world. Since fashion is such a large part of manufacturing, mass consumption, and utility, deconstruction in fashion could influence deconstruction in the way we design cities, transportation systems, energy, finance, governance, etc. Fashion opened new horizons in the 1990s when designers created a more inquisitive or critical position within and towards the dominant fashion system. Zborowska (2015) noted that *The New York Times* street fashion

photographer Bill Cunningham observed how "the structures of design appeared to be under attack, displacing seams, tormenting the surface with incisions…" (p.187). This was notably demonstrated by Belgian designers Martin Margiela and Ann Demeulemeester in the 1990s. Margiela's focus on fragmentation helped transform the traditionally functional role of design into one more interested in questioning the construction and processes involved in design based on an aesthetic and moral imperative. Granata (2013) points out that "in his anger against what too much money and too little imagination had done to his art form, Margiela recycled thrown-away clothes, disembowelled his perfectly cut jackets and wrapped bright blue garbage bags around the clothes he made" (p.183). Through such explicit and material commentary on the social and political realities of fashion production and creation, these designers elevate their work beyond the concerns of a purely artistic or commercial market, making it transcendental. In effect, what we have now is the *artist-designer*, a hybrid term that arose in the 1980s to suggest a move toward breaking down and combining aspects of traditionally separate roles and fields. It was even more subtly used to peck away at the distinctions between art and fashion, high and low culture and commerce.

Postmodern thinking diverges from modernism in its move away from monolithic forms of logic and meaning. It is about building forms and interpretations of meaning that are fluid, citational, paradoxical, and sometimes ironic in an attempt to elucidate that reality as we make it is actually quite polysemic and diverse. In doing so, it also honours what is *unreal* according to more rational analyses: there is an invitation to play with the irrational or chaotic (i.e., visions, ecstasy, myth) as well. Loschek (2009) claims that it liberates the individual to create form that is not beholden to function but rather a generator of visions and ideas. In his practice, Martin Margiela offered poetic insight into the fashion industry by pulling it apart and reconstructing it

— effectively using the material reality of fashion as a medium for his own visionary interpretation.

In this spirit, I have decided to compile a book of poetry, design, glitch art, and photo noise using deconstructive methods in order to advance the cause of the artist-designer for a postmodern audience-to-be. It is a book filled with contradictions between form and order, author and subject, fashion and art, narrative and poetry. As a bound fine art book, a common cover-to-cover order is suggested yet the content quickly contradicts this. Rather, the audience is moved back and forth through sequences of images and words, giving an order and rhythm that is individual to the reader.

The starting point of my exploration was based on Event Philosophy. The first chapter of Slavoj Žižek's book *Event*, titled *Framing, Enframing, Reframing*, describes how framing creates reality. He explains Event Philosophy by stating that Event is not only something that occurs within the world, but is a modification of the very frame through which we perceive the world and engage in it. The frame is, therefore, our experience or perception of reality; it can be understood as unconscious, fiction, fantasy, repressed truth, or the things we do not know that we know (Žižek, 2014). Once made aware of this frame, a breakthrough happens, which Žižek describes as *Enframing,* which was explained by philosopher Martin Heideggar's in *Das Thing* as a mode of technology (p. 31). *"Enframing"* brings about an awareness and shift in perspective. It is the moment that we become aware of the Frame that a shift in our relationship to reality happens. Once we have shattered the fantasy of the frame and are confronted with the reality beneath it, *"Reframing"* takes place. The Event is no longer a mere change of frame; it is the destruction of the frame itself (Žižek, 2014).

An early example of deconstruction used in my project was inspired by the glasswing butterfly and Žižek,'s concept of enframing. Just as the butterfly reframes its limited reality as a caterpillar when it undergoes metamorphosis, so did I when I chose to reframe a conventional article of clothing by tearing it apart and embellishing it to create something different. The reframing took place by ripping out everything but the seams of a hoodie. The exploration of this concept led to one of the first images used in my book (as seen below). The outcome of this experiment and its final product was intended to engage the audience in such a way that would expand their awareness of material reality beyond commonly prescribed forms of fashion.
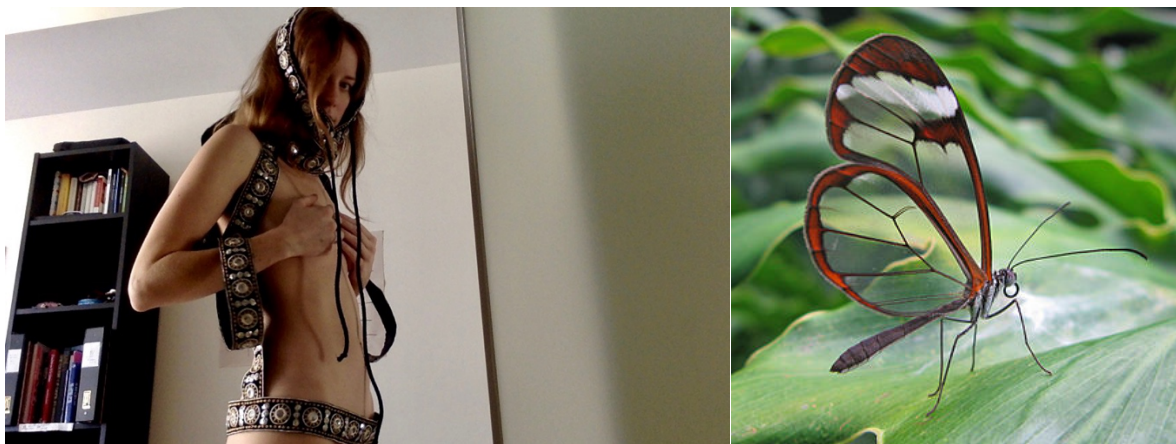
Figure 4. Deconstructed Hoodie
Figure 5. Greta oto-Glasswing (Tiller, 2008)

As a creator or subject in a world increasingly flooded with images and messages as we multiply our digital outlets, devices, etc., the destressing need for nature is that much more pronounced. My choice to make a tactile book is part of this desire: to give others a break from digital consumption and to pursue some of what is most avant-garde about digital art outside of its expected context of the internet. In effect, my work invites others to step outside the grid of marketing and communications in order to find a creative utopia they might encounter while walking in an outdoor museum or arboretum. My book can be approached from any page and is nonlinear in its delivery. Kane (2016) discusses "anti-communication" as an offsetting of the

logic of the "Internet's attention economy" as she observes the emergent art practices in digital media and culture: specifically, glitch art, which I have employed as a technique. She argues that even though glitch art may appear to be nothing more than meaningless fragments of polychromatic noise, it actually offers an emergent visual rhetoric of anti-communication that marks, echoes and offsets the progressive rationalization of the aesthetics in modern culture and media.

Eighteenth-century Romantic poets and artists encouraged expressions of nature, individuality, and enlightenment through arts and literature during an era of increasing industrialization and rationalization. Romantic thinkers were invested in returning to nature in order to restore the soul of man, as there was a general mistrust of institutions and industry amongst them. Today, there is a mistrust in the economy and of certain social realities– social media for instance, because they have the ability to determine, alter or corrupt our relationship to material culture and the environment. It is, therefore, useful to be aware of how fashion and visual art can be seen as both commodity and representation. The relation amongst these two serves to create collective fantasies, or frameworks for our experiences, which can be fetishized in such a way to create their own virtual realities. Marx and Engels (2001) observe how commodification begins to turn "a definite social relation between men into the fantastic form of a relation between things" (p.777). Ultimately, what is at stake or what is being created or *represented* is what Tiqqun (1999), a French collective of authors and activists, calls the "Young-Girl" — "the most authoritarian commodity in the world of authoritarian commodities (p. 81). This young-girl is not necessarily a gendered subject but "the model citizen as redefined by consumer society since World War I, in explicit response to the revolutionary menace. As such, the Young-Girl is a polar figure, orienting, rather than dominating, outcomes" (p.15). It is

helpful to examine fashion, material culture, and production — and their contingent consumer subject — in order to better understand what the postmodern artist-designer aims to critique or deconstruct.

Loschek (2009) states that according to Derrida, the process of deconstruction consists of first tentatively adopting a system of thought in order to then disclose its inconsistencies or failures in implementation (p. 178). Commodity occurs at the end of a chain of creation that involves many strata of social and environmental life; from the factory model of production down to the materials used to construct the garment; the systems of transportation and retail merchandising which are delivered within a framework of advertising and media. Kane (2016) asserts that digital media objects do not attain value in the same way that traditional commodities do. In relation to my book, the work can be seen as a "meaningful aesthetic phenomenon" and a "critical reflection into the processes and systems of power and control that govern everyday life" (p.42). This framework forms the second context for our interaction with fashion on a daily basis: representation. Billboards, television, and the various dress codes relay a reality in which we work and play. In eras past, these codes were more homogenous in tandem with the economic realities presented by the rise of industrialism and nationalism. Our current period is one marked by a more fluid subjectivity but one which still exists within the reality created by generations past. Moore (2004) claims that "in philosophy and the social sciences, postmodernism is said to characterize the exhaustion of totalizing meta-narratives and substitute localized, self-reflexive, and contingent analyses for the search for objective, universal truth" (p. 305). Postmodernism is the vanguard of a certain elite mindset, yet it still can be accessed through youth culture, and most significantly the internet. What was in vogue for a young woman during the 1920s was still catering to a wartime sensibility, whereas the post-1950s beatnik or later on, punk anti-aesthetic,

gradually served to demilitarize and scramble the codes of modernist expectation and metanarrative. The goal then, and now, is to transcend these limitations in favour of a poetic consciousness.

Blake's Proto-Postmodernism and 1970s Punk Subculture

Notions of postmodernism and deconstructivist philosophy can be found in the works of eighteenth-century romantic poet, painter, and printmaker William Blake. As an independent bookmaker, Blake was a major influence on my work. He, together with other Romantic thinkers, was invested in returning to nature in order to restore the soul of man in an age of increasing industrialization. Blake's love of nature is apparent in his poem, "The Echoing Green". This poem depicts the natural aesthetics of green grass, oak trees and singing birds that provide an idyllic playground for young and old alike. Those enjoying their day close to nature are filled with happiness and joy as their senses come alive with the sights, sounds, and feel of nature. Yet, Blake makes us painfully aware of the vulnerabilities experienced in nature, in his poem "The Sick Rose," wherein the beautiful red rose becomes infected and sick due to an ill-intended intruder who destroys the crimson rose, which inspired these following pages in my book (figure 6.)

Figure 6. Pages 38-39 in Generic Escape

Blake also questioned the institutions of power that were ripe with corruption and ignored

basic human rights. Blake's poem "London" published in 1794 depicts the feeling of bleakness

experienced by the people as they existed without hope of a better life. Tucker (n.d) contends

that:

> "The industrial revolution had taken its toll on citizens who now feel tired, sad and
> disconnected. Conditions in the city have worsened under the government's economic
> and social control, and people have abandoned much of their moral and ethical behavior.
> Blake's message is a wake-up call, so readers won't be lulled into believing that their
> current situation is acceptable, much less ideal".

Deconstructing fashion can serve to expose, reveal, or comment on the ongoing neglect

of human rights in bleak working conditions. Blake wrote of such human conditions in the

eighteenth-century, and today the majority of those labouring in factories for the garment

industry work in deplorable conditions and many are child labourers. Moulds (2017) explains

how employers can get away with such conditions because the fashion supply chain is so hugely

complex and hard for companies to control every stage of production, it makes it possible to pay

low wages, employ children and offer inhumane working conditions without consumers ever

finding out.

Originating in New York in 1974, and in Britain by 1975, Punk was a countercultural

movement born of frustration and dissatisfaction with the state of hegemonic mainstream culture

and as rebellion against the same forms of social and economic forces that Blake describes

(Bolton, 2013). It was a response to "the condition of postmodernity," and is defined as a crisis

of meaning caused by the commodification of everyday life. It seeks to establish a network of

underground media as an expression of artistic sincerity and independence from the allegedly

corrupting influences of commerce (Moore, 2004), just as Blake was doing by commenting on

the eroding meta-narrative of his time. Punk's "culture of deconstruction" fetishized the imagined purity of commercial independence (Moore, 2004).

In my book *Generic Escape,* the models were given ultimate freedom to style and photograph themselves using a suitcase full of deconstructed garments as an attempt to both preserve Roland Barthes'(1967) claim that the death of conventional narrative means the death of the author, and as a response to dominant systems of high fashion model culture. They were given the freedom of writing their own narratives in lieu of being controlled or directed. They were freed of conventional good forms and were allowed to express themselves according to their own desires, inviting us to consider what might be unexplored or repressed in ourselves. Just as Barthes was trying to remove critical concerns about the biography or intent of the author from the writing itself, punk culture is oriented around what it says and does and the community it creates rather than who you are or where you come from.

Within punk subcultures, the process of creating independent media and interpersonal networks in opposition to corporate media is referred to as the "do-it-yourself" (or DIY) ethic (Moore, 2004), which both Blake and I have embraced. In Blake's works, such as *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793), there is an instability at play: it is a pastiche of prophecy, philosophical pamphlet, satire, fiction anthology, proverb book, and could therefore be considered postmodern in the way that Jean Francois Lyotard has called "that which denies itself the solace of good forms" (Williams, 1998), just as punk subculture promoted. Those who embraced the DIY approach transformed media and consumer identities into independent networks of cultural production, which enabled a sense of community, allowing spectators to become participants (Moore, 2004).

Stylist Caroline Baker, a lesser known fashion editor from *Nova Magazine* (published in Britain from 1965-1975), is another individual who can be recognized for her anti-establishment mentality and DIY approach. Known as the first fashion editor to publish street-style, Baker helped change the face of Fashion Media by producing fashion pages that were almost an insult to fashion at times and were what appeared to be "anti-fashion" statements (Beard, 2013). Baker's aim was to challenge established notions of ideal femininity while working within a limited budget. She resorted to DIY interpretations set against mainstream fashion, as her motivation was a desire to innovate and challenge the medium of fashion editorial as an articulated act of rebellion (Beard, 2013).

An example of Baker tackling the fashion system's hierarchical structure, conventions and restrictions can be seen in her editorial spread: "Every Hobo Should Have One". Beard (2013) explains how Baker demonstrated an irreverent attitude towards the fur industry by removing fur coats from their context of glamour, wealth, and couture, and using them to dress her model as a tramp, posing her on a litter-strewn city street (p. 26).

Figure 10. Every Hobo Should Have One (Baker & Leiter, 1971, p. 39)

Utopia is such a vast subject of debate and speculation that it is always perhaps best to leave this to the imagination of the audience or readers: any kind of law and codification of utopia seems paradoxical and is what got us yearning for it in the first place. What motivates Blake, Baker, and me is this democratic promise of hope and freedom. We all chose to experiment with the medium of the book or print media in hopes of challenging expactations, while restoring knowledge and pleasure in an unconventional way. Baker inspired her magazine readers to be free in trying out new ways of dressing, while demonstrating ways of adding marks of individuality (Beard, 2013), and the book, for Blake, embodied the celestial economy of non-reciprocity (Green, 2005) because it is offered without the demand for any expectation, reward, or examination, just as my book intends to do. Blake, therefore, can offer us the tools of vision but even that can only go so far in terms of liberation: the poets and artists that came after Blake, and perhaps even something as simple as an overgrown garden, could help to create a utopically oriented community. The urgent sociopolitical rupture performed through, say, graffiti and beat poetry, or more specifically to our concern, fashion deconstruction, glitch art, and photo noise, were all to come much later and are even more radical but continue along a similar trajectory.

Enframing/Reframing:

In his publication entitled *Event*, Žižek (2014) discusses a variety of modern meta-narratives which are framed and reframed by what he conceives to be an event. By seeking to examine universal and sublime concerns such as love, religion, and warfare, he begins by seeing the event in itself as sacred: "There is, by definition, something 'miraculous' in an event, from the miracles of our daily lives to those of the most sublime spheres, including that of the divine" (p. 2). He has decided to engage with grand narratives like Christianity, Buddhism, and the

discourse of cinema, but uses the concept of event to take them apart and critique them. He is performing an ideological critique exactly as deconstructivist fashion designers frame and reframe their own fashion creations, and as Blake and the Punks of the 1970s were deconstructing the metanarratives of their time.

Žižek's discourse is guided by the question: "Is an event a change in the way reality appears to us or is it a shattering transformation of reality itself?"(p. 5), he explores this question through the process of framing reality. Most pertinent to my book is the definition of an event as "a change of the very frame through which we perceive the world and engage in it" (p. 10). What naturally developed through the models' free-interpretation of styling themselves in my book becomes fantasy. Fantasy is a frame that teaches us how to desire, "Fantasy provides the frame which enables us to experience the real of our lives as a meaningful whole" (p. 26). *Gestell*, Heidegger's word for the essence of technology [which is the effect that techniques have on the limits of our understanding], is usually translated into English as "enframing." At its most radical, technology does not designate a complex network of machines and activities, but more so the *attitude towards reality*: technology is the way reality discloses itself to us in contemporary times (Žižek, 2014). In other words, technology has always existed so long as humans have engaged with all of the devices of their own making – it is part of the human experience. In Blake's time, book culture was the framework for community, religion, and love. The books of our time: Facebook, Instagram, and social media, form a network of platforms which inform how we relate, desire, and act. Žižek (2014) states that "the paradox of technology as the concluding moment of Western metaphysics is that it is a mode of enframing which poses a danger to enframing itself" (p. 31). It is very easy to reach a dead end in a mechanical network – a place where desires become short-circuited and the subjects look back at themselves, unsure

of what separates them from the devices they have created, or the content they create with those

devices. It is a kind of death to transcend, and how I wished to reframe the conventional view of

digital media. An expression of this thought is depicted in the image of a woman enframing

technology, embodied in a car, holding it in her mouth, as if to devour the very vehicle that

normally carries her as a subject. I propose a triumph of desire and nature over our devices – this

was an impetus for taking the colours and themes usually used on screen and printing them in a

bound book.
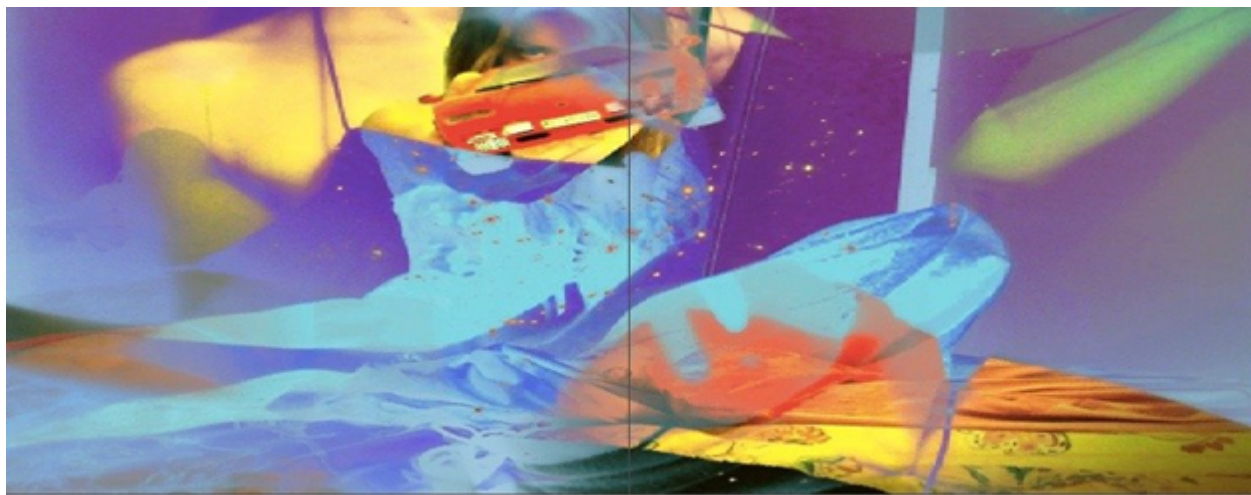
Figure 11. Pages 172-173 in Generic Escape

In 1857, art critic John Ruskin coined the term the "innocent eye," denoting the ways in

which artists could experience and paint the external world with the innocence and purity of a

child's vision. Through the innocent eye, the world became "an arrangement of patches of

different colors variously shaded," which is to say free of signification and thus of social and

political realities as well (Kane, 2014). Kane (2014) contends that this is mirrored by the way

television painted the world in the 1950s, and by 1969 the new psychedelic colors of electronic

media seemed to offer a utopic reprieve and radical alternative to social and political ills. It is a

mistake to see technology as a mere tool or piece of hardware (p. 91). Technology is not

restricted to "objects" solely for practical use, but instead, history, infrastructure, memory, knowledge, cultural convention and in my case artistic representation.

In her seminal work on cinema, Mulvey (2006) stated that the art of movies is akin to death at 24 frames per second. This is because cinema – and by extension, television – takes still photography images, which are technically moments captured out of time, and cuts them together at a speed at which we no longer visually process a series of images but feel as though we are watching a seamless moving picture – the movie. Both cinema and television epitomized the transformation of visual representation into a mass commodity – by the 1950s most homes in North America had a television, and moviegoing was a widespread phenomenon. Television, in contrast to authorial cinema or art, usually creates content and images for a localized public by promoting and nurturing family values (Mulvey, 2006). Cinema managed to retain a closer relationship to the author or artistic consciousness so long as it was created independently of the big box office industry. One of the earliest pioneers of cinema, Eadweard Muybridge, used his photography to study motion in animals and people, but his subjects remained objects of study and contemplation (as seen in figure 12). In one of the earlier panels in my work, I allude to cinematic editors' film reels in the same way that they demystified the process of filmmaking. I referenced this tradition in a way that celebrates the naturally cinematic nature of taking a series of automatic selfies using *Photo Booth*. The subjects in my work, however, are aware and in control, as the event is the creation of the work itself.
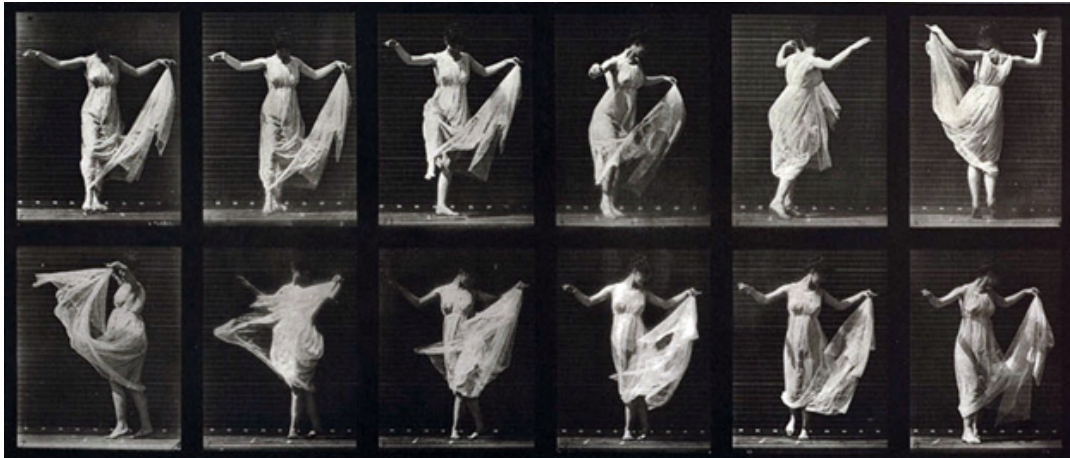
Figure 12. Plate 187 – Dancing, fancy, no. 12, Miss Larrigan (Muybridge, 1887)

The main difference to note is that I have broken down the formality of where art traditionally occurs by taking the subject outside of the studio or scientific/observational setting, and placing her in the privacy of her own bedroom. The dance is a play with the deconstructed garment in The end result does not provide for the traditional gaze looking for form, beauty, and cohesion: there is, instead, an invitation to take a second look, to notice the fantasy is skewered but maybe more interesting because of that. The viewership of such a work is part voyeuristic but made innocent and whole again because it is no longer participating in a purely scientific, or aesthetic experience personified by the male gaze or consumerist eye (Mulvey, 1975). There is much said by what is not there, and taken out of the frame, we must learn to see more carefully in a way in which we can share in the secret unfolding before us.

Figure 13. Pages 12-13 in Generic Escape

Blackwell (2000) explains that television and other popular media enabled a sharing of human experience that was not achievable through the book (p. 29). In a review of popular arts in the United States from 1957 entitled *Mass Culture* by Gunter Anders, there was much debate about what TV had done or would do to cultural habits, particularly reading. The most frequent criticism was the loss of meaningful culture and the idle behaviour that television might encourage (p. 26). Anders' essay proposes that the growing inclination not to use (spoken) language is making the human experience itself poorer and cruder (Blackwell, 2000). He claims that the world brought into our homes by television is a debased, philistinised world where culture is reduced to the lowest common denominator (p. 29). Kane (2014) expressing the view that there is something about technology that further catapults mystical visions to an intensified pitch, is another example of how one may see reframing taking place. Colour abstraction in video synthesis seemed to provide the perfect escape into a world of pure and innocent poetic transcendence (p. 79). The world of video synthesis circa 1969 was for many, one of transcendental immersion and cosmic union between humans and machines (p. 97). Where the avant-garde of the early twentieth century used broken mirrors, colour fields, dramatic imagery, torn paper, or other tools to critique culture and society, artists today sift through the world of computation and digital networking (Kane, 2016).

WGBH , a non-profit education-based public radio station directed by Fred Barzyk in Boston, incorporated the public television channel 2 in 1955, making itself the first non-profit television station in New England and a pioneer in public television. In 1967, WGBH transitioned to using colour and new video switchers as they began broadcasting experimental programs (Kane, 2014). David Atwood, a colleague of Barzyk, recalls "we started… doing these light shows where we just did whatever came into our head. We mixed

black-and-white cameras with telecameras, light show images, and then feedback…we broke all

the rules." The experiments were broadcast in a weekly program called "What's Happening Mr.

Silver" (p. 82). At the time, Barzyk and Atwood saw themselves as directors fooling around with

TV: in hopes of making a change (p. 83). Barzyk encouraged hundreds of artists such as Nam

June Paik, Stan VanDerBeek, Max Almy, Douglas Davis, Peter Campus, Trisha Brown, Ed

Emshwiller, and William Wegman through an artist-in-residence-program (1972-1992). It was

there within the program that participants enthusiastically and eagerly pioneered a new genre of

electronic art (p. 82). Nam June Paik's residency, for example, worried management on the

executive level, as they viewed the incoming artists as a disaster waiting to happen. However, the

wild and unruly experiments that Paik conducted at WGBH are today heralded as cornerstones

in the history of video and new media art (p. 83).

Figure 14. Electronic Opera (Paik, 1969)
Figure 15. What's Happening Mr. Silver (Barzyk, 1968)

In 1969, the radicality of video experimentation symbolized pushing new media in new

and unforeseen directions, into an optimistic future not yet conceivable (p. 97). It was a unique

cultural and historical moment when play, experimentation, and a significant degree of freedom

were constitutive of the equipment and technics, as an environment or media ecology, which

collectively molded the new media and invested it with visionary utopic ethos (p. 92). This new

media landscape is indicative of our postmodern era, in which the mode of viewing or

referencing the past is no longer innocent, but ironic. Thus, the models (in Figure 16) wearing

deconstructed garments, while peering at us through a screen that has been overlaid on a noisy

video screen that references old tape players with the PLAY button slightly visible beneath a

garden of clip art roses is a playful demonstration of postmodern ethos. Ihab Hassan states that

while modernism focused on genres and boundaries, postmodernism is more interested in text

and intertext – it is a place of surface and depthlessness (Powell, 2008).
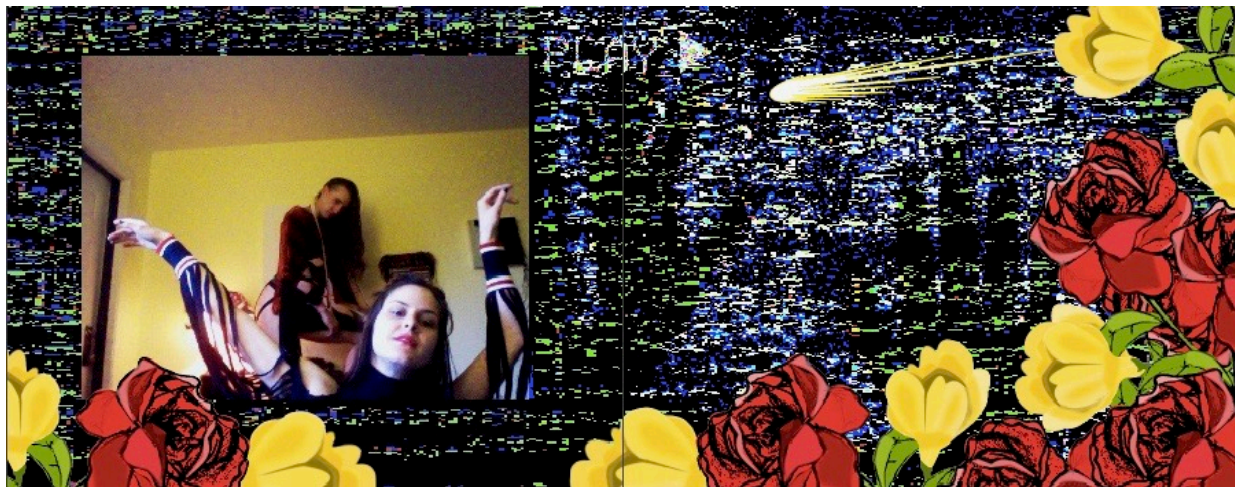
Figure 16. Pages 64-65 in Generic Escape

Powell (2008) explains how deconstruction can be seen as based on decentering:

allowing repressed, marginalized, and other meanings to become central, thus subverting

politically accepted norms or stories (p. 100). Modernist poet William Butler Yeats epitomized

the modernist vision and foreshadowed postmodernism when he expressed that "the centre

cannot hold, mere anarchy is loosed upon the world" (p. 15). Whereas Yeats was interested in

populating the lack of centre with heroes, damsels, or fairies from a folkloric tradition, the void

was also filled by the machine in the modern era. Postmodern theorist Jean-Francois Lyotard is

less interested in scientific knowledge than narrative: narrative time is mythic time (p. 24). Artist

Stan VanDerBeek for example spoke directly to the mystical and transcendental themes that

reemphasized the way in which a number of artists in the 1960s and 1970s were appropriating

new computer techniques as a metaphor for the cosmic union between human and machine

consciousness (Kane, 2014). In his work *Newsreel of Dreams*, a lava-like Christ-figure in fiery

oranges and golds appears on screen accompanied by a solemn voiceover:

> "I am the body of my mind. I am the mind of my body. I am the theatre of the dream of
> my life. I am the dream. I am the eye of my dream. I am the dreamer in which the seams
> of sleep open to the stage of seeing and the audience is the insights of my dreams... from
> the eye of dreams I see the invisible theatre of reality" (p. 133).

Kane (2014) emphasises this transcendental theme by quoting VanDerBeek:"...the world hangs

by a thread of verbs and nouns. Language and cultural-semantics are as explosive as nuclear

energy. It is imperative that we (the world's artists) invent a new world language" (p.137). A

cultural zeitgeist that followed from this era was Cyberpunk — a hybrid of 80s counterculture,

cyber technology, and anarchy in which machines gained the position of central signifier. Powell

(2008) explains how "in 1974, Lyotard predicted that no knowledge will survive that cannot be

translated into computer language – into quantities of information". He suggests that the

unconscious mind is not a language so much as it is visual and figural and this is what forms and

legitimizes narratives (p. 20). It is through this acknowledgment that the growth of multinational

corporations invade the unconscious mind through advertising and, how the cyberpunks want to

heroically subvert through hacker culture (p. 36). Cyberpunk, however, had a tendency towards

the macho or male imaginary and does not necessarily end in liberation from the hegemony of

the computer age, so whatever follows from it would need a female-centred or earth-centred

approach if it is truly to continue deconstructionist subversion.

In postmodernism, there is awareness of the fact that whatever is created is not real

experience but a simulacrum: which is according to Plato, the false copy that overshadows our

experience of the essential and ideal forms (Powell, 2008). It is within this simulacrum that lies

Heidegger's theory of enframing – that which we are unaware of – or in other words, the

presiding power in our postmodern age that is the model or code, the binary. It is these signs and

images that constitute a hyper-reality at such a pace that it makes us unaware of its constitutive

essence. Therefore breaking the binary code, as is done with glitch art, is essential to breaking

the centrality that computers have come to have in our lives. Though we need a withdrawal from

our new digital environment/reality to become humanized, my work demonstrates the concept of

"hyperdividuation", which performs a double labour: it denotes both a new kind of techno-

subjectivity that draws on the material logic of cybernetics and information circuits, and a

subsequent shift in sociality and socially mediated practices (Kane, 2014). The image below

incorporates all these ideas: the fairies, the feminine, and nature fill the centre. It is not corporate

or meant to sell or to lull us into machinery.

Figure 17. Pages 186-187 in Generic Escape

The image also relates to Green's (2005) elucidation that "the visionary materialism that

Blake's works promote is tied to a particular conceptualization of the divine that positions God

within, rather than beyond, the bounds of human experience" (p. 84). Therefore, in Blake's

cosmology, "the palace of Eternity could only be built by human hands", and therein lies the

material manifestation of the all-preceding poetic genius which, in more ethical terms, is just a

matter of conscience (p. 68). Poetic genius is, more specifically, a matter of perception in a

principled way: *The Marriage,* in Blake's book *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790) refers to how ancient Poets animated all sensible objects (p. 48).

In stark contrast, a contemporary of Blake, Enlightenment scientist John Locke, replaces the idea of conscience with a universal code of conduct or a system of ethics (Green, 2005). Locke's empiricism augments Blake's visionary reverie, but cannot go much further in imagination. For this, we could turn to the work of Thomas Paine, who considers the matter of conscience within the spectrum of political government: in *Common Sense*, the declaration that 'the palaces of kings are built on the ruins of the bowers of paradise' is followed by the remark that 'were the impulses of conscience clear, uniform and irresistibly obeyed, man would need no other lawgiver'(p. 49). Ultimately for Paine, 'government, like dress, is the badge of lost innocence'. Similarly, in both religious and Blake's poetic thought, covering the body represents a fall from eternity (Green, 2005).

Williams (1998) sites Lewis Mumford, a scholar on the city and utopian thought, in saying that "the first utopia was the city itself" but the same city brings with it "isolation, stratification, fixation, regimentation, standardization, and militarization" (p. 170). More specifically to the subject of inquiry here, cities give rise to the model factories which produce fashions and city codes which produce standardized design in architecture, planning and advertising: all places where the spectral image becomes realized as monolithic forms which organize how the city dweller lives and interacts. Our overall target of critique is what Tiqqun (1999) describes as the "the young-girl … the entire reality of the Spectacle's abstract codes. The Young-Girl occupies the central node of the present system of desire." (p. 42). In this spectacle, social media, instant messaging, emoticons, gifs, and digital memes proliferate at such a rate that they become our new realities and new set of choices. Our socially hyperconnected lives do not

often give much room for doubt, play, subjectivity, etc. Therefore reconstituting this digital

environment into a book or new set of forms opens us to new possibilities, releasing us from the

grip of automated technology, which runs the risk of dehumanizing us. After all, digital imagery

is often used for advertising on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, etc. which tend towards

certain ideas of lifestyle, or certain ideas of happiness which are very homogenous and capital-

driven (be happy! consume! get money! etc.).

Fashion is also susceptible to being commodified and codified, and creates a

simulacrum: by promulgating certain styles, mainstream, and consumer fashion can only produce

simulations of originality, as the Kinks ironized in their 1966 song *Dedicated Follower of*

Fashion:

"They seek him here, they seek him there
His clothes are loud, but never square
It will make or break him so he's got to buy the best
'Cause he's a dedicated follower of fashion
And when he does his little rounds
'Round the boutiques of London Town
Eagerly pursuing all the latest fads and trends
'Cause he's a dedicated follower of fashion"

Though Christian Dior is known for high price points in luxury fashion design, he is also

recognized for filling the vacuum of meaning during the postwar era of the 1950s, as he lent an

appearance to the need for a new and better reality (Loscheck, 2009). In the spirit of

postmodernist enframing, Dior had created the fiction of elegance and illusion of a lady. He was

the first designer to introduce to fashion 'form follows vision' at the cost of the function once

demanded by modernism (Loschek, 2009). It was not until the 1990s however, that this illusion

was reframed to create a wholly postmodern fashion event, when designers began working and

claiming individuality alongside well-known brands. "Though this can be referenced back to the

punk subcultures of the 1970s, the best examples of deconstructivist artist-designers taking on

this revolutionary act are Japanese designers Rei Kawakubo (Comme des Garçons) and Yohji

Yamamoto who began designing in the 1980s" (p. 178). Loschek (2009) continues to explain

how Ann Demeulemeester and Martin Margiela followed suit in the 1990s by succeeding in

creating a new perspective of fashion deconstruction by showing fashion's soul (or lack of it).

They deconstructed historical construction and questioned the story of its development. Margiela

"deconstructed the definition of 'fashion as constant change' and succeeded in constructing a

new dress identity while preserving its original identity. As a construction made visible, the once

carefully concealed and now turned-out seams and hemlines become the dysfunctional, and are

so transformed into ornament" (p. 178). Demeulemeester, in proximity to Arte Povera, creates

both anaesthetic and emotional innovation in her designs. She makes the "broken and run-down

visible by means of torn-off or pointed hemlines, stockings full of creases, or burst seams and

then revaluated into a desirable consumer product" (p.179). Outlaw and establishment,

provocation and pleasure, fear and longing are merged into one as she rediscovers a new

harmony of fashion transcendence (Loschek, 2009). Beyond a commodity or a representation of

a consumer/model, these artist-designers invoke a poetic subject that interacts with invisible

processes that are normally left off the runway or in advertising.

Conclusion

Kane (2014) explains how Heidegger gave importance to the "poetic genius" by stating

that "technology is never a single tool or object, but rather, a system and context of innovation,

application, awareness, and use that is more often than not regulated and controlled by external

and often invisible forces" (p. 13). It is these invisible forces that deconstruction brings forth, and

where artists can find the poetic power of animating today's computers and machines in such a

conscious way as a means to be used in the service of humanity. Recognizing that the internet

has become an integral part of our modern economics and daily lifestyle, I chose to ironize it

while referencing digital art but by doing so in a print medium that lends itself to fanciful

viewership and community which lets people engage with computer-based art without it being an

extension of their technological selves. This is related to my utopic impulse in putting together

disparate elements that reframe dominant narratives, namely fantasy, advertising, and

technology. In the machine age, there is a primacy of binary logic and depersonalization. While

withdrawal from nature or others help people find their own subjectivity -- and this is partially

fashion's gift to people -- just as in the Christian narrative around the fall and the creation of

personality -- it too can lend to alienation and commodification. The use of glitch, photo noise,

and deconstruction in my work helps to destabilize the codes and expectations of how we put

together our lives and our dress. Although self-aware and looking inwards, the overall intention

is to integrate the imagery and discourse of nature and femininity while playing with various

forms of digital reference. The ultimate goal was to reframe the conventions of modeling fashion

for consumption into an event where models deconstructed fashion on their own terms.

Advertising tropes and digital folk imagery was reframed as poetry and play. Through the ironic

pastiche of references and the interplay of poetic genius, I hope that audiences and participants in

the creation of my book might have a taste of postmodern play and humour, and through it

imagine their own utopias and deconstruct the stories or fairy tales which operate in their own

lives, moving towards a more pluralistic and innocent vision.

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