Frame #1
—ones & zeroes, light & shade (dimensions: 4, easter eggs: 3)

Robert Briggs & Niall Lucy

Without frames, no messages. The frame *is* the message—something which (with all due respect to Marshall McLuhan) we might be said to have learned from Marcel Duchamp.

Duchamp's *Fountain*—the most influential art object of the twentieth century—is a work that was never exhibited, being hidden from view at the last minute by the committee of the Society of Independent Artists at the 1917 show in New York. Having never quite been seen as such, it is also a work that exists only in its many copies: the 'original' went missing long ago, shortly after the closing of the exhibition in which it didn't appear.

What kind of an art object, let alone one as notorious and therefore, in a sense, as conspicuous as Duchamp's *Fountain*, has never been seen ... except through the media of its reproductions? Even Alfred Stieglitz's famous photograph of the work is no more than the first in a long and seemingly never ending line of copies, each one at some remove from the thing itself without ever being entirely independent of it.

So by gesturing here to a kind of return (to a moment that never actually happened, at least not quite in historical time; a moment that exists only in its repetitions without origin, repetitions that don't so much repeat as invent), we might be said to stake out the kind of territory in which the new or the revolutionary is necessarily compromised or constrained in the wake of Duchamp.

© Succession Marcel Duchamp, Villiers-sous-Grez, France

New, media, philosophy? Well, yes, but only in a certain sense.

With Duchamp, thus implicating everything that came before, art turned into the *work* of three functions: signature, event, context. What used to be called the work 'itself' could now be seen as more or less incidental to art as such. Does it matter that *Fountain* was a urinal … or that it was *that* urinal?

Being otherwise indistinguishable from countless manufactured objects of its type, the urinal that Duchamp chose to call *Fountain* (the one that was only ever an instance in a series of any number of identical urinals, and therefore always already no more than *a* urinal) was made over into art precisely in that act of naming. No doubt the artist could have called it *Jet* or *Spray*, or even—perhaps in a moment of aleatory or hallucinatory preemption—*PlayStation 2*, and the effect would have been the same. What mattered is not that it was named *Fountain*, but that it had a name.

Once named, framed off, as it were, from the series of manufactured readymades from which it had been cut out, the urinal that was *Fountain* was re-messaged. Instead of saying, *Piss in me*, it now said, *Think*

about me: what am I? What's happening here?

This is both an inaugural and a revolutionary event (art stripped back to the work of the frame—the title, the artist, the gallery) and at the same time a profoundly Kantian (and therefore to some extent a conservative) gesture, since art, for Kant, is whatever poses the question of 'itself': *what am I?* In this way *Fountain* was both an opening and a return: an opening to conceptual art that would return art (albeit not to any historical time or place) to 'philosophy' in the broadest possible sense, or simply to thinking.

But since anything might pose the question of itself, henceforth anything might be art. At which point (but what point, exactly?) the question of what art 'is' no longer matters, and 'art' gives way to (con)text.

Consider, for example, the computers we're writing this with. Imagine them exhibited in a gallery—a MacBook Pro opened in the shape of a 'V' and suspended by two stainless steel cables above an iMac positioned on a pedestal:

<div style="text-align:center">

The Artwork Stripped Bare Descending a Staircase #7
Silicon, copper, plastics.
RB/NL (Australia), 2012

</div>

If you buy this concept, you've bought our art.

After Duchamp, then, which includes everything that came before, anyone could be an artist. We can all do it ourselves. Punk's D.I.Y. aesthetic thus precedes it … and several times over, as Darren Tofts points out in the present issue: after Borges, after Beckett, after Rauschenberg, after Cage, et al….

To paraphrase one of Tofts' citations of Borges, if not also to repeat Duchamp: it is sufficient that a work —*Fountain*, *The Artwork Stripped Bare Descending a Staircase #7*—be possible for it to exist. What is therefore essential to the work, to what Kant calls the *ergon*, is in fact this virtuality; the work's actual or material being is merely *parergonal*.

In so far as this couches art in philosophical or quasi-philosophical terms, we may say that art doesn't 'express'. It invents. But this is also to reposition philosophy outside both the history of philosophy and its institutionalisation as a discipline. 'An image of thought called philosophy', as Deleuze puts it, 'has been formed historically and it effectively stops people from thinking' (*Dialogues*, 13). This image gives philosophy the (false) task of reflecting *on* questions, problems, phenomena; and what we need to do, according to Deleuze, is to 'stop allowing philosophers to reflect "on" things. The philosopher creates, he doesn't reflect' (*Negotiations*, 122).

The Deleuzian philosopher (who is not a philosopher) and the Duchampian artist (who is not an artist): each of them is already more than one. Who is this (who are these) today if not, at least to some significant degree, each of us sitting at a computer screen manipulating—as Mark Amerika is fond of saying—*source material everywhere*?

Some of that material which Amerika sources here, in a fragment from an unfinished novel, derives from Duchamp's notes towards what would become *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1923), better known as *The Large Glass*. Attempting to describe the work to a roomful of students, the scene's main character, a teacher called Walt, is forced to philosophise Deleuze-style: he doesn't explicate, he invents. For Walt, Duchamp's lesson is that there's no such thing as human history, history understood as a product of human consciousness. Instead, what we call consciousness, or used to call consciousness, is our 'unfiltered readiness potential' to 'remixologically inhabit the Source Material Everywhere'.

But since what we are given to source is never straightforwardly and certainly not exclusively actual, this material is also indistinguishably and necessarily im-material (as in the case of Amerika's collaborative audio mashup with Chad Mossholder). Where, for instance, is the Internet? What is its time and place?

Where is 'it' such that you might point to it as you would to a table or a chair?

If a work may be said to exist by virtue only of its possibility, then such questions are scarcely 'new' in the sense of belonging to an epoch defined by the use of new media technologies. As Tony Thwaites could be taken to argue here, even the often celebrated and just as frequently mourned idea of the 'post-human'—a consequence of our increasing reliance on digital prosthetics—harbours a nostalgia for a form of subjectivity that never was. For Thwaites, sounding one of the lessons of Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, 'being is infused by revenance', such that any distinction between real historical subjects over here and imaginary ghosts over there is rendered problematic. Or as he puts it in a reading of Althusser, ideology (another of those things to which we cannot point) interpellates us not as good, bad or compliant subjects, but *as* subjects at all. Interpellation, what Thwaites calls 'response-without-decision', does not result in 'the captivity of a subject who before was free', but rather in 'the *subject itself*' in all its real-historical concreteness and materiality.

Surely, though, if both textuality and subjectivity are always preceded—as a condition of possibility—by spectrality, virtuality or unfiltered readiness potential, this claim risks a certain generality that would elide the specificity of our interactions with different media (whether 'new' or 'old') and of those media themselves. This is the question raised by Clare Birchall, Peter Woodbridge and Gary Hall in their interrelated pieces in the present issue, where their essay, 'How to Do Justice to Media Specificity', poses as an exergue to, but not as an explication of, their video, *The Post-Secret State*, the third installment in their *Liquid Theory TV* series. What differences distinguish these forms, then, such that they are not reducible to forms of textuality in general?

If textual specificities were absolute, however, constituting a set of differences resembling the periodic table of the elements, how could different examples of a medium (an essay, a video, etc.) be understood as other than repetitions of a general type: the essay in general, the video in general, etc.? 'Poems aren't pies', as Simon Critchley puts it here in his response to (again, not an explication of) a poem by John Kinsella—they aren't something other than themselves, however impossible it would be to say exactly what any poem (let alone what *poetry*) 'is'.

All efforts, in other words, to define the specific features or properties of a medium (whether writing in the standard sense or new media platforms) would risk essentialising or ontologising those specificities, a point that could be drawn from Derrida's early ('pre-digital') work (see for example *Grammatology*) despite claims that Derrida's insistence on the pervasive logic of supplementarity commits him to a theory of *general* media effects. As Chantal Faust shows here, the necessary errancy and erasure that might be associated with writing in the Derridean sense, and the ghostly non-presence of the one who writes, do persist in online forms, but without therefore simply reproducing a general system. For Faust, indeed, 'the new' has no fixed ontology: in her case, since she's been manipulating images using a flatbed scanner for more than a decade, the 'new' medium is drawing in the old-fashioned sense, 'a certain lack of communication between my hand and brain' leading to surprising results.

Other surprising results are obtained by Baden Pailthorpe through his use of new technology to translate Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the data being visualised in a piece called *Topos*. Working on the assumption that 'code is the contemporary *lingua franca*', Pailthorpe's data visualisation is not a representation of one-to-one correspondence (an idealised translation of the Orwell novel), but of the necessity of error—here a product of algorithms—in any attempt to translate a text from one language into another, or from one medium into another. Novels aren't pies.

East and West aren't pies, either. But in Paul Bowman's piece on fight choreography in some recent Hollywood films, he argues that the 'borders between East and West have become more and more blurred within and by the aesthetic crossovers facilitated by new media technologies and the globalised discourses set up within and by them'. In a fashion not dissimilar to Google Translate's rendering of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Hollywood's translation of a certain 'Oriental' style of fighting is also an invention. This so-called Oriental style itself, however, is already a hybrid of several forms of martial art, none of which is culturally pure or authentic. Referring to what he calls the 'deracinated ninjas' of a film such as *Batman Begins*,

Bowman traces the film's 'Oriental' fighting style to two street fighters from Europe, who developed a martial art known as the Keysi Fighting Method that was urban and therefore non-traditional in origin while claiming to be authentic in spirit.

Questions concerning authenticity haunt discussions of new media practices and effects: Facebook friends aren't real; email correspondence is impersonal; ebooks aren't tactile; mp3 files lack warmth; digital art is too conceptual and not fully felt. Such skepticism towards new technologies, however, is far from new itself, relying as it does on Plato's condemnation of writing as a poor substitute for speech—writing understood simply as *written-down speech* (see Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy').

Deracinated communication and expression? But as if there had ever been other forms.

Whatever might be 'new' about new media, then, could never be *absolutely* so, which is not to say that new media don't have forms, effects, affects and possibilities of their own. It's precisely for the sake of experimenting with and speculating on those possibilities that we've developed *Ctrl-Z*—as a journal, an exhibition space, an events machine and inevitably (we hope) a 'brand'.

Details of our first event, *Writing in the Age of New Media*, held at the Fremantle Arts Centre in November 2011, are now available from our homepage.

In this inaugural issue of the journal, we are pleased to present a wide range of styles and approaches from both well known and emergent critics, artists and writers. We thank the members of our editorial board for their support, and we are especially grateful for the thoughtful comments and advice received from reviewers of submissions to this issue.

We encourage readers to join us in manipulating the source material everywhere by contributing to future issues, in playful, critical, speculative, interactive, performative or other ways.

See our homepage for contact details … and welcome to *Ctrl-Z*.

References

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