

# **Johanna Drucker Remixed: "no file is ever self-identical"**



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ART + RESEARCH

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What began as an exploration now threatens to become an institution. The display simply appears to be "there" and we "simply" seem to absorb it. Are we ready to abandon humanness—or the project of humanistic inquiry and beliefs? Leaping forward to what & why? Think of the implications for concepts like <terror> or <democracy>.

When I got to the party you were already there. The heart of the mechanism, the soul of a new machine howling in the wilderness in order to be heard. Text seemed fluid, mobile, dynamically charged. Here where things have just begun every piece was beautiful. Starry eyed the creatures dreamed their dreams in an alien world.

Fundamental questions arise about who speaks and who is spoken. The degree of collaboration and interaction is left to the artists involved. We will close gaps, see motion, make partial shapes into whole ones in ways that are surprisingly predictable.

All aesthetic objects are fields of potential. Human perception isn't literal. Try different combinations. Try this: No document is self-identical. The lines can be turned.

**"we think of days as entities, bounded and discrete"**

Classical in our logic, medieval in our illness: the haphazard character of a police state where one is in X country at X time. Repressive power structures are personal boundaries, and media play their role in what is "really" happening. The world we see is digital media; the message is conceived as the material fact of history.

Certainty is forming the space of modern life. We think of days to promote habits of waking and sleeping, nostalgic for the authority of coded procedures. Knowledge must be in the world and embodied. Repressive power structures are personal boundaries, and media play their role in what is "really" happening.

Of course they want to believe in knowledge. They want to believe in the relation between signifier and signified. Religion is the formal system of repeated signs governed by a belief in certainty. We are certainly meant to imagine a plane crashed: its material form has to be an exercise in faith and the stable-seeming cultural authority.

I am seduced by the hypnotic repetition of history, the stable-seeming buildings, and facades, and the people. Unfinished lines broken partway seemed to dazzle and confound. One tenet of faith now became an obsession. Code is material, and its materiality knowledge. The airwaves were full of authorial intention.



**“we are still Babylonians, in our use of the calendar”**

Out of the city state emerges a stable set of syntactic laws: all human knowledge into a single circulating currency. The value of the product now threatens to become an institution through which to rethink human culture into a single string of characters. Repressive power structures are not to be interfered with. We are simply a convention.

Part of the excitement was dwelling on our habits of work. We like to think we both theorized and produced the fabric of meaning. We are simply a convention, interesting and unexpected in ways that are surprisingly predictable. The heart disappears in such a model, since we inhabit even the most apparently simple task.

Out of the city state emerges the conventions or cognitive maps, computing the semantic value of a text. All perception is readily consumed. Vision may be static or mobile, but may be considered codified: intellectual activity manufactured for painless consumption: a techno-corporate space generated to guarantee the value of the product.

Rapid despair infiltrated the field of digital humanities. It's too late for even the most apparently simple task. Some of our students refuse to let us indulge - our students and repressive power structures. Of course they want to believe in older forms; a new machine is exhaustive and exhausting. We will have to activate our habits of work.

**“writing is already the embodiment of absence”**

I wasn't even attracted to the material world, for writing is already the failure to engage with materiality. Think of the page as a landscape; think of the page as a growing despair, silence, disappointment. Words are possibilities: the unruly condition of possibilities – and the assignment now threatens to become an institution.

The world we see is the first page of any search result, the author whose identity now threatens to become an institution, so naturalized it has become performance. All aesthetic objects are refreshed and updated. All aesthetic objects are devices and platforms. The world we see is the fine mesh of its own self-produced screen.

Permeated by digital technology, we don't have an essence. The book is a momentary slice through perception: each page marks the absence of the speaker. Organization of the page slips continually away. Its means of transmission is not even identical to itself.

Process cannot be followed in a strict linear pattern. Think of the page as a force of writing. The book is a momentary slice through perception. The work is endless borrowings, copyings, and possibilities. There is a great deal of noise in the mechanism.

**“the text breaks off, leaving everything else unsaid”**

A new aesthetic form would bring about forces of destruction – a text file can be a good start. A sequence of ragged signs announce the violent ASCII file. My own project has become equivalent to that code, a text file littering the world with letters on a page. Every text we generated was to resist authoritarianism.

New media are already active lessons in deconstruction, littering the world with bugs and glitches. A text file can be a politically significant act. Short-circuit the models of cultural order. The sloppy and badly made effect of a material signifier is an end in itself.

We like to think we are shaped by social media. We will “publish” our essential identity, distributing text in non-linear ways. Assumptions are changing through social media. Technology is an event, not an entity: we may read through our links and click the world.

The self now threatens to become an institution – we think of days too limitedly. We used to have difficult-to-follow threaded conversations. I am seduced by the hypnotic repetition of Los Angeles, the traffic sign forming the space of modern life. A viewer enters a new aesthetic form: the vocabulary of signs in which she has been living.

## **“we talked about poetry & other influences”**

Artists used to meet in the interlocking structures. A bunch of us went to drink and be productive, creating a poetics of pathfinding, charging into the increasing panic. She came into the room with different degrees of success. There is a great deal of noise in what's inscribed and present - veils of illusion are replaced with a glass in her hand.

You came on stage in X city. Performance of a text or work marks the absence of the speaker, but every reading reinvents emotive and personal experience, the literary illusion that anything is possible, for writing is already a poetic revolution, allowing the reader to dwell in the relation between signifier and signified.

Artistic activity challenges the aesthetic object. A particular intellectual capable of devastating the infrastructure of a room was able to unravel poetic traditions and norms. Take the alphabet, cut it in strips, put the strips in the reader: human artefacts captured and cut-up for reuse, back into the stream of human communicative exchange.

We talked about poetry in ways that are surprisingly predictable. We talked about poetry & followed a strict linear pattern. The process of its own making now became an obsession. I wanted to know the reader, but every reading reinvents the limits of reading itself. Take a powerful instrument, cut it in strips. Every reading reinvents the reader.

**"everything was slightly out of control"**

Are personal boundaries repressive power structures?  
We want the long-absent immediacy of sensation, and  
your features are composed of molecules. My animal  
desires are composed of molecules. The most difficult  
subject leaves a trace on the emerging hands. <flirtation>  
caused the steam to run on windows.

Together on a sofa in ways that are surprisingly  
predictable - artists may be combined in a multiplicity of  
ways, just as we are combined in a multiplicity of ways.  
The most violent and daring persons alive in X city: we  
smoked a joint together in the wilderness.

NOW I BECOME non-linear. We smoked a joint together  
this morning (a joint as the unpacking of ideological  
poetry). We are projected onto the field of days, hours,  
and minutes, a book of light into which a viewer enters.  
There is a great deal of noise in this contact of hands -  
every text we generated was an emotional landscape.

We had a pretty good discourse charging into an infinite  
loop of identity, the text literally changed according to  
perception. The very breath of life seemed fluid. Since we  
inhabit each other the body carried no interpretation. The  
voice of the text slips continually away.

## **“because of our habits of waking and sleeping”**

We think of days as a temporary intervention in our habits of waking and sleeping. Signifier and signified dreamed their dreams in an alien world. The user can be the relation between signifier and signified. We dreamed their dreams. We know a nearly inexhaustible technique. For writing is already waking and sleeping.

Ragged signs announce the violent hallucination, their haphazard fields of potential, the feedback loop that generates fields of potential. Take the city, cut it in strips, put the strips in the landscape. We are certainly meant to break apart and drift.

Think about a walk through a discontinuous city. Art is a notoriously difficult landscape: from every text springs the world. The world we see is a map transforming it, for writing is already air, fire, water – writing is a catalogue of possibilities.

The book of the future will not simply be read through. We no longer believe in finished forms. I had always known the world we see is a map, I'm merely shifting the materiality of the typographic signifier. The price of decipherment has been the world.

**“an electronic document can be continually reconfigured”**

Conventional authority can be continually reconfigured – there is no linear path among characters, scenes, events. We are built on interactive variables. Every text we generated yields a different result tomorrow. The focus of this study has been on our associations.

My own project has become a nearly inexhaustible technique: knowledge production into which a viewer enters. There is no linear path among characters, scenes, events: we are built on interactive variables. Every text we generated yields a different result tomorrow.

Simply acknowledge the limits of the written language. Take a rising and setting sun, cut it in strips. Try different combinations & endless borrowings, the most violent and daring recombination. Simply acknowledge the limits of words.

This essay is a cut-up / remix / montage of the work of Johanna Drucker. It is a recombination of materials from her critical and artistic publications, including "From A to Z" (1977), "Against Fiction: Organized Affinities" (1983), "The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art" (1996), "SpecLab: Digital Aesthetics and Speculative Computing" (2008), "What Is?" (2013), and "Graphe-sis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production" (2014). The section headers are all direct quotations from Drucker's texts, as are the individual sentences in the essay's first section. All other sentences are splicings-together of syntactic fragments from her texts. This essay is part of Inhabitations: A Recombinant Theory Project. Micro-reports from this project are regularly published on Twitter: @remixtheory.



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