

**LIKE SOMETHING DIFFERENT:
A FARFETCHED INQUIRY INTO ART AND AGENCY**

By

Galan Akin

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF APPLIED ARTS

in

Visual Arts

EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART + DESIGN

2015

The author renounces copyright ownership of this document and designates the
contents as public freehold - Galan Akin, 2015

Abstract

This thesis research is comprised of artworks that are concerned with the processes by which art objects are delimited in terms of both their creation and their reception. My conception of objects is informed by Karen Barad's agential realism, which understands reality to be constructed not of 'things', but as a result of the way that various forms of agency enact 'cuts' upon entangled phenomena. Objects in my practice are therefore defined by surfaces which are reconfigurable; in my work I seek to render them in as much complexity as possible, in a manner inspired by Walter Benjamin's ruinous *Arcades Project*. My conception of agency is mimetic and linked to the gaze, and draws on Rennie Girard's theory of mimetic desire. Iterating on and in some ways critiquing appropriation art and institutional critique, my work draws on ideas of the copy, the commodity, and the gaze to enact or depict the complex surfaces that define art. Two works are described in terms of the surfaces that define their possibility, definition, source, and audience. While *Manual* is an attempt to capture the source of aesthetic choice, taste, and agency, *Bob Rennie Painting* addresses audience and reception as surfaces or defining limits of the work. *Bob Rennie Painting* evokes a strange, hybrid art world, one which blurs the line between mutually exclusive audiences. Both of these works seek to render contradiction, or to glimpse the possibility of something simultaneously being what it is not.

Table of Contents

ii	ABSTRACT
iii	TABLE OF CONTENTS
iv	LIST OF FIGURES
v	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
vi	DEDICATION
1	INTRODUCTION
3	CHAPTER 1. A FARFETCHED INQUIRY
7	CHAPTER 2. MIMETIC DESIRE
13	CHAPTER 3. ENTANGLED OBJECTS
18	CHAPTER 4. BOB RENNIE PAINTING
24	CHAPTER 5. DEPICTION: BECOMING SIMILAR IN DIFFERENCE
28	CHAPTER 6. BRANDING AND OBLIVION
37	CHAPTER 7. LIKE SOMETHING DIFFERENT
39	WORKS CITED

List of Figures

- 4 Fig. 1: Galan Akin, *Manual*

- 9 Fig. 2: Galan Akin, *Manual* (detail; inside front cover)

- 10 Fig. 3: Galan Akin, *Manual* (detail; inside back cover)

- 12 Fig. 4: Galan Akin, *Manual* (detail; Fraser/Cowles ad spread)

- 21 Fig. 5: Galan Akin, *Bob Rennie Painting* (detail)

- 27 Fig. 6: Galan Akin, *Manual* (detail; *Centerfold*)

- 29 Fig. 7: Galan Akin, *Manual* (detail; Bas Jan Ader ad with Goldstein obituary)

- 30 Fig. 8: Galan Akin, *Manual* (detail: Goldstein ad with loft ads spread)

- 34 Fig. 9: *Manual*, presented with props.

- 35 Fig. 10: Painting Like object

Acknowledgements

I am immeasurably grateful to my wife Laura Krutz, whose love and support made this possible. I am also very thankful to my supervisor, Chris Jones, who always pushed me to make this thesis stronger. I received so much generous and valuable feedback from faculty, visiting artists, and members of Vancouver's arts community. I would especially like to thank Kimberly Phillips, Bruce Grenville, Kathy Slade, Dirk Fleischmann, Kathleen Ritter, M. Simon Levin, John Cussans, Ron Terada, Germaine Koh, Fiona Bowie, Kelly Wood, and Jonathan Middleton.

For assistance in the technical details with *Manual*, I would like to extend my gratitude to Carlos Mendes and Eduardo Rodriguez at the DOC, to Jonathan Hodges, Keith Higgins, and Robert at TR Trades.

Dedication

For *Garth Stuart Akin*, who wrote his poems in *Comic Sans*.

Introduction

What are the boundaries, limits, and defining surfaces that frame artworks and their reception, and how might they be rendered visible? What are the rules for a field that has no rules, or that has made a tradition of breaking tradition? What kind of interests and agency are at stake in the definition of these boundaries? How and why do I want to make art, and what is the nature and position of my own artistic agency in relation to the dynamic, shifting structures it inhabits?

The artworks that comprise my thesis research are impelled by and address these questions. In this essay I will discuss how two works in particular, *Bob Rennie Painting* (2014) and *Manual* (2003 - 2015), embody this research. These works draw on and mimic the traditions of appropriation art and institutional critique, with the intention of carrying on that tradition while examining its paradoxes and contradictions. These include the way that a successful critique may perpetuate what it criticizes, and the way a copy can be an original and an original can be a copy. For me, paradox is a symptom of a Real that is too complex to apprehend, a situation I find ultimately liberating rather than discouraging. My goal, then, is not to answer these questions, but to keep them visible in as much complexity as possible. This does not represent a preconceived idea of whether critique can be successful or not; I am interested in the ways that it might be both, or might succeed through failure or fail through success. Fundamentally, I see both of these works as 'pictures' of situations that are too complex to picture.

Bob Rennie Painting is an appropriation of a watercolour painting by an artist named Bob Rennie, who happens to share a name with a prominent collector in Vancouver's contemporary art scene. The two Rennies both live in Vancouver, but occupy very different art worlds. The work is not the painting itself, but the situation in which the watercolour painting is offered for sale in a space where the different audiences related to each Rennie have the possibility of overlapping. As such, it is an exploration of the illegibility of these two art worlds to each other, and an examination of the surface that

constitutes the barrier between them. In the spirit of appropriating appropriation art, it is modelled on a 1978 work by Louise Lawler, in which she presented a 19th century oil painting in a contemporary artist space.

Manual is a 198 page simulation of an *Artforum* magazine, circa 2001 - 2003. It mimics, as closely as possible, the format and content of a typical issue from this time period, while simultaneously reflecting my own taste and agency, which in turn were heavily influenced by the magazine at this time. The editing of the magazine, laboriously assembled from source material of 16 issues of the magazine over a period of years, is therefore simultaneously an examination of the formation of agency, and an exercise of agency itself. *Manual* is both a record of where my ideas, taste, and choices may come from, and a handbook or manual to structure the art I will make in the future. It is composed of copies and appropriations, and is intended to be copied and appropriated. In practices of copying I see, not just a critique of authorship or the subject, but a bi-directional process of absorption, of taking on or stealing traits of another body or losing oneself to the other or to the larger world.

This two-way street of absorption, which helps to both solidify the boundaries of objects and keep those boundaries fluid, is the core of my practice. In an absorptive mode, I work with conventions of depiction, framing, and display in order to explore the contingency, instability, and temporality of the frames that define and differentiate (art) objects. To copy is to lose myself to the other, and to blur the boundary between self and other, and between the interior and exterior of what we temporally think of as an object. Both *Manual* and *Bob Rennie Painting* are passionate representations that try to be what they are not, and that follow a depictive realist logic into unrealistic terrain. My practice seeks to keep in mind (and take seriously) the historical critique of representation while engaging ecstatically with representation and copying on its own terms.

1. A Farfetched Inquiry

Manual was conceived as an inquiry into my own artistic motivation and taste. My interest in the postmodern critique of authorship led me to be curious about the source of my own desires and agency. At the same time, I saw a paradox where appropriation art could be used as just another tool to promote originality and the singularity of the artistic subject. This led me to be suspicious of my own motivations for making art, and to question why I wanted to make the kind of art I wanted to make, even as I was developing the idea of what that was.

In 2001 I bought my first *Artforum* magazine, and I read them obsessively for a few years as I tried to gain a better understanding of contemporary art and contextualize my nascent practice. By 2003 the magazine was functioning as a kind of art world guide for me, one that helped me to form a picture of an imaginary art world. I noticed that this guide was affecting my taste and the kind of art I wanted to make. The more I tried to discern the difference between my genuine interests, motivations, and agency and those operated on by the magazine, the more ridiculous this distinction appeared. Bruno Latour writes, “to discover one’s own real naked interest requires probably the most convoluted and farfetched inquiry there is” (Latour 12). I came to embrace this inquiry precisely because it was so farfetched.

Manual is a glossy 198 page magazine in an edition of one (fig. 1). It mimics the look and feel of *Artforum* from the turn of the millennium. The pages are selected and scanned from sixteen source issues, dating between October 2001 and Summer 2003, which is the time that I was most avidly reading the magazine and being influenced by it. I used the type and distribution of content to construct a template for *Manual*. There are 118 pages of ads, 17 pages for columns, 40 pages of feature articles, and 23 pages of reviews. These categories, and the typologies, placement, and sub-categories within them, are derived from the average content of the sixteen source magazines. *Manual* is intended to accurately reflect the distribution, layout, and type of content of a typical issue from the time period. These typologies include, for example, the proportion of male

and female artists represented, and the regional distribution of artists reviewed, as well as links between ads, articles, and reviews¹. Within this template it is composed and arranged by my own aesthetic choice². *Manual* is a depiction of a magazine or institution as I would assemble it; it is a depiction of my ideal *Artforum*, which is both a reservoir and guide for how I make art and an expression of an agency that is exercised ambivalently over what it is partially constructed by. The content, assembly, and methodology address themes and ways of working that are touchstones for my work.

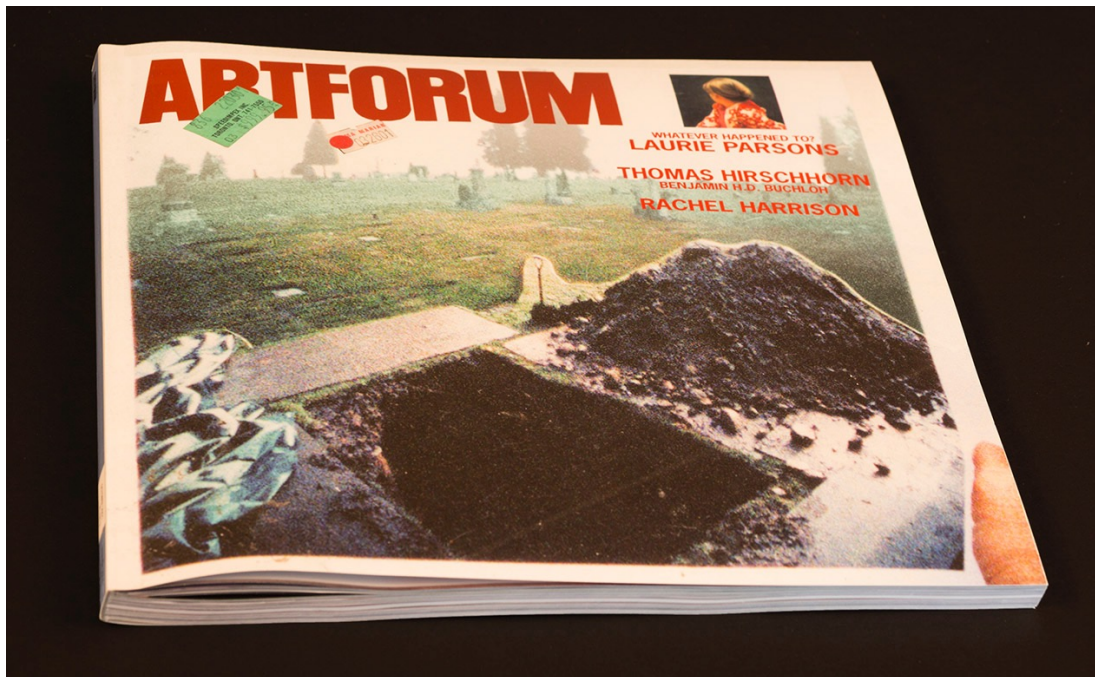


Fig. 1: Galan Akin, *Manual*. 2003-2015. 198 page Magazine. Page size 10.5" x 10.5".

The magazine, with its glossy pages, weight, and mix of high end glamour, intellectual rigour, and specialized commerce, is intended to function very much like a real issue of *Artforum*: it should be leafed through, here absent-mindedly, there with more concentration or purpose, in search of knowledge, recognition, currency, inspiration, val-

¹ For example, in the capsule review section in the source issues, reviews were on average 58% male artists, 29% female artists, and 13% group shows. 38% were from New York, 13% from elsewhere in North America, 3% from South America, 9% from London, 34% from Europe, and 3% from Asia.

² Which is, however, heavily influenced by my close reading of the magazine from 2001 - 2003.

idation, or invalidation; this is a place to help determine boundaries, however fluid they may be. To be sure, there are errors, interventions, idiosyncrasies that are more expressionist or critical/parodic. Ruptures and reframing in many of the scanned pages (each page was scanned twice, then assembled in photoshop; some repaired seamlessly, some not) reveal the method of assembly. Areas are blurred, articles conflated, illustrations or the names of artists swapped, but these are generally subtle effects and many would not be noticed on first reading. *Manual* disrupts transparency to a degree, but it faithfully copies its selected source material. It relies heavily on meticulous forms of copying, but is, strictly speaking, a simulation rather than a copy.

To simulate is to present to the world that you have what you don't actually have (Baudrillard 2). A simulation is a copy without an original. A copy is the original without an essence. both are important to my practice. Copying, simulation, mimesis, depiction; all are concerned with surface. In my case they elide, or are skeptical or indifferent to, the very idea of essence, of what the simulation pretends to have or the copy lacks. Surface, for me, is not a case of embracing shallowness or eschewing complexity; in fact it is the opposite. Surfaces can be very deep, and what is inside or outside, where the surface begins or ends is not clear. A surface is what defines, and in a sense, ends something, but when it is examined closely enough it is revealed to never be just one unchanging entity; rather, it is the result of changes that only appear to have been frozen. The examination itself helps to determine the surface. The simulations and copies I make are exhaustive and laborious precisely because I want them to be detailed enough to reveal this strangeness. *Manual* is a kind of physiognomy of art as I wish to understand or misunderstand it.

Physiognomy is a dubious pseudo-science that conflates facial features and appearance with inner character. However, the term is also used, as in botany or forestry, to refer to the general physical appearance of a place, person or thing. In using the term I am mimicking Walter Benjamin, whose use of "physiognomy" is somewhere between these two definitions. In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin uses the term frequently to suggest that we can only learn about inner truths (about capitalism, for example)

through material means, or through how things currently appear³. Surfaces, for Benjamin, are the evidence of deep historical processes, and constitute a remembering that may be crucial to the future of humanity. To look closely at a surface, as Benjamin does at the surfaces or material evidence of the development of capitalism, is to notice what is generally unnoticed. It is to save what is lost to history before it disappears forever, in order to recuperate the present from the status quo ("Theses" 255). Surfaces, in this sense, are not always physical objects, but may be boundaries or collections of events that have material manifestations (for example, the city, with all its history, populations, and transformations of material). For Benjamin, these surface manifestations of how things come to their current state have as much significance as any essence or ideal that might be seen to be behind them:

Truth is not - as Marxism would have it - a merely contingent function of knowing, but is bound to a nucleus of time lying hidden within the knower and the known alike. This is so true that the eternal, in any case, is far more the ruffle on a dress than some idea. (*Arcades* 463)

I conceive of *Manual* as a Benjaminian physiognomy of an object that, while not as broad in scope as Benjamin's object of study, is still irreducibly, impossibly complex. Its object of study is the surface of an art world, represented by *Artforum* at a specific point in history, as understood, or misunderstood, by me. Benjamin wanted to construct a work out of quotations and aphorisms, to sidestep theory and bring awareness to the ongoing effect of history on those it had vanquished. *Manual* attempts to glimpse the formation of a subject simultaneously from within and at a distance. The pages of *Manual* are a record of this attempt.

³ See, for example, *Arcades* pp 207, 369, and 866.

2. Mimetic Desire

Manual is about editing, selection, and choice, and where these might originate. In order to represent my own, imaginary issue of *Artforum*, I had to spend long hours deciding what belonged and what didn't. Although I wanted the results to ultimately reflect on my practice as a whole, it was important to me that each individual choice was the result of a personal, aesthetic preference. Articles and columns were selected for their written content if they related to some aspect of my practice, but they also had to have an aesthetic resonance. As much as possible, I tried to make decisions quickly and intuitively, and according to what caught my eye. This applied to all parts of the magazine, and even to text (especially with regard to artists names), but was particularly the case when it came to selecting the ads.

In 2001 - 2003 *Artforum* was about 60% ads, so the selection and type of ads was very important to the look, feel and likeness of the finished product. Ads operate by catching the eye, shocking, or working on an affective level below the operation of conscious choice. It was therefore important to me to choose ads that affected me in this way, to choose before overly considering the content, or whether it related logically to my practice or to my picture of myself. I tended to respond more quickly to ad content that related to sex, death, and desire, and it seemed important to reflect this to get an accurate picture of what my 'favourite' ads were. While I started this project long before I had heard of the theory, I came to realize that what I was doing was a literal enactment of René Girard's theory of mimetic desire.

According to Girard, the self is constructed from the unconscious mimicking of other selves through the mechanism of mimetic desire (Garrels). Our desires, which determine to a large degree our agency and our personality (and our criteria for selection, noticing, and editing), are generated largely from the perceived (and misperceived) desires of others. Girard, following Gabriel Tarde, sees imitation as the basis of what makes us human (Garrels). In cognitive science, it has been found that newborns are able to imitate gestures and facial expressions: they 'know' to move their tongue and not

their lip when an adult sticks out their tongue, or rather, they come to eventually know themselves by imitating an other. In *From Universal Mimesis to the Self formed by Desire* Jean-Michel Oughourlian writes, “It is imitation, immediate and then increasingly deferred, that little by little, by its very process, constitutes representation, the symbolic function, and consciousness itself, with all its attributes” (Oughourlian). Imitation is at the core of what it means to be human and is a necessary precondition for representation.⁴

Advertisements and other visual images function in part by implying that someone has shown interest in what is framed, which implies, according to Girard, that you, the viewer, should also be interested in it. Furthermore, Girard claims, we are apt to mistake this implied desire for our own, ‘original’ desire and forget that it came from outside of us. I think of this mimetic gaze effect as applying to all the content of the magazine, certainly to images from ads, but also to the textual brand names of artists eliciting recognition in the viewer, and even to lengthy articles that allow the viewer, or reader, to experience the extended viewpoint or ‘gaze’ — and its attendant desires — of another (a writer and/or editorial staff, and to an extent a remote subculture or social group).

The idea of experiencing someone else’s viewpoint and mistaking it for your own relates to Laura Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze. For Mulvey, a masculine viewpoint and desire is embedded in narrative cinema and by extension, culture as a whole, meaning that women as well as men unconsciously conform to this viewpoint, and perpetuate a binary opposition where the masculine is active and the female passive (1967). The idea that the pleasure of looking is inherently male (and that the more problematic pleasure of being looked at is female) is reductive and has been critiqued by other feminist scholars. Mulvey wrote her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* in 1975, and there has arguably been an explosion of viewpoints represented in both popular culture and contemporary art since that time. Yet since learning of this theory in the ear-

⁴ Physiologically, the cells of the human body are outnumbered by bacteria to a factor of ten. Psychologically, we may also be more other than self, and we are, in a complex way, all ‘copies’. Every copy is different.

ly 90's I have felt implicated in it, and never able to dismiss its concerns as it remains dominant or at least prominent in visual culture both high and low. While the content of *Artforum* will often address the gaze in critical and productive ways, both the art it covers and its ads frequently perpetuate this gaze problematically. In making *Manual* my goal was not to create an ideologically better version of the magazine (what good would that do?), but to make an accurate and detailed picture of the magazine as it appeared to me at the turn of the millennium, with particular attention to how it affected me. I felt that I needed to honestly account for the effect that this masculine gaze had on me (the ads that were sexually objectifying, either of men or women but most frequently women, were the ones that grabbed me affectively, and came to have a more, rather than less prominent place in the magazine). My solution was to accentuate this binary or highlight it, to amplify its visibility.

As I assembled and arranged the magazine based on my template, I paid attention to the position and depiction of women and women artists in the magazine's pages. When two full page ads faced each other, I tended to make one male and one female, to accentuate the binary and make it more of an issue, rather than pretend it wasn't

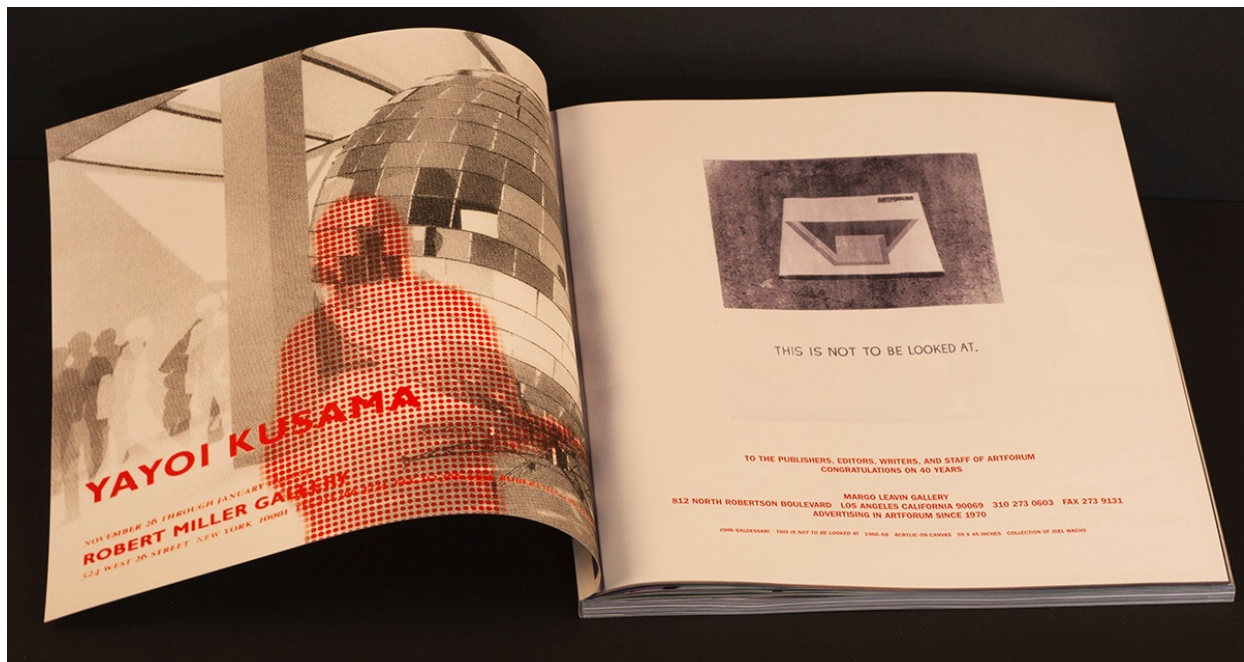


Fig. 2: Galan Akin, *Manual* (detail; inside front cover). 2003-2015. 198 page Magazine. Spread dimensions 10.5" x 21".

something already present in the magazine. The inside back and front cover ads reflect feminine and masculine takes or stereotypes of the gaze; the inside front is an ad for Yayoi Kusama, whose work tends to befuddle and complicate any gaze, gendered or otherwise. Opposite Kusama, John Baldessari's *This is Not to be Looked At* is reproduced for a Margo Leavin gallery ad congratulating *Artforum* on its 40th anniversary and proudly announcing. "Advertising in *Artforum* since 1970." (fig. 2) The inside back cover features a blurry shot from a video of Jeff Wall looking at his own work, *Man with Rifle*, in which a man in a parking lot holds an imaginary rifle in a vaguely threatening gesture towards an oblivious woman walking by. A view of a naked woman holding a lamp, taken from Marcel Duchamp's posthumous work *Étant donnés*, is silkscreened onto Wall's body. (fig. 3) This layering of male gazes (the rifleman's, Wall's, Duchamp's, and my own), is heavily rasterized, alluding to the dot patterns used in Kusama's art and Wall's silhouette is repeated in ghostly form in the Kusama ad.

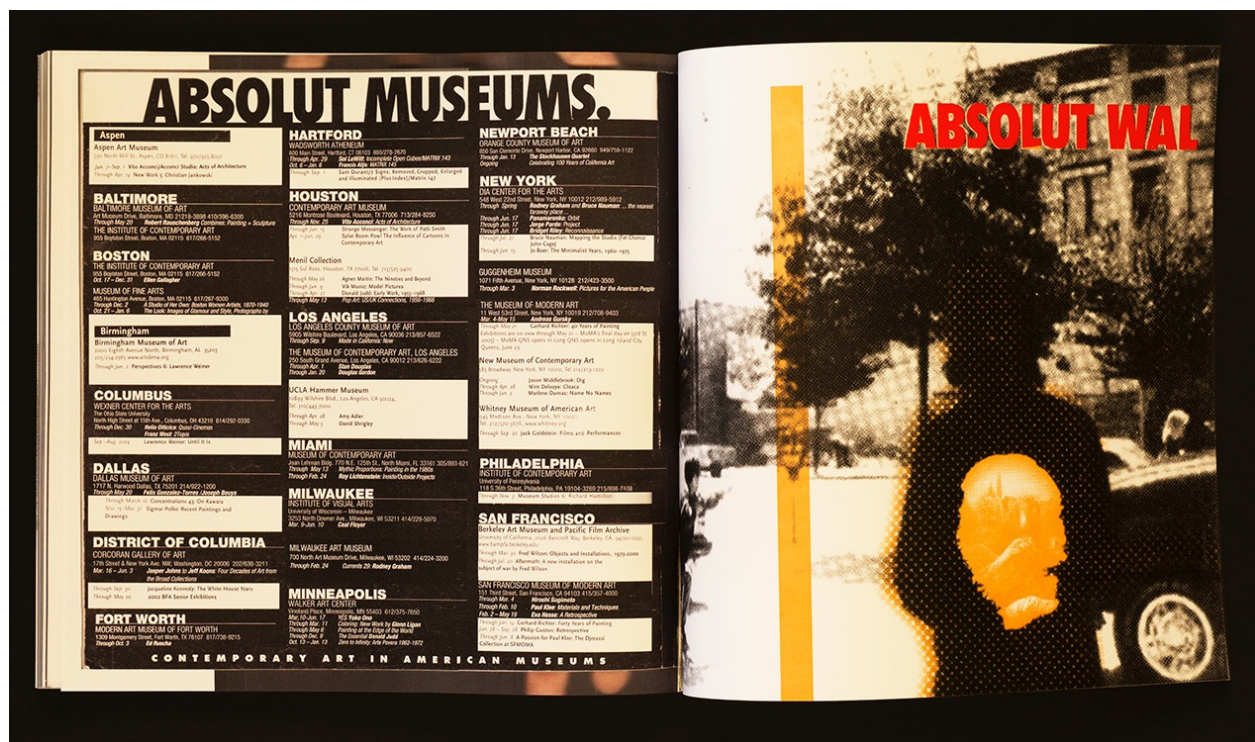


Fig. 3: Galan Akin, *Manual* (detail; inside back cover). 2003-2015. 198 page Magazine. Spread dimensions 10.5" x 21".

Another example from *Manual* is the page spread that features an Andrea Fraser ad on the left (featuring the artist as a sexualized circus performer, presumably offering a comment on the position of the artist, and of women as well) and a portrait of art dealer and collector (and original *Artforum* publisher) Charles Cowles (fig. 4). While Fraser has her back turned to the viewer, presenting herself as object of the gaze with no gaze returned, Cowles, fully clothed, faces the camera, looking directly at us. He stands in front of the spoils of art, an authentic Warhol Marilyn portrait (the ultimate sex/fame/death object), procured, in the early sixties, at a time before only the very wealthy could afford such a work, and before Fraser was born. As in many pages of the magazine, the scanning seams and slight scaling of the scanned magazine pages draw attention to the complex construction of the magazine and of the image.

I see this arrangement as almost a parody of the ideas of the male gaze and of mimetic desire, which is complicated by my own position in relation to the subjects of art, the artist, and the collector/dealer. Fraser has framed an object of desire, which others may mistake for their own. But the object of desire is very ambiguous, especially in the context of *Artforum*: it is not her objectified body so much as her objectified position in the art world, and her own desire to have a widely recognized, successfully branded art practice that I have perhaps mistaken for my own. Certainly as a viewer I empathize more with Fraser than with Cowles, but the sexual politics remain - a Fraser ad in 2003 also brought along the immediate baggage of her controversial video work from this time which involved the artist having sex with a collector in exchange for money. In repeating the presence of the male gaze I am marking it as an issue that I wish to acknowledge, but I don't yet know how to resolve. I am also suggesting, in a somewhat self-accusing manner, that these are some of the many constituent elements that help to form my agency and desire in relation to art.

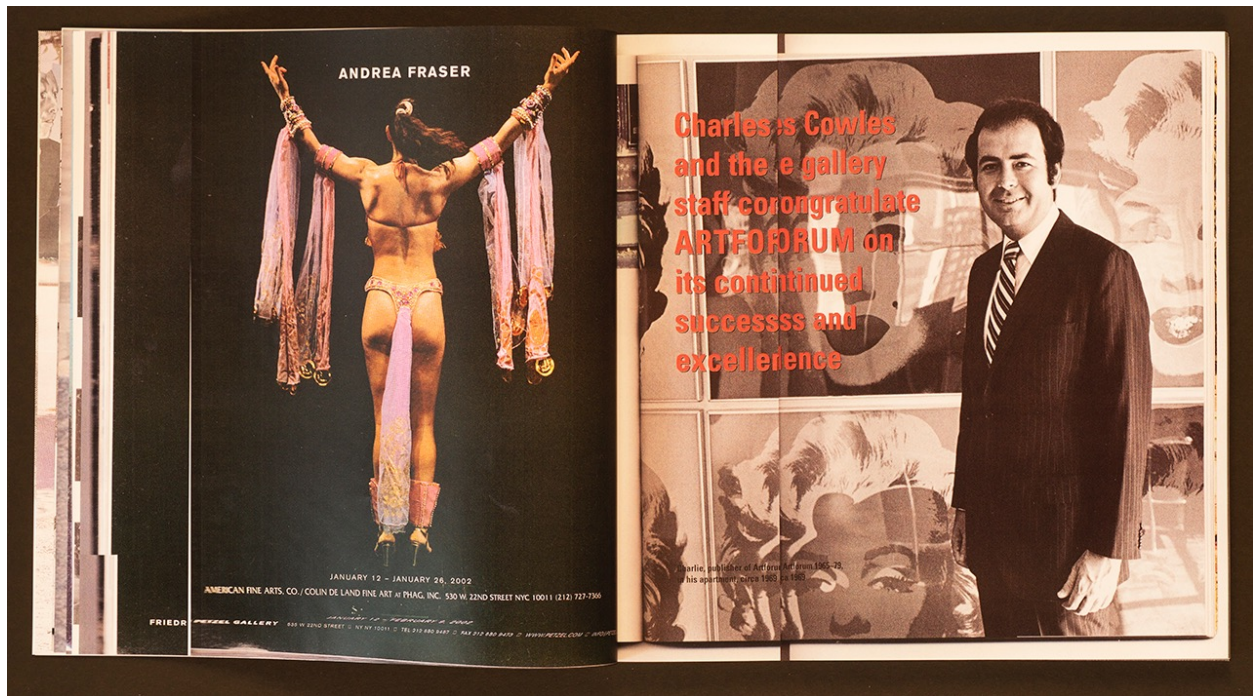


Fig. 4: Galan Akin, *Manual* (Fraser/ Cowles ad spread). 2003-2015. 198 page Magazine. Spread dimensions 10.5" x 21".

3. Entangled Objects

The model of agency I am concerned with has the potential to bridge a gap, or highlight a paradox, between two seemingly incompatible, yet coextensive, models of the subject. One conception of the subject, the heroic individualist one, has been heavily critiqued by the second, postmodernist one. A binary opposition would seem to be evident: either the heroic subject causes social relations, or the postmodern subject is caused by them. Karen Barad and Jacques Ranciere, among others, explore various ways to bridge this gap. They grapple with a situation in which these models are not wrong or right but, because they are models, must always leave out more than they contain.⁵

The feature articles in *Manual* provide a backdrop and outline for a model to make or understand art. They are also examples of how entangled agencies give rise to objects, such as the brand of an artist. For Karen Barad agency is fundamental to reality, as an ongoing process of “mattering.” What matters in the sense of being material as well as being important or salient, is not the way that things interact with each other, but rather the way that things are a result of ongoing “intra-actions” between phenomena that may appear to be contained inside separate objects. In Barad’s agential realist ontology, things, or rather *relata*, do not precede relations:

“Matter is produced and productive, generated and generative. Matter is agentive, not a fixed essence or property of things. Mattering is differentiating, and which differences come to matter. Changing patterns of difference are neither pure cause nor pure effect; indeed, they are that which effects, or rather enacts, a causal structure, differentiating cause and effect. Difference

⁵ This helps to explain how, for example, artists who seek to undermine myths or heroic models of genius may be mythologized themselves. Barthes is an author well known for authoring “The Death of the Author.” The myths of the most individualistic or romantic artist-subjects, on the other hand, are precisely linked, through the search for the Sublime, with the destruction of the self.

patterns do not merely change in time and space; space time is an enactment of differentness, a way of making/markings here and now.” (Barad ch 4)

Importantly, Barad’s notion of intra-actions is meant to show that surfaces are not made of only the parts they contain, but also of what they do not contain. What is inside or outside an object is the result of ‘agential cuts’ that generate what is possible or impossible at any moment through ongoing intra-actions. While Barad uses the example of light behaving as a particle or a wave depending on the apparatus of observation, she is at pains to point out that apparatuses are also the result of intra-actions; to study an apparatus one needs another apparatus. Most crucially, for Barad agency is not tied to human consciousness but is constitutive of the real in way that is not anthropocentric⁶.

I have long been attracted to paradox as a symptom of a limited human capacity to describe an infinite reality. Whatever we look at is ultimately too complex to fully grasp. In order to make use in thought of any object — including words, concepts, people, desires or goals — we must leave out most of what it is, and forget that it is also what it is not. *Manual* ruminates on this condition, especially through its selection of features, which includes articles on Gerhard Richter, Rachel Harrison, Lee Lozano, Laurie Parsons, and Benjamin Buchloh on Thomas Hirschhorn. These articles reference the ongoing operation of agential cuts that structure both the exterior and interior of an artist, art work, or artistic practice.

The political battles over art, artists, and meaning captured here allude to the entangled agencies that intra-act within and between subjects. Jacques Ranciere’s notion of a political subject that “part-takes” in both ruling and being ruled is “a being who is at

⁶ For Barad, human consciousness is, like everything else, constructed by agential intra-actions, that is the relations that operate between and inside relata: “Human bodies, like all other bodies, are not entities with inherent boundaries and properties but phenomena that acquire specific boundaries and properties through the open ended dynamics of intra-activity. Humans are part of the world-body space in its dynamic structuration.” (Barad ch 4)

once the agent of an action and the one upon whom the action is exercised.” (Ranciere) This points to a model, similar to Barad’s, where simple cause and effect will not suffice. For Barad, the problem with trying to determine causes and effects, or which object acted on which object, is that objects themselves do not precede the things that they do, or that happen to them. Rather, the intra-acting agencies, in this case various forms of artistic and political interest, are what produces art, artists, and other objects.

The source magazines span the setting up of Richter’s 2002 retrospective at MOMA, advertising for the show, multiple critical reviews, and an angry exchange of letters between the curator Robert Storr and the critic Rosalind Krauss. All these elements are present in *Manual*. The feature article mashes together two features from different issues: the pre-show interview with Storr discussing the installation and reviews from multiple artists and critics, all of which are negative (a striking rarity in *Artforum* reviews). No one is critical of Richter, but only of the received meaning of Storr’s installation; clearly there is a lot at stake here, but Richter himself is silent on all of it. There is consensus on Richter as an important artist, but not on what is important in his oeuvre. At the heart of the critique is the contention that monochromes and colour charts are given insufficient space, and that representational works and colourful abstracts are privileged.

This conflict represents a struggle between ‘shallow’ surface and intellectual depth which triggered the formation of *October* magazine in the 70’s.⁷ *October*’s founders, including Krauss and Buchloh, frequently appear today in the pages of *Artforum*, allowing the magazine to continue to harness both sides of this split. The debate over Richter is prefigured by Buchloh’s famous interview with the artist, in which the two appear to be from different planets (Richter 1036). In *Manual*, Buchloh advances

⁷ This split in part occurred as a reaction to Lynda Benglis’ infamous ad featuring the naked and oiled female artist sporting a large dildo. This ad/ artwork was inspired in part by a promotional photo of Robert Morris shirtless, in chains and an army helmet taken, ironically, by Krauss (!), who left the magazine as a result of the Benglis ad (Smith).

Hirschhorn's practice as an exemplary articulation of contempt for the totalizing and hopeless conditions for contemporary art and its reception. For Buchloh, Hirschhorn confronts and makes visible a situation in which all sculpture and installation are subordinated to architecture in a context where public space has been thoroughly privatized. Architecture, in turn, is subordinated to the image and the spectacle. Buchloh's concerns are, for me, impossible to ignore as a ground for my work, both in terms of the omnipresence of neoliberalism, and in its characterization of a specific relationship between object and image. The image (and object) of Hirschhorn's brand (and Buchloh's, *Artforum's*, and *October's*), the way in which both Buchloh and Hirschhorn benefit from the system that they hate⁸, is the unspoken backbone of Buchloh's article. *Artforum* and *October* mutually benefit from their not so binary antagonism: The weight of *October*, supposedly washing its hands of the market and the spectacle, strengthens both Hirschhorn and Buchloh's market value, precisely through this disavowal. For his part, Buchloh perpetuates the system he critiques through his very critique. Hypocrisy is not the issue: in the context of *Manual* and its framing of my practice, my interest is in the complexity of the situation and its implications for artistic agency and motivation. 'Richter' and 'Buchloh' are depicted through the articles as being also what they are not as the result of entangled agential cuts.

The sculptural practice of Rachel Harrison, using object and image in a non-dichotomous way, are framed in the two articles in *Manual* about her in a way that points a way out of Buchloh's prison, at least temporarily. Harrison's practice and its articulation in the magazine relates to my desire to work with image and object in a non-oppositional way; for me images are always three dimensional and temporal, and objects and situations are always images to the extent that they are objects of thought. The images

⁸ Buchloh's article begins with the following Hirschhorn quote: "My exhibition is not about hope, or about creating points of stabilization; it is about showing my disgust with the dominant discourse and showing my contempt for the fascination with power." (Buchloh 109) Hirschhorn's practice, while driven by a hatred of society in its current conditions, is more ambivalent than Buchloh's polemic; whatever the artist's intentions and motivations, viewers might still find hope in his work, hence the need for his clarification.

that determine if something is art or what kind of art it is in a specific, temporal situation are material intra-actions which are never bound by 2 dimensions. *Manual* is specifically intended to function as a three dimensional object/image in this way.

The art of both Richter and Harrison may concern itself with life, but they are both clearly working within the art world, and what they are producing is nothing if not art. In *Manual*, their features are bookended by the Hirschhorn, Lozano, and Parsons pieces, which, by contrast, are concerned with blurring the line between art and life (or politics), or even with escaping or destroying the category of art altogether, relating to earlier explorations in this vein by movements such as Fluxus⁹ and artists such as Daniel Buren. This ongoing political engagement with the question of what art should and should not be, and whether the proper activity of the artist is to belong inside or escape those boundaries is not really composed of straightforward binary oppositions. For me, what is interesting is the enactment of complex agencies which iteratively generate the surfaces, or the possibilities, of art worlds that are constantly changing and attempting to exclude each other. I want to draw my own lines, or trace others, to depict this formation of objects in its agential, intra-active messiness. *My work Bob Rennie Painting* builds off this questioning of the boundaries of different kinds of art that is represented in the content of *Manual*.

⁹ One column in *Manual*, on Nam June Paik, has all the text removed except for a pull quote referring to the artist's disagreement with the Fluxus group. It reads, "When George Maciunas staged a picket against Stockhausen in 1964, calling him a 'ruling-class artist,' Paik left the group in protest." While referring broadly to artist power struggles and disagreements, the Stockhausen picket is described in detail in Hannah Higgins Fluxus Experience, and her account strikes me as an illuminating allegory. Higgins describes how her father, the artist Dick Higgins, dealt with the conflict by attending ('performing' in) both the concert and the protest, thus satisfying all his loyalties and making Maciunas' s cartoonish attempts at control of the Fluxus group appear ridiculous (Higgins, 72).

4. Bob Rennie Painting

The entangled agencies that form the surfaces of Richter and Harrison's practice, and the international art world(s) to which they belong, are constructed in part through the apparatus of *Artforum*. By making my own agential cuts in *Manual*, I seek a way to make sense of this world through my practice. Because I am situated in Vancouver, my personal magazine is immersed in local considerations. Every ad and every review for a Vancouver artist or show that appeared in the 16 source issues appears in *Manual*. This reflects a kind of hierarchy between full page and smaller ads and where those ads are placed in the magazine. Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace, Stan Douglas and Ken Lum all appear at the front of the New York reviews section (which always appears first in the magazine's capsule review section near the end). The first three, plus Rodney Graham¹⁰ all appear in one or more full page ads; Lum has a half page ad. The Catriona Jeffries Gallery ads are the only full page ads that appear from a Vancouver gallery or institution; all eight of these and every smaller ad for Vancouver galleries or artists that appeared in the source issues is in *Manual*. This represents a subjective yet constrained amplification of Vancouver's presence in the magazine, yet still filtered through a New York-centric view. Most of the Vancouver shows advertised were ones I had seen; some had a significant effect on me. In particular, the Catriona Jeffries ads featured emerging international

¹⁰ Graham did not have a show reviewed in the 16 source issues, but did have reviews within a year to either side of it.

artists such as Geoffrey Farmer¹¹ and Brian Jungen, both of whom figure prominently in the collection of Bob Rennie, a powerful art patron in Vancouver's small but influential contemporary art world.

Bob Rennie, the collector, has enormous influence in the tiny world of Vancouver contemporary art. He has converted his collection of significant local and international artists into a semi-private museum, and has engaged in public feuds with the leadership of the Vancouver Art Gallery. He sits on boards for the Faculty of Arts at the University of British Columbia and Emily Carr University of Art and Design and has contributed heavily to funds for Emily Carr University's impending expansion and relocation. His influence in the Vancouver art community is enhanced by his international connections; he also chairs the Tate Museum's North America Acquisitions Committee. Rennie's considerable financial clout derives from the development and the marketing of condominiums, and as such he represents almost a personification of the feedback loop between art and gentrification. His interest and patronage of cutting-edge contemporary art benefits an art community that has a role to play in rising property values which inevitably force the artists to move into new areas which can in turn affect the marketability of the new neighborhoods.

As it turns out, there is another Bob Rennie involved in land and art in Vancouver, albeit in an entirely different capacity. Bob Rennie, the artist, is not known in the community of contemporary art in Vancouver, though he has had a successful career as a

¹¹ Farmer's 2001 solo show, *Catriona Jeffries Catriona*, is one of the advertisements. This show, which featured an ongoing constantly changing installation that was also a performance, had a catalytic effect on my thinking about art before I ever conceived of *Manual*. Farmer occupied the gallery at night and worked, so that the show was different each day but the artist was never present except through his alterations and recorded videos. This had the effect of making me realize that all art, and all objects, are temporal, and that the most conservative painting on a wall in a gallery is always also a sculpture, an installation, and a performance. The title for the exhibition changed at several points: called 'Expendables' when the magazine ad was taken out, it was titled 'Catriona Jeffries Catriona' when I encountered it. Reflecting this, I altered the ad digitally to remove the expendable 'Expendables' title and replace it with the one I had known.

traditional watercolour painter and teacher in the city. He paints well-crafted land and seascapes depicting the beauty of the west coast of Canada. *Long Beach Breakers*, the painting I purchased from the artist to offer for sale in *Bob Rennie Painting*, is a typical example¹². While Rennie's subject matter and style disqualify him from serious consideration for inclusion in the world of the collector Bob Rennie, it is interesting to note that the developer started out collecting this kind of art. Rennie the collector only started buying contemporary art around 1996¹³, which is when he purchased a Ron Terada painting of an Artforum ad for On Kawara, a painting that I now own.¹⁴ While collector Rennie clearly has developed a passion and an eye for challenging contemporary art, it's interesting to note the massive increase in potential prestige, power and visibility (admittedly within a small world) that has accompanied this change in taste, almost as if this shift was linked to the transition from a successful businessman to the more prestigious and elite position of "Condo King" of Vancouver. (Solomon) It is also interesting to contemplate the relationship the artist's subject matter and the collector's day job have to land, waterfront, ecology, and property values in BC's lower mainland. Granville Island, for example, is the location of the Emily Carr campus and is a stone's throw of the collector's residence. It also appears in paintings by the artist, who sells work in a commercial tourist gallery on the island.

This "shift in taste," or question of appropriate boundaries and types of art, is the starting point for *Bob Rennie Painting*, a work that uses elements of copying, doubling, and conventions of display to enact the material and social surfaces that define an art work's context and meaning. *Bob Rennie Painting* consists of an original framed water-

¹² It was important to me that this painting, commissioned or otherwise, included seagulls and waterfront, which was the reason I chose *Long Beach Breakers*.

¹³ Personal conversation with Ron Terada 10 July 2014.

¹⁴ Rennie disposed of the painting when Terada refused to return his calls to repair it, after it had apparently fallen down some stairs. Years later I found the painting at a garage sale in East Vancouver. After a disagreement with Terada, Rennie never purchased another work by the artist (personal conversation with Terada).

colour painting by the artist Bob Rennie, a wall label, and a site of commerce. The painting depicts a Vancouver Island beach, in a skilled, traditional watercolour style. Waves crash on the beach, seagulls dot the sky, and the signature “Rennie” appears in the lower right corner amongst sand, water and rocks. The label lists the artist’s name and the painting’s title, medium, and price (Bob Rennie; *Long Beach Breakers*; Watercolour; \$600.00). These two items are mounted on the wall in the READ bookstore, in a location normally reserved for selling Emily Carr branded tote bags or other merchandise. It is also a location where Bob Rennie the collector is influential and known, while the painter is not.

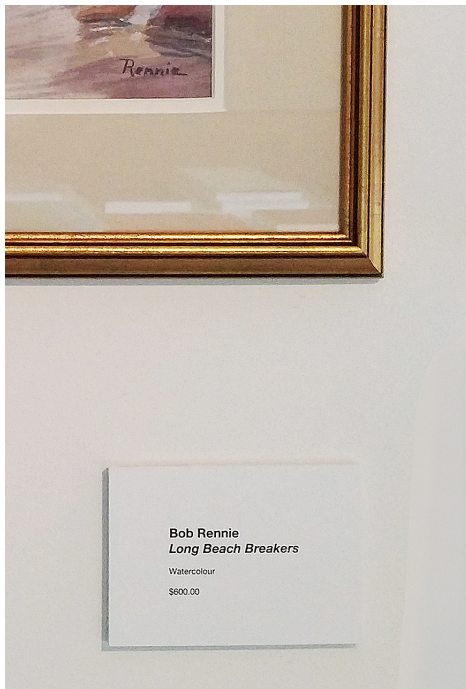


Fig. 5: Galan Akin, *Bob Rennie Painting* (detail). 2014. Purchased watercolour painting, wall label, commerce. Dimensions variable.

Bob Rennie Painting can potentially be shown in a wide range of situations, and these situations can be taken as a kind of surface study of art economics. This commercial aspect is absolutely crucial to the work, which by framing commerce in a specific way, actually escapes it. This is because 1) the painting is offered for the exact same price I paid the artist for it and 2) the work *Bob Rennie Painting* is destroyed if *Long Beach Breakers* is sold; i.e. it reverts to being simply what it is, a skillfully rendered wa-

tercolour painting by a west coast Canadian artist. It is also important that my name appears nowhere on the work, allowing the label to function properly.

My hope for this work would be that it could reach two different audiences — regardless of how small each one is — in two completely different ways. The local Vancouver contemporary art audience — those in the know — can laugh at the inside joke, or reflect on the impact of Rennie on the local art scene and on the institution in which the work is displayed.¹⁵ Those who are uninformed or uninterested in these subtleties may be able to enjoy the artist Bob Rennie's work on its own terms, and possibly enjoy the fact that his kind of painting is in a place that it does not belong¹⁶. Some of them will enjoy their own, different subtleties, which may be unavailable to the first audience.¹⁷ While the best case scenario might be that a viewer would enjoy both these elements, to me it's important that this not be framed in terms of hierarchies: the painting is an interloper in this environment and this is a form of joke, but the joke is not on the water-colour painting or its audience. While contemporary art has the capacity to swallow just about anything, a fact that I am complicit in illustrating if the work is successful as a work of contemporary art, it is important to me that the painting function as it was originally intended to function. The fact that I have grafted the functions or the anxieties of

¹⁵ In this sense I see *Bob Rennie Painting* as borrowing elements of methodology from Hans Haacke's 1970 *MOMA Poll*, although it is laughably more genteel than the iconic work which publicly shamed the governor of New York and MOMA board member.

¹⁶ On Granville Island, tourists frequently visit the university bookstore and galleries during the summer months, and while many of them may be interested in or open to the more experimental art produced on campus, there is a frequent if stereotypical negative reaction to both student works and established artists; they are hoping to see something more akin to what is presented in the commercial galleries on the Island, and are disappointed with what is being taught in the art school.

¹⁷ I reject the notion that *Bob Rennie Painting* is strictly a work functioning in the contemporary art world, and that it does not function in the parallel art world. While it may be that the breadth and depth of contemporary art, its potentiality and variability, dwarf the more popular, less historically engaged paradigm of art, the latter's narrow and shallow accessibility gives it its own weight. This paper is firmly entrenched in one world, and cannot really articulate or speak to the other except on the terms of the first. But the reach of that first world is minute within the larger picture.

an alien art world onto it does not mean that these layers are 'higher', or that the intended function was lesser.

Just as *Manual* functions as a template with regard to local content seen at a distance or from a strange perspective, it also references and demonstrates appropriation practices and artists. Constrained by the number of such examples that were available in the source material, I made sure to include all the examples I could in my magazine. Louise Lawler, for example, is represented by a full page ad, and one of her works acted as a template for *Bob Rennie Painting*. In a work from 1978, Lawler presented a 19th century painting of a racehorse in a contemporary New York artist run space. Lawler borrowed the oil painting from a race track, suggesting a correlation between the act of betting on a racehorse, and the speculative aspect of selecting or acquiring a work of art (Foster). *Bob Rennie Painting* was intended to be an appropriation of this work which relates to a strain of appropriating appropriation work in my practice. This 'appropriation of appropriation' is represented both inside *Manual* and in works that are guided by it.

5. Depiction: Becoming “Similar” in Difference

The subject matter and execution of *Long Beach Breakers* places it squarely in a mimetic tradition discredited by modernism and critiqued by postmodernism. Certainly, it is what places the work clearly in one West Coast art world and not in the other. Yet I don't conceive of *Manual* as fundamentally different than *Long Beach Breakers*. It's not that they belong to the same art world, but *Manual* is an attempt to depict a scene, situation or object very much in the way that *Long Beach Breakers* does; that is, to render in faithful and realistic detail with a subjective hand. I see *Manual* as a kind of picture-making, and certainly a kind of depiction with a complex, layered and folded surface. While I can identify critical placements and trajectories in *Manual*, these mostly take place after the fact. The process of assembling and making selections for *Manual* is the same, absorptive process with effectively the same goal as *Long Beach Breakers*.

This form of conventional copying/picture making can be linked to a mastering (masculine) gaze, which is instrumental in commodifying land/landscape or life/lifestyle and picturing it as an object to be owned or controlled by an individual (even, perhaps, in helping to create the individual by articulating what is outside or beyond the individual but a valid target for absorption/expansion). It is interesting to consider the link between depiction of landscape — whether through painting, photography, text or advertising — and the abstract forces of capital and the formation of agency that are involved in an acquisitive drive linked to both real estate speculation and the collection of contemporary art. I avow this critique of the gaze of the individual, of its problematic role in traditional mimetic art such as *Long Beach Breakers*. And yet the very opposite has always also been true about picture making of this type, and about picture making in general: it is an opportunity, and a temptation, for the individual to lose his or her self, to be absorbed into the other rather than to absorb it. I believe both impulses are always present, both in the viewing and in the creation of mimetic, depictive art.

In *On the Mimetic Faculty*, Benjamin writes,

Nature produces similarities; one need only think of mimicry. The highest capacity for producing similarity, however, is man's. His gift for seeing similarity is nothing but a rudiment of the once powerful compulsion to become similar and behave mimetically. There is perhaps not a single one of his higher functions in which the mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role. (Benjamin, Faculty 333)

I disagree that the compulsion Benjamin describes as “once powerful” has diminished. Rather, I think it is intimately and complexly linked to his observation that, “every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object by way of its likeness, its reproduction.” (“Work” 223) A simple reading would suggest that as the desire or ability to acquire reproductions (to absorb) increases, the compulsion to behave mimetically (to be absorbed) lessens. I believe that both sides of this apparent binary opposition are completely entangled aspects of one phenomenon. Rather than strictly existing on one side or another of a static boundary, they are involved in the continuous generation and dissolution of overlapping and contradictory boundaries that define art. One reason for this is that the subject implicated in mimetic desire does not have a clear interior and exterior.

Mimesis is fundamentally about the possibility of something(s) becoming other(s), or about absorbing/being absorbed by an other. The artist who draws or paints an object or scene with the intention of creating a likeness is engaging in this absorptive, mimetic mode. When a painter such as Rennie creates a work such as *Long Beach Breakers*, he *is* asserting a kind of control, creating an image that can be owned in the imagination, and in actuality in terms of the object that is the painting. But he is simultaneously losing himself in a reverie, blurring the boundary between what lies inside and outside the self, and putting into question, however lightly, the very notion of control, or of a self that could exercise control. John Berger writes that a drawing of a tree does not show a tree, but instead shows a person looking at a tree (Berger 43). Rennie's painting shows the artist looking at a seascape in the same way (or does it show looking at a

photo of a seascape? It's not clear which). Michael Taussig, following Berger, claims that a person drawing becomes what they are drawing (Taussig). Cognitive scientist Andrea Kantrowitz writes about drawing:

Beginning to draw, you immediately discover that you understand far less about what you see than you had assumed and that there is much more there than you had imagined. Drawing enables the drawer to see and comprehend that which is beyond words. (Kantrowitz 10)

Rennie's seascape and Berger's tree both involve not just a record of looking and making, but the fundamental mimetic impulse to absorb and be absorbed by the other. *Manual* as a whole is part this impulse: I am trying to exert some control over the magazine, and at the same time examining it in such detail that I become lost in it. By looking at it in such detail I am following a process analogous to the one described by Kantrowitz.

While I see *Manual* as mimetic and depictive, it also contains specific instances of the hand drawn or painted. These are labour intensive, detailed, and 'realistic' depictions that echo the labour intensive, absorptive process of building *Manual*. One example is derived from Amy Adler's photographed drawing *Centerfold*, presented as an artist contribution to the January 2002 issue of *Artforum*. Adler's nude, hand drawn self portrait was destroyed after it was photographed, and as with her other works, the photograph became the work (although in this case its mass production in the pages of a magazine make it a different kind of work). I copied her photograph by hand but replaced the right side of the image with a 'self portrait' of my own lower body, creating a disconcerting and problematic enactment of gazes and objectification (fig. 6). Adler's work, in which she exerts some agency over her relationship to the male gaze is somewhat undercut by my repetition of it. Similarly, by presenting my own portrait in a depersonalized and objectified manner, I am both critiquing the male gaze and exaggerating the problems with a male critique of this gaze. For a man to sexually objectify himself in the straightforward manner in which Adler does is as much a threatening gesture as it is

one of giving up power. I see this gesture as 'exposing' my own complicity with patriarchy; this is a kind of accusation or reminder to myself of imbalances that I want to keep in view while I work. At the same time, the process of copying the image laboriously by hand is as much about giving up control as it is about exercising it. This mimetic impulse to absorb and be absorbed is implicated in both the drawing of boundaries in order to differentiate and define the individual (to 'brand' the artist) and in the removal of any distinctions between the subject and anything else. It is vital to both branding and oblivion.



Fig. 6: Galan Akin, *Manual* (detail; *Centerfold*). 2003-2015. 198 page Magazine. Page size 10.5" x 10.5".

6. Branding and Oblivion

Boundaries define objects with agential cuts which produce forms of meaning for specific ends. Dense theory, complex art practices, entangled political agencies, all are better understood, and therefore better used or confronted, with a paring down of contradictions and irrelevancies. What is essential must be identified and cleaned up, the inessential stripped away to reveal meaning. In other words: branding.

Branding is a process of differentiation to facilitate choice and decision making in the context of social belonging. This process is not new¹⁸, but has become more visible and important as our available choices and information have increased in complexity and number. (Neumeier 8) Crucially, a brand is not dictated by the brand owner or manager, who can only hope to influence it; a brand is the accumulation of a sufficient number of “gut feelings” by individuals on what the meaning of the brand is. (Neumeier 2) To use an artist or a theory in a specific way is to contribute to the branding of that artist or theory. While branding must be adaptive, its whole reason for being is to locate an essence which helps to protect the branded object from the fact that everything is always changing. What is graspable and useful is that which has a brand.

Branding is the opposite of oblivion. Like all oppositions, they are entangled. The artists and ideas in *Manual* can all spread mimetically through branding, and indeed, that is how they ended up there. What is not branded is lost, or at least removed from ordinary visibility.¹⁹ A brand is a complex material entanglement that only seems simple or static. It functions through the pretence of immateriality but, like Benjamin’s “ruffle on a dress” gains its essence in the ‘guts’ of consumers and other tribal groups. The brand is not “some idea,” but a complex surface where agential cuts reconfigure desire and

¹⁸ In *The Brand Gap*, brand manager Marty Neumeier claims that the process of branding as we understand it today is over 5000 years old (2). The barrier between meaning and what we currently call “branding” is porous.

¹⁹ But not from the kind of close looking at surface described by Kantrowitz.

interest. *The Arcades Project* tried to do too much, to rescue what was lost, as much of it as possible, before it fell into oblivion. In a sense, ‘oblivion’ is just another way of saying ‘what is not contained within a brand.’ *Manual* mimics Benjamin’s method and madness but also relies heavily on branding as a jumping off point. Content in *Manual* that addresses death and dematerialization, that is, oblivion, tries to point at both a way out of branding and to consider the role of branding in that exercise. This includes an obituary, ads and reviews for Jack Goldstein and feature articles on Lee Lozano and Laurie Parsons.



Fig. 7: Galan Akin, *Manual* (detail; Bas Jan Ader ad with Goldstein obituary). 2003-2015. 198 page magazine. Spread dimensions 10.5" x 21".

Goldstein was being ‘rediscovered’ by the art world in 2001, which coincided with a renewed interest in 80’s art in general. He had largely disappeared from view for about 10 years and was suddenly in demand and museum shows were springing up dedicated to his work. In the midst of all this, about a year after the October 2001 issue that sparked my interest, Goldstein committed suicide, implying a link between a search for recognition (fame/branding) and oblivion. I paired the Goldstein obituary with ads for two other artists that died young: Eva Hesse and Bas Jan Ader. The latter I experiment-

ed with by holding a few inches above the scanner bed when scanning, which seemed appropriate for an artist that, pursuing the logic of his practice, had disappeared at sea without a trace (Fig. 7). Elsewhere in the magazine this conversation is continued, with a condolence ad taken out by Goldstein's school, a feature review on the artist, and an exhibition ad showing a still from his film 'The Jump' (1978). The latter (Fig. 8), an image of a falling man, is nestled amongst real estate ads for high priced loft spaces in New York City. Two other artists who committed suicide during the making of *Manual* are represented by ads for Mike Kelly and Fred Sandback. This sense of a link between branding (or fame) and oblivion has its flip side in the column on Chris Burden's 'First Break' in gaining notoriety (literally having his arm broken with a shot from a rifle), a summation of strategies of risk and the efficacy of concise gestures in the building of a brand.



Fig. 8: Galan Akin, *Manual* (detail: Goldstein ad with loft ads spread). 2003 - 2015. 198 page Magazine. Spread dimensions 10.5" x 21"

The articles on Lee Lozano and Laurie Parsons allude to historical rhetoric of dematerialization and its role in both branding and oblivion. While Richter and Hirschhorn represent artist/brands at the peak of their careers, and Harrison is presented as an important discovery by the magazine, Lozano and Parsons represent a kind of remainder, artists who disappeared from the art world, in part perhaps because of their

gender, but above all because of their remarkable commitment to the logic of their practice. That this gives the magazine a chance to resurrect their careers (to rebrand them) is irrelevant to either woman; Lozano is dead, and Parsons has emphatically closed the door on that career in accordance with her principles and interests.

The lack of success of the 'brands' of Lozano and Parsons, as opposed to Richter, Hirschhorn, and Buren, is salient. In *Fluxus Experience*, Hannah Higgins argues that the fact that the art movement Fluxus is not seen as historically significant compared to other movements with overlapping concerns is precisely an indicator of success on its own terms. Fluxus sought to erase the boundary between art and life, to create new categories of experience. Above all, Fluxus was focussed on the transmission and reception of primary information (immediate, affective, non-mediated experience), as opposed to the secondary information that comprises criticism, legitimization, and history. For Higgins, Fluxus succeeded (and continues to succeed in the present day) precisely to the extent that it escapes art history (Higgins 59).

The trajectory of the careers of Lozano and Parsons follows the logic of their practice with a commitment and integrity that is interesting to compare with more renowned artists such as Daniel Buren or Thomas Hirschhorn. In the case of Lozano, this clearly has something to do with her gender, as evidenced by her disturbing, possibly anti-feminist feminism.²⁰ The fact that she quit making work and dropped out of the art world can be understood as a paradoxical artwork in itself, a protest against capitalism, patriarchy, and the art system that is certainly uncompromising compared to the related rhetoric of Hirschhorn and Buren. This is not to say Lozano's approach is more effective than Hirschhorn's, or to judge the quality of either oeuvre, but it does seem to say something about the system as a whole. As Lucy Lippard says in a sidebar to the original *Artforum* article, "Lee was extraordinarily intense, one of the first, if not the first

²⁰ In Lozano's most infamous work she refused to speak to other women for a year. This turned into a life long project and extended from 1971 until her death in 1999.

person ... who did the life-as-art thing. The kind of things other people did as art, she really did as life--and it took us a while to figure that out." (Lippard)

Similarly, Parson's practice, clearly owing a debt to Lippard's 'dematerialization' of the art object, pursued the dematerialization of the object until there was nothing left to dematerialize except the practice itself. Where most artists would balk at this final step, she saw it through to its logical end²¹. Parsons, seeking for ways to make meaningful connections with people through life, found that art was not as effective a way to do so as, for example, working with homeless and mentally ill people, which is what occupies her time now. The fact that she wanted to make her art into something more and that ended up not even including art stands in marked contrast to the career of Buren whose uncompromising early manifestos rail against the tyranny of art, and whose radical early work which eschewed progress and authorship has culminated in grandiose museum shows and commodity multiples.²²

The Laurie Parsons article appeared in a special issue looking back at the 80's, when Parsons was making art. *Manual* represents a kind of double nostalgia, filtering my interest in 80's art through a detailed regard for what was happening 15 years ago in *Artforum*. In *Manual*, a counterpoint to this romanticization of the 80's is provided by a Daniel Pinchbeck column, which is a tribute to his late father, the painter Peter Pinchbeck. The elder Pinchbeck lived in a rent controlled studio in New York and painted up until his death in 2000, yet he hadn't shown his work since the 70's. His son attempts to

²¹ When Parson's first solo show sold out (to a single collector/dealer) she asked that the gallery no longer sell any of her work. Later work included proposals for unrealizable projects, and suggesting that visitors to a sculpture park be told she had lived in the park for the last year, arguing it made no difference to the art whether it was true or not. An early work for the New Museum in New York is still in place: as in most institutions, museum guards were forbidden from talking to visitors; for a group show Parsons arranged for guards to visit studios and artist talks, and had the museum encourage them to talk to visitors about the art. This reversed policy is still in effect (Nickas)

²² A "unique, laser-cut table cloth" by the artist can be purchased for \$2600.00 online (Buren).

make sense of his father's life in a moving tribute that manifests all the passion of art and artists otherwise invisible in the pages of *Artforum*. In *Manual*, this represents a kind of 'branding of oblivion' which questions, perhaps absurdly, who and what art is for, and if it really needs an audience.

The difficulty of presenting *Manual* as an art object and its subject matter plays directly to these questions. As art, *Manual* runs the risk of being extremely self indulgent: it is, after all, an examination of the self, albeit a highly skeptical one. Its intended focus, however, is prior to any claim or definitive statement about my own 'branding' as an artist. Rather, it seeks to catalogue, if only briefly, what is completely outside my self but nonetheless constituent of it. The 'self' is encapsulated and summarized by what it is not.

Manual was made to be an art object, but it was not made primarily for an audience. Rather, I had the desire to see and experience what this magazine would be to use it as a way to frame (and brand) my practice while questioning that very need to frame and brand. Because I did want it to be art, I had to consider after the fact how to make it accessible to an audience, and how I wanted them to experience it. I knew it was important to me that it could be experienced like an ordinary magazine, not because it was an ordinary magazine but because that was the proper way to encounter it.

Whether the art is the gesture or the material manifestation cannot be definitively stated: it is both. It is also what it is not; in this sense it is also its frame; that is, the conditions and elements of presentation that would allow an audience to encounter the work. The frame I devised to present *Manual* as a magazine in the art gallery was a simulation of a living space, reminiscent of a condo showroom, composed of a picture hanging above a couch and coffee table, allowing the viewer to sit beneath the picture and flip through the magazine on the table if they chose to do so (fig. 9). These framing elements acted as a kind of decoy, giving a general audience something more to look at and experience. This distraction was deliberate: I wanted to present the magazine in a

way that made it more like a magazine and didn't require the viewer to read it unless it interested them.



Fig. 9: *Manual*, presented with props (couch, coffee table, painting-like object), Charles H. Scott Gallery, July 2015.

The picture resembled, at first glance, a painting stretched on canvas, but on closer viewing revealed itself to be a reproduction. It depicted an ad spread from the magazine, of two artworks at a Sotheby's auction (a photorealistic Vija Celmins painting on the Left and an abstract Pollock on the right). While it was close enough to be mistaken for a processed print of the magazine pages, it was actually a photo of a detailed, hand made drawing. Printing it on polyvinyl instead of canvas gave it a smooth texture that both made it look slightly cheaper, yet shifted the appearance of the slightly blurred

and saturated pencil lines between painting, photograph, and drawing. In order to view these details closely, the viewer would have to get close to the couch, and potentially feel invited to turn away from the picture and sit down on the couch.



Fig. 10: Painting Like object depicting ad spread and mounted behind couch.

This confusion between mechanical or digital reproduction and the hand made continued with the furniture. The Ikea couch featured a hand made 'acid wash' cover, referencing 80's fashion and the idea of the simulation of entropy through actual entropic processes. The table, also from Ikea, had it's veneer stripped off and a layered, hand drawn surface, evoking photo grain or animal skin, was covered with translucent gesso. The effect was subtle enough that it was not immediately clear that it was handmade.

This arrangement of a couch, coffee table, and picture allowed me to present *Manual* as a magazine that could be flipped through and viewed casually or distractedly, as magazines are typically encountered. While the wall label clearly identified that it was the magazine that was the art and not the couch and table, it was up to the audience what they wanted to focus on. By adding extra material that was not the artwork to the presentation, I was able to paradoxically dematerialize the art through a kind of materi-

alization of the frame. By enlarging the surface that separated the artwork from its surroundings the art object itself became *infrathin*.

Infrathin is Marcel Duchamp's term for a gap or zone of indeterminacy that describes where art, among other things, is defined ²³. Duchamp is purposefully circuitous in his discussion of this term, making it difficult to pin down (to brand). It has been defined as “the point where the same and the other are indiscernible.” (Badiou) Viewers easily overlooked the magazine. It was not clear to them that the magazine was not real, or was not of the current time. While this infrathin state could be dispelled by a close examination of the magazine and wall label, for me part of the point of the display was to continue to blur the line (the surface) between the art and the frame. I wanted to make a work about branding, and about the difficulty of branding, that was difficult to contain within a brand. By focussing on physical, surface elements, I hoped to explore a kind of ‘branding of oblivion’ by privileging the “ruffle on a dress” over the “idea.”

²³ “Duchamp... described art as a gap that represents the difference between intention and realization. ‘What art is in reality,’ he later commented, ‘is this missing link, not the links which exist. It’s not what you see that is art, art is the gap. I like this idea and even if it’s not true I accept it for the truth.’ The gap, the in-between, the liminal, the non-retinal, stretch the limits of articulation. When the definitive properties of known words fail, there is always the possibility of invention.” (Murray)

7. Like Something Different

In this essay I have tried to frame my thesis research in a way that consistently points to what is outside the frame, and to show that things are also what they are not. A frame, as I understand it, is a kind of apparatus that enacts agential cuts upon the relations that give rise to *relata* (that is, to ‘things’). I have attempted to articulate a fascination with the ungraspability of the real and with the compulsion to mimic, absorb, and be absorbed by the other. I have represented my work as a kind of mimetic realism that considers depiction and representation to be impossible and inescapable, vital and absurd. The term *mimesis* is itself a frame or representation that is almost unworkably vast; it is not something that ultimately can be grasped or contained.

I have also framed my thesis as a ‘farfetched’ inquiry into art and agency, suggesting that the subject is also what it is not. My investigation into the formation of my own agency is only about me to the extent that it is about how I am constituted from the other. *Manual* is dependant on my viewpoint but it is not intended to be autobiographical. It depicts agency, not an individual agent. Similarly, *Bob Rennie Painting* imagines that the two, unrelated Bob Rennies are also what they are not. I have looked at how something can be like what it is different from, and why I might be compelled to ‘like’ something because of its difference, because of its similarity, and because of both.

The strangeness of looking at a given surface exhaustively, in order to copy it ‘accurately’ is an exercise that, like Bob Rennie the painter, I enjoy for its own sake. But it is also my way of attempting, like Benjamin, to picture reality in its impossible richness. As in *The Arcades Project*, I want to try to capture what is lost to history or to theory. By definition this cannot be described or explained in a format such as this essay. Whatever I say *Manual* is, however I represent it, it is always something else, and this remainder is exactly the point. It is different, despite or perhaps because of the fact that it is concerned with similarity.

I have said that in some ways, my intentions in making *Manual* were not dissimilar to the painter Bob Rennie's intentions in making *Long Beach Breakers*. At the same time, I claim that I want to emulate Benjamin, suggesting perhaps that I see some sort of tenuous kinship between *Long Beach Breakers* and *The Arcades Project*. As ludicrous as this line of thought appears, it is perhaps a symptom of Benjamin's "gift for seeing similarity." This is why I can say that, for myself at least, the "compulsion to become similar and behave mimetically" has increased rather than diminished. In his essay *Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia*, Roger Caillois argues this absorptive, mimetic urge to be similar defies logic and threatens the notion of a clear distinction between an organism and its surroundings:

The individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at himself from any point whatever in space. He feels himself becoming space, dark space where things cannot be put. He is similar, not similar to something, but just similar. (Caillois)

Mimesis in art is not restricted to the reproduction of appearances, but is foundational to how it comes to be and how it is passed on. Not just artworks, but artists, audiences, support structures, and conventions are mimetic. By examining, copying, and simulating complex surfaces through laborious means, my work seeks to create likenesses and affinities that reveal differences, and to examine the similarities across the apparent differences which help to define barriers or surfaces. At the heart of mimesis is a paradox: it is similarity as difference. Somewhere between the similarities my work shares with other art and what differentiates it my practice is located. This may or may not be an actual, distinct object, but it must be articulated as such in order to be discussed. In other words, it must be differentiated, which is to say, 'branded.' In art, this process of articulation and branding is what generates, maintains, and alters the boundaries and defining surfaces that frame artworks and their reception.

Works Cited

- Badiou, Alain. "Some Remarks Concerning Marcel Duchamp." *The Symptom: Online Journal for Lacan.com* (2008). web. 12 Aug. 2015.
- Barad, Karen M. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Duke University Press, 2007. Kindle File.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994. Web.
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999. Print.
- Benjamin, Walter. "On the Mimetic Faculty." *Reflections*. Ed. Demetz, Peter. New York: Schocken Books, 2007. Print.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Illuminations*. Ed. Arendt, Hannah. New York: Schocken Books, 2007. Print.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*. Ed. Arendt, Hannah. New York: Schocken Books, 2007. Print.
- Berger, John. *Selected Essays of John Berger*. Random House LLC, 2008. web. 15 Mar. 2014
- Buren, Daniel. *Unique Tablecloth with Laser-Cut Lace (Object to Be Situated on Table)*. For Parkett 66. Web. 16 Jan. 2015
- Caillois, Roger. "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia." (Winter, 1984) pp. 16-32. Print.
- Foster, Hal. "Subversive Signs." Excerpted from *Recoding: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1986. Accessed online at allanmccollum.net
- Garrels, Scott R. "Empirical Research on Imitation and the Mimetic Theory of Culture and Religion." *Mimesis and Science*. Ed. Garrels, Scott R. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011. Kindle file.
- Higgins, Hannah. *Fluxus Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002
- Kantrowitz, Andrea. "The Man behind the Curtain: What Cognitive Science Reveals about Drawing." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*. 46.1: (Spring 2012): 1-14. web.15 Mar. 2014

- Latour, Bruno. "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik". *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. New York: MIT Press, 2005. PDF file.
- Lippard, Lucy. "On the Legacy of Artist Lee Lozano". Interview. By Katy Siegel. *Artforum* (October 2001), pp 120-128. Print.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema." *Art in Theory 1900 - 1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Ed. Harrison, Charles and Paul Wood. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. Print.
- Murray, Caitlin. "How to Isolate the Infrathin: Marcel Duchamp, Raymond Roussel and the Infrathin." *Impossible Objects*. weblog. 12 Aug 2015.
- Neumeier, Marty. *The Brand Gap*. Berkeley: New Riders, 2006. Print.
- Nickas, Bob. "Dematerial Girl." *Artforum* (April 2003), pp 202-205. Print.
- Oughourlian, Jean-Michel. "From Universal Mimesis to the Self Formed by Desire." *Mimesis and Science*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011. Kindle file.
- Ranciere, Jacques. "Ten Theses on Politics." *Theory and Event*. Vol. 5, No. 3, 2001. Web.
- Richter, Gerhard. "Interview with Benjamin Buchloh." *Art in Theory 1900 - 1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Ed. Harrison, Charles, and Paul Wood. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. Print.
- Smith, Roberta. "Art or Ad or What? It caused a lot fuss" *New York Times* 24 July 2009: Web.
- Taussig, Michael. "Peasant Tree Farms in the Age of Agro Terrorism." Lecture. Western Front. Vancouver. 28 Mar. 2013.