

3 ANTICIPATING INSTABILITY

Blurred: Parsing *Thinking* and *Seeing*

In 1970 the conceptual artist Peter Hutchinson proposed a work he called *Dissolving Clouds* which consisted of two parts, a written proposition and photographic documentation. The proposition states: “Using Hatha yoga techniques of intense concentration and pranic energy it is claimed that clouds can be dissolved. I tried it on the cloud (in square) in photographs. This is what happened. This piece happens almost entirely in the mind.”¹ The work is a humorous send-up of new age practices—all clouds dissolve on their own without any help from us. It’s also a piece that anyone can do: As I type this, I’m dissolving clouds in my mind.

Hutchinson’s piece demonstrates one of the fundamental tenets of conceptual art: the difference between seeing and thinking.

Ludwig Wittgenstein used the optical illusion of the duck-rabbit to demonstrate the concept of visual instability. Like all optional illusions, it keeps flipping back and forth between being a duck and a rabbit. The way to stabilize it, at least momentarily, is to name what you see: “If you are looking at the object, you need not think of it; but if you are having the visual experience by the exclamation [I exclaim “A rabbit!”], you are also *thinking* of what you see.”² In



Peter Hutchinson. *Dissolving Clouds*. Aspen, Colorado. 1970.

Using Hatha yoga technique of intense concentration and pranic energy it is claimed that clouds can be dissolved. I tried it on cloud (in square) in photographs. This is what happened. "This piece happens almost entirely in the mind."

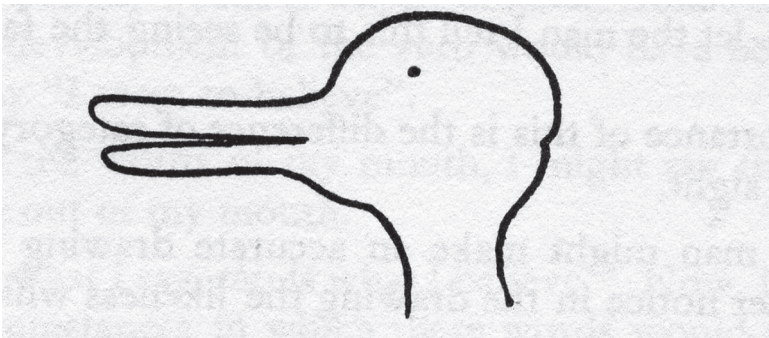


Figure 3.1. Peter Hutchinson, "Dissolving Clouds" (1970).

Figure 3.2. Wittgenstein's Duck-Rabbit.

Hutchinson's documentation, we are looking; in his linguistic proposition, we must *think* of what we see.

In 1960s and seventies conceptual art, the tension between materiality and proposition were continually tested to varying effects: how visual should an artwork be? In 1968 Lawrence Weiner began an ongoing series that he called *Statements*, which permitted the works to take on any number of manifestations:

1. The artist may construct the piece.
2. The piece may be fabricated.
3. The piece need not be built.

A piece could remain as a statement or it could be realized. Taking a classic work of Weiner's from this period, it's curious what happens when it's enacted. The proposition reads:

*Two minutes of spray paint directly upon the floor from a standard aerosol spray can.*³

This statement left propositional form—as language—open-ended. If two of us conceive of a mental image of *Two minutes of spray paint directly upon the floor from a standard aerosol spray can*, we're sure to have different ideas of what that might look like. You might think it was fire-engine red paint on a wooden floor; I might think it was Kelly green on a concrete floor. And we'd both be right.

The realization of the piece most frequently reproduced is the image from the catalogue *January 5–31, 1969*, which is very much a fixed image visually, historically, and circumstantially. It's got a great bloodline, hailing from the collection of famed conceptual artist Sol LeWitt, lending this particular realization a lineage of provenance and authenticity.

That authenticity is reinforced by the black and white photo—something that hardly exists any more—endowing it with historicity. Further credibility is bestowed by the material fact that there is an actual photographic print in existence, a negative from which copies were made. Yet, for the better part of the twentieth century, the photograph was suspect as not being capable of authenticity. Walter



Figure 3.3. Lawrence Weiner, photo documentation of *Two minutes of spray paint directly upon the floor from a standard aerosol spray can*. (1968).

Benjamin, writing in 1935, states, “From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the ‘authentic’ print makes no sense.”⁴ With the explosion of digital photography, Benjamin’s proposition is exploded billions of times over.⁵ Suddenly we find analog photos—particularly black and white reproductions—recast as being unique and authentic.

In the photograph the floor itself is not a neutral space, but an indicator of time and place: an old, rough, original industrial floor

that was common in artists' lofts in lower Manhattan during this period. The realization as documented (figure 3.3) was from Weiner's own loft on Bleeker Street. After decades of gentrification, such floors have been routinely ripped out and replaced as real estate values have climbed. In fact, after Weiner was displaced from that loft due to rising real estate prices, the purchaser of the loft, in the midst of ripping out the old floorboards and replacing them with new wooden floors, had Weiner's piece cut out intact and sent to him as a gift. The piece resides in Weiner's storage vault to this day.⁶ What this photograph is, then, is not simply a realization of a proposition, but a coded, historic period piece, which evokes nostalgia for a Manhattan that has long ceased to exist in a form signifying authenticity. We could refer to this documentation as the "classic" version of the work. In any case, it's a far cry from the neutral proposition *Two minutes of spray paint directly upon the floor from a standard aerosol spray can*. Although specific and pinned to a certain place and time, Weiner's work shows how much more limiting the realization of a work is as opposed to the simple proposition of it.

Is it possible to make a proposition and have it realized in a stable and neutral environment? Let's make a proposition: "A red circle with a two-inch diameter, drawn on the computer."

Yet, from the outset, we're plagued by language. This is what my computer calls "red," but the name *red* on the computer is merely shorthand for more language. "Red" is more accurately code: a hexadecimal code: "#FF0000"; or an RGB code: "R: 255, G:0, B:0"; or an HSB code: "H: 0, S: 0, B: 100". Even if you realize the identical proposition on your computer, because of your monitor's settings, age, manufacturer, and so forth, you're bound to come up with a different color than what's displayed on my monitor. What, then, is red? We're thrown into a digital version of a Wittgensteinian loop: "Does it make sense to say that people generally agree in their judgments of colour? What would it be like for them not to?—One man would say a flower was red which another called blue, and so on.—But what right should we have to call these people's words "red" and "blue" *our* colour-words?"⁷

Then there is the problem of scale and realization: while it might be created on the computer, should it be printed out? By a two-inch

diameter, do we mean a two-inch diameter when it is printed or when it is on the screen? According to the directions, “drawn on the computer,” I’ll take that to mean it should be viewed on the computer. But that’s problematic because I didn’t specify a screen resolution. I could take a digital ruler and measure a 2-inch-diameter circle in 640 x 480 resolution but if I change it to 1024 x 768 resolution, although it still says two inches, it’s considerably smaller on my screen.

If I e-mail you my red circle and you view it on your computer at an identical resolution, the circle will still be a different size, due to wide variances in monitors and their resolutions. When displayed on the Web, the variables are compounded: not only do we have screen resolution and monitor difference to reconcile, but there’s the question of browsers and the way they each display information differently. My browser, for example, often scales images to fit on what it calls a “page.” Only when you click on the image does it expand to its “actual” size in pixels. While the printed version will be able to stabilize the scale problem, we’re left with the variables of printer output: contingent upon your ink and paper stock, what your printer outputs as “red” will certainly be a different shade and tone than mine.

Moving beyond the formal problems of instability, then, there’s the slippage of meaning. When I look at my red circle and think of what it could mean, my associations include a stop light, a ball, the Japanese flag, the planet Mars, or the sun setting. In art I am reminded of the geometries found in Russian constructivism. Sitting on my screen, shimmering against the white of my “page,” its primarily retinal quality reminds me of an Adolph Gottlieb abstract expressionist painting minus the expression, now a red circle reduced to a geometric icon.

Turning away from the bright red spot on my screen, I see that the image has been burned into my retina, so much so that when I gaze at the white wall over my desk I see an afterimage, but it’s not red at all: it’s green, the opposite and complimentary color of red. And if I try to really examine it, it disappears, leaving a hovering ghost of its former self. What our eyes see is as restless and as unstable as trying to nail exactly what a digital red circle is.

Thinking makes it no better. If I turn away from the computer and think of the words *red circle*, I conjure a very different sort of red

circle in my mind. The image I'm thinking of is a round shape with a red outline; the interior is white. Now, if I think of a filled red circle, the hues vary. Concentrating, I see the red as a fire-engine red. Now it's changing to a maroon. To my mind the image is restless, morphing and changing its properties. Just like the duck-rabbit optical illusion, I can't seem to make it sit still. Size, too, in my mind, is variable from cosmically huge (Mars) to a microscopic (a red blood cell).

When I type the words, I get all of these associations and more:

red circle

I see that these two words consist of ten elements: nine letters and a space. There are two *rs* and two *es*, one in each word. The *d* of red is echoed in the *cl* of circle. There are also several instances of visual echoing in the letter forms: two repeated instances of *c* and *e*. The *cl* appears to be a split variation of the letter *d*, as the *i* could be read as the *l* with the top severed and floated above its stem.

The words *red circle* have three syllables. I can pronounce the words with the stress on both the first or second words with a significant change in meaning: *red* circle brings forth the color; red *circle* emphasizes the shape over the color. If I say the words *red circle* aloud, I can alter my intonation up and down in a singsongy way or speak them flat, in a monotone. The way I choose to speak them makes for an entirely different reception. In speaking the words, I also invoke the semiotic and emblematic properties of the Japanese flag or Mars.

Taking it one step further, if I perform an Internet search on the phrase *red circle*, it takes me places far outside what I, as an individual, can conjure. There are several businesses named Red Circle: a lounge called Red Circle in San Diego, an advertising agency in Minneapolis, a project that provides resources about HIV and AIDS for Native American gay men, and a company that runs tea tours in San Francisco. There are two films called *Red Circle*, one directed by Jean-Pierre Melville from 1970 and a 2011 film starring Liam Neeson and Orlando Bloom. There is an imprint of Archie comics starring non-Archie characters called Red Circle. In literature there is "The Adventure of the Red Circle," a Sherlock Holmes story, where the mark of a red circle means certain death. And that's just the first page of results.

When dropped into a semantically driven image search, the words *red circle* throw us back to the visual, but it's far from my initial simple red circle. Instead I find wide varieties of red circles. The first image is of the universal symbol for *not permitted*, an outlined red circle with a diagonal slash through it. The next is a sloppy spray-painted red circle outline on a concrete wall, which looks like it could be a variation of the Weiner proposition. Following that is what looks to be a Photoshopped outline of a red circle floating in a blue sky intersecting a cloud. Next is a veritable blizzard of red circles: painterly red circles, expressive Kandinsky-like red circles, a Swatch watch with a red circle around its face, a three-dimensional red circular piece of foam that holds test tubes and an image of a bonsai tree encapsulated within a red circle.

In fact, the results do not return a filled solid red circle until several pages deep, where we arrive at a thumbnail image that looks very much like my red circle. Yet when viewed full size, to my surprise, it's not a red circle at all, but an image of red shag rug, textured and modeled. And it's not really perfectly round: its perimeter is broken on the right side by some stray shag pieces. The color is different as well. This circle is, overall, more purplish than my red circle. And it's got a great deal of variety in its shading, getting darker in the bottom left quadrant and growing lighter toward the top. Clearly this is a very complex and unstable "red circle."

But we can complicate it further: When I download the shag rug to my computer and change its file extension from .jpg to .txt, and open it in a text-editor, I get a text (figure 3.4).

Clearly, this looks nothing like a red circle. In fact, neither the word *red* nor the word *circle*, nor even the image of a red circle, is anywhere to be found. We're thrown back into semantic language, but an entirely different one from the search term that lead me to this carpet or the hexadecimal color schemes. Where do we go from here? We could take this text and attempt to find patterns that would aid an investigation into the plasticity and mutability of language posing as image. Or we could do a close reading on this text alone, commenting, for example, how curious the row of fifty-one 7s is in the third line or on the random but somewhat even spatial distribution of graphical apples on the page. Metaphorically, we could even say that those



Figure 3.4: Image of a red circle saved as .txt and opened in a text editor

car image of an apple, it's no longer an apple, it's an apple. Enough!

pre, these hard and ever shifting states, from the very conceptual to

the very material. And writing that can mimic, reflect, and morph itself in similar ways seems to be pointed in the right direction.

Nude Media: Tony Curtis Defrocked

These sorts of slippages take place across all forms of media and can be best described by a phenomenon I call *nude media*. Once a digital file is downloaded from the context of a site, it's free or naked, stripped bare of the normative external signifiers that tend to give as much meaning to an artwork as the contents of the artwork itself. Unadorned with branding or scholarly liner notes, emanating from no authoritative source, these objects are nude, not clothed. Thrown into open peer-to-peer distribution systems, nude media files often lose even their historic significance and blur into free-floating works, traveling in circles they would normally not reach if clad in their conventional clothing. Branding, logos, layout, and context all create meaning, but, when thrown into the digital environment, such attributes are destabilized, stripping a fully clothed document into nakedness as more variables are thrown into the mix.

All forms of traditional media that are morphed onto the Web are in some way defrocked. An article about Tony Curtis, for example, that appeared in the Sunday Arts and Leisure section of the *New York Times* is fully clothed in the authoritative conventions of the *Times*. Everything from the typeface to the pull quote to the photo layout bespeaks the authority of the paper of record. There's something comforting about reading the Arts and Leisure section on Sunday produced and reinforced by the visual presentation of the paper. The *New York Times* represents stability in every way.

If we look at that same article on the *New York Times* Web site, however, we find that much of what gave the piece its rock steadiness in the traditional print version is gone. For starters, there's a big sans serif *W* for Washington instead of the classic black serified *T* for Tony. Thus, the message is that the place in which the interview happened has greater significance than the subject of the article. Other things have changed as well, most notably the size and character of the typeface. The default typeface on any browser is Times

THEATER

At 77, Tony Curtis Still Likes It Hot

By MATTHEW GUREWITSCH

TONY CURTIS'S weight-control strategy, which seems to be working for him, is to avoid cooked foods as much as possible.

In late August, for several days running, he was following a regimen of oysters for breakfast, oysters for lunch, oysters for dinner. One Sunday at the venerable Old Ebbitt Grill, across 15th Street from the White House, he was tucking into the evening ration of a half-dozen bluepoints (accompanied by a wedge of iceberg drizzled with balsamic vinegar), when a waiter danced up from another station and introduced himself as Kevin.

"I've always admired your work, Mr. Curtis," Kevin said. "Are you in town for a show?"

"Yeah," Mr. Curtis said almost bashfully, in the Bronx accent immortalized by lines like "Yonder is the valley of the sun and my father's castle." (Contrary to various inconsistent authorities, Mr. Curtis attributes it to "The Prince Who Was a Thief," 1951.)

At 77, after more than 100 starring film roles and half a century before the cameras, Mr. Curtis seemed to be basking in the gleam of imaginary klieg lights. The glossy black hair has gray in it now, but thanks to what Mr. Curtis calls "an unexaggerated hair piece," it has turned white for the new show. The big ice-blue eyes can still stop traffic though. Across the table was the former Jill Ann Vandenberg, 32, the statuesque equestrian and American history buff

The sole surviving star of a Billy Wilder film classic takes the stage in its theatrical adaptation.

who is his fifth wife and with whom he lives in Las Vegas. For the first time, Mr. Curtis, who has painted all his life, even has an art studio.

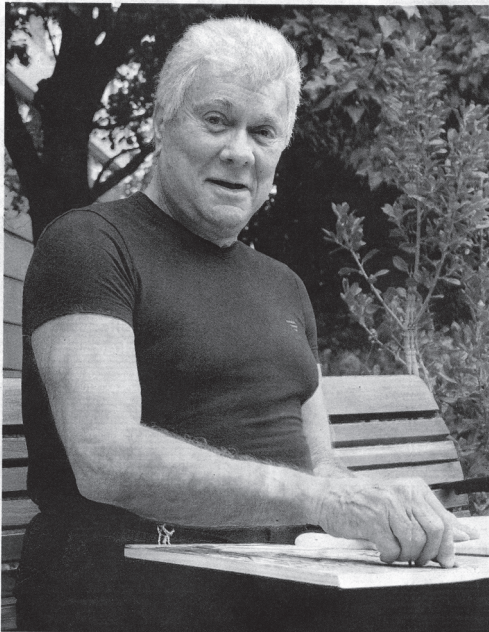
"Starting Tuesday, we're doing this musical of 'Some Like It Hot' out at Wolf Trap," Mr. Curtis continued, his baritone a smoky mix of silk and husk.

The show is his first stab at singing and dancing since the film "So This Is Paris" (1954), which led Gene Kelly to advise him, "Keep fencing." (That was in Mr. Curtis's swashbuckling days.)

The lone surviving star of the original "Some Like It Hot," Billy Wilder's Hollywood comedy of 1959, Mr. Curtis now has the marquee to himself. He has given up the role of the saxophone player Joe, perhaps the most popular of his career, for that of the eccentric millionaire Osgood Fielding III.

Wilder's masterpiece has required something more than mere classic status since its release: in 2000, the American Film Institute ranked it the funniest American movie ever made. (You'll remember the premise: having witnessed the St. Valentine's Day massacre in Prohibition Chicago, two down-on-their-luck musicians (Mr. Curtis and Jack Lemmon), fearing for their lives, dress up as women and run off to Palm Beach with an all-girl band in which Marilyn Monroe plays the ukulele.)

The new version has a book credited to Peter Stone (leaning heavily on the original screenplay, by Wilder and T. A. L. Diamond) and songs mostly by Jule Styne and Bob Merrill, some recycled from the Broadway adaptation, "Sugar" (1972). The show, directed and choreographed by Dan Siretta, opened in June, as the inaugural attraction at the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts in



Scott Suchman

Tony Curtis sketches with pastels outside his McLean, Va., hotel in August before performing in "Some Like It Hot" at Wolf Trap in Vienna, Va., left. The show had played there as part of its national tour.

Houston, the new \$100 million home of Theater Under the Stars. By August, it had made its leisurely way to the capital's Virginia suburbs and Wolf Trap.

On Tuesday, the real push begins: four weeks at the Golden Gate Theater in San Francisco, followed by dates in 21 other cities coast to coast. The New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark has the

show from Feb. 4 through Feb. 9, and the Shubert Theater in New Haven from March 11 through March 16. (The tour schedule appears on the production's Web site, thehotmusical.info.)

Mr. Curtis's accumulated stage experience before the new "Some Like It Hot" adds up to less than

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Figure 3.5. New York Times, Sunday, October 6, 2003, Arts & Leisure, print edition.

Roman, but, if we look at the newspaper compared to the screen, we'll see that Times Roman is not New York Times Roman.



Figure 3.6. Screen shot from, Sunday, October 6, 2003, Arts & Leisure, nytimes.com.

The image of Mr. Curtis, too, is different. It's shoved over to the side and shrunken, reminding us of Sarah Charlesworth's newspaper *détournements*. The Starbucks banner—which appears nowhere in the print edition—almost functions as a caption. I could go on, but I think the point is obvious. The Web version of the article might be termed scantily clad, missing the authoritative indicators of the traditional print version.

In the upper right-hand corner of the Web page is an option to e-mail the article. When we do that, what arrives in our inbox is extremely stripped down compared to the Web page. It's just a text. The only indication that it comes from the *New York Times* is a line at the top that says "This article from NYTimes.com has been sent to

you by . . .” The Times font has vanished, to be replaced—at least in my inbox—by Microsoft’s proprietary sans serif screen font Verdana. There are no images, no pull quotes, and no typographical treatments, save the capitalization of the words *WASHINGTON* and *TONY CURTIS’S*. How easy it would be to strip out the words *NYTimes.com*. If we do that, this file becomes detached from any authority, completely naked. In fact, it is entirely indistinguishable from any number of text-based attachments that arrive in my inbox daily.

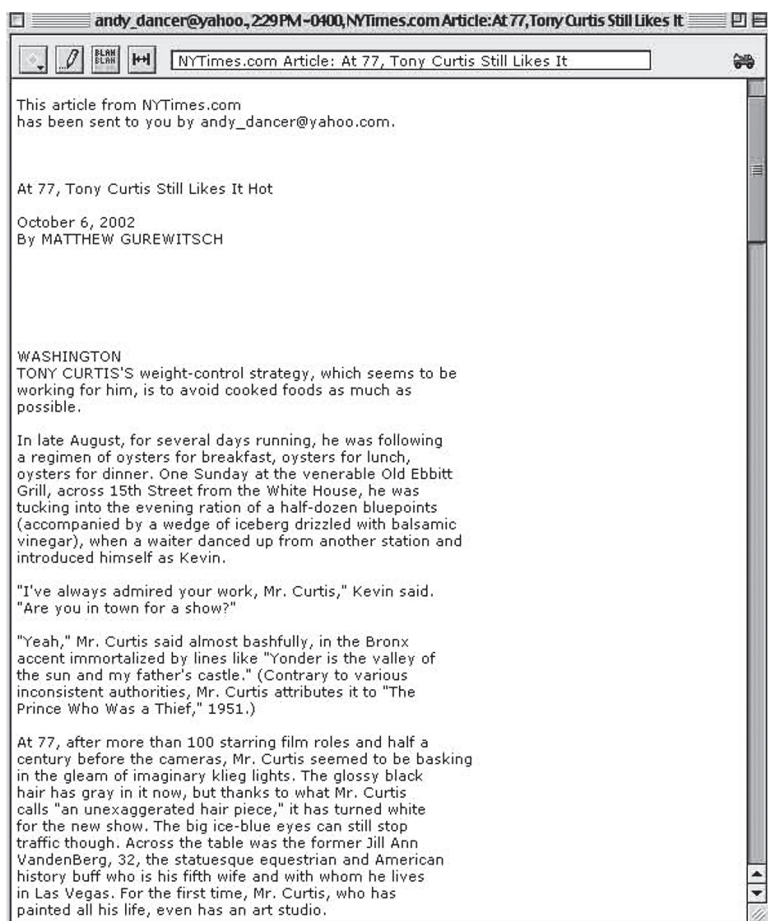


Figure 3.7. Article e-mailed to myself.

To go one step further, if we cut and paste the *text*—and it is a text and no longer an “article”—into Microsoft Word and run a primitive altering function on it, for example, the auto summarize feature, we end up with something bearing minimal resemblance to the original article as printed in the paper or on the Web. Now the lead line is “SUMMARY OF ARTICLE,” followed by its provenance and then the headline. Curiously, the word *Washington*, which figured so prominently in prior versions, is nowhere to be found. The body text, too, now becomes radically unhinged and stripped down.

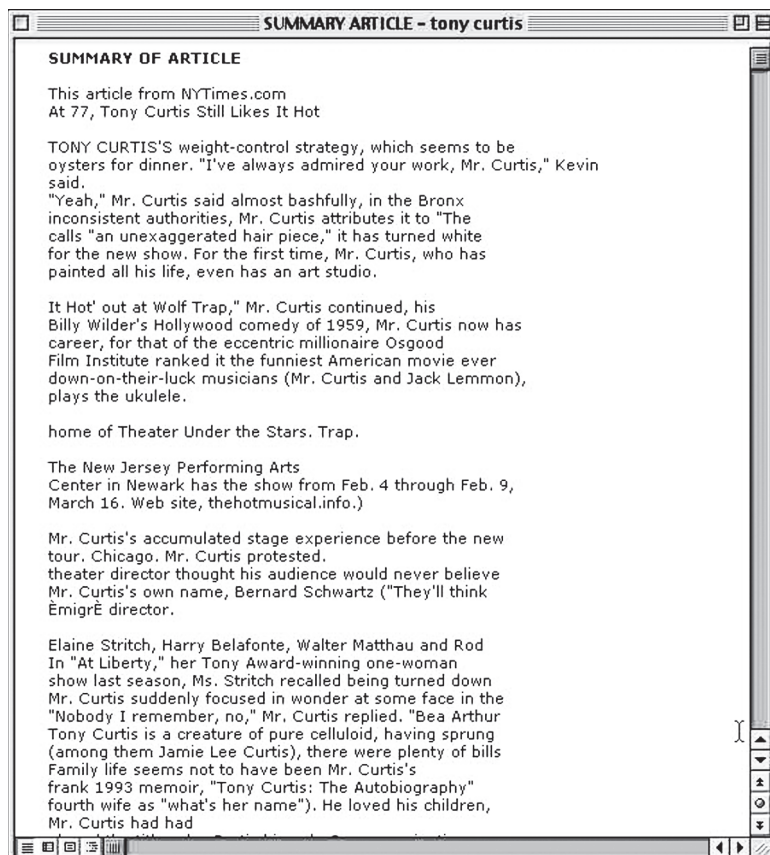


Figure 3.8. Summary of article.

If I were to take this text and either e-mail it to a number of people or enter it into an online text-mangling machine, the nude media game could continue ad infinitum. Think of it as an ever-evolving game of telephone. Free-floating media files around the net are subject to continuous morphing and manipulation as they become further removed from their sources.

When destabilized texts are recontextualized and reclothed back into “authoritative” structures, the results can be jarring. Examples of this include the now-defunct Pornolizer (pornolize.com) machine, which turned all Web pages into smutty, potty-mouthed documents while retaining their authoritative clothing, sporting the architecture of the *New York Times* site.



Figure 3.9. Pornolizer (pornolize.com).

Sound also goes through various states of instability, with increasing variables once digital. Over the course of the last half-century, Henri Chopin's sound poem "Rouge" has been subjected to various

mutations, both clothed and unclothed. Chopin began his tape recorder experiments in the mid-fifties, and “Rouge,” recorded in 1956, was one of his first pieces.⁸ It’s a literal sound painting, with the word *red* repeated with different emphases, almost like varying brushstrokes. Manipulated audio techniques and track layering build up an increasingly dense surface. The piece reflects its time: think of it as an abstract expressionist canvas:

rouge rouge rouge
rouge rouge rouge
rouge rouge rouge

rouge rouge rouge
rouge rouge rouge
rouge rouge rouge

choc choc choc
dur & rouge dur & rouge
rouge rouge rouge

bruit bruit bruit
rouge rouge rouge
choc choc choc

rouge rouge rouge
rouge rouge rouge
rouge rouge rouge

nu nu nu
nu nu nu
rouge rouge rouge
rouge nu nu nu nu

il n’est que veine il n’est que veine
il n’est que sang il n’est que sang
 il n’est que chair

rouge rouge rouge
rouge rouge rouge
rouge rouge rouge

rouge rouge rouge
rouge rouge rouge
rouge rouge rouge

rouge rouge rouge rouge rouge
rouge rouge rouge rouge rouge
rouge rouge rouge rouge rouge
rouge rouge rouge rouge rouge

il n'est que veine il n'est que veine
il n'est que sang il n'est que sang
il n'est que chair

rouGE rouGE rouGE rouGE rouGE rouGE rouGE rouGE rouGE
rouGE rouGE rouGE rouGE rouGE rouGE rouGE rouGE
rouGE rouGE rouGE rouGE

choc choc choc

ROUge ROUge ROUge ROUge ROUge ROUge ROUge ROUge
ROUge ROUge ROUge ROUge ROUge ROUge ROUge ROUge
ROUge⁹

The piece describes the intersection between the body and the voice, a main concern for Chopin, who later became well-known for his audio pieces that were derived entirely from the sounds of his body. Chopin would amplify the sound of his blood circulation system, heartbeat, digestive tract, and so forth, which would form the basis for his works. This early work still uses language to describe the body instead of using the body itself.

In its day, "Rouge" never made it to LP as an "official" release by a record label. It was born naked and remained that way, unreleased

and without a publisher until twenty-four years later when it was put out by a German gallery.¹⁰ Thanks to Chopin's highly visible work as a promoter and publisher of sound poetry, however, tapes of his work were making the rounds in advanced musical circles of the day.¹¹

A decade after "Rouge's" recording, it curiously appears in the first "Region" of Karlheinz Stockhausen's 1966 composition *Hymnen*, an electronic mélange of national anthems from around the globe. Although truncated, "Rouge" forms the basis for a short spoken-word section based around varieties of the color red. Chopin's voice alternates with German-inflected voices reading a portion of a list of Windsor Newton paints. To listen to this excerpt alone and decontextualized, it sounds like an extension of Chopin's sound painting. But, squeezed between magnetic tape deconstructions of "L'Internationale" and "La Marseillaise," its meaning becomes very different. The nude poem is now clothed in the garments of leftist politics.

Twenty-one years later, in 1997, the sample-based group called Stock, Hausen & Walkman (note the group's name) brought "Rouge" back into its original context when it was sampled into an ironic pop track, "Flagging" (*flagging* means dwindling, weak, fatigued, or drooping; a condition that occurs with the loss of blood). Amidst the cheesy vocals, snappy drumbeats, and appropriated mathematical recitations from children's records, Chopin's piece is snatched away from Karlheinz Stockhausen's political agenda and returned closer to its bodily origins. But it's an emptying gesture: finally "Rouge" is just one sample of many, part of a noisy landscape, in which sounds are easily obtained and just as easily manipulated. In such a landscape, no sound appears to have more meaning than any other. The corporeal and brutal image of Chopin's *red* is now clothed in kitsch, more akin to Betty Page than to Antonin Artaud.

Stock, Hausen & Walkman are known for their graphic sense. They understand how to create a package that visually approximates their musical practice. Packaging—or, in other words, *dressing*—creates a context of value. Stock, Hausen & Walkman's redressing of "Rouge" places Chopin's poem back into circulation fully clothed.

In the clothed realm, popular culture's fetishization of the historical avant-garde reached a plateau when the enormously success-

ful rock band Sonic Youth released a CD called *Goodbye 20th Century* (1999). On it the rockers rattled their way through cover versions of some of the more difficult works by John Cage and George Maciunas, among others. Through a curious confluence of Downtown sensibility and mass marketing, thousands of rock-loving, Lollapalooza-attending Sonic Youth fans bought the disc and were exposed to what until very recently has resided on the fringes of the historical avant-garde.

Through gestures like these, the avant-garde becomes well marketed and, in some cases, commodified. Stroll through any good record store or museum gift shop and you'll notice hundreds of artifacts of the historical avant-garde gorgeously repackaged to be snapped up by consumers, whether it be reissues of avant-garde music or sleek, handsomely produced monographs of once marginal artists or movements like Fluxus. As soon as these items are purchased, however, they can be recruited as nude media via peer-to-peer file sharing. In the case of some of this material, what was originally created as an antiauthoritarian gesture has, thanks to the Internet, been restored to its original radical intention. Due to the manipulative properties of digital media, such artworks are susceptible to remixing and mangling on a mass scale, hence never having *the* one authoritative version bestowed upon these objects in traditional media. They are ever-changing works in progress operating in the most widespread gift economy yet known.

Such circumstances raise many questions: How does having a variety of contexts influence the cultural reception of such objects? Who or what determines an artifact's value, both commercially and intellectually? How does this, in turn, impact the artist's reputation, both commercially and intellectually? If artifacts are always in flux, when is a historical work determined to be "finished"?

It's a little too early to answer such questions. Brought up on books and records—media in a clothed and stable form—it's hard for us to accept cultural artifacts in constant flux as "genuine." Once *Ulysses* arrived on our shelves, the only new versions of the book that came along were typesetters' corrections and annotated editions, which only reified our sense that Joyce was a singular genius. With the exception of Xeroxing and collaging, remixing texts on the scale of

Ulysses was difficult. When it comes to text, we haven't seen anything nearly like the bootlegging phenomenon, but sites freely circulating unauthorized books with copyable and searchable text—in particular, academic and theory texts—are burgeoning. And as e-readers capable of reading open-source files emerge, we'll begin to see more textual remixes. While nude Microsoft Word documents or .rtfs of texts have been floating around the Web forever, the lack of provenance and branding has, curiously, discouraged these sorts of gestures. Now, with fully clothed and gorgeously formatted PDFs, emanating from university presses in illicitly distributed circulation, the texts themselves are being more carefully catalogued and archived as potentially useful objects on one's local computer. Although they're free, an authoritative version of a text signifies that it's ripe for deconstruction.¹² As early as 1983, John Cage predicted and embraced the idea of unstable electronic texts as potential source texts for remixing:

Technology essentially is a way of getting more done with less effort. And it's a good thing rather than a bad thing. . . . The publishers, my music publisher, my book publisher—they know that Xerox is a real threat to their continuing; however, they continue. What must be done eventually is the elimination not only of the publication but of the need for Xeroxing, and to connect it with the telephone so that anyone can have anything he wishes at any time. And erase it—so that your copy of Homer, I mean, can become a copy of Shakespeare, mmm? By quick erasure and quick printing, mmm? . . . Because that's the—electronic immediacy is what we're moving toward.