

MetaFormances: The Hermeneutics of Play in Language/Art/Life

by

Marisa Jahn

B.A. Fine Arts and Interdisciplinary Studies
University of California, Berkeley

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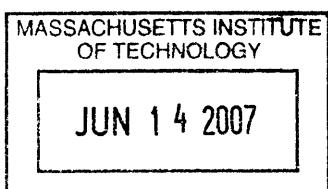
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Marisa Jahn

Submitted to the Department of Architecture on May 11, 2007, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Visual Arts at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Abstract

MetaFormances is a correspondence-based project that took place between 2005 and 2007. Miming the protocol of business form letters, the letters request their recipient to perform absurd, erotic, and illicit behavior in order to transform the letter into something else. As I see it, the recipients' correspondence signals their readiness to play, to accept their role in the transubstantiation of the letter, to believe in the metaphysical force of the delicate printed word, to extend a joke.

Each letter was mailed via overnight express courier along with a disposable 35 mm. camera and self-addressed, self-stamped envelope. The project engaged a motley crew of 32 characters – a mailman, a confettiologist, a Dutch man, a computation origami expert (and his dad), a porn artist, a pinata factory, a psychoanalyst, etc. As stand-ins for my own body, the letters enable an exploration of the forbidden, the otherwise inaccessible, the abject. Through this process of substitution, the the letters (symbolically) venture towards carnality, enacting rites of death, wish-fulfillment, and regeneration. The letters thus provide a way establishing communion, limitlessness, and transcendence. As its title suggests, MetaFormances is a project that investigates the in-between, restructuring authorship as vector; content as traversal; form as process.

This thesis explores various topics related to the notion of an epistolary game. For instance, in my examination of the suppression of the body within writing, I draw example from Julia Kristeva's notion of "obscene language", Jacques Derrida's "écriture batarde", and Doris Sommer's "bilingual aesthetics." In investigating both the historicity and affective aspects of a scriptural economy, I consider literary critics (Barthes, Derrida) and cultural historian Francis Barker. I draw from film theorist Giuliana Bruno and the psychoanalytic perspectives (Freud, Lacan, Kristeva, Zizek) to consider object-relations such as the substitute, the fetish, the specter, the transubstantiate. I conclude by comparing the eschatological figures of (in)finity in the writing of Kristeva, Bataille, Foucault, and Derrida.

Thesis Supervisor: Ute Meta Bauer

Title: Associate Professor of Visual Arts & Director of the Visual Arts Program

Biographical Note

Marisa Jahn is an artist, curator, and educator whose work explores and intervenes natural and social systems. In 2000, she co-founded Pond, a 501(3)c non-profit organization dedicated to showcasing experimental art in an accessible and non-competitive environment. Jahn has presented and exhibited work internationally, most recently at The Institute of Contemporary Art (Philadelphia), Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco), Eyebeam (NYC), ISEA/Zero One (San Jose, California), Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT, the San Francisco Commonwealth Club, Asian Art Museum (San Francisco), Showa Kinen Park (Tokyo), the Museum of Contemporary Art (North Miami), the Western Front (Vancouver), the MassMOCA (North Adams, MA), and museums and galleries in California, Estonia, Croatia, Tokyo, Istanbul, and throughout North America. Jahn's work has been reviewed in */Art in America/*, */Frieze/*, */Punk Planet/*, */Clamor/*, */the San Francisco Chronicle/*, */Fader/*, */Artweek/*, */Cluster (Italy)/*, */Metropolis/*, the Discovery Channel, NPR, CBC, KQED, and more. She has received awards such as CEC Artslink and the Robert & Colleen Haas Award at UC Berkeley where she completed a double major, studying art and cultural geography. She lives and works between the New York/Boston and San Francisco. www.marisajahn.com | www.mucketymuck.org

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'MetaFormances' is dedicated to Erik Carver.

Introduction

MetaFormances is a correspondence-based project that took place between 2005 and 2007. Miming the protocol of business form letters, the letters request their recipient to perform absurd, erotic, and illicit behavior in order to transform the letter into something else. As I see it, the recipients' correspondence signals their readiness to play, to accept their role in the transubstantiation of the letter, to believe in the metaphysical force of the delicate printed word, their complicity in extending a joke.

Each letter was mailed via overnight express courier along with a disposable 35 mm. camera and self-addressed, self-stamped envelope. The project engaged a motley crew of 32 characters – a mailman, a confettiologist, a Dutch man, a computation origami expert (and his dad), a porn artist, a pinata factory, a psychoanalyst, etc. I knew about half of the recipients; the others I found after extensive searches for recipients who I thought would “play along.” It was impossible to get responses from all the recipients. I got a lot of rejections. Most of those who responded did so after I pestered them with polite reminder emails and phone calls that followed proper business protocol. I used my best phone voice and invoked my most illustrious epistolary skills as I could possibly muster, deployed my ten years' training as an administrator and grant-writer. A few of the recipients responded of their own accord. It seemed to me that they did so because they felt that I had somehow incised their day-to-day life. Some explicitly told me this is how they felt. Several of the letters I wrote returned to me without warning, a year or two after I had mailed them off.

The process of letter-writing unfolded organically according to some logic that I processually discovered. During this working process, I needed to have some way of understanding the rules of the epistolary exchange, so I wrote them down exactly as they presented themselves to me. Most of the time, the logic governing the letters (the choice of the recipient, the request I suggested, the approach, etc.) made themselves clear to me through revelatory moments in which I imagined myself to be an ecstatic sociopath or thoroughly repressed Victorian pervert. It's the recognition of this double consciousness that I believe is contained here in this essay. Fundamentally, this essay explains why I wrote the letters. I don't consider myself a religious person but somehow these letters invoke a sense of religiosity. To me, the letters are meditations on life, death, and alterity; the letters utilize myth and symbolism to suggest transcendence, abjection, violence, communion, reincarnation, faith, etc.

MetaFormances culminated in the form of an installation and a book (this essay). Along the way towards its closure, MetaFormances was exhibited or performed in various gallery spaces from 2006-7 that helped me develop the project. These venues include Showa Kinen Park (Tokyo, Japan), The Lab (San Francisco), Moles Not Molar Series at The Rotunda (Philadelphia), Space Other (Boston), the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Cambridge, US), Second Gallery (Boston), and more. Many thanks to those who supported my endeavors.

Notes on Methodology

Polyphony as Method

We are all the time selecting to communicate in different interrelated socio-linguistic registers. Complimentary, different, they convey similar messages in different tones. Imbricated, they resound.

Embracing plurivocality, I therefore split this text into three voices. My intention is for this chorus to rejoin and echo one another; through this play I hope to show their respective virtues and limits.

Embodied Voice

The first voice narrates the series of correspondences exchanged with others over the period of a year and a half. Crude and naive, at times reflective, this spoken register ventriloquates the colloquial discourse of personages that I mime:

—the wistful voice of a ten-year old naif

—a “dude” voice assumed with close friends who know that its deployment mocks its patriarchal presuppositions

—the voice of an obsessive. Its propositional inflections is intended to build the reader’s perception of a hyperbolic and hysterical narrator. Purposefully maniacal, this is the voice of the humunculus—that exteriorated devil that drives its narrator towards mischief.

Stylistically, this voice finds inspiration, sanction, and aegis from writers such as Henry Miller, whose protagonists’ excess articulates trails of thought you refuse to otherwise recognize; Kafka, whose allegories geometricize from the most banal details; Dostoevsky, whose frightfully bumbling protagonists only affirm; Jerzy Kaczynski, whose gruesome tales shock, and Michelle Tea, whose protagonists are both pitiful and strong. What these writers share is their willingness to accept human fallibility—moments of pathetic grovelling, fear of death, perversion, abjection, and their converse: the desire redemption, the capacity for inspiration, for limitlessness—and their appreciation of what literary critic Michael Bakhtin referred to as ‘grotesque realism’. Describing the fundamental tenets of ‘grotesque realism’, Bakhtin writes, “Exaggeration, hyperbolicism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style.”^a Its narrator storytells like a carney barker. Excessive, they are excused only through maintaining their story and continuing their spell. Bakhtin writes, “The barker of a show would not be accused of heresy, no matter what he might say, provided he maintained his clownery. Rabelais maintained it.”^b

Voice of the Proper

Present in the form of business letters, the second voice parodies the restraints of workplace etiquette. This voice is almost-violent, almost-psychotic, almost-mystical, almost-maniacal, thoroughly repressed.

Exegetical Voice

The third voice interprets and locates this text within other discourses. It contests universalized notions of desire, language, and play. Destabilizing and decentering, this voice instaurates MetaFormances within an array of other discourses.

Writing For The/Its Self

Language, like currency, forms a means of exchange between others – it draws close and repels, gathers and obscures meaning, transposes. Inexact exchanges foreground its gaps and rules. In this way, intentionally pushing language past inexactitude and towards sonority reveals the tenuous nature of signification. Simply put, only by pushing language towards error does one find its rules. About this non-purposive writing that rejects and willfully flounders communicative norms – how might we think about the significance of its transgression? How might this breach expose the historicity of speech and writing, the contingency of its mediation? By recognizing the way language cleaves and codes, how do we then find the way to work its rules anew, cast or refigure its players, and rewrite its score?

Permit an extended example. A cover letter is a professional letter that accompanies a proposal. As the document that goes on top of the grant, the application, the proposal, cover letters form the 'face' of the project. Following a highly specialized formalized protocol, the faciality of cover letters readies the addressee's attention towards the documents beneath. The cover letter elicits the interest of its reader by describing the arc that connects writer with reader. As the career coach on JobStar.com writes, "It is regarded as a sign of laziness to send out a cover letter that is not tailored to the specific company...it gives you another chance to emphasize what you have to contribute to the company or organization."^c Other career advisors suggest platitudes such as, "Use the first line to grab the reader's attention" and warn to "Never, ever use threatening or suggestive language; never make the reader feel uncomfortable."^d Betwixt and between official written discourse and private epistolary communication, the successful cover letter entices while following professional protocol.

When this protocol is violated—baring the sender's aspirations, fears, desires --the sender obviates the possibility of a polite and swift rejection. The cover letter that reveals too much becomes coarse, manipulative, perverse, vulgar, embodying the characteristics Mark C. Taylor describes as attributes of the 'bastard'. "Bastards

I was born in Dallas, Texas, where my first grade teacher taught us to tease and attenuate our vowels ("bray-oun " instead of "brown ", etc.). My father was born in China and my mother in Ecuador, which makes my brother and I Chinkadorians. My parents met in an elevator in Dallas, and they don't speak each other's first languages. I first learned English, then pigeon Spanish in order to keep secrets with my mother. My uncle Guillermo, who lived with us on and off again, always had at least two large black dogs - usually quite rowdy - that he'd keep in the yard with our dogs. Guillermo's dogs responded best to Spanish. When Guillermo and his dogs would go back to live in his little trailer in the floodplains, we'd speak to our dogs again in English.

In 1945, my father's sister was given up for adoption to the French ambassador to China as my grandmother fled to Taiwan. Driven by the urgent need to deliver cheeky ripostes to this set of older teen cousins, I learned French in school. My brother Jason learned Chinese, so he's

been keeping tabs with the Chinese grandmother.

In this way, a certain set of historical circumstances made English the particular language the one with which I spent the most time. I learned all its tenses, homologies, inflections. Its relation to me is incidental, but through its endless exegesis it has come to mean so much. I cherish it, mull over it, and turn to it my devoted attention. I am grateful for the signification language makes possible; through it I access others. I accept and forgive its limits. I generously acknowledge its constraints.

As a kid, I often helped my mother writing correspondence and filling out forms. She needed help to make the English 'sound official.' Through engaging with her flurry of paper slips, receipts, and notations I gained purchase into her world. A command over the written word brought a sense of purpose.

For Halloween, I would dress up as typographic characters (such as the asterisk, the parenthesis, quotation marks).

When I didn't have a pen pal, I would write myself letters and have my mom mail them to

appear and (disappear) to enact impropriety. Accordingly, the bastard might be named 'impropriety itself'—might, that is, if he/she/it could be named, or if impropriety could be itself. Bastards, however, cannot be named properly and the one thing impropriety cannot be is one thing."^e Derrida locates 'the bastard' as a condition of illegitimacy that emerges from within writing. "...écriture batarde (or simply batarde) is a kind of writing that tends to be aimless scribbling, and thus is not regarded as legitimate."^f In other words, *écriture batarde* is that which does not function as communication but as expression in itself.

Similar to Derrida's notion of the *écriture batarde*, Julia Kristeva's theories on abject language, which she refers to as "the obscene," shares a structure that codes social values in terms of binaries—order/disorder, Law/illicit, pure/impure, subject/object, proper/obscene, etc. The mention of one opposition indirectly conjures its converse: 'legitimate' or 'proper' language signifies by knowing what not to reference. For Kristeva, the "obscene" refers to the body and desire suppressed within writing.

Far from referring, as do all signs, to an object exterior to discourse and identifiable as such by consciousness, the obscene word is the minimal mark of a situation of desire where the identity of the signifying subject, if not destroyed, is exceeded by a conflict of instinctual drives linking one subject to another. There is nothing better than an obscene word for perceiving the limits of a phenomenological linguistics faced with the heterogeneous and complete architectonics of significance. The obscene word, lacking an objective referent, is also the contrary of an autonomy—which involves the function of a word or utterance as sign; the obscene word mobilizes the signifying resources of the subject, permitting it to cross through the membrane of meaning where consciousness holds it, connecting it to gesturality, kinaesthesia, the drives' body, the movement of rejection and appropriation of the other.^g

In other words, when the obscene word crosses the threshold of the proper, it evokes desire and disgust. As Roland Barthes suggests, impassioned reading and writing cannot take place without desire: "every reading is steeped in Desire. (or Disgust)."^h

We might locate the elision of the body within writing as a very specific characteristic of a society founded on a scriptural economy, or what Derrida refers to as a 'graphosphere.'ⁱ Influenced by the work of Michel Foucault,

Francis Barker links the corporal proscription in writing to the formation of modern institutions (e.g., prisons, juridical systems, apparatus of censorship, etc.). Establishing the context for understanding the radical reformation of the body politic in 17th century Europe, Barker writes:

The political upheaval of the mid-century established, as all revolutions must if they are thoroughgoing, a new set of connections between subject and discourse, subject and polity, and in doing so altered fundamentally the terms between which these mutually constitutive relations held. In the space of a relatively few years a new set of relations between state and citizen, body and soul, language and meaning, was fashioned. The older sovereignty of the Elizabethan period was disassembled, and in its place was established a conjunction of novel social spaces and activities, bound together by transformed lines of ideological and physical force among which new images of the body and its passions were a crucial, if increasingly occluded, element.^j

By suggesting that the “occlusion” of the “body and its passions” from official written discourse is historically determined, Barker aligns corporal alienation as a precondition of the modern bourgeois subject. Like Kristeva, Barker suggests that the suppression of the body paradoxically incites its invocation. Never fully absent, Barker locates the body’s spectral presence within or around writing.

Constituted in writing, the discursive medium which governs the epoch and separates itself silently but efficiently from the spectacle, covering its own traces, the bourgeois subject substitutes for its corporeal body the rarefied body of the text. The carnality of the body has been dissolved and dissipated until it can be reconstituted in writing at a distance from itself. . . . As the privatized subject writes, its text is constrained to say more than it knows itself to say, an excess of signification beyond the self’s lived disposition which is incited, paradoxically, by the censorship which is the governing principle of its discourse. The split subject is designed at an abject inner distance from itself and from the ambivalent, supplementary body which has been exiled, in one of its aspects, from the interior consistency of the subject’s discourse to a ghostly, insubstantial place at the margins, and in its other phase, to a location outside discourse as one amongst its objects in the world.^k

The “surplus of signification”—the “carnality of the

me at varying lengths of time so that I could extend the joy of receiving them.

Our household always included many animals (cats, dogs, snakes, birds, crickets, mice, geckos, anoles, etc.). The pleasure of new pets was in part derived from the challenge to match it with its exact and perfect name. I'd keep long lists of possible names that developed over the course of many years to assist in this task ('Chloe', 'Rupert', 'Madeleine', 'Ruffles', 'Pancho', etc.).

In make-believe games such as playing house, air plane, restaurant, or store, I would most look forward to the drawing up of the forms - the airline ticket, the menus, the receipts, etc. As a kid, I would name all of my most important personal possessions. In fact, by habit I still name my most important possessions. At present, the current menagerie includes:

*my favorite pair of pants - scarlet
a pair of shoes I purchased from a woman in Latvia - potato
my camera - Fiercely Beloved
my computer - Jujuboss
my small computer - Jujubee
my portable drive - Chicopee
my cell phone - Paco
my bike - pup*

my ex-bike - Ann(telope)
my ex-ex-bike - Hound
I try and name my roommate's
possessions but I can tell
that sometimes he's a little
resistant.

I have always been fascinated
with the way that language
gives form to process, being,
and gesture. Language makes
things things; language also
misleadingly makes things
things. It services, signi-
fies, and points to some-
thing other; at the same time,
language is a thing in itself
- scratches on a blank page,
hands gesturing to make a
sign, bytes whirling about a
computer. Language astonishes
the most when it's barely any-
thing at all.

Vocationally, I earn my living
by writing for others. People
hire me as a grant writer, a
publicist, a freelance writer
or editor, a database de-
signer, a business strategist,
human resource manager, job
coach, etc. There's a pleasure
in this writing in the third
person with no ego investment
in the task at hand. The rapid
clip of keyboard tapping
generates immediate reward:
order transubstantiated in
the form of

letters of recommendations
college essays (not necessarily
my own)

body"—is either relegated to a space outside official
written discourse (such as the private diary, a space of
confession), or sublimated within the margins of writing.

Thus, under the sovereignty of the modern graphosphere,
expediency is predicated on a self-removal: in budgets,
form letters, grants, and databases, the individual voice
or corporal presence is inimical to an objective order. I
am interested in the moment when the 'grain of the voice'
bleeds through and exceeds the normative strictures
of a bourgeois protocol. Rebellious and haunting, this
(abject, obscene, bastardly) excess reminds us of our
own pretensions in assuming that the letter was ever
something other than a transmission from one human to
another. What is this 'insubstantial place at the margins'
of the graphosphere—the place where the corporal elision
is incomplete, where the body or voice begins to emerge-
-perhaps inappropriately-- rendering all at once, in a
way that may not have been previously perceptible, the
massive corporal suppression involved in the scriptural
production of a bureaucratic hegemony?

business plans
databases
fifty two hundred budgets
fifty two times ten sub-bud-
gets
resumes
sixteen hundred brochures
marketing sales pitches
six million grants
newsletters
3 million press releases
12 billion fax cover sheets
two billion cover letters
automatic bank deposit author-
izations
k-12 curricula
4 million permission slips
insurance forms for night-
clubs, parties, exhibitions,
corporate luncheons, etc.
forms for planting trees in
urban areas
contracts for artists
contracts for venues employ-
ing artists
memoranda of understanding
legal exemption forms
bar tallies
etc.

and for all kinds of people:
carpenters
tree planters
tree wanters
construction managers
dads
moms
curators
teens
teens' moms
teens' moms' brothers
artists
teachers

conductors
parents
highschool students
the dude from the pub
and his wife
policemen
Turkish rug store owners
fishermen
fishermen's neighbors
engineers
people I have never met
etc.

Now, I am telling you that I am an extremely proficient administrator, and there is no shortage of situations that people want to employ such people to help organize their bureaucratic quagmires. Most of the time, administrating can be relaxing; its ends are knowable, discrete, finite. In pursuit of this pleasure I find myself in search of places where order is needed. I usually regard this task as a challenge to implace a robust infrastructure of well-chosen words whose crystalline lattice withstands any incident.

And while monetarily remunerating, or perhaps because of it, this bureaucratic paper pushing drives me to total madness. The practice binds me to the computer, tap-tap-tapping away for hours on end - an egregious disuse of the body and its gift of motility. The writing becomes stale, scripted. This ennui induces

a kind of sadness and fury.
It instigates an impulse akin
to that which compels bureau-
crats to steal paper clips or
photocopy their naked butts
after work when no one's
around.

How can I save language from
this instrumentalization?
How can I recuperate language
as that simplest and most
tenuous of gestures which
brings blood to the cheeks,
pumps adrenaline through the
muscles, dries the mouth and
makes it fall agape?

I want
the discovery of a phrase de-
scribing what you thought was
ineffable
the surprise of a well-drawn
metaphor
the exaltation or embarrass-
ment at the reception of a
letter addressed to you, and
only you.
the feverish panic induced by
an improper address.

I want to feel the weight of
a simple apostrophe or con-
junction, whose presence or
absence can determine so much.

I want to see and feel the
way that language returns
mangled and strange, tangled
up in incidence.

MetaFormances

letter to:



My friendship with [REDACTED] started through email exchange in which we'd make up games through language. In each email, the rules of the game were always shifting, which required us to study what was going on and define its parameters anew. As things continued, the games increased in complexity and developed an interior logic of their own.

Over a few months, our correspondence increased in frequency, and I found myself racing home from work to check my email. When I sent an email, I'd break into a cold sweat; sometimes checking my 'outgoing' email folder to doubly ensure that the message had left my computer, and sent to the right person. I would also discover myself pressing the 'refresh' button on my email program for entire minutes at a time, waiting to see if I might catch his email as its electronic bits transferred to my computer.

I wrote him the following letter...

marisa jahn

mail [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

March 10, 2006

Dear [REDACTED]

I'm writing to ask for your complicity.

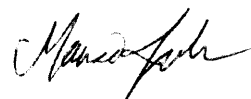
Perhaps you didn't know, but it's enjoyable to watch you shave your beard. When I watch you tend to your body's exigencies, I encounter a pleasurable contradiction: on the one hand I recall my failure at times to locate the boundaries between you and me. On the other hand I am reminded of your complete bodily otherness. To watch you shave your beard—this masculine attribute—invokes the sensation of otherness; from this distance I then objectify you.

And I've noticed that you often end up with quite a few nicks. You then use bits of tissue paper to stop up the blood. I'm interested in thinking about artwork as something that touches the body and serves an alimentary function.

So here's what I ask of you: next time you cut yourself shaving, use a snippet of this letter in place of the tissue. As our relationship began first as epistolary correspondence, it's quite fitting that you would trust my words to dress your wounds.

If you choose to send correspondence or evidence/documentation it would bring me great pleasure.

Warm Regards,



Marisa



X told me this was the nicest letter anyone had ever written him. After receiving his response, I wanted to see what happened if I extended the scope of the game outwards towards others...

letter to: Peter Magic O'Malley

MAGICIANS

AAA BIRTHDAY MAGICIANS SERVICE
Children & Adults-Magicians And Clowns
11 Richmere Rd Mat 617 286-1030

ABSOLUTELY AMAZING MAGIC BY JIM RAINHO Med 781 391-6800

AH MAGIC BY PETER O'MALLEY
Handwritten: This is the one
www.petermagicomalley.com
54 Crescent Av Bos 617 822-2292

Ala Magical Productions
14 County Rd Eve 617 387-4500

All Access Events Inc
Call Dedham TelNo-781-320-0100

All Access Events Inc
Franklin Cambridge TelNo-617-547-7777

ALL-STAR CLOWNS Chelsea -- 617 889-9600

Awesome Robb's Magic
Call Cambridge TelNo-617-547-3777

Blossom Magic
Braintree TelNo-781-848-5926

Magnetic Inspection
See
Controls, Control Systems & Regulators
Laboratories-Testing
Testing Apparatus

MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING MRI

ALLIANCE IMAGING
Alliance MRI Cypress St. Greater Boston, MRI, LP
235 Cypress Bro 617 734

Aurora Imaging Corp
1153 Centre Jam 617 522

BOSTON IMAGING ASSOCIATES
1 Brookline Pl Bro 617 754

BOSTON OPEN MRI
85 Western Av Bri 617 782

In search of the perfect magician, I scoured the United States. I started with the 'House of Magic' in Los Angeles. No luck there. I tried other magic clubs but met some skepticism and resistance.

It turned out it was kind of hard finding a magician sympathetic to my request. 21

Troubadour on Skates - Mozilla Firefox


File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

http://www.petermagicomalley.com/troubadour2.htm

4.301 Guardian UK WFMU post to del.icio.us webcast.berkeley post to del.icio.us PirateCatRadio

Peter O'Malley

Troubadour on Skates



Dressed in festive attire to fit the event or function. Peter O'Malley roves through the crowd with the greatest of ease. Providing Close up magic, comedic venues, minstrel music (guitar and song) and fun for all attendees.

His performance is very often done on roller-skates which adds an additional element of surprise and astonishment. Never a dull moment when he rolls around engaging people and groups in fun and laughter wherever he hangs his magic hat.

[Corporate Close Up Magic](#)

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[Educational Shows](#)

[Children's Entertainment](#)

[Highlights and Performances at Special Events](#)

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http://www.petermagicomalley.com/index.htm

Peter O'Malley

Award Winning Boston Magician, Musical Entertainer, and Boston Variety Entertainer



Marrying an Engaging Personality and keen sense of wit with an uncanny repertoire of magic tricks, comedy and song, this Boston Magician, Peter O'Malley is acclaimed as "a brand new species of one-man show" and is among New England's most successful entertainers.

[Corporate Close Up Magic](#)

[Troubadour on Skates](#)

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[Highlights and](#)

After an entire month of cold-calling magicians, I located one individual whom I found to be the most charismatic, humorous, and compassionate - Peter 'Magic' O'Malley. I was sure he would understand what I was trying to achieve...

marisa jahn

mail

tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

Peter Magic O'Malley
c/o Old Country Buffet
Arsenal Mall
500 Arsenal St.
Watertown, MA 02472
617 822-2292

April 11, 2006

Dear Peter:

I'm writing to ask for your complicity.

From your website and the enthusiasm of your voice over the phone, I understand that you are someone who enjoys magic because it brings others so much joy. I am an artist whose work involves transforming letters and correspondence (such as this) into something more. I like thinking about artwork as a kind of magic: through the mastery of our medium, we use the simplest of tricks to turn the ordinary into something extraordinary.

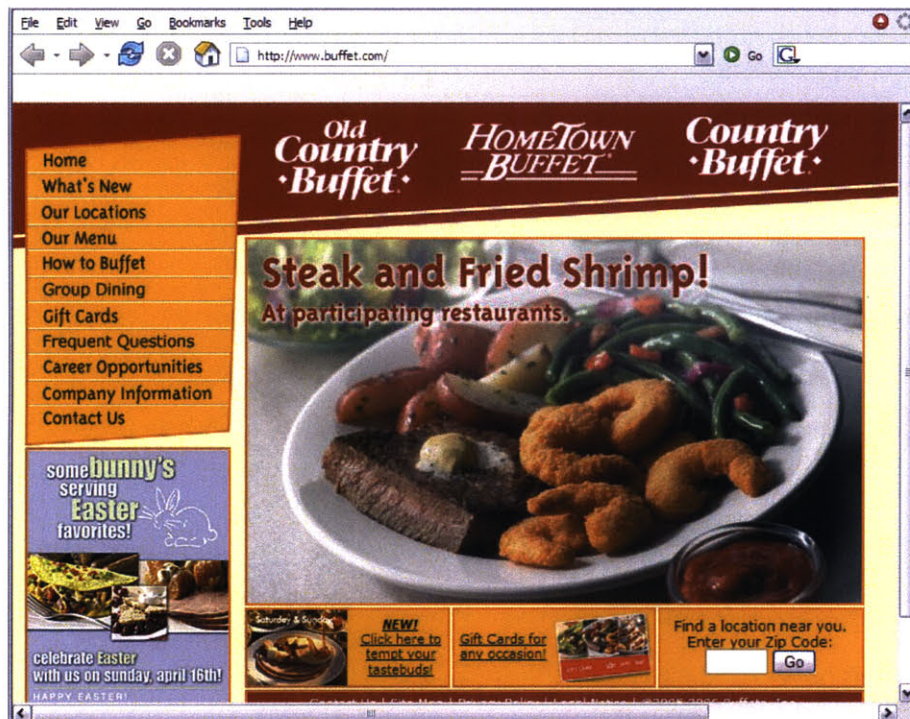
With a nod to your skills and command of your materials, I am hoping that you'll assist in transforming this very letter using your magic. So here's what I ask of you: could you please incorporate this letter into your magic shows? I'm exhilarated at the idea that you could manipulate this piece of paper and make it appear and disappear in front of an audience—I can imagine the enchantment in their eyes. Your assistance would help fulfill my wish to have my words invoke wonder in others.

If you choose to send correspondence or evidence/documentation it would bring me great pleasure.

Warm Regards,



Marisa



After playing phone tag a few times with Peter, we finally arranged to meet the subsequent Thursday at the Country Town Buffet, a restaurant located in the mall of WaterTown, Massachusetts. On Thursdays, Peter performs magic tricks throughout the evening to dining families. Mostly, these tricks are to entertain kids, but everyone laughs.



When I arrived, I gave Peter my letter, which he then used in his magic tricks. The best one was a trick referred to in the industry as 'torn and restored.' In this trick, the magician tears up the letter, pushes it into his closed fist, does a twirl with each hand, then pulls the fully intact (or 'restored') letter out of his fist. Peter performs this trick wonderfully, and it really stumped a lot of the adults, including myself. I was pleased that my letter and his sleight of hand could together entertain so many kids and adults.

I was really impressed with the sustained attention Peter devoted to his audience. It seemed quite evident that he well understood the importance and pleasure of wonder. Peter had an amazing sense of patience and empathy in his voice, and I enjoyed the pride he took in honing his craft.

Throughout my two hours' stay at the Country Town Buffet, the employees, managers, and other diners let me to videotape them inside the restaurant - they all wanted my art project to come out well. The manager crossed his fingers for me with hopes that I'd get good footage and that I'd get an A for it at school. Peter even bought me a buffet dinner in between magic tricks.

letter to:



I used to know this woman who was really obsessed with porn, fetishes, and role-playing. One project of hers involved shooting plastic eyeballs from her vagina. So I thought this lady might appreciate my request to enlist her exhibitionist proclivities. The letter I mailed her was accompanied by a disposable camera so she could document my request; I also included a self-addressed pre-stamped return envelope. This format was repeated in the other letters I sent...

marisa jahn

mail [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

March 10, 2006

Dear [REDACTED]

I'm writing to ask for your complicity.

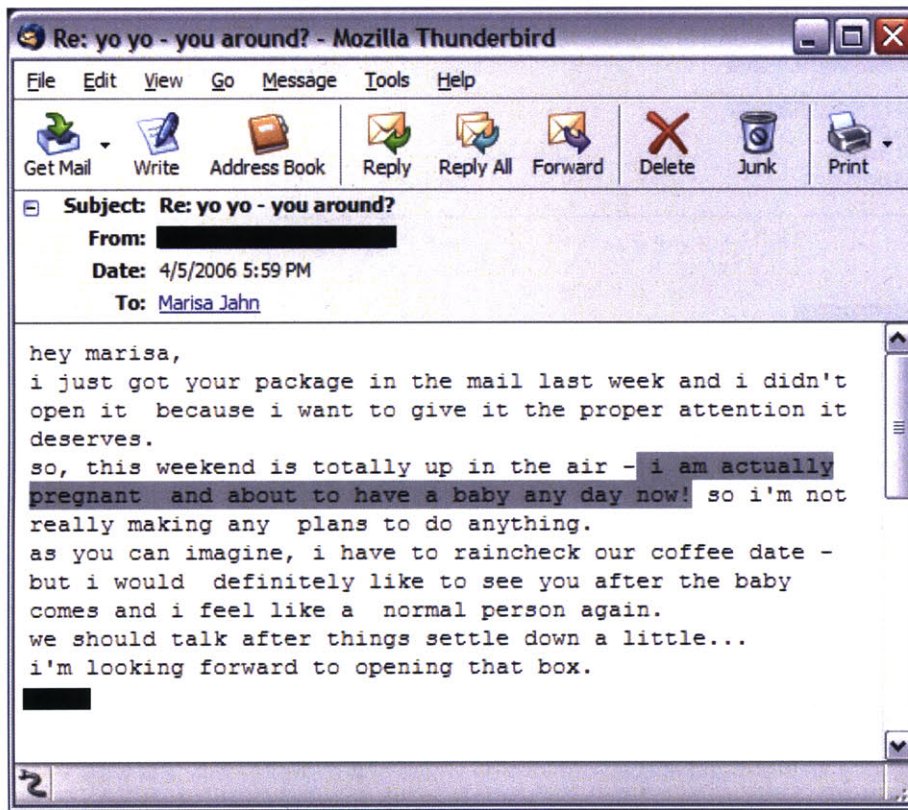
Although it's been a long time (8 years) since we've corresponded, I haven't forgotten one of your projects at [REDACTED] in which you inserted objects into your vagina and expunged them on webcam. I'm looking at your website and see that your work continues to explore the process by which objects acquire an erotic and affective dimension - I too share this interest. But while my work (such as this letter) often situates language and text as the object of fetish, your work explores these ideas through what you describe as the 'visceral'. The other day, it became apparent to me the way that words and body could become conjoined.

So here's what I ask of you: Take this letter and insert it into your vagina; expunge it.

If you choose to send correspondence or evidence/documentation it would bring me great pleasure.

Warm Regards,






After about a month with no response, I sent [REDACTED] a follow up letter. she responded shortly thereafter, but Jill's email told me I shouldn't press any further. I didn't want my letter to get in the way of that baby...

letter to:



somewhere in the world, I knew I'd find an art handler who would lend me their help. I asked my East Coast art handler pals if they would help me out, but they were either too busy or they didn't want to get busted for performing my silly requests.

I then located , who is one of the most surprising people I have ever met in my life. *He really makes things happen.* He too had some reservations, which we quickly got around.

marisa jahn

mail [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

April 11, 2006

Dear [REDACTED]

I'm writing to ask for your complicity.

As a professional art handler, your work involves the careful handling of culturally coveted objects. I can't help thinking that on a day-to-day level you must have a very tactile and sensual experience of these icons which are known to most only as image. This sensorial memory of the artwork lends you a special power over the art object: the owners themselves do not touch the artwork in their collection; they are, like me, viewers. You alone, as the artwork's handler, possess this access—the power to touch.

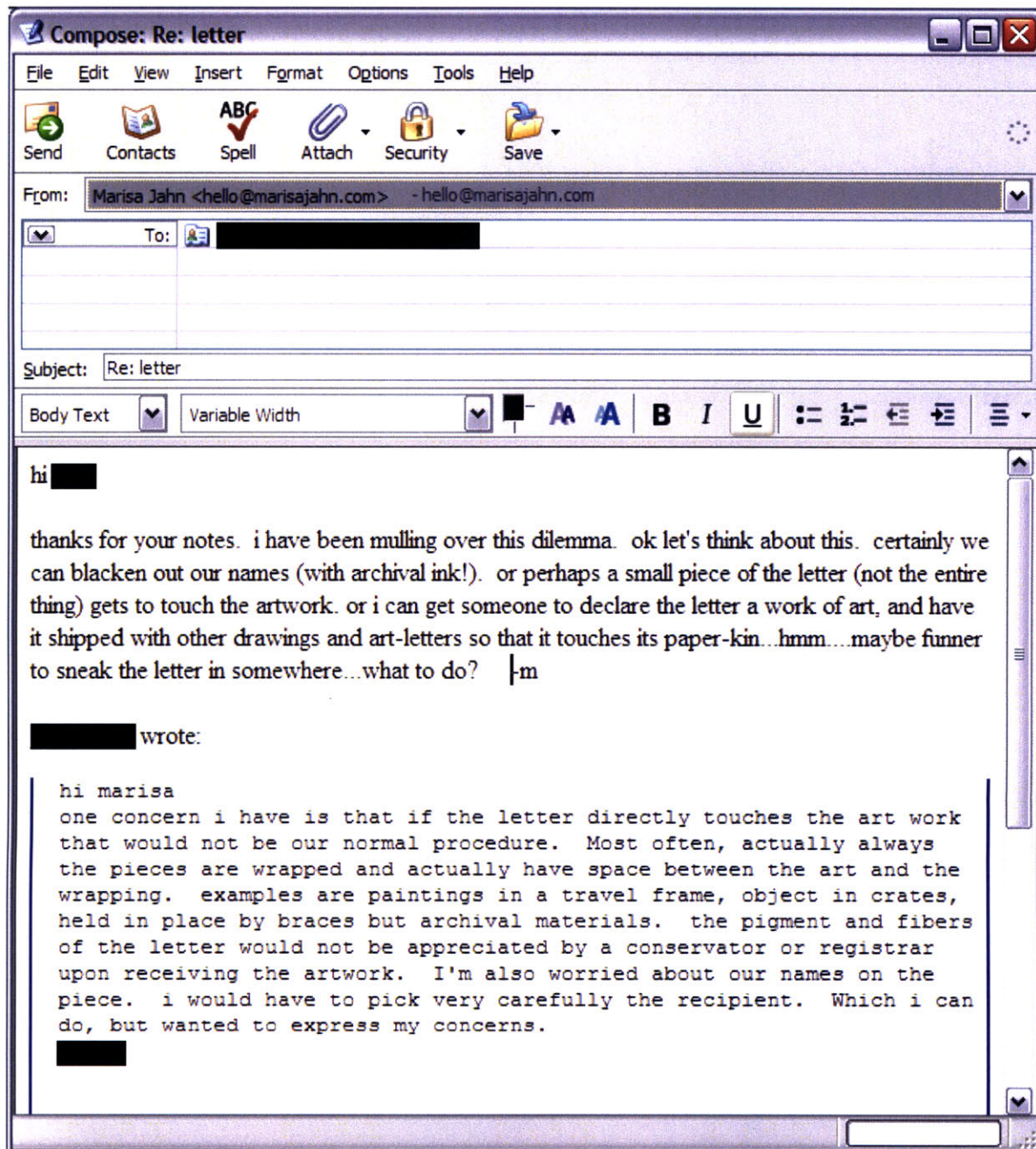
I would like to partake in your intimacy with the art object, and I hope you will indulge a specific request. So here's what I ask of you: the next time at work, when you are asked to ship a work of art, slip this letter in with the rest of the packing material. Please be sure that this letter directly touches the artwork, to both caress and cradle.

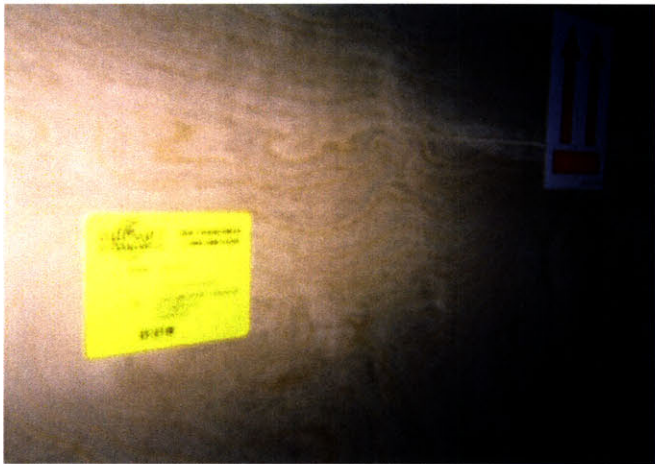
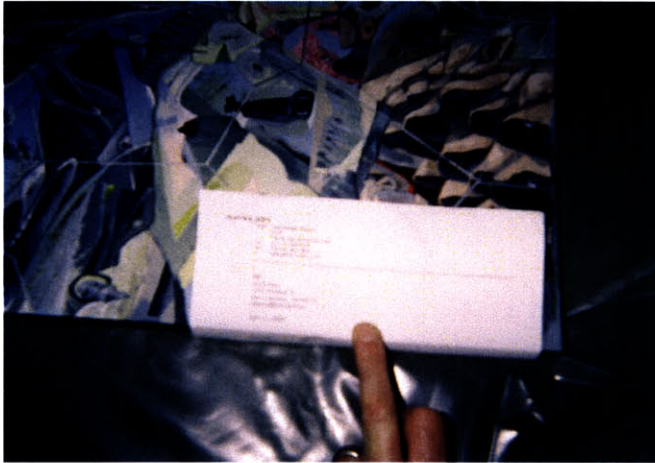
If you choose to send correspondence or evidence/documentation it would bring me great pleasure.

Warm Regards,



Marisa





The next month, I received the following photos by mail from [REDACTED]. They document the letter as he wraps it alongside a painting by [REDACTED], crates it, and ships it off to its new owner. . .

letter to: the Demaines


When I first heard news that I was accepted into the Visual Arts Program at MIT, I was elated. I would be surrounded by a whole new crop of interesting people.


That same week, the Tuesday science section (my favorite section) of the 'The New York Times' featured the work of Erik Demaine, the computation origami expert who, at the age of 22, was MIT's youngest tenured professor. Concurrently, my best friend had seen a TV special about how NASA was employing origami experts to design the folding wings of satellites. For me and my friend, Erik Demaine epitomized MIT.


OrigaMIT - Paperfolding at MIT: Members - Mozilla Firefox


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http://web.mit.edu/origamit/www/members.shtml

 **home**

 **members**

 **gallery**

 **links**




Next Meeting:
Date: 8 Mar 06
Room: 5-231
Time: 7-9 PM

OrigaMIT Members

Faculty Advisor:
[Erik Demaine](#)

Club Officers:
[Andrea Hawksley](#) (President)
[Brian Chan](#)
Connie Yeh (Treasurer)
Jim Sukha (Webmaster)
[Wesley Andres Watters Farfan](#) (Phantom Spiritual Presence)

Members:
OrigaMIT has more members than it knows what to do with, but a few members with notable origami galleries are listed below.
[Gilad Aharoni](#)



Done

Professor wins "genius" grant - MIT News Office - Mozilla Firefox

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http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/2003/macarthur.html Erik Demaine

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MIT

Professor wins "genius" grant
Denise Brehm, News Office
October 6, 2003

A 22-year-old MIT professor whose work fuses art, science, work and play is the recipient of a \$500,000 MacArthur Fellowship, commonly known as the "genius" grant.

Assistant Professor Erik Demaine of electrical engineering and computer science—who last month was called one of the most brilliant scientists in America by Popular Science magazine—is one of the youngest people ever selected for the fellowship and the youngest of the 24 named this year.

Demaine is interested in abstract geometry problems related to folding and bending that have practical applications in fields as diverse as manufacturing (sheet metal fabrication) and biology (protein-folding).

At age 17, he unfolded the secret behind a complicated geometry problem. Demaine and his collaborators proved mathematically that it is possible to create any conceivable straight-sided shape by folding a piece of paper and making a single scissor cut. This launched the field of computational origami, an interdisciplinary endeavor on the boundary of computer science and mathematics.

For his doctoral thesis, Demaine solved the "carpenter's rule problem," a mathematical dilemma first posed around 25 years before. If you take a set of rigid bars connected by hinges lying flat on a table, is it always



Photo: Donna Coveney
Erik Demaine solved the "carpenter's rule problem."

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CONTACT
Denise Brehm

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Done

When I first got to MIT, I wrote Erik a letter and handed it to him in person.

After waiting on edge for several months with no response, I mailed a second letter directly to his office.

still no answer.

I sent my final one in March 2006.

marisa jahn

mail

tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

Erik Demaine
Advisor, OrigamiMIT (MIT Origami Club)
MIT Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory
32 Vassar Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 253-6871
edemaine@mit.edu

March 10, 2006

Dear Erik:

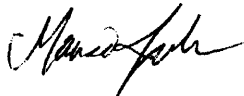
I'm writing to ask for your complicity.

As you know, my artwork often takes form as letters and correspondence such as this—likewise, as a person renowned for your work in the field of computational origami, much of your work begins from the manipulation of paper. I imagine that we must share an intimacy with this medium and take pleasure in its mastery.

So here's what I ask of you: transform this piece of paper. In a previous letter I wrote to you, I suggested you fold it as origami. However, when I ran into your father the other day, he mentioned that hesitated to reply because you were considering a different kind of augmentation which you apprehended was in appropriate. I am guessing that you are thinking about an interest you vocalized when we met briefly at CAVS in Fall 2005—to expand the project to include an ongoing number of collaborators, thus rendering moot the relationship between tenure and collaborators in academia. I suppose I should explicitly tell you that I would be delighted in any liberties you take. In other words, I relinquishing control without expectations; you take over.

If you choose to send correspondence or evidence/documentation it would bring me great pleasure.

Warm Regards,



Marisa


Martin Demaine - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View Go Bookmarks Tools Help


http://theory.lcs.mit.edu/~mdemaine/

Martin Demaine

Artist-in-Residence in the [Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science](#)
 Technical Instructor in the [Department of Materials Science and Engineering, Glass Lab](#)
 Visiting Scientist in the [Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Lab](#)
 Member of the [Theory of Computation](#) group
[Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#)



[Papers](#) -- [Puzzles](#) -- [Book](#)



[Junkyard Art: The Art of Recycling](#)

[Building with Books](#)

Now Erik Demaine's biography is interesting. As a kid, he was schooled by his dad Marty (image above) on the road as they travelled throughout North America. They were quite close, and worked together at MIT. Occasionally I'd see them together but more often than not I'd run into Marty alone. We would occasionally chat, and he knew about the letters I'd sent to his son. He would assure me that he would mention something to Erik and follow up on my behalf. Only I still never received a response.

A month later, I asked Marty if he would (in Erik's stead), alter my letter. After all, Marty was a computation origami expert too. I let him know that he had the liberty to do anything he wanted to the letter.

marisa jahn

mail

tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

Martin Demaine
MIT Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory
32 Vassar Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 253-6871
mdemaine@mit.edu

April 25, 2006

Dear Martin:


I'm writing to ask for your complicity.

When we last ran into each other in the 77 Mass Ave. foyer with Andrea Frank, we talked about how wonderful it would be if you would transform this letter in place of your son Erik. From what I read on the 'Building with Books' section of your website, I see that we both share a fascination in the de-sacralization of language, whose authority we subvert through the manipulation of its physical form. This is evident to me in the furniture you've built from books which put the written word literally to use in functional forms.

And so I hope you will accept my invitation/solicitation. So here's what I ask of you: transform this letter. You are invited to take creative license and liberty.

If you choose to send correspondence or evidence/documentation it would bring me great pleasure.

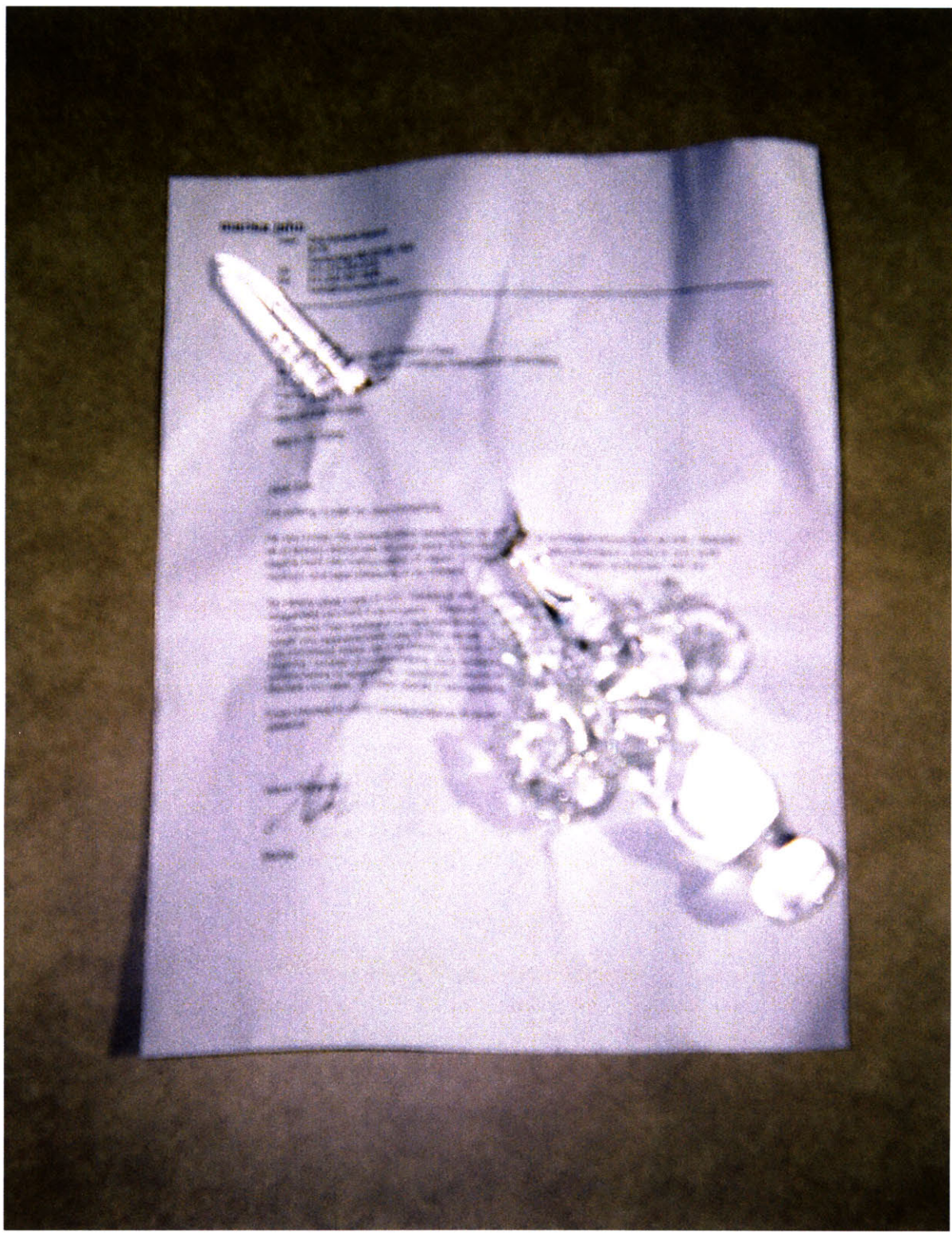
Warm Regards,



Marisa

six months later, in October 2006, I received the following letter in the mail with the accompanying disposable camera. When I developed the film I discovered what Marty meant by 'paper cuts' [see image right]...

marisa,
I thought
the pics had been
sent. Sorry.
paper cuts
the papers in my
office
Marty
32-~~5~~582



letter to: Simon Starling

The other day I met this guy Simon who sure liked to talk about his car and his bike. He even made them the center of his artwork. After he won a prize for his artwork, the website read, "Simon Starling is fascinated by the processes involved in transforming one object or substance into another. He makes objects, installations, and pilgrimage-like journeys which draw out an array of ideas about nature, technology and economics. Starling describes his work as 'the physical manifestation of a thought process', revealing hidden histories and relationships. . . For Tabernas Desert Run 2004, Starling crossed the Tabernas desert in Spain on an improvised electric bicycle . . . "

It seems to me that if he loves these possessions so much, it must be because he loves the adventures they bring. I think I understand this feeling because I adore my bike so much I gave it a name.

marisa jahn

mail [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

Simon Starling

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Germany

March 10, 2006

Dear Simon:

I'm writing to ask for your complicity.

As we spoke briefly the other day at the bar, I'm interested in the way that the subject of your artwork is the medium itself. In this way, you circumscribe art within larger geopolitical dimensions. My work also self-reflexively explores the contingent nature of its material presence, the events and conditions that frame its existence. However, while at times your work employs actual vehicles (motorbike, car, etc.) for physical adventure, I situate language and text (such as this very letter) as the metaphoric vehicle that explores.

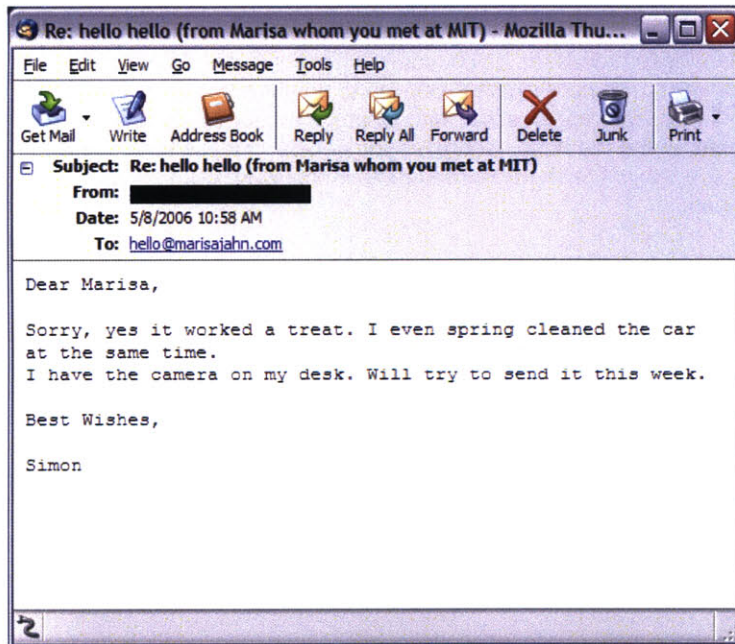
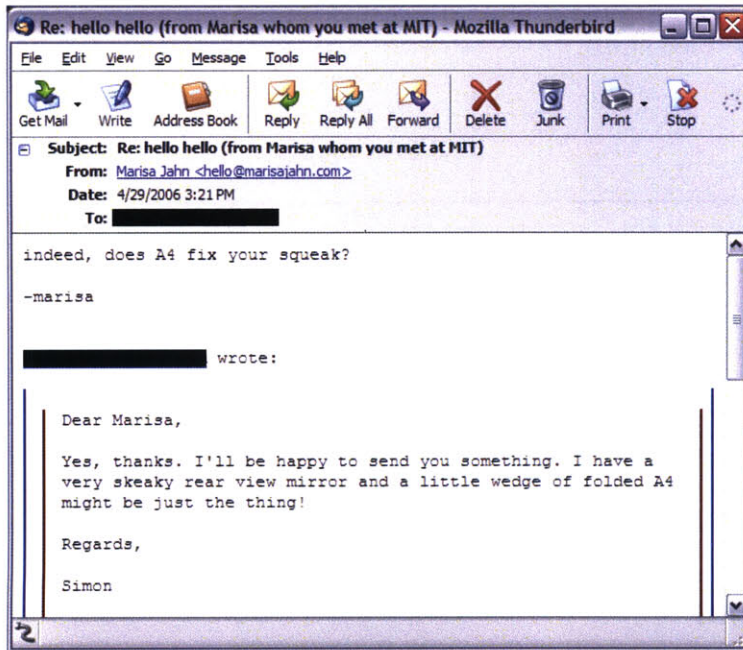
A certain connecting logic between these processes has become apparent to me, which compel me to write and solicit your participation. So here's what I ask you to do: take this letter and place it somewhere in your trusty Volvo, which you speak about with so much fondness. Smoosh it in the windshield, beneath the footmat, under the hood, wherever you decide. Please make sure both 'vehicles' touch so that they are subject to shared experience. In this way, words and transport are conjoined by incidence.

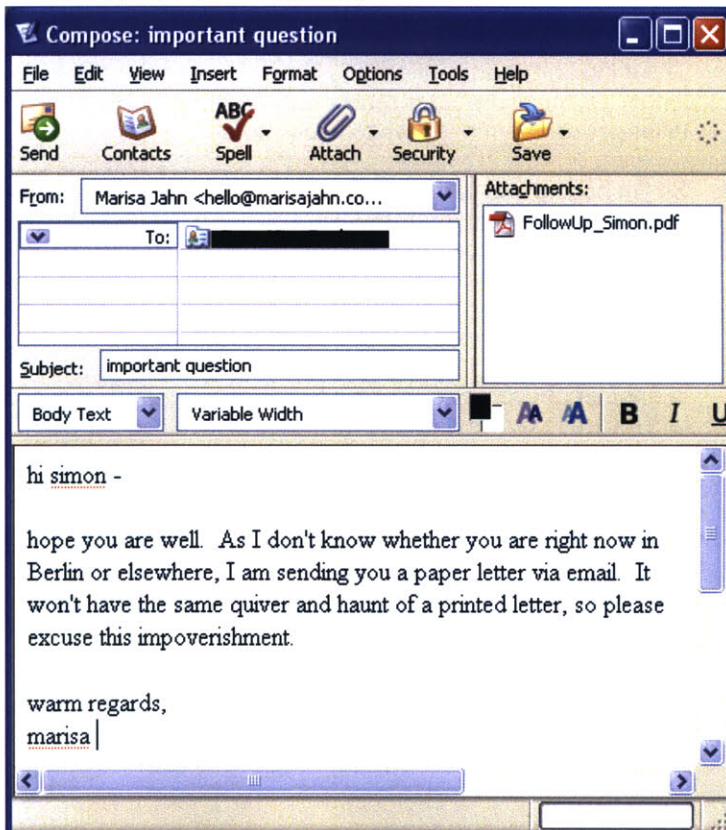
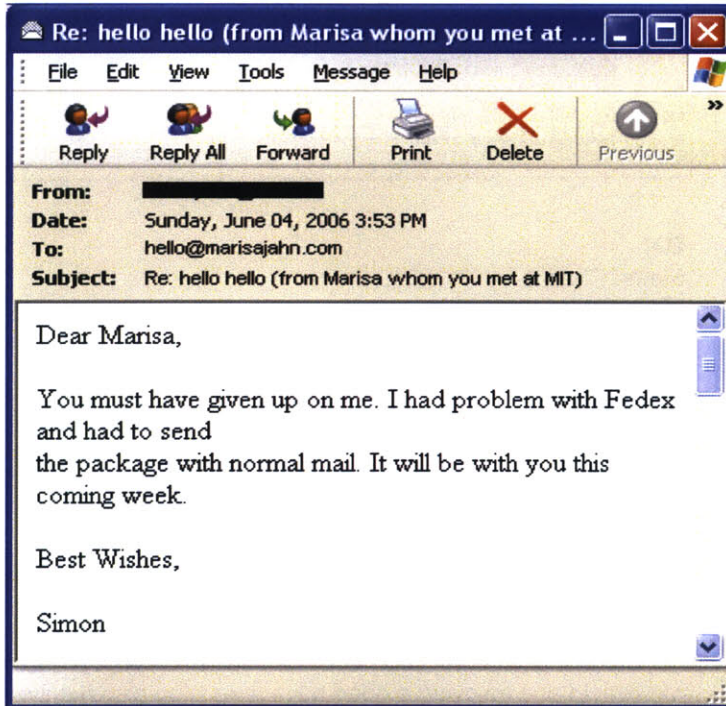
If you choose to send correspondence or evidence/documentation it would bring me great pleasure.

Warm Regards,



Marisa





marisa jahn

mail [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

Simon Starling

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Germany

April 22, 2007

Dear Simon:

Hope you are well and enjoying the Spring. It's been so pleasant here in Cambridge when I wake in the morning I wonder how the weather could be so gentle and temperate.

Per our last exchange, you mentioned you had taken photos of my letter, wedged into your windshield and enjoying a good adventure. You also mentioned that you FedEx'd me the photographs.

A series of incidences compel me to write. At the end of last year, a box of my personal belongings and files were stolen. I think I recall that the camera you sent was in that box, but upon closer inspection I curiously cannot recall whether I ever actually received the camera at all. The thing is, I had spent so long imagining what it must have been like for that letter that I can no longer distinguish what is real or only fantasy. Like a phantom limb or lost child, the life of this letter possesses me; I have to know more.

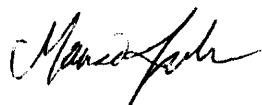
So I'm hoping you can let me know whether the photographs went something like this: I am the letter, wedged in the rear view mirror. The wind, entering the car from both rolled down windows, rumbles about the car, stirring up the sand accrued in the pits of the car and abrasing all surfaces. In the photograph, the rear view mirror reflects what appears to be a bright warm desert and low-lying houses. There are several photographs taken from the same perspective that depict your traipse through sand, shrub, green.

In another: the force of the wind has knocked the rear view mirror from the windshield. You've taken care to bind the letter and mirror together with a patch of duct tape; they lie on the front seat. In the photograph, the mirror faces up, reflecting a swath of sky framed by dark silhouettes of the car's interior.

The set of third photographs are taken by someone presumably at the shore of a very still lake, their back to the morning. A swimmer, whose face is obscured, holds their arm into the air with the mirror-letter facing the camera catching colors otherwise unseen.

Was it indeed something like this?

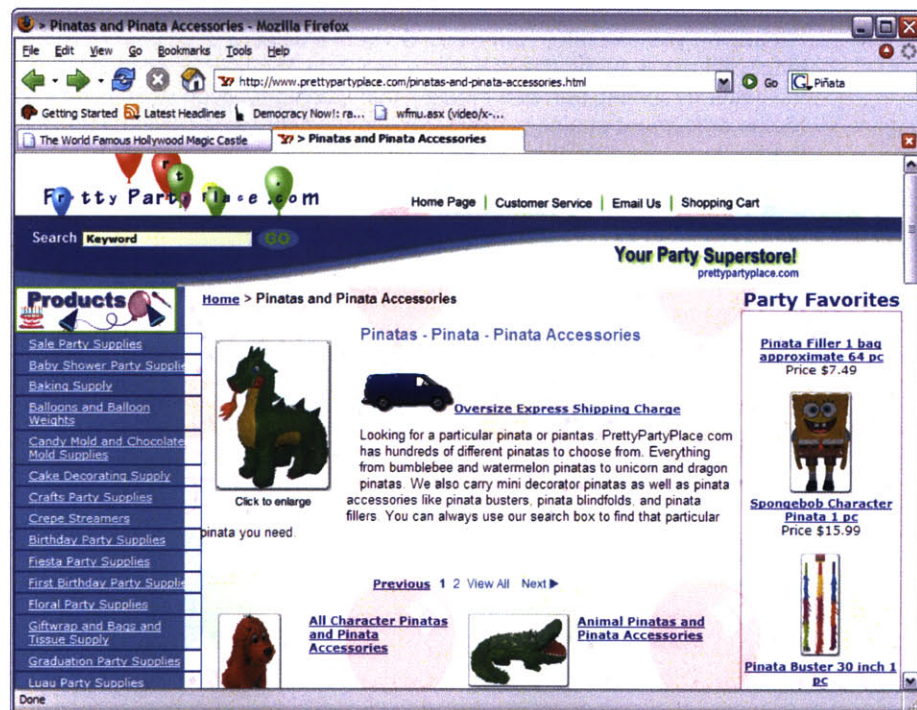
Warm Regards,



Marisa

letter to: Pretty Party Place (Piñata Division)

I spent several months researching a pinata maker. I mean, I know how to make pinatas myself, but the point of this game is for someone else to transform my letter and take it to a whole new level. I tried calling several big factories with no luck.



marisa jahn

mail

tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

Pretty Party Place
Piñata Division
1300 S. Country Club Dr.
Suite #3
Mesa, AZ 85210

March 10, 2006

Dear Pretty Piñata Division:

I'm writing to ask for your complicity.

In your work as piñata makers, you transform paper into festive objects. As an artist whose work often takes the form of correspondence and letters such as this, I see that our shared artistry is in manipulating paper to create beauty and thrill for others. I imagine that we must both feel an intimate relationship with our artworks, crafting them with care to give others joy.

I'm hoping you can offer your help. So here's what I ask of you: Could you please tear up this letter and use it as the tissue used to decorate one of your piñatas? I'm exhilarated at the idea of this letter becoming part of a piñata—that it could function as a game and finally burst into the air for the enjoyment of others. Through your assistance you can help fulfill my wish for these words to transform into a celebratory moment.

If you choose to send correspondence or evidence/documentation it would bring me great pleasure.

Warm Regards,



Marisa

letter to:

Marijke Jorritsma

I then tried to enlist the assistance of my friend Marijke who also made pinatas. It turned out she was too busy and probably wasn't going to be able to help out...

marisa jahn

mail [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

Marijke Jorritsma
1855 Mission St.
San Francisco, CA 94103
missmarijke@yahoo.com

March 10, 2006

Dear Marijke-

I'm writing to ask your complicity in inserting myself into your life. This very letter will be the material means by which I begin to enter into the apparatus of your life.

I've always admired your facility with materials, your tactile and haptic relationship to the world evidenced in your wonders as a cook, musician, filmmaker, and artist. This quality are what in part make you so successful as a teacher: your ability to think through objects as a way of accessing larger aspects of the world around you.

Here's what I'd like to ask of you: Quite often I recall you making with piñatas with kids at the various places where you work in preparation of Cinco de Mayo celebrations (which are coming up). Take this paper and use it to decorate one of the piñatas. This process essentially mirrors an earlier discovery we made as co-teachers about our respective relationship to materiality: yours – hands on, engaged; mine – distanced and always through language.

No one has to know about this. At the same time if you choose to send correspondence or evidence/documentation I'd be quite pleased.

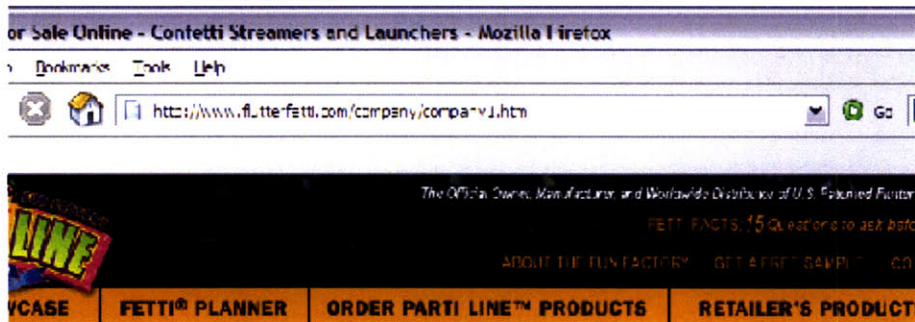
Warm Regards,



Marisa Jahn

letter to:
Ronée Holmes
& the Flutter Fetti
Fun Factory

After having no luck with getting my letter turned into a pinata, I thought I'd try switching to confetti. I researched all the confetti factories in North America. Finally, I discovered the Flutter Fetti Fun Factory in Fort Lauderdale Florida.



the Flutter Fetti® Fun Factory - A Division of Parti Line International, L.L.C.

Fun Factory offers for sale online an exciting array of party special effect streamers designed to add life to your next special event. We also offer a variety of confetti launchers for sale online that are simple and easy to install and operate!

Fun Factory, the innovators in the art of party confetti design!

Parti Line, offering you the guaranteed lowest prices and volume discounts for all your party confetti needs!
 Each online order is custom assembled for you.
 Special color combinations with your minimum order.
 Our party confetti products for sale can be enjoyed with no mess necessary.

Flutter Fetti, streamers and launchers will add the WOW effect to any event.

Interested in becoming a domestic or international distributor? Contact us for Flutter Fetti Fun Factory products for sale.



The Flutter Fetti Fun Factory appeared so incredibly enthusiastic about their mission and demonstrated a sophistication over their competitors - they own several patents such as Flutter Fetti, a confetti that stays in the air longer than any other confetti. One of their most successful products is the Flutter Fetti Fun stick, a confetti launcher that comes in variable sizes and colors. In particular, I liked the Flutter Fetti Fun Factory because they have these exuberant online videos that demo their products and carefully describe the steps for optimal confetti launching. Plus, when you call them up, you can talk to a real person. Best of all, the Flutter Fetti Fun Factory has two mascots - the pups seen above whose names are "Flutter" and "Fetti" (you can see them in the picture above).

Confetti For Sale Online - Confetti Streamers and Launchers - Mozilla Firefox


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<http://www.flutterfetti.com/company/company1.html>

ONLINE EMPLOYEE BIOS

RONÉE HOLMES

Pictured in Ronée's lap are the company's adorable mascots - Flutter and Fetti



Ronée Holmes, Manager of the [Flutter Fetti@Fun Factory](mailto:FlutterFetti@FunFactory.com) - Parti Line™ International, sees theater in everything she touches. That's why when she is asked to supply party confetti, events become a more memorable talk of the town.

Ronée, a theatre major, has put "high drama" into an Arts Council in Yazoo City, Mississippi, (which was honored as the "Most Outstanding Small Arts Council in the Nation"), in the New Orleans Symphony Series starting the "Beethoven In Blue Jeans" Series to "sold out" audiences... SRO in theatres across Florida where she runs the Florida Theatrical Association, a not-for-profit organization bringing touring Broadway shows to the State.

Her creativity in developing new concepts for existing ventures, to exploring new theater, to owning her own business, has brought Ronée to the greatest part of her life... the : [her own party confetti company The Flutter Fetti Fun Factory](http://www.flutterfetti.com) where she does wh

Flutter Fetti@Fun Factory | Find Next | Find Previous | Highlight | Match case

For several weeks, Ronée and I played phone tag. When we finally spoke, she agreed to receive my letter and photograph it going through the Flutter Fetti machine. She also promised to stuff my letter-bits into tubes of fourteen inch Flutter Fetti Fun sticks and send this to me by mail, pronto.

marisa jahn

mail

tel 011.415.254.9151

fax 011.800.867.2839

e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

Ronée Holmes
Manager
The Flutter Fetti Fun Factory
5555 65th Way N
St. Petersburg, FL 33709
T: 727.541.6463, 877.321.1999
info@flutterfetti.com

March 10, 2006

Dear Ronée:

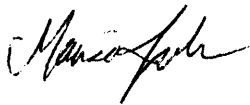
I'm writing to ask for your complicity.

As an artist whose works involves letter-writing and correspondence such as this, our shared artistry involves manipulating paper to celebrate life. We must both share the idea that artwork is like confetti, and vice versa: both are intended to make others experience happiness. Your short bio on www.flutterfetti.com portrays you as a person who enthusiastically enjoys what you do and extends to others this same appreciation for creativity and joy. This is evident in your interest to "Make who I'm working with or who I'm working for stand out." This enthusiasm and empathy in helping others to create meaningful moments is what convinced me to write to you. Because I think you might identify where I'm coming from. I hope you can extend your compassion.

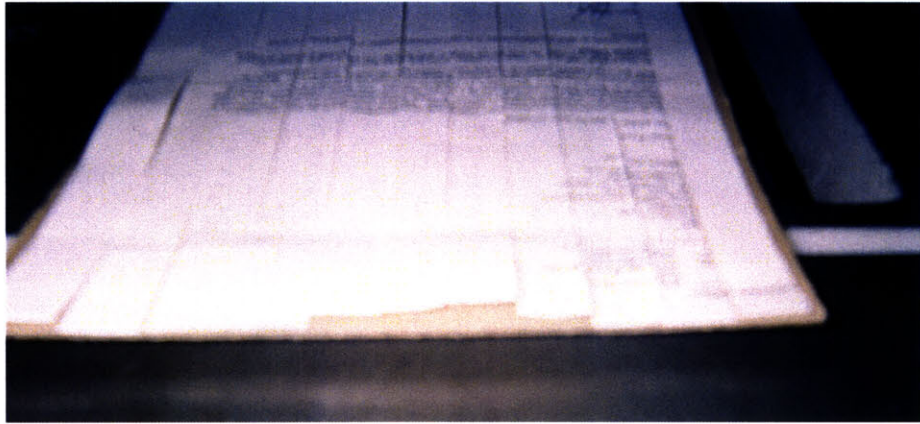
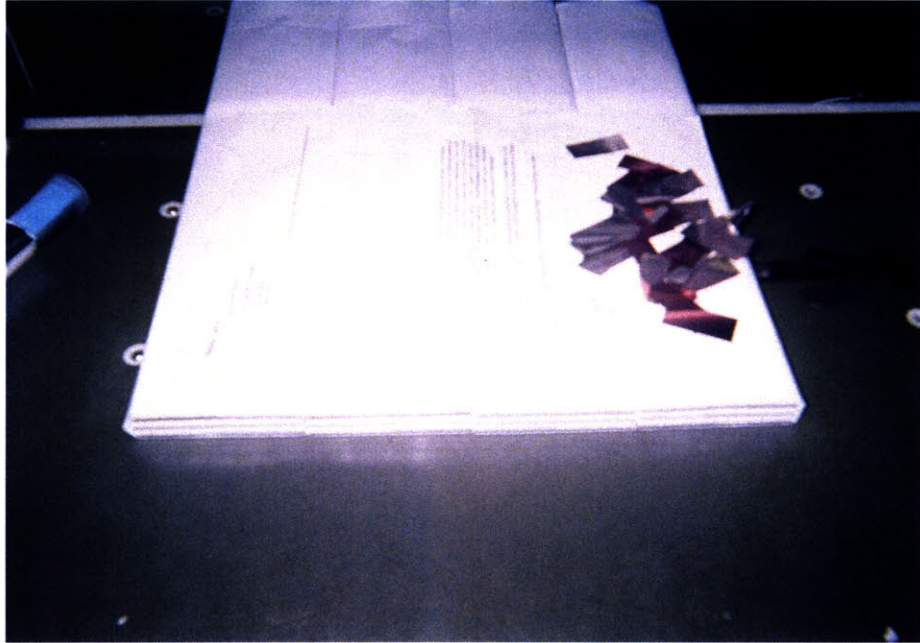
So here's what I ask of you: Could you please shred this letter and mix it in with a batch of your confetti? With your help, my wish for my words to waft through the air amidst a crowd of cheers would be fulfilled.

If you choose to send correspondence or evidence/documentation it would bring me great pleasure.

Warm Regards,



Marisa



When I received my Fun sticks in the mail, I also found the disposable camera that Renee had used to document the letter as it got tore up by the Fetti shredder. She'd also enclosed instructions so I would know how to properly launch the Fun sticks.

Dear Ronée

March 10, 2
anager
ne Flutter
555 65th W
st Petersb
F: 727.541
info@flutter

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE
FLUTTER FETTI® CONFETTI STICK

Step 1- Hold the Flutter Fetti confetti stick firmly in one hand and extend the arm upward above you head to the 12 o'clock position.

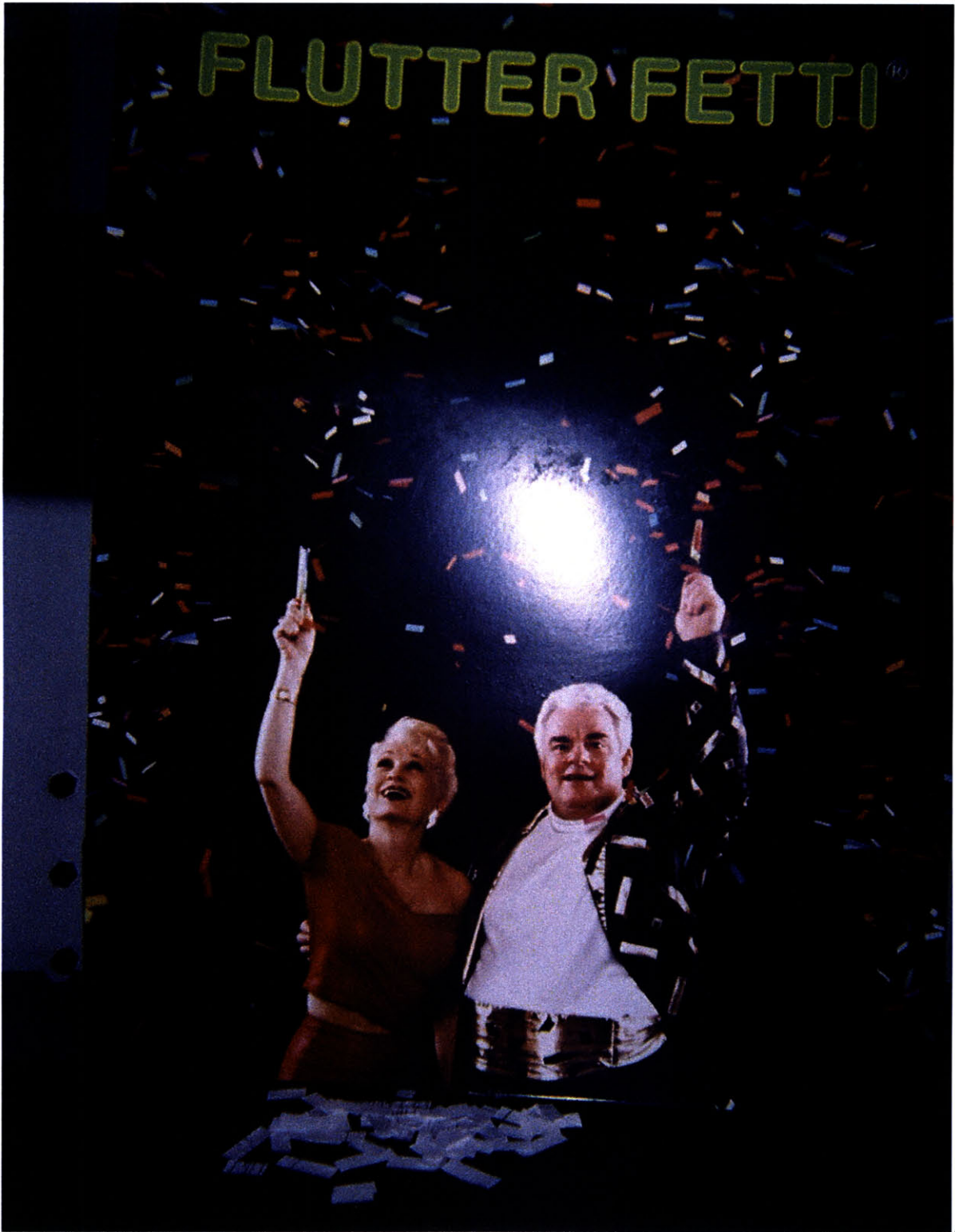
Step 2- Bring your fore arm back to the 3 o'clock position. Return the arm to the 12 o'clock position quickly flicking the wrist at the same time until all the confetti is out of one end of the tube. If nothing happens, snap harder.

Step 3- Turn the tube over, hold the empty end and repeat step 2 until the tube of confetti is empty. Watch the Confetti Stick flutter, fly and float spectacularly in the air.
WARNING- Do not point, flick or fling towards anyone when using.

ahn
mail #170
Camb
011.4
011.8
hello@
to:
Ronée Hol

In addition, Ronée also took an extra special photograph of my letter (now confetti) which she had placed before a poster of her with the original Fettiologist...

FLUTTER FETTI[®]



I then set about finding myself some crowds who could help fulfill my wish... After I found some groups of people, I asked them to hold the sticks in the air, then on the count of three, to flick their Funsticks in the air and release my letter. I pleaded them to cheer...

[below]: event for 'Moles not Molar' reading series at The Rotunda, Philadelphia, PA - (June 2006)

[image lower right]: opening reception for exhibition entitled 'The Listening' at The Lab, San Francisco, CA - (December 2006)

[image upper right]: a group of students and faculty from the Visual Arts Program MIT, Cambridge, MA - (May 2006)

Those confetti sticks sure loosened everybody up, and everyone seemed to have a really good time.





So here's what I ask of you: Could you please shred this |
confetti? With your help, my wish for my words to waft th
would be fulfilled.

If you choose to send correspondence or evidence/docun
pleasure.

Warm Regards,

では、ここからかお願いいで
この手紙をシレッダーにカ
ないでしょうか。 ~~それ~~ そ
ふゆふゆと飛をていた

Marisa

お返事 ~~や~~, ~~この手紙を~~
~~返すか~~ ~~実際に~~

頂ければ大変うれしく

よろしくお願いいいたします。

口ずか

ご協力していただきたいニとがあります。

このような、手紙をかきことや文通 ~~を~~ に関する作品
とあなたと共通の芸術的感覚をもついま
'を分かちあうべきです。

ともに、相手の経験を楽しいものにようと



[images above, left and on next page]: documentation of a performance with the Fun sticks at Showa Kinen Park, Japan.



letter to:
Robbie Herbst
& Kim Varella

Robbie and Kim are these friends in mine in Los Angeles who are super duper California healthy types. They're great. They even grow their own vegetables and compost everything. I really appreciate this extra effort and hoped my letter could become part of their lives. Well, I'm still waiting to hear back from them about my request for a letter burial.

marisa jahn

mail [REDACTED]
tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

Robbie Herbst and Kim Varella
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

April 19, 2006

Dear Robbie and Kim:

I'm writing to ask for your complicity.

I am an art-maker whose work often takes form as letters and correspondence such as this. In these letters, I ask others to transform the letter based on the letter's physical properties. As a couple who compost your waste to fertilize your garden, I imagine you must also share this fascination and pleasure in watching the familiar metamorphosize. Indeed, there is something both uncanny and comforting in witnessing an extension of yourself absorb into a larger system.

And as we both understand our respective work as a kind of alimentionation for the environment, I hope you will empathize a specific request. So here's what I ask of you: take this letter, whose carbon-rich properties I'm sure you know well, and include it in your compost bin. Conjoined, words and waste can nourish another.

If you choose to send correspondence or evidence/documentation it would bring me great pleasure.

Warm Regards,



Marisa

letter to:



One day in February, I met this guy named [REDACTED] through a friend in common. Now I don't know [REDACTED] that all well, but I do know that he is obsessed with the internet. The three of us were sitting around my office sipping this funny tea that smelled like swamp foot. When my visitors left, I found that [REDACTED] had accidentally left his gloves in my office...

marisa jahn

mail [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

May 1, 2006

Dear [REDACTED]

I'm writing to ask for your complicity.

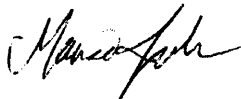
I enclose in this package the gloves you left in my studio when you were visiting back in February. I want to account for their tardiness—your hands in the middle of winter must have been quite freezing, and for this I sincerely apologize. Actually, your gloves remained in my outbox, enveloped and stamped the day after you left. For reasons I could not place until just now, the gloves were evocative, and I found myself delaying their return.

Gloves interface between body and world, mediating between inner and outer. This train of thoughts led me to think about our respective practices and their curious relationship to material form. Now to me you are known as a net theorist and artist. My own artwork takes form in letters and correspondence such as this. As I see it, net and text are generally perceived as disembodied media. As I derive considerable pleasure from the sensory nature of the written word, I imagine you in turn must think about the way that the surfaces you touch mediate between skin and the net.

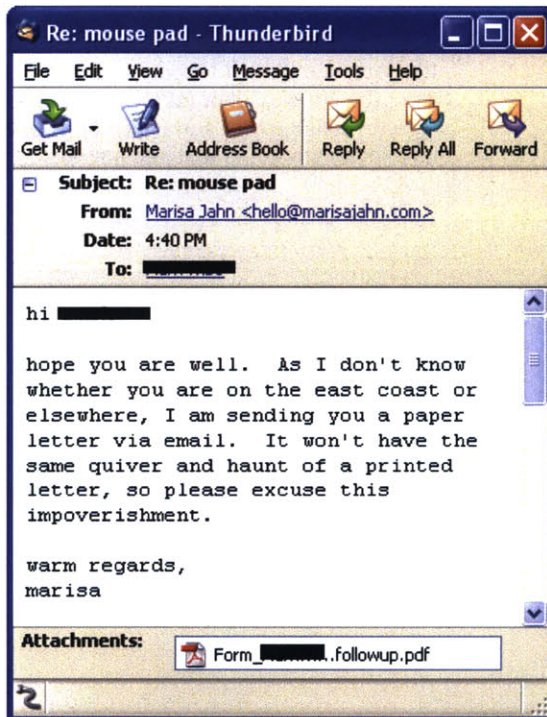
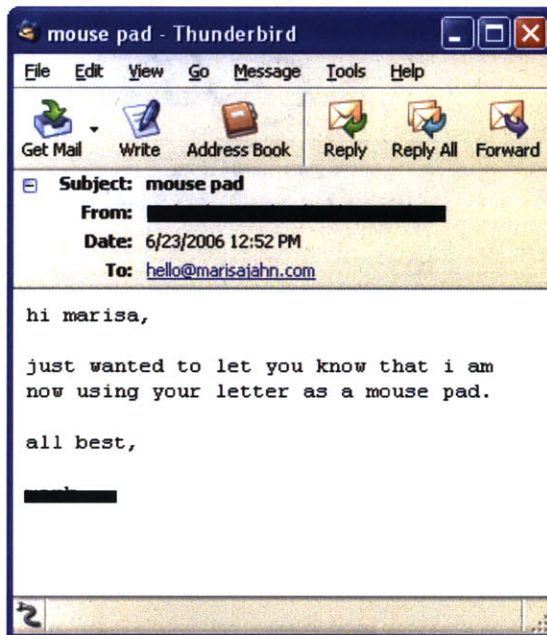
A certain connecting logic between these processes has become apparent to me, which compel me to write and solicit your participation. So here's what I ask you to do: use this letter as a mousepad. Place it face up so that with wear, your work efface my words.

If you choose to send correspondence or evidence/documentation it would bring me great pleasure.

Warm Regards,



Marisa



marisa jahn

mail [REDACTED]
tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

May 1, 2007

Dear [REDACTED]

Hi there; hope you are well.

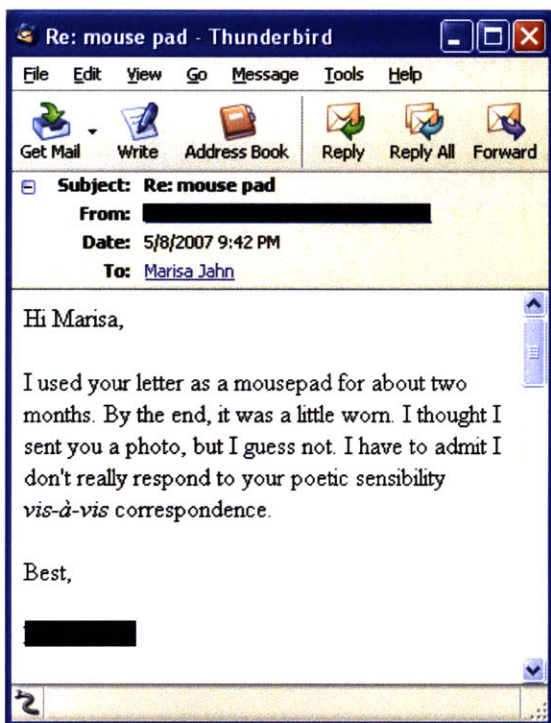
It's been a while but I thought I'd inquire how the letter fared as your mousepad? Like a phantom limb, the life of a letter (such as this) possesses me. When it goes away from me, I still feel it--a specter sidling other surfaces. As your mousepad, the trace of your skin must have worn holes in its middle, smearing text into sound.

Do you think it went something like this? I look forward to your response.

Warm Regards,



Marisa



letter to:



About six years ago, I saw this woman [redacted] give a lecture on the West Coast. I thought she was dynamite - a stellar speaker, strong woman, witty, funny, irreverent, relentlessly intellectual, and compassionate. [redacted] was my hero. When I discovered she was teaching a course at MIT, I enrolled. I was ecstatic. Her course consummated all of my academic desires. It was awesome.

As [redacted] is a trained Lacanian psychoanalyst, I was curious about what she would say about the letters I was writing. In her office hours, [redacted] pointed out to me that they were oddly erotic and S&M: "You're writing these letters, telling people what to do - do this, do that, bark like a dog, sit up, etc..." were her words. This in fact incited me to run with the project and make really prurient letters. As she pointed this out to me, I wanted to honor her by writing her a letter in turn. After all, I felt that she had really helped give birth to the project. I'm not sure if it in the end this was such a good idea...

marisa jahn

mail [redacted]
[redacted]
tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:
Professor [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]

March 10, 2006

Dear [redacted]

I'm writing to ask for your complicity.

As someone whose academic work examines the affective relations people have with objects, we share an interest in the psychic dimensions of material substrate. In your office hours the other day, we discussed this in relation to the letters I've been writing to people (such as this one). You brought to my attention a few things. First, these letters function as transitional objects: objects which I identify as part of myself and experience in a sensory dimension. Second, you brought my attention to the fact that in making demands on others ('do this, do that', 'stand up', 'bark like a dog', etc.), my propositions become erotic, and the letters function as a fetish.

In class this semester you've mentioned several times your pleasure in writing—a delight which I too share. So here's what I ask you to do: take this letter, turn it over, and use it as scratch paper; scrawl, sketch, doodle...as you wish.

If you choose to send correspondence or evidence/documentation it would bring me great pleasure.

Warm Regards,



Marisa

After I sent [REDACTED] the letter, things started getting a little strange. To keep track of what was real, I began keeping a [REDACTED] log...

3/7/06: I go to [REDACTED]'s office hours. I tell her a few ideas for my final mid-term and final paper that I've been considering. I mention that I have written a letter to Erik Demaine, the computation origami expert at MIT, where I ask him to transform the letter into origami. [REDACTED] picks up on this and tells me that there is an erotic dimension to the letter: "This is a weird thing you are doing. You are asking someone to stand up, bark like a dog, do this, do that, etc." I had not until that point really considered the s&m undertones of the project. Sure, I'd considered the dimensions of power. I really had not considered the erotic dimensions of my work. That day, I went back to my studio and decided that I would explore this further, without censoring myself and fearing consequence. I started drafting a letter to [REDACTED] in which the letter itself carried out the s&m undertones that she had in fact suggested to me. I felt I was actualizing a kind of counter-transference. This seemed to be the most dangerous or destructive of the letters I could imagine writing.

3/14/06: I write and send my letter to [REDACTED], accompanied by a disposable camera. I do not want the letter returned; what I want is to see or imagine seeing its transformation.

3/21/06: I go to class. I fear that [REDACTED] will take my letter, turn it over in class, and write on its back; I would be its only witness for the others do not know. [REDACTED] does not mention a thing, nor in the subsequent emails she sends me regarding class-related projects.

3/28/06: I turn in my first draft of my paper to [REDACTED]. The paper is about the letters I have been writing. In this paper I mention every letter I have written at that point in time except the letter I have written to [REDACTED]. When I turn in the essay, I do not include the letters, I only hint at them.

4/4/06: [REDACTED] suggests I do a book report on Victor Turner, her mentor at the [REDACTED] whose contribution to the field of [REDACTED] is the investigation of [REDACTED]. It seems that she is specifically assigning it to me...

4/16/06: I read [redacted]'s writings about [redacted]. It's fascinating. Mind-blowing. I try to get someone else to read it too. I give it to Oliver, my studio-mate, to read it. Oliver is about to go climb a mountain and remove its top with his twin brother; it seems really relevant. Later I talk about liminality in the class I share with my six other studio mates and professors, with whom I feel quite close. They are also charting my progress with this [redacted]-letter.

4/11/06: in class, I discuss [redacted]. The class discussion turns to a conversation about writing. In class I have previously discussed my own pleasure in writing, in reading, and in reading those who share this pleasure as well. *A desire through refraction.* Somehow I got to discussing that as a kid, I was a pretty good writer, and would help my mother with organizing her life, filling out forms and writing her 'official' correspondence. I am having some kind of revelation in class. It takes form as an outburst. At the same time, decontextualized, it feels a bit histrionic. I don't think it is that extreme. I also know I feel this self-censure because, well, my family doesn't talk about assimilation.

[redacted] mentions in class that she too would fill out forms, write letters, and fill out forms for her mother. She uses both examples to illustrate Lacan's theory of the phallus and the lack: the child is weaned from the mother at the under and through the father's 'no', the law. The child attempts to fill the mother's lack through adopting the name and the law of the father. For Lacan, the child attempts to fulfill this lack through the symbolic (language). [redacted] sees that my interest in language is perhaps a means to fill this lack. If you buy all that.

At this point, I am still in the process of my quirky self-revelation. Talking aloud I mention that this interest in language and order is played out professionally, that I make my money from organizing other people's lives. [redacted] says to me, in class, "Really? Do you really do all that kind of stuff?"

I said, "Yes. You wouldn't believe how good I am. Quick and efficient - you should see my databases. "

she responds, half-talking to herself, "well I just can't help thinking that I have all kinds of work that I could hire you to do. But I won't ask you until you are finished being my student."

Towards the end of class, [REDACTED] suggests that I should write my paper about this filling out forms for my mother. I'm amused. Being a Lacanian trained psychoanalyst I guess natural that she would want me to write about my mother and about language.

5/09/06: I go to [REDACTED]'s office hours to talk about my paper. I have it in mind that I am going to write a paper about the letter-writing project I am working on. I start to explain that I am going to write it as if it were an interview between her ([REDACTED]) and myself. In other words, my paper would involve two dissociated voices - the first person-singular voice (my own voice) and a third person objective perspective (which would be the voice of the psychoanalyst, or her).

[REDACTED] interrupts. she touches my arm and tells me, sternly but gently, "Marisa. This is just a paper. A 30 page paper. It's not that difficult. Get a grip." she looks me in the eye and repeats, "Get a grip." I realize [REDACTED] does not want to play my game: no means no.

5/16/06: I present my final paper in class today. she loves the topic and tells me to keep in touch.

letter to: Joseph del Pesco

The way that this letter-writing game works for me is that I get this feeling when I chance upon a target letter-recipient. I stop doing whatever I'm doing, and mull over things (hours, days, weeks) until I figure out the logic by which the letter can slip and slink into their lives.

While in initially this interminable search for the rules of the next game were exhilarating, it was now getting hard to get anything accomplished on a day to day level. I found I had restructured my entire life around my mailbox. What started as playful prurience was starting to feel out of control.

I needed to figure out a logical way to rid myself of this awful business and get on with things, so I tried a few strategies. First, I wrote to this guy I know named Joe. He always seemed like such a good sport...

marisa jahn

mail [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

Joe del Pesco
Banff Centre
Box 1020
Banff Alberta, Canada
T1L 1H5

April 11, 2006

Dear Joe-

I'm writing to ask for your complicity

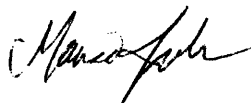
As someone whose curatorial interests include letter-writing projects, we share an interest in epistolary communication. We both must find compelling the way that such a commonplace object – the 8.5 x 11" white letter – could become uncanny – that such an ordinary object could carry such metaphysical, affective, psychical, and political tremor.

Recently, I've been writing letters to people who share a material, affective, intellectual, or incidental relationship to the letter itself and ask them to transform it. Some of these letters make innocuous demands. Others make erotic and socially inappropriate propositions to people with whom I have personal or professional relations. The problem is that the letters (such as this), possess me and dominate my life until I've mailed them to their appropriate recipient. These demonic letters, then, threaten to disrupt the sanctity of my own community. I sweat at the prospect of their repercussions.

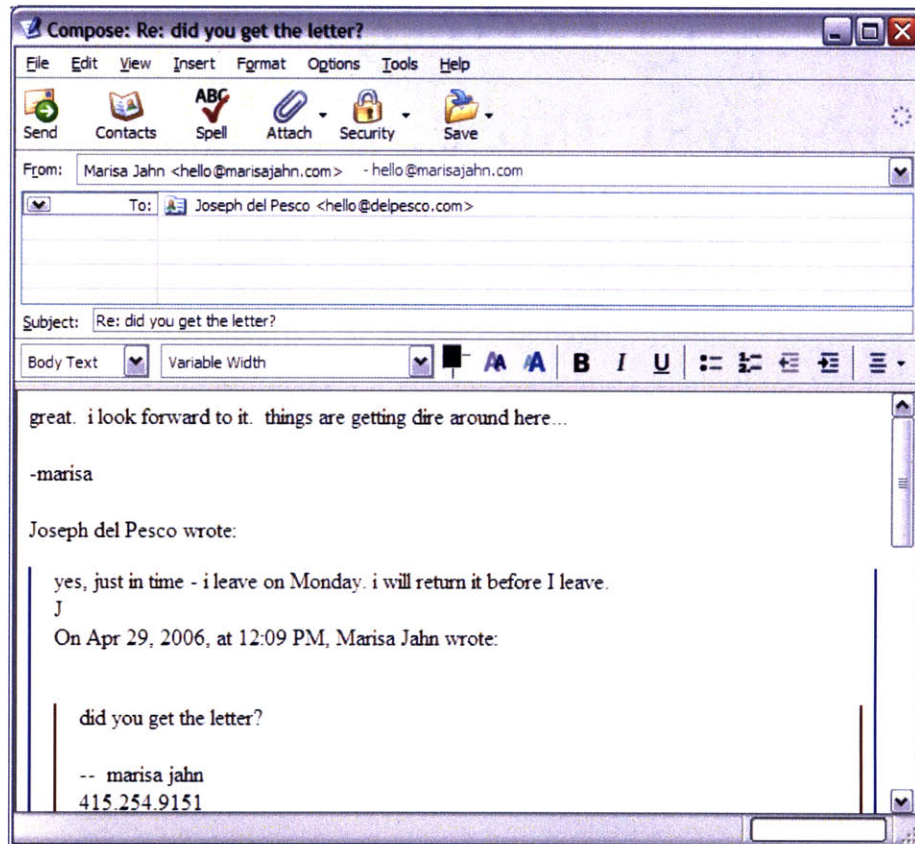
So you see I'm in a bit of a bind. As you are a curator of epistolary art, I entreat you to help. So here's what I ask you to do: declare my letter-writing a work of Art. In granting me this aegis, my deviance is excused. Please.

If you choose to send correspondence or evidence/documentation it would bring me great pleasure.

Warm Regards,



Marisa





Just as i set down the last
 stamps i see that youve
 the box has stamp and address!
 maybe ill send this separately.



So, yes. I'll respond by acknowledging this letter
 is art. I'm not sure what either of us accomplish
 with this gesture... but there is clearly precedent
 and interest in these forms as artwork.



MARISA JANN
 ONE KENDALL SQUARE
 #170
 CAMBRIDGE MA 02139



In desperate for his response, I sent him a reminder email. I figured that we all need reminders every now and then. *shortly thereafter, he sent me some photos [above] he'd taken to prove that he'd received my letter way up there in Canada, showing me all the places through which my little letter had travelled. He also sent me a note in response [left], written on the back of the letter I'd mailed him.*

letter to: Josh Greene

I thought that it might be fun to see if I could not only invite someone to play the letter-writing game but entirely take it over. The logic of the letters had become so clear to me and I wondered how it might be redefined by another. I chose this artist named Josh Greene to be the exorcist, who would evacuate me of my letter demon and possess him instead.

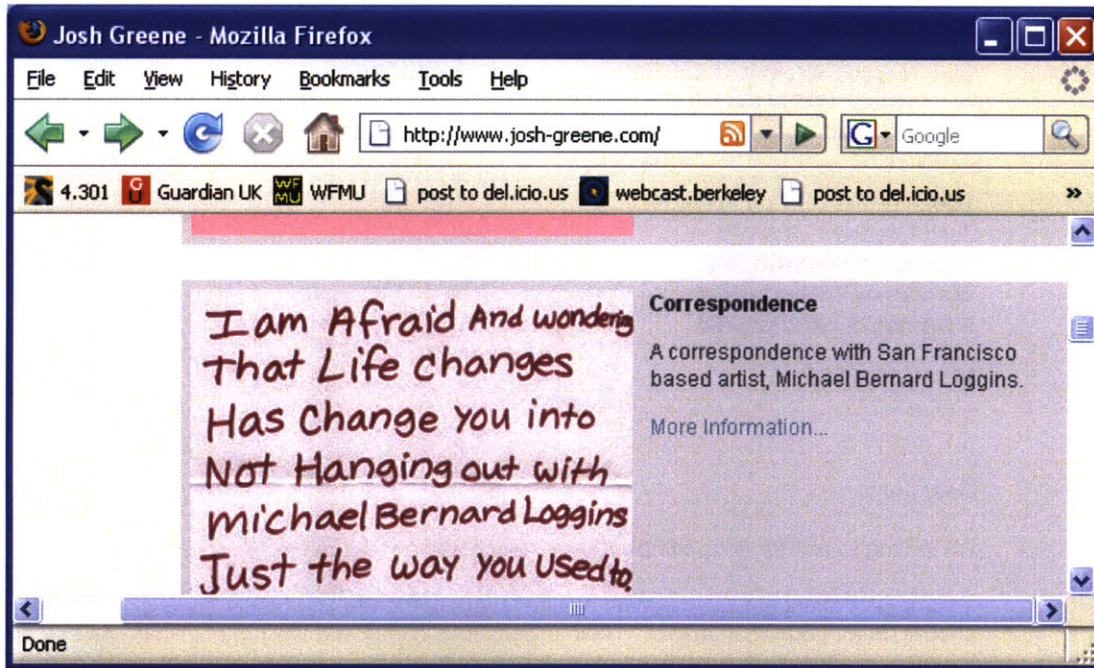
Josh was the perfect exorcist for a number of reasons. Here's three:

1) For his MFA thesis show, Josh sent a letter to his friends and family asking them what he should do for his final exhibition. The replies he received were then framed and exhibited next to the original letter he mailed.

2) He does a lot of other correspondence-based projects

3) He also did this totally deadpan but kind of pervy project where he asked an artist named Sophie Calle if he could sleep in her bed.

Based on the fact that Josh likes projects where it is unclear who is the author, it made perfect sense to elect Josh as my successor. Piece of cake.



marisa jahn

mail [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

Josh Greene
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

March 10, 2006

Dear Josh:

I'm writing to ask for your complicity.

Your MFA project at CCA involved writing letters to friends and family, asking them what you should do for your final project. Their suggestions comprised the project itself. As I've mentioned to you, I've always very much enjoyed this project—its complicated relationship to authorship and earnest valorization of naiveté. In this project and others, I personally identify with your ongoing exploration of self-dissolution, in locating meaning in others, and in the social and material structures through which this passage between self and others occurs.

Like yours, my work often involves reciprocity and exchange, taking on a distributive nature. Recently, I've been writing letters to people who share a material, affective, intellectual, or incidental relationship to the letter itself and ask them to transform it (literally, through a material manipulation). There is a clear system governing this project: each correspondent has a particular way that they are linked to the letter. Some of these letters make erotic and socially inappropriate propositions, others make very innocuous solicitations. But what's curious is when the logic for each correspondent becomes apparent to me, the letters possess me and I cannot think about absolutely anything else until I write the letters (such as this) and mail them. Their uncanniness and tremor has at this point become overwhelming, and so I write to you for help.

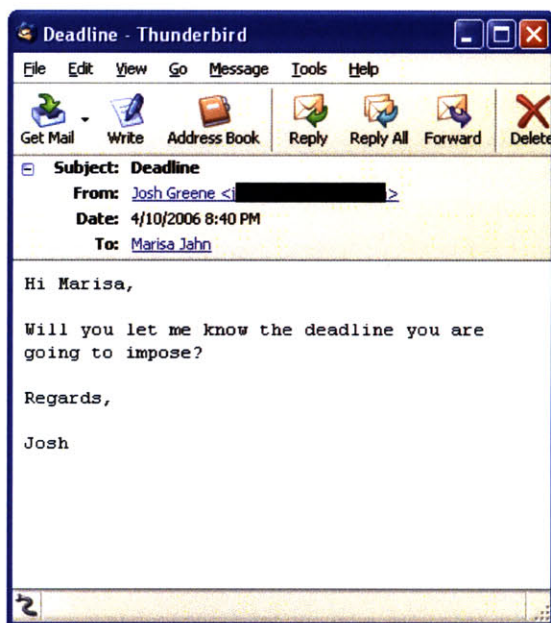
As an epistolary artist whose work is also recursive and redoubling in nature, you singularly can dispossess me of this whole affair. So here's what I ask you to do: Recast or claim this project as your own; assume it, take over as author. Please.

If you choose to send correspondence or evidence/documentation it would bring me great pleasure.

Warm Regards,



Marisa



3/20/06: Nary a reply from Josh. It's starting to look like Josh is going to need some convincing. So desperate I am to dispossess myself of this letter-writing game, I take a plane to San Francisco where he lives. . .

3/24/06: Casual-like, I call up Josh and ask him if he wants to meet me for fish-tacos at a taco stand in the Mission district. After ordering, we sit down, and I start to tell Josh why he should help me out. I explain that I am going bonkers, and could he please accept this gift that I am forcing on him. I tell him the three reasons why he is THE perfect person to do the job.

Josh resists. He says, "Listen, I'm just some simple guy." Then he explains that he is wary of gifts. He tells me how when he graduated from high school, he went with a friend to stay for a few weeks at a Native American Indian reservation in the U.S. His friend assumed he was there to help the Native Americans but Josh went thinking he was there for himself. Ok, so Josh is telling me that gifts have to be mutually beneficial. If they help anyone out, it's only by second gain.

I told Josh that what he has to do was to find a way that my project can benefit him. Confused about how he might help or what role he might play, Josh finally accepts my invitation (or demand) and promises to send something to me in one month's time.

marisa jahn

mail [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

Josh Greene
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

April 11, 2006

Dear Josh:

Per your request, I would like to impose a deadline of May 3 or sooner. You can send your response to my contact information above. Please let me know if there are any shipping costs related to your Take Over that I can assume. Thanks in advance for your assistance.

Warm Regards,



Marisa

marisa jahn

mail [REDACTED]
tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

Josh Greene
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

April 25, 2006

Dear Josh:

I just wanted to mention that I sure am looking forward to your assumption of my letter writing affairs. These letters, for me, are getting considerably out of hand and I know that under your control things can return to a more comfortable order.

Warm Regards,



Marisa

JOSH GREENE [REDACTED]

April 27, 2006

Marisa Jahn
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear Marisa,

As you know, I have been slightly confused by this correspondence project of yours. I did read your initial letter several times and still find myself stumbling over, "epistolary, recursive and redoubling." After consulting the dictionary, I have gained a bit more clarity.

I am glad that you enjoyed my MFA project at CCA and that you still think about it occasionally. Perhaps sticking with my family, I have used the disposable camera that you sent to me to aid me in a current grieving process.

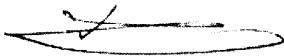
One year ago today, my maternal grandmother passed away. She was 88, and so it would stand to reason that her passing away was within the realm of possibilities. But it all happened rather suddenly. She was diagnosed with cancer and died four months later.

I was extremely close with my grandma. We shared a similar sense of humor and we also enjoyed taking naps and watching Dr. Phil together. Since she died, I have not been able to look at photographs of her. I suppose this is some form of denial.

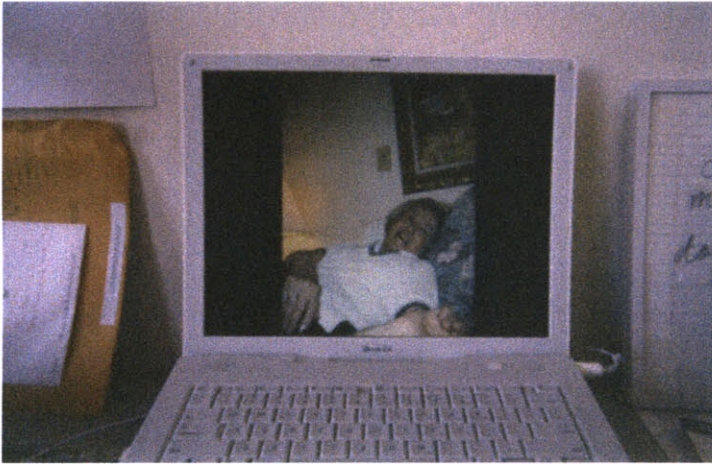
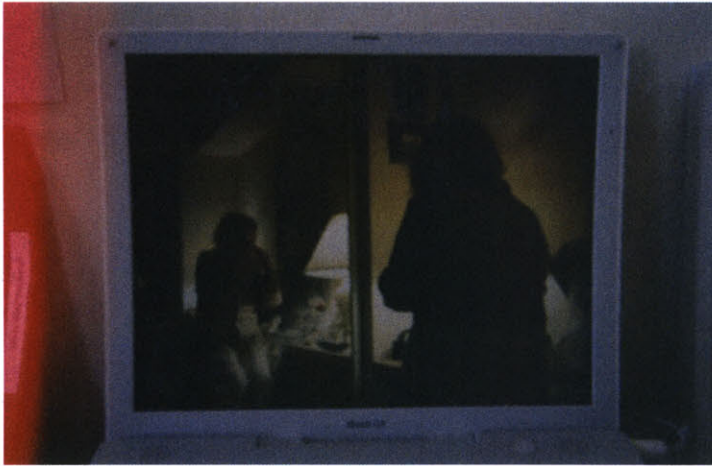
Your disposable camera, as well as the deadline you imposed, has been useful tools in moving my grieving process along. Whether or not the photographs turn out, I cannot say, but taking them allowed me to look at pictures of my grandma and for that I should thank you.

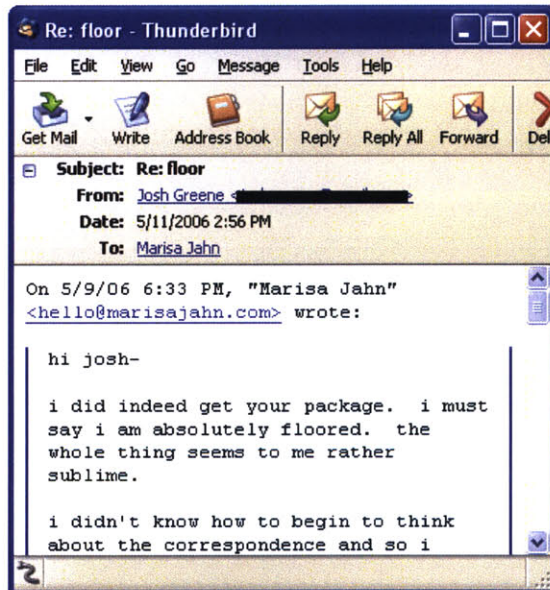
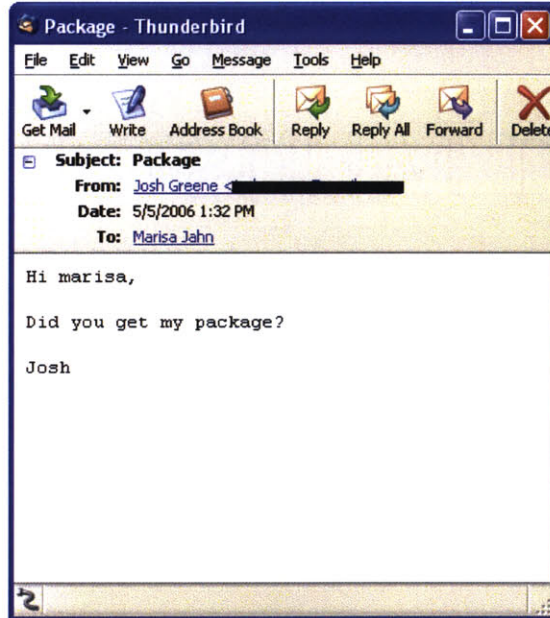
Good luck with your work.

Warm Regards,



Josh Greene





In simply using my letter and the camera I gave him as an opportunity to meet his own needs, Josh had actually shown me exactly what I wanted to see - what was on the other side of the exchange. I found that I still wanted more and kept writing these letters...

letter to:

Leo van Munster

My friend Femke asked me if I wanted to do a collaboration with this guy named Leo who was visiting from Amsterdam. I checked out his website and thought he had some interesting artwork.



Here are some images of Leo's artwork, taken from his website. On the left is a large print he placed outside the zoo in Amsterdam. On the right is a treehouse he built from cardboard placed on the roof of the stedelijk museum in Amsterdam. He seemed to like using snippets of printed matter to make new compositions.



Leo also made this funny project called 'Solo-Para-Adultos' in which you saw truncated images of boobs and ass. But when you moved the scroll bar up, down, or sideways, you never saw anything revealing.

marisa jahn

mail [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
tel 011.415.254.9151
fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

Leo van Munster
The Distillery
516 East 2nd St.
South Boston, MA 02127

January 24, 2007

Dear Leo-

I'm writing to ask for your complicity.

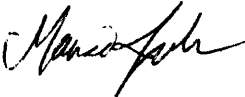
As you now know, I am an someone whose artwork often involves letter writing. In particular, what interests me is the physicality of the printed word – its capacity to hover between object and image.

What struck me about our conversation the other day was your knack for juxtaposing objects and words into unique and surprising ensembles. Somehow, your faith in the interpretation of these hybridized signs restores my own faith in art, which I confess sometimes flags.

I would very much enjoy for this very letter to become integrated into your logic, and so here's what I ask you to do: could you please take this letter and use it in one of your sculptural collages? Cut it up, twist it, mark and mask over words, alter it past the point of recognition. In this way, sidled against other elements, my words in fracture can suggest a new truth.

If you choose to send correspondence or evidence/documentation it would bring me great pleasure.

Warm Regards,

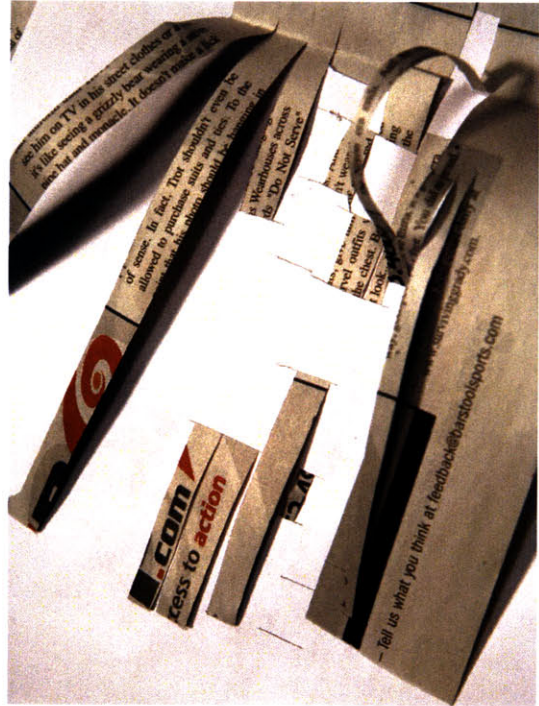
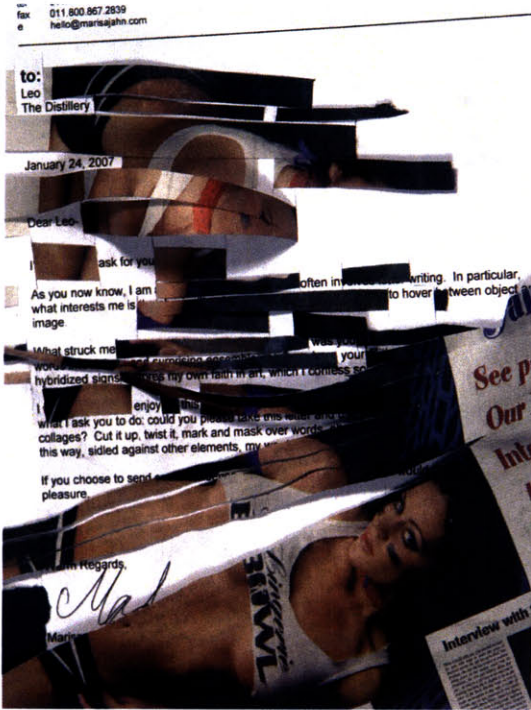


Marisa



I sent Leo my letter. After a few days, Femke brought me back footage from the camera and video camera that Leo used to document his process.

In front of the camera, Leo began with few newspapers dated the same day that he received my letter. With both hands, Leo then gently circled the newspapers and letter for the camera to see, as if teasing the lens. He then cut out select images and wove them into my letter so they would touch. It was all very innocuous but still very suggestive. When I reviewed this footage (above, right), I blushed - Leo was matching me in my game.



letter to:

■ the Mailman Guy

It's April 2007 now. A full year has gone by since I started hunting people with my letters. Anticipating that I will be moving away from Massachusetts in a few months, I began feeling fond of my mailbox which functions as an anchor: it's an intimate part of me and yet it's a very real space with a physical address. When I started recounting how it is that I came about getting this particular mailbox and came across some interesting discoveries about myself...

8/20/05: As someone who is nervous about the mail getting to its destination, I spend my day researching all the private mailbox services in Cambridge in search of one where I can get ahold of someone on the other end of the phone. I want the assurance that some person is in charge of my mail's comings and goings. Being a last-minute kind of person, I also want a mailbox service that's open late so that I can retrieve or post things at the eleventh hour. I also want a mailbox close to my office so that I can run to post things before the last pickup. I look for a facility to accommodate my habits...

8/23/05: Today I bike to all the mailbox stores throughout Cambridge. I think I have located the right one. It is a mail service in a business shopping area close by; plus they give you a special key so that you can access your mail even in the middle of the night. Before signing up for this I want to visit it again to make

sure it's the right choice.

8/25/05: I return to the postal store. It is the right one. I subscribe for 2 years.

9/3/05: Today I pick up the mail - my very first pickup. For some reason the postal lady was in a very cranky mood and grouched at me for something or another. I cry on my walk home from the mailbox.

10/22/06: For the past year, I regularly visit my mailbox a few times a week. I try to time things so that if I have to pick up a package at the counter it's anyone but that grouchy mailwoman.

But now there is a new mailman there. His name is ■. ■ is way more raucous than the other ones. The first day he was working, we instantly hit it off and started cracking jokes. When I went up to the counter, an African-American lady with great hair was there sifting through her mail. The three of us got to talking about hair and its absence (■ is bald), their wives, my boyfriend, the rain, and other incidentals of life. Suddenly my relationship to my mailbox is transformed.

11/1/06: Sometimes, if I feel I might have a package arriving, I structure my entire day around the post office. It's such a treat to receive a package that I leave it as a reward for when I get my work done. The whole day long I put it off, savoring the wait, then sprint all the way there to make it to the post office five minutes before closing.

Other times, I'll call the post office to see if I have a package - I can't bear to get there and be let down in person. "This is box 170. I'm hoping I could bother you to check my mail. Can you tell me if so-and-so package has arrived?"

12/20/06: I call the post office to see if I've received a check from the IRS. ■ picks up. He checks my box, full of sympathy. Nothing.

1/14/07: Today, me and the mailman are chitchatting about shoulder bags. We both have been looking for the right one--good shoulder strap, large enough to carry parcels, waterproof, tough-looking. I myself just got a new shoulderbag, but it's the kind that you have to lift over your head to place it on your shoulder. This gets to be a little bit of a problem when you are carrying big, heavy-ass things, because you nearly knock yourself out while you're squeezing your head up in there. I recommend to ■ that he gets a bag whose shoulder straps snap in the front.

2/14/07: I'm depressed. I'm not used to this weather, and I miss all my friends in San Francisco. I need a new haircut and feel dumpy. I go to the mailbox, hoping to run into ■ whose crass humor I know will make me feel better. Sometimes the security guard is there and the three of us banter back and forth. Back home I had a bunch of scrappy friends who made crass jokes. Even at work with my boss we'd talk about sex and farts, laughing all day long while delivering kitchen cabinets to people's houses. *Here in Cambridge, the only place I can go to get my craving for low-brow humor is the post office.*

3/2/07: Today at the post office me and ■ are talking about how we're saving up for glasses. He wears these dark colored tinted ones with round metal rims, and comments, "You don't think I'm enough of a doucher-bag that I'd wear these tinted ones inside, do you? It's just that I broke my other ones and I'm saving up for new ones." He takes off his glasses, and I stare. ■ points out that when you get used to people always wearing their glasses and then one day they take them off, their eyes look sunken. ■ says is saving up for his next pair of round spectacles and keeps his money in a plastic bag in the fridge.

I tell him that I developed these cysts on my eyeballs and can no longer wear contact lenses. I want to switch to glasses only I didn't know that glasses were so expensive. I relay the story about how for months I would walk past this one pair of yellow and black frames in a window of this little mom and pop store in Harvard square. I went in twice to try them on, and really liked how they looked and felt. The sign next to them in the window said they cost \$300.

After months of saving up, I go in the store, and bring them to the cashier, they took my credit card and started ringing things up. I asked casually how much they were going to be with the lenses. They said it was going to be \$500. What! Astonished, I tell them very gracefully that I can't afford that amount, and could they please leave the glasses on hold. I leave them a \$100 deposit and tell them I will return. Every week or so afterwards, I call them to make sure they haven't sold my glasses to anybody else.

After a month of saving up, I bring them another \$50 in cash. A few weeks later, I bring them my credit card and have them charge \$300.

A month after that, I bring in my final \$50. Both mom and pop are there, elated for me that I've finally put down the final fifty. They cheer for me, and tell me how wonderful they look on me. The lady owner shows me how to clean the glasses

under cool, running water, never-ever never ever hot water. I say compliantly,
"Yes mom..." The man-owner, looking on, tells me that the Bausch & Lomb contact
guys just brought him a huge box of sample contact lens solution, and asks would
I like some samples? He gives me the entire box, which he helps me load onto the
back of my bike, like a proud dad. I wheel away dizzy, still not fully adjusted
to the clarity of my new glasses.

■ laughs about how it's so profoundly humiliating to have to save up money just
to be able to see.

4/15/07: Today I went to the mail box and ■ and I are again shooting the shit.
We are laughing when his boss walks in; I leave so that he won't get into trouble...

4/16/07: Walking home from work today, I have an epiphany. I am going write
one of my letters to ■, asking him to put my letter into other people's mail. I
realize he is the perfect person who will play the game - I'm surprised I hadn't
thought of it before. *Here he was, the whole time, right at my very own mailbox,
the perfect player.* I go home and draft that letter...

marisa jahn

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fax 011.800.867.2839
e hello@marisajahn.com

to:

[REDACTED]
Mailman guy
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

April 7, 2007

Dear [REDACTED]

I'm writing to ask for your complicity.

Wandering to the mailbox always promises a hearty laugh with you about some thing or another. We laugh about pathetically saving up money for new eyeglasses, finding the right waterproof backpack, getting mugged in cities, your mama, my mama, and so forth.

Last week when I went to check the mail, I found out some personal things about you – your birthday, age, hobbies, so forth. And then you asked me, "Hey, what do *you* actually do?" But we couldn't really go into it because a customer came in. The next time I went in, your boss was around and we couldn't shoot the shit. So I thought I'd answer you by way of a letter.

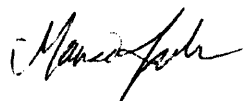
I'm an artist whose work involves letter-writing and correspondence. What I like about writing letters is that I imagine what it's like to be those letters – shoved into the back of a drawer, crumpled in the trash, strewn into the dumpster, etc. I'm exhilarated at the idea of my letters scattered around the world, each feeling something different.

As the mail man person over there at One Kendall Square, you must have a similar relation to the mail. The post office where you work is that point of transfer where stuff comes in and goes out. More importantly, you *are* that person that makes those letters crisscross to other parts of the globe. As this is an experience that we both intimately share, I think you might understand where I'm coming from when I ask for your help.

So here's what I ask you to do. Take this letter and rip it up. Then tuck these bits into other people's mail. You know, in that part of the envelope that's not fully sealed. Or you could wedge it between the paper part of the envelope and the little glassine window where you see the address. Wherever you can squeeze it in. It doesn't even have to be a very big chunk of the letter - it can even just be a tiny, tiny, *tiny* bit so that I can have the satisfaction that my letter, like an invisible parasite, possesses other people's mail. With your assistance, you can help fulfill my wish to have my words touch new parts of the world.

If you choose to send correspondence or evidence/documentation it would bring me great pleasure.

Warm Regards,



Marisa

4/7/07: The mailbox closes at 7 pm, and I think that ■ is working. I cancel an appointment that day so that I can go in right at 6:30 when he is closing. ■'s there, waiting on a customer. I wait, sifting casually through my mail while he finishes ringing them up. When they leave, I hand ■ my letter. He reads it, looking up quizzically a few times. He says, "you know, this is shit I think about all the time. I think about how I'm that person who makes the mail get to their destinations. One slip or error and I could really influence someone's life. Like someone could not get a big check or a Father's Day card because of me."

He continues. "Marisa Jahn, this is some kooky shit. I don't know whether this is art or a prank but maybe it doesn't matter."

■ starts ripping up the letter. He opens some package sitting on the counter and stuffs a corner of my letter into the box, then tapes it up. He continues, choosing the letters that are going to the farthest corners of the earth because he wants to make this "the biggest installation in the entire world." We work as a team: he rips the corner of outgoing boxes and letters, sticks my letter up in there while I write down their locations. I take occasional photos. After a while, ■ says that I should just leave the camera with him and he'll continue working on the project. I leave while another customer comes in.

4/11/07: I go to check the mail and check up on ■. I don't know if he's working today. Rather than risk being served by the postalwoman grouch, I open up my box, pull out my mail. When the mailbox is empty, you can see all the way through and spy on the postalworker's back office. I can't see or hear whether ■ is there so I make up a reason to go to the desk. "When is the last pickup for today?" I ask, scanning the back room. No ■.

4/14/07: I make up a reason to go to the mailbox. When I walk in, ■ is there with his boss and a bunch of customers. He gives me a sigh, warning me to make sure I don't bring up anything while his boss or the customers are there.

4/16/07: I call up the post office, hoping ■ will pick up. Today I'm calling to see if my paycheck arrived. Some other dude picks up the phone.

4/17/07: I'm walking down the street when I get a call on my cell. It's an unfamiliar number. I pick it up.

"Is this Marisa Jahn?"

"uh, yes. Can I help you? "

"This is [redacted] the Mailman guy. I wanted to let you know that I think your IRS check arrived... "

"No, come on [redacted] It can't be. It's probably some junk mail. I've been waiting on this thing for 9 months. I'm afraid it's not the real deal. Maybe you should open it up. "

From the other end of the line I can hear [redacted] as he rests the phone between his neck and shoulder and tears open the corner of the envelope. "Yes, it says 'eight hundred dollars' and 'Pay to the Order of Marisa Jahn' and it's from the US Treasury. How's that Miss Jahn? " I tell him that I'll go in a little later to retrieve the check.

I cancel my meetings that afternoon and go in a 5:45. He has a line of customers. He hands me my mail, no words exchanged. I can tell he has taken the roll of photos in the camera and wants to give it to me but can't. I grab my IRS check and take a walk around the block. But since he called me from his cell phone, I realize that instead of returning, I will leave him a voice mail. I call and ask him whether he wants to get a beer after work. I then text it to him as well so that he can more surreptitiously check it at work. "Do u want to meet me after you get off work? -Box 170. "

A few seconds later, he replies, "Yes, box. meet me at 7:20 at [redacted]"

I text him again: "Do you think you can bring the camera? "

He texts back, "yup. "

I go to the bank, read the paper, and take a walk to kill time. I get there at 7:20.

He's there, and we get pints of beer. We each down two before we really talk since he's just unwinding from work and I'm just nervous. I have been waiting on the edge waiting for the photographs from the camera I gave him.

[redacted] first hands me the camera. Then we start with mailbox jokes to clear the ice a bit. Me: "Hey thanks for bringing this. You know, you could have left your small package somewhere up in my big, big box; I would have found it. " And [redacted]

"Yeah, well I tried to stuff my package in your box but it just wouldn't fit. "
This goes on for a while.

Finally, we talk about the letter. He describes how difficult it actually is to accomplish the project: he has to wait till his boss isn't there, but by the time the boss leaves him alone, all the mail has already been picked up and en route to their destinations. But he describes how he persevered: at all times, he kept the letter in the pocket of his work pants so that he could have it ready at hand should he get the opportunity to place it in someone's mail.

■ also hands me a list [see below] of the all places where he's grafted the letter: sheperdsville, KY; Gyeonggi-Do, Korea; Munchen, Germany; Anchorage, Alaska; Beijing, China; Louisville, Kentucky; etc. He is delighted with the way he's just expanded my project to a global level.

One of the locations is Cambridge - ■ points out that he put a piece of my letter in my own mail, and I didn't even notice it!

Holy crap, ■ has trapped me in my own game!!! He re-wrote the rules from the inside!!!

After a few more pints, we part ways.

SHEPHERDSVILLE, KY

ASHLAND, OR

GLOUCESTER, VA

LONDON, UK

OLD LYME, CT

LOUISVILLE, KY

WESTCHESTER, OH

GYEONGGI-DO, KOREA

SANTA FE SPRINGS, CA

CAMBRIDGE, MA (GUESS WHO?)

BEIJING, CHINA

BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

CHEYENNE, WY

MÜNCHEN, GERMANY (SIGNED NAME)

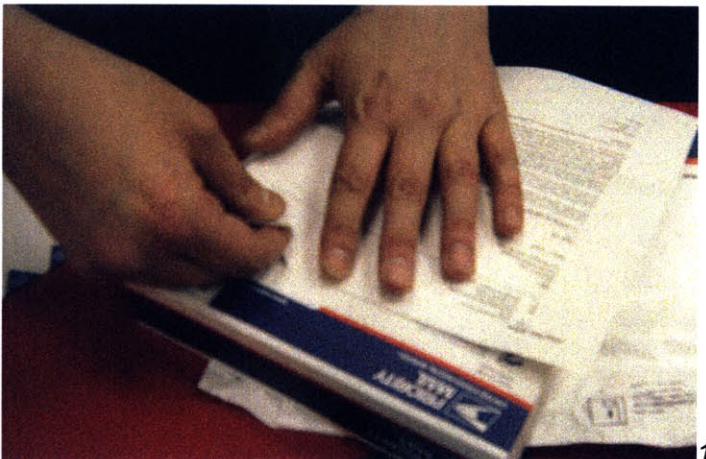
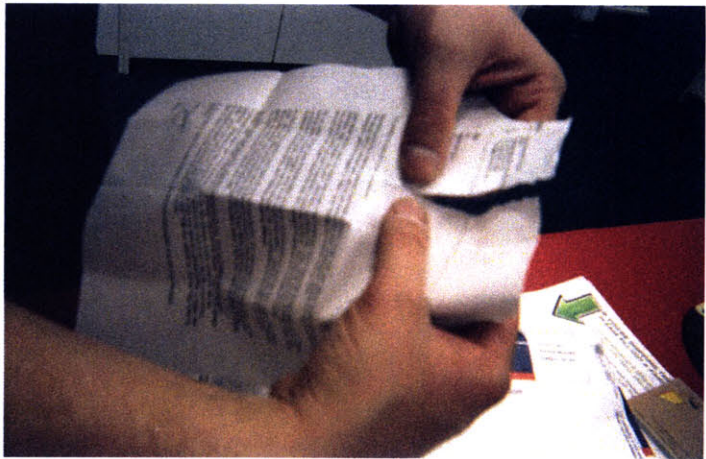
CHARLESTON, WEST VA

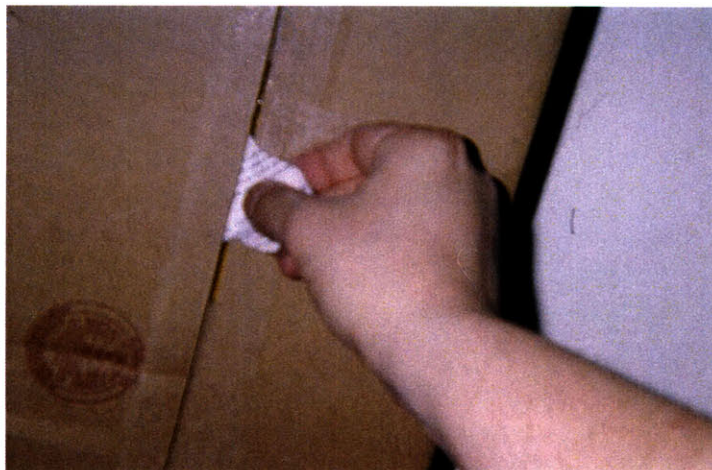
PALM BEACH, FL

CLEVELAND, OH

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

GUANGZHOU, CHINA





The Hermeneutics of Play in Language/Art/Life

Rule #1. The Hunt for the Game, or Establishing Players and Terrain

If you have ever hunted or fished, you will know that success is predicated on listening well. With bass fishing, for instance, you will want to notice the angle of light as it hits the variegated regions of the water. How might the temperature of the water and air above effect the fracturing of light? What is the time of day, and how will the acceleration of the sun as it exceeds its noon apex effect the clarity of vision from the fish's perspective? What is the speed of the current and how will this effect the weight of your fishing line? What are the colors of the rocks and stones beneath the surface of the water? What weeds and algae grow on these surfaces, and what colors present a stark contrast? In what season are you fishing, and in what developmental stage are the grubs and insects

In an essay about the Surrealists' appropriation of Oceanic art in the early to mid 20th century, art historian Philippe Peltier describes the hunter's self-preparation for the moment of discovery. In the search for the object, the hunter readies him/herself for the sign that points.

"Discovery is an activity that requires keeping one's mind unfettered while also maintaining a state of alertness. Clarity is achieved at the moment the found object signals to you. As Breton wrote in one of his most beautiful texts, (L'Amour Fou), discovering a found object is like a bolt out of the blue, a magical moment that transports you to the core of your existence and crystallizes your desires in a lightening flash. Attention now shifts to the object . . . This the gateway to collecting."^m

For Peltier, then, part and parcel with the object's discovery is the preceding moment of self-reflection. Discovery, then, may have little to do with the object itself but its anticipatory desire. In "The Storyteller", Walter Benjamin also describes the affective dimension structuring an acquisition. While this 'acquisition' for Peltier is in the hunt for the object, for Benjamin's storyteller, the sought-after thing is the story. In either case, the end-goal is neither object nor reportage but their raconteur's experience. "[The story] does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. The travels of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel."ⁿ For Peltier and Benjamin, discovery and storytelling enriches one's sense of belonging in the world. Through narration, the individual affirms the constructive relation between

the individual affirms the constructive relation between subject and surrounds.

For Kierkegaard, the process of loving one's surroundings is an ethical imperative that precedes the determination of meaning. He writes,

"Even the least, the most insignificant, the most unimpressive, the poor little flower disregarded by even its immediate surroundings, the flower you can hardly find without looking carefully—it is as if this, too, had said to love: Let me become something in myself, something distinctive. And then love has helped it to become its own distinctiveness, but far more beautiful than the poor little flower had ever dared to hope for. What love!"^o

In other words, for Kierkegaard, self-acceptance and self-love is predicated on the love for another. ". . . true love, the self-sacrificing love, which loves every human being according to his distinctiveness, is willing to make every sacrifice—it does not seek its own. Love does not seek its own. . ."^p It is this selfless attendance towards the other that founds Kierkegaard's philosophy.

Undergirding the explorer's hunt for the artifact, the storyteller's search for a story, and Kierkegaardian is the quest for the exotic Other. Driving this search for that which baffles, edifies, and inspires is the desire to swoon in the face of difference and self-reflexively assess one's assumptions about selfhood. Oppositional to a model of ontological self-containment, this model of openness towards alterity (otherness) posits selfhood as a constructive process by which the self extends outwards, adjusts, and renews in relation to contingency and incidence. Martin Buber identifies the desire for heterology as a "primal longing for relation."^q He writes:

In the drive for contact (originally, a drive for tactile contact, then also for optical contact with another being) the innate You comes to the fore quite soon, and it becomes ever clearer that the drive aims at reciprocity, at "tenderness." But it also determines the inventive drive (Urbebertrieb) . . . and thus the product is "personified" and a "conversation" begins.^r

Buber further suggests that the "craving for the You" is a necessary component to a child's development. To summarize, for Buber, self-actualization is predicated on the relational involvement.

surrounding your local fishing spot? From what angles can you occlude yourself from the fish beneath? This environmental or atmospheric listening determines whether you choose the lavender rubber worm with glitter or no glitter, the weight of the line, the size of your plumb bob, the force of your cast into the water.

similar logic governs the hunt for the proper recipient to the prurient letter. Observe the details of the systems around you - the relative speed of traffic, the hiding places within the institutions you visit, the way the store displays their chocolates, those offices where coffee breaks take place, the ease of communication amongst a crowd, the color of the soil in the planter outside the mini-mart, etc.

Now squint. Blur things a bit, gain some perspective. Locate that person or thing whose agency stands out. Someone whose existing patterns and habits you can harness. Someone who might share your love for language, letters, paper, and the mail. A confettiologist already has an intimate and everyday relationship with paper, as does a pinata maker. A computation origami expert

already transforms the flat plane of paper into sculpture. Alternately, you may locate a certain relationship with your target that may not be initially apparent to them. In such a case, you will have to carefully explain this connection. The most important criteria is to choose someone that you think wants to play along, someone who will want to play your game, someone who has been waiting to receive your letter.

Choose your target well, because you are going to fall in love with all the details of their life. You will graft yourself to the letter recipient's milieu and only through this self-displacement it will become in part yours. Through your letter you will stitch and suture.

You may ask why begin this endeavor at all. You are writing this letter because you have to. You need the response of the other to know you are alive. You cannot yourself verify whether you are alive; there is no way for you to alone prove whether you exist as an individual subject within a continuum. You need the Other. You can know that they are singular. You can recognize them as agents in all of their historical specificity. If you can

Only through reciprocal exchange is the stranger within^s discovered. Further, this mediation between Self and Other is where one recognizes boundaries, one's own particularities, one's historicity. In those moments when one anticipates approaching the heterological Other, one deliberates the proper address, switching modes of communication, protocol, lexa—or what Doris Sommer refers to as a game of “code-switching” and “side-stepping.”^t Through the process of weighing modes of self-presentation or translating between socio-linguistic registers, the subject at that moment occupies a philosophical relation to language. Writes Sommer: “Bilinguals develop a ‘metacosciousness’ to coordinate (Bakhtin might say orchestrate) alternative ego-positions and to withstand shocks with more mechanisms than monolinguals deploy.”^u This metacosciousness is that antechamber where the binaries such as subject/object, familiar/distinct, I/Thou, etc. commingle, where the language is de-universalized. Underscoring the ideological importance of agonistic difference^v in democratic polity-formation, Sommer writes, “[Externality] is also a condition of democracy. In bilingual aesthetics, externality is always visible and audible and it goads movement rather than marks impassés. Multitongued engagements are opportunities for a range of performances and asymmetrical receptions.”^w For Sommer, an aesthetics of difference drives (“goads”) movement forward and offers surprise. As Sommer writes, “. . . jouissance happens when one tongue invades another.”^x When “rubbing words the wrong way feels right”^y, when codes collide, the effect produced embraces risk-taking, worldly engagement.

Taking Sommer's focus on linguistic bilingualism as a point of departure for thinking about a more generalized notion of hybridity, I am interested in those moments in code-switching between socio-linguistic registers and protocols. What happens in that brilliant hand-to-hand encounter between the etiquette adopted for one's inlaws, the propriety of a business letter, the contemplative or interrogative tone of the academic inquiry, the crudity of the first person narrative?

In this game, its players are not just code-switchers but code-hackers and the terrain is those things “-meta.”

elicit their response, then
you in turn can know you too
exist. Like so: Not the I
think I am but instead, I
see that you exist; and if I
can reach out to you and elicit
a response, I know you exist.
By extension I know that I
too can exist.

Rule #2.

The Approach, or Mediating Alterity

You need to know how you are going to enter into the life of your target--the Other. First, imagine the normative everyday processes of that person's life. What objects do they distractedly toy while talking on the phone? Where do they lunch, what surfaces and signposts do they pass as they leisurely take their snack break? What do they do in the office or workshop after work when the boss has left and they are last ones there left with the charge to turn out the light. They turn around and retreat to the office to do something - what do they do?

Now, imagine you are the letter. Determine the way in which you intercept that person's life. What papers do they handle, shred, wrap, crumple? Or, how do you, as the piece of paper, relate to other things happening

Replete with the trace of its procession—stamps, wrinkles, stains, tears—the postal letter suggests its sojourn—the post office, the mailman's bag, the mailbox, the desk of its addressee, etc. Delivered directly into the home of another, the letter becomes a gift, signal, Trojan-horse, imposter, or augur, gaining access to places otherwise unavailable. Handled by both writer and reader in moments of solitude, letters invite intimate moments of the touching and viewing. A stand-in for the body of the corporally absent Other, the sensuality of epistolary exchange operates through “the very reversibility of the flesh, where touching also means being touched.”^z

How is it that the letter so uncannily evokes an imagination of its geographic travel? How does the notion of an embodied visuality assist in understanding the symbolic force of the written letter? How does understanding the relationship between visual and haptic sensing help explain how we phenomenologically apprehend the world?

In *Atlas of Emotion*, film critic Giuliana Bruno problematizes the assumption that Western post-Enlightenment philosophy singularly privileges vision over other senses. By locating counter-examples, Bruno presents an epistemological thread that binds vision and touch as the sensations involved in geographical travel and self-location. In Etienne Bonnot de Condillac's *Treatise on the Sensations* (1754), Bruno points to the passage where the author describes the limitations of vision: “The eye in itself is incapable of seeing space outside itself.”^{aa} But despite the inadequacy of vision, the sensation of touch “extends” the sensation of sight--“We are led to attribute to sight

ideas what we owe to touch alone”—leading Condillac to conclude that the human perception in fact synchronously deploys and commingles vision and touch to achieve a sensory apprehension of the world. Condillac summarizes, “When considering the properties of touch I came to the conclusion that it was capable of discovering space and also of instructing the other sense to relate their sensations to bodies extended in space. . . With the aid of touch, [the eyes] come to judge objects which are in space.”^{ab}

Building from Condillac and other philosopher’s phenomenological writing, Bruno presents her own thesis about the commutability of the senses. She writes,

Touch is a sense actively involved with the locomotive capacity of the body and with its kinesthetic perception. Because the haptic realm is not simply inclusive but “comprehensive” of this motile touch and its kinesthetics the haptic, in a way, becomes an actual geographic sense. In our haptic experience of reaching, an extended, imagined, and even global touch is achieved. Hence contact, exploration, and communication are to be considered haptic activities. . . A participatory aspect is at work in this kine(sthe)tics, for the haptic involves a sense of reciprocity. The haptic, as its etymological root suggests, allows us to come into contact with people and the surface of things. Thus, while the basis of touch is a reaching out—for an object, a place, or a person (including oneself)—it also implies the reverse: that is, being touched in return. . . Furthermore, we should consider that, as a receptive function of skin, touch is not solely a prerogative of the hand. It covers the entire body, including the eye itself, and the feet, which establish our contact with the ground. Conceived as such a pervasive enterprise, the haptic sense actually can be understood as a geographic sense in a global way: it “measures”, “interfaces”, and “borders” our relation to the world, and does so habitually.^{ac}

Bruno assertion that “the haptic sense actually can be understood as geographic sense in a global way” explains how we phenomenologically understand the written letter as an import from the space of the Other: in touching the letter, by extension we understand the way that it interfaces with the world. When receiving a letter we apprehend the sum-total of deferred “interfaces” involved in arriving at its destination. Through this imagined passage, the letter—received from locations faraway or local—metonymically imply their vector of geographic navigation.

But the MetaFormance letters traverse both geographic

in their life? When you determine this logic, consider how it feels at the moment of this encounter. Do they handle and hold you with grace? Do they pin you to the cork board of their office cubicle? Do they pull you to their nose, inquiring whether they might detect the trace of a scent? Do they rip you into bits and open their hand so you are strewn as far as the wind carries you...one snippet landing in a puddle, sinking to its depth; another part of you flying past the quizzical stares of squirrels chattering in the park; more bits bumbling awkwardly getting stuck and unstuck, stuck and unstuck by the snares of the Bermuda crabgrass banking the sea? Dissimulated across a terrain, you are like a school of fish, alive as both singular unit and mass.

¹ From conversation with Francisco Ricardo, April 2007

and psychic boundaries. Sent on an indulgent course, they venture towards carnality. Soliciting its recipient to place the letter inside their body, to touch their blood, to violently shred it to bits, to instigate its decomposition, the letters symbolically enact rites of sex and death. Taking up Freud and Mary Douglas' theories on totemism, taboo and purity, we return to Kristeva's assertion that abjection is 'socialized' as the inverse of law and order:

The object is related to perversions. The sense of abjection that I experience is anchored in the superego. The object is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law, but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts, uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them. It kills in the name of life—a progressive despot; it lives at the behest of death. . . That is the socialized appearance of the object.^{ad}

Thus, abjection and order involve a mutual disavowal. Summarizing Kristeva's position, Elizabeth Gross writes that for the child, taking up of the symbolic order entails a the codification of body and speech.

The ability to take up a symbolic position as a social and speaking subject entails the disavowal of its modes of corporeality, especially those representing what is considered unacceptable, unclean, or anti-social. The subject must disavow part of itself in order to gain a stable self, and this form of refusal marks whatever identity it acquires as provisional, and open to breakdown and instability.^{ae}

This necessarily "disavowed part of [the] self" refers to those parts of the corporal and social body that are deemed impure and unstable.

What happens when this "disavowed part of [the] self" is personified? What agency does this figure, devil, or humunculus assume? Slavoj Žižek describes the psychic liberation in deploying an object-thing to substitute for the self: "By surrendering my innermost content, including my dreams and anxieties, to the Other, a space opens up in which I am free to breathe: when the Other laughs for me, I am free to take a rest; when the Other sacrifices instead of me, I am free to go on living with the awareness that I did atone for my guilt; and so on."^{af} For Žižek, psychic displacement—whether as god or fetish—in fact regulates normalcy. Even for the individual who "knows better", their self-consciousness does not obviate the experience of cathartic release.

Fulfilling escapist and scopophilic fantasies, the MetaFormance letters exceed and invade borders, passing through a sea of hands that relay and relay and relay the letter towards its destination until it is finally deposited directly into the private domestic interior of another.

Rule #3.

The Appeal, or Soliciting Communion

Consider your language, your tone, the mechanisms of your appeal to the Other. You are the letter, and you want them to love you so that they share with them your own love for language. You want them to feel the delicate force of a single word all its metaphysical tremor. Find the way your letter will close the distance between you and the Other. You want them to do anything for the sake of language as you too have done.

At the same time, make sure that when the Other responds you allow them to speak. Do not demand that they respond, but instead give them the prerogative to speak or not, to play along with your game or not. Their non-complicity is their right.

You want to what they have to say. Do they comply with your request? Do they reject your

Within epistolary communication, the intended reader may be its recipient (the dialogist), the reader of the letter-never-sent (the voyeur), the scriptor him/herself (the monologist or narcissist). So too, there may be multiple audiences. Regardless of putative addressee, each entreats its reader to devote their rapt attention. For Roland Barthes, the desire in written language is refractory: "What we desire is only the desire the scriptor has in writing, or again: we desire the desire the author had for the reader when he was writing, we desire the love-me which is in all writing."^{ag}

In epistolary communication, when the letter stands in for the corporally absent scriptor or reader, the schema of epistolary correspondence takes on a liturgical process that conflates the letter with lover: a thoughtful literary composition signifies the writer's devotion to its recipient, the sending of the letter is analogized as a bodily emission, the reception of the letter signifies the addressee's reception of desire. In *Paper Machine*, Derrida writes:

Paper echoes and resounds, subjectile of an inscription from which phonetic aspects are never absent, whatever the system of writing. Beneath the appearance of a surface, it holds in reserve a volume, folds, a labyrinth whose walls return the echoes of the voice or song that it carries itself; for paper also has the range or range of a voice bearer. . . Paper is utilized in an experience involving the body, beginning with hands, eyes, voice, ears; so it mobilizes both time and space.^{ah}

He laments:

I do slightly miss the long time, the intervals, and the rhythm that then used to mark the history of written text, all its comings and goings before publication. It was also the chemistry of a conscious or unconscious process of maturation, the chance of mutations in us, in our desire, in the bodily closeness with our text in the hands of the other.

ai

In other words, paper is an exteriorated 'subjectile' that reveals and conceals the body. As an external boundary of the body it becomes a prosthetic locus of sensual pleasure. The erotic pleasure of the text emerges from within this metaphysical tension between body and paper, the dotting intimacy one bestows on paper, the time and space created through reading and writing.

In *Postcards: From Socrates to Plato and Beyond* (1987), a series of letters exchanged between Derrida and a putative lover, the author writes, ". . . you see that I am writing it to you, you are touching it, you are touching the card, my signature, the body of my name--and it is indeed you who, now, right here. . . --do you love me?"^{aj} Upon receiving his lover's letter, Derrida writes: "I am spending my time rereading you."^{ak} The plot unfolds through the sending and receiving of correspondence and complicates as their epistolary exchange supersedes their relationship.

Presaging the problem of conflating epistolary exchange with the relationship itself. Derrida writes, "You yourself explained to me that the jealousy begins with the first letter."^{al} And later, "[I can hardly bear] the day when you no longer will let me put the dot on my Is, the sky will fall on my head and the fall will be endless. . ."^{am} For Derrida's protagonist, the love of language has replaced the lover for another. As Freud warns, "The case [of fetishism] becomes pathological only when the striving for the fetish fixes itself beyond such determinations and takes the place of the normal sexual aim; or again, when the fetish disengages itself from the person concerned and itself becomes a sexual object."^{an} In failing to distinguish the love for another with the love of language, language becomes the fetish that overshadows the lover's primacy.

The monological nature of Derrida's letter is made clear when Derrida demands that the recipient of his letters return to him all the letters he sent. Enraged, she responds, "Whose letters are these, anyways?" Derrida has assumed they are his; in doing so he has annulled her voice. Lacan considers the discovery that

demand? Do they exceed your request? Do they take over your project as their own and cast you aside?

Do not forget that you need their response and not your own. You can handle this uncertainty, this unknowable, and it is in fact what you crave. You want to open your wide your sense to see and hear the Other.

the addressee of epistolary exchange is the scriptor himself. "Might a letter to which the sender retains certain rights then not belong altogether to the person to whom it is addressed? Or might it be that the latter was never the true addressee?"^{ao} Lacan explicates the ethical consequences of narcissism's demand. "Demand already constitutes the Other as having the 'privilege' of satisfying needs, that is, the power to deprive them of what alone can satisfy. The Other's privilege here thus outlines the radical form of the gift of what the Other does not have—namely, what is known as its love."^{ap} For Lacan, when the demand formulates the Other as the one who can fulfill, this designation objectifies the Other, thus denying him/her of a selfless love. "[The demand for a response] annuls the particularity of everything that can be granted, by transmuting it into a proof of love, and the every satisfactions demand obtains for need are debased to the point of being no more than the crushing brought on by the demand for love."^{aq} In other words, when the proof of love pre-structures a response, it obviates an authentic response. Summarizing Lacan's notion of narcissistic love, Mark C. Taylor writes about the individual who is unable to recognize their image-reflection (the *imago*) as split from the self; he/she then is unable to see the Other and collapses the Other into his/her own ego:

The pleasure that the specular ego longs for arises through a process of 'identification'. . . Since it is ruled by the principle of identity, the pleasure-seeking ego is inevitably 'auto-erotic'. In different terms, the effort of the speculative I/eye to see itself in every 'other' is essentially narcissistic. The love of the 'I' is always an *amour-propre*. Such narcissistic love is inseparably bound up with aggression. Unwilling to tolerate difference, the 'loving' 'I' seeks satisfaction by dominating others and assimilating difference. This struggle for mastery is the psychological form of the 'will to power' that Heidegger believes to be characteristic of the modern philosophy of the subject.^{ar}

The 'specular ego' then both seeks to identify with and destroy its object of identification. The narcissistic drive characterizing the epistolary exchange in *Postcards* resounds throughout Derrida's other philosophical writings which assume love is always a self-love, or *amour-propre* (a return to oneself). But to understand *Postcards* as a mediation on love overlooks the epistolary exchange as a mediation with death and the Unconscious.

For Derrida, the emission/reception of postcards is likened

to the game (Fort/Da) played by Freud's infantile grandson who throws and recoils a spool of thread in response to his mother's egress and return. Freud and Derrida speculate that this repetition of this game permits the child to witness presence/absence, death/return. This pleasurable and painful impulse originates from what Derrida refers to as the self-appropriating drive ('proper' or 'se proprier'), a drive stronger than both life and death that involves a self-distancing and self-return--a telos. Derrida articulates the mechanics of the 'proper' drive:

The step must occur within [the organism], from it to it, between it and itself. Therefore one must send away the non-proper, reappropriate oneself, make oneself come back [revenir] (da!) until death. Send oneself [s'envoyer] the message of one's own death. Such would be the function of these component drives: to help (auxiliary function) to die one's own death, to help (function of assistance: to assist in death) in death's being a return to the most proper, to the closest to oneself, as if to one's origin, according to a geneological circle: to send oneself [s'envoyer].^{as}

In other words, the exteriorizing drive within "geneological circle" takes place through the heterological Other. "Heterology is involved, and this is why there is force, and this is why there is legacy and scene of writing, distancing of oneself and delegation, sending, envoi."^{at}

Despite his intentions of scripting a role for the Other, one is always left wondering whether there is indeed a place for radical and unpredictable alterity within Derrida's universalizing philosophy. What happens if the Other doesn't want to take part in Derrida's solipsistic mediations with death? Derrida writes of the resistance within the echo¹ but what happens when the echo is an embodied voice with an agenda of its own? What happens when the voice of the Other is a chorus?

¹ See Derrida's writing on Echo and Narcissus in *Positions*.

Rule #4. The Delivery, or, the Medium and its Specter

Write your letter. Print it on paper. Even better, send it via overnight express. You want to communicate the urgency of your request. But also, you want to surprise your recipient by the printed word exposed and vulnerable, like the nature of your request.

You want to expose the materiality of text, to make visible the substrate that enables printed letters to appear as disembodied signifiers. Analogous to 19th century Impressionist painters who, through broad and coarse brush strokes, dismantle pictorial illusions, the gesture intends to reinscribe a corporeal presence into the otherwise seamless transmission of formulaic bureaucracy. It's a hunt for the fingers that grasp the pen or touch the computer keyboard, the hands

A specter of speech and an almost-drawing, the printed word lies between. The printed word mystifies by its capacity to cajole and spurn, to mirror (e.g., mimesis) or officiate (e.g., performative utterance). In a recent riposte to the charge that his speeches were more fluff than substance, Massachusetts governor Deval Patrick alluded to the language's historical role in enacting social change. "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal' -- just words," . . . "We have nothing to fear but fear itself' -- just words. . . . 'I have a dream' -- just words. They're all just words."^{au} Patrick suggests that mere words bear significance on the course of history and justice.

Invoking the metaphysics of the printed word, Derrida writes, ". . .and I write to you that I love the delicate levers which pass between the legs of a word, between a word and itself to the point of making entire civilizations seesaw."^{av} The majesty of language, again, is its ability to command from the position of its near-absence, its near-nothingness. It is language's evanescent quality that renders its material substrate haunt all the more.

In an age of electronic communication, the materiality of paper gains in its evocative force by virtue of its near-obsolescence. At this particular moment in time, email communication surrounds the exchange of paper documents, supporting paper's legacy as signifier of the real. For instance, even today, contractual exchanges between entities may involve the preliminary exchange of emails that ensure and confirm the reception of the paper document. One might even attach an electronic document

whose parameters (8.5 x 11 inches with one margin border) refer to original paper documents. And still, one prints out important documents as a guarantee against the short life-span of electronic data storage. The spectrality of the paper document is all the more prescient to those traveling from industrialized and lesser-developed places where paper documents still reign.

In essence, the preeminence of a dematerialized writing technology (e.g., email exchange) produces the paper letter's fetishistic and spectral puissance. Slavoj Žižek writes, ". . .in our postmodern age, what we witness as the gradual dissipation of the very materiality of the fetish."^{aw} Žižek uses the example of electronic money, a dematerialized medium whose spectral presence we sense only through its effect. ". . .the paradox is that with this spectralization of the fetish, with the progressive disintegration of its positive materiality, its presence becomes even more oppressive and all-pervasive, as if there were no way the subject can escape its hold."^{ax} According to the "progressive disintegration" of "positive materiality," the email stands in for the paper letter, which stands in for the word spoken by the absent Other, which stands in for the Law (per Lacan) or the Other (per Žižek). Moreover, the spectralized fetish signifies by summarizing or invoking the entire (synecdochal) chain of replacements. "[It is a] paradoxical fact that the dimension of universality is always sustained by the fixation on some particular point."^{ay}

In this way, by understanding the implicatives invoked by the printed word, the player of language games finds a well-stocked storehouse for linguistic repartee...

*that open envelopes, the eyes
that read the contract, the
voice within the written word.*

You want your letter to haunt.

*Do not forget to include
the disposable camera. You
want to see the lives of the
Other but you do you not
need the proof that they
exist. You have to begin
with the assumption that
they exist, and that unlike
Doubting Thomas, you do not
need to touch the wound to
believe. However, you DO
want to impart to the letter's
recipient that they have been
chosen or elected to do what
they might not normally do.
You want to allow them that
privileged moment when they
do not know whether their
complicity is right or wrong.
This thrill is the gift you
bring. As the mailman said
upon receiving my letter, "I
don't know if this is art or a
prank but I guess it doesn't
matter." The recipients'
use of the camera signals
their willingness to be a part
of the game.*

Rule #5.

The Rapture, or, Pleasure in the Hermeneutics of Play

stalking is hard work. Thus, throughout your pursuit of the Other, it is imperative to keep diligent notes. Follow up and use any means and medium necessarily to ensure your letter's reception.

Developing a shorthand. For instance,

*"l/m v/m 2/3/06 20 "00,
c/b 2/3/06 21:00 -s/t Mona
recept xBill "*

to signify:

"I called and left a voicemail on February 3rd, 2006. Make sure to call back later today in one hour; try to speak to the receptionist named Mona and try to call when the receptionist named Bill will not pick up the phone. "

Don't underestimate the

In games whose rules are unknown, the ideal player is someone enticed by the prospect of writing its rules anew, someone who willfully suspends belief, someone who opens towards the future. The temporality of the indeterminate game is an endless "what if" and "remember when"; its tone is interrogative (questioning existing order and law), propositional (suggesting anew), and reflective (recalling an alternative). As a protected space of deferred judgment, players by definition must be ready to trust. In this way, the hunt for a player is a search for someone with whom to keep secrets. As the anthropologist Johan Huizinga writes,

The exceptional and special position of play is most tellingly illustrated by the fact that it loves to surround itself with an air of secrecy. Even in early childhood the charm of play is enhanced by making a 'secret' out of it. This is for us, not for the 'others'. What the 'others' do 'outside' is no concern of ours at the moment. Inside the circle of the game the laws and customs of ordinary life no longer count. We are different and do things differently.^{az}

Huizinga suggests that the space of play is a self-contained space that sets itself apart from a broader set of (hegemonic) order. The mystery of the game is the logic of its self-containment, the system of its governance. Writes Huizinga:

Inside the play-ground an absolute and peculiar order reigns. Here we come across another, very positive feature of play: it creates order, is order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary,

supreme. The least deviation from it 'spoils the game', robs it of its character and makes it worthless. The profound affinity between play and order is perhaps the reason why play, as we noted in passing, seems to lie to such a large extent in the field of aesthetics.^{ba}

Play, then, offers a temporally delimited space for transgression of social mores, intensification of feeling, assumption of alternate personage, and more. Exuberant and excessive, oppositional to normativity, play can only ephemerally exist. The ephemeral nature of play draws attention its bounded nature: "Indeed, as soon as the rules are transgressed the whole play-world collapses. The game is over. The umpire's whistle breaks the spell and sets 'real' life going again. . . Play beings, and then at a certain moment it is 'over.' It plays itself to an end."^{bb} The importance of sanctioned transgression is underscored through anthropological examples in which the individual self-liminalization is regarded as a socially-regulating rite of passage. In his field investigations of the Nbemtu, a Central African tribe, anthropologist Victor Turner studied a ritual in which adolescent boys become temporarily dispossessed of their belongings, divested of their status in society, and appear different through dress and costume. He describes the social importance of 'liminality':

Liminality may be partly described as a stage of reflection. In it those ideas, sentiments, and facts that had been hitherto for the neophytes bound up in configurations and accepted unthinkingly are, as, it were, resolved into their constituents. These constituents are isolated and made into objects of reflection for the neophytes by such processes as componental exaggeration and dissociation by varying concomitants.^{bc}

Those in this state of 'liminality' are considered ontologically separate from the social whole, a bifurcation reflected even in the grammatical use of a separate noun structure to refer to these youth. In their bounded state, they are endowed a freedom to temporarily create alternate structures of meaning. Turner writes, "Liminality is the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the facts of existence. As in the works of Rabelais, there is a promiscuous intermingling and juxtaposing of the categories of event, experience, and knowledge, with a pedagogic intention."^{bd} Significantly, these youth then undergo a ritual to be re-integrated back into society.

While theorists such as Huizinga, Victor Turner, and

importance of keeping diligent notes. Once you start cultivating more than one target, your mind may become easily confused. But you cannot afford to mix up the details.

Consider using a mail service that you can count on. You can't afford for your letter to get lost in the mail. Choose a courier service where you can get ahold of someone on the other end of the phone and where the manager is visible.

Take pleasure in your exactitude, the measures you take to prepare for your recipient's encounter with the letter.

Throughout the process of sending your letter and your investigative processes, you are forcing yourself to attend to every phenomenon as a possible evidence, proof, clue, or cue.

You may find yourself in search for the perfect stamp that might pique the interest of the other.

You may find yourself researching the life and work of the other for the exact word that binds you to them, that might invoke their recognition of your shared passion for language - an 'aha!'

You may find yourself

reverting to numerology to interpret the days between their last correspondence and yours.

You may find your life structured around your mail box, constructing elaborate excuses for visiting the mailbox multiple times a day. You may find yourself urging the postmaster to see whether there is not really one more piece of mail in his sorting bag that might be yours.

Your phenomenological apprehension of the world is converted to a hermeneutics of the everyday, an interminable search for signs. Take pleasure in this ecstasy.

The continued search for signs will leave you exhausted and hysterical. You will need to invent an alibi, an out, a way to bring yourself back to normalcy. You need someone to initiate you back into the world of normative operations, to usher you from the limns of your madness. You may need to invent this humunculus or devil who can save you from your ridiculous ecstasy.

'Art' may offer such an aegis. By declaring your actions as art, however, you pay the price of flattening your love for the reader.

Caillois^{be} focus on the social function of rituals such as play, the 20th century hermeneutic philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer methodologically shifts the anthropological gaze from the production of play to its philosophical consideration. Imparting to the field of study his phenomenological heritage, Gadamer consistently de-ontologizes social givens and interprets them in terms of process and perception. For example, Gadamer questions whether it is not the game that grips its players but instead the player's capacity to participatorily enact a sacral space of play through the discovery of its order:

The attraction of the game, the fascination it exerts, consists precisely in the fact that the game masters its players. . . The real subject of the game is not the player but instead the game itself. What holds the player in its spell, draws him into play, and keeps there is the game itself. This is shown by also by the fact that every game has its own proper spirit.^{bf}

For Gadamer, the game's "proper spirit" appears as transcendent, unfolding for its players to interpret. "[Play] presents itself" through the player's negotiations and interactions and takes place as a process 'in between.'^{bg} In other words, the search for a player is ultimately the desire to achieve a state of that ecstasy in which the game reveals itself, delimits the playing field (terrain), names its players, and proscribes the actions. Huizinga describes being apprehended by this rapture: "The joy inextricably bound up with playing can turn not only into tension, but into elation. Frivolity and ecstasy are the twin poles between which play moves."^{bh} This ecstasy and frivolity occurs when the individual perceives him/herself as an agent within a larger unfolding system.

Similarly, the protagonist of Derrida's Postcards engages in the tragicomedy of a letter-writer's agony and ecstasy—the writing and rewriting of the same two lines, the nod from the mailman, the incessant anticipation of an auspicious sign, signaling an the letter's reception and response, etc. Derrida writes,

When I am creating correspondence, I mean when I write several letters consecutively, I am terrified at the moment of putting the thing underseal. And if I were to make a mistake about the addressee, invert the addresses, or put several letters into the same envelope? This happens to me, and it is rare that I do not reopen certain letters, after

having failed to identify them by holding them up to the light at the moment of throwing them into the box. My sorting and my postal traffic is this scene. It precedes and follows the last pickup, the other one, the next one, or the one I missed. The obsessional moment occasionally lasts beyond the imaginable. Once the letter or the lot of letters is gone (I have finally unclenched my hand), I can remain planted in front of the box as if before an irreparable crime, tempted to await the following pickup in order to secure the facteur and to take everything back, in order to verify at least one last time the adequation of addresses.^{bi}

For Derrida, the postoffice and mailperson personifies the site of epistolary convergence. Perceived with heightened sensibility, they become folded into the protagonist's drama. Describing his relationship with his postmaster, Derrida writes, "I think she really understands me, she would like to take part in a great scene that she does not see, she treats me a bit like a son who comes to make obscene confidences to her."^{bj}

Like Derrida's protagonist who knows he himself invented the "postal pleasure," the player of the make-believe game is likewise lured by the game that seemingly possesses an interior logic. Writes Gadamer:

The players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (Darstellung) through the players. . . The movement backwards and forward is so central to the definition of play that it makes no difference who or what performs this movement. The movement of play as such has, as it were, no substrate. It is the game that is played – it is irrelevant whether or not there is a subject who plays it. The play is the occurrence of the movement as such.^{bk}

For Gadamer, play is not just the discovery of transcendent order and ontological thresholds. "Play is more than a subjective act. Language is more than the consciousness of the speaker; so also it is more than a subjective act."^{bl} Gadamer uses the term "transformation into structure" to name this process by which language or play become "something more":

I call this change, in which human play comes to its true consummation in being art, transformation into structure. Only through this change does play achieve ideality, so that it can be intended and understood as play . . . Transformation means that something is suddenly and as a whole something else, that this other transformed thing that it has become is its true being, in comparison

with which its earlier being is nil. . . Thus transformation into structure means that what existed previously exists no longer. But also that what now exists, what represents itself in the play of art, is the lasting and true^{bm}.

Gadamer's invocation of ever-lasting 'truth' problematically recalls the universalist claims of Kant's transcendental consciousness. Nonetheless, I find Gadamer's description of this process useful for describing the experience of the player who perceives the game's rules as exterior and requiring divination. But Gadamer also puts forth that "genuine play possesses besides its formal characteristics and its joyful mood, at least one further very essential feature, namely the consciousness, however latent, of 'only pretending'. The question remains how far such a consciousness is compatible with the ritual act performed in devotion."^{bn} Assenting to the player's double consciousness, Gadamer continues:

Play fulfills its purpose only the player loses himself in play. Seriousness is not merely something that calls us away from play; rather, seriousness in playing is necessary to make the play wholly play. The player knows very well what play is, and that what he is doing is 'only a game'; but he does not know what exactly he 'knows' in knowing that.
^{bo}

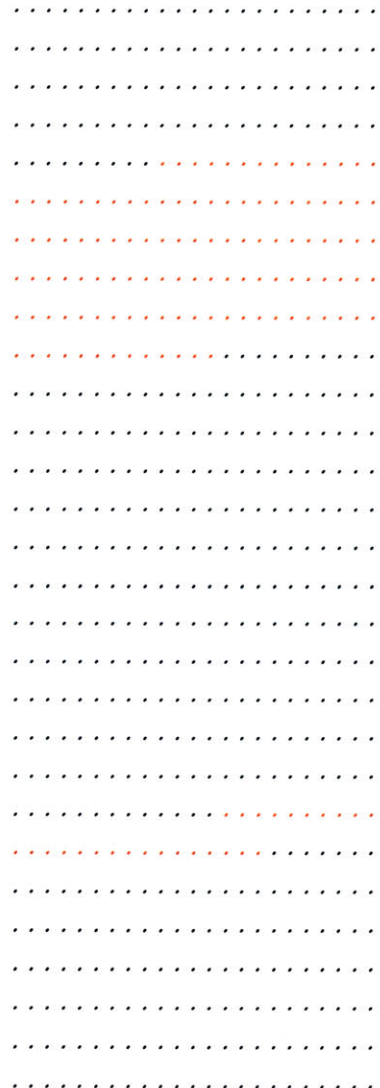
Acknowledging that the players by definition know that the game is "only a game" seems to undermine Gadamer's insistence that play is transcendental. This nugget of implausibility and philosophical instability, however, reminds us that Gadamer's hermeneutics describes the player's experience of invoking the universal sublime, this sensation does not necessarily confirm its existence. What Gadamer's hermeneutics of play obscures is that while the rules or logic of the game appear as divinely exterior and transcendent, they are in fact (eschatological) rarefactions of those same historical symbolic structures that present themselves through the myths, language, and body of the subject.

Conclusion

The Rejoinder, or, Ellipses & Eschatology...

I take up Derrida's consideration of the ellipses -- ". . . ." - that figure of speech that extends declarations into time and space. Through their textual insertion, the ellipses ambiguates the preceding and succeeding declaratives, reframes them as either quasi-questions, and defers resolve. For Derrida, the conclusion of a book (a production delimited by an author and reader) signals its return as a text (discourse divorced from its authorial creation and open to interpolation). Through the death of the author, the book is (re-)inaugurated into the continuity of discourse. Derrida describes the process by which the ellipsis paradoxically both closes a statement and joins it to others: "Within the elleipsis, by means of simple redoubling of the route, the solicitation of closure, and the jointing of a line, the book has let itself be though as such."^{bp} Through its indeterminacy, the ellipses thus commands, luring the reader and writer towards transcendence. "It is there, but out there, beyond, within repetition, but eluding us there. It is there like the shadow of the book, the third party between the hands holding the book, the deferral within the now of writing, the distance between the book and the book, that other hand."^{bq} Conceived in terms that echo the structure of Freud's drives, Heidegger's 'Being towards Death', and Nietzsche's 'eternal return', Derrida writes,

. . . what disposes it in this way, we now know, is not the origin, but that which takes its place which is not, moreover, the opposite of an origin. It is not absence instead of presence, but a trace which replaces a presence which has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun. Now, the book has lived on this lure: to have given us to believe that passion, having



within writing reveal their historical subjectivity. Both theorists, however, unsatisfactorily describe the pleasure and horror induced by that eschatological moment of textual rarefaction. Certainly, there is an exhilaration at the very moment in which writing becomes divorced from the body who wrote it. Rejoining Kristeva, Elizabeth Gross identifies the uncanny moment of recognizing bodily ejection as a moment of comprehending (in)finitude.

“Abjection is a reaction to the recognition of the impossible but necessary transcendence of the subject’s corporeality, and the imputer, defiling elements of its uncontrollable materiality. It is a response to the various bodily cycles of incorporation, absorption, depletion, expulsion, the cycles of material rejuvenation and consumption necessary to sustain itself yet incapable of social recognition and representation.”^{bv}

While for Kristeva, a comprehension of transcendence is a bodily, eschatological intuition, for Bataille, a fundamental existential isolation finds transcendence in communication:

Reproduction implies the existence of discontinuous beings. Beings which reproduce themselves are distinct from one another, and those reproduced are likewise distinct from each other, just as they are distinct from their parents. Each being is distinct from all others. His birth, his death, the events of his life may have an interest for others, but he alone is directly concerned in them. He is born alone. He dies alone. Between one being and another, there is a gulf, a discontinuity.^{bw}

And elsewhere: “To communicate means to try to establish a unity, to make one of many; this is what the word communion means. In one way or another, something is always missing from the communion sought by humans, driven by the feeling that solitude is impotence itself.”^{bx}

For Bataille, then, communication seeks continuity, a counter-measure to existential isolation. Comparing Bataille’s affirmation of communion points out the antihumanist thrust within Derrida’s negative dialectics and pathologization at work in Kristeva’s notion of abjection.

I want to offer the ellipses as a -meta figure that sutures discrete bodies into a constellation of polyphonic discourse. As the space between determination, it embraces ambiguity, polyphony, and slippage. As that metonymizing mark that conjoins part to whole, book to text, the ellipses seeks to rejoin the singular with the

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“oceanic”^{by}--a term Freud used to refer to limitlessness and continuity. Like the game of Fort/Da, the ellipses enables the witnessing of death and transcendence. Spectrally present, the ellipses drives the work towards its eschatological rarefaction and that moment where, by virtue of its externality reveals the historicity of its own production. The ellipses opens the statement towards others, inviting its interpolation, a call for the Other to partake. Like the Surrealist game of Exquisite Corpse in which one part of the figure is drawn, then left for others to successively fill, the ellipses is an invitation for the heterological rejoinder.

Appendix

(Career Advice from <http://www.career.vt.edu/JOBSEARC/coversamples.htm>, accessed 5/4/07)

All cover letters should:

Explain why you are sending a resume. Don't make the reader guess what you are asking for; be specific: Do you want a summer internship opportunity, or a permanent position at graduation; are you inquiring about future employment possibilities?

Tell specifically how you learned about the position or the organization — a flyer posted in your department, a web site, a family friend who works at the organization. It is appropriate to mention the name of someone who suggested that you write.

Convince the reader to look at your resume. The cover letter will be seen first. Therefore, it must be very well written and targeted to that employer.

Call attention to elements of your background — education, leadership, experience — that are relevant to a position you are seeking. Be as specific as possible, using examples.

Reflect your attitude, personality, motivation, enthusiasm, and communication skills.

Provide or refer to any information specifically requested in a job advertisement that might not be covered in your resume, such as availability date, or reference to an attached writing sample.

Indicate what you will do to follow-up.

In a letter of application — applying for an advertised opening — applicants often say something like “I look forward to hearing from you.” However, if you have further contact info (e.g. phone number) and if the employer hasn't said “no phone calls,” it's better to take the initiative to follow-up, saying something like, “I will contact you in the next two weeks to see if you require any additional information regarding my qualifications.”

In a letter of inquiry — asking about the possibility of an opening — don't assume the employer will contact you. You should say something like, “I will contact you in two weeks to learn more about upcoming employment opportunities with (name of organization).” Then mark your calendar to make the call.

(“What Makes a Good Cover Letter”. JobStar.com, accessed 5/5/07.)

1. No spelling or typing errors. Not even one.
2. Address it to the person who can hire you. Resumes sent to the personnel department have a tougher time of it. If you can find out (through networking and researching) exactly who is making the hiring decision, address the letter to that person. Be sure the name is spelled correctly and the title is correct. A touch of formality is good too: address the person as “Mr.,” “Ms.,” “Mrs.,” “Miss,” “Dr.,” or “Professor.” (Yes, life is complicated.)
3. Write it in your own words so that it sounds like you--not like something out of a book. (Electra gets in trouble with libraries when she says things like this.) Employers are looking for knowledge, enthusiasm, focus.
4. Being “natural” makes many people nervous. And then even more nervous because they are trying to avoid spelling errors and grammatical mistakes. If you need a little help with grammar (do they still teach grammar?)--check out the classic work on simple writing, Strunk & White’s Elements of Style, published in 1918 and now online. A good place to begin is “Chapter 5: Words and Expressions Commonly Misused.”
5. Show that you know something about the company and the industry. This is where your research comes in. Don’t go overboard--just make it clear that you didn’t pick this company out of the phone book. You know who they are, what they do and you have chosen them!
6. Use terms and phrases that are meaningful to the employer. (This is where your industry research and networking come in.) If you are applying for an advertised position, use the requirements in the ad and put them in BOLD type. For example: the ad says--

(sample cover letter from <http://www.career.vt.edu/JOBSEARC/coversamples.htm>, accessed 5/4/07)

Your Street Address
City, State Zip Code
Telephone Number
Email Address

Month, Day, Year
Mr./Ms./Dr. FirstName LastName
Title
Name of Organization
Street or P. O. Box Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. LastName:

Opening paragraph: State why you are writing; how you learned of the organization or position, and basic information about yourself.

2nd paragraph: Tell why you are interested in the employer or type of work the employer does (Simply stating that you are interested does not tell why, and can sound like a form letter). Demonstrate that you know enough about the employer or position to relate your background to the employer or position. Mention specific qualifications which make you a good fit for the employer's needs. This is an opportunity to explain in more detail relevant items in your resume. Refer to the fact that your resume is enclosed. Mention other enclosures if such are required to apply for a position.

3rd paragraph: Indicate that you would like the opportunity to interview for a position or to talk with the employer to learn more about their opportunities or hiring plans. State what you will do to follow up, such as telephone the employer within two weeks. If you will be in the employer's location and could offer to schedule a visit, indicate when. State that you would be glad to provide the employer with any additional information needed. Thank the employer for her/his consideration.

Sincerely,
(Your handwritten signature)
Your name typed

Enclosure(s) (refers to resume, etc.)

(Note: the contents of your letter might best be arranged into four paragraphs. Consider what you need to say and use good writing style. See the following examples for variations in organization and layout.)

(advice to students on applying to jobs, from the Writing Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, http://www.rpi.edu/web/writingcenter/cover_letter.html, accessed 5/4/07)

Audience

A cover letter provides, in a very real sense, an opportunity to let your prospective employer hear your voice. It reflects your personality, your attention to detail, your communication skills, your enthusiasm, your intellect, and your specific interest in the company to which you are sending the letter.

Therefore, cover letters should be tailored to each specific company you are applying to. You should conduct enough research to know the interests, needs, values, and goals of each company, and your letters should reflect that knowledge.

Notes

- a Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*, 232.
- b Ibid., 215.
- c "What Makes a Good Cover Letter". *JobStar.com*, accessed 5/5/07.
- d See various articles on how to write a cover letter in the Appendix
- e Derrida, Jacques. *Positions*. quoted through Taylor, Mark C. *Altarity*, 280.
- f Ibid.
- g Kristeva, Julia. *Portable Kristeva*, 111.
- h Barthes, Roland. *The Rustle of Language*, 41.
- i Derrida, Jacques. *Paper Machine*, 41.
- j Barker, Francis. *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection*, 8.
- k Ibid., 62.
- l See Barthes, Roland. *The Rustle of Language* and *The Pleasure of the Text*.
- m Peltier, Philippe. "Oceania: Objects of Revelation and Desire," 66-7.
- n Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, 5.
- o Kierkegaard, S. *Works on Love*, 270
- p Ibid., 274.
- q Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*, 78
- r Ibid.
- s See Kristeva, Julia. "Strangers to Ourselves."
- t See introduction to Sommer, D. *Bilingual Aesthetics*.
- u Ibid., 13.
- v "agonistic democracy" is the term deployed by Chantal Mouffe in various writings.
- w Sommer, D. *Bilingual Aesthetics*, 60
- x Ibid.
- y Ibid., 59.
- z Henri Lefebvre quoted through Bruno, Giuliana. *Atlas of Emotion*, 258
- aa Bruno, Giuliana. *Atlas of Emotion*, 252.
- ab Ibid.
- ac Ibid., 254.
- ad Kristeva, Julia. *Portable Kristeva*, 241
- ae Gross, Elizabeth. "The Body of Signification," 86.
- af Zizek, Slavoj. *The Plague of Fantasies*, 109.
- ag Barthes, Roland. *A Barthes Reader*, 41.
- ah Derrida, Jacques. *Paper Machine*, 44.
- ai Ibid., 26.
- aj Derrida, Jacques. *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, 73.
- ak Ibid., 50.
- al Ibid., 15.
- am Ibid., 26.
- an Freud, Sigmund. *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, 567.
- ao Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits*, 19.
- ap Ibid., 278.
- aq Ibid., 276.

- ar Taylor, Mark C. *Altarity*, 99.
- as Derrida, Jacques. *The Postcard*: 355-6.
- at Ibid., 256-7.
- au Helman, Scott. "Patrick, Obama campaign share the language of 'hope,'" *The Boston Globe*: 4/16/07.
- av Derrida, Jacques. *The Postcard*, 278.
- aw Zizek, Slavoj. *The Plague of Fantasies*, 103.
- ax Ibid.
- ay Ibid.
- az Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, 14.
- ba Ibid., 10.
- bb Ibid., 9.
- bc Turner, Victor. *A Forest of Symbols*, 105.
- bd Ibid., 106.
- be For more information on the anthropology of games, I recommend the following: Johan Huizinga (*Homo Ludens*, 1950), Roger Caillois (*Man Play and Games*, 1933) and Victor Turner (*A Forest of Symbols*, 1967)
- bf Gadamer, Hans. *Truth and Method*, 106.
- bg Ibid., 109.
- bh Ibid., 21.
- bi Derrida, Jacques. *The Postcard*, 102.
- bj Ibid., 110.
- bk Ibid., 103-4.
- bl Ibid., xxxiii.
- bm Ibid.
- bn Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens*, 22.
- bo Ibid., 103.
- bp Derrida, Jacques. *Writing & Difference*, 296.
- bq Ibid., 300.
- br Ibid., 295.
- bs Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*, 300.
- bt Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 127.
- bu Veyne, Paul. "Foucault Revolutionizes History," 161.
- bv Gross, Elizabeth. "The Body of Signification," 88.
- bw Bataille, George. *Erotism*, 12.
- bx Bataille, George. *The Unfinished System of NonKnowledge*, 5.
- by In his opening paragraph to *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud begins by describes his repartee with a colleague who admonishes him for failing to properly comprehend the true source of religious sentiment. Freud's colleague describes, "This [sensation] consists in a peculiar feeling, which he himself is never without, which he finds confirmed by many others, and which he may suppose is present in millions of people. It is a feeling which he would like to call a sensation of 'eternity', a feeling as of something limitless, unfounded--as it were, 'oceanic'" (Freud: "Civilization and Its Discontents" in *A Freud Reader*: 723). Somewhat humorously, Freud then concludes that while the notion of the 'oceanic' posed a challenge to his theories, he could in fact not discover the 'oceanic' feeling within himself.

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