

"The collective gathering of bodies... is an inherent act of resistance against the lack of care that a given regime provides to these bodies..." — Jonas Staal, "Assemblism," e-flux journal #80

Letter from the Editors

Lara Houston, Daniela K Rosner, Steven J. Jackson, Jamie Allen

Like all collaborative endeavors, bringing together an edited collection is about fixing as much as gathering the insights and details (and yes, flaws and limits) of individually or jointly conceived pieces to bring about a larger conversational whole – a drawing forth, or drawing together, of scattered threads and pieces into something considerably messier than a quilt. All the more so when the collection is the result of a generative collaboration, bringing guest editors Lara Houston, Daniela K. Rosner, Steven J. Jackson in conversation with the *continent. collective* to present this special issue "R3pair Volume". The conversation of course runs deeper and longer than the 17+ months of engagement among the contributors here. For the last 5, 10, 20 or 100 years (pick your starting point!), a motley and heterogeneous band of thinkers from Europe, North America, and the world have grown suspicious of the stories we tell about objects as stable and therefore rather settled things (whose drama, if any, inheres only at moments of design); and the way these stories render invisible a whole range of human relationships with and to objects that turn out to be central to sustaining the worlds around us, however provisional.

This is not to question the value of design (and we wish to recognize here the beautiful work of Nina Jäger, the gifted designer who helped give shape and life to the visual form of the pieces herein) but rather its primacy – or more simply, the presumption that most or all that is interesting and worth caring about in objects is accomplished at the moment of design. If that were the presumption, the pieces here beg to differ. They inhabit forms of difference in situations of technology production: ordering development practices anew and offering alternative metaphors of fulfillment and care, complete with their knots, complexities, and breakdowns. They address how we organize to sustain technologies across time, charting formations of labor that catalyze around recuperating social and material order. They also explore what happens when we let go of these ties – whether through acts of abrupt severance or slow forgetting – revealing the negotiated limits of repair and its aftermath. In short, this collection affirms there is life beyond design – a welcome thought to those of us who have always found Silicon Valley rather problematic in its universal

approach to material production. But it also suggests that we are always already living this possibility, even if our stories so often work to obscure it.

Contributors to the R3pair Volume follow and unsettle objects across all these themes and registers. Marisa Cohn follows a long-lived space mission, tracing the temporal logics of design and repair work and how these are knitted and intertwined through the maintenance of the craft. Lara Houston follows this theme to Kampala, Uganda, where the livelihood maintenance and mending of mobile phones de-naturalizes linear life cycles, extending and complicating the timeliness of repair. Linda Hilfling Ritasdatter's "Bugs in the War Room" manoeuvres between the imaginaries and reals of supposedly-retired computer languages, Y2K bug, and software development outsourcing. Benjamin Sims extends questions of timeliness in yet another direction, showing how the repair of High Performance Computing systems at Los Alamos is not only reactive, but also inherently forward-facing and anticipatory. By contrast, Jamie Allen tells a story of longevity, and shows how accounts of resilient technological temporalities (here, the Centennial Light Bulb) may be hijacked by motivations of monetary profit.

Such questions emerge as an immediately practical problem for the designers and operators of mobile operating systems, as shown by Jason Farman in his thoughtful reflection on software obsolescence and the often fleeting status of objects in the digital age. Brittany Fiore-Gartland explores the residues left behind when a successful telehealth system is abruptly removed from an organization and its practices. More literal forms of residue are found in Louis Henderson's "Lettres du Voyant", which digs into the processes of wasting and recuperation – of metals, but also of information – to be found in the digital dump Agbogloboshie. Tazoo Park takes us to his art studio and introduces us to "digital beings" that touch and reveal worlds of hidden value to be found in the (growing) piles of neglected and abandoned electronics around us. And Daniela Rosner turns to the painting of cracked ceramics to explore the uncertain space between breakdown and repair, and the unique aesthetic possibilities this relationship may unfold.

If repair defines and connects humans and the built

environment, it is no less central to human engagements in what we once called, rather quaintly and before the anthropocene moment, the "natural world." Kristina Lindström and Åsa Ståhl ask readers to imagine through speculative experiments how a ragpicker and composter might live and interact in a late plastics age. Lina Dib's sound piece layers technological and environmental obsolescence by juxtaposing recordings of moribund technologies with the calls of extinct bird species. Repair may also inhabit and uphold artful processes of place-making, as Josh Lepawsky, Max Liboiron, Arn Keeling, and Charles Mather illuminate in their multiple spatial readings of repair, each highlighting the subtle ruptures and discontinuities that make repair sites continuously undone. Connecting such concerns to the organizational context of the modern university, Christopher Henke approaches sustainability as a form of repair and explores a central dichotomy (and perhaps choice): namely, repair as maintenance vs. repair as transformation.

These points raise in turn connections between maintenance and repair and the ethical relations and actions embodied in notions like care. Jérôme Denis and David Pontille, for example, describe two horizons of maintenance and repair: one in which invisible workers maintain stabilized systems, and another in which everyone is invited to participate in the care of things. Laura Forlano extends such concerns to the care of bodies, invoking the figure of the user-repairer, and her role in the management of Type 1 diabetes. Lee Vinsel's re-reading of Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance underscores the urgency of replacing contemporary "innovation speak" with a broader and more generative understanding of maintenance and/as care. Of course, not all repair work (and not all care) is innocent, and the virtues above should never be taken, as David Ribes reminds us, to obscure the ways in which repair itself may be undertaken in service of more dubious projects.

Taken together, this grouping of nearly twenty articles and media pieces, coming from various authors and artists, designers and thinkers, makers and doers, writers and typists, play some small role in supplying depth, range, and perspective around a partial and splintered domain of interest (a point we regard as a good thing!). "Repair studies" as it shows up in this special issue, is perhaps best seen

as a meshwork for finely sift through a set of concerns related to media making and studies, disaster preparedness and risk management, the negentropic energies of organisations, individual and institutions, and *souci de soi*. Here are questionings of the oppositional forces of newness and continuation, replacement and restoration, garbage and treasure through ethnographic writings, philosophical deliberation, artwork, film making and cross-linked online projects.

What might all this mean applied to the collaborative and collective knowledge- and public-making we call publishing? The process of preparing a publication, or a discussion event or artwork for that matter, is tantamount to a sort of maintenance — it is a custodianship of ideas, people, relations, representations, a continual vigilance against their breakdown. Preparing issues and editions, working-over texts (on screen or off), images (moving or otherwise), recordings of the world or physical works in it, are acts of care, the nourishing of attentions. Publication is, as well, we might hope, the repairing of notions like “discipline”, “like-mindedness” and the assumption of publics toward the more heterogeneous, complex and inclusive, productive manifestation of a “broken publication” — always incomplete, forever undone and in need of you, dear reader, to orient your attentions toward it in order to activate and sustain its performance, poor cracked, fractured, and unfinished thing that it is. Always, forever and always under construction, we welcome you to the “R3pair Volume”, a very special issue of *continent*.

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