

Letter from the Editors

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This issue was found in the lost conversations of *continent*. 's Jamie Allen and guest editors Johannes Bruder and Felix Gerloff. It is the crystallization of interests in the empirical, in notions of 'evidence', and the act of 'returning' something from a site of investigation. Developed through the Swiss National Science Foundation project Machine Love?^[1], a project by researchers from the Institute of Experimental Design and Media Cultures at the Academy of Art and Design FHNW^[2] (Claudia Mareis, Johannes Bruder and Felix Gerloff), these articles and artefacts stem in part from a workshop (All Eyes on Method in Basel on the 4 and 5th of June 2015) attended by contributing authors Sarah Benhaim, Hannes Krämer, Luis-Manuel Garcia, Priska Gisler and Stefan Solleder. We also sought to expand the constituency of this *continent*. issue through a discussion of the role that media artefacts and material objects play in empirical research more generally. We have reached out to thinkers and doers who have developed ways of productively navigating the ambiguities of losing and finding, forgetting and remembering, capturing and deleting. Works by Geraldine Juarez, Mara Mills, Verena Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor with a response by Nina Jäger and Bronwyn Lay, Natasha Schüll, and the Times of Waste research team further elaborate the thematic of 'Lost & Found' for this issue. We (re)present here attempts to (re)create experience, waving our flag of surrender at a world that is forever slipping through our fingers.

A call to the lost and found:

Y: Hi, this is Y speaking. I lost my X yesterday. It would seem I just dropped it somewhere. Did someone bring it in by chance?

Z: I can have a look, could you describe it a bit more?

Y: Yes, well... no. That depends. I don't remember exactly where and when I lost it, so I can't describe its current state. Also, I never thought about having to describe its characteristics while I had it. It was always there, with me, so I never had to pay much attention.

Z: So... How do you expect me to help you find it then?

Y: I don't know. Can you just look through all the

Xs you have and describe each of them to me?

Z: Sorry, but this is way too much work for me right now. I am the only person in the office and I have a queue a mile long of Ys just like you waiting outside. Every one of them seems to be looking for Xs. Also, if you can't describe it, how can I trust you? Maybe you didn't even lose your X and simply want to take one that someone else lost!

Y: What if I send you some rough sketches and you look for possible matches?

Z: Let me tell you something about what I do every day: people bombard me with confused accounts of losing their Xs, of how their Xs look—descriptions full of personal sentiments, weird details, unhelpful relational characteristics. You people need to get a grip on what you have lost before you try and find it again. And don't give me that "I have a special bond with my X" stuff. I've heard that a thousand times and it doesn't change the situation. I cannot solve a problem that you can't even describe.

I was about to answer "It seems like you are part of my problem", but Z had already hung up. I was left with my incomplete accounts, my loss, my vague ideas and my fading hopes. The "Lost & Found" is *brutal*, I thought. It forces you to march backward into the future, tracing an ignominious path back to where a mistake of attention, perception or memory was made. We tumble, scrape and scuttle, searching for things to hold on to, keeping our grip too firm.

The next day, I woke up all sweaty. My dreams were about being in a little boat, just offshore... engaged in the chance operation that is fishing:

"The creative act is a letting down of the net of human imagination into the ocean of chaos on which we are suspended, and the attempt to bring out of it ideas. It is the night sea journey, the lone fisherman on a tropical sea with his nets, and you let these nets down - sometimes, something tears through them that leaves them in shreds and you just row for shore, and put your head under your bed and pray. At other times what slips through are the minutiae, the minnows of this ichthyological metaphor of idea chasing. But, sometimes, you can actually bring home something that is food, food for the human community that we can sustain

ourselves on and go forward." —Terrence McKenna

Fishing in the dark is what we do, day in day out, and it leaves us dissatisfied for we find the darkness of the sea obscuring our operation. "*Numquid ingressus es profunda maris et in novissimis abyssis deambulast?*" (Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?), God asks Job (Job 38:16) in response to his challenge. Yes, we have, is the bold statement of Verena Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor when they ask: Canst thou draw Out Leviathan With a Hook? Digital video, sound and still imagery from a year spent at sea in the Atlantic Ocean conveys a sense of the Deep, the tomb of lost utopias, shipwrecks, drowned beings, and human detritus, serving as a limitless reservoir of spirits, of stories, myths, nymphs and sirens—of beings both monstrous and beatific.^[3] Nina Jäger and Bronwyn Lay descend into the dark abyss and bring back a selection of stills from Paravel and Castaing-Taylor's project.

"Hello Darkness, my old friend!"^[4] I've met you before, in the basements of dilapidated buildings and in the dark forests of childhood — where secrets can be comfortably hidden but fearfully hide. Here things (re)appear, like the lost documents of Forest Porn that Geraldine Juarez finds there. These things that give us a rough idea of what might have occurred, of how evidential landscapes are co-constituted by living minds and dying ideas, by captured surroundings and the conclusions these induce. These are unsettling spectral appearances, triggered by the oversaturation of forgetting, just like the case of the 'creepy naked cyber girl' (Sarah Benhaïm & Johannes Bruder) that instigated maximum entropy at a noise music show in Paris, and eventually left the audience in the dark. These are sound recordings of times long past — evocative objects that have been ambiguously designed and designed to be ambiguous, helping Mara Mills get closer to an object through fantasy, rather than appeals to truth of a 'self' or the fundamentals of a culture. These are things that grant access to some kind of understanding, but cannot be found unless we open up to an affective relationship with objects and their documentation (Hannes Krämer). These are things that trigger the personal narratives and unexpectedly influential moments (Priska Gisler) bridging different realities of the Pantanal,

simultaneously smudging together the concepts of model and prototype.

Here a reminder that “letting down of the human net of imagination into the ocean of chaos” need not always be tantamount to clutching to (re)membering, holding on to thought or object. Instead, we might go fishing for things that give us ideas about how to navigate darkness, how to re(cover) a ‘dark empiricism.’

Like layers of paint added to or peeling off a wall in Northern Ireland; the political mural is not a thing that stands for itself, but is entwined with the work of architecture, the action of painting, the always overlapping practices of memorialisation and future-making (Stefan Solleder). Rather than taking these layerings at face value, and rather than holding on to the appearances, we depend on documentation, on documenting—a thing-making that lets our eyes fixate on the dark, decaying detritus of cultures. But detritus, if it is waste, is never entirely lost, it is just hidden from view by the processes and infrastructures supporting the evidence of technology: off-cuts, effluents, discharges and debris. The project *Times of Waste* here tracks these emissions, its members presenting accounts of the fact that our memory of things is supported by those things’ traces in an eroded material Earth.

As much as memories of both things and events tend to fade, our attempts at materializing them, at (re)turning them to experience, wither as well (Luis-Manuel Garcia). Against the notion that the Internet never forgets, this cacophonous collection mass of informational layers incites forgetting by forestalling our registration, never allowing anything to sink in. We are suspended in a vast oceanic chaos, from which these things and events emerge, and to which they near immediately return through over-documentation, over-saturation, re-internalisation:

“The conditions that obtained when life had not yet emerged from the oceans have not subsequently changed a great deal for the cells of the human body, bathed by the primordial wave which continues to flow in the arteries. Our blood in fact has a chemical composition analogous to that of the sea of our origins, from which the first living cells and the first multicellular beings derived the oxygen and the other elements necessary to life. ... The sea where living creatures were at one time

immersed is now enclosed within their bodies.”^[5]

What can we do in order to find in the underbelly what we thought we had lost? *Natasha Schüll* takes account of how bodies and their actions are monitored in order to find ourselves; this new ‘time-series self’ that emerges through an accumulation of data that supposedly permits a continuous reconstitution—a hyper-recording we can no longer keep track of. Here again, an oscillation between finding and losing ourselves, between construction and negation, between signal and noise, the found and the lost.

REFERENCES

[1] Please see <http://www.ixdm.ch/portfolio/machine-love/> for further information and keep track of our research activities via <http://machine-love.ixdm.ch>.

[2] www.ixdm.ch

[3] Lucien Castaing-Taylor & Verena Paravel, *Canst Thou Draw Out Leviathan With a Hook?* Proposal for Three Art Installations, Unpublished Proposal.

[4] Lucien Castaing-Taylor, Nina Jäger, Bronwyn Lay & Verena Paravel, *Profunda Maris*, this issue.

[5] Italo Calvino, *t zero* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 40.