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Cloud
Donna Szóke

2022

The Small Walker Press celebrates creative and analytical thinking, the pleasures of text and image, design and print.

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Foreword
Catherine Parayre

Cloud (10 Oct. 2015–17 Jan. 2016) and *Satellite* (19 Oct.–28 Nov. 2015) were two parallel exhibitions by artist Donna Szóke, held respectively at Rodman Hall Art Centre and, on the other bank of Twelve Mile Creek, at the Art Gallery of the Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts, Brock University. Curated by Stuart Reid, they echoed each other, but were also conceived as two independent projects. The present catalogue focuses on *Cloud*, an exhibition whose apparent simplicity or incongruity elicits an adroit treatment of complex facts. Put succinctly, *Cloud* is about irony. As Søren Kierkegaard explains in his “Concept of Irony” (1841), irony arises from a sensitivity to imperfection. This awareness, he continues, often manifests itself in the uninhibited expression of lightness, including in relation to serious topics.

Cloud proposes free associations, such as those formed spontaneously in everyday life without being subject to a control mechanism, such as institutional or critical approval for example, that would verify their appropriateness. At the same time, the exhibition conveys a meaningful reflection on the condition of well-to-do women in Victorian families, the practical and ideological constraints of the museum space, or the very real danger of radioactive contamination.

Alluding to her professional experience and her environment, Szóke establishes various connections between her work, her perception of society, and her life without revealing personalized details or analyzing them in an overall synthesis. Using her own experience as the premise of the exhibition, the artist, in her sprightly style, puts everyday life at the heart of her creative research, with a preference for what is small, frequently ignored or counted as negligible, whether it is donuts from a fast-food chain or a hand-made scarf in the form of a cigarette. In her hands, the quotidian becomes a subject of creative vitality and an object of ironical appreciation in relation to how we differentiate high from mass culture.

Let me stand
on your shoulder so
I can see the future
Stuart Reid

A man dressed in rubber boots, orange overalls, yellow hard hat with a light on, a sooty face and a canary on his shoulder walks into a bar. The whole bar goes silent and everyone stares at him for a few seconds then carries on what they were doing. It was only a miner distraction.

A well-formed joke is a thing of beauty. This joke relies on the cultivation of rich visual associations through storytelling and then delivers a punch line that surprises the listener with an inversion of meaning. A “miner” distraction or a “minor” distraction—there is a chasm in meaning that opens up between these two words with the slight shift of an “e” to an “o.” Despite the difference in spelling, both words sound the same and, in this story, the two meanings can both be true, simultaneously. Humour resonates through the story in the relationship between seemingly opposing ideas enmeshed by supporting details. The tiny yellow bird on the shoulder is a stroke of genius—how tender a detail that the sacrificial canary-in-the-coalmine gets to go to the bar for a drink at the end of another shift?

Donna Szóke uses storytelling and humour to bring the viewer to new understanding of relational theory in her exhibition called *Cloud*, mounted at Rodman Hall Art Centre from October 10, 2015 to January 17, 2016. A diverse assortment of multi-disciplinary objects, multiples, and prints, purports visual messages and/or didactic text. Often, they are provocative springboards to other concepts: *Pieces of String Too Small to Use*, *REASONABLE & SENSELESS*, *Let me stand on your shoulder so I can see into the future*, *Completely Fucked in the Head* or *Failuer*. Poetic, sometimes profane, in their manifestation as signs, they may be a ruse on a clear path to understanding as an intended result. Szóke alludes to the fallibility of linear logic with a couple of directional maps (*the meeting of minds* and *masterplan*), graphs (*The Geometry of Meaning*), and diagrams (*coffee and doughnuts*). These cyphers mock the didactic voice and hover around a set of instructions that may not be completely resolved. Like the ambiguity of the miner joke, the wandering is more enlightening than the arrival.

Many of the works in *Cloud* employ traditional hand-making techniques such as sewing, hooking, knitting, silk-screening, or flocking. Other objects that sit alongside may look handmade but are actually machine-made or digitally reproduced, whether commercially printed, scanned or 3D-printed.

In these works, the message is not fully comprehended without a consideration of the materiality of the object or a reckoning with how it was made. Is this slow art, maybe? The reading is often cryptic and, in each situation, requires a bit of decoding. *Failuer*, for example, is a hand-pulled linoleum print that celebrates a spelling mistake. How can that error not be an intentional failure considering the path of production? Stare at it long enough and the constellation of marks and letters looks just perfect. *REASONABLE & SENSELESS* is a perplexing paradoxical message cut into a banner of decorative coloured foil letters usually reserved for greetings like “Happy Birthday” or “Happy New Year.” Often disguised as something simple, Szóke’s visual provocations in *Cloud* open up into complex puzzles that pull the viewer into a deeper read beyond the punch line into relational contemplation.

Twists and ironies abound in *Cloud*. The seeming simplicity of many of the objects is evidence of the artist’s intent to plumb the lines between meaning, making and material. While object and meaning exist in tandem independence, Szóke draws attention to the thin filament linking them and the ensuing complexity of the relationship with the presentation of the exhibition, the location, and the viewer. A good example is *A Set of Instructions*—a series of commercially-produced matchbooks, each printed with a cartoon-like drawing of a paper matchbook cover bursting into flames. A cautionary portent of flammability or an infinity mirror? Both intentions suffice. *Faint Feint* is a rather fancy white settee cushion piped with dark edge, decorated with the fine line drawing of a woman’s body splayed on the ground, legs akimbo. Perhaps this cushion is a potential landing pad and there may be a bit of time-travel implied by the fact that it is positioned on a 250-year-old fainting couch within a beautifully appointed parlour from the same era? A deeper dive into context reveals the subject of the drawing is the maker of the cushion and that she has a medical condition that results in periodic fainting. Serendipity indeed. In *Bold as Love*, the titular words of a rock anthem by Jimi Hendrix are recreated, one letter on each of ten hooked rugs, made of strips of shredded, black, rock-and-roll concert t-shirts. One can hear the back-up vocals from good old McLuhan singing “the medium is the message.” The knitted soft sculpture called *Smokes* comprises two oversized, droopy cigarettes, whose scale and making are evidence of a compulsive habit, indeed.

Within the exhibition presentation in the ornate Victorian parlours of Rodman Hall, the *Smokes* were draped casually over a hot-water radiator in the corner of the room, further complicating elemental meaning and pointing out how these unusual objects can’t find a logical place to sit in an ordered world.

Cloud was mounted within an art museum framework that was a complex space of converging meaning and purposes. The stately rooms of Rodman Hall were once domestic spaces, the parlours of a prominent St. Catharines historic home, the Victorian mansion home of Thomas Rodman Merritt, the fourth son of the Honourable William Hamilton Merritt (1793–1862) who built the first Welland Canal. Rodman Hall was also a community art gallery since 1960 but was acquired by the university in 2003 for the cost of a dollar. In the ensuing years it became a site of pedagogy, supporting the visual arts program at the university as a training centre, studio, and exhibition space for students and faculty, while also offering substantial scholarship and discourse on contemporary Canadian art through a respected program of exhibitions mounted in fertile dialogue with other art centres across Canada and internationally, *Cloud* being a great example.

This exhibition existed within this relational construct like a beautiful spider web strung up in a corner of a finely appointed room. In 2016, the writing was on the wall that the parent university wanted to rid itself of the cost and divest itself of the function related to running a contemporary art museum. As the curator of this exhibition, I didn’t know at the time that I was to be the last Director/Curator hired by this institution and that the university would later sell the grand old building to a developer and eventually close the doors for good in 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic. *Cloud* presented a bit of *déjà vu* in terms of the unease it introduced into those parlours, questioning the solidity of relationships, probing frail ties, lingering in a liminal zone.

The title of this exhibition, *Cloud*, is also a bit of an occlusion. The artist says: “[A] cloud is actually a very complex shifting architecture, existing momentarily but based on the relationships between the discrete elements. I worked hard to ensure that themes of absurdity, irrationality, immanence, failure, and anachronism shone through.” The shifting architecture of this gathering of recent works by Szóke creates a set of experiences that cannot

be read solely on their own but take on power from the collective within a mist-veiled cloud. The power of the exercise pulls from the whole rather than the individual parts.

The notion of a web of interrelationships calls to mind the Vedic story of the jewelled net of Indra. A powerful metaphor, the story tells of an infinite net stretching in all directions that has been cast over the universe by Indra, the God of all Gods. At the junction of each of the strands of the net is a faceted jewel that, within its perfection, reflects all the other jewels in the infinite expanse of the web. Szóke's *Cloud* prompts some contemplation of the infinite, inviting a wander to the edge of reason and senselessness to stare down into the abyss. What we see there is the interrelationship of all phenomena. Everything contains everything else, but each individual thing is not curtailed or confused by all the other individual things. *Pieces of String Too Small to Use*, for example, becomes the summation of creation and a symptom of the human incapacity to reason through the fragmentary nature of existence. In *Cloud*, the seemingly insignificant may, in fact, encompass everything.

REASONABLE & SENSELESS

2015

Foiled cardstock banner

10 × 64 cm



bold as love

2015

Black classic rock t-shirts, canvas, bias trim, thread

60 × 40 × 5 cm each

BOLD AS LOVE





Faint Feint
2015
Multiple. Edition of 100.
46 × 46 × 18 cm





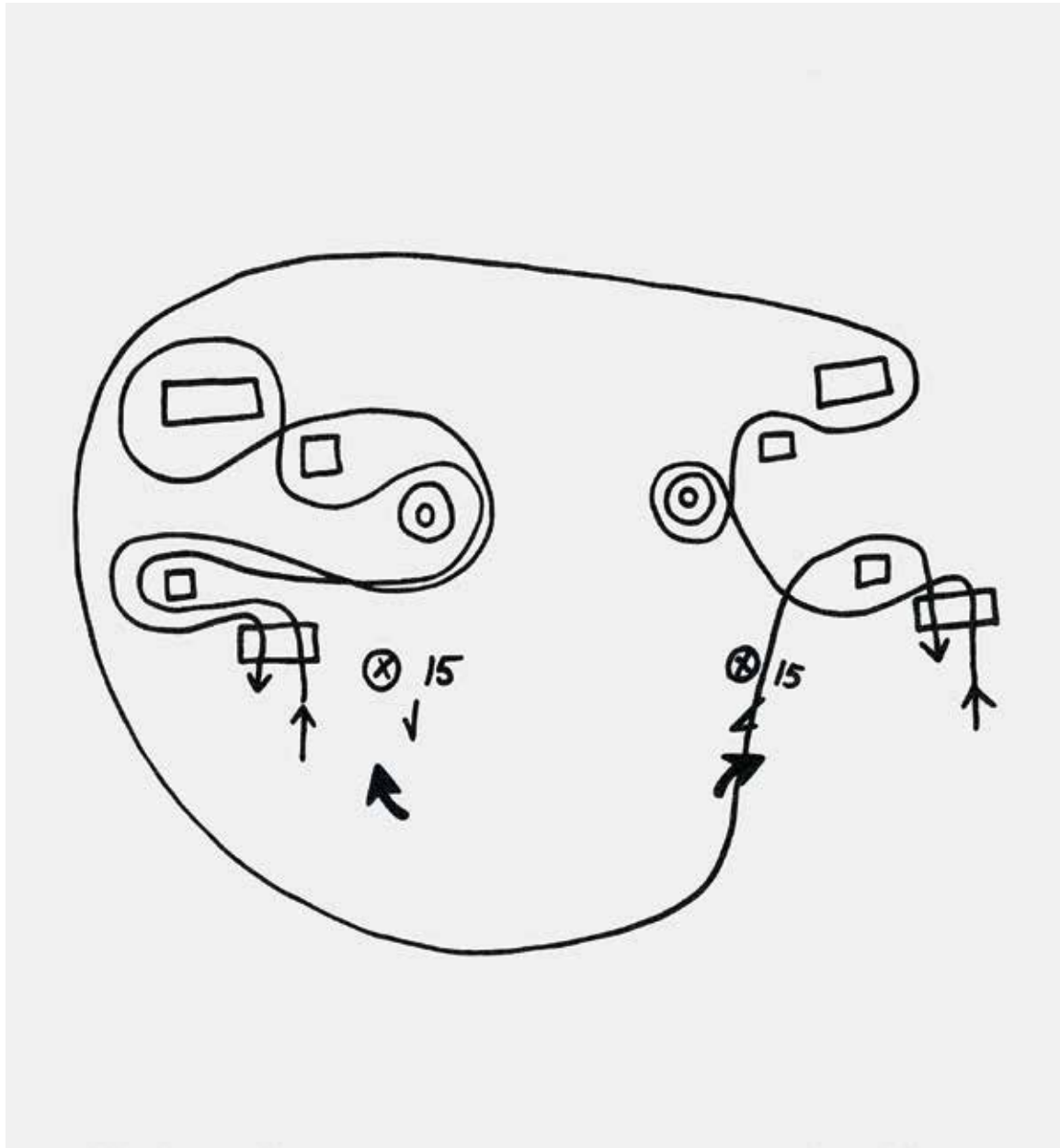
Smokes
2015
Knit cigarettes
178 × 20 × 20 cm

A Set of Instructions
2015
Hand-coloured commercially printed matchbooks
4 × 2.5 × 1.5 cm each



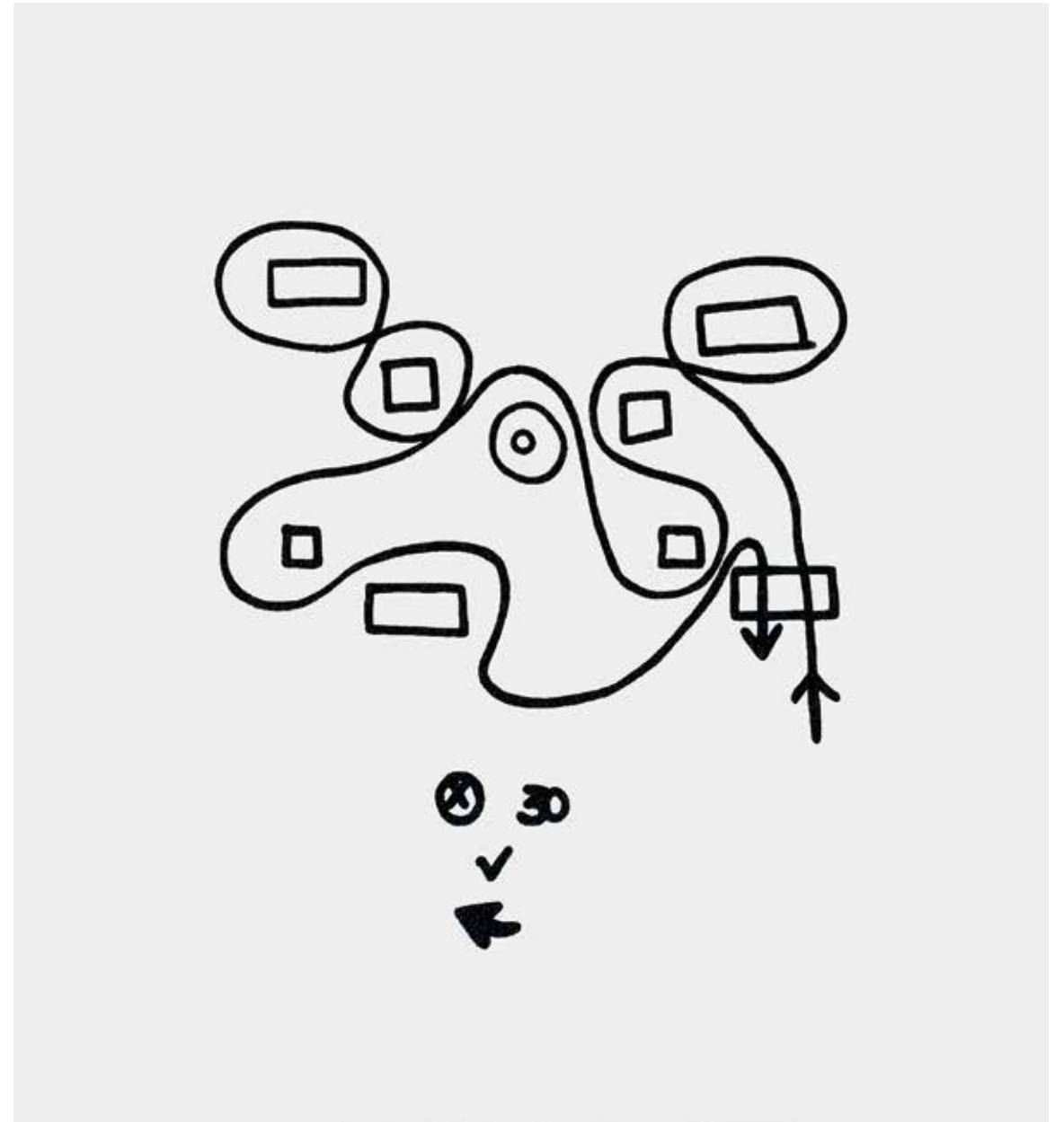


the meeting of minds
2015
Serigraph
20 × 20 cm



28

masterplan
2015
Serigraph
20 × 20 cm



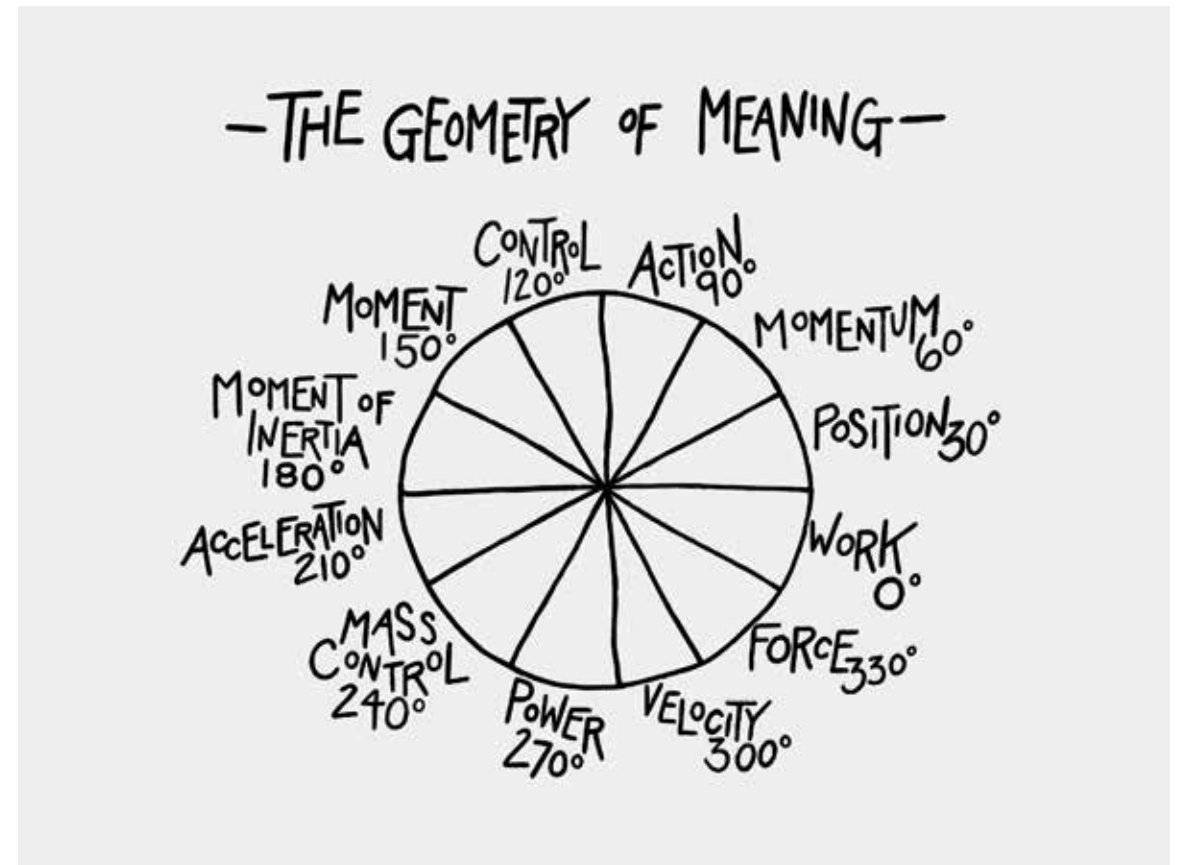
29

Failuer
2013

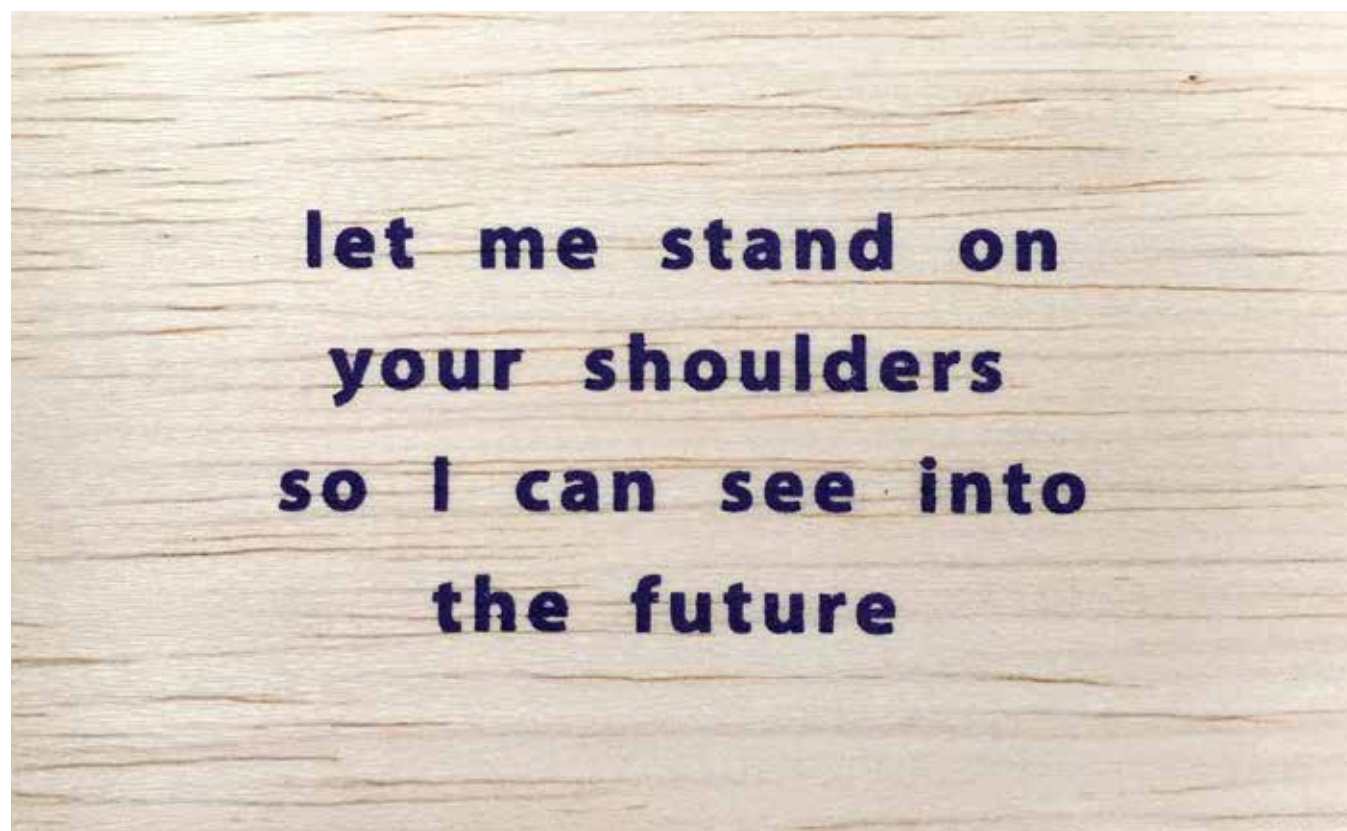
Linoleum print process blue typesetters' ink on Arches 88 paper
26 × 35 cm



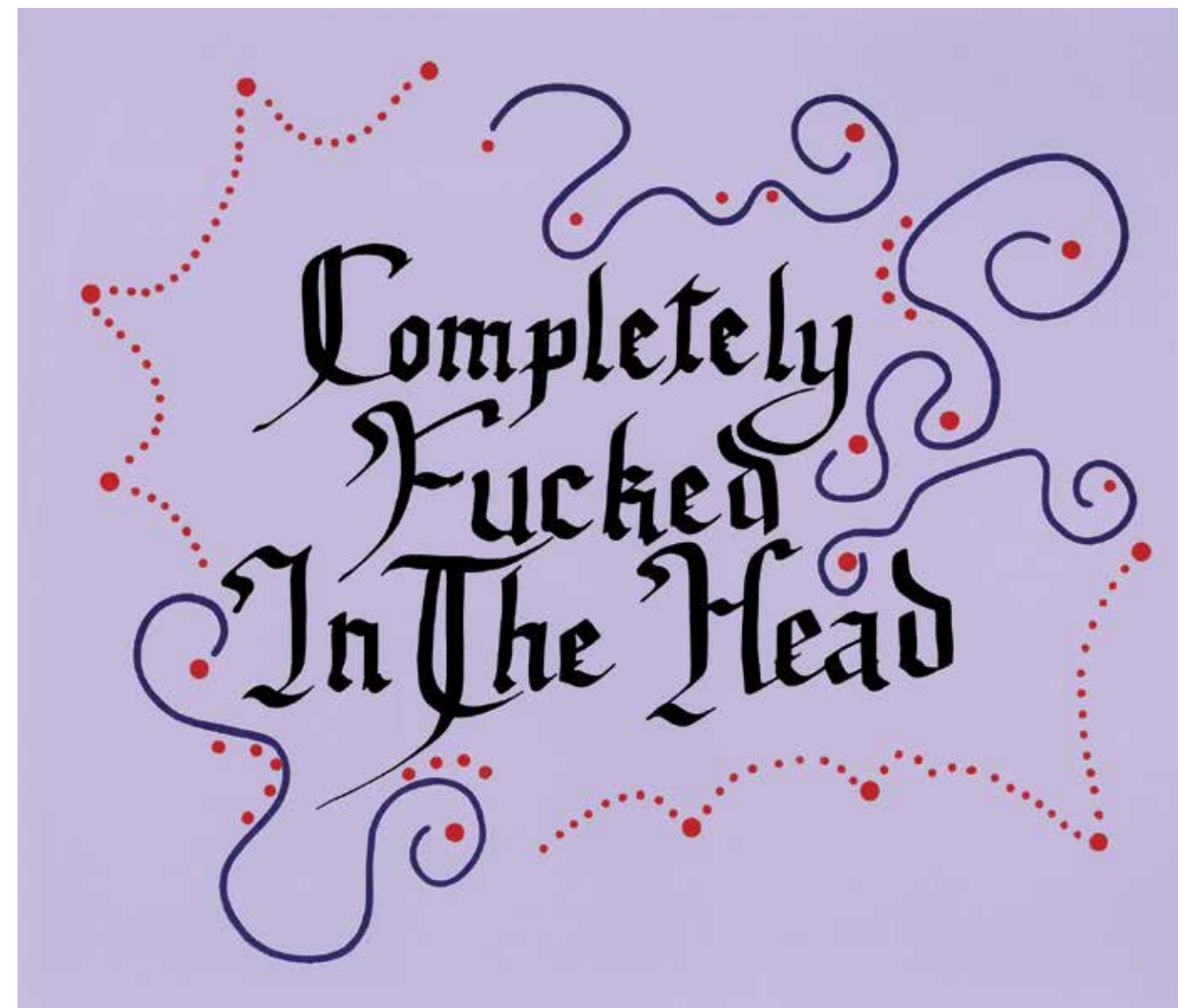
The Geometry of Meaning
2015
Serigraph on Arches 88 paper
56 × 76 cm



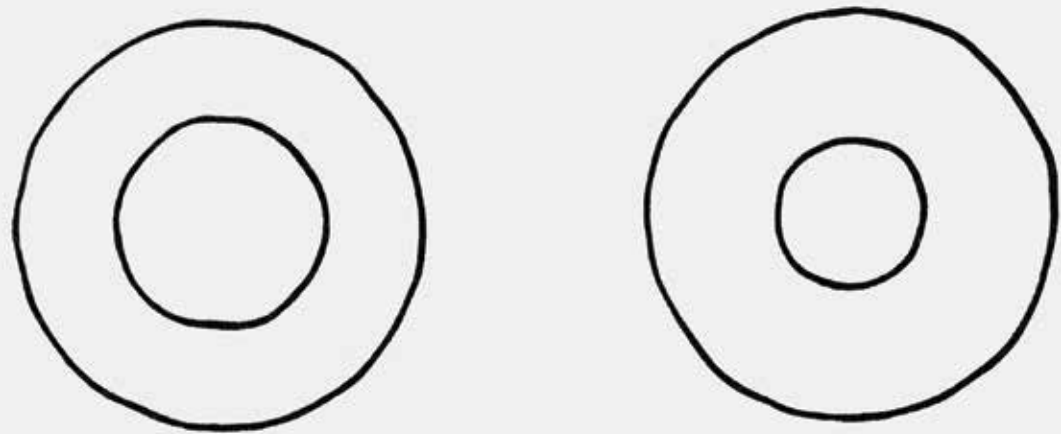
Let Me Stand
2015
Silkscreen on balsa wood
8.8 × 12.7 cm



Completely
2015
Four colour serigraph on Arches 88 paper
36 × 42 cm



coffee and doughnut: ground plan view
2015
Serigraph on Arches 88 paper
36 × 42 cm



GROUND PLAN VIEW:
COFFEE AND DOUGHNUT

Pieces of String
2013
Serigraph on vellum envelope with string
7 × 9 cm

Pieces Of
String Too
Small To Use

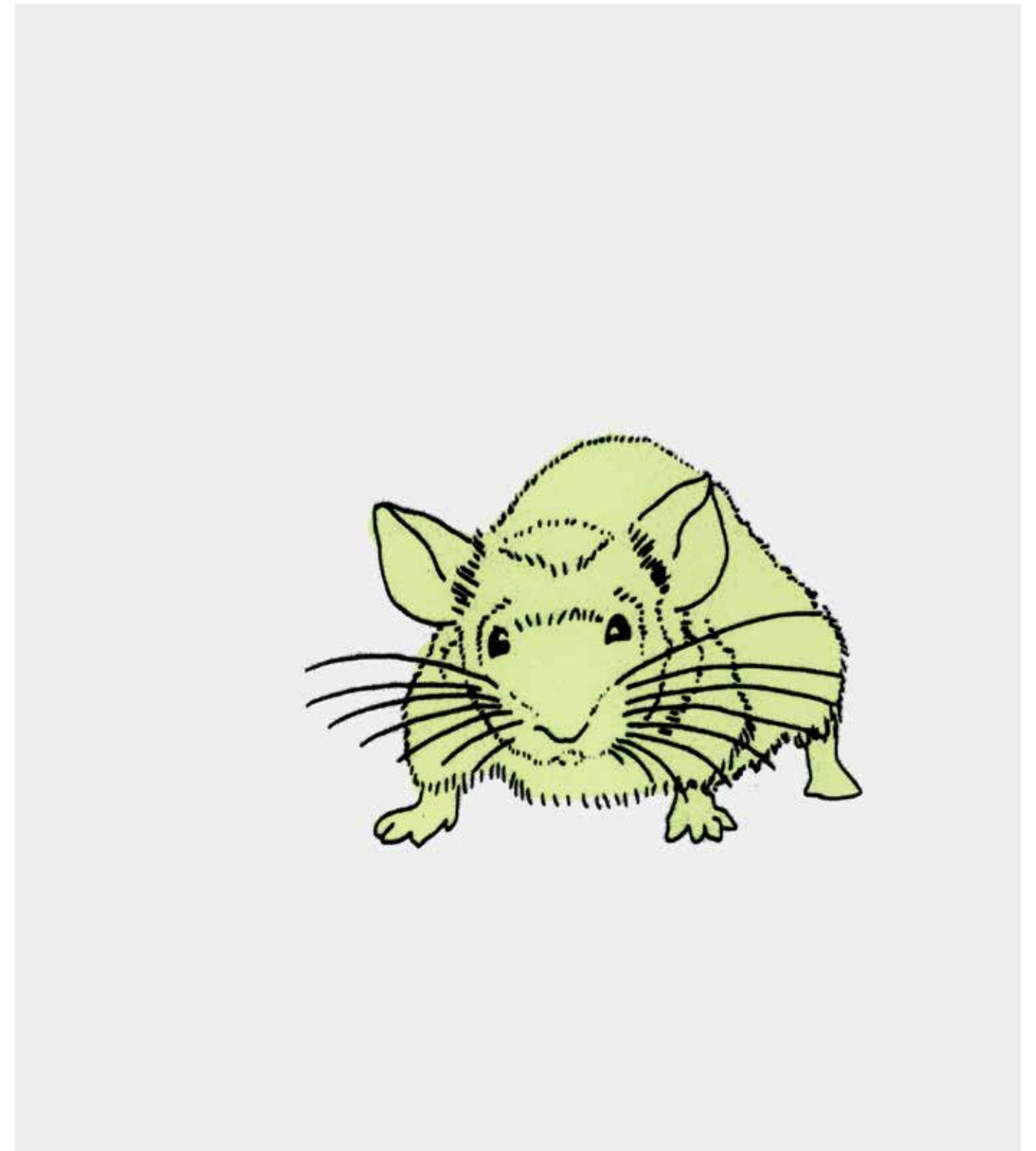
Invisible Histories

2013

Two-colour serigraph: green/glow in the dark ink
with black ink and flocking on Arches 88 paper

28 × 25 cm

36



37

Decoy
2015
3D-printed, hand painted objects
4 × 8 × 8 cm each
ceramic plate



Cloud Relationality

Emily Rosamond

In her exhibition *Cloud* at Rodman Hall, Donna Szóke presents a series of multiples: 2D prints, 3D prints, and short-run, not-so-mass-produced everyday objects. Subtle, understated and precise, these works present themselves, at first, as compact jokes and puns—funny little riffs on mundane imagery and objects. Slowly, their subtle twists and turns between concreteness and abstraction, between forms and technical processes, open them onto a much longer timescale for contemplating relationality.

What kinds of pull can one object have on another? In one of the central rooms of her exhibition, Szóke dissolves the iconography of coffee into the iconography of donuts. The serigraph *coffee and donut* (2015) presents a diagram of these two objects, each reduced to just two concentric circles, as if viewed from above: the top and bottom edges of the coffee cup, the donut's outer edge and inner hole. Above, a topsy-turvy font of Szóke's own design (which feels more hand-printed than typed) reads: "Ground plan view: coffee and donut." This print presents a precise path to similarity, which transforms its objects' metonymic link by association into a link by sameness. The concentric circles are rendered in what appear to be competently hand-drawn lines, tinged with tiny irregularities. Other than this, the only difference between the two objects is rendered in the relative sizes of the circles. Since this diagram provides no easy way to differentiate between positive and negative spaces, its referents can easily flip—"coffee" becoming pastry, "donut" becoming a mug on a large saucer. This simple print finds a loophole, as it were—an abstract diagram, which morphs one object into the other. In doing so, it plays on the subtle tensions between the absences and presences that can be represented by the edge, between solidity and an abstract liquidity. Reducing these forms, in a sense, speeds them up, renders them similar. Yet there is something of a "cost" to this acceleration. The object wavers, caught between positive and negative space, its certainties undone as its informatic form wanders off into other material substrates.

This diagram-print, in turn, diagrams the exhibition, describes its conceptual tasks in condensed form. *Cloud*, we are told in the exhibition's press release, explores relational meaning. This exploration is all the more pressing, given that, in a highly networked "cloud" context, relationality itself has fundamentally changed—something that becomes clear if we compare our present moment with that of around a century ago. Many

artists of the first modern avant-garde, of course, produced, inscribed, analyzed and managed odd, oblique, idiosyncratic, relational meanings. One need only think of the radically decontextualized readymade, or the fractured images in a Hannah Höch collage, to see how meaning, in modernity, leaked out of objects, hovered in the *frisson* between juxtaposed contexts and things. Producing new kinds of relation was a radical aesthetic, and at times even political act. In our time, however, relational meaning seems destined to be ever more normalized as a network meta-logic. Any scrap of information, networked in a newsfeed, is always, already juxtaposed with many others—as if “collaged” by default. What, after all, does a platform such as Facebook produce, if not visible, tangible, and of course, highly monetized relations—between disparate content sources, friends and contacts, people and platforms? In the realm of cloud computing, surveillant servers and data centers hover in the background of everyday life, and new kinds of relationships develop between computation and materiality (via 3D printing, for instance). By emphasizing topological relations, examining the differences between information and materiality, and exploring tropes of transmission, *Cloud*, in my reading, theorizes a form of relational meaning suitable to a “cloud” context: one that emphasizes not the juxtaposition of differences as such (this has been largely normalized by networks), but, rather, a host of far more subtle stretches, shifts and sidesteps. In what follows, I will explore a few of the sub-theses on relational meaning this exhibition explores: a move toward the topological production of meaning; a renegotiation of the relations between information and materiality; and an examination of various tropes of transmission.

TOWARD A TOPOLOGICAL RELATIONALITY

In *coffee and donut*, diagrammatic representation overtakes the specificity of objects—and a strange feedback loop opens up between forms. In emphasizing the morphological flow of forms, we could even say that this piece intuits the mathematical field of topology: the study of space from the perspective not of a static set of points in a fixed space, but rather from the perspective of a constant set of *features* in an ever-shifting space. Topology

understands geometric properties, such as holes, as constant—even if they are stretched or bent. In fact (oddly enough), one of the common illustrations of topology involves a coffee mug and donut. Topologically speaking, the coffee mug and donut share a common feature: they each have one hole (the donut’s centre; the mug’s handle). Thus, considered topologically, with constant features but fluid, changeable, ever-morphing surfaces, we could imagine the coffee mug morphing into the donut and back again. Indeed, a popular gif, easily searchable online, helps us visualize just that: the mug’s cavity fills in, its handle balloons out, its handle-hole rounds to circular perfection. And back again.

How does this fluidity of surfaces speak to contemporary relationality? According to Celia Lury, Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova, topology’s significance goes far beyond the mathematical. In fact, they argue, broadly speaking, there has been a *becoming-topological* of culture—a shift, over the past century, toward topology as a “new order of spatio-temporal continuity for forms of economic, political and cultural life today” (3). In so many realms of contemporary life, it is no longer possible to cleanly differentiate between so-called “reality” and its representations. Investors’ conceptions of share values drastically reshape the value of the shares themselves. Screens cover “the split between here and there” (10), warping distance and weaving amorphous representation into the spatial fabric of the home. Online objects express the “dynamic recursiveness of processes of sharing, linking and modifying” and “the circulation of the social quanta of beliefs and desires” (19). In what Eli Pariser calls the “you loop” of social media platforms, actions such as clicking and “liking” directly feed back, distorting and reshaping the content of the newsfeeds that form the background conditions through which “liking” and clicking take place. In all of these senses and many more, an ever-morphing, ever-changing relationality, in Lury *et al.*’s view, becomes the norm. It is not so much that stable representations “affect” the world that they purportedly describe—but more that the spaces of representations and materialities are hyper-connected, continually morphing into each other along a continuum of constant distortion. The mutual pull of Szőke’s coffee and donut on each other speaks to a new order of cultural relationality, an abstract liquidity of form that comprises the background conditions through which any ostensibly stable form settles into place in the first place.

Many of Szóke's works analyze and mobilize this topological sense of relationality, by exploring a pervasive slippage between representations and material conditions of production. In *Faint Feint* (2015), for instance, Szóke produces a line drawing of a woman sprawled awkwardly on an unseen ground, as if she has fainted. This image is printed on a pillow, prominently displayed on a puce-green, period fainting couch. The fainting couch fits right into Rodman Hall's grand, mid-nineteenth century, mostly Victorian architecture, recalling the space's previous lives as a stately mansion home. The casual, contemporary dress of the fainter on the pillow (she wears a summer tank-dress, necklace, flip-flops, and a purse) pierces through this temporality, sewing presentness into periodicity. The languages of fainting (rendered in image, object, and furniture) skirt around the act itself—the passive act of losing consciousness, of succumbing to the body's temporary frailty. Fainting, of course, is an act decisively coded as feminine. The fainting couch, and fainting pillow, reify the female fainting body, catching, in their very limbs, Victorian-era gestures, experiences and conceptions of fragility—the corset-strained breaths and melodramatic parlour airs that knocked bodies off their feet, caught in a puff of pillow or the curling swoon of an asymmetrical lounger. These domestic frailty-catchers catch, in their long-reach time web, not a flesh-and-blood woman but an image—an image of a contemporary woman, set into the pillow as if falling through the product of her own sewing. For the fainting woman depicted on the pillow is actually Nancy Kapodistriasis, the local artisan who Szóke commissioned to make the pillow. Recursively, her picture transforms her labour into her own image. The artisan Szóke tells me, was more than happy to pose as the fainting woman; by a strange coincidence, she suffers from a rare condition that causes her to faint frequently. Asynchronous synchronicities accumulate in the artwork's thick time. By means of a double looping, the piece's present falls through its past, and the pillow's producer warps space, appearing as the image of which she has also formed the ground.

The faint is a feint, posed and poised atop the pillow. If anything, feigning the act of fainting protects against the danger of fainting, of falling while upright and unconscious. The mimicked, represented act (much like the furniture, the dressings designed to catch it) somehow sidesteps, vaccinates against the momentary danger it repeats in represented echoes,

images, tropes. The representational languages of fainting twist the act, feign the act, protect against the loss of which they speak. And yet the blank, the faint, the break in consciousness remains (with its thick, accumulated histories of silenced women) as a silent spur that churns the piece, that governs its recursive presentational/representational loops.

In a highly networked context, David Joselit remarks—given the unfathomable scale of global networks, and given that connectivity is all but obligatory—it becomes impossible to bracket out an artwork from its context. Rather, paintings (and other discrete, self-contained art objects) must understand themselves not only as sets of internal relations, but also as networked entities, even *transitive* entities—that is, entities that act *on* their surroundings as much as they act within them, performing something of the vocabulary of network-effects (125). Transitivity—a subspecies of relational operations—well describes the ripples that Szóke's work imposes in Rodman Hall's time signatures. Here, they are woven into a tight feedback loop—a topological sphere in which image distorts production, which distorts image; and information leaks into its material substrates, which then leak into the information to which they bear weight and witness.

INFORMATIC MATERIALITIES

How do information and materiality relate to one another? What does it mean for disembodied information to “inhabit” a material? This is yet another way to frame *Cloud's* conceptual procedures, its means of wondering. Take, again, the simple donut. Szóke's recent work *decoy* (2015)—a plate holding five donuts—sits quietly on a fireplace mantle alongside the coffee/donut diagram. The inviting pink icing of the humble Tim Hortons strawberry frosting, with multi-coloured sprinkles, asserts its appeal, drawing us in toward smelling (or even tasting) range. The textures are just so—the shiny glaze, the soft, crinkly dough. But at close range, the sprinkles give it away; they are clearly paint daubs. Slowly, the textural logics of painting spread over the donuts' surface, like another coat of brushmark-icing. What looks like dough and sugar is, in fact, 3D printing: information transferred through a scanner and a file and a program and quite a lot of

cabling and factories and mines, channeled through a printer into resin, and then coated and coloured, dressed in acrylic makeup, which makes up for its telltale lack of colour.

Let's think of a donut as an information-bearing object. Any donut already is. It carries its recipe—that code which renders it reproducible—in its very tissue. If it's corporate, it carries its corporation's "secret sauce," the particularities of facticity and flavour that will aim to get mouths hooked—not on any donut but on *that* donut, *that* nuance, *that* flavour. Donuts carry many other forms of information as well—of molecule and temperature, geometry and geopolitics, or a diagrammed consumer desire. But the 3D printing transforms the donut's informatics, by placing information at a remove from materiality.

According to Ted Striphas, the emergence of the scientific concept of information in the 1940s was a key precursor to what we could now call "algorithmic culture" (his term for a state in which machines—and algorithmic machine learning—perform significant cultural work, and even become significant audiences for culture, thus drastically morphing the relational landscape). The concept of information makes it possible to view all events and phenomena—from "genetic material to the temperature inside one's home" (Granieri)—as, in some sense, comparable, quantifiable and similarly analyzable. Thus the donut (or any other thing), understood as information-bearing, bears witness to its environment in its very materiality, its structure, its form. Yet how does information "sit" within the object? Is it material or disembodied, relational or simply a property of the object itself? As Lars Qvortrup points out, since its inception in the 1940s, information has been fraught with controversy. It remained unclear whether information should be understood as objective—a thing-in-itself—or whether it must come entwined with a subject, existing only as information-to-someone.

This is an ambiguity that N. Katherine Hayles explores, in a critical analysis of the conditions through which the concept took its now most well-known forms. She examines the manuscripts of early conferences that established and consolidated the concept of information in its current form, and argues that information has a problem: though it tries, it cannot truly account for meaning. Early formulations of the concept of information were concerned primarily with transmission (for instance, of signals

through a phone line). They emphatically bracketed out meaning, since the latter is complex, relational, context-specific—and thus impossible to quantify. (The same sentence, for instance, can be understood variously as a serious pronouncement or a joke, depending on context and interpreters. The sentence's semantics transmit information—but its meaning depends on a much broader field of relations.) In subsequent theorizations of the concept of information, meaning was factored in; yet this came at a cost. Meaning, folded into information theory, came to be denatured, demeaned, robbed of its unruly relationality.

The broader cultural significance of such debates is enormous; for the conceptual distinction between information and materiality governs much of economic life. This distinction makes it possible, for instance, for the English theorist of postcapitalism Paul Mason to describe information as the epicentre of contemporary production. "The knowledge content of products," he writes, "is becoming more valuable than the physical elements used to produce them" (111). At every level, manufacturing has been fundamentally transformed through computation, which, in turn, trades in information. Simulation, stress tests, and virtual modeling informatively inscribe the manufactured material object. This leads to fundamental, if barely perceptible, shifts in how manufactured objects work, and what they can do—as when, for instance, engineers at Pratt & Whitney invented a new method for producing a vastly more efficient fan blade for airliner jet engines. Instead of hammering or casting the blades, they learned that they could make a far more efficient blade by growing them out of single metal crystals in a vacuum (Mason 110). Through computation, information comes to inhabit materials in drastically new ways. Yet recursively, the presupposition that information can be, somehow, separate from materiality also actively informs the languages used to describe business practices in the age of computation, leading to a tendency to overlook the material, or forget about the demands of actual space. Keller Easterling points out that when, say, a Google car is being programmed, it is so easy for programmers to forget about physicality that the last thing they take into consideration is the actual length of the vehicle. It becomes so easy—too easy—in a computational context to divorce information from materiality and space. To remedy this, perhaps what is needed, Easterling argues, is a concept of "Information In Real Space." Szőke's donuts, which subtly

pull apart expectations as to how information and ideas inhabit material substrates, present their own form of Information In Real Space, enacting something of the conceptual paradoxes at play in thinking, and rethinking the relations between information and materiality in the “decoy” donut.

TOXIC CONNECTIVITY AND ENABLING RELATIONS

In these topological and material senses, Szóke’s exhibition examines the complexities of relational meaning in an era in which hyper-connectivity becomes the norm—even as this hyper-connectivity often instantiates subtle partings between information and materiality. Yet hyper-connectivity—the normalization of close, dense, continually shifting, reflexive relations—plays out, in Szóke’s work, in both major and minor keys. To close, I want to briefly mention two works, which demonstrate the range of “minor” and “major,” tragic and comic senses in which *transmission*, as a relational trope, ripples through the dense relationalities in this exhibition. *Invisible Histories* (2013) presents a flocked serigraph of a fluorescent green mouse on a white background. Its companion piece is a smartphone app, available for free download, which tells the story of 270,000 radioactive mice, left over from the Manhattan Project (the research and development project that produced the atomic bomb during World War II), stored in the little-known, nearby Niagara Falls Storage Site nuclear waste facility. Depending on the phone’s proximity to the storage site, the app makes more, or less, radioactive mice scuttle across the screen, in the direction of the site. The mice, in this story, have been imprinted with radioactivity—much like the donut file imprints the 3D printing resin with information. They have been victims of a toxic connectivity: an irreversible, tragic leakage into tiny experiment-bodies. Yet this connectivity is so utterly sealed off from the land around it, from the public, from political consciousness: too much connectivity, not enough information. Szóke’s app unravels this problem, bringing the radioactive mice above ground as images, as information, as specters in another cloud of too-much relation, ameliorating the repressed force of toxic connectivity.

On the other hand—and already prefigured in *Invisible Histories*—there is love—a force of care-full attention to the subtleties of transmission between generations, between makers, between forms and language fragments. In *Bold as Love* (2016), Szóke has taken droves of old, black rock t-shirts, ripped them up (using only the plain black parts, not the pieces with bits of colourful screen-printing), and rug-hooked the words “BOLD AS LOVE” from Jimi Hendrix’s *Axis: Bold as Love* album (1967). Like the mice, buried in a storage site with barely any public knowledge, the information printed on the t-shirts is missing: unseen, lost information. Yet something of their disposition (transmitted, as it is, through records and labels) is transposed into the words in the sign. “Bold as love” speaks to circulating signs of love in an alienated, commodified form—yet a form reworked, through the craft of rug work, into a crafted expression—one that declines to differentiate between alienated and “true” love. This love is a transmission, in fact, that circulates around that which cannot be traversed: the distance between complicity and personal truth, as these two concepts weave their way through personal lives, families, production networks, cultural histories. This exhibition tells its stories of transmission in the languages of love for simple objects: the love of old favourite t-shirts, the love of diagrams, the love of donuts.

A HOLE IN THE OBJECT

Transmission, information, topology. *Cloud*’s range of relational procedures explores the ways in which relational meanings respond to the networked conditions that make relations robust, rampant, over-abundant, ever-changing, compulsory. Yet in all cases, the relations Szóke explores accrue around something that does *not* relate: lacunae, gaps, pieces of lost, repressed or unseen history. An unknown—a hole—opens in the object, as it plunges (much like the image of the fainting woman) into a deeper time—troubled, bubbling decades and layers of context.

In the long history of twentieth-century readymades and collage, taking objects and images in and out of place drew attention to the ways in which an object or image’s meaning was always context-dependent—relational

and never completely self-contained. Images and objects, with their deftly foregrounded contexts, contained a hole—an opening, at their cores, onto the outside. This reflected a kind of thinking made possible by the advent of mass production. The desire to produce disjunction spoke to the production of disjunction already integral to the massively expanding circuitries of modernity, which pervasively and provocatively took objects out of context, inserting an internal split in the process. As Walter Benjamin put it in his fragment “Capitalism as Religion,” even the nineteenth century’s biggest critics of capitalism—Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud—performed capital perfectly; for capitalism primarily splits everything from itself. In a cloud context, in *Cloud*, Szóke locates the lacunae that still come to bear on relational meaning in an age of networked relation—even as relation seems to vastly outpace the contextual gaps around which it morphs. Reconstructing intimate details of lived histories, and taking them on intricate material detours, this exhibition stitches a patchwork of ways to situate oneself in a field of relations that still—yes, still—bear the traces of the not-transmitted, not felt, not said.

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