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The User Is Dead, Long Live the User: Creation through Consumption in the Context of the Reader and the User

Anna Wheeler
Bard College

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by

Anna Wheeler

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INTRODUCTION

In the computer science community, the saying goes: “Only two industries refer to their customers as users: computer design and drug dealers.” The quote comes from a prolific professor who has taught at Yale and Princeton named Edward Tufte. Most of the people I have heard quote Tufte are also professors or professionals in computer development, and they tend to say it with a knowing smile reserved for inside jokes and secret-telling. This quote has the capacity to be read as a parallel between drug addiction and an addiction to technology, but contains other intricacies that bear more merit. First, Tufte's use of the word “industries” carries with it the connotation of established structures that put out products, rather than the unofficial capacity in which drug dealers are often conceived. An industry has a history, support, and a maintained structure of production; industries make products to be consumed. Both drug dealers and computer designers assume the role of producer, which leaves their “users” in the role of consumer. Drug dealers and computer designers alike produce something that their customers are incapable of making from raw materials; their customers know what to do with these products once the products are ready-to-use, but depend on the producers of the products they use for said products. The dependence that drug users have with their dealers is often met with pity; by aligning that dependence with a user's dependence on computer designers, Tufte, whether intentionally or not, brings that pity into the second dynamic. Even though many people are also consumers of many products in their daily life, Tufte's comparison makes us pity users *because* they are dependent consumers. Their dependence positions them as passive recipients.

The way that Tufte situates users must be brought into the larger historical context of the term “user.” The etymological history of the term has its roots in drug use and was first established as a term in 1935 (Harper). The first iteration of the term being used in conjunction with computers occurred at around the same time as the emergence of personal digital computing in the late 1960's (Harper)(Spicer). This is not a coincidence. Digital computing has existed since the 1940's, but until the 1960's, the only individuals who had worked with computers were the same people who developed them (Spicer). Once institutions like IBM and MIT began to pioneer models for use by people without computer design skills, like members of the military and members of scientific research facilities, there arose a need to describe the people for whom they were making products (Spicer). These people were and continue to be known as end-users. The “end” prefix occurs to further situate the user in the development process; end-users are often described as the ultimate “goal” of developers in that end-users represent the last stop and final stage of the development of an information technology. The exact genesis of the term is difficult to trace, but the term had solidly entered legal language by the 1980's (“End User”). End-users represent the end of the line; developers create technologies for personal consumption with them in mind. By making a platform “user-friendly,” developers make the product accessible and consumable to those who cannot produce said product. They can navigate and interact with a product but only because it has been developed in a way that lets them do so.

The end-user is a specialized, re-articulated term for consumer. While end-user is a relatively new term, it is also relatively absent from common contemporary vocabulary

because it is most commonly used in professional, and therefore less accessible contexts. The demographic of people who use the term most often do so because they themselves are not end-users. The average person is more likely to know and use the term “user” than “end-user” in part because of their distance from the development process of the technologies they use. We are capable of referring to ourselves as users because we know our roles with technologies, but since we do not participate in the processes that invoke the term end-user, we do not use it to describe ourselves. Outside of the historical context I just presented, users are not as directly associated with consumers because information technologies and platforms tend to be thought of as tools, but in the last forty years have become some of the most pertinent and present consumers. The teleology of information technologies partially disguises this fact; one does not consume a computer or a phone in the same way that one does not consume a hammer, or a treadmill, or a car, for example. That analogy, while not meaning to equate computers with hammers, treadmills, and cars, does show the commonality between these things: the consumers of them do not just consume them, and instead *use* these products as means to an end. Tools are used actively. That activity calls into question conceptions of the user. Conceptions and definitions of the user create a paradoxical effect in how they position the user as a consumer, but upon closer examination, present evidence that challenges that same situation. Users are defined by their limitations in production, yet are also defined by their activity. They are, in a way, the ultimate recipients, but they also produce an incredible amount of input. Users are consumers, but consumers are typically thought of as passive figures since to consume is to receive.

It is tempting to think of users as a singularity when in fact they are a part of a mass of other types of content consumers. When television broadcasting became popularized in the 1950's, most viewers didn't understand how the moving images on their TV screens were being transported from the broadcasting station to their home. In the electrical age of the 19th century, thousands of people sent telegraphs to each other but never once tapped those messages out in morse code; they gave their messages to telegraph operators, who translated the message into morse code (Standage). These people used a service to which they had minimal access in order to send and receive information (Standage). For centuries, readers have been engaging with texts they have had no hand in producing. While users are a specific type of consumer, they reside in the larger family of consumers of content who interact with a service or product to access that information. I use the word family because I do not seek to conflate users with TV viewers, telegraph users, or readers; I just mean to acknowledge their relation. Further, users are not a singularity even in their own category; since they entered into existence, users have changed as the platforms and products developed for them have changed. Underneath the umbrella term of "user" are multitudes of different users from different times and devices. For clarity's sake, however, the Internet did not create the user; the term arose before the Internet was a mainstream utility, but quickly became primarily associated with the Internet due to the amount of information technologies that rely on the medium in order to function. The personal computer, the World Wide Web, video gaming consoles, smartphones, and tablets all gave users new and different avenues for usage (Spicer). Now, the user dies and is born again every time a new application or

software update is released.

While I agree that users are consumers in that their existence arose from this fact, I find the associations of passivity and inaction with content consumers to be limiting. The definitions of what constitutes creation in the consumer-producer oppositions of information technology, whether in the form book or a picture on someone's phone, must be expanded and challenged. Consumers of content have made and continue to make creative space for themselves across a variety of information technologies. This creative and productive space does not invalidate the classification of them as consumers; instead, the ability of a figure like the user to make creative and productive spaces for themselves within platforms that only make room for them to consume indicates the necessity of consumption in their methods of creation.

Users, however, do not exist in a vacuum. As noted earlier, they comprise a faction of a larger category of content consumers, who I define as consumers who use information technology. An information technology is not necessarily digital, or even affiliated with a form of the internet; an information technology can be a book, an image, a newspaper, or a record on a record player. In my research, I have observed a pattern of collecting, hunting, gathering, and curation in content consumers like the user and the reader. They connect, interpret, respond, reframe, and critique in ways that require consumption as well as a critical eye. Writers like Roland Barthes, Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, and Umberto Eco uncover certain manifestations of this pattern that relate to the reader in their writing. Their discoveries and arguments provide points of reference for my larger articulation of this pattern in relation to the user as well. I consider the various

methods of user-artists from 1971 to 2014 like Guthrie Lonergan, Lillian Schwartz, Cory Arcangel, Jodi, James Bridle, and William Boling. Their works are evidence of the ways in which users find methods to create and produce in contexts that limit their access to more classic methods of production. This pattern is one of action and function; while I examine results of said actions and functions, I do so to get closer to the methods that led to such results.

Writing about content consumers is tricky; in order to establish or call attention to a type of content consumer, or a method of their consumption, authors and artists have had to fix said content consumer in a theoretical place, which leaves the figure and the idea of the figure closed off from further investigations. The user is already limited enough by the platforms they use and those who produce said platforms. In the tradition of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco, I seek to open up creative methods of the user instead of closing them off through absolute classification. Users are more than a punchline to an inside joke; they defy classification and the resulting fixity of classification. Over the last forty years, there have been multitudes of users. When a different type of user has emerged, they have not taken the place of the user who had existed previously. Users carry traits from past users within themselves as they adapt to changes in the platforms that they use; users are a result of evolution, culmination, and movement, rather than a trade of one type of users' figurative birth in exchange for another type of users' figurative death.

PART ONE

In thinking about the user, I realized that much of what I had noted in my initial analyses contain traits from criticism regarding the reader, their relationship to the text, and their relationship to the author. In my analysis of the user, I found a re-manifestation-- a reorganization-- of dynamics and functions noted by critics and theorists, like Roland Barthes, Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, and Umberto Eco. In light of that discovery, I must first present these arguments in the context from which they came originally before I can argue and detail their different manifestations in the user. This is not to claim their arguments as my own, or to repurpose their arguments; instead, this chapter must acknowledge and address the first part of a pattern before it can suggest the existence of a second. So, first, I will address Barthes, Iser, Fish, and Eco in isolation from the user, then see how my synthesis of their thoughts interacts with already existing writing on the user, and ultimately argue the results of this process as a perspective on the user. My reason for calling it a perspective rather than any type of treatise or concrete definition is because, like readers, there is no one "type," no monolithic entity of "user,"; no one can claim to know, much less prove, how all readers read, or how all users navigate the platforms they use. In this project, the terms, "the reader," and "the user," are meant to function more as variables; a signifier, an "x" that can signify a number of values. This project does not aim to define these variables, or to solve for the reader or the user; instead, it works to identify how those variables operate within the function that they occur. This is less about "what," and more about "how," and "why."

The four critics involved in this project wrote about several different practices, following several different traditions of literary criticism and critical theory. Most notably

of this group, Roland Barthes, an author whose work tends to defy classification due to its evolution of topics, sources, and scope, wrote on subjects from semiotics, to aesthetics, to philosophy, to his own life, to love, to reading, and to writing. He moved from structuralism to post-modernism, (a problematic term, as many different practices in the arts and in their criticism have been labeled as such, inconsistently) and was said to be working on a novel until his death in 1980. I use two works of his, which were written at different periods of his intellectual progression, and interspersed with the works of the other authors in this project; I begin with one of his earlier, but more well known essays, *The Death of the Author.* Alternately, the works I cite of Fish and Iser, which were published within two years of each other, are more readily classified within one paradigm of literary criticism: reader response theory. Their arguments, when placed side by side, produce the effect of difference mirrored by the oft-compared Mac and PC. Two entities, just similar enough to be brought up in conversation together, but too incompatible to render any side by side comparison unproductive. My inclusion of both of them in this survey is not to compare them, but rather to treat them as two sides of the same coin that can give a complete picture. Umberto Eco comes in last, chronologically, with his text, *The Open Work,* published in 1989, and exists outside of the tradition of reader response theory. His work uses the mathematical concept of information theory and places it in the context of aesthetics. He, Fish, Iser, and Barthes all situate the reader in the context of an institution, a community, or as an individual in different but intersecting ways. Eco's comments on an eponymously “open” work-- what makes a work versatile to different interpretation, fertile with meaning-- illuminate a different aspect of Barthes' writing in *S/Z* regarding his classification of “writerly,” and “readerly,” texts.

The Birth of the Reader

Before *S/Z,* there was *The Death of the Author.* Before the "readerly" and "writerly," Barthes first had to argue for the reader as an important and active figure in the field of literature and literary criticism. His seminal essay, written in 1967 and later published in the book, *Image-Music-Text,* laid the foundation for a type of criticism less focused on the author and instead more focused on a text itself and as Barthes writes, it's "destination" (Image-Music-Text 148). By "destination," Barthes means the reader, who tends to be the end-recipient of a text. For most of the essay, Barthes is concerned with the role of the author in the interpretation of a text. He questions how much importance "we" give to authors; in this instance, the "we" refers to a collective trained in what he calls "classic criticism," which "has never paid any attention to the reader" (Image-Music-Text 148). It is easy to align *The Death of the Author* with an intention of killing the author-- which, to some extent it is-- but the essay is more concerned with what the title implies, and in what the last sentence of the essay later articulates. The essay takes on the qualities of a trojan horse because the title disguises the essay as being primarily about the figure of the author. Once dissected, however, the essay ultimately has more to do with the recognition of the reader. The actual killing of the author is a means to an end; we need to kill the author in order bring a less-recognized figure into critical thought. The essay is less concerned with the author, and more concerned with what needs to happen to the author in critical thought to keep literature and literary response alive.

In one of the most iconic paragraphs of contemporary literary criticism Barthes writes, "we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the

birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Image-Music-Text 148). Barthes brings the reader as an entity in themselves into the arena of literary criticism. While he doesn't claim to be the critic to give readers the "history, biography, psychology" that was absent from their recognition as a figure, he does acknowledge readers as a distinct, separate, and necessary part of literature and literary criticism (Image-Music-Text 148). Going forward, it is important to remember Barthes' role in the "birth" of the reader; many critics in this chapter write about the reader and the functions of the reader, but Barthes was the figurative midwife that brought the reader into the world of literary criticism. The "classic criticism" he mentions did not consider the reader as a valid entity to analyze or write about, even though "classic" critics were readers themselves. When Barthes names the "myth" that the "writer is the only person in literature" and then challenges it, he implies a link between "classic criticism" and its "myth" in that the institution of "classic criticism" had become the myth-makers that established such a belief. By Barthes' argument, there would be no myth without a structure through which it could be perpetuated. His main concerns in this essay are, of course, about the reader and the author, but the essay also marks the beginning of his tendency to challenge structures like institutions. Further, this essay represents the beginning of Barthes positioning of his type of critical theory as separate from more paradigmatic, or "classical" criticism. By Barthes' writing, not only is the myth-making structure of "classic criticism" incorrect, it is he, Roland Barthes, whose criticism will break this paradigm in two. His writing challenges and questions the institution-- whether that be the institution of "classic criticism" or the larger limiting structures of the institution of language.

The Reader as Consumer

In his book *S/Z,* published in 1970, Barthes mentions the reader and their relationship to an institution within the first three pages. Before Barthes introduces his more well-known concept of the "writerly" and "readerly" in *S/Z,* he sets the stage for the reader and the writer through delineating their roles in the interpretation of a text, and in their relationships to the "literary institution" (S/Z 4). I must note, however, before I begin to quote Barthes, that the texts I quote from are all translations to English, and while I have consulted French speakers and French-English dictionaries regarding some word choices, a majority of my interpretation and synthesis of his work comes from its translation, because I do not speak or read French. Therefore, I do minimal amounts of close reading relating to word choice, and when I do, I have consulted with my advisor, Professor Éric Trudel, a native French speaker and owner of the Barthes texts in the French. At the beginning of *S/Z,* Barthes addresses the state of "our literature" before he goes into the meat of the work; he writes:

> " Our literature is characterized by the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producers of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer, between its author and its reader. The reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness-- he is intransitive; he is, in short, *serious:* instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text," (S/Z 4).

In the context of the larger text of *S/Z,* this excerpt functions to lay the foundation for the rest of Barthes' argument on language and on the various ways a text can be read because it shows how readers had previously been taught to treat a text. A majority of *S/Z* devotes itself to showing readers how to unlearn the role of consumer given to them by the "literary institution." Barthes' articulation of the dynamic that had caused readers to be cast in the role of consumer does not entail his giving in to said dynamic. Instead, it is an

articulation of exactly what he chooses to go up against. The separation and challenging of the "literary institution" happens not only in the meat of *S/Z,* but also in the way that Barthes locates his voice in the quoted excerpt. While Barthes does include his voice as a writer in the ownership of "literature," he does not include himself as a part of the "literary institution" to which he attributes the reader/writer consumer/producer opposition. Barthes' shift from his use of collective voice to a removed voice indicates a lack of belief in and support of the "literary institution" and its maintenance of the separation between authors and readers. By shifting from the collective "our" to the third person "the," Barthes establishes that the attention he pays to this structure does not mean he condones it through his writing. The language of that paragraph is visceral; his observations on the roles of the text, the author, and the reader are not precious. He further separates his voice from the "literary institution," through the use of a subjective judgement phrase like "pitiless divorce," which is comprised of an adjective meant to vilify the institution, and a verb that connotes a visceral emotional process.

His situation of the reader bears complexity in that the idleness of the reader is not a self-imposed, or even required, state. The relationship of the passivity of the reader to the institution implies that their idleness is not because they are not capable, but because the then-current paradigm barred them from being anything other than idle. The language that Barthes uses to analogize the binary between the author and the reader heavily locates said binary in the scope of consumerism. I asked my advisor, Prof. Éric Trudel, about the connotations of the French terms, particularly in regards to the translator's use of the word, "user." In the original French, Barthes wrote the word "usager," which literally translates to mean the word user. Upon further research and consultation with

Éric, however, the word “usager,” signifies different things than the English “user,” does. The “usager,” signifies an entity that uses a product, but extends past the definition I previously gave of the “user,” in my introduction and encompasses other types of consumers; in addition to being used to describe drug users, the French term is used to describe people who use the roads, the subway system, and, in its adjective form, “usagé,” means worn, in the way that a piece of clothing is worn down, or the seat in a theater is worn (Usager, *Reverso*). In short, an “usager,” refers to a person who uses something, often in the form of some type of service. The original French and English translation both triangulate the reader as a consumer; someone with enough access to receive the product, and to use it, but not enough to create it themselves, someone dependent on the producers of this product for the product itself. Barthes' further establishment of the author/reader binary through his alignment of the author with a proprietor, and the reader with a customer, continues to imply that the reader is relegated to the role of consumer out of circumstance, out of a lack of proper tools and resources. The reader's lack of access to production through a lack of tools and resources is what makes it possible for an institution to “maintain” a consumer/producer opposition between readers and authors, because an institution is a large enough structure with enough resources to be able to continue to enforce the boundaries of the spaces they allot to readers.

Barthes attributes the rigidity of the author/reader binary to the “institution,” which makes sense due to the fact that institutions have a history of regulating access to different groups of people, and tend to become gatekeepers of the usage of their products. Although Roland Barthes has, in other works of his, worked to deconstruct existing

paradigms, in *S/Z* he argues within the pre-existing structures he observes. Before outlining the "pitiless divorce" of the reader from creativity, Barthes sets up a small contradiction between literary work and literary institutions by saying that "the goal of literary work is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (S/Z 4). His concepts of "readerly" and "writerly" texts therefore arise from the institutional separation of creativity from the reader, with the "readerly" upholding this separation and the "writerly" subverting it. A "readerly" text is one that "can be read, but not written," a category which encompasses almost all existing "classical" literature and through it, criticism (S/Z 4). Barthes positions the "readerly" text as a product to be consumed by the reader. Conversely, a "writerly" text is "what can be written (rewritten) today," but "is not a thing," and is instead "a perpetual present," and "production without product," (S/Z 5). The "writerly," then, assumes the role of that which is impossible to pin down, through its opposition to the established form of the "readerly," which, by its nature, requires pinning.

One of the ways in which the "writerly" attains such effervescence through lack of establishment is in its refusal to cement its meaning. Barthes positions the "writerly" as having the capacity to become an "ideal text," "a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds," aligning meaning or significance with limitation (S/Z 5). The "ideal text" becomes a concept linked to the freedom granted by the variable possibility of "signifiers," and the attempt to escape from the revocation of that possibility, that vitality, through the specification and classification resulting from becoming the "signified." By Barthes' logic, once a text becomes "a structure of signifieds," the role of the reader, and the reader's access to the text become diminished; there becomes less for the reader to do

in the space of that text. If the meaning is given to them, there is no way for the reader to participate in the text and to produce their own meaning. Instead, they are left to receive it, to say yes or no, and to consume or reject. This opposition also clarifies the binary of consumer/producer by showing that rather than the opposition being between producers of texts and consumers of texts, the actual opposition of production and consumption is the production and consumption of meaning. By attaching concrete meaning to a text, the one place where readers can and do produce meaning gets taken away. A "structure of signifieds" alienates the reader from the one process of production they have.

Barthes' argument holds both authors and readers accountable in that the responsibility of constructing a "galaxy of signifiers," falls to the author. The responsibility given to the reader in this case is more elusive. Barthes' arguments suggest that a reader, in order to be creative, productive, and active, must mirror the qualities of writers, rather than being able to manifest their own forms of creativity. These suggestions are in part made through Barthes' alignment of the "writerly" with the desirable and the "readerly" with the less desirable. Most of my language in this paragraph positions the reader as a more passive entity subject to the movements and decisions of the author. In the context of that, the responsibility of the reader then becomes one of action and subversion; if an author of a text gives no space for response, it is up to the reader to make one, often in ways authors cannot.

Making Space

Both Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser question the binary opposition of author/reader and producer/consumer in different ways in their work in reader response theory.

They do not directly cite or comment on Barthes' writing in *S/Z,* so it would be problematic and deterministic to say that their work resulted from that of Barthes. More accurately, their work in reader response theory expands and jumps off from the issues raised by Barthes' work in *S/Z*. Between Fish and Iser, Fish takes a view closer to that of Barthes he considers the author as a major actor in the interpretation of a text; his book, *Is There a Text in this Class?* still implies a need for the author to guide the reader through their text, to direct the different types of meaning a reader could glean. This direction gives the author/reader binary connotations closer to those possessed by the relationship between a conductor and musician in that direction is needed to follow the content-- in the case of this example, the score-- but the musician is the ultimate interpreter of the content. While Fish does not fully give agency to the reader, he does do away with Barthes' idea of the "literary institution," and instead goes with a more crowd-sourced structure.

Fish's identification of literature being defined through a community rather than an institution like Barthes does is a step towards the creative liberation of the reader, but falls short due to the types of responsibility that individuals have to communities in which they participate. Although literature, as Fish argues, "is still a category, it is an open category, not definable by fictionality, or by a disregard of propositional truth, or by a predominance of tropes and figures, but simply by what we decide to put into it," (Fish 11). In Fish's writing, literature is a structure upheld by the community that participates in it, rather than a more rigid structure maintained by a less-accessible institution like Barthes argues. This is not to say that Fish argues for individual definitions of literature, even though he writes that "it is the reader who "makes" literature," which gives a great

amount of agency, creativity, and power to the reader (Fish 11). Shortly after this statement, Fish reigns in his claims, clarifying that "the reader is identified not as a free agent, but as a member of a community whose assumptions about literature determine the kind of attention he pays and thus the kind of literature 'he' 'makes'" (Fish 11). The structure of this argument positions the reader as a participant, but not yet an agent, in that the reader is capable of contributing, of participating in a community, and of being productive in said community through their participation, but that same community limits the agency of the reader because of their responsibility to the community, in that a community always has guidelines, and tends to require compromise.

Fish's half-way position on the agency and creative productive abilities of the reader initially distract from a more subtle point of his, also regarding agency. Although he sets up his ideas of the text, and of content, to be one of objectification, his comments regarding "kinetic art," reveal a subtle undercurrent in which he actually places most of the agency and power in the hands of the text itself. First, Fish concerns himself with the physicality of content; the temptation of calling a physical object, a piece of content, "objective," because the seeming fixed-ness of a line on a page (Fish 43). He briefly close reads the term, "content" in that a text is often believed to contain a thing, but ultimately argues against this misconception, positing that really, "the line or page or book *contains*-- everything," (Fish 43). The second part of this argument lies in his classification of literature as a "kinetic art," in that it moves and changes, contrary to the misconception of literature as a fixed object. He debunks this misconception by arguing that the "physical form [literature] assumes prevents us from seeing its essential nature... Somehow when we put a book down, we forget that while we were reading, *it* was

moving (pages turning, lines receding into the past) and forget too that *we* were moving with it," (Fish 43). By Fish's line of reasoning, a text not only "*contains* everything," in the sense of meaning, it also possesses within itself an inherent mobility, inextricable from the process of its reading. To Fish, to read a text is to move "with," the text; the medium specificity of a book requires the movement of the eyes of the reader, and the movement of the pages of the book to be read. Although a text requires the reader to physically move it, the necessity of this movement, the catalyst for this type of movement resides in the text itself, not the reader. The physicality of a text moves the reader to move *it,* not the other way around. The kinetic qualities of literature observed by Fish push the location of agency and power from the producer to the product.

Through this push, the reader becomes the site for texts' movements; while Fish's main argument on the kinetic qualities of literature is about an internal type of movement, he also notes a quality in texts that enable them to move externally. If the experience of reading, as Fish argues, moves the text in the mind of the reader—a fairly internal process and experience– in the space of time in which the reading occurs, the external kinesis of a text also relies on the reader. The most direct example of this occurs when Fish writes briefly about "verbal utterance," in texts in that "because it gives information directly and simply,it asserts (silently, but effectively) the "givability," directly and simply, of information," (Fish 29). I have been unable to find a prior use of the term in quotes used by Fish, which would imply that "givability," was a term coined by him for the terminology of his own work. Although he only employs this term in relation to a specific type of occurrence in a text, a "verbal utterance," the term extends beyond its initial qualification to apply to the way in which texts move outside of their own physical

existence and into other texts and other forms of discourse.

The internal and external kinetic abilities that Fish gives to texts call into question the way in which he considers texts as objects as well as almost elemental ethereal forms of motion. Primary evidence of this confusion occurs when Fish further elaborates upon "kinetic art," arguing that "the great merit of kinetic art is that it forces you to be aware of "it" as a changing object-- and therefore no "object" at all," (Fish 43). His articulation presents some problems; in order to establish literature as a kinetic art, he must approach it as an object. Once that approach happens, and Fish is conceptually satisfied with this alignment, the qualities of kinetic art transform literature into something other than an object due to the change required of a piece of kinetic art. The only unproblematic classification I can give to his thoughts on literature, and to the labeling of texts, is that more than an object, Fish sees texts as change, as motion, before he sees them or attempts to regard them as objects. To draw on my rudimentary knowledge of Physics for a comparison, Fish sees texts in measurements closer to speed, rather than mass, as distance over time, instead of kilograms, as something defined by change rather than fixity.

Wolfgang Iser's book, *The Act of Reading,* also classifies the text in a variety of ways, but in a manner different from Fish. To Iser, the text is both space and object; the literary text is both platform and 'thing', the reader moves in *and* around the text. More specifically, although Iser first introduces the text as an object, he quickly differentiates it from "given objects," arguing that instead of being able to "be viewed or at least conceived as a whole," "the 'object' of the text can only be imagined by way of different consecutive phases of reading," (Iser 108-9). He argues for this exception by reasoning

that “we always stand outside the given object,” but “are situated inside the literary text,” (Iser 109). Iser's location of the reader within the text affords the reader a level of mobility that frees both text from the fixity that Barthes calls “a structure of signifieds,” and the reader from navigational limitations of that structure (S/Z 5). By calling the literary text a space, Iser sets up the literary text to be a platform, a setting across which the reader can produce and create their own meanings.

The situation of the literary text as a platform, however, does not entail its passivity in the “act of reading”; instead, Iser makes clear that the reader and literary text are “two partners in a relationship,” and positions the “reading process as a dynamic interaction between text and reader,” (Iser 107-109). The collaboration between reader and text that Iser notes serves as an extension of Jean-Paul Sartre's idea of the “pact,” between a reader and a literary text in his work, *What is Literature?* from which Iser quotes. Unlike Iser, however, Sartre includes the author in the collaborative process, outlining that:

> “when a work is produced, the creative act is only an incomplete, abstract impulse; if the author existed all on his own, he could write as much as he liked, but his work would never see the light of day as an object...The process of writing, however, includes as a dialectic correlative the process of reading, and these two interdependent acts require two differently active people. The combined efforts of author and reader bring into being the concrete and imaginary object which is the work of the mind.” (Iser 108).

Upon the combination of Iser and Sartre's arguments, a chain-like, collaboration-based pattern emerges: first, a collaboration of the author and reader is required to establish the space of the text in that the text requires the author to write it and the reader to read it. Second, once the text is established, a collaboration between the text itself and the reader is required for the production of meaning. Through his involvement of Sartre, Iser argues

for two types of production from the author and reader: the author is required to produce a space-- a moveable, flexible, versatile space-- and the reader is required to produce their own response, their own making of meaning. To call back to my comparison of a conductor and a musician in the context of Fish's work, in this case, Iser removes the conductor from the equation. This is not to say that Iser removes the author entirely from his work; instead, he gives less responsibility to the author in the reader's production of a response. The reader remains in the role of the musician, who still interprets a score (a text) to produce music (a response). In Iser's interpretation of the relationship between the reader, the text, and the author, the role of the author shifts to the more removed role of a composer. The author still creates the score, but once it leaves their hands, it can be interpreted in any way, and that interpretation occurs between the musician and the score itself. The score relies on its composer and musician to realize it, in the same way Iser's vision of a text relies on its author and reader to bring it into existence. Once a text is written, it enters into a give and take relationship with its reader, similar to the relationship between a score and a musician.

If Iser focuses primarily on what happens between the text as score and the reader as interpreter, then Umberto Eco examines the entire chain of productivity, from author to text, text to reader, and reader to response, by initially focusing on what makes a text "open," in his book, *The Open Work*. He writes that "the dialectic between *form* and the *possibility* of multiple meanings," "constitutes the very essence of the 'open work'" and isolates the tension between a tight system of constraints (form) and the chaos of "possibility," (Eco 60). This tension, however, requires a level of compositional skill from the author in order to present a work that somehow "oscillates," between "order,"

and “entropy,” between improbable and probable; “[the author] introduces forms of organized disorder into a system to increase its capacity to convey information,” (Eco 60). He arrives at this argument through his theory that information with the highest level of meaning comes from less probable combinations of words in our accepted code: the combination of symbols and sounds that make up language. Eco, through his use of information theory and the concept of probability in its relation to meaning, posits the author as an organizer of the text, an organizer of patterns, probabilities, and meaning.

If the responsibility of making meaning falls under the jurisdiction of the reader, as Iser, Fish, and even Barthes argue, Umberto Eco would argue that in order for the reader to produce meaning from a text, the text must first be organized by the author in a way that leaves room for the reader, and for a multiplicity of interpretations, to be an eponymously “open,” work. This argument sits tangential to Fish's positioning of the author as a director of the text because while both Fish and Eco hold the author responsible to the text and the reader, Fish continues to hold the author responsible after the text has reached the reader. By Eco's argument, once the literary text is out of the hands of the author, the reader and reading process almost become tests of the author's organizational skills; how open to interpretation can an author make a text? How can an author develop a direction that a reader can approach from numerous locations? Eco presents one possible answer to these questions by offering the example of “great artists,” who “introduce new ways of saying or doing into their community,” but adds the provision that “the public consumption of their work as the consequence of the work's inclusion within a collective background-- the inevitable process of popularization and banalization that occurs to any original work the moment people get used to it,” (Eco 53).

This suggestion hinges on the relationship between an individual and their community similar to that which Fish uses to talk about the establishment and identification of literary texts in that both Fish and Eco note that while an individual can produce "new," work, the way in which this "new," work can propagate is through an already established community. In quoting information theorist Norbert Weiner, Eco suggests "a piece of information, in order to contribute to the general information of a community, must say something substantially different from the community's previous common stock of information," (Eco 53). The establishment or publication of a work, however pioneering, then becomes about the ways in which it makes itself comfortable to the reader, while still providing new combinations of language, and therefore, new combinations and possibilities of meaning.

Eco's identification of this dynamic illuminates two types of readers: those who first interpret and spread the text, and those who accept the text and respond to it because of its establishment by the first group. The acceptance of a text by the second group of readers entails the transition of said text into the "common stock of information," due to the increased level of comfortability, or, in terms of information theory, predictability, with the text itself. I'd like to bring Barthes and Fish back in for a moment, because the predictability that Eco discusses has something to say to Barthes opposition of "signifiers," and "signifieds," as well as the temporality of "kinetic art," that Fish notes. The mainstreaming of an "open," work represents the shift from possibility-- "signifiers,"-- to establishment-- "signifieds," – in that once a work becomes accepted or popularized, and the previously low-probability associated with an author's organization of a text becomes known and a part of the code, and, most importantly, becomes more

likely, its unexpectedness becomes expected. The text then moves from ethereal to tangible, and from kinetic to fixed, because it has been named and classified.

If a text becomes closed, or "readerly," upon its popularization, how can we expect it to be read in a way that still fosters the "pleasure," of "production," that Iser gives to the reader (Iser 108)? Can the popularization of a text be stopped? To answer the latter question first, no, we can't. Instead, what we can do is pay attention to the parallel that Umberto Eco makes between the reader and the author in terms of their modes of production in relation to a literary text. This parallel lies in the categorization of the reader as making meaning through a gathering of associations, of finitudes, of "signifieds," based on their education, lives, and interpretation of the work; Eco similarly positions the author as a compiler, an organizer of possibility, of "signifiers," (Eco 53)(S/Z 5). If the worry is that once a text becomes popularized it ceases to be able to be interpreted in any other way than the accepted responses, then the response to that worry should be that the creative organization should land in the hands of the reader in order to produce more unlikely combinations of meaning, instead of relying on the author's original organization of the text, or on the text itself. The sustainability of finding creativity in the response of the reader occurs when we are able to note the reoccurring qualities between the reader and the author: organization, compilation, and curation of different combinations, and therefore different iterations of information, of meaning.

A primary difference between the compositional practices of the reader and the writer is in the connotations of each because of their previously rigid roles of consumer and producer established by the "literary institution," and questioned chiefly by Barthes. If a consumer compiles content, or, rather, compiles parts of products that others consider

to be property, it is considered appropriation, because the reader has no way of creating that content from nothing, and collages things to make meaning. The figure of the author is not held to such standards in that type of producer/consumer binary. The writing of one individual challenges this distribution of appropriative work to the reader, and argues instead, for the appropriative types of "discourse," that authors produce. Michel Foucault, in his essay, *What is an Author?,* isolates what he calls "the author function," in order to begin to talk about what the author does (Foucault 6). While multi-layered, the part of his argument relevant to this survey is that he also positions the "author function," as one closer to editing, to compiling, because, in his words, "discourses are objects of appropriation," (Foucault 6). This opinion rises from his argument that, similar to what Barthes attributes to the efforts of the "literary institution" at the beginning of *S/Z,* texts are products. Although parts of his essay are at times overly deterministic, he attributes the alignment of texts with products to birth of the "author function," (Foucault 6). He goes one step beyond Barthes' argument, however, by stating that the "author function," is appropriative; Foucault labels early continental authors such as Aristotle and Homer, "unique in that they are not just the authors of their own works," because "they have produced something else: the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts," (Foucault 9). While his suggestion was influential in that introductory literature courses still assign it in their syllabi, I believe a repurposing of this observation with the aid of Eco, Iser, Fish, and Barthes is in order.

Critical Bricolage

In order to define a sustainable form of production in relation to Literature as a field, whether it takes the shape of a series of individuals, as Iser suggests, or of a more uniform community, as Fish claims, or an institution, as Barthes argues, the focus must shift from the author to the reader, as Fish and Iser argue. I cannot address this shift, however, without first defining a practice known as *bricolage*. Etymologically, its root word means "to tinker," but the term now more closely translates to describe a type of improvisational "do-it-yourself," project, primarily occurs in relation to visual arts, and is typically associated with collage, readymades, and mixed media work involving found objects ("Bricolage"). The term itself is relevant because a form of bricolage is a solution to the inherent fixation of meaning in literary texts over time and the diminishment of the creative capabilities of the reader; the form in question is what I call *critical bricolage*. I mean critical bricolage as a continuation of Eco's attribution of meaning-making to organization, and Foucault's attribution of it to the use and compilation of "discourses," but as a shift away from the organizational skills of the author and a shift towards the critical aggregative and associative skills of the reader. If we consider a literary text as something to be tinkered with, to be taken apart and put back together by the reader, and to give the combinative responsibility to the reader instead of the author, a text has an infinite amount of combinations and possibilities not only because of the variety of readers, but because of the variety of other texts, other art, and other media that readers can then place in conversation with the text itself.

Further, critical bricolage as a practice provides an example of a "writerly" type of text, and type of production, which, by its nameable existence, partially disproves

some of Barthes' argument regarding it. He states that a "writerly" text is "certainly not [found] in reading (or at least very rarely: by accident)" and that because "its model," is "a productive one, it demolishes any criticism which, once produced, would mix with it," (*S/Z* 5). Critical bricolage as a practice theoretically mutates this argument of Barthes' because it is both reading and a product of reading; the hunting, gathering, and sharing required of the practice invigorates it and the reader, gives them both movement and form. The practice of critical bricolage is both production and product, and evidences both reading and reader. It combines interpretation, association, circulation, and propagation. By presenting different combinations of a text itself, and by presenting different combinations of a text with other media, the reader is able to present both signifiers and signifieds because while their interpretations and decisions give a literary text some fixity, their re-organization creates new, or at least, different, possibilities.

Détournement

My suggestion of critical bricolage as a practice is not meant just for readers; putting content together in a critical way to produce meaning is a practice that extends beyond literature and could, theoretically, extend to almost any field, and in some cases, like the Situationnistes and their adoption of détournement[1], already has. Détournement is the process of taking something, often content, from its original context and twisting

[1] In 1957, a revolutionary group founded by artists in the legacy of avant-garde movements like Dadaism and Surrealism started a magazine in France called "Internationale Situationniste," which gave them the name of their movement, Situationnisme (Debord). While the group was politically motivated, they would circulate art that consisted of mass media like magazine clippings or comics in a different context; the situationists were known for changing the contents of speech bubbles in comics ("Situationism"). Like the Dadaist and Surrealist artists that came before them, Situationists challenged the limits of what was considered "art" (McDonough). Near the beginning of their movement, the Situationists adopted détournement from the Letterists as a primary method of articulating their ideology (McDonough). It is important to note that détournement was initially adopted by the Situationist International movement in specific reference to visual art rather than literature (Debord). As the employment of détournement grew more widespread, however, the line between literature and visual art began to blur as many manifestations of détournement began to include more and more textual elements (Debord).

the original intent through a change in context or alteration of content; it is a type of appropriation, often performed in a political context (Debord). Guy Debord, one of the leading figures of the Internationale Situationniste movement, wrote extensively on the subject, and devised two main categories of détournement. The first, a "minor détournement," is the taking of something incidental and without much meaning in its original context like a "press clipping, a neutral phrase, a commonplace photograph," and giving it fresh, new meaning by placing it in a different context (Debord). Umberto Eco's writing on information theory echoes the ideology of minor détournement in that they both rely on instances of low probability to catalyze high meaning in content with originally low levels of meaning. The second, a "deceptive détournement," is the taking of content with already high levels of meaning, and re-situating it to access new meaning and/or more meaning (Debord). While détournement is an important method to bring into my introduction of critical bricolage, the reason I call it critical bricolage and not critical détournement is that not all critical bricolage is appropriative; in the case of many readers' responses to texts in academic settings, critical bricolage is a practice that involves thorough citation. Détournement can be a method for the execution of the practice of critical bricolage, but is by no means the only method for practicing critical bricolage.

The User

In other cases, there are some producer/consumer binaries that are simply less feasible to hold to the standards and applications of critical bricolage; although a student of architecture could place several different qualities of different buildings in

conversation with each other to produce meaning in a paper or presentation, the physical immediacy is not the same as that of a visual or textual organization. Regardless of physical immediacy, critical bricolage more accurately encompasses the compilative and appropriative meaning-making practices of figures who have been previously positioned as the consumer in a consumer-producer binary. It becomes difficult, then, to place the user in conversation with critical bricolage because the user has been both consumer and producer, literally, and in theoretical writing about the user. I feel it necessary, however, to do so, because the user has, more often than not, been associated with the consumer. The history of the term, in the context in which I use it, arose to describe a certain type of consumer. The user is defined by the products and platforms they use, and therefore, consume. If the title "reader," primarily signifies a figure who reads, then the title "user," primarily signifies a person who uses. The two differ conceptually and linguistically because the title, "reader," denotes a figure labeled by the action of "reading," whereas the title, "user," denotes a figure labeled by the action of "using." The act of reading contains more response-based qualities; the reader reads a text, which has its own rules and limited content. The user, however, uses a platform for their own ends. And while the user may be more directly associated with the role of consumer, there is a larger sense of self-starting and mobility to the actions of the user. A text could be argued to have the same teleological role as whatever platform or product a user uses, but that is just one possible role of a text.

The amorphous nature of the user makes them difficult and problematic to write about because of the necessity of definition or classification in critical writing; how can you argue a point about something if you can't concretely say what that something is?

Not only do the functions of the user change depending on what type of platform or product they use, but they also change as those same platforms and products are further developed. In the writing that currently exists on the user which is diverse in scope and content, the work of Olia Lialina and Hito Steyerl rises to the top. Unlike my engagement with Barthes, Fish, Iser, and Eco, Lialina and Steyerl write about very different periods of the internet; instead of combining different parts of their writing for a full ideological picture of the user in the way that I did with the reader, I put their work in conversation with each other because together, they depict a chronological progression[2] of the user. During this progression, two types of users, not mutually exclusive from one another, emerge: the pioneer and the layman. These types echo Eco's observation on the popularization of "new ways," of saying, writing, doing, and making art in relationship to the community in which they occur in that there seems to be two stages of this process: experimentation and introduction, followed by popularization and de-sensationalization. Lialina and Steyerl approach these stages and different types of users, through different methods which result in different arguments about different subjects.

Before delving into Lialina and Steyerl's work, I must first address the context in which both writers made their arguments insofar as when they were working, what

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[2] The chronological progression of the user directly ties to the chronological progression of the internet. The internet began in 1969, with a group of networked computers on the west coast of the United States; during that time, it was called ARPAnet, or Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (Spicer). The internet didn't enter people's homes until the eighties, and even then, was restricted to the interfaces of e-mail and Bulletin Board Systems-- also known as BBSs (Spicer). The World Wide Web, which people often think of as the first version of the internet, lifted off in 1994 (Slocum). When I refer to Web 1.0, I mean the period on the internet between 1994 and roughly 2001. The dot.com boom and burst are time periods that overlap with both Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. The dot.com boom was a time in the first year of the new millennium when venture capitalists were pouring investment money into the development of web sites, which created a bubble that eventually burst. Several highly developed sites rose out of the ashes of the dot.com bubble bursting, and laid the foundation for the more polished, less free Web 2.0, an era which lasted from around 2003 to 2009, ending with the release of the smartphone. Another distinction of Web 2.0 is that it emerged in full as broadband internet connections became more widely adopted in favor of dial-up connections (Slocum). The rise of smartphones and other smart devices began the internet age we currently reside in.

iteration of the internet they reference, and what fields influence their writing, as neither were originally trained as critics, and neither include the field of literature in their investigations. Olia Lialina, a Moscow-born, identified "Net Artist," was originally trained in film, but when the film collective she was a part of asked her to design their web page, she became literate in HTML and began exploring what art could be made with that medium (Mass Effect). Once the Soviet Union announced its discontinuation of 16mm, she was faced with the decision of leaving a traditional practice behind to fully pursue a "new" one: early Internet art, also known as "net.art". She is often described as a "pioneer" of this field, and rightly so; as an avid contributor and critic of the field, Lialina's work provides rich examples of both creator and critic, of producer and consumer. One of her biggest contributions to what Foucault and Barthes would call "the discourse" of critical writing about the internet and internet-aware art[3], is her classification of the different iterations, aesthetics, structures, and effects of the internet on those who navigate and create it: users.

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[3] The term, "internet-aware art" refers to art made after the emergence of the internet in the way we have contemporarily known the internet; not the ARPAnet of old, but the internet of the personal computer, from email and bulletin board services in the late eighties and early nineties, to the web, to the multi-device wireless internet we know today. Internet-aware art describes the type of art that could not have occurred without an artist's exposure to some form of the internet; whether or not the work takes place on the internet, or directly mentions the internet, it somehow, through some quality, takes influence from the internet. As Ceci Moss puts it in her essay, *Internet Explorers,* "internet artists began to make art *about* the informational culture using various online and offline means, no longer determining their practice solely by an online existence" (Moss 147). While some may argue that if that is the case, then any art is internet-aware art because we are all aware of the internet now, I disagree. Let's say I am a painter, and decide to paint only landscapes exclusively on canvas. In that case, my work would not be internet-aware art because it bears no consequences or influence (Continued on next pg.) of the internet itself. However, if I chose to put those same landscapes I had hypothetically painted and framed them as if they were appearing on someone's Instagram feed with a username, a caption, and accurate buttons, and show them in a gallery, the work (although conceptually heavy-handed) would be considered Internet-aware because while its medium and method of display did not occur on the internet, or use any part of the internet as a tool or medium, it would be influenced by aspects of the internet like the platform of Instagram. My use of this term will occur in higher concentration once I go deeper into Hito Steyerl's writing, because the works I cite of Lialina's were written before the concept of internet-aware art came into high use.

Web 1.0 and Web 2.0

Lialina's essays, *The Vernacular Web: The Indigenous and the Barbarians,* developed after a talk she gave in 2005, *The Vernacular Web 2,* published in 2007, and *The Vernacular Web 3,* published in 2010, detail changes in internet use, and therefore, users, as the internet evolved from what she calls "Web 1.0," and "Web 2.0," (Lialina). In the first installment of this conceptual trilogy, she takes on an almost ethnographic tone, referring to the "culture" of the internet and how the aesthetics and said culture of the internet have changed; her nostalgia for the open terrain of the web of the 90's is unmistakeable (Lialina). She recognizes the internet era she began her work in as the "amateur web" and, at the time of publication in 2005, recognizes "the amateur web as a thing of the past," that was "washed away by dot.com ambitions, and professional authoring tools" (Lialina). She positions the amateur web, Web 1.0, as a wild west, a sparsely populated frontier, full of hope. Although Lialina's nostalgia for this iteration of the web takes a front seat in her first essay, a major topic within the essay itself is the types of access that was available at the time. An example of this happens when Lialina heralds the "under construction" graphic that many pages had during Web 1.0, as evidence of "great times shortly after the scientists and engineers finished their work on the Information Highway," because "ordinary people came with their tools and used the chance to build their own roads and junctions," (Lialina). Again, the "great times," come to the front of her writing, but her use of the qualifier, "ordinary," in the phrase "ordinary people," sneaks in and speaks volumes; her nostalgia partially comes from the fact that the ability to build, produce, create, and pioneer, as she argues, was taken away from the "ordinary people," that populate the internet with the arrival of the dot.com bubble. In

this early essay, Lialina doesn't directly refer to users; she treats them as citizens of a nation– in this case, the nation of the web– adrift in a changing landscape.

In her documentation of the shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, Lialina mourns for the designation of the figure of the user to the realm of consumer. By Lialina's argument, the dot.com boom, in its corporatization of web content and web pages advanced beyond a point of accessibility that "ordinary people," could engage with. To go with her analogy of construction, it would be as if "ordinary people," went on attempting to build a neighborhood of slightly ramshackle but endearing single family homes while a number of start-ups and corporations were racing to make skyscrapers and suburbs. When access to a certain practice becomes diminished through monopolies and the distancing of technique through lack of inclusion in education, independent agents, "ordinary people," who populated the internet during the arrival of the dot.com bubble.

Similar to Umberto Eco, Olia Lialina has two different ways of describing and considering users. For Lialina, a user can fall into one of two categories: the pioneer or the layman. The names for these divisions are of my own making to describe the disparity between the "amateur" builder and the "ordinary people," left to be consumers after web design fell primarily to institutions and corporations. This distinction describes a larger phenomenon that has continued to occur over the course of the history of the user: a small group of semi-amateurs will explore a fringe platform, and through this exploration and the self-teaching required of said exploration, demonstrate the viability of said platform to certain institutions, like governments and corporations, who then take over and privatize the modes of production pioneered by that first group of users. That kind of take over heightens initial accessibility and lowers long-term accessibility to the modes of

production that are used to develop the platform. This dynamic noted by Lialina resonates with Eco's structure for describing the popularization of methods for organizing information in that a smaller group of people will introduce a tradition into a community and as the understanding of this tradition, concept, or method grows, its capacity to carry "meaning" decreases proportionally (Eco 53). This, in context with Lialina's work, illuminates a distinct difference between her and Eco; although they identify similar patterns in each of their fields, Eco is concerned more with "meaning making" while Lialina is concerned more with just the act of "making" in itself. While Eco writes about the practice of maximizing the interpretive versatility of a work, Lialina writes about the practice of bringing works into existence in the first place.

The gap between Lialina's and Eco's writing also evidences a larger problematic issue in my practice of putting the figures of the user and the reader in conversation with each other, because as I have said before, the user is not a continuation of the reader. Readers largely depend on authors for the texts that make them readers. Users do not; their only dependence is on the developers of the technologies and platforms that they use. The user's primary similarity and point of comparison to the reader is that they have both been cast in the role of consumer in a consumer-producer opposition. The products involved in these oppositions differ greatly, but the concerns of the critics in both fields writing about these oppositions remain the same: is there still room for the creative and productive capacities of the consumer in a consumer-producer opposition? Does this opposition even exist anymore? If so, what ways are the consumers in question able to make room? In the case of the reader in the theory I have surveyed, this room lies in the reader's response-- a result of interpretation-- to a text, and the critical bricolage a reader

is capable of enacting for reasons that initially placed them in the opposition in the first place. For the user, the answers to these questions are less clear; the terms "interpretation" and "response" become more shrouded because there are minimal standards for them. Users are not taught standards for the platforms they use in the same way readers are taught to read, interpret, and respond to texts. In spite of the lack of standardization, users still rely on more interpretive and response-based practices to find the room to be productive and creative in the face of their role in the consumer-producer opposition.

Lialina articulates this opposition similarly to Barthes in *S/Z* in that their observations of dynamics are necessary for their oppositions to said dynamics, and their arguments against them. They both present the reality of these oppositions as relational to entities larger than individuals; Barthes attributes the opposition in literature to the literary institution, and Lialina attributes the opposition on the web to the evolution of the platform at the hands of corporations during the dot.com boom (S/Z 4)(Lialina). Unlike Barthes, who uses his observation of this opposition as jumping off point for his argument about the infinite possibilities of interpretation, and of semiotics, Lialina's articulation of the dynamic *is* her argument. Her first essay of this series, *The Vernacular Web,* illuminates the consequences of the evolution of the web; consequences that, due to the way in which user-platforms evolve incrementally, are rarely noticed because the changes themselves are so minor the platform's user base can sometimes not realize they are using a fundamentally changed platform. Although her essay presents no alternative, it does not resign the user to their fate through exclusion either. Lialina's argument in the first *Vernacular Web* is not about a dismissal of the user; instead, it is a call to save them

from extinction.

This call, however, is not without limits. The user Lialina advocates for is the user of web-platforms past; citizen of GeoCities and user of HTML. As Web 2.0 ushered in a new type of user-citizen, more consumer than ever before, there became fewer and fewer spaces for the type of production Lialina attributed to the user of Web 1.0, the wild west of the 90's (Lialina). After the web's full evolution into Web 2.0, which occurred around 2004-2007, with 2004 marking the web's transition to broadband connections from dial-up, 2005 marking the first installment of *The Vernacular Web,* and 2007 marking Lialina's publication of the second installment (Lialina). In the introduction of her second essay in this series, *Vernacular Web 2,* Lialina writes that "the Web of the 90's was... a full blown relationship between a new medium and its first users," (Lialina VW2). Lialina's presentation of Web 1.0's dynamism echoes Iser's presentation of the reader and the text as "two partners in a relationship" (Iser 107). Again, the parallel between Lialina's work and the literary criticism surveyed also shows the way in which the user is different from the reader in that Iser's argues for an active collaborative dynamic and increased access in the face of a noted opposition whereas Lialina's argues on the existence of opposition and decreased access at the cost of an active collaborative dynamic. In an articulation of the then-current state of the user, Lialina states:

> "Today, that relationship is gone. And for a good reason. The space we've researched as a new medium over the last ten years has turned into the most mass-medium of them all. Nothing more than a mass-medium, permeating our daily lives... Connection never breaks, distinction between a server and a hard disk, between your desktop and that of another person has almost vanished, and there's nothing that could contribute to the development of user-media relationship, nothing to provoke us."

In this continuation of *The Vernacular Web,* Lialina positions the consumer-producer opposition as absolute; her vision of Web 2.0 as it was in 2007 left minimal space for the

productive and creative pursuits of the user. The “hope” that she considered to be integral to the user-based development of Web 1.0 dissipated as users became less able to develop the web they navigated. Her presentation of this dissipation evidences a viewpoint that while correct, is only correct in the limited structure she set with the first *Vernacular Web*. The type of production and creativity she associated with the development of the web may have been less available to users, but in no way did that mean they couldn't find new ways for and new forms of creation and production.

The Internet of Things

Hito Steyerl argues for one such “new” method in her essay, *Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?* While Lialina's answer to this question would be “yes,” Steyerl takes a different stance. After posing this question to her readers, Steyerl first describes the state of the Internet she proceeds to assess, calling it “obviously completely surveilled, monopolized, and sanitized by common sense, copyright control, and conformism” (Steyerl). Her description of the rigid structure of the Internet of 2013 initially matches that of Lialina in 2007. It diverges when she provides an answer to her question; “The internet is not dead. It is undead and it is everywhere” (Steyerl). Steyerl's use of the word “undead” carries significance in that it denotes a life after death, an incarnation with vitality that, in order to occur, first requires a death. Lialina notes this death but was writing during a time after the dot.com boom and before the popularization

of smartphones, tablets, and other such devices that comprise the Internet of Things[4]. The internet era known as the Internet of Things becomes integral in Steyerl's argument for why the internet is undead; one aspect of the death required for her diagnosis is the death of the Web. The Web was just one of many platforms that have been developed to access the Internet; the death of the Web does not therefore mean the death of the Internet.

Instead of focusing on the limitations of the Internet of Things, in the way Lialina did for Web 2.0, Steyerl focuses on what forms user-based creation and production take when they are no longer able to be a part of the development process. Steyerl's type of focus resonates with different aspects of Barthes, Fish, and Iser in that each critic, including Steyerl, ultimately choose to focus on how the consumer in whatever consumer-producer opposition they examine creates, responds, and interprets the products they are given; they each focus on how their consumers make room for themselves. Before Steyerl presents her findings, she first establishes that "the world is imbued with the shrapnel of former images[5], as well as images edited, photoshopped, cobbled together from spam and scrap. Reality itself is postproduced and scripted" (Steyerl). In the face of "these conditions," of a reality already based in dispersion and post-production, Steyerl argues that "production becomes post-production," and further explains that this means that "the world can be understood but

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[4] The term "Internet of Things," relates to a concept of users using a variety of devices to access the same internet; a concept that dates back to 1982, when researchers at Carnegie Mellon connected a Coke vending machine to the Internet (Lane). This term is the most widely used to describe our current Internet-era due to the variety of interconnected devices most users engage with. One user can now access the same internet through a variety of, at times, interconnected devices. At other times, the Internet of Things refers to the specialization of devices; a watch for this, a headset for that, a television for this, a desktop for that, etc., and is often linked to the rise of specialized applications on smart devices.

[5] At this point, I must add that Steyerl, a prominent video artist trained in film, wrote this essay with the image in mind, and while I find her arguments to be relevant to more than just the image, I do not extend them to more than the image in this chapter, but do refer to images primarily in the following chapter.

also altered by its tools" (Steyerl). These "tools" are the methods of post-production: "editing, color correction, filtering, cutting," which are "not aimed at achieving representation," and instead, "have become means of creation" (Steyerl). Steyerl's definition of post-production methods contain qualities similar to the compilative practices of critical bricolage in that they both require a level of critical decision-making based on interpretation. Both post-production methods and critical bricolage are a type of response; they stem from some jumping-off point of some type of consumed content but become a creation in themselves.

Steyerl's argument points towards a method for thinking about the user, or any consumer of content seemingly trapped in a consumer-producer opposition for that matter. Barthes, Fish, Iser, and Eco also contribute to this method in that they put forth several different types of criticism that advocated for the creative and productive elements of response, and of interpretation. Steyerl's essay, *Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?* embodies how that same advocacy manifests in the context of the user, and user-specific issues. Her invocation of post-production as a method of production shows the necessity of critics who are constantly willing to re-evaluate the structures through which we measure creativity and productivity, and the necessity of re-evaluating those structures ourselves when thinking about the consumers in consumer-producer oppositions. If Steyerl shows the importance of re-evaluation and reframing, then Lialina shows us the importance of questioning the oppositions of consumers and producers that come to be in our lives.

To consider critical bricolage as a creative and productive pursuit as well as a practice through which content consumers can make room to develop their own content

in oppositions that leave little room for them is necessary if we are to critique the content consumer. If I aim to understand the practices of the user, it is imperative for me to understand critical bricolage as a valid practice that occurs across many different types of content consumers. I must reach beyond the limiting classification of consumption, and open my analysis to include creation *through* consumption.

PART TWO

Note: At this point, please refer to the Figure Booklet/User's Guide, located inside the back cover to view any images labeled Fig. 1, etc., referenced in this section. Thank you.

My definition of the user must sharpen in focus from the larger variety of users in the first chapter to a more specific type. The users I engage with in this chapter exist in the context of an established art and/or literary scene because they have produced works that I can engage with as a student of literature and visual media. I do not engage with the masses of users because while there may be interesting things to say about those users and the way they use certain platforms, there are no works, no evidence to evaluate, in the context of my argument. In theory, I could spend this chapter observing the daily use of various platforms, but my observations would be limited and incomplete because of the limits of my own experience as a user; I know only a very small part of being a user. This chapter aims to identify and evaluate different possible methods[6] used by users to practice critical bricolage, so I found it more productive to look at a more specific type of user who produces work more conducive to analysis. This type of user has functioned and continues to function within academic and artistic spheres; most of the work I cite in this chapter has been shown in gallery settings or written about in the context of internet-

[6] A quick delineation between my use of "method" and my use of "practice": when I use method, I refer to a way of doing something, and when I use practice, I refer to the actual doing. Methods can remain theoretical, practice implies an enactment.

aware art. The users I look at have all actively made the work I cite with the aim of "making" rather than the sometimes unconscious existence on social media that could be considered art if one chose to read it that way. Alternately, the work I chose to include in this chapter is established and, moreover, established in systems like academia, a museum, or a gallery space, that consider it material conducive to analysis. Their establishment is why I chose them; I am not trying to introduce a new method of analysis, or to argue for the place of a type of work in the category of art or literature. Instead, the establishment of these works enables me to use already accepted conventions of analysis to argue for the prominence of a type of response and type of production on behalf of the user.

The role of appropriation in this project and more particularly in this chapter, is complicated; all of the sources I cite in this chapter involve components that have been appropriated. While I cannot ignore the prominent part appropriation plays in critical bricolage, I must clarify that I do not consider appropriation to be the primary focus of this venture. Instead, I believe the compilation, collection, connection, and curation that go into critical bricolage to be a more central focus; appropriation is often required in order to procure the content that is critically bricolaged by the user, but appropriation is a method for the practice of critical bricolage, in the same way that détournement is a method of practicing critical bricolage. Détournement and appropriation are not mutually exclusive of each other and often inform one another. Détournement is an even more specific form of appropriation that requires an element of re-contextualization to increase meaning of content.

One helpful articulation of the relationship of appropriation to critical bricolage, however, was made by Paul Slocum in his 2007 *Spirit Surfing* manifesto; he argues that "perhaps finding is making, but finding is not enough," continuing that once found, content can become "jewels publicly removed and reset," (Moss 149). To run briefly with Slocum's comparison of content with "jewels," and extend that analogy, the user-artist, the finder, would then be a jeweler who studies and assesses the jewels they encounter and decides how to best situate said findings. The discerning eye required in this analogy demonstrates how necessary the qualifier "critical" is in critical bricolage; one could argue that all bricolage is critical, but the practice I refer to requires an educated type of assessment of content that stems from an expertise in searching. This expertise is what makes the "finding" that Slocum mentions possible, as the act of "finding" results from the act of searching, which requires the setting of critical parameters. The user-artists whose work I investigate differ greatly, although most are still active. While there are a few outliers, most of the works in this chapter were made between 2005 and the present day. Some occurred within a window of time, like James Bridle's Instagram project, *Dronestagram,* which was an active from 2012-2015, or, like Cory Arcangel's piece, *Working on My Novel,* was compiled on Twitter from 2011 to 2014 and then published and advertised once, also in 2014. In the instance of surf clubs[7] like Nasty Nets, the work

[7] Surf clubs refer to a practice that occurred during the mid to late Web, from around 2005 to 2009, parallel to the rise of more polished social media platforms like Facebook, which became available in its non-collegiate, mainstreamed form in 2006. The term comes from the words "Internet Surfing Club" displayed on Nasty Nets, but came to describe many other clubs, like Double Happiness, Supercentral, and Mouse Safari (Boling). Surf clubs came to signify online communities of users, or as they were colloquially known at the time, "surfers," who navigated the web and brought content they liked, thought was funny, or thought was "surfable" to their online community, their "club" which was often centralized around a website. Often, the surfers that populated these sites were artists. The term, "Professional Surfers," arose out of an eponymously titled exhibition in 2006 by Lauren Cornell, which "boldly considered web browsing as an art form" (Moss 149). Notable Surf Clubs include the club Nasty Nets, which was formed in 2006, and is now archived on the Rhizome database.

is more centered around its existence as a collection; Nasty Nets is often talked about by critics and artists as a combined effect of all of its posts, and the environment it created for work during Web 2.0.

The User-Artist and The Computer

The works I look at in this chapter come from a variety of backgrounds, platforms, and styles; almost all of them were made between the years of 2005 and 2015, which means that most of the work in this chapter was made during a time when some iteration of the internet, whether the web or the internet of things, was in existence. The only artist who made their work before any widespread version of the internet is one of the first artists who made artistic work using a computer. Starting in 1969, Lillian Schwartz collaborated with Bell Laboratories as a "consultant" and produced a series of computer-generated moving-image works using the early computer technology the laboratory made available to her. I wanted to include her work because while I focus primarily on the user after the integration of the internet and internet-based platforms, her work represents an important stage of the user-artist, and how, even before the internet, she, as a user, relied on a type of critical bricolage to bring her work into being. Most of the early works she made during her time at Bell Labs combined a series of computer-generated images, often paired with early computer generated music by artists like Richard Moore and Jean-Claude Risset (Schwartz website/film). In the 1976 film *The Artist and the Computer* by John K. Ball which documented Schwartz's process at Bell Labs, Schwartz mentions her project, *UFOs,* made in 1971, and how it used three

different programs which, in her words, began as “garbage” that she “picked out of a scientist's [trash] pail that he was writing for atoms and molecules” (Keating). She continues by explaining that once she saw the scrapped programs, she “realized that the proper addition of color was able to produce a very exciting image” (Keating). Lillian Schwartz was one of the first computer users who actively made art with a computer while still being fairly distant from the development of the computer itself.

As a user and an artist, Schwartz worked with what she had access to and part of what she had access to was the programming detritus of other people working in the lab to also make computer-generated images. Her skill-set as an artist and knowledge of more classic practices of post-production in film differentiated her from the rest of the workforce at Bell Labs; her grasp of the conventions like color, timing, and sound that go into film but are often augmented in post-production made *UFO's* possible. Her experience making *UFO's* demonstrates the necessity of consumption for the creative practices of the user. Before she found those leftover programs for visualizing atoms and molecules, they were garbage[8]. Once she employed her own type of production, which mirrored a lot of what Steyerl considers post-production, in that Schwartz added color, music, and timing to it, once-garbage programs became a collection and re-situation of Schwartz's making. Schwartz's editing of the programs was only the first part of how she practiced critical bricolage to create *UFO's.* In addition to more formal elements of post-production, Schwartz's critical bricolage manifested in the fact that she compiled three different programs together and allowed them to interact with each other in a way that

[8] Literally. She picked the programs out of the trash (Keating).

produced something greater than the sum of their parts. Although difficult to capture in one still, the three programs and the images they produced collaborate to create a blinking, shifting, and multi-patterned visual. I have included a screenshot, Fig. 1, that attempts to capture all three working together; one can see a red crescent in the center of the frame, with an almost houndstooth-like pattern in the back. That pattern is actually a result of two programs interacting, one of which creates a crystalline pattern similar to what salt molecules look like up close, and the other is a more angular visual. Combined in the frame, the two programs create a kind of cross-hatching. All of the color in the work was added by Schwartz, which drastically affects the content, and the way the shapes of the various programs move within the space.

Hacking

Detritus plays an important role in *UFO's,* and reprises a similar role in most of the internet-aware works in this chapter. Whereas Schwartz literally picked some of the programs she used out of the trash, many of the user-artists I mentioned are or were highly capable at gathering and hunting for useful pieces of detritus that built up and continues to build up on the internet. I use the term “detritus” because of its connotations to scrap, as in scrap metal, which can be scavenged and melted down or repurposed. Detritus is non-threatening, unnoticeable, and unsophisticated; if sophistication enters into the picture it is in the form of a critically sophisticated eye, capable of high levels of discernment. In some works in this chapter, the idea of user-artists scavenging, sifting through, and collecting this detritus is quite literal; however, in the context of Guthrie

Lonergan's concept of the "default," detritus becomes more figurative in that the term doesn't necessarily mean appropriation/repurposing of content, and at times, can instead refer to an appropriation of a method of using a platform. Fig. 4, a screenshot I took of a table by Lonergan which explains this concept, uses the example of painting a mediocre picture in MS Paint, a program that came installed in many PCs that ran Microsoft as their operating system. In the case of Lonergan's idea of "defaults," the repurposed scrap is the platform itself rather than developed content made with the platform. Pinning down a definition for defaults is a tricky process because they are a highly relational genre. Defaults could and can manifest in any number of ways, which is why they are so often defined by what they are not.

Guthrie Lonergan, who pioneered and popularized the term in the vocabulary of the internet-aware art world, first presents the term in a table that contrasts defaults with what he calls "hacking." The title of this table, "Hacking vrs. Defaults" announces the necessity of an opposition from the beginning to flush out what defaults are. In it, Lonergan positions hacking as a subversive and "sophisticated" practice of making art on the web that exists outside of or in opposition to "The Man." This type of opposition occurred most during the era of Web 1.0, and became less feasible as the more developed Web 2.0 moved into prominence. One example of the pre-Web 2.0 hacking style is the series of altered video games created in 2002 and 2004 by Cory Arcangel, whose work also appears later in this chapter. In *Super Mario Clouds,* Arcangel removed every aspect of the game except for the clouds (Arcangel). In *F1 Racer Mod,* also referred to as *Japanese Driving Game,* Arcangel removed everything but the road and scenery of the

game through modifying video game cartridges using code (Arcangel). Both removals cause the viewer to question if the visuals they interact with are really games anymore. By removing their "gameness," Arcangel subverts their originally intended use. One cannot "play" *Super Mario Clouds* or *F1 Racer Mod* in the same way one could "play" their un-modified counterparts. Arcangel's modification of Nintendo cartridges evidence a type of user-artist who worked in a time when he could still crack open the technology he used and alter it. Arcangel's type of hacking art relies on a breaking of technologies developed for users in their hardware; he changed the physical cartridges which are the hardware of a game.

Other earlier hacking artists also experimented with how they could break a piece of technology to highlight a wrong way of using said technology. The artist-team known as Jodi, mentioned by Lonergan in his table as the primary example of user-artists who make hacking art, made most of their work during the mid to late 1990's, after the invention of the web, but before Web 2.0. In a number of their works, the user-artists behind Jodi[9] investigated the visual and conceptual relationships between the source code of a web page and the interface that the code produced. Although they also started making net.art by modifying old video games, most of the work that helped them define the genre of hacking art was in web page form. One of their more prolific works, titled *wwwwwwww.jodi.org,* features an interface-- Fig. 2 is a screenshot of said interface-- of green symbols and numbers arranged in what appears to be no particular order against a black background. A look at the source code of the site, reveals elegant, minimal code

[9] Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans

and the specs for several different types of bombs, illustrated with symbols found on a computer keyboard. Fig. 3 is a screenshot of the specs in the source code. *wwwwwwww.jodi.org* challenges our expectations of what a web page is supposed to be, and where the content, or information is located. In this piece, the Jodi collective urges us to reconsider how users of the web during the mid to late 1990's received and more importantly, could have received their information. Not only do they make the viewers of *wwwwwwww.jodi.org* more aware of the capacity of web pages to carry information, but they also draw attention to the importance of looking "under the hood" of a web page.

An issue with Jodi's attempt to draw that type of investigative attention is that as the web became more highly developed, users began to lose the type of knowledge required to engage with works like Jodi's; if users even know what source code is and how to access it, there is the additional challenge of being able to read what Jodi coded--and, as noted in the introduction, what often makes users users is an inability to code or to develop content, which means an inability to read or understand the product that has been developed. Hacking art is an interesting intersection of user identity and artist identity because artists like Jodi and Cory Arcangel initially treated developed hardware like video games or software like the web as tools to explore, to break, to figure out how to use well or how to use wrong. Hacking art still challenges users' relationships to the software of a platform and the hardware of a technology ten years after its hay day. Hacking artists treated the early web as a tool, a medium, rather than the blanket environment that came to be with more established platforms in Web 2.0. The ability to

crack open a technology or platform in order to modify its hardware or software dwindled as Web 1.0 drew to a close. While Lonergan does not mention Lialina's essay series on *The Vernacular Web* in his table*,* Lonergan's idea of "hacking" does connect to the type of user Lialina talks about. Both seem to be pushed out of the picture by the more developed platforms that survived the dot.com bubble bursting, however, this point of connection does not serve as grounds for the conflation of the two. In order to make hacking work, the user doing the hacking must be able to exist outside of the web of "The Man," which became more difficult as developers began to produce platforms at more advanced levels. This is not to say that the practice of hacking disappeared entirely with Web 2.0; instead, the pervasive growth of Web 2.0 made an internet no longer capable of having hacking as the predominant practice of art-making.

Defaults, Pro Surfers, and Sub-amateurs

The marginalization of hacking left a gap in the web, which Lonergan fills with defaults through his table. Defaults do not seek to dismantle or "subvert" the system or "The Man," like hacking does; instead, defaults illuminate questions and critiques of "The people by using tools made by The Man." They question within and through the system rather than outside of it. Defaults are by no means "sophisticated;" they are not hacker-chic like Angelina Jolie rollerblading through the streets of New York City in the 1995 film, *Hackers.* Instead, defaults are made in the image of an uncle posting twenty copies of the same image on Facebook by accident, or, as Lonergan puts it in Fig. 4, in the form of a "semi-naive, regular use of technology." If hacking fought to make a

productive and creative space for itself, then defaults used the space already allocated for them as an end-user and as a non-sophisticated consumer. As the name of the genre would suggest, defaults refer to the factory setting, that which is basic, banal, and non-threatening because they are made in the image of most of the content we encounter on a daily basis to critique that same content, and therein lies the crux of Lonergan's concept. Although Web 2.0 consisted of highly developed, almost impermeable platforms, most of the content a user would see while surfing the web was produced by average, relatively unskilled users. Defaults make creative and productive space for user-artists by repurposing the limitations of default settings-- of the norm.

Lonergan's idea of the default requires the creator of a default to draw on their knowledge and experience as a consumer. If the concept is “being and critiquing The People by using tools made by The Man,” then one must be comfortable enough with the consumer qualities of being a user to understand “The People” and the “tools” enough to emulate them in a critical way (Lonergan Fig.4). The concept of the default highlights mimicry over appropriation in that the user who creates defaults finds ways of using platforms and repurposes them by copying them under the context of critique. That is not to say that defaults do not also appropriate content; Guthrie Lonergan features a work on his site called “Darcy's Marilyn Manson Pictures,” which is a poorly-lit, low resolution image of two floppy discs, with the one on the right bearing the label, “Marilyn Manson Pictures Darcy's” with a right-side up star in a circle (Lonergan, ageofmammals.com, Fig. 6 in booklet). The viewer of this picture might infer that Darcy, whoever they are, meant to draw a pentagram, but got the execution wrong. Even though the image itself was

taken from its original place, the focus is less on the change in environment or the Lonergan's appropriation of the image, and more on the types of questions that the image prompts: Who is Darcy? Why did someone feel the need to put this picture on the web? Who was this picture meant for? The image itself is so absurd and exists so far outside of any possible explanation that it causes the viewer to turn to more viable approaches.

"Darcy's Marilyn Manson Pictures" pushes the viewer to bring up larger critical questions about the intersection of "The People," the "tools" they use that brought this image into existence on the Web. "Darcy's Marilyn Manson Pictures" makes us ask: What does this picture say about the way people use platforms available to them? In the case of this default, it points to a certain humorously ignorant but endearing type of self-importance; not only did Darcy label their floppy disc with their name and a failed pentagram, but someone– it is impossible to guarantee if the photographer was Darcy or not-- took further measures to let the web know that that floppy disc contained Marilyn Manson pictures that belonged to Darcy. Lonergan makes visible the incorrect assumption made by many average users that no one cares enough about what they put out to put it somewhere else, and that their ways of using platforms are only of immediate interest to the networks they function in, and to no one else. Further, Lonergan calls attention to the human element of platforms during Web 2.0; somewhere, sometime, someone used a platform to let another person know about these floppy discs. "Darcy's Marilyn Manson Pictures" remind us of the oft glossed-over reality of the ways in which Web 2.0 connected us; when people talk about the history of the web, they mention the

boundaries it broke, the terrain it pioneered, even the memes[10] that resulted from it, but rarely do they mention the average, the mundanely absurd and "naive" parts.

Defaults possess an uncanny ability to highlight the absurdity of daily internet-use. User-artists who make defaults search for the type of content they wish to reframe as defaults. This searching can manifest in more intentional ways or in less intentional ways; sometimes user-artists can find those "jewels" of content, ready to be "reset" through an active establishment of search parameters, and in other cases, can happen upon content through a fortuitous series of unplanned circumstances (Moss 149). The site, *You Ain't Wrong,* by artist William Boling contains the results of both an active search and more spontaneous findings. The site is an archive of auction pictures from the United States vis a vis Ebay and New Zealand on its equivalent site, TradeMe. The format of the work consists of Boling placing two auction images side by side, often one from New Zealand and one from the United States (Boling). This piece began as a continuation of an earlier project of his, an archive of just Ebay auction pictures, titled *Peel.* The archival form of *You Ain't Wrong* is not the only iteration of this work; it was shown in 2007 at Window, a gallery in Auckland, New Zealand, and was written about in Rhizome, an art blog/ archive. While each version of this work carries its own set of connotations and possible responses to it, its core remains the same in that it presents auction images in conversation with each other. The conversation between each pair of images is different, but often, their proximity highlights aspects of their composition and content. The corroborative tone of each pair of images illuminates a possible link between the work

[10] Meme: an often viral piece of content or structure for making content that circulates around the internet-- LOLcats are a well-known proto-meme.

and its title, as if Boling, through his title, was responding to the original posters of those images by saying “yep, that sure is a deer hoof ashtray; *You Ain't Wrong.”* The colloquial “ain't” further establishes this work as part of the default genre in that it aligns itself more with “The People” than “The Man.”

The images rely on each other to produce the type of meaning conducive to critical investigations. Unlike Lonergan, who placed an image out of context which enhanced its absurdity and a line of critical questioning, Boling critically capitalizes on a more relational dynamic. If “Darcy's Marilyn Manson Pictures” encouraged critical response through its singularity, then Boling's comparisons of images in *You Ain't Wrong* encourages critical response through noting commonalities. On page five of Boling's web archive which corresponds to the screenshot of Fig. 5, a picture of a plastic figurine of a bald cartoon man with cloth pants that are pulled down to show his backside on a black plastic base on a table is placed next to a picture of a deer or cow hoof with a wooden base and what appears to be an ashtray glued on top (Boling). The images are different sizes; the left image of the plastic figurine, is about twice the size of the right image of the hoof that doubles as an ashtray. Both items are hideous, but my judgement of their hideousness is purely subjective. Objectively, both images are composed in similar ways; the flash illuminates each object, which have been placed on similarly dark wooden tables. The presence of the flash in each picture renders their surroundings indiscernible, except for pieces of white against the black backgrounds. The significance of the images together does not carry over to each image by itself. While they are compelling images by themselves, they are only able to create a meaning bigger than

themselves when in relation to the other image. By placing these two images in conversation with each other and finding they have things to say to one another, Boling proves his critical and curating eye as a user-artist.

While I do not claim to know the specifics of Boling's process during his creation of *You Ain't Wrong,* the relational quality of the pictures implies a specific type of focus in how he picked the images he used. The initial constraints of the images' original role as auction pictures, and their original locations on Ebay and TradeMe imply search parameters that Boling found and set for himself as a user. After consideration of those parameters, however, Boling's distinctions between images become less clear; each pair of images relates to each other differently. Boling's decisions of which images to include from the vast number on Ebay and TradeMe moved his method of choosing closer to a case by case basis, rather than adhering to any further parameters. Out of the works in this chapter, *You Ain't Wrong* is a primary example of a user-artist who used a hybridized method of finding and evaluating the detritus of the web to create their work. The point in time when Boling made this work corresponds to an era of the internet before the idea of "trending" became widespread; in 2007 searching and poking around the various corners of the web was a necessary practice that was rendered almost obsolete with the arrival of platforms that not only provide users with content, but do some of the searching for those same users. Now in 2016, platforms like Instagram, Tumblr, Twitter, Amazon, Ebay, Vine, and Facebook all have components that suggest and recommend things, people, places, and other content to their users. As the role of page development initially fell to the user before Web 2.0, so too did the responsibility of finding interesting content fall

entirely to the user before the Internet of Things.

As Web 2.0 began to flourish and the few platforms that had survived the dot.com bubble and subsequent burst began to thrive, users began to witness how other users used the same platforms; unlike the wild west of Web 1.0 ripe with individually created web pages, the platforms of Web 2.0 entered the mainstream in a way that created huge bodies of content. Gone were the "Welcome to my Home Page!" greetings of old. In their stead, wells of information began to form. William Boling found all of the images for *You Ain't Wrong* by sifting through the content of just two platforms. Nascent sites like Facebook and Youtube which were opened to the public in 2006 and 2005 respectively became places where users could witness, firsthand, the other ways in which other users engaged with these platforms. This engagement was often average and unassuming, but its resulting content became the "detritus" that user-artists who worked during Web 2.0 scavenged through. Ceci Moss articulates this as an "explosion," stating that "The introduction of social media opened the gates for an explosion of user content online" (Moss 148). Surf clubs and the idea of the "professional surfer" represent the ways in which user-artists honed their skills in navigating the vast amount of user-generated content on institutionally developed platforms. The adoption of the term "surfing" to describe this action points towards the amount of grace, balance, and focus required of "professional surfers;" gliding over the surface of a deep, fluctuating, and powerful wave is no small feat, and doing it with such aptitude as to garner the interest of others as you do it requires a high and highly specified level of skill.

In the case of "professional surfers" however, they became professionals at being

amateurs or, at least, at sifting through the world of amateur web usage. Ed Halter's essay in Rhizome, *After the Amateur: Notes,* published in 2009, surveys the relationship of amateurs and professionals to photography, film, and video in the context of defaults in a fragmented, note-based structure. He links the introduction of widely commercially available cameras and the divisions between the technologies' use by amateurs and by professionals, and then places the "artist" in conversation with those divisions. Halter notes that "corporations created products specifically geared for the amateur in mind--simplified, less expensive, stripped-down versions of professional equipment," which mirrors the type of platforms developed for users during Web 2.0 (Halter). He continues with the statement that once "filmmakers [in American avant-garde cinema] chose to align themselves with the amateur," "where the artist fit into the scheme of amateur versus professional became open to debate" (Halter). In the context of "artists engaged with the internet," however, the term "amateur" has almost too many responsibilities. Halter negotiates that while "we can still find traditional "amateur photography" online... artists engaged with the internet" are not "drawn to" that "kind of work," and suggests that "we need a new category... to describe what's happening" (Halter). He presents the "sub-amateur" as an alternative (Halter). While the term itself is housed in the overall category of amateur, the sub-amateur (by Halter's notes) breaks several standards of "amateur," in that the sub-amateur does exhibit their work. Halter goes on to say that "the phenomenon of defaults," and through them, sub-amateurs, "point to the end of the amateur, and the emergence of a new category... that completely ignores the formal properties of images in favor of their raw instrumentality" (Halter). *You Ain't Wrong* and

Darcy's Marilyn Manson Pictures show this type of image instrumentalization; both Lonergan's and Boling's works center around function, or around eliciting questions about function.

Lonergan and Boling instrumentalized content through their use of images and found graphics to accomplish an end; their medium was in pre-existing content most of the time. In contrast, their earlier net.art compatriots like Cory Arcangel and Jodi instrumentalized the hardware and software of Web 1.0. Both types of instrumentalization called attention to the functions and usage of content or hardware and software, but required completely different types of "cracking." In the case of Jodi and Arcangel, the cracking they did required a knowledge of and facility with the Web as a medium, and the technology of that time, like game cartridge, as a medium. Alternately, user-artists like Lonergan and Boling who worked during Web 2.0, focused more on cracking other users, and patterns of usage. By the time Lonergan and Boling were making their work, the Web had become a far more ubiquitous platform; the material that had been accessible to user-artists like Jodi and Arcangel had since disappeared under layers of developed interfaces.

The sophistication associated with the idea of hacking or cracking is one that should be somewhat distanced from Halter's idea of the sub-amateur, but not divorced from the figure entirely. Yes, the sub-amateur works in "amateurish" content (read: already produced content), but they do so with professional rigor, which makes Halter's classification surprisingly compatible with Lauren Cornell's concept of the "professional surfer" which "boldly considered web-browsing as an art form" (Moss 149). The element of surprise at this compatibility comes from the initial opposition made by Halter in his

essay of amateur versus professional. Cornell's professional surfer and Halter's sub-amateur are actually two sides of the same default coin in that both terms were developed in reference to figures that brought elements of the opposing side into their practices and are evidence of bringing professional and amateur elements in art-making to a level of coexistence. Both are more about action and function than result and form. A primary difference between the two, however, is that the sub-amateur exists on a more individual level, whereas the professional surfer tends to work within a community of other surfers, like surf clubs. In this instance, Halter and Cornell mirror the dynamic between Barthes and Fish respectively in the way they situate their individual in context with an institution or a defined community. The sub-amateur is an individual who makes art in or against the context of institutions; whether they are the web platforms themselves or the impenetrable “Man” that Lonergan refers to, much like Barthes' reader was placed in the context of the “literary institution.” I do not seek to confuse the sub-amateur's relation to institutions with hacking artists' relation to institutions; while an institution is involved with both, their methods for interacting with or against said institution are completely different. Cornell and Fish find commonality in the way that they position their figure in the context of a community in which responses take place.

By comparing the sub-amateur with the professional surfer, I do not seek to distance Guthrie Lonergan, who is often primarily associated with defaults and his individual works, from the collective of surf clubs. Lonergan himself was an active member of Nasty Nets, one of the more well-known clubs, and collaborated with many other professional surfers on other works. In fact, Lonergan founded Nasty Nets along

with Marisa Olson, Joel Holmberg, and John Michael Boling[11]. Surf clubs and defaults are not wholly separate entities; they informed and fed into each other. One could argue that surf clubs merely served as a hosting site across which members circulated defaults, but that would be an over-simplified stance that just grazes the surface of surf clubs and of defaults. It would also incorrect. A surf club like Nasty Nets contains so many more intricacies than just one type of post; while defaults did populate the site, so too did remixes of previously posted images, original .gifs and images made by the original poster (OP for short), and text in the form of comments. Each post on a club like Nasty Nets (while there were other clubs, Nasty Nets is the best preserved and documented result of pro surfers) would catalyze a vocabulary and structure specific to that post; as Ceci Moss writes in her essay, *Internet Explorers,* "a single post to Nasty Nets, for example, often generated a flood of posts and related imagery by its members" (Moss 149). The post that would set such "generation" in motion served as a kind of theoretical initiation of a vocabulary. Even though I am distinctly in the realm of the pro surfer, I find a quote from Ed Halter's essay still relevant; he wrote "Theories create names for patterns" (Halter 5). Posts on Nasty Nets that set off a chain of other posts related to it would do just that: the original post would "name" a "pattern," and break the floodgates open for other users to respond with their takes on the manifestations of that pattern like a collection of "Cool Gradients" or a series of photos of various people doing the same yoga pose ("Nasty Nets"). Granted, not all posts on Nasty Nets would generate such things; in my combing of the archive on Rhizome, a thread with fifteen additional

[11] Not William Boling.

comments could turn out to be 80% spam. But, when a "pattern" was articulated at the right time and place, the resulting comments were highly productive and on theme.

The dynamics of a Nasty Nets thread also mirrors Hito Steyerl's idea of post-production in literal and theoretical contexts; the pro surfers on Nasty Nets would literally use post-production methods, like cropping or adding animation to images, to contribute to the discussion. The structure of a Nasty Nets post and its potential for content generation, however, are also evidence of post-production in a theoretical sense in that the users responding to the original post would take the idea, the "theory that named the pattern," and tweak it, edit it, and repurpose it. One difference between the type of post-production in a Nasty Nets post and something like *You Ain't Wrong,* or even *UFOs,* is that the users on Nasty Nets were still in conversation with the context of the original content as they post-produced, repurposed, and critically bricolaged it. Many threads contained questions and conversations between the posters, which differentiate between the total cut-off between source and content. An important aspect of these conversations to note, however, is that these were conversations between fellow hunters, gatherers, and collectors, not between posters and whatever place they originally found their content. Some threads on Nasty Nets assume the role of the proverbial water cooler, with pro surfers like Tom Moody detailing their methods to other curious posters.

Critical bricolage takes an inventive form in Nasty Nets through the group authorship demonstrated by the user-artists that populated Nasty Nets. Not only did they go out into the larger world of the web to find content to repurpose, they also repurposed content within their own environment. It is difficult to choose one post or even one thread

to represent the whole of Nasty Nets; in a way, the archive requires a method of browsing similar to what its users once did. In order to get a full picture of the body of work located there, the viewer or navigator must comb through its archives. On the left-hand side of the archive, there are two different paths one can take to look through the content; one can search by user or by month and respective year. There is no way to find the "most popular" threads; the absence of such suggestions beautifully parallel the absence of suggestions to those who frequented the surf club while it was active. Nasty Nets provides a relatively unique example of critical bricolage because the surf club was both a site for the practice of critical bricolage, and the practice itself; it was both content and host. The archive's Web 2.0 structure is not compatible with our current ways of internet navigation, which heightens the role of "finding" in the manifestation of critical bricolage in the context of Nasty Nets.

In April 2016 Paul Slocum, an artist, critic, and overall participant in creating user-artist communities, published the highly detailed *Catalog of Internet Artist Clubs* on Rhizome. Slocum's reason for not limiting the title to just "surf clubs" is because of the variety of communities of user-artists, and what they used the space of a web site for. He delineates these communities into three overarching sections: Surf Clubs, Art Clubs, and Related Sites. Slocum's explanation behind his inclusion of "Related Sites" is that while they may have "similar artistic content," they also have "substantial differences in operation" (Slocum). Sites that qualify as relations to art clubs and surf clubs are sites like Geocities, 4Chan, You're The Man Now Dog (also known as YTMND), Myspace,

and Wordpress[12]. Unlike surf clubs and art clubs, which were almost always started by individuals and stayed community-ran, many of the "related sites" became a part of a larger scale operation. The only sites from this list still running with even a minor semblance to their original forms are 4Chan, Wordpress, and YTMND. Wordpress and YTMND are interesting examples because in their most established forms, they were platforms that gave opportunities to their users to create their own type of site. In the case of Wordpress, users were given the ability to create their own blog within the parameters of the platform. YTMND began as a platform of single page sites comprised of image, text, and sometimes sound with less access, but was opened up into a client for less-experienced and less-knowledgable users to be able to make their own single page contributions to YTMND. Both Wordpress and YTMND differentiate themselves from art clubs and surf clubs because even though they give their users the opportunity to create, they still do so within a consumer-producer opposition in that their users still come to them for a service they provide. The developers of these related sites are separated from the communities that exist on them.

The communities grown from art clubs and surf clubs had a more immediate, less removed feeling to them because the creators of these clubs were some of their primary contributors. A large difference between art clubs and surf clubs also relates to differences between their communities of participants. Even though both clubs were populated by mostly artists, Slocum notes that art clubs had little "to do with web surfing" (Slocum).

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[12] While Slocum also includes Tumblr, Twitter, Instagram, and Dump.fm, I disagree with his simplification of these latter sites' relationship to the dynamic and community of surf clubs and artist clubs, as all four carry traits that make them more of an evolution of a dynamic rather than a tangent of a dynamic.

Art clubs were simply clubs of artists located on the web, who either made work online or offline and engaged with it on the web. Art clubs have and had minimal affiliation with the consuming, hunting, and gathering important to critical bricolage. Perhaps a better explanation is that surf clubs were populated by user-artists, and art clubs were populated by users who are or were artists. For the members of a surf club like Nasty Nets, they were their own species. For the members of art clubs, their identities as artists were not always tied up with their identities as users.

Online/Offline

Nasty Nets ran from 2006 to 2012, and its conclusion coincided with the rise of the Internet of Things[13]. While I will stay away from overly-determinist thought, I do think that Web 2.0 pushed Lialina's everyman pioneer user's methods of creation and production out of the way, in the same way that the Internet of Things pushed the pro surfers and sub-amateurs out of the spaces they made for themselves as structures were developed to do the same things that they did; conventions like trending and bottom-feeder sites that pay people to comb the internet so that their users didn't have to took over. Once again, user-artists were faced with the question: what now? At this point of internet and internet-aware art history, a variety of possible forms had arisen for the user-artist. Some user-artists have taken their work further offline as the internet became associated with objects more and less with space. Other user-artists burrowed even deeper

[13] Again, Nasty Nets was not the only surf club in existence; another surf club called Spirit Surfers, remains active to this day in that users still post their findings on the site. There are minimal threads that result from these posts, and the site in general has relatively low traffic-- from January 2016 to April 2016, only ten posts were put on the site.

into the platforms made available to users; James Bridle is an example of a user-artist who did both through the subject matter of drones. His series of drone shadows outlined on various city streets across the world starting in 2012 and ending in 2014 brought the internet firmly back out offline. This movement back offline reaffirms Steyerl's argument that "the internet is everywhere;" it no longer exists solely in the screens that we use to access it (Steyerl). The outlines of the drones are shadows of evidence of the real thing, just as the works themselves are shadows of evidence of the internet, and its presence in our lives. Bridle also created the Instagram account, @dronestagram, which ran from 2012 to 2015, and accomplished an inverse effect of what his drone shadows did. I use "inverse" because of how our perceptions of the object of the drone and the space it occupies change with each of Bridle's pieces. In drone shadows, we are made heavily aware of the thing-ness of drones; their dimensions, and relation to our own space of the street, and the town we might occupy, are brought to the front of our minds. In *Dronestagram,* however, Bridle posted stills from United States drone strikes. A cognitive shift happens in the change from *Drone Shadows* to *Dronestagram.* We go from the realization that we could be viewed from *Drone Shadows* to being the viewer in *Dronestagram*.

While Bridle is an excellent example of how a user-artist can bring the offline *online*, and the online *offline*, such movement in the Internet of Things does not always require subject matter as dystopian as drones. In 2014, user-artist Cory Arcangel made a book titled, *Working On My Novel.* Published by Penguin Books Ltd., *Working On My Novel* contains the compiled feed of a Twitter made by Arcangel that solely retweeted

other Twitter users who had composed tweets that included the phrase “working on my novel.” The account was made under the username, @WrknOnMyNovel, and, in Arcangel's own words, sought to ask: “What does it feel like to try and create something new? How is it possible to find a space for the demands of writing a novel in a world of instant communication?” (Arcangel). *Working On My Novel* also marks an interesting shift in how a user-artist like Arcangel interacted with the original content he found; he retweeted the original posts on the Twitter account @WrknOnMyNovel and did not need permission from the original posters in that instance because he was working within the accepted structures of the platform. Once the project moved offline and into the form of a physically published book, however, he reached out to each person he had retweeted and got their permission to publish their tweets. His treatment of original content and how he compiled it differs greatly from that of the various kinds of user-artists working during Web 2.0; instead of finding content across the vast reaches of the web and re-contextualizing it for a semi-private community like a surf club or even an exhibition in a gallery, Arcangel stretched out into an already established platform, and kept himself, and the content he found within it.

There is a shift in the tone of *Working On My Novel* away from the recontextualized content of surf club threads, works like *You Ain't Wrong,* and Lonergan's independent defaults; Arcangel abandons a focus on the naive, on the preset, and moves towards a more complex concern: how do we, as users, navigate the different forms of creation presented to us by online and offline platforms? Arcangel does not position himself or his concerns in opposition to the users whose content he re-contextualizes. Instead, he aligns himself with those users and voices a growing concern about the

medium specificity[14] on the Internet of Things.The rapid growth of applications that can be installed on smartphones, tablets, and other interfaces associated with the Internet of Things set in motion more specified conceptions of creation by users. Instead of the free-for-all of Web 2.0, the catchphrase, "there's an app for that," popularized by the IPhone 3G in 2009, indicates the movement from finding one platform to do what you want, to having a multitude of platforms to do highly specific things. In the context of social media, which draws many user-artists post-Web 2.0, the movement towards the specific indicates that we create different things in the contexts of different platforms; the content of a tweet is thus different from the content of an Instagram post is different from a Facebook status is different from a blog post is different from a Vine, and so on. Theoretically, all of these platforms can be interconnected; users can share their tweet on Facebook, or share a video they made on Instagram to Vine, but often, users constantly update their classifications of what content is most compatible with which platform. They separate and compartmentalize their usage.

[14] Medium specificity is most often used in the context of visual art, and refers to the question of "what can this medium do that others can't?" The term stemmed originally from the modernist period when the practice of portraiture was taken over by photography. Artists who worked with the medium of paint were forced to ask themselves: what can I do with this that cameras can't?

TTFN[15]

Arcangel's concern with the multiple meanings of the "novel" in the contemporary context of the Internet of Things indicate a resurgence of modernist thought. I define "modernist" as any type of thought or practice, particularly found in art and literature, that is concerned with what is "new," and concerned with an individual's capacity for genius through generating said novel content. I take my definition largely from Frederic Jameson's essay, *Postmodernism and Consumer Society,* which was originally published in 1983. Modernism and post-modernism define and inform each other, as both are often defined as being movements away from or in disagreement with their counterpart. Jameson defines modernisms[16] as "predicated on the invention of a personal, private style" and post-modernisms as what happens when the artists, critics, etc., of a field are faced with the possibility that "the old individual or individualist subject is 'dead'" (Jameson 114-115). The death of the individual is predicated on the growing concern that everything has already been, to use Jameson's word, "invented," which then raises concerns for the creative livelihood of the individual (Jameson 115). The word, "invented" calls to mind Jameson's larger argument that links modernism with industrial periods of mass-production, and post-modernism with periods that occur in the wake of large waves of industrial production (Jameson 111-112). While one could argue that the umbrella category of "the internet" has been and continues to be one big industrial boom of content, it would be an oversimplified argument, as if one tried to

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[15] Ta Ta For Now: a conclusion of sorts

[16] A brief clarification: the distinction between modernism/post-modernism and modernisms/post-modernisms is one made subtly by Frederic Jameson. In his essay, -ism refers to a school of thought and the movement, and -isms refer to more tangible results of said movements (Jameson). Modernisms and post-modernisms are manifestations of modernism and post-modernism (Jameson).

argue that book-making had been one big boom of content, when in reality, there were many different permutations of book-making over centuries of time. It is true that the eras of the internet that I have been looking at do not stretch centuries, but in the twenty-one years from 1994 to present day, much has changed and happened to the internet and the ways users navigate it. I find it more prudent, then, to align different life cycles of the internet with Jameson's mapping of modernism and post-modernism through an industrial perspective.

Web 1.0 brought with it an expanse of newness; the world wide web was a novel technology, which meant that figuring out how to use it and figuring out new ways of using it were almost one in the same. Users' involvement with the development of the web during that time meant that almost every web page coded and created by users was new. The newness of the technology at that time continues to be reaffirmed by the type of art made by Jodi and Cory Arcangel. As users were figuring out how to use the Web, user-artists were figuring out how to break it. The web at that time was still open and malleable enough to be broken and experimented with in the way that Jodi and Arcangel did. They did minimal amounts of collecting compared to the user-artists who worked in later periods of the internet because there were minimal amounts of anything to collect. Another way of looking at Cory Arcangel's and Jodi's methods is to say that they were the first group of user-artists to figure out the limits of consuming on the web; by trying to break the platforms that gave them access to the web or to a gaming interface, they made as much space as possible for themselves as creators in the platforms that had designated them as consumers.

The fresh feeling of Web 1.0 touches on another aspect of Jameson's argument.

He reasons that modernism and post-modernism are not just used to describe "style" (Jameson 113). They are also used as "periodizing concepts whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and economic order" (Jameson 113). Additionally, modernism refers to a movement of creators working within a time period when emergent "formal features" still have qualities to be explored. Post-modernism, then, is a concept used by those who work within a time period when those same "formal features" have fully emerged, and have been explored ad nausea. By touching on the shelf-life of emergent forms, Jameson's argument aligns with Umberto Eco's point on the popularization of forms and techniques in *The Open Work*. Both Eco and Jameson point out that an idea or platform can only stay in the novel position of *emergent* for so long, until the widespread adoption and establishment causes it to become fully emerged, and therefore, known. Web 1.0's proven viability brought on the dot.com boom, the subsequent burst, and the rebuilding and establishment of Web 2.0. The world wide web had emerged, was known by individuals and run by corporations.

If Web 1.0 and net.art were the first wave of internet-modernism, then Web 2.0 was the first wave of internet-post-modernism. Users began to be aware of the vast amount of content housed by the web, generated by every entity that used the web from 1994 to around 2003. Rule 43, an internet-born idiom, guarantees that one can find anything on the internet if they are willing to look for it long enough. As user-artists became faced with the seeming "death" of novel content, genres like the default that asked what makes us average instead of what makes us different arose. Both defaults and surf clubs built on a type of pattern recognition and critical bricolage that Jameson would

attribute to post-modernism. Similarly, defaults and surf clubs were also full of satire and parody, two genres often associated with post-modernism. As these conventions surged across Web 2.0, Internet-aware art, humor, and pranks became more inextricable from one another than ever before.

Now, it appears user-artists have cycled back to another mutation of modernist thought. User-artists who have produced work since the rise of the Internet of Things have a more somber tone; gone is the excitement and scrappiness of Web 1.0, and gone is the irony, irreverence, and endearing intentional tackiness of Web 2.0. The institutions (read: corporations) that maintain the structures of the internet on all of our devices have moved into the spaces that users made for themselves not once, but twice. The joy of page development by average users that Lialina mourns for is now all but gone. The phenomenon of surf clubs and defaults have passed relatively far enough into internet-aware art history that there currently exists a decent amount of critical writing on them. These manifestations of user-artists' creative work are less viable methods for current user-artists. In spite of a shift in method, those same current user-artists are functioning with a modicum of modernist sensibility. The opportunities for making art as a user that are currently presented by a host of interconnected portable devices are different than the opportunities that were presented by the world wide web in 1994. Companies and individuals make new applications for said devices every day, and those applications can change drastically over the course of their use. Snapchat, for instance, is an application that began as an image-sending application that displayed images to their recipient for an amount of time specified by the sender, and only for that amount of time. Since it began, Snapchat now includes video and a face-mapping feature that lets its user put different

effects on their face. As the internet evolves, our grasp of "periods" changes too; there are fewer clean starts and endings of platforms. Myspace, a social media giant of Web 2.0, still exists, but does so as a music hosting site instead of its original social networking structure. As I write about the internet, it becomes clear to me that classifications like "dead," "alive," "born," "killed," and even "undead," so favored by critics and students, cease to be valid.

The user, nor the internet are dead, or even, as Steyerl argued in the case of the internet, "undead." While I do agree with the structure of Steyerl's characterization of the internet as both (alive and dead) and yet neither (undead), I find it limiting to current and future discourse on the internet and the user to constrain talking about the movement of both to terms of vitality and morbidity. In the context of literary criticism, Barthes positions the vitality of one figure to be at the cost of another; in order to "give birth to the reader," he reasons that "we" must kill the author (Image-Music-Text 148). At times, during her *Vernacular Web* series, Lialina uses the word "extinct" (Lialina Vernacular Web 1,2). Frederic Jameson, too, writes on the "death" of the individual, or of individuality. In my work on my theory of critical bricolage, I also found myself drawn to using that type of terminology. This terminology is that of the visceral absolute: the distillation of an observation to the most primal, inevitable processes of birth and death. In the classifications of birth and death, there is no wiggle room.

Frederic Jameson categorizes the emergence of critical theory, or as he defines it, "theoretical discourse" as a post-modern form, and he is right to do so; "theoretical discourse" as Jameson defines it, defies previous categorizations of political science, literary criticism, etc. (Jameson 112). Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes fall into this

category of non-category. In theoretical discourse there is a sense that the writer constructs a world for their reader, and in some cases, establishes that world through calling their reader's attention to how and when life and death factor into this world. If a critic calls out the time of death for an idea, method, or structure of thought, they fix it in time. If a critic gives life to a theory of theirs, a method, or category, they imbue it with some kind of expiration date; ideas cannot live forever. Giving life or bestowing death upon ideas fixes them in theory and in time. They become "signified" rather than "signifiers" (S/Z 5). They cease to be changeable and they become impermeable and immutable; the use of visceral absolutes creates visceral finitudes.

Critical bricolage, in any of its manifestations, is not about "giving" life or "taking" it away; it refers to the patterns of creative methods enacted by different types of individual consumers like readers and users; it puts a name to connections made, to wires being tripped, and to collected parts creating a third entity, separate but resulting from those parts, rather than the parts being seen as pieces of a whole. The practice of critical bricolage will no doubt wax and wane with various technological and informational advances, but as long as there is content to consume and individuals to do the consuming, critical bricolage will remain; critical bricolage is *connection*, not the connected. Critical bricolage transforms the act of consuming and challenges previous connotations of what it means to consume, and to be a consumer. Consumption is more than reception; it is interaction; it is a conversation, a give and take, and an evolution.

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NOTE: This booklet is meant to be printed out and bound, but has been included as an appendix for digital submission.

FIGURE BOOKLET
A USER'S GUIDE

I have compiled all of the figures I cite during the course of this project in one place. I did this for two reasons; some of the figures needed to take up an entire page in order to be seen properly, and I reference certain figures at multiple points in my writing. As you are the one reading and using this booklet, you may do so in whatever way you like, but this booklet primarily serves as a reference to anyone who would like to read this project. Thank you.

Figure 1.
Still from Lillian Schwartz's video, *UFOs*

Figure 2
Screenshot of Jodi piece, wwwwwwwww.jodi.org

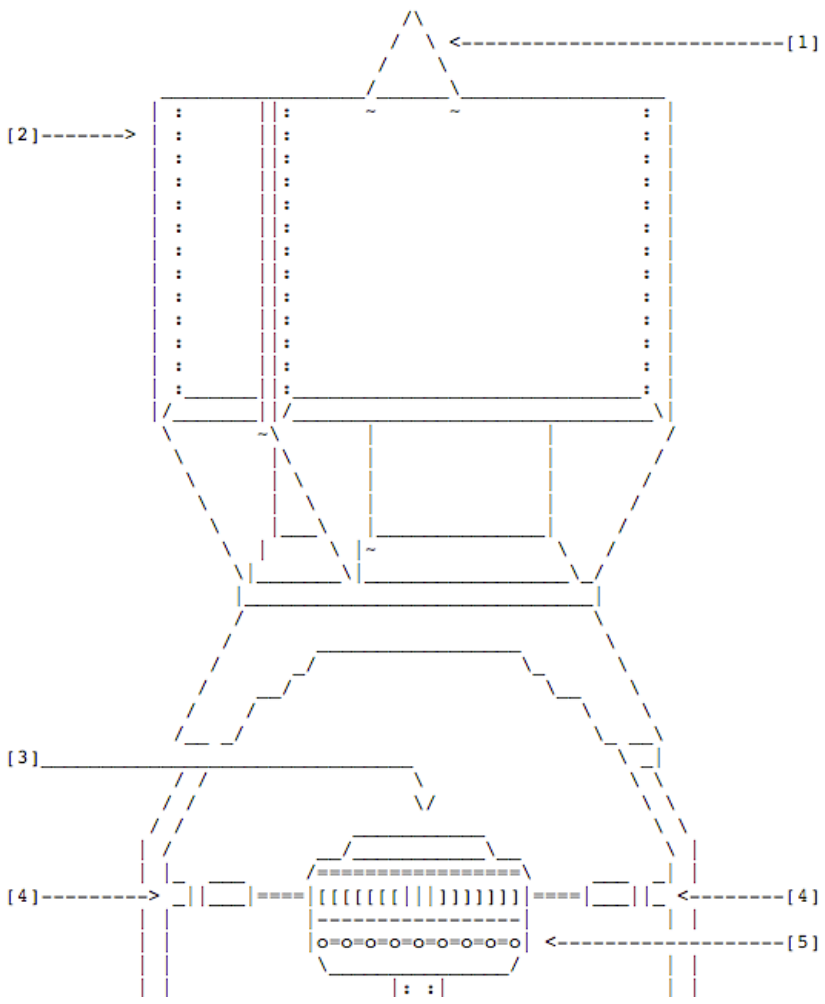


Figure 3
Screenshot of source code from
wwwwwwwww.jodi.org

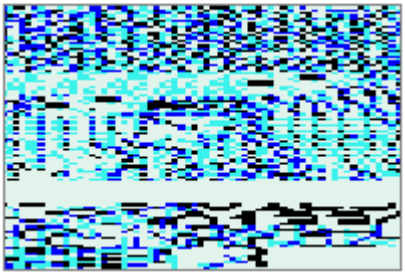
Hacking	Defaults
Hacking a Nintendo cartridge to make images	Using MS Paint to make images
	12 point Times New Roman
Net.Art 1.0	???
 Anxiety	 Banality
"The Man is taking away our privacy... that's lame!"	"We willingly give up our own privacy (i.e. endlessly talking about ourselves on our Myspace profiles)... why?"
Empowering The People by subverting The Man's power	Being and critiquing The People by using the tools made by The Man
Rock & Roll attitude	Exuberant humility
Jodi's blogs	Tom Moody's blog
Sophisticated breaking of technology	Semi-naive, regular use of technology

Figure 4
Screenshot of Guthrie Lonergan's
Hacking vrs. Defaults table

You Ain't Wrong

NZ US

Figure 5
Screenshot from William Boling's site
You Ain't Wrong

Figure 6
Screenshot of *Darcy's Marilyn Manson Pictures*
taken from Guthrie Lonergan's web site,
theageofmammals.com

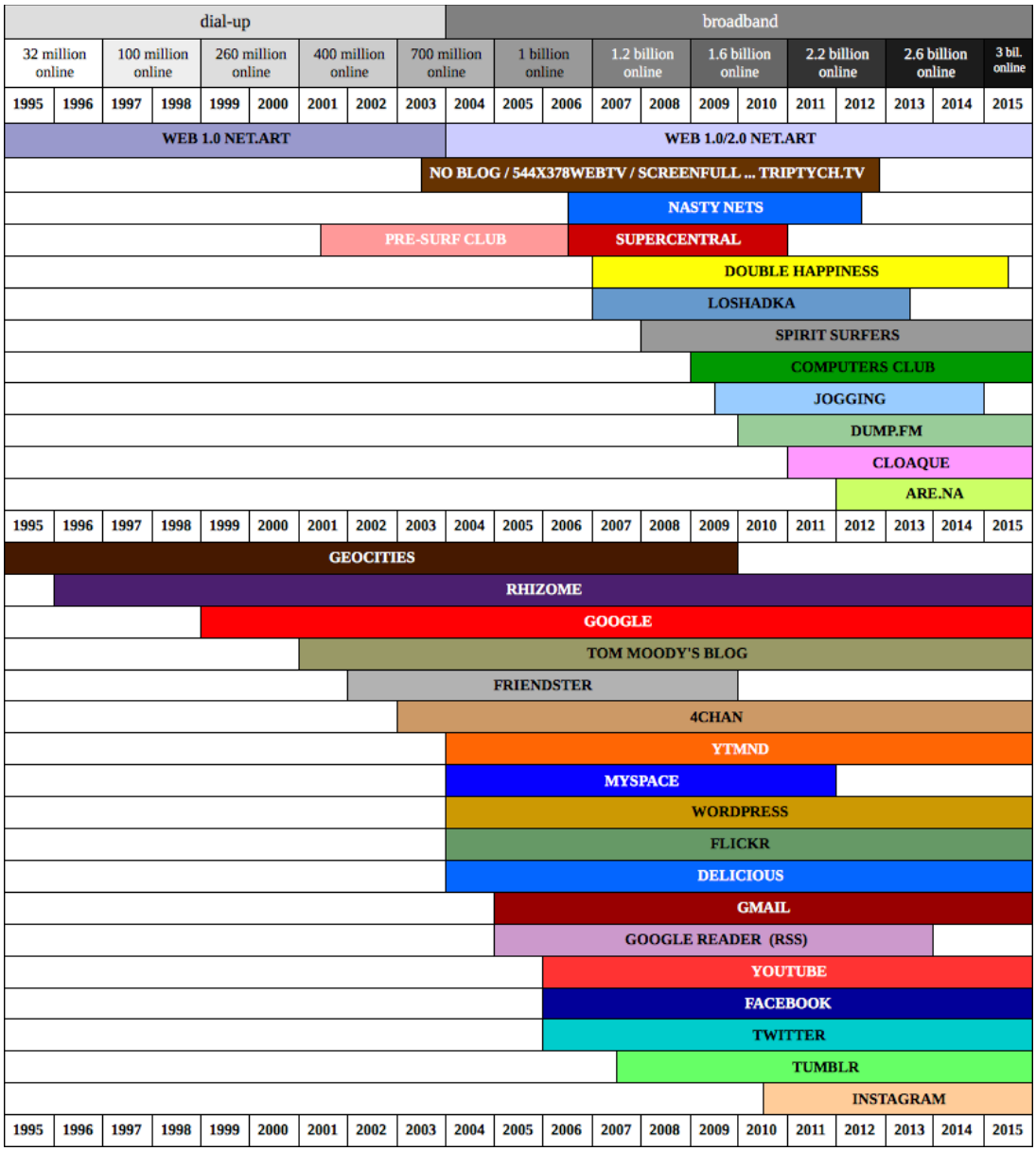


Figure 7
Paul Slocum's timeline of Internet Artist Clubs in the top half, and related sites on the bottom half. Taken from Rhizome.