Picturing Machines
Where then does the reader orient themselves in a world that forever is writing, that is unbound, unmoored with a sea that is infinite, bounded but infinite. Writing, reading, researching inside the network, propels more and ever more texts, images, video, sounds and in turn more reading and writing. Our reading-writing for sometime has become computerized and machine added, and to manage it, as it exceeds the boundaries of human cognition, we use all kinds of algorithms that put forward all kinds of new associations that if we let them can take us on some very strange detours. That’s because image search, all search, by computers are indifferent to the representations of the contents of those images, ‘seeing’ not, what for some, may be a site of trauma, but simply properties like density, edges, color, hue, reference tags, surface attributes that are for the machine-reading, without affect. The machine has no stake in the game, no doubts, no difficulties, no sensations. The human-machine coming together reading the world purports a new world, that tells us new things, but only if we want it to. If we let it can be an augury of sorts, an uncanny vanishing, a fleeting glimpse of sense, a fragment of agon, that gobbles us up like a cannibal into a nice little, white little, missionary stew. (1)

All contemporary fabrication of artworks are obsessed with archivability and want to defeat aging. I want to create a material that performs this vanishing, that takes on this stew, that contaminates, and leaks and like a tidal pool draws under the sway of search a cast of thousands of image text fragments that cling, in sunlight and darkness. Each sheet of everyday rice paper is taken from IKEA paper lamps, has a circular hole, and is crinkled and layered placed on top of other papers and images printed at different sizes which bleed and peer into each other. Each assemblage is a relation of images and each paper sheet, permutable in its ordering, and the paper itself diaphanous and fragile. I think of these work as a series of codices made with search algorithms, industrial materials and my horizontal curiosity that finds relations along numerous axes of narrative representation, color, scale, assemblage. In search things sometimes seems to be an infinite concertina, and not just one, but like an mc escher drawing, each a staircase leading in all directions, defying gravity. Where as an archive purports an authority, a closed corpus, a collection specificity, these codices operate like the function of search in the network ceaseless and never ending, forever allowing or banishing us to move laterally.

Where then to locate this work for the reader, a work that is perhaps more Locus Solus than Mnemosyne, more mutable than immutable mobile, more machine than form factor. (2) And yet there can be no denying that there is an inflection and strange attractors at work, that the work is more a machine itself that can continually re-write, reorder itself, an apparatus that writes, an android that dreams of electric sheep, not a flesh-and-blood author that makes one photograph, one image, one fixed image, but a machine-human that images itself. A picturing machine that dreams us, that in the name of logic and sense gives us, if we let it, an automatic writing, a dream of a thousand plateaus, a thousand years of non-linear history. (3) (4). It is not just texts and their representations but the concrete
movement of matter and energy through human populations, through our machines and technologies, that may, if we listen, be writing and heralding right now, in the midst of us, a post human history, where there are authors such as sea and storms, plant and animals beings, energies and substances that have been without authorship at the table of the human. (5)

So what then are the recipes, the inquiries asked of my picturing machines, and what are these artifacts that have resulted and what might they portend. I suppose they could be analyzed as dreams, deconstructed as archives, seen as poetry, as indictments, as revelries, as pictures reading pictures, as fragments and fragmentary, as all too human and not enough machines, as all too much of a western gaze, too earth bound, perhaps asking what is the sense that we demand as readers as authors, what are we looking for to get to the western lands. (6)

Does the picturing machine have something to say, a story telling turned into a kind of liberated reading or it is simply stage machinery where in there is nothing but scenic effects, a polyphony, a sprawling failure, an attempt to construct and resolve an intelligibility in the history ideas in a world gone mad, where all sense is the sense we make of it until the stage is swept away.

Footnotes


2. The last project of the German Jewish “cultural scientist” Aby M. Warburg (1866–1929), the Mnemosyne Atlas is an unfinished attempt to map the pathways that give art history and cosmography their pathos-laden meanings. Warburg thought this visual, metaphoric encyclopedia, with its constellations of symbolic images, would animate the viewer’s memory, imagination, and understanding of what he called “the afterlife of antiquity.”

https://warburg.library.cornell.edu
http://curator.co/things-that-inspire-us-aby-warburg-mnemosyne-atlas/

3. A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (French: Mille plateaux) is a 1980 philosophy book by French authors Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, respectively a philosopher and a psychoanalyst. The authors draw upon and discuss the work of a number of authors, including Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Wilhelm Reich. A Thousand Plateaus is written in a non-linear fashion, and the reader is invited to move among plateaux in any order. It is the second volume of Capitalism and Schizophrenia, and the successor to Anti-Oedipus (1972). Before the full English translation by social theorist Brian Massumi appeared in 1988, the twelfth “plateau” was published separately as Nomadology: The War Machine (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986). Though
influential, and considered a major statement of post-structuralism and postmodernism, the book has been criticized on many grounds.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Thousand_Plateaus

4. Working against prevailing attitudes that see history as an arena of texts, discourses, ideologies, and metaphors, De Landa traces the concrete movements and interplays of matter and energy through human populations in the last millennium.

https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/thousand-years-nonlinear-history

5. In her book *How We Became Posthuman*, N. Katherine Hayles, writes about the struggle between different versions of the posthuman as it continually co-evolves alongside intelligent machines.[20] Such coevolution, according to some strands of the posthuman discourse, allows one to extend their subjective understandings of real experiences beyond the boundaries of embodied existence. According to Hayles’s view of posthuman, often referred to as technological posthumanism, visual perception and digital representations thus paradoxically become ever more salient. Even as one seeks to extend knowledge by deconstructing perceived boundaries, it is these same boundaries that make knowledge acquisition possible. The use of technology in a contemporary society is thought to complicate this relationship.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Posthumanism

All I desired was to walk upon such an earth that had no maps.
—The English Patient, Michael Ondaatje

It was also clear you could not write directly about the horror of prosecution in its ultimate forms, because no one could bear to look at those things without losing their sanity. So you would have to approach it from an angle, and by intimating to the reader that these subjects are constant company; their presence shades every reflection of every sentence one writes. If one can make that credible, then one can begin to defend writing about these subjects at all.
—W. G. Sebald