UC Irvine
The Present and Future of Humanist Inquiry in the Digital Field

Title

E-Ject: On the Ephemeral Nature, Mechanisms, and Implications of Electronic Objects

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2xv6b6n0

Authors

Grigar, Dene
Tabbi, Joseph
Kirschenbaum, Matt
et al.

Publication Date

2009-12-12

Peer reviewed

E-Ject: On the Ephemeral Nature, Mechanisms, and Implications of Electronic Objects

Dr. Dene Grigar
Digital Technology and Culture
WSU Vancouver

dgrigar@vancouver.wsu.edu

Dr. Joseph Tabbi
Department of English
University of Illinois Chicago

jtabbi@gmail.com

Dr. Matt Kirschenbaum
Department of English
U of Maryland, College Park

mkirschenbaum@gmail.com

Dr. Michael Angelo Tata
Creative Director
iPublishing LLC

mtata@ipublishingllc.com

Dr. Davin Heckman
Department of English
Siena Heights University

davinheckman@gmail.com

Dr. Maria Angel
School of Communication Arts
University of Western Sydney

m.angel@uws.edu.au

Dr. Anna Gibbs
Writing & Research Group
University of Western Sydney

a.gibbs@uws.edu.au

ABSTRACT
In his post on Empyre, Michael Angelo Tata coined the term, "e-ject." Alluding to Walter Benjamin's notion of an artifact generated from "the technological innovation of mechanical reproducibility," Tata suggested that the e-ject "creates a culture industry by making culture maximally mobile, available to even the lowest social strata." Questions raised in this statement focused on whether or not such an object is "genuine" to how one goes about "collecting" "commodif[ying], and discussing it." This presentation extends that discussion by focusing on the ephemeral nature, genres, and criticism of electronic objects in a roundtable discussion led by members of the Electronic Literature Organization. Thus, the theorization of e-jects looks specifically at those objects that have a literary quality but that are not reproducible in print-based contexts.

Categories and Subject Descriptors
H.5.3 [**Group and Organization Interfaces**]: Theory and models; H.5.3 [Hypertext/Hypermedia]: Theory

General Terms
Experimentation, Theory, Design

Keywords
Electronic literature, e-ject, ephemera, "Agrippa," collectibility, telepoesis

1. JOSEPH TABBI, INTRODUCTION
"The proceedings are the records of the conference. ACM hopes to give these conference by-products a single, high quality. . ."

I'm not sure when journal editors began requesting articles in .pdf format. Without thinking about it much, I've tried to comply—though I myself never liked all the extra fiddling around and I rather enjoyed collaborating with copy editors: It helped me to feel that I was being welcomed *in*, becoming part of a publishing network and not publishing myself.

Now and then, I'll come across a literary or scholarly archive that gives its criteria for selection. One such might run: "The content hosted on your site must consist of scholarly articles. Content such as book reviews and editorials are not appropriate for Google Scholar." [1] And this, despite my sense (shared by many of my colleagues active in the field) that electronic literature has been characterized often by the fusion of boundaries, so much so that distinctions among creative, critical, and curatorial writing seem to be less settled than they were under the domination of print technologies and broadcast media. Much industry, today, seems devoted (lovingly, with much care and fondling) to the literary object. Everybody wants to have his writing in the current format, her talk in bulleted points, and a book jacket fetchingly designed––despite the fact that, as Lieven DeCauter writes:

> Every format is an echo chamber of the preconceived harmony of marketeers between what the public wants and what the advertisers need. The format is the ultimate neutralisation of the event. It is a mould that prevents anything. . . occurring outside the predictability of the formula. [2]

My own, perhaps, romantic idea of literature—electronic literature no less than oral, print, or performative writing—is that it tends to occur "outside the predictability of the formula." There's nothing in new media that I can see to stop that unpredictability from occurring. Though at the same time I

recognize more and more formulaic uses for new media, and I pass by many more write-protected literary objects, while the *literary* itself, in much of the web and nearly all of the recent social networking sites, has been cast out. While objects of public desire are produced in growing numbers (though still without a stable economy capable of supporting those who produce the objects), something else, something less easy to locate, seems to be emerging in the shadow of new media environments.

The papers gathered for this panel follow a term thrown out by Michael-Angelo Tata—literally, tossed out, seemingly off the top of his head one morning during the course of a blog discussion (on Empyre, Spring 2008). These papers work variations not on literary objects, but on the literary itself, as a potential removed, by necessity, from the object. Electronic Literature as *e-ject*.

2. MICHAEL ANGELO TATA, IS THERE AN E-JECT? RUMOR, RUMINATION

The notion of e-ject is much more than chic abbreviation or snappy catchphrase, although it is each of these, and vividly so. Going beyond mere convention or invention, it represents the stage in the crisis of the object when the crisis in question finds itself put in brackets, having run out of steam, or helium, or vitriol. As such, the e-ject, an EZ-object, is the crisis in the 'Crisis of the Object,' or that glistening moment when the modern challenges to objecthood, such as ephemerality and mass production, identified by Frankfurt School thinkers Walter Benjamin in his seminal "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" [3] and Theodor Adorno and Horkheimer in their classic "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" [4], lose their danger. The catch is that reproducibility and ephemerality are voided of perilousness just ahead of the dissipation of the emotional upheaval that would be the ending of a crisis mentality and the manifestoes manifesting its militancy. As a result, we are posed for a crisis that never comes, dressed in camouflage and waiting to participate in the carnage when, unbeknownst to us, the war and all its skirmishes have ended. Telepoetically speaking, to use the Derridean term from *The Politics of Friendship* [5], Adorno has forgotten to call us, and so we wait, revved up and ready to go.

Impure, the electronic object, the e-ject, our e-ject, the hyphenated combination of a means of innervation (electronics) and undirected motion (the pure throw or "-ject" of "object" minus the "toward" of "ob-"), takes the *objet petit a* of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, his representation of the little objects and others populating our worlds, as plug or cork to a ridiculous extreme. Theorized in Seminars like *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* [6] and *Encore* [7], the *objet a* is that fragment of the other that is my only access to its plenitude, a tiny mosaic piece or marble that I use to fill in the emptiness of the void that ultimately constitutes my fractured subjectivity. Because it is a piece of an impossible whole, it is never enough, each one implying an other I will need to consume shortly: and so the *a*'s come in a chain best embodied in the literary figure of the metonym, or network of substitutions. In the contemporary scenario, the *objet petit a*, or little object, becomes *objet petit c*, or little commodity, as I would call it. Under the guise of e-ject, it stuffs itself into the *aporias* of consciousness and desire for just the time it takes for the next blip in the metonymic cyclone to take over the task of managing the great fetishism of experience, without which there might be no object relations or

psychoanalysis or thermodynamics in the first place, since there would be no physics or metaphysics of the thing.

Radically democratic, even when taken in the context of Ernesto Laclau's theories of the contingencies of hegemony in his and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* [8], and his reflections on freedom and particularity in his *Emancipations* [9], the e-ject is fractally of the people, representing a fractured *demos*. Like those particulars Laclau fears might jeopardize the universal and its evocation of an inalienability of rights because of their sheer singularity, the e-ject breaks apart universalism into a smashed mess of particulars. Only here, within the ream of the aesthetic, there is a point of unification unavailable to politics, a saving grace for particularity and its lack of prophylaxis: that glue is a certain species of scopomania tempered with a *schadenfreude* that, apparently, enough of us share, or else YouTube would go out of business. Hence what for a project of radical democracy might be an unwieldy and distasteful explosion of individualities and particularities is for aesthetics a treasure trove of alterities begging to be broadcast.

Furthermore, the e-ject, fatally hyphenated, rent in such a way that it connects itself to itself as if running an ipseic generator, is not only an object, but primarily and at the core an *abject*, effecting a recuperation of trash, kitsch, and otherness proper through the concatenation of clicks and amassing of gazes it authors. In her *Powers of Horror,* Julie Kristeva gives the abject its richest theorization; for her, all that is excluded from identity mirrors all that is excluded form the body, those fluid and solid excrescences, like menstrual blood, semen, mucus, feces and lacrimal effluence, which culture after culture have attempted to manage through law, custom and social pressure. [10] Culturally, the abject is everything that we as a culture reject in the interest of rendering our identities clear and identifiable: the e-ject, reject of all rejects, and abject of all abjects, is a thing thrown or jettisoned away from us (hence the prefix "ab-"). This it accepts, capitalizing jovially upon our curiosity about all we have excluded and stricken from the record with an anthropology that is in many ways a pornography, obscene, unseemly and infinitely enticing.

As such, the e-ject demands a certain ecstasy from its viewers and auditors, who succumb to the electron transfer that is its fabulously open secret. We resonate along with it, giddy with phantoms of an abjected order that has found a home on the supernumerary screens dominating our horizons and horizontalities.

And so we watch Beyoncé tumble down a flight of stairs [11] or a chubby little white guy stuffed into his own black Beyoncé leotard dance around the private space of his bedroom embodying the moves of her 'All the Single Ladies' [12] and perhaps, if we're inventive enough, come across Cazwell rapping "I Seen Beyoncé at Burger King" [13] while a bad Beyoncé trannie orders up a storm yet cannot find the cash to pay for all those Whoppers: all permutations of the object come together in the e-ject, which carries them to the limit situation epitomized by abjection, filthy and Kristevan. What results is a type of notoriety—and motoriety, given the nimbleness and fluidity of this radical popularity—that can only be described as the fame of fame (fame revealed not as quality, but as quantity): that is, the type of telepoetic popularity produced when being and its attributes become less the potential for knowledge or contemplation or comprehension or mastery and more the sheer fact of being-seen, being-heard, being-encountered, being-talked-about, being-circulated, being-

electrified, and, of course, being—or perhaps *not* being—e-phemeral.

3. DENE GRIGAR, RE-JECTING EPHEMERA

But what about the seemingly ephemeral nature of the e-ject, that electronic object "tossed out" as Tabbi suggests, the e-jected object that seems to last but for a breath of time and seems to be easily wiped away, whose beauty may even lie in the intimation of its transienceness? Much talk was made in the early existence of the electronic object about its "impermanence and changeability." [14] But haven't we already been reminded that just because an electronic object is not inscripted it is not immaterial? [15] Couldn't it also follow that just because an electronic object is not readily accessible that it may not be undurable? The strange truth is that the e-ject may not always be an ephemeral object. Those of us who believe that it is are led astray by misperceptions of the word *ephemera*, for we tend to associate it with the finality of death, a loss of physical existence, a momentary ghostly presence of something that was but is no longer really here.

But the word *ephemera* embodies both the spatio-temporal positioning found in the preposition, *epi*—"on, "upon," "on the surface of"—and the noun, *hemera*, day. Yoked to the short eta of h̲emera, *epi* contracts and mutates into *eph*-, the sound itself shifting from the linguistic stop of the –p to the continuance of sound of the –ph. Both voiced, both labials, the former emanates solely from the two lips; the latter, both lips and teeth. "Upon a day," therefore, yields to us the notion of eternity instantiated as the medium on which infinity lies. Thus, the word *ephemera* suggests an irony, for if *ephemera* implies an incessant quality—doesn't the f resonate long after we voice it? Isn't that the further offense of the expletive, *fuck*? That the sting of the insult endures with the sound as well as the sentiment?—then, would not the objects that are ephemeral be also long-lived?

The answer to this question results in a paradox: They are and they are not. Oral objects can live on, for various degrees of time and space, but not as the objects themselves. They exist instead as memories embedded in our brains, as perhaps sound waves carried by the air, myths passed down through generations, reverberations of objects that once were.

E-jects, however, are not ephemeral, for they do continue to live on, and as the objects they always were. When we erase a file, the file does not cease to exist, though sometimes we wish it would go away. The code that makes up the file persists somewhere in the machine that we just cannot easily get to. When we orphan a document with an upgrade to our system, that document does not disappear, though it may seem that we have lost it forever. Information on floppy disks, diskettes, and CDs we hold on to still remains *the* information on floppy disks, diskettes, and CDs. The fact that we cannot get to it says more about our need for *better*, *faster*, *more robust* than the e-ject's durability. That e-jects can be recovered are not evidence of their durability but rather of their status as texts. They are "acts of communication" that lend themselves, as all texts, to "acts of translation." [16] Recreated, they are new. Bringing an electronic object to contemporaneity into another electronic format constitutes, like print-to-print or print to electronic, a form of translation. Thus, the updated e-ject is but a "simulation" of the original, a new object made possible for a new user. [17]

So, the study of e-jects suggests is that there may exist assumptions about ephemera requiring clarification: that not only may there be types of ephemera but also that some objects deemed ephemeral may not be so after all. We need to reject the notion of ephemera for e-jects in order to get to the work of understanding them. Only then we will believe we *can* preserve them; only then will we will find ways to reconstruct them, and perhaps better construct them so that they do not fool us into thinking they do not endure.

4. MATTHEW KIRSCHENBAUM, MECHANISMS AND TRANSITIONS

In *Mechanisms*, I furnished two competing first-hand accounts of how the text of William Gibson's famously self-effacing poem "Agrippa" came to be on the Mindvox bulletin board in the early morning hours of December 10th, 1992. [18] One of these is that the text was filched by someone inside the project; this explanation has been given by only a single individual. The other account holds that the source of the widely circulated online text of the poem is a transcription from a surreptitious video recording made at one of the events comprising "The Transmission" on the evening of December 9th.

In June 2007 Alan Liu and I each received email from an individual identifying himself as Rosehammer, one of the three pseudononymous hackers credited in Templar's original posting of the text of the poem to Mindvox. [19] He had found and read a few pages of my manuscript that I had posted in advance to the *Agrippa Files* [20] and wanted to corroborate my account of "the hack" which released the text of Gibson's poem onto the internet. Rosehammer put me in touch with Templar himself, and email exchanges with both of them, as well as a phone conversation with Templar, allowed me to confirm certain details and correct others, most notably the location at which the surreptitious video recording had been made: not the Kitchen, as I had originally surmised, but the Americas Society, uptown instead of downtown, but on the same evening, December 9th, 1992. This new information was included as an Appendix to *Mechanisms*. Rosehammer also promised to attempt to locate the original video recording, the source for the transcription of the poem Templar had posted that night. He did locate it, though not in time for the book's publication.

A year later, in the summer of 2008, Kevin Begos, Jr., *Agrippa*'s publisher, contacted Alan Liu with an offer from a collector who owned an original copy of the *Agrippa* diskette. The collector was willing to lend his disk to a scholarly effort to "decode" or somehow reverse engineer the encryption for purposes of restoring the original *Agrippa* program, not seen in public since that night in 1992. Alan, Kevin, and I decided the disk should come to the University of Maryland where we would be able to draw on technical expertise from a new Digital Forensics Lab on campus, as well as the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH). Through a process of trial and error we were able to obtain a complete "image" (that is, a bit-level copy) of the disk and then mount the disk image in a Macintosh System 7 emulator, thereby allowing us to "play" (and replay) *Agrippa* at will by spawning multiple copies of the disk image.

I believe the *Agrippa Files*, and I think Alan Liu would concur, is as much an extension of the still-dilating performance of the work as it is an archive or repository, terms which encourage too much detachment from the realities of the network environment in

which *Agrippa* is now irretrievably situated. The maverick bibliographer Randall McLeod has described this phenomenon as "transformission"—how a text is transformed as it is transmitted. [21] After all, the "hack" wasn't only about transcribing a single instance of the text, it was about enacting a modal shift in its semiotic material, thereby allowing it to propagate endlessly and effortlessly. Both of the new "primary sources" that we offer are in fact exquisitely mediated, not only through layers of file formats and compression algorithms and virtual machinery but also through the shifting contours of the network itself, which brokers very different relationships and transactions than it did sixteen years ago, on the eve of the first release of the NCSA Mosaic browser. If disciplines such as textual studies and cultural criticism teach us anything, it is that our representations are always one-way keys, not to the past but the present.

"In short," Alan Liu has written:

> *Agrippa* was for all practical purposes a self-sustaining circuit of event driven/event-producing information 'about' *Agrippa* ('information about information,' Shoshana Zuboff characterizes such phenomena in her *In the Age of the Smart Machine*) whose 'being,' which is to say *doing*, far exceeded that of any actual instances of the work issued or seen. [22]

This new set of materials scarcely alters that dynamic. Indeed, there are at least two primal artifacts that remain beyond reach: the first is the source code for the encryption program, a few scraps of which survived in hard copy and are viewable amongst the materials on this site; the second is the electronic manuscript of the poem itself, marooned on whatever computer Gibson originally wrote it on, wherever that machine is now if it even still exists as functional hardware. Nonetheless, the new materials here do offer a kind of closure to anyone who, like me, has ever stumbled across the text of *Agrippa* on the open net and asked, *but how did it get there*? This is now documented. So we take satisfaction in the release of these new sources to scholars and fans alike, and we marvel that after sixteen years in the digital wild a frail trellis of electromagnetic code once designed to disappear continues to persist and to perform. [23]

5. MARIA ANGEL AND ANNA GIBBS, NEW MATERIALISM AND THE E-JECT

For us what characterises the e-ject is its insistence that we rethink the materiality of objects. In his online conversation with Michael Angelo Tata, Joe Tabbi refers to the collectibility of literary works and the manner in which the electronic 'object' (e-ject) confounds this "simple" materiality of things. Emergent genres of elit are characterised by their ephemeral nature, but also their 'playability' (to use John Cayley's term) [24] that requires us to pay attention to the temporal and spatial relations and scales that they rewrite (the time and space of the electronic work is radically different to that of the typographic book). Referring to Jay David Bolter's comment that the largest aircraft carriers are still infinitely closer to human scale than the simplest micro-computer, Anthony Dunne writes of the electronic object as "a confusion of conceptual models, symbolic logic, algorithms, software, electrons and matter," and he notes that the gaps between scales is difficult to "grasp." [25] As Serge Bouchardon [26] and Barbara Bolt [27] have both noted in different contexts that provoke questions about tacit knowledge, to grasp or to handle a concept,

an object or text is to introduce a human dimension through the figure of the hand and its capacity for manipulation and gesture.

What we are witnessing with electronic writing is the exteriorisation of writing through its relationship to gesture and movement. Electronic text is increasingly being treated as a visual landscape to be explored, one that moves and makes sounds when you "play" it or play with it. One of the emergent generic features of this new landscape is its interactivity, its capacity to be manipulated by the reader/user. Bouchardon writes of electronic work as "moveable, actable or explorable text." He argues that the materiality of electronic text "cannot be dissociated from the action of the reader. The text on the screen is not only another materialisation of a meaningful form. It is the gesture of the reader that *reveals* the materiality of the text. One can wonder if the nature of a digital text is not to be *manipulable* more than to be *readable*." [26] The significance of this lies less in outdated debates about interactivity and its limits in artworks, or in discourses of the power, control or freedom of the reader, than in the way electronic works solicit the body's involvement with reading via gesture, and in the nature of the experience this generates. Bouchardon's work suggests that this involves not only the reader's active capacities, but also their failure: for him, the experience of manipulation is characterised not only by grasp, but also, and crucially, by its loss. Here he draws on the way in which Bessy and Chateauraynaud use the concept of "grasp" to describe the embedding, in both persons grasping and things grasped, of moments when the body is engaged in noncognitive experience.

It seems then that the e-ject requires a new mediality that has to do with both the technology and formal codes that make practice different, but also with other cultural structures that feed off and intensify certain online practices. We could call these forces (after Nigel Thrift) "new structures of attention" [28] that are characterised by "fast" thinking (Joe Tabbi's description of "just in time" writing is an example here) [29], experimentation, and reliance on non-cognitive realms such as habit, intuition, and emotional connection (commodity culture embraces and perpetuates these structures as is evident in any corporate mission statement or piece of advertising). One of the ways in which these new 'reactive' rather than "reflective" forms is affecting how we conceptualise the electronic "object" can be seen in the emergence of the importance of tagging to the formation of electronic taxonomies. The electronic tag (and associated tag 'clouds') can be seen as forms of emergent classification based on new structures of attention which challenge traditional aesthetic categories and which can perhaps lead to new ways of thinking about the migration, circulation and "shape" of the electronic work.

6. DAVIN HECKMAN, FROM THE OBJECT TO THE E-JECT

In Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, the abject refers to those things that exist psychologically outside of the sphere of representation; the abject is the counterpoint of Lacan's "Object of Desire." [10] Practically speaking, the abject is regarded as shit. But if we place the abject within the general economy of sociocritical designations, the abject is neither the subject who desires nor the object desired, the abject is contrary to this libidinal economy. It frustrates our conception of the subject by inducing an automatic response of revulsion, it frustrates our conception of the object because it falls outside of mastery. This

makes it difficult (but also disruptive to the system of representation). And, importantly, as a psychoanalytic concept, abjection, though it carries an "objective" character in that it is typically the "victim" of an action, it is a way of being, a subjective state. Thus, it is powerful because of its liminal character. (For Zizek, modern art places the excremental object in "the *sacred* place of the Thing," precisely because the sacred object *is* always already excrement, it never is the Thing). [30]

True abjection should threaten the very critic that attempts to wield it. But if we view the e-ject through the cycle of ejection, with a potential for abjection, not on the grounds of moral outrage, but simply on the grounds of their instability, ephemerality, their potential shittiness, we get closer to understanding the e-ject as powerful because of its marginal character.

Moving from an abstract concept with deep psychic implications, to the trite, melancholy nostalgia brought on by daily experiences with post-consumer waste [10], my thought drifts to the many yard sales that I attend, where I can buy cassette tapes for 25 cents, where I can meditate on the sad lives of commodities. I rifle through stacks of cassettes, always thinking of the one who bought them, what they meant at the point of transaction. Most recently, I bought a copy of Rockwell's *Somebody's Watching Me* and a cassingle of Erasure's "Chains of Love." Someone might have paid a considerable amount for them when they were new. But now they were sitting on a blanket, a little dusty, the plastic yellowed, destined to be thrown away, unless some poor soul who still has a cassette player is willing to pay the 25-cent ransom. Did the grizzled man in the NASCAR shirt and mirrored shades buy them when he was younger? Maybe he has an adult child who left him with a bedroom full of stuff? What if someone died? Went to jail? Whatever the case is, I look at this stuff and think about when it was new, and I am gripped by the bittersweet emotional anxieties that occasionally make me cry when I sit with my kids to sing them Puff the Magic Dragon or awaken suddenly from a dream of my departed father. And, like these melancholy flutterings of my imagination, these objects are part of a cycle of desire and disappointment.

To be sure, these objects are in a different material category from the "born digital" objects that we are talking about today. But, I think it is important to place them along the continuum, if only to accentuate the emotional impact of their consideration. The cassingle exists between the heirloom and the purely digital commodity, caught between the materiality of the industrial economy and the transience of the informational economy. Such things have a hold on material existence, but not for too long. As the memory machines that played them are today, these media are interchangeable, ephemeral, ejectable (the biggest differences are the interval between newness and obsolescence and the prices). And thus they are not overwritten with the same type of memory as "traditional" objects like the heirloom, the antique, or the artifact (see figure 1).

As Bernard Stiegler notes in *Technics and Time*, all technologies and techniques are inscribed with memory. By virtue of their purpose, they contain information. However, not all technologies and techniques are the same, for there exists, specifically, a technics of memory, mnemotechnics, or those created objects and processes which are for the purpose of organizing and transmitting information themselves. They are the technics of technicity itself. [31]

In Stiegler's work, he is careful to note that these mnemotechnics have deep historical roots, that history itself is coincident with them. Language, gesture, writing, reproduction, archiving, these are all the mnemotechnics. The difference between today and some "other" era, then, is not in the presence of such techniques and technologies, but in our relation to them. In "Anamnesis and Hypomnesis," Stiegler draws two separate sets of distinctions. The first distinction is the difference between technics which contain traces of memory, but which do not exist to store information, and those that exist to store information (mnemotechniques). The example given here is the stone tool, which contains traces of information in its specifically intended purpose as compared to techniques of "ideogrammatic" writing which exists to communicate information as an end in itself. The second distinction is between the mnemotechnique and the mnemotechnology. The mnemotechnique is a set of practices that are used to aid memory, mnemotechnologies are exterior devices that store information less as an aid to enhance memory but as a substitute for it. Stiegler continues:

> For today, memory has become the major element in industrial development, and quotidian objects are more and more the supports of objective memory, that is, also forms of knowledge. Now, these techno-logical forms of knowledge, objectified in the form of equipment and apparatuses, also and especially engender a loss of knowledge at the very moment one begins speaking of 'knowledge societies' and 'knowledge industries' and 'cognitive' or 'cultural' capitalism. [32]

The difference here is in a relationship between the subject and memory—the subject is in many ways the embodiment of memory. The Information Society, to Stiegler, is not so much a society that has technology, the Information Society is characterized precisely by the external storage and automation of knowledge itself. As operational memory is increasingly placed outside of the subject, so moral, ethical, and social decision-making is increasingly displaced from the human domain in favor of more efficient, automated processes and technically oriented priorities. Long considered a source of practical wisdom, the memory is earned by long experience.

But there is another category of "thrownness" that colors my reading of the term "e-ject." To Heidegger, "thrownness" (*Geworfenheit*) is a basic characteristic being (*Dasein*). What this means, basically, is that we are thrown into the conditions of our daily existence, that the world we are born into precedes us. We do not create them nor direct the conditions, rather, they simply are the conditions into which our consciousness is projected. To be clear, this quality of "thrownness" as discussed in Heidegger belongs to the subject rather than the object. To clarify, it uses the objective metaphor of the "thrown object" to describe the primordial state of the subject. The subject/object division is blurred in Heidegger's discussion of *Dasein*.

Objects, of course, are always "thrown." This characteristic of objects is precisely what makes Heidegger's metaphorical "thrownness" so compelling. But there is an equally compelling way to employ Heidegger's metaphor in our discussion of "memory." [33] What if, for instance, we were to read Heidegger's objective metaphor for subjectivity in reverse—to read the subject as the metaphor for the object—to help us understand the subjective object, the e-ject—the impermanent thing whose being is conditioned exclusively by memory.

Properly understood, the e-ject is the subject thrown, memory outside of being. It is the very sort of mnemotechnical object to which Stiegler refers. They are, in a sense, lost memories the moment they are made, inherently ephemeral because they are instrumentalized, externalized.

In itself, as it necessarily relates to others, the very status of the e-ject contains a profoundly hopeful possibility. As a liminal object, which exists on the threshold between two states (subject/object), the e-ject can serve as a place marker within a larger discussion of new media phenomena. As Victor Turner notes in "Betwixt and Between," liminality is a key moment in rites of passage, where subjects dwell momentarily in a state of "becoming," between two states of being. This liminal state is characterized by a blurring of boundaries, where commonly held norms are inverted, and traditional expectations held at bay. To be fair, Turner's language reflects quite specifically on the weird nature of the ritual process, but subsequent scholars have found that such liminal characteristics are often attached to other social phenomena as well, from seasonal changes to geographical borders. In particular, Alan Liu has elaborated on the liminal character of New Media as a "thick, unpredictable zone of contact—more borderland than border line." [34] Going further, as Zizek does in *Organs Without Bodies*, the virtual is that which exists without being. [35] Summarizing this view, Allison Wright explains:

> Donna Haraway, in her famous essay, 'A Cyborg Manifesto,' discusses the liminality of the cyborg in terms of boundaries and contradictions. She articulates the complexity of the cyborg as being an 'image of both imagination and material reality,' a 'hybrid of machine and organism'; it exists as both-but-neither of these states. Like Turner, Haraway references invisibility as a key classification of the liminal being insofar as it cannot be recognized as any singular, corporeal, or embodied entity. Cyborgs, she notes, 'are about consciousness.' [36]

Rather than being an object in transition, the e-ject is, perhaps a subjective object, just as the "cyborg" occupies the space of the objective subject, though neither descriptive term adequately covers the relationship I mean to discuss. Rather, we might say something along these lines: The subject is to the object in the material world, as the avatar might be to the e-ject in a virtual world. Yet the potency of the e-ject does not reside in the fact that it symbolically preserves "realistic" relations of objects and subjects in virtual worlds, the e-ject exists really and truly for subjects of this world, whatever we call it. Its potency rests in the fact that it intervenes in the material world with the effect of queering the boundaries of subjects and objects.

7. REFERENCES

[1] Google Scholar. DOI= (http://www.google.com/support/scholar/bin/request.py).

[2] DeCauter, L. "Notes on Subversion/Theses on Activism." In Essays on Disruption: Art and Activism in the Age of Polarization, in press.

[3] Benjamin, W. 1988. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In Illuminations. Trans. Harry Zohn. Schocken Press, NY, NY.

[4] Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M. 1976. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." In Dialectic of Enlightenment. Trans. John Cumming. Continuum , NY, NY.

[5] Derrida, J. 2005. The Politics of Friendship.Trans. George Collins. Verso, London, UK.

[6] Lacan, J. 1998. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, Book XI. Trans. Alan Sheridan. W.W. Norton & Company, NY, NY.

[7] Lacan, J. 1999. Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973, Book XX. Trans. Bruce Fink. W.W. Norton & Company, NY, NY.

[8] Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. 2001. Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Verso, London, UK.

[9] Laclau, E. 2007. Emancipations. Verso, London, UK.

[10] Kristeva, J. 1982. The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection. Columbia University Press, NY, NY.

[11] Knowles, B. 2008. "Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)." From the album *I Am…Sasha Fierce*. Columbia Records, NY, NY.

[12] Squires, C. July 2007. "Beyoncé Orlando Fall." YouTube. DOI = http://www.youtube.com/user/Surferboy28pr.

[13] Cazwell. 2008. "I Seen Beyoncé?" Peace Bisquit Records, Queens, NY.

[14] Bolter, J. D. 1991. Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, NJ. 3.

[15] Hayles, N. K. 2002. Writing Machines. The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA. 22-24.

[16] Biguenet, J. and Schulte, R. 1989. The Craft of Translation. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL. ix.

[17] Hayles, N. K. 2003. "Translating Media: Why We Should Rethink Textuality." In The Yale Journal of Criticism 16 (2003), 263-290.

[18] Kirschenbaum, M. G. 2008. Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination.The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA. 220-7.

[19] Templar, Rosehammer, and Pseudophred. "Hacked and Cracked." DOI= http://agrippa.english.ucsb.edu/%E2%80%98templar%E2%80%99s%E2%80%99-introduction-to-the-first-online-copy-of-gibson%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%98Agrippa%E2%80%99-poem-1992item-d44-transcription/.

[20] Kirschenbaum, M. G. "Hacking 'Agrippa': The Source of the Online Text." DOI= http://agrippa.english.ucsb.edu/kirschenbaum-matthew-g-hacking-Agrippa-the-source-of-the-online-text.

[21] Kirschenbaum, M. G. "Editing the Interface: The Textual Condition of Electronic Objects." In TEXT 14 (2002), 15-52.

[22] Liu, A. "The *Agrippa* Process: Agrippa (A Book of the Dead) in the Age of Web 2.0." (Stanford University, January 12, 2007).

[23] Kirschenbaum, M. G., Reside, D. and Liu, A. "No Round Trip: Two New Primary Sources for Agrippa." DOI= http://agrippa.english.ucsb.edu/kirschenbaum-matthew-g-with-doug-reside-and-alan-liu-no-round-trip-two-new-primary-sources-for-agrippa.

[24] Cayley, J. "The Code is not the Text (unless it is the Text)." In Electronic Book Review. (September 2002, updated July 2005), 1-9. DOI= http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/literal.

[25] Dunne, A. 2005. Herzian Tales: Electronic Products, Aesthetic Experience, and Critical Design. The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA. 7.

[26] Bouchardon, S. "The Aesthetics of Materiality in Electronic Literature." (Bergen, Norway, September 11-13, 2008). Electronic Literature in Europe. DOI= http://elitineurope.net/node/12.

[27] Bolt, B.. 2006. "A Non Standard Deviation: Handlability, Praxical Knowledge and Practice-led Research." In Speculation and Innovation: Applying Practice Led Research in the Creative Industries. University of Technology, Australia: Queensland.

[28] Thrift, N. 2007. Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect. Routledge, NY, NY.

[29] Tabbi, J. "Objecthood and Ephemerality." In Empyre. DOI= https://mail.cofa.unsw.edu.au/pipermail/empyre/209-April/001412.html.

[30] Zizek, S. 2009. The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For? Verso, NY, NY. 25.

[31] Stiegler, B. 1998. Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus. Trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins. Stanford University Press, Berkeley, CA.

[32] Stiegler, B. "Anamnesis and Hypomnesis." DOI= http://www.arsindustrialis.org/node/2923.

[33] Heidegger, M. 1996. Being and Time. Trans. Joan Stambaugh. State University of New York Press, Albany, NY.

[34] Turner, V. 1967. "Betwixt and Between: Liminal Period." In The Forest of Symbols. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.

[35] Zizek, S. 2003. Organs Without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences. Routledge,NY, NY.

[36] Wright, A. "Liminal, Liminality." In The University of Chicago: Theories of Media : Keywords Glossary. DOI= http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/liminal.htm.