

RE:PRINT/RE:Present

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INTRODUCTION

This review refers to the artist book publication re:print published by Marmalade Publishers of Visual Theory in 2018. Edited by Véronique Chance and Duncan Ganley, it was conceived as an extension of the Symposium and Exhibition RE:PRINT/RE:Present convened in July 2015 at Cambridge School of Art, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge. With contributions, both visual and textual, from twenty artists, the publication does much more than adhere to the original aim of the symposium and exhibition, which sought to examine the impact of technological developments of print within trans-medial art practice. It archives these proposals and ideas, formally documenting the oftentimes hard-to-find critical discourse on print. Often disregarded for an emphasis on technique and reproducibility, here, print assumes greater critical significance, evidenced in the scope of its influence on those featured. Coming from various fields of enquiry, the contributors of re:print demonstrate a diversity of situations and register the activity and theory of print as it is located and explored within contemporary art practice, research and education today.

REVIEW OF RE:PRINT

Edited by Véronique Chance and Duncan Ganley, the artist's book publication titled re:print refers to the Symposium and Exhibition RE:PRINT/RE:Present convened in July 2015 at Cambridge School of Art, Anglia Ruskin University, which sought to examine the impact of technological developments of print within trans-medial art practice. Published in 2018, this artist's book is the culmination of over two years' collaboration and consultation between the artists involved, the editors, designer, printer and publisher. A compendium of text contributions with accompanying images from ten artists, as well as additional visual contributions interspersed throughout by ten others, the publication does much more than adhere to the original aim of the symposium and exhibition. It archives these proposals and ideas for future appraisal

and formally documents the oftentimes hard-to-find critical discourse on print in the context of events such as this one. Often disregarded within contemporary art theory and criticism for its emphasis on technique and reproducibility, here print assumes greater critical significance, evidenced in the scope of its influence on those featured. Coming from various fields of enquiry, the contributors of re:print demonstrate a diversity of situations and register the activity and theory of print as it is located and explored within contemporary art practice, research and education today.



Figure 1

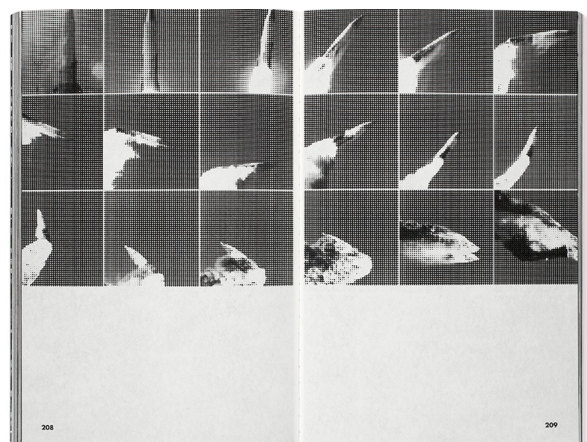


Figure 2

Figure 1: pp2–3. re:print inside cover. Designed in collaboration with Christian Küsters of CHK Design Studio, London and Publication Series Editor Gordon Shrigley.

Figure 2: pp. 208–209. Source Image_Nick Devison, from Still: Return (Atlas) and Still: Return (Mercury) series, Inkjet prints. Designed in collaboration with Christian Küsters of CHK Design Studio, London and Publication Series Editor Gordon Shrigley.

Published by Gordon Shrigley of Marmalade Publishers of Visual Theory, re:print is a small, conveniently portable book with dimensions 130mm wide, 200mm high, 18mm deep, consisting of 264 pages, offset litho printed on recycled, uncoated paper. My own copy, which I have carried with me for some time now, has been perused, abused, its pages creased and corners crumpled. Opening at random in a final glance before I complete this review, I notice a coffee stain has percolated through the paper fibres on one corner to form what looks like a rather tiny but intriguing Rorschach blot – those almost bilaterally symmetrical, abstract images used in psychology to test a subject’s perception of said image. I wonder in what way might they interpret what I see? The once-pristine white cover lightly embossed with a bold image of a documents/pages pictogram in black has, over the course of my handling, become cumulatively scuffed and stained, archiving the life of the object. The portability and flexibility of this perfect bound book (printed and expertly bound by Rik van Leeuwen at Wonderful Books, The Netherlands) enables a quick scan of its pages, an action that undoubtedly compromises the resilience of the paper and the stability of the spine that binds them, yet facilitates ease of access. Perhaps it is only the sensibility of a printmaker who would notice these idiosyncrasies. However, since we are dealing with a subject that obsesses over paper, aesthetics, the method and process in which an image is printed and indeed what it even means to print today, these details are paramount. It is for this reason I commend the combined efforts of the editors, designer, printer and publisher. This collaborative enterprise has resulted in a book that is carefully considered and aesthetically satisfying in terms of its design, but also academically insightful.



Figure 3



Figure 4

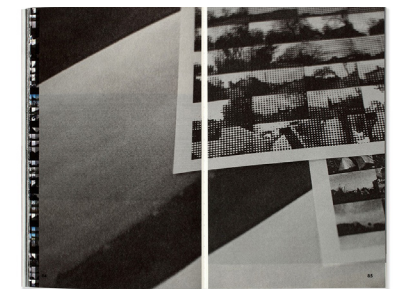


Figure 5

In his essay ‘The Death of the Author’, Roland Barthes suggests once the author’s job is done, they relinquish all sovereignty over their words; meaning or interpretation rests with the viewer or reader. As Barthes puts it, ‘unity lies not in its origin but in its destination’ (Barthes, 1977: 148). With a book that can be attributed to multiple authors both visual and textual, not to mention those responsible for its design (CHK Design), I too become author as the object acquires the patina of my touch and the evaluation of my interpretation.

The exhibition and symposium RE:PRINT/RE:Present is long past, yet it remains extant in a form that invites further reflection. The careful editing of re:print along with the design’s strategic layout has a cumulative effect revealing interconnecting insights into attributes actively examined within print practice. Some are more familiar ideas relating to reproducibility, the multiple, appropriation, circulation, the original versus the copy. Others, as a result of advances in and collaboration with new technology, explore the potential of the error; the hand versus the machine. These themes re-surface as ideas throughout the publication, reinforcing the individuals’ shared interests and indicating the prevailing debates in the field. As recurring motifs, they allude to the widespread use of the #hashtag in social media posts, a device used to gather, categorise and index discussions. Inevitably, the frequent and strategic use of the hashtag taps into a

Figure 3: pp. 184-185. Source Image_ Monique Jansen, from A Drawing that Makes Itself, Inkjet prints of scanned drawings on paper. Designed in collaboration with Christian Küsters of CHK Design Studio, London and Publication Series Editor Gordon Shrigley.

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Figure 5: pp. 84-5. Source Image_Veronique Chance, from The M25 in 4,000 images, digital photographic source material from mobile phone. Designed in collaboration with Christian Küsters of CHK Design Studio, London and Publication Series Editor Gordon Shrigley.

greater audience far beyond our own physical and geographical reach. It mirrors the social dimension of print. Whilst re:print foregrounds the mutability of print, one thing remains certain – the communication revolution spawned by the invention of the movable type press continues to hold significant influence in how print is harnessed and assimilated within a fine art context.

Such is the focus of Kelcy Davenport’s text ‘Feeling the Benefits’ (96-103). Recognising print’s history as a catalyst and conduit for social change, she has applied the democratising nature of print as a stepping off point in using the World Wide Web ‘to externalize, explore, communicate and distribute the experience of being a benefits claimant’ (98). Resurrecting the ‘five giants’ – Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness – Davenport turns the very language used in the 1942 Beveridge Report, a report that was influential in founding the welfare state, against the current government and ‘its own oppressive intentions’ (100). Within the context of her project, the words become logos, free to download for multiple uses as protest ephemera (banners, t-shirts, badges, etc.). Harnessing a more relational approach in the use of online platforms that enable interaction with anonymous yet empathetic audiences, her project exploits the very essence of print – that of dissemination and (re)circulation.

The act of appropriating, recontextualising and recirculating existing information, both image and text-based, is epitomized by many artists working in print, implying a resistance to disappearance and oblivion. The archive represents for Steve Lovett (42 – 54) a fertile ground from which to both harvest and cultivate alternative historical narratives – that “before an image, however old it may be, the present never ceases to reshape” (Didi-Huberman, 2003: 33). Resurrecting the family snapshot, he recognises this anachronistic potential within the image that Didi-Huberman describes – the capacity of the image to reappear and repeat itself, to move between different temporal domains, projecting the past onto the present. For Lovett ‘the image, especially in the context of the ‘snapshot’ that records family and social events, operates as a means of remembering ourselves as we were and those around us as they were’ (49). However, through his method of cut and paste collage, Lovett’s collection of ‘orphaned images’ (50) ‘bear the scars of revision’ (49). The ‘cut’, as I understand it, becomes symbolic of a particular neglect or disregard for social cohesion, a sign of the Neoliberal times.

Alluded to in the introduction, this preoccupation with the ‘itinerant image’ (Steyerl, 2012: 32) or as Steve Lovett says so eloquently, the ‘fugitive nature of the image’ (50), is also the focus of Mark Graver (220 – 229), Nick Devison (208 – 219) and Duncan Ganley (188 – 199). Their work could be described as a detour into previously unexplored potentials of the found or dormant image to recover and reconstruct unforeseen pasts. To that end, their work confirms the inability to fix an image in place. In fact, the only certainty of the image today, particularly in its digitised form, is its perpetual transformation and constant movement across time and space. It is thus that the

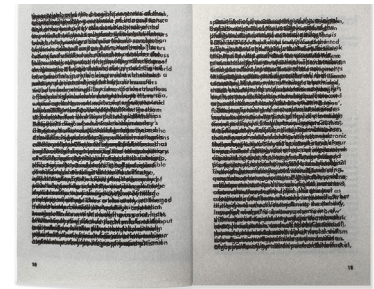


Figure 6

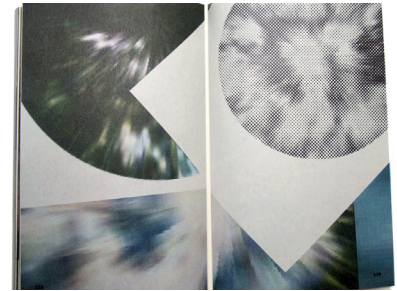


Figure 7

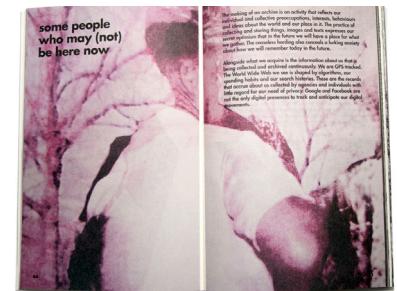


Figure 8

Figure 6: pp6-7_re:print Introduction by Veronique Chance and Duncan Ganley_compressed and reprinted. Designed in collaboration with Christian Küsters of CHK Design Studio, London and Publication Series Editor Gordon Shrigley.
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methodologies of these artists reveals print in its most subversive, where our preconceptions of historical continuity, authorship and originality are challenged and destabilised.

Richard Kearns' text (136 -149) investigates further print's complicity within our digital age, seeing the scanning of QR codes (in this case intended to give access to CCTV imagery) as analogous to the print process and an activity, which forces us to rethink the location of print, its limited and unlimited dissemination. Taking it a step further, his more recent work 'dispenses with the printed artefact' (145) altogether, instead using historical printmaking theory to reflect on today's 'similar revolution in communicative technology' (145). Through his and indeed Davenport's investigations, these artists highlight the concept of 'technogenesis, the idea that humans and technics have coevolved together' (Hayles, N.K., 2012: 10). To that end they draw attention to the prosthetic potential of print as it harnesses and co-opts developments in technology and our information age.

Emily Godden in her project 'Handle with Care' (240 – 251) extends this investigation of technological intervention, which serves to 'remove the temporal burden of the hand present within the traditional print process' (244). For Godden, transferal from matrix to substrate is revealed as sound, an echo, through the mining and recording of data in 'the spaces where time has documented its presence' (241) – in her case, within the craquelure evident in a series of Gainsborough paintings. It is this overlooked and unrepresented space within the digital image, which is the focus of Meg Rahaim (230 – 239). Turning her attention to images as we encounter them on the screen, Rahaim considers the consequences technology poses on their rendering. Simplified by technology to comply with and make user-friendly our digital devices, the technologised digital image for Rahaim conceals details and aspects of its origin, what she describes as image 'depresentation' (233).

We also see this process of 'depresentation' play out in the work of Jo Stockham (22 – 35). Her use of a 3D scanner as prosthesis for the hand, reads, maps and captures data as she attempts to simulate objects in space. The complexities and inadequacies of data capture results in missing details, or objects separated in space now fused into one. Stockham pushes the limits of the technology she uses to perform in unanticipated ways. Print moves further away from the hand; the distance grows between matrix and substrate, allowing increased potential for inaccuracies and improvisations. This notion of print playing against technology, of 'error as aura' (Boym, 2010) is, for Annis Fitzhugh (150 – 166), something to be exploited and celebrated within the process of printmaking, particularly in its hybrid form of digital and analogue. Her experience of collaborating with artists through print at DCA (Dundee Contemporary Arts) has revealed that 'errors' can be 'fortuitous, with interventions by the machine providing their own mechanical, distinctive character to a given work' (153). In printmaking we continue, perhaps unconsciously, to assert the presence and influence of the hand in the use of technology. Is it any wonder human

error is then transferred as a distinct techno-personal touch that imprints itself on images, rendering unique that which is ostensibly mere facsimile? Nerma Cridge (104 – 119) coming from a position within the field of architecture suggests, on the other hand, the dwindling need to print physical copies of architectural plans due to technological efficiency inhibits the potential for the endless proliferation of variations on the original. She thus implies developments in technology breed 'not more difference but overwhelming familiarity' (117).

We live under the conditions of image saturation in today's digital age, and we continuously contribute to it through our online, virtual activity. Where Lovett and to lesser extent Kearns negotiate the physical remnants of image memorabilia, Susana Gomez Larrañaga (86 – 95) considers the virtual traces, the imprints of our presence, which we leave behind as floating digital debris. She imagines this debris as a hologram, a virtual reproduction, double or copy and with it questions the dualities of 'the finite character of life' (the original perhaps) '...yet the enduring power of data' (90) (and thus the original's subsequent and infinitely available copy). The implication this raises in our understanding of what constitutes a(n) (im)print is further challenged in Fay Hoolahan's 'Imprints of In-Between' (120 – 135) and in Véronique Chance's use of mobile and internet technologies to document and record the performative, live action of running (74 – 85). Theirs is a preoccupation with the intangible register of an imprint generated by the technological apparatus, thus relinquishing the idea that the imprint is manifested only through a physical contact and transferral between a matrix and its substrate.

Does this suggest technology-let-loose will render the hand obsolete altogether? Or that because of it, engaging with traditional print processes will signal a mere nostalgia for an increasingly decaying material, analogue world? Thankfully, re:print does not continue previous hackneyed debates on the digital Vs analogue and the threat by technology to traditional print practice that tended to be common to events dedicated to the subject of technology and print in the past. Rather, it focuses on the anxieties-turned-potentials between analogical and digital technologies. It explores the possibilities of print in terms of what Katherine Hayles describes as 'technogenesis'— print as it has evolved and continues to coevolve with developments in technology. To that end and as evidenced here, it seems traditional print has also reaped benefits as the critical discourse surrounding it has grown in complexity, enriched by the critique of the technological apparatus now accompanying it.

While each individual text presents distinct conceptual and philosophical concerns, contributing both directly and indirectly to a theory of print, the visuals, interspersed throughout the book, dominate the content. They remind us of the power of the image. That said, navigating the pages of re:print, authorship and provenance of the visual content is blurred. Save for the contents page and the insightful introduction written by editors Véronique Chance and Duncan Ganley,

no signpost of where one artists' work begins or ends is indicated. The text orients where the visuals, at times, disorient. All control over ownership of the work and its (re)presentation has been relinquished and put in the service of the design. It is difficult to comment on the artists' works in the context of a publication like this one. The images here within are clearly not the originals nor are they an attempt to reproduce them. Instead they appear as speculative propositions that offer an insight into the labyrinthine-like working process and thinking hand of the artist.

Images stimulate our sentient eyes in ways that a text cannot. One artist I am drawn to is asim (66 – 73). While I fail to focus on the text within these pages, I rather see them as reminiscent of a mind-map, astrology or zodiac chart, or a constellation of thought that privileges simultaneity over continuity. Despite the compromise in quality of some of the reproductions, it is possible to appreciate some images as, for example, a preoccupation with surface – with concealing and revealing. Such is evident in the work of Jo Love (36 – 41); the laborious and tactile rendering of a dense sheen of graphite over the surface of a digital print visibly evidences and conjures the slowness of the human hand against the apparent immediacy of the digitally printed image. Rob Smith's (56 – 65) concern for surface is that which is intangible (the screen) and remote (the surface of Mars). Reproduced in black and white here, the image's lack of clarity emphasises the insufficiency of the cybernetic eye to provide accurate representations and indeed the limitations of this publication to faithfully represent the artists' original intentions. In some cases, this limitation inspires not criticism but an alternative generative potential and interpretation. In others, there is a loss in translation – so much so as to obliterate and negate the work entirely (pages 200-207). But perhaps this is the intention? As the introduction explains, 'Mark Shaw's close-up images reveal the space between perception and representation' (16). Removed further from their original context, Shaw's images, ambiguous and ambivalent as they appear in the publication, do indeed challenge the reader's perception. Surface within the context of the the digital/virtual realm is infinitely thin and infinitely mutable. In the images attributed to Monique Jansen (177 – 187) and James Hutchinson (167 – 177), depth of surface is condensed and everything is reduced to the same plane in a paradoxical 'mismatched harmony' (14) to quote the editors.

Re:print achieves something that in isolation these individuals could not, namely it provides a metaphoric screen in which these ideas, theories and artworks can be understood not only within the context of print but across other disciplines such as architecture. They intermingle to form a kind of constellation, where different connections can be established and interpreted to offer new questions, new propositions. I've chosen one set of constellations and isolated points that connect these artists but that is by no means the only route. One is sure to find multiple other strands of thought. The reader, particularly those not familiar with print discourse, may be forgiven for wanting deeper clarification in identifying the relevance or tangential association to print from some of the texts, in which case an abstract may be useful.

However, to spell this out might too rigidly circumscribe the ever-expanding parameters of print. Moreover, the range of philosophical, theoretical and media based enquiries within the individuals' contributions from both a theory and praxis perspective, makes me believe re:print is relevant to other fields that extend far beyond the confines of an exclusively print-oriented discourse and practice.

IMAGE GALLERY



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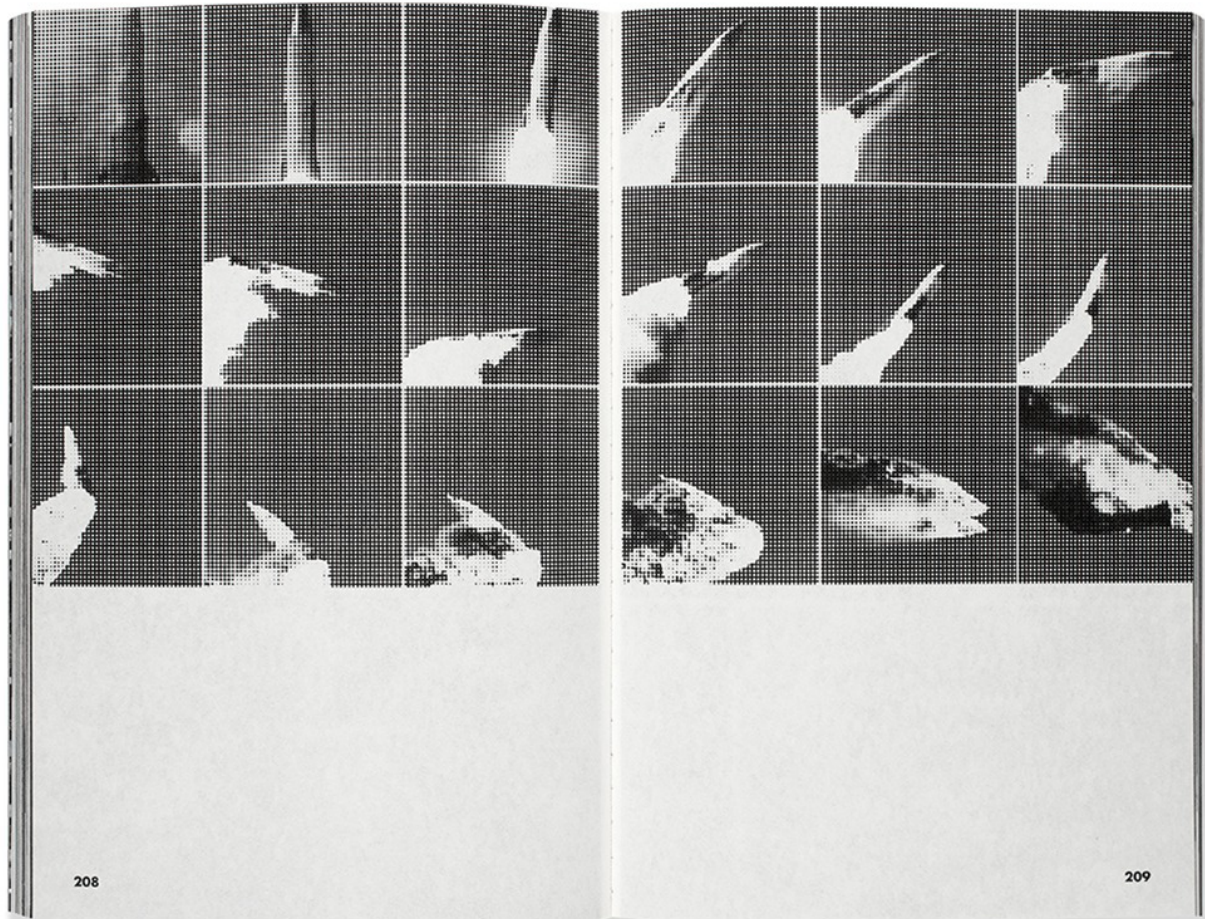


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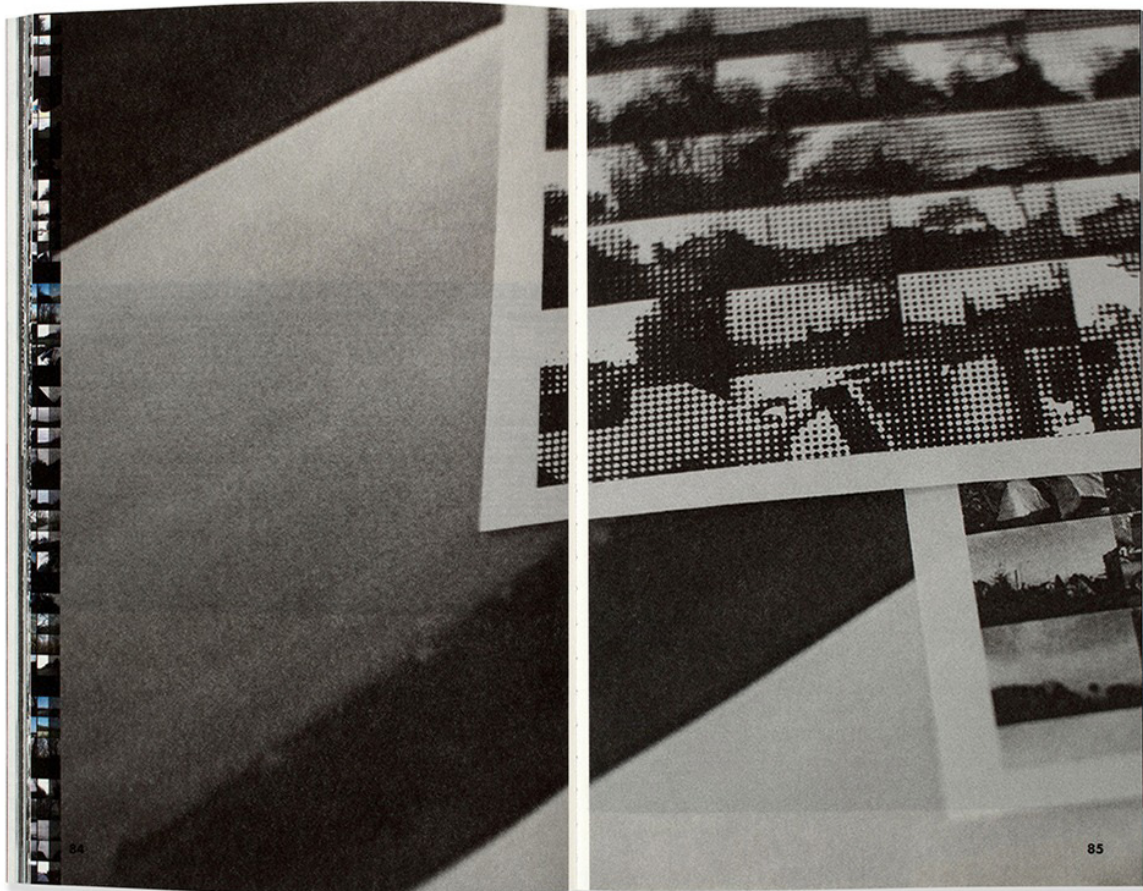


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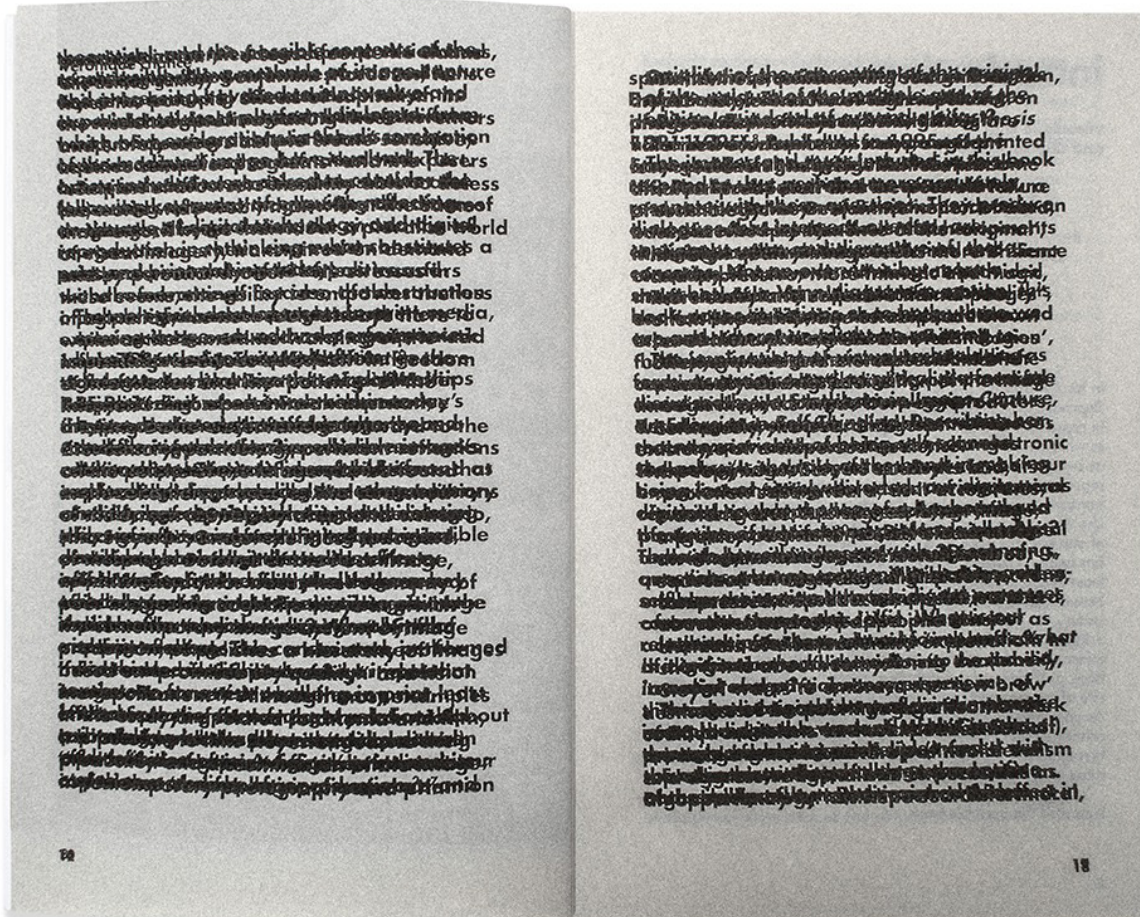


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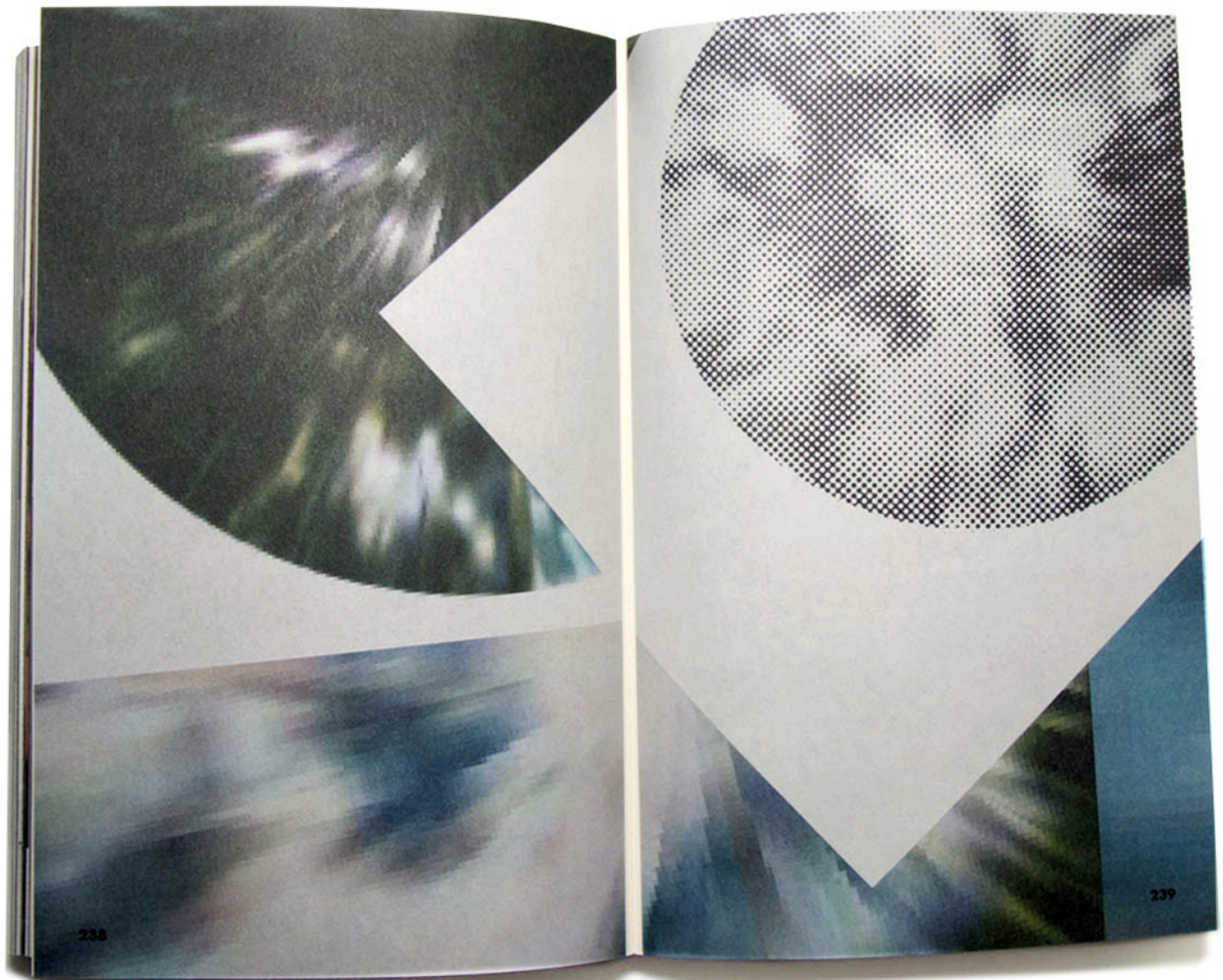


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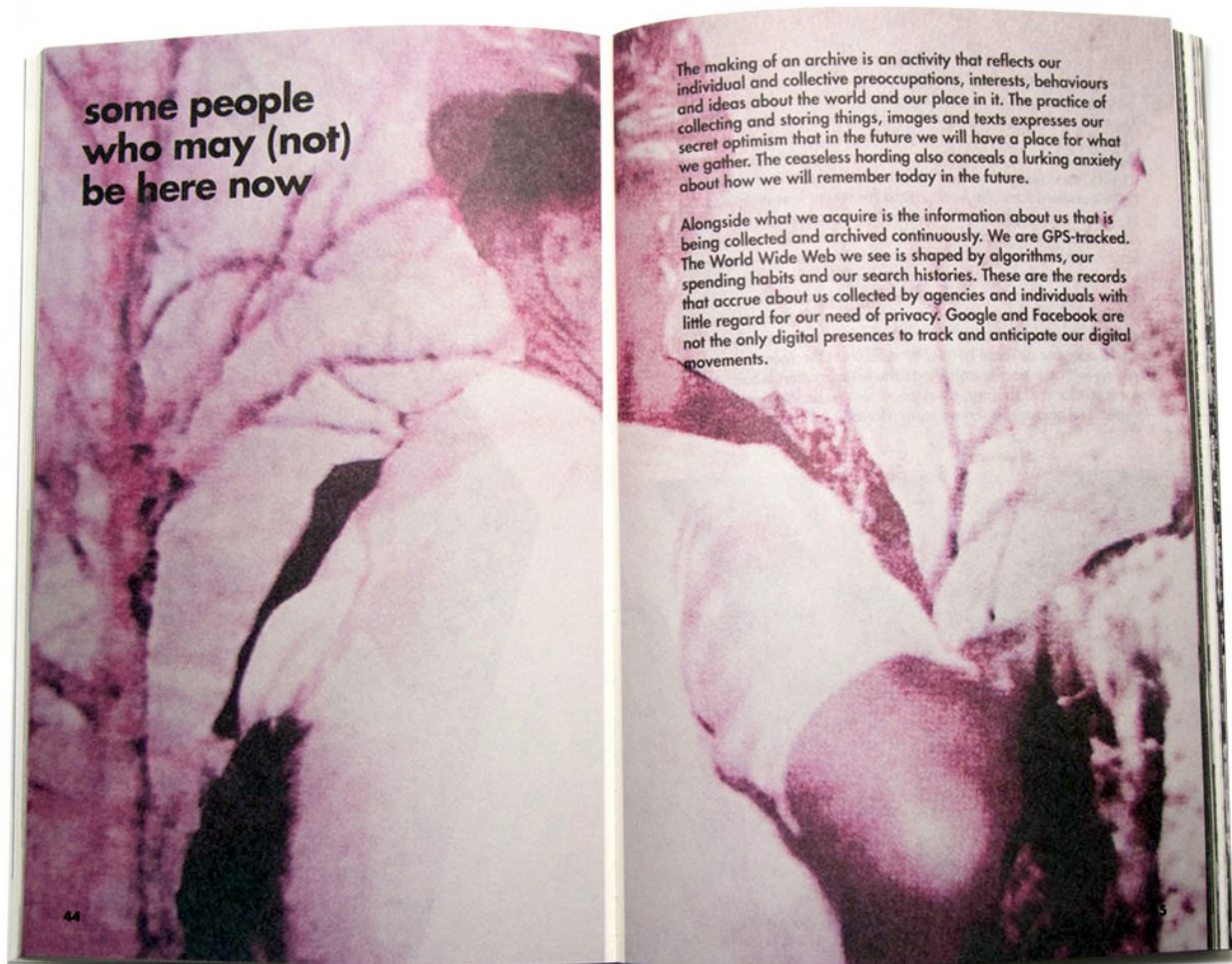


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