

Hands on the Document: Arnold Dreyblatt's T Archive

Introduction

I have been working for many years on the development of an artistic practice that has involved the acquisition, administration and display of historical archival source materials. The 'T Project' is one of a series of ongoing works that look at the archival traces of the individual as represented in written storage.

Whereas parallel projects, such as my *Who's Who in Central & East Europe 1933* (Dreyblatt, 1991, 1995) are based on biographical data from thousands of people as a representation of the collective, the 'T Project' concerns one individual, a marginal and mostly forgotten Central European historical figure whose multiple identities span three continents (Europe, North America, and Asia) and obliquely touch on many of the most important events of the pre-war period. More importantly, during the last 28 years of his adult life, Mr. T was followed and observed nearly every day by the intelligence services of various world powers.

This enormous effort in collecting documents resulted in the accumulation of thousands of daily reports and various forms of correspondence between 1915 and 1943, forming a vast communication network in which the observation of the activities of one individual becomes a kind of international discussion held over three decades between intelligence agencies, which is, in turn, cross-referenced in my artistic projects with historical events, international personalities, and geographic locations.

In this essay, we will examine the roles of handwriting in this archive of documents about T, and interrogate the ways in which handwriting relates to other material dimensions of the documents.

Biography of T

One may look at a series of representations of this biography, which in turn trace the development of this project. Here is a selected list of chronological events, as they would appear in a short biography of a Mr. T:

- born April 4, 1879, Paks, Hungary
- student at Budapest Drama Academy
- conversion to Christianity
- adopts 'name' Lincoln
- Protestant missionary in Montreal
- social research in Belgium and France
- election as member of Parliament in England
- oil speculation in Romania and Galicia
- fraudulent business deals
- under arrest in Bucharest
- arrested in Brooklyn as German spy
- escapes from prison
- rearrested
- deported to England
- imprisoned in England as German spy
- suffers nervous breakdown
- involvement with German rightists
- involvement with Kapp Putsch in Berlin
- encounters Adolf Hitler
- involvement with the White International
- arrested and tried in Vienna
- arrives in Shanghai
- involvement with rebel Chinese Warlords
- obsession with Tibet
- abandons sons in China
- ruined in Monte Carlo
- mystical delusions in Ceylon
- second son sentenced to death for murder
- adopts name 'Chao Kung'
- Buddhist missionary in Europe
- heads Buddhist monastery
- letters to Adolf Hitler
- visits Canada
- deported from Liverpool
- establishes 'League of Truth'
- seeks return to Hungary
- calls for World Peace
- espionage in Japanese-occupied China
- contacts with Nazis
- dies October 6, 1943, in Shanghai

While the form is familiar, the seemingly linear format betrays an unstable pattern, jumping geographically and professionally in a refusal to be ‘pinned-down’ to one historical identity. In fact, Mr. T was not only observed continuously by the intelligence services, he, in turn, furnished a stream of misinformation, countless false identities or aliases such as:

Abbot Chao-Kung, Theodor Lakatos, Heinrich Lamprecht, Thomas Langford, Dr. Tibor Lehotsky, Jack Fisher, I.T.T. Lincoln, Thomas Langford, Thomas Lorinz, Vilmos Ludwig, Wilhelm Ludwig, H. Ruh, Henry Fischer, Thomas Tandler, Theodore Trautwein, Dr. Johann Lange, Patrick Keelan, Joseph Schlesinger.

Building an Archive

For this work, I created a duplicate or mirror archive, which entailed the acquisition of copies of over 4,000 intelligence documents from State Archives in Europe and North America.¹ It was through this long process of data acquisition, and then the administration of these data materials, that the focus of the project moved away from and beyond the familiar chronology or biography of T. I became fascinated with issues of fragmentation and loss and with the dynamics of the storage and migration of data through governmental agencies and archival institutions. Within the transformations of the artistic project, these ‘originally sanctioned archival copies’ were re-scanned, digitized, altered, displayed as paper and projected, re-archived and re-lent.

Documents in Motion

The ‘T Project’ follows the physical movement of paper as an ‘original’ passes from hand to hand, being sent and received internally within an agency and externally from agency to agency, often around the globe, by post and by telegraphic cables. Carbon copies are made and forwarded, and in the process are annotated, signed, stamped and initialed, leaving a ‘paper trace’ or evidence revealing a network or ‘biography’ of the document itself. Eventually the document becomes inactive, is filed away, migrating in medium from microfilm to photocopy and finally to digital bits and bytes.

Recently, a major news story in the US revealed that the laboratory director of the Secret Service had lied under oath in his testimony during the Martha Stewart trial (Glater, 2004). Stewart was perhaps one of the most powerful and richest businesswoman in the US, and she was on trial for having lied about her reasons for selling her shares in another company after having received inside information that that company’s share price was about to collapse. A Mr. Stewart, the Secret Service agent (and no relation to Ms. Stewart), had testified about the results of his analysis of a handwritten annotation to a document in the files of Martha Stewart’s stockbro-

ker. Mr. Stewart testified that his analysis of the notation ‘@60’ showed that it was written in an ink different from ‘other marks on the documents’, and that it was therefore likely that this notation had been added separately, and at a later date, from other handwritten entries on the page. The defense countered with their own ink expert, who testified that the analysis of the ink did not support any of these conclusions.

At stake in the testimony was whether the analysis of certain handwritten annotations to a document can reveal the intention of another party (the intentions of Martha Stewart, and her stockbroker who made the annotations supposedly in response to her orders. Did she, in fact, intend for these shares to be sold automatically if the price ever fell to \$60 a share? And can the point in time at which this communication of an intention took place be determined? The handwritten mark, from the perspective of both the prosecution and the defense, is privileged, as providing access to an understanding, an agreement, that stood only on the margins of, as an addendum to, the more formal set of transactions, which either confirmed an order communicated verbally over the telephone, or, more sinisterly, from the prosecution’s perspective, was intended to give the false appearance of the prior existence of such an agreement. For the prosecution, this handwritten annotation was an illegal, after-the-fact alteration – a falsification of the document.

Ironically, a couple of months after the trial, the Secret Service expert on the authenticity of documents (he had also served as an expert on ‘the authenticity of documents used in a Nazi war crimes case’ – such comments in newspaper articles are always meant to show us that the person has had direct contact with the most overpowering event of the 20th century) was now being accused of lying about his personal role in the analysis of the ink, and about the point in time at which he gained knowledge of the fact that two of his subordinates were writing a book containing a chapter on ‘a certain type of ink analysis’. During the trial he claimed he had performed the ink tests while analyzing the document, whereas now it was revealed that he had not performed any of the tests and had not even participated in the analysis at all (the work had been done entirely by his subordinates); and that, at the time he appeared on the witness stand, he had no knowledge of the book his employees were writing. The authority of the handwriting and document expert is based on the presumption that he can scientifically demonstrate whether someone had been present at a certain point in time (whether the document reveals their presence) and that he can reveal to us facts about the temporal chain of events in the life of a document (whether it was produced before or after a certain time; certain marks were simultaneous to or later interpolations on the earlier

content). Now the expert was being prosecuted for these identical issues: for lying about having a direct, ‘hands on’ relation to these documents, and for having a knowledge of the intentions of others at an earlier time than he actually had.

I think this incident, which was ‘newsworthy’ only because of the celebrity of Martha Stewart, serves as an allegory for much of our current relation to texts and to handwriting. In our era of word processing, telecommunications, and the Internet, handwriting is now likely to be something added later, a note on another text, rather than the mark of the original, the trace of the earliest intention, the first stage in the life of a document. The handwritten is now largely the mark of a *reader*; it calls attention to the hands through which documents have passed. The ‘analysis’ of handwriting, rather than revealing to us an individual identity, an original intention, and a specific moment of presence (the moment of the coincidence between the writer’s thinking and the written expression of that thought), will instead tell us more about the many different ways in which the *hand* interacts with the *written*.

Yet we are also still driven by the desire to establish the priority of the human agent in relation to the transmission, circulation, reproduction, and migration across media of writing. The fear of the reversal of perspective, in which the human becomes merely the servant of the written, is an old one, and is the subject of powerful stories by Melville, Kafka, and many others.⁷ In the age of the video replay, the simulation, and the delayed ‘live’ transmission, we especially want to be able to come into contact with or at least determine the presence of the author, and to be able to fix exactly the point in time in which a written event takes place. The Stewart trials reveal yet again that the bureaucratic institutions charged with preserving the belief that we can read, can retrace, and can fix the precise meanings of the marks left by our hands are themselves thoroughly haunted by the processes of circulation and remediation that undermine any claims to clear and direct knowledge about the presence, moment of action, and intention of an ‘individual identity’.

Arnold Dreyblatt’s work, and his T Projects in particular, help us reflect on and think through these dynamics. These projects revolve around the remediation and redisplay of a huge collection of documents, gathered from various archives, regarding the life of a marginal world-historical figure (this oxymoron, or tension between ‘marginal’ and ‘world historical’, will play out in many ways). Through different media, they present to us or give us access to the archival traces of an individual biography, and help us to re-orient our perspective and to understand more clearly important aspects of our relation to documents, to handwriting, and to remediation. Dreyblatt’s work is not simply an aid to critical understanding, or a

challenge or resistance to the conventional ways of thinking. These projects do much more than mark the shift in perspective from the ‘human’ to the ‘bureaucratic’, from a biographical life and from the generation of a document to the archive, to the transmission and circulation of texts, and to the life and afterlife of documents. Rather, they immerse us in, and encourage us to explore, reflect, and play with, the layers and the traces of the passage of a person through the observation, transmission, and information storage systems of the major world powers.

Levels of Representation

We can move to a second level of representation, in which the chronological list of biographical events is transformed into an administrative, bureaucratic structure that reflects a categorization and systematization performed by the archival institutions upon the documents:

Record Group 59

11.41T73

Goldstein to Roundtree, 10-11 July, 1914

Record Group 58-137, Book 1, Page 105-70, 4 October 1946

Record Group 65

FBI OG 500\BS202600-1356

State Department Decimal File

862.2.898

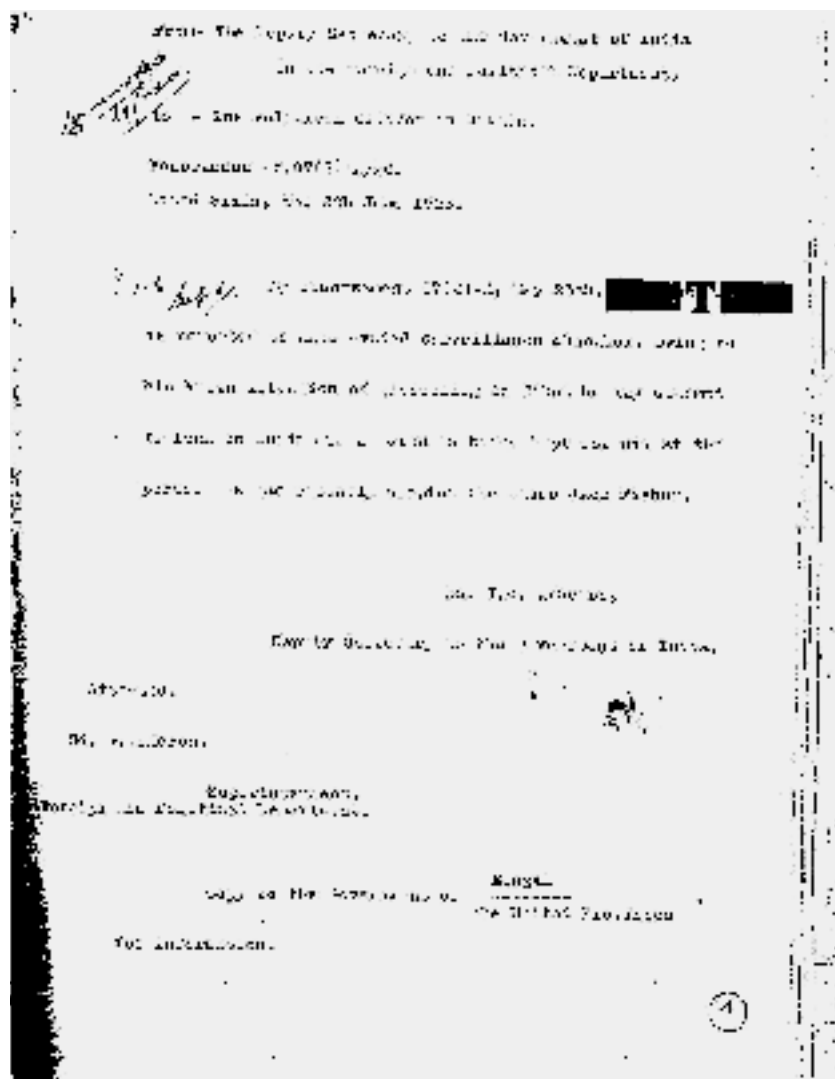
Court Extradition Hearing and Related Documents

Records of the Office of the Special Agent

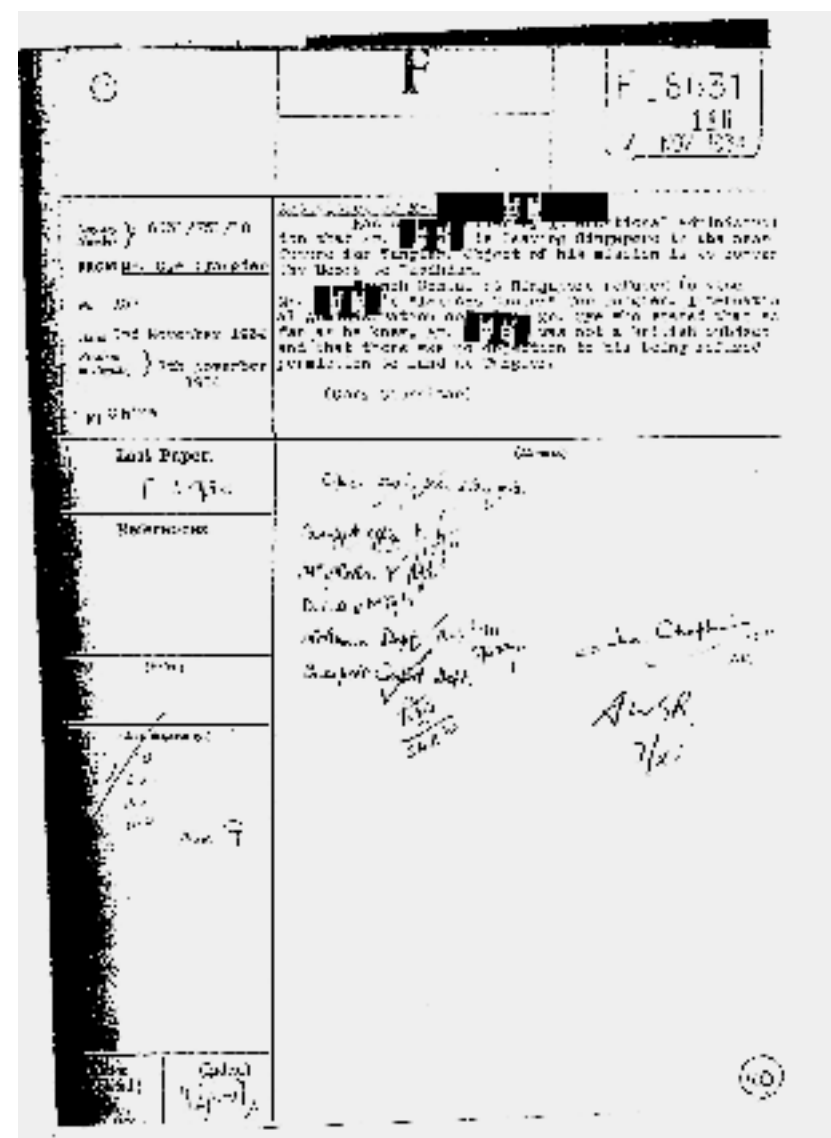
The above represents a frozen moment in the archival process in which the chronological biographical or autobiographical form is fragmented and exploded into thousands of individual files, found under various classification systems and in diverse geographical locations. The identity and credit card databases, which reduce the contemporary individual to a number, find their origins in this administration of archival data.

At a primary level, the T-projects have as their basis the reproduction of several thousand pages of documents concerning ‘T’, and the remediation and redisplay of selections from these documents. This is done through newly created ‘original’ versions of these documents; or through the creation (as one part of a larger ‘Memory Arena’ project) of an actual working archive (staffed by archivists) where one could search, request, and then read a version of some of these documents; or, later, through various computer interfaces. In

order to make this less abstract, I will discuss a couple of documents in order to reveal some of the ways that Dreyblatt's projects shift our processes of reading and the processing of this material (selecting and displaying one document in this manner, however, short-circuits the aesthetic mediation and the recontextualization that is integral to the project).



document #1



Document #100

What leaps out at one is the immensity of the document-producing structures – Deputy Secretary, Government of India, Foreign and Political Departments, Superintendent, Government of Bengal, and so forth – rather than the figure who is the apparent focal point. Dreyblatt has stamped out the name of the figure with ‘-I-’, adding another layer to this palimpsestic document, both defacing and drawing attention to the apparent connection thread of these papers (though here, the recently adopted alias ‘Jack Fischer’ remains unmarked). More powerful still are the ‘marginal’ handwritten notations: ‘Communicated by India’– who wrote that? Its literal

meaning (with the synecdoche here of the whole standing in for the part, 'India' standing for one officer and one office within the Imperial governing structure of India) seems clear, but what sort of performative speech act is it to note on this document, 'Communicated by India'? And what follows the content of the message is equally intriguing: a name and title; then 'Attested' with another name and title; and especially the 'copy to' with its wonderful fill-in-the-blank quality of another imperial province (not a person or office), here 'Bengal'.

The scope and craziness of this 'mission' is mind boggling, but there is also a euphoria (and a vertigo) that opens up on the surface of the document itself. The 'content' here occupies only a small rectangular box. The other compartments ('registry number', 'from', 'received in registry', 'minutes', 'References', 'Last paper', 'how disposed of'); the stamps acknowledging receipt and processing of the document; and the various hand-written annotations under 'minutes' and 'how disposed of' (marking the different offices to which the document has been sent, and/or the offices and people who have reviewed the document?) draw our attention and our imagination inexorably to all the circuits of transmission, review, and reproduction through which information is being passed, and to our own relations to and implication in these circuits through this further 'remediation'.

I want to make a few fairly straightforward points about some of the shifts in perspective that Dreyblatt's work call forth. A basic transcription of these documents, focusing on their 'content' and on simply following the target ('T'), would filter out many of the layers and traces of circulation in order to sharpen the picture of the story of an individual, and his passages through 'world history'. Dreyblatt's 'remediation' gives us a different standpoint: the 'life' of the document. Rather than drawing us toward trying to ascertain or understand a precipitating event, the true happening, some actual moment in the 'life' of a person that generates these series of observations (what was T really trying to accomplish in November of 1934?), this redisplay of material displaces our attention from an origin to an afterlife, and from the individual to the archival, to the now public traces that continue to circulate. Any desire to recover an original moment of intention or of action or of observation or of inscription or of transmission (and the multiplication of possible starting points already testifies to a crisis of determination) gives way, when one becomes drawn in to the 'T project', to other fascinations. By reorganizing, cutting up, reconnecting, and/or redisplaying the material, Dreyblatt helps make visible to us the rever-

berations – the further movement, circulation, and connection – of each point of contact between an individual and state networks of power.

A passage from Jacques Derrida's 'Plato's Pharmacy' provides an interesting perspective on Dreyblatt's use of the archive:

The 'outside' does not begin at the point where what we now call the psychic and the physical meet, but at the point where the *mn m*, instead of being present to itself in its life as a movement of truth, is supplanted by the archive, evicted by a sign of remembrance or of com-memoration. The space of writing, space *as* writing, is opened up in the violent movement of this surrogation, in the difference between *mn m* [living, knowing memory] and *hypomn sis* [re-membrance, recollection, consignation]. The outside is already *within* the work of memory. (p. 109)

Derrida argues that Plato's hope for a '*mn m* with no *hypomn sis*, no *pharmakon*' is an impossible dream, and that the 'living, knowing memory' is always already being 'supplanted by the archive'. Dreyblatt's work shifts our perspective, so that the categories of 'inside' and 'outside', 'living' and 'recollected' (and one might add 'handwritten' and 'machine printed'), lose their ground in the 'simple alternative presence/absence'. The archive itself is for us no longer '*hypo-*', no longer 'beneath', 'under', 'in a lower relation'.

Installation + Exhibition: Process of Reproduction

I will discuss three differing instances involving this mirror T archive in my artistic practice over the last twelve years.

The installation *T-Docs* (1993) playfully contrasts the nature and authority of the 'original' as found in the archival institution with the display of the original in art. In *T-Docs*, 110 original archive documents (officially sanctioned institutional copies) have been digitized and faked by specially developed printing techniques utilizing diluted inks and applied to the reverse side of postwar East German archival material, which poses questions about the identity of both the subject's personality and the authenticity of the documents themselves. The documents are presented in chronological order as both archival and 'art' originals (which are ironically not signed by the artist). All occurrences of 'Mr. T's' name are digitally removed and hand-stamped with a large red 'T'. The reprinting process attempts to retain the 'hand', in this case, as the 'typing hand' along with subsequent handwritten commentary and markings which later appeared, including this 'real' hand stamp.

Exhibitions of this work often lead to viewer irritation because they raise the question: were these illegally displayed ‘real’ documents actually stolen from an archive? Yet the biographical content is too improbable to be ‘real’ and therefore ‘original’. Are the documents faked or is the content ‘original’ in terms of being ‘thought up’ and thereby ‘faked’? The art world is immune to these problems, being unconcerned with ‘real’ but rather with the ‘original hand’ of the artist, and with the artist’s ‘originality’.

Being in the Archive

The Reading Projects

In a second instance, the document is no longer isolated and displayed on a wall but is now found in its rightful home in a file folder in an archive box, within a filing system and inside a ‘real’ archive. Here the ‘original’ and its copies are stored, protected, categorized, according to archival practice.

Influenced by my experiences in document collection at various archives for the ‘T Project’, I began a series of projects in which I became interested in simulating the living environment in which data is stored with the intention of making this process transparent and interactive within an installation and performance context. All of the documents contained in the archive could be searched for in a catalog (card or digital) and ordered and lent out to be read in a special reading room. Copies of the ‘T’ documents were among the archive holdings:

re: Card Catalog

The Archive contains the following types of Files:

1. Class ‘D’ Files: copies of all Files that are read in the Arena.
2. Class ‘QI, QII’ Files: *Personal Biography Data Files* of Visitors and Readers and from Memory Arena I and II.
3. Class ‘QIII’ Files: *Personal Biography Data Files* for Visitors and Readers from Memory Arena III; (entered into the Archive as they are filled in).
4. Additional Archive Material including: *texts by Archivists* (Class ‘A’ Files); copies of Original ‘T’ Files (Class ‘T’ Files), etc.

Sections 2 through to 4 of the Archive are available for reading by visitors for a limited time at tables within the *Reading Room Area*. The Archive personnel assist visitors in the use of the Card Catalog and in the selection and ordering of files.

The viewer is now a participant in a temporary functioning archival system. One cannot browse the ‘stacks’, one must know what one is looking for beforehand. One is only allowed to browse the catalog, where one must imagine ‘content’ from the bureaucratic classification of numbers, dates, and short titles (which may be designed to protect rather than to reveal!). One must wait for a functionary to locate and deliver the file. One has a period of time in which to hold the ‘original’ in one’s hands before returning it to its home in the ‘archive’, and one must of course sign out the document with one’s signature. The participant, filling out a re-

quest form for documents by hand, and then reading them, re-enacts to some extent, the role of those in the various agencies who had earlier reviewed these same documents. The reader handles the documents, and leaves behind the traces of his or her own pathway through the archive—the handwritten requests and signatures for documents. In addition, participants in the readings and in the archive were invited to fill out biographical questionnaires and to donate them to the archive’s administration, thereby taking part in a process of autobiographical, bureaucratic description.

Digital Remediation



T-Mail

In a third stage, *T-Mail*, in the migration of the T Documents through my various projects, the data is digitized and automated. One thousand documents were selected from my larger mirror-archive, in which the identity of a sender and receiver is clearly visible. I consider the collection as a kind of pre-war e-mail, composed of a network of international communications. The content of the selected documents was transcribed into a growing database over several years. The database form allows multiple realizations by searching and hyperlinking details of content.

In the automated display of 'T-Mail', new documents are chosen randomly from the database, a scan of the next document gradually slides into view as various thematic categories and cross-links are activated. Text writings are simultaneously emitted sonically as Morse code, in five different sine wave frequencies that change with each subsequent paragraph. The viewer becomes unnecessary here. Even without a public presence, the computer continually searches and updates information in the database, hereby functioning as a form of 'automatic writing' in which history seems to 'write itself', without further human intervention. Much as the Internet saves and preserves our information traces without our knowledge, scanned handwriting and asci text are equally displayed without concern for differences in authenticity, source, or receiver.

The mark of the hand here leaves a public mark, not merely the outward sign of personal, inner, or unique intention. We are presented with the intersections of a person with the bureaucratic, in some sense 'public' systems of recording information. What we also have here, in Dreyblatt's work, is the gesture, and the performance, of making public. These documents were originally parts of non-public, government files, but in the democratic state systems of government (and in the US and the UK, in particular), the government record, often after a 'suitable' delay, *becomes* the public record, accessible, (potentially) to anyone. Some of the most important political battles going on in the US today involve the current Bush administration's attempts to radically redefine the nature of government, so that what is open to the public will only be what the president explicitly wants the 'public' to see. At one level, Dreyblatt's 'remediation' makes these documents public: it retrieves them from the archive, from a closed, guarded, often locked room, for anyone to see. It also makes visible to us some of the recording and circulating processes that mark the lives of individuals. But more than this, it also exposes to us, and crosses for us, the threshold that separates the closed or 'secret' from the open or public. And it is this very act of crossing the threshold that is at the essence of any construction of a public.

Dreyblatt's Memory Projects, which often have as their point of departure excerpts that he culled from the book *Who's Who in Central and East Europe* (1935), confront us with a juxtaposition of different moments in time; a juxtaposition of interpretive frameworks, (as biography, history, and other theoretical groundings no longer function as they once did); and a juxtaposition of information collection and display systems (the 'remediation' of the contents of a book by means of a multitude of old and new modes of presentation). A haunting dimension of the project, of course, is our knowledge that so many of the lives whose fragments we read or hear were violently ended in the ensuing years. The various 'T Projects' center more on making visible to us some of the enormous

systems for observing and recording the traces of a life. While these projects focus on written texts, the various practices of artistic display, from the 'forging' of 'original' documents (using old paper and old typewriters to present documents that look as if they were taken from an archive) to the latest hypertext programs, also help focus our attention on the hands that type or write or write on or read these documents (reading the printed document is an activity of the hand as well as the eye). Dreyblatt's project, like his musical works, calls attention to the overtones, to the often-unnoticed vibrations and movements that take place 'above' or around the dominant line of information flow. The hands on the document produce overtones, which Dreyblatt now helps us to hear and see.

Artistic practice, in relation to bureaucratic information systems and in relation to new media, often attempts to interrupt a flow of information or to draw attention to the medium (or media) through which information is passing. The attempt is often to obstruct, at least minimally, some operation of power, and to make people more aware of all the shaping and controlling forces that determine what we are presented with. The hope of 'media literacy', for example, is that if the 'consumers' of media are made more aware of the technical, economic, and political processes that determine what they see and hear, they will be less susceptible to its influences. Art is now often a symbolic substitute for the seeming inefficacy of most 'political' action. Dreyblatt's projects, in contrast, operate less by interrupting or calling attention to the medium (which does not take much artistic skill) than by opening up new possibilities. The power and beauty of new and old media of display fascinate us, but here they also provoke us to ask further questions, and to seek further responses. The works, that engage us in the flow of information and invite us to participate, are unsettling: we continually want to know something more, or to reflect further on some point of connection.

The Mark of the Hand

The document in the archive is often seen as a repository of the past, kept and protected for the future. The material seems to be frozen and secure, but the situation is ultimately quite unstable. We find it difficult to choose – as in the preservation of ruins and historical or monumental sites – which document state is actually authentic. The document is migrating through media and technologies much as Mr. T is migrating geographically with his unstable identity.

Furthermore, the handwritten annotations and signatures marking the documents cannot lead us back to a hand or to a sign of human intention or to the inter-document relations that had previously existed. The imprint on paper caused by

handheld bureaucratic rubber stamps does not bring us closer to the sender or receivers of these documents, nor do they help us to control their authenticity.

A reconstruction of the life of Mr. T was and is no longer possible, not for the intelligence agents who have to contend with T's multiple identities and continuous issuing of misinformation and downright lies or 'noise', not for the archivists who have to contend with these often conflicting and fragmentary documents; not for the historians who try to make narrative sense of it all; not for me as an artist, and not for the viewer/reader.

The marks of the hand do not function like precious bits of original, authentic material. They will not allow the crime scene investigator to recover the evidence that will determine exactly who is responsible for the death. They will not someday allow us - like the scientists in *Jurassic Park*, who bring dinosaurs back to life after the discovery, decoding, and regeneration of bits of their genetic material - to reconstruct either a unique life, or the social network that observed and noted a person's activities.

Handwriting no longer betokens the unity of the hand and the individual life, or the intimate connection between the work of the hand and human identity. In the age of technical reproduction, in the archive, in the T projects, the handwritten indicates *Nachträglichkeit* rather than original intention. We can no longer hope to reconnect all the varied movements of hands, documents, and identities into an image of a human life, or into a reflection of ourselves.

Arnold Dreyblatt

Jeffrey Wallen

SIGN HERE!

Notes

1. Documents were acquired from the following archives: The Public Record Office and The British Library, London; The National Archives, Washington, DC; Bundesarchiv Koblenz; Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Bonn.

2. See Herman Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener' and Franz Kafka's 'Ein Traum' or 'In der Strafkolonie'.

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