

Michael Takeo Magruder's <event>

A little over a year ago, Turbulence launched Cory Arcangel's "Data Diaries," a work comprised of his computer's RAM captured once a day for the month of January on QuickTime. One year later, Michael Takeo Magruder's <event> launches, in which headline news articles have been parsed from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/> between December 29 and February 1. Both artists are concerned with memory, Arcangel with the personal and Magruder with the collective made personal.

Magruder's <event> explores the individual's relationship with finite moments in recent history. As with his earlier works, Magruder is concerned with media saturation and its subsequent devaluation of information; copyright—who actually owns the information, the event that triggered it, the history it becomes?; is it the 'truth?

As world events become known to us in real-time, and earlier events become available for instant retrieval, we seem to depend more and more on our extended bodies-recording devices-for storing our memories. We swallow less; we rarely digest, assured that our 'external' memories are always at our fingertips. When we are attentive, we trust our sources and the methods they use to capture "live," unscripted events. We are oblivious to what we're being sold, and whose campaign contributions have compromised our elected officials.

In <event>, Magruder re-presents 31 news items, compelling us to "reflect upon the minute isolated occurrences of which history in an empirical sense is composed." He does this by extracting, slowing down, and meticulously crafting samples of audio, image, text, and video information. Rather than disguise or remove distortions, Magruder deliberately incorporates the artifacts of data compression into the piece. Events that usually stream towards us in a rapid, undifferentiated flow become moments of quiet contemplation that can be viewed and re-viewed in one's own time.

The user can apply an array of colored filters, like gels used on theater sets—we can, in fact, choose to view events "through rose-tinted glasses." Depending on the color, the moving image either partially obscures or reveals the 'truth', i.e. word. One can choose to literally tone down the rhetoric, or inflame the masses. One filter filters out the others. Multicolored, Magruder's default, represents ambiguity, multiple viewpoints, the many.

With the motion slowed, and much of the detail removed from the images, one can begin to see what news actually 'looks' like. We see the outlines and the spaces in-between them. We study the news as we would study a painting. The dark gray spaces between the words form vertical and diagonal lines that resemble marks, networks, or microscopic organisms. Despite the regiment of text, the smoky images floating on top diffuse the linear edges into billowing organic shapes. As with abstract painting, we instinctively look for recognizable forms, and are especially comforted by those that are human. They run in slow motion, away from burning rubble and bullets; or gather to talk about Bird Flu, SARS, and Mars.

Magruder's <event> is his most powerful and beautiful yet.

Jo-Anne Green
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