5

Q Night Without Objects

Jeanne C. Finley
John Muse
with
Lucy Suchman
Jeanette Blomberg
Susan Newman
Randy Trigg

Figure 5.1
Images of John Muse and Jeanne Finley at work on site and studio

John Muse and Jeanne C. Finley have worked collaboratively since 1989. Our installations, single-channel videotapes, and book projects often utilize documentary elements and tactics, though usually in order to undermine their authority. The theoretical and practical problems of nonfiction compel us, as do the challenges that attend crossing the borders between reportage and fable, the evidentiary and the invented. With our work we attempt to submit these borders to the troubling forces of humor, rigor, and passion.

At Xerox Palo Alto Research Center we were paired with members of the Work Practice and Technology (WPT) area, a small group of anthropologists and computer scientists who study work and the practices by which workers take up technologies in creative and necessarily unpredictable ways. WPT also uses video, interviews, and observation in its research. We share not only technologies but also a concern for the ethical implications of using technology to create and distribute images, texts, and stories.

When we began our residency, we were in progress on an experimental documentary videotape. Entitled *Based on a Story,* this work examines the well-publicized encounter between Lincoln Nebraska's Ku Klux Klan Grand Dragon Larry Trapp and Jewish cantor, Michael Weisser. Trapp had harassed Weisser by telephone and mail and on cable television programs. And yet after a series of telephone conversations and meetings, Trapp renounced the Klan and eventually became close friends with Weisser. We were particularly interested in how media technologies were used to disseminate fear and yet also made possible Trapp's transformation.

We came to the PAIR program to explore how recent innovations in digital and Internet technologies might affect artists who work with nonfiction elements. With WPT members we decided that they would use their technologies and expertise to document our activities while we were working at PARC to produce our tapes. We became the objects of their observation so that we could mutually explore the relationship of video technologies to the documentary artist as both subject and object of the work.

Documentary theory and practice have always been linked to technological innovations. The crystal-synch camera facilitated cinéma vérité, and the Hi-8 video camera radically changed the aesthetics of documentary recording. By contrast, digital technologies seem to be having a minor impact on the act of recording but a huge one on how the images are edited, disseminated, and stored once captured. For inspiration we began to look for artists

who were using hypermedia and interactive strategies for documentary works. We searched the Web for such projects and found few. But the experience of the search taught us more than the projects: the data were overwhelming, the paths difficult to navigate, and the technologies obtrusive. Our passion for traditional narrative time and space was frustrated. We were not seduced by these materials because the very process of using the technologies upset the traditional pleasures of total immersion. It was impossible to become "lost" in this material as one can when simply reading text or watching film or video.

We aren't sure whether this is the good news or the bad news. Much avant-garde (but by now mainstream) documentary theory calls for the documentarian to explicitly critique the rhetoric of objectivity by breaking with the seamlessness of traditional storytelling. Disrupting narrative continuity and calling attention to the "hand of the maker" was to reveal the fiction and constructedness of ostensibly nonfiction works. Such disruptions allow artists and audiences to examine the power relations between documentarian and subject. These techniques also sought to problematize spectators' desire for the truth. However, we realized that the new technologies with which we were working continually broke continuity through a more ubiquitous and even "natural" disruption: the distractions of Internet navigation and hypertextuality seem to have foreclosed some possibilities of rupture by hyperbolizing them.

At PARC we shifted from linear to digital editing systems but also set aside the desire for a radical break with our prior commitments to traditional forms and distribution networks: we would make a single-channel videotape and turn our attention to WPT's attempt to document us. But we began to think more thematically about the problem of continuity, discontinuity, and narration and determined that continued work on *Based on a Story* would give us the opportunity to address these issues. Our interest in the story shifted from how media technologies disseminate fear to the phenomenon of conversion experiences. Conversion poses the problem of continuity and disruption. Generally understood to be a radical break with the past, conversion is never absolute and depends for its power on the past that it seeks to leave behind. As we worked, Jeanne recalled her own childhood conversion to Christianity at a Baptist camp where the instrument of conversion was an extremely low-tech, low-voltage electric chair. The chair was both seductive

and terrifying and played on the imagination of this twelve-year-old girl, motivating her conversion.

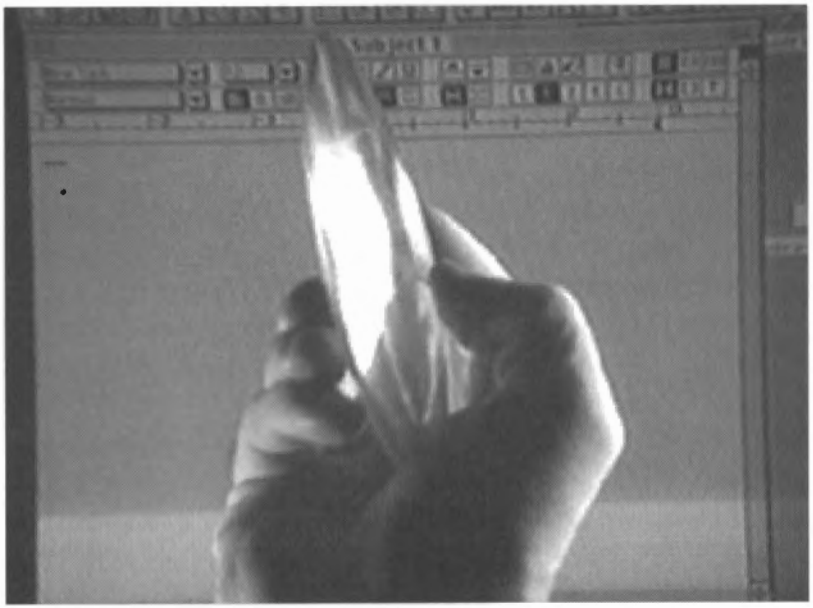
We developed this story, which we called *Time Bomb,* into a tape and subsequently decided to incorporate *Based on a Story* and the latter into a trilogy in which we could explore continuity and disruption through several instances of conversion. The trilogy, entitled *O Night Without Objects,* combines an autobiographical narrative (*Time Bomb*), a documentary (*Based on a Story*), and a performance-driven work that stages the administration of a psychological test to a young girl (*The Adventures of Blacky*). In each of the three components, narratives cohere and seduce according to traditional schema, and yet these individual works should simultaneously break continuity through their correspondences and intertextuality.

What follows in this chapter is the most materially accessible artifact of our mutual collaboration: there are scripts of the first two sections of *O Night Without Objects,* records of a dialogue that took place between ourselves and WPT as we worked together, images from these pieces, and a WPT analysis of a few of our production artifacts.

> O night without objects. O obtuse window outward, o carefully closed doors; arrangements from long ago, taken over, accredited, never quite understood. O stillness in the staircase, stillness from adjoining rooms, stillness high up against the ceiling. O mother: o you only one, who shut out all this stillness, long ago in childhood. Who take it upon yourself, saying: Don't be afraid, it is I. Who has the courage all in the night yourself to be this stillness for that which is afraid and perishing with fear.
>
> —RAINER MARIA RILKE, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*

Part 1: Time Bomb

On June 18, 1995, the San Francisco Cinematheque screened Jeanne C. Finley's *Conversations across the Bosphorus* and premiered Finley and John Muse's *Time Bomb,* the first installment of *O Night Without Objects,* a three-part work being completed during their residency at Xerox PARC. A presentation by



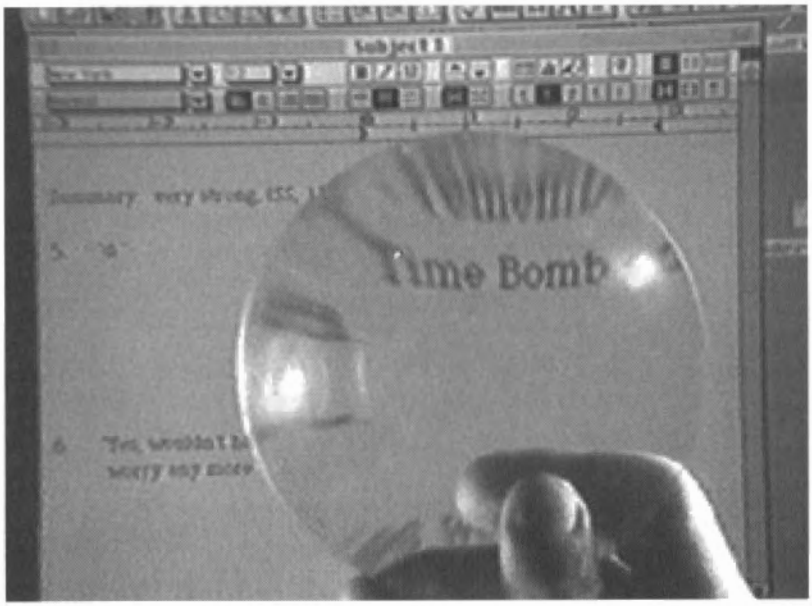


Figure 5.2
Lens, from *Time Bomb,* 1998

Figure 5.3
Lens with words, from *Time Bomb,* 1998

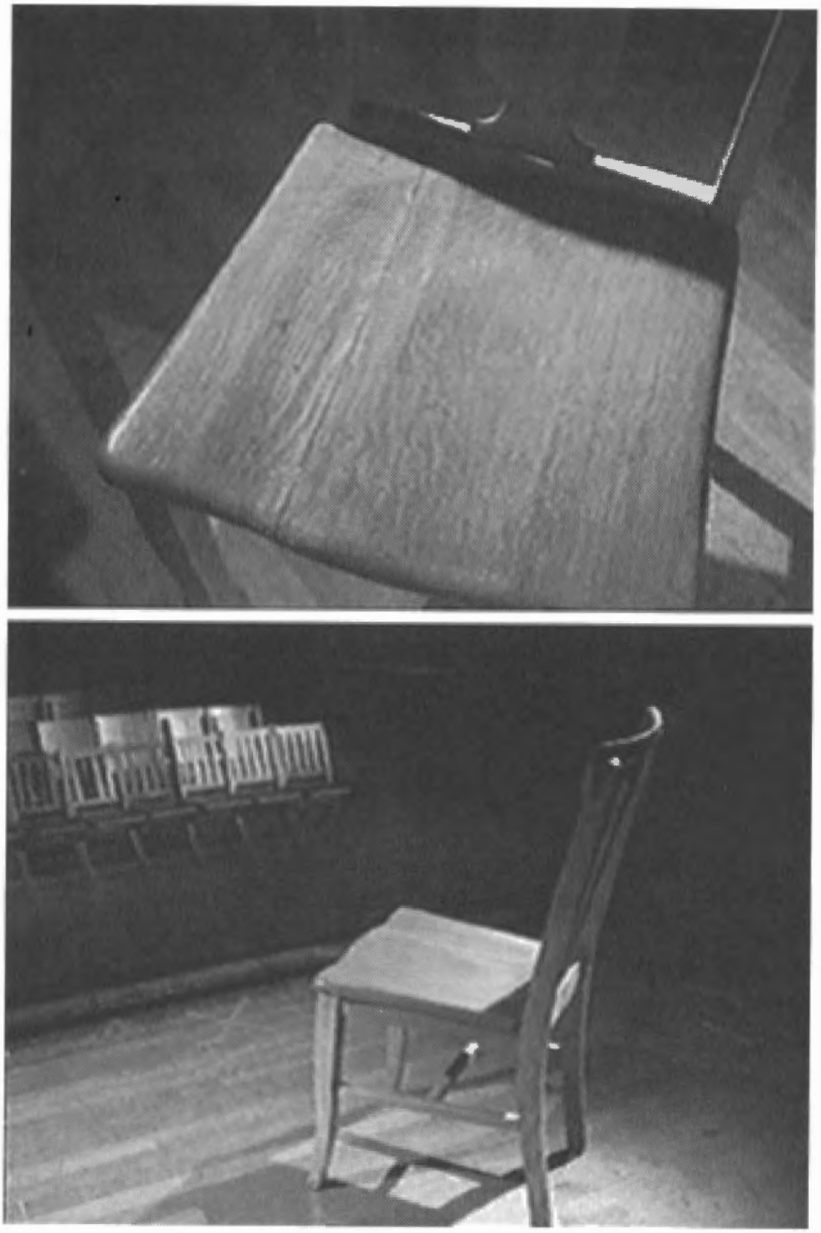


Figure 5.4
Chair seat and chair on stage from behind, from *Time Bomb,* 1998

Lucy Suchman of Xerox PARC's Work Practice and Technology Area on Finley and Muse's activities as artists in residence followed *Time Bomb.*

Below is the voice-over script to *Time Bomb.* The citation from Rilke scrolls at the head of the tape immediately following the *0 Night Without Objects* title sequence.

Time Bomb

> But to me she would suddenly turn (for I was already a little bit grown-up) and say, with a smile that cost her a severe effort, "What a lot of needles there are, Malte, and how they lie about everywhere, and when you think how easily they fall out...." She tried to say this playfully; but terror shook her at the thought of all the insecurely fastened needles that might at any instant, anywhere, fall into something.
> —RAINER MARIA RILKE, *The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge*

When I was seven years old our next-door neighbors invited me to join their daughter at a mountain Baptist camp over Christmas vacation. They were a quiet family and seemed concerned for my welfare. I enthusiastically accepted the invitation, and camp proved to be great fun. I slept in a cabin with other girls my age, and my friend's parents were leaders of many activities new to me such as hiking, bobsledding, and skating.

Since I was a camper without my own family, each dinner I was assigned to a different family table. After the meal we would walk through the snow to the big cabin for evening festivities. There the entire camp participated in rowdy clapping and singing in praise of the Lord. Every night, a solo gospel singer, in the deepest and most beautiful voice I have ever heard, electrified the air. His songs were about the tranquillity and peace of paradise. Then one of the camp leaders would speak about the fires of hell, with specific details about the pain of burning flesh for those who did not accept Jesus as their savior. Following this, there was an empty silence and prayer.

Then the games began. There were many games, but the only one I can remember is Time Bomb. I was exceedingly shy and terrified of electricity. Time Bomb energized the crowd. The rules were quite simple and relied purely on chance. A round, black, lacquered ball—just smaller than a bowling ball and a bit lighter—was passed as quickly as possible from person to person down one row and back to the next. The bomb was battery-powered, and at an un-

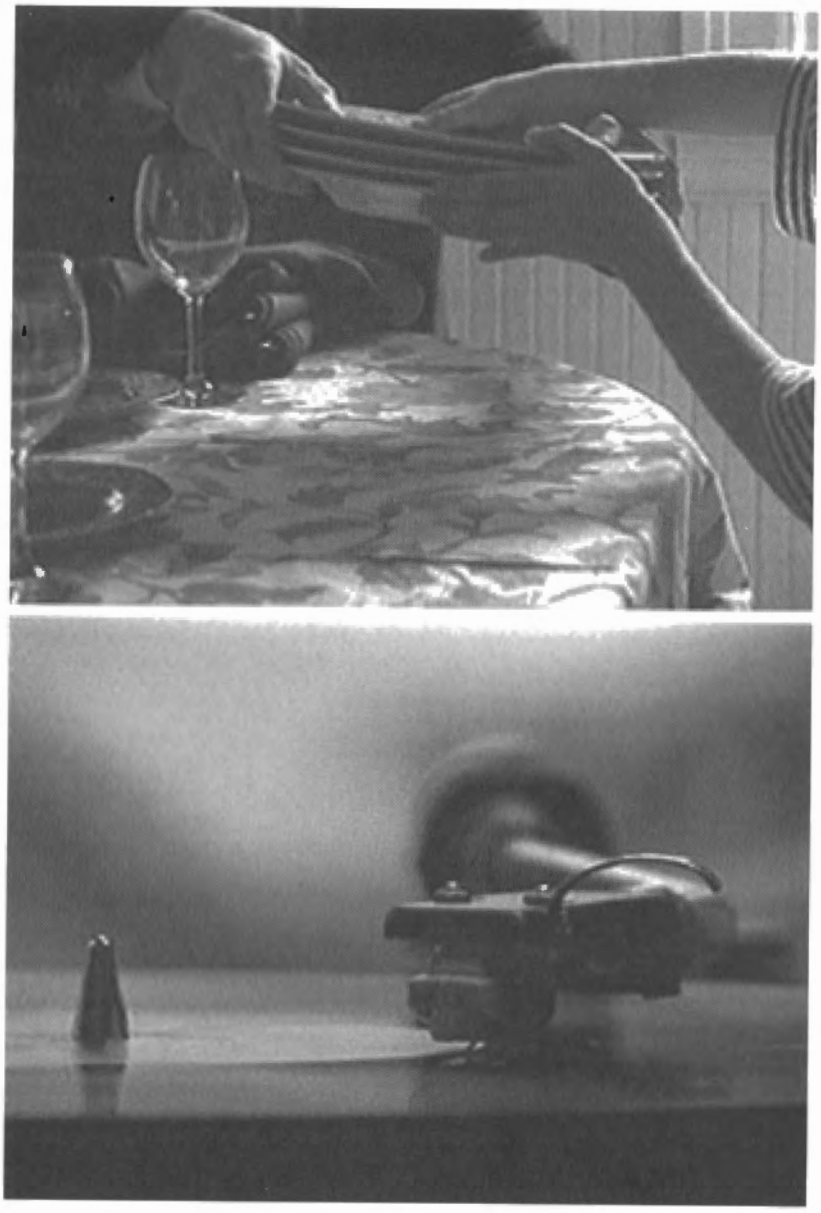


Figure 5.5
Passing plates and record player, from *Time Bomb,* 1998

predictable moment it would go off by making a loud buzzing noise. If you were caught with the bomb in your hands when it went off, you had to go up on stage. After five or six losers, as they were called, had been gathered, each and every one of them in turn would be forced to sit in the electric chair.

The electric chair was a straight-backed wooden chair rigged with wires that led to an electrical socket and to a control pad held by the man who had spoken of the pain and anguish of hell. One by one the losers would be led to the chair, sat down, and administered their shock. A few resisted vocally and physically up to a point, but they were led firmly to the chair by the leaders of the group to the hilarity of most of those sitting in the audience.

Following game time there was another prayer that concluded with the reminder that anyone who hadn't yet taken God into their heart could do so now. During an expectant silence, some would pray to God, asking to become a part of his kingdom. Those who made the agreement with Him would stand to show they had accepted the Lord Jesus into their lives. As we each stood, singing, blessings and congratulations rang out from all sides.

The "Notes for June 18, 1995" by Blomberg, Suchman, and Trigg reproduced in the left-hand column below were presented by Suchman to the SF Cinémathèque audience directly following *Time Bomb.* In the right-hand column are Muse and Finley's subsequent interventions, the "Notes on 'Notes for June 18, 1995,'" which take the form of questions, comments, irreverences, and irrelevancies. The center column offers a response in kind by Suchman, along with WPT members Blomberg, Trigg, and Newman to Muse and Finley's "Notes on 'Notes.'" With such a structure we hope to put our PAIR relationship itself into allegorical form, a palimpsest that holds the trace of our encounters, our difficulties, our pleasures.

Figure 5.6
Aya with hands clapping and Aya with hands cupped, from *Time Bomb,* 1998

Notes for June 18, 1995
SF Cinémathèque
Jeanette Blomberg, Lucy Suchman, and
Randy Trigg

Notes on "Notes for June 18, 1995"
Jeanne C. Finley and John Muse

Response to "Notes on 'Notes'."
Lucy Suchman, Jeanette Blomberg, Randy Trigg, and Susan Newman

Like Jeanne and John's screening, ours is a work in progress.

The first word, "like," errs on the side of our affinities without implying identical pursuits—i.e., like but not the same. This word prepares the ground for future distinctions and irreconcilables. The pronoun "ours" in "ours is a work in progress" stands in for the phrase "our screening." Is not the word "screening" from our territory?

Certainly this is an ambiguity, perhaps even an appropriation. We meant *ours* to carry the reader forward, toward "work in progress," invoking the open horizon of our ongoing work as well as the evening's presentation. We didn't actually think of the latter as a screening, given that the word *screening* is from your territory. But on this particular evening we were in your territory, attempting to fit in but not to pass; to be recognizably competent and interesting while at the same time being different. We aimed both at making sense within the setting of the Cinémathèque and at manifesting our distinctive relation to your work and to *Time Bomb*.

Moreover, it's assembled,

The "like," your first word, and the "moreover" from this last sentence don't yet account for the (b)ordering operations of our disciplines. Our practices, the uses to which our artifacts are put, and the communities to

which we each must answer are proximal but still at a distance.

The experience of this distance calls for evidence and testimony. Some of us answer to artist, *some to* anthropologist, *some to* computer scientist, *some to* writer, *some to* scientist, *etc. Your screening and ours were contiguous, but neither of the same order nor even in a fully obvious relation to one another. Your presentation wouldn't be recognizable as art criticism nor as itself a work of art. Nonetheless, it could reconfigure the task for the critic: not "is it beautiful?," not "how and for whom is it beautiful?," not "what effects does it produce?," but "what disappears? what falls away into a kind of artifactual unconscious? what gets to count as the matter of art? how are the abandoned parcels, words, times still somehow at work in the work?" This last question seems the most pressing and as yet barely touched on. So neither evaluative, nor merely descriptive, your discourse salvages things, moments, movements, accidents, ephemera, and "errors" that seem to count for nothing in the artifacts themselves, and yet are the secret situation of things.*

Yes, at least that's our aspiration.

Is there in your work a connoisseurship of the marginal, a taste for the derelict occurrence? How does your taste compare with ours? Is it even a question of taste?

Not so much of the marginal as the circumstantial, taken-for-granted, unremarkable that, as you say, disappears in work's products. As for *taste,* that's a word from your territory, a term we've never used in relation to our own work. In using it you urge us to reflect on, to become more aware of and articulate about, our own aesthetics. It's in these "crossings" that we feel the value of our collaboration. according to our usual practice, as a collection of video sequences designed to be talked around rather than shown from start to finish.

So we'll be setting up each sequence with some comments on why we're showing it to you, the issues that it raises for us.

In general, in our collaboration

We're less and less certain that this word "collaboration" is adequate to the relationships and situations that PAIR has facilitated. Not only could we ask how our collaboration has affected each of our works, we could also ask how our contacts and crossings have changed our concept of collaboration. Did our collaboration happen according to scripts previously known or unknown? To what extent did we fail to greet one another across the divide of our positions, practices, concerns, passions, stipends? To what extent did you overestimate our irreverence, our subversions, the richness and importance of our being artists, the weighty mystery of our decisions? To what extent did we fail specifically to address in our work the areas of your expertise and day-to-day commitments?

A moment of shared guilt/anxiety here, as we think of what we might have done with you, absent competing and more forcefully presented demands to prove our business value to Xerox. Some envy of the different zones in which your productions circulate and their different purposes. And some regret for what else we could learn from you, if we had made the time for it.

Unfortunately, we left you to account for collaboration effects, for the ways in which we crossed and double-crossed each other, for telling the story of our times, places, and contacts.

Our double-crossings at least were done respectfully, affectionately. Sustained collaboration requires more dedicated times and energies, perhaps more courage, than we were able to assemble.

with John and Jeanne we'reinterested in the relation between their practices as artists, particu-

larly their use of video in the creation of visual images, and our own practices as researchers.

In what ways are artists like researchers? In what ways are researchers like artists? Do the terms "artist" and "researcher" help or hinder? Were we proposing that researchers become artists? Was this ever a serious possibility? Was there not a narcissistic benefit to being taken by WPT to be exemplary image makers? Was there not a narcissistic benefit to proving that artists are soat home in the grammars and rhetorics of the image that we escape their effects or can master them?

These questions of likeness are the stuff that could have made up, been manifest in, a sustained collaboration. Some preliminary thoughts: that your art involves you in forms of research (drawing as you do on documentary and literary resources), that our research relies on forms of artfulness (in the framing of images, selection of settings and occasions, attempts to make compelling narratives out of fragments of mundane talk and activity). We tried not to turn you into icons, representatives of the class artist, while at the same time looking for what you could teach us about such practices. This is a recurring problem for our work—finding the general in the specific, generalizing without stereotyping.

This includes exploring a set of concerns that have been around in ethnography and ethnographic film since the 1970s, summarized by the notion of returning the gaze. This phrase refers to the sense in which the anthropologist increasingly is called to account not only for the other but for herself as part of the ethnographic encounter. This repositioning is resonant with developments in filmmaking during the same period, and it's part of the ground we share with John and Jeanne.

The 1970s: our arrival at and work for PAIR was both an occasion for recalling what was encountered but left behind, a shared ground perhaps, but also a cemetery of sorts: we share, we mourn. We remain curious about the stability of this shared ground, about the footing it provides for and against our respective domains. We have always tried to produce works that allegorized their conditions of production, works built with meta-narrative movements, highly reflexive structures, allegorical thicknesses, and unresolvable conflicts; all by now fairly conventional strategies. And although one tires of problematizing the maker's right to the word, image, voice, etc., do you find yourselves ready, willing, or able to live up to the imperatives of this repositioning while employed by Xerox Corporation?

A site of conflict for us, no question. How can we simultaneously develop the reflexivity of our practice, with all the experiments that requires, while still being seen as competent within the traditional frames of our own workplace, which demands that we "speak with authority," where science rules and where, as anthropologists, we're already of somewhat dubious scientific status?

In this particular collaboration, though, the phrase "returning the gaze" has opened up for us a new range of meanings having to do with questions of who's creating images, for what readings or uses, by whom.

Can we be specific about the genealogy of "returning the gaze"? Such a notion implicates many too many proper names and theorizations. To quickly lay out some alternatives: "returning the gaze" could imply a posttheft work of restitution, or a duel, or even a discarding of the scopic itself: a turning, or returning, away from visuality as the privileged domain of occurrence, sense, evidence, etc. So either someone or something had the gaze on their side and has returned it, possibly to its rightful

owner or proper place. Or someone looks back, with or without permission, at the one who had previously wielded the gaze as an instrument of domination and in doing so destabilizes permission itself. Or scopophilia itself is put into crisis, and ambivalence wanders onto the set. The latter was our concern during the production of Time Bomb. *Visually the piece proceeds through a sequence of tropes that figure the work of memory, the "light" of memory, as simultaneously revelatory and obscuring, constructive and destructive.*

For us the phrase "returning the gaze" raises central questions of audiences and purposes in our different uses of video: questions invoked but not yet taken up directly in our own productions. We conceive of ourselves still as speaking to engineers and scientists (or within the discursive regime of science) about how things really are. We are still engaged in providing evidence for foundational qualities of social life, working life, life with artifacts, etc. Science and reliable witnessing are linked, however we may perturb the relation. And these demonstrations are our primary warrant for demands for technological change, changes in design practice, within Xerox.

We think this has to do at least in part with the fact that we use the same technologies—video cameras—in our work

Can two technologies ever be the same, especially when the ensemble of technologies and practices within which these same technologies are located are disparate? The questions "who's creating images, for what readings or uses, by whom?" can't be external to the question of what something is. We each put a video camera to work—but what the camera is is constituted through the contingencies and particularities of use. A fine point, yes, but important because the phrase "same technology"

carries forward a claim of sameness and undermines the likeness between our activities.

This fine point is the heart of our work: the irreducible contextuality of technologies as prac-ticed. Your point regarding likeness is one we have tried hard to make with respect to, e.g., photocopiers, documents, computer artifacts. The particularities in the case of our collaboration with you have to do with what it means to study a work practice and its technologies where the technologies include, centrally, a camera—a fact that makes our own camera-in-use more visible to us, less a matter of mere recording.

and that this has all sorts of interesting consequences. What we're presenting tonight is aimed at trying to give you a sense of that.

And thus any expectation that you would directly address Time Bomb *or the larger project* O Night Without Objects *was abandoned. And so your attention, the turning and returning gaze, treated the spectacles of design or the moves, procedures, and accidents that destined the artwork,* Time Bomb. *If we hungered for a word, it's only because we didn't take your caution or your particular passions seriously.*

We're reluctant to take up the stance of art critic, feeling ourselves intimidated, unprepared, unqualified. Our responses to the works themselves are unarticulated ones for which, if we have words at all, the words seem unprofessional and inappropriate for public presentation.

At the same time, we think there is something other than art criticism to be done that would nonetheless focus carefully on the artifact, the representations of events, settings, actors, that the video accomplishes—specifically, an enlightening confrontation between our strategies and yours. Takes time, of course.

We're going to start with a bit from John and Jeanne's studio space at Xerox PARC. As is our usual practice, we've left a camera in their workspace and asked them to turn it on for us while they're working. What's happened, though, is that they've not only turned it on for us but appropriated it to make particular images for and of themselves, partly as an additional resource for their work, partly as a distraction.

We're interested in precisely how you understand these spectacles to be both a resource and a distraction. In particular: What is distraction? What is it good for? For whom were the spectacles primarily a distraction?

We thought we took the term "distraction" from you, believing you to mean it in the positive sense of a break, a play time.

Yet your reading here points as well to the problematic presence at PARC of what might at first be misrecognized as distraction—the haunting worry that the PAIR collaboration is a distraction, in the most alarming sense, from the urgent concerns of the company, a kind of fiddling while Rome burns.

In the process their workspace has become in part a performance space.

Within our performance space we imagined even more elaborate productions and more visible interventions at the worksite and beyond: an area to stage a return of the repressed within the confines of a corporate culture: as if we could ever live up to such a project. As if it would have made any difference. But what kind of difference would we have wanted to make? Should we have decided on the latter prior to making trouble? Or does this need for decision function only as stall?

But mostly we were acting out in hopes of provoking a reading, a response. The framings we would impose—the monologues, complaints, the proscenia and transparencies placed before the camera—were to produce

shock, laughter, and were to solicit further enframings from your side. We did and didn't want to be subjected to analysis. We did and didn't want to be called to account for what we were doing, asked questions. We work and work hoping that the work outstrips our accounts—to speak about one's work is always some kind of betrayal.

And we did respond, loving your provocations, taking them partly as ventriloqutions of our own malaise, partly as a form of engagement with us that we've missed in our work with other subjects, busy conspiring to ignore us in service of creating a naturalistic record of their work.

In this short sequence, Jeanne is reading John a passage from Rilke that you'll all recognize as a text that later found its way into *Time Bomb.*

I mentioned that in the 1970s there began to be some changes in the practice of anthropological filmmaking. This next image is nicely illustrative of that.

Figure 5.7
Jeanne Finley and John Muse, reading Rilke, WPT video, 1995

Figure 5.8
Future direction of innovation. Reproduced by permission of the American Anthropological Association, from *American Anthropologist* 97:2, June 1995. Not for further reproduction.

The caption of this image (taken by us from the *American Anthropologist* of June 1995) reads "Future direction of innovation. Hortensia Caballero, trained by Timothy Asch in video editing, now instructing Yanomamis in filmmaking themselves." Our practice of handing over a camera to our subjects with the request that they make their own films for us is reminiscent of this innovation. It's complicated in the case of John and Jeanne, however, by the fact that the equipment is already an integral, indigenous part of their working practice. Moreover, they're significantly more sophisticated with respect to filmmaking than we are: in part, our collaboration is about them teaching us new strategies of documentary video production.

In the days of our first encounters we chose to critique your ethnographic video, Workplace Project, *according to the way it unconsciously repeated errors it otherwise explicitly condemned.*

The term "error" isn't a term that we would use, at least insofar as it implies a correct practice: it's more a question of what's assumed in traditional representations of work, that we ourselves have unwittingly reproduced while trying to overthrow, for example, the assumption that operations proceed in an orderly way because they are designed to do so, rather than through the ongoing order-producing activities of organization members. But what we see as a result of your interventions is that, while asserting the contingent and local logics of situated work practices, our video failed to show them as such. Instead, we rendered the work as heavily analyzed sequences, easily recognizable even by an unfamiliar observer, thanks to our tidy narrations.

Subsequently, experimental films, documentaries, narrative features, and ethnographies were brought to PARC so as to share with WPT works that manifestly thematized their conditions of production, works that did what they said, that questioned the presumption that the spectator ever masters or is fully mastered by the spectacle.

We found these viewings extremely provocative, challenging our own video production strategies, opening up new directions for experimentation. And then later we bemoaned our inability, unwillingness, to follow through on these new possibilities, knowing the expectations of our audiences.

So who, in this case, are the Yanomamo?

Who, indeed?

Rewind: our proposed collaboration with you shuttled through a few options but settled rather quickly on the idea that we would position ourselves as the objects of WPT's usual observational practices and inscriptions. At the same time we would intervene in the modes by which we were called on to become objects, never underwriting the notion that a recording apparatus is

ever unobtrusive or passive. We hoped in turn to produce works that explicitly revealed these conditions of production. Thus, several reflexive circuits were built into the relationship so as to perturb standard operating procedures. For example—and this very text is such an example as well—we kept a scrapbook journal during our residency and made it available to WPT via the internal PARCweb. You subsequently wrote short commentaries cataloging each of the pages. We, in turn, printed out your commentaries, cut them out, and incorporated them into the journal. The online version was then updated to account for the changes.

F & FV Video Log
95.04.01-02, C13
J & J at work,
logged by L. Suchman

Time code	Comments	Issues/Quality	Stills
	Opens with visit from John Winet and Margaret Crane. Brief discussion of how it's our camera that's running, after which laughs and glances are exchanged, and J and M announce that they have to go work. But talk continues, including about arguments for and against Freud and his charged cover up of the abuse of his hysterical patients.	Opening hugs are for the camera. JM: "You were even almost in frame!"	
00:08:48:19	J&J comment apologetically on the lack of technology-relevance of their project, and my comment that "work practice is a technology." JM: "We are a technology."		
00:13:53:21	J and M leave. JM: "Speeding through our heavy workload for the day."		
00:15:37:00	JM hangs conscience dog Blackie transparency in front of camera.		
00:16:50:12	JM sits down on floor and starts to cut. Brief discussion about whether they're "burning tape" or doing something interesting. Jeanne describes a story, then looks for it in book (?) that JM produces for her.		
00:19:26:25	JF finds story. Reads it aloud for JM. Dogs, needles. Here's the quote about needles from image 13 of J&J's journal.		
00:22:26:07	JM asks what time it is. JF: "Oh shit, 5:14? I'm not going to finish this tonight."		
00:23:55:01	JM back from spraying ? JM: Vicky says I throw everything around. Is that true? JF: She's right.		
00:25:10:12	JF: We don't know how to wrap this thing up, you know? JM: Mm hm. JF: It's like so fucking what towards the end. JM: The most compelling thing to me the last time I went through the transcripts, which was a couple of days ago, is all the ways the word "family" gets used. Um, with qualifiers, like sur- not surrogate, what's the word that Julie uses. Replacement family. Right. That kind of stuff was really interesting to me, just to track those moments. But that's not narrative, I don't know how to tell you, like ... JF: Well, it's getting kind of non-narrative. JM: That's good.	Given the frame, it's hard not to see the conscience dog and Blackie in relation to Jeanne on the left, John on the right, though the latter are looking away from each other, absorbed in their respective tasks...	

Figure 5.9
A page from the WPT video log, 1995

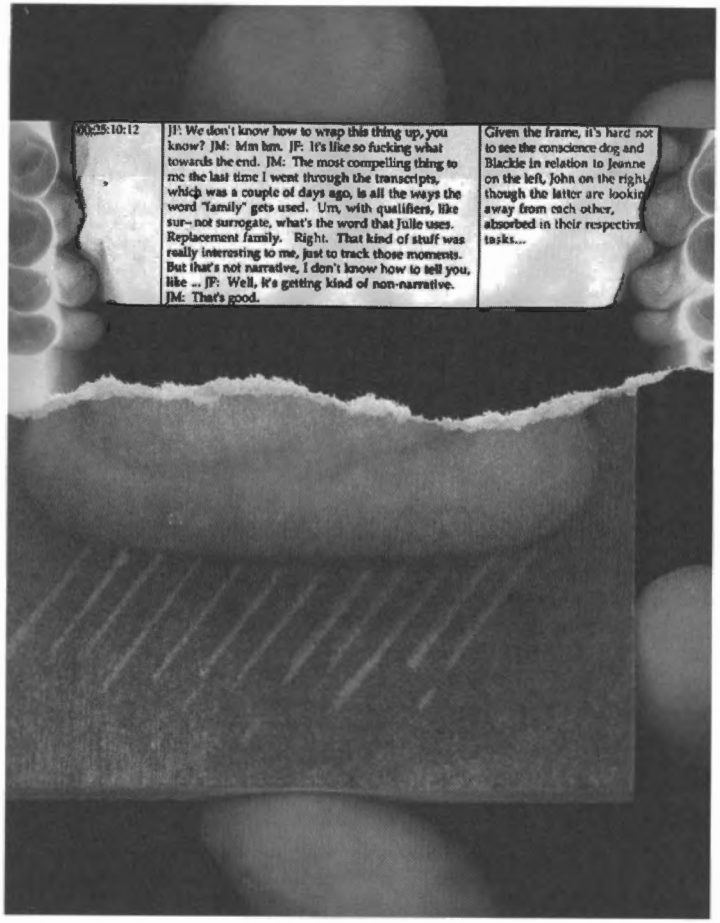


Figure 5.10
Log reused in John's journal, 1995

Having our descriptions read by those whose activity we were studying was already a stretch. More than that, we were concerned that casual descriptions of your journal pages in our logs were finding their way into subsequent layers of that very journal. It helped that you chose to put the descriptions on different pages than the ones we were describing. That made it seem as though our words were being taken up as materials in an artistic endeavor,

rather than calling into question the accuracy of our descriptions.

You also appropriated our video logs, which we were taken aback to see clipped and transported into new contexts. Yet isn't this a case of turnabout being fair play? Did you think that our clips took bits of your activity out of context? Is such ripping off of activity records, such moves of "bringing home the Other," common to both of our practices? Is this what you expected when deciding to work with us? Are you disappointed that we didn't do even more?

As objects we desperately wanted to be interesting, worth saving, worth preserving, worth collecting, worth teaching, worth reading. But we were exotic not only because of our apparent foreignness. We were exotic because unlike many of your colleagues we listened to you and shared with you traditions, suspicions, a particular criticality, and so on. Your position within the apparatus of PARC is as readily describable and strange as ours.

And we're further worried that the Yanomamo are working in this text at all, brought along for rhetorical purposes, even productive ones.

Point well taken. What does it mean to identify images of specific persons as tokens of a class? What does it mean to be the artists, or the anthropologists at PARC? And how do we reproduce these tokenizations when we use the Yanomamo as tokens of the Other, however ironically?

To give you a sense of how the subject as filmmaker has worked for us in the past, we'll play two short sequences taken from a collection made for us by a lawyer whose work we were studying. We were especially interested in just how he used a particular filing cabinet in his office.

Figure 5.11
Mark at the filing cabinet, WPT video, 1995

As Mark ironically but tellingly says, the video in this case was for us another data point. While in fact we approach such materials not as data to be processed but as images to be interpreted, we are treating the camera as a kind of passive device aimed at unobtrusively recording Mark's working practices.

Please elaborate on the reading of the above sequence. What does it deliver directly that we either deliver more indirectly or refuse to deliver at all?

Also: could you more fully articulate the distinction between data processing and image interpretation? Are you saying that Mark's irony tells the truth of his relation, not only to his work but to the camera that he wields against himself, to you, to his employers who you do and don't stand in for?

Mark's irony turns the camera back on us, simultaneously playing with but also acknowledging the scientific premises of our engagement with him as

subject/object. His remark underscores the ambivalence of the camera in his office, operating both as recording device and as a communications medium. The camera's ambivalence mirrors our own, as we are caught between a position that takes images like those he creates for us as bits of storytelling, of moments to be heard using all of the cultural resources available to us, and as evidence that speaks for itself leaving us un-implicated. As you suggest, there are other equivocations here as well—of time and motion studies, surveillance. These seem less at play in Mark's case, given the power of his profession, but are always present when cameras are in the workplace. A challenge that we face in our research is to distinguish ourselves from the management consultants, the marketeers, the efficiency experts. Instead we position ourselves as researchers, a title that affiliates us with science rather than management or marketing and serves to legitimize a project of understanding rather than re-engineering or sales. Art does not seem to be an option.

And this stands in sharp contrast, as I said, to John and Jeanne's appropriations of our camera as a resource of their own.

In the next sequence as in the first we showed they've created a kind of proscenium, in this case to stage a scene expressing some aspects of their experience of working at PARC, specifically their feelings of anxiety about the technological imperative that pervades that setting.

There are at least two dimensions to this technological imperative: on the one hand, we presumed ourselves latecomers to digital media, feigning disinterest, critical distance, and ignorance, while moving among our more wired peers with acute cases of bad conscience. On the

other hand, we wanted to be taught, led to the sandbox, and shown how to make it all work.

And unlike other workers with whom you've occupied yourself, we could only mime certain anxieties: we don't necessarily fear being replaced by technologies and aren't fragilized by the automation fantasies driving most technology design. Well, sometimes: being replaced happens piecemeal, organ by organ, territory by territory, prosthesis by prosthesis. The cyborgs that we already are, that we always already were—these creatures distributed across languages, technical media, socialities—have never been at home, whole, in one body at a time. So we're anxious—but not for the sake of threatened homelands.

We often worry that our participation in technology development can only be read as a search for greater time savings, replacing human labor with ever more sophisticated machines, even enlisting workers themselves in the enterprise.

Figure 5.12
John and Jeanne seen through one of their proscenia, WPT video, 1995

Figure 5.13
John pauses after shooting to ask Lucy, "Any questions?," WPT video, 1995

> For us as researchers, fears of being replaced take the form of a forced transformation from researcher to entrepreneur, a transformation happening, as you say, piecemeal.

To appreciate this sequence, you should know that one of PARC's claims to fame is the invention of an extremely high-resolution computer display, celebrated in a recent annual report as being "as good as paper."

This last sequence was recorded with our camera but seen by us only after the fact, as we reviewed the tape. Our usual practice, as I mentioned, is just to let our camera roll, as John and Jeanne have said, "incessantly." And in general, our camera is rolling wherever it is that the work in which we're interested is happening. In the next two sequences our camera is rolling as John and Jeanne work on location in my office at PARC shooting a sequence for *Time Bomb.* You'll see that in this case I'm behind our camera, but still it's

Figure 5.14
"Okay guys, here's the shot," WPT video, 1995

positioned to operate as a kind of unobtrusive observation device. Again this stands in contrast with the painstaking camera work that John and Jeanne are engaged in.

The reason we let our camera roll is that we're interested in relations between John and Jeanne's ongoing work and the artifacts that result from it, including how much of their work "disappears" in the resulting artifact. But of course John's question to me—"Any questions?"—anticipates that the meanings of their work cannot be read off unproblematically from the images that our camera creates. Moreover, the accounts they might provide us at any given moment about what they're doing are as dynamic and equivocal as the activities they narrate. That's one of the paradoxes of our practice.

Can meanings ever be "read off unproblematically"?

No, never.

I assume "Any questions?" only anticipates a general dilemma, a general paradox, a general equivocality that attends all readings, all testimony.

As it does, but an equivocality still without acknowledgment within the scientific territories we inhabit.

The final three sequences, which we'll play without interruption, again are taken from an occasion of John and Jeanne at work shooting on location for *Time Bomb.* Again, the view you'll see is through our camera, positioned as usual so as to be as close to the action as possible without getting in the way. At the moment we enter the action here our camera has been swung around momentarily to record the scene that John and Jeanne are currently shooting. Walking by our camera, which has a small monitor on top of it, Jeanne notices and admires our view and calls John and Jim Meek, their cameraperson, over to see it.

In the second sequence, John and Jeanne ask us to move our camera out of the way, so that they can recreate the same shot with their camera. Finally in the third sequence, having been unable to find the shot they're looking for, Jeanne comes and asks again to find the scene through our camera.

When you "swung around momentarily to record the scene," something strange happened: the recording of our ongoing activity, of our preparations, our work on and with the camera was for you insufficient. You swung around to approximate our view because the latter was the artifact we were establishing, the thing-to-be-looked-at. You did so as if you were performing in our place, taking our place, constructing an image "like" ours, with a camera "like" ours. Whereas in other situations you move to take in workers' views of the action, never have you turned to take in such a view that was it-

self being established precisely for framing by a camera. Our respective positions became substitutable—and the "actual" substitution, our appropriation of your camera, made this explicit.

Our camera is often turned not on workers but on the objects of their work—documents, whiteboards, drawings. We're always struggling for some approximation of what the world looks like from their points of view, their experiences, their concerns, their time frames. We bring the camera in when talk requires its objects in order to be intelligible, at the same time that objects require being talked about in order to be understood. This instance is unique for us insofar as not only did our camera record what you were doing with your work's object, but our own camera work mimicked how you were doing it.

As I mentioned, we believe that the fact that our work and John and Jeanne's share technologies has led to some interesting mutual appropriations of equipment and images—appropriations that don't occur for us in settings where the technologies in use by others are different, and the camera is clearly ours.

The lesson may be even more fundamental: the camera was never and is never clearly yours. It is always taken up and appropriated even if the mode of appropriation appears to be mere passivity. The camera always stages some spec-tacle, some image, some relation of the framer and the framed.

These boundary crossings have challenged even further our relations as researchers and subjects. So, for example, we've asked ourselves what might be the outcome of our work with John and Jeanne. Are we likely to produce some kind of analysis of their practice, as we have in previous work studies that we've done?

We think not.

Admittedly, we do carry some slight sense of disappointment. We would like to have been delivered over to rigorous analysis, not because we want an upgrade or because we believe in a manifest truth of creative labor—as if the latter were clearly distinguishable from any other activity.

At the outset we imagined doing this more naively than we would now, something closer to a variation on our previous practices, attempting to do some kind of justice to the character of your work. Were we to do it now, our analysis would be meant more as a shared provocative object, a site for further collaboration. But now our reluctance is due more to your status (or lack of it) as prospective customers, turning on questions such as: How could we position artists as a market in which Xerox might have an interest, or how could we generalize your work to make it recognizably relevant? Which product division would sponsor such work? How can we possibly justify it otherwise or manage to fit it in along with the projects that we have promised to deliver?

More likely, we'll assemble our own set of images, partly created by us, partly by John and Jeanne, sometimes with our camera sometimes with theirs. Having given up the notion that what distinguishes us are the different roles of authors and subjects, scientists and artists, we're left with the much more interesting problem of how to elaborate in other terms the samenesses and differences among us. That for us has become the collaborative project.

We hope that this text, by enacting our hybridity, will be the occasion for further coelaborations.

Part 2: Based on a Story

Below are two texts—a script for a documentary videotape entitled *Based on a Story* and a reading of a few of its production artifacts by WPT. The former is the second installment of *0 Night Without Objects.* The events related in *Based on a Story* occurred over the course of a year and involve Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan Larry Trapp, Cantor Michael Weisser, his wife Julie, their children David Weisser and Rebecca Nelms, hospice

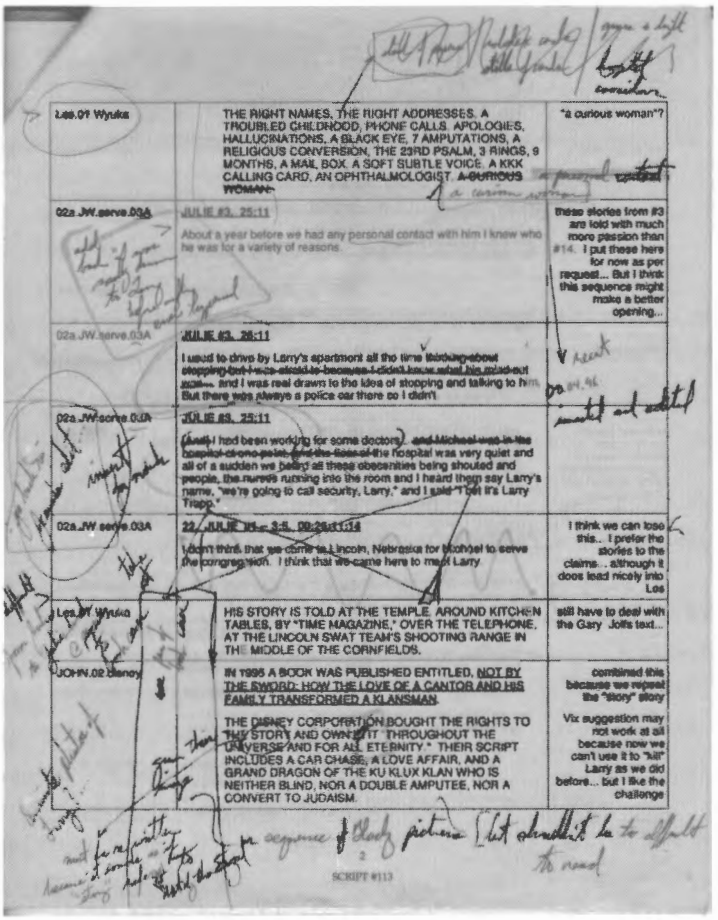


Figure 5.15
Page 2 of Script #113 for *Based on a Story,* 1996

Figure 5.16
John explaining Script #113, WPT video, 1996

nurse Jan Branting, and temple congregation member Eva Sartori. The middle column is the voice-over script.

So here and there on my coverlet lie lost things out of my childhood and are as new. All forgotten fears are there again.

The fear that a small, woolen thread that sticks out of the hem of my blanket may be hard, hard and sharp like a steel needle; the fear that this crumb of bread now falling from my bed may arrive glassy and shattered on the floor; the fear that some number may begin to grow in my brain until there is no more room for it inside me; the fear that I may betray myself and tell all that I dread.

I asked for my childhood and it has come back, and I feel that it is just as difficult as it was before, and that it has been useless to grow older.

—RAINER MARIA RILKE, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*

Based on a Story

Julie Weisser: I mean, I hate to use the word *phony,* but it almost is the word that strikes me because you know Larry was the Grand Dragon of the state, yet it was a very small group of people who were actively involved in his group. You know, he had a bodyguard, and he had a few members. But who Larry was when he was the Grand Dragon was more or less in his head.

On September 6, 1992, a man dies. Several days later he is buried on Mt. Lebanon, the Jewish section of the Wyuka cemetery in Lincoln, Nebraska.

There's evidence. The right names, the right addresses, a troubled childhood, phone calls, apologies, hallucinations, a black eye, seven amputations, a religious conversion, the Twenty-third Psalm, three rings, nine months, a mail box, a soft subtle voice, a KKK calling card, an ophthalmologist, a curious woman.

Julie: I was really drawn to Larry before anything ever happened because about a year before we had any personal contact with him, I knew who he was for a variety of reasons. I used to drive by Larry's apartment all the time, and I was real drawn to the idea of stopping and talking to him. But there was always a police car there, so I didn't. And I had been working for some doctors, and Michael was in the hospital at one point, and the floor of the hospital was very quiet. And all of a sudden we heard all these obscenities being shouted and people, the nurses, running into the room, and I heard them say Larry's name: "we're going to call security, Larry." And I said, "I bet it's Larry Trapp."

His story is told at the temple, around kitchen tables, by *Time* magazine, over the telephone, at the

Lincoln swat team's shooting range in the middle of the cornfields.

In 1995 a book was published entitled, *Not by the Sword: How the Love of a Cantor and his Family Transformed a Klansman.* The Disney Corporation bought the rights to their story and own it "throughout the universe and for all eternity." Their script includes a car chase, a love affair, and a grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan who is neither blind, nor a double amputee, nor a convert to Judaism.

Lawrence Roger Trapp was born on May 30, 1948, in Omaha, Nebraska. On a sunny Sunday in June of 1991, Larry Trapp placed a call. This is where the story begins.

Larry Trapp: Well, the first thing I did was I made a call to his home. I believe it was a Sun-day afternoon, and I simply stated—I didn't say who I was, I just simply stated—"You're going to be sorry you ever moved into" his address, and then I said, "Jew boy."

Michael Weisser: And the phone rang, and I picked it up, and a voice on the other end of the line said, "You'll be sorry you ever moved into 5810 Randolph Street, Jew boy."

Julie: And the phone rang, and Michael answered the phone, and this voice on the other end said, "You'll be sorry you ever moved into 5810 Randolph Street, Jew boy."

There's a history. By the age of six Trapp had developed the diabetes from which he would later die at the Randolph Street home of Michael and Julie Weisser. For two years in the early 1970s Trapp served as chief of police for Pierce, Nebraska. In 1988, at the age of thirty-nine, Trapp joined the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. By this time he

had undergone seven separate amputation procedures on both legs.

The call Trapp made to Cantor Weisser often begins the story. A few days later someone at 5810 Randolph Street picked up the mail.

Michael: I came home from the Temple about five o'clock or five-thirty and picked the mail up out of the mailbox at the curb and bought it into the house. And there was a big fat envelope.

Julie: It was mostly anti-Jewish kinds of material, and on the top of all this anti-Jewish material was a little calling card that said, "The KKK is watching you, scum." And that is when I really felt fearful.

Larry: You'd be surprised what fear can do, especially to a person with a family, either a man or a woman. You can say that you know where their kids go to school. You don't have to actually say what you're going to do to them you. You just say that you know where their kids go to school. Being an ex-police officer I knew what I could and could not say.

Despite several surgical interventions, by the late 1980s Trapp's cataracts and diabetic retinopathy had worsened considerably, and he was unable to read anything but heavily magnified text.

Trapp conducted substantial business from his efficiency apartment at 817 C Street—by mail, by phone, and through regular meetings with Klan members and skinheads. Trapp organized the March 1991 ransacking of Omaha's Vietnamese Resettlement Association. He brought Tom Metzker's show *Race and Reason* to Lincoln Nebraska's cable access channel and said during an interview, "We sponsored this show just to let the general

public know more about the white movement—to let them know that we're not the killers society seems to say we are. We just have a goal in mind."

He used a tape recorder to make lists and record his thoughts. He would edit these recordings for "Vigilante's Voice," his racist hotline. After his message callers were invited to leave one of their own.

Michael: I know that when I first called Larry it was in anger, and I wanted to somehow get even for what he had done. And I know that's true because when I called at first I didn't identify myself. I just called. And so Julie said, and it was sort of prophetic—"If you ever reach Larry on the phone say something nice to him; it will blow him away; he won't know how to deal with that." And that's exactly what happened. And so I began to call Larry.

Julie: And he would leave messages like "Why do you love the Nazis so much? You're a disabled person. You would have been one of the first to be killed."

Michael: And another time Larry knew about what time I was going to call, and Larry left a thirty-second fart noise on the tape, and when it was over, I was inspired by it, and I said, "It sounds like the voice of the master race to me." Finally, one day Larry answered the phone and yelled in the phone, "Why do you keep calling me? Why do you keep calling me? You're harassing me. I'll have your ass in jail." I remember that real clearly. He sounded angry and bitter and awful. And I remember what Julie had suggested, and I said, "Well, Larry I know you're a disabled person. I thought you might need a ride to the grocery store."

And Larry's voice got quiet and he said, "No, I have that taken care of. Thanks, anyway. But don't call this number anymore. It's my business phone."

Larry: And I had one of my nurses listening, and I asked her, "Well, what do you think this is all about? Would you trust this person?" She said no. She wasn't a racist. She was just putting herself in my position: would I trust that person? She couldn't understand it either. I suppose in a way it did instill fear in me now that I think about it. Not knowing something you will fear it, and not knowing what his intentions were, a soft subtle voice, it worried me.

On the "Vigilante's Voice" hotline he left the street address of an African American activist and encouraged callers to "Pay her a visit and let her know what you think." One night his cat wouldn't stop crying, so he shot it. To his favorite nurse he said, "Leave your fucking hands off my fucking television." She walked out and never returned. Someone left a poem on his hotline about a fish laid against a wall with its eyes popping out. One day at his ophthamologist's office Trapp had difficulty finding his way into the elevator. A woman offered to help him. He declined, saying, "No thanks, I'll do it myself." "Where are you from?" He asked. "I am from Vietnam," she said.

On November 12, 1991, Trapp pulled *Race and Reason* off the air.

Michael: And I said, "Larry I see you've taken your program off the air," and he said, "Yeah, I'm rethinking some things." And I said, "Well, do you want some help with that? Do you want to talk about it?'" And he said, "No, no, no. I can handle it myself."

A few days later, on November 16, 1991, another call was made. The phone rang at 5810 Randolph and Michael Weisser heard someone say, "I want to get out, but I don't know how." They conferred, and the Weissers offered to bring a bucket of fried chicken over to Trapp's C Street apartment to talk things over. Trapp equivocated and then consented.

Julie: And so Michael asked if he could come over, and at first he really balked and didn't really want to do that, and Michael persisted, and said, "Larry, come on. We need to talk."

Michael: And so I told him that I'd talk to him, and did he want to talk right then that night, Saturday night, and he said yes. So I said, "I'll bring over a little bite to eat, and we'll talk about it." So I hung up, and I told Julie what had happened. And Julie said, "Hey, we ought to bring this guy a gift or something. You know he is probably just as leery of us as we are of him."

Julie: And I thought, "God, what am I going to take this guy? I can't take him candy; he's diabetic. I can't take him a book; he's blind." So I started rummaging through this jewelry box, and I found this ring that I had given Michael that was this silver braided ring that I thought was kind of pretty that he never wore. And so I decided to take him this ring.

Michael: So we drove to his house, knocked on the door, opened the door, and Larry let us in. And I reached out and shook his hand, and he started to cry.

Julie: Larry started tugging on these rings he had on his fingers that were swastika rings, and he pulled them off his fingers, and he put them in Michael's hands. And he said, "I want you to get rid of these and get them out of my life."

Larry: I had these two swastika rings on. They were Maltese crosses—iron crosses, some people call them—and they had a swastika in the middle. And the minute I shook Michael's hand I couldn't wear them any more. And I took them off and gave them to him and said, "I can't wear these." And it was just a good feeling that I had. It was just a feeling that I was doing something right.

Julie: I put this ring on his hand, or Michael did, I don't really recall who put it on his finger, but one of us did. We kneeled down beside his wheelchair, and we were all crying, and after that it was all history.

Trapp renounced the Klan. The next morning he wrote a letter to the office of the White Knights: "Please accept this as my resignation from the Ku Klux Klan, effective immediately. This resignation is due to personal reasons."

In the months that followed he apologized to everyone he remembered harassing. He made phone calls, lectured to school groups, spoke at the temple's Martin Luther King Jr. birthday celebration, and made other public appearances.

Michael and Larry were interviewed frequently by local and national media.

Michael: Most of the people from the media, I think unconsciously so, acted as if they were doing us a favor, when really what they were doing was disrupting our lives. But on the other hand, the word that got out through the media—even though sometimes it was a bit distorted, and sometimes it was angled in this way or that way—the word got out that there is this possibility that every human being can change. An or-

thodox Jewish Lubavich woman called me one day from New York and told me about the problem her community was having in relating to the black community. These orthodox Jewish women and these black women from the same neighborhood would get together in each other's homes to have a cup of tea, and whenever they came to an impasse about some community problem that they couldn't solve, one of them would say, "If that Jewish guy in Lincoln, Nebraska, could be friends with a Ku Klux klansman, then we shouldn't think our problems are so great."

Julie: I think the story with Larry, I think it was pumped. And it was pumped because there are people out there who want to show other people, "Look what can happen. Look at this story of hope and redemption and love." And so as real as that is, it still has—it still can be played upon. Everybody wants to latch onto something to promote their own story.

Julie began attending Larry's personal needs.

Julie: I went on this cleaning spree and started throwing out all this stuff that was gross and clothes that were ruined with food stains. We bonded. All of us bonded, and it felt so right that I guess I started—I don't know. The maternal dimension kicked in. I just felt that it was OK to straighten things out.

One day she rearranged some of Larry's belongings. Later, when he couldn't find them, he flew into a rage, screaming, "I've been looking for my god damn toothbrush, and you've moved it, and I'm a blind person, and you can't move a blind person's belongings." Surprising even herself, Julie struck him hard on the back as she walked toward the door. But Trapp called her back.

Julie: "If you're going to leave and not ever going to come back," he said, "I at least want to see what you look like." So I walked over to this desk, and Larry turned the lamp on. And he put on these glasses that had the magnifying glass attached, and he was adjusting it, and he asked me to lean down so that he could look. And all of a sudden I looked through this magnifying glass, and all I could see were these big blue eyes just filled with tears. And it was kind of a pivotal moment where everything kind of changed.

Larry: I'm used to whatever I said before—no matter how hateful it was, no matter how damaging it was to a person—I was always backed up by other people with the same ideas. Now I'm on my own, and I'm learning how to love people again. That's a whole different way of life. It's not easy. Sometimes I think to myself, "Well, these guys were my friends." But really, if I stop to think, they weren't my friends. They were using me because I had a way to get in. I had my handicap. Well, I don't call it a handicap, I call it a disability. I had my lack of legs, and my blindness to get me in the door. I could get in places they couldn't because people would feel sorry for me because of the way I was. Then I could really nail them to the wall once I got in the door.

In January of 1992, somewhere in the middle of the story, Larry moved into the Weissers' home, displacing Julie's daughter, Rebecca, to the basement with her stepbrother and sister.

Michael: We knew that Larry couldn't go on living by himself, and we also knew that whatever support system he used to have was gone because he was now the enemy for his former colleagues. And we knew that it would be wrong for us to not to continue to grow our relationship with Larry.

And so we decided to invite him to come live with us.

David Weisser: Julie had the harder job. She invited him to move in. Dad would have never made that step, I don't think. He would definitely have called. He would definitely have traveled to his apartment and talked to him and helped him find a place and helped him with his medical difficulties and all that. But he would never have brought him into the house and paid for his medication. And I think that's where Julie comes in. . . .

Julie: When this all started, it was really initially between Michael and Larry—the initial contact, the initial breakthrough. But once that happened, I think that Larry had this rapport with me because for a variety of reasons Larry had been wanting a woman to be a part of his life.

> Larry's room began to fill with a growing collection of model trains and Martin Luther King Jr. memorabilia. He studied Jewish faith and traditions with Michael and expressed his desire to convert to Judaism. He acquired a cat, a bird, and a hamster.
>
> Julie shampooed and cut his hair, shaved his face, trimmed his nails, changed his bedding, and prepared his meals.

Rebecca Nelms: When Larry came to live with us, he needed a full-time nurse because he was so sick, and Mom became that nurse. And she was running around after him, and she didn't really have time for us kids. And so I kind of felt like I really didn't have a mom because she'd be running around the house, but she'd be doing things for Larry because it was like having a little baby around all the time: you know, you need to constantly take care of him.

Larry: I told Julie I haven't been confused until I moved in here, and that's the truth. I never had a family life. So the things that go on: I like what I see. I love the kids, you know. They tear my nerves up once in a while, but I think I did the same thing when I was little. Of course, if I got out of line, I'd get a fist upside my head.

Julie: He said he wasn't confused until he lived with our family. Which isn't true, I don't think, but there is this sense of confusion because he doesn't know how families are. He doesn't know that in relationships, that there's all this conflict in relationships. It doesn't matter if you love someone or if you hate someone: there is conflict in families.

Michael: Is the story to give hope? Is the story to give a lift to someone who feels down trodden? Is the story to show that even the most recalcitrant individual in the world can change? Or is the story made better by telling the dark side along with it? The dark side of the doubts and the hassles and the yelling and the screaming that went on: How necessary is that?

Toward the end of his life Larry worked diligently on his model train collection and often played audio tapes of engines, whistles, and signals.

Jan Branting: I believe there had been numerous phone calls back and forth between the Weissers and Larry's father. I'm not sure if Larry actually made the phone calls, but I know that it was important for those two to get together. And it was also a really difficult situation because Larry's father was very angry at the Weissers and very suspicious of them, and he would not come into their home if they were there, so they were both gone for the day.

Julie: I think that Larry's parents were so incredibly—his father, in particular—were so abusive and so neglectful of Larry's needs physically and emotionally. And I think that Larry replicated those things because, you know, it's interesting: he had this hate for his father and this love and admiration for his father. So I think that the way that he neglected his body and his relationships were the exact way he had seen his parents do that.

Larry: So everything I did—or nothing, I should say—nothing I did impressed my dad. Whether I was on the right side of the law or the wrong side. In fact, I became the chief of police in Pierce, Nebraska, a small town. That was wrong. He said, "I can't imagine you carrying a gun." Well, my sister took a different view of the whole thing. She became very antiracist. Myself, I took Dad's way. I thought, "Well, I'm trying to impress Dad." Everything I did I was trying to impress Dad. So basically he instilled—He said he wasn't a racist, but when he found out I was living with the Weissers, he called Michael Weisser up and said, "Why don't you keep your Jew—your big Jew nose out of family business?"

Jan: Larry was so scared of his father, and he refused to be alone with him that day. He really was a scared little boy. He knew how close it was to the end, and it was important to tell his father he was sorry. When his father came, he was very dapper, and they immediately started to talk in Larry's bedroom. I was in tears listening to them apologize to each other. I was touched by how hard it must have been for Larry's dad to be able to apologize after all these years and for what all Larry had done in his life. That would be real hard for a

father. Even though I think his father's behavior when Larry was young precipitated this behavior.

Eva Sartori: One troubling aspect of the story is that people came to the conclusion that Larry's immoral acts were the consequence of an unhappy, troubled childhood. And I think that's a great simplification of how a person is prompted to perform evil deeds and leaves to the side larger social questions. Those issues were never analyzed in the Larry Trapp story. The focus was entirely on the relationship of Larry and Michael. I think a lot of people felt that Michael's stance exemplified the highest morality. I guess I don't. I don't see his motives as being as much moral as emotional. Emotional in terms of his own needs for the kind of recognition that the publicity awarded them.

> That evening Larry asked Michael to step into his office. He said, "I'm ready to convert to Judaism and join the congregation." Michael asked him, "Why? Why on this day?" Larry replied, "my father and I have forgiven one another. We've had a Yom Kippur."

Julie: It was part of the story about Larry that made it so newsworthy, but I didn't really care. Larry was the same person to me that he was before the day of the conversion or the day after. That didn't change who Larry was, not even a little bit.

> Late one night Trapp confessed to Julie a number of lies: he had never been a mercenary soldier; he had never been in the Hell's Angels; he had never fully divulged the extent of his hate crimes.

Julie: And I guess the most difficult thing he had to say was that these black kids in reform school never raped him. I mean that was the hardest thing for him to say. And he went on to say that he

had done things that he had never talked to us about and that he had never told me about. He was really, really, remorseful when he told me that this had not happened—that these four boys in reform school had not raped him, that he had no reason to be a racist. That he had created his own racism through this mythology, this lie that he had created in his head about this rape.

Michael: Larry did have a fantasy that he was going to be this great powerful leader of a racist organization. Larry designed his persona for a long time and added to it and added to it. When he would get feedback from various racist organizations around the country it helped him to believe more and more that he really was this Grand Dragon of the state of Nebraska. But the truth is it never became who he was. Only he didn't know that. Because if it really was Larry, then Larry could never have responded to a telephone call, or a few telephone calls from a person like me and to a hand of friendship from a person like Julie. He would have said, "Get the hell out of here. Are you crazy? I hate you. You're the enemy."

One day in August after handling his trains, Trapp suffered a mild heart attack. He recovered, but his condition became even more precarious. He began to move seamlessly between dream and conscious states. He dreamed he was stuck in a circular saw and was being chopped to pieces. When his kidneys began to malfunction, the accumulating toxins in his blood stream amplified his hallucinations.

Julie: Larry, at some point on the way out to the car, just stopped his wheelchair, put his hands on the wheels and stopped it. And he looked at me and said, "Am I dying?" and I said, "Yes, you are." And he started to cry, and then he told me—he said, "You know, the car is filled with soda

bottles." And I said, "No, it's not." And he said, "Yeah, I know." There was also a day that he thought his whole room was filled with electrical cords dangling from the ceiling, and if he moved he would be electrocuted.

Michael: The night that Larry died Julie went downstairs and woke up the kids. It was kind of interesting what they did. They all came upstairs—maybe one by one, if I remember right—to Larry's room, and they said good-bye even though Larry was already gone. And they left the room, and we called the hospice people, and Larry's body was taken away. Julie made sure it was covered with a quilt rather than the plastic bag they usually use. That's how he died. It was really not a horrible way to die. Was pretty sweet, actually. We knew that an episode in our life that had its moments of spirituality and rage and humor was over, and we would be going forward to other things pretty soon.

This is where the story ends.

Michael: The story of Larry Trapp and my family is very important to us. All of its details are very important to us. But I wouldn't tell you all the details because in a way the most personal of the details are really nobody else's business. The essence of the story I think belongs to everybody.

David: What people thought about the situation—from their perspective—was that it was this huge, timeless biblical event that was, I don't know, like my dad was some messenger of God, and we were angels of mercy, and we brought this lost soul into our home and endured this situation with him, and they spoke to us as if we were martyrs, really. But inside the house we ate together, played together. Larry listened to tapes. He had train sets.

Julie: I don't really care to denigrate Larry's memory. And yet there is this whole issue of the truth, and I think there will always be dishonesty that's connected with this story. And really it's been one of the things that has just not been OK, but I don't have any choice. I feel like there is this part of it that's very personal that's there that I'm not willing to deal with—I mean publicly deal with. So there is this whole part of it that's dishonest, and it sort of fits actually, given all the things that went on. It fits.

Jan: I think many people in the community felt that Michael and Julie did this for the publicity—that it was not real, that Larry was using them, or that they were using him. When you were in the home, it was very obvious that this was not the case. It was very genuine the love they had for each other. After he died, and they ran all the tapes on the news, and I saw him after having not really remembered seeing him in his Klan garb, it was—it gave me a chill to think of the contrast in this person.

Eva: There were people who were and I think still are very angry at the episode. They felt that Michael was spending an awful lot of time with Larry on Larry's needs, and he was neglecting people in the congregation who were perhaps equally as needy. It wasn't an easy issue, and I thought it was resolved and I had come to terms with it. This was an incident that was in the past. But I think the more distance I have from it, paradoxically, the more bitter I feel.

Rebecca: Larry, I miss him. I mean, I do. I loved him. He was—we had some really good times. I mean there were some awful times, but we had some really good times.

Larry: They're going to be people out there who will say, "Oh, Larry Trapp is no longer the Grand Dragon of the state of Nebraska, but at least now we know that the Klan is an active entity in the state. So let's look around and see who we can get to join the outfit." Then there are some who will think, "This is good. Here is a Klansman who changed his mind." And this person saying this, if he's got racist ideas, maybe he'll say, "Let me, let me kind of look things over." This is what I'm hoping, he'll say, "Let me, let me have another—let me think about this another time."

We have four, mutually referential artifacts—a rough-edit tape (Based on a Story: Test Print for WPT Only)*, a script, a page from a working document in John and Jeanne's notebooks (figure 5.15, plate 1 in the color pages), and a videotaped interview in which John discusses the notebooks with members of WPT. For John and Jeanne, these artifacts are elements in the production of* O Night Without Objects*, a work that when completed will supersede the rest. For us, these ar-tifacts are documentary evidences for the work of writing and reading as part of the ongoing activities and interactions, the working practices, of video production.*

Our project is to recover the work from these documentary evidences, which we read as residual moments, as traces of J&J's activity. But as we read them they remind us, or teach us again, that such artifacts are irremediably incomplete as records of the activities of their production and use. The artifact opens out onto a temporal course of past and future activities, of experiences and referents, that aren't themselves in evidence. This partiality of artifacts in relation to the activities that produce and make use of them is a basic premise of our work and of its central problem. Our problem is to read these traces, to assemble them into recountings of each document's meaningful embedding in ongoing working practices, while knowing that they were written to be read not as a text but in situ, practically, in relation to activities beyond the page.

Script 113 is a canvas with multiple layers, indexed to multiple activities. It documents J&J's work of production—the evolving script and its changes, including work completed and work to be done. It also documents J&J's interaction, their collaboration. It is a hypermedia document, crossing in and out of paper and electronic forms, referencing conversations as well as video segments, databases, paper and digital texts. The spatial geography of the page represents the temporal sequence of the script, the layers of annotation its reworking over time.

This script itself, 113, stands for one version, one moment or series of moments in the course of the work. The oldest layer is a template, borrowed from WPT's video logging practices and reused/adapted for J&J's production work. The template is a table: in column 1 are references to tape segment names as stored for use by the editing system. In column 2 are references to videotapes, as tape i.d.'s and time codes, as well as references to the audio track, USING UPPERCASE FOR NARRATION, lowercase for protagonists' own voices. And in column 3 are references to ongoing work and conversation and "J&J's notes," comments to themselves and each other.

Onto this template are layered handwritten annotations. Different colors of pen trace different moments of annotation, though their order is only partly recoverable. The order that is recoverable requires us to make use of our own members' knowledge of practices of writing and reading. So, for example, we read the relations of red, black, and green in the annotation in the page's top margin ("still of papers, rolodex cards" etc.) as first red, then black, then green—not because the order is in any way readable directly from the marks but because we recognize the black box as a kind of highlighting operation on the red text, the green squiggling line as a kind of deletion. In the interview John explains to us that these notes for him evoke images of images on the tapes.

In an effort to reanimate the page we ask John to narrate it for us, videotaping him as he does. He explains the annotations "a curious woman" and "a personal contact" as last items in the list read by the narrator. In the course of his explanation for us John underlines the words personal contact, *under* JULIE #3, 25:11, *in black pen. We know then just how that mark got onto the page, its occasion within the course of his explanation, its working at just that moment as an act of highlighting, directing our attention to that particular phrase. We assume the other marks were as occasioned as this one within the work, though in ways no longer recoverable.*

Crossing-out operations, for example, represent edits or deletions to the script, but we can't always tell whether the work is still to be done or has been already. In some cases this question is anticipated and addressed in further layers of annotation, like JM's green 08.04.96 inverted and edited, *which we can read, from its placement and its sense, as a reference to work done on the script to the left of the note, as indicated by the lighter green* S *around these two sequences, the black penned instruction to* invert, *and the cross-outs, in the same dark green pen, of parts of the text. And in looking to the tape we can see that this inversion has been done, while the note to rewrite* the *to* their *in* the Disney Corporation bought the rights to the story, *indexes work still to come.*

Part 3: Blacky

> Afterward I never again saw that remarkable house, which at my grandfather's death passed into strange hands. As I recover it in recalling my child-wrought memories, it is no complete building: It is all broken up inside me; here a room, there a room, and here a piece of hallway that does not connect these two rooms, but is preserved, as a fragment, by itself. In this way it is all dispersed within me. . . . It is as though the picture of this house had fallen into me from an infinite height and had shattered against my very ground.
> —RAINER MARIA RILKE, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*

The following presents relevant fragments of an email correspondence John and Jeanne conducted with the editor of this book, Craig Harris. In March 1997 Harris wrote to them:

In our past discussions I had the impression that Part 3 may not end up in the chapter. I could use some explanation of your views on what was sent to me in the recent draft. Is it your intention to publish only the Rilke quotation followed by the photograph of Blacky with no caption for Part 3? If so, please let me know what it is that you have in mind here.

We replied:

We expect to complete *0 Night Without Objects* in July of 1997 and are just now beginning work on *The Adventures of Blacky,* so it has been difficult for us to say with precision how Part 3 of the chapter will work. Now we know more. In the piece a woman's voice will be heard reading a series of questions from the *Blacky* pictures, a projective psychological test much like Rorschach's. Our script begins as the test does:

> Here are some cartoons. I'd like you to make up a little story about each one. At the end of the story I'll ask you a couple of questions to make sure I got everything you had in mind. There are no right or wrong answers. I'm just interested in what you imagine the answers to be. The comic is about a family of dogs: Papa, Mama, Tippy, and the main character, Blacky.

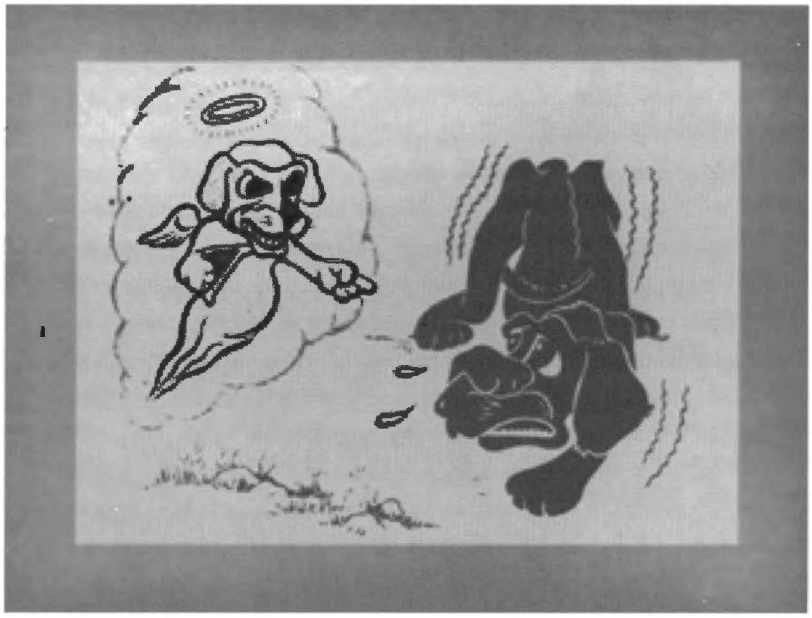


Figure 5.17
Jeanne Finley and John Muse, Blacky, from *O Night Without Objects,* 1997. Here Blacky is very upset. What might have happened between the last picture and this one?

A young man and a girl sit across from one another. Ostensibly, she is the test subject and he the administrator of the test. The girl will be played by the same actress who claps at the end of *Time Bomb,* and Pamela Z, who narrated *Time Bomb* and *Based on a Story,* will also narrate *Blacky.* This voice and this girl are intended to unify the sections of the trilogy and raise questions concerning the position of the narrator relative to the events.

As a caption for the image—we've always called this one "Conscience Dog"—please use the following question: "Here Blacky is very upset. What might have happened between the last picture and this one?" The image presents—at least this is how we imagine it—the paradox of conscience. Look closely at the image: Blacky turns tail, turns against himself and in such a way that the one, Blacky, turns out to be two: Blacky, and his conscience. For there to be one there must be two: i.e., to be oneself one must have been called and caught up in a circuit that puts a double in place as voice-that-knows-better. Yes, pace Gertrude Stein: I am I because my little dog knows me.

The cartoon foregrounds this doubling insofar as the rendering of conscience mimics that of Blacky and vice versa. The squiggled marks to the right and left of Blacky frame him, put him into—i.e., inside—the fear and persecutory shudder that these marks on the page are conventionally understood to signify. This scalloped edging, Blacky's fear, molds him, forces him into a space, a container, one *like* the billowy cloud in which the other dog floats. And Blacky's spine, too, doubles the shudder, doubles his conscience's cloud, doubles even the halo and its sparkle. So which comes first—the shudder or the splitting headache? And thus, who comes first—Blacky or conscience?

0 Night Without Objects: the conversations, our collaboration with WPT. We hope to put our practices to the test of too much scrutiny, too much conscience, this book. We want to include these very paragraphs in Part 3; as much as our work at Xerox PARC, our email correspondence has been constitutive of the chapter, of our written pieces, of our relationships to WPT even. Would these writings exist at all, their responsive rhythms, if we hadn't been persuaded that textual and graphic artifacts of our collaboration could be *representative* of our work—or at least representative of its unrepresentability. The demand that we narrate and thus allegorize our relations produced effects that weren't limited to a representation of work we were already doing. The chapter itself is a work that attempts to dramatize the fragility and fecundity of the relations that made it possible.

Best,
John and Jeanne