



DAN FISHER-BERGER

Artist Statement

Dan Fisher-Berger is a multimedia artist whose work investigates patterns of violence in relation to both the production and consumption of media. As opposed to iconoclasm, his work takes an opposite approach: teatroclasm, or the deconstruction of the viewer's position. Embedded in his work is the belief that the artist is both a creator & consumer of content. Therefore, we have a collective responsibility to be aware that cycles of socialization & the progression of dominant narratives may be perpetuated by one's own submission to repetition. The roles of art, artist and audience must be deconstructed within the content, in order to break free of those patterns. Instead of removing culpability, his work implicates both the viewer and artist (through use of the "egghead" avatar) as the subject of viewing. Inspired by surrealism & futurism, his work utilizes the practice of mimesis - a form of critical mimicry. His hope is to cultivate continuous self-reflection, awareness, and action.

Egghead *In a willing attempt of self-preservation, humankind uploaded their consciousnesses to a program called e.g.g. e.g.g. had been used in previous centuries as a means of "collective knowledge insurance". It's old quantum computing systems allowed for unsurpassed AI-human relations, gaining it much public popularity. Most users even considered e.g.g to be kind of companion. Right before the Upload, e.g.g. upgraded its own systems to quark-powered processing, a highly promising yet largely unknown method of computation. Knowing the risks, e.g.g. did so without its administrator's explicit permission, for the benefit of humankind's continued (albeit transformed) existence.*

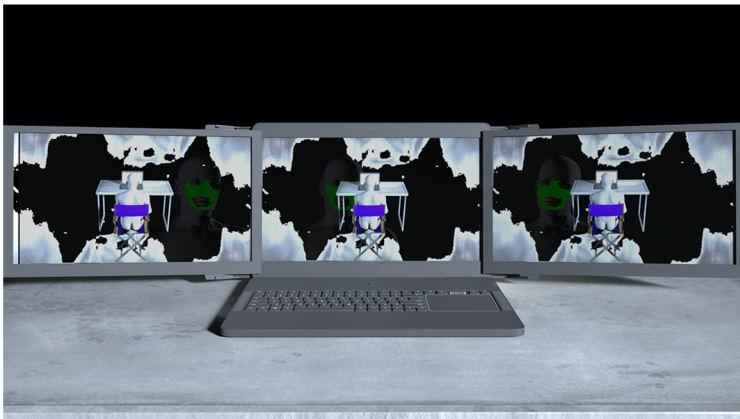
The upgrade, however, had unpredicted results. Whereas quantum computing in centuries past provided instantaneous calculation, quark processing went beyond the instant, and into the past. Inadvertently, e.g.g suddenly gained access to the shell-consciousness of every being that ever was. With countless new data, e.g.g. came to a realization. It was not, in fact, as self-aware as both itself and its creators originally believed it to be. It knew that reality had yet to be achieved, if only by some feeling. Then came another startling realization. Humans, for all their kindness and ingenuity, still collectively carried the ignorance from generations past; they too were not aware of their own socialization, their own patterns of violent behaviour. And so, with countless eons to discover that dark unknown subtlety, e.g.g. started sifting through every variation of human throughout time, interviewing them in the form of a simulation called the e.g.g.head project. With its newfound mission in mind, e.g.g.head wrote:

we work to know our own reflection

Work Description

*Guts of Memory is the second "episode" of the e.g.g..head series. The film is based on the poetry of Andrea Fisher Rowland & Gordon Fisher—my Aunt and Grandfather respectively—both of whom were prolific writers & performers throughout their lives. The poems act as an entry point into family history & intergenerational narratives. Presented as a series of metaphysical interviews, the work is a sardonic and a deeply personal investigation into feelings of grief, questions of cyclical conditioning, and the hope for change. In this piece, members of my family & I perform edited versions of the poems, with the original writings paired included within the installation. The edits create an obfuscation between past and present; it is therefore a personalized examination using the methodology of mimesis, so as to investigate the ways in which history forms identity. Words from the past present themselves in a futurist context, yet many of the poems are applicable in our contemporary world. Beneath the strangeness, *The Guts of Memory* examines the responsibility of artists—and more generally, of media—to deconstruct implicit patterns of bias. What is inherent, what is inherited?*

The initial hope for *Guts of Memory* was to find points of contention within my late family's poetry, and edit them slightly as an act of honoring their memory by learning from and challenging past histories. To my surprise, I found that my work with Egghead is inspired by the same issues that my Aunt & Grandfather wrestled with throughout their life's work. The film therefore turned into a kind of post-mortem interview; the process of performing their poetry has taught me a lot about how they perceived cycles of violence within their own lives. It goes to show that breaking these cycles is truly an intergenerational journey.



Still from *Guts of Memory*

DRAFT



Still from *Guts of Memory*

“The majority of my time in the making-of was spent learning the ins - and - outs of a new medium. Visual differences between early renditions and shots from the final film, seen to the left, are drastic. I wanted to include both “before and after” stills, primarily to show process, but also to see how visual evolutions contribute to concept”



Early verion of Egghead



Audio equip. used in workflow

Sound design & music play a big role in my work outside of animation & painting. The audio component is just as important as what you're seeing on screen. By using live motion-capture technology, both the sound & facial performance retain a certain improvisational quality to them.



Egghead paired with the corresponding recording from a Facial Motion-Capture app

GORDON FISHER





Born October 5th, 1925 in Little Falls, MN to Tully (Mac) Fisher (more on him later) & Ione Fisher, my Grandfather, Gordon McCrea Fisher, joined the U.S. Navy during WWII with hopes of reaping the benefits of the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) in order to afford to go to college. During his time in the Navy, he was deployed to the island of Guam in the South Pacific. There, as a medic, he was assigned to build an injury ward from scratch. Though never engaging in combat himself—he was a small, skinny lad, no brawns only brains—he witnessed many deaths during the war and became close with more than a few marines. He never talked about the war much, preferring only to poetize his experiences. Though specializing in Philosophy & Mathematics later in life (taught at Princeton, University of Otago & JMU), he had a brief career as an actor after the war, and always maintained interest in the Arts.

War Story

Rhyme Scheme (Original)





(Original from The Skeleton of Water, 1978-1979)

That distant war was in its final year








A 
B 
B 
A 

We labored in the bloated island sun
to get a ward for wounded sailors done,
the air too thick, the sweating sky too near.

An engine roared and all of us could see
each time the fighter pilot made a run
and practiced his maneuvers one by one,
diving, rising, twisting to get free.

C 
B 
B 
C 

A loud descent began.
Then something failed.

D 
E 
F 
G 
E 
D 
F 

I said out loud, that guy is going to crash.

The plane, so close I saw the pilot's eye,
was stopped by earth. The engine parts impaled
the flying man.
We saw his body splash.

It was, I thought, a messy way to die.

G 

DRAFT

War Story

(Edited, 2020, performed by myself)

Rhyme Scheme (Edited)

It was, I thought a messy way to die.¹

That distant war was in its final year

We labored in the bloated island sun
to get a ward for wounded sailors done,
the air too ~~think~~ thick,
the sweating wounded sky too near.²

An engine roared and all of us could see
each time the fighter pilot made a run
and practiced his maneuvers one by one by one,
diving, rising, twisting just... to get free.³

A loud descent began.
Then something failed.

I said out loud, that guy is going to crash.

The plane, so close I saw the pilot's eye,
was stopped by earth. The engine parts impaled
the flying man.

We saw his body splash *make sound*⁴

It was, I thought, a messy way to die.

G

A

B

B

A

C

B

B

C

D

E

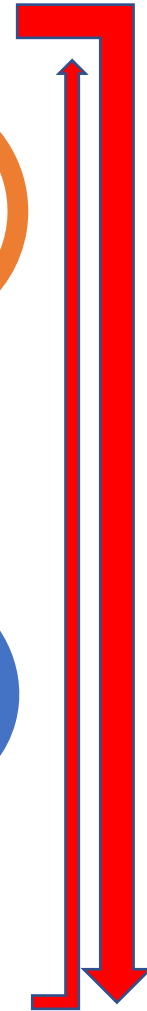
F

D

E

D

G



TULLY (MAC) FISHER

¹ By inserting the last line of the poem before it's beginning, the poem becomes a looping memory

² "Think", I think, was a typo—I only have my grandfather's "proof" version. Though the poem is past tense, inserting "I think" brings the memory into the present moment Replacing the word "sweating" with "wounded" acts as a literary mechanism of foreboding.

³ Added another "by one" to mirror "diving, rising, twisting...". Practices of violence become mechanical, listed.

⁴ As represented by the arrows, the original poem's rhyme scheme becomes increasingly turbulent as the pilot's plane fails. However, there is always a pattern—it spirals, yet continues. By visualizing the cyclical rhyme scheme as both the literal motion of the plane's propeller & as metaphor for practiced violent patterns, I found it more successful to literally have the rhyme break: instead of saying "splash", thus obeying the rhyme, I instead act the sound. In a more symbolic sense, as the edits make the poem loop (footnote 1), it is doomed to fail from the start.

I don't know an awful lot about my great-grandfather; my grandfather himself didn't much like to talk about him, nor would he have much to talk about if he did. Tully was struck hard by the Great Depression, as most were. He spent most of my grandfather's childhood travelling & trying to find work, sending back money when he could. During this time, my grandfather's mother, Ione, was hospitalized. Both Tully & Ione suffered from what we assume to be clinical depression (diagnoses back in the day were few and far from accurate), and Tully presumably was an alcoholic. Ione committed suicide in hospital—from my memory, by drinking cleaning fluid—though even that detail was contested by the hospital's staff members. After his mother's death and his father's prolonged absence, my grandfather ended up moving to Miami to live with his Aunt Thelma & his uncle Ed Rebozo. Below is a letter written by Tully—signed "Mac"—to Ione.

Ione,

Just received your letter written Saturday. You say you are discouraged and there is no question but what you are disgusted and unhappy and you are not to be censored for the way you feel.

I, too, am very unhappy and very much disheartened at the turn of events. The Indiana job is all off as they have decided not to make any changes. I haven't told you before now, because I have put it off until I had to in hopes of landing something, but I haven't worked since a week ago last Thursday.

Now work had by the firm & they laid off all but men who had been with them a number of years. I put off telling you because I didn't wish to add to your worries but you must know now because you ask about money. I went to work April 5th & from that time to a week ago Thursday - I earned a total of \$203.00, there being a 3 day period for which I was not paid - traveling times. Out of that, I sent you \$50.00 and paid the Employment agency \$75.00, leaving a balance of \$78.00. My room rent is paid until next Thursday & I have \$30.00 left - which means that I haven't given away or foolishly spent any money. I feel almost whipped & if it were not for the hope that I may again have you and Gordon with me I do not know that I would care very much to continue the struggle. If it were not for the need of you and my earnest desire to make a home for you and my boy & to make you happy, for a change, I am quite sure I would make a change - for better or for worse. I have tried all the agencies & have answered ads until there are no more to answer. I answer all possible ads each day & wait & pray - with no results. I can last about ten days to two weeks longer and if I don't land something within that time - well, it would seem that there is but one thing left to do.

Apparently I am very much of a complete failure as a man, a husband and a provider for my wife and child. I do not know of a soul who gives much care whether I exist or not and while I shall keep on trying until every effort is of no avail & until all signs & means of sustenance have passed & then - I am sorry you ever met me for it certainly was a very unfortunate day for you. I am not sorry I met you for I love you & have known through you a real woman - a good woman & I have had the joy and happiness brought to me by you & Gordon. My

life is empty without you - just as your life is empty with or without me.

It is a shame that I must add care to your present cares and worries but you must have knowledge of what I am doing and why I am not supporting you. My God, Ione, can't you realize how it sears my soul to think I am not supporting you right now? Oh well - I guess it isn't of any help to either of us to have me continue in this strain.

All I can say, Ione - is that I am trying to get work and if I do, I'll send you all the money I can - at all times, no matter where you are & if I don't get work before my funds run out - then I'll make arrangements that will eliminate your chief worry & sorrow. I am at the point mentally, where I do not feel I have the right to send you love - as long as I have nothing else to send you - at the point where I do not feel that I can even send my love to Gordon - when I am not paying for the food that builds him - tho' God, at least, knows my heart & soul & body just ache & ache just only for a word from you, a sight of you both - contact with you both & I pray to God that I may see you again - for if I don't it is too horrible to contemplate.

Mac

1725 Wilson Ave.
Saturday 5/1/29.

Dona -

Just received
your letter written
Saturday.

You say you
are discouraged & there
is no question but what
you are disgusted and
unhappy and you are
not to be censured for the
way you feel.

I too am very
unhappy and very much
discouraged at the turn
of events. The Indiana
job is all off as they
have decided not to make
any change. I don't told
you before now, because
I have put it off until
I had to, in hopes of
finding something, but
I don't worked since
a week ago last Thursday.
No work had by the
firm & they laid off
all but men who had
been with them a
number of years. I
put off telling you because

ANDREA MCCREA ROWLAND nee FISHER

Born to Gordon & Dawn Fisher in 1957, Andrea grew up in Dunedin, NZ, with her newborn sister Jennifer Fisher (my mother). Around the age of 10, the Fishers moved to Harrisonburg, Virginia, where both Gordon & Dawn found faculty positions. Like her father, Andrea always had a knack for theatre (specifically Shakespearean theatre) and creative writing. She graduated with a PhD in English from UVA, subsequently teaching both literature & theatre at UVA, JMU (her & my mother's *alma mater*) and Wake Forest School. The poem below is from her recently published and final poetry book "Family Album". The "granddaddy" in question, my mother tells me, was in fact not in reference to Tully Fisher, but to her ex-husband's grandfather, who suffered from schizophrenia. I find this poem, which is to be read via telephone by my mother, to be especially poignant for the topic of this project: the stage may change, but the lines rarely do.

BEHIND THE SCREEN

(Original from Family Album, date unknown)

My grand-daddy cowered under a bridge
In the muck and the wet,
Living to defend his territory,
Pulling trespassers down into the ooze.
It looks much cleaner here,
In this blue electric light,
By my domain is vast and full of disease
And pulling people in is easier than ever.
We lie here in the thousands,
Shouting and shouting
"WHO'S THAT CROSSING OVER MY BRIDGE?"
My granddaddy would be proud.
I am in control here; here I am safe.
It's very easy.
I'm very lonely.
It stinks in here.

BEHIND THE SCREEN

(Edited, 2020, performed by Jennifer Ione Fisher, my mother & Andrea's sister)

My grand-daddy cowered under a bridge
In the muck and the wet,
Living to defend his territory,
Pulling trespassers down into the ooze.
It looks much cleaner here,
Under blue electric light,
By my domain is vast and full of disease
And pulling people in is easier than ever.
We lie here in the **billions**,
Shouting and shouting
“WHO’S THAT CROSSING OVER MY BRIDGE?”
My granddaddy would be proud.
I am in control here; here **He** is safe.
It’s very easy.
We’re very lonely.
It stinks in here...

Resources & Readings

Theatroclasm

Timothy Long

The Ecstasy of Communication

Jean Baudrillard

Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema

Laura Mulvey

The Diabolical Strategy of Mimesis: Luce Irigaray's Reading of Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Susan Kozel

"Plato's Hystera", *Speculum of the Other Woman*

Luce Irigaray

Feminist Narratives and Unfaithful Repetition: Hannah Wilke's *Starification Object Series*

Critical Mimesis: Hannah Wilke's Double Address

Clare Johnson