

A response in text to *Hurricane Irene* (piece number 1 in the gallery)
written by John Dummett



Interlude:

“It is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say”ⁱ

The image today is like a ventriloquist's dummy mumbling without conviction or triumph. With a face of painted features, it sits in the spotlight but it does not hold our attention. This puppet of wood and clay is a demoted extra, a minor bit part player who stutters with the mutter of an amnesiac.

Interlude:

“Nothing is vaster than empty things”ⁱⁱ

In the regime of the dummy-image, history and context; the very ground of the image, is worn down and eroded. Under the duress of economics and reproducibility the image is dislodged and dismantled. The pictorial space dissolves into a sparkling but obscuring dust. In this falling apart the very fabric of the image is rendered into pixels, bytes and binary code.

Interlude:

“A play of transferences that run, proliferate, propagate and correspond affirming and representing nothing”ⁱⁱⁱ

All images wait immanent behind the ubiquitous electronic screen, ready to be assembled and immediately consumed. Settling out of a saturated solution boiled up from centuries of undone pictures, the contemporary image is the sediment of momentary passions. Neither truth nor fiction, this deposit of hastily conceived desire is quickly and irrevocably redundant.

Interlude:

“In the ruins new information is always emerging”^{iv}

Jostling interminably back and forth from one provisional depiction to another, the programmable particle chases meaning and narrative. Existing under a wandering and itinerant gaze the contemporary image can only rehearse its historical origin. This half remembered purpose of communication is postponed. Leaving meaning and narrative to falter into legibility as only faint shadows clustered around the pictorial frame.

Interlude:

“Forgetting must achieve equal status with learning”^v

Images quickly outlive their designed duration and turn to waste. Abandoned everywhere they point to moments passed, to events witnessed and forgotten. Shorn of the exigencies of desire, the image decays into an indexical ghost of what was wanted, expected or planned for.

Interval:

“Narrative time seems incompatible with vision, and in order to try to see, it will become paradoxically necessary to introduce a disordering of vision – slow motion.”^{vi}

In 2011 during late August hurricane Irene caused extensive flood and wind damage in the Caribbean and along the eastern seaboard of the United States. This meteorological event became, as is typical of major weather phenomena, the subject of extensive representation and prediction; Irene became a locus around which technologies of vision were deployed and performed.

This deployment of vision defined a temporal space for Irene that enclosed its documented past, its shifting, fluid present and its multiple potential futures. In this space of simulations and rehearsals Irene became a focus of speculation, planning and ultimately presidential warnings.

The media representations of Irene have a velocity, a speed which transgresses vision and the viewer’s comprehension. Existing in a stream of probabilities, Irene is a cloud of differing and contradictory dummy moments, none of which can coalesce as the definitive depiction of the hurricane itself.

Faced with this indefinite rehearsal of Irene’s own impossible representation, Elizabeth Gossling shows us a method capable of finding a comprehensible conclusion to the procession of dummy depictions that is the hurricane.

Through establishing a performative relationship with the image, Gossling introduces a methodology of comprehending the image that resides in an action and not in a moment of seeing.

Using a hand held scanner to carefully track line by line a streamed digital image as it is unreeled on a computer screen; Gossling reveals the performance that lies inherent in the contemporary production and viewing of the image. Her method of moving a scanner across the screen foregrounds the continual coming into being of the contemporary image and brings to light an *avant-texte*^{vii} of the streamed image.

The physicality of Gossling’s mode of production, or more accurately her mode of vision, is a pulling back from the velocity of the stream, it is a de-acceleration. This deliberative slowing restrains the image to a human speed; it recovers and returns representation to the world of matter, away from Flusser’s particle universe of fluid technical images.

In a welcome contradiction to contemporary art practice’s unreflexive love affair with the moving image, Gossling creates a new ground for the image, a stilled ground that disinters the possibility of a critical space, from which it is possible to view, judge and more importantly, to comprehend the nature of the contemporary image. No longer projected into the wooden throat of a ventriloquist’s dummy, the image can now speak freely in its own unique voice.

ⁱ Michel Foucault, *This is not a pipe*, 1968, P9

ⁱⁱ Francis Bacon, via Paul Virilio, *The aesthetics of disappearance*, P116

ⁱⁱⁱ Michel Foucault, *This is not a pipe*, 1968, P49

^{iv} Vilem Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, 1985, 2011 english translation, P 106

^v Ibid, P110

^{vi} Paul Virilio, *The aesthetics of disappearance*, P94

^{vii} An Avant-text is a term used in current literary critical theory to describe a gathering of a writer's notes, sketches, drafts, manuscripts, typescripts, proofs, and correspondence. This material provides an insight into the development of the final text and shows its range of other possible outcomes.