

Anthony Johnson
*A foreign fork in the
cutlery drawer*

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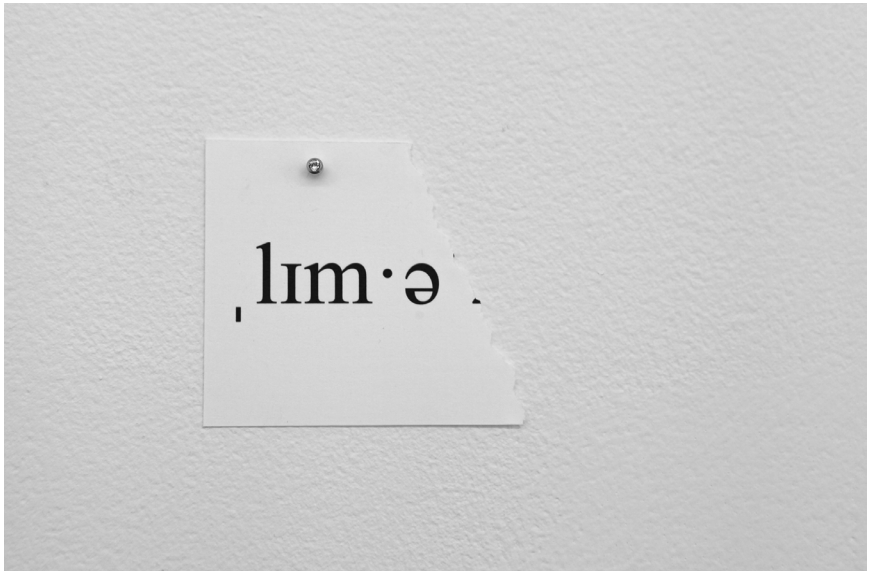


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I think it was during this journey that the image became detached, removed from all the rest. It might have existed, a photograph might have been taken, just like any other, somewhere else, in other circumstances. But it wasn't. The subject was too slight. Who would have thought of such a thing? The photograph could only have been taken if someone could have known in advance how important it was to be in my life, that event, that crossing of the river...

Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*, 1985.



Limousine in a cul-de-sac – A card torn in half, stretched the length of the subject
2018

My Dad had a giant pawn. It was maybe 10cms tall, some non-descript beech coloured timber, shiny varnish. After school on a rainy afternoon, or maybe early on a Saturday morning, one of us would notice that one of the standard sized pawns on the smoked glass chess board that ornamentally adorned the 90's lounge room, had been swapped out for this oversized imposter. It matched the colour of the others and it knew its place in the line-up, but it towered over even the queen. Its base spilled to the edges of the sandblasted, grey glass square that my Dad had secretly chosen for it. We would beg to be shown the trick. Demand an explanation for this puncture in the reality of *a-car-idling-poorly-suburban* childhood. We'd search the house for the small dis/re/placed chess piece— the casualty of this comical foreigner— as proof of the banality of a straight up swap, fighting the thrill of belief in an impossible transformation. We never found the interloper or its victim and we never saw the trick take place. We would interrogate him and he would claim that he had used magic. That he had seen the chess board and that he had felt like a change... and so he had inflated the unsuspecting pawn to more than five times its original size.

Sometime later, a week? A month? A day? the switch would be reversed, the original piece reappeared and the chess board would look as it had. The swollen prop would have disappeared and my Dad would deny all knowledge of our endless accounts of how for some time, (how long?) one of the pawns on the chess board had been giant. He would screw up his face and ask what we were talking about. Through a shrug he'd say that the chess board looked perfectly normal to him. He denied ever taking credit for such a strange trick. The trick became doubly invisible, something to look for, and then to look through. We would drop back into a frenzy of waiting that dissipated seemingly right before the switch took place again.



The architect's view, removed
2018
Production still

The architecture of this magic trick is more than sleight of hand, perhaps in the same way that some jokes are more than punchlines. There is no need for the illusionist's diversion, no cheap flourish so as to momentarily distract the audience from what is really taking place. What *is* —*is* in fact— the taking of place and this is not where the magic is. The magic is in *the architects view* of the silence between the random intervals of discovery and then again in the denial of those discoveries themselves. A thrill not in a knowing how, no longer in a knowing when, but not-knowing *if*. When the discovery of the transformation is made, the magic pours out backwards between present discovery and past discoveries and then erases even these bookends. Everything falls of the shelf. The space that can no longer be delineated by a sandblasted square on smoked glass —the interval of the multiverse— explodes the way stories do and the distance between is suddenly the object of potential language. *A card torn in half and stretched the length of the subject, phonetically speaking.* Writing can invisibly recount the duration of nothing happening. Nothingness, synthetically bracketed by the short-sucked breath of surprise and the sharp turn of the head in search of a witnesses witness. Space-time is a series of holes made by words that accumulate in their own disappearance, swelling as if in memory of a rainbow. My Dad's game lasted years, it goes on even now; the magic of attending to silence eating silence.

This space of time

is organised
We need not fear these *silences.*

John Cage, *Lecture on Nothing*, 1949.

In her essay titled, *Geometries of Attention*, Joan Retallack finds in John Cage's *Lecture on Nothing*, a recursion to emptiness that describes the capture and redirection of attention, that whilst surrounded by diversion is not beholden to it. She describes the lecture's "formal gaps,"

Lecture on Nothing [is] full of beautiful philosophical statements, stories, ideas, surprising references; but its formal gaps, its recursive attention to its own emptiness, foregrounds structure and turns it into a template for noticing similar relationships elsewhere—for example amongst words and silence, ideas and experience, what is and is not apparent in other instances of art and of course in the course of everyday life.

Joan Retallack, *The Poethical Wager*, 2003.

The magical making of formal gaps in everyday life is the re/drawing of geometries of the vectors of our attention. This, Retallack writes, is what allows us to "establish relations between abstract directionalities, insides and outsides, enabling us to notice certain things we could not otherwise." Anthony Johnson's works for, *A foreign fork in the cutlery drawer*, are a proliferation of formal gaps, *doorstops* and *fossils*, tripping hazards and possibilities for the redirection of attention. They are like the pawn; whose transformation is the possibility for the object to become an invisible image of incongruity that could not have been captured unless someone had known of it in advance. They, like Marguerite Duras' character in "The Lover," are here, to write out the event of the object of the photograph that was never taken. Each, like "Lecture on Nothing," "conspires (breathes together) with its own alterity... is transferable to any other situation, with content composed of any other collection of details."¹



Limousine in a cul-de-sac – A card torn in half, stretched the length of the subject
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A bulbous pawn. A lecture on nothing. A *t-shirt worn only when flying*, Duras' girl with the red lipstick, the gold lamé high heels and the "man's flat-brimmed hat, a brownish-pink fedora with a broad black ribbon,"² crossing the river. This empty building once occupied. These things that are of something external to themselves, perfectly formed as images yet to be made. Geometries without beginning or end of the everyday magic of the doubly invisible.

...the photograph could only have been taken if someone could have known in advance how important it was to be in my life, that event, that crossing of the river. But while it was happening, no one even knew of its existence. Except God. And that's why — it couldn't have been otherwise — the image doesn't exist. It was omitted. Forgotten. It never was detached or removed from all the rest. And it's to this, this failure to have been created, that the image owes its virtue: the virtue of representing, of being the creator of, an absolute.

Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*, 1985.

¹ Joan Retallack, *The Poetical Wager*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

² Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*, London: Collins Publishing Group, 1985.

Anthony Johnson was born in Sydney in 1974. Since 2000 he has resided predominately in Hobart, Australia.

He is known for his poetic and humorous approach to objects and his ability to re-contextualise situations to articulate his ideas. He engages a breadth of different media, utilising performance, photography and sculpture to bring into question his implicated role as artist/protagonist, relative to materiality and context by exploring subtle modes of disrupting our perception of the spaces we occupy.

Anthony has undertaken numerous residencies nationally and internationally and holds an extensive twenty-year exhibition history at artist-run initiatives, contemporary art spaces and museums throughout Australia.

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Sarah Jones is a writer, curator and artist. Sarah's research based practice explores text and exhibition as a medium through which critical theory performs as the material of practice. She is currently examining the ways in which publishing can be redefined through the embodied exhibition event as the subject of her PhD with the University of New South Wales.

Sarah has recently returned from residencies at Banská St A Nica Contemporary (SK), The Meetfactory (CZ), ACC Galerie (GER) 2016/15 and Laughing Waters (AUS) 2014/15. Since being awarded her Masters of Fine Arts from The Dutch Art Institute in 2014 she has worked as an independent curator, project coordinator, arts administrator and assistant for several contemporary artists and arts organizations based in Tasmania, Slovakia and Berlin.

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