

About Every Icon

The statue was black and seemed at first glance to be carved from one solid block; but little by little the eye could detect a great number of grooves cut in all directions and in general forming numerous parallel groupings. In reality the work was composed solely of innumerable whalebone corset stays, cut and bent to the needs of the modeling, Flat-headed nails, whose points no doubt must have been pointed inward, joined together these supple staves which were juxtaposed with art, without leaving room for the slightest gap....The feet of the statue rested on a very simple vehicle, whose platform base and four wheels were also made of black whalebone stays ingeniously fitted together. Two narrow rows of raw, reddish, gelatinous substance which was in fact calves' lights were aligned on a dark wood surface, and by their shape if not color, created the exact illusion of a section of railroad track; the four immobile wheels rested on these without disturbing them. A floor adapted for carriage wheels, formed the top of a completely black pedestal whose front displayed a white inscription which read:"The death of Helot Saribskis". Beneath, also in snow white letters, could be seen this inscription, half French, half Greek, with a fine bracket:"Duel"

Raymond Roussel, Impressions of Africa

Raymond
Roussel
['New
Impressions
of Africa'](#)
Cantos I, II,
& IV
translated
by Andrew
Hugill

[Raymond Roussel generated language. He rigorously held to his rules of rhyme and reason.](#) The above passage is from Impressions of Africa, a novel and play inhabited by numerous automatic machines that among other things play music and paint. These machines appear as a wish to program the "creative infinite loop" where automation begets automation that in turns begets further automation returning it to its point of origin. He "programmed" language, even structuring it within sets of recursive brackets (this became explicit in the poem New Impressions of Africa), like above where the paragraph is determined by bracketed pairs of simple phonetic displacements (in his native French) and double meanings. The full identity of the passage is achieved when the borders of Roussels's "rules" have been defined.

John F
Simon Jr's
[Every Icon
statement,](#)
originally
published
in
Parachute,
January
1997

The identity of Every Icon lies at the edge of it defining its every border. This identity is kept in place by the mathematical understanding of what will take place in the distant future. The art work's value lies in the theoretical understanding of its existence to the point when it has defined its every limit and exhausted its every combination. At that time, several hundred trillion years from now, Every Icon will stop functioning (see John Simon Jr's accompanying statement)! If its computer life-support system can sustain itself, Every Icon will have lived in an ever changing and yet immaculate present. It will never appear the same nor will it ever deteriorate.

Every Icon will generate every possible image. What effect can this have in an era of spectacle advertising and image fatigue? Or during a time when it seems that the understandable relations of time and space have been twisted and

reduced by information technology to serve only as a way of extending corporate marketing? Any given instant, billions of images are produced across the world. The fever pitch of our specular culture causes vertigo and blindness. Adopting an image or images (a movie or tv show) is more a matter of survival than consumerism. We are now talking icons and not images.

John Simon adopts a modernist strategy of the sublime to counter the spectacle of today. It originates from the theoretical and machinic ability to generate, as opposed to the psychological and visual ability to represent. In fact, representation is too cultural a framework for Every Icon. Its resolving of an image is aggressively non-cultural. For example, it will take approximately six billion years to reach the end of the second row of Every Icon. What culture can survive that amount of time? The applet will not intentionally present an image. In a few thousand years enough squares of the grid will be shaded that images may appear but they will be coincidental and subjective. The fact is that Every Icon will "generate" every image and not "represent" every image. Its automatism is not in the nature of the Turing model of "machine intelligence" or in the nature of automatic writing with its dependency on psychology. Its automation is mechanical and relentless so that it will endure unflinchingly.

Its lack of representation or need of an audience may be frustrating but this exclusion of the viewer or the moving outside of our cultural notions of sight and representation positions the work within an avant-garde strategy. For example, Alexander Rodchenko's Red, Yellow and Blue in 1920 and Gerhard Richter's Color Chart paintings. It is interesting how vast a shift in technology and labor practice there is between the painted objects of Gerhard Richter or On Kawara's adoption of print technology in the works One Million Years Past or One Million Years Future, and Every Icon. The latter exists in a generative state that unlike its antecedents is not recuperatively extant but is truly extant. It occupies another realm, namely that of the network. A particular instance of it exists on the stadium server but it will perfectly duplicate itself through electronic distribution on other computers. Every Icon is among the first network objects.

The automation of Every Icon inherently removes it from the constraints of us as subject and our culturally determined imagery. John Simon hints at the prospect of an image generator that will produce images from the past that are unrecognizable to us and images of the future that we cannot possibly perceive or understand. Every Icon will mathematically produce images in a predictable manner but its relation to our culture will be random and coincidental. Ultimately, Every Icon will produce those images that exist underneath, between and above our specular society as well as those familiar to us that we are too tired to see again.

Ron Wakkary for Stadium, 1997