

Unit2 Written Response

PROMPT

This written component has two parts. We recommend writing them in this order (though when you submit your writing should present them in the opposite order):

A small annotated bibliography of 6 references that help you to situate this project in wider contexts. These references can be texts, projects, or practices (bodies of work that explore a consistent theme). As you look for and select references, think about how they specifically challenge, stretch, or deepen your approach to your project. Maybe they give you a new critical angle on a topic you're exploring. Maybe they suggest a new process or method to test out.

For each reference on your annotated bibliography you will include: (a) an academic citation, (b) a short quote, an image, or some other detail sampled from the reference, and (c) a short statement (100–200 words) explaining how that specific detail of the reference contributes to your understanding of your specific area of interest. (Tip: Don't summarize the reference; instead, put it in context of your emerging practice.)

Your set of references should include:

- 2 references drawn from the course reading list that situate your project in a broader discourse or conceptual domain
- 1 reference that is specifically related to your project in its topic (theme or subject matter)
- 1 reference that is specifically related to your project in its medium or method
- 1 reference that demonstrates a critical position in context of your specific topic, medium, or method
- 1 wild card reference (identify another type of relationship, or re-use any of the above prompts)

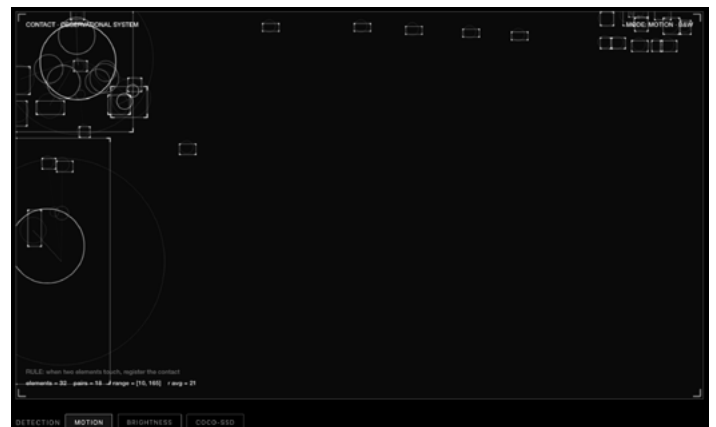
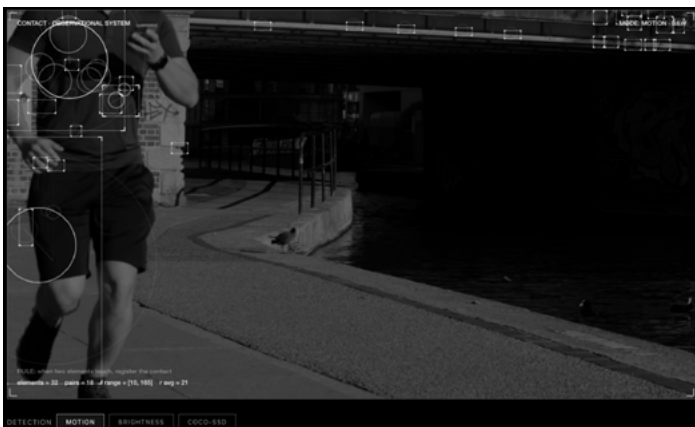
A short statement (100–200 words) that articulates your line of enquiry. What questions are you exploring in this project, and how are you exploring them? Be as focused and specific as possible. (Tip: Don't try to write this during the first week. Wait until your iterations have developed meaningfully.)

Line Of Enquiry

My research project, CONTACT, asks: when an abstract rule is applied through different machine-vision systems to the same footage, what does each register as "contact," and how does the divergence between them become visible to the viewer? CONTACT is a browser tool that runs one rule from Casey Reas's *Element 1* (B3: *when two elements touch, register the contact*) on a single video stream through three detectors—pixel, brightness, and AI recognition. Same rule, same footage; three irreconcilable accounts of what touched what. My enquiry sits in this irreconcilability. Reas wrote B3 in plain language, but the rule was written for code, not for a viewer. To reach the screen it must first be translated into binary; to reach the viewer it must then pass through one detector's specific logic. A rule is never executed alone—always through an apparatus that has already decided, before any contact occurs, what counts as "contact." My position: this divergence is not a flaw to resolve but the subject of the work. The tool exists so the viewer can see what each machine eye sees, and recognise that an apparatus assumed to be neutral is never neutral once chosen.



QR code for the CONTACT website



CONTACT visualizes the rules of code in the real world through real-time detection

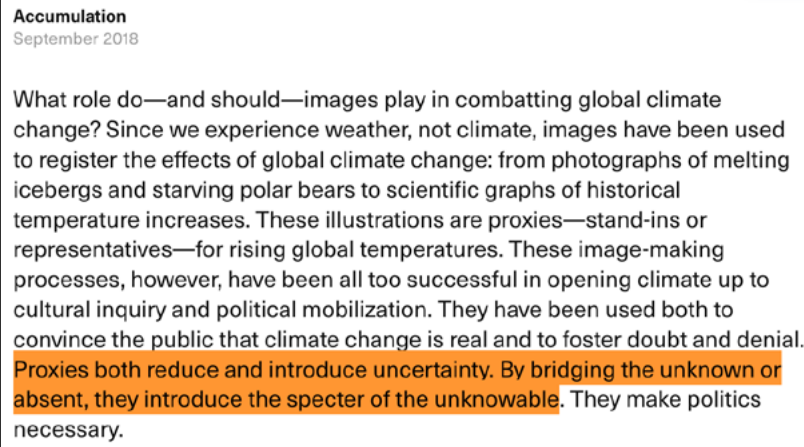
Chun (reading list)

Citation

Chun, W.H.K. (2018) 'On Patterns and Proxies', *e-flux Architecture: Accumulation*, September. Available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/accumulation/212275/on-patterns-and-proxies> (Accessed: 21 April 2026).

Quote

"Proxies both reduce and introduce uncertainty. By bridging the unknown or absent, they introduce the specter of the unknowable." (Chun, 2018)

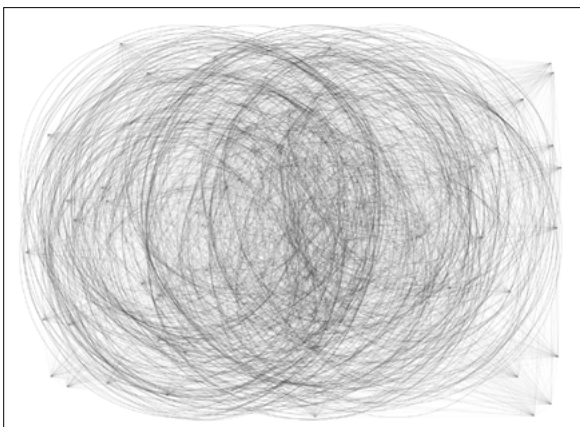


Chun, W.H.K. (2018) 'On Patterns and Proxies'

Annotation

Chun opens on a problem of visibility: climate is too abstract to be directly experienced, so it must be made legible through proxies: melting icebergs, temperature graphs. This gave me a way to reframe the second week of iteration. I needed to introduce another kind of proxy, one that would let the viewer directly experience "contact," an otherwise abstract concept. By feeding real footage into three different detectors, the user could analyse the real world through each, allowing the code rule to manifest itself in the world outside the system.

But Chun does not stop at necessity. She argues that the same proxy which makes something legible also introduces new uncertainty. I had introduced these proxies hoping to make the rule more objectively visible. Looking back at the finished tool, Chun's argument re-asserts itself one level higher: the moment I run the rule through more than one proxy at once, the very objectivity and neutrality I was reaching for collapse. Three proxies do not converge on a clearer view; they produce three irreconcilable views, each carrying its own preset aesthetic and non-neutral position, and the gap between them is the unknowable Chun names.



Using the concept of proxies, transition into developing a new proxy pattern in the second week

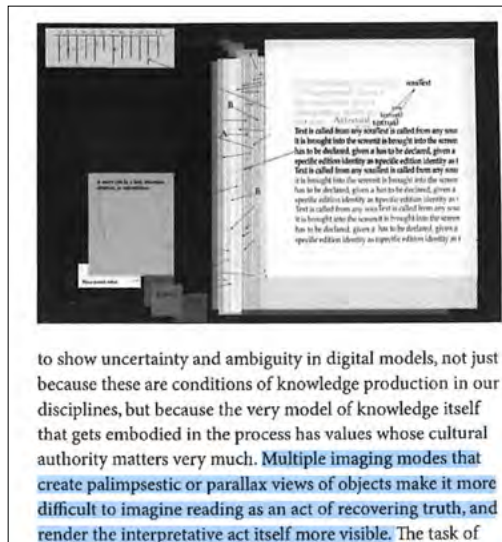
Drucker (reading list)

Citation

Drucker, J. (2014) 'Designing graphic interpretation', in *Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 180–192.

Quote

"Multiple imaging modes that create palimpsestic or parallax views of objects make it more difficult to imagine reading as an act of recovering truth, and render the interpretative act itself more visible." (Drucker, 2014, p. 191)

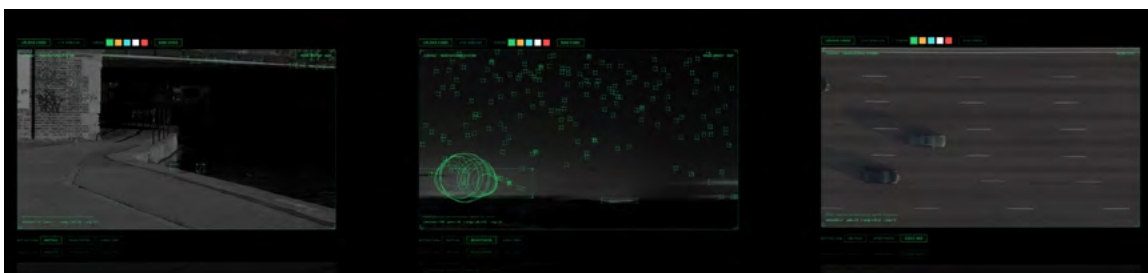


Drucker, 2014, p. 191

Annotation

Drucker reads single-view displays as a kind of politics. A graphic system that shows only one version of what it sees — even an accurate one — carries what she calls an "administrative sensibility": authority maintained through standardisation, through making one way of looking appear to be the only way. Her alternative is parallax: multiple incompatible views of the same object held together, so that no single view can pass itself off as the truth.

This argument determined the form CONTACT eventually took. Under ideal experimental conditions, once a camera was feeding the system, a faithful execution of B3 from a position of neutrality should yield a single, objective output: the most accurate one preserved. Drucker made me reconsider the single-output form of the first week — the collapse of position she warns against. The moment I choose one "accurate" view, I have already taken an administrative position of singularity and authority. Keeping the three detectors side by side, each producing its own population of elements from the same footage, is Drucker's parallax enacted at the level of machine vision. The three irreconcilable views are not a comparison waiting to be resolved; they are the work refusing to deliver "truth," and showing the act of interpretation itself.



Keeping the three detectors side by side

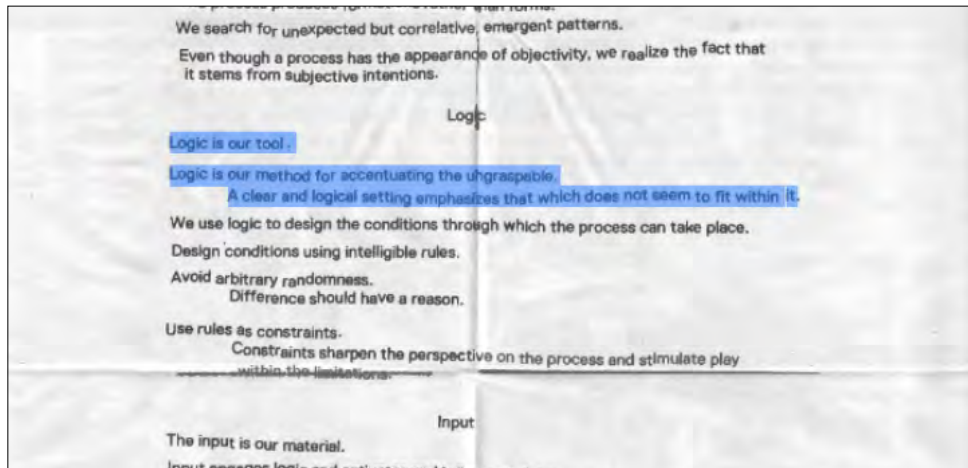
Conditional Design Workbook (related to my project in its topic)

Citation

Maurer, L., Paulus, E., Puckey, J. and Wouters, R. (2013) 'Conditional Design Manifesto', in Blauvelt, A., Maurer, L., Paulus, E., Puckey, J. and Wouters, R., *Conditional Design Workbook*. Amsterdam: Valiz, p. ii.

Quote

"Logic is our tool. Logic is our method for accentuating the ungraspable. A clear and logical setting emphasizes that which does not seem to fit within it." (Maurer et al., 2013, p. ii)



Conditional design workbook by Maurer, Luna

Annotation

The Conditional Design Manifesto describes a way of working that is structurally analogous to what this project does at the level of detection. Maurer, Paulus, Puckey and Wouters propose a method in which a small set of logical conditions is set in advance, then executed by a group of human participants on a shared input. The conditions are fixed; the executors are not. What emerges is not a single image but a population of irreconcilable outcomes — each one a faithful execution of the same rule, each one different.

This is the method I had been performing without naming it. CONTACT inherits B3 from Casey Reas as a single fixed condition, and runs it through three executors: Motion, Brightness, COCO-SSD — on a shared video. The detectors are faithful to the rule; they are not faithful to each other. This let me understand what I had been treating as a problem: the divergence is not noise around the rule, it is the rule's mode of existence. A condition only becomes a condition when more than one executor tries to enact it.



Run on the same video by the executors. The detectors are faithful to the rule; they are not faithful to each other.

Akten, Fiebrink & Grierson (medium / method)

Citation

Akten, M., Fiebrink, R. and Grierson, M. (2019) 'Learning to See: You Are What You See', pp.1–6. doi: 10.1145/3306211.3320143.

Quote

"Metaphorically speaking, the training data determines the full life experience of the network and ultimately shapes its worldview. When the trained network looks out into the world via the camera, it can only see what it already knows." (Akten, Fiebrink and Grierson, 2019)

Motivation: Bias

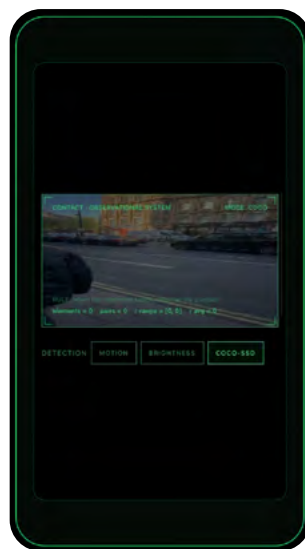
We have two primary motivations behind this work. One is a conceptual motivation related to bias. The work exposes and amplifies the learned bias in artificial neural networks, demonstrating how critical the training data is to the predictions that the model will make. This is particularly obvious when different models using the same architecture (but trained on different datasets) produce radically different outputs for the same input. Metaphorically speaking, the training data determines the full life experience of the network and ultimately shapes its worldview. When the trained network looks out into the world via the camera, it can only see what it already knows.

Akten, Fiebrink and Grierson, 2019

Annotation

Akten, Fiebrink and Grierson describe Learning to See as a "visual instrument": a real-time system in which a neural network trained on a specific dataset: ocean waves, flowers, Hubble images — looks out through a camera and reconstructs whatever it sees using only the visual vocabulary it was trained on. A piece of crumpled cloth becomes a wave; a tangle of wires becomes a galaxy.

This is the medium CONTACT inherits from: a camera feeding live frames into a browser-based pipeline, rendered on screen in real time. The architecture is the same; the move is in what gets foregrounded. Learning to See makes a single trained network's worldview visible by letting it reconstruct the world. CONTACT places three detectors on the same footage at once: pixel difference, brightness threshold, and COCO-SSD — to make visible what Learning to See states as a structural claim: that no eye looking through code is ever looking neutrally. Akten's piece sets the medium and the stakes. Where it shows one apparatus's worldview, CONTACT shows the divergence between three, and treats that divergence — as what the work is about.



Effect of CONTACT in a smartphone camera

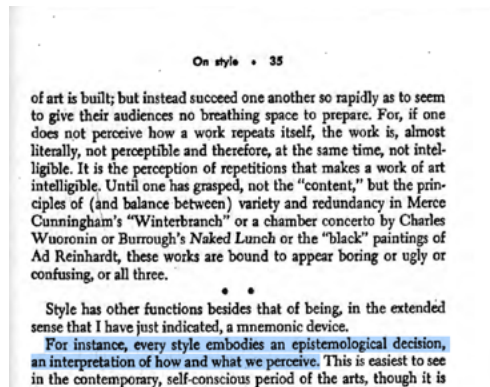
Sontag (critical position)

Citation

Sontag, S. (2009) 'On Style', in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. London: Penguin, pp. 15–36. (Originally published 1965.)

Quote

"For instance, every style embodies an epistemological decision, an interpretation of how and what we perceive." (Sontag, 2009, p. 35)



Sontag, 2009, p. 35

Annotation

Sontag's essay attacks a fantasy she calls "style-less, transparent art": the belief that a work can exist in which content speaks for itself, unmediated by formal choice. She acknowledges most critics know this is impossible, but argues they behave as if it were. Her counter-claim is sharp: style is not an addition to content, it is an epistemological decision. Every stylistic choice determines what can be perceived and, just as importantly, what cannot.

This argument operates at two levels in CONTACT. The first-week system was monochrome, geometric, symmetrical: a style I had read as "no style," as if code-generated circles were the most neutral possible output. Yet that aesthetic belongs to a particular and very familiar stylistic tradition. So I used three detectors to explore exactly this: each is not simply "seeing" — each outputs a chosen form (circles, contours, bounding boxes), and each is a stylistic decision about what is allowed to count as an element. Sontag's argument confirms the position I had already taken: an apparatus is non-neutral not because of a flaw in its design, but because, in her terms, every form is itself an epistemological decision.

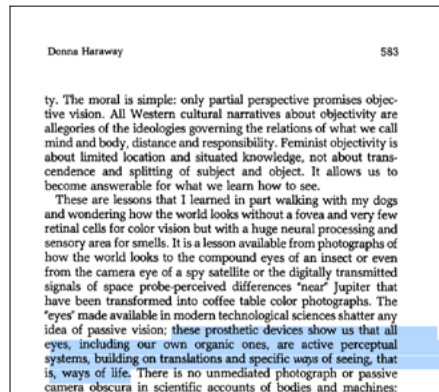
Haraway (wild card)

Citation

Haraway, D. (1988) 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), pp. 575–599.

Quote

"These prosthetic devices show us that all eyes, including our own organic ones, are active perceptual systems, building on translations and specific ways of seeing, that is, ways of life." (Haraway, 1988, p. 583)

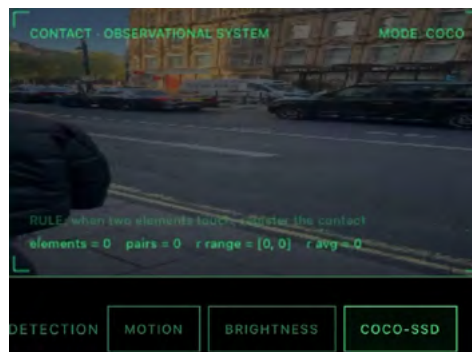


Haraway, 1988, p. 583

Annotation

Haraway writes against what she calls the "god trick", the fantasy of seeing everything from nowhere, a vision of objectivity as disembodied and unlocated. She lists the technologies that have put this fantasy into ordinary practice, including AI-linked imaging and satellite surveillance.

Her response is not to reject technological vision but to re-situate it: all eyes are "active perceptual systems" built on specific translations, on specific ways of life. This let me see CONTACT in a different shape. It is not a neutral instrument applied to the world; it is itself a specific way of observing, with one camera, one rule, three particular detectors, in a particular body (the user's phone at a particular time under particular light), from which one particular version of contact becomes legible. Haraway's crucial move is that situatedness is not a limitation: only partial perspective promises objective vision. CONTACT does not present one partial perspective; it places three side by side, and the gap between them is what the user sees. What stays with me is her closing phrase: a situated system "allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see."



The user's phone at a particular time under particular light