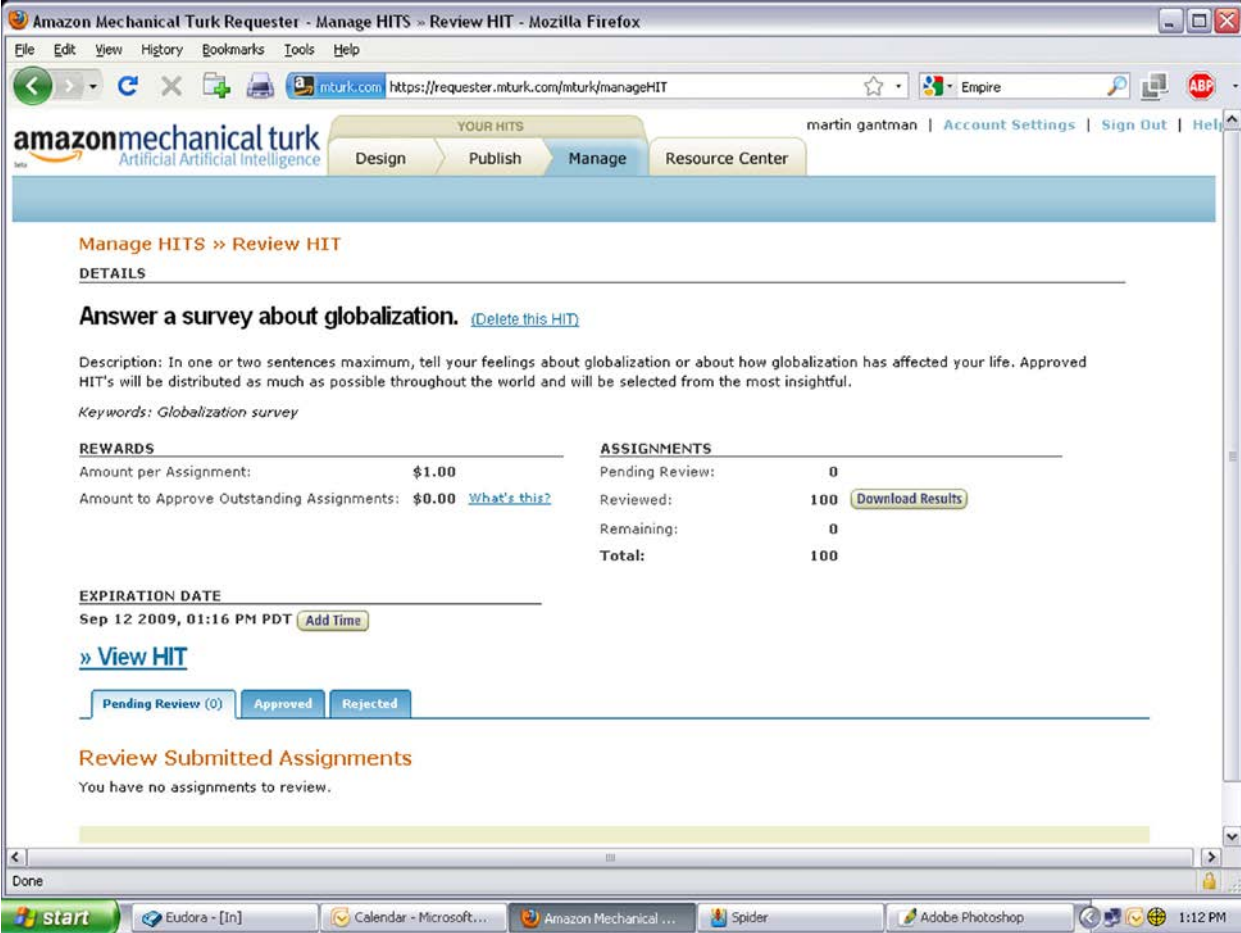


NET

BLACK BOX

Decoding the Art Work
of Martin Gantman

Martin Gantman



It was a furtive step I took from physically appropriating information to extracting images from the Internet. People kept asking, “Why aren’t you using Photoshop? You can do it pixel by pixel. Why not go on the Internet?” And really, when I finally tried, it became immensely easier than going to the library to search for and copy reproductions, and then cutting them out with an Exacto No. 11 blade. Of course, I missed the physicality; not only the reduction in the number of times I would get up out of my chair to move about, but also the texture of the cut. Even when a pasted-up collage is photographed, there is still an element of texture that is transmitted off of the smooth page, as if a statement of physical labor was being announced along with whatever image was being conveyed.

My transition to the Internet also facilitated the beginnings of my more intensive investigatory works. Not only could I find images appropriate to a project more easily, and in greater number, but I could also discover relevant material that would lead my projects in directions I hadn’t foreseen. If I took on a topic, such as the doings at Davos, Switzerland, it eventually became clear, after a period of searching, that the topic was much broader than I had originally contemplated. This particular story, on Davos, evolved into a piece about economic globalization rather than simply the machinations at the World Economic Forum.

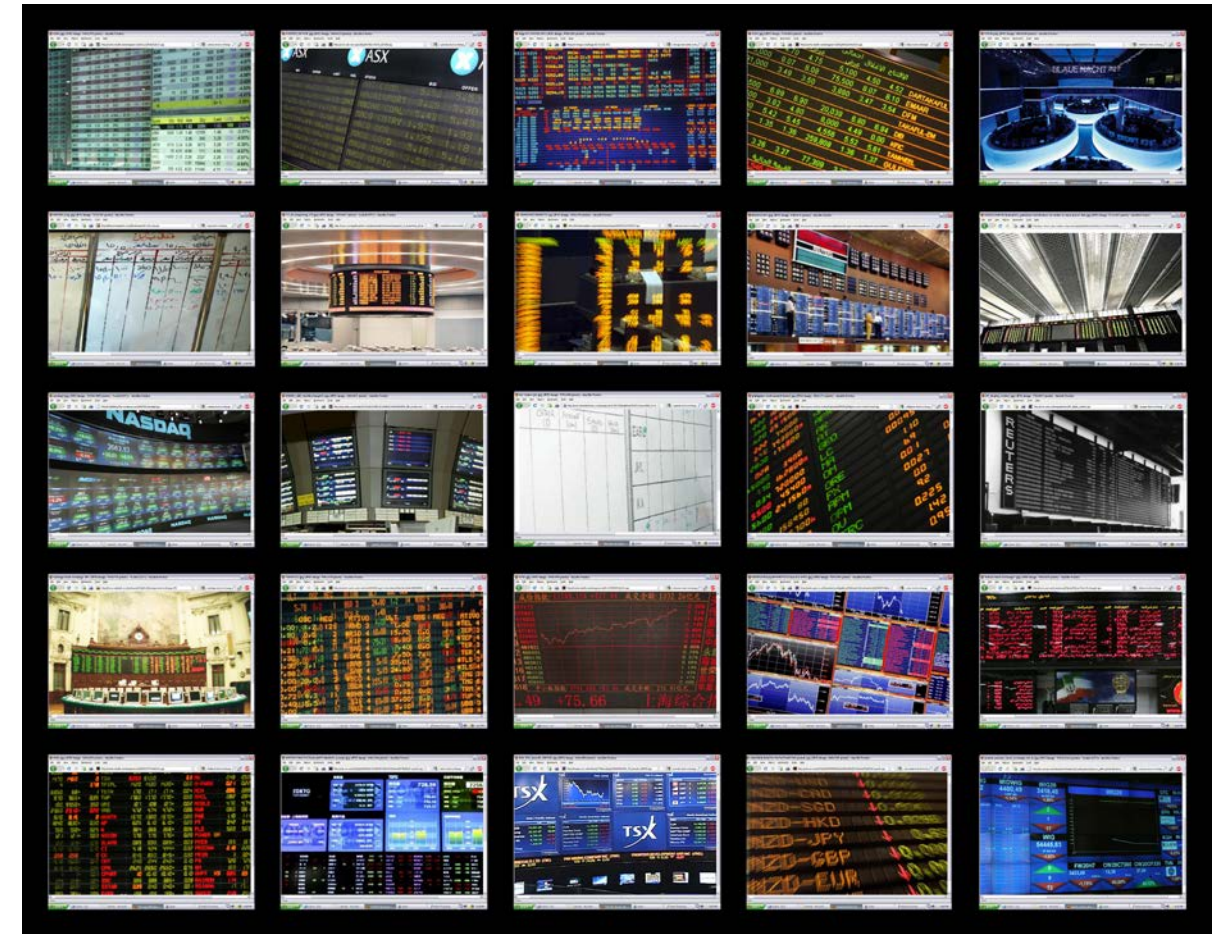
With the Internet my socio-political projects became more comprehensive, tending toward inquiry as well as exposition. As I have said elsewhere in this writing a bit of research on the Internet does not make one an expert in any topic, but it does provide a breadth of views, as well as sufficient information, that allows for the possibility of presenting more and better evidence. That is to say that, while information does not equal knowledge, it may open our eyes to possibilities, it can clarify open questions, and it can lead to other, more pertinent inquiries.

I avoid being interpretive or declarative in my projects for several reasons. First, I don’t consider myself sufficiently expert in most areas that I investigate. Second, I think being dogmatic within a presentation can easily inhibit an intellectually interactive environment, as in speaking to the choir versus allowing for a variety of opinions. And third, my intention in making art is to simply promote intellectual and perceptual growth as best I can, not to strew, like the spreading of manure, my sometimes equivocal personal opinions.



Empire: 25 Young Prostitutes

2011

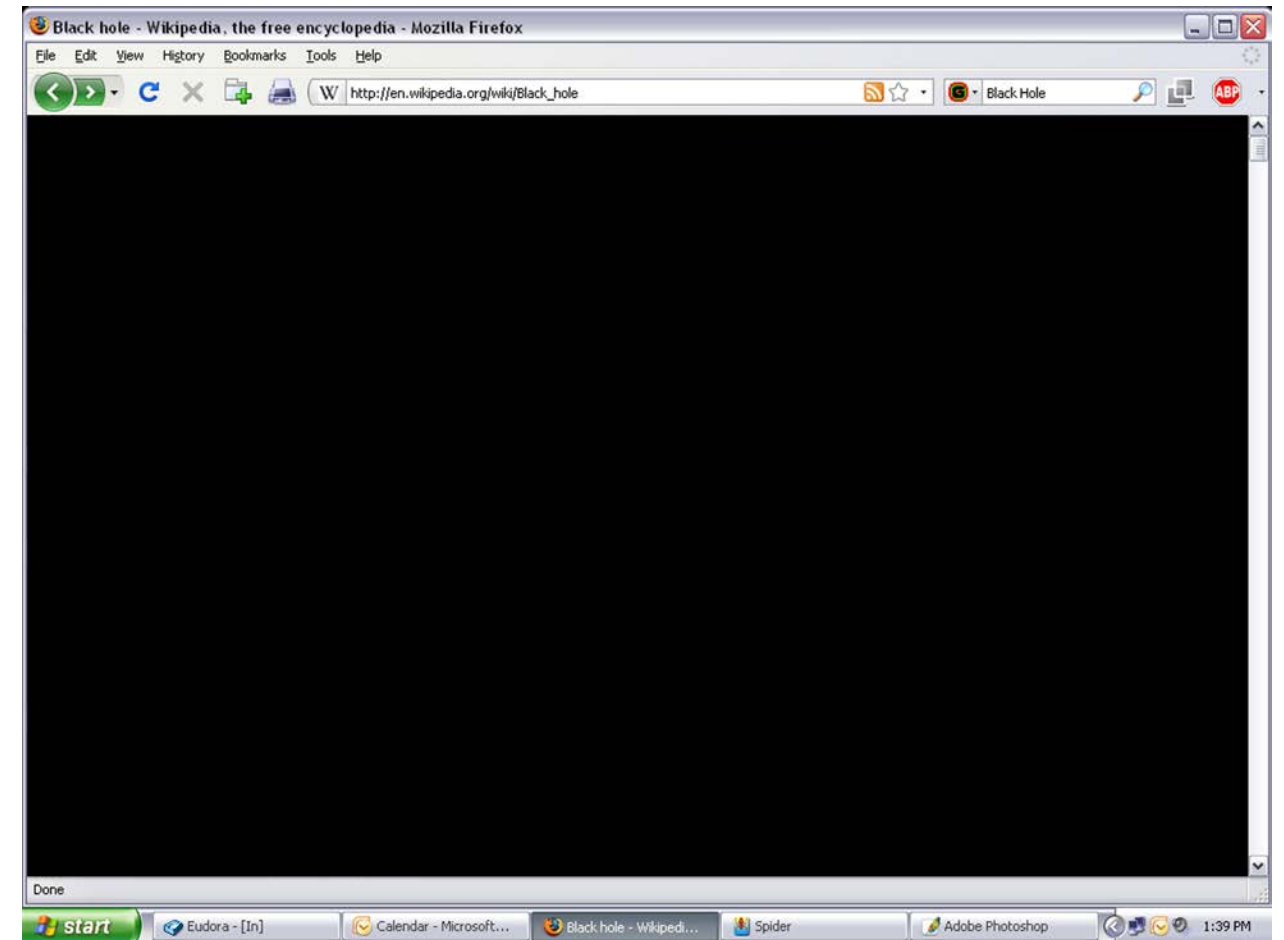


Empire: 25 Stock Exchanges

2011

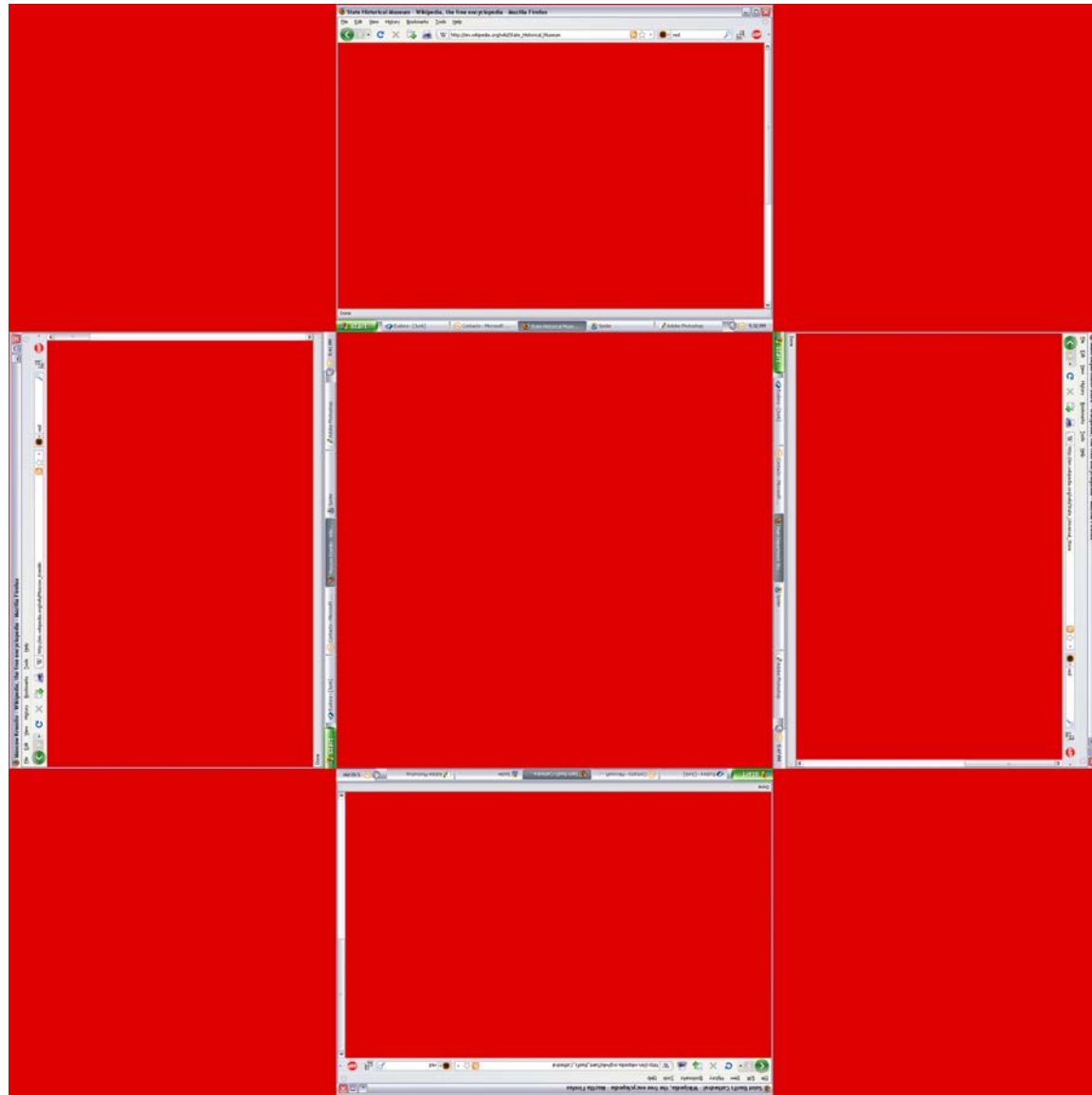
Despite my use of the Internet for source material, I don't like the computer. I think it is a drug. It's addictive. It abets my tendency to sit. I usually feel like I'd rather be outside doing almost anything. Seeing actual things. Making physical movements. That feeling is what led me to my recent projects, *Intersections*, *Worldview*, and *Stepping Off/Stepping Up*, all of them photographic projects that take me out of the studio to various physical locations. Yet what happens with those projects? I end up bringing them back to the computer for editing. No problem! At least I get out a bit. And though I really like these projects, they are more like sketches. The works that I feel most fulfilled by, the works that feel like full-fledged artworks, are the investigatory projects, like *Dozens of Things That I Want*, *Empire*, and *Atmospheric Resources Tracking, Incorporated*.

In spite of my self-congratulatory fullness, I do believe my immersion in the world of the spider-Web has caused me to become subject to the pall of "Brave New World" or "1984" woven together into an immense, potentially suffocating, shroud: which brings up the question, about how does one establish an independent self within such an all-intrusive environment? With every keystroke someone, or many someones, are documenting my moves and grasping at my individualistic soul with their clammy, viscous tentacles. If I research some very specific item, like taking a cruise to Antarctica, my computer is suddenly saturated with spam about that very topic. But I have made this trade with the devil, the very same Mephistopheles whom my art work often rails against. To paraphrase an old line by Dick Gregory (look him up), I have not only subjugated myself to the cosmos of this otherworldly authority, I am paying actual money for the privilege of doing that. I have become a curmudgeon about the Cloud. I avoid the Cloud, this great capitalistic ploy, while knowing that I am on it or within it – somewhere – without my consent.



Coloring: *Black Hole*

2010



Coloring: Red Square

2010

That all said (and I apologize just a bit for that little rant), I still at least get to have my say within my work. It seems like an oddly circular arrangement; enriching the very folks whose wealth I call into question; using the power of the center to call attention to the margins. But that again speaks to the confusion between capitalism and democracy. Like others, I have attempted to make peace with this Faustian arrangement; using the Internet as a tool to call attention to the issues that I feel are of value: Attempting to penetrate or perforate the omnipresent stasis resulting from class demarcation at both ends of the economic spectrum.

What got me to this particular mind set was my acceptance that art is about truth, about exposing realities that are difficult to see. There are innumerable kinds of truth that become obscure to us. Sometimes those truths are blurred when we are very young, at home and in school, the way things are told to us, sometimes without out a clear analysis. Sometimes that blur occurs before our very adult eyes, presented by biased authorities of all kinds. What we are rarely taught, particularly when we are young, is how to understand those influences in order to assess them objectively. In art these truths appear in a broad spectrum of forms, from starkly visual to exceedingly social. They are available to be seen, but it seems it often becomes the artist's function to make these truths evident.

I used the Internet to gather and study information for projects such as *A.R.T. Inc.*, *Empire*, *The Democracy Album*, and *Dozens of Things That I Want*. And I used it again to extract and produce presentation imagery for those same projects, as well as for *DuSable Park: An archeology*, *The Inconsequential Suite*, *Evidence*, and *Coloring*. I have been able to contact working class people around the world, using the Amazon Mechanical Turk outsourcing app; extract geophysical and socially significant information for the postcard projects; *See you when we get home*. and *Old Friends*; and collect relevant data for the personal expose', *I'll always have Spider Solitaire*. All of which simply points out the age-old adage that new technology almost always means equivocal progress.

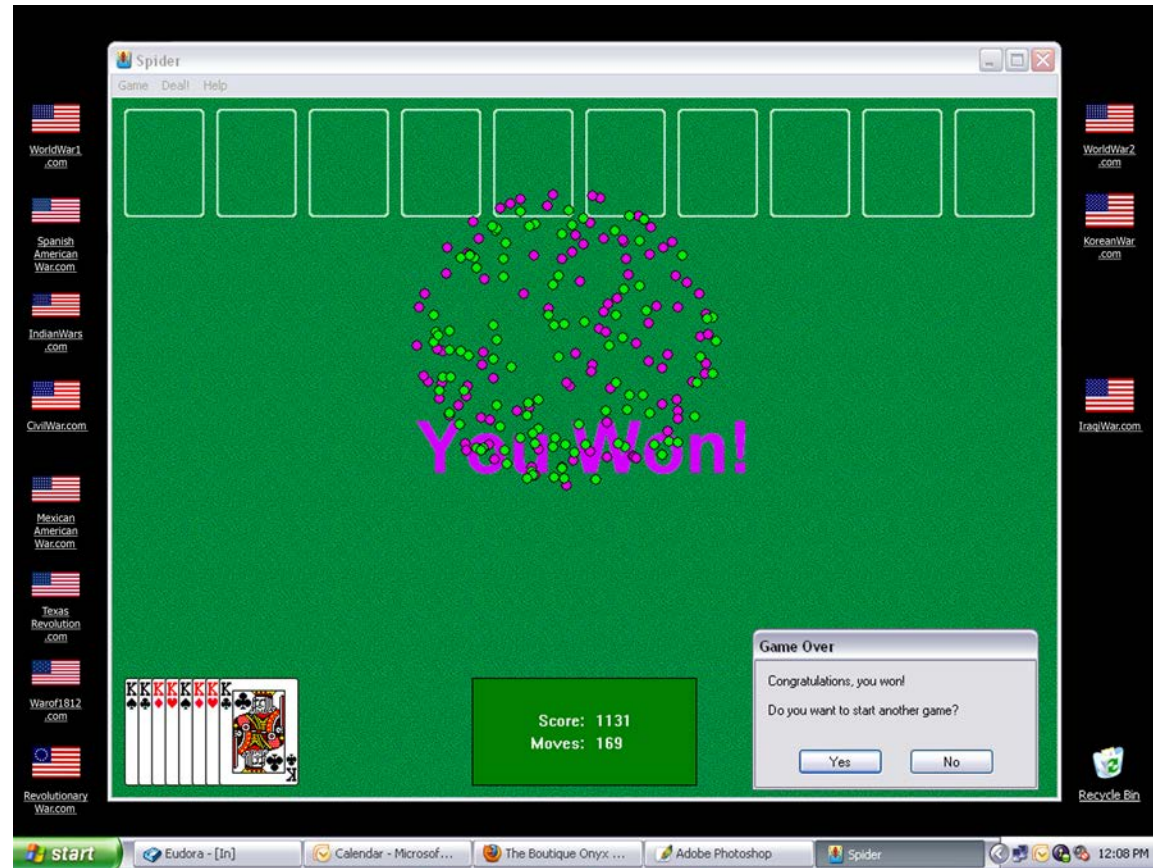


I'll Always Have Spider Solitaire: Don't Panic!

2011

While I was gathering information about the World Economic Forum conference in Davos, Switzerland, for *Empire* (2011), I was able to look into the progress of proposed water and electrical projects in India and Africa. I investigated the global structures and assets of the largest international corporations, and I studied the public CIA files on many different countries. I was able to get images of large and small financial trading centers around the world. I captured images of counterrevolutionary militias and young women who were being trafficked and sold into prostitution. I saw pictures of migrants risking their lives to cross large and dangerous bodies of water, and I saw the slums that they left behind. I didn't experience any of this first hand; I was a voyeur. The Internet allowed me to collect these images, and compose them and the survey material, and the letters, and more, into a presentational format.

It is an understatement to say that the Internet is an extremely complicated tool. There are very simple tools, an awl, for instance, that do just one thing; an awl makes a hole. There aren't any ramifications to using an awl that the user is not in control of. Set the point, tap the top, and you have it. Hole. Paint brushes are a bit more complex. Different shapes, sizes, types of bristles. Techniques for applying the paint. It gets very specialized, but still, it is all fairly well contained. And if you are not happy with the results of your brush stroke, you can conceal it with more paint, or you can toss the canvas!



I'll Always Have Spider Solitaire: War Games

2011

With the Internet there is no tossing back. The Internet is perplexing, too much so for non-professionals to be able to comprehend. Cookies, for example, used to be a big deal. Cookies were what we were all warned about. There was a time when you could actually decide about whether to keep a cookie or not. I know we can still toss them out, but, yes, they just come right back. Now, I don't even know what is being used to capture my activities on the Internet. But what I am so awkwardly trying to decipher while I am writing this, is that once having used the Internet as a tool for a specific purpose, the process that one has started, and perhaps completed, just doing a search, for example, continues to expand beyond its original purpose and intent in a perfect illustration of butterfly/chaos theory (where the butterfly's flapping wings affect weather around the world). You type in a search question, get a bunch of potential answers, already filtered by which answer gets to be on top, but the question itself, the search, keeps on going, everywhere, in a potential nightmare scenario of 'I really didn't mean to do that! Other people may continue to see that search long after you have forgotten that it actually occurred. Or your question, with you as the source, is logged into a server that is connected to other servers, and so on. Nothing is deleted.

When you use the awl to make a hole, the hole is yours. You can show it, hide it, or destroy it. If you choose, the hole will never be seen. Of course, you can make the case that the hole is a negative; that it is non-material, a non-thing. That what exists is what surrounds the hole. Still, whichever part you want to control, you are, for the most part, able to. But with the Internet, once you press return, or enter, your search takes on an expansive and potentially infinite life.

I bring this all up because I think that our use of the Internet includes these phenomena or ramifications as a part of the work artists are doing. Perhaps pressing that button is art work, or part of an artwork, maybe not. Still there should be no naivety about it. We are not just getting an answer to something when we do a Google search, we are asking a question that others are seeing and putting to use in ways that we have no sense of or recourse about.

Listing



Acreage

28 sq. ft./\$ See Agent

This large, 2 story home is set in the midst of a lushly landscaped 2 acre site. With easy access to major transportation routes, it is still designed to maintain maximum privacy for its owners.

Dozens of Things That I Want: Listing 4

2016

Listing



Urban River Front
 12 sq. ft./\$ Undervalued

This home is sited along an intimate and quiet plot of land along a calm stretch of urban river.

Lot sizes are adequate to give appreciable space between neighbors, and the neighborhood itself is landscaped to inhibit transient through-traffic.

Dozens of Things That I Want: Listing 5

2016

Listing



3-Story with Views
 16 sq. ft./\$ Great Value

Elegant vertical residence with rooftop deck
 And attached garage.
 Spacious lot away from neighbors.

Must see.

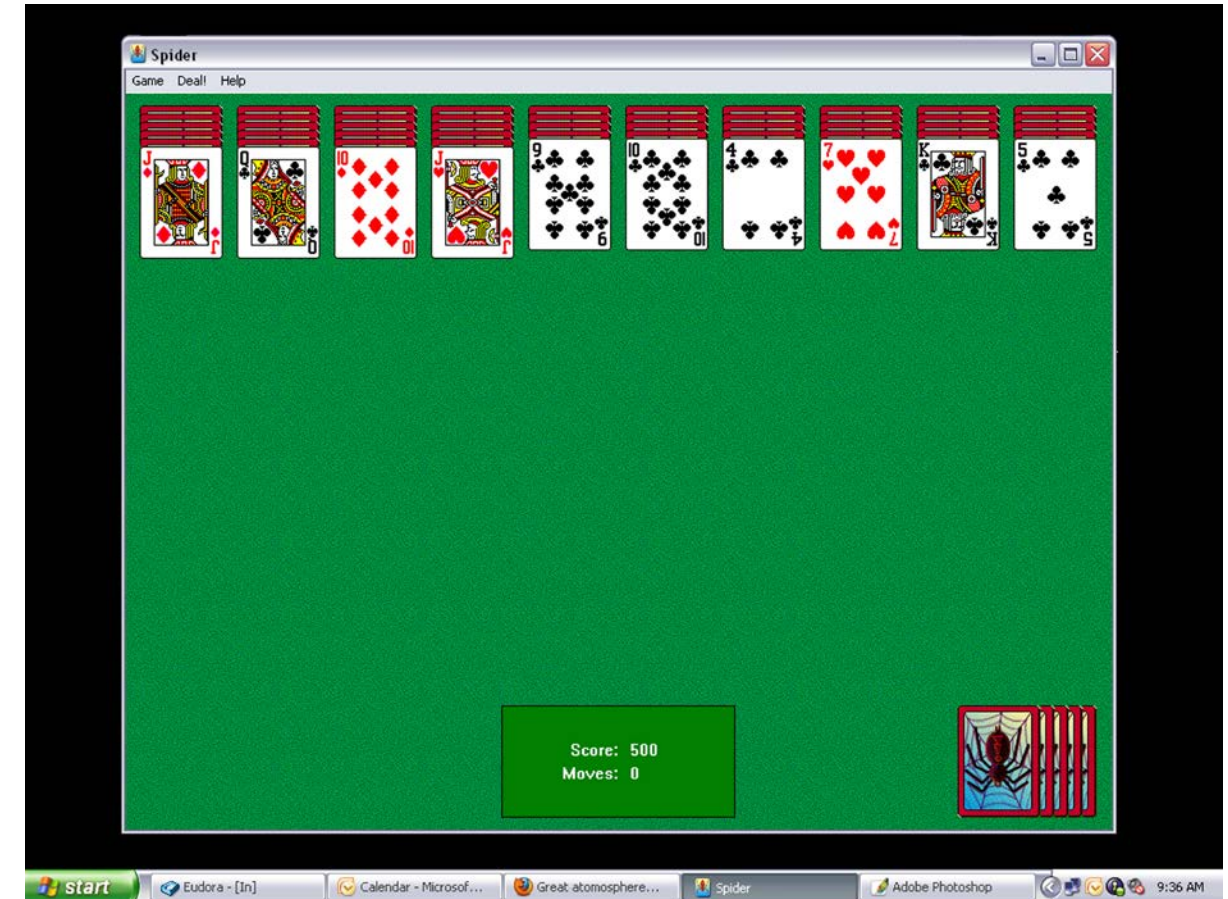
Dozens of Things That I Want: Listing 11

2016

In one sense this really is what art does, puts out information while letting go of control. The difference here is that we don't think we are making art when we do a search on the Internet. We think we are just making a hole with an awl; push a button/tap the broad end of the metal spine. Question answered/hole made. We inure ourselves to whatever consequences these actions have, because how else can we go on doing what we want to do? And in that way, just like the unselfconscious use of Facebook, or freely disseminated selfies, we change ourselves and, by extension, all of society.

There are of course artists who use the Internet purposely and purposefully to take advantage of its capabilities, artists that work with developer codes, scripts, and search engines. They filter and harness information that embeds within their programs and, like sperm impregnates ovum, a new message emerges. They revolve information so that as it comes in, it is reinterpreted, and then spun out. In and out. Continuously reinterpreting and rotating. Completely embedded. No buttons are needed. No hammer tapping.

And as far as craft is concerned, isn't it obvious that one person's spin of a pottery wheel, or knitting with thread and fabric, or particularly their mixing of oil and pigment, is another person's weaving of electronic material?



I'll Always Have Spider Solitaire: Campaign 1



I'll Always Have Spider Solitaire: Campaign 2

2011



I'll Always Have Spider Solitaire: Campaign 3

2011



I'll Always Have Spider Solitaire: Campaign 4

2011



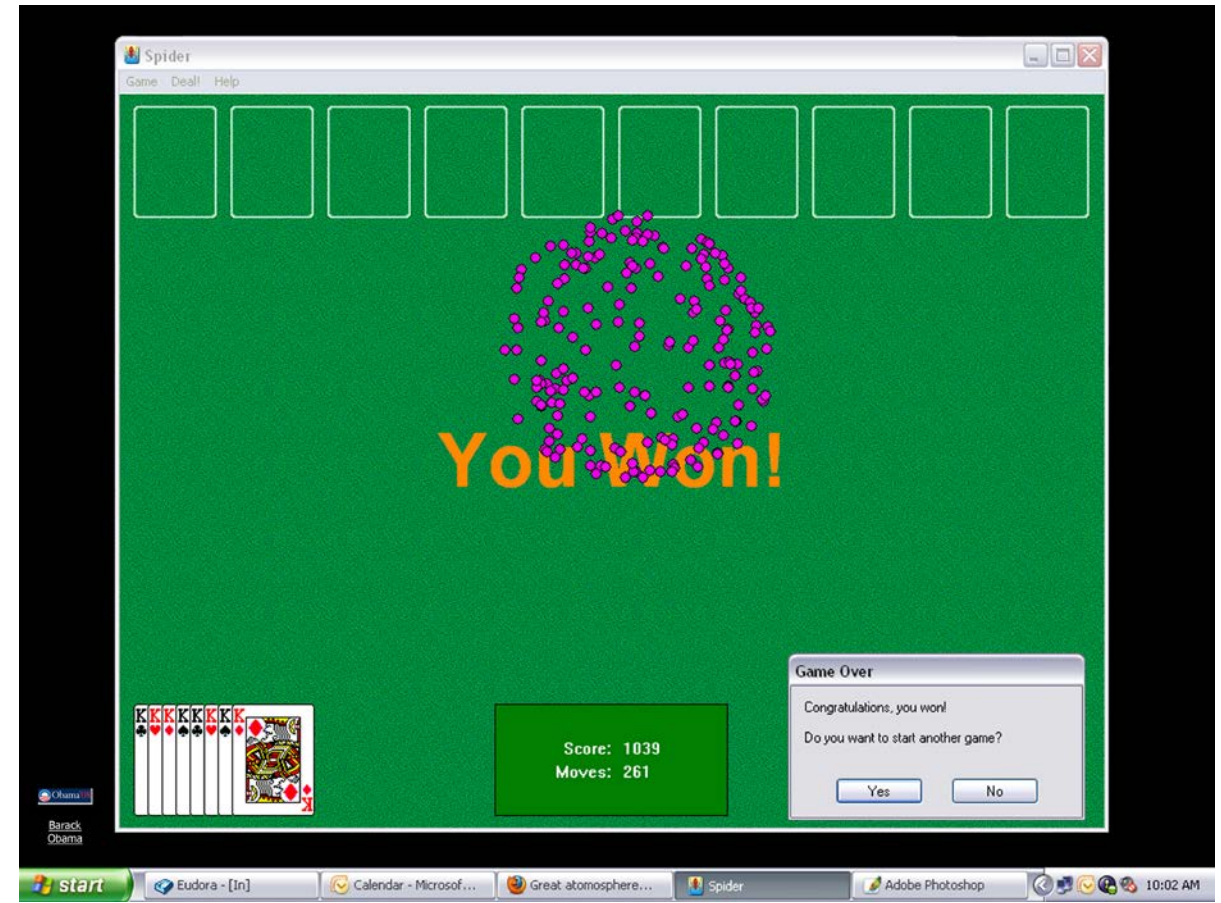
I'll Always Have Spider Solitaire: Campaign 5

2011



I'll Always Have Spider Solitaire: Campaign 6

2011



I'll Always Have Spider Solitaire: Campaign 7

2011

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