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*Man with Hands on Face*
*Depressed Businessman in Front of Cityscape*
*Businessman Resting Head in Hands*
*A Girl in Black Nightdress Sitting on Bed with White Cover*
*Middle-aged Man with Head in Hands*
*A Portrait of an Older Woman Hiding Her Face from the Camera with Her Hand*
*Man Covering His Face*
*Businessman in Empty Office, Sad*
*Man Holding Hands in Front of Face*
*Depressed Businessman*
*Depressed Businesswoman*
*Depressed Senior Man*
*Close-up of a Man Looking Depressed*
*Businessman Sitting on Briefcase in the Desert*
*Grief*
*Woman Hiding Face, Side View*
*Girl with Face Covered by Hands*
*Businessman Sitting with Head in Hands*
*Young Man with Dark Hair*
*Woman Fired from Her Job*
*Man with Hand over Face*
*Woman Sitting on Stairs*
*Close-up of a Businessman with His Head in His Hands*
*Man Covering His Face with His Hand*
*Depressed Middle-aged Man*
*Disappointed Businessman with Hands on Face*
*Senior Hispanic Woman Covering Face with Hands*
SAD, DEPRESSED, PEOPLE

Stock photography is a mode of representation that has kept careful pace with advanced capitalism. The photographer provides all labor and resources to produce an image with no known future, no certain use. An empty signifier waiting to be filled with content, the stock photograph comes into existence under the terms of speculation. In finance, speculation is understood as the assumption of risk in anticipation of gain. Here the stock photographer, if she or he is up for the challenge, can mitigate risk through skillful command of cliché.

Browse through any online collection of stock photos. It’s a vast database of consumer desire narrated through a generic set of keywords. Like a 1950s psychiatric hospital, here is where the photograph comes to be lobotomized. Hollowed of any meaning, vitality, or agency, the photograph waits for the creative director or advertising exec to decide its fate and for the intellectual property lawyer to enforce its copyright. The conceivable force and profit behind such operations is poignant in contrast to the limpness and cheapness of the image itself.

Type the keywords “sad, depressed, people” and here is what turns up: mental anguish styled into its most photogenic pose. Photos poised to sell us our antidepressants and debt relief services. The very image of the social relations capitalism engenders to market us the cure to the problem that is itself.

Laurel Ptak
Stockholm, 2012

GLOSSARY

Affect
Unlike emotions, which are mental phenomena, affects refer equally to body and mind. In fact, affects, such as joy and sadness, reveal the present state of life in the entire organism, expressing a certain state of the body along with a certain mode of thinking. Affective labour, then, is labor that produces or manipulates affects. One can recognize affective labor in, for example, the work of legal assistants, flight attendants, and fast food workers (service with a smile). One indication of the rising importance of affective labor is the tendency for employers to highlight education, attitude, character, and “pro-social” behavior as the primary skills that employees need.

Antidepressant
Currently one in ten Americans is taking some form of medication to cure depression. The antidepressant has come to symbolize health as consumerism.

Assembly Line for Images
The image today can be seen as going through an assembly line of sorts, where it is difficult to demarcate an ending. Various stages include the actual taking of a photograph or photographs, where a camera is in use; editorial processes; digital manipulation with computers; the production of metadata; compiling a list of tags, creating titles, writing descriptions; the image’s circulation (here, on a stock site), its waiting to be purchased, its recirculation once “consumed” to be “consumed” again by the public, by the public. Etc....

Advertisement
Picture a future desire not yet thought up. That’s most likely what the pictures in this book are for. Why they exist. They anticipate and materialize an abstract or imaginary need created to sell you something. Overall spending on advertising in 2010 was estimated at more than $300 billion in the United States and $500 billion worldwide.

Advertising Executive
Like Donald Draper from the TV show Mad Men. Toasted. Like him. Warm in that way. He smokes forty a day but still swims those lengths. The advertising executive no longer wears a suit. He now lives in your brain.

Camp
An aesthetic or sensibility derived from deliberately theatrical or ridiculous costumes or gestures. Camp is usually humorous, closely aligned with kitsch.

Capitalism
The less said about this the better. Though (like a twitch)
these thoughts follow to im-
mediately contradict what has
gone before. Hatred of capital-
ism? What about the love of it?
For the love of it. Who knows
anything else.

Charlie Chaplin

The greatest silent film actor.
In the absence of dialogue, silent-film-acting style required exaggerated gestures and body language to tell the story. I wonder could one apply details from Chaplin’s career here? For instance, in 1936 Chaplin produced the film Modern Times as a comment on the desperate employment and fiscal conditions many people faced during the Great Depression—conditions created, in Chaplin’s view, by the so-called efficiencies of modern industrialization. Modern Times portrays Chaplin as a factory worker employed on an assembly line. After being subjected to such indignities as being force-fed by a “modern” feeding machine and working on an accelerating assembly line where Chaplin screws nuts at an ever-increasing rate onto pieces of machinery, he suffers a mental breakdown that causes him to run amok, throwing the factory into chaos. Consider this in relationship to today’s reorganization of time, power, capitalism, and class via immaterial labor and digital culture—where images are produced at an ever-increasing rate.

Cliché

An expression, idea, image, or element of an artistic work that has been overused to the point of losing its original meaning or effect, especially when at some earlier time it was considered meaningful or novel. The word’s etymology is particularly interesting. In printing, a cliché was a printing plate cast from movable type (also called a “stereotype”). When letters were set one at a time, it made sense to cast a phrase used repeatedly as a single slug of metal. “Cliché” came to mean such a ready-made phrase. The French word cliché is said to come from the sound made when the molten stereotyping metal is poured onto the matrix to make a printing plate.

Commodity Form

One question the publication of this book raises is if, by turning these images and ideas onto the commodity form of a book, does the book become just an extension and embodiment of the same kind of problem it attempts to address? After all, don’t these images get subjected to many of the same forms of alienation and re-authorship as they are pushed along an “assembly line”—editing, design, writing, etc.—in the production of meaning? And are the labor practices in play here really any different or more ideal than that of the stock photography model? Even though many people have participated in the construction of this object and its meaning, what is the hierarchy of who benefits from this—either financially, symbolically, or otherwise? How can we move beyond this form of “soft critique” that the art world enables? Are there better or more sincere ways to address such issues?

Copyright Infringement

The unauthorized or prohibited use of works under copyright, infringing the copyright holder’s “exclusive rights,” such as the right to reproduce or perform the copyrighted work, spread the information contained within copyrighted works, or make derivative works. These are violations of “intellectual property,” rights typically assigned by a work’s creator to a publisher or other business representing his or her interests.

David Horvitz

The name is the ultimate key-
word/tag. It is exactly what you are looking for. It is and it gives a kind of value to information. The name is not just a name, and it is not just “you.” In fact, it is not you at all. It is all the information that is culled, all the circulating “biographies” sourced and re-sourced. Look up your own name. What is all that crap that returns? View the profiles of professionals named David Horvitz on LinkedIn. There are 7 professionals named David Horvitz who use LinkedIn to exchange information... David Horvitz is on Facebook. Join Facebook to connect with David Horvitz and others you may know. Facebook gives people the power to share and makes the... Sign up for Twitter to follow David Horvitz (@davidhorvitz). Our names have been hijacked for the profit of others.

Debt Relief

Personal debt has become an increasingly large problem in many developed countries primarily due to credit bubbles. For instance, it is estimated that the average US household has $19,000 in non-mortgage debt. With such large debt loads, many individuals have difficulty making repayments on debts and are in need of help. As it was during the Great Depression, suicide is becoming an increasingly popular response to debt. There are many companies who offer and advertise debt consolidation services. However, such services may not always be in the best interests of the person involved, and may require taking out a loan secured by a person’s home. Marketing materials are designed to persuade customers to take up the company’s offer rather than offering a solution tailored to a specific person’s needs.

Depression

The term depression was derived from the Latin verb deprimere, “to press down.” From the fourteenth century, “to depress” meant to subdue or to bring down in spirits. The term also came into use in psychology and economics.

Effect

What, after all, is an “effect”? The word is familiar enough. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, its earliest appearance, just antecedent to Chaucerian times, denoted either a “result” or “goods, movable property.” Other applications would soon arise, however, including a pair that seem directional opposites along a single axis of causality, pertaining to “a mode or degree of operation on an object” and, conversely, “the physical result of an action of force.” Here the significance and usage, one imagines, were determined by context—by the grammar of a given situation. Yet all these different meanings are germane and even possess a kind of simultaneity today, when it comes to digital effects bought and sold in filter packages ranging from Adobe Premiere to Final Cut Pro. Indeed, they are tightly interwoven, production and product, dynamic and object, catalyst and consequence. For at stake in this specific contemporary context—where the effect is understood as “a visual or acoustic device used to convey atmosphere or the illusion of reality”—it is an impression of naturalistic action or behavior rendered in what is, in fact, inanimate form. Put another way, as a simulation device, the “effect” posits a kind of chronology where there is none—suggesting some precipitant act responsible for the visual and aural phenomena taking place before the eye and ear. The “ef-

fect” creates nothing so much as a rhetorical hole in time, but only in order to fill that hole in advance with some false history or phantom memory for the individual viewer (so that he or she encounters the world intact, and also anew). In this way, while the above examples of Adobe Premiere and Final Cut Pro are relevant, most aptly named is no doubt Adobe After Effects: After what? one might reasonably ask, uncertain of what could possibly constitute a “before.”

ImageTracker™

Data provided by those in a po-
sition to benefit from copyright infringement shows that more than 80 percent of rights-managed images used on commercial websites today are infringements. ImageTracker™ successfully identifies hundreds of image rights infringement cases for clients every day. ImageTracker™ employs proprietary image recognition and digital fingerprinting tech-
ologies to proactively search
the Internet for images. Clients know exactly who has used their work, where it’s been used, and, after internal client validation, if each reported use is actually authorized.

Intellectual Property

The term "intellectual property" refers to a number of distinct types of creations of the mind for which a set of exclusive rights are recognized under the corresponding fields of law. Within intellectual property law, owners are granted certain exclusive rights to a variety of intangible assets, such as musical, literary, and artistic works; discoveries and inventions; and words, phrases, symbols, and designs. Common types of intellectual property rights include copyrights, trademarks, patents, industrial design rights, and trade secrets in some jurisdictions.

Metadata

Within digital imaging, metadata is information that may be written into a digital photo file identifying the file’s owner, its copyright, contact information, the camera used to create the file, along with exposure information and descriptive information such as keywords about the photo—all of which can be used to make the file searchable within computer file systems and on the Internet. Recently, metadata has been increasingly activated as a site of economic power and legal contestation. Problems involving metadata in litigation in the United States are becoming widespread. Florian Schneider has begun to compellingly theorize metadata itself as a cultural form. In "Theses on the Concept of the Digital Simulacrum" he explains: "metadata appear as coordinates which have to be synchronized in order to anchor the digital image that is always on the move in a real life and that otherwise would have no connection to reality. It becomes obvious that metadata are the surplus value which is to be appropriated and expropriated from the images.... In an economy based on imaginary property the real abstraction of the exchange has turned into its opposite, the real-time exchange of data that are abstracted from the image which does not portray or equal anything anymore. What matters instead is the instant comparison of metadata that are divested and transformed into relational value. Relational value is everything but beyond measure. In fact it solves a fundamental problem: how can one quantify the appropriation of images in terms of value if what is produced is immaterial or merely affective, let alone imaginary? What can be counted, measured and traded are in fact the relations generated from the abstraction of metadata out of images."

Motivation

The general willingness to do something. But also, motivation is the underlying reason for doing something in the first place ("What's your motivation?"). Gilles Deleuze famously quipped near the end of his life that "young people strangely boast of being 'motivated.'" Everyone agrees (from employers to activists) that losing one's motivation is something to be avoided at all cost, producing a kind of ultimate stasis or death.

Oil of the 21st Century

In an interview with the Economist in 2000, businessman Mark Getty, co-founder of the stock photo agency Getty Images and grandson of oil magnate J. Paul Getty (whose collection and trust incidentally form the basis of the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, California), infamously asserted that "intellectual property is the oil of the twenty-first century." Getty Images is a supplier of stock images for business and consumers with an archive of more than 80 million images. The company has caused controversy for aggressive pursuit of intellectual property enforcement on behalf of its photographers. Rather than pursue a policy of sending out "cease and desist" notices, Getty typically mails out a letter claiming substantial sums of damages to owners of websites that it believes are using its images in infringement of its photographers’ copyrights. However, Getty rarely if ever issues court proceedings, instead relying on debt collection agencies to enforce its claims.

PhotoShop

PhotoShop is a ubiquitous computer software application produced by Adobe Systems that allows for the manipulation of images. The result is a hall of mirrors where we the people look out onto the media landscape and see a fabrication of an ideal type presenting itself as reality. In reality these ideal types are literally impossible to achieve, as the images have no fidelity to reality. A Photoshopped image is not indexical, it is a painting.

Prozac

In 1969, Swedish scientist Arvid Carlsson made discoveries that would eventually lead to the creation of the drug Prozac, probably the world's most famous antidepressant. Carlsson found that when an electrical impulse passed from one neuron to another, the substance serotonin was released into the space between the neurons—the synapse—to help the "message" be transmitted. After it had done its job, the serotonin was reabsorbed by the neuron. But antidepressants prevented the neurons from taking the serotonin back. Instead, it remained in the synapse, where its presence seemed to help the patient recover from depression. By 1990, Prozac was the most prescribed antidepressant, with 850,000 prescriptions written or renewed each month. Annual sales soon topped $1 billion. Prozac is not just a pharmaceutical but a brand, a shorthand for instant, artificial happiness and medication as a lifestyle choice.

Sad, Depressed, People

Stock photographs are intended for circulation in the channels of advertising, news media, etc., and are intended for public consumption. "Sad, depressed, people" images are interesting because they portray a negativity, rather than something ideal. They may end up in a news article about Prozac, or in an advertisement for a domestic abuse hotline. The sadness here is a pseudo-sadness, it is performed, superficial. (It is almost an oxymoron for sadness, out of all the emotions, to be superficial, because it is a feeling that has so much depth.) If we can make the presumption that consumer society itself has some responsibility for the problem of depression today, these images can be seen almost as a strange self-portrait of our society. There is a loss of meaning in one's life, the loss of social and public spaces, the decline in social relationships, and a loss of an engagement with the world itself. The sadness here is just as empty.

Similar Image

The similar image is the image that is just like another image. It is a specific genre/cliche. It serves the same function as the original image to evoke the same feelings/meaning/associations. It is essentially the same image, yet different. A similar image may be cheaper. It may have different resolution, different reproduction rights.

Stock Photograph

A photo that is an empty signifier, waiting to be filled with content. It has an entirely different economy of meaning than other kinds of photographs. The stock photograph is ultimately destined for a life of circulation and it does not know its future. As David Horvitz described this kind of photo to me: "It is the intention of the photographer to make something that has no known future, but has an open future. To make things that are intended to wait. Like purgatory."

Suicide

There is a persistently false myth, set partially in motion in 1960 by American president Dwight D. Eisenhower, that the country of Sweden has the world's highest suicide rate.
This is (and was in 1960) statistically incorrect. The idea was born by reports in the New York Times and gathered momentum through a well-publicized speech by Eisenhower, which read: "This country [Sweden, which was not named directly but understood clearly] has a tremendous record for socialistic operation, following a socialistic philosophy, and the record shows that their rate of suicide has gone up almost unbelievably and I think they were almost the lowest nation in the world for that. Now, they have more than twice our rate. Drunkenness has gone up. Lack of ambition is discernible on all sides. Therefore, with that kind of example, let's always remember Lincoln's admonition. Let's do in the federal Government only those things that people themselves cannot do at all, or cannot so well do in their individual capacities." It has been suggested that Eisenhower mobilized this (mis)information in order to promote capitalism as a superior economic and social system, which ultimately caused less sadness.

Tag

In information systems, a tag is a descriptive and non-hierarchical keyword or term assigned to a piece of information (such as an Internet bookmark, digital image, or computer file). This kind of metadata helps describe an item, often humanizing it, and allowing it to be found again by browsing or searching. Tags are generally chosen informally and personally by the item's creator or viewer and could be considered a form of digital affective labor.

Watermark

A watermark is a recognizable image or pattern in paper that appears as various gradations of lightness and darkness when viewed by transmitted light (or when viewed by reflected light, atop a dark background), caused by thickness or density variations in paper. Digital watermarking is the process of embedding information into a digital file or signal that may be used to verify its authenticity or the identity of its owners. In digital watermarking, the signal may be audio, pictures, or video. If the file or signal is copied, the watermark information is also carried in the copy as metadata.

Composed and Edited by
Sean Dockray
David Horvitz
Michael Mandiberg
Eric Nylund
Paul Pironi
Laurel Ptak

With Assistance from
Jaclyn Arndt
Jeff Koonsary

TAGS

1940s Style
1950–1959
1950s Style
20–24 Years
20s Adult
20th Century
25–29 Years
30–39 Years
30s Adult
35–39 Years
40–44 Years
40s Adult
45–49 Years
50–54 Years
50–59 Years
50s Adult
55–59 Years
60s Adult
70–79 Years
70s Adult
80 Plus Years
Adolescence
Adult
Adults Only
Adversity
African Ethnicity
African–American Ethnicity
Aging Process
Ailing
Alliment
Alcoholic Beverage
Alienated
Alienation
American
Anatomy
Anxiety
Baby Boomer
Bad News
Bag
Bangs
Barefoot
Bed
Bedding
Bedroom
Beginnings
Belgium
Beverage
Bitter
Black and White
Black Background
Blanket
Blond
Blond Hair
Blue
Boredom
Breakdowns
Briefcase
Brown Hair
Brunette
Brussels
Built Structure
Business
Business Person
Businessman
Businessmen
Businesspeople
Businesswomen
Button-down Shirt
Café
Capital Cities

Car Trouble
Caring
Casual Clothing
Caucasian Ethnicity
Challenge
Change
Characters
Child
Childhood
Children Only
Cityscape
City Life
Clean Sky
Clerk
Close-up
Close-up View
Clothing
Color Image
Colored Background
Comforting
Company Executive
Concentration
Concepts & Topics
Conceptual
Concern
Confidence
Conflict
Confusion
Conquering Adversity
Consideration
Container
Contemplation
Copy Space
Corporate Business
Covered
Covering
Co-worker
Crisis
Cry
Crying
Cuban Ethnicity
Cuffs
Cup
Cut Out
Cutout
Day
Daytime
Death
Decision-making
Defeat
Deliberating
Dependancy
Depression
Desert
Desk
Desk Lamp
Desolate
Despair
Difficult
Disappointment
Disconsolate
Discontented
Dismal
Displeased
Distracted
Domestic Life
Dress Shirt
Economic Downturn
Economic Issues
Economic Recession
Effort
Embarrassment