

# Empty Entries

RIC ROYER

• Fig. 1.



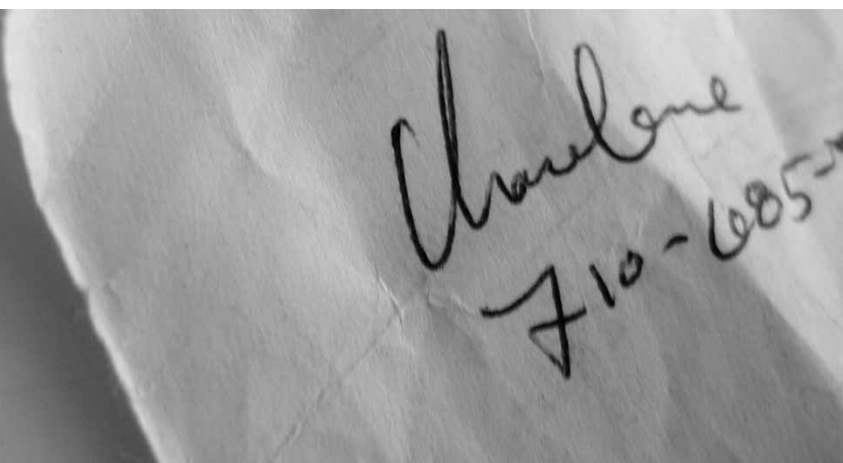
<sup>1</sup> See <http://weirdshadow.com/museum/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://denisetassin.com/>

There is a Museum of the Double. The collection archives twins, decoys, replicas and anything that fits the description by curators Julia Dzwonkoski and Cal Clements, as ‘two where there should be one’.<sup>1</sup> The Museum includes fake rats, Rorschach ink blots, a spork and over one hundred other objects.

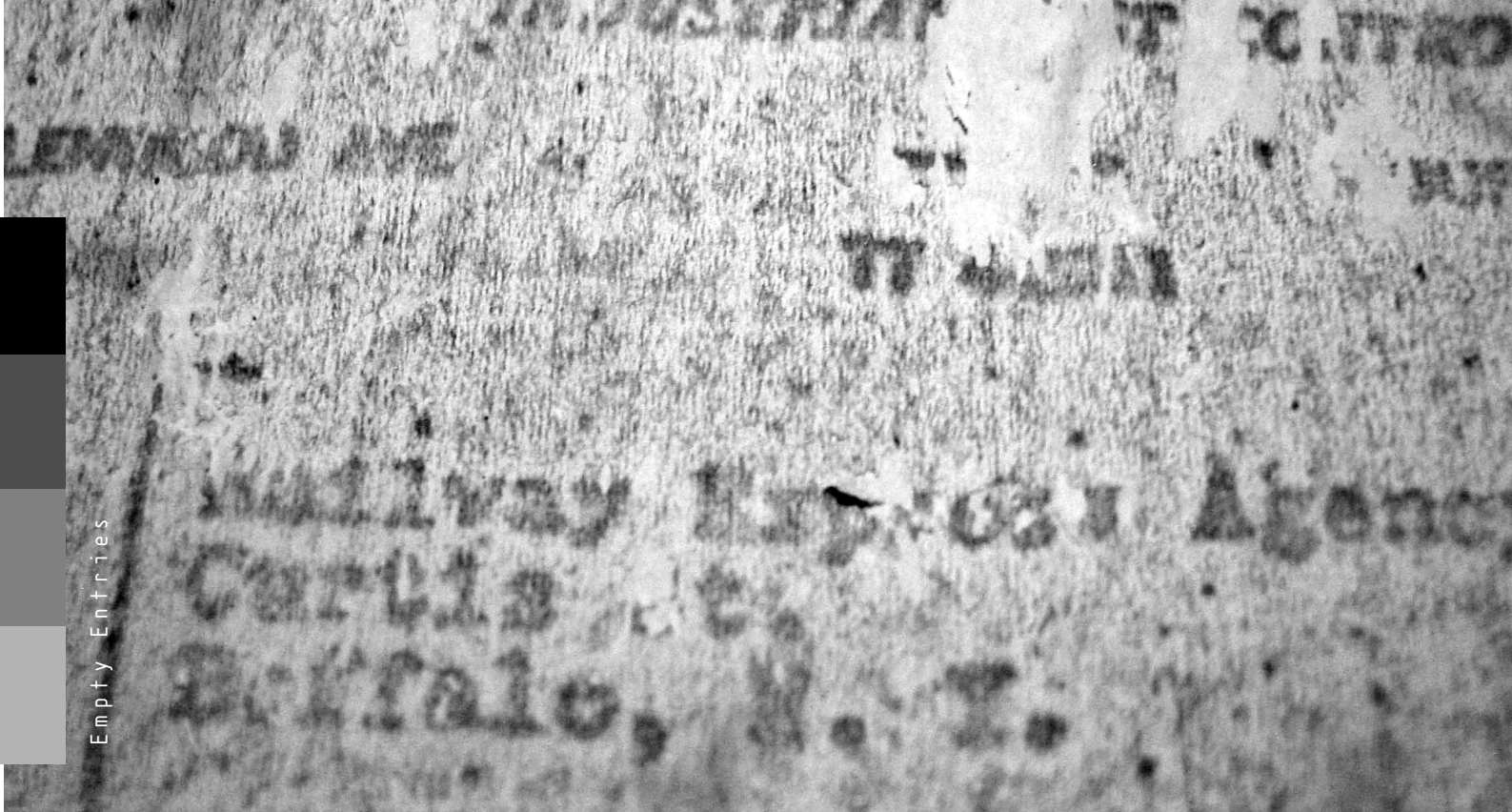
Inspired by the curatorial mission, I began thinking about the possibilities that would then fit a description of two where there should be one, or even vice versa. I became interested in the possibility of museums of the single, museums of the half, and especially museums of the not-quite. For several weeks after my musings on multiplicity, I documented my encounters with broken information, blocked recollections and dysfunctional indices. The following is a selection of images and reflections from this project of wholeness and potential, an archive of ‘one where there should be beyond one’.

• Fig. 2.



The color swatches [Fig. 1] are from the collection of Baltimore artist Denise Tassin.<sup>2</sup> They have been collected by Tassin on her various expeditions for curious acquisitions. At each encounter, the swatches were found in a context where they exercise their purpose as an indicator of a particular color - a name matched with a hue. They wear the color that they intend to relay. Framing color, naming color. Here, in the context of this grayscale publication, the swatches lose their purpose. The swatch implies that it carries a color reference, but in grayscale it can only refer to color in the generic sense, and cannot refer to the specific color it represents. For Tassin, the swatches perform their duty, not only in that they act as index of color, but she also arranges them on her studio walls in a composition of color range. But printed in grayscale, they are no longer an *example* of color. They become, like much formalist art, a formation without purpose. Yet maybe there is no such thing as a formation without purpose; perhaps purpose is always arbitrary and always in negotiation between the object and observer, like the interpretational procedure of language. Ultimately, the swatches may lose an original purpose when shown in grayscale, but acquire a new one, one that may irritate logic but satisfy an aesthetic appreciation. Still, there is the feeling of a potential not fulfilled. The name of a color without the color is not the color but the name.

A name can be remembered while what it represents vanishes from memory, as in **the**



• Fig. 3.

forgotten name found in a pocket [Fig. 2]. The name, scribbled on the piece of paper, might be found in an old pair of jeans, gone unworn for over two years. The pocket held on to the moment, the person on paper, but the writer no longer remembers the interaction. The name must have meant something; we can pass a thousand people in a day without ending up with a single one of their names in our pockets. I keep a list of everyone I meet.<sup>3</sup> It's an impossible task, which I attempt to resolve by setting definite criteria. The criteria require that I learn the person's first and last name, and that I have a certain unexplainable connection wherein I can say 'I have really *met* this person'. I don't know if this person on the piece of paper made the list, I can't be certain that I had any further contact with 'Charlene'. One of the curious phenomena about keeping the list is that even names that do make it, names of people I have talked to, possibly been close to, will often fail to evoke the image of the person for which the name stands. Lost, possibly forever. I do not erase the name from the list if I can't remember whom the name stands for, both

in hope that someday I will be able to remember again and because there is something profound in looking at a name that means nothing when it once had meaning. Nothing is something jarring to come across when it is in the place of something that once was.

I noticed this in the floor of the abandoned train station in Buffalo, NY. In one section of the station the floor is covered in what seems to be a severely water-damaged carpet [Fig. 3]. But closer inspection finds that the carpet is actually abandoned paper documents, bound together several inches thick by twenty-five years of continual process of dampening and drying. The top several layers bear no resemblance to paper, and even the best-preserved sheets towards the bottom of the pile can only transmit mostly **illegible text**. This is due to both weather erosion and the combination of cheap paper and mimeograph ink. With the erosion, what is intended might never be known. It is swallowed like a secret. Illegible text is a failure of notation. A system of notation implies collaboration, a transmission of a code established to record and relay. The

<sup>3</sup> See <http://ricroyer.com/everyone.htm>



• Fig. 4.

(legibly) written word becomes the memory for those who rely on it. When the words fail, histories are lost.

Likewise, the history of the **plastic flower** is lost [Fig. 4]. It was found in an attic, abandoned by previous tenants. There is something beyond this plastic. There is no reason to hang on to a fake flower unless it is a vessel containing a moment. This flower might hold the fading memory of innocence lost at a senior prom, a piece of a place visited, or a reminder of a person from one's past. It's a charged object, from 3-dimensions to four. It's an object that Christopher Fritton would include in his serial assemblage Ferrum Wheel,<sup>4</sup> a collection of found or otherwise one-of-a-kind objects in what becomes a distributed time-capsule, a modified absence. Fritton calls these items *hyperobjects*: objects that act as information carriers, landmarks or mnemonic devices. But an object like the plastic flower is also a mute object, an amnesiac object. It's an object that aggravates our emotions. The brain does not know what to do with the incomplete; it looks forward to completion. There is an undeniable feeling of pleasure that accompanies closure, and an equally undeniable frustration when encountering instances when closure is thwarted or delayed, when the index fails to work properly.

There is a sadness of loss, the puzzle with a missing piece, the incomplete narrative, the reference without the index, a melancholy of the hollow signifier. Sour resonance through the limbic system. Experiencing such objects of unfulfilled potential highlights our human relationship to wholeness and the desire for completion. Humanity has never ceased working on the potential of the archive, thus bringing us into the digital age and the space of the Internet, closer to a new universe than an archive.

The internet is a massive databank, but like any massive databank, there is the potential for information to become erased or blocked, accidentally even, lost possibly forever, like a misplaced book in the stacks of a large library. The potential for blocked potential on the web is felt in every broken hyperlink. The broken link, resulting in the '404' message, is an irritating dead-end. A dysfunction on the informational pathway. As the error message states, the desired page *might* have been removed, it *might* have been changed, it *might* have never existed. The only certainty is that the location of the page behind the glowing, underlined link is unknown to the viewer. Perhaps it is even unknown to its author, lost somewhere in a confusing cache of folders or trapped behind a forgotten password. The computer, with its attendant hard-drives, hardware and software, is a system designed to prevent loss, to store great amounts of data, but at the same time it risks loss at a greater scale. The hard drive becomes memory for those who rely on it. The external systems of archive and notation will always fail to suffice, juxtaposed with our internal emotional memory that never forgets, always indexing, always adapting for future use, making us miss, missed and missing. My mammalian brain, faced with the dilemma of knowing too much but never enough, will always *feel* my mortality in the mortality of moments, with my only consolation in believing that there is never nothing, only something else.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://ferrumwheel.blogspot.com/>