

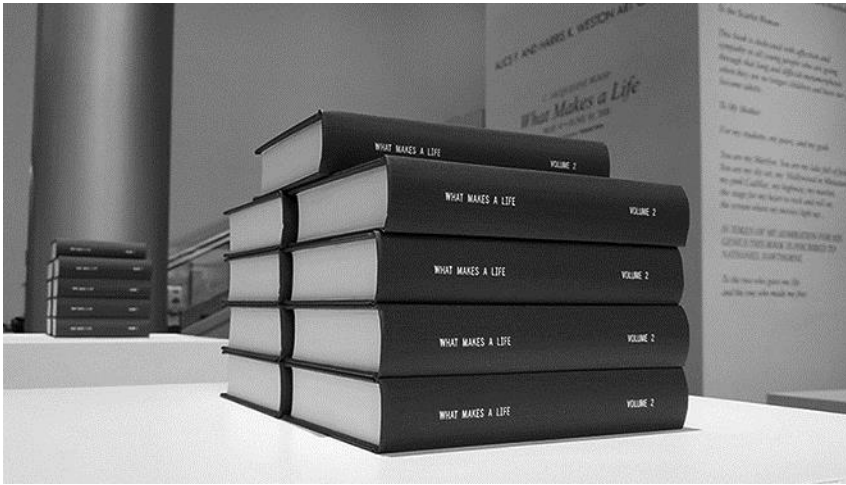
C. Jacqueline Wood: What Makes a Life

Alice F. and Harris K. Weston Art Gallery

May 4–June 10, 2018



What Makes a Life is a series of interconnected installations about information. As the digital is becoming the norm and analog is disappearing, the way we capture, store, access, and consume media is also shifting. **What Makes a Life** questions how this shift affects identity, belief systems, communication, visual culture, and the creation of personal and collective histories.



What Makes a Life – Volumes 1, 2, 3, 2018, hardbound books, signed editions #2-9 of 10
Volume 1: 9¼ x 6½ x 2 inches, Volume 2: 9¼ x 6½ x 1¾ inches, Volume 3: 9¼ x 6½ x 2¼ inches

When examining my own relationship to and navigation of information in the digital age, I felt compelled to catalogue all the media that I own which includes books, DVDs, LPs, newspapers, and magazines. The culminating volumes tell my story. They are a record of my interests and education, of the media that I received as gifts or inherited, the mixtapes I was given from old friends and ex-lovers, and the (embarrassing) pop music I listen to when I work out. I did not include the media that I have personally created, but the media created by others.

The long and arduous process of taking stock was an enlightening experience. I not only recorded the citations but went through and pulled text from each book, which has been used in other components of this show. Oftentimes I pondered who gave me the book or its previous owner. I discovered interesting passages of text and revisited old favorites. I also found many things stuck between the pages of these books, bits of ephemera, and interesting scribbles and notes, most notably from people who have long since passed away.

*Although **What Makes a Life – Volumes 1, 2, 3** were printed just a few weeks ago, they are already out of date. I have thrown out some of the old newspapers, received a few books as gifts... But, relatively speaking, the volumes are an accurate account of the books that line my shelves and the records I have in my peach crate, as well as the ridiculous reality television shows that I purchased in the past that now live in the iTunes cloud.*

I believe my drive to create a stable and tangible archive is in reaction to the way that we consume media today. Now we stream media, which I know is nothing new (like television and radio broadcasts), but nowadays it is more prominent than ever. The ease and convenience of streaming is undeniable. Modern technology presents such a breadth of choices, where many voices are represented and instantaneously accessed. But, I find digital navigation of new media much more deliberate than analog media. We don't surf the internet anymore or just flip through a magazine, but are pushed information through calculated notifications. More and more, we must question the role of algorithms in determining the information that we see and consume, and how this will affect the formation of identity and storytelling between generations. I have a very different relationship to my hard drives and Google search history than I have with my record collection or boxes of paper ephemera.

Ultimately the media that I own and have consumed is a small part in telling my story, but it does speak to the things that have influenced my beliefs and view of the world. Like anything that we experience, media sometimes passes through our subconscious with no effect. But sometimes it has a profound and lasting resonance on our identities. As the digital is becoming the norm and the analog is disappearing, how will this shift affect how we tell our personal and collective stories? When we pass away, will we just leave a collection of hard drives or a list of usernames and passwords?

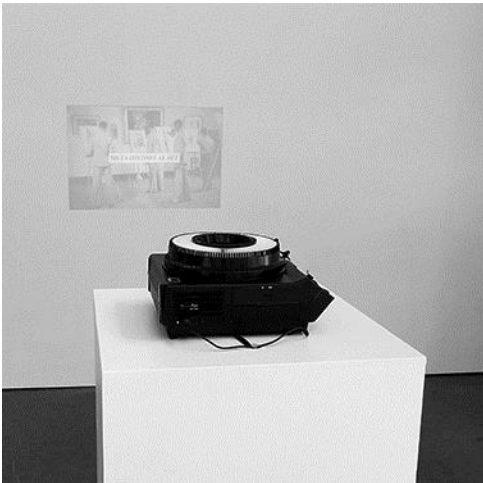


Color Transparency, 2018, video, CRT monitor, media player, edition 1 of 3 with 1 AP, 00:03:30 loop
13¼ x 13½ x 17½ inches

*The source image from which **Color Transparency** derives is a 35mm slide that I found among my paternal grandfather's photography collection. John Riddell Wood (1915-2000) was an avid naturalist and environmentalist. He loved to take pictures of nature and birds and of his travels around the world. The original image is actually of two juxtaposed landscapes, either incidentally created through double-exposure during the development process or when he advanced the film stock through the camera. The unintentional juxtaposition represents a constructed and unreal moment, created before digital manipulation was even possible. But, these are two moments that he lived, so many years ago at an unknown time in an unknown place, and have been passed down to me through a small photographic remnant.*

I took this image, digitally scanned it, and made an analog recording of the file. I then dubbed it over and over on a VHS tape until the image disappeared over many generations of tape recording. The final video consists of still frames pieced together to show the disintegration of the image over many hours of dubbing.

*The way that we capture, store, and access media is constantly changing as technology changes. **Color Transparency** is about the fragility of analog media and, similar to memory, its ability to disappear, deteriorate, and fade over time. Although not optimal for preservation purposes, this degradation also represents a certain character that is not possible with digital media. By design, the digital is infinitely reproducible. You can copy and paste a file ad infinitum, with no loss of quality. **Color Transparency** examines the analog media that past generations have left behind and questions how future generation's use of digital media will alter their connection to the past.*



Machines Making Meaning, 2018, 140 transparent color slides, slide projector, edition 1 of 3 with 1 AP
Projector: 6 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 13 x 12 inches, Projection: 24 x 36 inches

Computers lack consciousness. Yet, they make meaning every day.

***Machines Making Meaning** explores the ways that computer algorithms are affecting contemporary visual culture. We scroll and scroll as words and images jump out at us, some with significant meaning, some with no meaning at all. Yes, we choose what to read, watch, and listen to, but algorithms have often determined or limited these choices, whether we are aware of it or not. Information is catered to us individually as search engines remember our past online experiences, which then affects future ways of navigation, communication, and commerce, as well as what we believe as fact and interpret as truth. Search engines are proprietary mechanisms that not only determine what we see, but are biased entities that determine importance and relevancy. We are also constantly confronted with information taken out of context, with no clear author or origin. When machines make meaning for us, how will this affect identity, belief, communication, and the creation of personal and collective histories?*

*When cataloguing all of the books that I own (see description for **What Makes a Life – Volumes 1, 2, 3**), I gathered more than 1,500 quotes and passages, erased their sources, and tried to make sense of these words and phrases out of context. I was interested in how Google would interpret and visually define the short snippets of text that I had gathered. **Machines Making Meaning** consists of the Google image search results of these headings and phrases (set with only two search filters: hi-resolution and black and white). Some of the results are quite predictable, and some are quite humorous. But, as a whole, the work is a simple examination in how computer algorithms are making meaning and affecting current visual culture. The final form of the work, transparent 35mm slides, is a stable representation of the ever-shifting search process in which the work derives.*

We now live in a sharing economy, where images and information are freely accessible. “Rights of use” and ownership are blurred when reposting, copy/pasting, and appropriation are built into the digital user experience, as well as the ways that we currently communicate. What role does the individual/maker have, when the product is so easily taken and repurposed? How do we interpret the meaning of these images, when we often don’t know their origin or when they have been stripped of context?



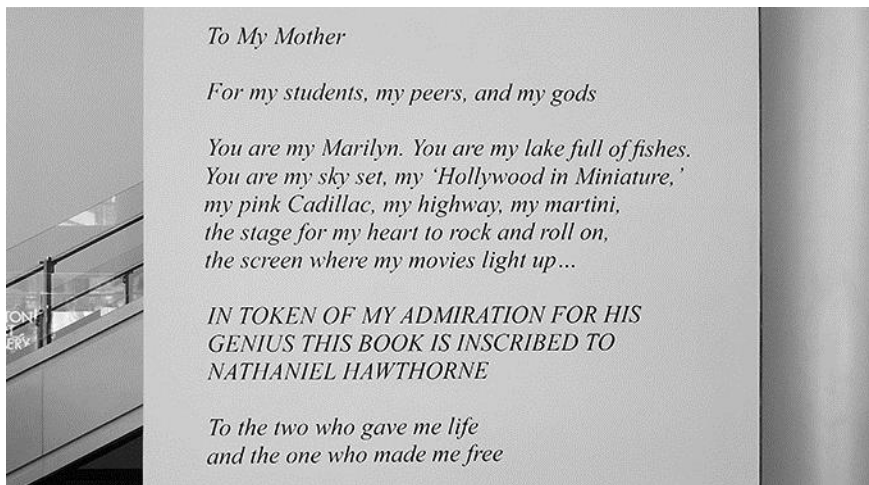
What Makes a Life (I Look at These Windows More Than I Look at Your Face), 2018, 3-channel video, 3 TV monitors, 3 media players, 1 pair of speakers, port switch, edition 1 of 3 with 1 AP, 00:18:00 loop with 5 different interludes
31½ x 162½ x 7 inches

Like so many people, I make my living working on a computer. I am all too familiar with mobile interfaces and digital landscapes. I constantly sort, store, import, export, upload, and download data between computers and hard drives and the mysterious cloud. On a daily basis, I deal with software and hardware updates, compression and resolution, constant rendering, and the elusive spinning beach ball of death. I also look through a lot of windows.

After so much research and contemplation into my changing relationship to media, I concluded that my experience of the digital world, as a disembodied participant, is often absent of the organic, the natural, the raw, the ugly. Yes, of course there will always be ugliness in terms of content, but I am thinking of design and experience. In form, the digital world has a binary quality. The exactness of a pixel, the calculated search result, all create a very structured and deliberately designed user experience. This very neat facade is even carried throughout the ways we express our online identities and explains the proliferation of filters and stock photos. Although we are drawn to the rush of a social media “like,” the physiology associated with the consumption of digital media is inherently different from our physical experience with analog media.

What Makes a Life (I Look at These Windows More Than I Look at Your Face) reveals the visual architecture and processes of the computer interface to create a visual essay in search of the natural, the poetic, and the imperfect in the digital sphere. The chapters, which all use found and appropriated footage, explore different representations and experiences of nature in the online world. Though we connect to nature through media in a variety of ways, it will never be a substitute for the real thing. Much of the content also relates to the ways that the digital world is influencing our use of time, as well as our perception of time.

The soundtrack of ***What Makes a Life (I Look at These Windows More Than I Look at Your Face)*** is a selection from James Brown’s *Live at the Apollo, Volume II*, recorded in 1967 and released a year later. This record is one of the very first successful live albums ever recorded and released. The use of this song is a very conscious and considered choice used in order to clash with the digital aesthetics of the work. This song embodies improvisation and art. It calls on the messy, the sweaty, feeling, and soul. For me, it is emotion that is missing from the digital form, and it makes so much sense that the physical isolation of the online experience is evident in our constant search for interaction and physical connection.



As For Dedication (Nothing Exists Alone), 2018, vinyl text on wall, open edition, 24 feet x 89 inches

Everything comes from somewhere.

A book is not only a record of one's own thoughts, research, and imagination, but of those who have helped influence and form those ideas. Traditionally, the written word clearly defines the author of the text and customarily has a dedicated space for acknowledgments. Like the liner notes of a record or the bylines in a newspaper, in its form, traditional analog media makes a very strong point in memorializing those who have either created the content or influenced its creation.

*When pulling passages from my own collection of books, I was drawn to the diversity and beauty of these dedications. In contrast, I find the absence of dedication, or even attribution, in digital media to be disquieting. We are bombarded with information, and a simple (factual) source is often missing. I believe this changes our relationship to, and retention of, digital media, because it hinders the emotional connection that we have to the author or maker. Dedications and acknowledgments also indicate that the media was created by an actual person, and not a machine. **As For Dedication (Nothing Exists Alone)** is just a small collection of acknowledgments sourced from my personal library of books.*

*This seems like the most appropriate place to thank those who helped make **What Makes a Life** possible. Thank you to my parents (Connie Redwine and Kim Wood), Eric Dornsife, Peter Van Hying, Justin West, Timmy Carlin, and the rest of my wonderful friends and family. A special thank you to Dennis Harrington, Kelly O'Donnell, Tim McComas, and the rest of the Weston team. I am so grateful for this opportunity and your help along the way.*

What Makes a Life is dedicated to Shellie Fleming.

*Nota bene: My choice and style of font throughout this exhibition (Times New Roman italic) is homage to the conceptual artist Félix González-Torres (1957-1996), and his "dateline" series. I recently learned that the company that installed **As For Dedication (Nothing Exists Alone)**, also installed González-Torres's "Untitled" (Portrait of the Cincinnati Art Museum) in 1994, a permanent work in the front lobby of the Cincinnati Art Museum. What an honor and strange coincidence.*