

A written dialogue between Jason Lazarus and Ruslana Lichtzier: *The Rickshaw* at Andrew Rafacz Gallery, April 16 - May 21, 2016

Does the storefront hold the possibility of politicizing a site of consumption?

Chicago Black's Friday protest had me so excited from a distance. It makes perfect sense to occupy the Magnificent Mile on Black Friday, a fantastic double pressure point. So yes storefronts are a reliable and loaded space, especially in an age of abstract commerce. With gentrification it is often the storefront where we feel the biggest sense of pain/loss/repulsion when something comes in that has no relationship with the community and its fabric. I think irritating capitalist systems is a form of *high protest* (my term). But, as you know, the show also holds the storefront as a poetic or literary idea as well. It is of course used in this relation as a frame/and or/multiple-frames/multiple-fields too!

Oh man... check [this](#) out. I completely agree with your points. We can say that in this gesture you propose—among other things—to **(re)imagine** the storefront. Here the latent image returns to the conversation.

We need to be clear about the relationship between Imagination and Capitalism.

#3 Niketown detail



I think the show shares a spirit with Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs*—the storefront as structure, sign, and idea. The Tampa inspired LED lights are such a strange way to start thinking about violence on Chicago streets. There will occur in the exhibition a moment where the protesters are shown linking arms to block the Niketown front door and the LED lights across the room infer an open door invitation yet have an almost repulsive light effect on the viewer. These ideas are not only political but I am also interested in their relationship to the image, vision, *seeing* (literal/theoretical/metaphorical)...

(The next paragraphs are my meditation on your work in relation to the text by Max Haven "Crises of Imagination, Crises of Power.") Today's society is where **everyone is creative**; where "we ought to be 'free' of the fetters of societal obligations like permanent jobs, social securities and pensions. Artists, no longer social reprobates, have become the iconic 'pioneers' of this brave new world." In this world, imagination, or its commodity--creativity—translates to a clear profit for the economic elite while detaching any social responsibilities upon the worker (by structuring a part-time, short contract based economy). For the us, the workers on the other hand, this structure means "more insecurity, more precariousness, and more exploitation [...]. So while contemporary capitalism may cynically solicit our imaginations at every turn, what cannot be imagined is an end to the economic system as we know it." This is the place within which we operate. Agree? Yes see Hakim Bey's [temporary autonomous zone](#) (TAZ), where he rejects the term revolution/belief-in-revolution and advocates for dinner parties, bands of pirates, festivals, etc. as momentary places of autonomy. Poetics as TAZ? Yes, yes, not to anticipate for the future but to do now something else. The profundity is maybe about a temporary glimpse seeing into/seeing/seeing through? Or, in addition, performing as the [public amateur](#) for an audience? Example: I'm an artist, not an economist, historian, or classic activist, although I can bring my naivety about these things to provide productive collisions? Reimaginings? Politicizing the encounter with LED lights in the exhibition, for example, in order to politicize/poeticize their presence in the strip mall? YES, exactly.

"Capitalism," Haven writes, "has dissolved into society and social relationships themselves and seeks to shape the way people make community [...] it has become properly 'biopolitical'. From this perspective, **imagination becomes a key battleground over** [...] **'the general intellect'**—the sort of baseline of social knowledge, competencies and understandings that allow us to communicate and work together, and that also represent the timbre of our collective, creative power [...]. The absence of the radical imagination sees the totalitarian world of Walmart as normal and reasonable." Would we say then that Walmart is a product of, and one that recreates the image of absence imagination? Further, can we suggest, for a second, that the LED installation alludes to the blinding experience that recalls a visit in Walmart? Within this, it activates the battleground over the "general intellect." Since, in reality, [Walmart](#) is a cooperation organization that "conscripts the imagination and the bodies of its managers, front-line workers, shoppers, security guards and others [...]" but the bodies are

multiplinous, contradictory, carrying overlapping relationships. For them, Walmart becomes a site of "of multiple overlapping, conflicting, antagonistic and incongruous values at once" that, through frustrations and desperation, activates a radical imagination in the form of protests. Would you say that common intentions are running through the show? Of incorporating a minimal sign of a site to stir the "general intellect" toward a radicalization of imagination?

Yes, yes. Within this framework, perhaps it will be useful to think of your gesture in opposition to Carsten Höller's work, specifically the "double Light Corner." Yes I'm not interested in Höller's work; phenomenology is not interesting to me without the politics! Höller's work here is even worse—in it he does not produce a space of phenomenology but an amusement park. I'm much more interested talking about light when you do a Google image search for the allegory of the cave see [here](#).

The LED light installation is a site-specific work. Is it going to be one installation or several?

Ruslana, this is ongoing work. I picked this particular storefront because of its relationship to the wall it will be on in Chicago, the fact that it was the first storefront I felt justified this way of working (my first love/aha moment), and also that it went out of business so quickly made me feel the ephemeral nature of these types of spaces. Also something we should talk about—the LED light installations are engaged in the idea of *the edge as content*. I love this phrasing; I'm reminded of the grotesque art that first appeared in the architectural framework; a form of communication that is marginalized, literally, to the edge, due to its "low" value. Later I will use the LED lights to also make images, and will text you a recent experiment. To make images is to fold the strategy forward—the edge becomes a new writing instrument.

Regarding writing instruments, consider this from Flusser: "We should differentiate between prehistoric, historical, and posthistorical images, and we should consider the photograph to be the first posthistorical image. Prehistoric images are those that were produced before the invention of linear writing. Historical images are those that contradict linear texts either directly or indirectly. Posthistorical images are those that set linear texts into the image. This differentiation is intended (among other things) to divide image thinking from writing thinking as clearly as possible." Thoughts?

Let me counter with ideas I think about: images as evocation rather than illustration, images as language, language as cloud, ideas as dialectic (ping pong) vs. ideas as sub/super structure, images as multiple planes compressed together with shallow space between them (think of an *idea* as a drop shadow of another *idea*), or medieval manuscripts that share multiple panes of information or a border that is its own narrative or center.

Can you send me some images of the grotesque art? Explain more; I am excited to see them.

[Here](#) is a collection of grotesque art. Its first known coherent manifestation was found in Nero's *Domus Aurea* villa that when was discovered by the renaissance, caused a radical shift in thinking about antiquity, art and morality. The ancient grotesque art that found its name from *Grotto* (cave) expressed main themes of doubleness, hybridity and metamorphosis, while taking upon the frames of the walls, not the center. I have a prolonged interest in the manifestations of these ideas today and through history. We can talk more about it if you wish.

Very interesting. I'd like to read more, can you explain how they emphasize the frames of the walls? Which walls? Meaning the frames of the pieces are embellished with negative space inside? I am looking at art and other things anew as I strategize future LED pieces where I am using the lights to create new or reproduced images rather than outlines of the storefronts. Especially cartoons and illustrations 😊

In my reading, the LED lights echo specific types of architecture that provide the structure for the temporary businesses. Yes, it echoes in some cases the architecture (especially because this one implies a door in the middle that you walk into; a sort of invitation if you like). I would be interested to know more about it. Is it unique, or is it similar to all the other strip-malls that exist across the states? I think the thing that occurs in Tampa is the frequent use of white, uncolored/unblinking LED lights. Although they are present, the unblinking white strategy is used way more, and they immediately felt philosophical, loaded, restrained, un-theatrical, ontological / they have a velocity even in stillness. I enjoy more and more thinking about the installation in relation to photography, it being an actual ghost image, phenomenological. It mourns its presence... an imprint of light... ...yes I agree the photographic roots are strong and my practice always has photographic thinking as its base, although I find I learn more about photography by coming in at it from an angle, in this case using other mediums/strategies. In a funny way, the LED lights are almost like a photogram—indexical; content is created through edges that organize a space?



Anna Atkins, *Dandelion*, ~ 1854.

Atkins is really great; I'm personally obsessed with this photograph by Talbot:



William Henry Fox Talbot, *Lace*, Plate XX, first published in *The Pencil of Nature*, 1844

Why I'm fascinated with this:

1. It is a proposal for a new object, which is a result of direct translation of one flat object to another flat object while maintaining the same dimensions.
2. It is a perfect and radical composition—something that forecasts the compositions developed by Robert Ryman and Ad Reinhardt.

Talbot, of course, created also the China Cabinet that encapsulates in such simplicity the indexical function of photography.

To state the obvious, this touches first upon the difficulty to define what the photographic medium is, or rather, to define its boundaries. Photograms are strange animals in the photographic field because they involve a direct touch. Due to this, and the always existing limitations of the darkroom, the photogram creates a non-illusionary space; it defines what is here, now and not what is there, at some moment. With this in mind, your analogy to the photogram is productive—being an indexical content that organizes the space through its edges. Do you propose the LED to be a light that touches our retina, a light that we can feel? I am into how the lights do, yes, occupy this new burning, almost like they are the white of an empty browser screen on our computer (maybe this is a return to my weird connection to digital space/aesthetics); they are not initially seductive like neon or seductive like an electronic billboard; they feel almost violent in person (although when they are photographed they tend to look calmed down a bit and dangerously gentle/seductive



China Cabinet: Plate III – Articles of China

Omg yes china cabinet is like a huge representative sample of how photo was/will be used for centuries!

... By the way, do you know William Cordova's "the House that Frank Lloyd Wright built for Fred Hampton y Mark Clark"? Great suggestion, yes! One of the things I've been nervous about is that the LED lights aren't historical per se. Much of my work distills or transfigures already monumental historical figures/events, and as an artist that is a compelling place to start. I'm trying to make these LED light installs important/iconic, or in a sense write my own history! You are the image of history.

The image is indexical, contains signs that replace the gesture. It is a conceptual image. A linguistic one. Echoing Walker Evans's dance between the image making and the script.

The ink pours and protest image, of course, are overtly political/historical and do that work for me and create some balance. But in the past year or two I've thought I'd like to do more work that is a bit less deferential to history and the LED lights are a good step for me. I think using them as a light instrument in the future will amplify this risk-taking and new discovery! I feel like the city-based storefronts hold a different visual, historical and political value than the Tampa storefronts. One suggests the politics of labor and the other the politics of race. I'm not sure that the two completely align with each other. Please tell me more. Yes, I am all about not easy alignment. My artistic philosophy tries to create not linear experiences but triangular. For example: two dots are two dots, two dots create a line, three dots create a triangle when connected. The art is inside the triangle, the dots and lines are the artistic gestures. It may be the case that you are tracing spirals here, in a sense that I can count 4 movements and we are still finding / searching for more. Can you explain this further? Tracing spirals is a nice phrase. Someone I know had a nice way of putting non-alignment... like dividing numbers, art works well when the numbers don't divide evenly, but there is a remainder. A triangle has a very stable, closed structure. A spiral on the other hand is a movement, a curve, whose coordinate positions are not visible, as with the corners of the triangle. While evolving from one point it grows, and each layer echoes and amplifies the other. Ah I see; I like this tracing of spirals!

Since arriving for install in Chicago, I've noticed how many LED storefronts there are. It's a fucking delight! This makes me think even more about the opportunity to link something ubiquitous with something political and at times abstract—it's a great artist opportunity that perhaps when someone runs across the LED lights they are thinking about precarity, race, class, economics, the (post) photographic!!!!

The ink pours are meant to evoke/reference more canonical storefronts you don't necessarily need to see again because they are either in the public conscious (more common) or known to art-historic (common to art audiences). We all saw the horrifying video of Eric Garner's death and now I am trying to think about the history of the storefront photograph, and how the excerpted Garner video still has a relationship (to me) with Walker Evans, Gordon Parks, Zoe Leonard, the iconic Black Panthers storefront of the late 1960s in Oakland, etc. Some of those images are easy to conjure, some less so.... I find it very interesting to reconsider here the cultural *imago*; what images are imprinted in our mind, what images do we forget / dismiss / suppress? What is the structure of this economy? What and why are some images that are not remembered, some histories vanish, and why? I understand your rationale in the cases of Walker Evens and Gordon Parks photographs, but not quite yet in relation to the other photographs. I'm not aware with the Black Panthers storefront image. Is it shared visual knowledge that I failed to be aware of because of having a different cultural origin? I think you are absolutely right and I took this for granted. In my mind the ink pours work two ways: they can evoke the cultural/historical images that we already have in our mind, or they can serve as invitations to search out these images. I think the install will be nice because it will employ both of these strategies: images that are in the center and images that are on the margin. If we go back to "the general intellect," in relation to which you are working, this invitation to conduct research is a point of resistance against the capitalistic regime that feeds us with images that, regardless their content, always come with an expiration date.

Read this great *New Yorker* article headline today:

APRIL 4, 2016

In the Future, We Will Photograph Everything and Look at Nothing

So yes anything to resist this!

In your research you shared with me, you write: "The vernacular tradition lingers in these LED wireframes; they become a digital vernacular, a new version of the hand-painted sign, if you will; a hand-made digital gesture, but with a different referent." Why do you consider it to be digital and not electrical? It is an interesting point to touch upon because—and perhaps this is my own confusion—I connect the digital with the virtual, while electrical is physical. Yes, literally they are electrical but they have the aesthetic/implications of digital—on 24/7 (rather than electricity that is turned on/off every day), they are brighter than daylight (they look like a digital affect/effect), or the easiest way of saying it they "look photoshopped' in real life. Like hi-res, but IRL? Hard to explain but the image below starts to relay the effect I think? Yes, more like higher res than real life? Or the lights become the sun and everything else becomes a shadow? *Real life becomes a drop shadow of the lights?* 😊



You are talking about the post photographic, while I'm thinking of the un-photographable, which becomes the unarchival in the sense that it cannot be preserved in history, because it cannot be documented. An interesting connection occurs between the fact that the temporal business starts with the too quickly approaching deadline, filling the windows with content, while the LED lights echo the shell of the building—the architecture—and are there to stay. The content is the frame.

I'm always thinking—and the more storefronts you see the more this will be clear—the LED storefront installations will reference image borders more than architecture, but also they are interdependent and co-present always, much like in Walker Evans storefronts. Maybe what I am proposing in my idea of the post photographic is that unphotographable is irrelevant, because the evocation of the unphotographable is perhaps more revelatory? Rather than pointing and saying THIS like trad'l photo, it is asking a question of the viewer and engaging them as co-authors of the photographic moment that no one can see?

Let's talk about the post photographable. In what way and through what process does the viewer becomes a co-author? What is the difference today between photographic registration, meaning the photograph is being taken, the reality that is being visualized and optical registration, meaning to remember an image? In your research you write that the LED "reference image borders more than architecture." Do you mean the LED's presence as an image or the image that is being framed within the LED?

Well of course reality is a relative term but for conversation sake, yes! I think remembering or more important *lingering* with an image is key in an image culture. I rarely make 'photographs' because they don't feel particularly necessary most of the time. I always think evoke rather than illustrate. That's why many photo-artists are sculpting their work, **the printed images is losing its potency as an invitation to think and linger, I believe.** Also that is why many artists are turning to abstraction/created environments, they are looking for intimacy and confusion.

Your second question is wonderfully confusing as things get messy. Some storefronts may have an awning above that is ringed with lights, and in that case I will leave that out. So the focus is more on the image arrangement/scale than the entirety of the architectural layout. At the end, of course, the whole LED light installation becomes another big image but better than a huge photograph I think.

We need to consider Dan Flavin.

I haven't thought of Dan Flavin much. That has been productive for me I think. I've thought about graffiti artists, window washers, garbage on the sidewalks, hard daylight, drop shadows, staple guns, a brush stroke, car culture, asphalt, and sex... Great list!

It is interesting that the "un-photographable" LED lights anchors one pillar of research in Walker Evans's work indexical work but the possibility of one cancels the other. Then, your "gesture 2" is heightened further. This kind of decoding is final, it's information that cannot be recovered. The specific, complex content becomes a simplified, elementary gesture of red, green and blue. I would like to hear more about the intentions, thoughts behind this piece.

Hard to follow the above but let me try :)

I think there is no canceling because the ink pours evoke images that may not need to be seen, they are in the public and/or art historical consciousness as stated above. They are not 100% canceling but, yes, erasure does help create important content for me. The ink pours are bodily, a kind of bleeding, a way to introduce/refer to images that is less dry or dependent on tech. I like trying to present photographic/photography gestures without actual photos/photography, it makes sense to me.

"The ink pours evoke images that may need not to be seen". I wonder about this statement. Why do some images may need not to be seen? Because of oversaturation? What about new audiences that can gain knowledge from these images?

Yes because of oversaturation for one. Or, an invitation not to remember the image but to *think* about it! And I think, as mentioned before, if the viewer isn't familiar, if they are thinking and not coming up with an image to reference, the piece becomes an invitation to explore, search, think, wrestle...

I'm still thinking of "gesture 3." I like it. I need to contemplate on it further.

Here we return to the ghost, phenomenological image. In relation to this, I'm thinking about the economy of the gift. As viewer, the image is mine. But, a gift of what? An image of protest? A cry? Possible revolution?

The afterimage strategy in this case first of all attempts to mark/celebrate/begin canonizing the black Friday protest as an iconic moment of protest in Chicago—the mag mile was literally and symbolically intervened upon and it was history! Can Laquan's death be kept visible for a distracted public? This means through the initial reportage images/reporting we need more actions, meetings, protests in multiple forms, and cultural responses of course! in the short term, anything to remind us that Rahm is still in office and that is a PROBLEM. in the longer arc--these are problems that in some ways converge at the 'storefront'...what can we learn from this?

We need to discuss labor. How does the artist group picture relate to the economy of the show?

Yes interesting question. I just talked to the Chicago Cultural Center tonight, and they will host the image near the Randolph Street entrance. It will quietly sit with other literature available for visitors. The piece will be just inside the entrance, in proximity to the doors, which I like. Just walk into the "storefront" and grab your image ☺ I will send you a PFD rough version to view. I have a short essay on the back that may help our conversation on this. The artist economy, as you know, is different. Yes of course money and sales are powerfully implicated in the art world. But the artist economy is also poetic, gestural, labor, touch, verbal, proximate, digital, full of likes, but also full of deep drunken conversation and urgency. I grew up in the Midwest where writing a thank you note is part of the culture of gift exchange. It feels necessary to finish my gesture with a physical offering, for the posters to be squirreled away, taped to walls, written on, and even over time forgotten or not treasured anymore—there are moments of profundity in all of that.