

**Karin Hofko**

*iTrash/ youTrash/ weTrash*

15 March – 14 April 2013

The Physics Room

# The Web as a Playground

## Chloe Geoghegan

As Karin Hofko's cursor scrolls in and out of her Internet browser – searching, dragging, moving, saving, trashing – her movements appear improvised; actions stimulating thoughts of one's own mindless meandering searches and saving of image files as potentials for another time or situation. Though these continuous performative actions document a seemingly unconscious shared experience, Hofko's movements are planned and logical. She deconstructs methods of 'play' through a media-based experience of composition that today has become a deeply embedded mode of social and personal navigation through everyday life.

Hofko's recent exhibition at The Physics Room is a continuation of her emerging performance and media-based practice. *iTrash / youTrash / weTrash* presents two works within the gallery space: a large performance-based projection *iTrash* and a smaller plinth and screen work *KARIN AND THE COMPUTER BAND*. Exploring the themes of play and compositional experience through a multi-media lens, Hofko is one of several 21st century artists to peel back layers of reality and fiction within the framework of the Internet in its current iteration. Reminiscent of Canadian artist John Rafman's influential project *Kool-Aid Man in Second Life* (2009), Hofko's *iTrash* project illustrates the meta-fictional grey areas abundant in essential applications such as the now commonplace Google Image Search. Both Rafman and Hofko take on roles of director, storyteller, and tour guide; they place themselves between reality and fiction as middlemen exploring essential concepts of modernity and contemporary experience that is processed or framed into a descriptive piece.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps our subjectivity changes over time, but it is ultimately part of our shared human history. We are narrative creatures. No matter what, we will create stories that have patterns and arcs and consist of a series of events that can be recounted.<sup>2</sup>

The central anchor point to *iTrash / youTrash / weTrash* is *iTrash*, a 3:39 min HD colour screen capture-based video work made by Hofko between 2010 and 2012. *iTrash* was recomposed as a 'digi-web pop show' during the opening of the exhibition

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<sup>1</sup> John Rafman in conversation with Lindsay Howard, "Revealing John Rafman," on *Bomblog*, July 8, 2010. Date accessed 25 April 2013, <http://www.bombsite.powweb.com/?p=12240>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

on Thursday 14 March where Hofko performed to two songs live: Bonnie Tyler's 'Holding Out for a Hero' and 'Master of Puppets' by Metallica.<sup>3</sup> During the performance, Hofko generated *iTrash* at her laptop for all to see on an adjacent wall projection, which remained on loop for the duration of the exhibition. As the performance progressed, Hofko's cursor guided the audience at pace through a comprehensive cross-section of screen-grabs, MIDI song files, fan art, and other Tyler-based online ephemera as she sourced, collected, and arranged it on her desktop.

Although *iTrash* works within an aesthetic mostly aligned with the genre of Net Art, her work evokes the kind of sensory, engaging, superabundance that Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn achieves within a non-digitised spatial environment. While Hirschhorn consumes the traditional white cube space, Hofko works in a similar way with the intentionally banal interface of web and desktop. *iTrash*, much like Hirschhorn's 54th Venice Biennale installation *Crystals of Resistance* (2011), is built on the concept that intellectual scavenging and sensory overload is designed to simulate our own process of grappling with the excess of information in daily life.<sup>4</sup> Though these collage-like concepts become a natural part of the work itself through the nature of the pop culture content, *iTrash* explores a "different mode of being."<sup>5</sup> The work is visually and audibly tonal, as the material and immaterial meet in a way that seeks to analyse multi-layered artistic paradigms within current digital networks.

Throughout the exhibition (after the opening performance) visitors were met with Hofko's pre-recorded cursor movements almost as if they were a "ghost in the machine."<sup>6</sup> As Hofko removed herself from the process following the performance-based installation, she enacted what then became a residual documentation of *iTrash* that sought to prompt subsequent viewers to activate their own performative deconstruction of the web as a playground.

The moment the viewer interacts with the work by looking at the work or moving around it and creating a physical spatial relation to it, I would consider that an active contribution to the performative experience of a piece.<sup>7</sup>

Hofko's engagement with performance in this way is essentially emblematic; not so far removed from her preceding work *A performance* (2012) in which she hired an actor to impersonate herself giving a presentation to the audience, employing "the power of deception as a tool for creating confusion in order to initiate the imagination of the audience."<sup>8</sup> Although audience perception is strategically key to how the

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<sup>3</sup> The majority of the looping performance is Tyler, as due to the nature of using performance as an installation tool, Hofko did not include the Metallica segment in the exhibition loop.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hirschhorn on ARNDT, date accessed 26 April 2012, [http://www.arndtberlin.com/website/artist\\_1030](http://www.arndtberlin.com/website/artist_1030)

<sup>5</sup> Karin Hofko, in conversation with the author, 22 April 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Karin Hofko, in conversation with the author, 1 May 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Karin Hofko, 22 April 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Karin Hofko, 2012 Artspace New Artists Show Part 1, artist talk, November 27, 2012, date accessed 25 March 2013, <http://www.vimeo.com/53567004>

performance evolves into an experience, Hofko's use of Google Image to initially disrupt the formality of the presentation in *A performance* is also vital within *iTrash* to emphasise the web as still a very new kind of infrastructure within daily life. During *A Performance* the web was "a backdrop, the images provide a screen, which correlates directly to the virtual space in which the artist appropriated them, at times successfully creating the illusion of transporting the performer into this realm."<sup>9</sup> Hofko's tool in the instance of *iTrash* was the Internet, contextualising it as a multi-systemic force that continues to centralise within social and personal experience, consistently challenging the clarity between what is or could be real and fictional. In this way, *iTrash* specifically displays how new online possibilities – along with new oddities – have begun to align much closer with human nature and how we each express ourselves: "we are, collectors, hunters, curious and social."<sup>10</sup>

The second smaller component of *iTrash / youTrash / weTrash* was presented within the same space on an iMac desktop. *KARIN AND THE COMPUTER BAND* sat on a plinth at eye level inviting the viewer to watch and listen through headphones as a concoction of online sources are presented through a variety of pages within a Google Chrome browser on loop. As another pre-recorded cursor guides the viewer in the same ghostly way as in *iTrash*, the audio component begins with a text-to-speech loop saying "love is music" repetitively, followed by a chain reaction of online audio encounters. Again, the content appears compositionally improvised, yet it is Hofko's logical composition that conveys an intimate audio-visual experience that is out of no specific or particular motivation. What plays from the iMac begins calmly and evenly; both the close up visuals on the screen and the audio playing from the noise-cancelling headphones are equal in depth and position within the work. The visual components range from real to fictional – the real possibly being various international news reports playing from within a raw format of the webpage, and the fictional possibly being the virtual keyboard that the cursor is running "love is music" from. The final section of *KARIN AND THE COMPUTER BAND* types in new words, saying "thanks to the audience for listening." For Hofko, this work is a representation of the information flow found in the web in the form of an ultra-long but finite sound composition:

It could be a way curiosity takes you on a personal journey with a narrative style that borrows from the power of armchair travelling stories, stories that take you somewhere else.<sup>11</sup>

In comparison to *iTrash*, which immediately consumes the space as the visual anchor point of the *iTrash* concept, *KARIN AND THE COMPUTER BAND* offers an almost personally immersive experience of Hofko's process. In this way, *iTrash* proposes an abstract or introduction to what is explored in depth through *KARIN AND THE*

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<sup>9</sup> Anya Henis, "The Hofko Show" in ed., Caterina Riva, *NAS pt. 1* (2012: Artspace, Auckland), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Karin Hofko, 22 April 2013

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

*COMPUTER BAND*. It builds on the concept of media-based appropriation and playful improvisation in a less intentional way that logically becomes performative, as the story unfolds as the work is created. Thus discourse is generated between what is reality, fiction, or both, within the web as an abundant yet conventional component of life today. As *iTrash* initially introduces these ideas, they are further processed within a condensed format in *KARIN AND THE COMPUTER BAND* – revealed without the iconography, gender politics, pop culture, authorship or copyright issues that are inherent within the ‘surface’ content of *iTrash*.

Although both the large and small works in *iTrash / youTrash / weTrash* appear fictional in any conclusive structure or material resolve, the ‘live’ element that is sustained throughout the exhibition offers a real experience that acts more as an initiation of an unfolding conversation surrounding the web as an extension of oneself. As this exhibition continues Hofko’s explorations into everyday meta-fictional realms of perception, she encourages her audience to recognise current frameworks and source material as ultimately a composition of experience – a playground.

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