

# Social Disruptions: **WYSi-WE**, What You See is What Emerged

Jessica Barness

## ABSTRACT/

Social experiences and identities are being reshaped through forces that build, debase and stir. In this visual essay, the author discusses the context and process behind *WYSi-WE (What You See is What Emerged)*, a series of graphic assemblages created to investigate this idea. Using images from an online photo sharing community, together with text selections, social intersections are explored through assemblage theory and databending (also known as glitching). Photographs, sourced by keywords related to class, faith, gender, politics and sexuality, are fused together at the level of code bits to graphically expose the influence of one piece of social identity on another. Each assemblage is accompanied by documentation of its text-image parts, and the viewer is invited to read through the compositions in multiple ways.

KEYWORDS/ assemblage, collage, databending, glitching, identity, photographs, social media

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must go into s  
before they ca



IT'S ALSO A TSUNAMI THAT WILL UPROOT ALL THE DICTATORSHIP REGIMES ALL OVER THE WORLD

more we know and control, the less surprise and revelation.

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e

with our collective ignorance,  
large it is, and how fertile.



in many traditions, the young  
must go into silence or wilderness  
before they can emerge as real

before they can emerge as real



NOT ONLY IS IT AN ARABIAN SPRING

## Context

The social shaping of identities might be read through overlapping cycles of creation, disruption and reconstruction. People speak of experiencing oneness through affinities, then celebrate the distinctions that set themselves apart. New economic classes emerge as jobs become available in once impoverished areas. Sexual freedoms are roused or stymied, while national communities are imagined or dissolved. Global centers of manufacturing create revenue but will also

impact the local quality of life and surrounding environment. These are forces that build, debase and stir, strengthening or challenging social perspectives in unexpected ways. *WYSi-WE (What You See is What Emerged)* is a series of graphic assemblages, designed to investigate the disruption that occurs when these ideas intersect. Conceptually based in theories of assemblage, and created with photographs,<sup>1</sup> text and raw digital data, this body of work imagines social identities and perspectives as modular pieces of a larger system.

Photographs of life experience are being rewritten and re-contextualized online within social media communities. In addition to being given titles, these images are tagged with keywords, which are critical to understanding an individual's world views (Williams, 1985); these facilitate specific, text-driven online image searches. In this project, I examined how pieces of photographed perspectives—related to keywords such as class, faith, gender, politics and sexuality—are like found objects of experience. These bits could be subject to a selection process, then remixed to graphically expose their relationships to one another. Early speculations focused on visual outcomes: How might these forces look when they intersect and influence one another? In what ways could they mingle or transform, and would the results be seen as destroyed images, or 'new' content?

### WYSi-WE: Surprise, Control, Real

TYPOGRAPHY/ Hyde L (2010) *Common as Air: Revolution, Art and Ownership*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, pp. 69.

KEYWORD/ gender LOCATION/ United Kingdom TITLE/ Gender inequality awareness idea. SOURCE/ Craftivist Collective (2010) <http://www.flickr.com/photos/craftivist-collective/4254120624>.

KEYWORD/ protest LOCATION/ Canada TITLE/ 6th Annual Women's Housing March. SOURCE/ Frampton C (2012) <http://www.flickr.com/photos/caelie/7998505539>.

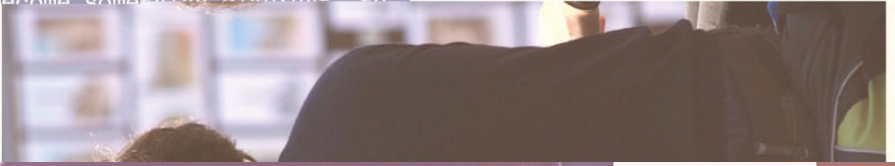
KEYWORD/ dictatorship LOCATION/ Syria TITLE/ Not Only Is It An Arabian Spring, It's Also a Tsunami That Will Uproot All The Dictatorship Regimes All Over The World. SOURCE/ Freedom House (2012) <http://www.flickr.com/photos/Syriafreedom/6859825725/>.

HYPERTEXT/ Sassen S (2006) *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 344. "The digital is embedded in the larger societal, cultural, subjective, economic, and imaginary structurations of lived experience and the systems within which we exist and operate"

KEYWORD/ inequality LOCATION/ United States TITLE/ Occupy Wall Street-11/3/11-050. SOURCE/ Young, M (2011) <http://www.flickr.com/photos/gungirlnewyork/6310622833>.



Change drives every moment and physical arrangement to pass out of a phase with itself, to become something different, to



disaggregate and to become momentarily free to enter into new alliances.



arrangement to pass out of a phase with itself, to become something different.



Authorial practices of collage, assemblage, remix and mashup provide the means to create novel concepts from the reconfiguration of existing, disparate parts. Situated in a specific time and place, 'new' readings will emerge and meaning resides with the viewer. While these images outwardly resemble cut-and-paste collage, the shaping of *WYSi-WE* was influenced by non-visual theories of assemblage. Emergent and contingent, individual parts of an assemblage may be detached and used in another; this action may stabilize or destabilize the whole entity, influencing its overall identity and function (De Landa, 2008). Assemblage may be a transformative activity or performance in urban studies (McFarlane, 2011), while a nation-state assemblage has the potential to redefine and disrupt the socio-economic status quo (Sassen, 2008). In effect, a visual assemblage may represent far more than what is seen, and complex understandings emerge through deeper reading.

## Method

*WYSi-WE* compositions were designed by fusing pieces of text and image together through databending, also known as glitching. Databending is a technique for manipulating the raw data of digital media at the level of code bits to create mixed-media compositions (Geere, 2010; Mason, 2012). The raw, alphanumeric digital data, unreadable by humans, can be cut, pasted and rearranged linearly using WYSIWYG text editing software ('what you see is what you get').

Image selection was limited to Creative Commons licensed content (CC BY 2.0, which allows for reuse and remixing with author attribution), found on the social media site [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com). Flickr (2014) describes itself as 'a global community made up of many different kinds of people' and contains photos uploaded by individuals with internet access and the desire to share their views within a specific photo sharing environment. The photos used in *WYSi-WE* were first subject to a keyword query using Flickr's search feature. This yielded considerable insight on how international participants

## WYSi-WE: New Alliances

TYPOGRAPHY/ Kwinter S (1998) African genesis. *Assemblage* 36(24), pp. 5.

KEYWORD/ religion LOCATION/ Malaysia TITLE/ My First Mosque  
SOURCE/ Bueso D (2010) <http://www.flickr.com/photos/daverugby83/4571041368>.

HYPertext/ Friedman T (2002) *The World is Flat*. New York: Picador, pp. 448. "The society which has the least resistance to the uninterrupted flow of ideas, diversity, concepts, and competitive signals wins".

KEYWORD/ us and them LOCATION/ Belgium TITLE/ Us & Them  
SOURCE/ Bonuccelli R (2008) <http://www.flickr.com/photos/askthepixel/2814505718/>.


KEYWORD/ ethnicity LOCATION/ United States TITLE/ JOY-celebrations after Argentina scored first. SOURCE/ Brohi M (2006) <http://www.flickr.com/photos/seedingchaos/178821805/>.



Finally, it is imagined as a community,  
because, regardless of the actual inequality

the nation is always conceived as a deep,  
horizontal comradeship.





view, organize and communicate social experiences through their photos. I selected images from diverse places of origin with compelling visual content, and this ranged from commonplace to taboo subject matter. Text as typography or hypertext relates conceptually to the images and keywords. Using Mac OSX applications TextEdit and Preview, databending was used to make each composition in its entirety, inviting the visual nuances of the process. To create a new assemblage, part of a digital image file was selected (content as alphanumeric digital data), then detached (cut) and finally attached inside another image file (pasted). This new 'whole' was then used as raw material to add to another image. In some instances, the image fragments shown in *WYSi-WE* were carefully chosen, and serendipitous opportunities in others. This working method continued until I felt the work communicated, visually and conceptually, the pushing and pulling of forces shaping identity and experiences.

### Reading the assemblages

In assemblage theories, each individual part influences the identity and function of the whole. It is an aleatoric, transformative process and redefines previously existing conditions. Within *WYSi-WE*, there are harmonious relationships as well as obscured, dissonant associations among assemblage parts. These can be seen through visual noise, color shifts and visibility of content. When one image's raw data clashes with that of another piece of media, the glitch may show as noisy geometric textures that interrupt the composition's visual flow. Disrupting the data, however, does not always break an image. Color may change instead. This acts as a unifying force within each assemblage, through hues of blue/yellow, yellow/purple/red and yellow/green. Databent noise and colour—typically favoured effects of the technique—are inseparable from another consequence of my working method. The top of a digital image corresponds to the top of its raw data file, but cutting and pasting code bits is an inexact way of image making. It produces imprecisely cropped type and images, unrecognizable visual data and narratives that abruptly begin and end. *WYSi-WE* visually communicates

### WYSi-WE: Encoding/Decoding Community

TYPOGRAPHY/ Anderson B (2006) *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, pp. 7.

KEYWORD/ rich and poor LOCATION/ United Kingdom TITLE/ Sales

SOURCE/ Cleaver A (2008) <http://www.flickr.com/photos/alancleaver/3138856308>.


HYPERTEXT/ Hartmann F (2002) 'Media Philosophy beyond the Dualism of Image and Text' In G. Lovink's *Uncanny Networks*. Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 297. "New forms of social information processing request new forms of encoding/decoding to stay functional".

KEYWORD/ class LOCATION/ India TITLE/ Garima shows off her work

SOURCE/ One Laptop per Child (2008) <http://www.flickr.com/photos/olpc/3011271232>.

KEYWORD/ sexual LOCATION/ Guatemala TITLE/ Desfile diversidad sexual 2010

SOURCE/ Penados L (2010) <http://www.flickr.com/photos/pena2/4841567178>.




the intersecting edges of social experiences, demonstrating that the forces that shape us are not always clear-cut and attractive, but are filled with influences and obstacles. To experience this, I invite viewers to read the assemblages three ways: first as visual works; then solely through the content documentation of keywords, places of origin, titles and sources; and finally, as combinations of all these things.

The approach behind this project may be used to increase awareness of issues of human diversity, and influence the way individual and group identities are understood. My future work in this area may be translated into immersive, interactive environments to examine what happens when unlikely bits of data connect. Additionally, the contextual connections among keywords, places of origin and visual content are compelling enough to warrant additional study. The works in this series are preliminary visualizations of the forces that shape our identities, informed by personal, international perspectives. *WYSi-WE*, what you see is what emerged.

**Jessica Barness** is an assistant professor in the School of Visual Communication Design at Kent State University. Barness's research through design, on topics related to social issues, language and interactivity, has been exhibited and published internationally. She has an MFA in design from the University of Minnesota, and an MA in studio art from the University of Northern Iowa. [email: [jbarness@kent.edu](mailto:jbarness@kent.edu)]

#### NOTE/



1. All photographs used in this research are licensed for reuse and remix with author attribution, including commercial use, under the Creative Commons CC BY 2.0 license, available at [http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en\\_GB](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en_GB)

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