'UnSearching for Rue Simon-Crubellier: Perec out-of-sync

Darren Tofts

My idea of literature was of something that could and would
intervene in reality. Or at least that's the way I thought of it then

Italo Calvino

When nothing is sure, everything is possible

Margaret Drabble

All other resemblances to living persons or to people having lived in
reality or fiction can only be coincidental

Georges Perec

Stay, illusion!

Shakespeare

One of the things writing does is wipe things out

Marguerite Duras

Art consists of limitation

G. K. Chesterton

I'd rather regret the things I've done than regret the things I haven't
done

Lucille Ball

'A schedule of' complications:

What might seem like a surfeit of epigrams prefacing this tapestry that you are about to Unweave (essay, text, fly specs on a page or screen, the subliminal flicker of codified light), this assemblage of samples already performs what you are about to do in reading this text. It has already said what will have to be, and have been said. All a matter of tense, colliding times, duration and anachrony, it puts the pieces together in the manner of a jigsaw, then takes it apart, out-of-context, out-of-time. Epigrams are at once rhetorical figures of what is to come, other words doing the work for someone else, suggestive, prefatory and oracular. They are a kind of mime or ventriloquism, prolonging entry into another text with the sign-sound proxies of others speaking. Not 'dismantled', 'broken down', 'read' or 'interpreted'. They are gestures out-of-sync.

A label then, on a parcel addressed to *someone*, is another assemblage of Unwords. Its specificity is a contract between signs and atoms, artifice and edifice:

Life A User's Manual, p.54

In another context its dark borders and curlicue italics would announce a death, notifying a recent absence which can no longer be delivered, made present or signed for. The brittle uncertainty and rigorous ambivalence of the *pharmakon*, the *either/ and/or* of writing, becomes the excessive irresolution in print of a street address in a verifiably real city that is nowhere to be found outside page space. Yet it is *potentially* located somewhere in a city that exists in empirical space if it is sought after with enough suspension of belief as well as its opposite. *Life A User's Manual* is a palimpsest worthy of Lewis Carroll or Jorge Luis Borges in which the map and the

territory seamlessly appear to overlap. But there is one minute but not insignificant detail missing in this particular heraldic *mise en abyme*: a glitch marked on a calling card, an address to which we are invited.

Writing is by its own mandate is an ecology of restrictions, rules and conventions. While it is 'obliged' (before and after Georges Perec) to perform 'a schedule' of specific and unseen codes and admixtures to ferment its alchemy, it nonetheless complicates everything it touches from reference outside as well as to itself. A previous architect of universes in nutshells, by way of oblique reference to the quantum austerity of another, also wrote from Paris trying to find a path and a destination through its thickets:

> You is feeling like you was lost in the bush, boy? You says: It is a puling sample jungle of woods. You most shouts out: Bethicket me for a stump of a beech if I have the poultriest notions what the farest he all means.[1]

So while we can find such a reference to Samuel Beckett in *Finnegans Wake*, no matter how hard we harrow the Dantean penance of traversing the 17th arrondissement in Paris, our search will never yield a street bearing the name of Simon-Crubellier.

After 'pataphysics and surrealism in that city, before fractal geometry and binary code in others, the Knight's tour of chess served Perec as the architectonic plan for arranging, intertwining and indeed 'intertwingling' detail and more detail.[2] Perec's encyclopaedism reinforces, in the unforgiving facticity of the things it amasses, the unmoving weight of mortar that binds bricks and masonry together in a seven-story *appartement*:

> The inhabitants of a single building live a few inches from each other, they are separated by a mere partition wall, they share the same spaces repeated along each corridor, they perform the same movements at the same times, turning on a tap, flushing the water closet, switching on a light, laying the t a b l e, a few dozen simultaneous existences repeated from storey to storey,   f r o m building to building, from street to street. They entrench themselves in   t h e i r domestic dwelling space – since that is what it is called – and they w o u l d   p r e f e r nothing to emerge from it; but the little that they do let out –   the dog on a lead,

the child off to fetch the bread, someone brought back,   someone sent away –
comes out by way of the landing. For all that passes,   passes by the stairs, and
all that comes, comes by the stairs: letters, announcements of births, marriages,
and deaths, furniture brought in or   taken out by removers, the doctor called in an
emergency, the traveller   returning from a long voyage.[3]

But at the centre of such weight in this closed field of *things* is the aporia of an
absent detail beyond the indelible marks of type or the *gramme* of letters.

UnSearching

And so another calling card. This one less white than black, sans serif rather than
cursive. It announces a more recent passage through Paris in search of that same
street:
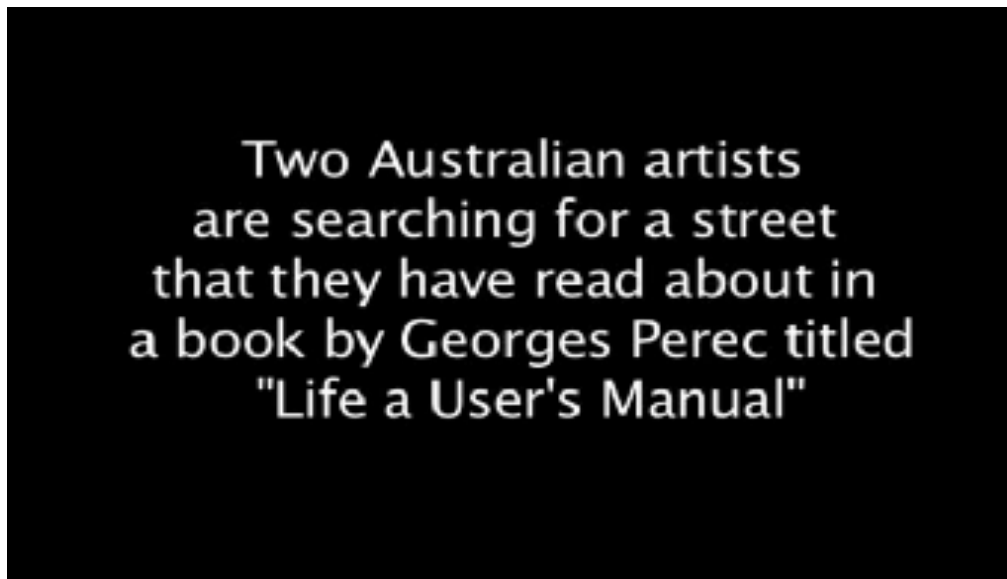
Still from *Searching for Rue Simon-Crubellier* (2004)

Artists Norie Neumark and Maria Miranda (collectively known as 'Out-of-Sync')
travelled to Paris in 2004 with one determined and interrogative aim in mind: 'Is it
possible to bring something that doesn't exist into existence by searching for it?' An
inquisitive exercise in the absurd, such rigour tests the credulity of suggestion and
suggestibility of a kind that Italo Calvino marvels over at one point in *Cosmicomics*:
'"The Dinosaurs are coming back!"'[4] The same artists could have travelled to Dublin
in search of number 7 Eccles Street, in a real city described in the voluminous page
space of the 'Book of Bloom'. But such fey insistence on the possible would be

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unnecessary and ridiculed mercilessly by a legion of incisive Joycean wits from Irvine to Zurich. To search for the celebrity streets of Joyce and Perec implies pilgrimages found and lost.   But Neumark and Miranda are not interested in bringing Perec's novel to life as street theatre or surrealist dramaturgy.   As a video work it is understated in its transparency as a documentary trying to disprove that the street *does not* exist somewhere: Miranda has described the work in this respect as 'ongoing as the search is open-ended and never finished', particularly in a city such as Paris that is indivisibly strange and overwhelmingly familiar.[5] In one moment in the video we see a figurative assemblage being made in an attempt to locate the precise co-ordinates of Rue Simon-Crubellier on fragments of a street map of the 17th arrondissement in Paris:

www.out-of-sync.com/

The map is sampled exactly from co-ordinates detailed in Perec's novel:

> On the sheet there are in fact not one but three sketch-plans: the first, at the top right-hand corner, shows where the building is, roughly half-way along   Rue Simon-Crubellier, which cuts at an angle across the quadrilateral formed   b y   R u e Médéric, Rue Jadin, Rue de Chazelles, and Rue Léon Jost, in the Plaine   M o n c e a u district of the XVIIth arrondissement of Paris… [6]

Despite being armed with such cartographical precision no such address is to be found in the municipality of Paris (not even the 17th arrondissement that one literate video interviewee cannily suggests). Other testimony of its possible whereabouts is provided by a toddler who advises the artists to 'go there and go there', then revises the direction 'perhaps there or perhaps there', with decisive and confident hand

gestures that are identical in each case. *Searching for Rue Simone-Crubellier* is a gloriously failed quest in which the pursuit of the imaginary and the suggestively elusive is its tentative and fragile goal (an anagram of which, the archaic 'gaol', is a misprision that would have appealed to Perec's lexicographical imagination).

The aesthetic élan of the artists in this work is to shrink the bounds of incredulity and doubt through persistent reinforcement. The medium for this thought experiment is a mediated derive that overlaps page space and urban space. Technologically kitted out with various audio-visual capturing devices, the idea of testimony is visually and assertively reinforced by the assuring rigor of a literary pursuit undertaken simultaneously, consulting the pages of a well thumbed copy of a book they carry around with them: *Life A User's Manual* is talisman, Baedeker and Paris street directory. Along with hunting for snarks in pastoral England, furtively seeking out faeries at the bottom of the garden or the Loch Ness Monster, such forensic vigor may not count for much beyond being a devilish stretch of the truth.[7] But their journey resembles a detective aesthetic that takes them to the reassuringly non-fictive offices of civic officials, map-makers and bureaucrats, the Town Council offices of the 17th arrondissement and even the Office of Town Planning responsible for the naming of streets in Paris. The artists are politely and repeatedly advised that the object of their pursuit is imaginary, to which they counter with the suggestion that it may be the name of an ancient street that has since disappeared and been appropriated by Perec. In testing the bounds of credulity they are persistently met with dogged municipal resistance insisting that it is fictive and not factual. A literate official in the Office for Paris Maps, a former neighbour who knew Perec 'very well as a writer and as a person', decisively underlines the street's fictionality. A walking-talking *Brodie's Notes* or French version thereof (if such a gauche thing exists) he demystifies any possible truth in the whereabouts of the street by proceeding to describe *Life A User's Manual* as a 'building that is cut down the middle to show everything that happens there'. In itself this architectonic conceit for a street is a curious metafictional figure for a novel as a building lacking a fourth wall (an image of which features on the cover of most editions of the book in varying forms). While the artists are repeatedly advised that Simone-Crubellier is an imaginary street 'in the framework of a novel' it occupies a lot of civil servant time and effort *searching* for it nonetheless. Throughout *Searching for Rue Simon- Crubellier* the pursuit of the

fabulatory goes viral– a tenuous membrane between making and Unmaking, vanishing, materiality and materialization.

Avatars of other pursuants of the impossible, Neumark and Miranda nevertheless persist in their quest to find the fictional in the real through the subtle and insidious poetics of suggestion. They do however put doubt in many minds, not the least of which is that of the collective viewer of *Searching for Rue Simon-Crubellier*. So when the imaginary persistently refuses to live up to possibility, there is always OULIPO. The artists finally end up in the book-lined salon of Marcel Bénabou, the Permanent Provisional Secretary of the 'workshop of potential literature'. Having described his enthusiasm for the 'Perec-like' nature of the artists' project, Bénabou flatly declaims that the street does not exist. *Their* work then finishes in an exquisitely reflexive and bookish set piece that features Bénabou's disembodied voice reading from *Life A User's Manual* as his image moves phantom-like through his flat. A heretical Plato in his library, with nothing more to say of 11 Rue Simon-Crubellier, he walks and talks nonetheless.

Such reflexivity of a ludic and mathematical precision is to be expected in relation to any discussion of the fastidiously complex worlds of Georges Perec. While there may indeed be no *outside-text*, in either the most limpid *nouvelle vraisemblable* (*Piers Plowman*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *To the Lighthouse*) or the opacity of well-wrought urns (*Persuasion*, *The Bostonians*, *On the Road*), the conundrum of *the who and the what* (after Jacques Derrida) and *what where* (after Samuel Beckett) is nothing so banal as a pursuit or search.   Rather it is a beguiling fuzzy logic, a Gordian knot of 'UnSearching. But further, not disentangling any more than weaving. The possibility of its impossibility, a momentary half-seeing or half-life is glimpsed fleetingly as if an eye mote courted the imagination or like trying to hold the fragile and fleeting shimmer of a star in focus just long enough to 'see' it, for it *to be* a star.[8] And this *possibility of impossibility* is the aleatoric *and* highly systematized rule driven poiesis that motivates the very notion of potential literature as always already to come; it is 'un-conceived, on the verge of its 'unlikely possibility. Or not.

UnSightly/UnSitely

Searching for Rue Simon-Crubellier is an ideal Sisyphean penance. The artists' knowing pursuit of the non-existent street is a loving labour not of credulity but fabulation, of testing the bounds of possibility in the minds of the interlocutors they interview in Paris. UnSightly then, in the absence of something seen, UnSitely in an absence un-scène. In her book *Unsitely Aesthetics* Maria Miranda describes the situation of 'unsitely' as a term that

> pivots on the traditional history of site – from the site/nonsite of Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty to the decades long history of site-specificity. And i   s "un" brought into play to dislodge the fixity of site and to multiply its potential, rather than discard "site" itself.[9]

When site-specificity is blended with or 'folded into the notion of unsitely'[10] it expands the very question of site, initiating 'new possibilities for artists to work productively at the edges of the art world and its institutions, rather than at its centre'[11]. Accordingly Out-Of-Sync is a nomadic rather than studio-based collective, working beyond the boundaries of the gallery, mobile and kitted out with myriad audio-visual media, physically embodied in the streets of Paris and simultaneously online elsewhere. Not only Unsitely but unseemly, creating time-based, site-specific and speculative art artworks that 'reflect in some ways on the new condition created by the network'.[12] And as well on the tentative borders of credulity and the possible. No matter how hard the toil then the mythical building, unlike Sisyphus' boulder, will fail to appear, and at that moment the journey continues. However just as Perec's *La Vie Mode d'Emplois* is fictional, it is just as factual in the crushing weight of detail that amasses a real Paris into words with the precision of an ordnance survey map and a genealogist's patient rigour:

> The exemplary biographies of the five Trévins sisters, unfortunately, do not stand up to close scrutiny, and the reader who smells a rat in these quasi- f a b u l o u s exploits will soon have his suspicions confirmed. For Madame   T r é v i n s (w h o, unlike Mademoiselle Crespi, is called Madame despite being a   spinster) has no brother, and consequently no nieces bearing her surname; and Célestine Durand-Taillefer cannot live in Rue Hennin in Liège because in   Liège there is no Rue Hennin; on the other hand, Madame Trévins did have a   sister, Arlette, who was

married to a Mr Louis Commine and bore him a   daughter, Lucette, who married someone called Robert Hennin, who sells   postcards (collector's items only) in Rue de Liège, in Paris (VIIIth   *arrondissement*).[13]

Such encyclopaedic detail - *passim* – reassures as well as affirms, as mortar adhering to masonry, a real Paris not only to which it refers, but indexes as well in loving, myopic and incessantly pedantic detail. Here is the entry on 'Paris':

> Paris, 18, 19, 33, 34, 40, 48, 50, 83, 97, 108, 112, 113, 117, 128, 134, 145, 161, 170, 186, 187, 193, 198, 199, 203, 204, 208, 214, 229, 231, 237, 245, 246, 249, 252, 258, 261, 269, 270, 273, 274, 280, 290, 303, 312, 321, 328,   356, 358, 401, 403, 404, 406, 419, 421, 438, 441, 445, 449, 452, 479, 480, 482, 483, 499.[14]

That the previously sampled page 450 is not itemized is no facile eye skip, nor is it anything so banal as myopia, especially as on that page the speculative and verifiable identity of street names punctuates the paragraph in question– the poetic conceit that underwrites *Searching for Rue Simon-Crubellier* as a holograph as well as the imaginary hologram imposed upon the city of Paris by Neumark and Miranda in *Searching for Rue Simon-Crubellier*. In a novel entirely set in Paris such bibliographic detail is hardly surprising. What is surprising is that every page is not included in the Index and thereby another heraldic gap is Unwritten into history as fiction (we can be reassured that a 'pataphysical index to the book would surely inventory every single page).   The errant page 450 and the street name to which it refers is nonetheless garnered into a sub category of the boroughs of Paris named in the novel in their own Index entry:

> *Arrondissements*:
> Eighth, 450.
> Ninth, 237.
> Sixteenth, 465.
> Seventeenth, 4, 129, 239, 289.
> Eighteenth, 456.
> Nineteenth, 244.[15]

The Eleventh, suffice to say, is not mentioned.

Inside-text/outside-text. The putatively real and the elusive Unreal. James Joyce's most eloquent and inventive scholiast, Hugh Kenner, similarly inverts the interface between page-space and extra-diegetic space (putatively called 'the real') in one of his many tours through *Ulysses*. In his chapter on Joyce in *The Stoic Comedians*, Kenner underlines the absence of any difference between fact, fiction or the irreal when it comes to the 'thingness' of signification:

> For the reader of *Ulysses* holds a book in his hands. Homer envisaged no such possibility. Consider what it makes feasible. On page 488 we read, 'Potato preservative against plague and pestilence, pray for us.' Now just sixty pages earlier, if we were alert, we may have noted the phrase, "Poor mamma's panacea", murmured by Bloom as he feels his trouser pocket. And fully 372 pages before that, on the bottom line of page 56, we have Bloom feeling in   his hip pocket for the latchkey and reflecting, "Potato I have". The serious   reader's copy of *Ulysses* acquires cross-references at three points; and   Bloom's potato, it is by now commonplace to remark, is but one trivial   instance among hundreds of motifs treated very briefly at two or three   widely separated points in the book, and not even intelligible until the   recurrences have been collated.[16]

It is for such meticulous cross-reference and recapitulation of detail that Kenner distinguishes Joyce from the other stoics that detain his attention (Gustave Flaubert and Samuel Beckett) as the 'comedian of the inventory'.[17] The physical apparatus of the book for Joyce enabled him to materially embody the Thomist principle of *consonantia*, or exact interrelation of parts within the whole, to ensure that any detail would be referred to at least twice. Unlike Perec Joyce did not append an Index to the text of his metropolis for easy re-tracing of the poetic repetition and recapitulation of the same detail throughout *Ulysses*' 732 pages.[18] He did however build complex series of cross-references and *leitmotifs* throughout its numbered pages to prompt a dramatic form of reading that *enabled* the assemblage of networks of detail that could be bibliographically remembered through collation, pagination and alphabetization.

As with Kenner on Joyce there is here an impeccable enjambment of words and things in Perec. And with a nod and wink to Michel Foucault and his allegorical pipe, the hierarchical contract of the material and the immaterial that binds them together.[19] In collating such cross-references I had the benefit of being able to consult

the Index that appends *Life A User's Manual*. Here the book again blurs fiction and factuality as a form of faction. Indexes imply a code of reference and collation of information that is expected in encyclopaedias or a street directory. In a work of fiction the presence of an index inventories who, what and where is present in the imaginary world of page-space rather than empirical space outside-text. *Ulysses* had no accompanying word reference guide to itself when it was first published and had to wait until 1937 when Miles Hanley did the pitiless work of assembling his *Word Index to Ulysses*— work of a kind that Perec did himself in *Life A User's Manual*. The leitmotif of the jigsaw is a fitting emblem of the novel's totality as *qua world*, this world or a parallel possible world. It is countenanced and measured at the meta-level not beyond the novel (as exegesis, critical commentary, hermeneutical complexity), but in its Index. Hanley's word index is a meta-text belonging to the world of cataloguing and inventory; a word-world outside-text. Perec's on the contrary is more like a key or textual legend to identify the miscellaneous pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, whose previous life as seamless traces in an imagistic whole that will have, can and might be put together, fleeting to the eye as an image before being ceremoniously destroyed.

With minutiae such as this it is hardly surprising and somewhat droll to suggest that Miranda and Neumark, like Gaspard Winckler, also had their work cut out for them: the most elusive piece of the dismantled painting-puzzle being the one depicting the whereabouts of number 11 Rue Simon-Crubellier itself (perhaps it was one of Perec's lovingly named 'little chaps'). [20] But this is indeed the *work* that is done in *Searching for Rue Simon-Crubellier* and its complexity is echoed in *Life A User's Manual* in the density of its cross-references within, without and to itself. Lexical collation at such levels of exactitude resembles a form of scholasticism worthy of Flaubert's Bouvard and Pécuchet and their truncated *Dictionnaire des idées recues*. Such rigour transforms both Perec's and Flaubert's works into prodigious compendia that would have met the countenance of Robert Burton. Whether canniness or cruel happenstance, Neumark's and Miranda's lost cause is a *poetic* success. But it is also a cipher of the novel's most futile Pyrrhic victory, Percival Bartlebooth's lifelong pursuit of extravagant ludic artifice: painting 500 images of harbour scenes throughout the world that are made into jigsaw puzzles by Gaspard Winckler and are eventually

destroyed. Tania Ørum has suggested that in this cork-lined myopia Bartlebooth is Perec's model of an avant-garde artist of the 1960s, who 'turns his life into a (self-dissolving) art project'.[21]   To underline the absurdity of treating life as a gnostic form of art, mortality claims Bartlebooth at the moment of completing his 439th puzzle (499 would have surely been a more exquisitely cruel number, were it not for Perec's considerable forbearance). The contemporary Afterword to this preposterously time-consuming devotion to Unmaking would underwrite the fruitless search of Norie Neumark and Maria Miranda as they travel blindly through the City of Light.

But networks, from ant colonies and flocks of birds to books and databases, are not invulnerable. They are open to attack from viruses, the weather as well as material disintegration. The same is true of oil paintings and crossword puzzles. The life's work of Percival Bartlebooth and Gaspard Winckler is an aesthetic labour of making and Unmaking.   The dissembling of Bartlebooth's seaside paintings into jigsaw puzzles to be reassembled and returned to their point of origin and destroyed is an OULIPEAN conceit in absurdity, an endurance otherwise described by philosophers of the history of ideas as the 'meaning of life', or a Zen-like ludic exercise in what John Cage called 'purposeful purposelessness'.[22] The amassing of detail over the course of two simultaneous lifetimes is verified and denied, made and Unmade:

>   Gaspard Winckler had clearly conceived of the manufacture of these five
> hundred puzzles as a single entity, as a gigantic five-hundred-piece puzzle of
> which each piece was a puzzle of seven hundred and fifty pieces, and it was
> evident that the solution of each of these puzzles called for a different approach, a
> different cast of mind, a different method, and a different system.[23]

And Bartlebooth's response to the pretzel logic imposed upon him by Winckler is a search for the impossible to give his life meaning.   It is also an oblique and anachronistic reference to another pursuit yet to come, a pursuit out-of-sync:

>   Bartlebooth found the very essence of his passion in this feeling of being
> stuck: a kind of torpor, a sort of repetitious boredom, a veiled befuddlement in
> search of a shapeless something whose outlines he could barely manage to
> mumble in his mind. [24]

Neumark and Miranda certainly don't mumble in their interviews with the citizens of Paris during their search for Rue Simon-Crubellier. Yet the spectre of that 'shapeless something' is nonetheless always present during these discussions.

Perec tests the burden of incredulity by making it difficult for his reader to *not doubt* that such a street can at least be sought after. It is in the nature of 'UnSearching that such pursuit is countersigned by a psychological, epistemological and ludic code that searching for the impossible and not finding it is an aesthetic and psychological end in itself.   Like an OULIPO experiment in the strict adherence to and rigorous application of rules and constraints, both Perec's novel as well as Miranda's and Neumark's media art work exert pressure on the 'Un': unseeable, unreachable, unsitely, unsightly, yet vigorously pursued nonetheless.   So to further quantify the Un, the search is Unfound and Unfinished.

Pre-Un
Searching for Rue Simon-Crubellier, as with the eponymous street on which it is based, is undoubtedly a brash postmodern work in its playful enjambment of ontology and epistemology, the fictionality of worlds of words and its dogged pursuit of the imaginary in the (putatively) real.   Miranda's and Neumark's 'UnSearching project rests cheek by not so solemn jowl at the posterior end of Perec's formidable pages.   Yet there is another, more distant and anterior work that precedes both of them.   In a previous time of reflexive experimentation British artist Ian Breakwell's *UNWORD* series of live performances (1969-1970) engaged with the audio-visual aesthetics and inscrutable semantics of the 'Un before Perec had even started scribbling *Life A User's Manual*. UNWORD has been generically described as a 'film/ film document of a series of theatre events'. [25] Art scholar Eve Kalyva is more detailed in her account of the performative and aleatory nature of *UNWORD* as an 'act' that

> takes place in a room filled with paper sheets from ceiling to floor covered with words beginning with the UN-prefix. While projected films and tape recorders play, the artist moves through this "forest of words" as he called it, biting and shredding them with his teeth… Paying attention to the visuality of words, the event

acts on both the conceptual dissolution of the words' meaning – now marked, or shall we say "un-marked" – but also their physical destruction. [26]

The event was filmed by Breakwell's collaborator Mike Leggett not only as documentation, but also as an incursion into each live event that was visually represented on a suite of still images. Like a palimpsest being written in real-time, *UNWORD* converges the immediacy of anarchic choreography, live performance, sculptural and painterly elements with images of it being filmed by Leggett.

UNWORD, © Ian Breakwell Estate and Mike Leggett, 1970

The Unpredictable element of the work is its 'live' relationship 'within the audience', such that no two performances/screenings are the same. Breakwell evocatively described works such as the UNWORD series as 'process-events or performance events', contrary to 'expanded cinema' as characterised by the late filmmaker Steve Dwoskin. Both terms, though, capture the 'constantly shifting' nature of the relationship of the event with its audience.[27] This observation, made originally in 1975, is precursory to both *Life A User's Manual* and *Searching for Rue Simon-Crubellier*, as well as *'UnSearching for Rue Simon-Crubellier*.

Searching for Rue Simon-Crubellier is a variation of a hypermediated performance event. It combines the liveness of *vox pop* interviews and the artifice of staged performance (Neumark reading a copy of Perec while sitting on a Metro train, a peripatetic Bénabou in his apartment) with recorded documentary-like sequences (in

civic offices, etc.) as well as intra- and extra- textual engagement with the Paris of Perec's pages. Perec's fugitive street as well as the artists' pursuit of it is UnSightly and UnSitely simply because while it is never seen it is always *en scène*, whether in the material pages of a book marked with the vestiges of once wet printer's ink, or the virtual *somewhere* within the material division of the French capital defined by another Seine. What is missing in both works is its placement in time (as the object of a search) and space (as a grail that makes its hyperreal incarnation in the 17th arrondissement). What Miranda and Neumark are constantly faced with is a famous street's putative and virtual status *in lieu* of its presence: both are searching for something intransitively. Nothing is found but only sought in a continuous present tense of searching and 'Unsearching.

Searching for Rue Simon-Crubellier is a talismanic instance of Perec's anticipatory consciousness for media artists in his preoccupation with preposterous complexity, mathematics and the playful permutations of various forms of code. The codework of Australian artist Mez (also known as Mary-Anne Breeze) coincided with the emergence of digital aesthetics in the 1990s. Something of Perec's encyclopaedism and his fastidious obsession with systems and rules is shadowed in works such as *Cut Space* (1995), which parlays the interface between narrative and persistent interruptions that break its flow into sense. Her interest in hypertext as a post-alphabetic form of writing (in works such as _*the data][h!][bleeding t.ex][e][ts* [2001]) is predicated upon the desire to forge a language for an online environment beyond the page; a universe of words not dissimilar to Perec's.[28] Not, though, as a didactic manual of style for making and 'unmaking media art, or a user's guide to its underlying logics. But rather, for that very inventory of abstractions to be the subject of art as much as a motivation for its making. Tactical art collective Blast Theory in the UK do just that, exploring "questions about the meaning of interaction and, especially, its limitations".[29] Blast Theory have no fixed artistic palette, nor do they work within singular spaces. The province of their largely performative and time-based work is the mixed reality of interconnected media with which we are constantly immersed on a daily basis. Integrating the built and online environment via mobile phone and web-based interfaces, Blast Theory works generate alternative vectors between artists, art and audiences that are direct expressions of the

distributed conditions in which artists now work and most of us live. The complex, nuanced and integrated networks of connections within Blast Theory's considerable practice over the last twenty years is a hybrid means of bringing together different kinds of space as a manifold event. In this their poetic and polemical aesthetics are not dissimilar to the method of juggling more *appartements* than you can handle and manage to get away with it: exactly what Perec finesses in *Life A User's Manual*.

As I noted in *Interzone* in 2005, no doubt with Perec's hauntological presence over my shoulder, media art 'didn't simply appear as if from nowhere'.[30] And nor did *Searching for Rue Simon-Crubellier*. It owes as much to the apparatus of the interactive screen, networks and data storage as to the modern novel (Proust, Joyce, Woolf and Fawkner) and the postmodern anti-novel with its obsessive and compulsive mania for lists and algorithmic rules (Robbe-Grillet, Calvino, Beckett, Duras). It is beyond the modern in its closed and insular world of domestic busy-ness, clutter and overly complex quests. Peripatetic strolls along the boulevards in the manner of Maupassant or Baudelaire, or the flâneurie of Rimbaud losing himself in the precariousness of the crowd, are a distant memory in Perec's Paris.

So with Perec and Italo Calvino hovering as a pair of tutelary deities[31] of media and 'undecidable art in the 21st century, 'You are about to begin searching for 11 Rue Simon-Crubellier', etc.

Notes

1. Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, p. 112.
2. The term 'intertwingled' is one of the many neologisms coined by Ted Nelson to describe the ongoing, web-like interconnectivity of hypertext systems, *Literary Machines*, pp.2/8-2/9.
3. Perec, *Life A User's Manual*, p. 3.
4. Calvino, *Cosmicomics*, p. 105.
5. Miranda, *Unsitely Aesthetics*, p. 10.
6. Perec, *Life A User's Manual*, p. 4.
7. *Searching for Rue Simon-Crubellier* is a fraught, futile and hysterical pilgrimage cum journey not unlike any number of Monty Python sketches that feature the pursuit of absurd grails; po-faced follies such as **'**Tunnelling from Godalming to Java' (1970), 'Cycling Tour of Cornwall' (1972) and 'The Hairdressers Ascent of Mount Everest' (1973).   Arguably the most allegorical labour of urban endurance is **'**Climbing the North Face of the Uxbridge Road**'**, first televised in 1972.
8. In Arthur Penn's 1976 film *The Missouri Breaks* the eccentric regulator/man hunter Lee Clayton (Marlon Brando), talking in riddles, gives an enigmatic lesson in Unsightliness to the dying cattle rustler Calvin (Harry Dean Stanton):
    'You know about this time of year, Indian summer, getting' there, they say you can see the star of Bethlehem, if you look real good. I've seen it once or twice. But you gotta look away and then gotta look at it see and you gotta just, blink like that, see…'
    Due to the duplicity of ocular parallax the star can never been seen directly, but glimpsed only at the moment of its blurring out of sight. It is sited, temporarily there, but simultaneously not sighted. The last image of Calvin is cruelly unsightly as Clayton throws a metal spike through his right eye.
9. Miranda, p. 13.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid, p. 14.
12. Ibid, p. 15.
13. Perec, *Life A User's Manual*, p. 450.
14. Ibid, p. 545.
15. Ibid.
16. Kenner, *The Stoic Comedians: Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett*, p. 32.
17. Ibid, p.30.
18. This pagination refers to the first Shakespeare & Company Paris edition of *Ulysses* published in 1922.
19. Michel Foucault, *This Is Not A Pipe*, 1983.
20. Perec, *Life A User's Manual*, p. xvi.
21. Tania Ørum, 'Georges Perec and the avant-garde in the visual arts', *Textual Practice*, 20, 2, 2006, p. 322.
22. John Cage, *Indeterminacy: New Aspect of Form in Instrumental and Electronic Music*, 1958.
23. Perec, *Life A User's Manual*, p.337.
24. Ibid.
25. Entry on Mike Leggett in *Survey of the Avant-Garde in Britain: Vol. 3*, 1972, p.32.
26. Eve Kalyva, 'Textual Counterparts: a performative beyond visual attention?' Paper presented at the Association of Art Historians conference, 2009.

27. Steve Dwoskin quoted in Duncan White, 'Expanded Cinema: The Live Record' in *Expanded Cinema: Art, Performance, Film*, eds., A.L. Rees, Duncan White, Steven Ball & David Curtis, p.26. I am grateful to Mike Leggett for drawing my attention to the distinction and particularly to Breakwell's understanding of the process and performance elements of the works.
28. See http://www.hotkey.net.au/~netwurker/
29. See http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/
30. Darren Tofts, *Interzone*, p.10.
31. The phrase is Hugh Kenner's description of the studiously avuncular presence of Jonathan Swift and Laurence Sterne in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, *The Stoic Comedians*, p.48.

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