

# CREATING KNOWLEDGE AND CONTROL



A **SPACE** for **DIALOGUE** 95

HOOD MUSEUM OF ART, DARTMOUTH



Examining technology as a top-down, disciplinary tool that regiments space, time, and the relations among people and activities can alert us to forms of control and power we often overlook. Today, such tools are created not only by governments but also by multinational corporations that leverage the potential of managed information systems and big data. The works included in *Creating Knowledge and Control* reveal ways that artists and citizens have grappled with what to make of these technologies, their insights and consequences, and the changes to the landscape that result from their use.

Doug Rickard's *#40.805716, Bronx, NY (2007)* and Mishka Henner's *Staphorst Ammunition Depot, Overijssel* draw attention to the contradictory nature of the Internet: a space that fosters open communication and information is simultaneously a massive infrastructure of surveillance and control. Both artists use open-access platforms from Google (Google Street View and Google Earth) to isolate visual data points and photograph them. Their works show us that humans are no longer the primary source of photographic information: machines take photos indiscriminately, as Google Street View cars and satellites document the world automatically. Due to the ubiquity of these services, imagery, text, and video technology now mediate our world. Both what we are shown and what we provide to the worldwide database of imagery shape how we view the

world we inhabit. We see more of the world than ever before, but our perception is highly curated by institutions like Google. While curated and distorted images have always influenced perception, the lightning-speed proliferation of pictures, videos, and online surveillance calls us to examine how much these media sources shape the way we view our world.

Although we associate "information management" with the computer age, knowledge-driven control has taken multiple forms in the past, exerting power in ways we also experience today. Dwayne Wilcox's *Luke Failed to Communicate*, and Nicholas Galanin's *What have we become? Vol. 3* both feature historical forms of knowledge documentation that also function to control populations. The two works also show how human experiences can be lost in informational tools. By carving his own face out of the lettered pages of an anthropological text on the Yakutat Tlingit and separating it from the book, Gaiman, who is of mixed Tlingit/Aleut heritage, draws attention to the gap between the narrative on the pages and the reality of the people the narrative is supposed to describe. However, paradoxically, the pages of written words literally comprise the form of the face, showing that ultimately our understanding of these people as presented in anthropological books or historical accounts is predicated on receiving information from a potentially biased writer, and that the "reality" of those being described may be lost in anthropological translations to "knowledge."

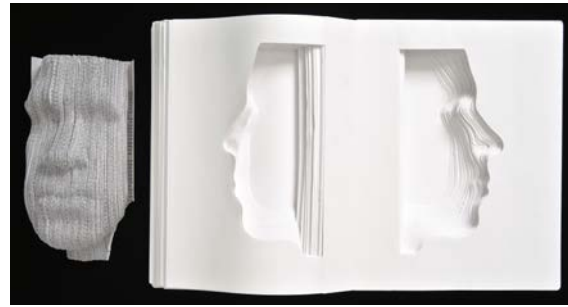
Dwayne Wilcox's chosen medium is ledger paper. Ledger art became famous in the early 1900s and enjoyed a resurgence in the 1960s and 1970s. Some of the most famous ledger art was created at Fort Marion in Saint Augustine, Florida, where military captors encouraged Native American prisoners to draw, providing them ledger paper. Today, Wilcox uses ledger art share a view of how Native people see white culture and to reverse the typical paradigm of white people portraying Native Americans. His title, *Luke Failed to Communicate*, points out the irrationality of a justice system upheld by bureaucratic means that are symbolized by the ledger paper. The works of Wilcox and Galanin

encourage us to see that reality is not necessarily wholly defined by anthropologists, historians, or bureaucrats.

These artists prompt us to question the tools we use to evaluate and understand the past, and help us to see how these distorted, flawed tools of information management shape our current perception of reality. Subhankar Banerjee hones in on how different surveying eyes create various conceptions of the surrounding world. Both industrial tracks from oil-surveying machinery and animal tracks are visible in one image. Industrial paths are symbolic of command-and-control systems that use technology to survey land in economic terms, and are easily recognized by participants in those systems. Animal tracks, on the other hand, can be discerned by those with indigenous knowledge and experience with local land and wildlife. Some may recognize both kinds of tracks, and have different levels of familiarity with each, showing how previous experience informs our relationships to the natural world around us. Additionally, this points to the potentially alarming fact that machine-made marks may be more recognizable than animal-made ones for many of today's viewers.

Artists show how documentary and data-aggregation technologies can influence geopolitical struggle and alter human flow. Luis Diego-Qualtrough and Ingo Günther both show how artists use information to create new ways of understanding global issues. Diego-Qualtrough focuses on the capacity of data to convey macro-happenings (like carbon emissions and global resource use) that may be on scales so large we cannot fully understand them. Although his simple numbers and statements show our capacity to measure such phenomena, his work also creates a sense of the absurd, which makes us question whether we actually do understand what these numbers mean.

Günther shows complex data on illuminated globes to foreground scientific, economic, and historical information, creating multilayered accounts of the relationship between humans and the planet. His map of global refugee concentrations and movement helps us see how global struggles can be quantified and mapped, perhaps giving decision makers with access to



this data the capacity to shape human activity on scales not possible before such technological developments.

Kevin Caplicki shows a snapshot of what technological attempts to control human flow look like in his reproduction of border-crossing documents. Ironically, although globalization means facilitated circulation of goods, it has also led to increased constraints on the mobility of individuals, as embodied by border-crossing bureaucracy. Josh MacPhee's work also comments on human flow across borders and shows the flaws in various tools like blockades, gates, and walls aimed to control human flow. The damaged gate in MacPhee's *Todas Las Fronteras son Temporales, US Border Do Not Cross* suggests that human activity persists in spite of regulatory efforts.

Man-made information systems hold potential for innovation and mass-coordination. However, their potential to harm us—by providing unimaginable transparency—may be bigger than we can understand. Algorithms—or, rather, algorithmic actions—may also be inscrutable, automatic, yet they can play an important role in catalyzing and organizing untapped potential. As technology and information management evolves, so do questions regarding if and how we should govern these tools of control and surveillance.

Annabelle Bardenheier '19  
Conroy Intern

## CHECKLIST

Subhankar Banerjee, American (born India), born 1967. *Known and Unknown Tracks*, from the series *Oil and the Geese*, negative 2006; print 2009, digital chromogenic print face-mounted to Plexiglas. Purchased through the Guernsey Center Moore 1904 Fund; 2008.59.2

Nicholas Galanin, American/Tlingit, born 1979. *What have we become? Vol. 3*, 2007, artist's book, 1,000 pages cut away to form a negative paper relief of the artist's face. Purchased through the Virginia and Preston T. Kelsey 1958 Fund; 2007.36.1

Dwayne Wilcox, American / Oglala Lakota, born 1957. *Luke Failed to Communicate*, 2008, crayon, graphite, colored pencil, and felt-tipped pen on ledger paper. Purchased through the Guernsey Center Moore 1904 Fund; 2008.59.2

Mishka Henner, Belgian, born 1976. *Staphorst Ammunition Depot, Overijssel*, from the *Dutch Landscape* series, 2011, archival pigment print. Purchased through the Mrs. Harvey P. Hood W'18 Fund; Selected by participants in the seminar "Museum Collecting 101": Jonathan A. Busam '17; Amy Chang '16; Xiyue (Bonita) Chen '16; Tangent Ting Cheung Cheng '16; Sharon J. Cho '17; Byrne Hollander '17; Felicia B. Jia '16; Suhyeon Kim '19; Catherine M. Most '16; Eva M. Munday '16; Julia M. Pomerantz '16; Katherine C. Schreiber '18; Joseph Wang '16; Nancy L. Wu, '16; Regina L. Yan '19; Eun Kyung Yoon '19; 2016.23

Doug Rickard, American, born 1968. #40.805716, *Bronx, NY (2007)*, from the series *A New American Picture*, 2011, archival pigment print. Purchased through the Mrs. Harvey P. Hood W'18 Fund and the James and Barbara Block Acquisitions Endowment; Selected by participants in the seminar "Museum Collecting 101": Annabelle Bardenheier '19; Maria Sarela Brenes '17; Maclean Calihan '17; Kang-Chun Cheng '17; Palden Flynn '18; Lena S. Gandevia '19; Ishaan H. Jajodia '20; Makena Kauhane '19; John Ling '17; Morgan Moinian '20; Oscar Rodríguez de la Vega Olivares, Tuck '17; Emily H. Yang '18; 2017.38

Kevin Caplicki, American, born 1978. *¡Imagina un mundo sin fronteras!*, from the portfolio *Migration Now*, 2012, silkscreen, letterpress. Purchased through the Contemporary Art Fund; 2013.46.7

Josh MacPhee, American, born 1973. *Todas Las Fronteras son Temporales, US Border Do Not Cross*, from the portfolio *Migration Now*, 2012, silkscreen, letterpress. Purchased through the Contemporary Art Fund; 2013.46.18

Luis Delgado-Qualtrough, American (born Mexico), born 1952. *Big Data, Coincidental Observation No. 9*, from the series *10 Carbon Conundrums*, 2016, pigment print on K3 Epson hot press white paper. Purchased through the Virginia and Preston T. Kelsey 1958 Fund; 2017.8.10

Ingo Günther, German, born 1957. *[154-7] Refugee (Republic) Network*, 2016, mixed media. Purchased through the Mrs. Harvey P. Hood W'18 Fund; 2017.35.3

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The exhibition *Creating Knowledge and Control*, part of the museum's student-curated *A Space for Dialogue* series, is on view at the Hood Museum of Art, August 10–September 22, 2019.

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Cover image: Doug Rickard, #40.805716, *Bronx, NY (2007)*, 2011  
Inside left: Mishka Henner, *Staphorst Ammunition Depot, Overijssel*, 2011  
Inside right: Nicholas Galanin, *What have we become? Vol. 3*, 2007

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