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FROM WHERE:  
A REVERIE ON DIGITAL SURROGATES

Janelle Rebel

Ordinance Series

Chicago: Kenning Editions, 2016

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kenningeditions.com

From where : a reverie on digital surrogates.

Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rebel, Janelle.

From where : a reverie on digital surrogates / Janelle Rebel.  
pages ; cm.

First ed. Includes bibliographical references.

1. Intellectual property—Intangible property. 2. Digital rights management. 3. Digital preservation—Distribution—Representation 4. Digital images—Intellectual history. 5. Libraries—Special collections—Digitization. 6. Library catalog management—Cataloging—Data processing. I. Rebel, Janelle.

Z699 R241f 2016      025.129 R241f 2016  
Manufactured in the United States of America  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

\*What's in a number? This work's cataloger, Lori Snyder, combed the LC and DDC classification schedules before deciding on these virtual shelf locations for an imagined reader: Z 699—699.5 (Books. Writing. Paleography. Libraries. Bibliography.) and 025.129 (Library Operations—Library use of reprography.).

1.

This is a work about digital surrogates. With any luck it will be beside the point.

2.

Film director Jean-Marie Straub who made films with his wife Danièle Huillet for seventy years, said: “Walk around a place three times and find the strategic point from which you can see something without destroying its mystery.”<sup>1</sup> I haven’t seen any Straub-Huillet films but when I read the line in an art rag a few years ago I decided to keep it.<sup>2</sup> So now this thing, a rather good sound bite, that was plucked from one context has since taken up residence alongside my other references in a mental, material, and digital scrap heap of recollections, papers, files, and windows. As an informally acquired sentence object, I’ve deliberately saved it and set it aside for future use in a rather traditional manner.

1. I’m attributing this to Straub because that’s how I initially recorded it. Technically, this phrasing was written by the artist Céline Condorelli recalling a conversation that she had with Straub. The important thing is to resist the urge to cite full publication details; I plucked it from an article which did not wholly resonate with me.

2. At the time of writing, I decided to partially remedy this by placing a hold on *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (1967) at the library. The film’s direction is credited to Straub and the editing and writing to Straub and Huillet, though Huillet also directed. For the Straub and Huillet curious, MOMA recently held a retrospective of their films from May 6–June 6, 2016: <http://www.moma.org/calendar/film/1641?locale=en>.



A sentence object at Little Sparta, the garden of Ian Hamilton Finlay. HIC IACET PARVULUM QUODDAM EX AQUA LONGIORE EXCERPTUM = "Here lies a small excerpt from a longer water"

### 3.

In Benjaminian terms—via Boris Groys, the sentence object loses its “aura of originality” when I take it “out of the material flow.”<sup>3</sup> Groys, who situates today’s digital archive alongside the long-standing archival strategies of a museum, explains:

A museum piece is an object minus its (invisible) aura of originality (originality being understood as the original placing of the object in space and time). Digital archiving, on the contrary, ignores the object and preserves the aura. The object itself is absent. What remains is its metadata—the information about the here and now of its original inscription into the material flow: photos, videos, textual testimonies. The museum object always needed the interpretation that substituted for its lost aura. Digital metadata creates an aura without an object.<sup>4</sup>

My sentence object was rather like a museum object. To talk about about digital surrogates in an information economy, on the other hand, it seems that we might not be dealing with objects at all but with *auras* and *nonrepresentations* of the works of art, archeological artifacts, images, and bibliographic materials that they stand (in) for.

3. Boris Groys, *In the Flow* (New York: Verso, 2016), 4.

4. Groys, *In the Flow*, 4.

To digitally archive an original object, one first creates a digital surrogate. In the process of making a digital surrogate, the aura (as some kind of atmospheric bundle of space and time) is divorced from the (original) object. This detachment can be taken one step further too. To re-enact that same aura would be to play the metadata. Such play can fashion a new object that does not resemble the original source material.

#### 4.

Before I get ahead of myself, which I'm afraid I already have, let's return to the quote attributed to Straub: "Walk around a place three times and find the strategic point from which you can see something without destroying its mystery." If we try to get acquainted with digital surrogates through methods of circumambulation, *is there a danger of spoiling the subject through unstrategic looking? Supposing for a moment that digital surrogates are more aura than object, what can be found—more mystery?*

#### 5.

While this exploration of digital surrogates will be kaleidoscopic, it is timely. We spend time producing and consuming all kinds of digital stuff. The listserv announcements, RSS feeds, and vendor email blasts common in knowledge and cultural heritage networks regularly broadcast that this or that special collection has now been digitized or that such and such archival holdings

are now fully accessible online. Photo collections, rare books, architectural sites, paintings, literary papers—all freshly cataloged, scanned, and ready for your use. As Marlene Manoff observes: “Digital technology creates an appetite as well as a market for the historical objects it delivers and recontextualizes.”<sup>5</sup> She adds:

Globalization and rapid social change induce nostalgia for the past even as the digital environment affords considerable intimacy with artifacts of earlier eras. We are in the odd position of having tremendous access to historical artifacts and digital surrogates while also experiencing a sense of being cut off from history. The current emphasis on the use of primary source material in teaching as well as the popularity of historical and genealogical material online is a function of the widespread availability of digital access to these sources, but it is also a symptom of a desire for historical continuity.<sup>6</sup>

So while the exchange of non-physical goods is part of what predicates a knowledge economy, one might reflect on the politics of such a system and ask, *what drives us to circulate*

5. Marlene Manoff, “Archive and Database as Metaphor: Theorizing the Historical Record,” *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 10, no. 4 (2010): 388, <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.

6. Manoff, “Archive and Database,” 389.



*what we do?* We find ourselves in the precarious position of assigning value to digital surrogates, while glossing over the particularities of what defines them.

## 6.

The term *surrogate*, when solo or in combination, feels like one you already know. A comfortable old friend. It's in the (contemporary) water. It pops up in art writing and exhibition press releases in every manner of use. Museum studies publishes articles that want to enhance the *user experience* of interacting with source objects and offering expanded, educational content through the body of digital surrogates. Library science concerns its expertise with issues of *preservation* and *access*. Focusing on utility, the discipline tackles how to create a *reliable* digital surrogate, how to make it *discoverable* within a search engine or database, and if it is a text-based work, *searchable* within. Critical theory is dogged by Baudrillard's *simulacra* and Borges's micro story about the Map of the Empire, and new media theory—taking its cues from Baudrillard—specifically hones in on the *circulation of images* in a distributed network and the demystification of cloud storage.<sup>7</sup> In the past, gender theory has touched on the cult of motherhood and the technological developments that enable *surrogate reproduction*. In turn it has

7. For an overview of the latter, see João Ribas, ed., *Under the Clouds: From Paranoia to the Digital Sublime* (Porto: Serralves Museu de Arte Contemporânea, 2015), exhibition catalog.

exposed an exploitative system that boosts the reproductive possibilities for middle-class white women at the expense of those who labor as surrogate mothers, namely low-income minority women.

On the other hand, the building block definitions of *surrogate* captured in the *OED*—some of which are familiar, some not—indicate a slight disjointedness between the common (past) and the current usage. *What is it we're addressing?* *Surrogate* is a noun: “a person appointed by authority to act in place of another; a deputy;” “the deputy of an ecclesiastical judge, of a bishop or bishop’s chancellor, esp. one who grants licences to marry without banns;” “a person or (usually) a thing that acts for or takes the place of another; a substitute;” and “a woman whose pregnancy arises from the implantation in her womb of a fertilized egg or embryo from another woman;” as well as an adjective: “taking the place of or standing for something else; representative;” and a verb: “to appoint as a successor, substitute, or deputy;” “to substitute in respect of a right or claim;” and “to act for another as a surrogate or substitute; *fig.* to minister to.”<sup>8</sup>

No single work lays out the expanding characteristics of a *surrogate* nor attempts to situate the narrower term *digital surrogate* with respect to an information society. It seems, in this sense, that some basic science can be done.

8. *OED Online*, s.v. “surrogate, n. and adj;” *OED Online*, s.v. “surrogate, v.”

If we want to better understand the situation—how surrogates interact within our “living social context”—we should try to make contact with some of their properties.<sup>9</sup>

## 7.

As briefly touched on, one of the ways in which surrogate has surfaced in language is within art writing. Mentions of surrogate and art go hand-in-hand. A quick search through the announcements, reviews, and features in *e-flux*, *Art Forum*, *Frieze*, and *Text Zer Kunst* shows how frequently it appears as well as how many meanings it propagates. From stand-ins, substitutions, and displacements to vessels, models, and outlines, here is a brief overview of how *surrogate* shows up in art-related texts.

- the surrogate as a metonymic or semiotic substitution, i.e. this thing now becomes that thing
- the surrogate object as a discourse, body of knowledge, or abstract concept, i.e. this thing stands for social justice
- the surrogate as a theatrical mask, screen, or intermediary, i.e. whose specialty is addressing an audience while protecting a hidden self

9. Walter Benjamin, “The Author As Producer,” trans. John Heckman, *New Left Review* 1/62 (July–August 1970), <https://newleftreview.org/1/62/walter-benjamin-the-author-as-producer>.

- a fictional character that lives out a surrogate self, identity, or consciousness of the artist but whose identity is distinct from the artist's
- a biomorphic or hyperrealistic avatar, which is experientially understood as a fantastical, artificial, or fabricated surrogate
- the surrogate is playing someone else or playing at being someone else
- the surrogate as a scalable model, i.e. scaled 1:1, miniaturized, or enlarged
- the surrogate as a philosophical ideal
- the surrogate as an archetype
- the surrogate as a decoy
- the surrogate as an outline, shading, or ghosted form
- the surrogate as existing in an alternate, parallel world
- the surrogate as a replacement for something known to be lost
- the surrogate bears a resemblance to its subject, i.e. with similar visible, material characteristics

- the object bears no resemblance to its subject yet acts as a surrogate body, perceivable with context clues
- the surrogate as a vessel for memory
- the documentation of an event as a surrogate experience
- the surrogate not as mere documentation but as *représentatif*

The examples above, overlapping and divergent, sketch out a theoretical net for understanding surrogates that starts to push beyond general usage.<sup>10</sup>

10. Despite this rich web, the term *surrogate* is absent from art theory and art history glossaries, dictionaries, and reference works. Though it is not officially recognized as a key word, it seems like fundamental vocabulary.

8.

Exhausted by the production of a well-researched bulleted list (it is summertime after all<sup>11</sup>), I took an afternoon to watch a Straub-Huillet film, the DVD of *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (1967) referred to in an earlier footnote. How did the film approach its subject—the figure of Johann Sebastian Bach—considering Straub’s artistic advice to “walk around a place three times and find the strategic point from which you can see something without destroying its mystery?” Well, spoiler, never head-on and in fact, with the directness of a well-traveled billiards shot.

The filmmakers do not presume to know more than their audience, situating themselves beside the viewer even as they make the film. I got the sense while watching *Chronicle* that Straub and Huillet were there looking too, searching for a glint of Bach’s life to appear on screen. A life which they plausibly could have glimpsed while in the archive sifting through letters, documents, and musical scores. The spare screenplay tells of Bach’s professional ups and downs as recorded by Anna Magdalena, Bach’s second wife, in her (fictional) diary. In *The Allure of the Archives* French historian Arlette Farge explains her own encounters with primary resources observing that “you realize that it is an illusion to imagine that one could ever actually reconstruct the past” but

11. Summer and writing seem less suited to each other than say fall and writing, or spring and writing. Quite obviously winter and writing were made for each other.

that the archives can produce “the sensation of having finally caught hold of the real, instead of looking through a ‘narrative of’ or ‘discourse on’ the real.”<sup>12</sup> Straub and Huillet certainly set out to create favorable conditions for brushing up against the real Bach; *Chronicle* is no narrative picture.

Straub uses long shots of musicians in 17th century garb re-enacting Bach compositions in courtly households and church choirs, interspersed with close-ups of archival materials. The musicians, including the roles of Johann Sebastian (Gustav Leonhardt) and Anna Magdalena (Christiane Lang), are not being *played* by actors or by persons in character. Instead, the film’s cast of musicians is made up of present-day musicians (Bach aficionados) being themselves (in Baroque dress). On and off screen, Leonhardt is at the helm of the ensembles, coordinating and conducting each piece according to historical annotations in order “to hear what Bach had in mind.”<sup>13</sup>

The music in *Chronicle* unfolds in real-time, which in film-time is slow time. The film viewer is the primary audience for these concert gatherings—a mix of funerary, celebratory,

12. Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, trans. Thomas Scott-Railton (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 8, 14.

13. “‘Making of’ Featurette,” *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*, directed by Jean-Marie Straub (1967; New York: New Yorker Video, 2005), DVD.

pedagogic, and liturgical occasions. No other listener or congregation is visible. The camera provides privileged access to a rehearsal or a performance (i.e. a worship service) but never takes a privileged viewing position. The camera is crammed alongside a church rail to frame a partial row of musicians or shows Anna Magdalena in profile from across a long room. The filmmakers and film viewers are a small part of the re-enactment, a fly on the wall. Straub and Huillet seem to ask, *what would happen if we created a filmed experiment that strings twenty Bach scores together? Will the viewer get a glimpse of Bach? Or will something new emerge?*

#### 9.

Though there might be a tendency to conflate *re-enactment* and *surrogate*, there is a notable difference between the two. The Bach re-enactment was happening without an appointment, without claim; whereas a surrogate has the “authority to act in place of another.”<sup>14</sup> Without the authority to stand-in for Bach, Leonhardt is himself.

14. *OED Online*, s.v. “surrogate.”





Gustav Leonhardt, not being Bach, in the opening sequence of *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*.

## 10.

Bruno Latour staged a re-enactment “with a twist” at the Pompidou in 2010 of a 1922 debate between metaphysician Henri Bergson and physicist Albert Einstein.<sup>15</sup> He describes re-enactment in terms of print technology, noting that a “re-enactment is not a mere facsimile of the original but a second version, or a *second print* of the first instance, allowing for the exploration of its originality.”<sup>16</sup> Re-enactment is not intended to create a duplicate copy of an event.

Latour’s bibliographic reference to a *second printing*, an impression which keeps the

15. “Selon Bruno Latour,” Centre Pompidou, 2010, YouTube video, 2:12, uploaded by Sciences Po on September 8, 2010, <https://youtu.be/EHswllzk61k>.

16. Bruno Latour, “Some Experiments in Art and Politics,” *e-flux journal* 23 (March 2011): 5, [http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article\\_217.pdf](http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_217.pdf).

same typesetting as the first, makes for a *very subtle* but apt comparison. I myself like bold analogies; I would have said re-enactment was like a *second edition* if only for dramatic effect. But thinking about the time that can elapse from one printing to the next, many variations can and do occur—e.g. changes to the paper stock, the trim size of the page, the color and density of the ink, the cover design, and even the publisher of a work. Add to that any number of production oopses—e.g. duplicate or missing pages, untrimmed signatures, and upside down insertions—and you end up with an object (in our example, a second printing) that is notably different from the original. It still fits nicely within the family unit (say, the family of the first edition), even as it expands the possible definitions of that family.

All that to say, re-enactment has very close ties to an original event. As it attempts to stage a second version of the original, it subsequently creates a hierarchical relationship that did not exist before. If mapped, the re-enactment creates a new node that extends from the original event, and by dint of its existence, challenges the familial identity that binds the original and the re-enactment together. In the bibliographic world, the realization of a second printing can call into question many aspects regarding the first printing. So when Latour talks about re-enactment and “the exploration of its originality,” the new performance can not only alter our understanding of an

event's placement in time and space, but effect the original event's aura or "inscription into the material flow" of the present.<sup>17</sup>



Minute Men of Massachusetts in a residential yard, Tamworth, New Hampshire. Through the additive linkages of re-enactment, the present effects the past.

## 11.

To continue speculating on surrogates rather than re-enactments, let's pendulum away from films and museum performances for a moment and back to occurrences in daily life.

Thinking about what it might mean *to be* a surrogate, that is to be appointed as a substitute for something or someone, begs the question: *what if you could know how a surrogate thinks*

17. Latour, "Some Experiments," 5; Groys, *In the Flow*, 4.

*and feels?* Perhaps this inquiry seems like a demand for direct access to the subject at hand after a series of digressions. But ever since I came across a 1991 piece by Angela Davis, “Outcast Mothers and Surrogates: Racism and Reproductive Politics in the Nineties,” I had the *holy crap* realization that *surrogates can talk*.<sup>18</sup>

With questions of uncertain quality humming in the back of my mind, it was the only (il)logical next step. It had to be done. I called my cousin Rita, the only surrogate mother I know, and soon found out that she’s the only surrogate mother she knows too.

Rita’s had six pregnancies, and seven children—three biological children of her own and four through gestational surrogacy. While she browsed the aisles at Target, she gave me a crash course about the ins and outs of a system completely foreign to me—of surrogacy agencies, fertility centers, state regulations, and health insurance—and zipped through the details of the process step by step—of the prequalification screening, the courting and matchmaking period between surrogate mothers and intended parents, the rigorous medical and psychological evaluations administered to surrogate mothers and their partners, the self-administered medicines and injections that prepare your body for IVF and trick it into believing that it actually is

18. Angela Davis, “Outcast Mothers and Surrogates: Racism and Reproductive Politics in the Nineties,” in *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, ed. Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski (New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2013): 452–458.

pregnant, and the regular slew of doctor's visits until the delivery.

"Oh yeah," she had forgotten to mention it in order, "there is also a contract time after the initial screening" where surrogate mothers and intended parents lay out the terms of the arrangement. *Of course!* It's the official moment when the gestational surrogate is both appointed to act in place of another and accepts the appointment. According to another source, the contract "protects the health and rights of the surrogate, the embryo, as well as the intended parents" and may include "stipulations regarding insurance, payments, court orders, genetic testing, terminations and selective reductions."<sup>19</sup> A transaction takes place to put the bodily substitution in motion (the agreement for one to carry and give birth to another's child) and to stipulate the length of time that the substitution is valid (e.g. the default in Illinois is that "the intended mother shall be the mother of the child for purposes of State law immediately upon the birth of the child"<sup>20</sup>).

Without yet directly asking Rita how she has felt about her surrogate experiences, about the burden of taking on another full-time job, I know. Her periodic and giddy "love its" give her away. It's a crazy kind of intimacy for the

19. Holly Neumann, "Becoming a Surrogate Mother," *Waupaca County News*, October 8, 2015, <http://www.waupacanow.com/2015/10/08/becoming-a-surrogate-mother/>.

20. Gestational Surrogacy Act, P.A. 93-921 (2005), <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=2613>.

uninitiated and the requisite amount of generosity is mind-boggling. Her desire to help is fulfilled by helping. It's that peculiar bit at the end of the *OED* entry "to minister to."<sup>21</sup> She said she cried with the first couple when they all found out what the sex of the babies were, she had taken a miscarriage really hard with another couple, and then later invited that same couple (from Europe) to live with her household for three months when the twins were born because she couldn't stand the thought of them staying in a hotel. *Would she consider doing it again?* One family sends her videos every other day. Another family attended her oldest daughter's graduation party. In short, yes. "I fall in love with those kids. I'm filling out the paperwork again."

How on earth could I reconcile the conversation I was having with Rita, who has experienced a state of self-empowerment through surrogacy, with the Angela Davis exposé about the inequalities of the surrogacy system? The chasm seemed wide as Davis's words rolled around in my mind:

The commodification of reproductive technologies, and, in particular, the labor services of pregnant surrogate mothers, means that money is being made and that, therefore, someone is being exploited.<sup>22</sup>

21. *OED Online*, s.v. "surrogate."

22. Davis, "Outcast Mothers," 454.

I tried to further understand Rita's participation. *Was income a motivating factor?* Nope, in fact, she had steered women away from surrogacy who were interested in doing it for the money.<sup>23</sup> *Okay, how about race—were all of the babies Caucasian?* Yes—so that was in line with critiques of the system. Although, was I really looking to prove something or just gathering information? I didn't have the nerve to ask over the phone so I decided to ask Rita over text, *how do you racially identify yourself?* Even though we are related, I thought it would be important to know from the (text) voice of the surrogate. After some time she answered "Caucasian," and threw me a genealogical curve ball right at the end. My reply? "Ok sorry to pry--thank you [blushing smiley face emoticon]."

## 12.

The racial classification snafu got me thinking about this topic in terms of another kind of identity. Reading through Illinois state law, I noticed that the legal identification of the surrogate mother—referred to as "gestational surrogate" throughout the Gestational Surrogacy Act—remains constant before, during, and after the birth of the child. She has a named identity

23. Extrapolating from Rita's response, compensation in the form of wages was not categorized as being excellent, sufficient, nor inadequate.

of her own within the gestational surrogate—child(ren)—intended parent(s) triangle. Her role and her relationship to others does not change throughout the process.

The intended parent however undergoes a dynamic transformation from one named identity to another, from “intended parent” to “mother.” Jan Verwoert might call this transformation a form of “applied semiotics” or “magic:”<sup>24</sup>

The forces at play in these forms of magic are the dynamics that are immanent to the relations—not only between people, bodies, or things as such but—between the sign, name, or image and the thing, event, or person that it relates to. . . . The name is the key to whatever comes to be the case, to give a name to, or put a name on someone or something is to transform them accordingly.<sup>25</sup>

The distribution of vulnerability between the surrogate and the intended parent is inverted within the realm of semiotic relations. Contrary to my own assumptions about the power dynamics of such a scenario, the surrogate mother has a unique, stable position whereas the intended parent’s position is multiple, and in flux. The surrogate’s status within the contract is not

24. Jan Verwoert, “Magic She Does,” in *Cookie!*, ed. Vivian Sky Rehberg and Marnie Slater (Rotterdam: Piet Zwart Institute; Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 76.

25. Jan Verwoert, “Magic She Does,” 76.



deemed lesser than any other involved party.

Further, the representational power of the surrogate is not dependent on the identity of the person she is standing in for. There is no originating mother identified in the legalese, therefore the surrogate cannot be and is not a secondary, derivative figure. In an oblique way, the statutes in the Gestational Surrogacy Act are crafted like an emergence myth. There is a before, but no beginning.<sup>26</sup> While we could have said from the outset that the surrogate does not need to resemble the intended parent, it goes further than that. No correspondence exists between their identities. It is not a situation of mirroring or doubling.

### 13.

At this moment, as strange as it sounds, I can't wait to flip to a discussion of digital surrogates and libraries. *What realm of connections and disruptions do these surrogates belong to? When do proxies bear a resemblance to a specific thing and when do they cut their ties? What role, if any, does a contract have to do with surrogacy and substitution?*

While digital surrogates pop up in many different realms—from interactive museum kiosks

26. Mythologist John Bierhorst points out that emergence myths have a different understanding of space and time and are not quite like origin myths: "The Emergence may be called a creation myth, though it says nothing about the origin of the world itself." John Bierhorst, *The Mythology of North America* (New York: William Morrow, 1985), 84.

that showcase rare books using software like Turning the Pages to archeological research that uses computational photography to create 3D site models in apps like Autodesk's 123D Catch—I'd like to locate a few angles within library science. In part, because the usage is wonderfully fuzzy there.

Reading broadly through different areas of library literature, *digital surrogate* can variously refer to 1.) the metadata for a digital object or more simply, interpretative data; 2.) a digital replica that stands in for an analog object; and 3.) a digital object plus its metadata as one entity.

#### 14.

To expand on the first, one thread I've been tracking stems from the world of library cataloging. Metadata is to a digitized object what a catalog record is to a bibliographic item—both function as interpretative data.<sup>27</sup> Some early essays by David Levy discuss the library catalog record as a surrogate and describe the role that surrogates play within the larger ecosystem of

27. David Levy explains, "Cataloging is not simply a matter of reading off self-evident properties of items, but is a highly skilled interpretative activity by which the properties of items are not simply described, but stabilized and even created." David M. Levy, "Cataloging in the Digital Order," in *DL 95 Proceedings* (Austin, TX: The Second Annual Conference on the Theory and Practice of Digital Libraries, 1995), <http://csdl.tamu.edu/DL95>.

“order-making.”<sup>28</sup> The catalog record which provides a classification and description for a bibliographic item does not necessarily imitate or resemble its source but recognizably functions as a lightweight, portable proxy.<sup>29</sup> Long before cataloging systems went the way of the MARC format (Machine-Readable Cataloging) and the OPAC (Online Public Access Catalog), paper-based catalog records were referred to as surrogates.<sup>30</sup> Levy writes:

Cataloging is part of the global system of order-making that Roger Chartier has

28. David M. Levy, “Cataloging Uncertainty: Documents, Catalogs, and Digital Disorder,” in *The Future of the Descriptive Cataloging Rules: Papers from the ALCTS Preconference, AACR2000, American Library Association Annual Conference, Chicago, June 22, 1995*, ed. Brian Schottlaender (Chicago: American Library Association, 1998), 98.

29. The catalog record in the American system is developed through a close examination of the item along with consideration of the publication’s CIP or PCIP data. While a publication is in process, a CIP (Cataloging In Publication) record is created by the Library of Congress or a PCIP (Publisher’s Cataloging In Publication) record is prepared by a professional librarian for inclusion on the copyright page.

30. The bibliographic description standard currently being developed to replace MARC is called BIBFRAME (Bibliographic Framework). It uses “a linked data model, in order to make bibliographic information more useful both within and outside the library community.” Library of Congress, “Overview of the BIBFRAME 2.0 Model,” April 21, 2016, <http://www.loc.gov/bibframe/docs/bibframe2-model.html>. See also Library of Congress, “BIBFRAME Frequently Asked Questions,” last accessed August 5, 2016, <http://www.loc.gov/bibframe/faqs/>.

called “the order of books.” This is the system of institutions (publishers, libraries, booksellers), genres (novels, pamphlets, newspapers), surrogates (catalog records, bibliographic entries, finding aids), categories of description (author, work, edition), and government regulation (copyright) that has evolved over centuries to stabilize and make accessible the flood of bibliographic materials “that first the manuscript book and then print put into circulation.”<sup>31</sup>

Surrogation’s role within such order-making is generally used for “providing access to content” through a compact substitute that “is used to represent the content for some specific purpose.”<sup>32</sup>

Drawing heavily on a lineage of cataloging and taxonomy (or as Levy puts it, descriptive cataloging and subject cataloging), *digital surrogate* in this trajectory is closely connected to traditions of textual description, abstraction, extraction, and indexing; and primarily seeks to make source items discoverable and retrievable.<sup>33</sup>

OPACs today have a few more dynamic enhancements than their predecessors (i.e. than bound catalogs and card catalogs), though their

31. Levy, “Cataloging Uncertainty,” 99.

32. Danny P. Wallace, “Taxonomies and Ontologies,” in *Knowledge Management: Historical and Cross-Disciplinary Themes* (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2007), 168.

33. Wallace, “Taxonomies and Ontologies,” 169.

records continue to perform as proxies “providing desired information without requiring the reader to examine the entire [source] document.”<sup>34</sup> Text-based attributes (e.g. title, author, publisher, and date information) approximate all of the physical and digital items held by a library. Additional information regarding such things as the shelf location and availability, dimensions and page count, summary, reviews, table of contents, and cover images allow information seekers to narrow or make selection decisions at the level of the catalog record.<sup>35</sup> Very simply the catalog record is designed to “facilitate the identification, location, access, and use” of bibliographic items.<sup>36</sup> Some discovery systems allow patrons to contribute their own order-making tags to item records for all to see and use.

## 15.

These digital surrogates are especially valuable when a library item is unavailable and cannot be examined in person.<sup>37</sup> When an item goes missing from a circulating library, the digital

34. Joan M. Reitz, *ODLIS*, s.v. “surrogate,” accessed July 19, 2016, [http://www.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis\\_s.aspx](http://www.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis_s.aspx).

35. The inclusion of thumbnail images in paper-based systems led to the expression *facsimile catalog*. See Joan M. Reitz, *ODLIS*, s.v. “facsimile catalog,” accessed August 21, 2016, [http://www.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis\\_f.aspx](http://www.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis_f.aspx).

36. Levy, “Cataloging in the Digital Order.”

37. Even in digital libraries, there might be a limit to the number of checkouts or active users that are allowed to view the full publication at any one time. Digital materials can have digital surrogates, and these surrogates can be quite valuable.

surrogate takes on a heightened importance. Suddenly though quite discreetly, the surrogate for the presently absent item has additional representational responsibilities, posturing as an elevated version of its surrogate self as well as serving as a substitute for its original referent. Its status changes merely through circumstance. The disappearance of the source object causes the surrogate to stake its claim, operating as a fully-fledged stand-in rather than a derivative approximation. If the missing item is found, the digital surrogate figuratively loses its right to act as a substitute and subsequently steps down to assume its place as a compact interpretation once again.

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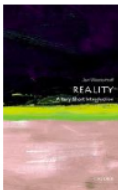


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## Reality : a very short introduction / Jan Westerhoff.



Main Author: Westerhoff, Jan.

Published: Oxford : Oxford University Press, c2011.

Series: Very short introductions; 291.

Topics: Reality.

Tags: This surrogate, is really real [Add](#)

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### School of the Art Institute

Location: 6th fl Sharp: Books, Main Stacks

Call Number: BD331 .W47 2011

[Review this call number](#)

Status: c.1 - Missing

The user-generated tags “This surrogate” “is really real” mark a missing item in the I-Share Union Catalog.

16.

Beyond the various manifestations of interpretative data and its heavy reliance on condensed forms of textual description, *digital surrogate* can also be shorthand for a digital replica designed to emulate an analog object. Whether the source object is a document or an artifact, this usage is more about simulating the “presentation and content” of a “unique original” in a digitized form.<sup>38</sup> Whereas Latour declared “reenactment is not a mere facsimile of the original,” *surrogation* in this instance is indeed “mere facsimile” in the form of a file or a set of files.<sup>39</sup>

Digital surrogates within the realm of libraries’ special collections, for instance, are often created to provide access to materials that have “ongoing research or cultural value.”<sup>40</sup> The creation of such objects connects back to long-standing traditions of “faithful reproduction,” exemplified by the specialty trade of facsimile publishing, which strives to simulate all aspects of an object’s physical manifestation including its

38. James A. Jacobs and James R. Jacobs, “The Digital-Surrogate Seal of Approval: A Consumer-Oriented Standard,” *D-Lib Magazine* 19 (March/April 2013), doi:10.1045/march2013-jacobs; “What Is a Facsimile?,” Skriptorium, accessed August 18, 2016, <http://www.skriptorium.at/catalog/index.php>.

39. Latour, “Some Experiments,” 5 (my italics).

40. David Pearson, “Special Collections in a Digital Future,” *Art Libraries Journal* 35 (January 2010): 17, <http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.artic.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aft&AN=502995835&site=ehost-live>.

materials, size, and the visual effects of its condition.<sup>41</sup>

High-end facsimiles (e.g. antique maps, illuminated manuscripts, and rare printed books) as well as replicas (e.g. cultural heritage objects and works of architecture) have made well-known, one-of-a-kind works available to wider audiences. Their hand-crafted detail, first-rate production standards, and research-based quality control are valuable to the likes of museums, archives, and libraries (whose missions champion the dissemination of knowledge and the preservation of original artifacts) as well as appeal to the aspirations of private collectors. Analog surrogates, whether one or more exists for a particular item, allow “rare, unique, valuable, or fragile” materials to travel by proxy to exhibition venues without the risk of loss or damage to the original.<sup>42</sup> They can serve as the main source of consultation for many research inquiries, and if several surrogates exist, be made available to multiple publics at different locations

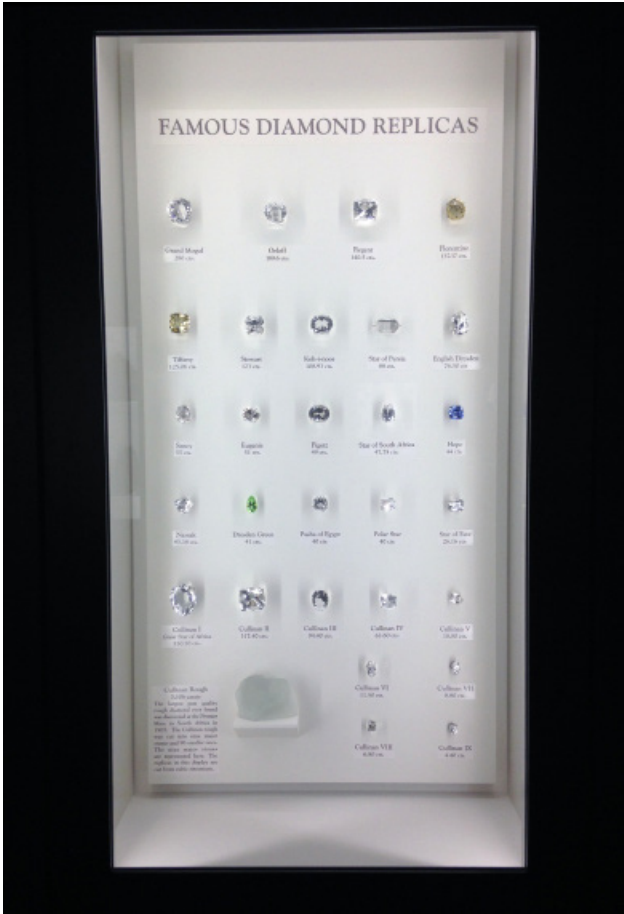
41. For example, the publisher and distributor Skriptorium writes of its facsimile editions, “The patina of gold, that evolves over centuries, is reproduced just as well as the relief of its chasing.” “What Is a Facsimile?,” Skriptorium.

42. Pearson, “Special Collections,” 12. In the case of the Walker Guest House Replica, the surrogate form allows the owners of the home in Sanabel, Florida to continue living in the original Paul Rudolph structure without disruption while the full-scale replica in Sarasota goes forth to speak of its wonders. See Sarasota Architectural Foundation, “Walker Guest House Replica @ The Ringling,” accessed August 21, 2016, <http://sarasotaarchitecturalfoundation.org/walkerguesthouse>.



simultaneously.<sup>43</sup> In effect, such stand-ins relieve the original artifact from performing certain routine duties, while increasing the visibility and desirability of the original work. The surrogate is not designed to trick the viewer; its fabrication is good rather than sneaky. Its material realization points to the existence of another.

43. The implementation of facsimile editions in research institutions has at times led to contentious preservation policies, keeping some original works from ever seeing the light of day again. See for example, Paul Lewis, "Preservation Takes Rare Manuscripts From the Public," *The New York Times*, January 25, 1987, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/01/25/books/preservation-takes-rare-manuscripts-from-the-public.html?pagewanted=all>.



A wall of famous diamond replicas shine with the wistfulness of cubic zirconium at the Lizzadro Museum of Lapidary Art.

17.

Presently, digital surrogates have set out to fulfill a similar role as their analog antecedents. The set of processes involved in creating image files can be likened to craft production which places an emphasis on capturing minute details. One set of best practices employed in the U.S. called FADGI (Federal Agencies Digitization Guidelines Initiative) uses a four star system to differentiate between levels of imaging quality.<sup>44</sup> A digitized project that achieves a one or two star rating is stated to have “informational value” but is “not of a sufficient quality to serve as a digital surrogate for the original.”<sup>45</sup> In this view, if the optical quality ain’t up to snuff, no substitution can take place. A proxy that merits three or four stars gets high marks for its presentational *and* representational qualities, thus achieving the status of a digital surrogate.

Following in the footsteps of analog facsimiles, digital surrogates also address “the twin goals of access and preservation.”<sup>46</sup> For

44. The other major system of digital imaging guidelines is Metamorfoze which started as an initiative in the Netherlands.

45. Federal Agencies Digitization Guidelines Initiative Still Image Working Group, “Technical Guidelines for Digitizing Cultural Heritage Materials” (draft document, September 2, 2015, Federal Agencies Digitization Guidelines Initiative, 2015), 7, <http://www.digitizationguidelines.gov/guidelines/digitize-technical.html>.

46. Diane Bockrath, Christopher Case, Elizabeth Rusch Fetters, and Heidi Herr, “Parchment to Pixel: The Walters Islamic Manuscript Digital Project,” *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 29, no. 2 (2010): 15, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27949547>.

example, the stated goals for the digitization of Islamic manuscripts at the Walters Art Museum are to facilitate, “unparalleled access to little-seen treasures [that] will enable close collaborative study of the materials from locations around the world and across disciplinary boundaries, reduce wear and tear on the books themselves, further the museum’s fulfillment of its mission [to free access to its collections], and allow the manuscript collection to be part of wider scholarly and public arenas.”<sup>47</sup>

Facsimiles and their ilk have not only influenced how and why we create digital surrogates, but have informed the manner in which today’s digital libraries and online collections have tried to organize them. As you might imagine, it is difficult to suddenly loosen the organizational systems associated with a lineage of knowledge that has “shaped itself to its medium of storage and communication.”<sup>48</sup> Add to that the division of labor involved in producing digital collections—where the digital imaging specialist provides the file and the librarian or archivist supplies the metadata. Discrete tasks and specialized skills in turn reinforce a division between the object and its catalog description and metadata.

47. Bockrath et al., “Parchment to Pixel,” 15.

48. David Weinberger, “Rethinking Knowledge in the Internet Age,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, May 2, 2016, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/rethinking-knowledge-internet-age/#1>. He further discusses the notion of “knowledge” in regards to the current state of epistemology and ontology.

## 18.

To briefly recap our last few turns, the use of *digital surrogate* in sections 15 and 16 was closely associated with notions of *aura*, while in 17 and 18 *digital surrogate* was allied to *object*. The third instance of *digital surrogate* within library literature that I came across was a chameleon of both *aura and object*. A confused author using the term here to mean *aura*, there to mean *object*, and other times to mean both at once. An understandable consequence of the times.

However, the use of *aura* and *object* in combination is a reflection of the record-like nature of born-digital works, the object-like nature of digital records, and the capacity for one to incorporate the other in digitally networked systems. The boundaries between description and item have been blurring as knowledge itself changes shape “from *content* to *networks* that mix ideas and sociality.”<sup>49</sup>

I stated earlier that a digital surrogate could refer to “a digital object plus its metadata as one entity.” I should clarify. It doesn’t need to be a unified, static entity. The object and the metadata can both be mutable. Such is the reality of digital surrogates on the Web.

For example, the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine which captures Web-based works exemplifies object variability. In an article for *The New Yorker* in 2015, Jill Lepore reported:

49. Weinberger, “Rethinking Knowledge” (my italics).

Web archives often crawl different parts of the same page at different times: text in one year, photographs in another. In October, 2012, if you asked the Wayback Machine to show you what cnn.com looked like on September 3, 2008, it would have shown you a page featuring stories about the 2008 McCain-Obama Presidential race, but the advertisement alongside it would have been for the 2012 Romney-Obama debate.

While the aura—the date and the URL—that situated the digital object at a particular time and place remained constant, the object itself had the ability to vary dramatically. As an archived digital surrogate, the pages of cnn.com were a representation of the past with a curious infusion of the present. The URL, as Levy has noted, is “directly embedded in the primary material,” incorporated into the object.<sup>50</sup> To alter the URL in an active or archived website would be to create a new object.

In the case of archiving Web-based works then, the observation from Groys that I previously quoted can be read in a different light: “Digital archiving, on the contrary, *ignores* the object and *preserves* the aura. The object itself is absent.”<sup>51</sup> As mentioned above, the object cannot be completely absent if the URL is present.

50. Levy, “Cataloging Uncertainty,” 103.

51. Groys, *In the Flow*, 4 (my italics).

They are intricately connected. In examining the Wayback Machine example, the aura was indeed preserved in the digital archive. Preservation is traditionally understood as the ability to slow inevitable aging processes. The date and URL in this scenario had not corroded, while the object was effected by the ravages of time. To slow the aging processes for this particular Web-based object would not be a matter of delaying its decay into nothing, but delaying its decay into a future self.<sup>52</sup> The September 3, 2008 cnn.com surrogate in the Wayback Machine did not correspond to its original state in exact likeness. No, this digital surrogate was unstable, and very much alive. Full of debate and contradiction.

#### 19.

As we have circled the term *surrogate*, and as we have doubled down, this latest proxy is certainly spirited. During my peripatetic research on surrogates, a digital librarian pointed out the relevance of its etymology to me. It is from the “Latin *surrogatus*, from *surrogare* and for *subrogare* to substitute, appoint a deputy,” which is quite similar to the *OED* definitions that we’ve been drawing from. Interestingly the etymology also notes that the term is “from *rogare*, to ask, appoint” or as it’s stated in another source “from *sub* ‘in the place of, under’ + *rogare* ‘to ask,

52. The preservation worry is altered. The typical concern that applies to both analog and digital materials is that something will eventually decay into nothing. Either dust or scrambled bytes.

propose.”<sup>53</sup> Surrogates, or rather the significance of the existence of surrogates is that they are in a unique position to ask and to propose. *With the proliferation of all kinds of digital surrogates, we might continue to ask, what is their commission? What do they aim to propose?*

53. Special thanks to Josh Honn for bringing this to my attention. Ernest Weekley, *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, s.v. “surrogate,” rev. ed. (New York: Dutton, 1952), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015066290431>; *Dictionary.com: Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. “surrogate,” by Douglas Harper, accessed July 21, 2016, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/surrogate>.





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Ian Hamilton Finlay with Maxwell Allen, Pond inscription by the temple pool, 1969, stone. The Little Sparta Trust, Dunsyre, Lanark, Scotland. <http://www.littlesparta.org.uk/displayD2/hiciacet.htm>. Photograph by Andrew Lawson.

"The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach: A Film About Johann Sebastian Bach & His Wife," YouTube video, from the 1967 film *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*, published by "Classical music," May 7, 2015, <https://youtu.be/NCFu7VmjmB4>. Screenshot by author.

Minute Men of Massachusetts re-enactment in Tamworth, New Hampshire, c. 2007-2008. Photograph courtesy of Mark Eddy Smith.

Item record for *Reality: A Very Short Introduction*, 2016. I-Share Union Catalog, <https://vufind.carli.illinois.edu/all/vf/Record/12490964>. Intervention and screenshot by author.

Display of "Famous Diamond Replicas" at the Lizzadro Museum of Lapidary Art, Elmhurst, Illinois, 2016. Photograph by author.

Acknowledgements:

Many thanks to those who have enthusiastically supported this amorphous project. I especially want to acknowledge Patrick Durgin for the opportunity to create this open-ended piece of writing and for his editorial patience as it took shape; and Kelly Christian for giving that oh-so-necessary feedback on an early draft. Thank you to Rita Gustafson for sharing her experiences with gestational surrogacy, Joe Tallarico and Josh Honn for imparting their expertise on digitization and digital libraries, Lori Snyder for creating the original PCIP data at the beginning of the book, and Mark Eddy Smith for having a yard full of re-enactors.

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