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Interview

Connections and coincidences in *The End: Death in Seven Colors*: A Conversation with David Clark

David Clark makes quixotic, interactive works that weave together cultural artifacts, images, videos, and writing. Users discover meanings through chance occurrences, coincidences, word play, interactivity, and choice-making. Clark's approach is poetic, cinematic, and surrealist, and reveals how stories unfold in the imaginaries of the database. Perhaps more accurately than many other forms, the experience of navigating a work through twisting paths and constellations may also draw the user close to Clark's own creative process of sifting, sorting, and shuffling through research and debris. Humor, puns, and surprising correspondences drive the fragmented narratives through unconscious neuron passages, flares, and blocks to form strange new configurations of our cultural imaginaries. His narrative worlds are not neatly resolved but rather belie the pathologies and ironic contradictions of cultural icons and their dynamic powers. His flash-based projects include works such as A is for Apple, which builds narratives from the periodic table, and 88 Constellations for Wittgenstein, in which narrative fragments are combined in star-like constellations. These works collapse texts, histories, and anecdotes in the present tense of dreams and the imagination. Their signifiers coexist in the cultural database, waiting to be connected. His recent work, The End: Death in Seven Colors, expands this approach. Clark connects Freud's cigar, Alan Turing's birthplace, Princess Di's final moments, and Jim Morrison's passing to explore cultural ideas about death. The work is presented using the innovative interactive cinema program, Korsakow, in which each clip in the database can be given multiple entry and exit points. There are seven points of departure. But just as artifacts mix within the works, so do characters or curious coincidences pop up between them, with the likes of Freud and Turing continually intruding into other's stories and moments.

QUESTION: *Your work interweaves cinema with so many aspects of other arts, writing, and technology—for example, your use of databases in your filmmaking. Do you consider yourself a filmmaker?*

DAVID CLARK (DC): Yes, I definitely, probably, say I come from film, or have come from film, but I came to film from visual arts and have gone into doing interactive stuff. Initially, this was through the provocations of interactivity. My approach to database stuff is really just an extension of my expansive research process and my stumbling, personal approach to research. I'm still working with very eccentric forms of connectivity between information. So, if you look at the way I structure the narratives, I'm exploiting outlier connectors.

Q: *Like what?*

DC: I've obviously been very interested in coincidence, the way certain historical facts meet in improbable and indescribable ways, and in visual puns, because they are of a form that uses sound, the meaning of words and visual forms. I find what's interesting is that you don't just make connections by the facts themselves. For example, one instance occurs in *88 Wittgensteins*. There's a connection between Wittgenstein, who is an architect and left philosophy in the middle of his career and went and sat at the feet of Adolf Loos, the modernist architect famous for *Ornament and Crime*. One of the themes that comes in later—which is completely outside of the Wittgenstein-ian scholarship—is the 2001 terrorist attacks in New York. I'm fascinated by that in relationship to modernist form, because the buildings that are attacked are the World Trade Centers—monumental forms. But the way I get to making that connection is if you take the word “loos,” the architect, and you spin it around into 2001. And, then, I also make fun of the fact that an eighth is a pun on a “loo,” a sort of toilet.

Q: *So this is a punning logic. It's also a kind of dream logic, right? You also work with Freud quite a bit in the new project. I wonder how this connects to your vision of the generative database. How might databases take up generative logic and these more punning approaches?*

DC: Gregory Ulmer is big influence. He has this idea of a “puncept.” We make puns as human beings. They're the kind of low form of humor, but they are also a form of connection that we are intrigued by. We feel that they won't hold up in court, but I think what Ulmer advocates for is that they open a door into solidifying other kinds of connections. I think that's a lot of what my piece is

Figure 1.1 Screenshot from David Clark's *The End: Death in Seven Colors*.

trying to do: to open up doors to the speculative connections between things. It's almost a diagram of how we actually think.

Q: Isn't that what we hope for with the computer, databases, and big data—finding hidden connections? Is your kind of approach with visual material something that might be learned? You start out by saying you could learn something from the procedural approaches but maybe it could go the other way.

DC: One of the provocations of net art was that when one makes a work, the work then interacts with the public and the public has some kind of input. My works have never been like that. But I've always imagined that they should be. As I had imagined the pieces, they always have some kind of center, like *A is for Apple* or *Wittgenstein*—a kind of central gravitational field around a series of associations that relate to it. And, I always thought "well, other people can throw stuff in there." But even then, I think, "No, they're probably not going to participate." These are very complex works that evolve out of making the pieces connect. It takes me a long time to figure out what the aesthetics are and what the feel of the piece is.

Q: Do you begin with a navigational model? A lot of your pieces use star constellations, maps, chemical diagrams, and so on. In each piece the discovery process seems driven by navigational forms.

DC: I think I've always been drawn to diagrams and the idea of a schematic. Those give a certain amount of freedom to populate their forms with ideas. Often my works have some sort of structural-type element that is arbitrary—like the periodic table was the 109 elements that I happened to choose. That periodic table was my structure. The 88 constellations have 88 bits; the 24 time zones had 24 bits. They give me a permission to cut things in a certain way.

Q: How do the works evolve? It sounds like you have a very personal repertoire of images and associations.

DC: Well, how they evolve entails a slow process of finding the micro connections between things within a larger structure that I have to work with. Some of them have evolved where I don't know how big they are. For example, *A is for Apple* doesn't have any containing metaphor; the structure holds it together. But this process happens very slowly, and often I'm looking for a weird connection, that moment when I discover, "I can connect this and this and this." And, these are significant because they take you somewhere else in the piece. I'm always looking for branch ideas: ideas that take you to different places.

Q: You also seem skeptical about what holds things together. Like in "Wittgenstein" and the possibility of language actually doing what we want it to do. Looking for a way for things that might hook together seems to be skepticism of how things ought to hook together.

DC: Yes, it's a little bit of magical thinking meets a little bit of pragmatic stuff. One of the things that surprised me when I started doing this work is that I got interest from people in documentary film festivals, and I didn't even think of it as documentary. But then I realized that, no, these are all actual, real facts which people can go verify and check for themselves. I wasn't doing anything to the material. I wasn't fictionalizing it; I wasn't twisting it. The thing that I think glues them together is that, yes, these are actual facts, but if you look at them in this way, they're unusual; it's a kind of weird logic.

Q: Can you make the inverse argument? Why is it still fiction or art?

DC: I guess I'd refer to Wittgenstein's idea of aspects of seeing, that the way that you look at the thing becomes its own kind of meaning. Is it a rabbit or is it a duck? It's the same diagram. The diagram doesn't change; it's how you perceive

Figure 1.2 Screenshot from *88 Constellations for Wittgenstein (to be played with the Left Hand)* by David Clark.

it. I think that my role as an artist in putting things together is to show you the rabbit or show you the duck in a particular set of relationships. What I really like doing is to form a piece in which you wander around, such that you're eventually led back to the something you encountered before but now you've come at it from this angle and you see it as a duck, and then you go "Wait, a sec! I've seen this before, but it was a rabbit."

Q: Can you talk some about the new piece, The End: Death in Seven Colors, and how it developed?

DC: A lot of the pieces have grown out of others; there comes a kind of clump of research that connects to itself and has its own sort of presence, and then there's a bunch of other stuff that is set to the side, and then it grows. *A is for Apple* came out of the periodic table piece, and I was trying to put the *A is for Apple* stuff in, but eventually it sort of grew off and evolved into its own piece. In some ways, *The End* came out of Freud and Turing showing up as characters in the "Wittgenstein" story. The idea of treating their deaths emerged—I was always intrigued by Turing eating the apple, and that also goes back to *A is for Apple*. So I started to just think about how one could gather stories around these deaths. Walter Benjamin is another one. He is believed to have committed suicide on the Spanish border; it's a terrible tragedy of history. Significant connective tissues started to appear. One of my favorites is that there's a hotel in London, The Colonnade Hotel, where Alan Turing was born. Before it was a hotel, it was a boarding house. And, that's where Freud stayed while in exile

from Vienna. So this place became a connecting point between the death or exile of psychoanalysis and the birth of artificial intelligence. I started to realize that places and things could connect the seven stories that I had put together. But I also wanted to break them out as a sort of spectrum of the different ways that we look at death.

Q: How about Jim Morrison? How'd you get to him?

DC: With Jim Morrison, there was Princess Diana. The connection that I used between Freud and Princess Diana is this idea that Freud said, "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar." But his nephew is Edward Bernays—who is the inventor of public relations—his first public relations campaign was trying to get women to smoke. And the way he did that was by consulting with psychoanalysts who said that a cigarette is not just a cigarette, but a symbol of male power. He created this publicity stunt to get women to march in the Macy's Day Parade, smoking, which is what he called the "Torches of Freedom" parade. For me that evoked the idea of the torch, of the Statue of Liberty. And, there's a replica of the torch of the Statue of Liberty on the site where Princess Diana died. Right? It became the place of commemoration for her death; she died in a car crash underneath this replica. And, she dies with her lover, Dodi Fayed, who was the executive producer of *Chariots of Fire*. If you look at the movie's poster, it has the torch: the carrier of the torch, the smoking torch, the symbol of power. Anyway, she dies at 4:00 a.m. in Paris, which for me evokes the Giacometti Sculpture "The Palace at 4 a.m." Jim Morrison also dies at 4 a.m. in Paris. So there is a series of these narrative connections that only become apparent as you move from one story to another.

Q: Deaths then—I mean, we're fascinated by death, and I guess it gives the narratives ending points of a sort, right? A point you can organize elements around. You also use a lot of found material, surrealist images, and so on.

DC: Narrative is based in death. Plots always lead to a death. What I wanted to do was remove plots. The electronic literature form is interesting because it doesn't have to rely on some sense that we're taken down a garden path, things are being planted only to be used later on. While the narratives are essentially about death, death becomes the beginning of the story as opposed to the end of the story.

Q: So, would you say the new piece is lacking in plot?

DC: I started by writing out all the stories, and I wrote it in my own voice. But, I was also going and looking for connections, finding films and Internet clips.

Figure 1.3 Main menu to *The End: Death in Seven Colors*.

I found that everything I wrote was already there. Whenever I went to the source for the writing I was doing, I realized that somebody else had already done all the writing.

Q: So, they were undermining your fiction because it was already out there with the facts?

DC: I realized that I could just cut myself out of this as a writer and see if I could take all the clips and put them together. The logic of it was that of the mash-up, because mash-ups do the same thing I'm doing, which is taking seemingly incompatible, already available cultural forms and putting them together in a relationship that makes them seem like they belong together.

Q: I'd like to talk about that a bit more because a lot of people have written about collage in your work and that is that kind of a mash-up theory, but there also seems to be intention in your language. You are building constellations and suggesting logics that express verbal ideas through visual and graphic forms.

DC: Yes, there's an aesthetic in that, which I come at from visual collage. Something happens when you do collage, which is that you're constantly surprising yourself because you're grabbing things and you're not actually drawing them, you're just placing them next to each other. So you're constantly judging how they go together. I think that's an equivalent process to how I treat my material. I'm always looking at story material to see how I place it next to another piece of story. That's the equivalency for me in terms of process. It starts with collage, and when I'm in my collage mode, I really have no idea what I'm doing. One has to be open to the constant possibility that something becomes meaningful, but without pushing it too much. One is not trying to make the meaning, one is trying to discover the meaning.

Q: The form also seems to shape the connective process. The End, for example, seems to have differing forms. You have a browser-based structure which connects topics around these deaths with a series of videos. But you are also developing it as a 3D game. How will it work as a computer game?

DC: I don't know quite yet, but one of the things I gathered and paid attention to was the different sites. The Colonnade Hotel, the house that Alan Turing killed himself in Coney Island became really interesting because Freud visited there in 1909—he went to Dreamland, and then the Statue of Liberty. When I was in Paris, I went to visit the Pont de L'Alma, the bridge where Princess Diana died, I went to Jim Morrison's apartment. So, in a way, I've been sussing out the 3D, real world places and building them as 3D models.

Q: I think I noticed that Turing's house in one video looks like a 3D model.

DC: I actually built that one, and I have a much more sophisticated version of that now. The project offers a kind of immersive game experience where I can layer towns and texts into the experience. You start in the front yard of Alan Turing's house. You walk in the door. You walk around from room to room. There are very surrealist objects all around. Then you walk through a room and suddenly you are on the street in Manchester where Turing picked up the young boy that eventually led to his confessions of homosexuality. So, I just put you in the places, and then you bring back the materials and stories by wandering around the spaces.

Q: How is this changing the role of the audience?

DC: Initially, the impulse is just to put you in my place of being that guy who goes and knocks on the door of the house that Alan Turing killed himself in. But I also

think that what I have to figure out for the game experience is how you can switch point of view, so I think at certain points I am playing with this idea that you are the player walking around and it's your thing, but then you also get the camera looking down at the character that I create and move around. I haven't quite figured out how that works. My initial idea, which I might go back to, was that it becomes more like staging an opera, so that these staging aspects of the 3D world are just like here's a stage and I'm going to bring in and stage the actors and singers.

Q: So maybe you could project it, or something like that, and have them in the 3D world.

DC: Actually, we have characters walking around.

*Q: Can you say a little more about your approach to plot and narrative. You've said that all plots involve death in some way and, also, that you're interested in doing away with plots. Ironically, you begin your seven stories in *The End* with death, such that the endings are beginnings, and these loop back upon themselves and other narrative threads to become endings once more. You seem interested in replacing cause and effect models for some other kind of narrative logic. That seems to go along with your sense of the mash-up. On the one hand you perhaps propose the death of the author in very postmodern fashion, and yet your work also has a lot of humor and whimsy and a lot of David Clark. It's very singular. Is there a tension there?*

DC: The posthuman thing—it becomes a big thing in the new piece. One of the endings is this theme of the death of the human, and the final chapter is centered on chess and the idea of the “end game.” Ultimately, it evokes things like the Cold War and Star Wars. And, hence, there's this bigger sense of species death. So, yes, I guess that's a little bleak. But at the same time, what I wanted to investigate about the deaths is something of a continuation from an earlier work: one of the haunting phrases from “Wittgenstein” is this idea that we actually don't experience death. It's an experience that happens outside of our own experiences. So whenever we talk about death we're only talking about a meaning that other people's deaths had. We have no idea. And yet there's so much about the posthuman that is about finding the idea of the other. Postmodernism has taught us about the other and the “you,” philosophers like Bruno Latour, who teaches us about that profound experience of otherness in all of our senses of reality. And that's something I've become more and more intrigued with. The more we snuggle up to computers and the more they absorb some of our humanity, the more we also realize that we will never get to understand their ontology. It will always remove itself from us.

Q: Is part of your intention to inhabit and picture that from within?

DC: As an artist I've moved from sculpture to film-making, and then to digital and interactive work. I am interested in making works more theatrical and in making transmedia works that don't have a single home in one particular media but that move around. This is an exploration I'm doing with *The End*, or it is a continuation through 3D gaming. I don't feel like I'm an artist who works in one medium, I feel like different projects put me into thinking about other kinds of mediums. Maybe I'll do a staged opera at some point.

Q: At the same time, you started with interactivity in all of these media, and interactivity seems central to all of your projects. You are not moving toward a traditional film that would be noninteractive, right?

DC: I have done those. But I've also been interested in that idea of interactivity. Interestingly, there're limits for interactivity for me, because I know when I have control, when my personality ends, there's a border there, and I can't hand it over. I like being in collaborative work because you can negotiate what that is, but I don't create works that are completely collaborative or random. In fact, I have particular prejudices in making my works and then spend a lot of time figuring what liberties there are.

Q: So, is it fair to say that the kind of interactivity you're interested in is that which allows the user to follow the associations you've made? As you say, it's not an open, free space where the user makes her own associations.

DC: For me, there's still something about the theatricality of film, a project of capturing your attention and concentration. This is something that is lost when there is too much choice. I remember having a conversation with a filmmaker very early on when I was very interested in interactivity, and he said he could never give up that control he has. Because film is all about building these tensions and releasing the tensions and building the tensions again. That massaging process still has to go on because we're still intrigued about what happens next. But if what happens next is that you get up and go get a beer, you know, you lose the thread.

Q: Returning to the concept of death and endings, I wonder how technological obsolescence impacts your work and more broadly the concept of the "outmoded," which was an important concept in surrealism and surrealist collage. Your works at linger in specters of time – of chronological forms and obsolete technology.

Figure 1.4 Screen shot from *The End: Death in Seven Colors*.

DC: One of the things that I brought into *The End* project is that each section has a corresponding surrealist object. There's "The Palace of 4 a.m." for Princess Diana; there's the Magritte apple painting for Turing; there's the "This is not a pipe" for Freud's cigar. I was interested in how the surrealist objects have a kind of presence; they offer a kind of promise of meaning while also denying that meaning. This is very explicit in "This is not a pipe," which has an almost paradoxical form of meaning. I wanted to take that provocation and bring it into a narrative where it could make a certain kind of sense. For instance, there is the famous bicycle wheel that Duchamp puts on a chair. He said, "Oh, it's just this thing that I like to hit in my studio and it turns around." But I connect that to a section called "The Rubber Meets the Yellow Brick Road" about the Belgian Congo atrocities and the genocide of 10 million people in the Congo. The actions were provoked by the fact that rubber was a big commodity in the development of tires, and famously the Duchamp wheel has no tire on it. This idea of an upside-down wheel with no tire on it placed next to the story of the Belgian Congo suddenly makes a certain kind of sense. So, I feel like I

can re-narrativize this fascination we have with non-meaning through those objects. I'm not interested in anti-narrative. I've always been interested in deeply narrative work, and finding different ways of configuring narrative is something that interests me.

Q: How do you structure it? Do you have private notation systems? Do you have notes? When you create the works, do you have special categorization systems?

DC: It's not very systematized. I guess this is why I feel like it would be hard to hand it over and program it unless I could write a program saying, "tag this" or "tag that". It's a sort of eccentric form of surfing.

Q: Do you work from files or images?

DC: A little bit of everything. There's a kind of collection process that always is going on, like my antennae are always out for a connection. For instance, at the moment I'm building material for the project, "The Copenhagen Interpretation." It's a collection of narratives centered on Copenhagen and Denmark, Hamlet, Tycho Brahe, and Niels Bohr, the physicist. One of the images that has come up is three dots: the ellipsis, the idea that things trail off ... I went to visit Copenhagen because I just like to go to the place to find stuff out myself. I was wandering around Christiania, which is the freetown city in the middle of Copenhagen, and there it was. Their flag is three dots. And I'm like "there's my dots!" There comes this magical moment of discovery. Suddenly an experience confirms for you something that you had already kind of predetermined. I always love those moments. Those are the things I look for, when one gets a tingle like "oh, that connects to that!" It becomes kind of bizarre. It's a childish, giddy feeling that you get; it's like, "I bet I could do that with this."

Q: When you see something like that do you write it down in a notebook or do you just file it away in your mind?

DC: Yes, tons of notebooks, and, then, also, a purposeful searching for things. I've just started to work with Pinterest, which seems like a neat research tool for me because I can collate and go through tons and tons of different images and then put them in a loose order. Things will start to get pushed into categories, so at a certain point with the Death project, I decided—well, the rainbow was coming up and I liked the connection with the Turing apple, and the first Apple logo, which has a rainbow in it. And then remembered that there's the whole "Dark Side of the Moon" album cover with different colors, spectrums, and rainbows.

So certain images kind of suggest themselves to become organizational systems, and then I test them out and ask what would be the potential of doing something with a particular image, like the three dots. Then, I try to figure out how to use that to do something.

Q: So, is that the point where you'd move to the computer and start juxtaposing things? Or are you still working with your notebook at that point?

DC: There are a lot of notebooks. I do some writing, and there are a lot of drawings. And, I diagram stuff. Sometimes, when I'm trying to organize material, I also use flow charts to start making connections. A lot of this is just really eccentric playing around in different modes. If something is not working over here, I'll try it over here. The sound, narration, visuals, video, and collage all operate simultaneously, and I can switch from one to the other.

Q: Do you work with collaborators in a regular way or do you bring them in as needed for particular tasks?

DC: It works in two different ways. If I'm doing a true collaboration where we need to determine what the thing is, then it's a constant conversation. It's not like I have determined what the rest of the thing is going to be. But, if it is a particularly technical collaboration such as with programming—like, at the moment I'm working with a guy who's doing some modeling for me, that's more like “can you do this, can you do that,” as needed. Sometimes that relationship will shift, and I work with someone long enough on a number of projects that the person starts to feed into the process.

Q: What kinds of new technologies are expanding this process for you?

DC: There are formal aspects of technology where particular kinds of abilities give you new ways to create meaning. But the more striking thing is what it opens up in terms of audience, and I noticed this very differently when I did a feature film. When you make a feature film, you have one year to show it and then it's gone. I was doing CD-ROM projects before one could do anything on the Internet. So when Flash came along, I had a bunch of students who were using it and showing stuff around the world. Flash, at that point, was not as powerful a tool as Director, but it had an opportunity to reach a different kind of audience. That's something I'm very interested in, the fact that if I can put stuff on the App Store or if I make a game or do theatrical performances, these are different ways of engaging audiences.

Q: Samantha Gorman was talking about a similar issue with her work Pry, which is a literary app yet is getting a lot of play at film festivals and gaming conventions. Audiences seem to be evolving in how they approach the concept of what a narrative work is and how it changes across forms.

DC: With film, it's a big gambit. You are enticing people to go and lock themselves in a dark room where they can't leave for two hours and if you don't get them, they hate you. But what I found with doing Internet work, especially in the beginning when people were going "what's this thing?", is that they're at home, and they can go do something else at any time. The structures of my pieces are small little bits that lead to the next bit and lead to the next bit. The idea that viewers might get entangled in the piece is a great way to engage an audience; people will say, "Yeah, I got stuck in your piece for an hour and then I realized that time had disappeared." For me, that's a much better way for people to be involved in one's work than to feel like, "Oh, when is it going to be over?"

Q: So what about with something like the iPad store or a future app of your work?

DC: The thing that's interesting me now is how and where people see the work. Seeing a work on their iPads is so much different than seeing it on their computer screens, and so much different than in the theater. This has implications for what I would do. One is the locative aspect, which I tried out; and, the idea that the actual site you're on has some kind of very specific meaning. I also think the medium is returning it to literature: that intimate relationship with an object that is as big as a book is something that's really going to bring people into a kind of reading mode. I think that's a good mode for me in terms of the kinds of stories I'm telling. I find that cinema skims over a lot of the content; like whenever a book is turned into a movie, you always feel like you're just getting a thin version of the book. What you can now do on the iPad is cinematic. It's so much about the immersive qualities of the thing, and you can also have more time, because people feel comfortable about this kind of intimate business.

Q: So you foresee doing iPad apps?

DC: Yes, I have one project that has an app, and I do like the space of the iPad. *Pry* is a particularly good example. The space between the cinematic experience and the reading experience is negotiated nicely.

Q: In this relationship between reading and watching things, I'm curious about your opinion about the essay film, how it borders on the fiction, nonfiction line.

Your work deeply engages forms of the essay film, moving aspects of the genre into these new environments.

DC: The irresponsible essay film! I think I describe my early CD-ROM pieces as academic essay meets a computer game, and I like that idea that again. The difference between seeing an academic lecture and reading a book is that as you read the book, you pause and go “oh, I wonder if that’s true, I’ll check a footnote” or go to the Internet and find it. I think that that space has opened up a little bit more in the interactive essay form. I guess I still want the kind of convincing power of the filmic moment—one doesn’t want a dry recital or just an essay about something by someone else. One actually wants to be in Alan Turing’s house and experience the weight of the moment and the drama of his life. Like with the film, you get all of that in my work. But it doesn’t tell you a lot about the underlying history. It doesn’t connect up with the rest of the story about war and so on.

Q: It is interesting that you make lots of use of narrators, alive or not, to shape the stories.

DC: I like unreliable narrators. In the new piece, I’m getting into a whole new way of doing narration and playing against the authority of it. I’m creating a completely made-up language, and playing on that. The thing that brought me into using narrators in electronic literature is that I actually don’t like reading words on a screen (which makes me a real heretic in the electronic literature world). But I felt that the differences between cinematic screen experiences, where you’re immersed in a real immersive environment, and reading things are so distant, they’re so different that I just would not read more than a few words on the screen. So you notice that in my screen pieces, there are never more than a few words. I very rarely use a whole block of text; I would never ask people to sit there and read something because it breaks the immersion.

Q: It strikes me, and tell me if you think this sounds right, that a narrator implies focus, a point of view, and you’re very interested in the way that leads us into data, and that having a focus, having a point of view, is part of the point of these works. You’re not interested in generative text. You’re interested in things that already have a kind of a mind working through them. I guess we get that with a narrator.

DC: Yes, you get that. The narrator also allows you to have text with a visual experience. If you put text there, you can’t have the visual experience. It’s like trying to read subtitles while watching a film. You’re distracted by doing too

many things visually on the same screen at the same time. But, for me, having a narrator in your head while you're looking at something is very satisfying.

Q: This also comes back to the database and narration. You weave together an expansive repository of facts and create characters whose lives you've followed deeply yet whose meaning has to be found by the narrator. But that narrator is very unreliable. Why? Is this narrator driven by some other logic and way of connecting evidence to make meaning? Is there some much more fundamental logic or a great act of deception at play?

DC: It's kind of like the narrator has the same function as the film soundtrack. For example, in the "Wittgenstein" piece, the narrator at some points goes off on his own little poetic track, and at other times he's telling you the story. You see, I don't think the narrator has to have a single kind of function. Music, even, and sounds operate that way. In *The End*, my narrator is the sound design because even though I'm putting down very different pieces, each little video is probably made up of four or five different sources, I am able to smooth it over when my sound design is added to it. I discarded the narrator in the new piece, but I still needed to bring some kind of cohesion to the unit.

Q: Although the experience feels unguided, there is still cohesion. It is just that the narrator has rather unique ways of leading us through the maze.

DC: That's editing. It was a bit of a challenge for myself in the beginning because I had a very specific idea of the story that I wanted to tell, and so when I went to edit the material and create the sound design, I still wanted to tell a story. I wanted those bits that I'm choosing to tell the story for me.

Q: This imagines stories coming from the database, but in your case these are maybe unreliable, fictional, and speculative. They are driven by images and also offer a literary experience.

DC: Yes, it's interesting for me to consider whether this is a form of literature. My work has always involved writing, but I've never done it through the lens of literature. The most sophisticated organ of my artistic body is my visual aspect, but I've also looked to theater, literature, and music, because I think each of these brings different histories. The thing I've always liked about literature is the power of story, and our fascination with words and meaning. I'm not interested in experimentation for formal reasons, I'm interested in it for content reasons. I've often said my work is not a formal exercise. In the visual arts world, there's a

lot of experimentation for experimentation's sake that's not actually compelling for any other reason. But, literary traditions of experimenting with form have profoundly affected me. I turned to experimental fiction for my own inspirations as a visual artist. I am very promiscuous when it comes to looking at what other people are doing, so I'll go off into the electronic music world and get inspiration. I'll go to the experimental theater world and get inspiration.