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Two Projects from the metaLAB (at) Harvard

Jeffrey Schnapp

A Flitting Atlas of the Human Gaze

Kevin Brewster, Todd Linkner, Dietmar Offenhuber, and Jeffrey Schnapp

metaLAB (at) Harvard, (summer-fall 2020/winter 2021)

A Flitting Atlas of the Human Gaze is one component of metaLAB's ongoing *Curatorial A(i)gents* project which consists in a series of machine-learning experiments that involve human curators working collaboratively with computational systems on the analysis and interpretation of the collections of the Harvard Art Museum. First presented at the Ars Electronica Festival on September 11, 2020, originally slated for installation at the Harvard Art Museum around that same time (but postponed due to the museum's closure during the pandemic), the experiments range from critical inquiries into the environmental costs of running deep learning models to a curator bot that selects artworks on the basis of real time color matching with the color of the overhead sky to an AI-based variation on the classic Surrealist game of the *cadavre exquis* to a deliberately "broken" art recommendation engine.

Within this setting, *A Flitting Atlas of the Human Gaze* performs an art historical experiment. The experiment is built upon the AI-based extraction and analysis, fine-tuned via human supervision, of pairs of eyes from the museum's photograph, painting, print, sculpture, and coin collections that have then been analyzed and mapped from the standpoint of the directionality of the depicted subject's gaze. The aggregate data has been transformed into an interactive experience—online in its current iteration; on-site in the Harvard Art Museum's Lightbox Gallery upon the gallery's reopening—which allows the visitor to navigate either the collection as a whole or media-based subcollections by moving the focal point via a cursor.

For centuries visitors have navigated collections on the basis of culture, chronology, genre, and medium; to those conventional forms of exploration, *A Flitting Atlas of the Human Gaze* adds a new mode based on the distribution of looks across media and time. [JS]

Their Names

Matthew Battles and Kim Albrecht

metaLAB (at) Harvard, (summer 2020)

Their Names is a kind of dynamic memory wall (which is to say, an online *Denkmal* or monument) that visualizes the names of 28,000+ fatal encounters with American police dating from the year 2000 up until the death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020. The names (beneath which are layered descriptions of the fatal events with which they are associated) may be viewed from the standpoint of year, gender, age, ethnicity, location, or cause; they may also be toggled on or off. The project was developed by Kim Albrecht working with Matthew Battles on the basis of the Fatal Encounters database methodically compiled by D. Brian Burghart and his team at University of Southern California to track police-involved fatalities in the absence of any comparable federal

resource. The data set in question makes no assumptions regarding the nature of each fatal encounter or the precise role performed by police. It comprises everything from homicides to accidents and suicides, and relies upon police and media reporting whose reliability or bias is inherently hard to ascertain. Nearly 6,000 of the victims are reported as African-American; another 9,000 are listed as "race unspecified." There are gaps in the record, names reduced to little more than initials.

Rather than map this community on the basis of the taxonomical practices of police or media, Their Names paints what is perhaps best described as a "pixelated" collective portrait of these mortalities in which each pixel is an individual, a life story, a tragedy, that the visitor can either engage in the aggregate, as one of 28,000+ such stories, or navigate in greater depth via the links the underlie each name. [JS]