

# UCLA

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Editors' Note

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### Authors

Acker, Amelia  
Goodnight, Melissa  
Kasch, David

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## Editors' Note

### *Volume 9 Issue 1*

Earlier this month, we were saddened to hear that Aaron Swartz, Internet activist and political organizer, had taken his life. Swartz was a talented computer programmer and activist who changed the landscape of the Internet by creating the RSS web feed protocol and by contributing to the design and code of the Creative Commons license project. He also started Demand Progress, an organization that fights against censorship on the Internet. Swartz was committed to sharing knowledge and making technologies that allow people to circulate ideas liberally. He was prosecuted for downloading thousands of academic journal articles from JSTOR with the intent to make them freely available. Swartz believed that open access to scholarly research was worth the risk. Shortly after the news of his death, academic researchers began to post links to their published works on social media to promote open access and honor Swartz's memory with *#PDFtribute* (Cutler, 2013). As many have already written, the loss of Swartz leaves many in academia asking about the importance of generating, accessing, and circulating knowledge. What's at stake when we limit the circulation of new knowledge? What are the risks when we commit to make our work free to access, free for all?

*InterActions* has been committed to the principles of open access, social justice, and critical perspectives since its inception. We believe that one of the best ways to promote social change is by publishing ideas that are free and accessible to all people who are interested in them. In this issue, we feature a set of manuscripts that challenge our readers to consider the importance of critically analyzing the objects that we create and their potential collective meaning. These texts highlight the significance of individual agents in broadening the diversity of knowledge and in challenging dominant values and representations—through the creation, utilization, reconfiguration, and documentation of objects. Each of these pieces prompts us to consider the impact of collectives and alliances in knowledge creation and social change.

Editors Melissa Goodnight and Amelia Acker interviewed *InterActions*' longest serving faculty mentor, Sandra Harding to discuss the evolution of the journal and the subject matter of her new book, *Objectivity and Diversity*. Professor Harding engages these topics with openness and humor as she delineates the importance of critical and interdisciplinary research and offers advice for developing scholars. A recurrent theme in the conversation is how critical scholarship and a commitment to social justice advances the production of knowledge. Harding's book is an examination of the role of diversity in how objectivity is conceived and, thus, in how knowledge is created and collectively

used and legitimated. A widening plurality of voices, perspectives, and interests in knowledge production advances its growth; additionally, such a plurality has the potential to further democratize social institutions and collectivities that rely upon these newly generated ideas.

Hugh Schuckman's "Old Silver Readings: Mythology, Portraits, and Booker T. Washington" encourages readers to engage the symbolic and potentially mythic value attached to portraits of civil rights leader Booker T. Washington. As material objects, the portraits reflect many of the styles and technologies of the day. As critical objects that subvert oppressive power structures, these same portraits shed insight into how Booker T. Washington challenged the racial and cultural attitudes of his time. Schuckman argues that part of Booker T. Washington's purpose was to cultivate an archetypal, even mythical, image of a Black intellectual that could be mass-produced and distributed through photographs in books and press; thereby, providing easy and open access to a counter-narrative of that era's racist and oppressive ideology. More than a hundred years after their creation, these portraits continue to serve Booker T. Washington's original symbolic and liberatory purposes as visual records that contest racist interpretations of African Americans as less than equal citizens in the United States.

Colin Doty's "Ontology of Live Performance" takes the topic of live performances and provides readers with a series of tests to identify crucial elements in theatre performance. This approach to performance builds on the idea that information systems make objects available for access and discovery through representations of things in the world. When information architects build systems, they represent things in the world with ontologies, or explicitly shared understandings of things (Gruber, 1993). In the information sciences, catalogers, bibliographers, and system designers create applied ontologies to information objects to represent them in systems and access them across a range of platforms. Identifying shared conceptualizations of how things are similar, or different, or even the same can be challenging when one encounters situations, objects or things that *resist* representation. By closely examining the relationships between theatrical performance elements, Doty argues that scholars can create accurate and comprehensive records of events. If one wants to represent and provide access to all cultural forms in information systems, scholars must confront works created from embodied practice, performance, and live events, even as their liveness resists representation in records. Doty's article provides an avenue through which readers can address the thorniness of applied ontologies and challenges viewers to seriously consider the range of art works and cultural forms that often fall outside of traditional catalogs, archives and retrieval systems.

Amelia Abreu's "Collaborative Collecting" literature review provides a close examination of collecting perspectives from the fields of archival studies,

human computer interaction, and cultural studies. Increasingly, as users of online systems, scholars are creating new ways of collecting. The proliferation of networked information communication technologies and social media are fundamentally shifting the ways people collaborate, encounter new cultural forms, and share knowledge. Abreu identifies potential areas for future research in collaborative collecting, including its description and preservation to further develop the ability to share and create knowledge.

Critical scholarship and activism certainly comes with risk and personal sacrifice to individuals as we see glaringly in the life of Aaron Swartz. Nonetheless, Harding reminds us of the importance of forming alliances across spaces and collectivities so that you don't have to fight your battles for justice all alone. Part of our social justice mission is to engage with critical objects, from things in the world (like photographs), to how we represent objects and events in systems, to how people engage with and collect objects. The pieces authored by Shuckman, Doty and Abreu engage with representing objects in new, critical, and challenging ways. They continue an important tradition within *InterActions* that honors the legacy of Aaron Swartz and builds upon the example of scholars like Sandra Harding—to advocate for free access to ideas, to assert the importance of diversity in knowledge creation, to make critical thinking an everyday practice, and to ultimately utilize that thinking to shape and change our world.

### References

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