

February
5305 Bolm Rd.
Bay #11
Austin TX
<http://february.today>

Usher 3: Reloaded
Connor Crawford



January 9, 2007 — It's 8:23AM.

Extension 273 rings through the 32nd floor of an almost empty office building.

Maintenance is meant to come by to fix the florescent light that won't stop flickering. One of the women working on the floor calls it the "ghost light" because she claims a ghost is flicking the switch on and off as an act of what she calls "emotional terrorism."

Extension 273 continues to ring.

Through the reinforced steel walls of the vault a man hears the muffled ring of Extension 273. Unsure of the call's importance he hesitates to drop what he's doing to answer the call. In the moments between rings he stands there frozen holding Botticelli's "Portrait of a Lady Known as Smeralda Brandini." The muffled ring returns and now his paranoia sets in wondering if it is, in fact, his extension that is ringing — he drops the painting and heads towards the vault door.

Cmd, Arm, 830522, Cmd.

With long strides the man makes it down the hall. With each step he is able to locate the ring with an increasing certainty. He is now sure it is coming from his office. He wonders if this will be the call letting him know that he has been fired. After all when he signed his contract the head of the HR departments welcoming words were “Don’t get too comfortable here.” Furthermore, just yesterday the man’s boss pretended to jab a pen into his neck — extension 273 rings again.

The man lunges towards his phone. He notices it’s raining.

“Hello?”

“Mr. Takamoto is dead.”

The man hears a click on the other end of the line leaving him alone in his office with only the white noise of the empty call and the buzzing of the ghost light. Feeling both dejected, and confused, the man slumps back in his chair looking at his computer screen — it has gone to sleep in his absence.

Ctrl, Alt, Delete, 8kandeng\$, Enter.

The man rubs his face and his eyes start to burn, he looks at his hands and realizes how dirty they are. Tears start to build up along the man’s eyelids, he wonders if this is from the news of Mr. Takamoto’s death or from the dirt his eyes are now trying to flush out. Acting on habit and muscle memory the man opens Google Chrome.

Ctrl, T, You.

www.youtube.com autofills the browser's search bar and Youtube’s main page loads. The man checks his subscriptions and scrolls through the trending videos of the day in a subconscious effort to avoid processing Mr. Takamoto’s fate. As the man scrolls down he arrives at a video titled “Scooby-Doo! Ghost Chase & Capture,” the leading video in a curated selection under the heading “Recommended.” The man stares wide-eyed at the video thumbnail feeling confused before deciding to get up and head back to the vault.

As he walked back down the hall the man was unaware that as a product of Google, Youtube’s algorithm is built on the Google Brain, a deep learning neural network that is able to learn approximately one billion parameters and are trained using hundreds of billions of working examples. Criteria such as *Scale*, *Freshness*, and *Noise* all represent ways that the neural network distills, and crafts, a facsimile of his preferences and desires — each click becomes a fingerprint left behind. Perhaps the confusion the man felt looking at the Scooby-Doo thumbnail came from the simple fact that he forgot he had been emailing with a dealer in Los Angeles regarding an upcoming auction of original hand-painted Scooby-Doo animation cell.

830522, Cmd.

The Steel door swings open and the HVAC system kicks in. Instead of returning to the woman in the window, the man looks towards an unopened package sitting on top of a box labelled “Playing card made from Human Skin” — it was the ace of spades no less. He gets close enough to the package that he can read the shipping details.

“Original cell from ‘A Gaggle of Galloping Ghost’ 1969. Hanna-Barbera Productions, INC.”

After removing layers of foam, glassine, and mylar the man reveals a still frame from episode 11 of the first season of “Scooby-Doo, Where Are You!” that originally aired in 1969. As he lifted the composition up to get a closer look, Velma fell off the page and the haunted mansion background shifted down and

to the left. The man hadn't noticed before but each element of the scene (characters, props, set, background) was hand painted onto a separate layer of clear mylar in order to isolate the animation to specific part of the scene. The secret-door-bookcase stage right does not need to be redrawn every frame if the scene between Shaggy and Scooby is unfolding stage left. As the man shifted the background layer to be square with the rest of the composition he left a clear thumbprint on the mylar. As the man started to worry he had ruined the artwork, he tried to rub off the fingerprint only to spread the dirt and grease further. Key to what allows this animation to coalesce into an entertaining scene is when the structure remains invisible, which allows the content to become subject matter. However, as soon as you can see the fingerprints the illusion breaks down and it is exposed as a fiction.

Extension 273 rings again.

USHER 3: Reloaded, is a new solo exhibition by Connor Crawford at February Gallery in Austin, Texas. Through a series of wall-mounted sculptures Crawford points to the paradox that is the attention economy. While participating in a collective push towards individual expression the digital fingerprints created by culture add to a growing stream of saleable data. This user-generated expression-driven data ultimately finds its way back to the individual in the form of recommendations on what to watch, wear, read, and of course buy next. As this feedback loop repeats itself, the portrait of the individual is meant to become clearer and clearer; however, with each successive layer that is added, the fingerprints that are left behind have created a soft obstruction of the original. The result is a transition from individual into stereotype and taste into trope.

- Text by Parker Kay

Connor Crawford is a visual artist living and working in Toronto, Canada. He received his BFA from Ryerson University in 2014 and has exhibited work at The Power Plant, Toronto, Skylight Gallery, Vancouver, AC Repair Co at Spring Break, New York and Clint Roenisch, Toronto.