

LAURA MOORE – KERNEL MEMORY
JODIE JAMES ELLIOTT

To this day on my bookshelves among volumes of texts and novels there continues to be about a dozen or so VHS tapes. It seems they have always been there so I seldom notice their presence anymore but they still exist. Some in their original cardboard boxes are identifiable as popular films from the 1990s and others can only be identified by the hand-written labels applied to their sides: *July 1996*, or *Art Project: Chair*, for example. I have a vague memory of what these titles mean but since I no longer own a functioning VCR there is no way for me to view them. And since I imagine it is now becoming increasingly difficult to even buy a new VCR I have already accepted the possibility that I may never view them again. Conversely some of their companions – my books – were printed as far back as the 1920s and '30s. Their contents remain easily accessible and will continue to be so for as long as paper maintains its material integrity. In both cases the data is only as good as the device required to access and interpret it.

Conditions such as these also concern Toronto artist Laura Moore whose newest collection of work *Kernel Memory* is built on a material premise of permanence: marble. The work asserts a temporally localized and idiosyncratic expression of personal cultural tendencies and invites entry into a techno-economic context. The acorns and pinecones that effectively signify perpetuation seem to be in direct contrast to the USB storage devices, clear signifiers of the fleeting nature of our 21st century culture of information. The object's referent, subdued by its nonfunctioning nature and tempered by fleeting necessity, is still rendered heroic by virtue of the same dialect that once articulated the gods of antiquity. That is, material and scale.

Scale demands to be recognized as a point of interest in itself through default of its presence in relation to the observer's body. Minimalism is a strategy to enhance spatial engagement and monumentalize the threat of technological devices, driven by Western humanity's metaphysical ambitions and serving to rationalize observers. This unique experience might be compared to Hal Foster's notion of contemporary crux, where the body, no longer suggests "the form of an anthropomorphic image" or "an illusionist space of consciousness" but has become "the *presence* of its objects, unitary and symmetrical . . . just like people."¹ Whereas Foster considers his phenomenological construct to emerge unaffected by history, language or power, *Kernel Memory* sees human desire for delivery over content achieved through surreptitious deployment of material. Data contained by objects becomes irrelevant due to their tangibility, material presence and crafted object-hood.

Moore's acorn and pinecone also reference seeds and their ability to contain information sequences that will perpetuate their species. Here is found a significant homologous analogy with USB flash drives and a perceived division between nature and technology begins to wane. Moore deploys similarity between nature and technology such that flash drives can appear as borrowed metaphoric signifiers in novel and amusing forms of cassette tapes, teddy bears and beer cans. The possibility of a consumer encountering a functioning flash drive that appears as an acorn is no longer remote and with this possible discovery, the signifier's slipperiness must be recognized along with homological sympathy.

Gary Michael Dault observes that Moore's early work pushes us to memorialize "dead-tech things – like cassettes" rather than "things that are still all too present, such as cell phones and batteries"² but his call defeats Moore's purpose. Because a technological generation lasts about three years due to economic pressures, technology itself constantly oscillates between introduction and obsolescence. When the USB storage device goes the way of the VHS tape, Moore's marble monument will remain as fresh and ancient as the day it was first cut and without it no one might remember the meaning of these funny little tabs that appear like acorns

and pinecones, nor bother to care about the digital information they once contained.

It is at this point of entry that Moore offers a wink and a nudge. As if to emphasize what is lost and how this is just our nature, *Kernel Memory* is accompanied by its own compendium: a series of table top drawings that bear traces of the artist's creative process. Like backup drives that guard our anxiety for imminent failure Moore's tablets record human activity, but unlike jpegs and divx files these records are etched in stone and built to last.

1 Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: MIT Press. 1996. 43.

2 Dault, Gary Michael. "Laura Moore at Peak Gallery," *The Globe and Mail*. 29 April 2006. R11.

WRITER BIO

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