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Field Guide to Skirmology: Handbook for the Skirmonaut

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1.

Who is the Skirmonaut? Or a better question: *Where* is the Skirmonaut? The task of the Skirmonaut is to constantly demarcate itself and delimit its environment, for it is the origin of the ecology of the screen. Its task is to delimit the screen. In so doing, it constantly rediscovers that screening is itself this act of delimitation.

The Skirmonaut is the preemptively, or even proleptically, nostalgic creature par excellence.

The Skirmonaut is diabolical. It operates according to the logic of the smirk. Twisted, it coils not insidiously (sinuously, unctuously), but rather according to the helical topology of reflection and deflection. The Skirmonaut is always only ever tangential – limning, deflecting, and reflecting back, returning.

This is why we must return to the beginning. The being of the Skirmonaut is essentially enmeshed with the problem of location. The Skirmonaut is a spatial creature, but it operates in a space whose own geometry begins to be known only through skirmological activities, which in the end can only be improvisations.

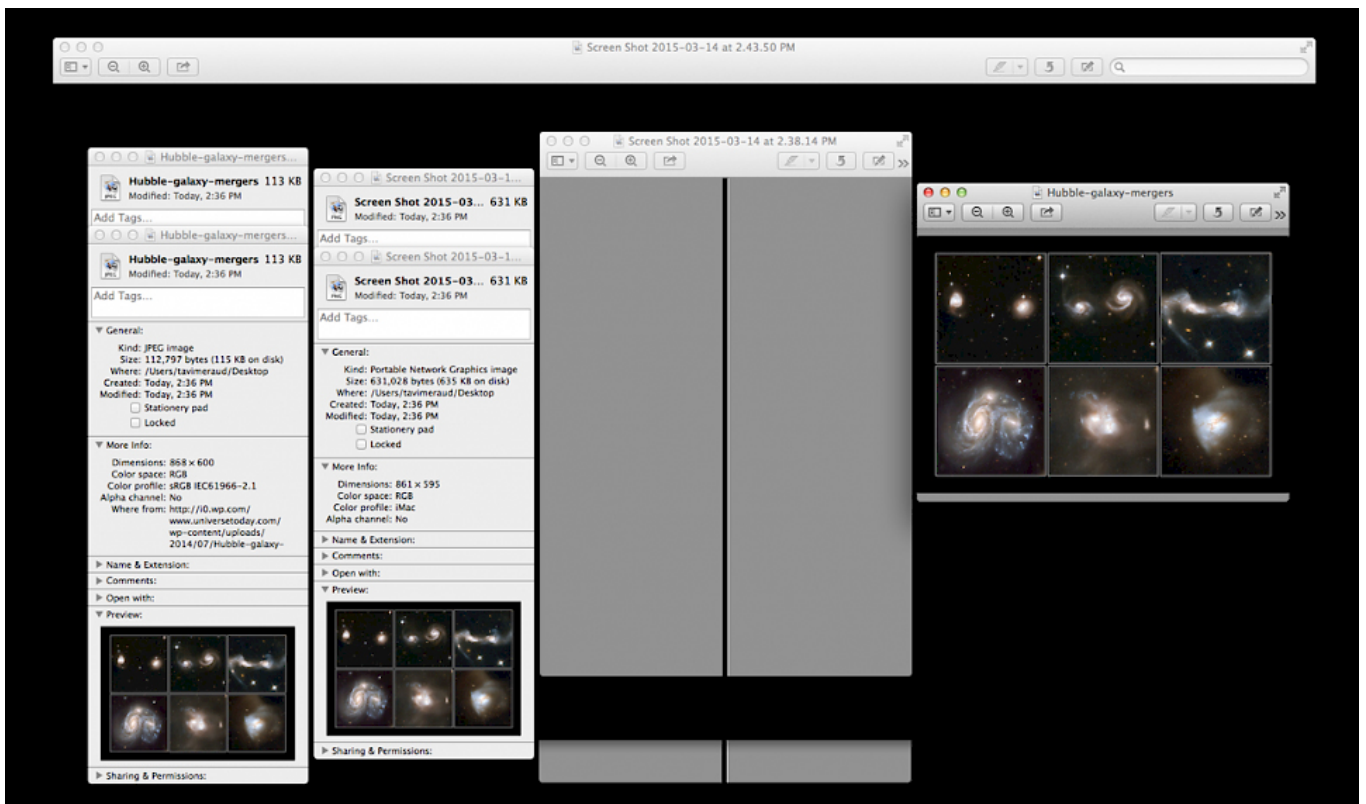
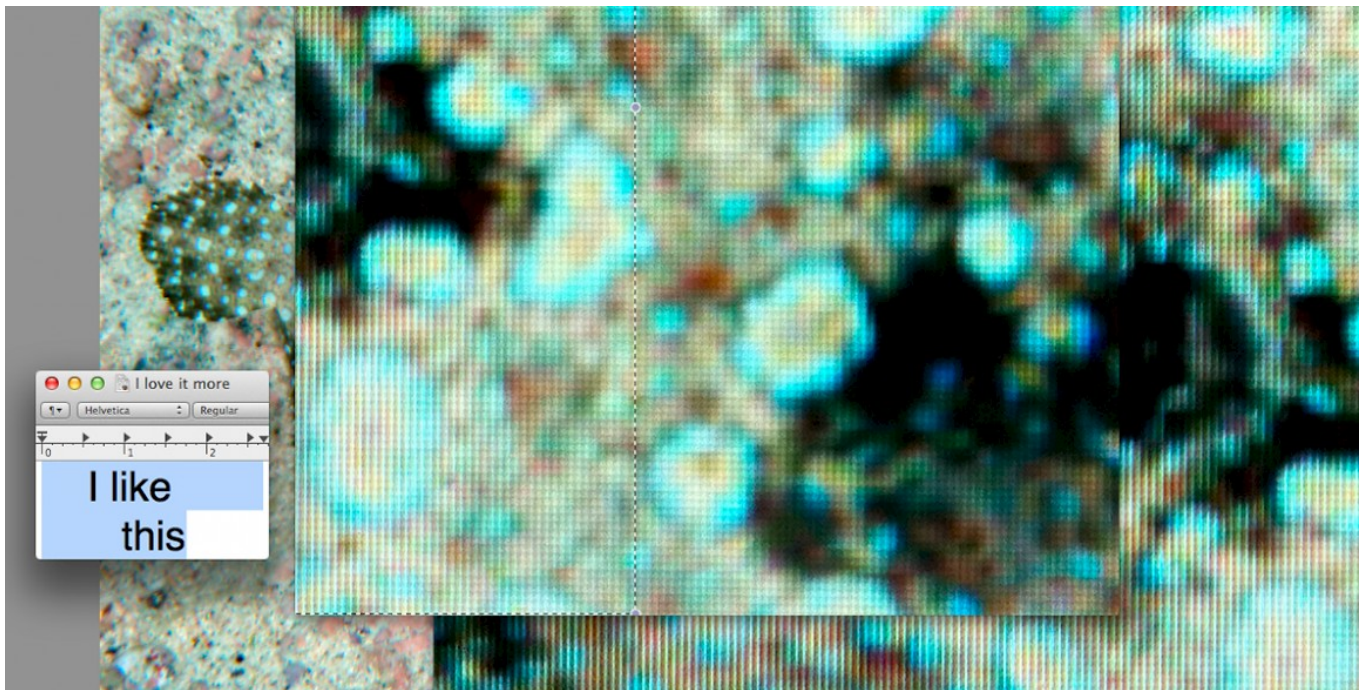
2.

What are the self-assigned tasks of the Skirmonaut? They are necessarily self-assigned, for Skirmology is only ever an amateur science, if it can be designated a science at all. The task at hand is ostensibly to demarcate the screen. And this is precisely what operates at the degree zero of being any thing at all; hence the science thereof must remain an amateur endeavor (if by amateur we mean the rampant allowance for a total exemption from regulations – in which all linearity of thought and organized activity bursts into confetti skirmishes of sparkles, curves, the glitter of rogue galaxies).

The Skirmonaut, then, practices the unwitting, hasty, and only-ever-amateur art of an alchemical cartography that resembles most closely a provisional piracy, a disorganized navigation (in the quaintest, canonical sense), a frantic but constant assemblage. Skirmology is not the simple transcribing of the territory of the screen, but rather the establishing of an archaeology simultaneous to an unfolding of its topography.

If the Skirmonaut is an adventurer in the canonical sense, it must be equipped with some arsenal of tools. Yes, these are the *keys* that, when concatenated in the appropriate way, release the thing that was always there yet until that moment invisible. For a moment, the map is finally one with the territory described. The two are touching on all points, one-to-one.

These keys support the first foray towards some understanding of the screen's surface. Capturing it and sampling it so it can be pored



over. A constant assemblage. And much repetition. Many mistakes. The hands are sometimes shaky. There is an urgency. As we have said, the Skirmonaut is plagued by the singular pestilence of a proleptic nostalgia, a longing that bends backwards from the future; a doubled longing that accelerates the hastiness, inflects the shakiness. Symptoms of precocious degeneration perhaps. In any case, there is a twisting of time in a place organized by time stamps. Everything is thoroughly diseased with temporal pestilence.

The Skirmonaut, then, weds cartography and divination (cartography as divination; divination as a particular variety of cartography).

But the Skirmonaut also releases a seismological revolution rippling across the screen's topography.

Taking a screenshot is a means to delineate/delimit what the screen is. But what results is an image of the screen that is, for a moment, identical to the original. With only a pixel of displacement, we are offering some kind of camouflage for the screen. The screen is suddenly protected (think of the German word *Schirm*, as that protective, sheltering cover, as a second skin). Camouflage is never the second skin. Camouflage must always collude with the skin through betraying it, as a double/doubled/doubling agent, simultaneously in cahoots with the wearer and the environment. The camouflage must ostensibly profess a singular complicity – displaying, alleging, or announcing a deep, hyper-penetrative complicity with the environment. Otherwise it fails and the organism dies.

But here, if the camouflage fails, nothing dies. This is the inherent, perennial elusiveness of screens. Where is the screen? What is the screen? How is the screen? Why screen? Screen who, exactly?

There is no environment beyond the organism. Moby Dick will be found but will be so expansive that we can no longer speak of dermis, of the membranal, epidermatological distinction between the animal and the environment. The animal becomes the environment. This is what the Skirmonaut's activity merely highlights.

The Skirmonaut belongs to some subdivision of the Cult of Moby Dick. It simultaneously searches for the Moby Dick and the Aspidochelone, slinking around in a region where these two are probably one and the same. To arrive at the shores of the whale-as-land, whaleisland – or to wake up in the proverbial cetological bowel, only to realize that the whale itself is located in yet another, greater ventral cavity. Of whose? Where?

To denature and dilute to transparency, the chaos and opacity of the screen.

3.

The map the Skirmonaut-as-cartographer-diviner creates suspends itself between the visible and invisible. If the Skirmonaut should, however, leave behind a legible trace, how does this look, and what could it be? Ostensibly a screenshot, a pixel or two displaced. Slightly displaced screenshot displayed upon screenshot. A sloppy palimpsest, a mock sedimentary cross section of an utterly fraudulent geology. A screen wishes to have no depth, but to operate (in loop) in that optative mode only begins to reveal its depths. Shimmering and scale-like. Positively piscine.

Multiple windows flattened into that instance of a click. (To study the Skirmonaut and its fugitive skirmishes may well lead to a musicology of click-cacophony, but in the end, the auditory has been bracketed.) All that remains is the study in camouflage, for in that instance of flattening, collapsing, only ostensible collapsing occurs – it is really collating, coagulating.

The screenshot becomes a divinatory map of screen-as-such. It is the image of the screen that most closely approximates it. It is, for a moment, the screen. It screens the screen. It screens screen screening.

Screening the screen, as it were. Threshold. Screenshot is playing at the threshold of screen as delimitation/delimited space versus threshold/window into something else. Congealing, which is the essential principle of constellating. And notarized by the timestamp that becomes its name, its cosmological designation in this unraveling galaxy.

4.

Domestication of chaos. The Skirmonaut only imitates the ocular grazing of the search engine. As suggestively arcane as the vernacular of the shipping forecast.

Constellation – terrestrial domestication of the firmament.

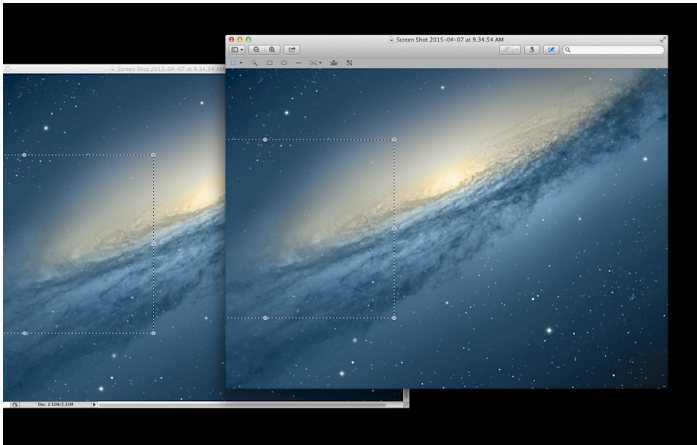
The Skirmonaut reveals the screen as operating on the iridescent principle. The twinning of the Iridic and Hermetic ethos.

5.

An Excursus on Virtuality. What the alchemical-cartographical efforts of the Skirmonaut delineate is not so much the virtuality of the real, i.e., the real seeming-ness of the real, but the real of the virtual, which again, chiasmic, intertwines into the realm of the virtual. The realm where the lines of the real and the virtual begin to blur precisely because the effects in the meatspace body are *real*. The Skirmonaut's frantic capturing of the screen, ostensibly in the

name of its silly narcissistic-xenophilic science, reveals the domestication of the fleshed self (for once upon a time, the Skirmonaut was birthed of a fleshy, voluptuous womb). This is why, for the Skirmonaut, the question of architecture and of locality is of the greatest urgency.

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6.

Skirmology, the perennial rehearsal of ambiguities, the ambiguity precisely of t/here.

7.

Ambiguity of the primordial soup. Doused in stardust. Always already a junkie for the stuff. Here is the final reminder of the imperative that yokes the Skirmonaut, its umbilical tether-cord that simultaneously connects it to the flesh-mother-ship and to that other uncharted expanse. Here is the final reminder that intrepidity is so often perceivable in figurations of loneliness. Skirmology might be summed up as a surrendering of will to dispersing/atomizing/vaporizing oneself into the unknown – touching. Skimming.

The Skirmonaut might be afraid of becoming burned by a new kind of sun, whose rays enter from the outside of a vast inside.

8.

The Skirmonaut, in the end, must be a kind of simpleton. And lonely.

9.

Outside (where?) a taxi sharking around for any body slinks by, half-lit.

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All images courtesy of Tavi Meraud.

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