Self

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Senior Thesis
Spring 2017

Data Overview

Years Active:	7
Weeks Active:	332
Total Tweets:	8,419
Saved Tweets:	29

Design Overview

1. Dust Jackets
Rather than filling the interior spreads, my entire Twitter archive is displayed on the books' seven transparent dust jackets, one for each year of the life of the account. The reader is immediately confronted with this, the informational content of the book, out of its typical context and in its entirety. This choice, a literal gesture of transparency, aims to reinforce the act of publishing this once-private content and emphasizes the tweets' demotion from protected (inside the book) to a vulnerable and public status (exterior).

2. Cover
The cover contains only the title of the book, "Self." With the dust jackets on, this title is partially obscured, almost entirely covered by the mass of years of tweets. Without this coverage it is clear, black on a white background.

3. Interior
The pages of the book are intentionally sparse. Horizontal bars of "placeholder text" stand in for redacted tweets that, during review, I felt deserved deletion. The only lines of real type are the few "important" tweets which I've concluded are still worth something—memories, thoughts, or jokes that I felt stood out from the mass of digital spew. This sparseness aims to illustrate the infrequency with which daily Twitter usage generates meaningful output.

4. Generative Design
Though exploration into generative design techniques took a backseat to the conceptual aspects of this project, the final output still made use of code-based design. In the final book, the time-based pagination (week numbers and date ranges) and horizontal bars for redacted tweets were generated entirely using Basil.js to interface with my data. The code used in the final book can be seen to the left.

On a base level, this book publishes, in print, the contents of my Twitter account from the time I joined the service in August 2010 until I began this project in January 2017, the effective end of the account. Though the result is an inherently personal object, this project is more a record of a change in the way that I think about my own relationship with social media services than a reminiscence about past usage.

My intention with presentation of this content (physically rather than digitally) was to transform it from self-projective to self-reflective. Removing complete archive of my Twitter account from its native container and familiar, active interface and placing it in a new context reveals frivolity, fragility, and inconsistency; outside of its usual networked environment, this collection suddenly pales.

I hope that observing this process can result in a similar kind of reflection for the reader. Do the things we say on the internet accurately represent us? What does the collected output of years of usage look like? After filtering the trendy internet jargon, reductive fads, trying-too-hard jokes and digital facades, what is left?

A secondary part of making this book was my experimentation with generative design. Using Basil.js, a script-based plug-in for Adobe InDesign, I was able to easily handle the large amounts of social media data I had acquired throughout the semester. Basil allowed me to control, in InDesign, placement on the page, typeface and weight, point size, and more using only code, a technique I felt matched the digital-to-physical transformation that was simultaneously underway with my content.