

Justin Astorino

Professor Rita Raley

English 110: Methods of Literary Study

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Maria Fischer's *Traumgedanken*: Thoughts on Dreams, Thoughts on Print

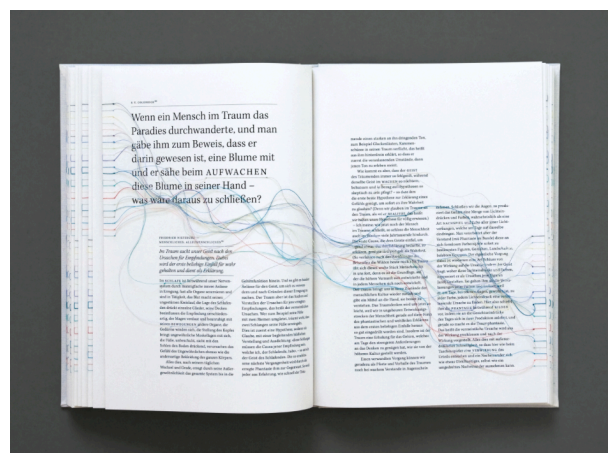
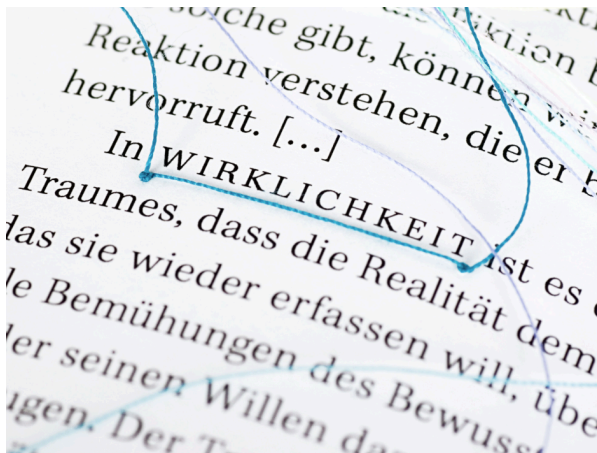
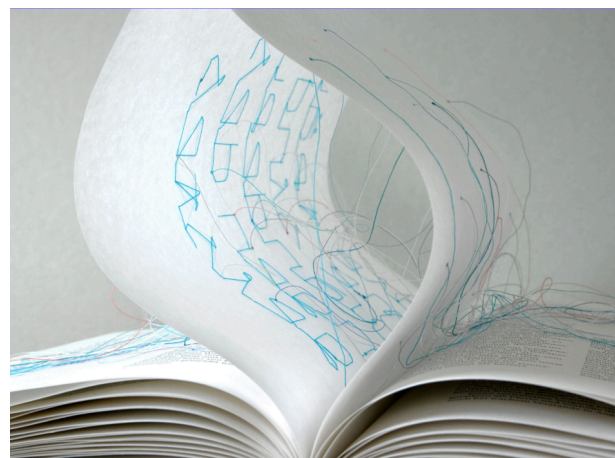
Summary

Quoting and excerpting the words of Jean-Paul Sartre, Aristotle, S. T. Coleridge, Friedrich Nietzsche, Salvador Dalí, René Descartes, Medard Boss, and more, Maria Fischer is able to encapsulate the ever-changing thoughts on dreams throughout time and across disciplines. Her finished project is titled *Traumgedanken*, which translates from German to “thoughts on dreams,” and the myriad threads interwoven throughout the book symbolize the chaos of the sleeping mind. Like connections in a brain, or hyperlinks on the web, each thread has a purpose and each thread forms a bigger, more confusing picture, sometimes quite literally. But more than just a representation of the dream, Fischer's art piece falls fortuitously into the heated debate on the futility of print. Without intending it, she has argued with *Traumgedanken* that the printed book remains meaningful, relevant, and unique as a form of artistic experimentation. She has placed the printed book back in conversation with the internet, electronic media, even dreams.

Description

German graphic artist Maria Fischer's *Traumgedanken* is a multimedia, multidisciplinary, multidimensional art piece that aims to offer a brand new perspective on dreams. Taking the form of a hardback book, this 2010 project compiles texts from literature, philosophy, science, and psychology on or about dreams. Sewn in and

throughout the book are a multitude of multicolored threads that make abstract connections between keywords such as “wirklichkeit” (reality), “geist” (spirit), “wanderungen” (migrations), and “welt” (world). The metaphor of the dream extends beyond the page with *Traumgedanken*, where woven threads signify “pieces of reality that are assembled to build a story.” And Fischer even uses thread to write excerpts of the book—the pages, stitched together, provide only a glimpse of the meaning within much like dreams themselves.



Images © Maria Fischer, via [Open Output](#).

Research Context

Fischer’s art project can be situated within the larger field concerned with the state and relevance of the physical/material book. Although her book is dedicated to

reconstructing the “confusion and fragility of dreams,” it also serves as a bold statement in favor of the hard copy book: the multidimensionality and threads of connection are examples of what an electronic book simply cannot achieve, that is, “physically and visually breaching its own boundaries.” At the same time, while the connections in book form are physical and thus limited by space, hyperlinks in electronic form are far less cumbersome and can operate seamlessly. Fischer mentions none of this on her website, however, for she is entirely preoccupied with the chaos and narrative of dreams, but the argument can still be made that *Traumgedanken* is a work that highlights the unique differences between the physical and electronic book.

Technical Analysis

The *Traumgedanken* book is seventy-six pages in length from cover to cover, and although not every page is featured on Maria Fischer’s website, enough is shown to accurately describe the layout, graphic design, and typography of the project. In terms of layout, nearly every page is structured into block of quotations or essay excerpts by notable authors, theorists, philosophers, poets, and psychoanalysts. Dozens of threads, uniquely colored, are aligned symmetrically on the left side of each page, and they twist, spread, and coil across to the right side of the book. Several of the threads underline the more oneiric words of the quotation or essay—such as “illusion,” “awaken,” or “continuous”—while most chaotically loop and twirl across the page, overlaying the text beneath. Graphically, she uses thread as her primary medium. There are multiple instances of Fischer creating fascinating art in which threads are sewn and aligned to form geometric, three-dimensional images (one pictured below, another pictured above). Fischer, typographically, uses a consistent sans serif font. She uses italics on certain blocks of quotation to offset other text, and she capitalizes entire words she

deems significant. She also uses white space liberally to counterbalance large blocks of text.

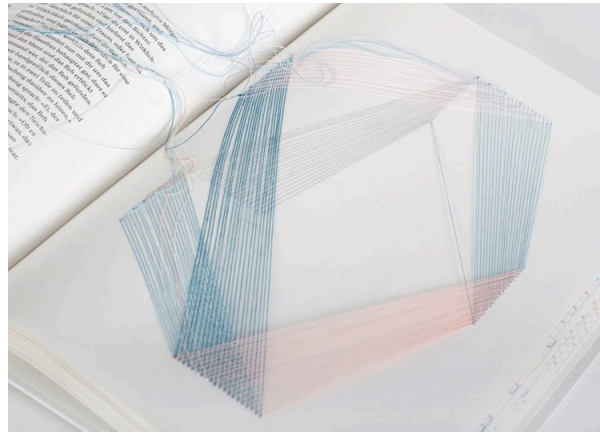


Image © Maria Fischer, via [Open Output](#).

Evaluation of Research Opportunities

With *Traumgedanken*, Maria Fischer is showing inadvertently the value and potential of the material book. Regardless of whether Fischer intended her work to be situated within this larger electronic-versus-print debate, the project illustrates that artistic experimentation belongs uniquely to the realm of the physical. The fact that this book was entirely handmade, including the binding and sewing, demonstrates Fischer's attention to detail, her dedication, and above all the materiality of the project. Furthermore, threads sewn directly into the pages provide a dimensionality and cohesion unavailable to a project with an electronic book. Thus, this "thoughts on dreams" art piece should allow theorists to widen the pool of study from artifacts actively engaging in this debate to *all* experiments playing with the form and function of the material book. Fischer went about this project trying to portray the dream on the page, and while successful, she was wholly unaware that her experimentation with the materiality of the hard copy book has led theorists down a rabbit hole of further research.

Resources for Further Study

Bardoff, Naomi. "Maria Fischer's Dream Thoughts / Hyperlinks Book." *SFCB Blog*.

<<http://www.sfc.org/blog/2011/05/31/maria-fischers-dream-thoughts-hyperlinks-book>>

Fischer, Maria. "Traumgedanken." *Maria-Fischer.com*. <<http://www.maria-fischer.com/project-5.html>>

"Half-Dream, Half-Reality: Maria Fischer's Stitched Book." *Le Fil Conducteur*.

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Pavlus, John. "A Book About Dreams with Hyperlinks Made of Thread." *Fast Company*

Design. <<http://www.fastcodesign.com/1663217/a-book-about-dreams-with-hyperlinks-made-of-thread>>