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A potency of life

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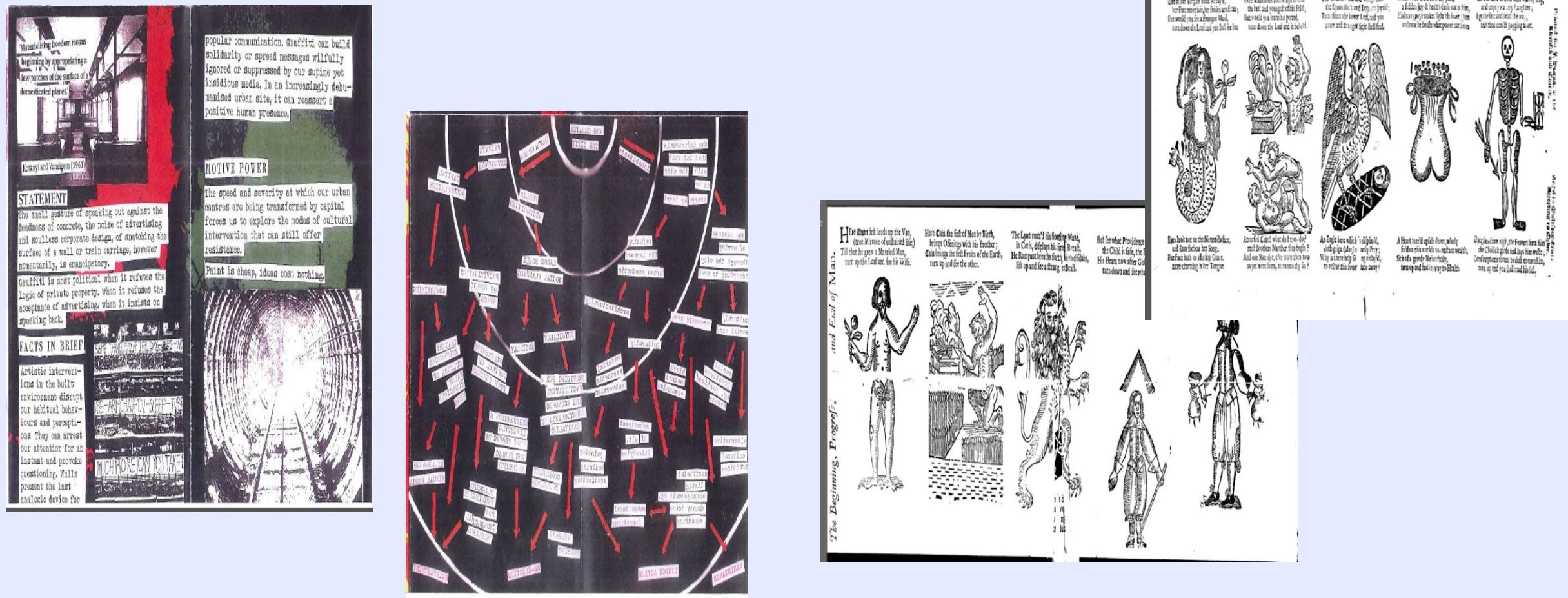
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Whiteley, Gillian, Catie Gill, Catherine M. Armstrong, and Matthew Inglis. 2019. "A Potency of Life". figshare.
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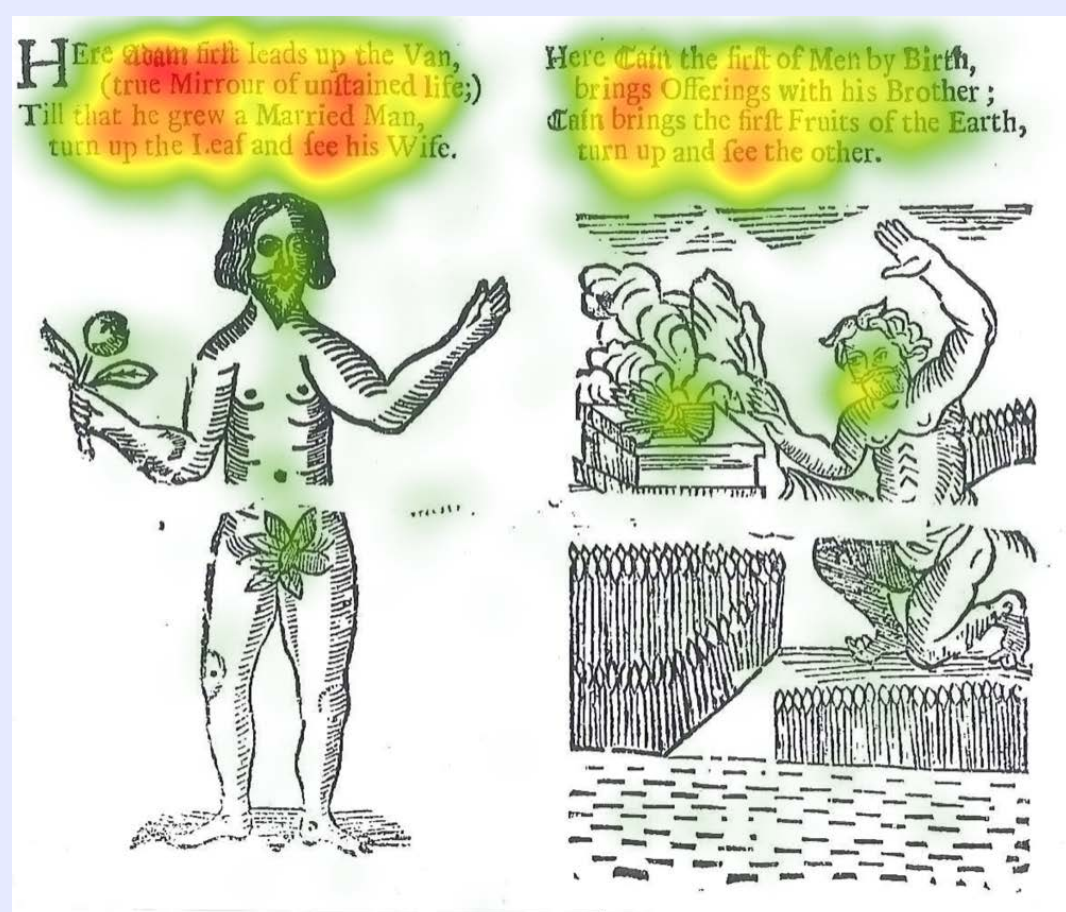
A Potency of Life

Gill Whiteley, Catie Gill, Catherine Armstrong, Matthew Inglis

In 1644, John Milton affirmed “books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them” (*Areopagitica*). Today’s technology can measure how readers respond to texts, and so help explain how pamphlets come to life.



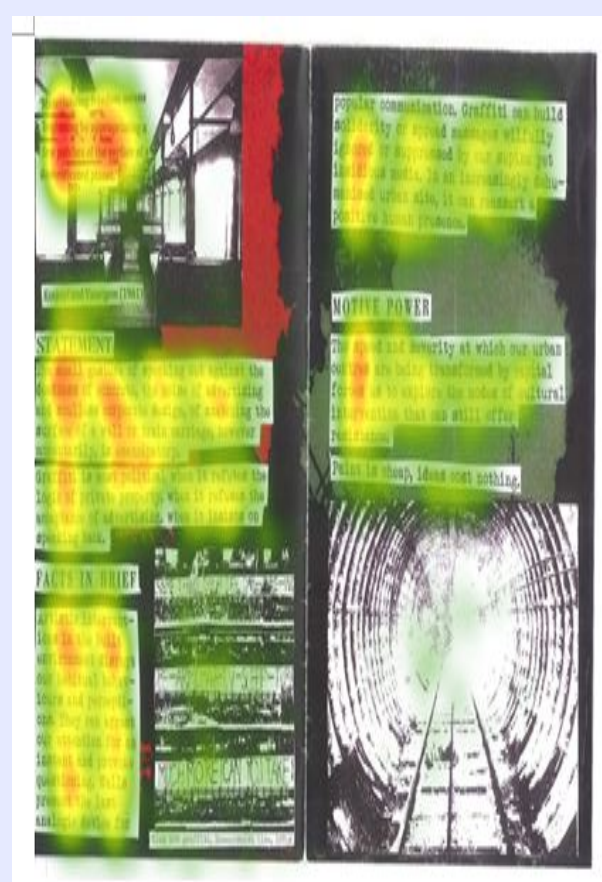
Pictured above, *Signalling the City* is about the creativity of graffiti artists, and their contribution to urban spaces; *The Beginning, Progress and Rise of Man* (c. 1650) is an irreverent account of key stages in a man’s life. Both the modern and the seventeenth-century text use a complex combination of word and image.



Loughborough’s eye-tracking technology allowed us to see how people viewed the above pamphlets.

Thirty one participants read the texts then answered questions on them. They knew nothing about the pamphlets in advance, and because comparing reading speed was not our intention, could take as long as they wanted.

The participants’ data has been turned into heatmaps, represented by these stills, which show attention location.



The data shows at a glance the reading behaviour of the group. The fixations are colour-coded in terms of significance: the locations in red being focussed on for longest, and by the most people.

We have been surprised by what seems to be a relative lack of time fixating on images.

The accompanying video supplements the data from the stills. Video data can be analysed by following a single reading attempt or a collection of reading attempts.