ISSUE NO. 8

CultureNotFoundException

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This intervention explores how software encodes intersecting systems of oppression. We graffiti excerpts from prominent software onto the computer science and engineering buildings at UC Berkeley. We photograph the juxtaposition of digital and physical constructions to explore how software reproduces gendered, sexual, racial, national, and class hierarchies.

Our studies asked us to see computer science as an objective discipline, programming as a technical task, and software as a neutral artifact. To wield this gaze, we had to discard our bodies and become mechanical eyes. From this position, we could see people only as disembodied users, objects, or nodes, insulated from their identities. We wrote software into a vacuum.

But we wanted to write software back into the world. We wanted to tear it from the vacuum and leave it vulnerable. We wanted to situate software inside the physical environment our bodies navigate every day. This demanded a new way of seeing, one that embraced subjectivities and exposed our role as actors. We had to hack the mechanical eye, turning it to our world, to ourselves, to itself.

The essay's title is the name of an error-handling class (exception) in Microsoft's .NET Framework; according to the official documentation, "The exception that is thrown when a method is invoked which attempts to construct a culture that is not available on the machine."

(https://adanewmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/system-global.jpg)

*System.Globalization. Soda Hall, Berkeley. Code from the
documentation of Microsoft's .NET Framework: "The System.Globalization
namespace contains classes that define culture-related information,
including language, country/region, calendars in use, format patterns
for dates, currency, and numbers, and sort order for strings. These
classes are useful for writing globalized (internationalized) applications."*

(https://adanewmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/type-radio.jpg)
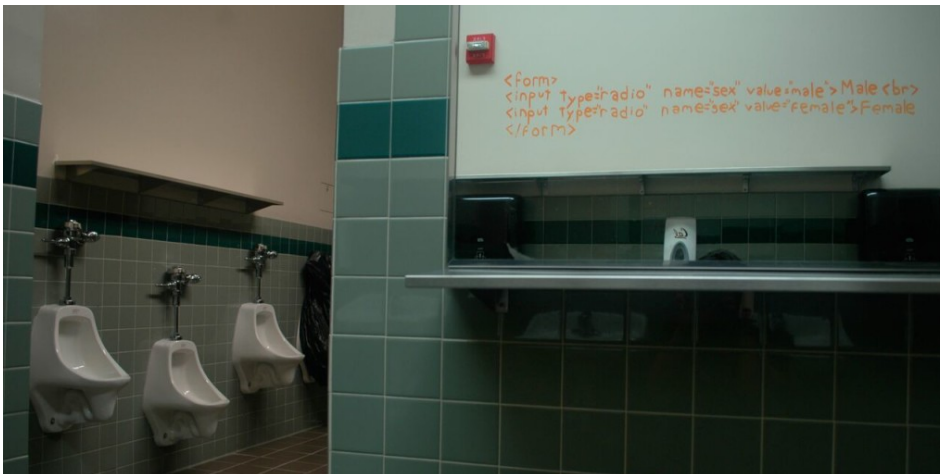
*type="radio". Cory Hall, Berkeley. Code from the HTML Tutorial of
W3Schools. This excerpt is the tutorial's example of radio buttons, user
inputs that permit only one choice from a predefined set of mutually
exclusive options.*

(https://adanewmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/create-eigen-face.jpg)

createEigenFace. Etcheverry Hall, Berkeley. Code from the documentation of OpenCV, a computer vision library. This excerpt creates a facial recognition model that "trains" with a set of images of faces.

(https://adanewmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/copyright-null.jpg)
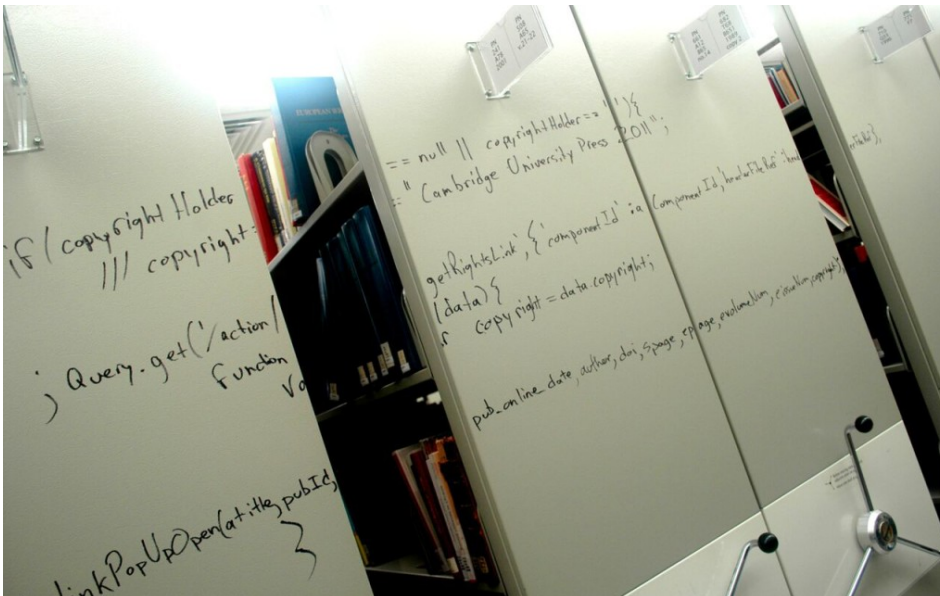
copyrightHolder == null. Main Stacks, Berkeley. Code from the Cambridge University Press paywall. This excerpt blocks access to scholarly articles from people without a subscription.

(https://adanewmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/fingerprint.jpg)

fingerprint('anonymizer. Cory Hall, Berkeley. Leaked code from XKeyscore, an Internet surveillance tool used by the National Security Agency whose targets included users of the Tor anonymity network. This excerpt identifies Tor users from any country except those in the Five Eyes intelligence alliance: United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

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CODE   **CULTURE**   **INTERSECTIONALITY**   **PEER REVIEWED**   **PHOTOGRAPHY**   **SOFTWARE**

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2 THOUGHTS ON "CULTURENOTFOUNDEXCEPTION"

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Alexis Hancock

DECEMBER 2, 2015 AT 8:11 AM

Thank you for this. As a web developer I have come across code and questionable content that I had to challenge to make more accessible. One case reminds me where I held my code hostage until they [stakeholders] included the option for self identification.