9. Interview with Norman M. Klein: *Bleeding Through*, Media Evolution, Walter Benjamin, and American Politics (May 27, 2022)

Jens Gurr: Can you tell me about the original idea for *Bleeding Through* – how did it come about?

Norman Klein: It came about in stages. First, there was a Molly who I *did* meet, and in fact we even found a photograph of Molly and I had to leave it out, because I wasn't sure if we'd be sued. But then this all drifted into a corner and then I put it in *History of Forgetting* as the short docu-fable "The Unreliable Narrator" (rpt. as ch. 5 of the present volume), an obsession of mine. It is also conceptually an important part of that book. And then someone got wind of it and said, "Why don't we make a film?" So they made a film that I thought largely missed the point of what I wanted to do. It was called something like *10 Hours to Kill a Man*. It had lots of gaudy things to it, and was based on the idea of following this woman's life and all the different places in L.A connected to the idea of murder in the movies. Then, at ZKM [Zentrum für Kunst und Medien, Karlsruhe] Jeffrey Shaw was talking to me while he was setting up some project, and he had just recently rejected a job from the University of Southern California; and they were trying to see if they could change his mind. And so he said, "I'm doing this thing on future cinema. Why don't you do a DVD-ROM?", and he had an Australian accent, "DVD-ROOOAM", you know. "Why don't you use that film, you have a film!" And then I told him I was going to do it another way, from scratch. And then he persuaded USC

to fund the project, and suddenly I was in business. They set up a team, and I still remember the first day, when they said, "Our job is to realize your vision.", and I realized this doesn't happen twice. So I invented the rhythm and the story while the archive and interface were being developed. Then I took the summer off to write a novella. And then, again very quickly, it came out in the late Fall, in an exhibition called "Future Cinema" – and then finally in a box set including the book and the DVD. So it happened in stages, in that pinball way. What certainly helped was that there was a tremendous amount of enthusiasm then in "interactivity", as they called it.

Jens Gurr: I was going to ask you about the media-historical moment of 2002/2003 anyway – that and then your views on interactivity now, almost 20 years later. It seems that there was much more enthusiasm then about the possibilities of digital media, more belief in the liberating potential of non-linearity in interactive media. You said in an earlier discussion that the arbitrariness of the interface, which brings the material up randomly from a database, and the resulting non-linearity, the fact that you're unable to retrace your own steps through the material – if you move three images to the left and then three to the right, you don't even end up with the same image – that all that was not as central to you in how you envisioned *Bleeding Through* as it was to your collaborators.

Norman Klein: No, no, it wasn't!

Jens Gurr: And in an essay from 2007 we also have in this new edition (ch. 3, "Spaces Between"), you even slightly dismissively speak of "clicking and clacking" (Norman laughs). Can you tell me how you feel about that now?

Norman Klein: I feel the same way. But now everyone agrees with me – they're fed up with clicking and clacking as a high aesthetic. They'd rather talk to the machine like a clerk at the store, and let the machine do it. At first, the feeling was that interactive surprises were almost a literary alternative or a mediated alternative to traditional narrative. This was very much a late modernist idea, from the eighties forward, even the

sixties. And there are many, many versions of setting up data stories that way – choose your own adventure kind of things, and there must have been 30 or 40 festivals around the world dedicated to it; there was a lot of money going in; the University of Southern California was given millions of dollars to develop projects that would work like this and that's how I got connected – it was called "The Labyrinth Project." And there were also anthologies about it, first person, second person, and so on, and, of course, identifying it with games to a large extent. But the enthusiasm was largely somewhat confused, because the argument was almost something like: since it doesn't tell a story, that's even *better* than a story. Well, no. I decided I wanted to be more archival, partly because of my obsession with Benjamin, but also my obsession with archive and that it should take the "spaces between" that are supposed to be random and that they're narrative. And I've recently spoken with some people who do props for Warner Brothers. I spent the whole day yesterday looking for props for some project and they said, "Oh, that's what we do all the time: we set up an object that has some narrative hook to it. And the audience doesn't know what it is, but they feel it." So this doesn't have to be some kind of late-modernist Robbe-Grillet type of experiment; it could be a mode of narrative that is in fact quite pleasant. Throughout the nineties, a great many experiments with interface and cities were featured, in the arts and in architecture. I loved those, especially the work of Joachim Sauter. I wish more of that had continued. Now, what's happened since, unfortunately, in some ways, is that the early experiments as to how you might set up archival distancing and the role of the viewer and what the programming might say, of how a story like that can use layers, has almost lost out, and more and more, this kind of work is simply video narrative; so you might say, the three-act video structure similar to film structure has won out. You know, even games are more and more looking like movies. So this was a moment when it wasn't entirely sure that this wasn't another mode of narrative or dis-narrative and there was a lot of money behind it, and then by 2010, 2012, 2015, it began to dissolve and people realized that there's nothing more boring than clicking all the time. Don't get me wrong: I'm delighted with the interface for *Bleeding Through*, which perfectly reflected urban design and fictional strategies

from that era. It appeared in dozens of festivals, won awards and even some twenty years later is still very appealing! I'm just not sure the randomness and non-linearity do very much for *Bleeding Through*.

Jens Gurr: So the non-linearity wasn't really central to what you had in mind?

Norman Klein: Absolutely not! No, I was quite convinced that the mental pictures you make are the powerhouse of all narrative. What you leave out. You play with the absences, so I felt there was a long definition of narrative that could easily include this interactive function.

Jens Gurr: What about the gaps and leaps? My sense is, if you had the same material that you have on the original *Bleeding Through* DVD in, say, a 90-minute documentary film where someone sits there for 90 minutes and gets the same kind of material thrown at them, then that would be less activating, less radical in effect in contrast to the interactive DVD, where you explore the material yourself.

Norman Klein: I agree; the spaces between fascinate me. I'm quite convinced there's something to what I call 'archiving' as a verb. It's a form of storytelling. Both you and I have roots somewhere in picaresque fiction going back many centuries. And we both understand how often there are gaps left in these picaresque novels. We find the character years later, with one leg missing. Something else has happened in between, but what, we don't know. Or take Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, which makes these narrative leaps – there are so many examples of this, and we both find quite charming what Sterne called "the gentle art of good conversation". The gaps. The pauses. "So what happened in your second marriage after all?", and the person pauses, puts their chin on their hand, and then says something like "Well, it was a long winter …", and then you almost *like* the fact that you don't know. And because I'm always interested in how people forget and collectively remember or don't remember, it's very clear to me that absences are as solid as a bridge, and in fact, you could say my real field is knowing what people are saying by what they

don't say. And absences, which is so much what this technology was offering, should be studied still more in terms of narrative.

Jens Gurr: What about the leftist or radical *politics* of the non-linearity, this Deleuzian idea of the rhizome and that everything is non-hierarchically or anti-hierarchically connected to everything else, that there is a leftist political idea behind it? Does that make sense to you for *Bleeding Through*?

Norman Klein: I think it's connected with the way that entropy is understood in information theory: the more random something is, the more meaningful it has to be. But here? I'm not so sure the randomness is so very political in itself.

Jens Gurr: But you *would* say that the kind of subversive, bottom-up sort of anti-authoritarian view of the city, as opposed to hegemonic planning, is central to *Bleeding Through*.

Norman Klein: Yes, oh yes! All my work is about that. I mean, I often say in lectures, fish don't know they're wet, but they have premonitions. And so the study of how power filters through the material world, which is where Benjamin is the great master, is central here. To find modernism and modernity in shopping arcades, if you stop and pause: There's nothing more mundane than people buying bread in the shopping arcade, and yet it matters how the lighting works inside. So I think I don't see that as subversive exactly. I think what's been subverted is how people really live, the everyday nature of things, but I guess that's typical of someone who has always been identified as leftist, which I guess I have been. But then to me, the randomness is not essential to the subversiveness.

Jens Gurr: Still on the media history, the non-linearity and the fact that *Bleeding Through* came as a combination of literary text and material on a DVD: This was extremely innovative and greatly added to the appeal then. Now, for technical reasons, because the content of the DVD cannot easily be migrated to the web without re-programming the entire

interface, we have a link in the book to a film that shows *Bleeding Through* being operated – and that is necessarily linear and non-interactive itself, though it shows the interactivity. And it seems there's a certain irony to this: I like the irony that when *Bleeding Through* came out, the non-linearity was radical, whereas now that interactivity is all over the place, we do this as a nicely conventional linear film.

Norman Klein: Yes! I guess the truth that was discovered in the last 20 years is that progress moves horizontally. We thought it didn't jump the rails, but it does jump the rails! All sorts of old horrible ideas are returning to the world, pre-modern ideas of land war in Eastern Europe, and so on, ideas of the nation state that go back in America to its colonial days and are unworkable; so why should narrative and media progress forward? It could progress sideways, even seemingly backwards. Take this idea that this new medium was not making us more reactionary and less progressive while it was providing all these wonderful toys. I remember between 1995 until around the time I did *Bleeding Through*, I was told many, many times, by people in media who will not remember they even said it (I'm an expert on people not remembering things) – they said: "Don't worry about the internet; it's too anarchic to make any money." I said: "Are you sure?" So the belief that something anarchic-looking is by definition a leftist step forward has been, shall we say, completely disproven by Cambridge Analytica, by people working with Trump, and by just bad taste. So we're now discovering the majestic idea that progress *can* actually move sideways and seem to even move backwards and still be progress, so this project is in a way part of that process. In his book *Dark Deleuze*, Andrew Culp writes about how Deleuze maybe wasn't such a progressive after all. So perhaps the collapse of the sign wasn't a progressive idea either, but worked very well with neo-liberalism.

Jens Gurr: What does that mean for the role of the viewer and the line between truth and fiction?

Norman Klein: You can't fix the role of viewer without bringing back Romantic Irony in all its muscular forms, from 1760 or 1790. As in a 1760

picaresque, the writer shakes the sleeping reader awake. It's a friendly nudge, a comical index finger. Regularly, as asides in the text, the writer interrupts scenes in order to chat with "Dear Reader". This is part of the story, not outside it. But what is our 2022 version of this old literary trick? The reader is not sleeping, sweats a lot, a more savage reader than in 1790 or even in 1990. The reader prowls furiously across social networks – armed with hundreds of ridiculous passwords, into rabbit holes less whimsical than Alice's. It is a war of nerves just to set up the boundaries and the code. What grievance culture version of Romantic irony does the Internet offer us? The Reader who is nudged gently now lives in a scripted space, not in an easy chair. This aggressive reader prefers the act of collusion, the myth of free will in a world of absolute predestination. So, the end result cannot be just clicking and clacking. It is too AI and unkind, a flattened kind of storytelling. Best to put aside the romance between digital screens versus printed pages. Who cares anymore? The reader corrupts our story; that is literature today. And so does the writer. I probably sound rather gloomy here. (Norman laughs). As for the line between fact and fiction, in some of the fictions I write, people don't know I'm lying for a while. Sometimes they'll talk to me later. As one example, I wrote a piece on an imaginary Freud: I wrote this novella "Freud in Coney Island", even though Freud really went to Coney Island in 1909. And someone contacted me, Zoe Beloff, a great video artist doing experimental video in the spirit of archive, and she said "Oh, did you know that there was a Freudian movement in Coney Island?". And I said, "Oh my God, there was a Freudian Movement in Coney Island!" And she did an art show and took my novella to help explain to people how it works.[1] And then I found out to my surprise, years and years later, that the version of Freud in that show was also fiction. She used my near fiction and fact to justify her fiction that there was a Freudian movement in Coney Island, so it's a fact-fiction-fact-fiction-fact-fiction, a kind of bubble effect, and media brings that out, but even if it's handled in some overly clever way,

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1   Cf. Beloff's collection of short films entitled "The Coney Island Amateur Psychoanalytic Society Dream Films 1926–1972": http://www.zoebeloff.com/pages/dream_films.html.

this crossover eventually just creates a very, very flat version of story. And that's why a lot of games have very, very traditional story tropes. They're not the same experiments that you associate with literature, even with cinema; in the games, the formulas of character development have to be very, very familiar. And so it's all about staging; it's more like an epic form versus a literary form. There's something to be done with all of this, but historically, it's much easier for people to simply watch a movie. If I constantly have to "do" something and act like I'm the author, then you have to pay me, you know. (Norman laughs). Why do I have to be the author? I don't want to have to sculpt my own adventure, so that it turns out that the programming of the viewer is part of the problem. And then our sense of truth and lie has become much, much more effaced – the membrane between truth and falsity is just almost gone. And now it's become this political crisis as well. This was not so evident when *Bleeding Through* was made, but it's completely evident now – people can't stop thinking about it.

Jens Gurr: In the essay on scripted spaces that you wrote while you were working on *Bleeding Through* (ch. 8 in this volume), you commented on what has later come to be called "post-truth", or, more notoriously, "alternative facts" – the Enron scandal, the George W. Bush administration and the lies about Iraq, the craziness of reactionary media, etc. And 14 years later, Donald Trump was President – and what we once thought was the craziness of the Bush administration seemed like the good old days. So is that something you want to comment on with regard to *Bleeding Through* and media evolution?

Norman Klein: Not just comment on, but this year, I have to write on it – I have a book almost done that is centrally about just that. It's called *Vatican to Vegas: The History of Special Effects* and the first edition came out in 2004, so it was it completed immediately after *Bleeding Through*, but the notes go back quite a long way, and I'm working on a new edition of it and I have to change or update *all* the political references in it. I have a section talking about the election of 2000 as a special effect – just think of how much has to be added after Trump! And so I'm painfully aware of

how this high consumer idea of making choices and the labyrinth of desire and so forth that was part of the internet and part of *Bleeding Through* and part of our political culture, has gotten poisonously dangerous to the point where it's the constitutional threat to what Americans call democracy. So yes, fake news and bullshitting your way through politics... it's gotten considerably worse, and I've been tracing this ever since.

Jens Gurr: Are you saying there is a continuity between "noir scenography" and national politics, as you commented on it in 2002 (cf. chapter 8 of this book) on the one hand and the present day and your recent, more directly political work?

Norman Klein: Oh my God, yes, in fact, that period, the period of 2003, is the end of an era of transition; the end of the Cold War, the beginning of having all these wonderful gadgets, was some false spring! What we thought was a renewal was actually a new kind of what I call the neo-feudal condition. The level of inequality is growing so ferocious, in the United States certainly, and even in Europe, despite the sense that Europe is more egalitarian than other places, and so all these things are connected to the story – there's a political, historical, sociological phenomenon tied into what *Bleeding Through* was trying to say about that era. Take the elections of 2000 and 2004 – and with each election in the US, it becomes more desperate. And then take Brexit – fact and fiction! I thought I was making a joke when I used to talk about fictions replacing constitutional facts. It wasn't a very good joke, because it was true, though back in 2000 I didn't realize how true it was.

Jens Gurr: But at the end, the reactionary media that helped George W. Bush and Cheney in 2000 ...

Norman Klein: ... and Trump! Oh yes! Same thing! I would always say a fiction is much stronger than a fact, it's stronger than a bridge because there are no facts that can change that sort of fiction. If you believe a fiction, it's a challenge to your belief, not to the truth, and I would say that as a joke. You know, and then everyone would smile, thinking, oh I don't do

that. I remember telling people how it seems serious what happened in the election of 2000 and I got answers like "oh shit happens". I remember contacting various scholars, and I'd say "I'm grieving for my country. I think something's going to get much worse", and it did. So *Bleeding Through* in a way is a step along the way. I'm fascinated by the construction of history and the thin line between fact and fiction. But it's just that it's gotten much more tragic now that it's not a clever joke to make anymore. When you put an end to distinction between fact and fiction, you ultimately end the social contract.

Jens Gurr: There is that argument Mark Lila and others have made that the originally leftist idea that truth is a construction and depends on power, that everything is a fiction, everything is narrative, that we should speak of 'knowledges' in the plural, that that epistemological relativism basically helps the Trumps of this world – "fake news", "alternative facts" –, because they are just better at it, or more ruthless.

Norman Klein: Yes! I don't want to condemn speculative realism or Accelerationism, but think of 2016, 2018 or 2020 and it is not a very flattering period to look back at. And I'm part of it, because my work has been centrally about combining, mixing, even blurring fact and fiction. Now it seems very difficult to be that slippery anymore, so when you talk about these things – epistemological relativism, knowledges – now, you think about "alternative facts" and such dangerous nonsense, about the collapse of the American elections. And you think about the invasion of Ukraine, you think about what China's trying to do, you have these very serious questions. The whimsy, the cartoon-like quality, is disappearing fast. However, I still believe that nothing is more surgically powerful than humour! And this initial process of trying to find a way through this problem, so the irony of *Bleeding Through* is in fact a bit of an echo to the irony of what's happening to our world politics – I wouldn't make a big case out of it, very faint. Little, detached echoes. You need special equipment to hear it. But it was part of what I was thinking about, and I still believe that somehow this has to be turned around; the collapse of print, or whatever you want to call this era. And the fact that some of

the early attempts at creating what they called "digital narratives" – this problem hasn't been solved. It has to be readdressed, because I think it's such an important question. There's no doubt that there was this worship of the role of the viewer and the death of the author that does parallel neoliberalism and the collapse of a lot of the basic infrastructure of culture and power. There is this, I guess, a Foucauldian argument, rather than a Deleuzian one, and then Benjamin, we have to go back to him, because he's in the shadows at all times. He is writing all of this literally in what Huizinga called "the shadow of tomorrow".

Jens Gurr: I was going to ask you about Benjamin. It seems we share a fascination with Benjamin. To me it seems that, though Benjamin is never explicitly mentioned in *Bleeding Through*, he is still a very strong presence.

Norman Klein: Yes!

Jens Gurr: In a sense, *Bleeding Through* is your *Arcades Project* for L.A.

Norman Klein: I've been obsessed with the *Arcades Project* since I first imagined Walter Benjamin's boxes of cards and Bataille holding them and how they survived the Second World War, and I was even called the American Benjamin at one time, and some people were going to fly me to where he committed suicide; what I would have said, I have no idea. What Benjamin taught me in particular was how the everyday ephemerality, the small objects, speak more to larger issues of power, the way things filter down. I learned about layers through Benjamin: with these layers comes the question why things are hidden, why people hide things. Benjamin became a master of the line between fact and fiction in a different sense, and so I was most certainly obsessed with him. And how we live comfortably in our skins, but don't. And then his story and his death were haunting to me. And then his experiments with montage writing and how to cross scholarship with literary experiments: Benjamin has been very central to me for a long time, but I never mentioned him in *Bleeding Through*. You've made me aware again of how

central he really is to *Bleeding Through*. But I have a tremendous empathy for his struggle and for what he saw, and I think he was mostly accurate: the power filters through. To me, Foucault and Benjamin are not that far apart.

Jens Gurr: To me it's very important that your docufable on Walter Benjamin in L.A. from *The History of Forgetting* is part of the new edition (see ch. 6, "Noir as the Ruins of the Left"), because it seems that it informs much of what *Bleeding Through* does aesthetically. Would you agree that *Bleeding Through* is very Benjaminean also with its layers?

Norman Klein. Yes! I remember talking with Mike Davis, who was my editor then; he mentioned Benjamin, I think, in one of his books on Los Angeles, and then I said. "You know, I think I'd like to write about Benjamin." So I thought about the 1980s a lot and how reactionary it got and then I thought about the responses in the 1930s in the US and in Europe, and then I realized that Walter is an example of noir as the ruins of the left, the failures of a leftist position to hold up, in a very dark way, but in a deeply archaeological way of thinking; so to me, Walter Benjamin was almost like a noir writer. So I thought, why not have him show up in Los Angeles? Why should we let the incidental fact that he killed himself right on the border of Spain get in the way of a good story, you might say. So I took him there, and then of course the irony is, how do you make an *Arcades Project* about a city that doesn't seem to have any archival reality in the usual sense – and imagine this man who loved to take walks walk into Los Angeles – he would have ended up in hospital practically. So I love the idea of him there. "Freud in Coney Island" came out later, and I've done other counterfactual things since then. I liked the game between fact and fiction in thinking about the construction of history.

Jens Gurr: How about the notion of layering? You're saying that it doesn't really fit L.A. so much, because it has so a little of an archive. Benjamin has this notion of superposition, the notion that when you're a flaneur and you're walking through a space, somehow everything that ever ex-

isted or happened in that place super-imposes itself in layers that you're able to see simultaneously, even if what was there left no physical trace.

Norman Klein: Yes, I love that! And he's right! That method I use directly in *The History of Forgetting*. And I've done since! I had this old house, old for L.A., it was 1907 or 1908, and in the basement there were lots and lots of bottles of liquor buried and other things, and then I realized that it was a doctor's place and he didn't want people to know he was drinking. So I felt I was doing a Walter Benjamin excursion. And I found all around different pieces of the neighborhood that reminded me of Benjamin every step of the way. I felt I was working with him when I was locating the objects that speak to a period of transition that made Los Angeles what it then became. Yes, this notion of superposition to me is indeed very central to *Bleeding Through*.

Jens Gurr: You mean the bleeds on the DVD, when the old images dissolve into new ones taken from the same position, that that's quintessentially Benjamin?[2]

Norman Klein: Yes, and it happened by accident that the team came to work on it. You know who really came up with operating a lot of it – Rosemary Comella and Andreas Kratky. They would come back exhausted every Monday and I could never understand why they were so tired and then I found out that they were trying to match the photographs, because everyone knows that the past is in black and white, and the present is in color. So they just created this bleed and I thought it was a magnificent way of taking the working title that I already had, *Bleeding Through*. And *Bleeding Through*, of course, is a very Benjamian notion, superposition! With the different periods speaking back and forth to each other, that's the way it felt to me. So I felt that that was much more dynamic, maybe dialectical, if you want to look at it that way, but there's no doubt that Walter Benjamin taught me how to look at a street.

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2   Several of these are to be found in the film version of the DVD: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMX5xuuyIDQ.

Jens Gurr: We tend to think of Paris, or Athens or Rome when we think of urban layers, but then it seems that with a city like Los Angeles, erased so often, rebuilt and erased again and rebuilt once more, only in much shorter cycles, the idea that, as Benjamin says, "space winks at the flâneur" and reminds him of everything that has ever been there, might also be especially pertinent. Take the cover image of the original *Bleeding Through* edition: South Main Street with City Hall as a fixture – and then the bleed from these old two-story buildings to the mid-century modernist glass and steel block of the old Caltrans Annex, the building that housed part of the California Department of Transportation.[3]

Norman Klein: Yes, the later photo was taken in 2002 – and even that "new" building has long gone. The new LAPD HQ is there now!

Jens Gurr: So this is directly opposite the *new* Caltrans District 7 building, the Thom Mayne/Morphosis landmark. The building site for that must have been right behind the photographer when the photo was taken in 2002.

Norman Klein: Yes, and if you look at that image now, you have a sense superposition also works forward, proleptically. You almost can't help "seeing" what is there now. Our new cover image, which superimposes all *three* layers, is very much in this spirit.

Jens Gurr: Was Benjamin ever brought up in the discussions of how the bleeds were done and how they function?

Norman Klein: Not explicitly. But, of course, Kratky is German, and he's very, very well read, so it's possible he thought of that, but strangely enough, Benjamin didn't enter the conversation. I always felt that the spirit of what he did was very much there, but not explicitly. It's because he was earlier than that to me; he came even earlier. Benjamin was conceptually very much with me in the 1980s, not so much later, no

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3   Cf. the essay in ch. 3 for these images and for further images of the site.

longer so explicitly. And the Benjamin I was obsessed with was more about archiving and how things are hidden and so forth, and he was, in a sense, my answer to the whole Freudian psychoanalytical idea of space and place. I found him a healthier way and I felt that Benjamin and Freud weren't that far apart in my own crazy reading, so I admit I had an eccentric reading of this magnificent structure, but I've been obsessed with archiving since I've read his stuff. And yes, I'm obsessed with a superposition that's a living imposition; it's not just architectural layers, it's actually a kind of breathing back and forth, and I do believe that that's a better reading of our modernity than referring again to Proust's Combray, and so on. I am so awed by those earlier achievements anyway.

Jens Gurr: Maybe we should bring in *The Imaginary 20th Century*? More than 10 years after *Bleeding Through*, you completed another multimedia novel. Can you talk about what was central to you with *The Imaginary 20th Century* and how it reflects your sense of media evolution? We talked about the media-historical moment of 2002/2003, when *Bleeding Through* was made – what about media evolution and *The Imaginary 20th Century*?

Norman Klein: How *The Imaginary 20th Century* started, actually not long after *Bleeding Through*, had to do with some early 20th-century illustrations of the future by French illustrators that were completely wrong, but also very beautiful – and I remember saying to Margo, "Don't you think we could do this better than them?" She said, "sure", so I said, "well, let's just do it: we'll do an imaginary layered book", but then it evolved very quickly into other things, and then I used some post-*Bleeding Through* thoughts, because it wasn't that far away at that time. The lead character would still be a woman, because it's so much fun for me to have a woman character taking me through the material, but she wasn't going to be this plain-looking, efficient woman who successfully runs this clothing business. She was going to be a woman who was overwhelmingly beautiful but depressed, and so she had the whole menu of men to choose from, but she always made bad choices; she always ordered wrong from the menu. So she would be an Anti-Molly in a way. I immediately decided *The Imaginary 20th Century* would be the opposite of *Bleeding Through* in other

ways, too: *Bleeding Through* basically only has three square miles in L.A. as its universe, so I decided *The Imaginary 20th Century* would have the entire Euro-American world of the early 20th century and including some continents that didn't even exist, and so it was large and much more epic than a kind of modern tale, and so we went back to a picaresque form and then began from there. But the Harry Brown character that I use at the center of *The Imaginary 20th Century* does in fact already appear in *Bleeding Through*, where he's a customer. So there *is* this connection, but it's almost like trying to take it one step further. *Bleeding Through* has a quality of a kind of instantaneity of a sketch, and this one is obviously much broader and playful in a different way, and in fact it's been set up so that it never ends; I write new chapters whenever I want; I wrote a new chapter last week. And there'll be a new edition of it, so it has a different quality, but it was using everything we learned from *Bleeding Through*. Most of all, it was not stochastic at all; it was even more extreme in its idea of narrative. *Bleeding Through* has a stochastic quality, and you can't figure out how to get back and reatrace your steps. But for *The Imaginary 20th Century*, we tried stochastic methods and we just got rid of all of it; no keywords, nothing, so it is an attempt to move even closer to a kind of narrative. I see it as an advance and also bookends of sorts – the three square miles versus the whole world, but there are some overlapping characters; I guess there's a kind of a *roman-fleuve* attempt to it, however mediocre on my part, to have the novels tie in.

Jens Gurr: So does the fact that *The Imaginary 20th Century* has none of the "clicking and clacking", none of the stochastic procedures, does that reflect your increasing scepticism about the sort of non-linearity and the multimodal interactivity?

Norman Klein: Yes, we very deliberately didn't do that with *The Imaginary 20th Century*, because I felt that the scope was too large and the journey was stranger and so on, and then it's 2000 images rather than 1000.

Jens Gurr: You mean we need more guidance through the material?

Norman Klein: The discontinuities and the randomness are actually the real motivating force; I would argue that narrative is *about* randomness. During the last half of the twentieth century, there were too many inscrutable theories about how chance stops us cold. But look at us now: We're lost enough without chance. Besides, all narrative is a fiction anyway, a construction about the everyday. Chance merely exaggerates where we prefer not to go. Chance is just a leaky labyrinth, as I call it, but most certainly a narrative. The interface to *Bleeding Through* is a brilliant attempt by designers to negotiate how we half engage the facts of our life. But leaky labyrinths are not about mechanical stupor. The universe is cold and empty enough without our help. I mean, how many weeks of your life are a novel, does that ever happen? I've almost never had a week that was a novel.