

Data Gardens Final Project Proposal

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Abstract:

In the past few years, my art practice has grown steadily in the direction of net art; I am interested in creating small and playful web sandboxes that act as a creative tool for others. Data gardens has been an incredible resource, and it has made me yearn to finish some unfinished work from a previous semester that I believe falls within the realm of what we study in class. Not having the mental space or time to finish these projects has been a constant source of regret because I care deeply for them. For my final project, I would like to complete two unfinished projects from last semester: Mdraw and Internet Postcards. The material we have learned in Data Gardens would be invaluable in informing their artistic direction as I work to finish them.

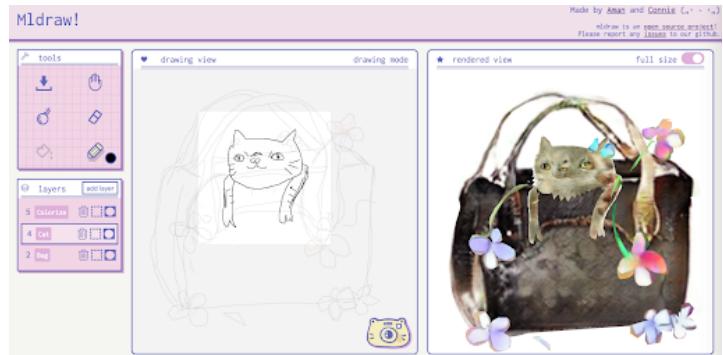
Part 1: Mdraw

Concept: Made in collaboration with Aman Tiwari from Fall 2018 to Spring 2019, Mdraw is a web app that uses a layered vector drawing system where each layer can be given a different machine learning model that translates user input. The user will give us a line drawing of edges, and our app's backend server renders the translation using whatever model is assigned to that layer. Mdraw was born out of seeing the potential of the body of research done using pix2pix to turn drawings into other images and the severe lack of a usable, “useful” and accessible tool to utilize this technology. See [this page for more info](#).

Work for final project: The project is nearly complete; however, Aman graduated and had to job search, and I had to work over summer, so we were never able to finish the project. It's been a while since we stopped working on it, so there might be more models online that we can add to our project. I also want to redo large parts of the interface because I've learned a lot more about interaction design since then, and I want to fix any remaining bugs.

Then, the most important part to complete would be to actually deploy the project on Google Cloud.

A critical aspect of my practice that I am currently lacking in is the existence of my work online. Although I love making interactive sites, I rarely see others use my work. When we first announced our project, a lot of people were excited to try it, but could not because we never deployed it. My inability to fulfill this promise has been eating away at me for months. The deployment process has been unexpectedly difficult because our project requires the existence of a GPU.



Relation to Data Gardens: Mldraw draws upon existing machine learning models that academic institutions and companies have published on the internet. It collects these code scraps and remixes them into something novel, unsterile and accessible for creative reuse.

It's always been unclear to me why companies and research labs invest so much money into GANs and image generation machine learning models. I'm grateful that they do, and I find them beautifully uncanny and novel, but being able to generate new, photorealistic images seems like it could only be used for either art or deceit, and most companies seem to be disinterested in engaging with artists.

Mldraw challenges the idea that you can make interesting AI images without human intervention; it takes a human's touch to frankenstein GANs together to make something that has character and life to it.



Part 2: Postcard Project

Concept: Started in Spring 2019, Internet Postcards is a chrome extension that allows you to generate physical, mailable postcards from your internet adventures. More specifically, this chrome extension takes a screenshot of the webpage that you are currently browsing, and opens an overlay in which you can postcard-ify the postcard with some decorative text, leave a message on the back and send the postcard result to a real physical address using an online direct mailing service. See [this page for more info](#).

This project was inspired by my nostalgia for the physical artifacts that result from traveling. Although I love sending postcards home to my mom, I rarely travel away from the university campus and my room. This project is my solution; if the only places that I visit are online, then why not send postcards from those locations instead?

Work for final project: What I have right now is merely a proof of concept; one can make postcards to screenshot and print, but it is so far from being complete. I need to automate the process by adding in a postcard API, receipts of transactions, NSFW filters, and address verification. I also want to redesign the UI and add in a global homepage to house postcards that people have made. I was also tentatively hoping to playtest the project with the class. I also think the concepts that we learned in class can help inform the direction of the project; for example, do the cards need to be physical? Do they retain their quality if they're emails? How can the metaphor of the internet as a physical space be advanced, now that I am aware of precedent work like GeoCities?

Relation to Data Gardens: At the beginning of the class, the idea of the internet as a physical place was explored through GeoCities and other articles; my project also aims to use this metaphor in an adjacent way. I am aiming to create a different type of relationship with the internet, one that is slower paced, deliberate and more considered; mailed postcards have a slow waiting period and a collaborative, giving nature that is oppositional to the typically instant gratification of the internet. Furthermore, I am using a postcard API that is typically corporate, along with using an opt-in collection system for the postcard homepage.

