DSGN 1020

RESPONSES!

Week 2: Ulises Carrión - Mail Art and the Big Monster from Second Thoughts

"To tell you the truth, I do not know exactly what or whom I am talking about. All I know is, that there is a Monster." (44-45)

In a largely quirky piece of writing, this line probably encapsulates the energy that Ulises Carrión is generating with this excerpt. Despite trying to take this writing as seriously as possible, it did feel very absurd at times.

From what I understand, Carrión is very passionately discussing the semantics of the term "Mail Art," what constitutes "real" Mail Art, and the underlying systems that contribute to it. I understand from my writing seminar years ago that good writing has an intended audience to which it tailors its content and rhetoric to, and perhaps I am not within that audience, as I struggle to figure out why exactly this is as important and necessary to break down as Carrión claims.

This all being said, I do think some of the statements Carrión made are salient, or at the very least interesting to consider outside of the context of Mail Art. Carrión asserts that "the proof that the post is not the medium [of Mail Art] is that to use it, an artist doesn't need to understand how it functions" (39). Since this was published 45 years ago, I wonder if this view would still hold today—many artists use tools they don't entirely understand, like digital programs. We don't all understand the machinery behind them necessarily, but it remains digital art. Maybe this isn't the most appropriate analogy, maybe the modern counterpart could be social media, and how social media isn't a medium but a platform for sharing that we don't all necessarily understand (nor have the need to) in order to use it to share. My question here therefore is whether or not we agree with his argument here, and if it applies today.

Additionally, I'd like to echo the question posed by Carrión himself—"What or who is the monster [he] is talking about?" (44). What does he mean by that? What monster are we fighting with Mail Art? On top of that, what are the other monsters that other forms of art are attacking? Who are we fighting with website design and digital painting?
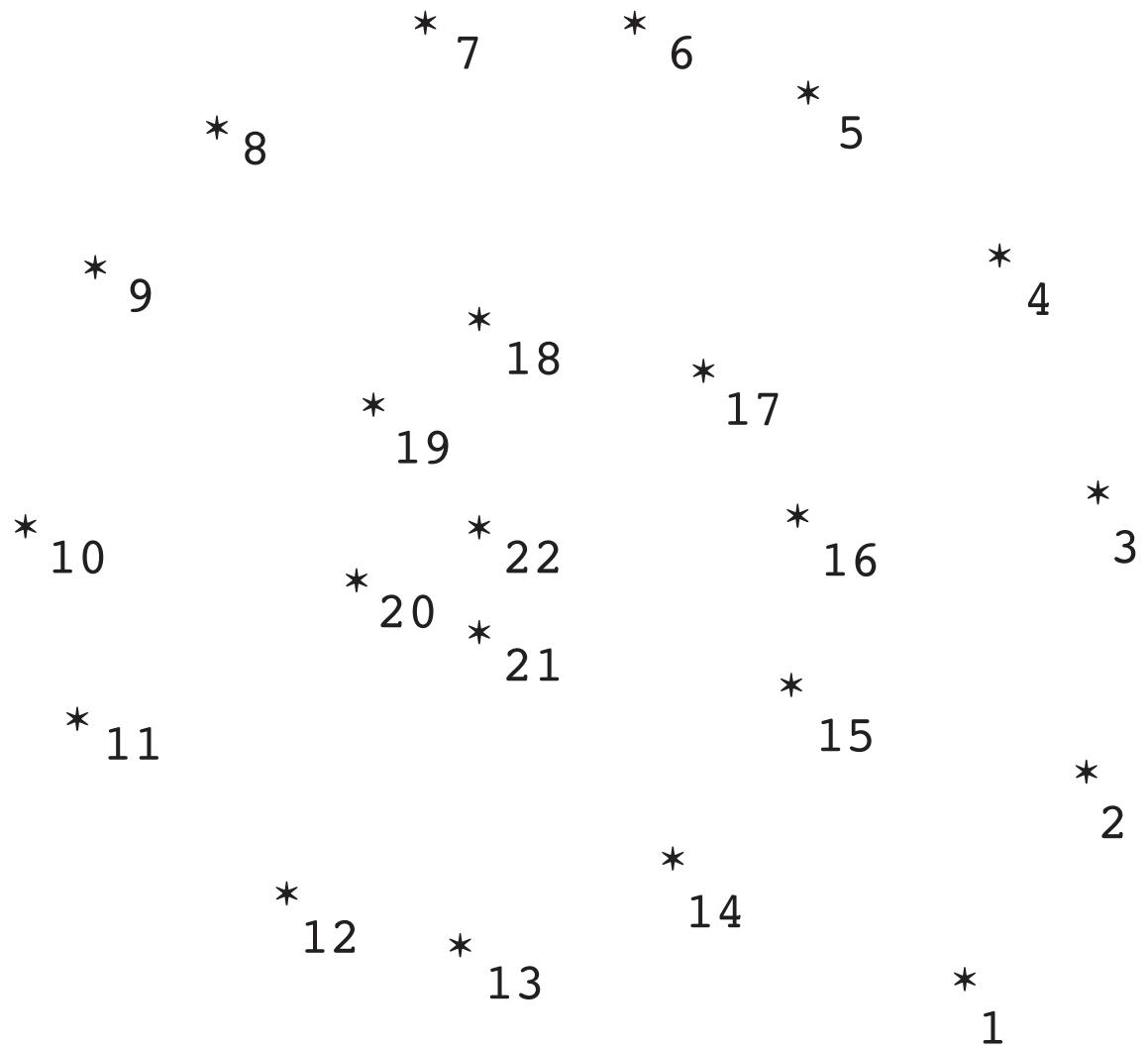
Week 3: Laurel Schwulst & Édouard U - Selections from How Do You Use the Internet Mindfully

In the selections from the text, a line that immediately stood out to me was Laurel Schwulst's question "what is a website, anyway?" (33). I think that this in of itself is a worthwhile discussion question—what does it mean to create a website? What is the essence of a website? Is text on a static page enough, or is it the customization and addition of features necessary? The additional context of the modern day, and how a website's necessities have evolved since their inception, is also interesting to think about. We no longer have as many html-heavy blogs dedicated to random interests of random people.

I really appreciated the likening of a website as a form of art, creating a world. I was sort of intrigued by her remark that a website "doesn't (and probably shouldn't) be an archive of your complete works" (36) although she substantiates this really convincingly. Complete works are 'dead' as she says, in that they likely won't continue to evolve. The idea of an unfinished website having a beauty to it intrigues me. In my efforts to circumvent the prices presented by Wix and Squarespace, I initially made my website through HTML/CSS and hosted it myself with GitHub Pages. It was a lot of effort and very easy to mess up for an amateur coder like myself. That, coupled with my habit of leaving things undone, meant updating my portfolio was very tedious to do. I find the idea that a website can be living and forever unfinished very freeing. I just wonder how that may be reflected in, say, a design/illustration portfolio like my own. I very much appreciate the conclusion that websites are what we make it—worlds, shelves, plants, gardens. I kind of want to literally make a website garden, on that note.

An additional discussion question could be what our end goal for this class is. We're eventually creating a portfolio of our finished works—is this not what Schwulst suggests avoiding? How do we prevent our portfolio/projects from being dead? Does that require interactivity, or some other variable that is never constant and ever changing?

How do you use the internet mindfully?

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The Creative Independent and Are.na

Week 4: Olia Lialina - STILL THERE Ruins and Templates of Geocities from Lost and Living (in) Archives

Olia Lialina argues that Geocities wasn't just a collection of amateur web pages, but a cultural artifact, a relic of a time when the internet was DIY, experimental, and weird. She highlights how Yahoo!'s decision to delete it in 2009 wasn't just the end of an outdated platform, but a mass erasure of digital history. Ironically, this destruction led to an obsessive effort to archive it, preserving Geocities as both a ruin and a research project.

One of the most interesting things Lialina points out is how web aesthetics—specifically, the clunky, garish, animated-GIF-filled mess that people associate with Geocities—have been reduced to a joke in professional web design circles. The "amateur web" is often dismissed as bad taste, but she argues that this perspective ignores the creativity and sense of community that early web users built. The "neighborhoods" of Geocities (like SoHo for artists or Pentagon for military personnel) weren't just themes; they were structuring digital spaces in ways we don't see as much today.

However, the concept that really stood out to me was that of digital ruins. Lialina describes missing images, broken links, and half-preserved pages as if she were walking through Pompei. But what's even wilder is that some of Geocities still exists, although more inaccessibly, in forgotten Yahoo! clip art folders or in the ghostly persistence of old background templates. It makes me wonder: how much of what we create on the internet today will survive several decades from now? Not only websites, but posts made on websites and platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok? Will the things we consider disposable—our social media profiles, our personal blogs, our Tumblr aesthetics—become historical artifacts? Or will they be largely lost?

Another question I have is about her focus on amateur web. Part of me wonders if this appreciation and almost veneration of amateur, unique web design and content is informed by nostalgia or a desire to be contrarian to the status quo. How much do we really care about bringing it back based on the actual qualities of it? Will we feel this way about current web design trends years from now?

STILL THERE
Ruins and Templates of Geocities

Olia Lialina

Week 5: Alessandro Ludovico & Florian Cramer - Selections from Publishing from Post-Digital-Print

I found this reading particularly interesting as someone relatively new to print design and recently thrust into a position where I am leading creative decisions for the print publication of a (relatively) widely read magazine. Prior to this, I had never designed anything for print beyond a poster. I think Ludovico and Cramer's discussion about the digital age and what it means for print as a medium is very important because of my lack of familiarity, as well as my unfamiliarity with a time before everything turned digital.

I was particularly moved by the idea of the relationship between print and digital being bidirectional, rather than a "one-way street" (153). These past few months, I've been involved in conversations about my publication's push towards being more and more digital, as thats where the money is—more people read articles online, thus making it more profitable to host content and ads online, rather than printing and distributing a newspaper every week and a glossy magazine every month. Even though it may not be (as) profitable anymore, there's a novelty to print products—both in having and holding the product itself, but also designing it. There's a stronger sense of pride seeing your work printed and held by people, pasted onto their dorm walls or peeking out their totebags, than there is seeing a 1080 x 1920 px graphic you made exist on the homepage for a week. It's a larger labor to create print, but it creates a more sentimental reward. Likewise, I find myself preferring to read magazines in print, rather than online—it feels like anyone can create a website, but can everyone print professionally these days? Perhaps this feeling is rooted in exclusivity and inaccessibility, which might be problematic, but it is also genuinely how I (and maybe many of my peers) feel in this largely digital era. Thus, I think it is important to consider print and digital as two, co-existing, mutually-interactive mediums, rather than alternatives to or versions of one another.

In terms of questions based on this reading, I'm curious about this concept of print being liberating. How can a medium be more or less freeing than another? Would content not be chiefly influential? Also, Ludovico's discussion of younger people's irreverent combination of digital/print is interesting—what are examples of this with today's youth? Is there an example unique to Gen Alpha?

POST-DIGITAL PRINT

The Mutation of Publishing since 1894

Alessandro Ludovico

Week 7: Bojana Coklyat & Shannon Finnegan - Selections from Alt-Text as Poetry Workbook

Ifound the excerpt of Bojana Coklyat and Shannon Finnegan's Alt Text as Poetry really interesting, as they took the discussion of alt-text beyond just a tool for accessibility. I really appreciated the discussion in the initial pages, both in their insistence in involving people of different abilities in every part of a process, but also in the discussion of what makes for good alt-text (and who makes a good writer—are artists any good at describing their own art?). It reminds me a lot of discussions surrounding translating creative works from one language to another—biases of the translator are embedded, cultural elements may get lost, puns and quirks may not have a 1:1 alternative in the new language. It reminds me of how different the different translation of The Odyssey are. It's cool seeing this sort of debate in the context of something as seemingly minimal as alt-text.

I found the premise of the book itself pretty cool too—seeing it as a form of poetry rather than a neutral, boring tool. With this idea of alt-text as poetry, they are able to lean on the thinking and strategies of poets to develop better alt-text. This section was helpful, as I personally never knew a lot of these guiding principles when writing alt-text. I'm guilty of having poor word economy with verbose descriptions, fearing things would get lost in translation. I really enjoyed the examples they list on page 17 as well. It's something so simple, most people take for granted, but very important simultaneously.

In terms of questions, I'm curious if these poetic lessons can be applied to other parts of web design or accessible design in general. Additionally, what are other mediums and creative positions we can lean on for advice?

Alt-Text as Poetry Workbook

Week 8: Ramsey Nasser - "A Personal Computer for Children of All Cultures" from Decolonising the Digital

This reading was awesome, especially for someone interested in linguistics and Arabic language like myself. It called into question a lot of things I've passively questioned myself, particularly how coding languages are understood globally. My best friend did a software engineering internship in Paris this past summer and despite his entire office being Francophones, they coded and commented on such code purely in English. When my mother studied coding in Bangladesh in the 1990s, she did so in Latin script and Arabic numbers, despite being from a rural area that hardly familiarized its students with either. My other best friend, Lebanese and a CS major at his university, loved sending me a meme (attached to this comment) based on the humor of a coding language in Arabic script. Its clear that these are problems experienced all over the non-English speaking world, so I'm surprised Nasser's piece is the first I'm reading about it.

This reading reminds me of the way the internet trivializes non-English languages, from Dutch to Jamaican Patois to even British English. While I would hate to call all of it problematic (Dutch is genuinely ridiculous looking sorry) it's clear that so much of the internet is English speaking, particularly American, and it seems very difficult to change that or exist within it if you speak differently. The internet world, socially and literally, isn't designed for people who exist outside of English. It's why my family members who don't speak a lick of English have display names with anglicized versions of their names on Facebook. It's also why every official NYC pamphlet or advertisement for social services in Bangla or Arabic is off, if not entirely wrong. The accessible and intuitive is simplified such that these scripts and the translation between languages is easy to screw up.

I think it's a shame that projects like Qalb are ridiculed, in the same fashion "we hebben een serieus probleem" is. But Nasser also acknowledges that it isn't a simple fix as making a version compatible for another language. Creating a linguistically fluid internet seems like a daunting task, but the only solution that makes sense.

My discussion questions based on this are how do these problems exist in other language systems and cultures? Or beyond language, how do different cultures have different compatibilities with computers? Additionally, how would you resolve this issue—what are some things that can stand to become more diverse?

DECOLONISING THE DIGITAL
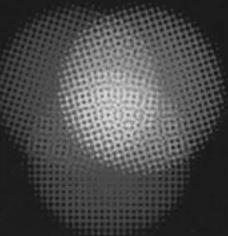
EDITED BY JOSH HARLE, ANGIE ABDILA, AND ANDREW NEWMAN

TECHNOLOGY
AS CULTURAL PRACTICE

Week 10: David Reinfurt - Selections from A *New* Program for Graphic Design

After taking a few psychology courses and a class dedicated to the philosophy of visual perception, I really appreciated how this week's reading approached gestalt psychology—not in an overly clinical or experiment-based way, nor in a way that makes me question the fabric of reality (I'm not a huge fan of philosophy lol), but in a straightforward and applied way. I appreciate the design angle and colloquial language David Reinfurt employs in this selection. I really enjoyed the connections Reinfurt made between Susan Kare (and other designers)'s iconography work and elements of gestalt psychology, demonstrating the problem-solving of perceived responsiveness.

In terms of questions, I'm curious if more lessons can be learned from gestalt psychology, particularly in a new context where young people aren't fluent in computers but rather tablets. Similarly, what other aspects of visual psychology can we learn from? Do we have design concepts tied to naive reality?

A *New* Program for Graphic Design

David Reinfurt

Week 12: Dot Tuer - Beyond the New Media Frame The Poetics of Absence in Vera Frenkel's String Games

This week's reading discusses extensively Vera Frenkel's String Games, particularly that it was ahead of its time with the interactivity and anticipating elements of the digital world. The way Frenkel adapted to new contexts and designed interactive, variable projects is very inspiring and thought provoking. It reminds me a bit of my final project for DSGN 0010 my freshman fall, where I was tasked with designing a social experiment of sorts with an anonymous participation element. My group ended up doing something involving a black box on locust filled with post-it notes written with anonymous messages. At the time, I struggled to understand the relationship between that project and the sort of design the class generally was about (most projects were just getting acquainted with Adobe products). Now, looking back at this project and now with this reading in mind, I'm curious about how such games can inform our approach to smart design—both for web and for other designed products, interactive or otherwise. I'm also intrigued by the concept of games like these overall—how can we incorporate more low-stakes, interesting creative collaborative projects in our lives?

Week 13: Paul Soulellis - Performing the Feed

This reading was really interesting and touched on many concepts that fascinate me in ways I hadn't considered prior. I appreciated the etymological look at the words we use to describe the web (posts, streams, flows, scrolls, leaks, etc.), the discussion of the role of bots and algorithms in the online ecosystem, and how we think about our interactions with others and those same bots. I admit that this reading was pretty difficult to follow through, in that it touched on many many interesting ideas (like the importance of printing and physical archival!) but I appreciated it nonetheless.

Questions: How would Paul Soulellis discuss ChatGPT and recent AI projects on the internet? Does the language we use to describe the internet influence our perception of it? When creating new technologies, should we put more care into what we call it? Rather than stringing random letters along? Why do we have that trend of naming things with random sounds?

PAUL SOULELLIS
PERFORMING THE FEED
CYBERNETICS.SOCIAL
18 NOVEMBER 2017
@soulellis

Week 14: Neta Bomani & Sabii Borno - Beyond Dark Matter from Logic Issue 15 Beacons

I found this reading very unique compared to the ones we've previously discussed. I think it's definitely ambitious and interesting for the author Neta Bomani to take on this topic with a sci-fi, graphic-novel-esque medium, and I admire the connections drawn between the pervasiveness of the internet and anti-Blackness in the United States.

That said, I also understand why this reading was so polarizing and divisive in previous classes. I felt a bit uncomfortable reading about these topics (less so the parts about the internet, moreso when they were connected to very real things, like pivotal moments during the Civil Rights Movement or analogies based on slavery). I also just am not the biggest fan of Sabii Borno's illustrations—although they make sense for a sci-fi graphic novel, especially one intended for children alongside adults, I feel like the subject at hand is a little too serious to depict like this. I also just don't really like the style to begin with.

I have to remind myself that this reading was intended for a wide audience, and thus its writing may come off as a bit too simple or overly generalizing, but I just don't think that this was the best way to reflect the author's very real take on the potential risks presented by the internet and its parallels with anti-Blackness. I think it was definitely ambitious and admirable to try to convey these thoughts in a palatable, easily digestable way, but personally I just felt like I was reading a mockery of that opinion, almost. It felt like every serious topic was dumbed down. Additionally, I didn't love the analogies made, with the titles (ex. "The Way" or "The Beyond") feeling insanely forced. It just felt like the nature of sci-fi graphic novels inherently undermine the power and strength of Bomani's argument.

In regards to questions, I guess I'm curious about what other people felt reading this. Do you agree with Bomani's point? Do you think this reading successfully conveyed it? Who is the true audience for this? What is the real-world counterpart for "The Beyond?" Is a better world truly possible?

BEYOND
DARK
MATTER

Week 15: Boris Groys - Art on the Internet

Boris Groys's chapter "Art on the Internet" is dedicated to the many ways art has changed in its migration to the digital world from institutional, physical spaces. Through entering these internet spaces, art becomes de-institutionalized, divorced from standards (e.g. beauty, goodness, originality, and other criteria set by institutions). He also comments on the increasing documentation of art on the internet and the caveats that come with it, including the globalization of the author and the control of the internet. He discusses surveillance and the panopticon previously discussed by writers like Foucault and applies them to that control exerted on art by the internet. He then appears to conclude that the internet is a graveyard for postmodern utopian dreams, in the same sense museums were for modern ones.

His discussion of surveillance, the panopticon, and the level of tracking of user interaction with digital media is interesting to me. How do you think this ties into this graveyard concept? What exactly is he referring to when he says "postmodern utopia?" Is there a way to remedy the internet to make it a better space for art and its appreciation?

Boris
Groys

In the
Flow