

Copyright Notice

Staff and students of City, University of London are reminded that copyright subsists in this extract and the work from which it was taken. This Digital Copy has been made under the terms of a CLA licence which allows you to:

- * access and download a copy
- * print out a copy

This Digital Copy and any digital or printed copy supplied to or made by you under the terms of this Licence are for use in connection with this Course of Study. You may retain such copies after the end of the course, but strictly for your own personal use.

All copies (including electronic copies) shall include this Copyright Notice and shall be destroyed and/or deleted if and when required by City, University of London.

Except as provided for by copyright law, no further copying, storage or distribution (including by e-mail) is permitted without the consent of the copyright holder.

The author (which term includes artists and other visual creators) has moral rights in the work and neither staff nor students may cause, or permit, the distortion, mutilation or other modification of the work, or any other derogatory treatment of it, which would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author.

Course of Study:

(IN1007) Programming in Java

Title:

Dear data pp. ix--xi

Name of Author:

Lupi, Giorgia & Posavec, Stefanie

Name of Publisher:

Particular Books

INTRODUCTION

EVER SINCE WE WERE YOUNG, WE HAVE BEEN fascinated with collecting and organizing information from the world around us.

Stefanie remembers going to baseball games with her father, helping him fill out baseball scorecards, slowly compressing inning after inning of the game into pencilled notations on two sides of paper, and feeling excited at being able to capture a moment in time into something that could be neatly tucked away and re-lived at another date.

Giorgia remembers how, as a child, she loved to collect and organize all kind of items into transparent folders that she would then tag with maniacal care. Coloured pieces of papers, little stones, pieces of textiles from her grandmother's tailor-shop, buttons, sales receipts and many more formed her collections, and she remembers the pleasure of categorizing her treasures according to their colours, sizes and dimensions and drawing tiny labels to specify how to read them.

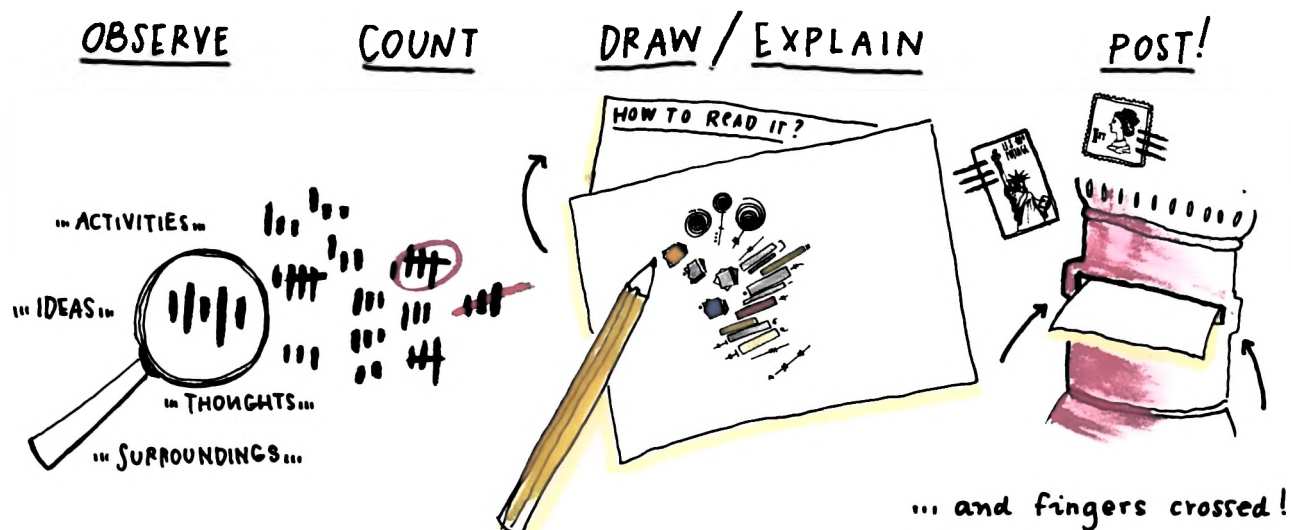
It was only later when we became adults that we realized we were collecting data, and that data was something that we could communicate with while working as information designers.

Unknowingly living almost parallel lives, when we bumped into each other at an arts festival we realized how similar they were. We were each living in a foreign country (Giorgia moved from Italy to New York, and Stefanie, who grew up in Denver, Colorado, now lives in London), we were the same age and were both only children. But, most importantly, we were visual designers who both loved drawing, and specifically drawing with data.

This book is the story of how we, Giorgia and Stefanie, became friends through revealing to each other the details of our daily lives. But we didn't do this by chatting in cafés and bars or on social media. Instead we started an old-fashioned correspondence with an unusual twist. Each week, for a year, we sent each other a postcard describing what had happened to the other during that week. But we didn't write what had happened – we drew it. And we didn't try to draw about everything that had happened to us: we selected a weekly theme.

Every Monday we chose a particular subject on which to collect data about ourselves for the whole week: how often we complained, or the times when we felt envious; when we came into physical contact and with whom; the sounds we heard around us. We then created a drawing representing this data

OUR NEW, SHARED ROUTINE FOR A YEAR



on a postcard-sized sheet of paper, and dropped the postcard into an English post box (Stefanie) or an American mail box (Giorgia).

Over the fifty-two weeks, the collecting of data about our lives became a kind of ritual. We would spend the week noticing and noting down our activities or thoughts, before translating this information into a hand-drawn visualization. On the front of the postcard there would be a unique representation of our weekly data, and, on the other side (in addition to the necessary postage and address), we would squeeze in detailed keys to our drawings: the code to enable the recipient to decipher the picture, and to fantasize about what had happened to her new friend the week before.

We started *Dear Data* as a way to get know each other through our data, the material that is most familiar to us: but we soon found we were also becoming more in-tune with ourselves as we captured the life unfolding around us and sketched the hidden patterns we discovered in the details. By noticing our behaviour, we were influencing our behaviour.

We believe data collected from life can be a snapshot of the world in the same way that a picture catches small moments in time. Data can describe the hidden patterns found in every aspect of our lives, from our digital existence to the natural world around us. Every plant, every person, every interaction we take part in can be mapped, counted, and measured, and these measurements are what we call data. And once you realize that data can be gathered from every single being and thing on the planet, and you know how to find these invisible numbers, you begin to see these numbers everywhere, in everything.

Besides *finding* data in the world around us, we are all *creating* data just by living: our purchases, our movements through the city, our explorations across the internet, all contribute to the "data trail" we leave in our wake as we move through life. This data is being collected, counted, and computed – both on a massive scale by companies and institutions seeking insights and answers – and on a smaller scale by individuals seeking to understand more about themselves, using data to "quantify" the self and become more efficient, optimised humans.

EVERYTHING CAN BE MAPPED, COUNTED, AND MEASURED



Because of this, we are said to be living in the age of “Big Data”, where algorithms and computation are seen as the new keys to universal questions, and where a myriad of applications can detect, aggregate, and visualize our data for us to help us become these efficient super-humans. We prefer to approach data in a slower, more analogue way. We’ve always conceived *Dear Data* as a “personal documentary” rather than a quantified-self project which is a subtle – but important – distinction. Instead of using data just to become more efficient, we argue we can use data to become more humane and to connect with ourselves and others at a deeper level.

We hope this book will inspire you in many ways: to draw (even if you don’t think of yourself as an artist), to slow down and appreciate the small details of your life, and to make connections with other people. You’ll find our fifty-two cards in this book, along with the thoughts we had while conceiving and crafting them. They have not been edited: they appear exactly as they did when originally received through the mail, highlighting a year of learning, doubts and indecision as well as love, affection and humour.

Bearing all the scuff-marks of their journey across the ocean, together they form a personal data-diary that first we shared with each other, and now we share with you.

We’ll also unfold what we’ve learned from this year of collecting our daily data, expanding upon how we gained meaning from what we collected and on our artistic process. Starting this year with nervousness and trepidation, we ended it feeling confident in capturing and drawing the moments of our lives: it doesn’t take much to get started.

We see data as a creative material like paint or paper, an outcome of a very new way of seeing and engaging with our world. We hope this book will inspire you to see your world through a new lens, where everything and anything can be a creative starting point for play and expression.

GIORGIA LUPI Stefanie Posavec