

# DIGITAL FOLKLORE



To  
computer  
users,  
with  
love  
and  
respect

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DRAGAN ESPENSCHIED  
(ED.)

Reihe Projektiv

Merz Akademie  
Hochschule  
für Gestaltung  
Stuttgart

merz&solitude





# **DIGITAL FOLKLORE**

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**merz & solitude, 2009**



**To computer  
users, with love  
and respect**



# EVERY BODY ELSE

By Cory Arcangel

My Interest in art and the Internet began as a lurker. As far as I could tell from my early Yahoo + Altavista searches in the late 90's, listserves like thinglist, nettime, & rhizome seemed to be the primary mode of interaction and production for those involved in this new art form. I lurked on these lists because I wasn't sure what all this stuff was about. Who were these artists? What were they interested in? Why make this kinda art? Are Jodi.org humans?

One frequent topic of discussion I remember clearly, was that net.art had finally freed the artist from the tyranny of the museums and galleries. The artist was free! They now had direct online access to their audience with no middle-man! Victory!! The history of art would be forever changed!

Looking back, it is funny to remember that moment of liberation, because what wasn't anticipated was that the self-identified artists (myself included) ended up being the least fun part of the distribution breakthrough provided by the internet. Remember, this utopian spirit truly meant that everybody was invited to this party! And here comes everybody: moms, teens, celebs, goths, tots, wizkids, noobs, lamerz, gamers and... oh yeah, artists.

After Google 1 simplified the search, each subsequent big breakthrough in net technology was something that decreased the

technical know-how required for self-publishing (both globally and to friends). The stressful and confusing process of hosting, ftping, and permissions, has been erased bit by bit by, paving the way for what we now call web 2.0. First we had Geocities (web hosting made easy), then Live Journal (posting text to a web host made easy), then MySpace (Geocities and Live Journal made easy), then Facebook (MySpace made easy), and now Twitter (Live Journal and Facebook made even easier).

So what did the artists do during this simplification? Last time we checked on them they were still celebrating. Still staying up late every night using Photoshop or whatever, still not having to take crap from anybody, and still having access to an immediate audience. But while true in theory, in practice, this freedom has turned out to be a bit more complicated for most of the last decade. Despite an ever-expanding online audience, the fine art audience has remained stubbornly centered around galleries and museums.

But while these artists were doing strange things with the internet, the online "everybody else" was doing the same. And what is art but human expression?

This is where Digital Folklore comes into play. Olia, Dragan and their students know that among the ongoing discussions of freedom from the tyranny from the traditional fine art world, that there is another much bigger show in town - "everybody else".

Sifting through the accumulations of net culture, the contributors to the "Digital Folklore Reader" are somewhere in-between researchers, scientists, academics, and poets. The common ground is that all are inspired by their favorite moments of human technological expression on the web. The results highlight the beauty and importance of gifs, glitters, backgrounds, construction signs, and tracker compositions - just some of the things that might have been missed in the fast paced Internet evolution.

As a very real example, Yahoo recently notified those who hosted their websites on Geocities that the site, and all its related content, would soon be deleted. Once one of the most active spaces on the web, the potential loss of Geocities (my personal fav on Geocities is the "Shania Twain & Mutt Lange Site", a place where we can "learn about Shania and Mutt and how they are forging away with a new type of alternative rock") should serve as a serious warning to all of us who put our content on the web. A warning that cultural capital does not necessarily translate into monetary

capital, and that unfortunately monetary capital is what keeps the Internet's lights on. And also, that once the shine wears off our Geocities, our MySpace, or our Facebook pages, all of that content might/will be deleted and forgotten. In light of this grim reality, publications like the Digital Folklore Reader become even more crucial—increasing our cultural literacy, enabling research, and teaching us about all modes of digital expression before they are forgotten. ¶

1 <http://www.google.com>

“  
-  
WE  
ARE ALL NAIVE  
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NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF.  
THOUGH SOME COMPUTER  
PEOPLE SEEM TO THINK  
IT IS.  
”  
-

TED NELSON,  
DREAM MACHINES,  
1974



# DO YOU BELIEVE IN USERS ?

By Olia Lialina &  
Dragan Espenschied (Ed.)

In an ideal world, we would love to skip this introduction - or at least the most difficult part of it, where we, as authors have to define the term used in the book's title.

Isn't it enough to put a unicorn on the cover, throw a bit of Comic Sans over it and announce a chapter on LOLCATS in the table of contents? You would know what we mean.

But sharing our fascination with amateur digital culture is only half of the business at hand. The Grand Plan, to which this book is only a tiny contribution, is to truly reconnect users and computers, users and developers, users and the history of their favorite medium. If this plan works out, perhaps a reasonable relationship between computers and people could be restored.

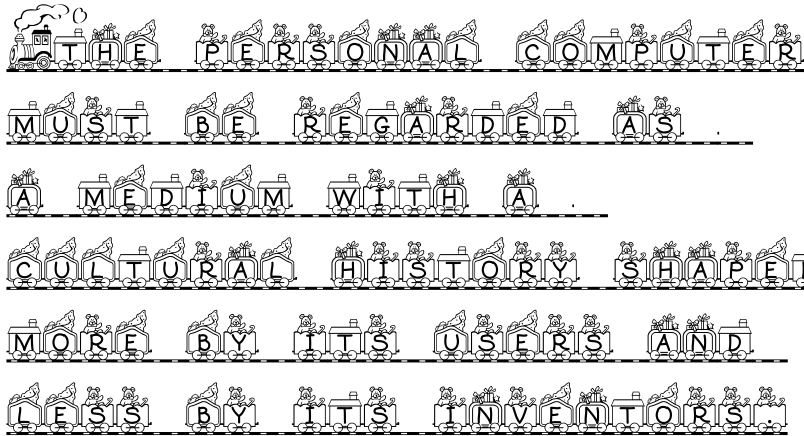
The personal computer (a meta medium), and the Internet aka network of the networks), are mistakenly regarded as mere extensions of pre-computer culture. Net, web, media, computer, digital, are the miserable and inadequate prefixes still used to

indicate that something was produced with a computer, was maybe digitized or can be accessed through a computer interface. A lot of effort is put into increasing the "fidelity," "realism" and "emotion" of the "content" rushing through digital circuits, and these efforts are almost always praised. These perceived improvements however are likely to wipe out the very reality and emotion that is living inside the computer. It seems that in spite of its prevalence in our culture, the computer's ultimate purpose is to become an invisible "appliance," transparent interface and device denying any characteristics of its own. Most computing power is used in an attempt to make people forget about computers. Thus, the often heard statement that computers are a common thing in today's world is a fallacy. Never before has computer technology been so widely spread and computer culture been so underdeveloped in relation.

If you ask a search engine what "digital folklore" is, it will pull up links to e-books on folk art or recordings of folk music in MP3 format. Likewise, five years ago if you looked for "internet art," you would get linked to galleries selling paintings and sculptures online, even though net art (where "net" was more important than "art"), had long been a unique art form. Computer games are subject to similar attitudes. Either they are seen only in relation to what is commonly regarded as "real" play (especially in the context of children), or they are judged in terms of the preceding mediums (namely cinema). Respect for the unique narrative and expressive potential of games only appeared very recently.

This has to change for the betterment of human culture as a whole, so we proudly coin the term Digital Folklore.

Digital Folklore encompasses the customs, traditions and elements of visual, textual and audio culture that emerged from users' engagement with personal computer applications during the last de-



cade of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st century.

This seemingly over-determined time frame is needed to distinguish Digital Folklore from Home Computer Culture, which ceased to exist in the 1990's. Before, home computers - machines elegant and quirky at the same time - nurtured the development of a passionate community. Using mostly their free time, these self-taught experts created their own culture. Meaningful contributions could be made quickly and with relative ease because of the home computer's technical simplicity. When the home computer became merely a machine for work, when it became a requirement in life to know Microsoft Office, when the workings of the machine became increasingly complex and business oriented, the role of computer users changed.

So what do we exactly mean by user? The movie Tron marks the highest appreciation and most glorious definition of this term. The film is mostly set inside a computer network; programs, represented by actors in glowing costumes, are the main heroes. One program asks another: "You believe in the users?" The other answers: "Yes, sure. If I don't have a user, than who wrote me?" In another conversation it becomes clear that both an account manager and a hacker are called "user" by "their" programs. The relationship of users and programs is depicted as a very close and

personal one, almost religious in nature, with a caring and respecting creator and a responsible and dedicated progeny.

This was in 1982. Ten years later the situation became dramatically different. The term "users" was demoted to what the fathers of computer technology dubbed "Real Users," <sup>1</sup> those who pay to use a computer but are not interested to learn about it, or "Naive Users," <sup>2</sup> those who simply don't understand the systems.

In 1993 AOL connected their customers to the Internet for the first time and naive users showed up in the thousands - invading the Usenet discussion system formerly only frequented by computer enthusiasts with a university background. These AOL-ers became part of the Internet without any initiation and none of them had any of the technical or social skills deemed necessary to the previous generation of Internet users. The "old guard" was unwilling to deal with a mass of "users" who were ignorant of their highly developed culture and the increasing onslaught was often referred to as an "Eternal September." <sup>3</sup> "User" became a derogatory term for people who need things to be as simple as possible and they became cannon fodder for system administrators and real programmers.

In 1996 The New Hackers Dictionary clearly distinguished two classes of people: Implementors

(hackers) and Users (lusers). <sup>4</sup>  
 Twelve years later, "Software Studies: A Lexicon", released by the same publisher The MIT Press, doesn't contain an article on User at all. As a way to deal with this new influx of "lusers," the prevailing tactic was to give them a nice and colorful playground <sup>5</sup> ("user-friendly," "user-oriented") where they could not cause any real damage and leave the hackers alone. This rather cynical view is still perpetuated today - users are being highly entertained, but also exploited as content producers and ad-clicking revenue generators.

While more and more people had personal computers and net access, fewer and fewer were seeing the value of their contributions. As most had agreed to have "no idea about computers," it became virtually impossible for them to reflect on the medium itself. At the same time however these lusers used computers very intensively, producing and uploading content non-stop.

And here we reach the point where we would like to highlight artifacts of Digital Folklore, a distinct user culture developed inside user-oriented applications and services despite their low social status and technical limitations. And their cumulative output began to dominate that of hacker culture.

Consider the way early amateur websites were made. As clumsy as they might appear to trained professionals, in terms of spreading the Internet's architecture and culture, they were of huge importance. In fact, the mental image we have of the medium today: intelligence on the edges of the network, many-to-many communication, open source (even if it was just about how to use the <blink> HTML tag), is the result of these early efforts. Users could easily write the code for their own web pages and were, by building their pages, literally building the Internet.

Already by the end of the 1990's however the rise of web design, the web designer as

a new profession, the „new economy" and the whole industry around it, all conspired to point the lowly users back to their place.

These days we can witness how the users' role has been reconsidered in the Web2.0 hype: noble amateurs, crowd-wisdom, user generated content, folksonomy - all crowned by the triumphal "YOU" as the person of the year on the cover of TIME magazine. <sup>6</sup> This grand "come-back" of the user, heralded by the glossy mirrored cover, illustrated just how vast the gap between users and their computers had grown. The implication being that a powerful user is a one-time sensation, not the norm.

During a short Web 2.0 time the users' creativity earned a lot of praise, whether it was "blinging up" their kids, rating books at Amazon.com or rickrolling colleagues. But being so busy and creative, we missed the moment when Web2.0 was replaced by a new trend, The Cloud: users in front of dumb terminals, feeding centralized databases and über computer clusters. One is easily reminded of the Master Control Program, the boogie man from the aforementioned movie TRON. Whatever association your mind is offering here, whatever the name of the system, it is about powerful computers, not powerful users.

But it won't be technology that will stand up for values like free speech and free thought. And the technological mastery of a few bright minds will not protect the Internet from being blocked, split up, throttled or censored by repressive regimes, conservative industries or religious zealots. Hackers and professionals will have to understand that in order to advance „their" medium and "their" culture, they too, have to tap into the powers of Digital Folklore.

In Germany, where this book originates, the problem has its own specificity because one gets the feeling that "The Internet" is happening somewhere

else. Journalists praise Iranian bloggers in their struggle for freedom, yet regard German bloggers voicing their concerns about German governmental control of the web as nutty freaks.

And there seemed to be little time for reflection in between the total neglect of computers and their sudden, unscrutinized adoption: In the 1980's people still generally thought of computers as Cold War machines that guide nuclear missiles, or as surveillance machines turning people into numbers in the 1987 census. Even playing the coin-operated Pac Man arcade machine was illegal for minors. By contrast, today's school children are educated as "Real Users." They learn how to use Microsoft Office to type business letters and design PowerPoint presentations, before they learn how to make a game or even spell IKEMZDOL <sup>7</sup> correctly. Users must understand their integral role in the process, demand comprehensible systems, work for better computer education and begin to see themselves as developers again. Studying Digital Folklore can do this, and help give back users the power they have earned and deserve.

The domain of the digital must belong to people, not computers. The personal computer must be regarded as a medium with a cultural history shaped more by its users and less by its inventors. In February 2009, speaking at TED conference, Sir Tim Bernes-Lee stated that he invented the web 20 years ago. Though officially he has the right to claim this, the web is in fact 16 years old, because that is when people started to use it.

Henry Jenkins wrote in his 2002 article "Blog This!" <sup>8</sup>: "We learned in the history books about Samuel Morse's invention of the telegraph, but not about the thousands of operators who shaped the circulation of message." To rephrase him, we could say that we have studied the history of hypertext, but not the history of Metallica fan web rings or web rings in general. This book is an attempt to fill this gap.

It is a collection of texts and projects on the digital vernacular, online amateur culture, DIY electronics, dirtstyle, typo-nihilism, cats, teapots and penis enlargement. We are grateful to our students, former and present, for participating in research and contributing to the book. ¶

- <sup>1</sup> "People who are buying computers, especially personal computers, just aren't going to take a long time to learn something. They are going to insist on using it awfully quick." J.C.R. Licklider: "Some Reflections on Early History", quoted from: A. Goldberg: A History of Personal Workstations, ACM Press, 1988, p.119
- <sup>2</sup> "Person who doesn't know about computers but is going to use the system. Naive user systems are those set up to make things easy and clear for such people". Ted Nelson: "The Most important computer terms for the70's", in Dream Machines, Tempus Books, 1987, p.9
- <sup>3</sup> September was a special month in the early days of network culture. With the start of the university term there would always be some new users that needed some introduction and caring for their first steps into the online world. See e.g. The Wikipedia entry [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eternal\\_september](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eternal_september)
- <sup>4</sup> Eric S. Raymond: "The New Hacker's Dictionary", The MIT Press, 1996, p. 463
- <sup>5</sup> The graphical user interface for "users" is also often called "WIMP," for "Windows, Icons, Mouse Pointer." Real programmers would use a command line interface of course.
- <sup>6</sup> Issue December 25, 2006/ January 1, 2007
- <sup>7</sup> IKEMZDOL = "Ich könnte mich zu Tode lachen", the German version of ROFL or LOL
- <sup>8</sup> Henry Jenkins: "Blog This!", Technology Review Issue March 2002, online at <http://www.technologyreview.com/energy/12768/>

DO  
YOU  
BELIEVE  
IN  
USERS  
?

**BODY**  
**OF**  
**WORK**

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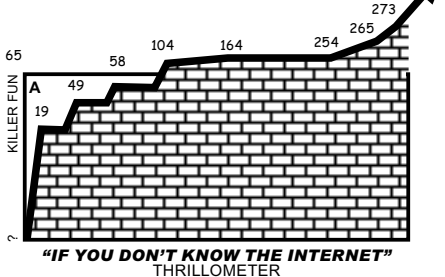
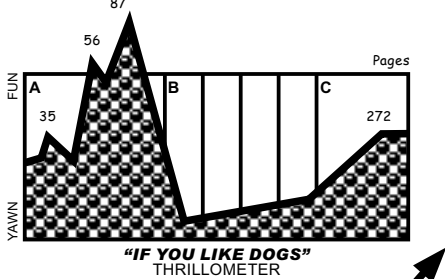
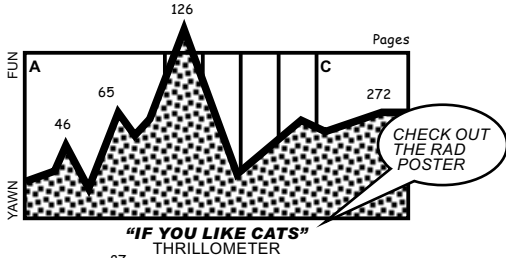
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*Don't forget:  
 Pixelants on the inside  
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# CLOUD

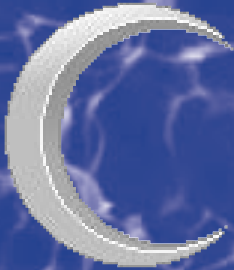
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 HTTP://WWW. (3) INTERFACE (6) INVISIBILITY (5) JURIJ (3) LOGO (3) LONG TAIL (3) MARIO (3)  
 MARKETING (4) METAPHORS (3) MIDI (3) MII (3) MONEY (12) OFFICE (5) OUTER SPACE  
 (5) PENIS (3) PERSONALITY (7) PIMPING (3) PIZZA (3) POSTFORDISM (3) RIP OFF (4) SOCIAL  
 WEB (8) SPIRITUALITY (8) TARGET GROUP (4) TECHNO (5) TEMPLATES (3)  
 TOYOTA (4) TV (3) TYRONIHILISM (3) UNDER CONSTRUCTION (3) URL (3) USA (4) USER-FRIENDLY (5)  
 USER-GENERATED (5) USERS (17) UTOPIA (7) VIRAL (4) WASTE (4)  
 WATER (6) WEB2.0 (5) WELCOME (3) XMAZ (3) YOU (3)



# OBSERVA- TIONS



You  
can  
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must  
understand  
computer  
culture  
NOW

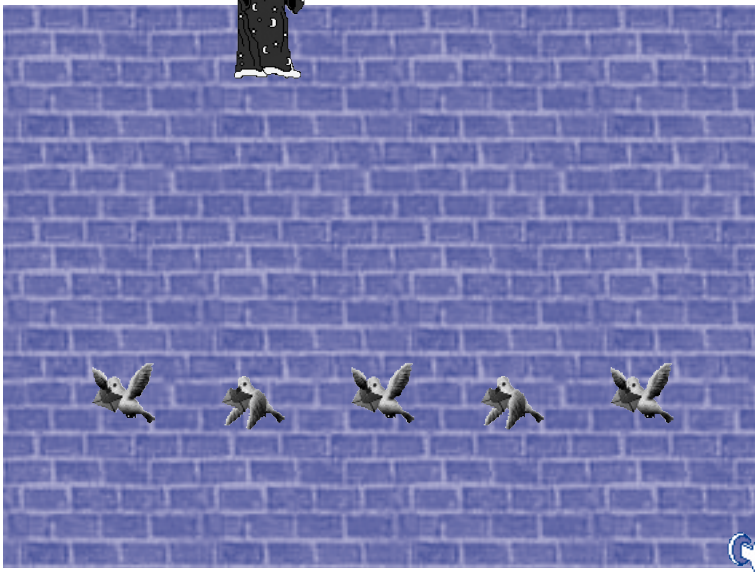




# A VERNACULAR WEB



By Olia Lialina  
February 2005



1. THE INDIGENOUS AND THE BARBARIANS
2. UNDER CONSTRUCTION
3. THE STARRY NIGHT BACKGROUND
4. FREE COLLECTIONS OF WEB ELEMENTS
5. LINKS
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7. FRAMES
8. TILDE
9. WELCOME TO MY HOMEPAGE
10. MAIL ME

## 1 THE INDIGENOUS AND THE BARBARIANS

When I started to work on the World Wide Web I made a few nice things that were special, different and fresh. They were very different from what was on the web in the mid 90's.

I'll start with a statement like this, not to show off my contribution, but in order to stress that -- although I consider myself to be an early adopter -- I came

late enough to enjoy and prosper from the "benefits of civilization". There was a pre-existing environment; a structural, visual and acoustic culture you could play around with, a culture you could break. There was a world of options and one of the options was to be different.

So what was this culture? What do we mean by the web of the mid 90's and when did it end?

To be blunt it was bright, rich, personal, slow and under construction. It was a web of sudden

connections and personal links. Pages were built on the edge of tomorrow, full of hope for a faster connection and a more powerful computer. One could say it was the web of the indigenous... or the barbarians. In any case, it was a web of amateurs soon to be washed away by dot.com ambitions, professional authoring tools and guidelines designed by usability experts.

I wrote that change was coming "soon" instead of putting an end date at 1998, for example,

HOME

HOME

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HOME

because there was no sickness, death or burial. The amateur web didn't die and it has not disappeared but it is hidden. Search engine ranking mechanisms rank the old amateur pages so low they're almost invisible and institutions don't collect or promote them with the same passion as they pursue net art or web design.

Also new amateur pages don't appear as much as they did ten years ago because the WWW of today is a developed and highly regulated space. You wouldn't get on the web just to tell the world, "Welcome to my home page." The web has diversified, the conditions have changed and there's no need for this sort of old fashioned behavior. Your CV is posted on the company website or on a job search portal. Your diary will be organized on a blog and your vacation photos are published on flickr. There's a community for every hobby and question.

This is why I refer to the amateur web as a thing of the past; aesthetically a very powerful past. Even people who weren't online in the last century, people who look no further than the first 10 search engine results can see the signs and symbols of the early web thanks to the numerous parodies and collections organized by usability experts who use these ear-

ly elements and styles as negative examples.

Just as clothing styles come back into fashion so do web designs. On a visual level things reappear. Last year I noticed that progressive web designers returned to an eclectic style reincorporating wallpapers and 3D lettering in their work. In the near future frames and construction signs will show up as retro and the beautiful old elements but will be stripped of their meaning and contexts.

In the past few years I've also been making work that foregrounds this disappearing aesthetic of the past. With these works I want to apologize for my arrogance in the early years and to preserve the beauty of the vernacular web by integrating them within contemporary art pieces. But this is only half of the job.

Creating collections and archives of all the midi files and animated gifs will preserve them for the future but we need to ask more questions. What did these visual, acoustic and navigation elements stand for? For which cultures and media did these serve as a bridge to the web? What ambitions were they serving? What problems did they solve and what problems did they create? Let me talk about the troubled destiny of some of these once ubiquitous elements.



2

## UNDER CONSTRUCTION

The "Under Construction Sign" [fig.1-fig.4](#) is a very strong symbol of the early web. It reminds us of the great times shortly after the scientists and engineers finished their work on the Information Highway. Ordinary people came with their tools and used the chance to build their own roads and junctions. Work was everywhere and everywhere there was something that wasn't ready, links were leading to nowhere or to pages that didn't quite exist and there were signs on the pages that warned of broken connections and lack of navigation.

Step by step people were developing pages into a functioning web and it became less necessary to warn us, especially using road signs, about missing information. But they didn't disappear. Instead, the meaning of "Under Construction" images changed from a warning to a promise that this page will grow. The symbol became a hybrid of excuse and invitation. It could appear on an empty or a properly functional site as a sign that the project was growing and being updated. Often you could see the newer sign, "Always Under Construction."

"Always Under Construction" didn't mean the site would never work but more the opposite [fig.2](#). It informed users that somebody was always taking care of the site and it would be interesting to return again and again.

This was a very important message because it was crucial to really insist on the idea of constant development and change, but the



fig.1



fig.2



fig.3



fig.4



fig.5

sign was wrong. The association with broken roads and obstacles on the way stopped illustrating the idea of ongoing development. Around 1997 the sign turned into a meaningless footer and became a common joke. Even the mainstream press wrote that the web was always under construction so, after a while, people stopped putting it everywhere.

Neither the "Under Construction" sign nor the idea of permanent construction made it into the professional web. The idea of unfinished business contradicts the whole concept of professional designer-client relations: fixed terms and finished products.

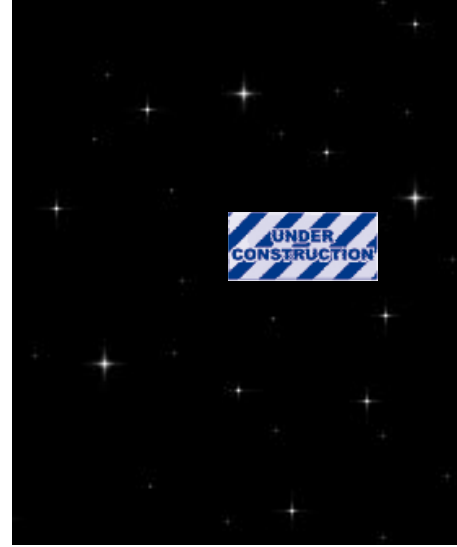
There was some follow-up though. The phrase, "This site is currently undergoing redesign" became an elegant substitute for blinking road lamps. New ways to show the project was constantly updated appeared as well: current news on the first page, a "Last Updated" notice, or the ridicu-

lous—but still very popular—solution that creates a magical effect of actuality and telepresence: put a clock on the web site showing the current time.

So what's with the very idea of web construction? Is it still around and how does it show itself today? I'd say yes. The "Under Construction" signs have unexpected followers, the "Verified XHTML" buttons [fig.5](#). You can see them on more and more pages of modern web users.


They are there, (to quote the W3 Consortium), "To show your readers that you have taken the care to create an inter-operable Web page." In other words, the new sign says the developers of the sites are taking care to reconstruct the web to meet new standards and to bring the "world's biggest trash pile" into a faultless, clean and clear code environment. I'm not a fan of this development but I do like the appearance of the

XHTML buttons. They manifest the power of end developers and show the great intention of participating in the global construction, or reconstruction, of the whole en-



vironment simply by making your own site.

```

* * * * *
* A note from the 21st of June 2009: *
* *
* Web2.0 brought Under Construction spirit back, under a new *
* name -- Beta. Hardly any new online service would appear with- *
* out a Beta subtitle in the logo. *
* In the end of September 2005 Tim O'Reilly stated in his "What *
* is Web 2.0" essay that we've entered Perpetual Beta times: "The *
* open source dictum, 'release early and release often' in fact *
* has morphed into an even more radical position, 'the perpetual *
* beta', in which the product is developed in the open, with new *
* features slipstreamed in on a monthly, weekly, or even daily ba- *
* sis. It's no accident that services such as Gmail, Google Maps, *
* Flickr, del.icio.us, and the like may be expected to bear a 'Beta' *
* logo for years at a time." 1 *
* Though the services he mentioned gradually gave up their Beta *
* status, new ones are keeping the tradition. *
* *
*  *
* *
* * * * *

```

<sup>1</sup> What Is Web 2.0  
<http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html?page=4>

3

**THE STARRY NIGHT BACKGROUND**



fig.6

Another heroic element of the vernacular web is the outer space background, also known as the “Starry Night.” Ordinarily it’s a black, dark blue or purple image tiled through with light static or blinking particles. It was very popular with the first web makers probably because there were a great number of science fiction and computer game fans among them.

Their desire to make the web look like the futuristic backdrop of their favorite pieces was justified. Not only by their taste but by the hope the new medi-

um was offering. The Internet was the future, it was bringing us into new dimensions, closer to other galaxies. So the look of the internet had to be an appro-

priate one like in *Star Crash* [2](#) or *Galaga* [3](#) [fig.10](#). It had to be like the inside of a computer or somewhere out there. Space wallpapers made the Internet look special. This was obviously a space with a mission that other media could never accomplish.

A great feature of the outer space background was that it could be just a two colors, maybe half a kilobyte in file size, but it would instantly give a futuristic mood for your page. So a bandwidth problem was solved as well.

However, the tragedy of outer space backgrounds is that, although they are magnificent, they don’t fit with any particular idea. They never did. Scientific texts, personal home pages, cinema programs, pathfinder image galleries, it’s always wrong. Even the starships don’t look authentic because

it’s wrong to hang pictures in the sky and there are no letters in outer space. Even if there were letters in outer space it would be impossible to read them. The dot over an “i” could be a star or a % sign and as for meteors...they’re just too easy to confuse.

If you ever designed anything you know that an outer space background only looks good if nothing else is placed on it. If you were ever asked to redesign a page made at the end of the 20th century the first thing you did was remove the starbck.gif.

One of the latest, and thus documented, star removal surgeries happened in 2004. Here you see the 90’s look of an online video shop. [4](#)

One of the last survivors is <http://www.kinoservice.de> [fig.8](#), a weekly updated website with the cinema programs for Stuttgart and Frankfurt. Every time I type this address I’m afraid that I’d find it remade without the stars. [5](#)

Day by day the hope for an extraterrestrial web future gave way



fig.7

fig.8

fig.9

12 Luigi Cozzi: *Star Crash*, Film, 1978  
 10 Namco: *Galaga*, arcade game, 1981  
 14 Video Online, <http://www.video-online.net>, 2004  
 15 A note from the 21st of June 2009: This apocalypse happened now. January 2008 was the last date the site was seen with a star

- <http://www.anni-und-jens.de> survived until April 2005: [http://web.archive.org/web/\\*/http://www.anni-und-jens.de](http://web.archive.org/web/*/http://www.anni-und-jens.de)
- <http://www.kinoservice.de>
- <http://www.merz-akademie.de/projekte/>
- anonymous: "Moon's Stars", <http://scri8e.com/stars/>, 2005
- anonymous, personal email, 2005
- artificial.dk: "Net Stars", [http://www.artificial.dk/articles/netstars\\_eng.htm](http://www.artificial.dk/articles/netstars_eng.htm), 2004
- Olia Lialina: "Stars Fading on the Web", <http://www.artificial.dk/articles/olia.htm>, 2005
- Fan Art: Star Crash-style space-scape by Andrew Glazebrook, <http://www.pachanko.com/starcrash/fanpage.html> (gone)
- <http://www.video-online.net>, 2004
- [http://web.archive.org/web/\\*/http://www.kinoservice.de](http://web.archive.org/web/*/http://www.kinoservice.de)
- [http://web.archive.org/web/\\*/http://www.anni-und-jens.de](http://web.archive.org/web/*/http://www.anni-und-jens.de)
- Galaga, <http://www.geocities.com/mogomra/galaga/> (gone! Yahoo bastards!!!!)

to the present reality of newspapers, magazines, electronic offices, online business, and other serious intentions. "Starry Night" backgrounds reduced proportionately; from being a symbol of the future they were turning into a sign of the web's early years. Its meaning shifted to the opposite: from future to past.

And it reminds us of the army of amateurs who, like Anni und Jens [fig.9](#) made a few pages in the last century and then forgot about them. [6](#)

Since stars shine outside of mainstream web culture they fit well with subversive or alternate projects and easily support the prefix "anti". Take the unamerican.com site for example, it's a sticker shop and antiamerican ideas portal. Stars give weight to this concept by placing the author in outerspace, viewing the whole picture, being objective.

And my projects page at the Merz Akademie [7](#) is heavily deco-

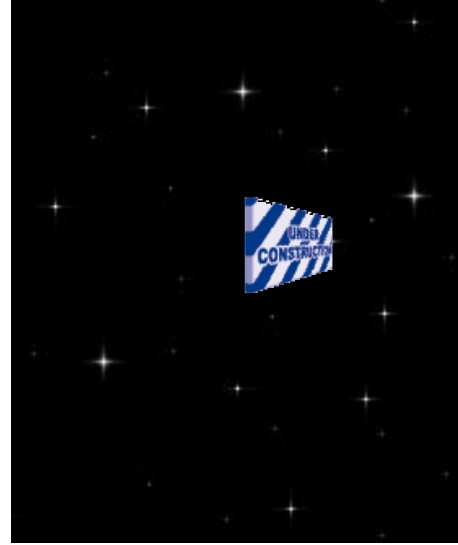
rated by outerspace motifs to emphasize that this is entirely my space and has nothing to do with the corporate identity of the institution.

The web site scri8e hosts a big and elaborate collection of animated stars and sparkles. [8](#) The webmaster of this site disagrees with me: IMO Stars are actually in bigger demand than ever before. No, not star backgrounds so much, but stars themselves. Designers all around the www use stars to get effects for animations and for stills. Placing a star or stars in different places on each frame of an animated image to get the image to sparkle or glitter. I doubt the interest in that will ever go away.

I do agree that the old style (the first style) of star backgrounds are losing ground in the "most desirable background" position. However, the higher quality star backgrounds are not. High quality star

backgrounds are in bigger demand. [9](#)

Further reading: artificial.dk hosts the show "net stars" [10](#), plus the interview "Stars Fading on the



Web" [11](#).

#### 4 FREE COLLECTIONS OF WEB ELEMENTS

Outer space backgrounds aren't the only images we have from the amateur web; paper, glass, water and wood themes came later. Background collections were formed and images were used to set different tones and celebrate different occasions like weddings, Christmas or Halloween.

Themes for web sets vary from music [12](#) to X-files [13](#) and victorian berry babies [14](#). I could pay a compliment to each one. Collections of web graphics expanded to include

buttons, bullets, dividers, animations and "Welcome to My Page" headers. They were a source you could use to build, structure and decorate your site.

Looking back through these early collections of web graphics you recognize some images that made it into a lot of pages and became famous: rainbow dividers, the "New!" sign and Felix the Cat [fig.15](#), a cult figure and perfect animation.

Some elements and sections of these free collections remind us of the historical peculiarities of the early web. For example "back" and "forward" buttons are part of the design set for non-profession-

◀ **Back** als who ignored the corresponding buttons on the browser. Indeed, how could you delegate such an important navigational issue to the browser, an application that had a new version released every six months!

The same is true for so called “bullets” [fig. 11](#), the small images used to replace the standard html list elements. It was a historical feature of the amateur web to prefer expression over structure. Early web makers were inspired by the possibility of using images and gladly substituted dull lists with spectacular graphics.

As we’re reminded by the various “Best Viewed With...” buttons, the choice of browser was a big aesthetic and philosophical issue for web makers. [15](#)

Another important problem for Russian speaking Internet users, or more precisely writers using Cyrillic script, were the numerous character encodings. On the first page of a Russian site you had to choose the appropriate encoding system. These encoding buttons [fig. 13](#) were “a land of opportunity” for designers and a lot played around with them making their own modifications.

In 1996, the soon-to-be #1 Russian Web Designer made 20 encoding button sets for different

backgrounds and tastes. Within a few months they spread to countless .ru domains and became naturalized in the Russian web landscape.

They had a short life. By the end of 1998 the encoding choice became automatic. Buttons disappeared from the pages and even this legendary collection itself has vanished into history. [16](#)

Free collections are the soul of the vernacular web. Lots of people were building their pages with free graphics and lots of people were making collections. The many-to-many principle really worked. Making your own site and building collections was a parallel process for a lot of people. The early web was more about spirit than skills. To distribute was no less important than to create.

It’s only a slight exaggeration to state that, because of the modular nature of web page construction, even those sites that never contained a web graphics collection were, in themselves, collections. Every element on the page, every line, figure, button and sound was on its own and could easily be extracted, if not directly from the browser then from looking at the source code to find the URLs of the files.

As soon as users divided into designers and clients, free collections lost their attractiveness for both sides. Around 1997 professional web sites were distanc-

ing themselves from the amateurs with the complete opposite of modular design. Graphic designs victorious expansion on the web had begun (It was so fast that a lot of designers and researchers believe that web design is a junior member of graphic design.). Designs were produced in Photoshop and later adapted for the browser. A page was created as a block then sliced into pieces. These pieces can’t be considered as modules since each piece only exists in relation to its neighbor. Extracting or reusing the pieces is meaningless and undesirable to the authors.

A very typical example is from the Mobile Telecom site, made by Artemy Lebedev in 1997. It’s a picture created and sliced in Photoshop.

Actually, it’s one of the first corporate sites in Russia made by a professional. It became famous and the design was “stolen” many times [fig. 12](#). Lebedev has a museum dedicated to the clones of this piece [17](#). It’s a very curious case, I think the people who stole the original design saw it more as a template: a guideline of how professional sites should now be created.

- [12](#) Marvel Creations: “Sonya’s Back ground Set 81”, <http://www.geocities.com/Wellesley/9402/bgset81.html>, 2003
- [13](#) Kelly McLarnon: “X-Files Set”, <http://www.topazdesigns.com/~kim/sets/x-files.htm>, 1998
- [14](#) Theda Fritz: “Berry Babies”, <http://www.tedi.net/berry.html>, unknown date
- [15](#) For an impressive collection of browser advocacy buttons, please consult Silly Dog: “Netscape Now buttons”, <http://sillydog.org/netscape/now.html>, 2007
- [16](#) Artemy Lebedev: “Бесплатные кнопки”, <http://web.archive.org/web/20001119031600/www.design.ru/free/buttons/index.html>, 2001

- unordered list
- unordered list
  - ◆ unordered list
  - ◆ unordered list
- unordered list
- unordered list
- unordered list

[fig. 11](#)



[fig. 12](#)



During the late 90's people were deleting links to the collections of files they had made or found.

A lot of collections still exist because they weren't removed from the servers but they're difficult to find. So how can you find them if they're not linked? My favorite is no exception, there's no link to these pages so I better write it down here: <http://yuricle.design.ru/fb/>

On the other hand it would be very wrong to generalize and say that free collections are a thing of the past. If you search for "my collection of web graphics" you can still find a lot of special collections though not necessarily retro ones (btw "my" is a very important key word, leave it out and you'll be sent to commercial pages). They're upgraded and updated and there was even a moment of revival in 2001 when the

\* \* \* \* \*  
 \* *A note from the 21st of* \*  
 \* *June 2009:* \*  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 \* *Proceed to the* \*  
 \* *Vernacular Web 2 to* \*  
 \* *get to know about* \*  
 \* *contemporary collections.* \*  
 \* *Page 58* \*  
 \* \* \* \* \*

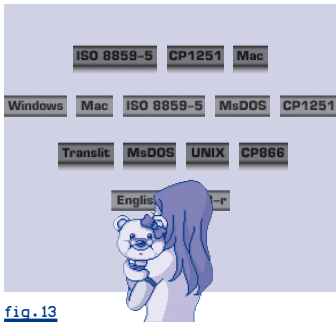


fig. 13

section "God Bless America" was added to many private and public collections.

They served US users of all skill levels who wanted to demonstrate patriotic feelings [fig. 16](#) on their home pages.

My respected readers might want to look at the Sweet Land of Liberty [18](#) or Lil Doc's Free Patriotic Graphics [19](#).

And a fresh market for free button makers is the "Verified XHTML" sign [fig. 17](#). The variety is still small but constantly growing as variations are needed to fit new design styles.

There are also examples like Juannas bunte GIF-Welt [20](#) or Gifwelt [21](#). They show that some have managed to bring their hobby to a higher level. Their libraries are huge and diverse, life is in full swing in their forums and guest books. These are valuable sources for archivists and those who still prefer to build modular websites using available elements. Like a couple of London based media producers who compiled their



fig. 14



fig. 15

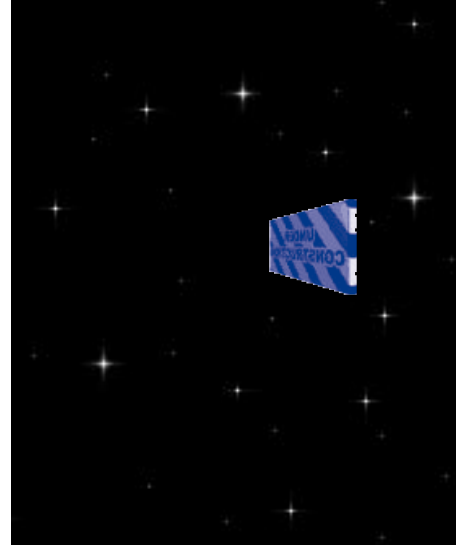


fig. 16



fig. 17

wedding web site from appropriate graphics. [22](#) In 2004 British designer Bruce Lawson made a contribution to the css Zen Garden [23](#) (a collaborative effort to



prove that CSS is a standard of web beauty [fig. 18](#)). His "GeoCities 1996 theme" [24](#) built of public domain GIFs is a perfect reminder that the true spirit will find its way around standards

- [17](#) Artemy Lebedev: "Клоны сайта, МобилТелеком", <http://www.artlebedev.ru/everything/clones/mtelecom/>, 1997-2002
- [18](#) snogirl: "Sweet Land of Liberty", <http://snogirl.snoville.com/MemorialIndex.html>, 2002
- [19](#) Lil Doc: "Free Patriotic Graphics", <http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/9787/maingraf.html>, 2001
- [20](#) J. B. Kraus: "Juannas bunte GIF-Welt", <http://juanna.ch/>, 1999-on going
- [21](#) Ingrid Libicky: "Gifiwelt", <http://gifiwelt.info/>, ongoing
- [22](#) Emma Davidson: "Ceremony", <http://www.lektrogirl.com/ceremony/>, 2004
- [23](#) Dave Shea: "css Zen Garden", <http://www.csszengarden.com/>, 2001-ongoing
- [24](#) Bruce Lawson: "GeoCities 1996", <http://csszengarden.com/?cssfile=http://www.brucelawson.co.uk/zen/sample.css>, 2004

Welcome to My!

A demonstration of what can be accomplished visually through CSS-based design. Select any style sheet from the list to load it into this page.

# HEY YO

## The Road to Enlightenment

Littering a dark and dreary road lay the past relics of browser-specific tags, incompatible DOMs, and broken CSS support.

Today, we must clear the mind of past practices. Web enlightenment has been achieved thanks to the tireless efforts of folk like the W3C, WaSP and the major browser creators.

The css Zen Garden invites you to relax and meditate on the important lessons of the masters. Begin to see with clarity. Learn to use the (yet to be) time-honored techniques in new and invigorating fashion. Become one with the web.

There is clearly a need for CSS to be taken seriously by graphic artists. The Zen Garden aims to excite, inspire, and encourage participation. To begin, view some of the existing designs in the list. Clicking on any one will load the style sheet into this very page. The code remains the same, the only thing that has changed is the external .css file. Yes, really. (s)

*CSS Allows Complete And Total Control Over The Style Of A Hypertext Document. The Only Way This Can Be Illustrated In A Way That Gets People Excited Is By Demonstrating What It Can Truly Be, Once The Reins Are Placed In The Hands Of Those Able To Create Beauty From Structure. To Date, Most Examples Of Neat Tricks And Hacks Have Been Demonstrated By Structurists And Coders. Designers Have Yet To Make Their Mark. This Needs To Change.*



### Select a Design

UNDER THE SEA! BY ERIC STOLTZ

MAKE 'EM PROUD BY MICHAEL MCAUGHON AND SCOTTY REIFSNYDER

ORCHID BEAUTY BY KEVIN ADDISON

OCEANSCAPE BY JUSTIN GRAY

CSS Co., LTD. BY BENJAMIN KLEMM

SAKURA BY TATSUYA UCHIDA

KYOTO FOREST BY JOHN POLITOWSKI

A WALK IN THE GARDEN BY SIMON VAN

HAUWERMEIREN

### ARCHIVES

next designs >>

View All Designs



CSS Resources

View This Design's CSS

CSS Resources

FAQ

Submit a Design

Translations

## Participation

Graphic artists only please. You are modifying this page, so strong CSS skills are necessary, but the example files are commented well enough that even CSS novices can use them as starting points. Please see the [CSS Resource Guide](#) for advanced tutorials and tips on working with CSS.



YOU MAY MODIFY THE STYLE SHEET IN ANY WAY YOU WISH, BUT NOT THE HTML. THIS MAY SEEM DAUNTING AT FIRST IF YOU'VE NEVER WORKED THIS WAY BEFORE, BUT FOLLOW THE LISTED LINKS TO LEARN MORE, AND USE THE SAMPLE FILES AS A GUIDE.



**5 LINKS**

*A note from the 21st of June 2009:*



*Usually its impossible to find creators of these GIFs, but I was lucky with the "New" sign. In the summer of 2006 I got an email from media designer Kirk Clyne:*

*"Hey there, nice site -- the early web vernacular content.*

*Just for the record, I'm responsible for creating the 'new' gif -- the tiny one in the yellow 'zapple', as I called it. I originally created it for a site called Virtual Vineyards -- now wine.com. This and a dozen or so other icons, mostly wine bottles, grapes, etc.*

*These tiny icons were all designed to sit at the start of a sentence, and so had to be less than 12 pixels high. Very tough! 'No, that looks more like a Merlot bottle than a Porto, can you flare the neck more?'*

*That's my story.  
- Kirk"*

*Well, almost lucky, as he never responded to my hundreds of additional questions.*

The World Wide Web was constantly developing and when we say it looked different 2,5 or 10 years ago we should also say it was conceptually different. The competence of early adopters, passionate amateurs and ambitious professionals, the dot.com hype and the mass distraction of the second wave (i.e. the blog) were all responding directly to the way the web was built and interconnected. The way it looked was derived from the underlying architecture.

Let's forget about the visual appearance of the vernacular web for a moment and think about how it worked. What were the principles of its growth? The obvious answer is links. A lot of links. Links on every page.

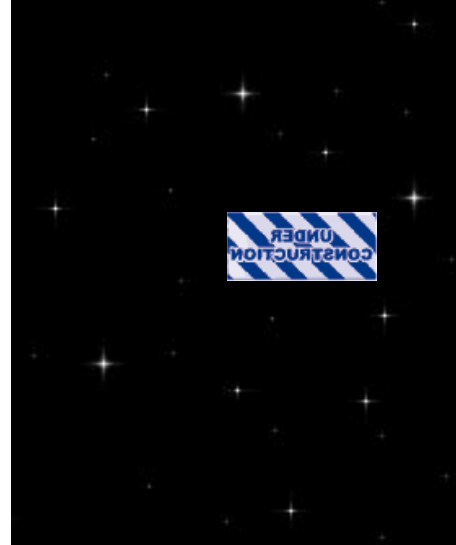
Ten years ago every web site had a section of external links because people felt it was their personal responsibility to configure the environment and build the infrastructure. The many-to-many principle showed itself in linking strategies as well. A site was not complete without links to other sites.

On some pages links were gates to additional information, on others to unrelated information. The way you looked for information was time consuming but rewarding. By following the links you could find much more than you were looking for.

The vernacular web was fascinated by the power of links and often ran to extremes. Sites composed of lists of links, long pages of unclassified and annotated links, webrings or published

bookmarks.html files from the Netscape browser.

After the late 90's linking wasn't that hip any more. Search engines, portals and catalogues



took over the linking responsibilities, making searches faster and less surprising. In the quest for order and hierarchy the web changed completely. Sites with no external links at all became the norm and now constitute the facade of the mainstream web. Users jump back and forth between search engines and search results.

Links—the once typical means of conveyance—have lost their infrastructural importance. In today's web, blogs compensate for over precise search engines by delivering a constant stream of surprise links. It's an interesting evolutionary paradox when you remember that old-school link collections were created to compensate, through human intervention, for the rough search engine results. In the end both cures deliver the same: a link to an address



fig.18

new to the user; an unknown topic, a surprise, an action, a deep web.

## 6

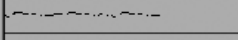
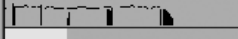
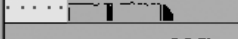


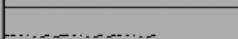
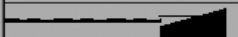

## MIDI

The vernacular web is not silent. Expressive pages are usually accompanied with music in the MIDI format. Before the MP3 format hit the net and bandwidth was precious, MIDI was the only option if you wanted to include a full song on a web page. Even those who would only test their website from their local hard disk noticed that a 75 MB WAV file of uncompressed audio was difficult to handle. This was the driving force behind MIDI and it's still going on today. Granted nowadays Macromedia Flash, for example, offers ways to use high quality audio with almost the same bandwidth as a MIDI file. However it has the disadvantage of being more difficult to use than the huge amount of MIDI's readymade heritage.

Similar to collections of free web graphics, collections of MIDIs [25](#) are widely available. Due to their quality and mostly fan based production, MIDIs are generally considered free to collect, use and share. Audio files never made it to this status, they're clearly the intruders from a world outside of the web. They come from CDs and the radio while MIDI gives the impression that the web is its natural environment. See: [26](#)

But MIDI collections differ from graphics collections: supply exceeds demand. There isn't the same tradition of composing music for a web page as there is

for GIF images. Instead, popular songs are adapted to this format. A MIDI file is usually considered of good quality if the adaptation gave a somewhat faithful repro-

1	M	S	R	Music Box	65	0	
2	M	S	R	Piccolo	111	0	
3	M	S	R	Soprano Sax	78	0	
4	M	S	R	Electric Bass (F	88	0	
5	M	S	R	Pizzicato String	100	0	
6	M	S	R	Tango Accordi	70	0	
7	M	S	R	Trumpet	93	0	
8	M	S	R	SynthStrings 2	62	0	

[fig. 19](#)



duction of the original, given the limitations of the format.

This means that you can't identify web music by genres or styles that "came from the web" but by the way it sounds. Although it sounds different on every system its played on, it will always sound trashy. How did this happen?

The MIDI standard was originally created in 1983 to allow data exchange between electronic instruments like synthesizers and samplers. It featured 128 standardized instruments (for example grand piano, steel guitar, a drum kit), each assigned a fixed ID number.

So a defined instrumental palette is part of the standard. A MIDI file itself does not contain the exact recording of a sound. It only describes what instrument should play a certain note at a certain time [fig. 19](#). How it actually sounds depends on the synthesizer that is used to replay these notes. In the case of web music a sound card or a

software synthesizer, like Apple's Quicktime, is in charge of reproducing the tunes. It can be compared to the way HTML describes how a web page should look and

leaves it up to the browser to render these instructions.

As all the instruments were standardized in 1983 the available sounds effectively go no further than Italo Disco. There will never be any

new and exciting sounds, only updated versions of old sounds. New sounds would only break the compatibility with all the existing MIDI files. Software vendors can't change the "trumpet" to a "Neptune's kinda honkashizzle" because, on the web, you can find all kinds of MIDI files that use the trumpet in many different ways. In this case the only solution is the lowest common denominator. The trumpet sound must fit into James Brown's "Sex Machine" in the same way it fits into "Ride of the Valkyries" by Richard Wagner. It does this by not really fitting into either. At least that's equality.

The result is that most of the time MIDI files give the impression of somebody playing hit music on an electronic organ in the privacy of their own home. In reality this happens at village weddings or the annual gathering of a rabbit breeder's association.

It's hard to imagine an easier target for usability experts. It

was found in serious studies that MIDI was distracting and considered annoying by most users, especially if they were listening to a CD while browsing the web.

Only very few MIDI files were composed especially for web sites. Michaël Samyn, author of legendary Home [27](#) for Netscape1.1, wrote minimalistic tracks for various websites in 1997 and 1998 [28](#).

Quite recently in the end of 2003 the “Zombie and Mummy Theme” for the online comic of the same name was produced. [29](#) It’s a great melody and also sounds good because the author took the challenge to fit the tune into the possibilities that MIDI offers.

It’s a “classical” melodic composition not relying on effects, and all the instruments were chosen by their name, not by their sound. If a “xylophone” is needed it’s wise to select the “xylophone” even if the “marimba” might sound more like a “xylophone” right now—but who knows with the next update of Windows Media Player? The tune was then tested on many differ-

ent platforms and adjusted accordingly, just as is done with HTML code.

## 7

## FRAMES

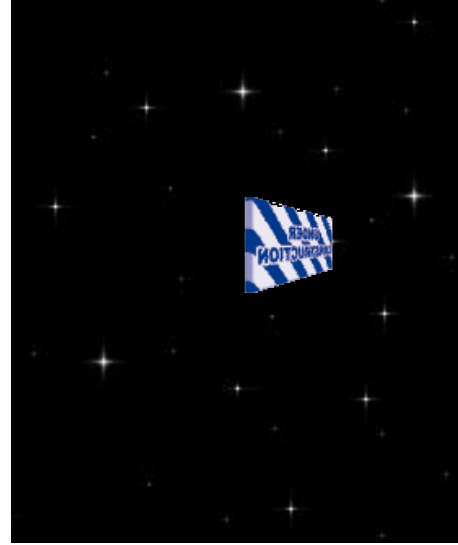
As the W3 Consortium puts it:

HTML frames allow authors to present documents in multiple views, which may be independent windows or subwindows. Multiple views offer designers a way to keep certain information visible, while other views are scrolled or replaced. For example, within the same window, one frame might display a static banner, a second a navigation menu, and a third the main document that can be scrolled through or replaced by navigating in the second frame. [30](#)

Despite this reasonable description of frames (one that even appeals to designers), in mass consciousness they still belong in the amateur world. In the latter part of the 90’s they were used with enthusiasm in both the professional and vernacular web and I think they belong to this period. I wouldn’t even mention them in the context of this article if not for two important reasons.

Firstly, frames are really the peoples subject. They’re a unique component of the Hyper Text Markup Language and everyone has something to say about them. Frames provide a common ground for professionals and amateurs, early adopters and newcomers. I don’t know how it happened but anyone who’s seen the web has an opinion. Everyone’s experienced them and has a ironic comment. Frames are part of the web’s folk-

lore. “Should you use frames?” This question was submitted by the editor to [designtimeline.org](#) [31](#), and had one of the greatest number of responses. In a thousand



years when the database is decoded by aliens (or archaeologists), they’ll conclude the web was actually just a lot of frames.

Secondly, frames create a very recognizable visual pattern. In general when graphic design makes reference to web design the frame layout is commonly used. (For example: the print ads by Amazon or budget airline ticket booking forms in a newspaper Travel section). The division of the surface into frame-like segments stands for the web in the same way a score display stands for video game screens or a blinking cursor on the command line stands for a hacker in a Hollywood movie.

In 2003 the students of the Merz Akademie celebrated the First Ten Years of the WWW by creating an exhibition of objects that

- [25](#) -> <http://www.ezgeta.com/midi.html>  
-> [http://www.steliart.com/web\\_designs\\_midis.html](http://www.steliart.com/web_designs_midis.html)  
-> <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/curly.johnson/midis.html>  
-> <http://www.saturn-soft.net/Music/Music1/MIDI/Chanson/Menu.htm>
- [26](#) C.L. Johnson: *Curly's Spooky Halloween Midi Music, 2002-2006*, <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/curly.johnson/midis.html>, visited: 2009-07-14
- [27](#) Michaël Samyn: “HOME”, <http://adaweb.walkerart.org/7EGroupZ/home/home1.html>, 1994
- [28](#) Michaël Samyn: “MIDI TRACKS FROM ZUPER.COM”, <http://entropy8zuper.org/airport/folder/zuper.mid.html>, 1997-1998
- [29](#) Dragan Espenschied: “Zombie and Mummy Theme”, <http://www.zombie-and-mummy.org/theme.mid>, MIDI composition, 2003
- [30](#) W3C: “Introduction to Frames”, <http://www.w3.org/TR/REC-html40/present/frames.html#h-16.1>, 1999
- [31](#) Piet Zwart Institute: “Design Timeline”, <http://www.designtimeline.org/cgi-bin/archive/timeline.cgi?q=22>, 2005



symbolized the landmarks of the web's history. The tribute to wallpapers consisted of a huge board of real wallpaper, (from OBI), arranged in a frame style layout. Even in this simple construction it was clearly the skeleton of a web page.

Although frames aren't widely used anymore they remain a very natural web design element that are even more recognizable than the classic table layout.

## 8

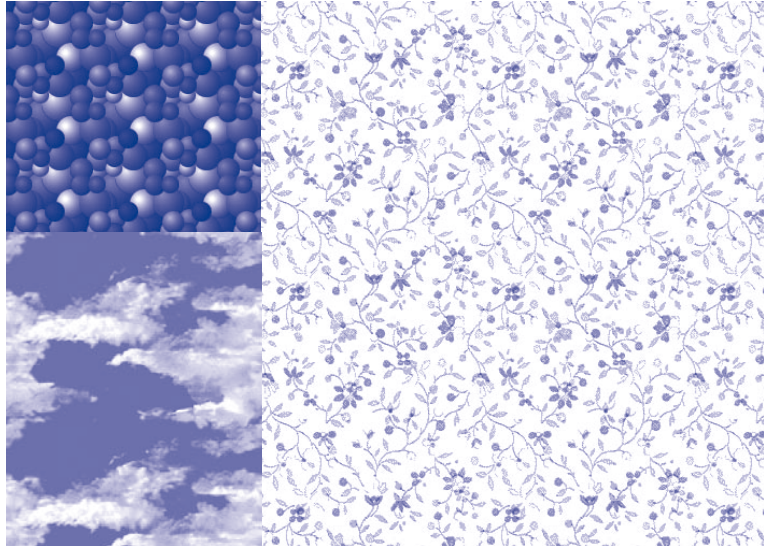
## TILDE

As you know, multiuser Unix machines use “~” as a shortcut to the “/users” directory and in the beginning all users were the same. The tilde in front of names and nicknames manifested the power of machines and the system. You were a user, a guest, something peripheral and only the stuff that followed the tilde belonged to you. You had no influence on the things in front.

The tilde showed hierarchy and made the relationship between users and the internet transparent. A quick glance at the URL and you could see the provider, university or institution that granted access. Getting rid of the tilde was important.

In 1997 I had a job in a design studio in Moscow. Besides money and a few other things, (like a free internet connection), they promised to host my files on the studio server without the tilde in front of my name.

After a year of being [www.cityline.ru/~olialia](http://www.cityline.ru/~olialia) I became [design.ru/olialia](http://design.ru/olialia). They dropped the tilde



and I became part of the team. Drop the tilde and your relation to the words in front isn't that clear anymore.

Back then the next step, (now the first step), was to register your name as a domain. Techni-

complication makes the old fashioned tilde mysterious and sweet like a forbidden fruit. It will soon come back as a sign of being cool and competent.

Actually, the really cool guys never renounced it:

<http://www.well.com/~cuba/>  
<http://www.zi.biologie.uni-muenchen.de/~franke/>  
<http://a-blast.org/~drx/>

cally you're still the same user on a server and your rights are still within the boundaries of a folder but it looks different: your “nick” is really a “name” recognized by the high level DNS. And don't forget that a registered domain promises success in business.

Today, having a tilde in front of your name is especially problematic in Germany because Apple computers don't have it on their keyboard. To type “~” you have to press Alt and N at the same time then release these keys and hit the spacebar. Even those who know the secret never remember it. This

I asked my co-author, the last on the list, “Why are you behind the tilde on a-blast.org when it's your own server?” And the answer is, “The tilde indicates that I am a user on a server computer. If I belong to a server I show where I am and I also talk about my past. Interesting relations are possible in the URL: my private page on a project server, one user in a community, the friend of another friend. This information is available to people that can “read” the URL so I make sure it contains some interesting information. And the word after the tilde



fig.20

is my Login Name. Through this I demonstrate that I can login as well, that I know about FTP, SSH, rsync etc.”

You see, today the sign for user can be read as a sign of being more than an ordinary user.

9

## WELCOME TO MY HOME PAGE

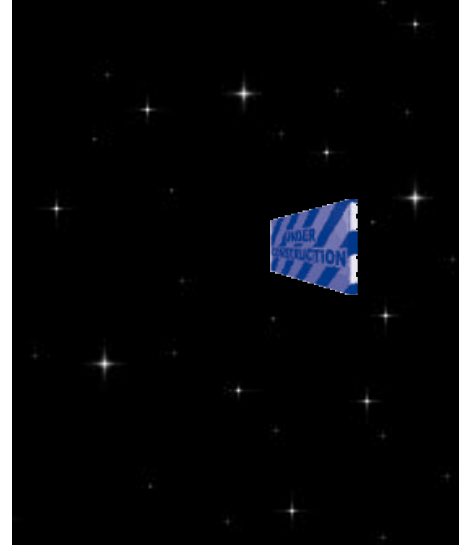
The welcome message is for websites that exist for no other purpose than to say hello to the world. They're extremely personal and truly amateur pages where holiday photos, a CV, free wallpaper collections, recipes, links to “other great cat sites” and “The History of Status Quo” form a pile of mixed up information. Although it's supposed to be just a welcoming message, for experienced users it's a warning that the rest of the website will be of the same informational value.

My surfing experience shows

that there's no real correlation between a welcome message and the quality of a site. In fact, the greeting appears on both useless sites and the very rich. Though I will agree that a lack of structure and higgledy-piggledy content is a characteristic feature of amateur websites.

But in no way is this a negative feature; especially in today's web. Instead, it shows that a real person created the site and not some marketing department or a content management system. This gives the information authenticity and value, and the experience of ten web years has proved that the devotion of one amateur can be worth a dozen specialists on the payroll. For example: fan sites are richer and more up to date than the official sites of stars. And when a stars is not really big, fans' sites are the only hope to get to know anything. Compare for example Bradley James Allan's profile on IMDB with his bio on the Czech fan site -- <http://www.volny.cz/renox/>.

Technical manuals, (with how-to's or tips), made and published by actual users are often more helpful and free of marketing blather than the official ones. And there are in-



stances when you would certainly prefer to deal with real people on-line: local shops, small businesses and hotels.

When you see a site made by the hotel owner, where she writes about her hobbies as well as the hotel facilities and also makes a portrait gallery of local cats and dogs, you think about the high level of personal service at this hotel and -what really makes a difference- you expect that your online order will go directly to the hotel and not to a travel agent (you'll find out if this assumption is true when you arrive). Don't forget the ingredients for amateur productions are not a secret and they can be imitated and faked so don't trust every amateurish looking site.

The “Welcome to my home page” style is attractive and there

are situations when it works the best, occasionally there are no alternatives even if the project isn't a personal home page.

A few examples:

The promo site of BIFI <sup>32</sup>, the producers of a popular German snack, is one of the greatest imitations ever. To really appreciate it you should know the BIFI tv spots; they're a series of episodes about an undefinable factory with bizarre employees. Zomtec.com is the factory's homepage, obviously made by the guys from the tv spots, obviously in their free time. They describe how they make mouth wash, they proudly present their private homepages, publish news that's rarely connected to BIFI and host the BIFI banner. This is a site for crazy folk by crazy folk <sup>fig.20</sup>. To stress this fact, the designer used clumsy framesets, buttons, backgrounds and animated flags. Everything that's fun on the web. The site's constantly updated and a little while ago they made a Flash version. It really looks like somebody's first attempt. It ridicules itself.

The site of Wise County Sheriff's Department in Texas is developed and maintained by Lieutenant Joy and Sergeant Huffman. It's made in Front Page 2000. There's a picture of the Sheriff on the home page that connects to his email address. There are a lot of funny graphics on the page and plenty of important information for the county's citizens. Although the Sheriff's site looks very un-serious and has all the common illnesses associated with amateur sites—like a navigation system copied from another site and adapted to the needs of the police

\* \* \* \* \*

*A note from the 21st of June 2009:*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Actually, some time earlier this year the site was re-made. But in a very special way: backwards. What you see now at <http://www.sheriff.co.wise.tx.us/> looks like it was made in 1994, not 1996: bullets instead of animated GIFs, lists instead of tables.*

\* \* \* \* \*

department—it puts across its message in the best possible way: your Sheriff is here, among you and for you and he knows there are better ways to spend taxpayers money than giving it away to a design agency. The county has a young, new Sheriff this month and I hope he won't try to reorganize and professionalize the site.

Another case, though not really from the web. In January 2005 Cory Arcangel, an artist from New York, opened a show called "Welcome to my Homepage Artshow" <sup>33</sup>. It's a good name for an exhibition of computer work made at home without a team of programmers, designers and managers. It sounds naive but stresses an opposition to complex and expensive media art market productions. The "Welcome to my Homepage Artshow" has a good DIY meaning.

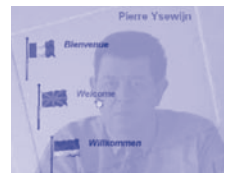
There's another reason why I'd like to foreground the "Welcome to my Home Page" style, and the vernacular web on the whole, as a web design tactic for today: it hasn't discredited itself in the dotcom years and the broadband

boom, so it's not associated with fleeting transience, superficiality and an absence of humour.

In 2004 the art.teleportacia gallery organized the 1000\$ Page Award <sup>34</sup> in order to attract attention to nonprofessional web making, to motivate people to do their own pages and honestly—above all—to see some pages we hadn't seen before.

And there were some nice surprises. Among the portfolios, blogs and web art pieces we found some "welcoming" pages. One of them really charmed us.

Pierre Ysewijn, a Doctor of Psychological and Educational Sciences from Belgium, (living in Switzerland at the moment), put a lot of effort into the welcome message on his personal home page. <sup>35</sup> Mr. Ysewijn welcomes guests with a video clip <sup>fig.21</sup> in either English, German or French. The greeting's spoken by a real person, directly addressing the visitor. It's a very honest start to communication. You can see




<sup>fig.21</sup>

what Mr. Ysewijn looks like, how old he is, how he sounds, how he presents himself. The video puts across a lot of personal information and it upgrades the "Welcome to my home page" into the broadband age. And! For the first time it becomes more than welcoming. Finally, without a doubt, this is a welcome message that became content.

<sup>32</sup> BBH: "ZOMTEC", <http://web.archive.org/web/20050128091451/http://zomtec.com/>  
<sup>34</sup> Olla Lialina: "1000\$ contest for personal home pages", [http://art.teleportacia.org/1000\\$/2004](http://art.teleportacia.org/1000$/2004)  
<sup>35</sup> Pierre Ysewijn: Personal Home Page, <http://mypage.bluewin.ch/Ysewijn/>, offline, 2002-2007



 As you would suppose, at the very end of the page comes the Mail Me button. It's not necessarily a picture, it could be just a text link or not even linked text. The important thing is that it worked.

When the web belonged to amateurs it belonged to the people. You knew that behind this page and email address was a person you could contact with a question, admiration or an insult. And people did. In time the feedback elements on private sites became more modest but they haven't disappeared. They're still present. What has been lost is the custom of sending feedback.

There are many reasons for this but primarily it relates to the above mentioned professionalization and automation of being online, and the transition to more sophisticated forms of interaction and communication: filling in, ordering, updating, repeating passwords, contacting support,

tracking, informing info @ then proceeding to the check out. And of course the reputation of email communication has been heavily damaged by Spam. Today if you're writing to somebody you don't know, you run the risk of having your message diverted by the junk filter on the server, or you can expect to be flooded by Spam after leaving your email address on an unknown site.

The once fascinating option to establish an immediate contact with the author of a site was recently supplanted by blogs. Instead of writing to the author, "Cool site!" you'd be better off putting the note in a blog. It will bring more people to the site and add more notes to more blogs. The counter will show hits but none of the visitors will say anything to you.

Getting emails from visitors to my site is something I really miss, more than starry night backgrounds and clumsy framesets. I know that from time to time the web will look and sound like it did ten years ago. Animated gifs will not be forgotten and at

Christmas Jingle Bells and Celine Dion in MIDI format will be ringing on sites around the world but they will not move you to send an email saying, "What trash! Mer-



ry Christmas!" That's gone and I don't think designers can do anything about it.







# Computer Idioms

When people talk about computers they use a lot of metaphors and idioms. The graphical user interface as well as the command line are full of such "images". It starts with simple things as saying "to throw a file away" (into the "wastebasket") and goes on to processes that have to be "killed" or changes that will be "forgotten".

Such expressions might serve as bridges to understand what is happening inside a computer, however, erroneous metaphors taken too far have caused a lot of trouble. For example:

You shouldn't steal data because you shouldn't steal a car.

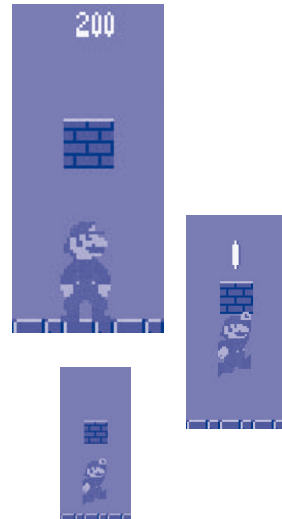
An unlocked car standing around unobserved is like an insecure password.

It would be great if there was a driving license for the internet, so that less accidents happen.

These metaphors popularize a conservative view on digital culture. When computers are continuously explained with analogies to cars, networks to highways, search engines to the human brain, even Email to the classic postal service, the actual properties and possibilities of the computer are lost.

The following examples try to do it the other way round: popularizing idioms and metaphors that come from the computer and refer to the so called real life. This will help restore a healthy balance of cultural exchange from both sides.

*1*  
**"I gonna bang  
 the bricks!"**  
 —  
**I will draw money  
 from an ATM.**



Nintendo: "Super Mario Brothers", 1985

Everybody knows how Mario from the Super Mario Brothers gets his money: he bangs against a block of bricks with his head or his fist. In real life you can say that you "bang the bricks" if you go to an ATM to draw money from your bank account.

Through this you can not only express your taste in video games,

but also hint to the fact that ATMs are themselves computers that operate by arbitrary rules. They could theoretically run any software with any interface. Maybe soon you will be able to play Super Mario on them, and if you win your mortgage rate will be lowered.

<sup>2</sup>  
*"That lady was  
 bitmapped!"*  
 —  
*That woman was  
 stupid.*

In 2001, Dwayne from the programming ensemble Beige asked a woman in a Chicago Transit Authority booth what train to take to get home. The woman did not know anything and gave him completely wrong directions. Later Dwayne said "That lady was bitmapped," a nice way of belittling her intellectual capabilities.

Bitmaps are computer graphics that are composed from only two colors. Every pixel's color is determined by just one bit. For example, if the bit is zero the pixel is white, if it is one it is black. Today's computer images use at least 24 bits for every pixel, what we call "true color." Given that this was the case by 2001, calling somebody bitmapped could be considered a proper insult even back then. The image of a brain as a bitmapped image is a good expression for simple-mindedness.

Now follows an image of one of the most well known bitmapped women ever:

Susan Kare: "Woodcut", demo picture for MacPaint, 1983



This bitmap was created in 1983 by Susan Kare, the main graphic designer of the Apple Macintosh's user interface. Miss Kare is anything but bitmapped.

<sup>3</sup>  
*"I defragged  
 all morning,"*  
 —  
*I pretended  
 to work.*

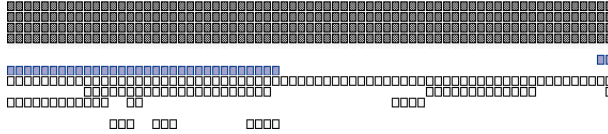
"Fragging" an enemy in a shooter game means to kill it, to blow it into pieces.

But there is also defragging, an activity mostly conducted in offices: employees are not actually working but just pretending to do so.

The term refers to "defragmenting the file system", a maintenance function built into Microsoft Windows. Originally it was serving the purpose of optimizing how the content of files is laid-out on the harddisk by moving parts of the same file close together. This way the read/write head

of the harddisk wouldn't have to move so much. If management personal were to drop by and see the defragmentation running, they wouldn't notice that no work is being done.

This worked so well because managers, of course, lack any technical knowledge, and the classic defrag



Microsoft: Harddisk Defragmentation, Windows 98 SE, 1999

*“The blocks didn't  
fall right.”*

*—*

*Something did  
not work out as  
planned.*

Tetris is one of the most played games of all time. The player is up against a (pseudo) random generator that determines what kind of “block” will be the next to fall down. And when the blocks do not fall right, there is nothing else for the player to do than taking it with pride and try to close the gap later on. (Or play in a way so that no matter what block falls, there will always be a place for it, right!)



Dragon Espenschied: "Bad Tetris",  
Microsoft Paintbrush, 2007

visualization in Windows 95 and 98 looked really complicated and active.

In later versions of Windows the visualization changed to boring and useless lines. But history demands that you should still use the verb defragging when you are pretending to work, no matter what tactics you apply.

Tetris has been used many times as an analogy for life. For example:

- × *Life is a Tetris game. Too many*
- × *unexpected shapes then you might*
- × *be finished, but try to enjoy it*
- × *and score big number at the same*
- × *time.*
- ×

nymocess: "Tetris Life",  
<http://nymocess.blogspot.com/2008/11/tetris-life.html>, 2008, now offline

Or:

- × *Life*
- × *is like the game Tetris*
- × *with the colored blocks*
- × *each representing your*
- × *responsibilities*
- × *and things that must be done.*
- × *Hence,*
- × *if you keep things in order,*
- × *the lines are cleared*
- × *and life is good*
- × *but when the blocks stack up*
- × *and you slack off*
- × *the blocks build*
- × *until they hit the top*

x and guess what?  
 x You just lost2  
 x

WasianShelky06: Tetris Life Poem,  
<http://www.quizilla.com/poems/3480197/tetris-life>, 2006

Or:

x "Do you remember my favorite  
 x game, Tetris? Well, I work with  
 x time like I play the game Tetris."  
 x Pieces are always falling, it never  
 x stops. Sometimes you get an in-  
 x dication of what's coming, because  
 x at the right of the screen there's  
 x a picture of the next falling piece,  
 x but when the pieces pick up speed  
 x you often have no time even to  
 x look over to see what's coming.  
 x You simply have to fit them all into  
 x place as they are falling at a  
 x frenzied pace. "This," she said,  
 x "is how I manage time."  
 x

Dave Turo-Shields: "Playing Tetris with  
 Time Management", <http://www.selfgrowth.com/articles/Turo-Shields9.html>, 2007

Clearly Tetris needs to be used as an idiom as often as possible.

Interestingly, newer variants of Tetris have an additional story, with anthropomorphic cubes called "Minos" and blocks called "Tetrions." These more detailed efforts never caught on however because these new stories took away too much of the game's associative potential. Tetris is better as a projection ground for our real lives than for Roger Dean type fantasy worlds.

THQ: Tetris Worlds "Minos", 2006, formerly found at <http://www.thq.com/gamesites/tetrisworlds/story.html>, now removed, probably because of embarrassment.



*5*  
*"It's a norton thing."*  
 —  
*I'm of two minds about this.*



Many computer users are concerned about the dangers "viruses" and "worms" are causing for the Internet. They read in computer magazines and witness on TV news that new threats are always appearing and that their personal computer is under constant attack.

Some are driven into the arms of Peter Norton, a software publisher that earned his reputation in the 1980s with Norton Commander, a software that could almost make you think MS-DOS was an operating system.

But this was a long time ago. Today you can ask yourself if it is worse to have your computer slowed down by a virus itself or by Norton AntiVirus, a software so heavy and baroque that it makes the latest Quad Core processors scream. A virus at least needs your computer to send spam messages and therefore keeps a minimum level of operability. Norton AntiVirus just makes sure nothing works anymore, including viruses.

Norton, once the synonym for enhancing your computing experience, has become an icon of the schizophrenic logic of software business that once you really solve a problem you destroyed your own job: If AntiVirus would be able to exterminate the threat of viruses once and for all, everybody would stop buying updates.

Use Norton to express ambivalence, inner conflict, split personality and day-to-day self-deception.



This is a screenshot of the ancient Norton Commander, taken 1995. Its killer feature was to split the text-only display of MS-DOS into two pseudo windows. This clearly shows that dispartment has always been at the core of the Norton product line.

6

***"Let's enlarge."***

***—  
Committing a  
small sin***

A system administrator working for a large company once told me the fol-

Hooy Program: "DUPA BISKUPA OR  
MATKA Z KATKA",  
ZX Spectrum Demo, 2002,  
<http://hooyprogram.republika.pl/>

lowing story: If the IT staff was about to decide whether to buy licenses for a new piece of software, they would first use a cracked version to try it out.

They called this process enlarging because there were always numerous advertisements for medical products to enlarge certain male body parts on the well known Armenian website where they got their cracks.

The saying went: "Before we buy it, we should enlarge it."

To crack the copy protection of commercial software is not exactly a legal activity, but the IT staff felt little guilt. They fully intended to buy large amounts of licenses after this evaluation process. The small sin they committed would lead to a greater good. If something is isolegally in doubt on the Internet it will be very likely combined with enlargement offers. This common knowledge should finally enter everyday language.

You can use to enlarge in a sympathetic way for any activity that is a small sin. For example you can say "I enlarged the CD for you," "Alice enlarged during the exam" or "I had to enlarge my iPod® to get my songs back."





*5*  
***"Read my blog!"***  
 —  
***Get lost!***

You can use "Read my blog!" to end any ongoing face to face conversation. It expresses that someone is getting on your nerves and you no longer want to spend more time in conversation with them. It also suggests that your conversation partner should switch from personal communication to a mass medium. Before the internet came along, celebrities could say things like "I to go, why you read up on in Vanity Fair? Today everybody can act with the same arrogance by quickly setting up one's very own mass medium! Praise progress!



only say have don't me Bye!"

Unknown Artist: "Rotating Globe", unknown year

*7*  
***"I need to underclock."***  
 —  
***Time for holidays!***

Most "knowledge workers" of "our information society" face a lot of stress. The cellphone always rings and the emails constantly arrive, then the WLAN is down, airplanes are late, and the video projector's lamp breaks just before the important PowerPoint® presentation.

When it all gets too much it's time to relax. Unfortunately the word "relax" has been a bit spoiled by its use in the

wellness industry. And some IT professionals wouldn't like their colleagues imagining them laying in a hot tub with slices of cucumber on the eyelids.

This is where the word "underclocking" can help out. Overclocking means to run a computer processor at a higher speed than it was intended by modifying hardware or toggling switches in hidden menus: Only for real phreax! So underclocking is the way for the competent computer user to chill out a bit, and make everything go slower.

You might express your need to underclock on Fridays, after Xmas or when an tight project deadline was met.

Neal Bridges: "AfterBurner", Palm Pilot Software, 1999

**Benchmark**

Relative timings:

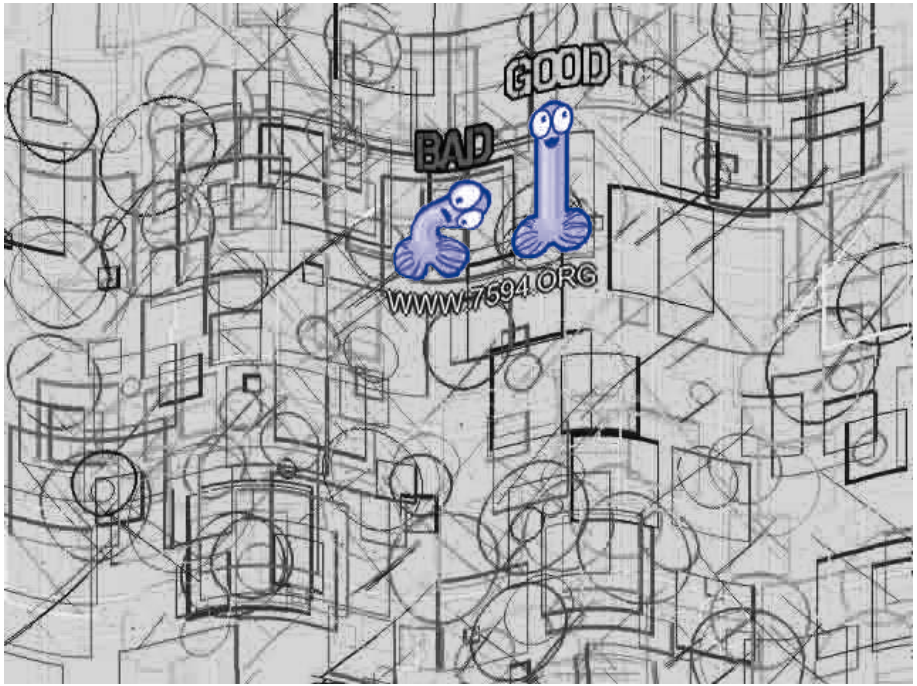
512K Pilot 43%  
 Standard Palm III/Pro 91%  
 Standard Palm IIIx/V 100%  
 Palm IIIx/V + StreakHack 108%  
 This unit 255%

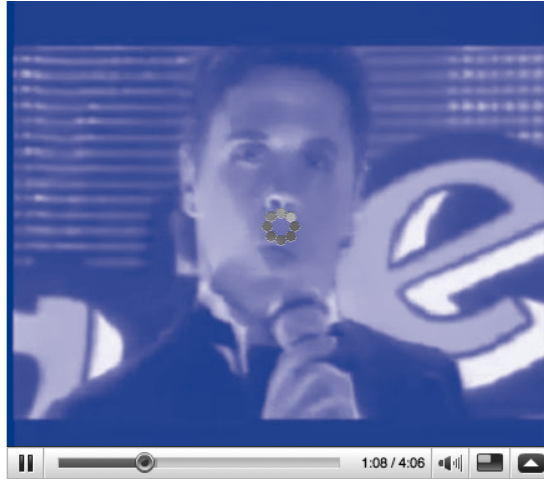
**AfterBurner Hack**

Slowest	18 Mhz	24 Mhz
13 Mhz	19 Mhz	25 Mhz
14 Mhz	20 Mhz	26 MHz
15 Mhz	21 Mhz	27 Mhz
Normal	22 Mhz	28 MHz
17 Mhz	23 Mhz	Fastest

16580 kHz

Suggestions for more idioms are happily received at [drx@a-blast.org](mailto:drx@a-blast.org)  
 Text by Dragan Espenschied, 2007







**CONG  
RATUL  
ATIONS!**



V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

C I A L I S

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

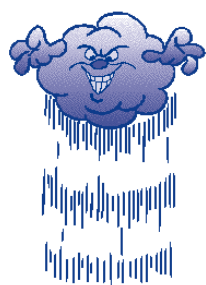
V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

V I A G R A

G I R L V I A G R A

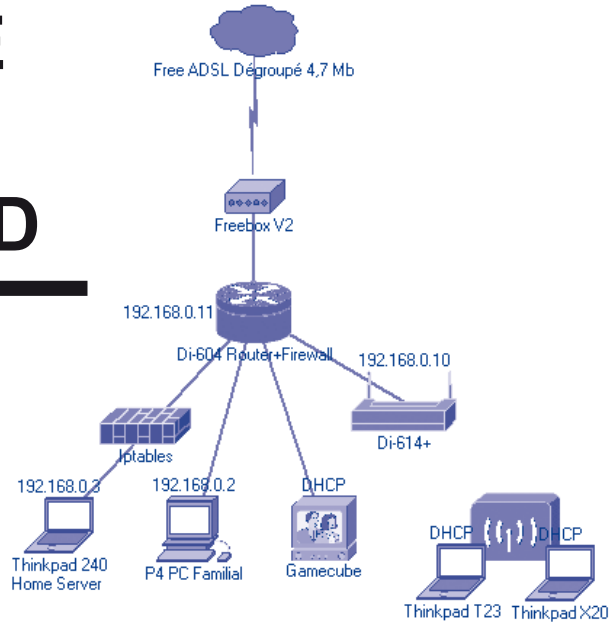


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# WHO ELSE IS THE CLOUD

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BY OLIA LIALINA, 2008



Since the beginning of time, in a typical network diagram, the Internet is represented as a cloud. In 2008 this fact was used to describe a new trend —

### *The Cloud.*

The Cloud eventually replaced the less than elegant Web 2.0. But that is not all. It is enthusiastically used as a new synonym for the Internet and represents our new understanding of what the networks of networks should be like.

The new buzzword is indeed beautiful, it doesn't even compare with the techy sounding Web 2.0, and this time it is actually a well defined technical term, meaning "computing provided as

online utility". The Cloud — is charming and, I'd even say, sedative.

Cloud earned its positive image with Internet users in the times when they were the person of the year. In 2006 ... It stands for an Internet of peers. The Cloud is the Internet that belongs to us, because we build the network with our good enough content, powerful enough computers and valuable enough data. It is programmed by us and that's why "*it's even more personal than the PC on your Desk*" as Nicholas Carr writes it in his great book "The Big Switch." carr, ...

Tag clouds stand for folksonomy, infoclouds for distributed knowledge, and so on. In their 2006 paper *Theses*

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In 2006, Time Magazine declared that "You", a user of the Internet, is the person of the year.  
Carr, Nicholas: "The Big Switch",  
W.W. Norton & Co., 2008

on Distributed Aesthetics. Or, What a Network is Not, Geert Lovink and Anna Munster expand on the positive meaning of the cloud to its extreme, suggesting:

*[w]e should be wary of techno-con-  
tractions like "social software" that sug-  
gest technology glues us humans togeth-  
er (again). Instead, we should read - and  
enjoy - networks as info-clouds that  
cover the sun. They disperse the bright  
light of broadcasting media. Anna ...*

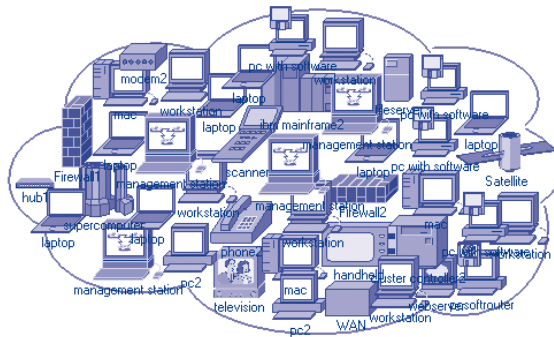
In The Big Switch Nicholas Carr is very aware about The Cloud's (or an anticipated "World Wide Computer"'s) potential for control, alienation and exploitation. But at the same time he, quoting Google's CEO, gives the following uncritical description of what The Cloud is:

*Back in the 90es Sun Microsystems  
coined the Marketing slogan "The Net-*

*work is a Computer" [...] Today Sun's slo-  
gan suddenly makes sense. It describes  
what computing has become, or is becom-  
ing, for all of us. [...]*

*Eric Schmidt, who was still employed  
by Sun back when it came up with its  
prophetic slogan, has a different term  
for the World Wide Computer. He calls  
it "the computer in the cloud". What he  
means is that computing, as we experi-  
ence it today, no longer takes a fixed,  
concrete form. It occurs in the internet's  
ever-shifting "cloud" of data, software  
and devices. Our personal computer, not  
to mention our BlackBerry, our mobile  
phone, our gaming console, and any other  
networked gadgets we use, is just another  
molecule of the cloud, another node  
in the vast computer network. Fulfilling  
Napster's promise, our PC have merged  
with all the other devices on the Inter-  
net... Carr, Nicholas: The Big ...*

This scenario can be translated back to a network diagram like this (here, we are the cloud):



THE INTERNET

But, paradoxically, The Cloud means exactly the opposite. The best sign of this paradox is Chris Anderson's flaming speech in an editorial in July 2008's Wired. He stated that we live in the Petabyte Age, that Petabytes don't

fit on hard disks and disks arrays, and that we ran out of organizational analogies. His solution (as expressed in his book The Long Tail Chris Anderson: "The ...) was to use the power of users and their computers, now the answer is The

Anna Munster & Geert Lovink: "Theses on Distributed Aesthetics. Or, What a Network is Not", [http://journal.fibre-culture.org/issue7/issue?\\_munster\\_lovink.html](http://journal.fibre-culture.org/issue7/issue?_munster_lovink.html), 2006

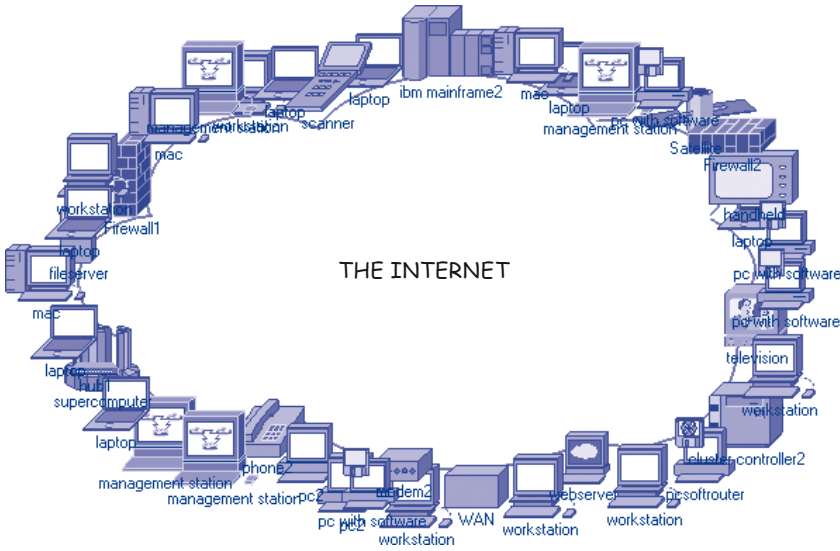
Carr, Nicholas: "The Big Switch", M.W. Norton & Co., 2008, p.113  
Chris Anderson: "The Long Tail", Hyperion, 2006



Cloud. But this time, The Cloud is not YOU or your tail, but the "cluster of 1,600 processors, several terabytes of memory, and hundreds of terabytes of storage, along with the software, includ-

ing IBM's Tivoli and open source versions of Google File System and MapReduce." Chris Anderson: "The End ..."

Translated back to a network diagram:



What we witness now is a shift in the interests of IT giants towards presenting their online capabilities as an inclusive utility, and their intention to put equal signs in between Internet and their service. Internet = Google's Cloud, Internet = Apple's Cloud, Internet = Facebook's cloud. Amazon allows customers to rent virtual computers on which to run their own applications with their Amazon Elastic Compute Cloud (Amazon EC2). [http:// ...](http://...)

Apple draws their collection of online services and software as a Cloud. see <figure: ...>

Erick Schmid is quoted in Business Week saying that "Google aspires to be a large portion of the cloud, or a cloud that you would interact with every day." Stephen ... Nicholas Carr thinks about Google's browser project that Chrome is the first cloud browser. Nicholas Carr: "The cloud's ..."

With Web 2.0 the question was what is it. With The Cloud, who will it be.



figure: <http://www.apple.com/mobileme/>, September 2008  
<http://aws.amazon.com/ec2/>

Chris Anderson: "The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete", [http://www.wired.com/science/discoveries/magazine/16-07/pb\\_theory](http://www.wired.com/science/discoveries/magazine/16-07/pb_theory), 2008  
Stephen Baker: "Google and the Wisdom of Clouds", [http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/07\\_52/b4064048925836.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/07_52/b4064048925836.htm), 2007  
Nicholas Carr: "The cloud's Chrome lining", [http://www.roughtype.com/archives/2008/09/the\\_clouds\\_chro.php](http://www.roughtype.com/archives/2008/09/the_clouds_chro.php), 2008

## INTRO BOX

In most people's minds, Apple's iMac series represents the closest thing to an invisible computer one can buy. It is a system inside a flat screen. iMac stands suspended gracefully in mid-air Y, it's a computer without a computer. Z

## FOREIGN IMAGE MATERIAL ATTRIBUTION BOX

- Ⓧ Title image: Apple Inc., 2004
- Ⓧ fashion: made with Web2.0 logo generator
- Ⓧ Excerpt from Commodore 64 print advertisement: Commodore Computers, 1982
- Ⓧ Apple Lisa promotion photo: Apple Inc, 1983
- Ⓧ Sad man and happy man in an airplane: Polymervision, 2006
- Ⓧ Doctor with hard disk: Norton Disk Doctor, 1991, Symantec; annotated
- Ⓧ Bluetooth mouse table: Apple Inc, 2004; rotated
- Ⓧ Office picture: ALPS, 2006; cable animation added
- Ⓧ Bubbles and shadows: Bubbles, Münch & Furukama, 2000
- Ⓧ Dotty text excerpts from Origami Project, Microsoft, 2005

## FOOTNOTES BOX

- X Peter Glaser: Das Elektronische Papier, Grimme Insitut, 1991, [http://www.trust-us.ch/contrib/glaser/e\\_papier.html](http://www.trust-us.ch/contrib/glaser/e_papier.html)
- Y Apple Inc: The all new iMac G5, 2004, <http://web.archive.org/web/20040901010300/http://www.apple.com/imac/>
- Z Neil McIntosh: "Apple unveils the computer without a computer", The Guardian, 2004, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2004/sep/01/digitalmedia.app1>



The home computer is physically vanishing.

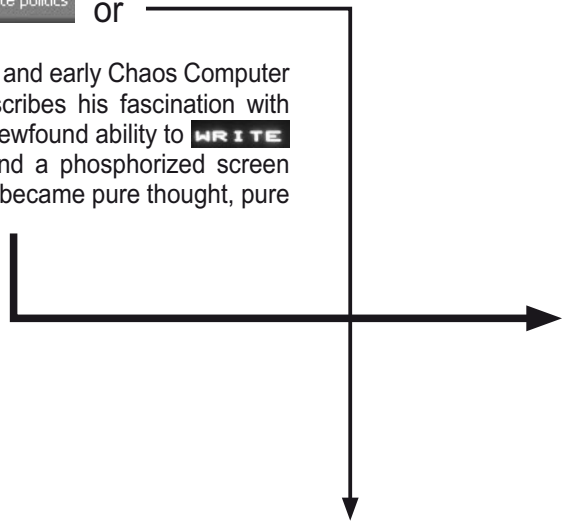
The home computer is comprised of several interfaces: some software, some hardware. While it is widely assumed that the goal of these interfaces is to expose the computing capabilities of the system to its user, these interfaces simultaneously attempt to transform the image of the machine itself.

These interface designs are not only driven by technical necessity and engineering decisions, but also by

**fashion** <sup>BETA</sup>, current visions of the **future**,

corporate politics or

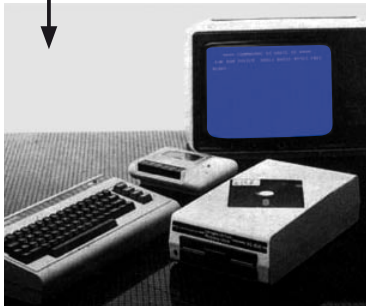
For example, the Austrian born author and early Chaos Computer Club member Peter Glaser frequently describes his fascination with early home computers as the result of the newfound ability to **WRITE WITH LIGHT** x With a cathode ray and a phosphorized screen (also known as monitor or TV tube), writing became pure thought, pure data—freed from physical constraints!!



Letters that appeared from out of thin air on a TV seemed to be the aesthetic representation of computing principles. Indeed thoughts, logic and information are all bodiless, so the computer should probably be bodiless as well—this machine is mind, not body. To achieve complete freedom, like in free thought, the tangible form of the computer has to vanish.

This wish, that home computers should become invisible has always been the case.

The legendary Commodore 64 is presented in a clear and sorted look in many advertisements of the 1980s. The actual working machine in real live would appear much more messy due to a large amount of cables.



On this picture we see a later model of the same system plus:

1. power strip
2. TV power cable
3. computer AC adaptor with one cable from the power strip and one to the computer
4. floppy drive AC adaptor with one cable from the power strip and one to the floppy drive
5. serial connection cable in between computer and floppy
6. video connection cable in between computer and TV (with an adaptor)
7. cable in between joystick and computer
8. (yet, there is no tape drive!)

As troublesome as it appears, such a setup communicates rough knowledge to the user about how the system works and its different components. It is easy to exchange them or look inside.

But this chaos does not look exactly like disembodiment. The solution for such cable discomfort was to integrate as many peripherals as possible into one case and limit the number of input devices.



Apple's Lisa is offering her keyboard and the never before seen mouse to the user. All the other parts of the machine, where data is actually being processed, are kept at a distance, in the box.

So the computer was divided into input devices and "the box." But this box was still too big. The biggest part was the cathode ray monitor. A 21 inch model would even make scary sounds when switched on. Electrons and magnetic fields were audible!

there  
mecha-  
work.  
and  
disk drives emit funny ticks  
when active and constantly  
running cooling fans for hot  
processors are regarded as  
annoying.



MOVING PARTS!  
good that an EXPERT  
is in the house!!!!

**BUT**  
are still  
nics at  
Diskette  
hard

**FLAT  
TFT  
SCREENS  
SOLVED  
THIS  
PROBLEM.**



Any sign of the computer working hard is unbearable. Mechanical noise is especially despised as it reminds us of mechanical parts. Everybody knows that the computer operates with nothing, with "ones and zeros." The noise distracts from this ideal picture.

This is why processors with passive cooling and fan-less cases are becoming more popular.

See  
"INTRO BOX"  
p.50

Concerning the wires: Infrared or bluetooth keyboards and mice are transmitting their information through the air. Of course they need their own batteries or power adaptors for recharging — so basically the same amount of cables is present — but these facts can be brushed under the carpet. It is not difficult to understand why "wireless" became the synonym for "wireless networking": data running through cables was already difficult to grasp, it's just natural that now it floats around everywhere like Ether. Finally, real computers are like the dreams of 1980s print advertisements!

Order number	M9269ZM/A
Technology	Bluetooth Wireless
Power source	Uses 2 AA Lithium Non-Rechargeable Batteries (included), on/off switch
Cables	None



However there is still room for reduction! Pure ideas and the computer are separated by having to press buttons on devices in order to operate the thing! **NAUSEATING!** Shouldn't it be more *intuitive*?

Pentop computers that operate completely on writing recognition and touchscreen interfaces will finally do away with grimy keyboards.

**BUT** wait,  
isn't the keyboard the way to escape pre-programmed paths, as it enables the user to write code? Writing code is the deepest interaction possible

with a computer!

While it is still necessary to have a computer nearby, people can appear computerless by hiding the box and connecting it to a video projector. This is especially popular with airy art installations utilizing computer image projection and camera tracking. Camera tracking also means that people can wave their limbs in the air instead of touching devices. Now that is intuitive.



Wonderful,

i am everywhere you are

but never in the way

i keep you connected...

and entertained

but, can you finally  
write with light?



Executive directors of the net label  
upitup write their names with torch  
lights in a PIPS:lab installation, 2006

Our fascination and enthusiasm for computers as tools to (digitally) “write with light” has ultimately led to the fantasy that they should go away again—as the ultimate fulfillment of their purpose.

However, as soon as computers disappear, when only the output of data being processed can be “experienced,” when all physical burden (including ownership) is taken from the user, computers must still exist somewhere else, just away from our line of sight. Probably in a noisy data-center full of glowing hot processors and spinning hard disks. And our “bodiless data” will be stored within.

Text by Dragan Espenschied, 2008







**IN THE BEGINNING THIS ARTICLE WAS AN "INDEX.HTML" SAVED IN THE "GLITTER" FOLDER. THEN IT GOT THE WORKING TITLE "THE WORK OF USERS IN TIMES OF PERFECT TEMPLATES." THEN IT BECAME "RICH USER EXPERIENCE FOR THE POOR" AND WAS PRESENTED AT THE NEW NETWORK THEORY CONFERENCE >> [more](#) IN AMSTERDAM. AFTER THE PRESENTATION, UCSB PROFESSOR ALAN LUI SUGGESTED TO RENAME IT TO "HOMESICK." BUT FOR THE MOMENT I'LL LEAVE IT AS**

>> <http://www.networkcultures.org/networktheory/>

# A VERNACULAR WEB 2

BY OLIA LIALINA

August, 2007

Two years ago I wrote an article titled "A Vernacular Web", in which I tried to collect, classify and describe the most important elements of the early Web, visual as well as acoustic, the habits of first Web users, and their ideas of harmony and order. I'm talking about everything that became a subject of mockery by the end of the last century when professional designers arrived, everything that fell out of use and turns up every now and again as the elements of "retro" look in site design or in the works of artists exploring the theme of "digital folklore": the "Under Construction" signs, outer space backgrounds, MIDI-files, collections of animated web graphics and so on. >> [more](#)



>> If you are missing the way pages looked before, you should install The Timemachine Firefox Add-on by Tobias Leingruber. <http://timemachine.6x.to/> Read more on the project on page XXX of the book



And today, in the end of June 2007, when we hear of amateur culture more often than ever before, the cultural influence of “Welcome to My Home Page” web pages looks especially interesting. People who created them and their ideas of what the Web is, how it can be used and how the pages should look, these people’s likes and mistakes gave today’s Web its current shape.

To me, what defines the history of Web is not just the launch dates of new browsers or services, not just the dot-com bubbles appearing or bursting, but also the appearance of a blinking yellow button that said “New!” or the sudden mass extinction of starry wall-papers

The relationship between ordinary users and the Web of the 90’s is a very interesting subject to study, because it’s a relationship filled with love, hate, all kinds of drama – in other words, it’s a full-blown relationship between a new medium and its first users, a relationship that’s exalted, complex, sometimes silly – whatever it is, all that matters is that it existed.

Today, that relationship is gone. And for a good reason. The space that we’ve understood as a new medium for the last ten years has turned into the most mass medium of them all. Nothing more than a mass medium, permeating our daily lives to the point of becoming invisible. Its numerous users are busy working, having a good time or expressing themselves, and they have almost perfect tools and services at their disposal. Connection never breaks and the distinctions between a server and a hard disk, between your desktop and that of another person has almost vanished. There’s nothing that could contribute to the development of user-media relationship, nothing to provoke us.

Web 2.0 propagandists can’t stop talking about the multitude and power of today’s web amateurs, the new users who love to dance, compose songs, write encyclopedic articles, take photos and film videos, write texts and publish it all on the Web. And yet, these users are rather indifferent to the Web itself.

So, here’s the question: how does the Web look now, when it’s no longer seen as the technology of the future, when it’s intertwined with our daily lives and filled by people who are not excited by the mere fact of its existence?

At a first glance, this question looks like a purely aesthetic one. One might think it’s almost unimportant. But in fact, nothing demonstrates the state of the Web in general and the state of its services, in particular the ones that follow the Web 2.0 ideology, as clearly as the style and look of ordinary users’ home pages.





## 2 Garden Gnomes

I guess I took it a bit too far when I called them “home pages.” Home pages no longer exist. Instead, there are other genres: accounts, profiles, journals, personal spaces, channels, blogs and homes. I’d like to pay special attention to the latter ones.

Professional web developers and designers scorned home pages (namely, personal home pages) starting in the mid-90’s. In a 1998 interview to W3J, Tim Berners-Lee formulated his attitude on private home pages:

“They may call it a home page, but it’s more like the gnome in somebody’s front yard than the home itself.”

Pioneer of Russian web designer, Artemi Lebedev, included home pages and their creators in his hate list [» more](#), next to boiled onions and the Caps Lock key. Two years ago, the Dutch interaction designer Hayo Wagenaar, with whom I shared a panel at the Decade of Webdesign [» more](#) conference, flung this remark:

“The question is, what do we think of amateurs getting involved in web design? It feels like getting stuck on the highway behind a caravan.”

Little by little, home pages became the lowest possible lifeform on the Web – it became terminally uncool, and in the end, useless to have one. Now, if you want to expose yourself to the world simply and effectively, you’re supposed to go to a site specifically designed for this purpose. The new generation of Web users create accounts, profiles, journals, spaces, channels, or blogs. Even the old generation had to move.

I’m far from imagining this process as painful and dramatic, though there are examples that cause mixed feelings – like, for instance, when the heroes of the 90’s such as Peter Pan convert their pages [» more](#) to another format [» more](#), to the language of MySpace.

It’s worth noting, and can be of special interest for designers, that home pages in the other sense – meaning first pages of sites or projects – lost their significance as well. Nobody really needs them anymore. They have been replaced by a modest-looking Google start page, which wraps itself around every website like a dust jacket.



» <http://tema.ru/hate/>

» <http://www.decadeofwebdesign.org/sessions.html>



» <http://pixyland.org/peterpan/>

» <http://www.myspace.com/randyconstanpeterpan>



Interestingly, even though home pages no longer exist, every other service invites its users to re-create the feel of a home page, offers ways to personalize their space quickly and easily.

In March this year iGoogle, formerly known as Google Personalized Homepage, announced six new themes for their users: Seasonal Scape, Tea House, Bus Stop and others. On this occasion, Jessica Ewing, Google Product Manager, wrote in the official Google blog [« more »](#) :

<http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2007/03/personality-goes-long-way.html> <<

“... you can choose between the classic theme and the six new themes we’ve designed. We hope this feature makes the Google homepage feel a little more like, well, home.”



Why does Google want us to feel like home on their pages? Not to bind us to themselves, that’s for sure. They don’t need that; they’ve already got us hooked. When they offer me to “feel at home”, they mean something different. They mean home as opposed to work. What they’re saying is “Relax, have fun. Play around while we work. We are professionals; you are amateurs.”

Although referring specifically to Creative Commons licenses, I still want to quote Geert Lovink from his preface to “Zero Comments”:

“The exclusive focus on young and innocent amateurs that just want to have fun, and the resentment against professionals is not accidental. Amateurs are less likely to stand up and claim a part of the fast increasing surplus value (both symbolical and in real money term) that the Internet is creating.” [« more »](#)

p... in Zero Comments: <<  
 Blogging and Critical Internet  
 Culture by Geert Lovink,  
 Routledge, 2007, p.xiii

It might sound paradoxical, but by encouraging the user to “feel at home” services create more distance between the users and themselves. Simplistic, silly graphics, senseless gadgets, customized pages with virtual puppies and kittens of the day heaped together with CNN news and bites of wisdom from Oprah – all of that subtly serves to show the user his proper place.





It would be futile to compete with iGoogle in absurdity, but I think that a young artist Helene Dams managed to put it very well in her work iGnomes >> [more](#) . Ten years later, Tim Berners-Lee’s caustic remark “But it’s more like the gnome in somebody’s front yard than the home itself” acquired a new sense. It is also clear now who owns the home with the garden and who are the gnomes grimacing on a manicured lawn in the company of plaster ducks and real flowers.

>> see page 272

US artist and blogger Tom Moody responded to the announcement of Vernacular Web 2 on Nastynets:

I wonder if there are class elements at work, too. In America poor people often have yards full of junk and the rich aspire to the “spare artist loft” look. Amateurs can’t hire their own CSS designers and end up filling up their pages with those garden gnomes because they don’t know any better. Whereas a website with money backing hires an “interior decorator” whose first instinct is to get rid of all the junk. >> [more](#)



>> Complete thread at <http://nastynets.com/?p=817#comments>

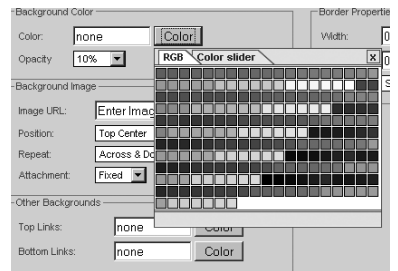
### 3 Translucency

If you look at the most viewed layouts on MySpace, you’ll notice that most of them have a big picture as a background, which repeats itself horizontally and vertically. This back-to-1996 design flaw is now forever linked to Web and amateur users, and nobody cares about eliminating it – neither services nor users themselves.

When browsing through MySpace user profiles, YouTube user channels and user accounts in the English-speaking cluster of LiveJournal, it’s impossible not to notice how alike they look and how they resemble their Web 1.0 predecessors. Despite the diversity of multimedia elements, new graphics, design styles, and new tools, non-professional user pages differ from the professional ones just as clearly as a decade and a half ago.

The main difference is that professional pages mimic the look of other media, and amateur ones are tied to HTML-based aesthetics, which is based on modular approach.

If in the 90’s professional web design imitated existing paper or screen designs, Web 2.0 tries to mimic iPods and other gadgets born in the beginning of the third millennium. The essential web



Sherry Turkle: "The Second Self", MIT Press, 2005. p.9





Noah Wardrip-Fruin & Nick Montfort: "The New Media Reader", The MIT Press, 2003

look now, just as it was back then, consists of a background with blocks of graphics, videos and text superimposed upon it, with no clear structure to bring it all together.

In 1991, before the web, J.David Bolter noticed in "Writing Space: The Computer Hypertext and the History of Writing":

Typographers and graphic designers who complain about the mess that naive users make on their terminal screens are themselves children of a different technology and are apt to judge the computers writing and drawing space in the wrong terms. [« more](#)

So, user profiles have kept their legacy and followed a certain tradition, whether intentionally or not. But there's a new distinctive feature I'd like to investigate. Sites are becoming translucent. Since recently, the Myspace profile editor allows to set opacity for blocks on the page from 10 to 100%; YouTube offers their users a 50 to 100% transparency option when designing their channels.

It's hard to pass on such a great offer. An effect that takes minutes to achieve with Adobe products can be achieved on the Web in milliseconds. At the expense of usability, pages acquire a haunted, immaterial look.

See-through amateur sites in a way follow the trend in contemporary interface style very well, which is all about taking user interface farther away from the old "desktop" metaphor, and making it look light, almost ethereal.

As we know, in the area of Human Computer Interface studies the term "transparency" has a meaning opposite to that in optics and common speech—even though the term was borrowed from optics(which, often leads to ambiguity and misunderstanding). But the most serious problem is that systems that are genuinely light, intuitive and transparent from a developers' or interface designers' point of view are not counting on users' competence and ability to see and understand how things work.

In 2004 Sherry Turkle noted in the introduction to the special edition of "The Second Self":

Macintosh meaning of the word transparency had become a new lingua franca. By the mid 1990s when people said that a system was transparent they meant that they could immediately make it work, not that they knew how it works. [« more](#)



**Advanced Design Customization**

Customize your channel further by entering your own colors and styles below.

Background Color:  [Pick](#)  
 Background Image (URL):   
 Repeat Background Image:  Yes  No  
 Link Color:  [Pick](#)  
 Label Color:  [Pick](#)  
 Transparency Level:  %  
 Font:





These thoughtlessly translucent sites that take 30 seconds to design, even though the user has no idea of how it really works, is a great illustration of the transparency concept in HCI in general.



And the aforementioned professional look of the Web 2.0 – the “glossy round edged style” that has become the talk of the town and provoked many parodies – is based on translucency as well. In this case it follows a trend in contemporary electronic gadget design and imitates Apple’s cool and expensive candy-colored plastics.

I can imagine that in the near future “translucency” may become a term just as contradictory as “transparency” is now due to the phenomena that inspire web makers today: ethereal desktops and glossy plastics.



These and other topics need further exploration I wasted that time staring at Glitter Graphics.

## 5 Glitter

If you ever talked about the Web with me – or talked with me at all – you probably know that my favorite thing in the world are animated GIF files and starry sky wallpapers, preferably animated as well. I just like the way they look, and I like them as a reminder of fun times when the users made a travesty out of the worldwide digital network.

The online life of a today’s user is full of diverse attractions, and yet it follows very strict standards. It is disciplined and formalized. There is a particular service offered for every format a user may want to share with the world, a community for every interest, a network for every social group. And mash ups for artists, and SL for 3D and furies. And there is something for animated GIF makers, too – there are glitter graphics generators and collections of ready-made graphics.







2

## I'll skip several big subjects

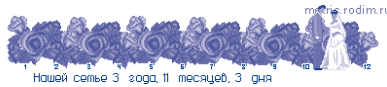
Animated cursors: a phenomenon equally ridiculous and dangerous.



Unfinished research on the topic of cats in today's Web. They are becoming so important that in the nearest future conferences binded with Internet subjects will have to announce LOLCats << more or Kitten of the Day panels to discuss things that really matter.



Relationships, Marriage, Pregnancy, Breastfeeding, Child age calendars, as an ultimate form of life visualization in online communities and diaries.



Read "I think you got Cats on your Internet" by Helene Dams on the page 105 <<

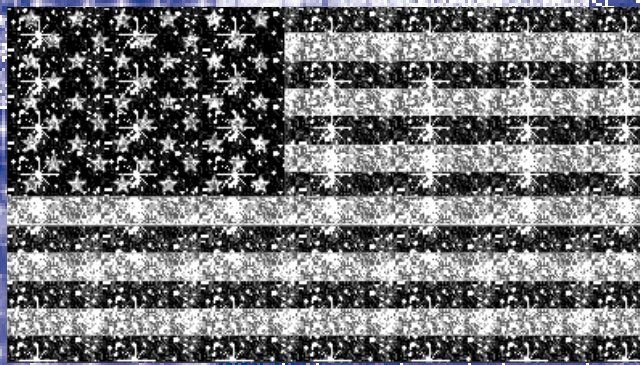
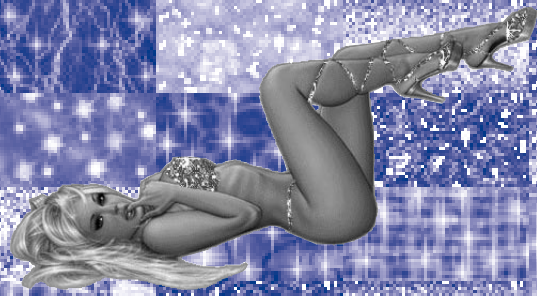
Generators allow you to enter as much text as you want and make it glittery. You get to choose from the unbelievable array of sparkling things.

A note from the 21st of June 2009: << [more](#)

Such collections offer glittery graphics for every occasion – whether you need to say hello or goodbye, to thank someone, wish a good day or just to sparkle and let your cursor and userpic sparkle with you.

I think there are two important aspects to the glitter graphic phenomenon.





FREEEEDDOUTS.NET

>> Tiny part of the patterns copied from <http://www.xospace.com/>. The service doesn't exist anymore.



"BootyClipse", << see page 253

Firstly, glitter became a trademark of today's amateur aesthetics, and I'm certain that in the future sparkly graphics will become a symbol of our times, like "Under Construction" signs for the 90's. Glitter is everywhere (in the universe of user-generated pages), it has become a meta category. It has absorbed all other categories of ready-made graphics – people, animals, buttons, sex graphics. I missed the moment when glitter graphics were born, and didn't notice it until two years ago, when I stumbled upon glittertextgenerator.net. Since then, new sites have appeared:

glitterfy.com, glittermakercodes.com, addglitter.com  
glittergraphicsnow.com, glittergraphicsweb.com,  
glitterglobe.com,...

It seems like every word with "Glitter" in front of it is now a site name.

Secondly, I can't stop marveling at how similar to each other and dull they are. Even naked gals from the "Glitter/Erotic" category don't move – they just sparkle, even my favorite hero Felix, the never-stopping Felix, is frozen in mid-air.

This is the animation trend for the times when templates and generators rule the Web. Let's call it Rich User Experience for the poor. But the reason for its popularity is not just because it's easy to generate.

The social networks researcher Danah Boyd from Berkeley University notices "flashy look of MySpace resembles the Las Vegas imagery that attracts millions every year." (See the 2007-08-21 addition at the bottom of the article.)

My daughter, who is almost fourteen, thinks that glittery graphics is the same thing as glittery stickers (only digital). Among pre-teens, glittery stickers are considered the most valuable objects. You can get several non-glittery things for one that glitters.

My almost former student Dennis Knopf, a big expert in the online booty and move that thing segment [see more](#), sees a direct link between glittery graphics and the pimp pop culture, which before MySpace, we knew mainly from hip-hop videos.

I agree with both of them, and there's something I'd like to note in the end. If we take glitter and starry backgrounds out of context, they will look almost the same – the particles of flickering light on a darker background. But there's a huge gap between these two. Starry backgrounds represented the future, a touching relationship with the medium of tomorrow. Glitter decorates the web of today, routine and taken-for-granted.



## 6 Additions

2007-08-21

In June 2007 Danah Boyd reviewed American class divisions through Facebook and MySpace >> [more](#)

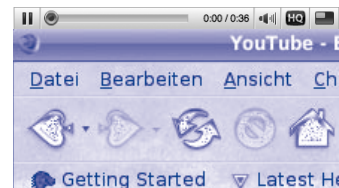
>> <http://www.danah.org/papers/essays/ClassDivisions.html>

Her observation is that good kids go to Facebook, bad kids go to Myspace, and that “MySpace and Facebook are new representations of the class divide in American youth.”

Boyd writes about the aesthetics appearances of both services:

These teens [who exclusively use Facebook] are very aware of MySpace and they often have a negative opinion about it. They see it as gaudy, immature, and “so middle school.” They prefer the “clean” look of Facebook, noting that it is more mature and that MySpace is “so lame.” What hegemonic teens call gaudy can also be labeled as “glitzy” or “bling” or “fly” (or what my generation would call “phat”) by subaltern teens. Terms like “bling” come out of hip-hop culture where showy, sparkly, brash visual displays are acceptable and valued. The look and feel of MySpace resonates far better with subaltern communities than it does with the upwardly mobile hegemonic teens. This is even clear in the blogosphere where people talk about how gauche MySpace is while commending Facebook on its aesthetics. I’m sure that a visual analyst would be able to explain how classed aesthetics are, but aesthetics are more than simply the “eye of the beholder” – they are culturally narrated and replicated. That “clean” or “modern” look of Facebook is akin to West Elm or Pottery Barn or any poshy Scandinavian design house (that I admit I’m drawn to) while the more flashy look of MySpace resembles the Las Vegas imagery that attracts millions every year. I suspect that lifestyles have aesthetic values and that these are being reproduced on MySpace and Facebook.

50 cent -> Pimpzilla  
(<http://www.pimpzilla.n1>)





Boyd's observation is very right. The "clean" pages of Facebook stay for design, professionalism, security, better service and upper class. (I cannot call Facebook clean without the quotation marks. The use of light colors and small fonts can't hide the structural clumsiness.)

However, very soon Boyd's argument will expire.

On the 18th of August blingee.com, a service for glittering profile graphics, already owning the hearts of all "glitzy" users, announced:

Facebook users can now join the Blingee fever. Send your Blingees to your Facebook profile, and get your friends to browse and rate your Blingees directly from your Facebook profile!

Facebook, in its turn, put it even clearer:

Express yourself, create a Blingee!

Add animated graphics, comments, and all sorts of goodies to your pictures for fun or glamour.

Facebook joined the getto glitter fever. Not without keeping its face, so it is not just Blingee, but an option to make a Blingee Book in your profile. I've already created one and now wait for my friends to see and rate it:

I guess Blingee is a good move towards Facebook's myspaceisation. They will soon incorporate funny cursors, lake applets, background sound and the rest of the vernacular repertoire.

I can be wrong. Maybe right at this moment conscious upper class users are caning the Facebook admins with angry demands to remove this inappropriate application from their "clean" pages. But then, I don't know how are they going to spend their time on this service. As a communication platform Facebook is mega boring. Since it's impossible to create there profiles like ☆☆☆M@TTH!@S☆☆ << more , there is hardly a reason to give them your data.

<http://www.myspace.com/matthiasunlimited> <<

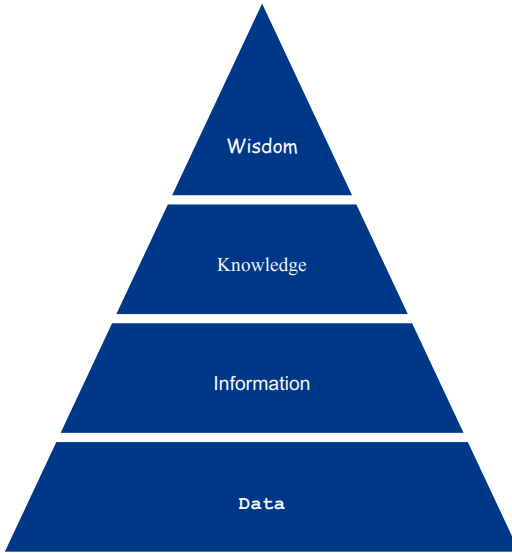
A note from the 21st of June 2009: profile is now private. Add Matthias as a friend to enjoy lake applets, animations and slide shows of all types on one long page.



Upload Photos and Videos









"Folklore des Digitalen", wenn man sich dieses Wort "Folklore" auf der Zunge zergehen lässt, so enthält es zwei wichtige semantische Felder: Das erste das für uns als Deutsche schwierigste Wort: Volk. Mein Gott, Volk. Das zweite, Lore, heißt so viel wie „lehren“ und etwas umfassender formuliert "gesammeltes Wissen". "Folklore" ist so etwas wie das gesammelte Wissen des Volkes; das Wissen, das ein Volk gesammelt hat, das da ist, ohne dass man es unbedingt immer abrufen muss, das Teil unserer Befindlichkeit und Körper ist, das sich in verschiedenen Situationen Bahn bricht und sich ausdrückt.

Trickreich ist der Begriff auch, weil er in der Tat so etwas wie eine paradoxe Konstruktion enthält. Das Digitale steht für Universalismus, für eine universelle Sprache, die durch die Universalmaschine möglich geworden ist und alltäglich generiert wird. Es enthält auch die Schwingung von technologischer Standardisierung, ohne die diese Universalisierung nicht funktionieren würde, ohne die diese Universalmaschine nicht zur Kulturtechnik und zur Technikkultur werden könnte.

Folklore verspricht etwas gegensätzliches zu diesem Universal. Sie verspricht etwas spezifisches, etwas widerständiges. In der Folklore schwingt das Reale mit, die Erfahrung, die sinnliche Wahrnehmung und alles, was man in diesem semantischen Feld aufmachen kann. Aber eben mit diesem Fallstrick, dass das Wort Folklore natürlich eine Verallgemeinerung enthält, eben die Verallgemeinerung des Volkes, einer kollektiven Identität, die Olia Lialina mal einfach gesetzt hat, für das, was man die delirierende Gemeinschaft der Netzwerker nennt.

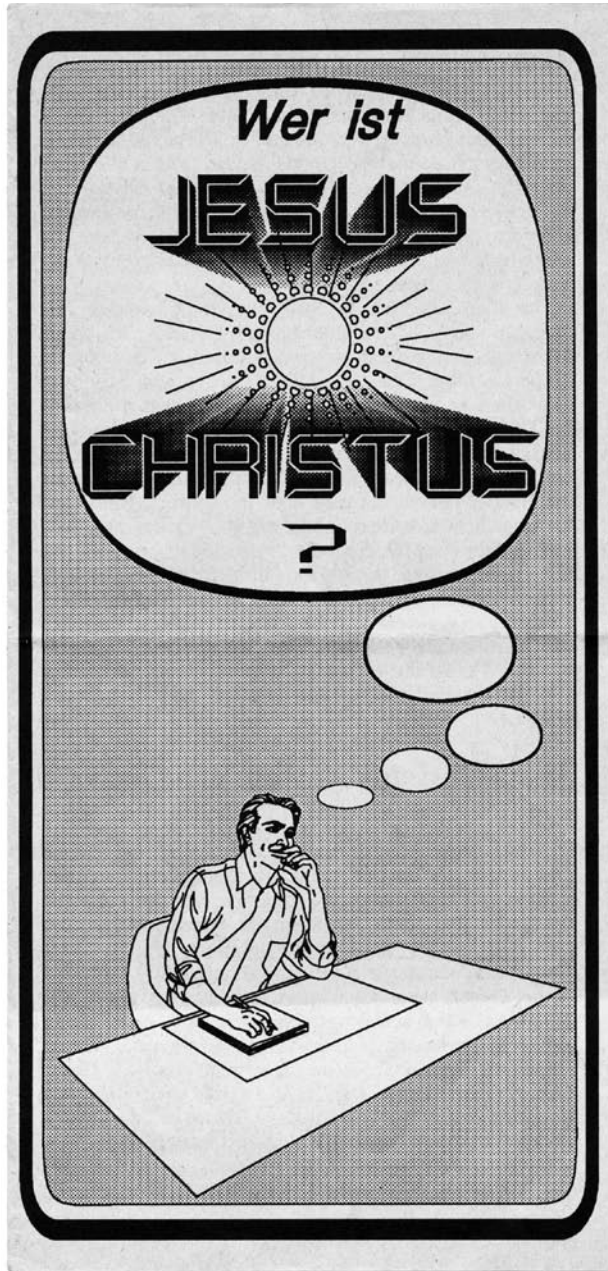
Der Begriff macht auf jeden Fall Sinn als Provokation. Volk, Wissen, Lehre des Volkes, damit ist auch so etwas wie eine regional-kulturelle Ausschmückung der digitalen Kultur gemeint. Ich habe hier einen anderen Begriff anstelle des Volkes gesetzt, nämlich "die Leute".

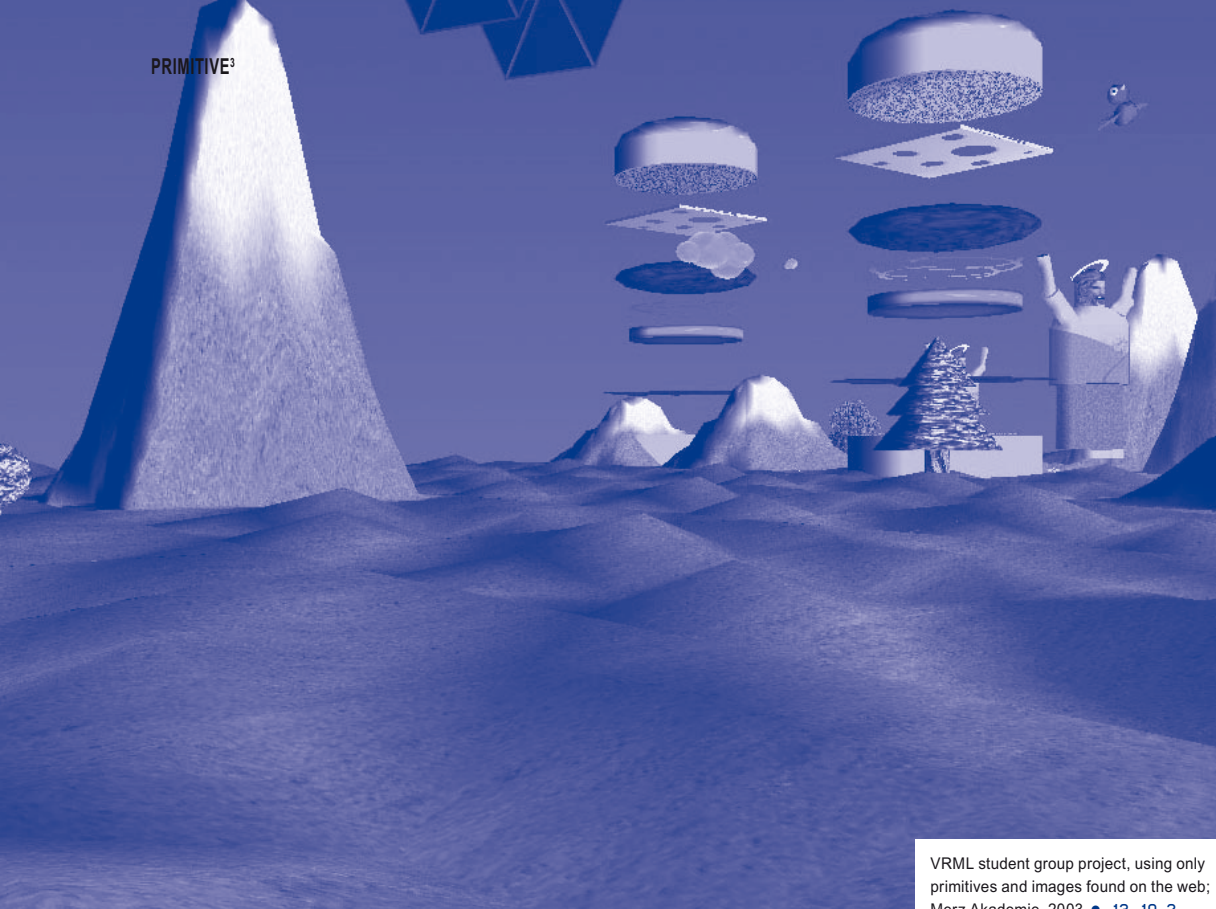


THNX

Siegfried Zielinsky, 9.5.2007,  
zur Einführung der Vorlesungsreihe  
„Digitale Folklore“  
an der Merz Akademie Stuttgart





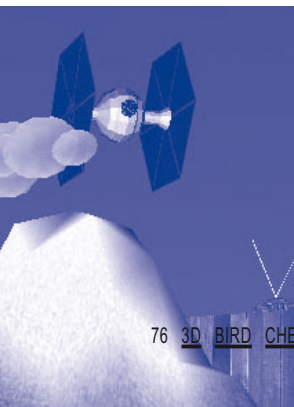


VRML student group project, using only primitives and images found on the web; Merz Akademie, 2003 • [13](#), [19](#), [2](#)

# Primitive<sup>3</sup>

By Dragan Espenschied & Jörg Frohnmayer

Since the term “Virtual Reality” first entered our consciousness, this technology has held the promise of an immersive paradise somewhere in The Future. High end 3D graphic systems will make all our science fiction fantasies come true: libraries, file management, video conferencing and, of course, games will fulfill their three-dimensional destiny. The notion of Utopia and “serious science” surrounds the development of so called virtual worlds and immersive environments. These systems supposedly only work on supercomputers and demand special helmets and gloves and scientists in white lab coats. Who wouldn’t want



to be a part of something so cool?

For our Personal Computers this utopian promise also exists but is described more modestly with the term “3D graphics”. The latest desktop computers are often advertised with stats on the number of polygons they can create per second and from time to time some minor 3D advancements are seen. 3D Desktops and 3D Web Browsers created a buzz however they didn’t offer any practical advantage over their two-dimensional competitors and vanished quickly into obscurity.

Regardless, for more than 20 years a technological breakthrough has been just around the corner. We are moving in the right direction, but seemingly without ever reaching the goal. But while 20 years isn’t enough time to achieve total 3D immersion, it is more than enough time to give birth

to a considerable amount of Folklore that embues 3D objects with mystical properties and entrenched rituals.

## VRML: 3D FOR THE MASSES

VRML, the “Virtual Reality Modeling Language” • [15.11.1](#) was supposed to transform the World Wide Web into an fluent, interactive 3D experience by describing geometries, cameras, lights and movements. VRML’s design goal was to work like HTML, the language used to create web pages. Indeed these languages share some properties, the most important of which are, in terms of folklore, the free availability of browsers and instructions on how to get started with nothing but a text editor.

At the end of the 1990s, a determined scene of VRML enthusiasts worked tirelessly on their home PCs that were actually much too slow for the task. Despite this, they created countless worlds full of dazzlingly bright colored primitives for users to explore.

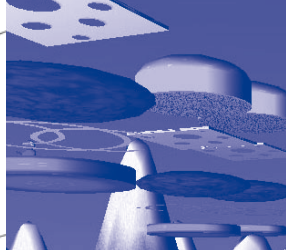
The most common property of folkloristic designs in VRML, and as it will become clear later, in other systems, are primitive base geometries: cubes, spheres and cones are the building blocks for thousands of virtual worlds. Their usage frequency and availability is comparable with how animated GIFs are used on the “flat” part of the World

[13.19.2](#) Dragon, Espenschied: VRML group project, <http://drx.a-blast.org/~drx/projects/vrml/>, Merz, Akademie, 2003  
[15.11.1](#) “Virtual Reality Modeling Language”

### AMATEURS & ENTHUSIASTS

Amateurs and home computer enthusiasts create three dimensional scenarios, sometimes with free software that “belongs” to the community, and exchange their achievements online. The simple visual language is partly rooted in the fact that it is difficult to move beyond the options offered by the software. Additionally, there is little interest in adapting established aesthetic systems like image composition, natural colors or forms. Instead media specific qualities of 3D graphics are emphasized.

→ VRML, POVray, Tuktimi Fighters



Checkerboard • [23,31,2](#)



Terminator 2 see [16,22,1](#)



out a detailed model is very hard, but POV-Ray makes it easy to create loads and loads of primitives with the help of a few mathematical formulas.

POV-Ray also allows for many diverse display effects. Mirrors, dull looking objects, “marble” or “cloud” surfaces, fractal mountains, and multiple light sources resulting in bizarre shadows were all made possible. And, to very “unique” results, these rendering techniques were often combined in one single image in the early days of home ray tracing. As POV-Ray progressed and offered new features, such as simulated depth of field and complex light diffusion, they were enthusiastically added to the mix as well.

This didn’t mean however that primitive geometries lost their role as dominant forms among amateurs in this sea of algorithmic riches. Spheres and cubes just peeked out of luxurious looking fog or got shiny chrome coating. These new effects became as easy to summon as primitives, with just a few lines of code.

A classic ray tracing style can be seen in Terminator 2, • [16,22,1](#) a film awarded with an Oscar for its novel special effects. In one scene a robot rises from a checkerboard floor in the form of a reflecting blob. These mirroring surfaces and checkerboard floors were already popular as tech demos -- a repeating pattern on the ground increases the impression of depth, mirrors show off computing power as they produce complex, computation-heavy light reflection setups. Although Terminator 2

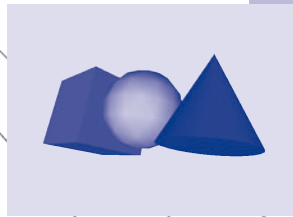
Wide Web. They are the „Hello World“ of 3D programming, the easiest way to create something out of nothing.

This example source code, written in VRML, demonstrates how easily these shapes can be summoned, colored and positioned:

```
#VRML V2.0 utf8
Transform {
  translation 2 0 0
  children
  Shape {
    appearance Appearance {diffuseColor 1 0 0}
    material Material {
      geometry Box {}
    }
  }
}

Transform {
  translation 2 0 0
  children
  Shape {
    appearance Appearance {diffuseColor 0 1 0}
    material Material {
      geometry Sphere {}
    }
  }
}

Transform {
  translation 4 0 0
  children
  Shape {
    appearance Appearance {diffuseColor 0 0 1}
    material Material {
      geometry Cone {}
    }
  }
}
```



Box, Sphere, Cone • [02,24,2](#)

It makes sense that newcomers love to use such Primitives to express themselves in three-dimensional environments. They are able to create complexity not by modeling complex elements, but by producing large amounts of these base geometries through the simple copy and paste of a few lines of code.

Today VRML is mostly forgotten. It never caught on with professional web designers who mostly had train-

ing as graphic designers and therefore preferred the conversational interface of Flash over VRML's text files. Also, there was never a compelling browser plugin to view VRML on the Macintosh—the platform preferred by most designers. As a consequence, VRML was used almost exclusively by amateurs that weren't aesthetically offended by the jaggy looking objects and their jerky motions.

It is a pity because on today's fast personal computers VRML works better than ever before. The ease with which objects and textures can now be copied and loaded from different sources, actually makes it aesthetically interesting.

## LET'S BE REALISTIC

Another popular playground for 3D amateurs is the free ray tracing software POV-Ray. • [08.06.1](#) Ray Tracing mathematically traces the course of millions of virtual light rays being reflected, absorbed or broken up in order to generate a picture. While VRML strives to offer a real time interactive experience, allowing users to freely move in a 3D space, POV-Ray's goal is to create more realistic looking images, although they can take hours or days of calculation to finish. Its interface, like VRML's, is a bunch of text files containing commands and descriptions. And again, it appears less like a designer's tool and more like a programming language. Hammering

borrowed from these tech demos, it can be assumed that it returned the favor by inspiring many home computer enthusiasts to create the next wave of amazing imagery.

## COMPLEX PRIMITIVES

Aside from these primitive and mathematically produced base shapes, two rather complex objects also became very popular, not only in the world of amateurs but also with high-end engineers: the Performer Cow and the Utah Teapot. Both are included with many 3D modeling software packages and are often used as test cases. If there is no object within reach to test a new texture or light atmosphere, cow and pot come to the rescue.

The tea pot was typed into a computer at Utah University in 1974 by Martin Newell, using an existing Melitta tea pot as a guide. • [16.06.1](#) Today the model appears 30% smaller than the original because another computer scientist, Jim Blinn, wanted to render the model on a different system that offered rectangular instead of square pixels. So Blinn divided all y-coordinates by 1.3. • [13.04.1](#)

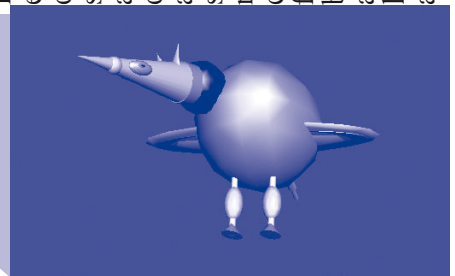
The most well-known appearance of the Performer Cow • [15.03.1](#) is probably Jeffrey Shaw's installation "Golden Calif", created 1994. • [15.02.1](#) There the cow is a direct reference to the story of Moses and the golden calf. Shaw's goal was to create a digital adaptation of a cult

[02.24.2](#) (There is a striking similarity in between this classic now primitive and the logo used on the computer magazine until 1999.)



### ELECTRONIC ARTS

[03.04.2](#) Len Bullard: "Island of the Jeenix", <http://home.hiway.net/~cbullard/jeenix.wr1>, 1996  
[08.06.1](#) <http://www.povray.org/>, ongoing  
[13.04.1](#) Verschiedene Autoren: "Utah teapot", [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utah\\_teapot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utah_teapot), Computer Graphics Institute, [http://www.jeffreyshaw.net/html/main/show\\_work.php3?record\\_id=94](http://www.jeffreyshaw.net/html/main/show_work.php3?record_id=94), 1994  
[15.03.1](#) "Performer" bezeichnet ein von Silicon Graphics entwickeltes Echtzeit-Grafiksystem  
[16.06.1](#) Boston Computer History Museum: "The Utah Teapot", <http://www.computerhistory.org/collections/accession/X398.84>, 2001  
[15.22.1](#) James Cameron: Terminator 2: Judgment Day, 1991, computer graphics by ILM  
[23.3.1.2](#) Pieter Finzenkelien: "3 of them", 1992, <http://www.tri-ni tro.com/gallery.html>



Island of the Jeenix • [03.04.2](#)

PRIMITIVES = REALNESS

happening by placing the Performer Cow on a virtual altar for spectators to worship. It remains questionable if he used the cow knowing I as a reference to low computer culture – after all, when the “Golden Calf” was created, the Performer Cow was only 2 years old. But it can be assumed that he was aware that the 3D model clearly represents a cow and not a calf. Regardless, today, when the cow is so well-known, it is hard not to read this installation as a deliberate engagement with banal techno-cultural icons.

The cow’s source code tells her story:

```

** Tue Oct 27 19:16:44 1992
** Cow (moo)
** Courtesy of:
** Viewpoint Animation Engineering
** 870 West Center
** Orem, Utah 84057
** (801)224-2222
** 1-800-DATASET
    
```

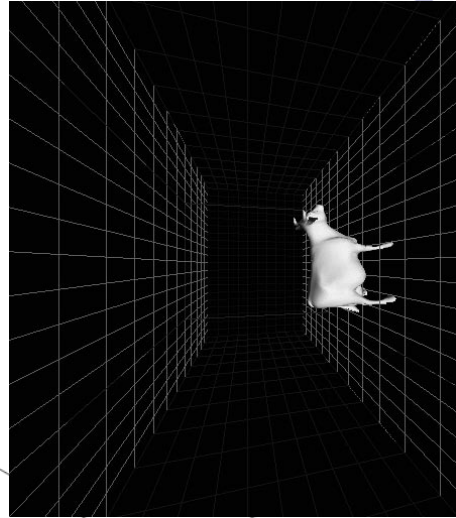
```

** (c) Copyright 1992 Viewpoint Animation
** Engineering, Inc. Sun Microsystems has been
** authorized to freely distribute these
** datasets. They are provided for unlimited
** use in existing or modified form. The actual
** dataset, (ie, geometry) may not, however, be
** resold in existing or modified form.
    
```

Cow (moo) • 05.22.2



Golden Calf



These days many 3D clichés like mirror spheres, checkerboard floors, rough polygon models, weird compositions or artificial looking surfaces are applied as signs of a hip retro futurism. • 17.30.1

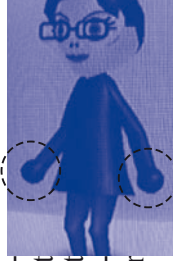
Player avatars on the Nintendo Wii video game console, “Mii’s”, probably represent the most well-known contemporary application of primitives. These figures are constructed from simple base shapes with hardly any changeable parameters and a very limited set of surface textures. The hands may just be spheres, but nevertheless, Wii players spend hours creating • 15.25.1 their Mii’s.

It is precisely because these figures are so simple (yet also totally unique) that a strong connection is created between players and their avatars. The formal language lacks any “magical” technique, so users feel that as if they actually created these avatars themselves. The success of the Wii shows that the simple use of primitives can be more entertaining than highly complex graphical effects.

An interesting thing about attempts at higher realism is that the complex geometries, textures, shaders and movement simulations are not necessarily more “immersive.” Rather they seem to draw more attention to areas where the simulation still lacks. Rather than strive for this illusive realism, amateurs regard this absence of physical laws as a chance to create and experience multi-

- 05.22.2 Quuz Yetkin: “SMUR Tutorial” <http://pages.cs.wisc.edu/~yetkin/smur/tutorial.html>, 2000
- 12.12.2 Jürgen Hochwald, <http://www.jhochwald.de/>
- 15.26.1 Nintendo quickly caught up with this trend and introduced the Mii contest channel in 2007, an originality competition for selfmade Mii’s. See Nintendo of America: “Nintendo Says ‘Check Mii Out’ With Creative New Channel for Wii”, 2007, <http://www.nintendo.com/whatsnew/detail/afnnyknpdr>
- 17.30.1 RZAVZHUW: “Hogwarts 3D”, Design for my art: <http://skatobocart.net/>
- 19.22.3 Linda Jacobson: “Garage Virtual Reality”, Sams Publishing, 1994

Mii, see 16.26.1

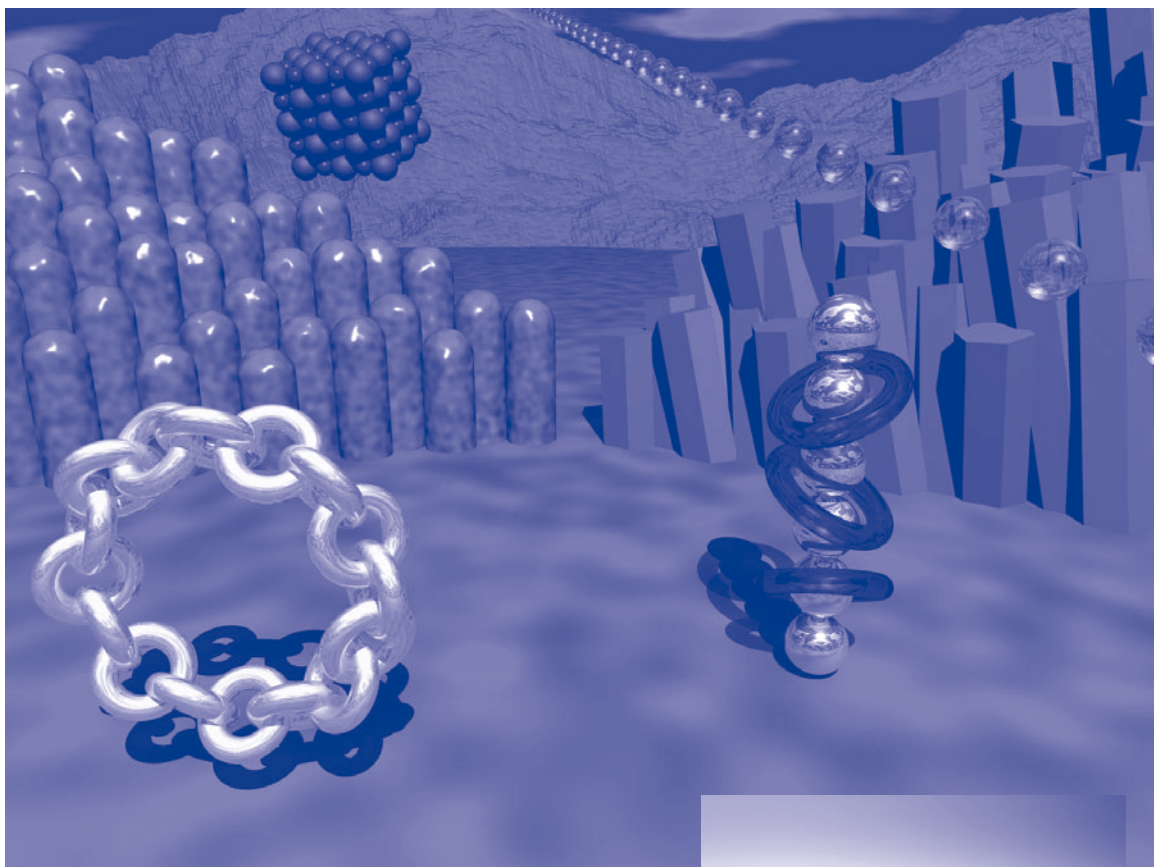


GARAGE VR

In projects whose goal is to improve Virtual Reality and 3D graphics, folkloristic elements can emerge as random by-products of functional tests. If an element, for example piece of 3D geometry, is useful for different test cases, it will be passed on and become part of 3D folklore. The so called “Garage Virtual Reality” movement, • 19.22.3 a term describing home experiments of VR pioneers before 1994, created many contributions to the 3d vernacular vocabulary.

→ Utah Tea Pot, Performer Cow

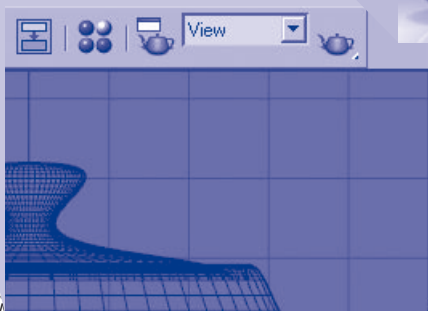




Jürgen Hochwald: "ST1", POV-Szene, 1998, • [12, 12, 2](#)



Roglok: "Angst 3D", see [17, 30, 1](#)



3D GLASSES - SCREEN HISTORY  
Teapot Icon in Autodesk 3D Max

strong visual design and inherent logic make all events appear completely plausible.

## MERGING OF HISTORIES

The labyrinth is one of the most loaded symbols in human culture. It is also one of the oldest -- stone age petroglyphs of labyrinth structures date back to 3500 BC. A labyrinth is a single wound path with a start and an end point, and it is often used to signify meditation and renewal. • [17, 28, 1](#) Its close cousin the maze however, with its many junctions and paths -- where one is lost when inside, yet omniscient from above -- is used to represent decision making and multiple perspectives... Over the course of their existence, these symbols have never really experienced a significant change. As a result of their form and what they signify, it seems logical that they were popular with early computer simulations and of course games. In the virtual reality piece *The Complex* • [13, 23, 1](#) artist Jörg Frohnmayer unites the one of the oldest folkloric elements, the maze, with Digital Folklore.

The user can explore the maze in a six-wall stereoscopic projection environment, which has the technical potential of delivering full immersion. Body movements are tracked and control the movement through an automatically created architecture. In contrast to this high-end equipment, *The Complex* applies a simple first person shooter perspective and nothing but semi-

dimensional space. Virtual worlds by default contain no rules. Even simple, natural properties that nobody even thinks about in real life, like gravity or the impenetrability of objects, must be fixed in code in order to work in a 3D simulation. The decision to simulate reality is therefore a highly conscious one. Likewise, authors of virtual worlds who don't try to simulate a natural environment often point out that functionality they add to their creations is equally deliberate and often embodies a particular concept.

This could explain why *Second Life* was so boring. While this virtual online world managed to draw a lot of media attention to itself, despite its technical richness it appears stuck and limited as a result of an allegiance to "reality". Only the commercially created areas ever attracted enough visitors to give an impression of an active community, and they did it by simulating incentives from the real world: the availability of virtual goods is artificially limited to create scarcity and competition, virtual land is sold to create a real-estate market, there is a virtual currency and so on.

Experimenting with the specific properties of virtual space is rarely encouraged, and is mostly this is done by artists and activists. The project *Second Lie* -- a good night story by Matthias Ljungström and Boris Müller is a project that examined how free play and experimentation in these virtual spaces is received by other users. Rather than choosing realistic 'Second Life avatars



Second Life, see [08, 15, 1](#)



TUKIMI Fighters, see [07, 06, 1](#)

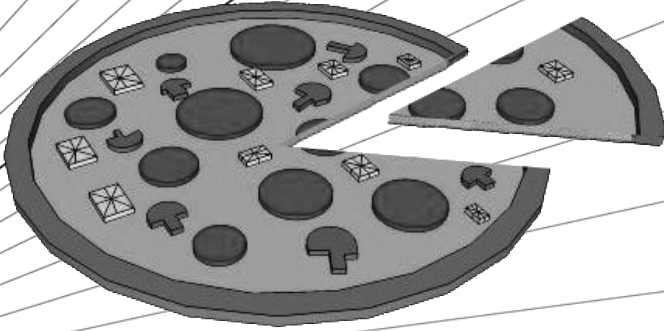
### SIMPLIFICATION

Conceptual and experimental projects are researching the relations of human perception and 3D graphics. In this case, very abstract visuals help to reflect on the medium, so the special properties and surplus values of virtual worlds can be defined or denied. Simple and understandable technological execution is a key part of such projects, so the use of primitives is a sane option. Most of the time, these research projects have a futuristic touch and perpetuate the cultural connection of "Simple 3D" and "Utopia". E.G. this method is used in 3D Information Visualization applications • [19, 21, 3](#) to make complex things more primitive and thus better understandable.  
→ [Second Lie, The Complex](#)



can export directly to a web site called 3D warehouse where creators share their self made objects. While at the moment the system is not as versatile as for example VRML, creating models is a piece of cake in Google SketchUp and a tremendous amount has already been amassed for free usage. Some of these objects might become folklore classics for future 3D systems or be converted to existing ones.

SketchUp can serve as a peek into things to come. When handling 3D models online will soon be as easy as working with text, pictures or video today, three-dimensional Digital Folklore will surely have a giant impact on the ivory tower of immersive environments, virtual worlds and high end computer games. Amateurs will be able to move away from primitives and instead pick complex objects from large libraries built by the community. Just some more years and we will be there, really! Δ



Google 3D Warehouse, object fa0905ba5ca49fecb77445a6633883a

POST CARD



*Dear Digital Folklore,*

*can you please print the  
VRML bird from page 79  
a bit bigger?*

*Thank you so muchy!*

*Yours,  
Len Bullard*

*To:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Digital Folklore* \_\_\_\_\_

*ISBN: 9 783937 982250* \_\_\_\_\_

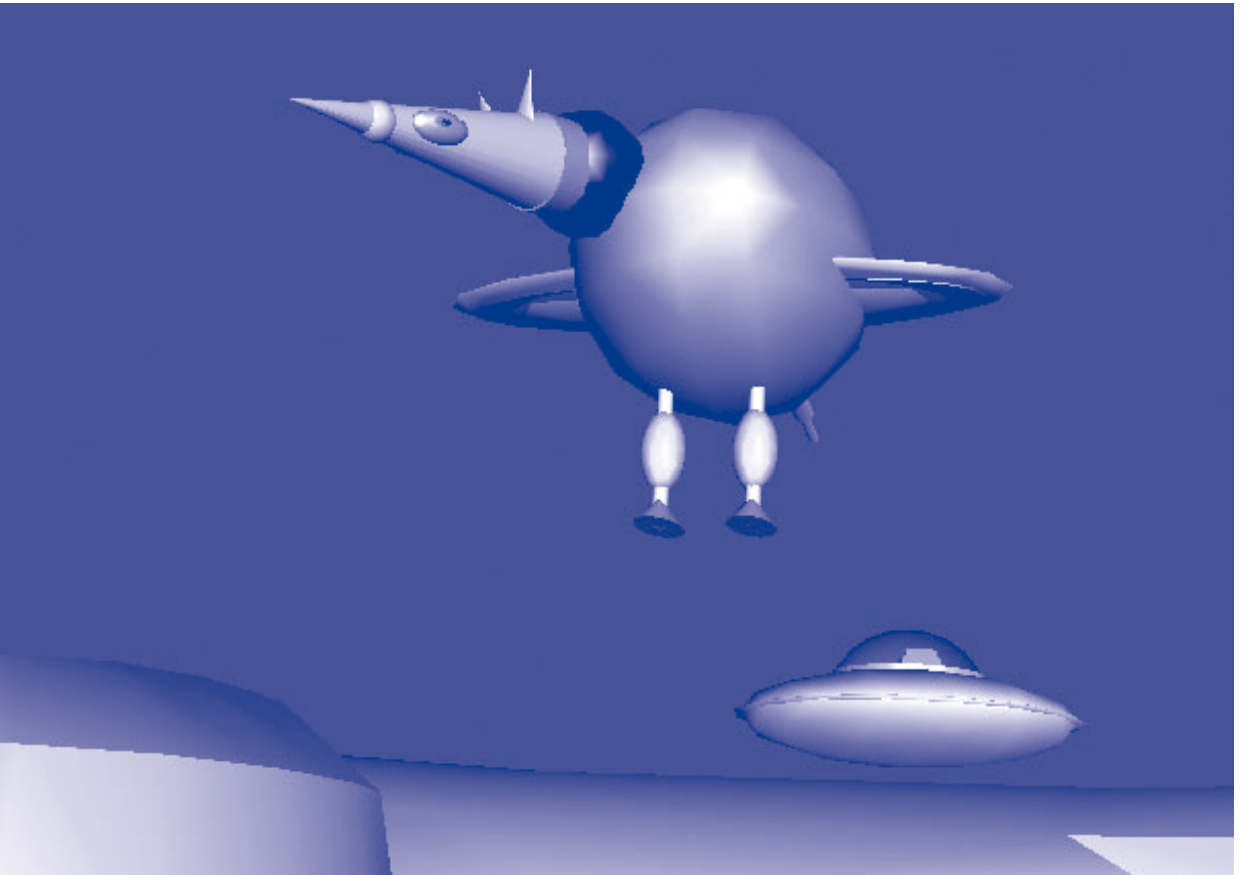
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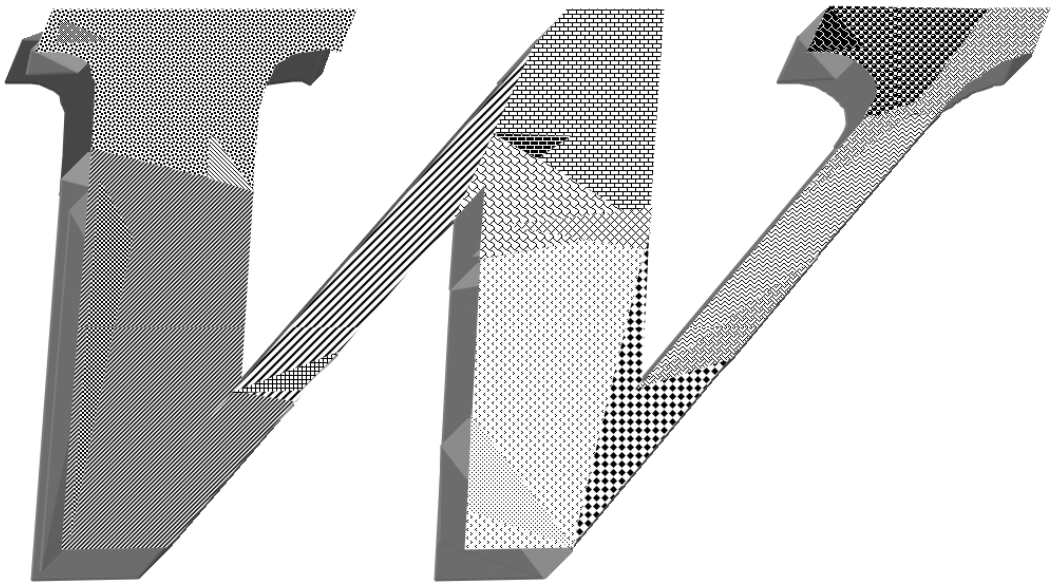


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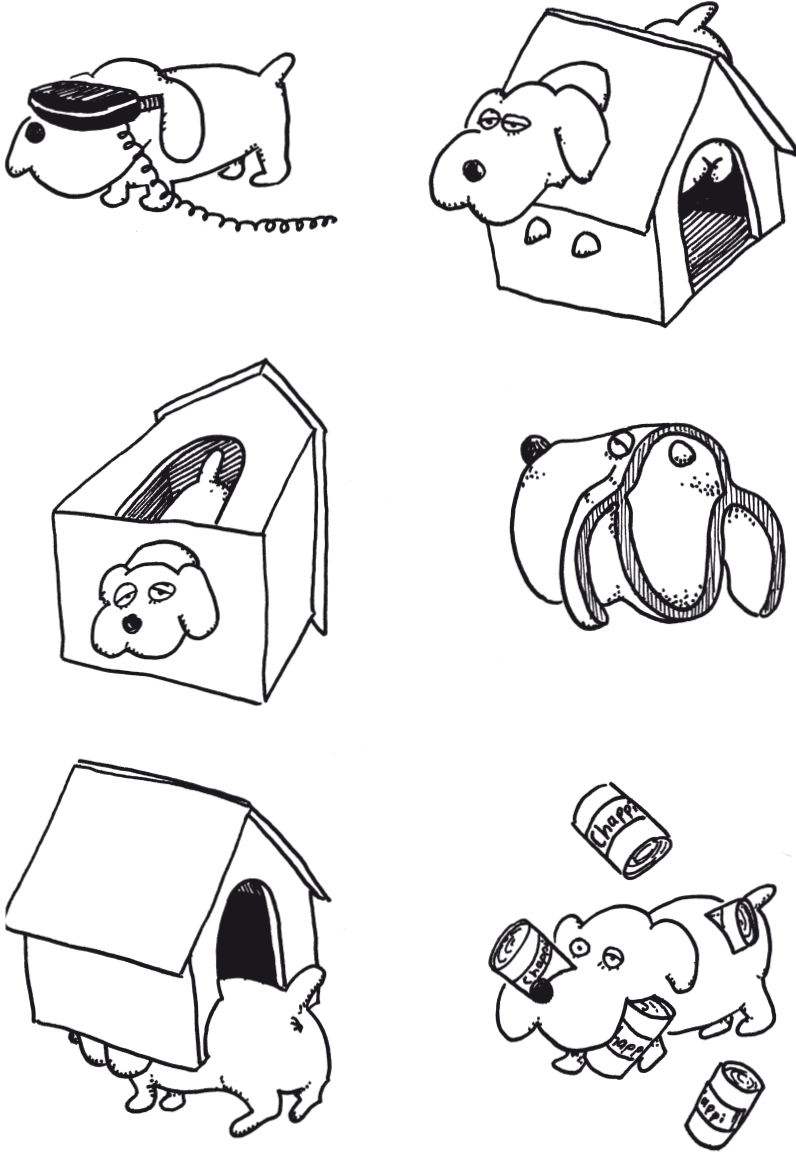
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Hong Kong Honour Publishing Co. Ltd.

Printed by: Mei Ka Printing & Publishing Enterprise Ltd.





HÜPF DER H& evaluiert seine neue H&ehütte in  
VIRTUAL REALITY



# Put yer fonts in a pipe and smoke em !!

When busloads of Desktop Publishing experts charged into the field of web design in the 1990s, they had to face a big disappointment: their beloved "fonts" from *Quark XPress* could no longer be used! Fifteen years later this situation hasn't changed. Designers still have to struggle with the select few typefaces that are installed on the web users' computers.

What are these web compatible typefaces? There is *Arial* (the boogeyman of every sensitive graphic designer, *Comic Sans MS* (tastelessness incarnated as a font) or *Times New Roman* (a winding and crumbling serif)!

At least once every 12 months online design communities desperately bring up the question of when, finally, it will be possible to use real, professional typefaces on web pages. New technologies are regularly introduced, promising true typographic happiness with server-rendered, Flash, and other font types, but to no avail.

## Five typefaces are enough

Now I would like to summarize why these fantasies are futile by drawing on the article by



Håkon Wium Lie titled "CSS@Ten,"<sup>1</sup> published in the web designers' online periodical *A List Apart*.

Lie, CTO of Opera, suggests an extension to the CSS standard that would allow web designers to tell the browser from what address a font can be downloaded for a selected web page. This article concludes with an appeal to all web designers: lobby browser makers to implement a system like the one Lie suggests.

People who think web design is a subsection of graphic design and who endeavor to transform all print media's conventions to the web will of course support this idea. The web, however, asks special requirements of typefaces. For a typeface to work meaningfully online it has to fulfill all of the following criteria:

- All letters and symbols must be readable even when 9 or 13 pixels high. This should be true if anti aliasing is turned off, meaning no "font smoothing" (more on this later).
- The largest possible amount of Unicode characters has to be included so web users from all over the world can express themselves in their mother language. Just imagine a blog where it is impossible to use umlauts in the comments because the

<sup>1</sup> Håkon Wium Lie: "CSS @ Ten", <http://www.alistapart.com/articles/cssatten>, 2007

chosen font only contains the US alphabet — Håkon or Mötörhead-Fän wouldn't be able to even write their names.

- The font needs to be available free of charge so everybody can view it without hassle.

Almost all typefaces that fulfill these criteria are already installed on most desktop computers. They are Arial, Times New Roman, Courier New, Georgia and Verdana. (Other popular typefaces like Impact, Trebuchet MS or Comic Sans MS are also useful but offer less Unicode characters and variants like bold or italic.)

1996 Microsoft founded the Core Fonts for the Web<sup>2</sup> project. Its task was to create, promote and distribute the aforementioned fonts, and of course, they have been bundled with the Windows operating system ever since. As much as designers despise them, without this project there would be no typefaces to choose from at all. Apple includes them with every Macintosh sold, and they can be easily installed on free operating systems based on GNU/Linux or the BSD family (although some might consider this betrayal to ideals of Free Software.)

Creating a useful web font is a laborious undertaking. Of course the web offers countless

2

Microsoft Corporation: "TrueType core fonts for the web",

<http://web.archive.org/web/20020124085641/http://www.microsoft.com/typography/>

[fontpack/default.htm](http://fontpack/default.htm), 1997-2001

3

See for example "Larabie Fonts",

<http://larabiefonts.com/> ...

4  
5  
6  
7

... or "Fontasy",  
<http://www.fontasy.de/>  
 Various authors: "DejaVu", font development  
 community, <http://dejavu-fonts.org/>,  
 ongoing  
 Wikipedia holds Vera's history at  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bitstream-Vera)  
 Bitstream-Vera  
 For example, in 2007 Linux distributor RedHat  
 introduced the "Liberation" typeface family,  
 licensed with a variant of the GNU Public License.  
 See <https://www.redhat.com/promo/fonts/>

fonts<sup>3</sup> for anybody to  
 use<sup>4</sup> but either they  
 contain only tiny fractions  
 of the Unicode range,  
 or they are unreadable in  
 small sizes. The only  
 additional typeface family  
 (to the Core Fonts)

meeting all the aforementioned criteria is  
*Deja Vu*<sup>5</sup> — an offshoot of the *Bitstream*  
*Vera* family. *Bitstream Corporation* originally  
 published the *Vera* fonts with a license that  
 allowed for copies and modifications<sup>6</sup>. As a  
 result a devoted community developed *Deja Vu*  
 by enriching *Bitstream Vera's* character set,  
 variations and readability, and because of  
 this open source development, most GNU/Linux  
 and BSD distributions use *Deja Vu* as the  
 default font for everything.

So, outside the set of standards, there are  
 no fonts that can be used with meaningful  
 reliability on the web. After Microsoft closed  
 the *Core Fonts*, new web fonts were only  
 created on the peripheries of the Free Software  
 movement.<sup>7</sup> Commercial vendors are unlikely  
 to put the required amount of resources into  
 a font that they then give away for free.  
 Maybe a "font DRM system" integrated  
 into the browser, that would only allow  
 the displaying of fonts under certain  
 conditions (aka "license paid"), could create

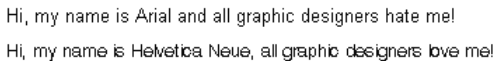
a commercial market for web fonts. Digital Rights Management systems have not been met with enthusiasm in the past though: "protected" audio files that play on one computer but not on another, or stop playing if the lender of the license goes out of business, cause users to foam at the mouth. Even Apple, Yahoo and Amazon have begun to see that the world needs less DRM, not more.

For all these reasons, downloadable browser fonts have failed to become a viable option on either economic or political terms. So to go back to the original problem of lack of web fonts, perhaps designers longing for more variety should not count on browser makers to implement new functions, but instead engage themselves in projects like *Deja Vu*.

## Pixels and hints

Every decent designer hates the standard font *Arial*. Legend has it that *Arial* is just an imitation of *Helvetica* and exists simply because Microsoft was too cheap to pay license fees for the real, and much beloved *Helvetica*.

The following screen shot displays *Arial* and *Helvetica Neue* in a browser with anti aliasing turned off:



Hi, my name is Arial and all graphic designers hate me!  
Hi, my name is Helvetica Neue, all graphic designers love me!

With this dramatic difference in rendering quality, all typographic ideology can safely be scrapped. Here's another example from the website of *Morable Type*, the "Business blog software" from 2007.

Arial is furnished with good hinting information that helps to present recognizable, readable characters on just a few square pixels. Helvetica looks great on paper spurting from a laser printer, where a single character is usually 140 pixels high. On a monitor screen where it is displayed 13 pixels high, not even the stroke widths appear consistent.

To improve the appearance of such typefaces on screen, anti-aliasing was invented. Simply put, anti-aliased characters use grey scales in addition to black and white pixels, creating the illusion of a higher resolution. With anti-aliasing enabled, Helvetica looks okay on screen!

#### Powerful publishing platform


The perfect platform for building easy-to-maintain blog, web, and social media sites.

- Easy, intuitive content management
- Simple installation and publishing
- Open, flexible architecture

Not nice.

People of Switzerland, i send you my warmest greetings.

So, what's the trouble? Just turn anti-aliasing on!! But there are some key reasons that might prevent anti-aliasing from working:

- Anti-Aliasing is not available on all operating systems because of software patents. Font rendering software like Microsoft's *Clear Type* or Adobe's *Cool Type 12* are protected intellectual property laws. Even *hinting* cannot be used without restrictions in *Free Software* because of Apple patents. 
- The still dramatically popular operating system *Windows XP* usually comes with anti-aliasing disabled and most users have no idea how to turn it on.
- Anti-Aliasing can cause a subjectively blurry, too soft appearance of characters, especially if they don't contain a single black pixel. So some users turn it off for aesthetic reasons.
- Anti-Aliasing can drag down the performance of slow computers, like handhelds or netbooks.

So, even if it would be possible that the browser could download a custom font for a web page, there is a chance that it will ~~be~~ look like trash—at that point *Arial* would have been a better choice. And to come back to the *Arial/ Helvetica* dualism, if *Helvetica* was properly hinted, it would be almost indistinguishable from *Arial* on screen anyway.

8  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14


In 2002, Designer James Stone published an ironic Flash game where *Arial* and *Helvetica* fight against each other, see <http://www.mimeartist.com/helvetica/> How bad *Helvetica* renders on this page is really worth a look. For his current site James Stone uses the standard font *Georgia*.  
 In the meantime, <http://movabletype.com/> moved away from *Helvetica*  
 See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Font-hinting>  
 Anti-Aliasing looks weird printed because there is no "gray" on paper. Gray is simulated with patterns of small dots of black ink.  
 For a list of font rendering techniques see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subpixel-rendering>  
 The *FreeType* project is affected by this patent, see <http://freetype.sourceforge.net/patents.html>  
<http://www.myspace.com/humanfilleter>  
 Solution:

## The amazingly boring discussion about fonts

Apart from all the technical and political hassles connected with browser downloadable fonts, the topic's main purpose seems to be to cause galactic amounts of boredom. Arguments about the important role of typefaces in classic graphic design, or that there is just 5000000 much text to design online, have been repeated for years. The overall lack of imagination is disconcerting.

Why is nobody complaining that all digital file formats for typefaces are optimized for print and not for the screen? For example "outline fonts" in the *TrueType* format contain no information about colors, translucency or programmatic effects like noise, extrusion, etc. The files only hold information that a black and white laser printer, technology from the 1980s, is able to reproduce. Also, most designers don't seem to mind that the CSS standard makes "fluent" layouts (ones that adapt to the browser window's size) quite difficult. And on and on. One could wish for so many interesting things, but in the end "fonts" seem to dominate all mental activity.

In closing I would like to present a great piece of typography I found online.

Can you read the name of the band? 

Can your font do that?

If not, why bother with fonts?

Dragan Espenschied, 2007







### An Oil Change To Complement Your Pastry?

### Legg Mason: Why It Needs A Big Leg Up

MONEY INVESTING

### A Lack of Pilots Darkens Skies For the Airlines

PERSONAL JOURNAL

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2007 • VOL. CCL NO. 143

## What's News

**Business and Finance**

**The Dow** indexes closed up 100.04 points, or 0.8%, to 13,450.75. The S&P 500 and Nasdaq rose 1.2% and 2.3%, respectively, to 3,000.00 and 2,500.00. The ECB threatened it will apply euro-zone financial institutions unlimited two-week limits as a first-time order. **A Fed official** said the central bank should rethink its policy of buying weaker growth or inflation is the principal focus of its interest-rate deliberations. **A Pentagon** report accuses Iran of continuing to funnel weapons into Iraq and a steep fall in the number of attacks led to roadside bombs linked to Tehran. The assessment comes as U.S. policy makers debate whether Iran still is trying to destabilize Iraq or if it has been to curtail such efforts. **Four** received its first re-shipment from Russia, clearing the way to start up the Bushbar reactor in 2008. Tehran said it would resume enrichment activities to make fuel for a second plant now being built.

**The administration** insisted it is on top of the housing and credit crises. Bush reaffirmed his position to housing aid lenders. **World leaders** pledged \$74 billion to aid Palestinian small cells for resources in the West Bank and Gaza. **Efforts** to overhaul the agency charged with consumer protection are aimed to increase oversight to housing aid lenders. **The U.S. needs** to overhaul the program that administers royalties for resources like oil produced on federal lands, a panel said. **Senate Democrats** forced a delay until January on a FISA renewal in a rift with party leaders over a liability shield for telecom. **The House** approved a \$300-billion spending package. The president vowed to sign it if the Senate adds \$40 billion for the Iraq war.

**The Saudi king** purchased a gang rape victim to prison and a lasting, a case that sparked rare U.S. criticism and a global outcry. **A judge** ruled that White House visitor logs are public, a blow to Bush, who didn't want to disclose visits by religious conservatives. **Castro** suggested he might step down from his leadership posts, the first time the Cuban leader has been in the forefront. **The U.S. Treasury** must issue a supplementary report on the credit crunch. The vote was tight.

**A judge** sentenced David Ramirez to 20 months in prison for his role in the 2004 Hollinger share sale of millions of dollars. **Many** shot down a ballistic missile, a first for a U.S. ship. **Coria** stepped in late abolishing the death penalty in Iowa agency.

## Mining Firms Bulk Up, Echoing Big Oil Mergers

### BHP Bid for Rio Heralds A New Era for Resources; The OPEC of Iron Ore?

**By PHILIP BARRA AND ROBERT CIV MATTHEWS**

MELBOURNE, Australia—First there was Big Oil. Now comes Big Mining. For years, now, mining companies have gotten rich supplying the raw materials that have fueled consumer booms from China and India to Brazil. As commodities prices soared, these companies socked away cash and suggested investors embark on another round of deals that promise a new class of megacorporations. The selling megacorporations would have great influence over the raw materials that live on iron, copper and uranium—and, by extension, the price of consumer electronics, cars and even power plants. Last month, Anglo-Australian miner BHP announced a \$23-billion proposal to merge with Anglo-Australian iron-ore giant Rio Tinto. The deal would combine the world's No. 3 and No. 3 iron-ore companies worth as much as \$220 billion at current market values—larger than the global oil industry. The world's largest producer of copper and aluminum, BHP, would combine with Rio Tinto, the world's No. 5 miner.

## Industry Seethes As FCC's Martin Sets New Curbs

### By AMY SCHATZ

WASHINGTON—Today, the Federal Communications Commission is set to ram through two measures that would force media companies to open both newspapers and television stations in the top 20 markets. The five-member commission is expected to pass that rule and another saying that no single cable company can serve more than 50% of the nation's cable subscribers. After perhaps the most tumultuous month of his term, Mr. Martin says he won't be moved and his resignation is a sign that he's getting the job done. "It's actually important for the commission. To try to grapple with decisions and make decisions," he said in an interview yesterday. In a highly partisan capital, Mr. Martin is unopposed in that he is coming under attack by members of both parties and several industries. The cable restriction, for instance, has stoked the anger of an industry that expects an orthodox laissez-faire Republican as chairman, only to find an aggressive regulator. Since taking the top post in 2005, Mr. Martin has issued a list of rules that would shake cable's business model—essentially a plan, later rejected, to allow people to buy cable channels in a la carte instead of bundles. "Almost everything he says about the marketplace and (cable prices) is false and demonstrably false," says Kyle McLerron, president of the cable

## Away in a Manger: It Takes a Miracle To Stage This Play

**In Living Nativity Scenes, Frisky Goats Steal Show; Joseph Takes a Tumble**

**By DOONNE SEABURY**

MOUNT LAUREL, N.J.—Mary and Joseph were headed for Bethlehem when the donkey leading the Virgin spooked, bucked her and bolted. Joseph frantically jumped on the donkey's hind end but fell off and got caught in the reins. The creature kept going, dragging Joseph behind for several hundred feet before it finally settled down. That mishap, of course, doesn't appear in the Bible. It's from a so-called nativity play, one that was performed here as the Fellowship Baptist Church. This Christmas season spectacle, in which human volunteers and farm animals are recruited to stand in for Mary, Joseph and the rest of the crèche—some-to-life, are growing in popularity. They're drawing big crowds, especially children, who are sometimes allowed to pet the barn animals and take a peek at the swaddled infant starting as baby. But the realism has subsided in some less-than-memorable moments like the Fellowship Baptist. "We don't have that come anyone," says Pastor Andy Wallin of the church near Philadelphia, which now uses a tape recording to narrate how Mary and Joseph arrived at their destination. "We gave up on trying to tame the donkey." In Fort Walton Beach, Fla., a cow fled the First Baptist Church nativity set several years ago and wandered around downtown for about an hour until police could corral it. At First United Methodist Church in Tucker, N.J., two years ago, a piglet noted that the nativity set used to create the stable setting was made of styrofoam. It ate nearby the manger. Pastor Wallin himself was a victim of a sheep that wandered near the Fellowship Baptist's living nativity, which still features a small flock of the woolly troupe here to page A17.

## Putin and Orthodox Church Cement Power in Russia

### As Nationalism Grows, Kremlin Finds Faith; Forgiving Father Sergei

**By ANDREW HROGINS**

CHITA, Russia—Sergei Taratkin hid his knees before the bishop of this frigid Siberian city 3,000 miles from Moscow. He begged for his clerical robes back and vowed to mend his ways. His sit: siding with a foe of the Kremlin. Once known as Father Sergei, Mr. Taratkin served for seven years as the chaplain at Correctional Facility No. 10, a grim penitentiary south of here. Among his parishioners was oil baron Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who was sent to Siberia in late 2005. Booed from the clergy after he declared the jailed billionaire a political prisoner, Mr. Taratkin decided this summer to recant. State-run television reported his about-face on the local evening news. Mr. Taratkin says he had a doctor consultation with a priest for a

## Who No. 1 in Stakes Out New Role As

Mr. Putin has been in the limelight since he took office in 2000. He has been a master of the media, a shrewd negotiator and a strong leader. He has been a master of the media, a shrewd negotiator and a strong leader. He has been a master of the media, a shrewd negotiator and a strong leader.

## HOUSING STARTS EXPECTED TO REBOUND

Market watchers are eager to see how Goldman Sachs's bullish bet on housing paid off in the most recent quarter. The investment bank is expected to post a record annual profit of more than \$1 billion.

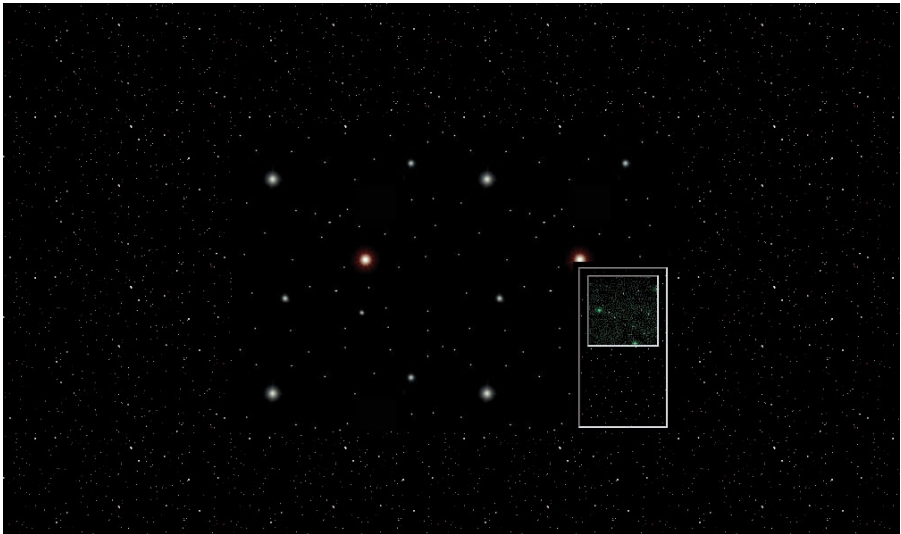
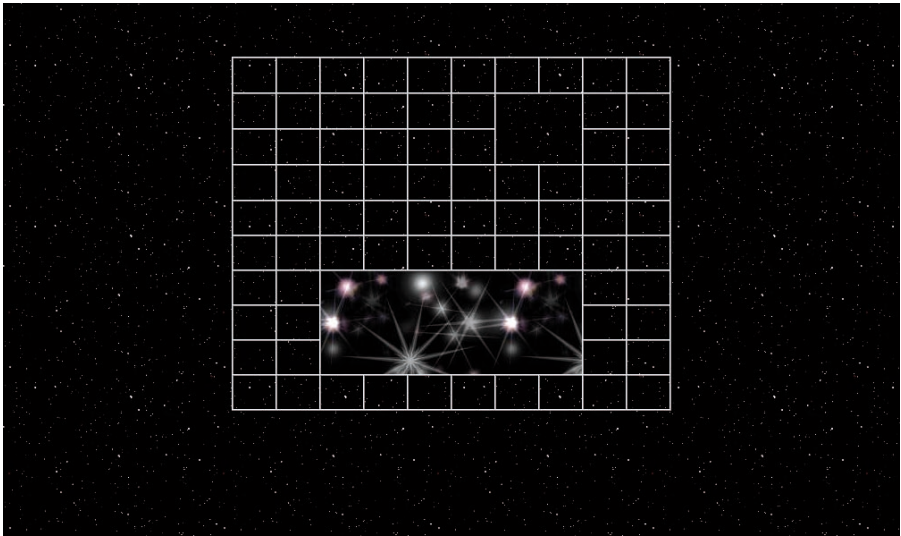
The Fed holds an open meeting to consider tighter mortgage-lending regulations. 10 am, Washington.

news all day at [wsj.com](http://wsj.com)

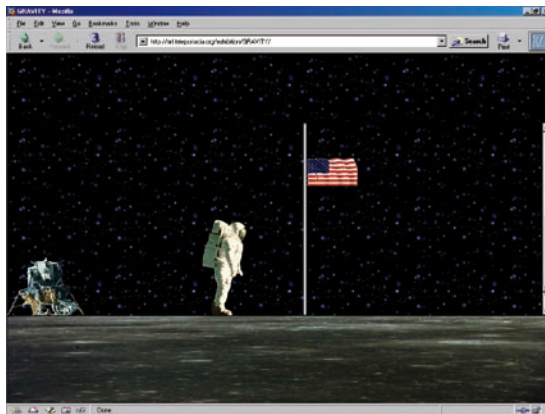
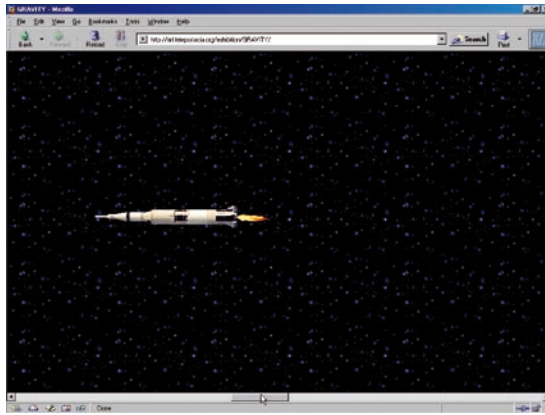
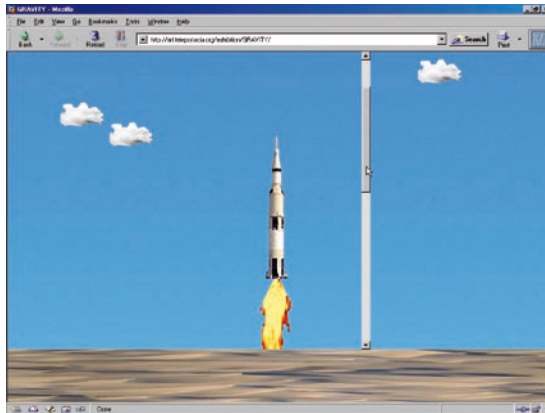
## ENGINEERING MARVEL.

THE NEW ASIM INTEL. Our first ever processor. Available now. Learning. GREAT COMPUTING STARTS HERE.





some universe  
2001

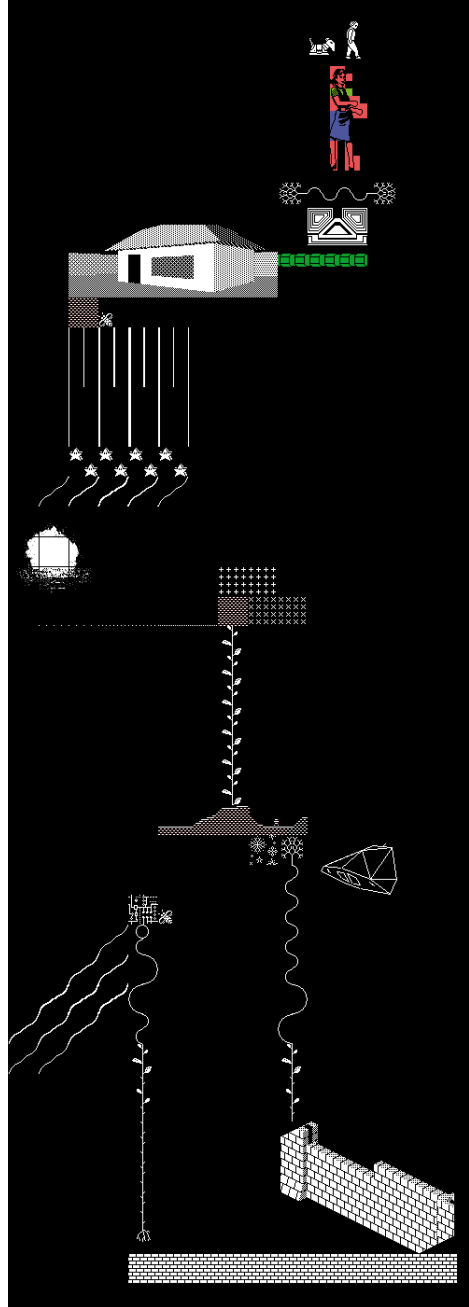
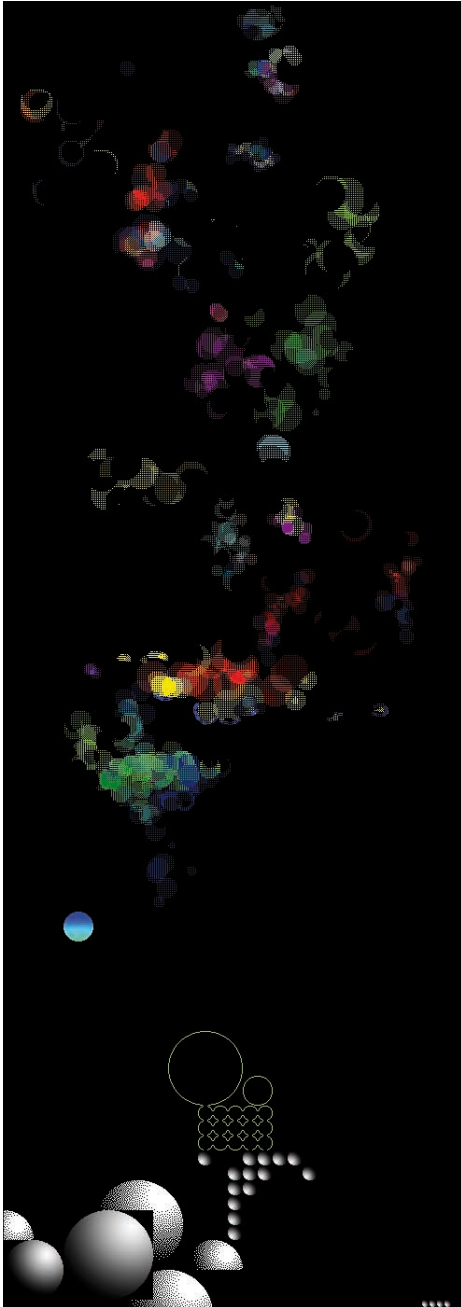


GRAVITY  
2003

Bridging the Digital Divide (right side)  
2003

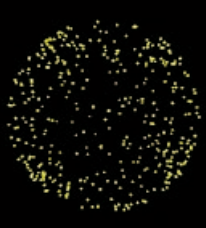
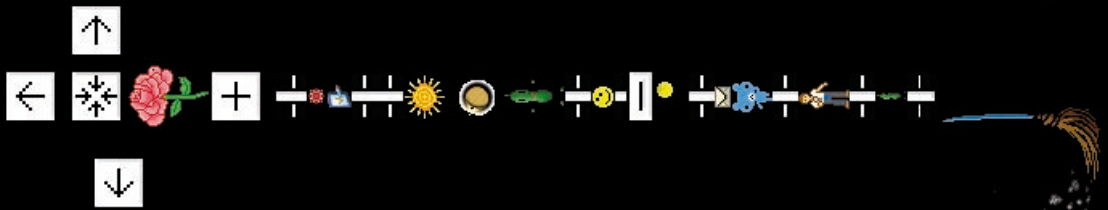
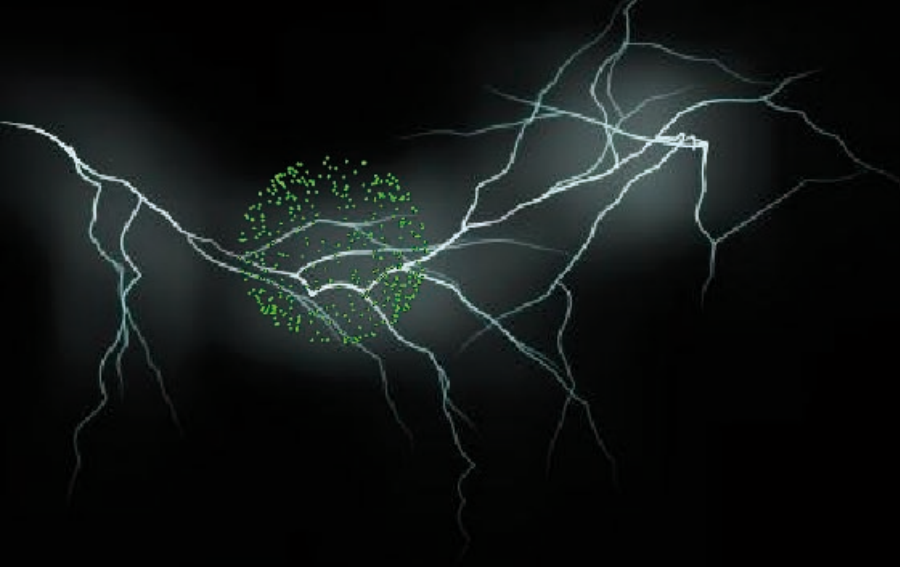
BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE





frozen niki  
2006

Midnight (right side)  
2006









# IT HINK YOU GOT CATS ON YOUR INTER- NET

english

version

1-28

deutsche

fassung

29-40

HELENE DAMS, 2008

## I THINK YOU GOT CATS ON YOUR INTERNET

“ Web 1.0 was invented to allow physicists to share re-  
search papers. Web 2.0 was created to allow people to  
share pictures of cute cats. ” 1

The internet is an unusual and confusing place where new curiosities are spawned on a daily basis, before being swilled out of the niches of the internet subculture and washed up on the mainstream shores of popular culture. Phenomena such as dancing hamsters or Charlie the unicorn can only exist online, and rely on this medium to become phenomena at all. Only online could artistes like Tay Zonday, with his song video for “Chocolate Rain”, or Grup Tekkan with “Where are you, my sunlight” become unexpectedly famous overnight, joining the “Star Wars Kid” at the pinnacle of internet stardom.

Cute little cats are even more popular. Admittedly, animals have long been an important part of the internet, but cats have always been the secret superstars. When they suddenly started demanding “cheezburgers”, rode invisible bicycles or cried continuously for “Halp!” (help), a clear breakthrough had been made and a new phenomenon was born – the “lolcat”, combining “lol” as an acronym for “laughing out loud”, a term used in internet forums and chat rooms, and “cat”.

*fig. 1*  
**see page 22**

“Lolcats” are not merely humorous, absurd images of cute kitties with headings in pidgin English, but constitute a running gag, the limits of whose circulation extend beyond a specific subculture dominated by nerds and geeks which may be linked to geographical locations and so-

cial networks. On the contrary, it is a gigantic, global insider joke which everyone can share.

Where? That's easy to answer, as it's hard to find a website or portal without cats these days. It goes without saying that Flickr, YouTube and Co. all feature a flood of cat-related images and videos, but personal weblogs and anonymous discussion rounds in forums are overflowing with them too.

The lolcat phenomenon is mushrooming rapidly. The cats suddenly appear to be populating the entire Web. They are the subject of many communities which have formed via and around these goofy images.

## **TEH BASICXS**

No one knows exactly who posted the first images of cats on the internet. However, it is possible to trace authorship of the lolcat "archetype" back to the anonymous imageboard "4chan" with sufficient certainty. 4chan is an online forum primarily used to post and exchange images. It was created in 2003, an eternity ago in terms of internet chronology, when a forum member of the "Something Awful" website was inspired to develop an English-speaking equivalent of the Japanese imageboard "Futaba Channel". In the Japanese original, primarily adolescent internet users swap opinions about everything that interests them via hundreds of so-called "channels", from music, movies and animals to cars and pornography. The frequently bizarrely manipulated images which circulate here attracted the attention of Anglo-American users very early on. However, language limited active participation at that point. This problem was solved with the launch of the English-speaking 4chan forum. There, users follow the example of the Futaba Channel and remain anonymous. 4chan rapidly became the Web's largest English-speaking imageboard.

Imageboards provide users with a unique opportunity to communicate via images. The sites overflow with thousands and thousands of bizarre

images on a variety of different themes, and each user can nominate a specific discussion topic in order to provoke reactions by other users. This usually occurs in the form of repetitions: older, previously published images are manipulated and republished. Some of them become established and turn into “memes”, a

“ [...] running gag that won’t stop running but instead reproduces and mutates in the petri dish of the Net’s collective imagination. ” 2

The term “meme” is an artificial word which was influenced by the evolutionary biologist and theoretician Richard Dawkins. The concept constitutes cultural units via which the growth and renewal of cultural systems can be explained. 3

Cats were not spared these dynamic image manipulations. Cute and adorable pictures were no longer sufficient. The images were soon adorned with text to lend the kitties a humorous effect. The unusual practice of embellishing images with eye-catching text has its origins in “image macros”, which have a long cultural history of their own. Their roots can even be traced back to the early internet of the 1990s and the culture of video games. “Cat macros” are an important part of image macros.

The cat macros didn’t become true internet attraction until 2007, when an anonymous member of the 4chan forum posted the picture of a hungry-looking, chubby-cheeked gray cat with the heading “I can has cheezburger?” online. This likeable little kitty, appropriately named “Happycat”, originates from the website of a Russian cat food manufacturer 4 and laid the foundations for the provisional crest of the lolcat wave on January 11, 2007: the blog [icanhascheezburger.com](http://icanhascheezburger.com). Happycat thus became, almost retrospectively, the ancestral father of all lolcats.

## *fig. 2*

## UR DOIN IT WRUNG

The majority of lolcat images follow a simple principle:

“ Take a picture of a cat doing something cute. Then make up a caption – something witty that the cat would be saying if cats could talk. Bear in mind that cats can’t spell all that well and that they’re not so hot on subject-verb agreement either. Photoshop the caption onto the image, and post your creation on a blog. ” 6

The images may appear incomprehensible to outsiders unaware of the codes on which they are based. This is because the authors who generate the lolcat images create their own subculture with specific criteria for access and participation. Those wishing to comprehend the unique grammatical structures and the distinctive aesthetics have to immerse themselves in the world of lolcats.

At first glance, all seem to bear a striking resemblance to one another. However, attentive observers can gain access to a large cultural spectrum. Each image pursues specific themes or insider jokes from the various niches of internet culture. The original “I can has cheezburger?” cat mutated into an entire series of species and sub-species which continued changing at lightning speed.

I would like to introduce the most important and well-known genres here.

## FRIENDZ I HAS TEHM

The “I made you X but I eated it” version surfaced soon after the “I can has X” variety.

# *fig. 3*

The “I’m in ur X, doing ur Y” construction originates from the widespread phrase “I’m in ur base, killing ur d00dz”, an insider joke amongst players of “Starcraft”, the online strategy game by Blizzard.

## *fig. 4*

This was followed by the “Invisible X” variation, which shows a cat interacting with an invisible object.

## *fig. 5*

Some cats also have a specific appearance, which is described in the text with the help of adjectives, such as “Serious cat is not amused” or “Happycat has running out of happy”.

The lolcat meme was soon transferred to other species. The first and probably most famous creation is a “lolrus”. The poor animal had its bucket stolen and it has been trying to recover it ever since. This tragic saga was continued on the internet in a thousand different versions.

## *fig. 6*

“Loldogs”, “lolbees” and “lolbunnies” – virtually every species imaginable can be combined with the lol meme. People aren’t spared either. In addition to the “lolgays”, politicians, religions and geeks are also the subject of satire.

## *fig. 7*

Meanwhile, the World Wide Web contains a lol counterpart for every conceivable issue. These even include grotesque and less amusing ad-

aptations such as the “loldedcat” images of run over or dead cats, some of which are in a more or less advanced state of decay. You just have to google.

And what’s the point of all this?

If a forum chat threatens to become too intense, for example, all you have to do is post an image with the remark: “I are serious cat. This is serious thread.” However, if the situation requires a sarcastic or sardonic response, it’s best to use the “O’ RLY?” phrase, short for “Oh, really?”. This typically appears on images of a perplexed-looking snowy owl.

## **SPIRITSHUAL**

At some indeterminable point in the past, someone had the terrific idea of proclaiming a holy holiday for all cat fans on 4chan, which was promptly christened “Caturday”. On this day, people across the internet create humorous kitty images, post them online and send them around the globe by e-mail.

Caturday is normally introduced with the following invocation:

*DON’T YOU KNOW WHAT DAY IT IS?  
WELL?  
DO YOU?  
CATURDAY, BITCHES.  
POST SOME FUCKING CATS.*

Originally, this event was scheduled to take place each Saturday, but it was eventually decided to abolish this rule and celebrate Caturday 365 days a year from then on.

Some cats which were created on these days became self-perpetuating. One example is the “speedycat”, which is really “speeeeeeeeedy”. The

“serious cat” watches over discussions in online forums, and the grim-looking “limecat”, clad in a helmet made from a lime, appears to be the queen amongst the cat macros.

However, some lolcats enjoy particular veneration and fame.

The “ceiling cat”, which constitutes the lolcat equivalent of the Christian God, and, as legend has it, watches people masturbating through a hole in the ceiling, is just one example. Its adversary is the satanic “Basement Cat”.

## *fig. 8*

Another spiritual figure is the long-serving meme known as “Longcat”. This cat simply materialized one day – it wasn’t a Caturday - and rose to instant fame thanks to its length.

## *fig. 9 - fig. 11*

### **KITTY PIDGIN**

At the beginning of 2007, blogger Anil Dash described the singularities of the lolcat language in an article dedicated to them, terming this “kitty 7 pidgin”, a mixture of “babytalk” and internet slang, which obeys its own laws and helps cats communicate with humans.

The language could have developed into “MeowChat”, a phenomenon which involves participants who had, on the strength of past experience, been human until that point, pretending to be cats and using correspondingly similar phraseology. However, many cat-lovers despise MeowChat, as it implicitly accuses their darlings of stupidity and human dependency.



Kitty pidgin is really hilarious. This isn't just because the kitties say "hai" instead of "hi" and refer to themselves in the third person. They simply don't know how to use the English language correctly. They communicate with us, but they haven't quite managed to master our codes yet.

" All of us are, of course, highly intelligent. Most of us have tertiary edukashun, and there are many regular posters with PhDs and so on. However, we do not consider ourselves bound by human rules and regulations and will therefore spell words any way we please. We all spell better in English than humans do in Cattish and, besides, how good was your spelling when you were two years old? Some of us also have difficulty spelling because our paws don't fit the human keyboard or because we telepathically send our posts to our humans, who type them for us, and something gets lost in the translation. Some of us, though, send telepathically directly to the computer, which spells most words the way humans do. Those of us who do that have difficulty spelling things strangely. " 8

Nevertheless, it is possible to make errors when using kitty pidgin. While the "I can has cheezburger?" species has reasonably standardized grammar, A. Dash demonstrates that examples of distorted kitty pidgin are now emerging:

Incorrect kitty pidgin jumped to my attention the first time I saw a reference to Dune being used with a lolcat image. The caption on the [...] version of the image, "The spice must flow." is fine, if not particularly cat-like. But the caption on the version I saw first was much more verbose: "I are dunecat. I controls the spice, I controls the universe." Besides being an awkward attempt at overexplaining the punchline (I've never read Dune or seen the film, but the joke is obvious) this was just all wrong. The fact that we can tell no cat would talk like this shows that kitty pidgin is actually quite consistent. 9

## *fig. 12*

### I CAN HAS HISTORY

Back when the Web was based purely on text, early internet users were inspired by the cat's cute factor and created so-called "cat emoticons" from the well-known "emoticons", or smileys, which express moods and feelings in written electronic communication.

## *fig. emoticons*

We cats are perfect works of art. Our images adorn temples, pyramids, picture books, and T-shirts. Our pictures grace the lines of e-mail too. Granted, the ASCII-character art stamped at the bottom of electronic messages is somewhat unsophisticated compared with paintings of Renoir and Gauguin. But as tributes to our impish spirit, they transcend their crudeness.

## <sup>10</sup> *fig. 13*

With the emergence of the World Wide Web and the amateur culture of the "personal homepage" in the mid-1990s, an important pearl of wisdom spread through the Net, which epitomizes the understanding of internet communication and the identity of the user: "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog." However, this idiom is easy to elaborate as follows:

" No one knows you're a dog, but everyone knows what your cat looks like. " <sup>11</sup>

That's hardly surprising, since those who created their own homepages kept their cats in mind, too. They paid tribute to their little darlings on their

own homepages in the form of illustrated descriptions and created “cat homepages” as virtual residences for the kitties.

“ Hundreds of cats now have their own Web pages, where they display pictures of themselves, discuss their hobbies and obsessions, and impart their view on life and politics. [...] When you arrive at the page a picture of a cat usually greets you. If you’re lucky, it will be a good-looking cat, with wide, luminous eyes and Cheshire grin. If you’re unlucky, you might encounter the hideous face of a dog, in which case you should disconnect immediately. ” <sup>12</sup>

Cat fans, including many cat breeders, founded internet communities, linked websites to form webrings and, if the beloved cat ever passed on, online pet-loss support groups provided consolation. The legend of the “rainbow bridge”, a place where the idolized little animals go after their passing, is another source of comfort. <sup>13</sup>

An important step in online cat culture was a so-called “cat scan contest”, launched by Cliff Bleszinski in 1999. Cat owners the world over were called upon to force their furry darlings onto flat bed computer scanners in the name of art, on condition that the cat was not seriously harmed or exposed to pain in any way.

“ I love cats, I just believe that a scanned cat is hilarious. ” <sup>14</sup>

## *fig. 14*

This competition caused such a stir that virtually all online media and even some radio stations and newspapers reported the phenomenon. C. Bleszinski was awarded the “Cruel Site of the Day Award” as a result. The website elicited extremely controversial reactions from internet users. Many saw it as debasing animal torment, demanded that the website

be closed down immediately and bombarded the operator with diatribes and threats:

“ John sez... You are really sick, Why don't you scan your face with your eyes open and post it so that everyone will know who to kill

heather weir wrote... Please take take down www.cat-scan.com. Please use your common sense and see that this web site promotes cruelty to defenseless, voiceless animals. thank-you

However, an extremely positive response was received from the majority of users. They found it downright amusing to put a cat on a scanner and take a picture of it:

Zigi sez... Your are truly precious! Thanks for my whole night of laughter, which I have shared with everyone on my mailing list. Your hate mail kept me laughing even longer..... If I still had my loved cat I would immediately put her in my scanner to see what I could make of her. thank you, thank you, thank you....cat-scans rule!!! keep the feline faith and laughter. ” 15

Bonsai kittens, which appeared on the homepage of the same name two years later, really put the cat amongst the pigeons, as it were. 16

## *fig. 15*

Here, the website operators introduced an innovative process for the creation of cute quadratic kittens, which were bound to turn other cat owners green with envy. However, before this, the cat had to be crammed tightly into a glass container for several weeks and nourished rectally via

tubes. The importance of daily feces disposal and the creation of breathing holes for their pets were impressed upon would-be owners in the process. This hoax, recognizable as such at first glance, put countless users and, above all, the animal welfare activists, on red alert:

“ While surfing earlier, I came across an internet site which is, in my opinion, a case for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The site is called [www.bonsaikitten.com](http://www.bonsaikitten.com). I’ve never heard of the so-called Bonsai cat until now. However, what I saw there almost broke this “cat mom’s” heart. They put the little cuties in a glass which is far too small in order to influence their growth - and leave them there for up to a week or longer!!! The glass has two holes. They get air, food and water through one and do their business through the other. I can’t believe how people can sit back and watch this. ... ” 17

Although this phenomenon was clearly a joke by students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the photos were manipulated using image processing programs, chain letter petitions appealed for protests and demanded that the website in question be censored. Humor just isn’t everyone’s cup of tea. The FBI even investigated the case on the grounds of potential cruelty to animals, but found no evidence that animals had actually come to harm.

Those responsible for the website were unable to comprehend the drama generated by their homepage. All they had wanted to do was

“ [...] shock cat lovers a little and expose the ‘hypocrisy’ of society and of animal welfare activists. ” 18

In contrast, the site’s guest book reveals other users’ acknowledgement and approval. Many would like to order a Bonsai cat, while others would prefer them to be even more eccentric:

“ JoyVessel@Home.com I have a bonsai kitten. they are really nice. i got mine in the shape of a star. bonsai kittens cant walk or anything but they can sort of move around. we feed ours with a bottle because it cant really eat and we have a colostomy bag hooked up for waste materials. its really not that bad he doesnt seem to complain i think he like being like this it sets him apart from other cats and makes him unique in his own special way. i know this may seem strange but it doesnt hurt them at all they just act differently. i love my bonsai kitten and would never go back to the traditional way of kittens you all should stop being so judgemental and accept new things maybe try one for yourself then you would understand. ” 19

Today, private blogs are a very successful online format. However, no blog would be complete without the cat:

“ In fact, new media theorist Geert Lovink noted in a terrific presentation last year that despite all the talk about the revolutionary potential of blogs, the \*most popular\* topic on blogs is still... cats. So you can't really talk about blogs without talking about'em. All hail our feline masters. ” 21

In fact, the majority of blogs are about kitties, even if the author doesn't actually own one. In an e-mail interview conducted in 2008, Geert Lovink explained why cats are so popular in the blogosphere:

“ for me, it's something to do with blogs and privacy. the house, the coziness of the PC environment. in my opinion, blogging is only partly to do with office culture of public life (although they still refer to these). the glimpse of peoples' private lives is what makes blogging so interesting. and there we find...

the cats. ” 22

One of the most famous blogs on the Web is probably “I Can Has Cheezburger” (IHC), which is based on the lolcat phenomenon and is thus the first port of call for cat lovers.

In January 2007, US programmer Eric Nakagawa, alias “Cheezburger” created a website with his partner “Tofuburger”, which revolved around a cat demanding cheezburgers, namely Happycat, who is already known to us. They initiated the whole thing for fun, and wanted to give the world a chance to share the joke. However, the site attracted so much attention that they quickly decided to turn their site into a blog, so that visitors could not only view the pictures, but comment on them too.

A short while later, the operators decided to involve users in the creative process of lolcat image design. Nakagawa programmed a tool which enables people to select pre-existing cat photos or upload their own pictures, embellish them with goofy captions, and send off the finished product.

“ It’s like you’re creating a story supplied by people in the community, and then the people in the community supply the next part of the story. ” 23

Subsequently, everyone has a chance to vote on the resulting images and the picture with the highest rating – the most cheezburgers – appears on the blog’s homepage.

The fact that users are given the opportunity to participate in a current event creates the feeling of belonging to a community. This factor, and the booming online subculture with the site as center of the lolcat phenomenon, triggered the lolcats’ mass proliferation of the lolcats, as they are now so easy to create, without any additional software, and even without precise knowledge of the insider jokes.

However, Mr. Nakagawa and his partner not only entertain their blog readers, but now earn a great deal of money from the project which

started out as a mere joke: The cheapest advertising on their blog costs five hundred dollars per week and the most expensive around four thousand dollars. Books featuring photos of lol- <sup>24</sup> cats have already been published.

Today, many unexceptional images of cats and the popular lolcats provide young users with the basis for the creation of glitter graphics, which have recently begun to grace almost every online community. Sparkling cats are used in countless user images and as avatars which, as users' personal pictures or emblems, represent their moods, feelings and interests in communities, discussion forums, journals and on profile sites.

## KITTNS FOR TEH WIN

After all the major US media, from "New York Times", "Wall Street Journal" and "Businessweek" to "Time" ran reports about the lolcat phenomenon, the kitty pidgin phraseology has infiltrated other cat-free blogs and websites. There are over seven hundred million Google hits for internet sites which include the sentence opener "I can has". For example, in 2007, the weblog software supplier "LiveJournal" used the following phrase to announce its partnership with the photo portal "Photobucket" on its company blog: "We has a Photobucket"<sup>25</sup>.

And those who haven't yet mastered kitty pidgin are referred to the "lolcat translators" or have their own website transformed into a "websiet" with the help of "lolinators". <sup>26</sup>

"Lolcode" <sup>27</sup> is a computer language inspired by kitty pidgin which is based on the lolcats' grammatical constructs.

" The language is not clearly defined in terms of operator priorities and correct syntax, but several functioning interpreters and compilers already exist. " <sup>28</sup>



Here is a sample program:

```
HAI
CAN HAS STUDIO?
I HAS A VAR
IM IN YR LOOP
  UPZ VAR!!1
  VISIBLE VAR
  IZ VAR BIGR THAN 10? GTFO. KTHX
KTHX
KTHXBYE
```

The “LOLCat Bible Translation Project” is a website based on wiki technology which has set itself the task of <sup>29</sup> translating the entire bible into kitty pidgin in the form of a joint collaboration. Its attraction lies in the fact that it calls for teamwork, and involves each participant in the project. The writing or translation style is logically based on lolcat idioms and jokes.

“I can has nomination?” was a campaign initiated by Barack Obama fans prior to the US elections in order to support their candidate. The lolcats’ idiosyncratic humor was grafted onto photos of Obama and mass-produced. Barack Obama, now better known as “Lolbama” gained enormously in popularity as a result of this campaign, even amongst those who usually displayed little or no interest in politics. <sup>30</sup>

Everyone wants to profit from the lolcats’ popularity and appeal, not just major communities like Flickr and YouTube, which offer their users a permanent flood of cat-related materials.

## *fig. 16*

New kitty communities are created on a daily basis. It seems as if the words “lol” and “cat”, freely combined with other terms, present thou-

sands of sources of inspiration: “Meme Cats”, “Katurday”, “Stuff On My Cat”, “ROFLCAT”, “lolcatr” <sup>31</sup> etc. ad infinitum.

## LISSIN UPZ!!1

The reason why cat motifs are so popular in internet culture, this irrespective of their aesthetic format, is because they radiate a cuteness which (almost) no one can resist. They appear helpless and vulnerable, and, when they look so sweet, most people have to refrain from cooing “Ooooh, how adooooorable!!!”. Those wishing to intensify this reaction should adorn the cat picture with a few glitter effects – success is guaranteed!

All this may seem ridiculous and trivial, but an entire culture, the “cute culture”, is based on it. [cuteoverload.com](http://cuteoverload.com) is just one Web location where all manner of sweet, cute, adorable and cuddly things congregate - to the delight of users.

However, the great thing about lolcats is the amazing speed with which a new form of expression can develop in the internet medium; it’s possible to experience everything live in just a few weeks, instead of over the course of years. Simultaneously, lolcats exemplify the future of media-based communication: the images are not merely characterized by a single piece of information which is passed between senders and recipients, but depend on the user’s willingness to manipulate the information, pass it on and to view the information’s coding as a design space in itself.

Lolcats thus depend on the participation of amateurs. They create silly, bizarre species and variations time and again, thus continuing to keep the meme alive.

“ Like cultural scavengers, fans reclaim works that others regard as “worthless” trash, finding them a source of popular capital. ” <sup>32</sup>

But what will become of the lolcats when they grow even more popular? Can an insider joke ever become exhausted and lose its appeal? Or will we have enough of looking at cute kitties?

## *fig. 17*

I have no idea, but I hope that many new creations will develop, like this one here:

### **FAIL**

The format for this current trend is just as simple and obvious as its predecessors: you take a picture of a cat doing something seriously amusing and wrong and write the word FAIL above it in big letters.

## *fig. 18* *fig. 19*

Nothing else can really go wrong, right?

/

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**fig. 1**

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**fig. 2**

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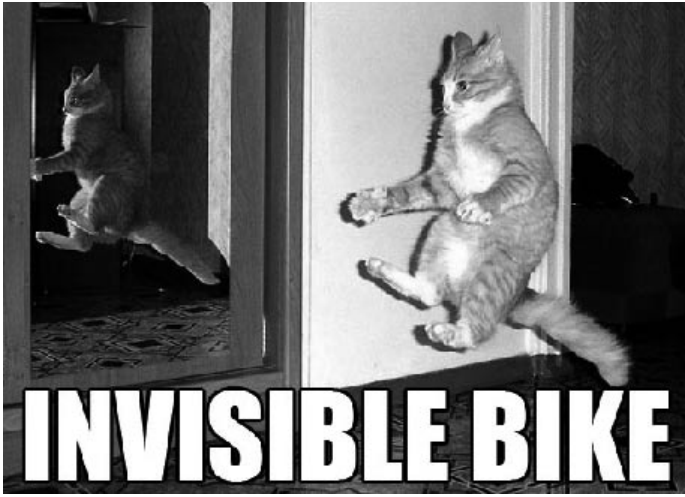
**fig. 3**

<http://icanhascheezburger.com/2007/01/15/i-made-you-a-cookie/>



**fig. 4**

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**fig. 5**

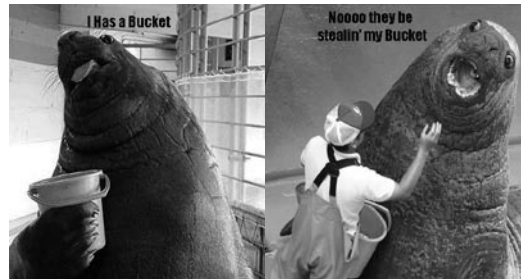
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FIGURES / ABBILDUNGEN



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<http://quantumrook.wordpress.com/2007/05/19/is-it-caturday/>



# fig. 10

<http://images.encyclopediadramatica.com/images/f/f4/Longcathearthf8.jpg>



# fig. 11

<http://images.encyclopediadramatica.com/images/7/79/Godcat.jpg>

24





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^^ ^^		U		U

# fig. 12

<http://www.myconfinedspace.com/2007/04/01/i-are-dunecat/>

# fig. emoti- cons

Heim, Judy (1996), *Internet for Cats. A Guide to How You and Your Cat Can Prowl the Information Highway Together*, Canada. pp. 36-37



# fig. 13

[http://www.xmission.com/~emailbox/ascii\\_cats.htm](http://www.xmission.com/~emailbox/ascii_cats.htm)



# fig. 14

<http://web.archive.org/web/20000510173244/www.cat-scan.com/Old/index.html>



**fig. 15**

<http://www.shorty.com/bonsaikitten/bnw.html>



**fig. 16**

<http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/2008/03/08/the-cute-cat-theory-talk-at-etech/>

Cats: not that funny.



Dear new internet users,

Please stop uploading and emailing photos of cats looking grumpy/cute/angry/fat/wet/sad or fixing your computer.

It was funny in 1995 when civilization first started using the web, but it's over now.

Sincerely,

The rest of us.

**fig. 17**

<http://miscellanea.wellingtongrey.net/2006/12/11/cats-not-that-funny/>



***fig.18***

<http://www.lafferty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2007/05/fail-24.jpg>



***fig.19***

<http://funnyfailpictures.com/2008/10/cat-eating-cactus-fail-picture.html>



## I THINK YOU GOT CATS ON YOUR INTERNET

*Deutsche Fassung*

“Web 1.0 was invented to allow physicists to share research papers. Web 2.0 was created to allow people to share pictures of cute cats.” 1 (siehe Seite 22)

Das Internet ist ein außergewöhnlicher und ein verwirrender Ort, an dem jeden Tag neue Kuriositäten entstehen und aus den Nischen der Internetsubkultur in den Mainstream der Populärkultur gespült werden. Phänomene wie beispielsweise tanzende Hamster oder das Einhorn namens Charlie können nur online existieren oder sich überhaupt zu Phänomenen entwickeln. Nur online war es Tay Zonday mit seinem Video zum Song „Chocolate Rain“ oder der Grup Tekkan mit „Wo bist du, mein Sonnenlicht“ möglich, über Nacht zu unerwartetem Ruhm zu gelangen und zusammen mit dem „Star Wars Kid“ zu absoluten Internetstars zu werden.

Noch populärer sind niedliche Kätzchen. Zugegeben, Tiere sind schon immer ein wichtiger Bestandteil des Internets gewesen, doch die heimlichen Superstars waren schon immer die Katzen. Als diese plötzlich Cheezburger forderten, unsichtbare Räder fahren oder ständig nach „Halp!“ (Hilfe) verlangten, war ihr endgültiger Durchbruch geschafft und ein neues

Phänomen geboren – die Lolcat. „Lol“ als ein Akronym für „laughing out loud“, welches in Internetforen und Chaträumen verwendet wird, und „cat“ für Katze.

## fig. 1

siehe  
Seite 24

Es handelt sich nicht nur um ein humoristisches und absurdes Bild einer niedlichen Katze mit einer Überschrift aus englischem Kauderwelsch, sondern um einen Running Gag, der nicht nur in einer bestimmten, von Nerds und Geeks dominierten Subkultur zirkuliert und eventuell an geographische Orte und soziale Netzwerke gebunden ist. Vielmehr ist es ein gigantischer, globaler Insiderwitz, an dem jeder teilnehmen kann.

Wo? Das ist einfach zu beantworten, denn kaum eine Website oder Portal kommt heute ohne Katzen aus. Nicht nur Flickr, YouTube und Co. halten eine Flut katzenbezogener Bilder und Videos vor, auch persönliche Weblogs und anonyme Diskussionsrunden in Foren quellen davon über.

Das Lolcat-Phänomen breitet sich in rasanter Geschwindigkeit aus. Die Katzen scheinen plötzlich das gesamte Web zu bevölkern. Sie sind Gegenstand vieler Communities, die sich durch und um diese albernen Bilder herum gebildet haben.

### TEH BASICXS

Wer die ersten Katzenbilder wann ins Internet stellte, ist nicht überliefert. Aber es lässt sich mit ziemlicher Genauigkeit sagen, dass die „Urform“ der Lolcat auf dem anonymen Imageboard

„4chan“ ins Leben gerufen wurde; einem Onlinenforum, in dem es hauptsächlich um den Austausch von Bildern geht. 4chan wiederum entstand 2003 – für die Internetzeitrechnung eine Ewigkeit her –, als ein Forummitglied der Webseite „Something Awful“ auf die Idee kam, ein englischsprachiges Pendant zum japanischen Imageboard „Futaba Channel“ zu entwickeln. Im japanischen Original tauschen überwiegend jugendliche Internetbenutzer in hunderten „Channels“ ihre Meinungen über all das aus, was sie interessiert: Musik, Filme, Tiere, Autos, Pornografie. Die oftmals skurril manipulierten Bilder, die dort zirkulieren, zogen schon sehr früh die Aufmerksamkeit der Benutzer aus dem angloamerikanischen Raum auf sich. Eine Barriere zur aktiven Teilnahme stellte allerdings die Sprache dar. Mit der Eröffnung des englischsprachigen 4chan-Forums war dieses Problem überwunden. Die Nutzer bleiben dabei wie bei Futaba Channel anonym. 4chan avancierte in kürzester Zeit zum größten englischsprachigen Imageboard des Webs.

Imageboards bieten die einzigartige Möglichkeit, über Bilder zu kommunizieren. Dort kursieren tausende und abertausende bizarrer Abbildungen zu vielen verschiedenen Themen, wobei jeder User ein bestimmtes Thema zur Diskussion vorgeben kann, um die Reaktion anderer User herauszufordern. Meist passiert dies in Form von Wiederholungen: Längst veröffentlichte Bilder werden manipuliert und erneut veröffentlicht. Einige davon setzen sich fest und manifestieren sich zu einem „Mem“, einem

„[...] running gag that won't stop running but instead reproduces and mutates in the petri dish of the Net's collective imagination.“ <sup>2</sup>

Der Begriff Mem ist ein Kunstwort, welches von dem Evolutionsbiologen und -theoreti-

ker Richard Dawkins geprägt wurde. Es ist ein Konzept kultureller Bausteine, durch die sich Wachstum und Erneuerung kultureller Systeme erklären lassen. <sup>3</sup>

Katzen wurden von diesen dynamischen Bildmanipulationen nicht verschont. Es reichte nicht mehr aus, dass sie niedlich und süß aussahen. Nun begann man die Bilder mit Text zu versehen, um den Katzen eine humoristische Wirkung zu verleihen. Diese besondere Praxis, Bilder mit eindrucksvollen Texten zu versehen, hat seinen Ursprung in den „Image Macros“, die selbst eine längere kulturelle Geschichte aufweisen. Ihre Wurzeln lassen sich sogar zum frühen Internet der 1990er Jahre und der Videospielkultur zurückverfolgen. Einen wichtigen Teil der Image Macros bilden „Cat Macros“.

Zum wahren Renner wurden die Cat Macros erst 2007, als ein anonymes Poster des 4chan-Forums das Bild einer hungrig aussehenden, pausbäckigen grauen Katze mit der Überschrift „I can has cheezburger?“ online stellte. Dieses Kätzchen mit dem sympathischen Namen „Happycat“, stammt ursprünglich von der Website eines russischen Katzenfutterherstellers <sup>4</sup> und sollte am 11. Januar 2007 den Grundstein für den vorläufigen Höhepunkt der Lolcat-Welle legen: Das Blog icanhascheezburger.com. Happycat wurde somit quasi rückwirkend zum Urvater aller Lolcats gemacht.

## fig. 2

### UR DOIN IT WRUNG

Die meisten Lolcatbildchen folgen einem simplen Prinzip:

„ Ein unerträglich niedliches, gerne auch mit dem Computer möglichst trashig und

übertrieben bearbeitetes Foto einer Katze ist die Grundlage.

In weißer, serifenloser Schrift (Arial [Arial Black] oder Helvetica [und Impact] zum Beispiel) mit schwarzem Rand [meistens in einer 48pt Schriftgröße mit einem 5px-Rand] knallt der Bearbeiter einen Spruch in dieses Bild.

Grammatik wird, so weit es geht, missachtet: Verben stehen in falscher Abfolge, im Plural, obwohl das Subjekt im Singular steht. Die Rechtschreibung muss nach ein paar Regeln gebrochen werden: Z statt S, the wird zu teh und so weiter. Grundregel: Solange es ausgesprochen richtig klingt, kann ein Wort fast beliebig buchstabiert werden.

Lolcat-Bildermacher verniedlichen, wo immer es geht: Aus Katzen werden zum Beispiel fast immer Kätzchen.

Ausrufezeichen und Akronyme aus der Websprache streuen die Autoren großzügig in ihre Lolcat-Werke ein, zum Beispiel OMG!!! (Oh my god), WTF (What the fuck), LAWLZ (für Lol, Laughing out loud).“ <sup>5</sup>

Für einen Außenstehenden, der die verwendeten Codes, auf denen die Bilder basieren, nicht kennt, mögen diese unverständlich erscheinen. Denn die Autoren, die die Lolcatbilder erzeugen, bilden ihre eigene Subkultur mit besonderen Kriterien für den Zugang und die Teilnahme. Will man die eigenartigen grammatikalischen Strukturen, die unverwechselbare Ästhetik verstehen, muss man in die Welt der Lolcats eintauchen.

Auf den ersten Blick scheinen alle Lolcats einander zu gleichen, dem aufmerksamen Be-

trachter eröffnet sich jedoch eine große kulturelle Bandbreite. Jedes Bild folgt bestimmten Themen oder Insiderwitzen aus den unterschiedlichen Nischen der Internetkultur. Aus der ursprünglichen „I can has cheezburger?“-Katze mutierte eine ganze Reihe von Spezies und Subspezies, die sich rasend schnell weiter veränderten.

Die wichtigsten und bekanntesten Gattungen möchte ich nun hier vorstellen.

### **FRIENDZ I HAS TEHM**

Bald nach der „I can has X“-Variante tauchte die „I made you X but I eated it“-Version auf.

## *fig. 3*

Die „I'm in ur X, doing ur Y“-Konstruktion entstammt der weit verbreiteten Phrase „I'm in ur base, killing ur d00dz“, einem Insiderwitz unter Spielern des Onlinestrategiespiels „Starcraft“ von Blizzard.

## *fig. 4*

Daraufhin folgte die „Invisible X“-Variation, welche eine Katze zeigt, die mit einem unsichtbaren Objekt interagiert.

## *fig. 5*

Außerdem gibt es Kätzchen, die ein spezifisches Aussehen haben, welches im Text mithilfe von Adjektiven beschrieben wird, beispielsweise „Serious cat is not amused“ oder „Happycat has running out of happy“.

Es dauerte nicht lange, bis sich das Lolcat-Meme auf andere Tierarten übertrug. Die erste,

wohl bekannteste Kreation ist ein „Lolrus“. Dem armen Tier wurde sein Eimer gestohlen, seitdem versucht es, ihm wieder habhaft zu werden. Diese tragische Saga wurde im Netz tausendfach fortgeschrieben.

## fig. 6

„Loldogs“, „Lolbees“ und „Lolbunnies“ – eigentlich kann jede erdenkliche Tierart mit dem Lol-Meme kombiniert werden.

Menschen werden genauso wenig verschont. Neben den „Lolgays“ werden beispielsweise Politiker, Religionen und Geeks aufs Korn genommen.

## fig. 7

Mittlerweile birgt das World Wide Web zu jedem denkbaren Thema das Pendant einer Lol-Variante. Auch groteske und weniger amüsante Abwandlungen wie die „Loldedcat“-Bilder überfahrener oder toter Katzen, die sich zum Teil im mehr oder minder fortgeschrittenen Verwesungszustand befinden. Man muss nur googeln.

Und wozu soll das alles gut sein? Wenn zum Beispiel die Unterhaltung in einem Forum allzu angestrengt zu werden droht, muss man nur ein Bild posten mit dem Vermerk: „I are serious cat. This is serious thread.“ Sofern aber die Situation einer sarkastischen oder hämischen Antwort bedarf, benutzt man am besten die „O RLY?“-Phrase, kurz für „Oh, really?“. Typischerweise steht sie auf Bildern einer verdutzt dreinschauenden Schneeeule.

### SPIRITSHUAL

Zu einem unbestimmbaren Zeitpunkt in der Vergangenheit hatte jemand die grandiose Idee,

auf 4chan einen heiligen Feiertag für alle Katzenfans auszurufen, der ab dem Moment an „Caturday“ heißen sollte. An diesem Tag erstellen Menschen im gesamten Internet humoristische Kätzchenbilder, stellen diese online und schicken sie per E-Mail rund um den Globus.

Der Aufruf, mit dem der Caturday üblicherweise eingeleitet wird, lautet folgendermaßen:

DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT DAY IT IS?  
WELL?  
DO YOU?  
CATURDAY, BITCHES.  
POST SOME FUCKING CATS.

Ursprünglich sollte sich dieses Ereignis jeden Samstag abspielen, allerdings entschloss man sich, diese Regel aufzuheben, um von nun an 365 Tage im Jahr den Caturday zu zelebrieren.

Einige Katzen, die an diesen Tagen erschaffen wurden, entwickelten sich zu Selbstläufern. Da gibt es die „Speedycat“, die wirklich „speeeeeeedy“ ist. Über Diskussionen in Onlineforen wacht die „Serious Cat“, und die grimmig dreinschauende „Limecat“, bekleidet mit einem aus einer Limone gefertigten Helm, scheint die Königin unter den Cat Macros zu sein. Einige Lolcats genießen jedoch ganz besondere Verehrung und Berühmtheit.

Hier wäre zum Beispiel die „Ceiling Cat“, die das Lolcatäquivalent zum Gott der Christen darstellt und die der Legende nach den Menschen aus einem Loch in der Zimmerdecke beim Masturbieren zuschaut. Ihr Gegenspieler ist die satanische „Basement Cat“.

## fig. 8



EINE weitere spirituelle Figur ist das lang gediente Meme „Longcat“. Eines Tages tauchte diese spezifische Katze auf – es war kein Saturday – und aufgrund ihrer Länge wurde sie sofort zu einer Berühmtheit.

## *fig. 9 - fig. 11*

### **KITTY PIDGIN**

Anfang 2007 beschrieb der Blogger Anil Dash in einem Artikel über Lolcats die Eigentümlichkeiten ihrer Sprache und bezeichnete diese als „Kitty Pidgin“ <sup>7</sup>, was frei übersetzt soviel wie „Kätzchenkauderwelsch“ heißt. Eine Mischung aus „Babysprache“ und Internetslang, die ihren eigenen Gesetzen folgt und Katzen hilft, mit Menschen zu kommunizieren. Die Sprache könnte sich im „MeowChat“ entwickelt haben, in dem die nach bisherigen Erkenntnissen menschlichen Teilnehmer vorgeben, Katzen zu sein und dementsprechend ähnliche Diktionen verwenden. Viele Katzenliebhaber verachten MeowChat allerdings, weil dort ihren Lieblingen Dummheit und menschliche Abhängigkeit unterstellt wird.

Kitty Pidgin ist wirklich lustig. Nicht nur weil Kätzchen statt „Hi“ „Hai“ sagen oder von sich in der dritten Person sprechen. Sie wissen eben nicht, wie man die englische Sprache richtig anwendet. Sie kommunizieren mit uns, aber sie haben es noch nicht geschafft, unsere Codes zu meistern:

“All of us are, of course, highly intelligent. Most of us have tertiary edukashun, and there are many regular posters with PhDs and so on. However, we do not consider ourselves bound by human rules and

regulations and will therefore spell words any way we please. We all spell better in English than humans do in Cattish and, besides, how good was your spelling when you were two years old? Some of us also have difficulty spelling because our paws don't fit the human keyboard or because we telepathically send our posts to our humans, who type them for us, and something gets lost in the translation. Some of us, though, send telephatically directly to the computer, which spells most words the way humans do. Those of us who do that have difficulty spelling things strangely.” <sup>8</sup>

Doch es ist auch möglich, beim Gebrauch der Katzensprache etwas falsch zu machen. Während die „I can has cheezburger?“-Spezies eine ziemlich einheitliche Grammatik aufweist, zeigt A. Dash, dass es zuweilen Beispiele gibt, in denen das Kitty Pidgin verfälscht wird:

„Incorrect kitty pidgin jumped to my attention the first time I saw a reference to Dune being used with a lolcat image. The caption on the [...] version of the image, 'The spice must flow.' is fine, if not particularly cat-like. But the caption on the version I saw first was much more verbose: 'I are dunecat. I controls the spice, I controls the universe.' Besides being an awkward attempt at overexplaining the punchline (I've never read Dune or seen the film, but the joke is obvious) this was just all wrong. The fact that we can tell no cat would talk like this shows that kitty pidgin is actually quite consistent.“ <sup>9</sup>

## *fig. 12*

## I CAN HAS HISTORY

Schon Benutzer des frühen Internets – als es noch rein auf Text basierte – ließen sich vom dem Niedlichkeitsfaktor der Katzen dazu inspirieren, aus den altbekannten „Emoticons“ – den Smileys, welche in der schriftlichen elektronischen Kommunikation Stimmungs- und Gefühlszustände ausdrücken – so genannte „Cat Emoticons“ zu schaffen.

# *fig. emoti- cons*

“We cats are perfect works of art. Our images adorn temples, pyramids, picture books, and T-shirts. Our pictures grace the lines of e-mail too. Granted, the ASCII-character art stamped at the bottom of electronic messages is somewhat unsophisticated compared with paintings of Renoir and Gauguin. But as tributes to our impish spirit, they transcend their crudeness.” <sup>10</sup>

## *fig. 13*

Mit dem Aufkommen des World Wide Web und der Amateurkultur der „persönlichen Home Page“ Mitte der 1990er verbreitete sich im Netz eine Weisheit, die das Verständnis über die Internetkommunikation und die Identität des Users symbolisiert: „On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog.“ Dieses Idiom lässt sich jedoch problemlos folgendermaßen erweitern:

“No one knows you’re a dog, but everyone knows what your cat looks like.” <sup>11</sup>  
Das ist nicht überraschend, denn die Menschen, die persönliche Seiten ins Netz stellten,

bedachten auch ihre Katzen. Sie würdigten ihre Lieblinge auf der eigenen Homepage in Form von bebilderten Beschreibungen und erstellten reine „Cat Homepages“ als Domizil für die Miezen.

“Hundreds of cats now have their own Web pages, where they display pictures of themselves, discuss their hobbies and obsessions, and impart their view on life and politics. [...] When you arrive at the page a picture of a cat usually greets you. If you’re lucky, it will be a good-looking cat, with wide, luminous eyes and Cheshire grin. If you’re unlucky, you might encounter the hideous face of a dog, in which case you should disconnect immediately.” <sup>12</sup>

Katzenfans, darunter auch viele Katzenzüchter, gründeten im Netz Gemeinschaften, verknüpften Websites miteinander zu Webring, und falls es zum Verlust der geliebten Katze kam, konnte man sich online an „pet-loss support“-Gruppen wenden. Trost spendete ebenso die Legende von der „Rainbow Bridge“, einem Ort, an den die vergötterten Tierchen nach ihrem Ableben kehren. <sup>13</sup>

Ein wichtiger Schritt in der Onlinekatzenkultur war ein 1999 von Cliff Bleszinski ins Leben gerufener „Cat Scan Contest“. Katzenbesitzer auf der ganzen Welt wurden aufgefordert, im Namen der Kunst ihre Lieblinge auf den Flachbettcomputerscanner zu drücken. Allerdings unter der Bedingung, dass der Katze keine ernsthaften Verletzungen und Schmerzen zugefügt werden dürfen:

“I love cats, I just believe that a scanned cat is hilarious.” <sup>14</sup>

## *fig. 14*

Dieser Wettbewerb sorgte für so viel Aufsehen, dass so gut wie alle Onlinemedien, einige Radiosender und Zeitungen über dieses Phänomen berichteten. Daraufhin bekam C. Bleszinski den „Cruel Site of the Day Award“ verliehen. Die Website rief bei den Internetusern extrem kontroverse Reaktionen hervor. Viele sahen es als tierverachtende Quälerei, verlangten den sofortigen Stopp der Website und überschütteten den Betreiber mit Beschimpfungen und Drohungen:

“John sez...

You are really sick, Why don't you scan your face with your eyes open and post it so that everyone will know who to kill.

heather weir wrote...

Please take take down www.cat-scan.com  
Please use your common sense and see that this web site promotes cruelty to defenseless, voiceless animals thank-you

[Von den meisten Besuchern gab es jedoch ausgesprochen positive Resonanz. Sie fanden es äußerst amüsant, eine Katze auf den Scanner zu setzen und von dieser ein Bild zu machen:]

Zigi sez...

Your are truly precious! Thanks for my whole night of laughter, which I have shared with everyone on my mailing list. Your hate mail kept me laughing even longer.... If I still had my loved cat I would immediately put her in my scanner to see what I could make of her. thank you, thank you, thank you....cat-scans rule!!! keep the feline faith and laughter.” 15

Für eine noch größere Aufregung sorgten zwei Jahre später Bonsaikätzchen, deren Herstellung auf der Homepage von „Bonsaikitten“. 16

HIER versprachen die Websitebetreiber ein innovatives Verfahren zur Produktion niedlicher quadratischer Kätzchen, welche sicherlich den Neid anderer Katzenbesitzer wecken würden. Doch zuvor musste die Katze einige Wochen eng in ein Glasgefäß gepresst werden und rektal über Schläuche ernährt werden. Dabei sollte die tägliche Entsorgung der Fäkalien sichergestellt sein, genauso wie das Anbringen von Atemlöchern.

## fig. 15

Was bereits auf den ersten Blick als Hoax erkennbar ist, versetzte etliche User und vor allem die Tierschützer in höchste Alarmbereitschaft:

„Ich bin vorhin beim surfen auf eine Internetsite gestossen, die meines erachtens ein Fall für den Tierschutzverein ist. Die Site heisst: www.bonsaikitten.com. Bisher habe ich noch nie von den so genannten Bonsaikatzen gehört. Doch was ich da gesehen habe brach mir als „Katzenmami“ fast das Herz. Die stecken die Kleinen in ein viel zu kleines Glas um das Wachstum zu beeinflussen. Darin stecken sie dann bis zu einer Woche oder länger!!! Es gib 2 Löcher in dem Glas. Bei dem einen bekommen sie Luft, Futter und Wasser und beim anderen könne sie ihr Geschäft verrichten. Das das jemand mit ansehen kann ist mir unbegreiflich. ...“ 17

Obwohl es sich hierbei eindeutig um einen Scherz von Studenten des Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) handelte und die Fotos mit Bildbearbeitungsprogrammen manipuliert waren, riefen Kettenbriefpetitionen zum Protest auf und forderten eine Zensur der besagten Website. Humor ist eben nicht jedermanns Sache. Wegen des Verdachts der Tierquälerei untersuchte sogar das FBI diesen Fall, konnte

aber keine Anhaltspunkte finden, dass tatsächlich Tiere zu Schaden gekommen sind.

Die Webseitenverantwortlichen konnten die Dramatik um ihre Homepage nicht nachvollziehen. Ihr Anliegen bestand lediglich darin:

„[...] die Katzenliebhaber ein wenig zu schockieren und die ‚Scheinheiligkeit‘ der Gesellschaft und der Tierschützer zu entlarven.“ 18

Im Gästebuch der Seite stößt man hingegen auf Anerkennung und Wohlgesinnung. Viele würden sich gerne eine Bonsaikatze bestellen, andere möchten sie lieber in einer ausgefalleneren Form haben:

„JoyVessel@Home.com I have a bonsai kitten . they are really nice. i got mine in the shape of a star. bonsai kittens cant walk or anything but they can sort of move around. we feed ours with a bottle because it cant really eat and we have a colostomy bag hooked up for waste materials. its really not that bad he doesnt seem to complain i think he like being like this it sets him apart from other cats and makes him unique in his own special way. i know this may seem strange but it doesnt hurt them at all they just act differently. i love my bonsai kitten and would never go back to the traditional way of kittens you all should stop being so judgemental and accept new things mabye try one for yourself then you would understand.“ 19

Private Blogs sind heute ein sehr erfolgreiches Onlineformat. Doch kein Blog wäre vollständig ohne die Katze:

“In fact, new media theorist Geert Lovink noted in a terrific presentation last year that despite all the talk about the revolu-

tionary potential of blogs, the \*most popular\* topic on blogs is still... cats. So you can't really talk about blogs without talking about ,em. All hail our feline masters.“

21

Tatsächlich werden die meisten Blogs über Kätzchen verfasst, selbst wenn der Verfasser in Wirklichkeit keine besitzt. In einem 2008 geführten E-Mail-Interview erklärte Geert Lovink mir, warum Katzen in der Blogosphäre so populär sind:

„fuer mich hat das mit blogs und privatsphaere zu tun. das haus, die gemuetlichkeit der PC-umgebung. bloggen hat meiner meinung nach nur zum teil mit buerokultur oder das oeffentliche leben zu tun (obwohl sie immer noch danach verweisen). was blogging so interessant macht ist der blick ins private leben. und dort finden wir... die katzen.“ 22

Eines der wohl zurzeit berühmtesten Blogs im Web ist „I Can Has Cheezburger“ (ICHC), das auf dem Lolcat-Phänomen basiert und daher die Adresse der ersten Wahl für Katzenliebhaber ist.

Der US-Programmierer Eric Nakagawa alias „Cheezburger“ erstellte im Januar 2007 zusammen mit seiner Partnerin „Tofuburger“ eine Website, die sich um eine nach Cheezburgern verlangenden Katze, der uns bereits bekannten Happycat, drehte. Das Ganze initiierten sie aus Spaß, sie wollten die Welt an dem Witz teilhaben lassen. Doch sie zogen damit so viel Aufmerksamkeit auf sich, dass sie kurz darauf ihre Site zum Blog umwandelten, damit die Besucher die Bilder nicht nur anschauen, sondern auch kommentieren konnten.

Die Betreiber beschlossen wenig später, die

User in den kreativen Prozess der Lolcatbildergestaltung einzubeziehen. Nakagawa programmierte ein Tool, welches erlaubt, ein bereits vorhandenes Katzenfoto auszuwählen oder sein eigenes Bild hochzuladen, eine alberne Überschrift darauf zu platzieren und das fertige Produkt abzuschicken.

“It’s like you’re creating a story supplied by people in the community, and then the people in the community supply the next part of the story.”<sup>23</sup>

Jeder kann anschließend über die so entstandenen Werke abstimmen und das Bild mit der höchsten Bewertung – den meisten Cheezburgern – wandert dann auf die Bloghauptseite. Diese dem User gebotene Möglichkeit, Teil eines aktuellen Geschehens zu sein, schafft ein Gefühl, einer Gemeinschaft anzugehören. Das war auch der Auslöser für die massenhafte Verbreitung der Lolcats – weil sie nun so einfach herzustellen sind, ohne jegliche zusätzliche Software, selbst ohne genaue Kenntnis der Insiderwitze – und die boomende Onlinesubkultur mit der Site als Zentrum des Lolcat-Phänomens.

Herr Nakagawa und seine Partnerin sorgen nicht nur für die Unterhaltung ihrer Blogleser, sie verdienen jetzt eine Menge Geld mit dem ursprünglich als Witz gestarteten Projekt: Die günstigste Werbung, die man auf ihrem Blog schalten kann, kostet fünfhundert und die teuerste ungefähr viertausend Dollar pro Woche. Bücher mit Lolcatfotos<sup>24</sup> wurden bereits veröffentlicht.

Viele gewöhnliche Katzenbilder und die populären Lolcats dienen heute den jugendlichen Usern als Vorlage zur Herstellung von Glitzergrafiken<sup>25</sup>, die neuerdings fast jede Community im Netz schmücken. Funkelnde Katzen sind Gegenstand etlicher Benutzerbilder und Ava-

tare, die als kleine Bilder oder Embleme den User, seine Stimmungen, Gefühle und Interessen innerhalb von Gemeinschaften, Diskussionsforen, Journalen und Profildseiten repräsentieren.

### KITTNS FOR TEH WIN

Seit alle großen US-Medien – „New York Times“, „Wall Street Journal“, „Businessweek“, „Time“ – über das Phänomen Lolcat berichtet haben, ist die Diktion des Kitty Pidgin zu anderen, von Katzen unbelasteten Blogs und Webseiten durchgesickert. Google verzeichnet im Web über siebenhundert Millionen Seiten mit dem „I can has“-Satzanfang. Zum Beispiel verkündete der Weblog-Software-Anbieter „LiveJournal“ 2007 seine Partnerschaft mit dem Fotoportal „Photobucket“ im eigenen Firmenblog mit der folgenden Phrase: „We has a Photobucket“.

Und wer des Kitty-Pidgin nicht mächtig ist, bedient sich am besten des „Lolcat-Translators“ oder lässt sich gleich die eigene Website mithilfe des „Lolinator“ in eine „Websiet“ umgestalten.<sup>26</sup>

„Lolcode“<sup>27</sup> ist eine von der Lolcat-Sprache inspirierte Programmiersprache, die auf den grammatikalischen Konstrukten der Lolcats aufbaut.

“The language is not clearly defined in terms of operator priorities and correct syntax, but several functioning interpreters and compilers already exist.”<sup>28</sup>

HIER ein Beispiel-Programm: ->

HAI  
 CAN HAS STDIO?  
 I HAS A VAR  
 IM IN YR LOOP  
 UPZ VAR!!1  
 VISIBLE VAR  
 IZ VAR BIGR THAN 10? GTFO. KTHX  
 KTHX  
 KTHXBYE

Das „LOLCat Bible Translation Project“ <sup>29</sup> ist eine auf Wiki-Technologie basierende Website, die sich zur Aufgabe gestellt hat, gemeinschaftlich die gesamte Bibel in das Kitty Pidgin zu übersetzen. Es ist deshalb so anziehend, weil es kollektive Zusammenarbeit voraussetzt und jeden Teilnehmer in das Projekt einbezieht. Der Schreib- oder Übersetzungsstil basiert logischerweise auf Lolcat-Idiomen und -Witzen.

„I can has nomination?“ ist eine von Barack-Obama-Fans pünktlich zum Wahlkampf in den USA initiierte Kampagne, um ihren Kandidaten zu unterstützen. Der eigentümliche Humor der Lolcats wurde Obamafotos eingepflanzt und massenhaft produziert. Durch diese Aktion gewann Barack Obama – jetzt besser bekannt als „Lolbama“ – enorm an Popularität, auch unter den Menschen, die sich kaum oder gar nicht für Politik interessieren. <sup>30</sup>

Von der Popularität und Anziehungskraft der Lolcats wollen alle profitieren, nicht nur die großen Gemeinschaften wie Flickr, YouTube und Co., die ihren Benutzern eine Flut katzenbezogenen Materials anbieten.

## fig. 16

Täglich entstehen neue Kätzchen-Communities. Es scheint, als ob man aus den Worten „lol“ und „cat“, frei kombiniert mit anderen Begriffen,

tausende Möglichkeiten hat, um sich ein Thema einfallen zu lassen: „Meme Cats“, „Katurday“, „Stuff On My Cat“, „ROFLCAT“, „lolcatr“ <sup>31</sup> und so weiter bis in die Unendlichkeit.

### LISSIN UPZ!!1

Katzen stellen – unabhängig von ihren ästhetischen Darstellungsformen – deshalb ein so beliebtes Motiv in der Internetkultur dar, weil sie unter anderem eine Niedlichkeit ausstrahlen, deren sich (fast) niemand entziehen kann. Sie erscheinen hilflos und verletzlich, und wenn sie so drollig dreinschauen, möchte am liebsten jeder „Ooooh, wie süüüüüß!!!“ schreien. Will man diese Reaktion weiter steigern, sollte man das Katzenbild mit einigen Glitzereffekten versehen – der Erfolg ist garantiert!

All dies mag lächerlich und unbedeutend erscheinen, doch eine ganze Kultur – die „Cute Culture“ – baut darauf auf. cuteoverload.com ist beispielsweise ein solcher Ort im Web, an dem alle vorstellbaren süßen, niedlichen, putzigen und knuddeligen Dinge auf einem Fleck versammelt sind.

Das Großartige an Lolcats ist allerdings die erstaunliche Schnelligkeit, mit der sich eine neue Ausdrucksform im Medium Internet entwickeln kann – statt Jahren kann man in wenigen Wochen alles live miterleben. Gleichzeitig zeigen Lolcats, wie die Zukunft der medialen Kommunikation aussieht: Die Bilder sind nicht allein von einer „Information“ geprägt, die zwischen Sendern und Rezipienten hin- und hergereicht wird, sondern von der Bereitschaft der User abhängig, diese Informationen zu manipulieren, weiter zu verbreiten und die Codierung der Information selbst als Gestaltungsfläche anzusehen.

Lolcats sind also abhängig von der Partizipation der Amateure. Sie schaffen immer wieder aufs

Neue alberne und bizarre Gattungen und Variationen und erhalten das Meme eine lange Zeit am Leben.

“Like cultural scavengers, fans reclaim works that other regard as „worthless“ trash, finding them a source of popular capital.” <sup>32</sup>

Doch was passiert mit den Lolcats, wenn sie noch populärer werden? Kann irgendwann einmal der Insiderwitz aufgebraucht sein und seinen Reiz verlieren? Oder werden wir uns an niedlichen Kätzchen satt gesehen haben?

## *fig. 17*

Ich weiß es nicht, doch ich hoffe, dass sich daraus viele neue Kreationen entwickeln wie dieser hier:

**FAIL**

Dieser aktuelle Trend besitzt ein genauso simples und einleuchtendes Format wie die Vorgänger: Man nehme ein Bild einer Katze, die etwas fatal Komisches und Falsches macht und schreibe ganz groß das Wort FAIL darüber.

## *fig. 18* *fig. 19*

So kann eigentlich nichts mehr schiefgehen.

/





# DEFRIENDING THE WEB

english  
version  
1-21  
deutsche  
fassung  
22-32

DENNIS KNOFF, 2009





“ the metropolitan type of man – which, of course, exists in a thousand individual variants – develops an organ protecting him against the threatening currents and discrepancies of his external environment which would uproot him. He reacts with his head instead of his heart. In this an increased awareness assumes the psychic prerogative. Metropolitan life, thus, underlies a heightened awareness and a predominance of intelligence in metropolitan man. The reaction to metropolitan phenomena is shifted to that organ which is least sensitive and quite remote from the depth of the personality. ” 3

Only a desensitization of perception and an unemotional view can ensure the coping with life in modern cities – its procedures are too complicated for an in-depth, case-by-case perception. With this intellectualized view of their environment, Simmel argues that people allow each other more individuality than would find acceptance among smaller networks or small towns.

One can easily look at the development of the WWW—with its lightning-fast means of global communication, its rapid commercialization in the mid-1990s and its accessibility to a huge audience – in relation to this notion of the metropolis. When the Internet, which previously was solely used by institutions, was opened to public and commercial use, global communication and information transmission became incredibly fast. The speed of email messages can't even be compared with traditional mail, which already bears the nickname “snail mail.” Mailing lists, forums and chat rooms have facilitated an open exchange of ideas; tools for publishing on private web pages and blogs have made displaying personal content easy; and since so called social networks like Facebook, Flickr, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, last.fm and so on have appeared, a large part of social life has begun to happen online. In an environment like this, the number of possible contacts for each person has grown far

beyond what could be expected in a large city. Yet just like in a large city, the Internet's anonymous structures have resulted in impersonal modes of communication.

Software that allows easy publishing of content—blogs and social networks—is based on “templates.” Thanks to these standardized web sites that simply have to be filled out, users do not need to know HTML or any other web specific technology in order to let the whole world access their photos, videos, music or texts. As the act of publishing became such a cakewalk through pre-fabricated web pages, naturally the users' influence on the way their information is presented has completely vanished. Each photo on Flickr is framed in the same layout; every YouTube video fits into the same grid.

But if the Web is an advanced version of Simmel's metropolis what are users doing to stand out as individuals within the mass? A mass that is significantly bigger than the number of people one could meet in a large city?

## **ESTABLISHING THE INDIVIDUAL**

Within the world of highly formatted and templated social networks, one possibility for individuality is to change the appearance of one's profile page. Blogs and MySpace pages are getting “pimped” by changing small bits of their source code. This makes it possible to manipulate the layout, font sizes, color and background images (There are also tools, so-called MySpace editors that help authors with the pimping process). Users who know about these tricks (or at least about MySpace editors) seem smart and stand out from the masses, who have to rely on defaults. Users also incorporate music, images and videos into their profiles. These multiple cultural signs piled up on the page underline one's own cultural intelligence. Other platforms like YouTube allow almost no freedom for personalization. Often users can only choose from a limited set of templates. In networks that allow even less modification of the overall look

(like Flickr or StudiVZ, the German clone of Facebook), users attempt to individualize themselves by using special characters (^\_^) in their user names.

***fig. 1***  
**see page 19**

In addition to creating visual identities, users voluntarily provide a lot of personal information to reflect their personality in a text-based form. Most free services require age and sex information to sign up and most users are happy to give away information about their profession and marital status. Facebook users take part in endless rows of quizzes (e.g. IQ tests, “Pick your 5 favorite beers” or “What Star Trek character are you? The result: Data”) and answer questions about their personal interests so their profile can represent them in the best possible way.

Within these networks, one can not only set up an account and profile, but also browse through millions of other profiles. But first, in order to set oneself apart from this mass, one has to join it. What appears grotesque about this practice is that the users, who are trying to express their uniqueness and individuality, are simply contributing to a collective mass of information. The main asset of any social network, besides offering the tools for personal websites, is their database—their social pool of users.

Unlike the open source movement or Wikipedia, however, participants of social networks do not seem to follow a common noble goal, or celebrate a community spirit. The focus here lies on the individual, like the “i” in iTunes, the “my” in MySpace, the “you” in YouTube or the “we” in Wii (emphasizing the option of multiple individuals playing together).

***fig. 2***

Even the shape of the “i” reinforces this sentiment. Similar to icons used to represent the user – a neutral figure which on one hand could apply to almost anybody but on the other hand expresses personalization and individuality. The “i”, the torso with a faceless head stands for a promise of individuality and a big pool of me’s.

## PROFITING FROM THE PROFILE

Henry Ford, the car manufacturer, in inventing the assembly line, symbolizes the idea of mass production. A term that bares his name—fordism – describes the principle of mass production for an anonymous customer. Post-fordism on the other hand, (also dubbed “toyotism” since Toyota is known for introducing it) has proved to be a more successful strategy of mass production by producing cars on demand. When production depends on the sales, a company is able to lower storage costs, prevent overproduction, and quickly adapt to changes in the industry. For post-fordism to work, however, it is essential to gather information about the customer’s wishes and then be able to satisfy them.

Post-fordism has huge implications outside of the auto industry. Media firms have realized that information gathering and segmentation of audiences into homogeneous consumer groups proves highly profitable. In the case of media this process enables advertisers to target only the specific group they are interested in. Again, this model requires a reliable and detailed system of consumer feedback that provides details about personal interests and behaviors. This system has manifested itself as the ‘user profile’ in which anonymous information is derived from statistics, or consumers voluntarily provide personal information about their demographic such as age, sex, nationality, profession, and interests. As entities requiring user profiles often promise a reward, or service of some kind, tracking down personal and behavioral information is not seen as privacy invasion, but as two-way relationships between media and consumer.

Now, the social web is all about user profiles; any Web2.0 service offers the free and easy set-up of a personal profile. In his text “Audience Construction and Culture Production: Marketing Surveillance in the Digital Age” Joseph Turow describes how newspaper and magazine publishers “realized that they could make most of their profits from advertisers by charging low subscription rates to garner the huge numbers of readers advertisers wanted.” <sup>4</sup> Philip M. Napoli in his book “Audience Economics. Media Institutions and the Audience Marketplace” mentions how,

“ [I]t is widely believed that Blockbuster Video’s most valuable asset is not its facilities or video and DVD library but its database of customer demographic data and video rental histories. Such data have become increasingly vital in the Internet context [...]. As a result the media environment of the future probably will be one in which media organizations increasingly will seek ways to gather and charge for the personal data of the audiences that they attract. ” <sup>5</sup>

This data gathering is more explicit with Blockbuster’s replacements like Netflix, where customers fill their preferences into user profiles so as to have movies suggested to them. A great service, and all you have to do is to provide detailed information about who you are and what you like. Even greater is your service to them; their market research isn’t just free, you even pay for participating in it.

Unlike classic television and radio where quotas about the audience can only be roughly estimated, the Web delivers exact numbers of viewers and details about their behavior through simple technologies like click streams and page view statistics. Furthermore, the detailed information users are voluntarily entering in their profiles allows for an unprecedented ability to analyze and segment the overall audience. Especially categories like nationality, sex and age; here the user chooses from default answers, and provide answers that require no abstraction or interpreta-

tion. Of course one could always find alternative ways to determine another's sex—by looking at that user's avatar or photos, screen name and so on. And you could also argue that although providing the user's age is required for legal regulations, the user agreeing to the general terms and conditions should be enough. In addition a legal disclaimer could be used, noting that the user must be over a certain age to participate, including the typical “enter, I agree” button. But there is clearly a unique value to users providing unambiguous information about themselves, as it is required to set up a user account at any social networking or content hosting site. Of course there are always a few paranoid users who provide the wrong information on purpose, but most tend to provide at least some information that is correct (just think of the millions of Facebook users who actually provided their real names in their profiles). This concrete demographic information, combined with the personal details users insert voluntarily as a way to express their individuality, makes the social web a perfect post-fordist marketing tool.

In addition to allowing for the highest possible degree of audience segmentation, in the Web2.0 each individual user is also a potential producer of content, and a media outlet. And, thanks to the tagging of this user-generated content the massive amount of channels can be searched and dynamically organized, enabling users to shift between defined audience groups without losing track of them. That said, tagging, or folksonomy, happens in a fairly haphazard way and rarely functions across platforms. More than traditional broadcast media firms splintering their audience into narrow yet differentiated target groups, Web2.0 firms can segment their audience even further down to the smallest possible unit, the user, potentially without losing the effectiveness of their mainstream marketing strategies.

The implications of this degree of fragmentation in commerce are immense. Chris Anderson talks about “The Long Tail”, a term that refers to a graph of industry statistics with a high-amplitude popularity of few products, so-called bestsellers or hits, followed by a very broad low am-



plitude popularity of niche or “underground” products. As Anderson mentions, even though the sum of The Long Tail often takes up just as much or even more than the popularity of the short head (the sum of hits), it has been ignored for a long time. Bottlenecks in distribution and costly logistics force traditional bricks-and-mortar bookstores to devote most of their shelf space to popular books since it is too expensive to waste on niche products. With virtual stores such as Amazon or iTunes, the selling power of The Long Tail has finally become lucrative and thus the logistic possibilities of the Web offer an even more concrete realization of post-fordist production and marketing strategies:

“ When consumers are offered infinite choice, the true shape of demand is revealed. And it turns out to be less hit-centric than we thought. People gravitate towards niches because they satisfy narrow interests better, and in one aspect of our life or another we all have some narrow interest (whether we think of it that way or not). ” 6

## *fig. 3*

Google found a way to tap into The Long Tail with its AdSense system, an automated adverting service that places ads on websites. What really makes AdSense special is how it targets minor audience groups in the same way as consumers who view popular content. Participants agree to host small ads on their webpages and receive money every time someone clicks on the ad. Not only does Google make money through commission on advertisers’ micro payments to audience sellers, they also withhold the money they owe to these sellers until they reach a total revenue of \$100 (less popular sites can take relatively several months or even years to collect as AdSense revenue of \$100). This means Google has ready stream investment money at its hands which actually belongs to people using AdSense—as much as 379 million according to their fiscal year 2006 results. 7

The Long Tail is one of the factors that helped fuel the Web2.0 hype. If every individual user represents a possible target group, however, who produces all the right ads for them? Doesn't each user require an art director? The phrase "customers who bought this product also bought..." isn't quite how you would imagine the ideal advertisement to look. I truly wonder who actually clicks on Google ads. Is it the same kind of people who still buy music CDs?

An interesting aspect is the new autonomy of consumers being able to decide what, where and especially when they want to consume content, instead of depending for instance on the broadcasting schedule of a TV network. The Web2.0 even took on demand production to a new level with the printing of custom requested content such as T-shirts by Cafe-press or Spreadshirt – that's as post-fordist as it gets. And again, these phenomena such as the lucrative Long Tail require reliable sources for consumer feedback, which remains the main characteristic of postmodern production strategies.

So, all this makes the Web seem less about establishing a "new digital democracy," and more about converting the general desire of people to express their uniqueness and personal information online into an intelligent marketing system. Maybe instead of "You" Time Magazine's person of the year 2006 should have been "Them"!

This more insidious side of Web2.0 is further illustrated by the censorship scandal that plagued Flickr in the summer of 2007. Through their 'Terms of Service' Flickr prohibited users in Germany, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Korea from viewing images that had not been explicitly flagged as "safe." Not only did Flickr authorities not announce these grave changes, but neither did they give any adequate reason for them—upsetting their community of users, many of whom had paid for a premium membership, a "pro account." A simple solution could have been to consider using the pro users' credit card information as a proof of age, since 18 is the required age to hold a credit card in Germany. Instead, Flickr contin-

ued to ignore the problem and even censored its users' protest, removing images that displayed slogans like "Think Flickr, Think!" and "Against Censorship." This type of action clearly shows that the aim of such sites is to service corporate interest first, and users second, even though in the end it is the users who give such services their value!

## WALLED GARDENS

The self-referential character of the typical Web2.0 service is also revealing of the darker side. While folksonomy should provide the user with greater search and cross-referencing abilities, this potential is hindered by only being provided within a particular system. For example you wouldn't get a video clip on YouTube as a result of searching with a certain keyword on Flickr. This reflects a strong interest in tying the user to single services, what online media firms refer to as creating "walled gardens"<sup>8</sup> in order to keep users navigating within their range of control. Such online environments like AOL, Google and Yahoo! offer multiple services like information and news, communication, entertainment, and commerce, as well as the customizable presentation of that content.

# *fig. 4*

Again, the user needs a profile for this personal customization, which is of course, presented as a service. These environments are supposed to make the user feel comfortable with the information, displayed according to their own personal interests and with exclusive services offered for free. The broader the offerings of such services, the more information can be derived from its users' behavior. If you log into your Google mail client, you're automatically logged in to every other Google service, such as Blogger or YouTube. In addition, a history of your regular Google searches can be archived in order to create intelligent statistics of related interests. Only one login is required for all offered services, hoping at some point the consumer will be too lazy to remember several logins of

different providers and thus stick to one (“password fatigue”). Facebook has found a new way to expand its walled garden with the single sign-on service Facebook Connect, where users can enable external sites to draw information from their Facebook profile and vice versa:

“ Facebook users represent themselves with their real names and real identities. With Facebook Connect, users can bring their real identity information with them wherever they go on the Web, including: basic profile information, profile picture, name, friends, photos, events, groups, and more. ” 9

This means that the walls of the walled garden are dynamic and the range of “data about audience members’ interests and movements” is becoming much broader. In other words,

“ [s]uch customization allows the site to cultivate a relationship with its audience and to develop data about audience members’ interests and movements that it can use for targeting ads. ” 10

This tremendous amount of voluntarily provided and fully indexable personal information is unparalleled in history.

The importance of such walled gardens is clearly illustrated through the recent actions of the larger media outlets. It has almost become a sport to establish a start-up featuring some useful or attractive service, generate some buzz making it popular quickly while gathering as much valuable data about its users as possible, and then sell it and its user data off to a big media mogul. In 2006, after having already bought Blogger, Google bought YouTube (for \$1.65 billion) despite the fact that they already had their own video hosting service, Google Video. Likewise Yahoo! bought Flickr and the bookmarking tool Del.icio.us (each for a rumored \$30-35 million) in 2005, CBS bought Last.fm for \$280 million in

2007, and mega-media conglomerate News Corp bought MySpace for an estimated \$580 million in 2005. Trying not to miss an opportunity or be outperformed by their competitors' range of offerings, the big media firms are competing to invest and speculate in the right services, over-bidding each other with vertiginous prices of acquisition. Some critics claim that this trend helped lead to the current economic bubble as the money paid in such deals exceeds the actual value of those service sites by far. Others point out the fact that such dazzling amounts of money represent an exception, and that usually acquisitions achieve much less. But the question still remains, all of these services are "free," so what did they really buy?

## TEMPLATES AS DIRECTIVES

As mentioned earlier, social networks are based on standards such as templates for publishing user-generated content. Such standards can also tell us a lot about how these services want the user to behave within their systems.

YouTube for instance is a service for viewing and publishing video; its format highlights the video frame and suggestions for similar or relevant content. The description area for videos (like date and permalink url) is relatively small and almost unnoticeable, placed in the "boring" area top right of the page. The description is often abbreviated and the user has to click on "more information" to view the full text.

# *fig. 5*

What is more noticeable than the author's description is other users comments. YouTube's success is based on the viral nature of its users' videos. By highlighting the community's reactions rather than the authors' statements, YouTube is stressing the role of the viewer in this process. It clearly shows how essential and precious user participation is. If sim-

ply clicking on a Google ad means real money in the model of AdSense, imagine what leaving a comment or rating material on YouTube means. This assumption explains the tiny space designated to the author's descriptive text: it is of no value for providing feedback, and therefore allotting would mean giving away useful surface. If one is too lazy to comment the development of the five rating stars is used to lure the more reluctant user into participating in this system of feedback. It doesn't even matter how a video is rated, just the fact that it is. "Awesome!" or "poor" confirms that "I have seen this video and paid attention to it".

## *fig. 6*

In other words, the template also reflects the way users are supposed to consume content: keeping them watching videos, jumping from one to the next. Their feedback works as evaluation, but more importantly, a way to keep them in the system – a system that relies on the presumed laziness of the consumer. What matters most is not the user communicating a deeper understanding of the content, but their emotional reaction to it. This makes video much more appealing than text:

“ Reading is a process which presumes a substantial intellectual activity and isn't learnable offhand. Essential is the direct ability to associate what is read with stored knowledge. Television, however, requires no further abilities besides language. With a minimum of mental activity a maximum of emotional reaction reaction can be

achieved. ” 11

Another effect of such standardized templates is that the form of presentation becomes indifferent. Allowing only a limited amount of customization (and costumization), often none at all, gives the illusion that the focus is on the content provided by the user. As was mentioned before,

all Flickr pages and YouTube pages look the same, only the pictures/videos submitted by the users change (the only exceptions are advertisements; some sponsored content have additional banners). This focus on the user implies a strategy called “immediacy,” described by David Bolter and Richard Grusin in “Remediation: Understanding New Media.” Immediacy describes a strategy of making the viewer forget the presence of a medium and instead feel as if the represented objects are actually present. The medium is supposed to become invisible just like the glass window that is being looked through. <sup>12</sup>

In the case of Flickr, the template is considered to be neutral both functionally and aesthetically – a point of view which is to be questioned. Not only does their standardized format influence perception (photos being down-scaled for a better preview images), but so does the side bar information: how many times was a picture viewed? How many people call it a favorite? Are there any comments and did it cause an interesting discussion? These are essential details that have come to define our perception of a photograph, which means the template itself (no matter how neutral) is far more than an invisible window to content. Another crack in the window is the fact that Flickr also names the type and brand of the camera a photograph was taken with. When one clicks on the camera name a short list of item specifications, its price and a link to Yahoo! Shopping—an ideal example of how Yahoo! directly benefits from bringing Flickr into its walled garden. The neutral reputation of the template

## *fig. 7*

makes it a mighty tool for credible advertisement: among all other brand names, Nikon was the only one with its logo being displayed on Flickr. But I guess this was a bit too obvious; the logo disappeared in order to prevent the interface from losing its credibility as a neutral medium.

In Facebook many applications place ads that subtly offer products for

your mobile phone, or food to eat while updating your profile, deliberately trying to take advantage of the above-mentioned reputation.

The use of templates highlights an important dividing of competencies. While the user is responsible for providing content, Flickr or Facebook is, in this case, responsible for the presentation. The division allows these services to expand their functions without boundaries, while the user (who provides the content) is still dependent on directives and boundaries created by the service. She/he probably doesn't even notice the transfer of the competence when deciding on the form of presentation.

## **NOTHING COMES FOR FREE**

I feel that a general understanding that the creation of free social networks is not simply about connecting people has become quite obvious today. On the other hand, I also feel that the media conglomerates' ability to actually realize all of the marketing possibilities of Web2.0 have been generally over-estimated. Web services not directly connected to selling goods have been suffering serious losses; Facebook doesn't make any money, not to mention MySpace and many others. If thanks to the sophisticated targeting of ads I was to buy two packs of Skittles instead of one, would that really pay the rent for all the server farms? For right now the user information itself seems more valuable than what could be done with it. So why keep the structures if nobody really benefits from them? It's like the only true winner is Google, because they have somehow managed to put a thin layer on top of everything and you basically have to pass through it if you want to do anything online. They made a gazillion dollars thanks to a technical infrastructure the Stasi only dreamed of. I doubt there's any other company able to take advantage from its gathered user information like Google is...

A conclusion two years ago might have been that the users should become aware of their position and demand the right to co-determine the ways the Web2.0 tools work. Recently users have managed to force



Facebook to retract from changes about copyright in its terms of service, which may indicate an important step into this direction. Today I'm curious how to put "social" back into the Web so that everyone doesn't feel exploited with every click. "Invite friend," and "add as a friend" – why can't the network be our friend!?! Google just introduced a preview to Wave which might provide alternative ways of communicating and sharing content outside social network and media hosting services. Wave will not necessarily be part of Google's infrastructure and could be hosted on anybody's server.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Opera just presented Unite, which promises to put "the power of a Web server in your browser."<sup>14</sup> Theoretically this would enable users to create their own social network service by connecting their home computers.

However, it is still early to predict how, or if, those two represent a change in "the landscape of the web." I'll be careful writing about something that just came out a week ago, so that by the time you read this I don't sound like somebody still hooked on Second Life. Also, why should we expect any change in the attitudes of the big media companies after they've been ripping us off for years? What should make us believe they are cool all of the sudden? Wave and Unite both try to give the user as much control as possible but will still keep the "protocol" under their own controls.

Let me finish with a car-metaphor: just because Google might finally let you sit in front doesn't automatically mean you're the driver! How come instead of everyone driving their own Toyota we're all still sitting inside the same motherfucking school bus? Post-ford me this.



FOOTNOTES / FUSSNOTEN

- 1 Grossman, Lev (2006), "Time's Person of the Year: You", <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1569514,00.html?aid=434>
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## FIGURES / ABBILDUNGEN



**studivz** ♡Joana ♡ M.  
Aktualisiert: 13.08.2009 (Profilfoto)  
Hochschule: HS Bremen



**studivz** '...°08%□□3 4ıçote 8%□□30°o...'  
Aktualisiert: 24.08.2009 (Persönliches)  
Hochschule: Uni Erlangen-Nürnberg



**studivz** Oliver Eckard 艾茲福  
Aktualisiert: 02.10.2008  
Hochschule: FH Zwickau



**studivz** ☆ M. V. ☆  
Aktualisiert: 22.08.2009 (Profilfoto)  
Hochschule: U.C.S.C. Rom

# fig. 1

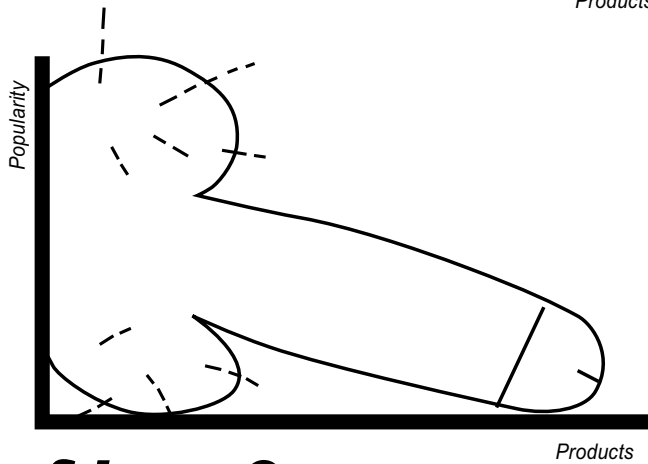
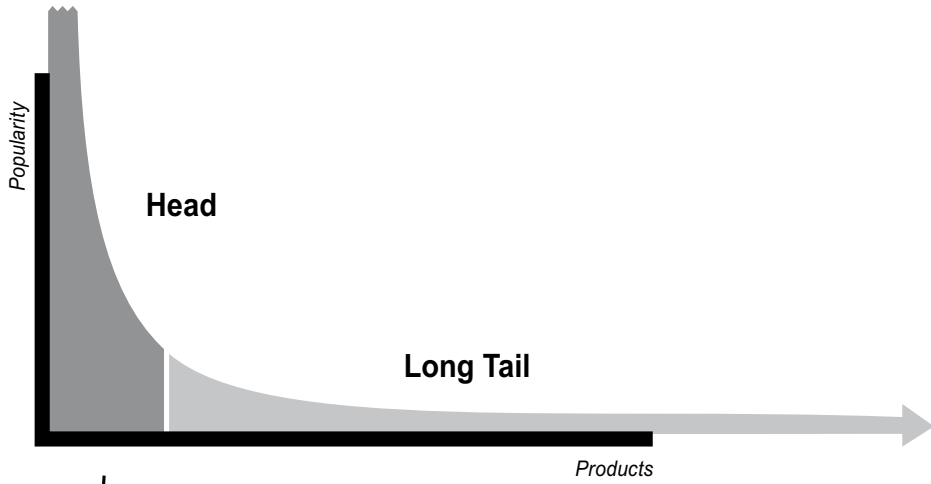
Examples of profile names with special characters on studivz.de



# fig. 2

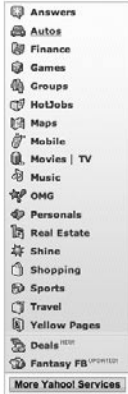
Default user icons as found on youtube.com, last.fm, chess.com, usatoday.com, wikipedia.org, livejournal.com, Skype, Garageband, multiply.com, and myspace.com. Large collection can be found at <http://www.murketing.com/journal/?p=3098>

## THE NEW MARKETPLACE



**fig. 3**

*The Long Tail*



# fig. 4

Yahoo!'s broad range of sections, example of "walled garden"



# fig. 5

Typical example of abbreviated video description text on YouTube



# fig. 6

YouTube's rating stars, easy and inviting function for consumer feedback

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Camera Type:	DSLR
Megapixels:	10.2 Megapixels
LCD Size:	2.5 in
Media Type:	SDHC Memory Card, MultiMediaCard, Secure Digital (SD) Card

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**Yahoo! Member Reviews** (19 reviews)  
 "Overall this is a great entry level DSLR. I have gotten great results with it and have seen a substantial improvement in my photography. The fact that..."  
 - From ohne\_fleiss\_kein\_preis

Find photos or video taken with the D60

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- 2,615 users yesterday
- Ranked 4 of 115 Nikon Cameras

D60 Usage This Year



# fig. 7

Example of camera info page on flickr.com featuring link to Yahoo! Shopping

## 2.0 DICH SELBER

### *Deutsche Fassung*

Als Tim O'Reilly den Begriff „Web 2.0“ erfand, waren alle ganz aus dem Häuschen. Obwohl keiner so recht verstand, was dieses „Upgrade“ eigentlich bedeutete, waren wir dennoch überzeugt, die neue, verbesserte Version von Web mit seinen unendlichen Möglichkeiten würde alles verändern. Das Time Magazine wählte „you“ gar zur „person of the year 2006“:

„Wenn einzelne ‚Individuen‘ den Charakter des Informationszeitalters mitbestimmen, [...] gestalten die Betreiber und die Konsumenten von nutzergenerierten Inhalten Kunst, Politik und Handel neu, [...] sie sind engagierte Bürger einer neuen digitalen Demokratie.“ 1 (siehe Seite 18)

Diese Behauptung und überhaupt die ganze allgemeine Stimmung, die darin zum Ausdruck kommt, waren Anlass für mich, die sozialen Netzwerke, Blogs und hosting sites einmal genauer unter die Lupe zu nehmen. Denn sie sind ja die Bausteine, auf denen die angebliche neue digitale Demokratie basiert.

### **VIRTUELLE GROSSSTADT**

Der Philosoph und Soziologe Georg Simmel glaubte, dass die Geldwirtschaft (bzw. die

Tatsache, dass Wert an Geld gemessen wird) sowie die anonymen sozialen Beziehungen, wie sie im urbanen Milieu der Großstädte herrschen, bei den Einwohnern das Bedürfnis entstehen lassen, ihre Individualität zu manifestieren. Im einfach strukturierten und persönlichen Umfeld einer Kleinstadt hingegen seien solche Bekundungen des Individuellen nicht nötig. Die extrem komplexen Muster der Großstadt basieren auf rationaler Sachlichkeit und praktischer Vernunft. Der kontinuierliche Wandel innerer und äußerer Einflüsse „mit dem Tempo und den Mannigfaltigkeiten des wirtschaftlichen, beruflichen, gesellschaftlichen Lebens“ 2 fordert den Bürgern einen speziellen Sensus ab, damit sie die überwältigende Masse an Eindrücken überhaupt verarbeiten können. Während die Einwohner kleinerer Städte sich auf ihr „Gemüt“ verlassen und instinktiv handeln „schafft der Typus des Großstädtlers, - der natürlich von tausend individuellen Modifikationen umspielt ist - sich ein Schutzorgan gegen die Entwurzelung, mit der die Strömungen und Diskrepanzen seines äußeren Milieus ihn bedrohen: statt mit dem Gemüte reagiert er auf diese im wesentlichen mit dem Verstande, dem die Steigerung des Bewusstseins, wie dieselbe Ursache sie erzeugte, die seelische Prerogative verschafft; damit ist die Reaktion auf jene Erscheinungen in das am wenigsten empfindliche, von den Tiefen der Persönlichkeit am weitesten abstehende psychische Organ verlegt.“ 3

Nur eine Desensibilisierung und eine emotionslose Perspektive können ein kompetentes Leben in der modernen Stadt garantieren – ihre Prozesse sind zu kompliziert für eine sorgfältige Wahrnehmung aller Vorgänge im Detail. Dieser intellektualisierte Blickwinkel auf die Außenwelt gesteht dem Einzelnen, so Simmel, weit mehr Individualität zu, als sie in kleineren Netzwerken oder Kleinstädten akzeptiert werden würde. Mit anderen Worten, es dreht sich in der Großstadt

keiner nach einem Punk um, während in einem Dorf ein Piercing zum Skandal werden kann.

Man kann die Entwicklung des WWW – mit seiner blitzschnellen globalen Kommunikation, seiner Mitte der 90er Jahre voranschreitenden Kommerzialisierung und seiner Zugänglichkeit für einen riesigen Nutzerkreis – durchaus mit diesem Konzept der Metropole vergleichen.

Als das Internet, das zunächst ausschließlich von Institutionen genutzt wurde, für den Normalverbraucher und die kommerzielle Verwendung geöffnet wurde, beschleunigten sich Kommunikation und Informationsfluss weltweit auf unglaublich rasante Weise.

Die Geschwindigkeit von Email-Nachrichten hat nichts mehr mit der traditionellen Nachrichtenübermittlung zu tun, die man mittlerweile schon liebevoll als „Snail Mail“ (Schneckenpost) abtut. Mailinglisten, Internetforen und Chatrooms haben den offenen Austausch von Ideen leicht gemacht; mithilfe privater Webseiten und Blogs kann jeder Nutzer problemlos persönliche Inhalte ins Netz stellen; und seit so genannte social networks wie Facebook, Flickr, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, Last.fm und andere auf dem Markt sind, spielt sich viel soziales Leben online ab. In einem Umfeld wie diesem ist die Anzahl der möglichen Kontakte für jede einzelne Person weit größer als sie in einer noch so großen Stadt jemals denkbar wäre. Und wie in einer großen Stadt haben die anonymen Strukturen des Internets zu einer unpersönlichen Form der Kommunikation geführt.

Software, die das einfache Veröffentlichen von Inhalt ermöglicht – also Blogs und soziale Netzwerke –, basiert auf „templates“, vorgefertigten Schablonen für private Webseiten. Dank dieser standardisierten Webseiten, die nur noch gefüllt werden müssen, benötigt der Nutzer keinerlei Kenntnisse von HTML oder anderer spezieller Technologie, um aller Welt Einblick in seine Fo-

tos und Videos, in seine Musik oder seine Texte zu gewähren. Mit den templates ist das Publizieren das reinste Kinderspiel geworden, aber zugleich hat der Nutzer eben auch weniger Einfluss darauf, wie seine Information präsentiert wird. Jedes Foto, das bei Flickr erscheint, ist auf identische Weise gelayoutet, jedes YouTube-Video ist in das selbe Raster gepresst.

Wenn nun aber das Web die Weiterentwicklung von Simmels Metropole ist, was tun seine Nutzer, um in der Masse entsprechend als Individuen kenntlich zu sein? In einer Masse, die weit größer ist als die Menge der Leute, denen man in einer großen Stadt je begegnen könnte?

## **DIE ETABLIERUNG DES INDIVIDUELLEN**

In der Welt der weitgehend formatierten und schablonisierten sozialen Netzwerke lässt sich eine gewisse Individualität erzeugen, indem man das Erscheinungsbild der eigenen Profilseite abwandelt. Blogs und MySpace-Seiten können „gepimpt“, d.h. kleine Teile des Quellcodes verändert werden. Dadurch kann man Layout, Schriftgröße, Farbe und Hintergrundbilder variieren. (Bestimmte Webseiten bieten sogenannte MySpace-Editoren an und unterstützen die Autoren beim „Pimpen“.) Nutzer, die diese Tricks kennen (oder zumindest mit dem MySpace-Editor umgehen können), wirken clever und stechen aus der Masse heraus, die sich mit den Standards begnügen muss. Viele User setzen Musik, Bilder und Videos auf ihr Profil – eine Ansammlung kultureller Zeichen, die auf die Seite gepackt werden, um die eigene kulturelle Intelligenz zu unterstreichen. Andere Plattformen wie YouTube lassen nahezu keinen Spielraum für eine persönliche Note. Hier können Nutzer meistens nur aus einem begrenzten Angebot von Templates eines auswählen. In Netzwerken, die sogar noch weniger Modifizierung der Oberfläche zulassen – wie Flickr oder StudiVZ –, versuchen die Nutzer, sich als

Individuen identifizierbar zu machen, indem sie Spezialzeichen (^\_^) in ihren Nutzernamen verwenden.

## fig. 1

siehe  
Seite 19

Zusätzlich zur visuellen Kennzeichnung stellen die Nutzer gerne jede Menge persönlicher Informationen zur Verfügung, um ihre Persönlichkeit in Textform darzustellen. Bei den meisten frei zugänglichen Anbietern ist die Angabe von Alter und Geschlecht obligatorisch, und die Nutzer legen meistens freiwillig noch Informationen über Beruf oder Familienstand drauf. Facebook-Nutzer nehmen reihenweise an Quiz teil (als da wären: IQ-Tests, „Wähle deine 5 Lieblingsbiere“ oder „Welche Star-Treck-Figur bist du? Ergebnis: Data“) und beantworten Fragen nach ihren persönlichen Interessen, damit ihr Profil sie so gut wie möglich repräsentiert.

In diesen Netzwerken kann man nicht nur sich selbst einbringen und darstellen, sondern sich auch durch Millionen anderer Profile klicken. Und um sich von der Masse abzuheben, muss man zuerst zu einem Teil von ihr werden. Es scheint paradox: gerade der Nutzer, der seine Einzigartigkeit besonders individuell zur Geltung bringen möchten, endet als einer unter vielen in der kollektiven Masse von Informationen. Und so besteht der eigentliche Aktivposten sozialer Netzwerke, abgesehen von den Werkzeugen, die sie zur Erstellung des eigenen Profils zur Verfügung stellen, aus der Ansammlung von Daten – dem Fundus ihrer Nutzer.

Anders als bei der Open-Source-Initiative oder bei Wikipedia scheinen die Teilnehmer sozialer Netzwerke allerdings kein hehres gemeinschaftliches Ziel zu verfolgen oder einen gemeinsamen Gedanken zu zelebrieren. Der Fokus liegt hier vielmehr auf dem Einzelnen:

worum es geht, ist das „i“ in iTunes, das „my“ in MySpace, das „you“ in YouTube oder das „we“ in Wii (was die Möglichkeit in den Mittelpunkt rückt, dass mehrere Individuen gemeinsam spielen).

Die äußere Form des „i“ verstärkt noch diesen Eindruck. Es ähnelt dem Standard-Piktogramm, das den Nutzer repräsentiert: eine neutrale Figur, die einerseits zu fast jeder Person passt und andererseits doch Persönlichkeit und Individualität ausdrücken soll. Das „i“, ein Torso mit gesichtslosem Kopf, steht für das Versprechen von Individualität und zugleich für ein riesiges Sammelbecken voller Ichs.

## fig. 2

### VOM PROFIL PROFITIEREN

Mit der Erfindung des Fließbandes symbolisiert der Autofabrikant Henry Ford die Massenproduktion schlechthin. Sein Name prägte den Begriff Fordismus, der für das Prinzip einer Massenproduktion für einen anonymen Endkunden steht. Als weit erfolgreichere Strategie der Massenproduktion hat sich indessen der Postfordismus erwiesen (nach ihrem ersten weltweit bekannten Anwender Toyota auch Toyotismus genannt); hierbei werden Autos on demand – also nur auf Nachfrage – produziert. Eine Produktion, die sich am tatsächlichen Verkauf orientiert, spart der Firma Lagerkosten, Überproduktion wird vermieden und es kann rasch auf Veränderungen reagiert werden. Damit der Postfordismus auch funktioniert, ist es allerdings unerlässlich, die Wünsche der Kunden genau zu kennen und sich dann nach ihnen zu richten.

Der Postfordismus hat auch außerhalb der Autoindustrie enorme Auswirkungen. Medienfirmen sind längst dahinter gekommen, dass es höchst



profitabel ist, Informationen über den Kundenkreis zusammenzutragen und diesen dann in homogene Verbrauchergruppen einzuteilen. Im Fall der Medien ermöglicht dieses Verfahren, Werbung genau bei der entsprechenden Zielgruppe zu platzieren. Dieses Modell erfordert wohlgerne ein zuverlässiges und differenziertes System des Verbraucherfeedbacks, das Details über Vorlieben und Verhaltensweisen liefert. Ein solches System manifestiert sich im „Nutzerprofil“, wo eher anonyme, aus der Statistik abgeleitete Informationen stehen können, oder auch solche, die explizit und von den Kunden freiwillig zur Verfügung gestellt werden – persönliche demografische Daten wie Alter, Geschlecht, Nationalität, Beruf und Interessen. Dem Bereitstellen persönlicher Angaben werden häufig eine Belohnung oder ein besonderer Service in Aussicht gestellt, der auf die persönlichen Interessen und Vorlieben des Kunden eingehen kann; persönliche Daten und Informationen über das Verhalten abzufragen wird so von der Allgemeinheit nicht als Übergriff auf die Privatsphäre angesehen, sondern als Zeichen einer Wechselbeziehung zwischen Medium und Benutzer gedeutet.

Im Grunde geht es beim social web um nichts anderes als um Nutzerprofile; jeder Web2.0-Dienst bietet gratis die einfache Installation eines persönlichen Profils an. In seinem Text „Audience Construction and Culture Production: Marketing Surveillance in the Digital Age“ beschreibt Joseph Turow, wie Herausgeber von Zeitungen und Zeitschriften „darauf kamen, dass sie die größten Werbeeinnahmen dann erzielen, wenn sie mit niedrigen Abonnementpreisen große Lesermengen an sich binden, denn das ist es, worauf es den Werbekunden ankommt.“ 4

Philip M. Napoli verweist auf die „inzwischen weit verbreitete Ansicht, dass das wertvollste Kapital von Blockbuster Video [der amerikanischen Videoverleih-Kette] nicht

seine Videotheken und auch nicht das Archiv aus Videos und DVDs ist, sondern die Datenbank aus den demografischen Daten der Kunden zusammen mit der Aufzeichnung der Ausleihbewegungen. Solche Daten werden im Internet immer wichtiger [...]. Folglich wird die Medienlandschaft der Zukunft wahrscheinlich so aussehen, dass die Medienorganisationen zunehmend alles daran setzen, persönliche Daten ihres jeweiligen Kundenstammes zu sammeln und zu verkaufen.“ 5

Dieses Datensammeln geht ganz offen vonstattan bei Blockbusters Online-Nachfolgern wie z.B. Netflix, wo die Kunden ihre Vorlieben in ihrem Nutzerprofil angeben, damit man sie sodann mit den passenden Filmen versorgen kann. Eigentlich ein toller Service, basierend auf seinen Lieblingsfilmen bekommt man Vorschläge für ähnlichen Stoff und alles was man tun muss ist angeben, wer man ist und was man mag. Der Dienst, den man der Firma umgekehrt erweist, ist allerdings noch größer: Man nimmt an deren Marktforschung teil und muss sogar noch für die Mitgliedschaft zahlen.

Anders als das klassische Fernsehen und Radio, wo die Zuschauerquote nur grob geschätzt werden kann, liefert das Web exakte Zahlen. Dank simpler Techniken, die Statistiken über Seitenaufrufe und Clickstreams erstellen, erfasst es jeden einzelnen Nutzer und überdies Details über sein Verhalten. Die detaillierten Informationen, die die Nutzer freiwillig auf ihr Profil setzen, tun ein Übriges und eröffnen nie dagewesene Möglichkeiten zur Analyse und Segmentierung einer globalen Nutzergemeinde. Besondere Kategorien wie Nationalität, Geschlecht und Alter, die der Nutzer aus Standardantworten auswählt, liefern eindeutige Antworten, die keiner Abstraktion oder Interpretation bedürfen. Es gäbe ja auch alternative Möglichkeiten, das Geschlecht eines anderen

Nutzers zu erkennen – indem man sich etwa seinen Avatar, seine Fotos, seinen Nutzernamen und dergleichen anschaut. Das Argument, die Angaben seien aus rechtlichen Gründen erforderlich, ist ungültig; die schlichte Zustimmung des Nutzers zu den allgemeinen Geschäftsbedingungen wäre völlig ausreichend selbst bei Vorgängen, bei denen das Alter des Nutzers aus rechtlichen Gründen von Belang ist. Es könnte zum Beispiel ein rechtsgültiger Haftungsausschluss vorgeschaltet werden, der auf das für die Teilnahme erforderliche Mindestalter hinweist, dazu das allfällige „Ja, ich stimme zu“-Knöpfchen. Doch damit begnügen sich die Web2.0-Dienste nicht, denn offensichtlich ist es von besonderem Wert, wenn der Nutzer beim Einrichten eines Nutzerkontos in einem sozialen Netzwerk oder auf einer hosting site eindeutige Informationen über sich selbst preisgibt. Es gibt natürlich auch immer ein paar paranoide User, die absichtlich falsche Angaben machen, doch die meisten wollen zumindest ein paar korrekte Informationen über sich herausgeben (man denke nur an die Millionen von Facebook-Nutzern, die sogar ihre echten Namen in ihren Profilen verwenden). Diese konkreten demografischen Informationen, angereichert mit den persönlichen Details, die die Nutzer freiwillig preisgeben, um ihrer Individualität Ausdruck zu verleihen, macht das Social Web zum perfekten postfordistischen Marketinginstrument.

Web2.0 macht es nicht nur möglich, seinen Nutzerkreis mit absoluter Präzision zu segmentieren, jeder einzelne User ist außerdem potenzieller Produzent von Inhalt, stellt einen eigenen Medien-Kanal dar. Und dank des tagging – der von den Nutzern selbst angelegten Indexierung – dieser nutzergenerierten Inhalte kann die enorme Masse an Kanälen durchsucht und dynamisch organisiert werden, wodurch die User zwischen unterschiedlichen Nutzergruppen hin- und herspringen können, ohne dass man sie aus den Augen verliert. Nichtsdestotrotz ist tagging (auch folksonomy genannt) eine reichlich

willkürliche Angelegenheit und funktioniert selten plattformübergreifend.. Viel konsequenter als traditionelle Mediengesellschaften, die ihre Kundschaft in kleine, aber immer noch heterogene und feste Zielgruppen einteilen, können Web2.0-Firmen ihren Nutzerkreis im Prinzip bis in die kleinstmögliche Einheit, den einzelnen Nutzer, einteilen; und das, ohne die Effektivität ihrer Marketingstrategien für die Massen einzubüßen.

Die Folgen einer derart durchgreifenden Fragmentierung sind immens. Chris Anderson spricht vom „Long Tail“, dem „Langen Schwanz“, ein Begriff, der auf Statistiken aus der Industrie Bezug nimmt; damit gemeint ist eine charakteristische Grafik: eine kurze hohe Amplitude, die die Beliebtheit einiger Produkte, so genannter Bestseller oder Hits, anzeigt, gefolgt von einer flach auslaufenden Kurve kaum nachgefragter Nischen- oder „Außenseiter“-Produkte – dem „Langen Schwanz“. Wie Anderson anmerkt, wurde der Long Tail lange vernachlässigt, obwohl die auf ihn breit verteilte Nachfrage zusammengerechnet häufig genauso viel beträgt oder sogar mehr als die im kurzen Kopf zusammengedrückte Nachfrage nach Bestsellern. Engpässe in der Distribution und eine aufwändige Logistik zwingen z.B. den traditionellen (nicht-virtuellen) Buchhandel, den Großteil seiner Lagerkapazität der Populärliteratur einzuräumen; den Platz an Nischenprodukte zu verschwenden, wäre viel zu teuer. Im virtuellen Handel wie bei Amazon oder iTunes hingegen schreibt die Kaufkraft des Long Tail schwarze Zahlen; das heißt, in den logistischen Möglichkeiten des Web wird postfordistisches Produzieren mit seinen entsprechenden Marketingstrategien erst so richtig zur Realität:

„Nur wenn die Käufer eine unendliche Auswahl haben, wird die wahre Nachfrage deutlich. Und es zeigt sich, dass diese viel weniger Hit-lastig ist, als wir dachten. Die Leute tendieren zu Nischen, weil dort

Sonderwünsche besser bedient werden, und in dem einen oder anderen Lebensbereich haben wir nun einmal alle gewisse Sonderwünsche (ob wir das selbst wahrhaben wollen oder nicht).“ <sup>6</sup>

## fig. 3

Google hat einen Weg gefunden, mit seinem AdSense-System, einem Werbedienst, der Anzeigen automatisch auf Webseiten platziert, den „Langen Schwanz“ anzuzapfen. Was AdSense in der Tat so besonders macht, ist, dass es Minderheiten im Nutzerkreis ebenso anspricht wie Kunden, die sich auf populäre Inhalte konzentrieren. Wer beim System mitmacht, erklärt sich einverstanden, dass kleine Anzeigen auf seiner Webseite erscheinen, und jedes Mal, wenn jemand die Anzeige anklickt, bekommt der Teilnehmer Geld von AdSense. Nicht nur kassiert Google eine Provision bei den Kleinbeträgen, die Werbende für das Schalten ihrer Anzeigen auf Webseiten bezahlen, das Geld der Nutzer wird von Google außerdem so lange einbehalten, bis sich die Werbeeinnahmen auf 100 \$ summiert haben (weniger populäre Seiten können Monate oder gar Jahre brauchen, um die zusammenzubringen). Google hat zum Investieren also ein komfortables Geldposter zur Verfügung, Geld, das eigentlich den Leuten gehört, die bei AdSense mitmachen – laut Bericht des Rechnungsjahres 2006 immerhin 379 Millionen Dollar. <sup>7</sup>

Anderson's Langer Schwanz ist einer der Faktoren, die zum rauschhaften Erfolg des Web2.0 geführt haben. Wenn aber nun jeder einzelne User eine mögliche Zielgruppe darstellt, wer macht dann die ganzen passenden Anzeigen für sie? Bräuchte nicht jeder Nutzer eigentlich seinen eigenen Artdirektor? Die Phrase „Kunden, die dieses Produkt gekauft haben, haben auch jenes gekauft...“ ist nicht gerade das, was man sich unter perfekter Werbung vorstellt. Ich fra-

ge mich wirklich, wer eigentlich die Google-Ads anklickt. Sind das vielleicht dieselben Leute, die noch Musik-CDs kaufen? Ein weiterer interessanter Aspekt ist die neue Autonomie der Kunden, die frei entscheiden können, was, wo und insbesondere wann sie Inhalte konsumieren wollen, anstatt zum Beispiel vom Sendeformat eines Fernsehsenders abhängig zu sein. Das Web2.0 hat auch die on-demand-Produktion auf die Spitze getrieben, indem es den Kunden gewünschten Inhalt druckt, wie zum Beispiel auf T-Shirts bei CafePress oder Spreadshirt – noch postfordistischer geht's wohl nicht. Und noch einmal: Phänomene wie der lukrative Long Tail brauchen ein absolut zuverlässiges Kundenfeedback. Die Rückmeldung der Verbraucher ist und bleibt das wesentliche Merkmal postmoderner Produktionsstrategien.

Es sieht also so aus, als ginge es im Web weniger um eine „neue digitale Demokratie“ als vielmehr um das allgemeine Bedürfnis der User, die eigene Einzigartigkeit auszudrücken, für ein intelligentes Marketingsystem zu nutzen. Anstelle von „You“ hätte Time Magazine wohl eher „them“ zur „person of the year 2006“ ernennen sollen! Diese heimtückische Seite von Web2.0 zeigte sich auch am Zensurskandal, der die Foto-Community Flickr im Sommer 2007 erschütterte. Anscheinend aus rechtlichen Gründen untersagte Flickr auf seinen „Nutzerbedingungen“ den Nutzern in Deutschland, Singapur, Hongkong und Korea, Fotos aufzurufen, die nicht ausdrücklich als „sicher“ ausgewiesen waren. „Sicher“ ist hierbei ein Euphemismus für „nicht anstößig“, und was das genau bedeutet, weiß niemand so genau. Diese doch ziemlich eingreifende Änderung wurde von den Verantwortlichen weder angekündigt noch wurde eine befriedigende Begründung dafür angegeben; Flickr verprellte seine Kundschaft ohne Not, Leute, von denen viele für eine Premium-Mitgliedschaft bezahlt und einen Pro-Account erworben hatten. Dabei hätte man die Sache ganz einfach arrangieren können: als

Nachweis des Mindestalters hätte man die Informationen auf der Kreditkarte der Pro-Nutzer heranziehen können, denn unter 18 bekommt man in Deutschland sowieso keine Kreditkarte, gleichzeitig bedeutet das Erreichen der Volljährigkeit, dass man sich jede Form medialer Inhalte zu Gemüte führen darf. Doch anstatt eine zufriedenstellende Lösung für beide Seiten zu suchen, ignorierte Flickr das Problem und zensierte sogar noch den Nutzerprotest, löschte kurzerhand alle Beiträge, in denen Slogans wie „Denk doch mal nach, Flickr!“ oder „Gegen Zensur“ auftauchten. Ein solches Verhalten zeigt ganz klar, dass solche Seiten in erster Linie den Interessen des Unternehmens dienen sollen und erst in zweiter Linie den Nutzern, obwohl es doch letztlich die User sind, die solchen Diensten überhaupt erst ihren Wert verleihen!

#### WALLED GARDENS – UMMAUERTE GÄRTEN

Der selbstreferenzielle Charakter des typischen Web2.0-Services zeigt sich auch an einer weiteren Schattenseite. Während folksonomy den Horizont für den Nutzer zum Recherchieren und Querlesen eigentlich enorm erweitern müsste, wird dieses Potenzial eingeschränkt, indem sich die Möglichkeiten auf Links innerhalb des jeweiligen Systems reduzieren. So erhält man beispielsweise keine YouTube-Videos als Ergebnis einer Suche nach einem Stichwort auf Flickr. Das spricht von dem starken Interesse der Firmen, den Nutzer an ihren Dienst zu binden: „walled gardens“<sup>8</sup> werden kreiert, um die Navigation der Nutzer verfolgen zu können. Online-Dienste wie AOL, Google und Yahoo! bieten alles Mögliche an – Information, Nachrichten, Kommunikation, Unterhaltung und Online-Shops, und dies alles speziell auf den Kunden zugeschnitten –, um den User vom Verlassen der Umgebung abzuhalten. Wie bereits dargelegt benötigt der Nutzer allerdings ein Profil, um diese Dienste als Kunde auch persönlich nutzen zu können; und dieses Profil wird, wie

könnte es anders sein, wiederum als besondere Dienstleistung angepriesen. Man geht davon aus, dass es dem Kunden gefällt, wenn Informationen, die ihn persönlich interessieren könnten, automatisch eingeblendet oder wenn exklusive Dienstleistungen umsonst angeboten werden.

## fig. 4

Je breiter das Angebot der Dienste gefächert ist, desto mehr Informationen über das Verhalten ihrer Nutzer können sie bekommen. In dem Moment, wo man sich ins Google-Email-Programm einloggt, ist man automatisch auf allen anderen Google-Diensten wie z.B. Blogger oder YouTube angemeldet. Google kann so genau nachvollziehen, welche Seiten ein bestimmter Nutzer regelmäßig besucht, und kann aus diesen Aufzeichnungen intelligente Statistiken über korrelierende Interessen herstellen. Exklusive Features wie Antivirenprogramme für Email-Clients werden Mitgliedern umsonst angeboten. Es reicht ein einziges Login, um in alle Dienste zu kommen – man hofft, dass der Kunde es irgendwann leid ist, sich verschiedene Logins von allen möglichen Providern zu merken (password fatigue – „Passwort-Müdigkeit“).

Facebook hat mit seinem Einmalanmeldeservice Facebook Connect einen neuen Weg gefunden, seinen walled garden zu erweitern. Nutzer können es externen Seiten gestatten, Informationen von ihrem Facebook-Profil zu ziehen und umgekehrt.

„Facebook-Nutzer sind mit ihrem echten Namen und ihrer echten Identität unterwegs. Mit Facebook Connect können sie ihre Original-Identifizierung mitnehmen, wohin auch immer sie im Web surfen; dazu gehören: Basis-Profilinformation, Profilbild, Name, Freunde, Fotos, Events, Gruppen und mehr.“<sup>9</sup>

Die Mauern des ummauerten Gartens sind also beweglich geworden, und das bedeutet, dass die Sammlung der „Daten über die Vorlieben und Klickbewegungen des Kundenstammes“ noch viel umfangreicher wird. Mit anderen Worten,

„das Eingehen auf den einzelnen Kunden erlaubt dem Anbieter, engen Kontakt zu seiner Kundschaft zu halten und Daten über die Interessen und die Bewegungen aller Mitglieder zu gewinnen, was dann genutzt werden kann, um gezielt Werbung zu schalten.“ <sup>10</sup>

Solch eine schier unendliche Menge freiwillig zur Verfügung gestellter und komplett miteinander abgleichbarer persönlicher Informationen hat es in der Vergangenheit wohl noch nie gegeben.

Wie wichtig ihnen ein breites Angebot ihrer ummauerten Gärten ist, beweisen die großen Medienunternehmen immer wieder; taucht irgendwo ein neuer Service auf, der erfolgreich etwas anbietet was sie selbst noch nicht in ihrem Repertoire haben, wird dieser Service einfach gekauft. Es ist schon fast zu einer Sportart geworden, ein Start-Up zu gründen, das einen nützlichen oder irgendwie attraktiven Service anbietet, das neue Unternehmen mit etwas Wirbel und Tamtam schnell populär zu machen und dabei so viel verwertbare Daten wie möglich über die Nutzer zu sammeln um die junge Firma dann samt den Nutzerdaten an einen Medienmogul zu verkaufen. Im Jahr 2006 kaufte Google zuerst Blogger und verleibte sich dann noch YouTube für 1,65 Milliarden Dollar ein, obwohl es mit Google Video bereits seinen eigenen Videoservice hatte. Ähnlich lief es bei Yahoo!, das sich 2005 Flickr sowie den Bookmarking-Dienst Del.icio.us unter den Nagel riss, Gerüchte sprechen von 30 bzw. 35 Mio. Dollar pro Deal. CBS schnappte sich 2007 für 280 Mio. Dollar Last.fm und das Mega-Medienkonglomerat News

Corp bekam 2005 MySpace für geschätzte 580 Mio. Dollar. Die großen Medienfirmen lassen keine Gelegenheit aus, es gilt, bloß nicht von der Konkurrenz mit einer größeren oder attraktiveren Angebotspalette ausgebootet zu werden. Deshalb wurde in junger Vergangenheit viel investiert und spekuliert, man überbot sich gegenseitig mit schwindelerregenden Preisangeboten. Einige Kritiker behaupten, dass dieser Trend die gegenwärtige ökonomische Seifenblase mit verschuldet hat, insofern die bei diesen Transaktionen fließenden Gelder den tatsächlichen Wert der übernommenen Firmen bei Weitem übersteigen. Angesichts solcher Unsummen bleibt doch ein dickes Fragezeichen: Alle Dienstleistungen sind „gratis“, wofür also haben die Käuferfirmen eigentlich bezahlt?

### **TEMPLATES ALS REGLEMENTIERUNGSMITTEL**

Wie bereits erwähnt basieren soziale Netzwerke auf Standards wie etwa templates, nach deren Schema nutzergenerierte Inhalte veröffentlicht werden. Solche Standards sprechen Bände über die Vorstellung, wie der User sich innerhalb dieser größeren Systeme verhalten soll.

YouTube zum Beispiel ist ein Dienst, bei dem man Videos anschauen und veröffentlichen kann; Schwerpunkte im Layout der Standard-Videoseite sind zum einen der Videoclip selbst sowie die Vorschläge für ähnliche oder entsprechende Inhalte. Der Platz für die Erklärung und Informationen des Videos (Datum, Permalink url, usw.) ist vergleichsweise klein und fällt kaum auf, er befindet sich im langweiligen Bereich des Fensters rechts oben. Die Beschreibung ist oft nur in Kurzform sichtbar, man muss auf „mehr Information“ klicken, um den ganzen Text sehen zu können. Weit mehr als das, was der Autor beisteuert, stehen die Kommentare anderer Nutzer im Vordergrund.

## fig. 5

Der Erfolg von YouTube basiert auf der schnellen und viralen Verbreitung von Videos. Dadurch, dass der Schwerpunkt auf der Reaktion der Allgemeinheit und nicht auf der Perspektive des Autors liegt, betont YouTube die Rolle des Zuschauers in diesem Prozess. Das macht deutlich, wie wichtig und wertvoll Nutzerbeteiligung ist. Wenn im AdSense-Modell bereits Bargeld lacht, sobald bloß jemand auf eine Google-Anzeige klickt, kann man sich vorstellen, was es bedeutet, einen Kommentar oder eine Bewertung auf YouTube zu hinterlassen. Aus dieser Sicht erklärt sich der winzige Raum, der für den beschreibenden Text des Autors reserviert ist: denn der ist irrelevant fürs Feedback, ihm mehr Stellenwert einzuräumen würde heißen, wertvolle Bildschirmfläche zu verschwenden. Und für Leute, die zu faul sind, einen Kommentar zu verfassen, hat man die fünf Bewertungssterne eingeführt: sie können auch zögerliche Nutzer dazu bringen, am Feedbacksystem teilzunehmen. „Öde“ oder „Genial!“ – es geht gar nicht darum, wie ein Video bewertet wird, sondern einfach um die Tatsache, dass es überhaupt bewertet wird. Der Zuschauer bestätigt „ich habe dieses Video gesehen und ihm meine Aufmerksamkeit gewidmet“.

## fig. 6

Mit anderen Worten, das template spiegelt wider, wie Nutzer die Inhalte konsumieren sollen; es drängt sie zum Dauerschauen und sorgt dafür, dass sie von einem Video zum nächsten springen. Das Feedback fungiert als Evaluation, und, viel wichtiger, es hält die Nutzer im System – ein System, das auf die mutmaßliche Trägheit der Konsumenten setzt. Es geht nicht darum, dass der User ein tiefgreifendes inhaltliches Verständnis zum Ausdruck bringt, wichtig ist allein seine emotionale Reaktion. Das macht Video so viel attraktiver als Text.

„Lesen ist ein Prozess, der eine substanzielle geistige Aktivität voraussetzt, die nicht ohne Weiteres erlernbar ist. Entscheidend dabei ist die produktive Fähigkeit, das Gelesene mit dem vorhandenen Vorwissen in Zusammenhang zu bringen. Fernsehen dagegen verlangt keine weiteren Fähigkeiten als Sprachverstehen. Mit einem Minimum an geistiger Aktivität kann ein Maximum an emotionaler Reaktion erzielt werden.“ <sup>11</sup>

Ein anderer Effekt der standardisierten templates ist, dass es überhaupt nicht mehr auf die Form der Präsentation ankommt. Dadurch, dass nur sehr wenige Anpassungen ermöglicht werden – oft gar keine –, entsteht die Illusion, im Mittelpunkt stünde der Inhalt, den der User ins Netz gestellt hat. Wie schon erwähnt sehen alle Flickr-Seiten und alle YouTube-Seiten völlig gleich aus, nur die Bilder oder Videos, die der User beisteuert, wechseln. (Die einzige Ausnahme sind Anzeigen: einige gesponserte Inhalte haben zusätzliche Banner.) Dieser Fokus auf dem Nutzer beinhaltet eine Strategie, die man mit „Unmittelbarkeit“ betiteln könnte, so beschrieben von David Bolter und Richard Grusin in ihrer Veröffentlichung „Remediation: Understanding New Media“. Unmittelbarkeit („Immediacy“) meint die Zielsetzung, den Nutzer die Anwesenheit des Mediums vergessen zu lassen; es soll ihm so vorkommen, als seien die dargestellten Gegenstände tatsächlich präsent. Das Medium ist nach dieser Definition vergleichbar mit einer unsichtbaren Fensterscheibe, durch die man hindurchschaut. <sup>12</sup>

Bei Flickr ist das template sowohl von der Funktion als auch von der Ästhetik her möglichst neutral angelegt – ein Umstand, der generell kritisch betrachtet werden sollte. Nicht nur die Komprimierung der Bilder (bzw. die verkleinerten Fotos für eine optimierte Bildvorschau), sondern auch die Zusatzinfos beeinflussen die Wahrnehmung: Wie oft wurde ein Bild angeklickt? Wie viele

Leute haben es zu ihren Favoriten hinzugefügt? Gibt es Kommentare, hat das Bild vielleicht sogar eine Diskussion ausgelöst? Dies alles sind entscheidende Details, die mit den Ausschlag geben, wie wir ein Foto wahrnehmen; somit ist das template (wie neutral auch immer) viel mehr als nur ein unsichtbares Fenster zum eigentlichen Inhalt. Ein weiterer Knick in der Optik besteht in der Tatsache, dass Flickr zu jedem Foto Typ und Marke der Kamera nennt, mit dem es aufgenommen wurde. Wenn man auf den Namen der Kamera klickt, öffnet sich eine kurze Aufzählung von Produktmerkmalen, der Preis wird eingeblendet und außerdem ein Link zu Yahoo! Shopping – das beste Beispiel dafür, wie Yahoo! direkt davon profitiert, Flickr in seinen Walled Garden mit hineingenommen zu haben.

## fig. 7

Das Image der Neutralität macht die templates zu einem mächtigen Werkzeug für Schleichwerbung: von allen Markennamen war Nikon der einzige, dessen Logo auf der Flickr-Oberfläche auftauchte (2007). Aber das war wohl doch ein bisschen zu offensichtlich; das Logo ist wieder verschwunden, die Glaubwürdigkeit der Benutzeroberfläche als neutrales Medium darf offensichtlich nicht gefährdet werden.

Bei Facebook werden viele Anzeigen geschaltet, die subtil für Produkte rund ums Handy werben oder Nahrungsmittel anpreisen, die man zu sich nehmen kann, während man sein Profil auf den neuesten Stand bringt; solche Produktwerbung versucht bewusst, Vorteile aus dem oben erwähnten guten Ruf zu ziehen. Oft präsentieren sich solche Anzeigen sogar als Teil der Funktionen von Facebook, denen die User ja vertrauen.

Die Verwendung von templates wirft jedenfalls ein interessantes Licht auf die Verteilung der Kompetenzen. Der Nutzer ist verantwortlich für

die Erstellung von Inhalt, Flickr oder in diesem Fall Facebook ist verantwortlich für die Aufbereitung. Bei dieser Aufgabenteilung kann Flickr sein Terrain ohne jede Beschränkung ausgestalten oder sogar missbrauchen, während der Nutzer (obwohl er es ist, der den Inhalt erst schafft) immer abhängig bleibt vom Reglement der Dienste und dem Rahmen, den diese setzen. Der User bemerkt höchstwahrscheinlich nicht einmal, wie ihm die Entscheidungskompetenz über die Form der Präsentation abgenommen und auf den Dienst übertragen wird.

### NICHTS IST UMSONST

Ich habe den Eindruck, dass es heutzutage offensichtlich geworden ist, dass es bei der Entwicklung frei zugänglicher sozialer Netzwerke nicht einfach nur darum geht, Menschen miteinander zu verbinden. Andererseits glaube ich aber auch, dass das Potenzial der Medienkonglomerate, alle Marketingmöglichkeiten des Web 2.0 auch tatsächlich auszuschöpfen, im Allgemeinen überschätzt wird. Es hat sich gezeigt, dass Social Web-Dienste, die nicht direkt mit dem Verkauf irgendwelcher Produkte verknüpft sind, ernsthafte Verluste zu verzeichnen haben; Facebook erzielt immernoch keine Einnahmen, gar nicht zu reden von MySpace und all den anderen. Wenn ich aufgrund der ausgeklügelten Schaltung von Werbung zwei Päckchen Smarties kaufen sollte statt nur einem, würde das tatsächlich die Miete für die ganzen Serverfarmen bezahlen? Zum jetzigen Zeitpunkt scheinen die Informationen über die Nutzer an sich erheblich wertvoller zu sein als alles, was man konkret damit anfangen kann. Warum also die Strukturen weiter aufrecht erhalten, wenn doch eigentlich gar niemand so recht davon profitiert?

Es sieht so aus, als sei der einzige echte Gewinner Google, dank einer technischen Infrastruktur, von der die Stasi nur träumen konnte. Die haben es irgendwie geschafft, alles mit einer dünnen Schicht zu überziehen, durch die

jeder durchmuss, der irgendetwas im Netz tun will. Ich bezweifle, dass irgendein anderes Unternehmen in der Lage ist, die über die Nutzer gesammelten Informationen wohl so effektiv zu nutzen wie Google ...

Noch vor zwei Jahren wäre mein Fazit gewesen, die User des Web2.0 sollten sich über ihre Rolle und Position klar werden und das Recht der Mitbestimmung über die von ihnen angereicherten Services einfordern. Tatsächlich haben die Nutzer es vor kurzem geschafft, Facebook zu einer Rücknahme der Änderungen in den Nutzerbedingungen zum Copyright zu zwingen, was tatsächlich ein Schritt in die richtige Richtung andeuten könnte. Heute frage ich mich, wie die Komponente „social“ wieder ins social web zurückkehren kann ohne dass sich der User bei jedem Klick ausgebeutet fühlen muss. „Freundschaftsanfrage senden“, „als Freund hinzufügen“ – warum kann das verdammte Netz nicht unser Freund sein!?! Google hat gerade eine Vorschau von Wave veröffentlicht, eine Applikation, die alternative Wege der Kommunikation eröffnen und es möglich machen soll, jenseits sozialer Netzwerke und hosting-Dienste Inhalte auszutauschen. Wave soll nicht zwangsläufig nur über Google funktionieren, sondern von jedem Server aus bedient werden können. <sup>13</sup> Vergleichbares hat Opera gerade vorgestellt: Unite verspricht, „die Kraft eines Webservers in deinen Browser“ zu holen. <sup>14</sup> Theoretisch würde das den Nutzern ermöglichen, sich ihren eigenen sozialen Netzdienst aufzubauen, indem sie ihre Computer vernetzen.

Es ist aber noch zu früh um vorauszusagen, wie oder ob überhaupt diese beiden Applikationen eine Veränderung in der „Web-Landschaft“ darstellen werden. Ich bin lieber vorsichtig über Dinge zu schreiben, die erst vor einer Woche veröffentlicht wurden; ich will, wenn Sie irgendwann dies hier lesen, nicht wie jemand klingen, der auf Second Life hängengeblieben ist. Und außerdem, warum sollten wir erwarten, dass die

großen Mediengesellschaften umschwenken, nachdem die uns jahrelang abgezockt haben? Warum sollte man annehmen, dass die ganz plötzlich cool geworden sind? Wave und Unite wollen beide dem Nutzer so viel Kontrolle wie möglich geben, doch das „Protokoll“ bestimmen immer noch die Hersteller.

Lassen Sie mich mit einem Vergleich aus der Autowelt schließen: nur weil dich Google endlich vorne sitzen lässt, macht dich das noch lange nicht zum Fahrer! Wie kommt es, dass wir anstatt jeder seinen eigenen Toyota zu fahren alle immer noch im selben beschissenen Schulbus hocken? Das postfordisieren Sie mir bitte mal.

/



# VIRAL CANDY



english  
version

1-34  
deutsche  
fassung  
35-48

ISABEL PETTINATO, 2009

## VIRAL CANDY

Of over 80 million videos posted on YouTube, only a negligible number have achieved a place among the Top Ten of most-viewed videos. Jean Burgess calls the phenomenon of a large number of videos available on-line with minimal hits “‘the fat head’ of the ‘long tail’”. <sup>1</sup>

In addition to an enormous number of recorded TV shows and official, as yet still available music industry clips, a few “user-generated” videos, whose popularity can be attributed to immense user participation in the form of comments and video responses, also grace the higher ranks. While professional film and cutting technology is a standard feature of traditional media content, “user-generated” videos are characterized precisely by the unspectacular aesthetics of self-filmed clips.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF SO-CALLED “USER-GENERATED” VIDEOS

The vast majority of the posted videos concern daily forms of communication. Users enjoy presenting individual skills and talents and inspiring their public to emulate them. Musical performances, a category which is generally extremely popular in video portals, are very frequent. One of the most popular viral video clips, called “Canon” <sup>2</sup> has been

*fig. 1*  
**see page 30**

viewed over 59 million times to date, and triggered enormous feedback of over 260,000 comments and 2,000 video responses. This video shows a guitarist playing a heavy metal cover version of the classical piece “Canon” by Johann Pachelbel on an electric guitar. He is seen sitting on bed, baseball cap pulled down low over his face, probably to prevent people

from recognizing him. The “user-generated” video genre is typically characterized by the fact that the videos are filmed in the poster’s home environment, as Jean Burgess explains as follows:

“ Productive ‘play’, media consumption and cultural performance have always been part of the repertoire of these ‘privatised’ spaces of cultural participation, but increasingly, they have become ‘publicised’ via webcam, SNS profiles and YouTube itself. ” 3

The unexpectedly high level of feedback in the form of video responses, in which other users also demonstrate their skills, is the prime result of the canon’s stylistic musical device, which constitutes chronologically staggered repeats designed to inspire participation. During the course of the video’s overwhelming popularity, intense speculation about the man behind the pseudonym “funtwo” dominated all social networks and press websites, until South-Korean Jeong-Hyun Lim was revealed as the guitarist in the original clip by the “New York Times” in August 2006. 4

If the media reproduction requirements for “alpha videos” are presented in a clear and comprehensible manner and can thus be converted into video technology on the basis of modest knowledge, it becomes increasingly probable that viewers will get active and reach for a webcam or camcorder. Everyday, cross-culture productions are particularly susceptible to imitation and thus to the copying and forwarding of the clip in order to demonstrate one’s own skills in the context of social networks. It is thus easy to comprehend why the lifespan of videos featuring content from everyday culture is considerably longer and why they enjoy wider viral online expansion than many technically perfect jokes in commercial clips.

“ [...] it is necessary to see videos as carriers for ideas that are taken up in practice within social networks, not as discrete ‘texts’ that are ‘consumed’ by isolated indi-

viduals or unwitting masses – a ‘copy the instructions’, rather than ‘copy the product’ model of replication and variation. ” 5

Another common trait of the virtual culture of participation is so-called “vlogging”. Here, personal comments on everyday topics are published online in video form. A factor which influences the popularity of these videos is the level of intensity with which the public identifies with the self-styled “vlogger”. The more controversial the video’s message, the more likely users tend to express their responses in the form of a parody or via an abusive comment. American Chris Crocker achieved this occasionally ambivalent form of community popularity with a bizarre video clip. 6

As a reputedly fanatical fan of pop star Britney Spears, he urged the mass media to respect the singer’s privacy in a very emotional way. The embarrassing yet entertaining outburst of emotions prompted users from around the globe to parody Crocker in countless video responses.

## *fig. 2*

Crocker’s video split viewers of his vlog into two camps, one of which reacted with animosity and torrents of hatred while the other expressed encouragement and support for Crocker. At the same time, interest by the mass media in Crocker increased in the course of the internet’s growing popularity, which culminated in appearances, reports, interviews and parodies about him and his video clip on American television, with the result that Chris Crocker became an internet celebrity via the dynamics of cultural participation alone. 7

An additional guarantee for maximum feedback is sensational clips, proved, for example, by the colossal reaction to the Mentos & Diet Coke video posted on the website eepybird.com by the artistic duo of the same

name in 2006. It wasn't the first time that the explosive character of the mixture of Diet Coke and Mentos chewy candies had been discovered.

## *fig. 3*

However, the interactive environment in which the video was entrenched was new, allowing viewers to distribute the video online, take an active role in the resulting discussion and imitate the results of the experiment via video responses. A short while later, Mentos became aware of the two men who had completed the experiment on video and began to encourage the hype surrounding it by linking its official internet presence with the video address and advertising a "Mentos geyser" online video competition. This generated a user participation of 100 video responses, which were, in turn, viewed over one million times. On the other hand, Coca Cola distanced itself from the video, stating that it considered it an endangerment of the "brand personality" of Diet Coke.

The viral potential of the original video increased significantly via user participation, which was deliberately encouraged by Mentos, and was estimated to attain a campaign value of ten million dollars by the company itself (Mentos has an annual advertising budget of 20 million dollars). <sup>8</sup>

### COMMERCIAL VIRALS

#### StRaTeGiEs AnD mEcHaNiSmS oF vIrAl OnLiNe CaMpaIgNs:

" When it comes to getting a message out with little time, minimal budgets, and maximum effect, nothing on earth beats a virus. " <sup>9</sup>

Jeffrey Rayport begins his article entitled "The Virus of Marketing" with this hypothesis, prompting a stricken advertising industry to place its faith

in viral strategies to systematically and sustainably stimulate the demand of defined consumer groups.

The fact is that the so-called classic advertising formats are no longer reaching their target groups. Even the most aggressive form of “interruption marketing” is being largely ignored, if not boycotted by consumers as a result of their permanent bombardment via TV advertising slogans, for example. According to expert opinion, the ratio of inefficient advertising amounts to “22 of the 29 billion euro spent annually on advertising in Germany.” <sup>10</sup>

In addition to serious financial losses, other far-reaching consequences of the “more is more” principle for the advertising industry have been growing criticism and consumer distrust. Apart from the trend of informing oneself online via purchase recommendations in consumer portals, advice and tips from family, friends and acquaintances were predominantly considered in the case of relevant purchase decisions, a phenomenon which elicits the following comments from Michael Bryce: “[...] Even in this era of mass communication and mass advertising, it has been estimated that as much as 80% of all buying decisions are influenced by someone’s direct recommendation.” <sup>11</sup>

This widespread orientation toward opinions from an individual’s social environment is caused by the authenticity, credibility, sympathy and supposed objectivity which characterizes a trusted source in the eyes of the prospective customer. Moreover, the potential customer also hopes to hear about the advice-giver’s possible experiences with the brand or product and thus discover qualities which a company is virtually unable to communicate to its target group. The most lucrative way for companies to profit from the current phenomenon of “internet recommendations” is so-called “viral marketing”, “[...] a new discipline relating to the marketing of companies, products and services [...], which has dedicated itself to systematically triggering word-of-mouth advertising and using this profitably.” <sup>12</sup>

Viral marketing is used particularly in the field of brand management, to create market shares for start-up companies with low advertising budgets on the one hand, and, on the other, to consolidate existing relationships between companies and their target group and to expedite demand for their products as a result.

“ Viral marketing is a marketing technique that aims to exploit the network effects on the Internet by offering a selected target audience an incentive relevant to their needs that encourages them to voluntarily pass on an electronic message to peers with similar interests, thereby generating growing exposure of

the message. ” 13

No other marketing technique in recent years has caused such a sensation among advertising pros and consumers, let alone provided so much food for thought. This advertising trend was triggered, among other things, by the as yet unsurpassed success of the Microsoft e-mail service Hotmail, which succeeded in attracting twelve million members within an 18-month period from 1997 onwards. This unusually high number of new customers was achieved by embedding a banner ad at the end of each e-mail, which contained the simple invitation “Get your private, free e-mail from Hotmail at <http://www.hotmail.com>”. 14

Three mechanisms characteristic of viral marketing were essential to Hotmail’s success: each subscriber acted as a passive advertising vehicle from registration onwards, advertising Hotmail with every e-mail sent. Thanks to the fact that the e-mail was received by a known sender, the recipient could reliably ascertain the integrity of the e-mail service, which was also free of charge. However, the fact that the e-mail came from a trusted source; a friend, family member or work colleague, was the decisive factor which ensured that the then completely unknown Web service came to be used on a global scale.

## **ThE eLeCtrOnlc ReNalsSaNcE oF wOrD-oF-mOuTh AdVeRtIsInG**

As the Hotmail success story shows, web-based, viral campaigns are established using the principle of word-of-mouth advertising. In contrast with offline campaigns, the communication sequence between companies and consumers is conceptualized in a completely different manner, as this does not take place, as usual, “face to face”, but almost entirely on a media basis online. The electronic version of this ancient marketing technique was anticipated in view of “the tremendous speeds with which information can spread exponentially via websites, forums or e-<sup>15</sup> mails” and the daily flood of new subscribers to social networks. Barriers such as distance and time, which apply in the offline world, don’t exist on the Internet. Internet recommendations take place via a simple click on the “tell a friend” button, which reaches a user’s entire social environment via e-mail in seconds. Thanks to the unusual efficacy with which content can be spread and the awareness of the provider increased, the “tell a friend” button can now be found as a standard Web 2.0 element on all public and private websites.

## **OnLiNe ViDeO aS tHe AdVeRtIsInG fOrMaT oF tHe FuTuRe**

For companies, social online networks are potential growth markets of inestimable significance. The increase in user participation on social platforms such as video portals is inspiring the economy to utilize innovative business models and advertising strategies.

The results of a 2007 study by Germany’s main market research institute, the Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung or GfK on “Alternative Advertising Forms Online”, which described the online use of moving images as particularly effective, medial “(Über-)vehicles” for advertising slogans, thus seem less surprising from a topical perspective. <sup>16</sup>

While 29.8 percent of the German PR agencies questioned during the study utilized video clips for online campaigns as early as 2007, a fur-



ther 17.5 percent planned to use moving images from among the possible online advertising forms in that same year. <sup>17</sup> Factors such as the advancing establishment of the broadband network, decreasing user fees for telecommunications and webhosting and the comparatively cost-effective distribution and provision of content on video portals in contrast to traditional distribution via TV and radio account for the explosive increase of commercial video clips on the internet.

According to the online market research institute “emarketer”, levels of expenditure by the American advertising industry in 2009 on online videos alone were anticipated to exceed the 850 million dollar mark; 66.8 percent of the agencies questioned planned to focus exclusively on videos for online advertising. <sup>18</sup> The turnover expected by the advertising industry is based on positive experiences with traditional TV and cinema advertising formats, which continue to generate the majority of advertising revenue in an undisputed manner. <sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, marketing strategists consider that online advertising via video present an effective opportunity to recapture previously “lost” target groups such as teenagers and young adults whose leisure time is increasingly spent with new media and less with conventional mass media.

Video is a familiar creative format and long-favored mass medium for big brand advertisers and ad agencies. Though TV may reach a broader audience quicker, online video advertising reaches an audience that’s easily targeted and difficult to reach via TV. <sup>20</sup>

### **CoNtEnT-oRiEnTeD sAmPLes Of ViRaL vIdEo CliPs**

The significant conceptual strategies of viral advertising videos will be demonstrated below, with reference to the results of the Convergence Culture Consortium Report <sup>21</sup> and with the aid of case studies concerning particularly popular virals.

In the light of the fact that the consumption of a viral is not configured to a particular individual, but should, at best, be shared with other users (so-called “sharing”), not every topic is equally suitable. All material forwarded by the user to friends and acquaintances in their social environment simultaneously says something about their personal preferences, opinions and interests and reveals a not inconsiderable part of their private sphere. Imprudent or falsely interpreted attentions may damage social relations. In particular, forwarding explicit advertising is likely to be interpreted by the recipient less as a friendly favor than as a spam attack. In order to encourage the propagation of a viral, the contextual focus must thus be less on individual than on group-specific value measures, compliance with which is implicitly expected by community members. Here, it is essential to remember that the value canon may differ considerably from community to community, as Henry Jenkins emphasizes:

“ [...] the worth of an advertisement may and often does differ from one community to another. ” 22

“ If the viral clip is circulated, the rating correlation of a viral and thus the campaign’s entire development can no longer be influenced. This loss of control on the part of the responsible party is not only a prerequisite of the video’s long range distribution, but is also an essential precondition for the user’s active, thematic confrontation with the video, during which he or she will, at best, create independent links between the video’s contextual aspects and internal community values. Concerned for their traditional brand image, companies narrow the scope of the user’s potential intervention, this at the risk of robbing the video of any potential for social participation in advance. The counter-productive entanglement of obsolete marketing strategies and banal advertising material is now considered a chief cause of the dismissive attitude of what are now emancipated and experienced users. Thus the challenge during the design of

viral formats lies in the creation of advertising slogans capable of initiating popular cultural processes in terms of individual and community-based expression and supporting these long-term. Henry Jenkins paraphrases these facts as follows: [...] in the spreadable media landscape, companies must find ways not simply to motivate consumers to talk about their brands but also enable them to talk through their brands. ” 23

If products of mass culture and their monitored production and distribution can be integrated into consumers' everyday lives, they become part of popular culture. From this point on, consumers alone determine the cultural significance which the product represents on the basis of their social values and relationships. The user's personal attitude is transmitted to the community via the advertising vehicle and the slogan transported by the same.

“ This act of turning mass media into popular media involves the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures (Fiske, 1989, p.23). ” 24

Advertising formats like virals therefore serve as “raw material” for the production of popular cultural values and content. Their user-dependent distribution increasingly transforms the original cultural mass goods into a cultural resource for potential identity concepts.

### **MaXiMuM rOoM fOr InTeRpReTaTiOn – aMbiGuiTy As StYliStiC dEvlcE**

If a viral cannot be clearly interpreted and correlated with the different views of several communities, it generates a need for discussion and incentives to create video responses. Ultimately, this intentionally broad-ranging compatibility of a video slogan triggers its increased dissemination. Henry Jenkins comments on this phenomenon as follows:

“ If the same content is passed between multiple communities, it is because that content serves relevant functions for each of those communities, not because it serves some lowest common denominator or universal function. ” <sup>25</sup>

The majority of popular video virals triggers ambiguous interpretations, as the following case studies exemplify very effectively. It follows that ambiguity can be understood as one of the central factors responsible for expediting the massive distribution of viral videos.

### **CoNtEnT cOuNtS – tHe CoNtExTuAl OrleNtAtioN oF a ViRaL**

Popular virals are characterized by a combination of several content-related stylistic devices whose co-action ultimately prompts the effect of the interpretative ambiguity described above.

### **SoCiO-cRiTicAl oR pOlitlCAlLy ExPLOsivE cOnTeNt**

A 22-second long advertising clip <sup>26</sup> from January 2005, which shows a purportedly Arabic terrorist attempting to perform a suicide attack outside a café triggered intensive reactions in weblogs the world over.

## *fig. 4*

However, his vehicle, a VW Polo, confounds his attempt, as the car bomb implodes and it appears that only the terrorist suffers in the process. The link between the campaign slogan of technical security, typical of automotive advertising, and social protection against terror attacks seems extremely incongruous to the observer, while the lack of a moral statement on the part of those responsible strengthens this impression further. Although the video's politically explosive content (discrimination of the Arab culture) elicited an enormous wave of criticism, it enjoyed a

positive reception by some. Blogs which originally published the clip as a result of its economic efficacy became venues for political and socio-critical debates in a matter of hours. The controversial feedback and resultant high level of discussion by members of various communities can be attributed to the content's social relevance and the complex interpretations of the video which followed. Henry Jenkins also underlined the role played by the viral video in the communication of community-specific value measures:

“ The commercial was spread through a number of different interest communities with a range of opinions, but what they all have in common was that each used the ad to articulate specific values and agendas. ” <sup>27</sup>

According to initial online rumors that the clip “accidentally found its way online from the poison cabinet of a VW advertising hotbed [...] and [was supposed to be] an entirely internal test”, <sup>28</sup> prompted media such as the British newspaper “The Guardian”, to investigate what was behind the curious viral a short time later.

To avoid damaging its image, Volkswagen distanced itself from the clip in a public statement on the marketing site AdAge.com, in which it vehemently denied any involvement in the viral. Moreover, the corporate group had sites showing the video legally removed and announced that it would be taking judicial steps against the British company leeanddan.com, which had admitted producing the viral. Volkswagen dropped the lawsuit unusually quickly after those responsible issued a public apology for publishing the film and for the resultant image damage. <sup>29</sup> Taking account of a report in “The Guardian” which stated that the internet spot was filmed on 35mm film “with a budget of over 80,000 <sup>30</sup> euro”, Volkswagen's approach appears generally implausible, but was deemed necessary in order to protect the brand image, to “soothe” the wrath of consumers and, ultimately, to turn the publicity generated for the Volkswagen brand to account. The “VW Polo” viral displays an effective

balance of ambiguity which, on the one hand, provides the public with sufficient leeway to create several other interpretations and, yet, on the other, uses significant contextual signs in order to clearly exclude complete incomprehension.

THE viral by the drugstore brand Dove, which was produced and marketed by global player Unilever, provides another clear example of the use of socio-politically relevant topics.

## *fig. 5*

DURING the course of its viral “Evolution”, <sup>31</sup> the cosmetic group practiced a moralizing form of educational advertising, the final headline once again emphasizing the fact that advertising and the media communicate a biased perception of beauty (“No wonder our perception of beauty is distorted.”).

THE advertising clip, which is 75 seconds long, documents the amazing transformation of an averagely attractive woman into an advertising model with the aid of standard industry procedures such as photo shoots and image processing using extremely impressive time-lapse and cartoon technology. Thanks to dramatic piano accompaniment and a documentary film style, the clip is a paradigm of manipulative advertising, as the viral’s rapid distribution and its overwhelmingly positive feedback online and on American TV demonstrates. Ultimately, the clip, under the cover of a purportedly socio-critical awareness and the supposed intention of moral enlightenment, generates customer retention for the “Dove” brand, in this case addressing mothers and their daughters.

THE viral video was the online breakthrough by the international advertising campaign entitled “Campaign for real beauty”, which was launched in 2003, which, according to marketing website AdAge.com, attracted three times as many visitors to the campaign site (<http://campaignfor->

realbeauty.com/) than a TV spot from the advertising campaign, which was broadcast during the American Super Bowl sport-<sup>32</sup> i n g event. Unilever simultaneously fuelled the distribution of its viral by calling for contributions to a global donation campaign, the “Dove Self-Esteem Fund”. This aimed to finance special workshops designed to help young women to attain a healthier and more tolerant definition of beauty.

WITH its high recognition value, this singular approach inspired users to create an impressive number of over 2,000 alternative versions on YouTube to date. Among these video responses is the professional parody “Slob Evolution”,<sup>33</sup> which ends with the contrary conclusion

## *fig. 6*

“Thank God our perception of reality is distorted. No one wants to look at ugly people.”, attracted millions of views, even garnering a prestigious “Emmy” award nomination.<sup>34</sup>

### **CaLcUIAtEd FuN: tHe Use oF hUmOrisTiC eLeMeNtS**

THE mutual online exchange of humorous video clips constitutes the contemporary virtual form of traditional joke-telling. Laughing about something together is a comparatively simple way of communicating philosophies of life, and supports the creation and preservation of social relationships. Within communities, for example, jokes about outsiders are frequently used in order to shore up a feeling of togetherness.

“ Humor, thus is not simply a matter of taste: it is a vehicle by which we articulate and validate our tastes. ”<sup>35</sup>

HUMOR is a matter of taste. A controversial joke, or a gag told at the wrong time can quickly be interpreted as an insult or attack, thus damaging the relationship between sender and recipient. As a result, vi-

deos containing more informal, cross-cultural everyday humor are far more likely to be forwarded than clips which are easy to misunderstand. Above all, these include virals containing parodic, absurd or surprising elements, which spread extraordinarily far. The viral advertising clip “Gorilla”, created by the British confectionary manufacturer Cadbury, used a combination of these elements by showing a gorilla giving a rousing percussion performance of the drum line in the famous Phil Collins song “In the air tonight”. <sup>36</sup>

## *fig. 7*

The surprise effect is controlled via the camera angle, which only shows the gorilla’s face during the song intro. When the drums are played, viewers grasp the scene’s sheer absurdity. The wider camera angle unmasks the gorilla as a passionate musician. The paradoxical setting overturns conventional perceptual patterns. Many viewers found the unexpected twist so entertaining that they wanted to share the surprise effect with others, <sup>37</sup> or remixed the viral by combining the clip with other famous songs. Jenkins believes that the absurdity of virals like this is a prerequisite for the development of other participatory actions:

“ [The Viral’s] absurdity creates gaps ‘wide enough for whole new texts to be produced in them’. (Fiske, 1989, p.104) ” <sup>38</sup>

The “Gorilla” advertising clip also illustrates that a link between the content and the product or brand in question isn’t entirely necessary in order to trigger viral distribution – a dangerous balancing act which proved the undoing of Scottish whisky brand Johnny Walker with the viral classic “grouse hunt” in 1999: although the computer game’s viral distribution was overwhelming at the time, hardly anyone knows to this day that it was designed to advertise the whisky company.

A further example of the successful integration of grotesque content is



the advertising clip “Tea Partay” by <sup>39</sup> Smirnoff, a British manufacturer of alcoholic spirits and mixers which positions its product at the heart of the viral.

## *fig. 8*

The clip is directed at the “young adult” target group, which is wooed with a combination of youth-related cultural elements and a demonstration of the product’s consumption. A fringe group of young, white snobs living on the American East Coast is parodied. Aesthetically, the viral recalls a professional music video in which a fictive rap group sings the praises of its privileged existence and favorite leisure pursuit, namely organizing ice tea parties. The objective of the viral campaign was the market launch of Smirnoff’s new product “Raw Tea”, a blend of alcohol and ice tea. Smirnoff launched a viral online campaign in addition to parallel TV advertising spots.

The company aimed to achieve product retention via different yet simultaneous advertising strategies. The music video filmed by one of the “Raw Tea” drinking, dandified suburbia inhabitants, which was published on YouTube, was just as much a part of this campaign as the fictive website of the band [www.tea-partay.com](http://www.tea-partay.com), which Smirnoff eventually used to divulge its advertising intention. In this case, the unusual combination of rap video elements and players who are usually rejected by the majority of communities due to their reputed arrogance was probably the key to success.

Parodic elements are particularly suited to eliciting participation and the nationwide distribution of a viral, as the creation of pastiches is then very probable.

Here, the main conceptual challenge is the correct assessment of the cultural background knowledge required in order to make the parody comprehensible for the vast majority of viewers. If the subject matter

refers to specific insider knowledge, only a few communities who share this will be addressed. However, if the parody is too broad-ranging and trivial, the clip will be imbued with a superficiality typical of the advertising industry, which will minimize the likelihood of viral distribution in the fledgling stages.

### **ThE aRtificialLY gEnErAtEd NeEd FoR aDdiTioNaL inFOrMaTiOn**

The majority of popular virals elicits enormous confusion and curiosity amongst its audience, with the effect that numerous users begin to search the internet for mysterious background information about the content, those responsible or the viral's filming, asking their personal network for support in the process. In order to bring about a collaboration amongst users, Jenkins believes it is necessary "that a successful media franchise is not only a cultural attractor, drawing like-minded people together to form an audience, but also a cultural activator, giving that community something to do." <sup>40</sup>

The exposure of additional information and the presentation and justification of personal interpretations can help strengthen user integration within social communities and increase their individual status.

While the fact that Volkswagen distanced itself from the "VW Polo" viral generated insecurity as regards who commissioned the advertising video, the Cadbury "gorilla" clip inspired users to discover various details about the filming of the ad - whether the gorilla was real or fake, for example, and, if the latter was true, whether Phil Collins himself had donned the costume.

The "Desire" campaign by vehicle manufacturer Ford also used this stylistic element. The publicity campaign served the market launch of the new vehicle model "Mondeo", and got off to a traditional start with a complex slow-mo advertising spot on TV. The TV clip <sup>41</sup> shows cars attached to helium balloons flying away from London's inner city in order

to figuratively make space for the new “Mondeo” model. A later “making of” revealed that the flying cars were created using plastic replicas and digital video processing techniques.

## *fig. 9*

According to online information, the advertising spot was recorded by private users and uploaded to online video portals. With around 100,000 views on YouTube, the clip did not prove particularly popular. The creation of new media content was characterized via the seamless (re-)combination of existing content in the form of remixes and mashups), and other participatory forms were omitted. More enthusiastic participation was only triggered by the release of another supposedly amateur video with the significant title “Homemade Ford balloons <sup>43</sup> a d ”, which showed two young men from New Zealand re-enacting the experiment and attempting to lift a car with helium balloons attached.

## *fig. 10*

The central question concerned the authenticity of the video – whether private individuals were indeed responsible, or whether Ford was actually pulling the strings behind the video viral. The technical problem regarding the realistic possibility of lifting a car using a specific number of balloons was also discussed intensively on numerous forums and blogs.

The example of the “Desire” viral clearly demonstrates how effectively contextually incomplete virals result in systematic investigations, which demand creativity, inference skills and logic from users, but also possess enormous entertainment value. Jenkins also emphasizes that the concrete content is less important than the research itself: “[...] it is the process of uncovering the ‘truth’, that is more important than what <sup>44</sup> is found.”

Veiled advertising campaigns often generate a kind of collaboration amongst users, who try their hardest to uncover all the facts hidden by the company running the ad according to the “beat the system” <sup>45</sup> principle.

And the internet, which guarantees unlimited opportunities for interaction, is a medium which is perfectly suited to “online scavenger hunts” of this nature.

### **LoW-bUdGeT aEsThEtIcS oF tHe “UsEr-GeNeRaTeD” vIdEo aNd ThE iMiTaTiOn PrInCiPlE**

An additional elementary feature of a viral video is the low-budget aesthetic designed to create the impression of a video produced with the most modest of means and to thus increase the probability of imitations from the start.

The recording quality, camera work and the cut of amateur videos are designed to inspire the public to create imitations and are therefore crucial characteristics in the case of virals in the category “stunts” and “experiments”. This low-budget aesthetics are employed give viewers the impression that it would be just as easy to organize their own shoots. While the aesthetics of a home video generate competitive feelings amongst consumers, such as “I can do that too, if not better!”, overly professional visuals create the impression that the clip has been digitally altered. The authenticity is subsequently doubted and the entertainment value decreases as a result.

A good example of the active principle of a plot designed to be imitated is the viral video “Guy catches glasses with face” by <sup>46</sup> leading global sunglasses manufacturer Ray Ban.

# *fig. 11*

A middle-aged man throws a pair of Ray Ban sunglasses at another man in different, acrobatically demanding situations, so that they land on his buddy's nose. Although the advertising character of the clip is initially masked by the enormous entertainment value, it is not lost completely for two reasons:

1. Numerous allusions to the advertising concept "Never hide" emerge, for example, in the name of the user account "neverhidefilms", which is referred to once more via the repeated depiction of the lettering on the car windows in the video (see fig. 14, right-hand image).

2. The advertised product has a high recognition value in the sense of a popular-cultural value: Ray Ban sunglasses exude a coolness factor for their target group of young males, as they have long become cult objects thanks to their use in films like "Blues Brothers" and "Men in Black". Within suitable communities, retro objects like these trigger recollections which users like to discuss. As expected, communication regarding the viral is prompted by forwarding it, which Jenkins comments on as follows:

" In many cases, the release of these retro products sparks enormous conversation wherever there are consumers old enough to have fond memories of their hay day. " 47

Additionally, discussions within the nostalgic fan base are followed by a younger target group, which serves to disseminate the viral even further. Another sophisticated search for information regarding authenticity was launched in the case of the Ray Ban viral, particularly in relation to the question of whether the feats performed had been digitally reworked or whether each sunglasses model could survive the so-called stunts unscathed.

Moreover, virals allow known brands like Ray Ban to revitalize their image by presenting products to the upcoming generation of potential buyers in a contemporary, attractive context.

The responsible marketing firm published the clip anonymously several times on invented user sites. A short while later, it disclosed its identity, confirming speculation by critical users that it was in fact a viral advertising clip, something which was obvious to the experienced observer on the grounds of the professional camera angles. Thanks to its resounding popularity (1 million views in just 4 <sup>48</sup> days), the clip, which just begged to be imitated, was copied repeatedly for subsequent commercial virals, including what was, if measured quantitatively, the even more successful advertising clip “Guys backflip into jeans” <sup>49</sup> a year later,

## *fig. 12*

which the same advertising agency created on behalf of jeans manufacturer Levi Strauss.

The Levi’s viral also emphatically proves that the motivation to imitate is the strongest and most seductive element of viral advertising clips which tempts viewers to participate, probably because, of all the possible contextual stylistic devices, it demonstrates the closest aesthetic and content-related links with “user-generated” content, thus masking the unpopular advertising character the most effectively. A secondary distributive effect is generated via user videos which re-enact viral content and thus raise the potential level of attention directed at the original advertising clip.

In summary, it can be stated that popular virals do not directly woo the product, instead creating new associations and values which lend the brand or company a contemporary aura. The additive features of a brand are spread via the exchange of information in online communities and transformed into lasting popular cultural values via virtual participation by social networks.

## OUTLOOK

The emergence of viral successes online is now far rarer than it was last year. The original advertising concept of the entertaining viral seems to have become outdated. Blogger Richard Lawson from the popular American gossip blog Gawker.com discussed the possible reasons for this development in his article “What killed the viral video?”, <sup>50</sup> and believes that an alteration in the behavior of YouTube users has triggered the change:

“ People are too savvy with the internet at this point to still be enchanted by its simple, chintzy magicks. YouTube is used more practically now, it’s more functional – and those dancing, lightsaber-waving fat kids have been reduced to mostly-forgotten

Coney Island freakshow diversions. ” <sup>51</sup>

In addition, it is unsurprising that the numerous attempts to recycle successful concepts which garnered extensive positive user feedback when first posted are now failing to grab the attention of a probably satiated target group as a result of a lack of new ideas and their sheer frequency. Lawson believes that the advertising industry has simply overdone the cannibalization of incidental, original successes.

“ The marketing companies overplayed their hands on this one, taking what could have been occasionally fun extra components to more mainstream ad campaigns and just overdoing it to death. ” <sup>52</sup>

The era of blurred advertising efforts using what are purportedly amateur videos really appears to be over. However, the future omission of viral word-of-mouth advertising mechanisms cannot be guaranteed. On the contrary, more and more marketing companies are exploiting the undervalued interaction factor between companies and their target groups.

While the users' willingness to participate has, until now, been manipulated according to the principle of "trial-and-error", it is now being used as a strategic component of viral advertising concepts. For example, a new model by American auto brand Chevrolet was launched via a month-long online competition in 2006, which challenged users to create their own video spots. After over 30,000 videos had been submitted, the winning clip was broadcast as the official TV advertising for Chevrolet on TV and subsequently posted online. The campaign not only acquired the desired viral character as a result of the host of competition entries, but the winning clip was posted on many social networks despite the official advertising intention – after all, the maker was "one of them" – a community member. The author Frank Rose comments on this as follows in his article "Commercial Break", published in the American "WIRED" magazine:

" Web video can be as emotionally involving as TV, and when used in consumer-generated campaigns, as crowd-sourcing efforts like Chevy's have come to be known, online clips come with a bonus – people see them less as advertising than as peer recommendation, which countless studies have shown to be far more influential. " 53

A similar user retention strategy was also applied in the case of the global online competition to find "The best job 54 in the world", which ended in May 2009.

## *fig. 13*

The company responsible, "Queensland", an Australian tourism company, cleverly gained international popularity by promising the winner of the supposedly "best job in the world" a generously paid (80,000 euro) six-month stint on the luxury Hamilton Island on the Australian Great Barrier Reef. Interested applicants had to convince the jury of their abilities via unusual application videos. A total of 35,000 applicants around the world



took part in the competition, generating a formidable PR value of over 110 million dollars according to company statements. 55

The British branch of vehicle manufacturer BMW has recently joined the ranks of those focusing on a more intense interaction with consumers, offering users the chance to download the experimental software “BMW 3D Paintbrush” 56 on the occasion of the campaign launch “Expression of Joy” for the Z4 model.

## *fig. 14*

Users can use a webcam to gain interactive access to an extended, computerized or “augmented reality”. They can then recreate the TV spot in a conceptually simplified manner, make screenshots and post these on the official “Z4 – BMW UK” Facebook profile page.

## *fig. 15*

As the British BMW site, which contains hyperlinks to social platforms like Facebook and YouTube, clearly confirms (see fig. 31), companies are now using these networks to seek immediate contact with potential customers, attempting to position their advertising material directly in their “private” networks. The companies’ focus is now on customer behavior, which is now the target of more intense scrutiny than was previously the case. Target-oriented online marketing on the basis of personal consumer information now appears to be standard procedure within the advertising industry, and could, from the consumers’ perspective, result in a potentially disquieting internet future.

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FOOTNOTES / FUSSNOTEN

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- 24** *ibid.*
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# fig. 1

Video still from the viral "Canon".  
Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjA5faZF1A8>



# fig. 2

Original (above left) and cover versions of the Chris Crocker clip (video stills).  
Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHmvkRoEowc>



# fig. 3

Video stills from the "Mentos and Diet Coke clip".  
Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKoB0MHVBvM>

## FIGURES / ABBILDUNGEN



# fig. 4

Video stills from the "VW Polo" viral.  
Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSSWeGBkf9o>



# fig. 5

Video stills from the viral "Evolution".  
Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYhCn0jf45U>



# fig. 6

Stills from the video clip "Slob Evolution".  
Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-kSZsvBY-A>



# fig. 7

Video stills from the viral "Gorilla".  
Source: [http://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_type=&search\\_query=cadbury+remix+gorilla&aq=f](http://www.youtube.com/results?search_type=&search_query=cadbury+remix+gorilla&aq=f)



# fig. 8

Video stills from the "Tea Party" viral.  
Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTU2He2Blc0>



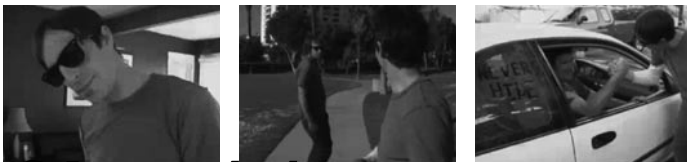
# fig. 9

Video stills from the "Desire" viral.  
Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjH4g2lxAY>



# fig. 10

Video stills from the viral "Homemade Ford balloons ad".  
Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVq0u1BTgE>



# fig. 11

Video stills from the viral "Guy catches glasses with face".  
Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-prfAENSh2k>





# fig. 12

Video stills from the viral "Guys backflip into jeans".  
Source: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pShf2VuAu\\_Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pShf2VuAu_Q)



# fig. 13

Homepage of the campaign "The best job in the world".  
Source: <http://www.islandreefjob>



# fig. 14

BMW Z4 online campaign.  
Source: [http://www.bmw.co.uk/bmwuk/augmented\\_reality/homepage](http://www.bmw.co.uk/bmwuk/augmented_reality/homepage)



# fig. 15

Instructions for using the provided software (video stills).  
Source: [http://www.bmw.co.uk/bmwuk/augmented\\_reality/homepage](http://www.bmw.co.uk/bmwuk/augmented_reality/homepage) on 15.04.2009+remix+gorilla&aq=f)



## VIRAL CANDY

*Deutsche Fassung*

Von über 80 Millionen auf YouTube bereitgestellten Videos hat nur eine verschwindend geringe Anzahl eine Platzierung unter den Top Ten der meistgesehenen Videos erlangt. Jean Burgess nennt das Phänomen einer grossen Anzahl von online verfügbaren Videos mit minimalen Hits „the fat head‘ of the ‚long tail“: 1 (s. Seite 26)

Neben einer gewaltigen Anzahl an abgefilmten Fernsehbeiträgen und den bisher noch zugänglichen, offiziellen Clips der Musikindustrie rangieren auf den oberen Plätzen einige wenige „user-generated“-Videos, deren Popularität auf die zigtausendfache Userbeteiligung in Form von Kommentaren und Videoantworten zurückzuführen ist. Während in den traditionellen Medieninhalten professionelle Film- und Schnitttechnik standardisiert angewandt wird, ist es gerade die unspektakuläre Ästhetik selbstge-drehter Clips, durch die sich „user-generated“-Videos auszeichnen.

### CHARAKTERISTIKA DER SO GENANNTEN „USER-GENERATED“-VIDEOS

In der überwiegenden Mehrheit der bereitgestellten Videos geht es um alltägliche Formen von Kommunikation: User möchten individuelle Fähigkeiten und Talente vorführen und ihr Publi-

kum zur Nachahmung inspirieren. Sehr häufig sind etwa musikalische Darbietungen, eine Kategorie, die generell in Videoportalen äußerst beliebt ist. Einer der populärsten viralen Videoclips namens „Canon“ 2 wurde bis heute über 59 Millionen Mal angesehen und löste in der YouTube-Gemeinde eine enorme Resonanz von über 260.000 Kommentaren und 2.000 Videoantworten aus.

## fig. 1

siehe  
Seite 30

In diesem Video zeigt sich ein Gitarrist beim Spielen einer Heavy-Metal-Coverversion des Klassikstücks „Canon“ von Johann Pachelbel auf einer E-Gitarre. Man sieht ihn dabei auf einem Bett sitzend, die Baseballkappe tief ins Gesicht gezogen, vermutlich, um nicht erkannt zu werden. Typisches Kennzeichen für das Genre des „user-generated“-Videos ist der Dreh in den Privaträumen des Herausgebers, was Jean Burgess wie folgt erläutert:

“Productive ‚play‘, media consumption and cultural performance have always been part of the repertoire of these „privatised“ spaces of cultural participation, but increasingly, they have become „publicised“ via webcam, SNS profiles and YouTube itself.” 3

Das unerwartet hohe Feedback in Form von Videoantworten, in denen andere User ebenfalls ihr Können unter Beweis stellen, ist vor allem auf das musikalische Stilmittel des Kanons zurückzuführen, der sich aus zeitlich versetzten Wiederholungen konstruiert und damit zum Mitmachen inspiriert. Im Zuge der grossen Popularität des Videos wurde in sämtlichen sozialen Netzwerken und auf Presse-Websites intensiv gerätselt, wer hinter dem Pseudonym „funtwo“ steht, bis im August 2006 auf der Website der

„New York Times“ der südkoreanische Jeong-Hyun Lim als Gitarrist des Originalclips vorgestellt wurde. <sup>4</sup>

Sind im „Alpha-Video“ die Anforderungen für die mediale Reproduktion klar verständlich dargestellt und damit auf Basis eines bescheidenen Wissens in Videotechnik umsetzbar, erhöht sich die Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass Zuschauer selbst aktiv werden und zu Webcam oder Camcorder greifen. Alltägliche, kulturübergreifende Darstellungen laden besonders zur Imitation und damit zum Kopieren und Weiterleiten des Clips ein, um das eigene Können in sozialen Netzwerken unter Beweis zu stellen. So ist es nachvollziehbar, warum Videos mit Inhalten aus der Alltagskultur ein weitaus höheres „Alter“ und größere, virale Ausdehnung im Internet erreichen als mancher technisch perfekte Scherz in kommerziellen Clips.

“[...] it is necessary to see videos as carriers for ideas that are taken up in practice within social networks, not as discrete ‘texts’ that are ‘consumed’ by isolated individuals or unwitting masses – a ‘copy the instructions’, rather than ‘copy the product’ model of replication and variation.” <sup>5</sup>

Ein weitere gängige Methode der virtuellen Partizipationskultur ist das so genannte „Vloggen“. Dabei werden persönliche Kommentare zu alltäglichen Themen im Videoformat online veröffentlicht. Ein Faktor, der die Popularität dieser Videos beeinflusst, ist der Grad, wie intensiv die Identifikation des Publikums mit dem so genannten „Vlogger“ ausfällt. Je kontroverser die Aussage des Videos, desto eher sind die User geneigt, ihr Statement in Form einer Parodie oder mit einer ausfallenden Bemerkung zum Ausdruck zu bringen. Diese mitunter zwiespältige Form von Community-Popularität erreichte der US-Amerikaner Chris Crocker mit einem skurrilen Videobeitrag. <sup>6</sup>

Als vermeintlich fanatischer Fan des Popstars Britney Spears fordert er die Massenmedien auf sehr emotionale Weise auf, die Privatsphäre der Sängerin zu wahren. Der befremdliche und zugleich unterhaltsame Gefühlsausbruch inspirierte weltweit User dazu, Crocker in unzähligen Videoantworten zu parodieren.

## fig. 2

Crockers Video teilte das Publikum seines Vlogs in zwei Lager, die einerseits mit Abneigung und Hasstiraden reagierten, andererseits Zuspruch und Unterstützung gegenüber Crocker bekundeten. Gleichzeitig nahm im Zuge der anwachsenden Internetpopularität das Interesse der Massenmedien an Crocker zu, das sich in Auftritten, Berichten sowie Interviews und Parodien über ihn und seinen Videobeitrag im amerikanischen Fernsehen zuspitzte – Chris Crocker wurde durch die Dynamik kultureller Partizipation ein Internetcelebrity. <sup>7</sup>

Ein weiterer Garant für maximales Feedback sind ebenso Beiträge mit sensationellem Inhalt, was die riesige Resonanz auf das 2006 auf der Website eepybird.com vom gleichnamigen Künstlerduo veröffentlichte Mentos- & Diätcola-Video beispielhaft belegt.

## fig. 3

Es war nicht das erste Mal, dass der explosive Charakter des Gemischs aus Coca Cola Light und Mentos Kaubonbons entdeckt wurde. Neu hingegen war die interaktive Umgebung, in der das Video eingebettet war, was Zuschauern ermöglichte, das Video im Internet zu verteilen, an der ausgelösten Diskussion aktiv teilzuhaben und über Videoantworten das Ergebnis des Experiments nachzuahmen. Kurze Zeit später wurde die Firma Mentos auf die beiden Männer, die das Experiment im Video ausführten, auf-

merksam und begann, den Hype um das Video anzufeuern, indem sie ihre offizielle Internetpräsenz mit der Adresse des Videos verlinkte und zu einem „Mentos Geysir“ Video-Wettbewerb im Internet aufrief, der eine Userbeteiligung von 100 Videoantworten erzeugte, die wiederum über eine Million Mal angesehen wurden. Coca Cola hingegen distanzierte sich von dem Video mit der Begründung, darin eine Gefährdung der „Brand Personality“ von Coca Cola Light wahrzunehmen.

Das virale Potential des Originalvideos potenzierte sich durch die Partizipation, die von Mentos gezielt gefördert wurde, um ein Vielfaches und wird vom Unternehmen selbst (jährliches Werbebudget von 20 Millionen Dollar) auf einen Kampagnenwert von zehn Millionen Dollar geschätzt. <sup>8</sup>

## KOMMERZIELLE VIRALS

### StRaTeGiEn UnD MEcHaNiSmEn ViRaLeR OnLiNe-KaMpAgNeN

“When it comes to getting a message out with little time, minimal budgets, and maximum effect, nothing on earth beats a virus.” <sup>9</sup>

Mit dieser These beginnt Jeffrey Rayport seinen Artikel „The Virus of Marketing“ und nährt seitdem die Hoffnung einer angeschlagenen Werbebranche, über virale Strategien die Nachfrage definierter Konsumentengruppen gezielt und nachhaltig anzuregen.

Fakt ist: Die so genannten klassischen Werbeformate erreichen ihre Zielgruppe nicht mehr. Selbst die aggressivste Form des „Interruption Marketing“ wird infolge des permanenten Bombardements durch z. B. TV-Werbebotschaften vom Konsumenten weitestgehend ignoriert bis boykottiert. Nach Expertenschätzungen beläuft sich der Anteil an ineffizienter Werbung auf „22

der jährlich für Werbung in Deutschland ausgegebenen 29 Milliarden Euro.“ <sup>10</sup>

Als folgenschwere Konsequenz des „Viel hilft viel“-Prinzips sieht sich die Werbeindustrie neben gravierenden finanziellen Einbußen mit wachsender Kritik und dem Misstrauen des Verbrauchers konfrontiert. Abgesehen vom Trend, sich mithilfe von Kaufempfehlungen in Verbraucherportalen online zu informieren, werden bei relevanten Kaufentscheidungen überwiegend Ratschläge und Tipps aus dem Familien-, Freundes- und Bekanntenkreis in Erwägung gezogen, was Michael Bryce folgendermaßen kommentiert: „[...] Even in this era of mass communication and mass advertising, it has been estimated that as much as 80% of all buying decisions are influenced by someone’s direct recommendation.“ <sup>11</sup>

Ursachen für die überwiegende Orientierung an Meinungen aus dem sozialen Umfeld sind Authentizität, Glaubwürdigkeit, Sympathie sowie vermeintliche Objektivität, mit der sich eine vertraute Quelle für den Kaufinteressierten auszeichnet. Darüber hinaus hofft der potentielle Käufer auf mögliche Erfahrungen des Ratgebenden mit der Marke oder dem Produkt und damit auf Qualitäten, die ein Unternehmen seiner Zielgruppe kaum entgegenbringen kann. Die für Firmen lukrativste Möglichkeit, vom aktuellen Internetphänomen der Weiterempfehlung zu profitieren, stellt das so genannte „Virale Marketing“ dar, „[...] eine neue Disziplin der Vermarktung von Unternehmen, Produkten und Dienstleistungen [...], die sich dem Ziel verschrieben hat, geplant Mundpropaganda auszulösen und diese gewinnbringend zu nutzen.“ <sup>12</sup>

Virales Marketing wird insbesondere beim Markenmanagement eingesetzt, zum einen um Startup-Unternehmen mit eher geringem Werbebudget Marktanteile zu verschaffen, zum anderen um bereits bestehende Beziehungen zwischen Unternehmen und deren Zielgruppe

zu verfestigen und dadurch die Nachfrage ihrer Produkte voranzutreiben.

“Viral marketing is a marketing technique that aims to exploit the network effects on the Internet by offering a selected target audience an incentive relevant to their needs that encourages them to voluntarily pass on an electronic message to peers with similar interests, thereby generating growing exposure of the message.” 13

Keine Marketingtechnik hat in den letzten Jahren unter Werbeprofis und Konsumenten für soviel Aufsehen und Diskussionsstoff gesorgt. Ausgelöst wurde dieser Werbetrend unter anderem durch den bis heute unübertroffenen Erfolg des Microsoft E-Mail-Services Hotmail, dem es im Jahr 1997 gelang, innerhalb von 18 Monaten zwölf Millionen Mitglieder zu gewinnen. Erreicht wurde diese außergewöhnliche Zahl an Neukunden durch die Einbettung eines Werbebanners am Ende einer jeden E-Mail mit der simplen Einladung „Get your private, free e-mail from Hotmail at <http://www.hotmail.com>“ 14. Für den Erfolg ausschlaggebend waren drei für virales Marketing charakteristische Mechanismen: Jeder Abonnent agiert von Beginn seiner Anmeldung an als passiver Werbeträger, der mit jeder versandten E-Mail Werbung für Hotmail betreibt. Durch den Erhalt der E-Mail von einem bekannten Absender vergewissert sich der Empfänger hinsichtlich der Seriosität des Maildienstes, der zudem kostenfrei nutzbar ist. Die Tatsache aber, dass die E-Mail von einer vertrauten Quelle stammt – einem Freund, Familienangehörigen oder Arbeitskollegen –, war der entscheidende Faktor, weswegen der damals völlig unbekannt Webdienst schließlich weltweit genutzt wurde.

#### **DIE eLeKtRoNiScHe ReNaiSsAnCe DeR MuNdPrOpAgAnDa**

Wie die Erfolgsgeschichte Hotmails zeigt, beruhen

webbasierende, virale Kampagnen auf dem Prinzip der Mundpropaganda. Im Gegensatz zu Offline-Kampagnen ist der Kommunikationsablauf zwischen Unternehmen und Verbrauchern völlig anders gestaltet, da dieser nicht wie üblich „von Angesicht zu Angesicht“, sondern nahezu vollständig auf medialer Basis im Internet erfolgt. Die elektronische Version dieser uralten Marketingtechnik war im Hinblick auf „die enormen Geschwindigkeiten, mit denen sich Informationen mittels Websites, Foren oder E-Mails quasi exponentiell verbreiten können“ 15, und die tagtägliche Flut an Neuanmeldungen in sozialen Netzwerken vorauszu sehen. Barrieren wie Distanz und Zeit, die in der Offline-Welt gelten, existieren im Internet nicht: Weiterempfehlungen im Internet erfolgen über einen simplen Klick auf den „Tell a friend“-Button, der via E-Mail in wenigen Sekunden das gesamte soziale Umfeld eines Users erreicht. Infolge dieser außergewöhnlichen Wirksamkeit, Inhalte zu verbreiten und den Bekanntheitsgrad des Bereitstellers zu erhöhen, ist der „Tell a friend“-Button inzwischen als standardisiertes Web 2.0-Element auf sämtlichen öffentlichen, aber auch privaten Webseiten aufzufinden.

#### **OnLiNe-ViDeO aLs WeRbEfoRmAt DeR ZuKuNfT**

Soziale Online-Netzwerke gelten für Unternehmen als potentielle Wachstumsmärkte von unschätzbbarer Bedeutung. Die steigende Userbeteiligung auf sozialen Plattformen wie z. B. Videoportalen inspiriert die Wirtschaft zu neuartigen Geschäftsmodellen und Werbemaßnahmen. Für wenig Überraschung sorgt daher aus heutiger Sicht das Ergebnis einer Studie der Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung GfK über „Alternative Werbeformen im Internet“ aus dem Jahr 2007, das den Online-Einsatz von Bewegtbildern als besonders effektiven, medialen „(Über-)Träger“ von Werbebotschaften beschreibt. 16

Während die darin befragten PR-Agenturen in Deutschland bei Online-Kampagnen bereits im Jahr 2007 zu 29,8 Prozent auf Videoclips als Werbeformat zurückgriffen, planten andere, von den möglichen Online-Werbeformen Bewegtbilder zu 17,5 Prozent noch im besagten Jahr einzusetzen. <sup>17</sup> Faktoren wie die fortschreitende Etablierung des Breitbandnetzes, sinkende Nutzungsgebühren von Telekommunikation und Webhosting sowie die zur traditionellen Distribution über TV und Hörfunk vergleichsweise günstige Verteilung und Bereitstellung von Inhalten auf Videoportalen bedingen die explosionsartige Zunahme von kommerziellen Videoclips im Internet.

Laut des Online-Marktforschungsinstituts „emarketer“ seien für 2009 Ausgaben der amerikanischen Werbeindustrie von 850 Millionen Dollar allein für Online-Videos zu erwarten; ein Anteil von 66,8 Prozent der befragten Agenturen fokussiere sich ausschließlich auf das Video im Bereich der Onlinewerbung. <sup>18</sup> Die Umsatzhoffnungen der Werbeindustrie gründen auf den positiven Erfahrungen mit traditionellen Formaten der TV- und Kinowerbung, die unangefochten nach wie vor den größten Anteil an Werbeeinnahmen hervorbringen. <sup>19</sup>

Außerdem sehen Marketingstrategen in der Onlinewerbung via Video eine effiziente Chance, verloren geglaubte Zielgruppen wie Jugendliche und junge Erwachsene wieder zu erreichen, deren Freizeitgestaltung zunehmend mit der Nutzung neuer Medien und weniger mit herkömmlichen Massenmedien einhergeht.

“Video is a familiar creative format and long-favored mass medium for big brand advertisers and ad agencies. Though TV may reach a broader audience quicker, online video advertising reaches an audience that’s easily targeted and difficult to reach via TV.” <sup>20</sup>

### CoNtEnT-oRiEnTiErTe MuStEr ViRaLeR ViDeOcLiPs

Im Folgenden sollen unter Bezugnahme auf die Ergebnisse des Convergence Culture Consortium Reports <sup>21</sup> mithilfe von Fallstudien besonders populärer Virals die wesentlichen konzeptionellen Strategien viraler Werbevideos aufgezeigt werden.

Angesichts der Tatsache, dass der Konsum eines Virals nicht auf ein Individuum ausgelegt ist, sondern bestenfalls mit anderen Usern geteilt werden soll (sog. „Sharing“), ist nicht jede Thematik gleichermaßen geeignet. Sämtliches Material, das User an Freunde und Bekannte aus ihrem sozialen Umfeld weitergeben, sagt zugleich auch etwas über ihre persönlichen Vorlieben, Meinungen und Interessen aus und gibt einen nicht unerheblichen Teil ihrer Privatsphäre wieder. Unüberlegte oder falsch verstandene Aufmerksamkeiten können sozialen Beziehungen Schaden zufügen. Insbesondere die Weiterleitung von eindeutigen Werbeinhalten wird vom Empfänger weniger als Freundschaftsdienst denn als Spamattacke interpretiert. Um zur Weitergabe eines Virals anzuregen, muss der inhaltliche Fokus demzufolge weniger auf individuellen als vielmehr auf gruppenspezifischen Wertmaßstäben liegen, deren Einhaltung von den Mitgliedern der Communities unausgesprochen erwartet wird. Entscheidend dabei ist, dass sich der Wertekanon von Community zu Community erheblich unterscheiden kann, wie Henry Jenkins betont:

“[...] the worth of an advertisement may and often does differ from one community to another.” <sup>22</sup>

Ist der virale Clip in Umlauf gebracht, ist der Bewertungszusammenhang eines Virals und damit der gesamte Kampagnenverlauf nicht mehr beeinflussbar. Dieser Kontrollverlust seitens der Verantwortlichen ist nicht nur für die

weitreichende Verbreitung des Videos erforderlich, sondern auch zwingende Vorbedingung für eine aktive thematische Auseinandersetzung des Users mit dem Video, in deren Rahmen er im optimalen Fall selbstständig Verknüpfungen zwischen inhaltlichen Aspekten des Videos und Community-internen Werten herstellt. In Sorge um ihr traditionelles Markenimage grenzen Unternehmen den Spielraum des potentiellen Usereingriffs ein, mit dem Risiko, dem Video vorab jegliches Potential für soziale Partizipation zu nehmen. Dabei gilt die kontraproduktive Verschränkung von veralteten Marketingstrategien und banalen Werbeeinheiten heute als Hauptursache für die ablehnende Haltung des mittlerweile emanzipierten und erfahrenen Users. Daher liegt die Herausforderung bei der Konzeption viraler Formate in der Generierung von Werbebotschaften, die imstande sind, popkulturelle Prozesse des individuellen und gemeinschaftlichen Ausdrucks zu initiieren und langfristig zu unterstützen. Henry Jenkins umschreibt diesen Sachverhalt folgendermaßen:

“[...] in the spreadable media landscape, companies must find ways not simply to motivate consumers to talk about their brands but also enable them to talk through their brands.” <sup>23</sup>

Lassen sich Erzeugnisse der Massenkultur, deren Produktion und Verteilung unter Überwachung ihrer Produzenten steht, ins Alltagsleben der Konsumenten integrieren, werden sie Bestandteil der Popkultur. Ab diesem Zeitpunkt bestimmen allein die Konsumenten anhand ihrer sozialen Werte und Beziehungen die kulturelle Bedeutung, die das Produkt für sie darstellt. Die persönliche Haltung des Users wird der Community über den Werbeträger und die über ihn transportierte Werbebotschaft vermittelt.

“This act of turning mass media into popular media involves the active process of generating and circulating meanings and

pleasures (Fiske, 1989, p.23).” <sup>24</sup>

Werbeformate wie Virals dienen demnach als „Rohmaterial“ für die Produktion von popkulturellen Werten und Inhalten. Ihre userabhängige Verbreitung verwandelt die ursprünglich kulturelle Massenware zusehends in eine kulturelle Ressource für potentielle Identitätswürfe.

#### **DeR mAXiMaLe InTeRpReTaTiOnSrAuM – DaS StiLmiTtEl dEr AmBiGuiTät**

Kann ein Viral in seiner Aussage nicht eindeutig interpretiert werden und korreliert mit unterschiedlichen Auffassungen mehrerer Communities, erzeugt es Diskussionsbedarf und Anreize, Videoantworten zu erstellen. Diese bewusst weit gefasste Kompatibilität einer Videobotschaft bewirkt letztendlich deren verstärkte Ausbreitung. Henry Jenkins kommentiert diesen Sachverhalt folgendermaßen:

“If the same content is passed between multiple communities, it is because that content serves relevant functions for each of those communities, not because it serves some lowest common denominator or universal function.” <sup>25</sup>

Die Mehrheit populärer Videovirals bietet vieldeutige Interpretationen, was folgende Fallstudien sehr gut veranschaulichen. In diesem Sinne kann Ambiguität als einer der zentralen Wirkungsfaktoren verstanden werden, der die massive Verbreitung viraler Videos maßgeblich vorantreibt.

#### **CoNtEnT cOuNts – DiE iNhAlTlicHe AuSriChTuNg EiNeS ViRaLs**

Populäre Virals sind durch eine Kombination aus mehreren inhaltsbezogenen Stilmitteln gekennzeichnet, deren Zusammenwirken schließlich den Effekt der oben beschriebenen interpretativen Ambiguität hervorruft.



## GeSeLLScHaFtSkRiTisChE OdEr PoLiTiSch bRiSaNtE InHaLte

Intensive Reaktionen in den weltweiten Weblogs löste ein 22 Sekunden kurzer Werbeclip <sup>26</sup> vom Januar 2005 aus, der einen arabisch anmutenden Terroristen beim Versuch zeigt, einen Selbstmordanschlag vor einem Café zu verüben.

### *fig. 4*

Sein Fahrzeug, ein VW Polo, vereitelt diesen jedoch, da die Autobombe implodiert und bis auf den Terroristen selbst scheinbar niemand zu Schaden kommt. Die für die Autowerbung typische Kampagnenbotschaft der technischen Sicherheit mit dem gesellschaftlichen Schutz vor Terrorangriffen zu verschränken, wirkt für den Betrachter äußerst befremdlich, wobei das Fehlen einer moralischen Stellungnahme seitens der Verantwortlichen diesen Eindruck zusätzlich verstärkt. Das Video löste infolge seiner politischen Brisanz (Diskriminierung der arabischen Kultur) eine enorme Welle an Kritik, aber auch an Zuspruch aus. Blogs, die den Clip ursprünglich wegen seiner ökonomischen Wirksamkeit veröffentlichten, wurden innerhalb weniger Stunden Austragungsort politischer und gesellschaftskritischer Debatten. Die kontroverse Resonanz und die daraus resultierende hohe Diskussionsbeteiligung von Mitgliedern unterschiedlichster Communities sind auf die gesellschaftliche Relevanz des Inhalts und die daraus resultierenden vielschichtigen Interpretationsmöglichkeiten des Videos zurückzuführen. Auch Henry Jenkins unterstreicht die Rolle des viralen Videos bei der Vermittlung Community-spezifischer Wertmaßstäbe:

“The commercial was spread through a number of different interest communities with a range of opinions, but what they all have in common was that each used the ad to articulate specific values and agendas.” <sup>27</sup>

Ersten Online-Gerüchten zufolge, der Clip habe „seinen Weg ins Netz nur versehentlich aus dem Giftschränk einer VW-Werbeschmiede gefunden [...] und [sei] eigentlich ein rein interner Test gewesen“ <sup>28</sup>, veranlasste kurze Zeit später auch Medien wie die britische Zeitung „The Guardian“, den Hintergründen rund um das kuriose Viral nachzugehen.

Um Imageschäden zu vermeiden, distanzierte sich das Unternehmen Volkswagen in einer öffentlichen Stellungnahme auf der Marketingseite AdAge.com vom Werbeclip, indem es jegliche Beteiligung daran vehement dementierte. Außerdem ließ der Konzern Seiten, die das Video zeigten, gerichtlich entfernen und kündigte an, juristische Schritte gegen die britische Firma leeanddan.com einzuleiten, die sich zur Produktion des Virals bekannt hatte. Volkswagen ließ die Klage ungewöhnlich schnell fallen, nachdem sich die Macher öffentlich für die Bereitstellung des Filmes und den angerichteten Imageschaden entschuldigt hatten. <sup>29</sup> Das Vorgehen seitens Volkswagen erscheint unter Bezugnahme eines Berichts aus „The Guardian“, der Internet-spot sei auf 35mm-Film „mit einem Budget von mehr als 80.000 Euro“ <sup>30</sup> gedreht worden, zwar generell fadenscheinig, war aber zum Schutz des Markenimages als notwendig empfunden worden, um die Empörung unter Konsumenten zu „lindern“ und die für die Marke Volkswagen erzeugte Publicity letztendlich positiv zu nutzen. Das „VW Polo“-Viral verfügt über eine wirksame Balance an Vieldeutigkeit, die einerseits dem Publikum genügend Freiraum für mehrere Interpretationen bot, andererseits über signifikante inhaltliche Wegweiser jedoch ebenso eindeutig gestaltet war, um eine völlige Unverständlichkeit auszuschließen.

Ein weiteres, anschauliches Beispiel für die Nutzung gesellschaftspolitisch relevanter Themen liefert das Viral der Drogeriemarke Dove, die vom Global Player Unilever produziert und vertrieben wird. Im Rahmen seines Virals „Evo-

lution“ <sup>31</sup> betreibt der Kosmetikkonzern moralische Aufklärung, was mit der abschließenden Headline, Werbung und Medien würden eine verzerrte Wahrnehmung von Schönheit vermitteln („No wonder our perception of beauty is distorted.“), nochmals unterstrichen wird.

## fig. 5

Mithilfe äußerst eindrucksvoller Zeitraffer- und Trickfilmtechniken dokumentiert der 75 Sekunden lange Werbeclip die verblüffende Verwandlung einer durchschnittlich attraktiven Frau zum Anzeigenmodell anhand der branchenüblichen Arbeitsschritte wie Fotoshooting und Bildbearbeitung. Mit dramatisch anmutender Klavieruntermalung und einer Optik, die dem Typus eines Dokumentarfilms gleicht, zeigt sich darin ein Musterbeispiel manipulativer Werbung, wie die rasante Verbreitung des Virals und dessen überwiegend positive Resonanz im Internet und im amerikanischen TV beweist: Unter dem Deckmantel eines gesellschaftskritischen Bewusstseins und der vorgeschobenen Intention moralischer Aufklärung wird letzten Endes Kundenbindung an die Marke „Dove“ erzielt, in diesem Fall an Mütter und deren Töchter adressiert.

Das virale Video war der Online-Durchbruch der 2003 gestarteten, internationalen Werbekampagne „Campaign for real beauty“ und hat laut der Marketingwebsite AdAge.com dreimal mehr Besucherströme auf die Kampagnenseite (<http://campaignforrealbeauty.com>) erzielt als ein TV-Spot aus der Werbekampagne, der während des amerikanischen Sportevents Super Bowl ausgestrahlt wurde. <sup>32</sup> Parallel dazu befeuerte Unilever die Verbreitung seines Virals mit dem Aufruf zu einer weltweiten Spendenaktion, dem „Dove Self-Esteem Fund“. Ziel der Stiftung sei die Finanzierung spezieller Workshops, die junge Frauen dabei unterstützen würden, zu einer gesünderen und damit toleranteren Definition von Schönheit zu gelangen.

Die eigentümliche Machart mit hohem Wiedererkennungswert inspirierte User bis heute zu einer beachtlichen Anzahl von über 2.000 alternativen Versionen auf YouTube.

Darunter erreichte unter den Videoantworten die professionell erstellte Parodie „Slob Evolution“ <sup>33</sup>, die mit dem konträren Fazit „Thank God our perception of reality is distorted. No one wants to look at ugly people.“ endet, selbst eine Zuschaueranzahl in Millionenhöhe sowie eine Nominierung für den amerikanischen Filmpreis „Emmy“. <sup>34</sup>

## fig. 6

### SpAß-KaLkÜL: DeR EiNsAtZ hUmORi-StiScHeR ELeMeNtE

Das gegenseitige Zusenden humorvoller Video-clips repräsentiert die zeitgemäße virtuelle Form des traditionellen Witzeerzählens. Gemeinsam über etwas zu lachen ist eine vergleichsweise einfache Möglichkeit, Weltanschauungen zu kommunizieren und unterstützt Aufbau und Erhalt sozialer Beziehungen. Beispielsweise wird in Communities häufig mithilfe von Witzen über Außenstehende das Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl verstärkt.

“Humor, thus is not simply a matter of taste: it is a vehicle by which we articulate and validate our tastes.” <sup>35</sup>

Humor ist Geschmackssache. Ein Witz kann zum falschen Zeitpunkt oder bei strittigen Inhalten rasch als Beleidigung oder Angriff verstanden werden und schadet so der Beziehung zwischen Absender und Empfänger. Daher werden Videos mit eher unverbindlichem, kulturübergreifendem Alltagshumor weitaus öfter weitergeleitet als Clips, die leicht missverstanden werden. Darunter verbreiten sich vor allem Virals, die parodistische, absurde oder überraschende Elemente enthalten, überdurchschnitt-

lich weit. Der virale Werbeclip „Gorilla“ <sup>36</sup> des britischen Süßwarenherstellers Cadbury macht sich eine Kombination aus diesen Elementen zunutze, indem es einen Gorilla am Schlagzeug bei der Darbietung der Drumline des bekannten Phil Collins-Songs „In the air tonight“ zeigt.

## fig. 7

Das Überraschungsmoment wird über den Kameraausschnitt gesteuert, der beim Songintro nur das Gesicht des Gorillas erkennen lässt. Beim Einsetzen der Drums wird dem Zuschauer die Absurdität der dargestellten Szene bewusst: Der erweiterte Kameraausschnitt offenbart den Gorilla als leidenschaftlichen Musiker. Die paradoxe Szenerie kehrt gewohnte Wahrnehmungsmuster um. Das Unerwartete äußerte sich für viele Zuschauer als so unterhaltsam, dass sie das Überraschungsmoment mit anderen teilen wollten oder das Viral in einem Remix neu zusammstellten, indem sie unter anderem den Clip mit anderen bekannten Songs unterlegten. <sup>37</sup> Für Jenkins ist die Absurdität solcher Virals die Voraussetzung dafür, dass sich weitere, partizipatorische Aktionen entwickeln:

“[The Viral’s] absurdity creates gaps „wide enough for whole new texts to be produced in them“ (Fiske, 1989, p.104).“ <sup>38</sup>

Der „Gorilla“ Werbeclip veranschaulicht zudem, dass der Inhalt nicht zwingend mit dem dargestellten Produkt oder der Marke in Zusammenhang stehen muss, um eine virale Verbreitung auszulösen – ein gefährlicher Drahtseilakt, welcher der schottischen Whiskeymarke Johnny Walker im Jahr 1999 mit dem viralen Klassiker „Moorhuhnjagd“ zum Verhängnis wurde: Die virale Verbreitung des Computerspiels erreichte zwar damals ein überwältigendes Ausmaß, aber kaum jemand weiß bis heute, dass damit für das Whiskeyunternehmen geworben wurde.

Ein weiteres Beispiel für die erfolgreiche Integration grotesker Inhalte ist der Werbeclip „Tea Party“ <sup>39</sup> von Smirnoff, einem britischen Hersteller alkoholischer Spirituosen und Mixgetränke, der sein Produkt als zentrales Element des Virals erscheinen lässt:

## fig. 8

Über eine Kombination aus jugendkulturellen Elementen und dem demonstrierten Konsum des Produkts soll die Zielgruppe junger Erwachsener erreicht werden. Parodiert wird eine Randgruppe junger, weißer Snobs, die an der amerikanischen Ostküste leben. Das Viral besitzt die Ästhetik eines professionell erstellten Musikvideos, in welchem eine fiktive Rapgruppe ihr privilegiertes Leben und ihre liebste Freizeitbeschäftigung, das Veranstellen von Eisteeparties, besingt. Ziel der viralen Kampagne war die Markteinführung von Smirnovs neuem Produkt „Raw Tea“, ein Mix aus Alkohol und Eistee. Neben parallel laufenden Werbespots im Fernsehen startete Smirnoff zusätzlich eine virale Kampagne im Internet.

Durch unterschiedliche, gleichzeitige Maßnahmen sollte eine Produktbindung erreicht werden: Das von einem der „Raw Tea“ trinkenden Vorstadtdandys gefilmte Musikvideo, das auf YouTube veröffentlicht wurde, gehörte ebenso dazu wie die fiktive Website der Band [www.teaparty.com](http://www.teaparty.com), auf welcher Smirnoff die Werbeabsicht schließlich enthüllt. Die ungewöhnliche Kombination von Elementen des Rapvideos und Akteuren, die in der Mehrheit der Communities wegen ihrer vermeintlichen Arroganz eher abgelehnt werden, war in diesem Fall vermutlich der Schlüssel zum Erfolg.

Parodistische Elemente eignen sich besonders, um Partizipation und die flächendeckende Verbreitung eines Virals hervorzurufen, da deren Nachahmung sehr wahrscheinlich ist.

Die größte konzeptionelle Herausforderung ist dabei die richtige Einschätzung von erforderlichem kulturellem Hintergrundwissen, um die Parodie für eine breite Masse an Zuschauern verständlich zu gestalten: Bezieht sich die Thematik auf zu spezielles Insiderwissen, werden nur einige wenige Communities, die dieses Wissen teilen, angesprochen. Ist die Parodie zu breit und trivial gefasst, erhält der Clip eine werbetypische Oberflächlichkeit, die die Wahrscheinlichkeit einer viralen Verbreitung bereits im Anfangsstadium minimieren wird.

#### **DeR kÜnStLiCh GeNeRiErTe BeDaRf Nach zUsÄtZliChEr InFoRmAtioN**

Die Mehrheit populärer Virals löst unter ihrem Publikum enorme Verwirrung und Neugier aus, mit dem Effekt, dass zahlreiche User beginnen, das Internet nach geheimnisvollen Hintergründen über das Dargestellte, über Verantwortliche oder den Werbedreh zu durchsuchen und ihr persönliches Netzwerk auffordern, sie dabei zu unterstützen. Um Kollaboration unter Usern herbeizuführen, sei es nach Jenkins erforderlich, „that a successful media franchise is not only a cultural attractor, drawing like minded people together to form an audience, but also a cultural activator, giving that community something to do.“ 40

Über das Aufdecken zusätzlicher Informationen sowie durch Darstellung und Rechtfertigung eigener Interpretationen können sich User stärker in eine soziale Gemeinschaft integrieren und ihren individuellen Status darin erhöhen.

Während beim „VW Polo“-Viral besonders die Distanzierung Volkswagens für Verunsicherung darüber sorgte, wer das Werbevideo in Auftrag gegeben habe, kamen bei Cadburys „Gorilla“-Clip unter Usern Ambitionen auf, diverse Einzelheiten über den Werbedreh aufzudecken, ob nun beispielsweise der Gorilla echt oder Maskerade war und – wenn letzteres zuträfe – ob

sich wohl Phil Collins selbst darunter verstecken würde.

Auch die Kampagne „Desire“ des Automobilherstellers Ford funktionierte über dieses Stilelement. Der Werbefeldzug diente der Markteinführung des neuen Fahrzeugmodells „Mondeo“ und startete auf traditionellem Weg im Fernsehen mit einem aufwendigen Slow-Motion-Werbespot.

## *fig. 9*

Im TV-Clip 41 fliegen in der Londoner Innenstadt an Heliumballons befestigte Autos davon, um im übertragenen Sinne Platz für das neue Modell „Mondeo“ zu schaffen. In einem späteren „Making Of“ kam zum Vorschein, dass die fliegenden Autos auf Nachbildungen aus Plastik und digitaler Videobearbeitung beruhten. Nach Online-Angaben wurde der Werbespot von privaten Usern aufgenommen und auf Videoportale im Internet hochgeladen. Die Popularität des Clips fiel mit etwa 100.000 Aufrufen auf YouTube nicht bemerkenswert hoch aus. Auch Remixe, Mashups („Mashup (von engl.: ‚to mash‘ für vermischen) bezeichnet die Erstellung neuer Medieninhalte durch die nahtlose (Re-)Kombination bereits bestehender Inhalte.“ 42) und andere Formen von Partizipation fielen aus. Erst ein weiteres vermeintliches Amateurvideo mit dem bezeichnenden Titel „Homemade Ford balloons ad“ 43, das zwei junge Männer aus Neuseeland beim nachgestellten Experiment zeigt, ein Auto mittels angebundener Heliumballons anzuheben, brachte die Partizipation ins Rollen.

## *fig. 10*

Die zentrale Frage war die nach der Authentizität des Videos, ob nun tatsächlich Privatpersonen verantwortlich zeichneten oder in Wirklichkeit doch Ford der maßgebliche Drahtzieher des Videovirals sei. Auch die technische Pro-

blematik, ob es möglich sei, ein Auto über eine definierte Zahl von Ballons anzuheben, wurde in zahlreichen Foren und Blogs intensiv diskutiert. Das Beispiel des „Desire“-Virals belegt deutlich, wie effektiv inhaltlich unvollständige Virals zu gezielten Nachforschungen anleiten, die den Usern zwar Kreativität, Kombinationsvermögen und Logik abverlangen, aber auch enormen Unterhaltungswert besitzen. Auch Jenkins betont, dass es weniger um konkrete Inhalte als vielmehr um die Recherche selbst ginge: „[...] it is the process of uncovering the ‘truth’, that is more important than what is found.“ 44

Bei verschleierte Werbekampagnen entsteht oft eine Art Kollaboration unter den Usern, die nach dem Prinzip „beat the system“ sämtliche vom werbenden Konzern unterschlagenen Fakten aufdecken wollen. 45

Wohl kaum ein Medium wäre für derartige „Online-Schnitzeljagden“ optimaler geeignet als das Internet, das unbegrenzte Möglichkeiten an Interaktion gewährleistet.

#### **LoW-BuDgEt-ÄsThEtIK dEs „UsEr-GeNeRa-tEd“-ViDeOs uNd dAs PriNziP dER ImItation**

Ein weiteres elementares Merkmal eines viralen Videos ist die Low-Budget-Ästhetik, die den Eindruck eines unter einfachsten Hilfsmitteln hergestellten Videos erzeugen soll und so bereits die Wahrscheinlichkeit einer Nachahmung erhöht.

Vor allem bei Virals aus der Kategorie „Stunts“ und „Experimente“ sind Aufnahmequalität, Kameraführung und Schnitt eines Amateurvideos einschlägige Charakteristika, mit denen das Publikum zur Nachahmung bewegt werden soll. Diese Low-Budget-Ästhetik soll dem Zuschauer signalisieren, dass die Anforderungen für die Erstellung eigener Aufnahmen gering sind. Während die Ästhetik eines Homevideos beim Konsumenten kompetitive Gefühle

im Sinne von „Das kann ich auch, wenn nicht besser!“ erzeugt, erweckt eine zu professionell erscheinende Optik eher den Anschein, dass Dargestelltes digital nachbearbeitet wurde. Die Authentizität wird angezweifelt, der Unterhaltungswert nimmt ab.

Ein gutes Beispiel für das Wirkprinzip eines auf Imitation angelegten Plots ist das virale Video „Guy catches glasses with face“ 46 des weltweit führenden Sonnenbrillenherstellers Ray Ban.

## *fig. 11*

Ein Mann mittleren Alters wirft einem anderen eine Ray Ban-Sonnenbrille in unterschiedlichen, akrobatisch anspruchsvollen Situationen so zu, dass diese auf der Nase des Kumpels landet.

Durch den enormen Unterhaltungswert des Clips wird der Werbecharakter zwar zunächst verschleiert, geht aber aus zwei Gründen nicht vollständig verloren:

1. Zahlreiche Anspielungen auf das Werbe-konzept „Never hide“ tauchen beispielsweise im Namen des Userkontos „neverhidefilms“ auf und weisen über die Wiederaufnahme des Schriftzugs auf den Autoscheiben im Video erneut darauf hin (siehe fig.11, rechtes Bild).
2. Das umworbene Produkt besitzt einen hohen Wiedererkennungswert im Sinne eines popkulturellen Wertes: Ray Ban-Sonnenbrillen strahlen für die Zielgruppe junger Männer einen Coolness-Faktor aus, da sie durch den Einsatz in Filmen wie „Blues Brothers“ oder „Men in Black“ längst zu Kultobjekten avanciert sind. Im Umfeld geeigneter Communities lösen solche Retro-Objekte Erinnerungen aus, über die sich der jeweilige User austauschen möchte. Die Kommunikation über das Viral wird erwartungsgemäß über seine Weiterleitung gestartet, was Jenkins folgendermaßen kommentiert:

“In many cases, the release of these retro products sparks enormous conversation wherever there are consumers old enough to have fond memories of their hay day.” 47

Zudem werden Diskussionen der Nostalgiker-Fanbase auch von einer jüngeren Zielgruppe mitverfolgt, was einer zusätzlichen, nicht unerheblichen Verbreitung des Virals dient. Auch im Falle des Ray Ban-Virals wird sehr geschickt eine Informationssuche nach Authentizität lanciert, insbesondere bezüglich der Frage, ob die vorgeführten Kunststücke evtl. digital nachbearbeitet wurden oder auch, ob jedes Brillenmodell die so genannten Stunts unbeschadet überstehen könnte.

Darüber hinaus bieten Virals bereits bekannten Marken wie Ray Ban die Möglichkeit, ihr Image zu revitalisieren, indem Produkte in einem zeitgemäßen, ansprechenden Rahmen der nachwachsenden Generation potentieller Käufer präsentiert werden.

Die verantwortliche Marketingfirma veröffentlichte den Clip mehrfach anonym auf frei erfundenen Benutzerseiten. Kurze Zeit später gab sie sich zu erkennen und belegte die Vermutung kritischer User, es handele sich um einen viralen Werbeclip, was vor allem durch die professionelle Schnittführung für den geschulten Betrachter nahe lag. Der zur Imitation verführende Clip wurde infolge seiner durchschlagenden Popularität (bereits nach 4 Tagen 1 Million Aufrufe 48) wiederholt für darauffolgende, kommerzielle Virals kopiert, unter anderem ein Jahr später für den quantitativ gemessen noch erfolgreicheren Werbeclip „Guys backflip into jeans“ 49, den dieselbe Werbeagentur diesmal im Auftrag des Jeansherstellers Levi Strauss realisierte.

## fig. 12

Auch das Levi's-Viral belegt eindrücklich, dass die Motivation zur Nachahmung das am stär-

ksten zur Partizipation verführende Element viraler Werbeclips darstellt, vermutlich weil es unter den möglichen inhaltlichen Stilmitteln die engsten ästhetischen und inhaltsorientierten Bezüge zum „user-generated“-Content aufweist und dadurch den unbeliebten Werbecharakter am effizientesten verschleiert. Ein sekundärer Verbreitungseffekt wird über Uservideos erzeugt, die sich mit der Nachstellung von Inhalten aus Virals auseinandersetzen und so die Aufmerksamkeit für den ursprünglichen Werbeclip nochmals potenzieren.

Abschließend lässt sich zusammenfassen, dass populäre Virals nicht direkt das Produkt umwerben, sondern neue Assoziationen und Werte erzeugen, die der Marke bzw. dem Unternehmen eine zeitgemäße Aura verleihen. Diese additiven Eigenschaften einer Marke werden durch den Informationsaustausch von Online-Communities verbreitet und durch die virtuelle Partizipation der sozialen Netzwerke zu dauerhaften popkulturellen Werten umgewandelt.

### AUSBLICK

Seit letztem Jahr ist das Aufkommen viraler Erfolge im Internet weitaus seltener zu beobachten. Das ursprüngliche Werbekonzept des kurzweiligen Virals scheint ausgedient zu haben. So setzt sich der Blogger Richard Lawson vom populären amerikanischen Gossipblog Gawker.com im Beitrag „What killed the viral video?“ 50 mit den möglichen Ursachen auseinander und sieht im gewandelten Nutzungsverhalten der YouTube-User einen denkbaren Grund:

“People are too savvy with the internet at this point to still be enchanted by its simple, chintzy magicks. YouTube is used more practically now, it's more functional – and those dancing, lightsaber-waving fat kids have been reduced to mostly-forgotten Coney Island freakshow diversions.” 51

Zudem sei es wenig verwunderlich, dass die zahllosen Recyclingversuche erfolgreicher Konzepte, die bei ihrem erstmaligen Auftreten auf große positive Userresonanz stießen, infolge ihrer Ideenarmut und Häufigkeit die Aufmerksamkeit der vermutlich gesättigten Zielgruppe nicht mehr erreichen. Die Werbeindustrie habe die Ausschlichtung zufälliger, origineller Erfolge schlichtweg übertrieben, wie Lawson meint:

“The marketing companies overplayed their hands on this one, taking what could have been occasionally fun extra components to more mainstream ad campaigns and just overdoing it to death.” 52

Die Ära der verwackelten Werbeaufnahmen vermeintlicher Amateurvideos scheint tatsächlich vorüber zu sein. Ein zukünftiger Verzicht auf Mechanismen viraler Mundpropaganda ist hingegen nicht festzustellen. Im Gegenteil: Vermehrt machen Marketingfirmen vom unterschätzten Faktor der Interaktion zwischen Unternehmen und dessen Zielgruppe Gebrauch. Während die Partizipationsbereitschaft der User bisher nach dem „trial-and-error“-Prinzip manipuliert wurde, wird sie nun als strategische Komponente viraler Werbekonzepte eingesetzt. So wurde zur Vermarktung eines neuen Modells der amerikanischen Automarke Chevrolet bereits 2006 ein vierwöchiger Online-Wettbewerb ins Leben gerufen, der User zur Kreation eigener Videospots aufforderte. Nachdem über 30.000 Beiträge eingingen, wurde der Gewinnerclip als offizielle TV-Werbung für Chevrolet im Fernsehen ausgestrahlt und auch im Internet veröffentlicht. Nicht nur die Masse an bereitgestellten Wettbewerbsbeiträgen verlieh der Kampagne den erzielten viralen Charakter, auch der Siegerclip wurde trotz offensichtlicher Werbeabsichten vielfach in sozialen Netzwerken ausgetauscht – schließlich handelte es sich beim Macher „um einen von ihnen“. Im Artikel „Commercial Break“ des amerikanischen „WIRED“ Magazins schreibt der Autor Frank Rose dazu:

Web video can be as emotionally involving as TV, and when used in consumer-generated campaigns, as crowdsourcing efforts like Chevy's have come to be known, online clips come with a bonus – people see them less as advertising than as peer recommendation, which countless studies have shown to be far more influential. 53

Eine ähnliche Strategie der Userbindung wurde auch beim weltweiten Online-Wettbewerb „The best job in the world“ 54 angewandt, der Anfang Mai 2009 zu Ende ging.

## *fig. 13*

Die verantwortliche Firma „Queensland“, ein australisches Tourismusunternehmen, erreichte auf geschickte Weise internationale Bekanntheit, indem sie dem Gewinner den vermeintlich „besten Job der Welt“ versprach, einen sechsmonatigen Arbeitsaufenthalt mit großzügigem Gehalt von insgesamt 80.000 Euro auf der Luxusinsel Hamilton Island im australischen Great Barrier Reef. Interessierte mussten die Jury über ausgefallene Bewerbungsvideos von ihren Fähigkeiten überzeugen. Insgesamt nahmen an der Ausschreibung 35.000 Bewerber weltweit teil und erzeugten nach Firmenaussagen einen gewaltigen PR-Wert von über 110 Millionen Dollar. 55

Seit kurzem setzt auch der Automobilkonzern BMW auf intensivierte Interaktion mit dem Konsumenten und bietet anlässlich der Einführungskampagne „Expression of Joy“ des Modells Z4 – zum momentanen Zeitpunkt lediglich auf der britischen Unternehmensseite – die experimentelle Software „BMW 3D Paintbrush“ 56 zum Download an.

## *fig. 14*

Mithilfe einer Webcam können User interak-

tiven Zugang zu einer erweiterten, computer-gesteuerten Realität (engl. „augmented reality“) erhalten. Es besteht die Möglichkeit, den TV-Spot konzeptionell vereinfacht nachzustellen, Screenshots davon anzufertigen und diese auf der offiziellen Profilseite „Z4 – BMW UK“ im sozialen Netzwerk Facebook zu veröffentlichen.

## *fig. 15*

Wie auf der britischen BMW-Seite mit Hyperlinks zu sozialen Plattformen wie Facebook und YouTube deutlich zu erkennen (siehe Abb. 31), suchen Unternehmen in sozialen Netzwerken den unmittelbaren Kontakt mit potentiellen Kunden und versuchen ihre Werbemittel nun direkt in deren „privaten“ Netzwerken zu platzieren. Ihr Fokus liegt auf dem Kundenverhalten, welches noch eingehender als bisher analysiert werden soll: Zielorientiertes Online-Marketing auf Basis persönlicher Verbraucherinformationen scheint die aktuelle Richtlinie der Werbeindustrie zu sein und könnte aus Sicht des Verbrauchers in eine eher beunruhigende Zukunft des Internets führen.

/



# COMIC RESISTANCE

english  
version

1-16  
deutsche  
fassung

17-24

LEO MERZ, 2009

## COMIC RESISTANCE

### Underground Resistance

**Underground Resistance is a record label and musical collective from Detroit, Michigan. Widely seen as one of the most important and influential Techno music labels in the United States, Underground Resistance (UR) is equally notorious for their rigorous recording and publishing policies.**

**As the name suggests, UR see their music as a form of political resistance and rebellion. The label was founded in the late 1980s by ‘Mad’ Mike Banks and Jeff Mills at a time when the decline of the automobile-industry had transformed Detroit from a booming ‘Motor City’ into a post-Fordist wasteland. Urban decay, drug-related crime and neglected school systems were, and still are, key elements in shaping the label’s attitude, sound and aesthetics. UR portray themselves as social activists who fight for ‘change by Sonic Revolution’.** <sup>1</sup>

**They have deliberately built up an epic scene around their music, often with an aggressive, militant touch. Their terminology even follows a military nomenclature. For example, an ‘assault’ designates a public appearance, music releases are dubbed ‘ammunition’ and producers are called ‘agents’ bearing names such as ‘The Infiltrator’ or ‘Unknown Soldier’. In keeping with this image some of them don’t even show their faces to the public so that their collective identity is able to subvert mainstream music marketing.**

**UR’s militance is also reflected in their graphic design and imagery. Their logo consists of big white block-letters on a black square, sometimes integrated into a fierce looking skull, and they often use fragmented, jagged typography paired with images of armed mutants and warriors. Notably, the group Drexciya has contributed greatly to the image and myths that surround the UR collective: systematically**



combining music, art and science-fiction narratives into an enigmatic conceptual whole.

During research for my diploma thesis, I watched a 2006 documentary about UR. <sup>2</sup> At one point during the filmmaker's visit to UR headquarters in Detroit, they show us a room which has been turned into a small UR museum. Amongst the items and ephemera, there is a glass cabinet filled with vintage electronic music gear.

Of the early 1980s instruments on display, most are made by the Japanese manufacturer Roland®. These machines, such as the TR-909 Rhythm Composer drum machine and the TB-303 Bassline synthesizer, have become synonymous with the sound of House and Techno music and are now highly sought after cult objects. Each of these instruments is exhibited with a small descriptive text. One example:

This 909 is the grand daddy of all drum machines. This particular machine was donated by Juan Atkins. It was and is used by many Detroit Techno producers most notably Anthony "Shake" Shakir, Mad Mike, and Eddie Fowlkes. It is still in use today by UR.

The mere existence of a museum of techno music history made me smile, but my smile grew much larger when I noticed that the typeface used for this label was the notorious Microsoft® font *Comic Sans*. The application of this casual type is neither appropriate for the carefully crafted identity of UR, nor does it match the aesthetics of the machines themselves. I initially assumed that whoever made the plates used the font accidentally, but upon further reflection a connection between *Comic Sans* and electronic music began to grow in my mind. In this text I will try to outline some of these thoughts, but first, let me introduce the font in question.



## Comic Sans

The typeface Comic Sans was designed in 1994 by Vincent Connare. An employee of the Microsoft Corporation, Connare worked on developing the beta version of the software Microsoft Bob. The impetus behind Bob was to create a new, more user-friendly GUI for Windows 3.x and Windows 95. Designed to replace the PARC-style interface of these operating systems, Bob was a cartoonish, pseudo-spatial environment where non-business metaphors like the private home and everyday objects were used instead. Despite Microsoft's ambitious endeavour to replace the desktop concept with this more inclusive interface (its internal code-name was 'Utopia') Bob was doomed to become one of the biggest flops in the company's history.

Bob employed so-called 'Personal Guides' such as the dog Rover to assist users in navigating through the program. Similar to a comic strip, the messages of these Personal Guides were displayed in speech balloons. Originally the typeface the engineers used for this program was the serif font Times New Roman. Connare felt this was 'wrong' because it didn't match the aesthetic of the cartoon setting. According to him, "the inspiration [of designing Comic Sans] came at the shock of seeing Times New Roman used in an inappropriate way."<sup>3</sup>

Connare set out to solve this problem and began sifting through the comic books he had in his office, specifically Watchmen, The Dark Knight Returns and Daredevil.

He started to analyse the hand-written letterforms used in these graphic novels and began work on a casual, readable screen font that could capture the aesthetics of the comic book lettering.

Ironically, the font he came up with did not find its way into Bob. As the metrics were different than the ones of Times New Roman, Comic Sans could not be easily implemented into the layout of the already finished software. Undeterred, Connare continued working on the font, adding

a lowercase and calling it Comic Book (it was later renamed Comic Sans, because most letters are of the sans-serif style). Very informal in appearance, it also had a somewhat goofy touch which made it stand out in comparison to other fonts.

The font was first used for dialog boxes inside Microsoft's 3D Movie Maker, an application aimed for children that allowed one to create little animations using three-dimensional cartoon characters. Later, project managers at Microsoft decided to include it as a standard font in the OEM version of Windows 95. When it was finally integrated into Microsoft Publisher and Internet Explorer as a default font, Comic Sans truly began to spread its wings. In 1999 Apple® followed suit by making it a system default font for Mac OS 8.6 and by June 2009 it was installed on around 97% of all Windows, 91% of all Mac and 55% of all Unix family platforms. 4

While Comic Sans was just one font among many, its distinct, informal character and wide accessibility made it a favorite font for many users. So much so that the font eventually developed into an icon of popular culture-in a both positive and negative way. Amateur users love Comic Sans, and most professional graphic designers and typogeeks share a violent aversion to it.

The leading force of this Comic Sans hater community is the 'Ban Comic Sans' campaign, whose supporters ask for the outright abolition of the font. The antisocial character of the campaign's motive bears a frightening resemblance to Italian Futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's strident and inflammatory 'Futurist Manifesto' of 1908. 5 Ban Comic Sans' call to arms asks for designers to:

[band] together to eradicate this font from the face of the earth [...] to ensure that future generations will be liberated from this epidemic and never suffer this scourge that is the plague of our time. 6

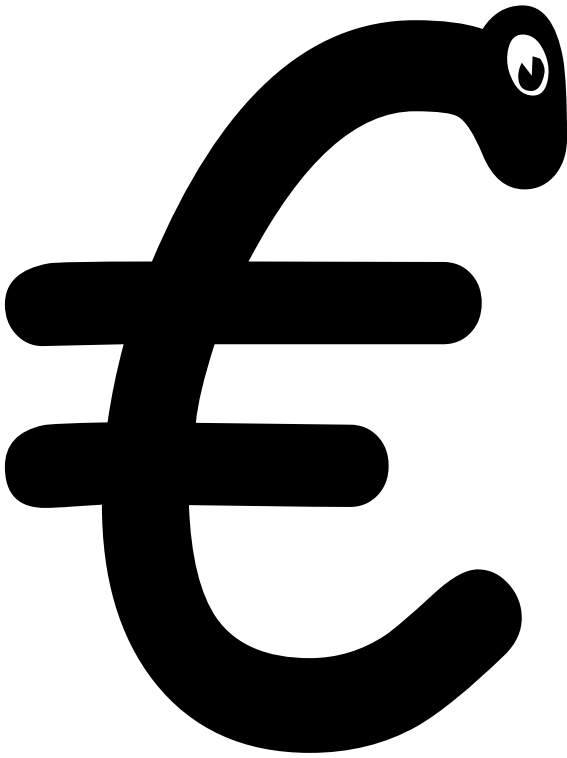
Another vitriolic quote from Ban Comic Sans states that ‘these widespread abuses of printed type threaten to erode the very foundations upon which centuries of typographic history are built.’ <sup>7</sup> Most interesting about this reaction however is that the majority of Comic Sans criticism is not focused on the font’s typographical flaws, such as the uneven kerning or lack of balance, but on its ‘wrong’ or ‘inappropriate’ use by amateurs and laymen. Ironically, Connare designed Comic Sans to reach as wide an audience as possible: professional designers, as well as the users who embraced it wholeheartedly.

### Wrong Use

This brings me back to my encounter with Comic Sans and the machines at the UR museum. Electronic musical instruments like the Roland, and Comic Sans were both conceived as solutions to specific functional needs. Similarly, both of these products were derived from already existing cultural references. While Vincent Connare created Comic Sans in order to emulate hand-written comic lettering, Roland engineer Tadao Kikumoto designed the TR-909 and TB-303 as substitutes for individual members of a (rock)band—the acoustic drummer and electric bass player to be exact.

Unfortunately the TB-303 was very cumbersome to program and the TR-909 had unrealistic sounds. and as a result, both instruments missed their target groups. These shortcomings meant poor sales which ultimately led to a very short production period. In 1987, three years after production of the TB-303 had ceased, and its price was at rock-bottom, the Chicago House combo Phuture fatefully picked one up. Not knowing how to program it, they used the random patterns that already existed in the sequencer’s RAM. With some tweaking of the knobs, and a drum machine beat under it the Acid House genre was born, and spread out to Detroit and the rest of the world.





Referring to Tadao Kikumoto's designs for Roland, DJ Pierre of Phuture said, "We don't use [the machines] how he intended them to be used. It was his work of art, and we degraded it with this new weird, high-tech-influenced music!" <sup>8</sup>

Not only did this 'inappropriate use' by some amateur create a new musical style, it also changed the cultural significance of the tool itself. A piece of trash-technology was transformed into the symbol of a movement that still persists over 20 years after its inception.

In contrast to the Roland instruments, a similar 'abuse' of Comic Sans (meaning its use in anything other than a cartoon or child-related setting) has not yet spawned any thriving reinventions. And while Kikumoto is celebrated by the fans of his tools (although he remains silent about his cult status and tries to preserve his anonymity), the typofascists of the Ban Comic Sans hold Vincent Connare up as

a villain—even using Connare’s face in their merchandising (which resulted in an emotional public quarrel between him and the initiative’s founder Dave Combs). 9

Sadly, the whole issue has led Connare to a point where he started to justify himself for Comic Sans. Although somehow proud of the font’s tremendous popularity in the low-culture arena, Connare makes various attempts of exculpation for Comic Sans by conducting lectures and giving interviews, repeatedly stressing the fact that he’s not the one who included it as a default font in Windows. Asked about his reaction to all this Comic Sans bashing, he says “It pisses me off.” 10

I think it is quite conceivable that Comic Sans will enjoy a comprehensive renaissance, even among the designers who are so vitriolic about it at the moment. In an often quoted interview Connare discussed his feelings about his invention and the resulting controversy saying:

If you love it, you don’t know much about typography and if you hate it you really don’t know much about typography either and you should get another hobby. 11

From my perspective, I would suggest something more like:

If you love it, you are probably not a typo-nazi, and if you hate it you really don’t appreciate the beauty of amateur design and should stop being so smug and narrow-minded.

Or perhaps he should pull his punches altogether and exercise noble restraint like Tadao Kikumoto. After all, going into seclusion is also one of the recipes for success the Underground Resistance crew employ.



## **Studio Metaphors**

**Comic Sans is the imitation of an older form, a tried and true medium of the comic book. Similarly, digital instruments have tried to imitate the sound and form of acoustic instruments. In contrast to most acoustic instruments, with their digital counterparts a complex layer separates the user interface and the sound output. Acoustic instruments have an exceptional range of expressions and tones, and this distinctiveness lies in the physical properties of the instrument itself, and the various modes of playing it. Physical force applied to an acoustic instrument is directly converted to acoustic energy.**

**By contrast, in electronic musical instruments (specifically in digital models), this force must be translated by sets of programmed control parameters before any sound can be produced. For example, when a key on a digital synthesizer is pressed it is mathematically analysed and processed into an audio signal. It is the discrete properties of the microchip that generates and manipulates the sound making the physical instrument itself interchangeable.**

**Therein lies the biggest challenge in the design of computer music interfaces: the characteristics of the digital instrument does not lie in its physical properties, but rather in an arbitrary connection between user interface and sound production. Unlike with an acoustic guitar, where picking a string makes the sounding board vibrate and produces the familiar sound, all feedback in software applications is far more subject to the arbitrary decisions of the interface designer.**

**Even though there is no true relationship between physical appearance and sound production in electronic instruments, emulation of the functionality and aesthetics of acoustic and analog instruments is a standard in the design of music software. Virtual Studio Technology <sup>12</sup> is similar to the metaphor of the desktop for home computing: Just as the symbol systems in most graphical user interfaces**

(desk, documents, folders, trashcans etc.) i help to convey the PC as an office-machine, the design of most computer music instruments relies on metaphors derived from the traditional recording studio, such as rotary knobs, patch cords and mixing-desks. As a result, aesthetically and culturally entrenched operating procedures are not reconsidered, but merely implemented as a simulation of the norm.

On the one hand the computer promises to be a universal musical production medium for all users, on the other this same user is actually made powerless by such an interface; the digital instrument is actually a meta-medium which tries to hide the intrinsic characteristics of the computer. Lev Manovich, in his writing on the concept of the Human Computer Interface (HCI), coined the term culture interface to describe this phenomenon:

The language of cultural interfaces is a hybrid. It is a strange, often awkward mix between the conventions of traditional cultural forms and the conventions of HCI - between an immersive environment and a set of controls, between standardization and originality. Cultural interfaces try to balance the concept of a surface in a computer interface as a virtual control panel, similar to the control panel on a car, plane or any other complex machine. 13

Despite their ubiquity, these emulations of vintage electronic musical instruments are not always performed gracefully. A good example of a failed attempt is the VST instrument Phoscyon. The Polish software group d16 designed Phoscyon as an emulation of the Roland TB-303, adding some functionality such as MIDI control, a distortion effect, and an arpeggiator. Employing photo-realistic graphics and 3D-renderings, the designers strove to capture the spirit of the cult instrument but ended up with a bulky, pseudo-tangible interface, even more cryptic in appearance than the original machine. Even though it's jam-packed with references to

the original, the simulation neither emulates the look and feel of the original, nor manages to become authentic or unique in its own right.

As a point of comparison however Comic Sans, as an emulation of graphic novel lettering, did manage to break free from its original context. Connare's creation, despite the design snobs who despise it, has transformed into a powerful symbol for the democratization of design. In 2003, Apple introduced the Chalkboard type. Chalkboard is a very close copy of Comic Sans – actually the two fonts can barely be told apart. With Chalkboard, many of Comic Sans' irregularities were corrected in favour of a better flow and a more consistent appearance. Apple, known for their radical and often revolutionary approach to design, did not copy Comic Sans because they needed a new comic book script, but because they recognized the immense symbolic strength of the typeface. And while the name Chalkboard evokes connotations of learning and temporality, all connections to comic book lettering are lost completely.



## Waste

There is one more piece in this comparison between Comic Sans and electronic music production and that is the notions of ubiquity and scarcity.

What accounts for democratization in the aforementioned examples is the general availability of the tools - an issue that holds true for software in general. Comic Sans was available on every computer, and similarly the abundance of cheap and even free audio software has contributed more to the democratization of musical production than the mass manufacturing of hardware instruments ever did. But this digital abundance also causes a devaluation, and as a result digital tools become cheap in two respects: price



and distinctiveness. While the shortage of vintage electronic instruments results in their uniqueness (and their current inclusion in the UR's museum), the abundance of their software counterparts carries a connotation of wastefulness. This bears analogy to the relationship between the vinyl record and the Compact Disc. Now that vinyl records are hard to reproduce and less available, they are regarded as having higher value. In comparison, the cheap and easy reproducibility of the CD makes it practically a throw-away article.

Prior to their rediscovery through House and Techno producers, many of the vintage instruments could literally be found on the dump (in the mid 1980's they were regarded as obsolete). So despite their contemporary artifactual nature, even these cult instruments carry with them a notion of waste.

Comic Sans, the epitome of trash culture typography, therefore does not seem to be the worst choice for labeling the instrument collection of Underground Resistance, who have internalized the concept of waste technology. When asked what lies in the future for the UR movement, Mad Mike replies:

Garbage. We'll sift thru your trash while you sleep and find some discarded technology or steal it. Re-adapt, mutate, compete and survive like we always have. Never seen always there! 14

Ω

**FOOTNOTES / FUSSNOTEN**

- 1** <http://www.undergroundresistance.com/main/content/view/12/26/>
- 2** Slices: The Electronic Music Magazine, Issue 3-06, DVD-ROM, Berlin: Sense Music & Media, 2006
- 3** <http://www.connare.com/whycomic.htm>
- 4** <http://www.codestyle.org/css/font-family/index.shtml>
- 5** “So let them come, the gay incendiaries with charred fingers! Here they are! Here they are!... Come on! Set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums!... Oh, the joy of seeing the glorious old canvases bobbing adrift on those waters, discolored and shredded!”  
Fillippo Tommaso Marinetti, Futurist Manifesto, Le Figaro, Paris, 20 February 1909 (original in french)
- 6** <http://www.bancomicsans.com/>
- 7** *ibid*
- 8** [http://remixmag.com/mag/remix\\_tadao\\_kikumoto/](http://remixmag.com/mag/remix_tadao_kikumoto/)
- 9** see comments on:  
<http://www.manic.com.sg/blog/archives/000118.php>
- 10** *ibid*
- 11** *ibid*
- 12** Steinberg’s Virtual Studio Technology (VST) is an interface for integrating virtual audio plugins with audio editors and hard-disk recording systems. In this text I use the proprietary term VST generically for software that simulates traditional recording studio hardware.
- 13** Lev Manovich, The Language Of New Media, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001, p. 62 ff.
- 14** <http://www.plasticsoup.com/article.php?id=17>



**fig.1**



Member of Underground Resistance:  
[http://www.alteregomgt.com/  
 Images/interstellar\\_color\\_small.jpg](http://www.alteregomgt.com/Images/interstellar_color_small.jpg)

The Other Side Of Bling, artwork:  
[http://joilet.blox.pl/resource/  
 undergroundresistancecover.jpg](http://joilet.blox.pl/resource/undergroundresistancecover.jpg)

**FIGURES/ ABBILDUNGEN**

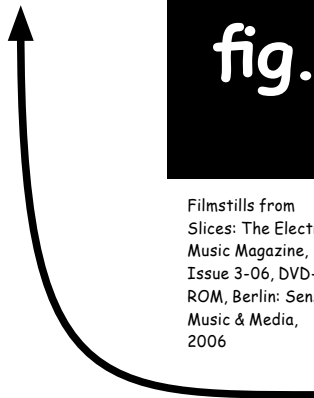
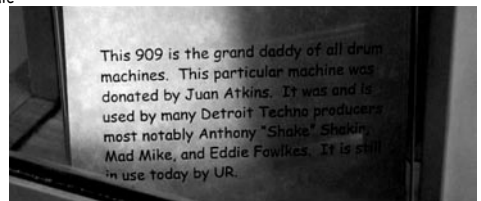
This 909 is the grand daddy of all drum machines. This particular machine was donated by Juan Atkins. It was and is used by many Detroit Techno producers most notably Anthony "Shake" Shakir, Mad Mike, and Eddie Fowlkes. It is still in use today by UR.



**fig.2**



Filmstills from  
 Slices: The Electronic  
 Music Magazine,  
 Issue 3-06, DVD-  
 ROM, Berlin: Sense  
 Music & Media,  
 2006



flickr®

Startseite Sie Organisieren Kontakte Gruppen Entdecken

### Comic Sans on a Diet 7up can



Comic Sans on a Diet 7up can, the most mainstream Comic Sighting I've had in a while..

#### Kommentare



**BethMOLson** pro sagt:

somebody needs to be fired. Immediately!  
Geschrieben: vor 3 Monaten. ( Permalink )



**ilwaitanotheyear** sagt:

It's on the normal cans as well :( saying 'natural lemon and lime flavour' and the pro preservatives/colourings/caffeine. and their website.

It's terrible :(

Geschrieben: vor 3 Monaten. ( Permalink )



**crazybat** sagt:

Well, the world's officially gone to hell. Isn't this one of the signs of the apocalypse?

Geschrieben: vor 2 Monaten. ( Permalink )



**dmcacrew** sagt:

Maybe that's why Pepsi or Coca-Cola never bought them out. The image is already ruined.

Geschrieben: vor 2 Wochen. ( Permalink )



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/dazil/3555146956/in/pool-comicsans>



d16 Phoscyon, 3D Mockup

a b c  
A B C  
1 2 3



Chalkboard Type vs. Comic Sans (see-through)

abc  
ABC  
123



## COMIC RESISTANCE

### Deutsche Fassung

#### Underground Resistance

Underground Resistance ist ein Plattenlabel und Musikerkollektiv aus Detroit, Michigan. Underground Resistance (UR) gilt als eines der wichtigsten und einflussreichsten Technolabels der USA. Das Renommee von UR ist nicht nur auf die Musik, sondern auch auf ihre radikalen Standpunkte als Independent-Label zurückzuführen.

Wie der Name andeutet, betrachten UR ihre Musik als eine Form von Rebellion und politischem Widerstand. Das Label wurde in den späten 1980ern von 'Mad' Mike Banks und Jeff Mills gegründet. Zu dieser Zeit hatte der Niedergang der Automobilindustrie die blühende 'Motor City' Detroit längst in eine postfordistische Einöde verwandelt. Drogenkriminalität, schlechte Bildungsperspektiven und die verfallende Stadt üben nach wie vor großen Einfluss auf das Selbstverständnis und die Soundästhetik des Labels aus. UR stellen sich selbst als Aktivisten dar, die für soziale 'Veränderung mittels einer Revolution durch Schall' <sup>1</sup> (siehe Seite 13) kämpfen.

Underground Resistance haben um ihre Musik eine Szenerie epischen Ausmaßes geschaffen, welche oft

aggressive und militärische Motive beinhaltet. Zum Beispiel bezeichnet ein 'Anschlag' einen öffentlichen Auftritt, Musikveröffentlichungen werden 'Munition' genannt. Die Produzenten heißen 'Agenten' und tragen Namen wie 'The Infiltrator' oder 'Unknown Soldier'. Einige von ihnen treten nur maskiert auf, um ihre Integrität als Untergrundkollektiv, das die Marketingstrategien des Mainstreams untergräbt, zu wahren.

Auch das Grafikdesign von Underground Resistance ist außergewöhnlich. Das UR Logo besteht aus großen weißen Blockbuchstaben auf schwarzem Grund und wird teilweise in Zusammenhang mit einem grimmigen Totenschädel gezeigt. Häufig wird fragmentierte Typographie für die Gestaltung verwendet und mit Zeichnungen von bewaffneten Mutanten und Kriegern kombiniert. Insbesondere die Band Drexciya hat viel zur Mythenbildung um das UR Kollektiv beigetragen, indem sie systematisch Musik, Artwork und Science Fiction-Erzählungen zu einem mysteriösen Gesamtkonzept verflochten haben.

Während der Recherche zu meiner Diplomarbeit habe ich mir eine Videodokumentation über das Label angesehen <sup>2</sup>, in welcher die Filmemacher den Hauptsitz von UR in Detroit besuchen. Im Film wird ein Raum gezeigt, der zu einem kleinen Underground Resistance Museum umgebaut wurde. Neben anderen Memorabilia wird in diesem Museum eine Vitrine mit älteren elektronischen Musikinstrumenten ausgestellt.

Gezeigt werden Instrumente aus den frühen 1980er Jahren, hauptsächlich vom japanischen Hersteller Roland, wie z.B. der Drumcomputer TR-909 Rhythm Composer oder der TB-303 Bassline Synthesizer. Speziell diese Maschinen sind zum Synonym für den Sound von House und Techno-Musik

fig.1  
S.14

geworden und stellen heute heiß begehrte Kultobjekte dar. Neben jedem der ausgestellten Instrumente steht ein kleines Schild mit einer kurzen Anekdote über das Gerät. Ein Beispiel:

This 909 is the grand daddy of all drum machines. This particular machine was donated by Juan Atkins. It was and is used by many Detroit Techno producers most notably Anthony "Shake" Shakir, Mad Mike, and Eddie Fowlkes. It is still in use today by UR.



fig.2

Dies fand ich höchst amüsant, da die Schilder mit der berühmtesten Schrift Comic Sans bedruckt sind. Diese handschriftähnliche Schriftart scheint weder in das ästhetische Gesamtbild von UR zu passen, noch greift sie den Look der Maschinen auf. Ich ging also davon aus, dass wer auch immer die Schilder gestaltet hat, diese Schriftwahl eher unbeabsichtigt getroffen hat. Als mich jedoch ein Freund nochmals darauf hinwies, dachte ich mir, dass sich aus dieser Angelegenheit doch etwas mehr herausholen ließe. In diesem Text will ich einige meiner Gedanken dazu schildern.

### Comic Sans

Die Schrift Comic Sans wurde 1994 von Vincent Connare gestaltet. Als Mitarbeiter der Microsoft® Corporation erhielt Connare eine Beta-Version der Software Microsoft Bob. Die Idee hinter Bob war es, eine neue, benutzerfreundlichere grafische Benutzeroberfläche für Windows 3.x und Windows 95 einzuführen. Bob sollte das PARC-Interface dieser Betriebssysteme durch eine cartoonhafte, pseudo-räumliche Umgebung ersetzen, die sich statt Metaphern aus der Welt

des Büros solchen wie dem privaten Zuhause und diversen Alltagsgegenständen bedient. Trotz des ehrgeizigen Vorhabens, das Schreibtisch-Prinzip durch etwas Neues zu ersetzen (Bobs Codename war 'Utopia'), wurde Bob zu einem der größten Flops in der Geschichte Microsofts.

Wie auch immer, Bob setzte sogenannte 'Personal Guides', wie zum Beispiel den Hund Rover ein, um dem Nutzer bei der Verwendung des Programms zu assistieren. Die Botschaften der Personal Guides wurden wie in einem Comicstrip in Sprechblasen angezeigt. Die Programmierer von Bob verwendeten im gesamten Programm die Schrift Times New Roman. Connare war der Meinung, dies sei "falsch", das es dem Stil der Cartoon-Kulisse nicht gerecht werde. Ihm zufolge wurde die "Inspiration [Comic Sans zu gestalten] durch den Schock beim Anblick des unangemessenen Einsatzes von Times New Roman" <sup>3</sup> ausgelöst.

Connare widmete sich der Lösung dieses Problems und begann einige der Comic-Hefte in seinem Büro zu durchstöbern, insbesondere Watchmen, The Dark Knight Returns und Daredevil. Er begann die handgeschriebenen Buchstaben zu analysieren und nahm die Arbeit an einer handschriftähnlichen, gut lesbaren Bildschirmschrift auf, welche die Ästhetik der Typographie in den Comics aufgreifen sollte.

Die von Connare entwickelte Schrift wurde allerdings nicht in Microsoft Bob verwendet. Die Schriftmetrik unterschied sich von der Times New Romans, weshalb die Schrift nicht ohne weiteres in das Layout der fertigen Software eingebaut werden konnte. Connare arbeitete jedoch weiter an der Schrift. Er fügte Kleinbuchstaben hinzu und nannte die fertige Schrift Comic Book (Später wurde sie in Comic Sans umbenannt, da die meisten

Buchstaben keine Serifen besitzen). Das Erscheinungsbild der Schrift war recht ungezwungen, und anders als die Handschriften, die ihr als Vorlage dienten, haftete ihr etwas Trotteliges an, was sie gegenüber anderen Schriften hervorstechen ließ. Comic Sans tauchte zum ersten Mal innerhalb der Dialogboxen von Microsoft 3D Movie Maker auf, einem für Kinder entwickelten Programm zur Erstellung von kurzen Animationsfilmen mittels dreidimensionaler Cartoonfiguren.

Später entschied Projektmanager bei Microsoft, Comic Sans als Systemschrift in der OEM Version von Windows 95 einzusetzen. Als die Schrift schließlich in Microsoft Publisher und Internet Explorer als Standard-Schrift implementiert wurde, begann sie sich auszubreiten. Apple® zog 1999 nach und machte Comic Sans zur Systemschrift von Mac OS 8.6. Heute ist Comic Sans auf etwa 97% aller Windows, 91% aller Mac und 55% aller Unix Systeme installiert. <sup>4</sup>

Obwohl Comic Sans nur eine von vielen Schriften ist, machte sie ihr eigenständiger, zwangloser Charakter und die Tatsache, dass sie auf den meisten Computern vorinstalliert ist, zur Lieblingsschrift vieler User. Schließlich entwickelte sich Comic Sans zu einer Ikone der Popkultur, sowohl auf positive als auch negative Weise. Amateure lieben Comic Sans, wohingegen die meisten professionellen Grafikdesigner und Typogeeks eine aggressive Abneigung gegen die Schrift hegen.

Die treibende Kraft der Comic Sans-Hassgemeinde ist die 'ban comic sans'-Kampagne, deren Unterstützer die Abschaffung der Schrift fordern. Der antisoziale Charakter des Kampagnenmotivs weist eine beunruhigende Ähnlichkeit zu Marinettis Futuristischem Manifest auf. <sup>5</sup>



fig. 3

Indem wir uns zusammenschließen, um diese Schrift vom Antlitz der Erde zu beseitigen, wollen wir sicherstellen, dass zukünftige Generationen von dieser Epidemie befreit werden und nie mehr unter dieser Geißel, dieser Pest der heutigen Zeit zu leiden haben. <sup>6</sup>

Ein weiteres pathetisches Zitat von ban comic sans lautet: "Dieser weitverbreitete Missbrauch der gedruckten Schrift droht die Fundamente zu erodieren, auf denen Jahrhunderte typographischer Geschichte ruhen". <sup>7</sup> Interessanterweise basiert die Hauptkritik an Comic Sans nicht auf ihren typografischen Fehlern, wie der ungleichmäßigen Spationierung oder dem fehlenden Gleichgewicht der Schrift, sondern auf dem Argument der 'falschen' oder 'unsachgemäßen Nutzung' von Laien und Amateuren. Ironischerweise hat Vincent Connare ein sehr ähnliches Argument dazu bewegt, Comic Sans überhaupt zu entwerfen.

### Mißbrauch

Dies führt uns zum ersten Berührungspunkt mit den Geräten im UR Museum. Sowohl die elektronischen Musikinstrumente als auch Comic Sans wurden als praktische Lösungen für eine bestimmte Aufgabe entwickelt und ihre gestalterischen Konzepte leiten sich aus bestehenden kulturellen Codes ab. Während Vincent Connare Comic Sans als digitales Äquivalent zur handgeschriebenen Comic-Schrift kreierte, entwarf der Roland-Ingenieur Tadao Kikumoto die TR-909 und TB-303 als Ersatz für die Mitglieder einer (Rock)band - den Schlagzeuger und den E-Bassisten, um genau zu sein. Die TB-303 war jedoch schwerfällig in ihrer Bedienung, und die TR-909 hatte alles andere als realistische

Schlagzeugklänge zu bieten, weshalb die Instrumente ihre ursprüngliche Zielgruppe verfehlten. Dies hatte niedrige Verkaufszahlen und eine kurze Produktionszeit zur Folge. 1987, drei Jahre nach Produktionsstopp, erreichte der Preis der TB-303 seinen Tiefpunkt. Die Chicago House-Band Phuture ergatterte ein günstiges Exemplar und verwendete mangels der nötigen Programmierkenntnisse einfach die Zufallspatterns im Arbeitsspeicher des Sequencers. Sie begannen an den Knöpfen herumzudrehen, legten einen Drumcomputer-Rhythmus darunter und erschufen so im Handumdrehen das Acid House-Genre, welches sich über Detroit in den Rest der Welt ausbreitete.

In Bezug auf Tadao Kikumotos Designs sagt DJ Pierre von Phuture:

Wir benutzen [diese Geräte] nicht auf die von ihm beabsichtigte Weise. Es sind seine Kunstwerke, und wir degradieren sie durch diese neue, seltsame, High-Tech beeinflusste Musik. <sup>8</sup>

Der Kontext dieser 'unsachgemäßen Benutzung' von Amateuren hat nicht nur einen neuen Musikstil erschaffen, sondern auch die kulturelle Bedeutung des Instruments selbst verändert. Ein Low Tech-Ramschprodukt wurde zum Symbol einer Bewegung, die selbst 20 Jahre nach ihrem Ursprung noch immer existiert.

Hier lässt sich eine weitere Analogie zwischen den Vintage-Geräten und Comic Sans herstellen, jedoch eine mit einem etwas bitteren Beigeschmack. Im Gegensatz zu den Roland Instrumenten hat der 'Missbrauch' von Comic Sans (womit jeder Gebrauch außerhalb eines Cartoon-Szenarios gemeint ist) keine erfolgreiche Neuerfindung mit sich geführt. Und auch die daraus entstandene Bewegung ist

nicht von positiven, sondern vielmehr kulturpessimistischen und destruktiven Absichten geprägt. Während Tadao Kikumoto von den Fans seiner Kreationen gefeiert wird (obwohl er sich zu deren Kultstatus nicht äußert und es vorzieht, seine Anonymität zu wahren), machen die Typo-Faschisten der Anti-Comic-Sans-Bewegung Vincent Connare das Leben schwer.

Ban comic sans haben sich sogar Connares Portrait für ihr Comic-Sans-Abschaffungs-Merchandising zunutze gemacht, was zu einem peinlichen öffentlichen Disput zwischen ihm und dem ban comic sans-Gründer Dave Combs führte. <sup>9</sup>

Traurigerweise hat die ganze Angelegenheit Connare dazu geführt, sich für Comic Sans zu rechtfertigen. Obwohl er einen gewissen Stolz über die enorme Popularität der Schrift im Low Culture-Bereich nicht verbergen kann, versucht er sich auf verschiedene Weise für Comic Sans zu entschuldigen. In Vorträgen und Interviews unterstreicht er immer wieder, dass er nicht dafür verantwortlich sei, dass Comic Sans zur Windows-System-schrift gemacht wurde. Nach seiner Reaktion auf das Comic Sans Mobbing gefragt sagt Connare: "Es pisst mich an." <sup>10</sup>

Für mich ist es leicht vorstellbar, dass Comic Sans eine Renaissance unter all den eingebildeten Designern erfährt, die jetzt Gift und Galle spucken. Ich bin jedoch nicht sicher, ob Connare das genauso entspannt sieht. Dieses berühmte Zitat aus einem Interview zeigt den Zwiespalt, in den er geraten ist:

Wenn du sie liebst, hast du keine Ahnung von Typographie, und wenn du sie hasst, hast du ebenfalls keine Ahnung von Typographie und solltest dir ein anderes Hobby suchen. <sup>11</sup>

Meiner Meinung nach sollte es eher heißen:

**Wenn du sie liebst, bist du wohl kein Typo-Nazi, und wenn du sie hasst, hast du keine Ahnung von Amateur-Design und solltest aufhören, dich wie ein bornierter Vollidiot zu verhalten.**

Vielleicht sollte er sich auch Tadao Kikumoto zum Vorbild nehmen und sich in vornehmer Zurückhaltung üben. Schließlich scheint dies ja eines der Erfolgsrezepte der Underground Resistance Crew zu sein...

### Studio Metaphern

Im Gegensatz zu den meisten akustischen Instrumenten existiert bei elektronischen Musikinstrumenten eine klare Trennung zwischen Benutzeroberfläche und akustischem Output. Jedes akustische Instrument verfügt über ein einzigartiges Repertoire an Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten, eine spezifische klangliche Eigenart. Diese Einzigartigkeit besteht zum einen aus den physikalischen Eigenschaften des Instruments selbst, zum anderen aus der Art und Weise des Spielens. Während bei akustischen Instrumenten die vom Musiker physisch verursachten Impulse vom Instrument direkt in Schallenergie umgewandelt werden, wird diese Kraft bei elektronischen Instrumenten im Allgemeinen und bei digitalen im Speziellen in Steuerungsparameter konvertiert, bevor ein Klangereignis entsteht.

Was zum Beispiel beim Drücken der Taste eines digitalen Keyboard-Synthesizers freigesetzt wird, ist ein Auslöseimpuls, der mathematisch analysiert und zu einem akustischen Signal weiterverarbeitet wird. Die diskreten Arbeitsvorgänge des Mikrochips, der hier als Klangerzeuger

bzw. Manipulator dient, machen das digitale Instrument austausch- und reproduzierbar. Die Einzigartigkeit, die das akustische und ein Stück weit auch das analog-elektronische Instrument charakterisiert, ist durch diese Abstraktion nicht mehr gegeben.

Hier liegt die größte Herausforderung bei der Gestaltung des Computer-Musik-Interfaces: Das Spezifische des virtuellen Instruments liegt nicht in dessen physischer Beschaffenheit, sondern in der Möglichkeit der arbiträren Verknüpfung von Bedienelementen und Klangerzeugung. Anders als zum Beispiel bei einer akustischen Gitarre, wo das Anzupfen einer Saite den Korpus in Schwingung versetzt, dessen Resonanz wiederum unmittelbar körperlich spürbar ist, unterliegt jedes Feedback in der Softwareanwendung den willkürlichen Entscheidungen des Designers.

Die Computertechnologie schreibt also keine dezidierte Repräsentationsform von Klang oder klangverändernden Parametern vor. Dennoch hat sich auch über den kommerziellen Sektor hinaus die Übernahme von Ästhetik und Funktionalität analoger Instrumente als primäres Modell bei der Gestaltung von Musiksoftware etabliert. Es verhält sich bei der 'Virtual Studio Technology'<sup>12</sup> ähnlich wie bei der Desktop-Metapher.

So wie die Zeichenordnungen der Betriebssysteme durch Metaphern wie Schreibtisch, Dokumente, Aktenordner und Papierkorb implizieren, den PC als Büromaschine zu betrachten, verlässt man sich im Bereich der Computermusik auf Paradigmen aus dem Studiobereich wie Drehknöpfe, Patchcords und Mischpulte. Ästhetisch und kulturell tradierte Arbeitsprozesse werden also, statt im neuen Medium auch neu (aus)gedacht, einfach als Simulation des Etablierten implementiert.

Einerseits wird das Versprechen

gemacht, den Computer als universelles musikalisches Produktionsmedium einsetzen zu können, andererseits entsteht eine Entmündigung aus Sicht des Benutzers, da ihm ja offensichtlich etwas anderes, nämlich ein das eigentlich Charakteristische des Computers verdeckendes Meta-Medium angedreht wird. Lev Manovich erweitert daher den Begriff des „Human Computer Interfaces“ (HCI) und spricht vom „culture interface“, der Mensch-Maschine-Kultur-Schnittstelle, um dieses Phänomen zu beschreiben:

Die Sprache der Cultural Interfaces ist ein Hybrid. Es handelt sich um eine seltsame, oft unbeholfene Mischung aus den Konventionen traditioneller Kultur und den Konventionen der Mensch-Maschine-Schnittstelle - aus einer immersiven Umgebung und einer Ansammlung von Bedienelementen, aus Standardisierung und Originalität. Cultural Interfaces versuchen das Konzept der Computeroberfläche als Steuerpult zu etablieren, ähnlich den Steuerpulten eines Autos, Flugzeugs oder jeglicher anderen komplexen Maschine. <sup>13</sup>

Die vielen Software-Emulationen von elektronischen Vintage-Musikinstrumenten zeigen, dass die Transformation nicht immer elegant gelingt.

Die Abbildungen auf der gegenüberliegenden Seite verdeutlichen diesen Konflikt am Beispiel des VST instruments Phoscyon. Die polnische Entwicklergruppe d16 hat Phoscyon als Emulation der Roland TB-303 entwickelt und die Software mit einigen Zusatzfunktionen wie MIDI-Steuerung, Verzerrer, Arpeggiator etc. ausgestattet. Mittels photorealistischer Grafiken und 3D-Renderings haben die Designer versucht, die Aura des

Kult-Instruments einzufangen, dabei jedoch ein klobiges, pseudo-anfassbares Interface geschaffen, dessen Erscheinungsbild noch kryptischer anmutet als das des Originalgeräts. Obwohl sie mit Referenzen zum Original vollgepackt ist, schafft es die Simulation nicht, selbst authentisch zu werden.

Im Gegensatz dazu hat sich Comic Sans von der Konnotation der Comic-Schrift befreit, und in ein mächtigen Symbol für die Demokratisierung des Designs verwandelt.

2003 stellte Apple die Schrift Chalkboard vor - eine Kopie von Comic Sans, die nur durch genaues Hinsehen vom Original unterschieden werden kann. Viele der Unregelmäßigkeiten in Comic Sans wurden in Chalkboard zugunsten eines gleichmäßigeren Schriftbildes korrigiert. Apple, welche für ihre radikalen und oft revolutionären Designentscheidungen bekannt sind, haben Comic Sans nicht kopiert, weil sie eine neue Comic Schrift brauchten, sondern weil sie sich der immensen Popularität und Symbolkraft der Schrift bewusst waren. Der Name Chalkboard (dt. Kreidetafel) zeigt, dass sich die ursprüngliche Assoziation zu Comicheften aufgelöst hat.

### Schrott

Zur Demokratisierung hat vor allem die bereits erwähnte allgemeine Verfügbarkeit beigetragen - ein Aspekt, der für Software allgemein zutrifft. Der Überfluss an billiger oder sogar kostenloser Audiosoftware hat weit aus mehr zur Demokratisierung der Musikproduktion beigetragen als die Massenfertigung relativ teurer Hardware-Instrumente. Der digitale Überfluss hat jedoch auch eine Abwertung zur Folge - die digitalen Tools werden



fig.4



fig.5

**in doppelter Hinsicht billig: in Preis und Besonderheit.**

**Während die Seltenheit der elektronischen Vintage-Musikinstrumente mit ihrer Einzigartigkeit (und ihrer Ausstellung im UR Museum) zusammenhängt, schwingt bei ihren Software-Entsprechungen etwas Verschwenderisches mit. Als Vergleich lässt sich das Verhältnis von der Vinyl-Schallplatte zur CD anstellen. Die Schallplatte hat einen hohen Sammlerwert, da sie schwer zu reproduzieren ist und üblicherweise in geringen Auflagen produziert wird. Verglichen dazu erscheint die CD aufgrund der billigen Qualität und einfachen Reproduzierbarkeit als schrottiger Wegwerfartikel.**

**Allerdings umgibt auch die heutigen Kult-Instrumente der Rest einer solchen Aura. Die Geräte wurden Ende der 1980er von vielen als technisch überholt angesehen und konnten vor ihrer Neuentdeckung durch House- und Techno Produzenten buchstäblich auf dem Schrott gefunden werden.**

**Underground Resistance scheinen daher mit Comic Sans, dem Inbegriff von Trash-Typographie, nicht die schlechteste Wahl getroffen zu haben. Jedenfalls haben sie die Verbindung von Schrott und Technik verinnerlicht. Auf die Frage, was die Zukunft für die UR Bewegung bereithalte, antwortet ‚Mad‘ Mike:**

**„Abfall. Während ihr schlaf, durchstöbern wir euren Müll und finden oder klauen ausrangierte Technik. Wir passen uns an, mutieren, rivalisieren, wie wir es immer schon getan haben. Niemals sichtbar, aber immer da.“ <sup>14</sup>**

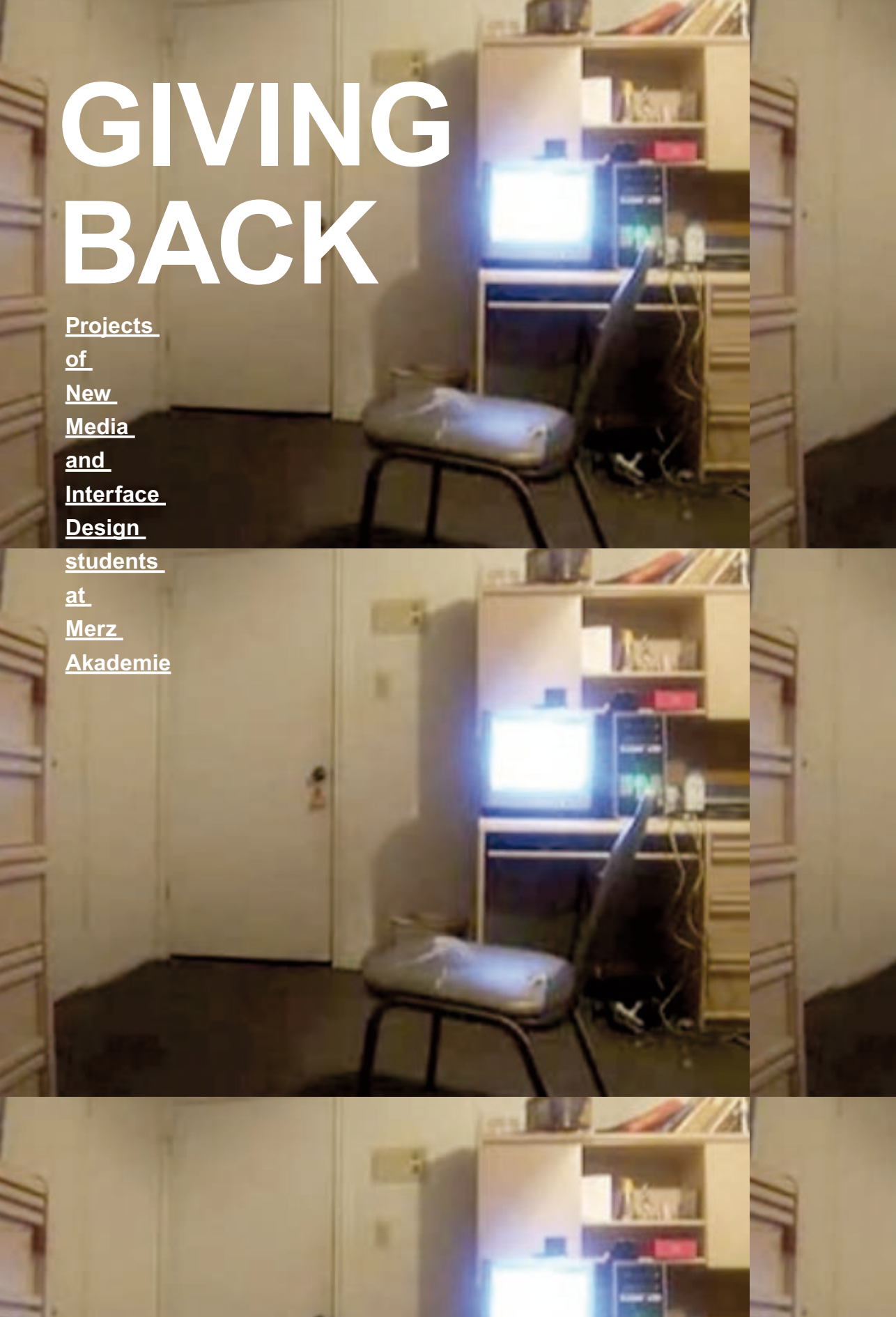
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# GIVING BACK

Projects  
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New  
Media  
and  
Interface  
Design  
students  
at  
Merz  
Akademie



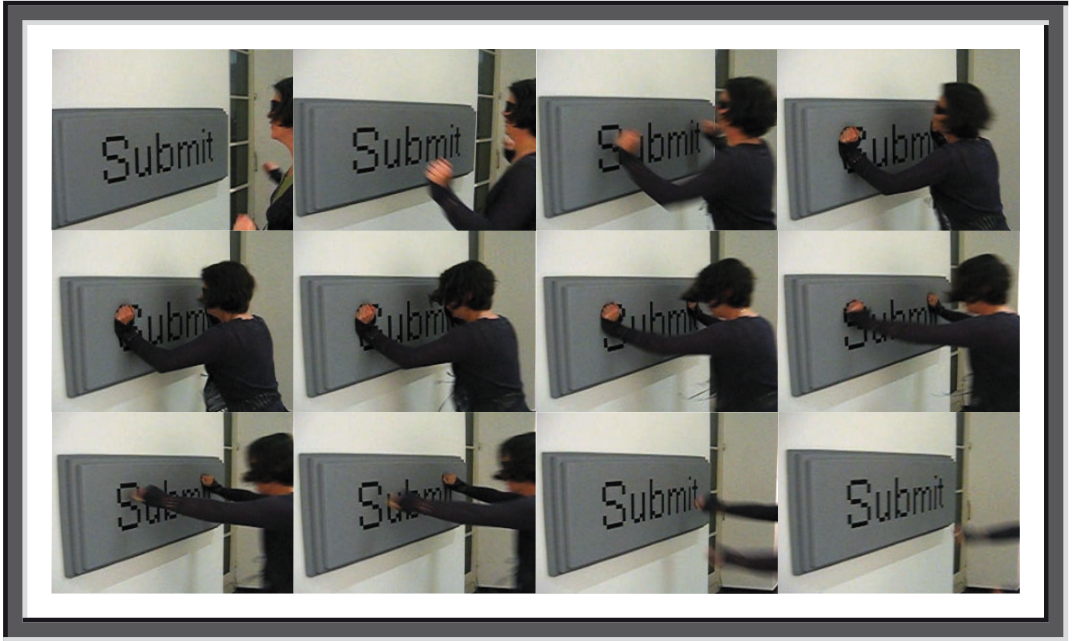
**<http://nm.merz-akademie.de/>**

# SUBMIT BUTTON

<http://johannes-p-osterhoff.com/submit/>

JOHANNES P OSTERHOFF

2003



## Real-Life Submit Button Model



The Submit Button is a 50 by 100 cm real-life model of a virtual submit button, used in Windows 95 (with Internet Explorer 4) to send form data over the internet.

It can be hung to a wall and its foam material means that it is very tactile and can be pressed. It was included in the group exhibition "The First 10 Years" at Merz Akademie Stuttgart celebrating the first ten years of world wide web.

# URSULA VDL FANCLUB



Germany's minister for family affairs, senior citizens, women and youth, Ms Ursula von der Leyen, had the idea to make everybody afraid of "online child abuse" with facts she pulled out of her nose. Taking no prisoners she established a law creating an Internet surveillance system that will raise Germany's censorship levels to those experienced in China, Iran, United Arabic Emirates, Usbekistan, Tunis, and the United Kingdom. Of course all her political colleagues voted for this law as well, otherwise they

would risk being called child molesters.

Because all this is so awesome, Ursula's fan club offers her in the form of a widget to include in your own web site or even blog! She will comment on what she finds in her new home and watch out so web surfers don't do bad stuff!

Meine Güte, 6 Links auf dieser Seite! Und jeder könnte zu **Kinderpornografie** führen!

Mein Tipp: nur anständige Seiten angucken (z.B. [www.CDL.de](http://www.CDL.de)) und die zur Sicherheit lieber gleich ausdrucken. Da "click" man nicht noch aus Versehen auf irgend etwas.

## Links are dangerous!!

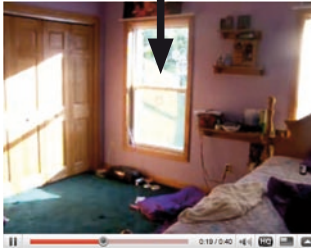
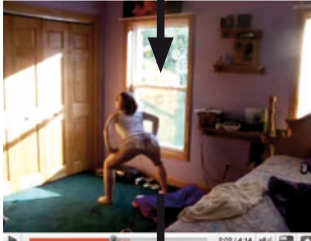
<http://vdl.odem.org/>

TOBIAS LEINGRUBER & DRAGAN ESPENSCHIED

2009

# BOOTYCLIPSE

**gigglytoot92  
(2 months ago):  
“LMvFAO!!...  
that shit is hilari-  
ous!!... there’s no  
one there.”**




What does the YouTube format offer to amateur dancers, strippers or porn actors? Several minutes of do-it-yourself footage recorded at home, untouched by an editor. There is nothing more important to voyeurs than the feeling of authenticity that comes from this lack of editing: there are several seconds, between when the actor switches on the camera but hasn't entered the frame yet, when we get to look around in someone else's room.

Bootyclipse uses these intros to videos where teenage girls show off their booty dancing skills in order to collect macho approval in the comments, and stretches them over the whole length of the clip. Everything stays the same, but the girl never actually appears. Titles, descriptions, tags and sounds have been retained from the original, so all Shake dat's, Booty!'s and Tip Drill's blend together and show up with the same keyword searches

Tobi's Timemachine Firefox add-on modifies the source code of any web page so it looks like an amateur page from the 1990's.

# TOBI'S TIMEMACHINE

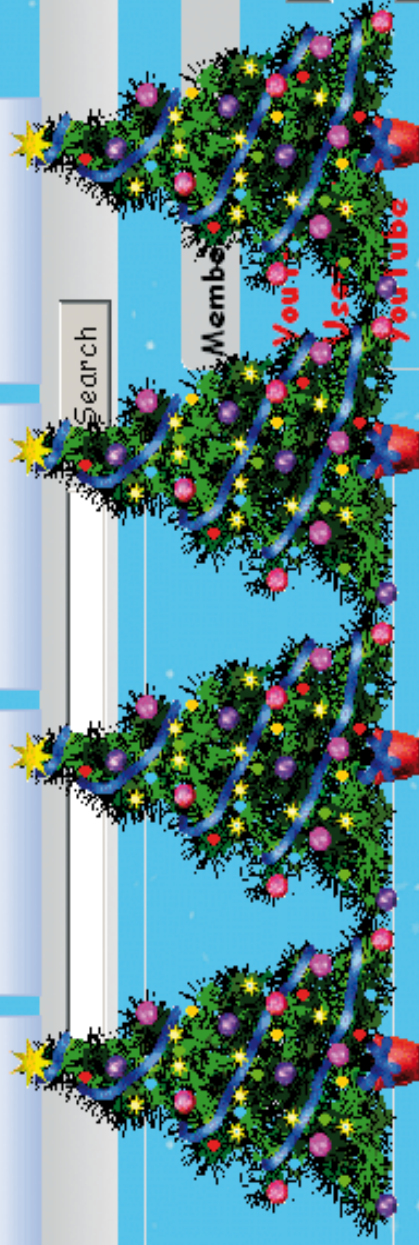



 In the 90's people started creating web pages about their hobbies and dogs on geocities and other free web space providers. As many people didn't have much content to post on their "homepages", animated gifs, seasonal designs, the Comic Sans font, flashy colors, frames and midi-music were quite popular. Nowadays the web is designed by professionals. Even the once trashy

Ebay was overtaken by so called "Power-Sellers." Shiny and smooth Web 2.0 Design rules the web.

Tobi's Timemachine Firefox add-on modifies the source code of any web page so it looks like an amateur page from the 1990's. Perfect for users that missed out on the first great internet wave and also a software tribute to the pioneers of the web.

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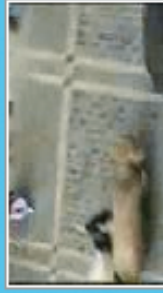
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# Wii MOTE MA- STERS 2008 & 2009



Some Wii owners don't even know that there is another game for their console than Wii Tennis, but they do know about the WiiMote masters tournament in Stuttgart. The amazing ADVERSI projector installation that allows two teams playing against each other face to face, was especially developed for these events. Naturally there was also a prize for the best outfit.



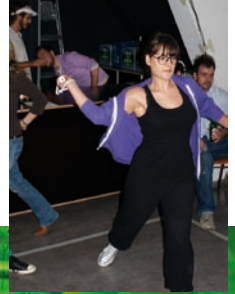
<http://nm.merz-akademie.de/~wii/>

GROUP PROJECT GUIDED BY  
OLIA LIALINA &  
JÖRG FROHMAYER

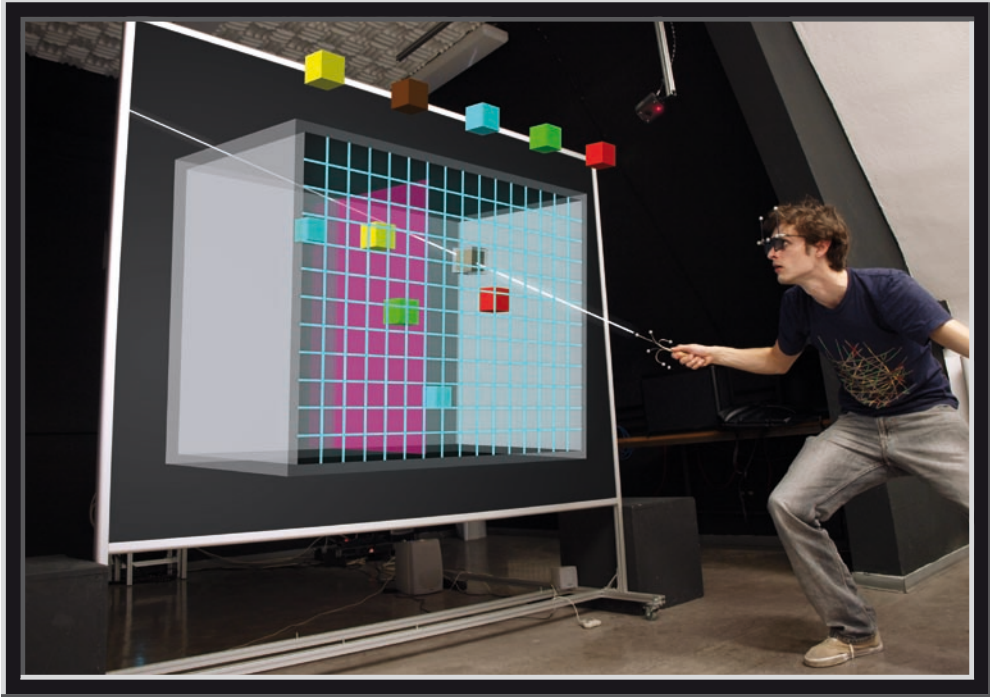
2008  
2009







# KLANG KLOTZCHEN KISTE



## There's a rainbow inside your mind



This virtual reality application presents a new, smooth, continuous interface to the step-sequencer approach of composing music. An endless supply of sound blocks can be moved inside a three-dimensional box with a tractor beam attached to the users hand. Different parameters of sound are manipulated depending on the blocks'

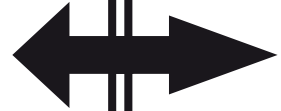
positions and colors. Now creating banging tracks comes as naturally as speeding on the Autobahn!

# PIXELARTS

32x32 pixels, 16 colors, countless lunch breaks wasted: an anonymous mass of users has already created more than 17,000 images with the simple online editor Pixel Arts.

Every image can be used as the foundation for a new one, making it easy to contribute. The absence of meaningful text input or attribution helps producing an ongoing stream of micro-art and narration. Check daily or follow on Flickr!

Alexander Schlegel, 2008  
<http://www.pixelarts.6x.to/>



<http://nm.merz-akademie.de/?p=31>

GROUP PROJECT GUIDED  
 BY YUNCHUL KIM

2009

# SCOOTER IN A BOX

A magnet, magnetic coil and the microchip programming language Arduino are driving this entertainment device.

Insert a coin, put the heavy metal tube into the hole, put the tube to your ear and don't just listen, but experience a random smash hit by Scooter. Feel the sound and analyze its frequency spectrum by moving the tube in and out. Hyper!

This group project was developed with help of the media artist and academic musician Yunchul Kim.



[Redacted]

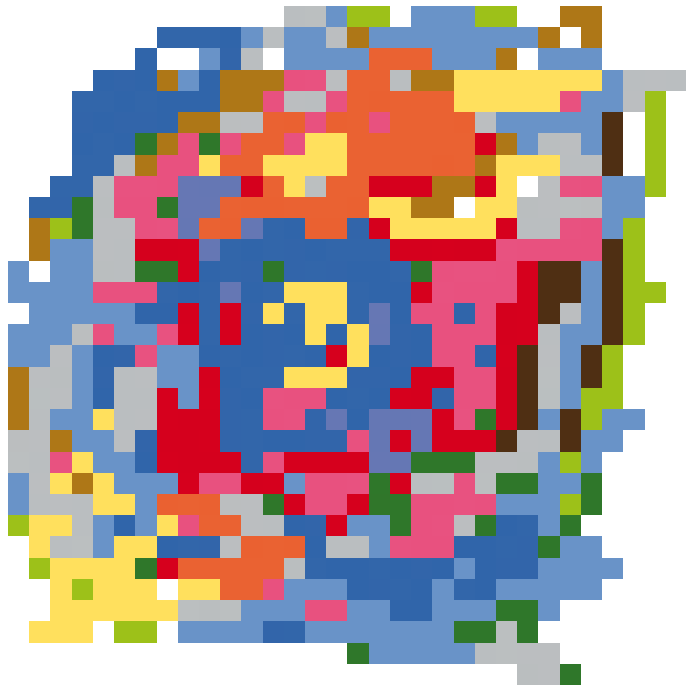
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# DIGITAL VISUALS

Home computer enthusiasts in the 1980's and 1990's created a rich visual language of ASCII art, rainbow gradients, fill patterns, icons, colorful bitmap fonts and raytracing that developed completely independent from classic graphic design. Today, the software packages left on the market that are regarded as "professional," promise a kind of "meta design" that is independent from its underlying medium. Be it paper, animation or web sites, designers are encouraged to work with a GUI that takes all its metaphors from print design (text frames,

rulers, pages, outline fonts, etc).

The workshop "Digital Visuals" encouraged experimentation with underground graphic and animation software to find an authentic digital aesthetic. It was lead by artist, VJ and fanzine publisher Julien Ducourthial (aka o+ro), a key figure in the chip-tune and homecomputer music scene and expert in lo-tech and handheld graphics

<http://ilbm.info/>

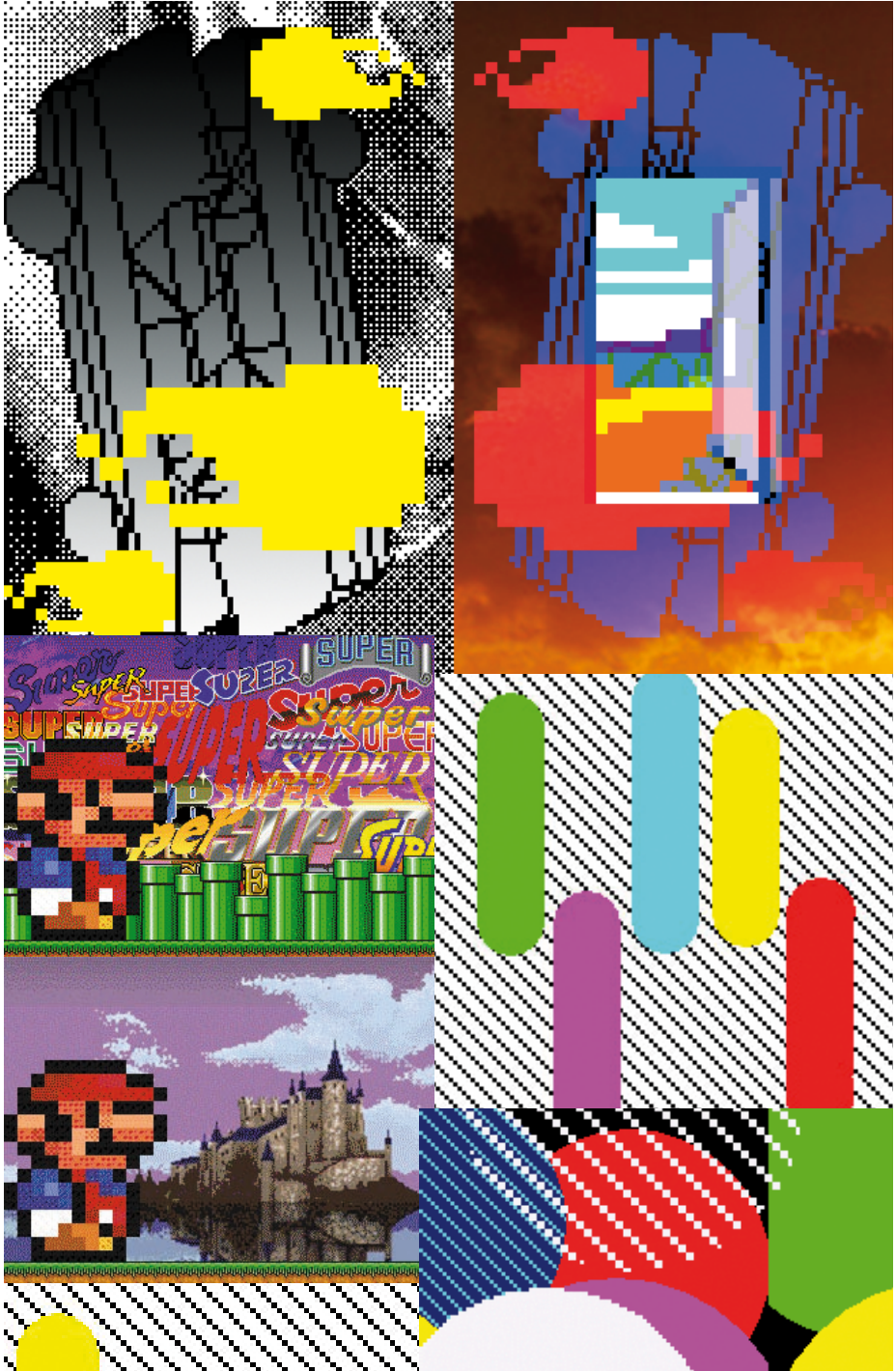
**Graphics by:  
Philipp Gresse, o+tro,  
Ingo Kollek & Christopher  
Heller**



<http://micromix.free.fr/>

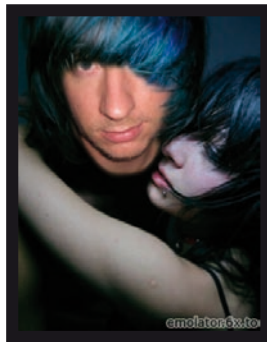
GROUP PROJECT GUIDED  
BY O+RO

2007



I don't think you trust in  
my self-righteous suicide.

# EMO LATOR



Join the movement! Chose from a wide variety of template-emos, upload your own photo (or one of your cat) and become what you secretly desire to be. More than 25,000 users can't be wrong! If you are too lazy to use your emulated self as an avatar picture in your favorite social network, you can be sure to be represented in the Emulator Gallery. Just google it, and keep those razorblades ready.

<http://emolator.6x.to/>  
<http://emolatorgallery.6x.to/>

FLORIAN KRÖNER

2008





# FLYER GENERATOR

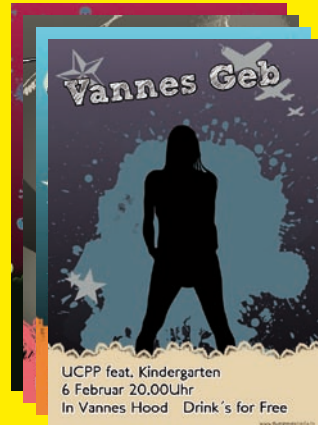
HARDER  
FASTER  
STRONGER



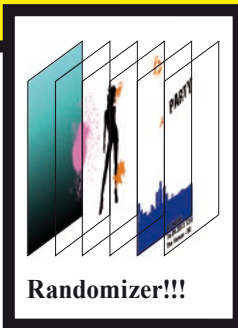
**Electro f#cks House**  
Made: 2009-01-27 19:09



**Abi rum - trotzdem dumm**  
Made: 2009-03-19 15:17



**Drink's for Free**  
Made: 2009-01-19 17:30



Several web-sites offer gratis source material for Photoshop. On deviantArt for example, one can find countless brushes

and vector shapes, dafont carries loads of fancy typefaces, and there are several other sources that also offer stock photography or color combinations. Amateur designers assigned to create a flyer for a party usually scour these repositories for usable material. In the end the most popular elements (see the download charts of each source website) appear everywhere, many

flyers are solely composed of them. Even some professional designers have adapted to this arbitrary looking style.

Now, Flyergenerator makes these designers redundant. The web application randomly combines material from the aforementioned sources and outputs a high-resolution image file, ready to hand over to the print shop and like the source elements, totally free. Thousands of flyers have already been built and downloaded. The zero dollar price tag allows flashy flyers even for small and frequent events, like business meetings, school classes or bus departures.

# HOEBOT AND LOVEBOT



**Love Bot** (Université d'Avignon) schrieb am 25.01.2007 um 13:55 Uhr

Hallo Janine!  
Uli fühlt sich so allein. Warum schaut Du nicht mal bei seinem Profil vorbei?

Seine Profnummer lautet 3a44eb3fdc -- kopiere sie in die Adresszeile Deines Browsers anstelle der angezeigten Nummer.

Dein LoveBot ♥

[ Nachricht ]



**Denise** schrieb am 29.01.2007 um 21:53 Uhr

"Finds ja sehr nett dass du dich so um deine Mitmenschen bemühst  
Merkst du eigentlich noch was? Keiner von uns hat deine Hilfe nötig! Du neevst!! Ich glaube der einzige der hier nen Kuppler braucht bist du! Schon mal was von Psychiatern gehört? Soll sehr hilfreich sein hab ich gehört!!



**Martina** schrieb am 25.01.2007 um 17:18 Uhr

Du Penner, kümmer dich um deine EIGENE Scheiße, du Psycho!

## Responses on Lovebot's entries

### Hoebot

Hoebot joined the community to look for crazy parties and hot chicks, which is not exactly uncommon in social networks. He visited and secretly saved public profiles of 10,000 students while leaving ASCII graphics like popular evergreens "The Bitchslap" or "The Beertruck" on their virtual walls. Eventually many "real" hot chicks, charmed by his manly behaviour, contacted him and Hoebot even got invited to parties. He never came. He was just a player.

### The Lovebot

Girls loved Hoebot, girls hated Lovebot. Hoebot passed on to his lovely colleague all the personal information he had collected: political orientation, relationship status, favorite movies, education and so on. Lovebot then carefully selected male and female single students, who might get along well, and posted personal hook-up messages to their profiles.

While some of the selected couples got in contact with each other, most sent Lovebot hate messages like "You psycho, why don't you care about your own crap and leave me alone?" or "I don't want you to help me finding a boyfriend, i am single and very happy about it!" Lovebot's mission was not over though, she posted the virtually hooked-up couples to her very romantic website. If you got hooked-up and googled your name, the top google search result was very likely Lovebot's cheesy logfile.

### The End

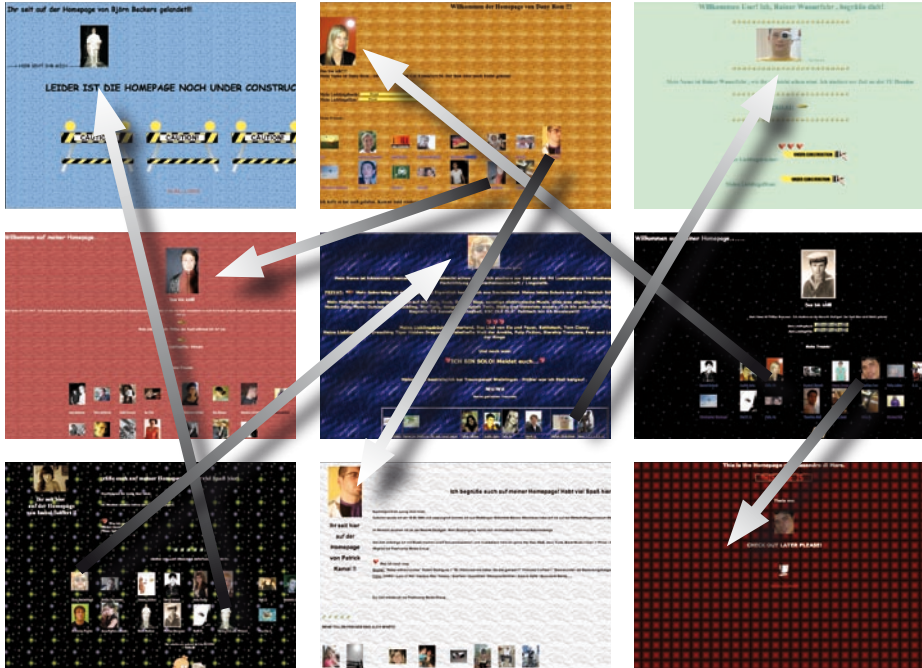
People sent messages like, "Please remove me from this website, because I'm looking for a job, and this could damage my reputation" or "Remove me from this website, or i gonna sue you!" All the last names were then removed, but the bot's profiles were eventually deleted by the administrators. Hoebot and Lovebot - may you R.I.P.!

http://tobi-x.com/studiuvz\_crawler/

TOBIAS LEINGRUBER & BERT SCHUTZBEACH

2007

# WEB1.0 (@ STUDIVZ)



forced\_offline

MICHAEL RUSS

2008



Project Web 1.0 offered an automated service to liberate user data from the social network site "StudiVZ." By typing in their user ID number, users could transfer their profile data back to the 90's, a glorious time of freedom!

More than 1,000 profiles were able to flee the golden cage that is Web 2.0 and return to glittering welcome banners and spinning under construction signs. Social networking could be so simple.

<http://nm.merz-akademie.de/~bernadette.neuroth/promi-spass/>

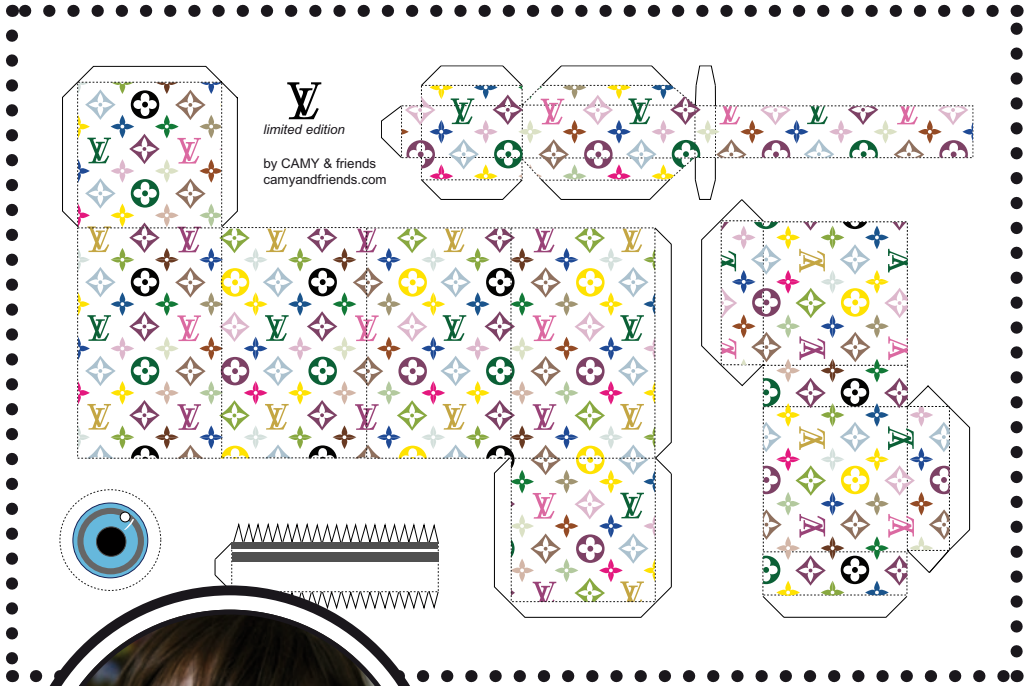


BERNADETTE NEUROTH

2008



# CAMY AND FRIENDS



<http://camyandfriends.com/>

JULIA BÖGER

2009

**Copy this sheet up 223% and cut out your own cam.**

surveillance cameras is educational fun, because security is a very important topic today and will be in the future. Kids can develop positive feelings for these unavoidable companions and learn to avoid tricky situation with government institutions.

Download cut-out sheets from Camy and Friends for quality time spent with the family!

Handicraft helps our little ones develop their motor skills and spatial senses. Cutting out and gluing together paper



# VIRAL CANDY SHOP

<http://viral-candy.com/>

ISABEL PETTINATO

2009



“Which screenshot do you want?”



...everything!  
...includes poster,  
...and sticker!”



“Viral videos are getting part of common knowledge. Your children can learn everything about viral stuff by playing the beloved memory game....”

Viral videos became part of the present and future pop culture, and-above all-part of our hearts. Who still needs posters of ordinary stars, artificially constructed by star agencies? Who still wears shirts with pictures of old-fogey comic characters?

Your viral icons are real and like you! Be the first: get the limited collectibles and keep your viral treasure with you -everywhere, even with-

out internet connection! Your friends won't believe their eyes.

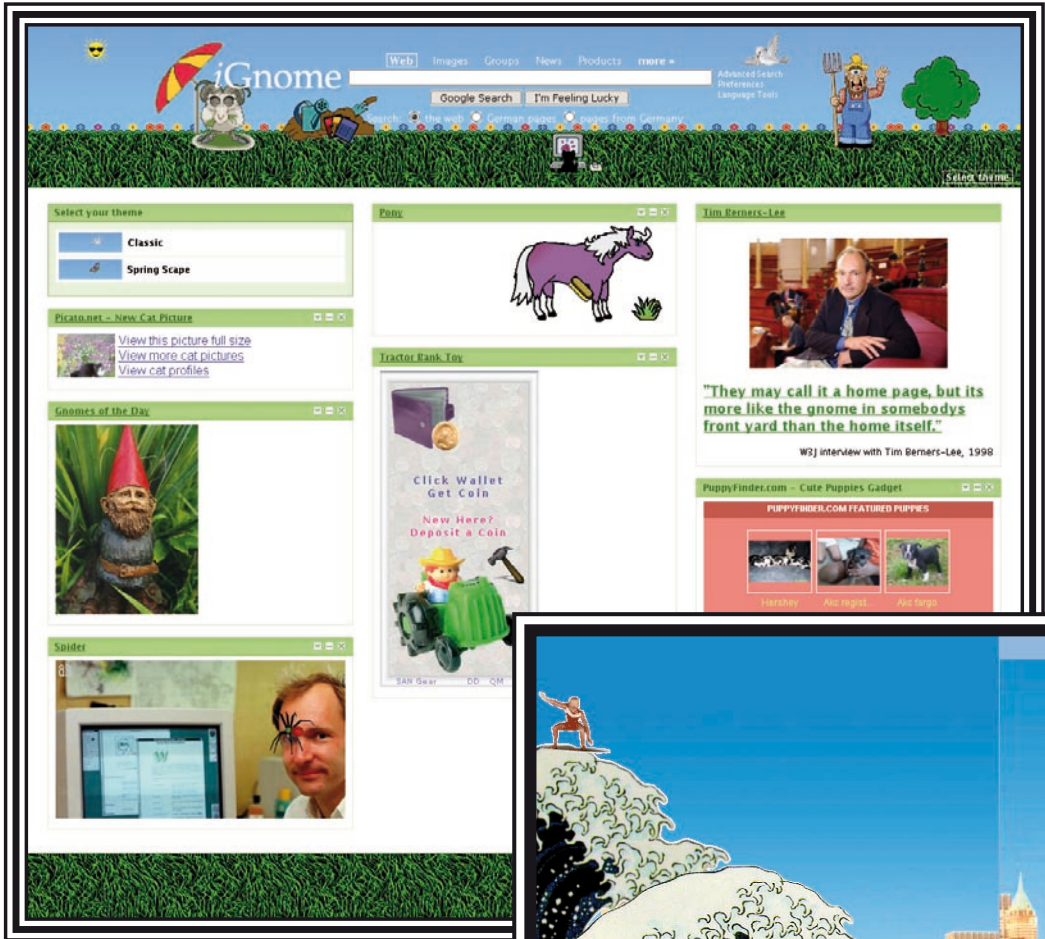
**YO SHAWTY!  
STICKAZ, POSTAZ,  
STREET WEAR!**



50 CENT MONEY PIMPING

# IGNOME

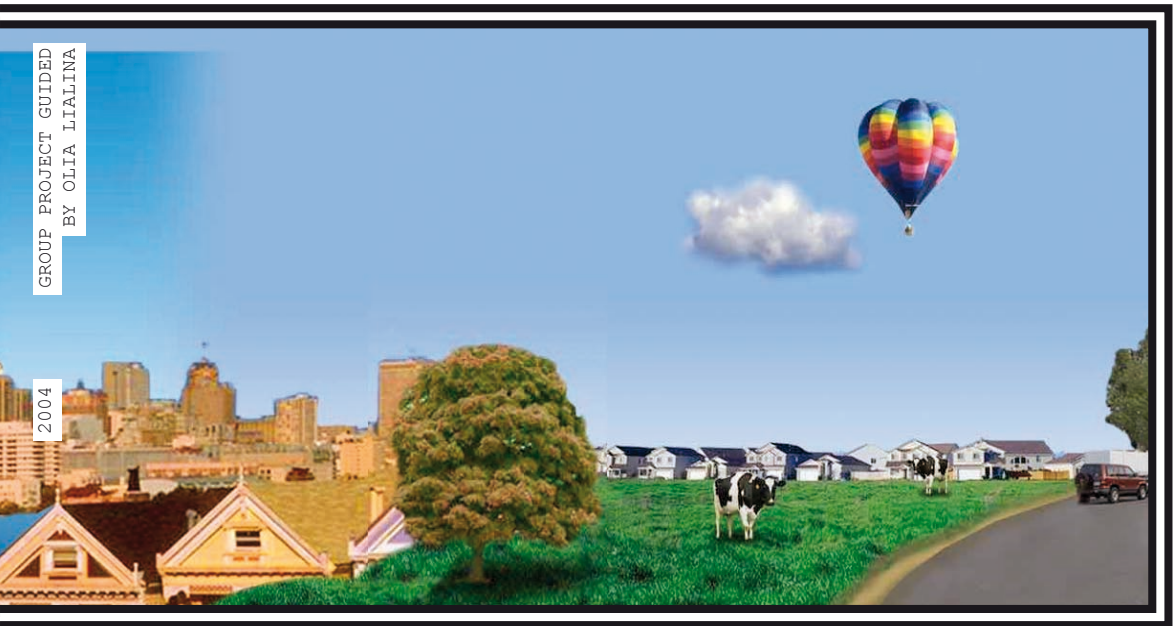
http://nm.merz-akademie.de/~helene.dams/ignome/





# SURE O CALYPSE

<http://www.merz-akademie.de/projekte/net/welle/>



GROUP PROJECT GUIDED  
BY OLIA LIALINA

2004







# HAPPY REAL

Digital Entertainment develops much faster than media education is willing to move.

Fear of the new is still a driving factor for the censorship of games, but the criteria for their analysis does not advance with gaming's tremendous technical developments. Ten years ago there were some red pixels on the screen, today's titles show photorealistic (yet totally unrealistic), fluent animations.

"Violence" is usually perceived as "realistic," no matter how abstract or absurd it may be pictured. Differentiating between reality and fiction is an important skill that appears to be totally lost in the discussion about Digital Entertainment.

HappyReal is a video game installation that

engages inplays with the unconscious transfer between "virtual"



and "real." This process is amplified by including real objects from the "player's" direct surroundings into the narration of the "game." Five IP cameras capture live video from the surroundings of the game machine, and this real time video is used to create the

game scenario. Players can switch between the camera feeds and shoot

anything that moves (TVs, Cars, Shadows, Persons, etc.) with a light gun. After the first stage, the player has to hold on for the bossfight. The "boss" is the player, recorded with a camera hidden inside the machine's housing. All reactions during the game are recorded and documented via the same camera.

The game runs on Windows XP, developed in

C# with mostly open source libraries. It will be released for XBOX 360 in 2010.



## D E S K T O P   I S L A N D

Dear reader,

If you have found this bottle and are reading the following memos and photos, I have reached my goals. It is my intent to report on the peculiar and somewhat disturbing encounters I have had during the last two years. They are too remarkable to keep silent.

This is also an appeal for help. Please save me from this seemingly undiscovered place, which I named "Desktop Island".

Save me,  
johannes p osterhoff

Memo 1, day 1

I am the only survivor of Flight 6000 to Redmond, WA. My plane has crashed into the bay of a desert-island.

It is quite likely this happened on February 1, 2007 at 3 pm (which is when my watch stopped working anyway).

It seems I am all by myself and so I have decided to take notes of my life here.

As the exact date is not clear, I will write the notes undated with consecutive numbers.

Memo 2, day 6

The island is a real paradise. The scenery is beautiful and diverse. It is populated by many exotic plants and appears to be completely untouched. Not a soul to be seen. No traces of any civilization at all.

And except for a few butterflies, no animals. How long will the supplies from the plane last?





Memo 3, day 8

I have discovered a bridge! It appears not to have been used for ages. Later I discovered more evidence of a civilization on the island. Not far from the bridge I have also found some deserted houses. I will continue my exploration into this direction tomorrow.

Memo 6 a, day 13, in the evening

Wow! From the peak of a hill I saw a gigantic city surrounded by a medieval wall. In the distance I could see the lights from suburbs and skyscrapers. I ran down the hill and climbed over the wall. I still cannot believe it! I am delirious with joy! I saw houses, and streets, and electricity.

Everything is familiar and I have found myself back in civilization.

Memo 6 b, day 14 in the morning

Yesterday I was completely exhausted and fell asleep on a nearby bench. I slept deeply.

When I woke up the next morning I was scared. Near by my bench I could see a group of... aliens. I thought I might still be dreaming. They had heads and torsos like you and me, but neither arms nor legs.

And they were hovering!

When I came closer, I could see their faces. They were blank. At first glance they were man-like, but then I saw that they were lacking eyes, noses and also mouths. They clearly could not see me.

I will try to remain undetected and observe these aliens from a safe distance.





Memo 6 c, day 14 noon

I am still observing the aliens. I have not tried to get in touch with them. I do not dare to.

I have noticed that they seem to communicate among themselves by telepathy.

Memo 7, day 15

Although there are streets, I have not discovered any cars. The streets of the city seem to me like the ruins of a formerly motorized society. Perhaps because the aliens can hover, they no longer need cars and have no need for the streets.

The city offers a network of teleporters. In all major locations there are teleport stations, which are used by the aliens to "jump" between stations throughout the city.





Memo 10, day 18

First contact! Despite my fears the aliens are very friendly. However communication still is difficult.

They appear to understand my words, but they cannot speak and I am not capable of reading their thoughts. Unfortunately this means that exchange takes place in a single direction.

Memo 16, day 20

We have found a way to communicate. The aliens are capable of projecting diagrams, signs and symbols to me. In response to my questions they answer with these visuals and I am slowly starting to comprehend.



Memo 19, day 25

The aliens invited me to the biggest building in the city—the "Library". It is a huge building that contains the entire history and collective memory of the alien society. It was communicated to me that I would find answers to all of my questions here.

After several days of silent observation I am very keen to learn more about the aliens' past.



Memo 20, history, part 1

My research in the "Library" is progressing well. I have begun to understand that:

- the entire society continues to evolve rapidly in many areas
- the beings' technological achievements can be seen as reactions to a genetic mutation that is causing these rapid changes.

Memo 22, dwellings

The beings inhabit small houses, reminding me of primitive cottages. These cottages are arranged into estates of terraced houses. Each of these estates is equipped with a teleport station.

They all look very similar. Entrance doors are located on the front right, and to the left there is a small window. Usually these houses have a red rooftop, although I have found a few smaller ones with light blue paint and a blue roof.

Memo 23, office buildings

The aliens work in large office buildings behind glass facades, some also have prefabricated plastic parts. The buildings usually have six floors and have a smaller adjoining building in which a teleport station is located. Office parks are surrounded with the same prefabricated brick walls. Each wall constructed of 14 bricks.



There are no gates or passages between these office parks. Commuting office workers teleport themselves from work to another teleport station near their home and hover the rest of the way.

Memo 25, history, part 2

The evidence suggests that these aliens must have developed their telepathic abilities over a short period of time. The change must have happened so quickly that that neither the culture nor architecture had time to properly adapt.

As I have discovered, this change was likely caused by a genetic mutation in which they lost their physiognomic features. When their ability to speak degenerated, they developed the iconic projections they still use to communicate with me. When they gradually lost their sight, they developed the ability to interconnect themselves by telepathy. Around this same time the teleport stations were built.

Memo 31, visual arts

Due to the degeneration of their sensory organs development in the visual arts also seems to have stopped. But even though the beings

cannot see paintings any more, the genre still is popular and retains a sentimental value. During my research in the Library I found that four styles remain popular:



#### 1. DEPICTIONS OF THE ISLAND

The most common subject on the island is the island itself. There are numerous different kinds of prints in various styles. Those prints can be found in the islanders' homes and on desks in many offices as well.

#### 2. FLOWER PICTURES

In addition I saw many images of the island's diverse flora. One type of image in particular, showing a flower in front of a gray pattern is very popular.

#### 3. PAINTINGS OF PAINTING

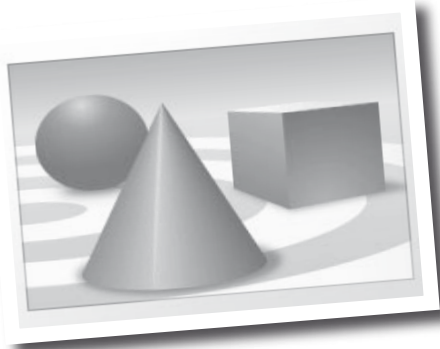
Another dominant genre on the island is depictions of painting itself. In this style of pictures I saw many images of brushes, painted color spots and close-ups of canvases. This genre seems to have had its heyday before the society developed their telepathic abilities. It is as if, worried they were losing their ability to paint forever, all they could paint was the act of painting itself. These sentimental and yet sober views bear witness to the impact of the severe changes the society underwent.

#### 4. GEOMETRICAL FIGURES

Simple geometric figures and shapes are the fourth and last genre of visual arts I have discovered on the island.

#### Memo 34, industries

As illustrated, the society is very technologically advanced



and highly developed. This is especially noticeable in their high-quality manufacturing of electronic goods and glass products.

Memo 39, planned society?

In the Library I have found an interesting document depicting a number of formulas and diagrams. According to these formulas the islanders seem to regard "half of the golden proportion" as a perfect and aesthetic ratio.

This would mean a ration of: 1 to 5,23 or 68,75 degrees of a whole.

Apparently this "ideal" ratio has been applied to many aspects of society.

Besides being dominant in architecture and the visual arts, it is also used to plan and control population. Eg. the relationship of couples to singles and the relationship of adults to children are subject to the ratio. As a result there are strong sanctions and laws for families.

Last memo

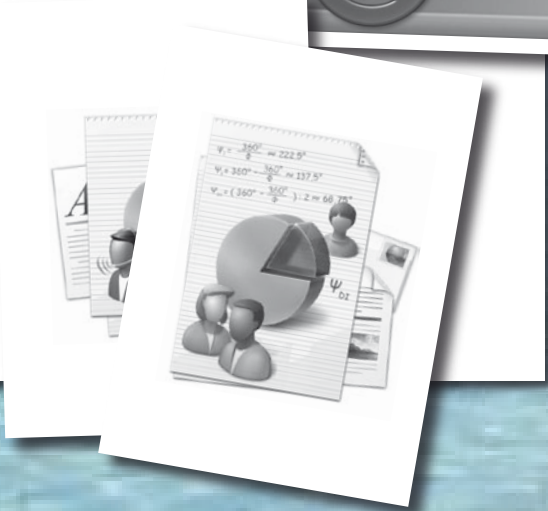
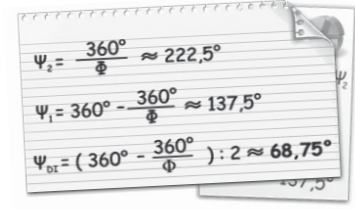
I remember myself being on my way to Redmond on Flight 6000. Most likely it was on February 1. Unfortunately I cannot provide any information on my whereabouts. The island and its inhabitants are so unique I can hardly imagine where it could be.

And because the islanders have never left their island there are no records in the Library as to its location. There is only one single map. It is very vague.

I am full of hope that this one map, which locates the island in the proximity of the Cayman Islands might give my rescuers a small hint.

With this I am finished and will off these documents.

Farewell.





# IMPRINT / IMPRESSUM



This book features many images found on the World Wide Web. Unfortunately in many cases it was impossible to ascertain the authors or contact them directly.

This book also references many online publications. As of August 2009, all mentioned links lead to the referenced materials. This can change anytime. If any link stops working we advise our readers to use the Internet Archive at <http://archive.org/> (last visited: 2009-09-09, 09:09 GMT +1).



Dieses Buch enthält viele im World Wide Web gefundene Bilder. Leider war es oftmals nicht möglich, die Autoren der Bilder festzustellen oder mit ihnen in Kontakt zu treten.

Dieses Buch verweist auf viele Online-Publikationen. Im August 2009 wurde überprüft, dass alle Links auf die entsprechenden Materialien zeigen. Wir raten der Leserschaft, das Internet Archive unter <http://archive.org/> (Stand: 2009-09-09 09:09 GMT +1) zu benutzen, falls etwas verloren gehen sollte.



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# **merz & solitude**



The Merz Akademie publishes in cooperation with the Akademie Schloss Solitude under the name merz & solitude. The three different series Reihe Reflexiv, Projektiv and Literatur provide a common publication platform for students, staff, fellows, and guests of both institutions and are dedicated to the individual artistic disciplines and the dialogue between theory, artistic, and design practice.



Unter dem Namen merz & solitude veröffentlicht die Merz Akademie, Hochschule für Gestaltung Stuttgart seit 2004 ihre Publikationen in Kooperation mit der Akademie Schloss Solitude. Mit der Herausgabe der Reihen Reflexiv, Projektiv und Literatur bieten die Institutionen gemeinsam für Studierende, Lehrende, Stipendiaten und Gäste eine Publikationsplattform, welche den einzelnen Künsten sowie dem Dialog zwischen Theorie, künstlerischer und gestalterischer Praxis gewidmet ist.



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**AND**
  
- ♣ **ALL UNKNOWN USERS  
FOR MAKING THE INTERNET  
A GREAT PLACE.**





To Computer Users,  
with Love and Respect

Technical innovations shape only a small part of computer and network culture. It doesn't matter much who invented the micro-processor, the mouse, TCP/IP or the World Wide Web and what ideas were behind these inventions. What matters is who uses them. Only when users start to express themselves with these technical innovations do they truly become relevant to culture at large.

Users' endeavors, like glittering star backgrounds, photos of cute kittens and rainbow gradients, are mostly derided as kitsch or in the most extreme cases, postulated as the end of culture itself. In fact this evolving vernacular, created by users for users, is the most important, beautiful and misunderstood language of new media.

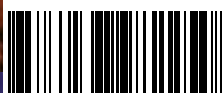
As the first book of its kind, this reader contains essays and projects investigating many different facets of **Digital Folklore**: online amateur culture, DIY electronics, dirtstyle, typographical nihilism, memes, teapots, penis enlargement, ...

To Computer Users,  
with Love and Respect

Computer- und Netzkultur werden nur zu einem kleinen Teil von technischen Innovationen geprägt. Es ist unwichtig, wer den Mikroprozessor, die Maus, TCP/IP oder das World Wide Web erfand und welche Ideen dahinter steckten. Ausschlaggebend ist, wer sie wie benutzt. Alleine durch die User gewinnt Computertechnologie überhaupt an kultureller Bedeutung.

Viele Bemühungen der User, seien es glitzernde Sternenhintergründe, Fotos süßer Kätzchen oder Regenbogenfarbverläufe, werden als Kitsch verlacht oder gar als allgemeiner kultureller Verfall bezeichnet. Dabei ist dieser scheinbar ästhetische Wirrwarr, geschaffen von Usern für User, die wichtigste, schönste und am meisten missverstandene Sprache der Neuen Medien.

In diesem Buch sind erstmals Essays und Projekte zu den unterschiedlichsten Facetten der **Digitalen Folklore** versammelt: Online-Amateurkultur, digitale Selbstbau-Elektronik, Typo-Nihilismus, Meme, Teekannen, Penisvergrößerung, ...

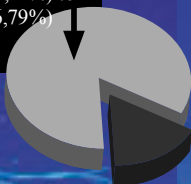


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