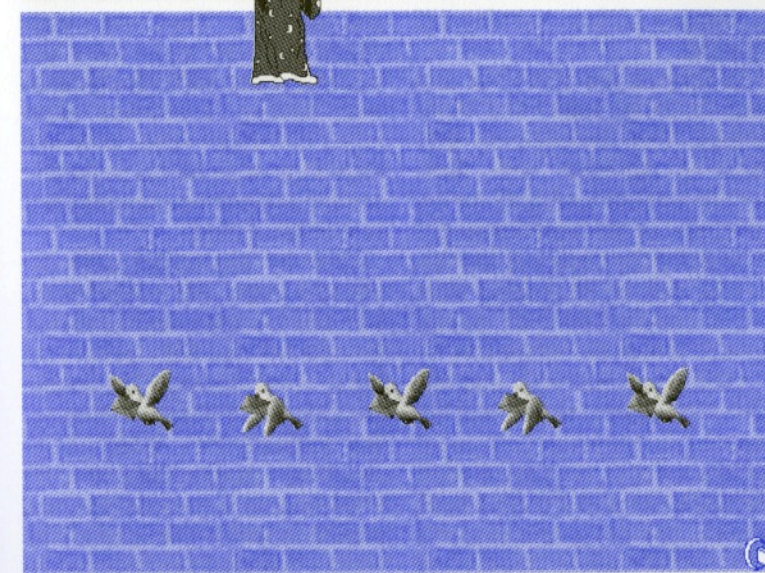# A VERNACULAR WEB

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
6. MIDI
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,

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 rating 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 early 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.

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

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

fig.1

always under construction
fig.2

fig.3

UNDER CONSTRUCTION
fig.4

W3C XHTML 1.0   W3C css
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 ridiculous–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 environment 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 without 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 basis. 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.

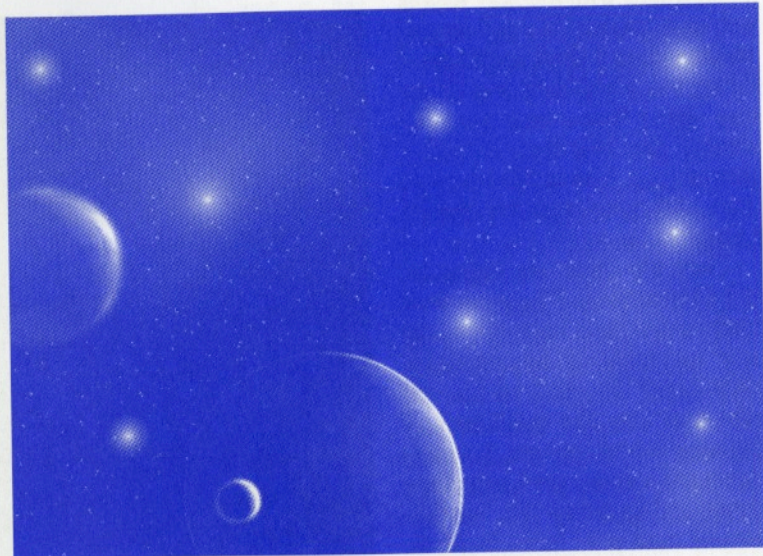Google scholar beta

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 appropriate 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

2 Luigi Cozzi: Star Crash, Film, 1978
3 Namco: Galaga, arcade game, 1981
4 Video Online, http://www.video-online.net, 2004
5 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

6 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.kinoservice.de
7 http://www.merz-akademie.de/projekte/
8 anonymous: "Moon's Stars", http://scri8e.com/stars/, 2005
9 anonymous, personal email, 2005
10 artificial.dk: "Net Stars", http://www.artificial.dk/articles/netstars_eng.htm, 2004
11 Olia Lialina: "Stars Fading on the Web", http://www.artificial.dk/articles/olia.htm, 2005

fig.6 Fan Art: Star Crash-style spacescape by Andrew Glazebrook, http://www.pachanko.com/starcrash/fanpage.html (gone)
fig.7 http://www.video-online.net, 2004
fig.8 http://web.archive.org/web/*/http://www.kinoservice.de
fig.9 http://web.archive.org/web/*/http://www.anni-und-jens.de
fig.10 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-

fig.7

fig.8

fig.9

fig.10

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 distancing 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.

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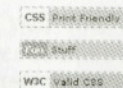ir wedding web site from appropriate graphics. 22 In 2004 British designer Bruce Lawson made a contribution to the css Zen Garden 23 (a collaborative effort to

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

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/klm/ 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

fig.13

fig.14

fig.15

invite ceremony party about us

fig.16

CSS Print Friendly
CSS Stuff
W3C Valid CSS

fig.17

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:// gifwelt.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.bruce lawson.co.uk/zen/sample.css, 2004

The Beauty of CSS Design

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.

**Welcome to My **

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.

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.

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 help 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.

Select a Design

UNDER THE SEA! BY ERIC STOLTZ

MAKE 'EM PROUD BY MICHAEL McAGHON 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

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CSS Resources
FAQ
Submit a Design
Translations

COOL PAGE OF THE DAY

A note from the 21st of June 2009:

Usually its imposssible 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"

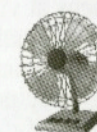Well, almost lucky, as he never responded to my hundreds of additional questions.

fig. 18

USERS

5 LINKS

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 delivere the same: a link to an address

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 reproduction 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

fig.19

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

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-

7 FRAMES

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://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, 2002-2005,
   http://homepage.ntlworld.com/curly.
   johnson/midis.html,
   visited: 2009-07-14
27 Michaël Samyn: "HOME", http://
   adaweb.walkerart.org/%7EGroup2/
   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.design
   timeline.org/cgi-bin/archive/
   timeline.cgi?q=22, 2005

symbolized the landmarks of the web's history. The tribute to wall-papers consisted of a huge board of real wallpaper, (from OBI), ar-ranged 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.
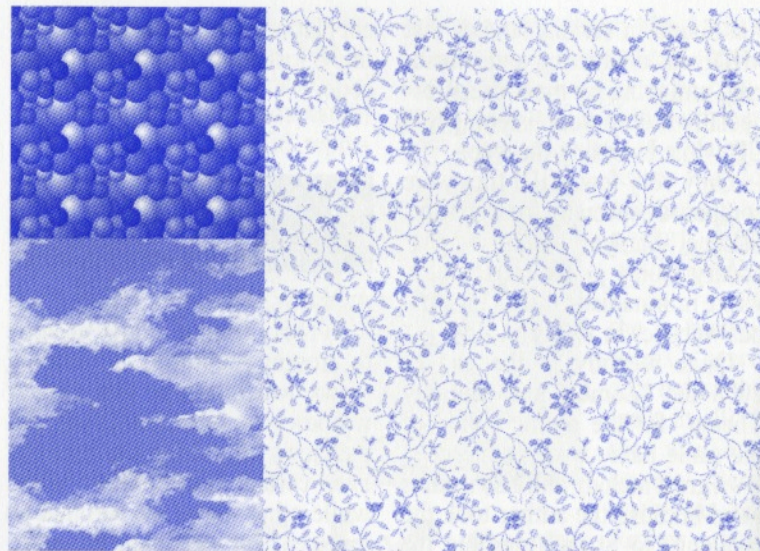
8 TILDE

As you know, multiuser Unix ma-chines use "~" as a shortcut to the "/users" directory and in the be-ginning 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 us-ers 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 impor-tant.

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 prom-ised to host my files on the studio server without the tilde in front of my name.

After a year of being www.city-line.ru/~olialia I became 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-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 for-get that a registered domain prom-ises success in business.

Today, having a tilde in front of your name is especially problem-atic 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

complication makes the old fash-ioned 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/

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 an-swer is, "The tilde indicates that I am a user on a server comput-er. 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 an-other friend. This information is available to people that can "read" the URL so I make sure it con-tains some interesting informa-tion. And the word after the tilde
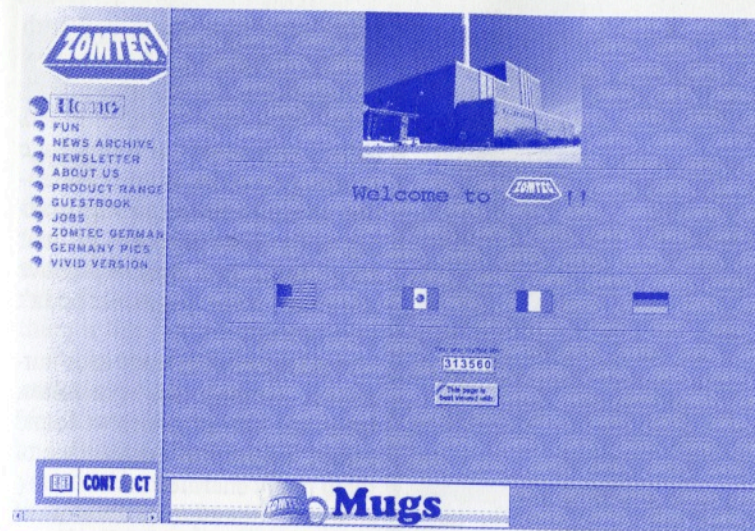
is my Login Name. Through this I demonstrate that I can login as well, that I know about FTP, SSH, rsync etc."

You see, today the sign for user can be read as a sign of being more than an ordinary user.
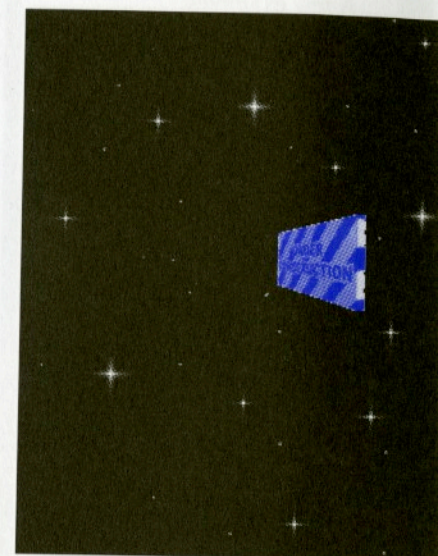
9 WELCOME TO MY HOME PAGE

The welcome message is for web-sites that exist for no other pur-pose than to say hello to the world. They're extremely personal and truly amateur pages where holi-day photos, a CV, free wallpaper collections, recipes, links to "oth-er great cat sites" and "The His-tory of Status Quo" form a pile of mixed up information. Although it's supposed to be just a welcom-ing message, for experienced us-ers it's a warning that the rest of the website will be of the same in-formational value.

My surfing experience shows

fig.20

that there's no real correlation be-tween a welcome message and the quality of a site. In fact, the greet-ing 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 nega-tive 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 look-ing 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 32, 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 fig.20. 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 unserious 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.sher-* ***
* *iff.co.wise.tx.us/ looks like* ***
* *it was made in 1994, not* ***
* *1996: bullets instead of ani-* ***
* *mated 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" 33. 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 34 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. 35 Mr. Ysewijn welcomes guests with a video clip fig.21 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

fig.21

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.

32 BBH: "ZOMTEC",
http://web.archive.org/web/20050128
091451/http://zomtec.com/
34 Olia Lialina: "1000$ contest for
personal home pages",
http://art.teleportacia.org/1000$/,
2004
35 Pierre Ysewijn: Personal Home Page,
http://mypage.bluewin.ch/Ysewijn/,
offline, 2002-2007

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10 MAIL ME

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-
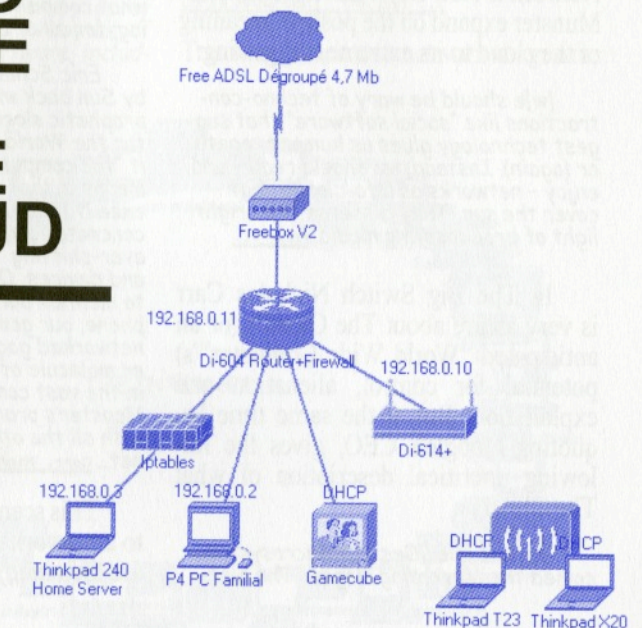
ry Christmas!" That's gone and I don't think designers can do anything about it.
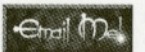
WHO ELSE IS THE CLOUD

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

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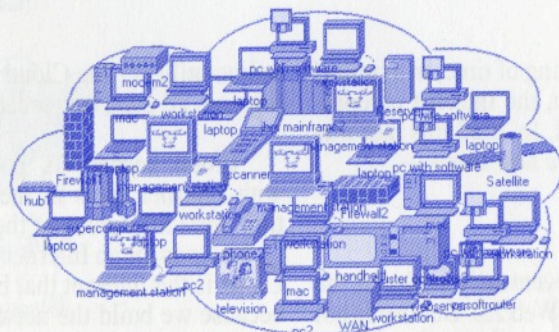Carr, Nicholas: "The Big Switch", W.W. Norton & Co., 2008

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-contractions like "social software" that suggest technology glues us humans together (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 Network is a Computer" [...] Today Sun's slogan suddenly makes sense. It describes what computing has become, or is becoming, for all of us. [...]
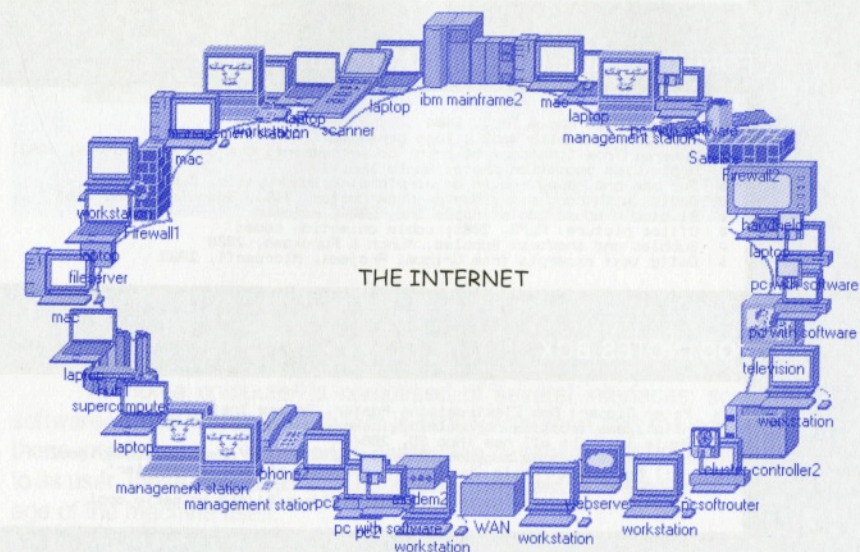>
> Eric Schmidt, who was still employed by Sun back when it came up with its prophetic slogan, has a different term for the World Wide Computer. He calls it "the computer in the cloud". What he means is that computing, as we experience it today, no longer takes a fixed, concrete form. It occurs in the 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 Internet... 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

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

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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:// ...

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 ...

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figure: http://www.apple.com/mobileme/, September 2008
http://aws.amazon.com/ec2/
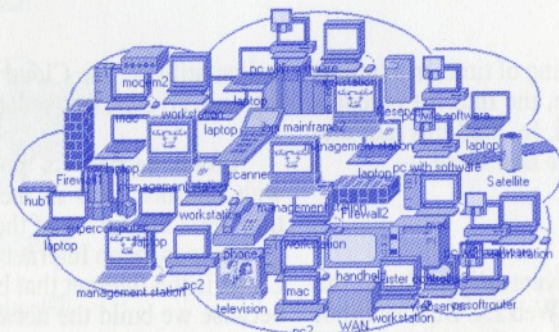
Chris Anderson: "The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete", http://www.wired.com/science/discoveries/magazine/16-07/pb_theory, 2008
Stephen Baker: "Google and the Wisdom of Clouds", http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/07_52/b4064048925836.htm, 2007
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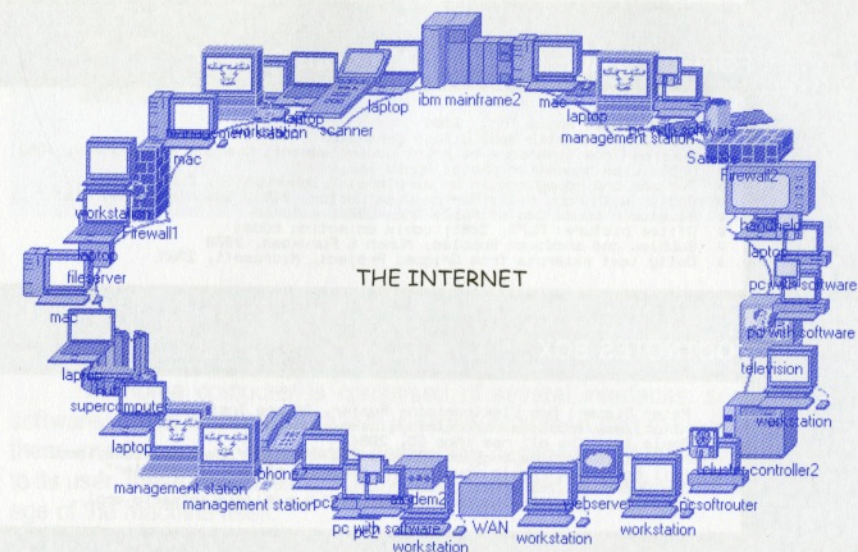
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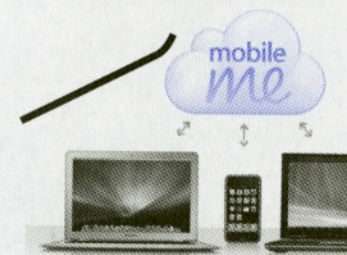the question was what
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figure: http://www.apple.com/mobileme/, September 2008
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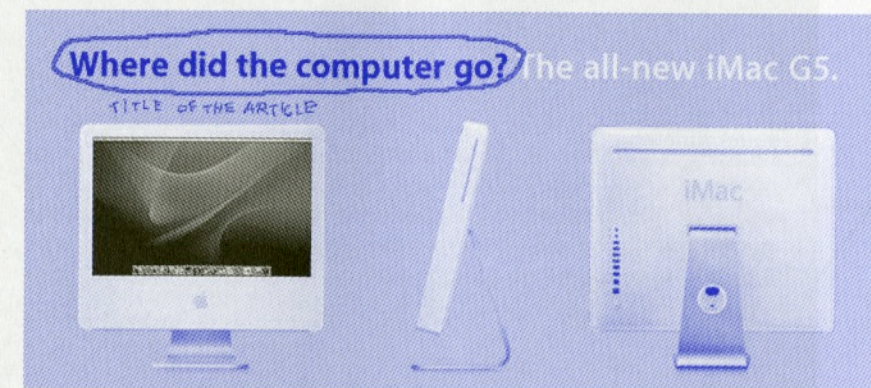
INTRO BOX

```
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

```
ⱷ   Title image: Apple Inc., 2004
ⱷ   fashion: made with Web2.0 logo generator
ⱷ   Excerpt from Commodore 64 print advertisement: Commodore Computers, 1982
ⱷ   Apple Lisa promotion photo: Apple Inc, 1983
ⱷ   Sad man and happy man in an airplane: Polymervision, 2006
ⱷ   Doctor with hard disk: Norton Disk Doctor, 1991, Symantec; annotated
ⱷ   Bluetooth mouse table: Apple Inc, 2004; rotated
ⱷ   Office picture: ALPS, 2006; cable animation added
ⱷ   Bubbles and shadows: Bubbles, Munch & Furukama, 2000
ⱷ   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
Y   Apple Inc: The all new iMac G5, 2004,
    http://web.archive.org/web/2004090101030/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.appl
```


Where did the computer go? The all-new iMac G5.
TITLE OF THE ARTICLE

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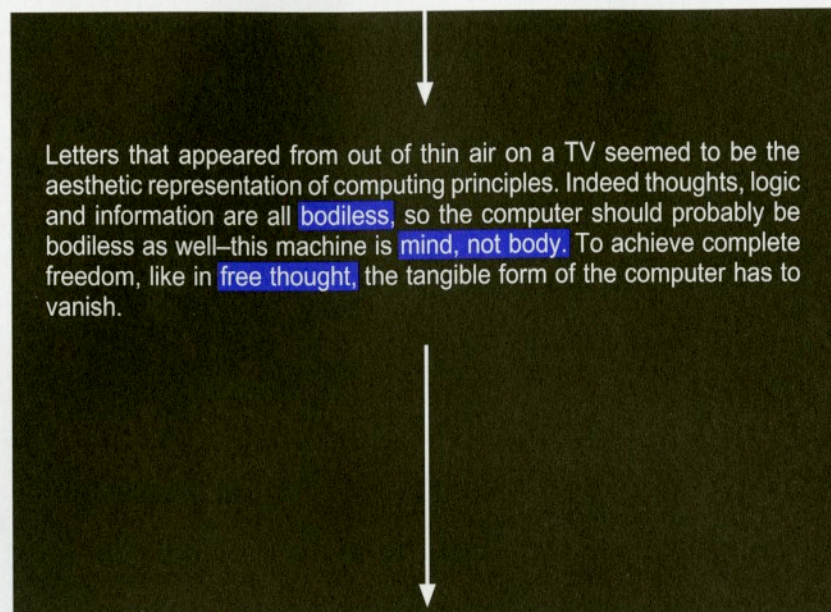
These interface designs are not only driven by technical necessity and engineering decisions, but also by

**fashion**, 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!!

MIGHT CONTAIN ELEMENTS OF ENTERTAINMENT

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.
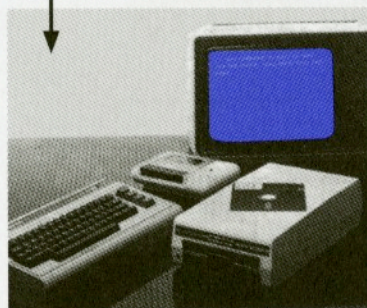

```
On this picture we see a later model
of the same system plus:

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
   power the 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 pro-
cessed, 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 BUT are still nics at Diskette hard 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!!!!

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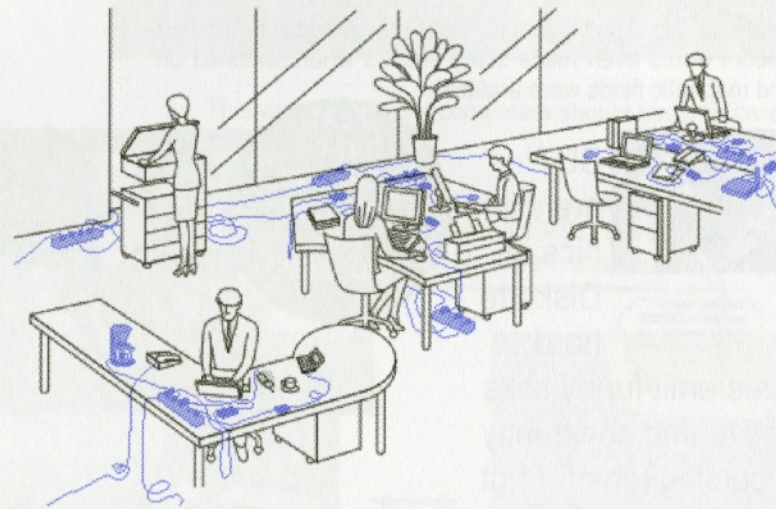
However there is still room for reduction! Pure ideas and the computer are separated by having to press buttons on devices in order to operate the thing! **NAUSEATING!** Shouldn't it be more *intuitive*?

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.
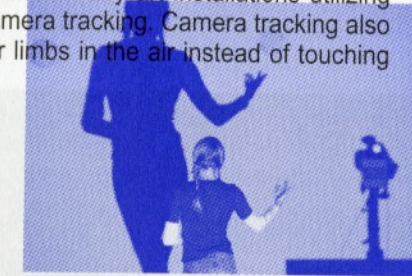
Wonderful,
i am everywhere you are
but never in the way
i keep you connected...
and entertained

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, 2005

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.