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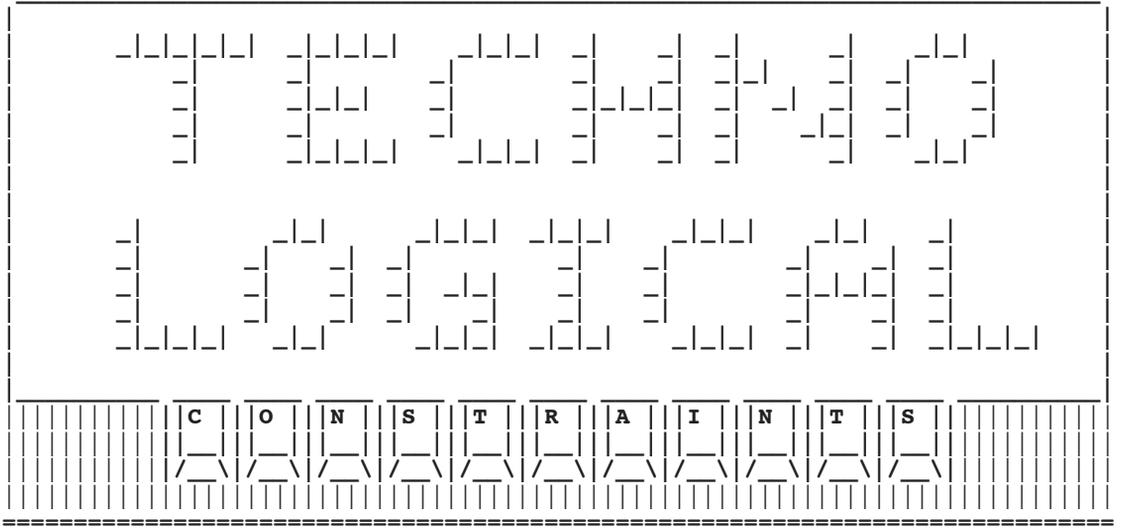
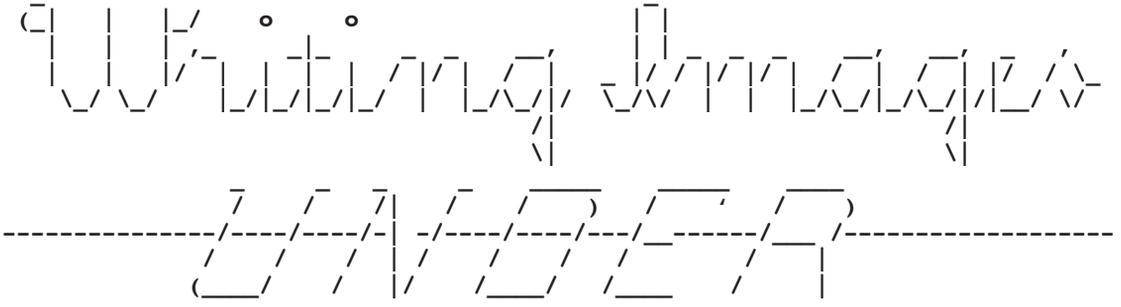
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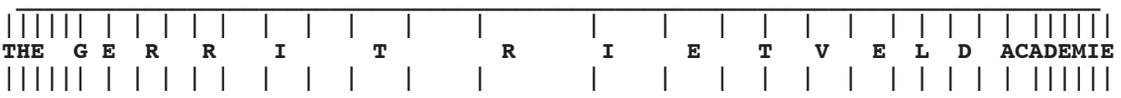
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OK, if you're new to ASCII art, you might want to read some of these chapters. If you're an ASCII art expert, there are some sigs you may have not seen. And if you've seen it all, then pass it along to your friends.

Enjoy!

S1S

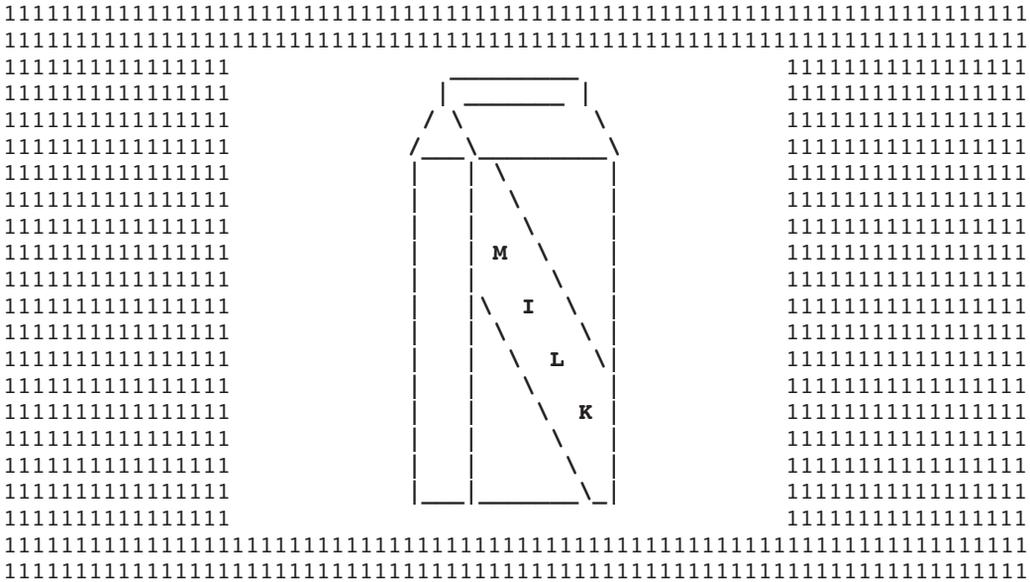
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ASCII art is mostly considered a hobby or folk art form that remediates images, words and objects of everyday life. It isn't exactly something you would easily encounter in an art museum. ASCII art has a lot of stigma attached to it. For some it is impressive because of the craftsmanship and time invested into it. For others it is simply text decoration. ASCII art is a way of writing images under technological constraints. The popularity of text-based communication encouraged the usage of ASCII art. At first glance the limitations is what makes it interesting. But does ASCII art have the potential to be something more functional rather than aesthetical surface play?

With a focus on the borders between visual and written language, this paper investigates in the example of ASCII art how humans handle the computer's keyboard as an instrument encouraging new forms of creativity and popular culture. Since the first time that machines could calculate, people have twisted, modified, hacked and played with them in order to create art. This study will describe the medium specific and historical connections to art, poetry, programming, and literature. It will discuss ASCII art as a movement with possible future potentials.

Text-based art can be defined as pictures or visual images created with letters, numbers and other typographic characters. ASCII pronounced "æski" or "ASS-kee" <sup>[1]</sup> is a technique of composing pictures with basic printable text characters <sup>[2]</sup>. It draws advantage from a limitation of early personal computers which had the inability of graphical presentation <sup>[3]</sup> and only displayed a set of characters in a fixed-width typeface <sup>[4]</sup>. ASCII stands for "American Standard Code for Information Interchange" and has become the standard for representing text in computers and communications equipment. Computers don't speak human languages instead deep down in the heart of the operating system, they speak a language comprised of '0's and '1's. To allow humans to type on a computer, a code was developed to convert human letters into numeric values that the computer could understand. This code is ASCII. With a limited set of characters, the computer keyboard supported the ASCII character set <sup>[5]</sup>, that in most cases is equivalent to the even more universal standard Unicode <sup>[6]</sup>. It disseminated and played a more active role in human communication online due to an enormous growth of text-based communication channels over the Internet and mobile networks, such as instant messenger systems (IM), bulletin boards (BBS), discussion forums (Usenet <sup>[7]</sup>), email and short message services (SMS).

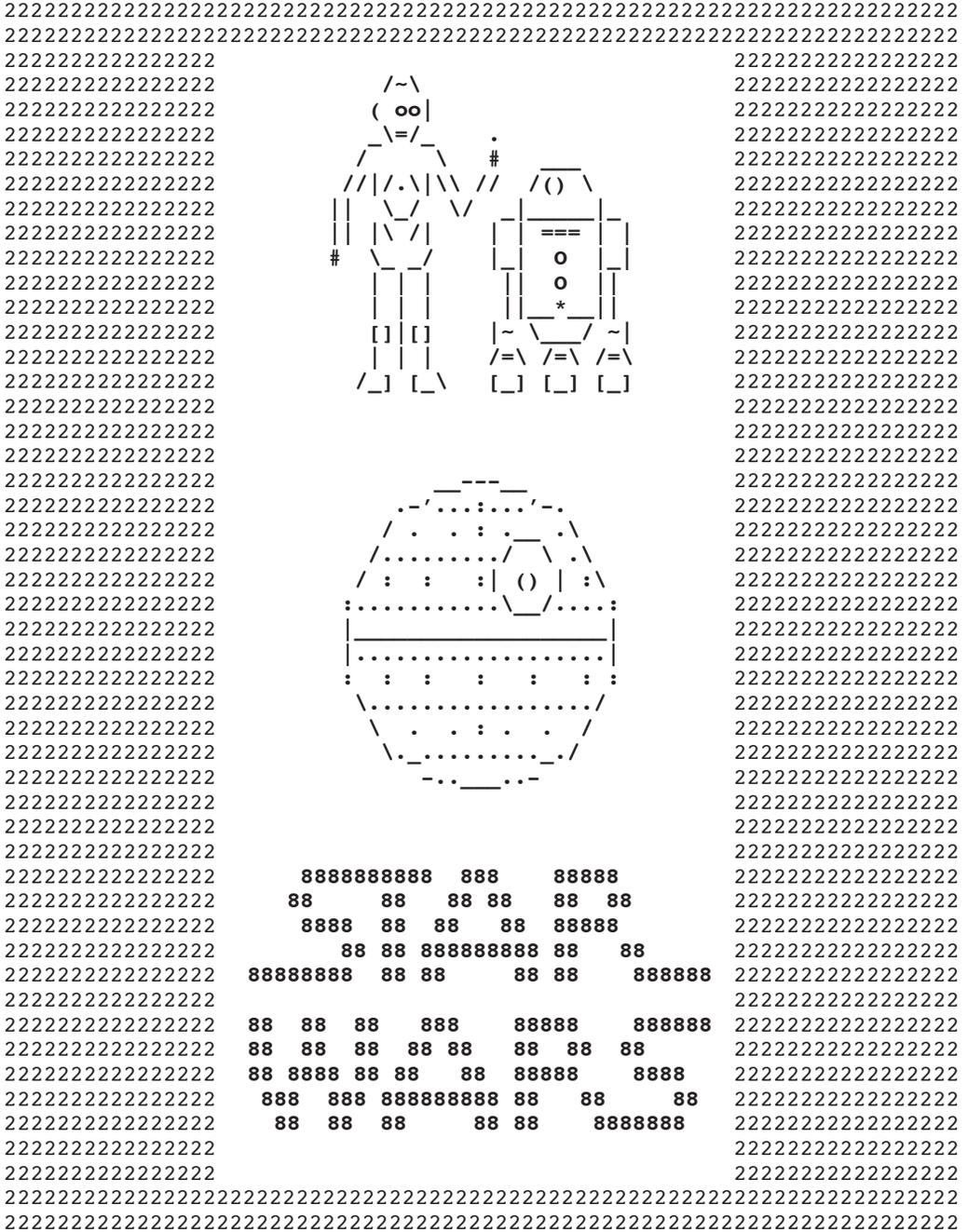
■ Figure 1.



In the beginning of the era 1960 to 1996 hobbyists and mostly male technophiles <sup>[8]</sup> sat down in bedrooms, basements and garages to experiment with early computers such as Commodore and Amiga. They were soaking themselves in the medium, pushing new technologies further than their instrumental capacities for personal and expressive purposes. This included making images with keyboard symbols. The frequently asked question they were encountering was: "What are the new possibilities for representing images on computers?" Textual art was the answer to this question. ASCII is an art form, that widely-used serves the function of re-mediating images, words and objects in Cyberspace. In Elisa Potier's drawing of a milk carton, it is clear how naive, silly and banal these drawings can be (■). A milk carton is a common object and household item that we all instantly recognize. To transcribe this even further "MILK" has been written on the front as a label. Like most ASCII images it

had the tendency to appear conceptually insignificant but at the time technically impressive. As the images increased in numbers so did the use of popular culture within it. An example of this is Simon Jansen's "Star Asciiimation" (\*). Star Asciiimation is a complete copy of Star Wars re-written in text characters also known as text-mode [9].

\* Figure 2.













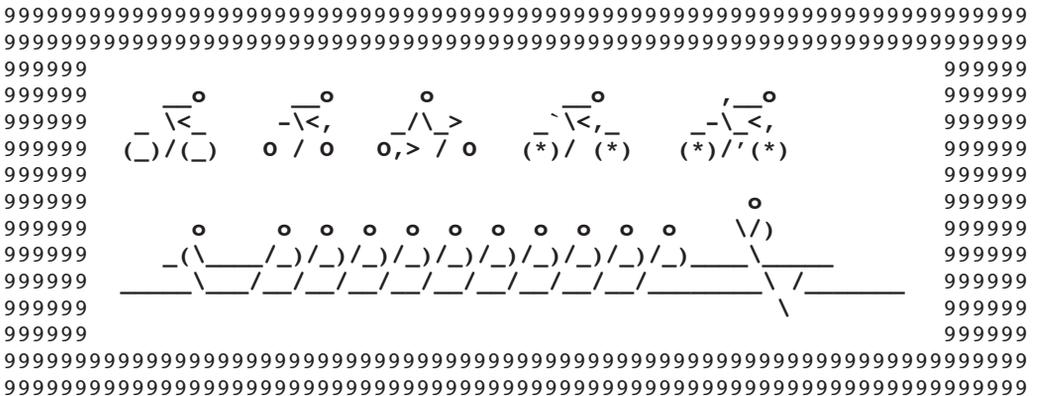
and commas: ',,' or an intensive use of "heavy" characters (x). Grey-scale pictures manage to create the illusion of grey shades by using letters for their light emitting value. The letter's light intensity and appearance of black changes drastically whether the characters appear white on black background or black on white background. To fully understand the thoughts behind the making of these images it is necessary to hear it from the artist themselves. On the website of artist Joan Stark, she writes:

"I do not use a program to create ASCII pictures. Essentially I sit at the keyboard and type. The more I do, the faster and easier it becomes. Some pictures I make come from models (usually one of my kids' toys), pictures in books and magazines, or from my imagination... they get faster to make... They usually take about 15-20 minutes each... a little longer for larger ones, less time for smaller ones. If I can see it in my head beforehand, they go fast. At times, I see lots of things in 'ASCII' - it's at those instances that I have a creative spurt! I think playing around on the keyboard figuring out where the characters fits really helps..." [10]

ASCII art clearly has some limitations, motifs with a high amount of detail are hard to make and to represent nuances of blurriness and softness is hard too. This is why the drawings are usually drawn in a bigger resolution to simplify the material that is depicted. It is important to get a good understanding of how to use the characters in the best way possible. Some drawings are clever representations that are created with minimal means or a just a few symbols in a row. At the core of this approach was the pleasure in accomplishing so much with so little. As ASCII artist Dave Bird puts it, the biggest challenge of all was to create art in just one line that still could be "read":

"The real essence of 'character art' is simply to take the fixed and arbitrary shape of written characters, and make that into a drawing. The highest form of it is not block or shade but 'line', as small as you can possibly get a meaningful drawing from." [11]

♣ Figure 9.



The drawings of people cycling and rowing (♣) are both rendered with limited means. Although less than eleven characters have been used, reused and arranged, the images are still rather true representations

of the actions they depict. They illustrate that with the fewer means the artist is able to render a meaningful drawing, the more pure that drawing becomes and the more impressive it is technically. Upon appreciating the image one can not escape to wonder how the artist came up with this clever, unorthodox arrangement of symbols. It must have required a good strategy to get the proportions correct and to join one line onto another at a place where the join is not neat.

People have always had different interests and ASCII embraced the diversity and the expression of the self by providing the tools for it to blossom. Most ASCII collections are extremely well organized and gives an insight in what was thematized <sup>[12]</sup>. Around the world thousands of hard disks contained millions of drawings, made by more or less anonymous artists. Only a handful of these are likely to be accepted as anything more than that naive and silly text art images. Character art on computers reached its glory days, when it invaded bulletin boards in the late 1970s and early 1980s. During the decade it was the only way to create graphics, but declined drastically in popularity from 1990s and onwards due to graphical browsing and fonts with variable width. Today it remains as a technique of picture making that still occasionally fulfills its purpose to create images in situations that only allow text.

DoD #: 577 Part [3]

Still more left to read...  
...Gee, this is neat..

Miranda July's quirky film "Me and You and Everyone We Know" <sup>[13]</sup> depicts a time around the mid to late 1990s when ASCII art had already become an active ingredient in the human communication. Two children, rather neglected and absent, are in front of a computer in the act of reproducing a drawing (■). One reads aloud the instructions for a drawing of a tiger, while the other fiddles with the keyboard: "space, space, dash..., space.. space, space, dash...". This scene shows the gesture of making ASCII pictures as an art performance of meta-linguistic awareness. To begin with we jump from the text character's semantic meaning as it is being read out to us, to the rendering of the image, which those same characters have formed.

It is interesting that a drawing of a tiger can be compressed to a set of characters written phonetically. It illustrates that all text, whether image or not, involves "sight" and "sound". The conventional symbolic role of words is the representation of certain sounds. We recognize text before us as modular visual units although we sound them, at least in our brains and imagination, when we process, read and write them. The literally presentation of the drawing of the tiger is the determining factor for us to understand the repetitive and crafty making of ASCII drawings. The scene in Miranda July's film emphasizes the labor part of making character art by enhancing the smaller bits that create the whole.

One of the most famous scenes of the film is when an older woman (Nancy) is having cyber sex in an IM conversation with the youngest of the two, without knowing that her partner (Robby) is roughly six years old. Robby types to Nancy in their final conversation before they will meet:

"I'll poop into your butt hole and you'll poop it back into mine, and we'll keep going back and forth with the same poop. Forever. )) <> (".

Their butts are here illustrated pointing towards each other in an ASCII one-line drawing. Robby, takes it further to a more conceptual and symbolic level. Robby's fantasy resembles the medium of instant messaging and online communication in general as a ritualized play. The words from Robby's fantasy are passed back to him verbatim the next time he logs on. He sees the words and when he replies, he himself not only echoes his chat partner's proposals, but literally copies and pastes her text back to her. It is obviously "the same poop going back and forth".

With a goofy Casio-keyboard score Miranda July's film is presenting the act of ASCII image making by today's standards as something rather absurd, outdated with an odd logic. Although the art form appears as simple child's play, it is a craft so complicated and precise, that it needs a manual to be performed fully. Most "readers" (viewers) are of course not consciously aware of this even though they are able to sense that the letters appear in space quite differently from that conveyed by writing.

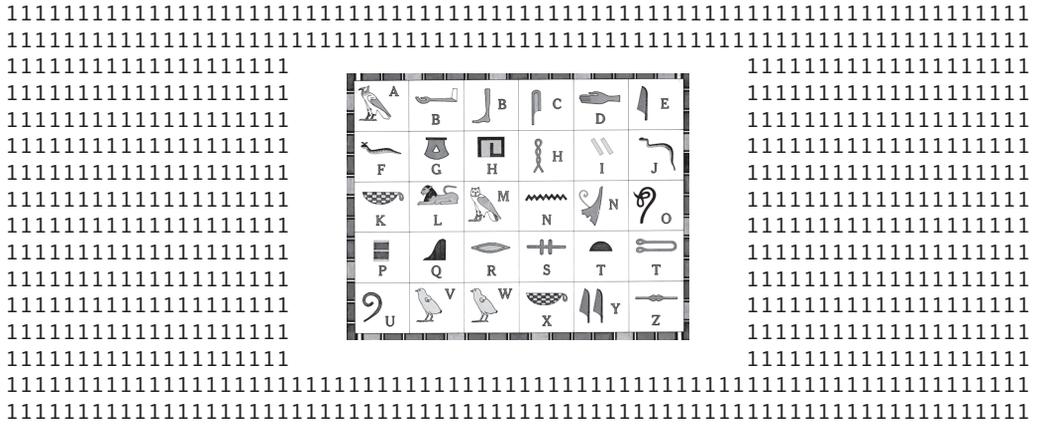
.:\*~\*:. \_.:\*~\*:. \_.:\*~\*:.:



Pictures have previously been made by putting small bits of various materials together. ASCII art can be considered the contemporary expression of what can be characterized as an old phenomenon. It is worth to do studies on the changes in appearance of the written word throughout history in order to clarify the inevitable relation between what is text and what is image.

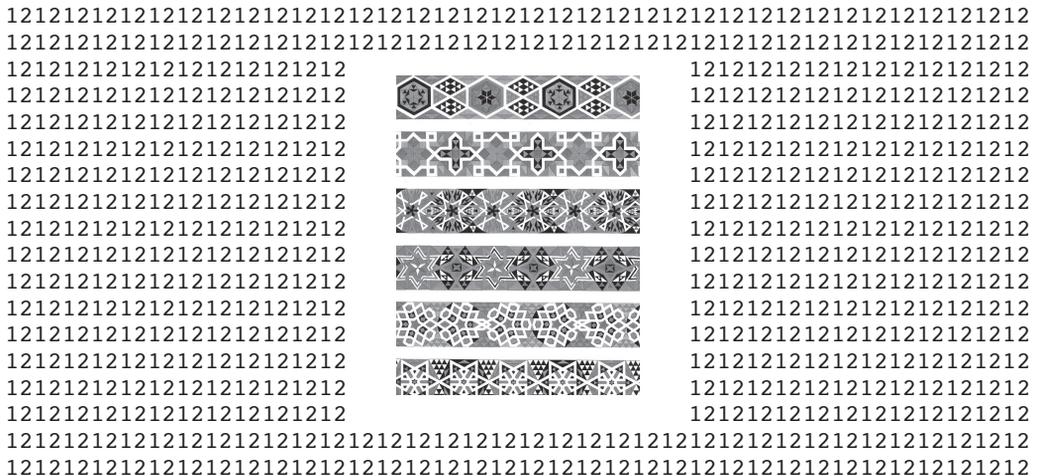
Ironically the first written word did not consist of text, it consisted of pictures which represented ideas and objects, not letters or typographic characters. Note Egyptian hieroglyphs (\*) and the cave drawings of Lascaux as an example of how images were used as means to communicate. Precursors of ASCII art are techniques and methods such as mosaics, patterns, and ornamental manuscripts among others.

\* Figure 11.



Mosaics, one of the earliest antecedents, can be defined as a decoration on a surface (wall, vaults, floors, panels) made up of small colored fragments of glass or stone to form patterns or pictures (☉). Mosaics dates back to 4th century A.D.. The most well-known example of mosaics is the mosaic of Justinian and his followers in San Vitale, Ravenna (↗).

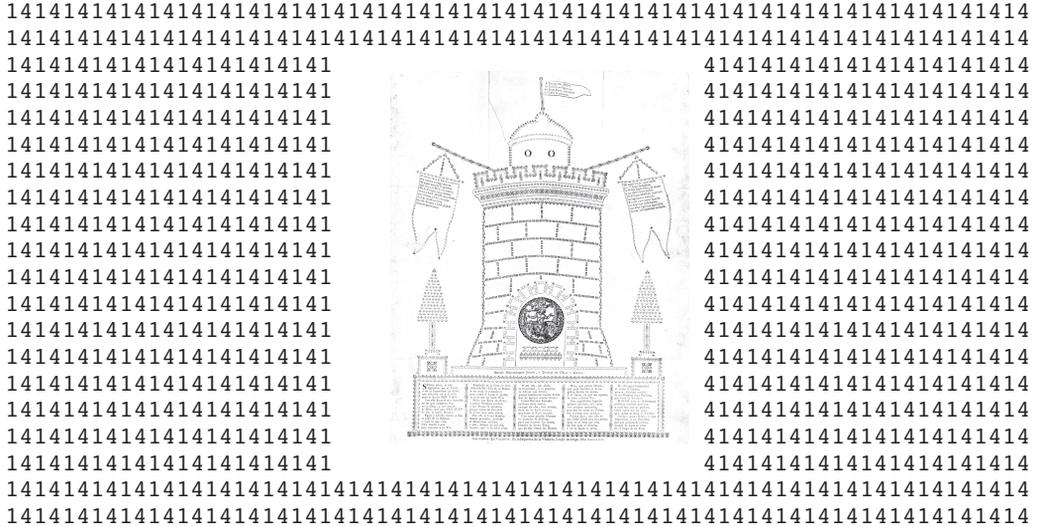
☉ Figure 12.



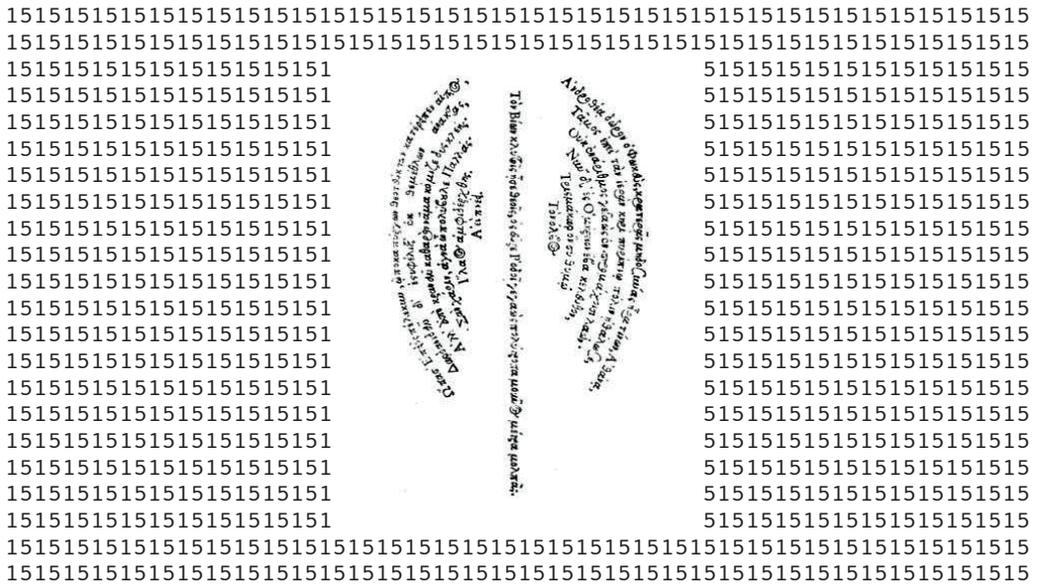


process of arranging, organizing and typesetting text characters than it is "writing" them. The original form of typesetting was to compose type by hand. It consisted in carefully positioning, repositioning and redistributing preformed letter types by hand. It is a way of working quite similar to how Joan Stark describes the making of ASCII images.

⌘ Figure 14.



⌘ Figure 15.



"Pattern poetry" also known as "shaped" or "visual" poetry is a term used to describe poems that are both visual and literary works. It is poetry, to some definitions, from before 1900 <sup>[14]</sup>, in which text and visual form interact or in which, the text fills in the visual form. Visual poetic works appear in the fourth and third centuries

B.C. as Greek manuscripts with memorial texts in the shape of urns and other over imaginative forms that set the base for a tradition of pattern poetry which continued until 1950's "Concrete poetry". As opposed to most ASCII art it presents a direct relationship between the typographical characters, the layout and the image design they create, in addition to being conceptually significant. The earliest surviving examples of visual poetry are ancient Greek Hellenistic poems by Simmias of Rhodes shaped as an egg, a pair of wings and an axe (Υ). These are all examples of an early play with written language. The form that each of these poems take on reflects its contents, the egg celebrates nature, the wings the spiritual nature and the axe honors and commemorate wartime heroism. The poem of the broadaxe is crafted in the shape of the content it presents. The symmetrical blades are not only an illustration they also relate to how the poem is meant to be read. The poem of the axe has a chiasmatic structure, and should be read parallelly from both ends until concluding in the center. It is an early simple version of a kind of interactive writing similar to Dada, that invites the reader to psychically turn the paper or move around it in order to read the text.

A similar more well-known example that can be characterized as pattern or concrete poetry is Lewis Carroll's "Mouse's Tale" from "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" (♠). In this example the text takes on the form of a vertical shape that expresses the idea of a tail of a mouse. As the lines get smaller and smaller, the type is set smaller and smaller. The way the typeface is set and the spatial arrangement of the words on the page, plays just as much of a role in the meaning of the poem as the words themselves. The layout then becomes an illustration of the text itself.

♠ Figure 16.

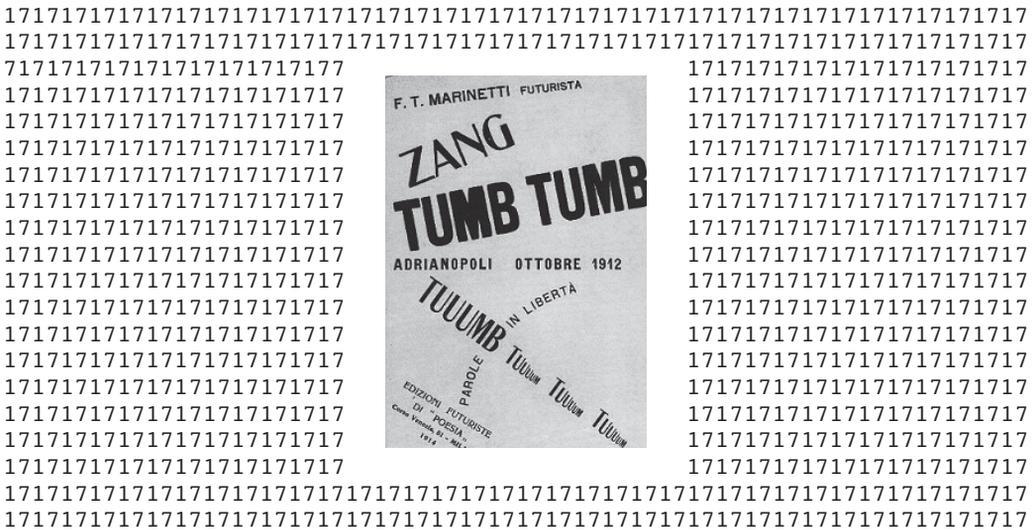


Throughout the 20th century different avant-garde literary and artistic movements made experiments with visual language, poetry and the inter-relationships between the text and the form of the text. The Futurist movement led by Italian Filippo Tomaso Marinetti rejected traditional expressions of art and literature by experimenting with unusual

typography. Marinetti created poems that simultaneously were textual and visual, such as the 1914 work "Zang Tumb Tumb" (⇨). Solely with the use of text to express, it portrays the sensations of artillery assaults on Adrianopoli where Marinetti spent time as correspondent in the Balkan war. The words are playfully set on the page as if the words have been locked up for many years and finally been set free. The nouns are scattered on the page only conveying meaning through their character, size, weight and placement. It is an example of a revolutionary writing style and an utilization of typography as visual elements, that deconstructs traditional linear writing norms.

In the United States Ottmar Mergenthaler invented The Linotype machine (1884), which easily and quickly set typography in lines. In Great Britain Tolbert Lanston invented the Monotype caster (1885), which set characters singly <sup>[15]</sup>. The monotype caster was the key printing technology that the Futurist worshiped. It was a printing method that reflected all the things they admired such as technology, speed, efficiency and noise. It allowed them to deconstruct any harmony of a page.

⇨ Figure 17.



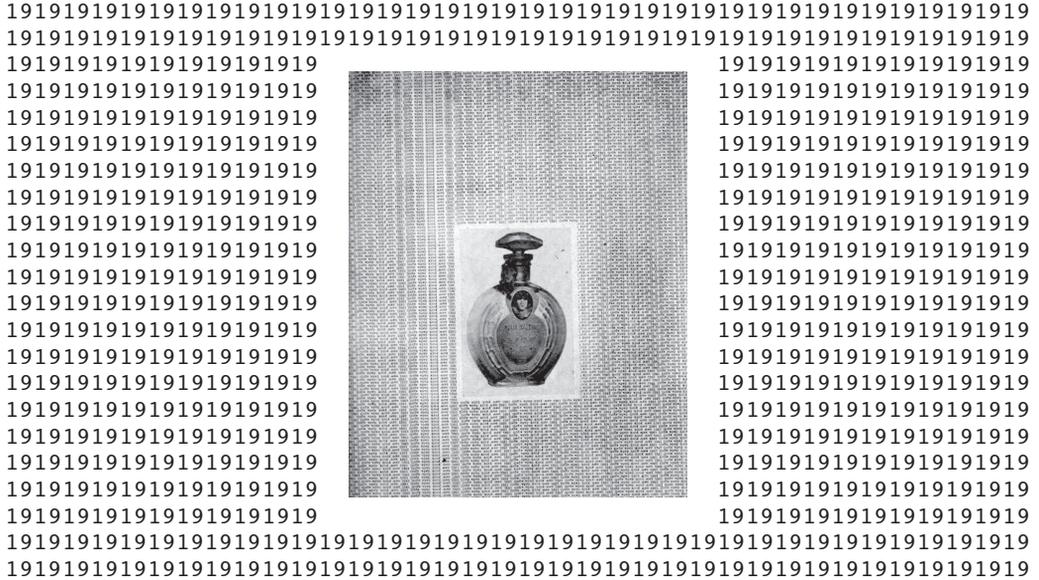
In print making control of position is what matters. When the monotype caster came out, it was able to break free from the limitation of the linotype machine that composed type in individual lines that were cast properly positioned based on a line-height throughout the page. The monotype caster came closer to the way we compose type in today's word-processed computers. In "Concrete Poetry in Digital Media", an essay by Roberto Simanowski, he concludes that:

"The philosophy behind this playing with form, behind this shift towards typography, is to free the word from its pure representational, designational function... while in literature the physicality of language – such as its graphical aspects – normally is neglected and even considered to poison the authority of the text, here the visual form of the word was used as an additional meaning." <sup>[16]</sup>



The American scholar Johanna Drucker states that Dadaism “was concerned with opposing the established social order through subverting the dominant conventions of the rules of representation” [18].

✂ Figure 19.



In perspective, this deconstructive play with the orders of language is not considered to be a specific token for ASCII art but lies however deeply implanted in its DNA. It can be applied as political commentary because of its accessibility and ever presence in written communication online. A most recent example is how text art plays a part in an ongoing “war” against the Internet service YouTube.

📄 Figure 20.



YouTube commenters bring in "Bob" and his text art tanks (♠) to fight the integration of Google Plus. Bob is a Unicode-based copy-pasta of a stick figure, that is encouraging others to copy paste him all over YouTube. The ASCII art here serves its right by having a clear function of portraying a rebellion within the comment section of YouTube, an user input where normally only text is allowed. In a way it is also opposing the established social order and convention for comments on YouTube by being striking, distinctive and "standing out" from the crowd of comments and their (traditional) use of language. Since ASCII characters are integrated in all computers, it will probably always have future potentials to be applied in similar ways whenever suited. In any text field online it can potentially be the ingredient to exaggerate the meaning of something that is already greatly defined.

With the invention of the typewriter [19], text art disseminated to a broader public. The typewriter was not only meant for manuscripts it could also be used as a tool to create visual works of art. In the 1890s a British secretary named Flora Stacey made experiments with moving paper in the typewriter while typing. These were as naive as ASCII drawings and made without any avant-garde aspirations. The earliest example of her work is an image of a butterfly (♠), in which the entire rendering was created with the use of typographic characters such as brackets, hyphens, slashes and several of 'o's.

♠ Figure 21.



Another example (☆) of typewriter art is from an article in a 1960 magazine about a man named Guillermo Mendana Olivera. The article states that Mr. Olivera works as a stenographer by day in Leon, Spain, and as a keyboard [20] artist by night. He used small 'o's and 'x's and periods, dashes, and commas to create his masterpieces. Each piece took him about seventy hours to complete. It clarifies that the process of making text art can be laborious, complicated and repetitive.

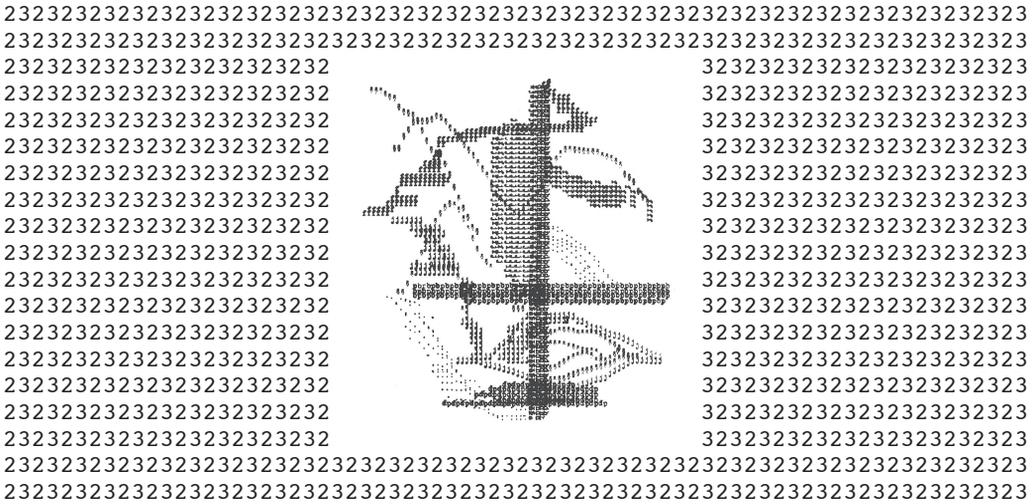
The typewriter lead the way for the modern computer keyboard. ASCII art is most obviously an extension of typewriter art though a typewriter artist can manipulate in ways that the computer artists can't. The

typewriter artist has some flexibility (imperfection if you will) in which he or she can manipulate the sheet of paper in various directions, angles or space the character in any desired way. This is often used to overstrike another character to produce various wanted effects.

☆ Figure 22.



© Figure 23.



The paper can be loosened on the typewriter, and the adjustments of each single period can be made as precisely as the artist has patience for. One is not restricted to the natural spacings of the letters like you usually are on a computer. The typewriter allows some level of arbitrary position of the characters, where as the ASCII canvas is a rigid, rather mechanical grid structure with fixed widths. That makes it easier for the artist to align elements up to one another. Although ASCII art works as a puzzle that can be modified, changed, rearranged in eternity, a typewriter can not undo what has already been done. Though the typewriter is pre-programmed to write in a linear structure



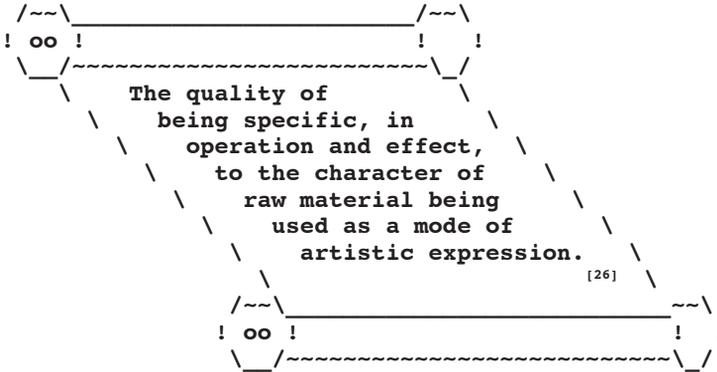






An extension of this play with writing is a drawing of a Christmas tree. The tree is build out of the prominent phrase "Merry Christmas" in several different languages (♥). The typographical arrangement of words is here as important in conveying the intended effect of Christmas as the meaning of the phrase itself. The text, the different languages and how it is set resembles the harmonious spirit of Christmas. It illustrates the philosophy of medium specificity, popularized in the early 20th century by art critic Clement Greenberg and others.

Medium specificity is defined by the University of Chicago's "Theories of Media Glossary" as:



It clarifies that art should be evaluated in relation to how it addresses itself to what are often taken as material properties of a given medium. As mentioned earlier most ASCII art has no verbal meaning even though existing media often was adopted for creative expression and conceptual experimentation. The visual experience compensates the verbal connotations of text and only in some cases the text is significant because it reinforces the purpose or meaning of the image as in concrete poetry. The historical analysis of earlier expressions revealed a natural relationship between the meaning conveyed in the text and the meaning conveyed in the form it fills out. The question arises: why did the original, presumably more "natural" procedure of text art seem less intriguing to the practitioners of ASCII?

If we conclude that the direct medium of ASCII art is the computer, we can find the answer to this. The computer is the physical carrier, in which the information is recorded. When a key is pressed, the physical action is translated into pixels on the screen that form typographic characters. In programming, codes are written into a text editor with the use of the machine and the keyboard. A programmer uses language, letters and numbers as building blocks to write his code. Inherent to the ASCII approach was a realization that inside the machine, the meaning held in languages is not necessarily interpreted, it is processed. Programming languages are not interpreted by the computer as letters and numbers, instead it is processed as a formula for a given result or a rendering of something. Humans and computers both "read" files but in different ways. All information, not just letters, numerals and others symbols but also texts, images and moving images that are displayed on the computer, are converted through standards like ASCII into a format that is more easily understood, transfered and processed by the computer. The purpose of the digital code is then not to represent meaning but to display itself as such, the code therefore becomes the modern equivalent of what is pure visual, hence pure code, data as language, a metalanguage.

Behind the making of for example Simon Jansen's "Star Ascimation" (\*) lies a large amount of manipulation and transformation of the material into a meta-language that can be interpreted as a visual "misprint" of the original, something of "low fidelity" rather than absolute completeness. Even though "Star Ascimation" is subverting the representational characteristics of the original film such as special effects, lighting, color and texture it does not interfere that drastically with the representation of the reality of the film. In other words although re-mediating ASCII images are images manipulated into digital codes, they do not lose their representational qualities, in fact they might gain some visual qualities instead.

In some examples ASCII art manages to withdraw itself from the line based aesthetics of Joan Stark in order to explore the conceptual relationship between text as code and text as image. "Deep ASCII" [27] a work from 1998 by Slovenian digital artist Vuk Cosic explores the relationships between porno and game industries. Cosic developed a method to render and re-create the classic porn movie "Deep Throat" [28] entirely in ASCII. The video is made out of a flow of text characters related to the foundations of digital media and computers. In the same manner as the film "The Matrix" [29] it is green colored text on a black screen. The graphic simplicity reinforces not only the aesthetic quality of the images but also the relation to the history of writing code.

ASCII can conceptually be seen as a way of revealing what is going on within the machine. It is a "secret" language, a set of illeteral codes. One could even argue that an ASCII image is a calculated image, a "purer" form of a digital image that reveals its own intrinsic nature. It is an image reduced to its structure, the black and white skeleton of raw computer data. Hidden ASCII art can be found as images or stylized lettering in the back-end of websites. Viewing the page source of websites of Internet artist Rafaël Rozendaal [30], reveals initials and signatures in ASCII. This signature is placed within the code, appearing in a different syntax color, but on the same textual "level" as the rest of the code. The idea behind this is to place a signature and by doing this also adding human language and expression to the source code of the computer. It then becomes clear that the code was not written by the computer but by a human. ASCII's transfer of attention from semantics to an indecipherable surface spectacle is arguably bound in a play with material that is mainly focused on impressive effects, and showing off technical skills. In that case ASCII is a type of language that celebrates and circulates around itself.

The replicating of pixels with text characters to shape images was a sensation that piqued people's curiosity. People's curiosity within this aesthetic surface play was to see what was promised behind every hyperlink rather than what was to be discovered and read between the lines. ASCII art has a somewhat unique position in between different systems of communication such as programming language (code), human language and visual language (image). The use of language within it is bound in an approach to language similar to the one in programming. This is the reason why ASCII differs from former types of textual image making, where the significance is not only put on the image part but on the text part as well. Hence we can conclude that it is moreover a reaction to the emergence of new technology and fulfills individual's need to show off what is technically possible within the medium rather than what is there to be expressed.

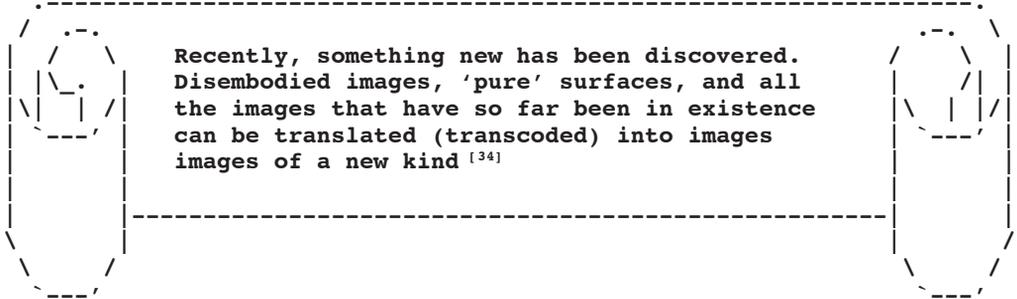
..~\*:\_.\*~\*:\_.\*~\*:

The digital media have had an enormous impact on the visual arts during the past twenty years <sup>[31]</sup>. From primitive expressions such as stick figures in the sand, hieroglyphics and the prehistoric animals in cave drawings, people all over the world have reacted to the world by making images. The utterly most fundamental aim behind creating art was, especially in the past, to convey meaning and express ideas.

In the 21st century there is a desire to go beyond the book, to exceed and poison the established literature and its transparent use of language. This tendency extends the creativity to oppose and expand the rules of conventional written behavior in order to provoke some change in our world. As declared in the historical analysis this desire and transformation of the word is an old phenomenon. The written word renewed itself periodically in former movements most notably Futurism, Dada and Concrete poetry. These are movements with a similar character and rupture of the conventions for written language and can all be traced back to a technological and ideological evolution.

From hand written gestures to the contemporary electronic writing there has been a constant struggle between what is image, the icon, and what is text, the alphabet. There is a clear renegotiation within character art of the relations between writing and orality, manifesting the word as image and saying that the text can be read as an image. This relationship is strikingly different from a more print based logic that we have been taught from writing. In some cases the elements that make up the larger image might interfere before the subject and the image is blurred by an abstract pattern of symbols we read. However this integration of alphabet utilizes text characters and the white space in-between them as representational space that replaces or removes spatial notions of perspective of an image. These are notions and principles of the representation of reality that date back to Renaissance art ensuring a depth in images closer to reality than the one found in ASCII images.

According to philosopher Vilem Flusser <sup>[32]</sup> an image is a surface and its portability is depending on its materiality or the "portable physical bodies to which images can be affixed" <sup>[33]</sup>. Traditional images (e.g. paintings) are mostly physical objects affixed to physical bodies such as a framed canvas. They are objects which have a material limitation and are identical with their displays. They can be shown in only one place at a time and exists in one or a certain number of copies. Though they can be reproduced endlessly, the reproduction is not of the same quality as the original. Unlike cave drawings or mosaics that can not be transported and must be viewed on site, traditional images are mobile images, that can be shown elsewhere only if transported. New media images are however surfaces over which only our eyes can wander:



Text art drawings are pure surfaces. In the same manner as raster images, the information, the text, sits loosely on the surface. Many different participants can cooperate to project different meanings onto the surface, its meaning then becomes ambiguous. It is by contrast to traditional paintings a transmissible universal art form. The very same image can be utilized and displayed on countless different computers, and each one of these screened images, is not a reproduction, but an authentic display of the work. The many limitations of the image-making method brought the advantage that anybody on any computer system could view the artwork the way the artist intended. In fact this made text art obviously very accessible and easy to distribute to a larger audience. Although ASCII drawings were produced and submitted in a dematerialized transmissible digital form, one might still argue that the images were "limited" to the imposition of the computer interface. The screen size of the computer imposes a somehow physical limit to the display of the image, creating a physical frame around the work.

Flusser mentions that traditionally an "image is a message" <sup>[35]</sup> because it has a "sender" – the image creator, and it searches for an "addressee" – the receiver. Similar to the traditional image, every image is dealing with the perspective of the maker of that image. ASCII drawings are literally "messages", since they are displayed and transmitted as numeric computer data in networked communication forms. The addressee or sender can potentially be anyone because of its portability and universal properties. The exclusive "addressee" and "sender" are therefore not present anymore.

The message within the images is usually as universal as the letters it consists out of. They were uploaded to be viewable over the Internet through a web browser which means they rely intrinsically on the Internet to exist. They take advantage of an interactive interface and connectivity to multiple social – and micro cultures. Any individual can mark the text (the image), copy and paste it in their own context and that same image or message would then reappear in a new setting with a new sender and new possible addressees. Entire compositions are portable and can be copied-pasted intactly from one document to another without changing the fundamental text nature of the composition. One could, for example copy an image directly from Joan Stark's site, paste it into a text document and edit it. This obviously led to great immediacy and property issues.

The question is whether or not ASCII art fairly may be considered an art form and if so what ideas are expressed with the images it produces?

Flusser says, that human beings live in a world they do not understand and to make sense of this world, to "decode" its meaning, in order to manipulate it, they use media:

"Images are mediations between the world and human beings. Human beings 'ex-ist', i.e. the world is not immediately accessible to them and therefore images are needed to make it comprehensible." <sup>[36]</sup>

The media can mediate between humans (the subject) and the world (the object), making the world more intelligible. Images make the world meaningful by representing it and elaborating upon it. The images then function as good models of experience and perception by representing human behavior. By doing this humans not only represent the world, but they also attach their own personal interpretation, ideas, expression onto it, obscuring and manipulating it, until they forget that the images to begin with, were representations of the world:

"They are supposed to be maps but they turn into screens: Instead of representing the world, they obscure it until human beings' lives finally become a function of the images they create. Human beings cease to decode the images and instead project them, still encoded, into the world 'out there', which meanwhile itself becomes like an image - a context of scenes, of state of things. This reversal of function of the image can be called 'idolatry'; we can observe the process at work in the present day: The technical images currently all around us are in the process of magically reconstructing our 'reality' and turning it into a 'global image scenario'. Essentially this is a question of 'amnesia'. Human beings forget they created the images in order to orient themselves in the world. Since they are no longer able to decode them, their lives become a function of their own images: Imagination has turned into hallucination." [37]

With this in mind, technical images or new media images differ dramatically from the cave paintings and traditional paintings. The images are no longer adequate representations, instead they are considered projections, programs or screenings that represents engagements with the world. These are symptoms rather than symbols of the world and therefore do not have to be decoded since their significance is automatically reflected on their surface:

"The world reflects the sun's and other rays which are captured by means of optical, chemical and mechanical devices on sensitive surfaces and as a result produce technical image, i.e. they appear to be on the same level of reality as their significance. What one sees on them therefore do not appear to be symbols that one has to decode but symptoms of the world through which, even if indirectly, it is to be perceived." [38]

Text art on computers tends in similar ways as Flusser's "technical image" to absorb other images and texts to make everything become eternally reproducible. The larger part of early practitioners are male [39] amateurs and hobbyist and their artworks are representational, specific, recognizable images of objects and people from the physical world. These are not very "original" nor extremely "personal" but rather stereotypical, male imagery [40] from everyday life and popular culture. They function as good, objective and universal models by trying to stay as true as possible to the objects they depict. For the artists was the believe that the computer world should come as close as possible to the daily visual experience. Its graphic space should be filled with objects that could ultimately deny the mediating presence of the computer interface and bring the humans closer to the technology. These images appear in windows on the computer screen as mediations and projections of the world. They are a sort of personal indication sign, a "concept" of humans interacting, decoding and understanding the world. Beyond any doubt there are many challenges associated with this medium such as trying to remove the stigma that is associated with it and the people who practiced it. Because of it's archetypical depiction and objectification, the expression of subjective ideas is obviously less significant and criticism towards the images is reduced to a minimum. The images are not criticized as images but as ways of looking at the world. Their criticism is not an analysis of their production or their given material properties but an analysis of the world in which they relate to.

To what extend an ASCII artist imagines the image they make "in their heads" is hard to say. Although there is needless to say some level of transfer and encoding happening, the many limitations of the medium makes it hard to represent an image in a way that differs drastically from a general idea of that image or the reality of that image. Images are traditionally meant to make the world accessible and imaginable to humans. As Flusser states, when they serve that function they place themselves between humans and the world. Instead of presenting the world they "re"-present the world. They are meant to be maps but on computers they become screens instead by putting themselves in place of the actual world. The images have then become invisible transmitters: objects instead of subjects. As a result humans live as a function of the images they have produced since they no longer decipher the images, instead they project and transmit them back into the world without having translated them. For the artists it was difficult to avoid challenging and focusing on what was technically possible within the medium. In that sense the function of the images is to liberate the audience by "magic" or technical skills from the necessity of thinking conceptually:

"The function of technical images is to liberate their receivers by magic from the necessity of thinking conceptually, at the same time replacing historical consciousness with a second-order magical consciousness and replacing the ability to think conceptually with a second-order imagination. This is what we mean when we say that technical images displace texts... (Technical images) are not windows but images, i.e. surfaces that translate everything into states of things; like all images, they have a magical effect; and they entice those receiving them to project this undecoded magic onto the world out there. The magical fascination of technical images can be observed all over the place: The way in which they put a magic spell on life, the way in which we experience, know, evaluate and act as a function of these images." [41]

The images magically restructure the reality into scenarios of undecoded images. The world then becomes a "states of things", a context of scenes and situations. Bound in an insensibility, humans seem to forget that they used to produce images as maps in order to find their way in the world and instead now try to find their way in images that are magically appealing. They use images to express themselves instead of making their own images. In other words they no longer decipher their own images, but live in their function. The imagination and translation that took place in earlier image making techniques has then become a hallucination instead.

Flusser's philosophy on new media images is rather related to ASCII images. The function of these images is to screen a meaning that was put into them by the image maker when they were typed. On some level they manage to represent engagements with the world. The images are passed along to other humans within computers screens, fulfilling that exact same meaning and function. An image can appear and re-appear in many different contexts online without having a new function or meaning. Since they depict universal expressions and general ideas, humans would obviously use different artist's drawings instead of making their own in order to express themselves online. One reason for that, is that it is complicated to make your own image and at the same it is easy (free) to copy-paste other people's work. Simultaneously this can be seen as another reason why the images are usually "true-to-the-topic" representations of reality. Millions of drawings were categorized by theme in collections and text files online. That way it became easier

to find the preferred drawing that could illustrate or decorate what the individual wanted to say. The meaning conveyed in those images is more universal than personal and utilizes them as extensions of written language or as means to express oneself visually. The more ordinary people, that can relate and understand an image, the more it is likely to be applied and appreciated among the many.

In that sense ASCII art has become like the language it consists out of. It is something of greater value than simple child's play with typography. Similar to text symbols it has become an element of visual character with a specific universal meaning that can be applied whenever needed as means to express. It has gone from object to subject and has become an active ingredient in written communication. ASCII was to begin with for the few but rapidly fulfilled a general need. In that sense it is a "folk" art form consisting out of typical folk objects that are not made as pure art objects to be purchased by collectors outside of the group but as utilitarian objects for everyday use within the group. In many ways it can be related to tourist art. These objects are made for local consumption and function as souvenirs to tourist, that serve as tokens for interactions. ASCII is also a craft, in the sense that it aims to make or manufacture objects or products with skill and careful attention to detail. They are "crafted" objects because "experts" have used limited capacities resourcefully and imaginatively in compensation for the inadequacies of the computer. "To craft" then is "to care" implying working with a personal engagement bound in personal resources and capacities. It is likely that ASCII art will have potentials for many future artistic, practical, political and corporate uses. Some might describe ASCII art as obsolete, but due to a continuous increase in popularity and power of text-based media such as Twitter and Facebook among others, it is likely that text art will gain more exposure with years to come.

T H A N K S

F O R

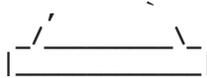
R E A D I N G

THE END

(.....)



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2 0 4 6

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- Note 1. Merriam Webster, dictionary, pronunciation.  
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/>
- Note 2. Wikipedia article on ASCII.  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ASCII>
- Note 3. "A lack of Graphic User Interface".  
An Historical Timeline of Computer Graphics and Animation  
Carlson, Wayne E., 2003, <http://webarchive.org/web/20080310082944/http://design.osu.edu/carlson/history/time-line.html>
- Note 4. "Monospaced, fixed-width fonts are digital typefaces that display the same number of characters per inch, no matter the width of the individual characters. Typical examples are FixedSys, Courier New (PC) and Monaco (Macintosh)".  
Danet 2001, Chapter 5; ASCII Art and Its Antecedents: p. 196.
- Note 5. 95 printable (from a total of 128) characters.  
The ASCII Standard.
- Note 6. The Unicode Standard is a character coding system designed to support the worldwide interchange, processing, and display of the written texts of the diverse languages and technical disciplines of the modern world. In addition, it supports classical and historical texts of many written languages.  
Wikipedia, <http://www.unicode.org>
- Note 7. Usenet was an early non-centralized computer network for the discussion of particular topics and the sharing of files via newsgroups. Two Usenet groups were especially dedicated to sharing ASCII art: "alt.ascii-art" and "rec.arts.ascii", which were active as early as 1993. Google Groups Archive, <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/alt.ascii-art>, Google Groups Archive, <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/rec.arts.ascii>, Faqs.org, <http://www.faqs.org/faqs/usenet/what-is/part1/#b>
- Note 8. Technophilia refers generally to a strong enthusiasm for technology. Especially new technologies such as personal computers, the internet, mobile phones and home cinema:  
Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technophilia>
- Note 9. ASCII traditionally works in text-mode. Text-mode is a computer display mode. Typically, the screen consists of a uniform rectangular grid of character cells, each of which contains one of the characters of a character set. Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Text\\_mode](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Text_mode), Figure 1, ASCII-Scramble, <http://www.roskakori.at/ascii/>
- Note 10. Joan Stark's ASCII Art tutorial, section 1.  
[http://www.ludd.luth.se/~vk/pics/ascii/junkyard/techstuff/tutorials/Joan\\_Stark.html#need](http://www.ludd.luth.se/~vk/pics/ascii/junkyard/techstuff/tutorials/Joan_Stark.html#need)
- Note 11. Comment from by Dave Bird, to Joan Stark's "History of ASCII Art", 27 March 1997.  
<http://www.geocities.com/spunk1111/geobook.html>
- Note 12. Categories from Christopher Johnson's ASCII Art colleciton:  
Animals, Anime And Manga, Art And Design, Books, Cartoons, Comics, Creatures, Events, Food And Drink, Holiday, Logos And Insignias, Movies, Music, Nature, Objects, People,

Places, Plants, Religion, Sports And Activities, Television, Transportation, Video Games.  
<http://www.chris.com/ascii/>

- Note 13. Selected scenes 02:52 – 03:40, 51:00 – 54:00.  
 In relation to the version of the movie found here:  
<http://www.putlocker.com/file/EA7DFDB711CD5083#>,  
 YouTube clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQoJo81lujk>
- Note 14. Higgins, Dick: Pattern Poetry: Guide to an Unknown Literature. State University of New York, 1987.
- Note 15. Letterpresscommons  
<http://letterpresscommons.com/merganthaler-linotype/>
- Note 16. "Concrete Poetry in Digital Media – Its Predecessors, its Presence and its Future", Roberto Simanowski:  
<http://www.dichtung-digital.org/2004/3-Simanowski.htm>
- Note 17. "Concrete Poetry in Digital Media – Its Predecessors, its Presence and its Future", Roberto Simanowski:  
<http://www.dichtung-digital.org/2004/3-Simanowski.htm>
- Note 18. "The Visible Word", Experimental Typography and Modern Art, Drucker, Johanna, 1909-1923, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Note 19. In 1867, Christopher Sholes, Carlos Glidden and Samuel Soule invented the first practical mechanical typewriter machine, Typewriter History, <http://www.ideafinder.com/history/inventions/typrwriter.htm>
- Note 20. Typewriter art was also called keyboard art.  
 "Keyboard Art", Hadley, Paul, Popular, Mechanics, 1948.
- Note 21. Dom Sylvester Houedard (1924 – 1992) British Council,  
<http://collection.britishcouncil.org/collection/artist/5/17691>
- Note 22. Philip Kaulfus, September 13, 1996:  
<http://www.afn.org/~afn39695/kaulfuss.html>
- ASCII Picture Collections curated by Joan Stark & Allen Mullen: <http://www.afn.org/~afn39695/collect.html>
- Christopher Johnson's ASCII Art Collection:  
<http://www.chris.com/ascii/>
- Bob Allison's work:  
<http://www.incredibleart.org/links/ascii/scarecrow.html>
- Note 23. Example of an textfile based ASCII archive.  
<http://www.textfiles.com/art/>
- Note 24. Peculiarly her site is still hosted by one of the first free web hosting services named Geocities.  
<http://www.geocities.com/spunk1111/>, quote: Paragraph 9,  
<http://www.geocities.com/spunk1111/howto.htm#life>
- Note 25. "Alt.Ascii-Art FAQ", section 10  
<http://www.ascii-art.de/ascii/faq.html>

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- Note 26. The University of Chicago's Theories of Media Glossary  
<http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/specificity.htm>
- Note 27. ASCII, animated video,  
 Can be viewed here: <http://www1.zkm.de/~wvdc/ascii/java/>
- Note 28. Deep Throat, directed by Gerard Damiano 1972:  
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0068468/>
- Note 29. The Matrix is a 1999 American–Australian science fiction action film written and directed by The Wachowski Brothers.
- Note 30. Rafaël Rozendaal, Born 1980, Dutch–Brazilian, lives and works in New York. Rafaël Rozendaal is a visual artist who uses the internet as his canvas. <http://newrafael.com>
- Note 31. Mciver Lopes, Dominic: A Philosophy of Computer Art. Routledge, 2010
- Note 32. Vilém Flusser (May 12, 1920 – November 27, 1991). A Czech-born philosopher, writer and journalist.
- Note 33. "Images in the New Media", Flusser, p. 70.
- Note 34. "Images in the New Media", Flusser, p. 70.
- Note 35. "Images in the New Media", Flusser, p. 70.
- Note 36. "Towards a Philosophy of Photography", Flusser, p. 9.
- Note 37. "Towards a Philosophy of Photography", Flusser, p. 10.
- Note 38. "Towards a Philosophy of Photography", Flusser, p. 14–15.
- Note 39. "The introduction of 'soft' or 'feminine' themes such as flowers reflects the arrival of increased numbers of women on the ASCII art scene. Formerly dominated by males, the art had featured stereotypically male imagery such as transportation vehicles, spacships, the weapons of war – tanks, guns, etc., and skull and bones motifs." Danet, Brenda: p. 217.
- Note 40. Examples: famous people, paintings ("Mona Lisa"); bikini models (also known as ASCII porn); weapons of war (soldiers, tanks, guns); skull and bones motifs, buildings (castles are common); machines (typically cars, computers, airplanes, space-ships); animals (teddy bears, dragons, cats); science fiction characters, cartoon characters (Mickey Mouse, The Simpsons, Garfield, etc); children book characters, angels, knights in armour, mermaids, etc.
- Note 41. "Towards a Philosophy of Photography", Flusser, p. 17.

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April 4, 1991 through May 25, 1991.  
<http://www.afn.org/~afn39695/potier.html>
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Simon, 1997. <http://www.asciimation.co.nz>
  - † 3 Dead by Dawn, cross stitch design, Embroidery,  
<http://raquelmeyers.com/text-mode/?p=6896>
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Danet, Brenda, Cyperplay: p. 211.
  - ☰ 5 The wikipedia entry on ASCII Art  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ascii\\_art#Types\\_and\\_styles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ascii_art#Types_and_styles))
  - ∅ 6 ASCII grey-scale, Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci  
[http://www.heartnsoul.com/ascii\\_art/mona\\_lisa\\_ascii.htm](http://www.heartnsoul.com/ascii_art/mona_lisa_ascii.htm)
  - 🦁 7 Joan Stark's lions: 11/96, ASCII drawing  
<http://www.geocities.com/spunk1111/zoo.htm>
  - X 8 Excerpts from "Rowan Crawford's ASCII Art Tutorial"  
Including Jorn Barger's light value scale.  
<http://www.chris.com/ascii/index.php?page=rowan-crawford>
  - † 9 ASCII miniatures, ASCII Art.  
Brenda Danet, Cyperplay: p. 218.
  - 10 ASCII Art by Maija Haavisto.  
Art Department: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0415978/combined>  
<http://www.davisart.com/Portal/SchoolArts/ASCII.htm>  
<http://www.retrojunkie.com/asciiart/animals/tigers.htm>
  - \* 11 Table of hieroglyphs with their meaning.  
[http://students.um.edu.mt/sabe0012/egypt\\_a\\_culture.htm](http://students.um.edu.mt/sabe0012/egypt_a_culture.htm)
  - 🏞 12 Mosaic border designs from a Sicilian church,  
produced in the 12th century. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/dis-order-ed/5516615485/in/set-72157625835494675>
  - ↗ 13 Justinian and his followers in San Vitale, Ravenna,  
A 547 A.D. A colorful and detailed example of Mosaics  
in a Byzantine style.
  - ☪ 14 Broadside, printed in Valencia, 1760s and 1770s. Courtesy of  
the Updike Collection, "Notes For Bibliophiles,  
Blog of the Providence Public Library Special Collections".  
<http://pplspcoll.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/ornaments2.jpg>
  - γ 15 Simmias of Rhodes, "The Axe", hellenistic Greek poem, ca.  
325 BC. [http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-nCm150RovA8/UNykepQUITI/AAAAAAAAAjs8/DR\\_bvOanitc/s1600/Simmias+de+Rodas.jpg](http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-nCm150RovA8/UNykepQUITI/AAAAAAAAAjs8/DR_bvOanitc/s1600/Simmias+de+Rodas.jpg)
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"Alice in Wonderland", Carroll, Lewis, 1865.  
<http://www.lewis Carroll.org/tag/the-mouses-tale/>
  - ➡ 17 "Zang Tumb Tumb", Tommaso Marinetti, Filippo, 1914.  
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- 🍏 18 "Apfel", Döhl, Reinhard, 1965.  
<http://www.reinhard-doehl.de>
- 🔗 19 New York Dada, cover, with Marcel Duchamp's readymade of a bottle of Belle Haleine perfume, April 1921.  
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- 📸 20 Screenshot of YouTube comment section, The Washington Post, Peterson, Andrea, November 14 2013.  
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<http://www.geocities.com/spunk1111/history.html>
- ☆ 22 Article on Guillermo Mendana Olivera, unnamed magazine, 1960. Originally posted on Usenet.  
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- 🕒 23 Typewriter Art, Werkman, Hendrik Nicolaas (H.N. Werkman 29 April 1882 – 10 April 1945), Dutch artist, typographer and printer.  
<http://www.ubuweb.com/vp/Werkman.html>
- 🎭 24 "Figuur", Sylvester Houédard, Dom, 1964  
Courtesy Ruth & Marvin Sackner – Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.
- 🌂 25 "Il Pleut", Apollinaire, Guillaume (1880 - 1918).  
From "Calligrammes – Poèmes de la paix et de la guerre", in Ondes, published 1918.  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/43383292@N00/513479139/>
- 👁 26 Portrait of John F. Kennedy, RTTY Art, Larsson, Ralph.  
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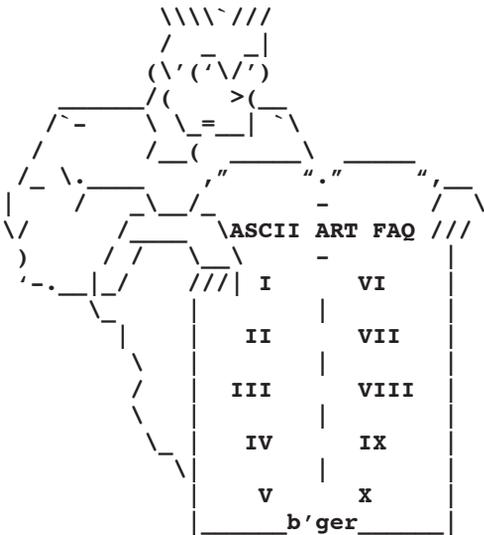
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- www Futurism use of typography  
<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/776445?uid=-3738736&uid=2&uid=4&sid=21103116067293>
- www Linotype invention  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottmar\\_Mergenthaler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottmar_Mergenthaler)
- www Simmias of Rhodes  
<http://www.dankoster.com/visualpoetry/I/01.htm>
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- www Byzantine Art, San Vitale, Ravenna  
<http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/byzantine-justinian.html>
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[theopenacademy.com/content/lecture-5-justinian-and-his-attendants-6th-century-ravenna](http://theopenacademy.com/content/lecture-5-justinian-and-his-attendants-6th-century-ravenna)
- www "DiamonDie's ASCII art tutorial"  
[http://www.ludd.luth.se/~vk/q/asciitutorials/Maija\\_Haavisto.html](http://www.ludd.luth.se/~vk/q/asciitutorials/Maija_Haavisto.html)
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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/\\$](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/$)
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THE ASCII ART FAQ TEN COMMANDMENTS



1. Thou shalt read the FAQ.
2. Thou shalt not remove the initials from any ASCII art.
3. Thou shalt not claim ownership of someone else's ASCII art.
4. Thou shalt read the FAQ.
5. Thou shalt ask permission before using someone else's ASCII art.
6. Thou shalt not sell someone else's ASCII art.
7. Thou shalt read the darn FAQ.
8. Thou shalt not post someone else's ASCII art without making clear that you didn't make it.
9. Thou shalt not assume that ASCII art isn't art at all.
10. Thou shalt read the FAQing FAQ.

