THE LIFE AND DEATH OF
AN INTERNET ONION

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Prompt

In her piece "A drop of love in the cloud" (2018), artist Fei Liu writes about the like/heart button as a flattening affordance of giving affirmation and love. The text-editor provides a much more expressive input.

But even people who can't communicate well because of language barriers can express love through actions, like cooking food. Can we create other "love inputs" that might allow us to "reach across the chasm of a seamless signal"?

What is expressing "real" love or affirmation about? Is it about effort, thoughtfulness, generosity, something else? What might a thoughtful or generous interface feel or behave like?

This is the first layer in the internet onion. Press PEEL or your down-arrow key to uncover the layer below.

PEEL
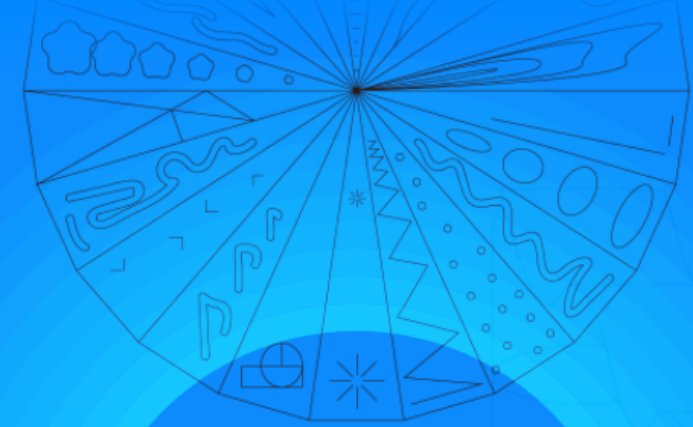
Tommy Huang

Anna Sagström

Proposals for loving interfaces.

A website that moves closer.

A website that breathes.

A website with a warm temperature, that beams through your fingers.

A website with soft buttons made of clay.

A website with the consistency of a stress relief ball.

A website with a cursor that sends more love the longer you hold it down.

A website that sends messages before they are fully written.

PEEL

INDEX

Laurel Schwulst

Minhwan Kim

In the winter of that year, Helsinki's sun stayed up six more hours than in Seoul. I usually had early dinner at around 5 p.m., and after I finished my meal and washed the dishes, I would fall deep into a loneliness that came from nowhere.

Just past 6 p.m. in Helsinki and just past midnight in Seoul.
Two places in different dates and times.

I thought to myself that all the people I loved would already be asleep. And then I deluded myself into believing that I'm all alone in this world. My town Maininkitie 12, where not a single street lamp was lit, seemed to assure my loneliness in the jet-black darkness.

PEEL

Minhwan Kim

Milo Bonacci

One defining difference between digital love and "real" love, I think, is that there are so many more dimensions and nuances in the actual world, whereas in the digital realm these are distilled down to a binary 'yes/no' or some variation thereof. There's a certain vulnerability to expressing love in the real world— however small a gesture it might seem—that is largely absent from the digital world. A reaction to or an expression of love might occur in any number of little ways, to which the responses of others leaves us out on a limb, so to speak. Hearts and thumbs-ups are so easily dispensed that they hardly elicit any sort of reciprocation from others. There are many reasons— simple, complex and varied— for ❤️ing something online. And because of that overly-simplified binary they are all equated the same. For perhaps the more extroverted

PEEL

WHAT IS THE INTERNET ONION?

The "internet onion" is a perennial website anthology first launched on July 23, 2020 about the possibility of love online.

It is orchestrated by Laurel Schwulst, an artist, designer, and educator interested in the poetic potential of the web.

It began in Laurel's interactive design class at Yale* with the following prompt:

What is expressing "real" love or affirmation about? Is it about effort, thoughtfulness, generosity, something else? What might a thoughtful or generous interface feel or behave like?

The onion theme was decided by the class, collectively. Like love, onions absorb and magnify the time and energy you put in. Both have incredible healing properties.

* https://veryinteractive.net/2019-spring-yale

DESIGNING FOR DECAY

Last summer, it lived for 5 weeks — the average lifespan of a non-refrigerated onion. Starting late August, it began a gradual process of decay. It has been dormant / "dead" since and will re-emerge, beginning its second life late July 2021...

Life
July 23 – Aug 27 (5 weeks)

Death
Aug 28 – July 22 (11.75 months)

DESIGNING FOR DECAY

Decaying is a gradual process
https://fruitful.school/blog/2020-09-17.html
Designing for Decay by Laurel Schwulst

The sensibility of worlding comes alive in *The Life and Death of an Internet Onion*. Structured as a webzine anthology, the site decays after a five week period—the average shelf life of a non-refrigerated onion. Both volatile and regenerative, the "perennial" publication is imagined to return each Spring. Rather than saving and preserving what otherwise might be lost, the publication invites visitors to move through states of change.

https://www.thealliance.media/what-if-we-let-archives-die/
What if we let archives die? by Cori Olinghouse

Engaging the web as a sensuous medium is a practice of "worlding" — a term that anthropologist Kathleen Stewart writes is an "intimate, compositional process of dwelling in spaces that bears, gestures, gestates, worlds. Here, things matter not because of how they are represented but because they have qualities, rhythms, forces, relations, and movements." Temporalities animate life. Marked by endless scrolling, so much of the internet feels like "dead space" with no sense of time passing. Similarly, archives can also feel like places where things go to die.

https://www.thealliance.media/what-if-we-let-archives-die/
What if we let archives die? by Cori Olinghouse

The internet onion is an "oral history of the internet." This type of unique personal history and tacit knowledge about the internet can't easily be understood from reading books about the internet or browsing archive.org's Wayback Machine, for example. In a related "oral history of the internet" project I did, curator Gene McHugh reflected, "The internet is so focused on the present that it's difficult to recall what it looked like even a few years ago, a few months ago. It's like remembering a dream, it doesn't seem to have actually happened despite the fact that you experienced it."

https://www.are.na/blog/onion-and-rocks
*Onion and Rocks* by Laurel Schwulst

SUPPORT THE 2021 INTERNET ONION

If you support, we're happy to list your company's name in the "Supporters" area on the about page.

Benefits of supporting:

• Directly contribute towards the growth of a community of writers, artists, thinkers working on a more hospitable, human, and poetic internet

• Know you're encouraging a more humane internet — one that is lifelike, changing with the seasons and not always up 24/7.

• Further design thinking around considering the death (subtraction) of a project as just as important as the life (addition, growth).

Supporting the internet onion allows us to pay all independent contributors, and extra for those with special roles:

• illustrator
• proofreader / copy editor
• sound designer
• metadata designer
• web designer
• voice
• conductor
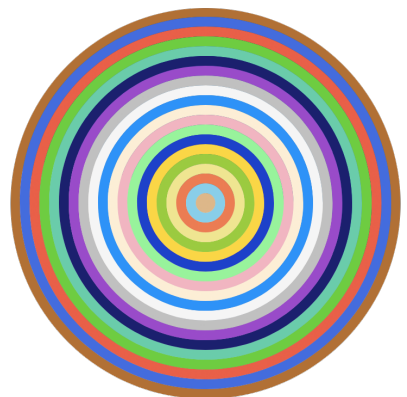
2021 ONION
WITH YOUR SUPPORT
WILL LIVE AGAIN ON JULY 23, 2021