

[UPDATE]

News and Articles

Arab Spring Tide: Will the Arab risings yield democracy, dictatorship or disorder? Seminar will take place Thursday, June 16, 2011 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM CST register here:

<https://www2.gotomeeting.com/register/535807594>

Online journalism: why articles still matter.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2011/jun/13/online-journalism-articles>

Nostalgia of a technological simpler past, technostalgia: <http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/internet/article2073723.ece>

TED2012 fellowship applications now open:

<http://blog.ted.com/2011/06/13/ted2012-fellows-applications-now-open/>

U.N. Report Declares Internet Access a Human Right:

<http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2011/06/internet-a-human-right/>

Call for Participation: Special Blog Series on Agriculture, ICTs and Youth <http://www.e-agriculture.org/en/news/call-participation-special-blog-series-agriculture-icts-and-youth>

The Trouble With the Echo Chamber Online:

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/29/technology/29stream.html?_r=2

The cult of the like:

<http://lynettecarpio.wordpress.com/2011/06/01/the-cult-of-like/>



The Digital Dinosaurs

Welcome to this edition of Of "Links in the Chain". The theme is Digital Dinosaurs, an exploration of the non-digital by those who are digital. The featured story of this issue is a monologue by Nilofar which explores the sensual aspects of humans and their objects of writing. Not only writing instruments, but the paper, the surface, the act of writing itself and their associated memories and feelings are dissected in an almost compulsive way to show the romantic relationship that we construct with the experience of writing. Writing as you know is a top candidate for the title of those key human activities which the digital world is making obsolete or reducing drastically in scope and usage.

One of the comics on this issue touches on the same idea. So many activities we used to be part of are now either partially or fully mediated by the digital world. Does that fact elevate the computer to a position where it stands in the center of our lives? As a Digital Native, are there areas of your life which the digital hasn't touched? Do any of you still write by hand periodically? I know my own handwriting is terrible, after years of little to no use. Do you specifically keep some aspects of yourself distanced from the digital? Will the internet and other technologies continue to engulf everything around them?

You will notice that the Facebook group has been very alive with conversations, links, discussions and more. We have tried to capture some of that goody goodness in the newsletter, but the best way to experience it is to be a part of it yourself.

Till next time,

Samuel



Buzz

Around Town

Have you heard of 'citizen science'?

Nilofar, Noopur and Sibley talk about projects which crowd source their research.

Crowd source digital story telling at its most chaotic and dispersed: Check out the cognitive adventures of Mrs. Hal.

Are Hacktivist who use technology to de-stabilize the state giving activists a bad name? Nishant, Ajay, Simeon and Nilofar talk about the use of technology and the ethics behind it.

Citizen journalism, reporting and the need for articles:

Discussion on the uses of participatory media by Nilofar, Maureen, Albert, Paida, Simeon and Rotimi.

Define yourself using 6 words, harder than it looks!

What should people never, ever do when online, especially on social networks?

Trail of paper cuts: Mapping paper memories



Nilofar Shamim Ansher

I share a *relationship* with words. I tend to romanticize those roundels and angles, gifted to the reader in me, by the story-tellers. For me, an untold story and an unopened book reek of uncut onions; each eager for the chore of unpeeling the delights within and tearing the eyes up with thrills no astrologer can predict. I recall the stories recited by my father at bedtime when I was three, and four, and five, and six (and further ahead), remembered not through sounds or images, but by the memory of words stepping on the grooves of my imagination, kind of like ink doing a Rorschach on a bubble of water – slow-motion burst, lazy snake undulating, and more of that suspense that shushes you into silence just so that you don't miss out on the turning point, the twist in the tale. Yes, fathers know how to keep your breath squeezed in!

A love-affair with paper and words means that an infatuation with writing instruments cannot be far behind. I was more favorable to the pencils and fountain pen varieties made in Japan, than the grace of a Made-In-India ballpoint. Scribble-Jot-Doodle-Doodle-Jot-Scribble-Jot was the Morse-Code tattooed on textbook margins, notebook covers, books loaned from the libraries and the glossy

Sunday Times newspaper. Here, let me make careful use of the word *copious*, to refer to my jottings on the last two pages of several storybooks (why call it fiction when they only contain stories) – blankness ripening towards black rot with every loop and dash and dotted i's of my childish scrawl. Was never any good at drawing you see, so words comforted me, and plied me with the bribe of glory in the years ahead.

A decade-and-more hence, I flip through my old textbooks, saved by the virtue of a tradition that prides itself on hoarding anything dated *yesterday*. Pencils have left smudges, and the inks, consistent stains that leak beyond the confines of my words. This is whom age resembles, a smudged and blotted nostalgia whose value lies in decay. Note the smells of oldness; the rigors of crushed tree-wood, industrial chemicals, press machines and dust-wrought ink and graphite mingled with the sweat from my wrist and palm, the saliva that tipped the pen top and beat a staccato rhythm on paper when words took their time to mouth. They all simmer within these pages. And the act leaves me no choice but to exhibit nostalgia. Again and again as the pages flip and my fingers wait to discover old phone numbers, hearts looping the names of crushes, X's and O's, and numbers that fit into these three forward slashes /// each slot inked with the days, months and years that

committed my words to their hearts.

I have more than 200 books, collected since childhood and saved from the ruthless family's intentions of selling them off as paper junk. I simply cite sentiments as reason enough to save the oldies. A new bamboo bookstand stands-in as their old-age home and I revisit them once a week, my index finger gliding through their spines (and I am sure, causing a tingle of excitement). The yellowed pages now stock a menagerie of silverfish and black-winged beings, too tiny to be labeled insects. However, the prospect of re-reading no longer spells a.n.t.i.c.i.p.a.t.i.o.n. and I am left feeling cheated by the astrologer's prediction of "thrills ahead". I still collect bookmarks but promptly forget to use them: old habits die hard and Miss Dog-Ears and me go back a long way.

Today, when I browse new titles in a bookstore, I feel eager to consume the text. The text, and not the story. A sense of leisure has been lost while I groped and then became adept at navigating digital texts. Book reading routines are eulogized thusly: lie on a bed, lean against mile-high-stacked pillows, foot crossed at the junction, and two hands propping the book on the belly, the right index finger ever eager to turn the page (never, never used a speck of saliva to turn pages). Reading on digital devices meant a slouched back resting on the seat of a swivel chair that aided in the fidgety flights of tapping foots, clicking finger (on mouse) and upper body perpetually swinging in the pendulum motion of forward-backward-forward-back depending upon the size of the text | image being scrolled and enlarged and reloaded on screen. I know you are imagining this.

I am used to accessing physical markers of the past – letters written to Santa Claus, postcards, stamps album, old books, Nat Geo magazines 20 years old, pen-pal letters from Botswana and Germany – stored in cupboards for those times when you can sit cross-legged on the floor, with a raggedy cloth nearby to wipe away the cobwebs, and spread out all your memories in circular chaos around you. No, I shall resist the urge



to turn this into a sordid rant against the wreckage wrought about by the wired world. Urban legend maintains that it's still about storytelling; nothing has changed, except the medium. Reminds me of this line I *tweeted* (what's the time frame it takes to morph a noun into a very form?) a few cyber-eons ago: do iPad haters / tech naysayers want their stories and news digests delivered to their doorsteps on papyrus and palm leaves, as was the practice in ancient Egypt and India, respectively? Could there be other forms of nostalgia that are birthed via digitized platforms? Are archives, chat transcripts and folders a time-machine into missed remembrances?

Humor me. I have this terrifying thought that the screen-age has upside-downed the way we write. I no longer *see* what I write. My eyes are on the screen as my fingers do the *seeing* and *writing* for me. It's disconcerting to have my eyes edit words "as" "they" "begin" "appearing" "on" "screen", whereas, on paper, it was my hands that steadily measured the slants, dips and ellipsis that would christen each line. This Word Document doesn't get closure even after my

Credit: <http://virtualsnipers.co.in>

fingers tap on Alt+F4; it waits until the next time I re-open it to realign the indents, hold trials for Calibri-Times New Roman-Bookman Old Style-Verdana-Oh-Calibri it is then, and play around with the margins (all in the name of aesthetics and options).

Guess you could tell by now that I romanticize the idea of history, an idea I find uncomfortable disassociating from paper. I try eliciting the sound-action of crumpling up paper from this screen and it mocks me with its white-lit ennui. How many movie memories are made great with the idea of the writer chipping away at his masterpiece one crumpled piece of paper after the other? Today, the memories of crisp white paper and its furlong sounds are evoked more in the ritual anticipation of buying a new notepad – which don't evoke the same white-noise as that of a school-book or single-lined journal. What haunts me today are the ghost-memories of paper cuts on my right index finger. While my fingers whisper thanks to the cushioned comfort of the keyboard, my mind rebels and waits to feel the slice of a phantom paper cut. All in the name of romancing paper.

Next Issue: July 1, 2011

Please send your contributions to:
nilofar.ansh@gmail.com or i@albertmucunguzi.com

Study: Ages of social network users

How old is the average Twitter or Facebook user? What about all the other social network sites, like MySpace, LinkedIn, and so on? How is age distributed across the millions and millions of social network users out there?

To find out, Royal Pingdom (<http://royal.pingdom.com/2010/02/16/study-ages-of-social-network-users/>) pulled together age statistics for 19 different social network sites, and crunched the numbers.



