Browsers and Browsers
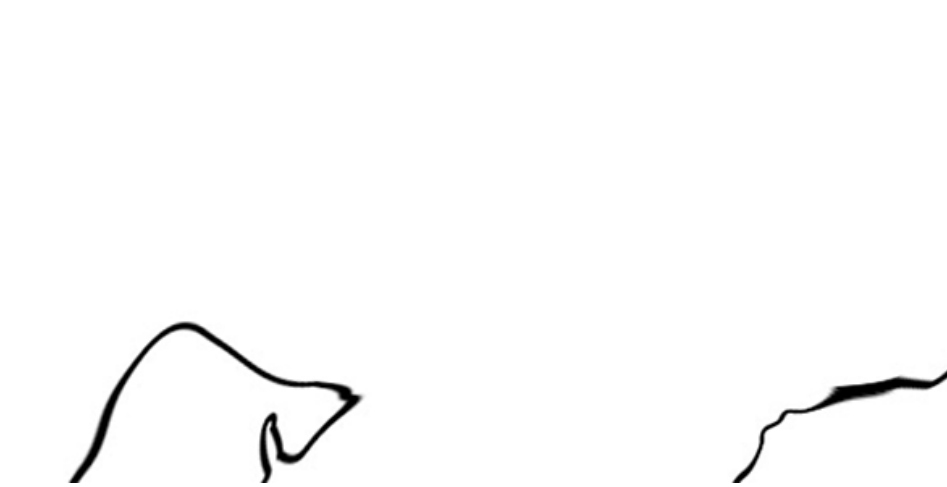
Abstract:

How can similarities and differences between human and digital browsers, bring new perspectives to our lives?
How can we define the gesture of 'browsing' based on the idea of 'non-place' in both physical and digital space?

Browsers and Browsers(2023) is a publication and website, referencing the theory '**non-place**' presented by **Marc Augé**(Auge, 2008). Non-place represents places that cannot be defined as relational, historical, or concerned with identity. Based on this idea, the project defines ourselves who live both in the real and digital places in the 21st century as 'browsers'. By depicting a browsing experience in real life as words in publication, and translating this **word poetry** into code, the website presents a new type of poetry, '**Coding Poetry**', which in turn generates a visual experience in the website. Here, reading the publication and interacting with the website is the same as browsing 'non-places' in a different form and medium. Ultimately, **the final form of the experimental website** questions what is the non-place both in physical and digital spaces. And by blurring the border between real and digital places, it leads the audience to discover that we are all 'browsers' and that it could be the representative aspect of ourselves in contemporary life.

We are constantly recommended to separate the physical and digital life. However, those boundaries have already collapsed. Embracing this fact and contemplating how we can coexist within it is a necessary step to the next stage. In terms of this perspective, the project aims to reframe fleeting moments in both the physical and digital non-places, providing an immersive experience to the audience.
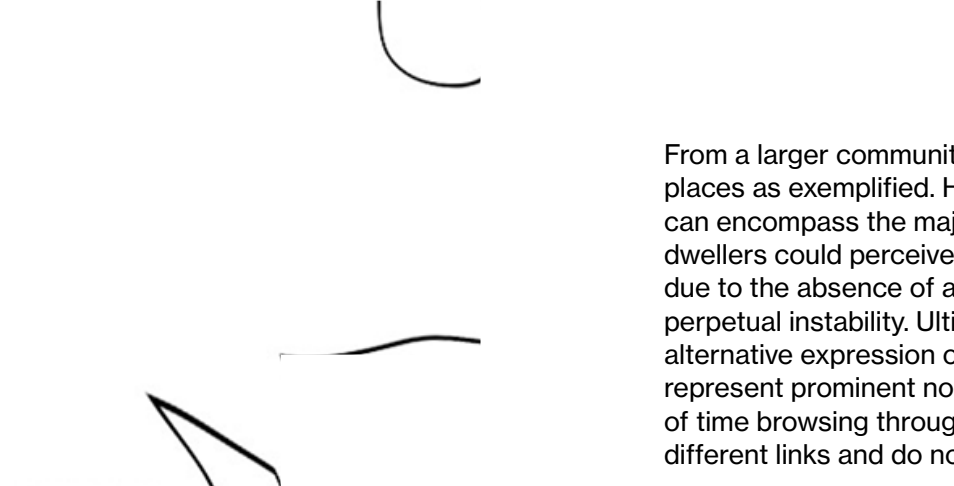
Browsers in the street, publication, and web environment:

The terms "browser" and "browsing" have become part of everyday language. We no longer question this expression. What comes to mind when we hear the word "browser"? An Internet browser? Or people you counter in a store? Fundamentally, it carries the same meaning, but the word "browser" is used differently in the physical and digital environment. On the other hand, we live in a world where the boundary between physical and digital life has become increasingly blurred.

The core discourse of the project is that we spend most of our time in non-places, and the word 'browser' can be a representative term for modern individuals. **Michael Rock**(Rock and 2X4 (Design Studio, 2013, p.311) compares the people on the street in the 19th century to that of the 21st century.

Browsers and Browsers(2023) extend the concept of the browser based on this idea. If the **21st-century browser**, as Rock presented, is situated within the context of consumerism, this project, on the other hand, is situated within our gesture and both of physical and digital places where it occurs.
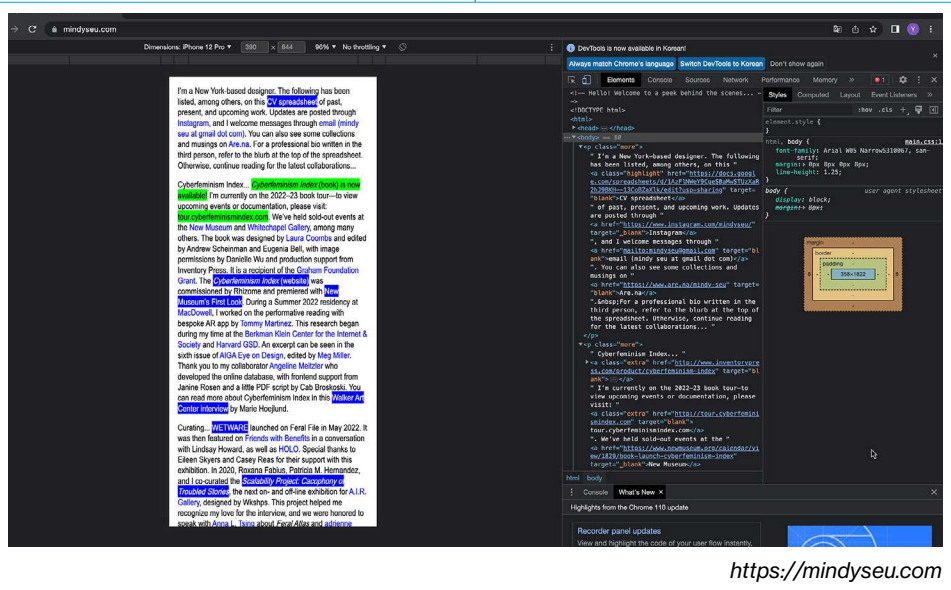
The places in which we exist as browsers are interconnected as '**non-place**'. As defined by **Marc Augé**(Auge, 2008), non-places are temporary transit points that lack historical or identity significance, found anywhere. Representative examples of non-places include large shopping malls and public transportation systems.

If the flâneur - one who walks the city in order to experience it-was an essential figure of the 19st century, the browser - one who, while shopping, purchases nothing - is the 21st-century equivalent.(Rock and 2X4 (Design Studio, 2013, p.311)

If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that super modernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike in Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places: instead these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of 'places of memory', and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position.((Auge, 2008),pp.63-65)

From a larger community perspective, non-places can indeed be specific places as exemplified. However, from an individual perspective, non-places can encompass the majority of places in which we reside. Numerous urban dwellers could perceive the places they spend their time in are non-places due to the absence of a sense of 'dwelling' and the prevailing state of perpetual instability. Ultimately, non-places in the physical world could be a alternative expression of urban life. Digital spaces, specifically web browsers, represent prominent non-place. Although we spend a significant amount of time browsing through screens on our devices, we constantly transit to different links and do not truly exist in those spaces.

To sum up, we engage in browsing in both in physical and digital spaces, and the places where it occurs can be defined as non-places. Then, where is the non-place in digital space?
If the places modern individuals consider as a 'place' in our daily lives can be defined as 'non-place', then how can we define the non-places in the web page? As Mindy Seu(Seu, 2023) used the inspector window of her website to place self-introductions, this project explores to find the 'non-places' in the web space at the end. Throughout the project it aims to provide perspectives on browsing and space by defining the non-places both in physical and digital environment.

This project can be broadly divided into two stages: '**As a Human Browser**' and 'A **Browser in Non-places**'. In the first stage, the main methods of 'iteration' and 'translation' are used to explore the similarities and differences between human and digital browsers, linking each browsers together. Through this process, browsing is documented by two forms of poetry, Word Poetry and Coding Poetry, as a publication and experimental websites. In the second stage, building upon the first stage, the exploration focuses on how non-places can be represented within web browsers and investigates how audiences can become aware of their role as browsers.

Stage 01:
As a Human Browser

In the first stage, the publication involves the browsing experience as a human browser between Finsbury Park Station and King's Cross Station in London.
This documentation captures the moments encountered during the browsing journey through the images, text, and diary format. And by repeatedly iterating, the documentation gathered into a Word Poetry book. Here, the method of binding is also connected to the idea of browsing. A thread becomes a part of the black browsing line while it browses between the papers and holes.

It makes sense to interpret the city as the ultimate platform of modernism ... a forest made of walls and words. ... Our cities are poems, our words are buildings. (Experimental Jetset, 2021)

One of the biggest characteristics of non-place is that people in non-place communicate more with the signs and texts in the place rather than the people in the crowd. This point leads the project to translate the publication into the website and make the poetry situated in a web environment. It is because most of the texts we can find in the physical non-places are notices and signs which has similarities with code, making people or computer react as they command((Auge, 2008),pp.107-111). The Coding Poetry created through this process generates other unexpected experimental visual images. Ultimately, the experience of browsing translated into digital spaces from physical spaces, blurring the boundaries between them.

Stage 02:
Browsers & Non-place

In the second stage, building upon the first stage, the project explore how non-places can be represented within the web browser and investigate how we can exist as browsers within those non-places. In other word, it focuses on the digital web environment in this stage.

The website, utilised by scrolling and clicking, has a looping structure. By following the structure, ultimately one returns to the initial starting point. The first scene in the website is initiated from a particular point where the **reflection** of oneself in the window screen in the screen transit to the digital screen by scrolling. This demonstrates a transition from an urban non-place to a digital non-place. Subsequent scenes visually explore the question of "Where is the non-place in the digital space? How do they exist?" In the end, the infinite looping space returns to the initial show window image. This effectively traps individuals within these non-places, prompting the audience to experience their existence as browsers.

We were a human browser on the streets, navigating through physical spaces. Then, as we read the publication, we transformed into a semi-virtual browser exploring the spaces depicted in the book on the page. Subsequently, we became a browser seated in front of the screen, exploring the digital virtual space. Ultimately, this system exemplifies our existence as browsers, traversing both physical and digital spaces.

https://mindyseu.com

Imagine you are walking down the street. As you pass numerous shops, you engage in browsing. Now, picture yourself stopping at a certain point and looking into a window screen. Through the window, you see the items inside, but simultaneously, you catch a reflection of yourself in the shop window. Depending on where you focus, you may see the objects within the shop window or your own reflection in the window. In this process of observation, the intermingling of my presence in the physical space and the show window(urban screen), occurs, blending together.

Projected Contribution:

In this project, graphic communication design plays a pivotal role in elucidating the concept of 'non-place'. The notion of 'place' lacks visual tangibility, despite our perception that we can visually apprehend or observe it. Although we may assume that we are capable of seeing or observing a place, it is in fact the visible objects within the place that allow for its understanding. Therefore, the idea of a 'non-place' proves to be an even more complex concept for individuals to grasp. Throughout the project, graphic design serves the role of helping the audience in comprehending unfamiliar and abstract concepts through visual methods. This enables a more intuitive and accessible understanding of the discourse in the project. Moreover, the gesture of 'browsing' as a medium of graphic communication design aids in achieving a more coherent and effective communication by aligning the gesture itself with the exploration of the enquiry, thus fostering enhanced communication.

In the graphic communication design field, the digital space is akin to the ground for humans. Numerous works are created in the digital environment, and many analog works are ultimately distributed and communicated in digital space. Consequently, understanding of the digital realm holds significant importance for graphic communication designers. As the prospect of meta-verse reshaping our lives is being raised, this project deals with the 'non-place' in both physical and digital space poses important questions to the graphic communication design field. The notion of '**non-place**', which exists in more profound sense than the commonly accepted notion of 'browsing', is a key point that applies to newly emerging digital spaces such as the meta-verse.

Reference List

Rock, M. and 2X4 (Design Studio) (2013). Multiple signatures : on designers, authors, readers and users. New York: Rizzoli.pp.030-033
Augé, M. (1995). Non-places: an Introduction to Supermodernity. London: Verso.
Colomina, B. (2001). Enclosed by Images: The Eameses' Multimedia Architecture. Contributors. Grey Room, 2, pp.5–29. doi:https://doi.org/10.1162/ grey.2001.1.02.4.
Sang, L. (1934) O-gam-do Poetry Vol.1-15, Chosun, Chosun JoongAng Ilbo
Experimental Jetset (2021). Superstructures. Amsterdam Stichting Roma Publications.
Ordinary People (2021). QXN — Quadrilateral. [online] Ordinary People. Available at: https://ordinarypeople.info/work/qxn [Accessed 25 Feb. 2023].
Georges Perec and Sturrock, J. (2008). Species of space and other pieces. London: Penguin.
Seu, M. (2023). Mindy Seu. [online] mindyseu.com. Available at: https://mindyseu. com/ [Accessed 19 May. 2023].