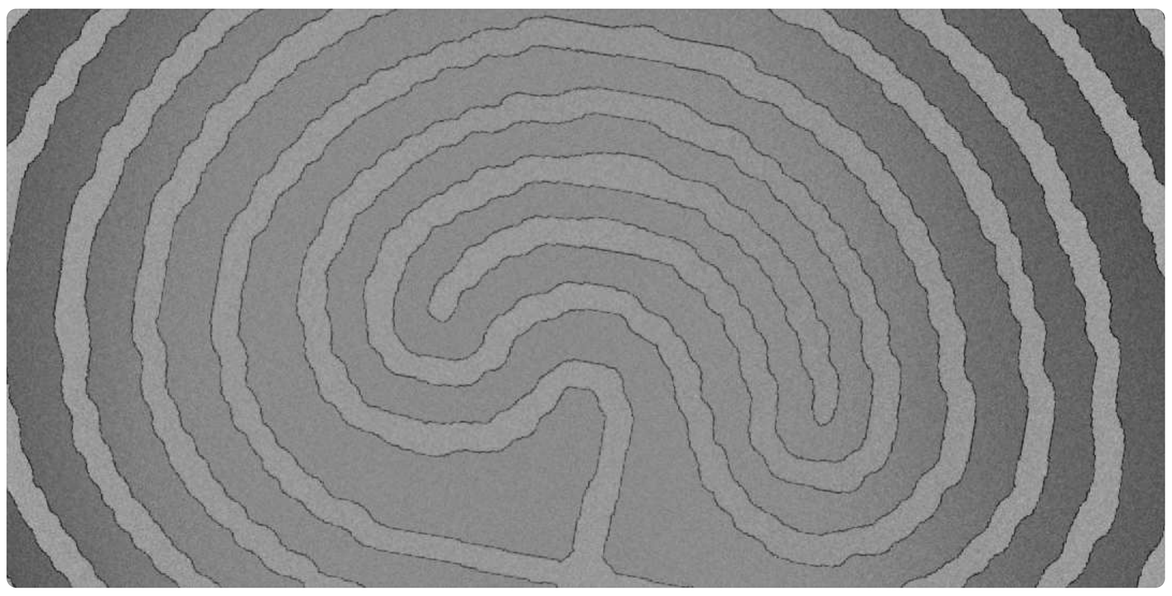


Seeds, not Brands

Folklore 0x109c Gilbert November 6th, 2023 26 Collected Mint

The curious swarm navigates the labyrinth

With this post, Folklore is ***seeding*** (and *ceding*) its graphic identity to its community. This identity consists of no approved assets, no brand guidelines, no official typefaces nor colours. In their place, Folklore offers the source material of these canonical objects: seeds, prompts, references, and an open-ended narrative concept through which to imagine Folklore's activity: *the curious swarm navigates the labyrinth*. What follows are some reflections on the technology and culture that inform this approach.



escape Mint

Gilbert 11 Minted

1973 sued 2023 and lost

Earlier this year, American fashion designer Thom Browne successfully defended his eponymous house against a trademark infringement lawsuit brought by the German sportswear brand Adidas. Adidas alleged that Browne's use of four parallel stripes as a motif on clothing was confusing and misleading customers, who might mistake (*miscount?*) them for Adidas's iconic three-stripe branding.

Twentieth century brands tended toward such visually reductive and deterministic formations. As case in point, take the transition from the intricate pictorialism of Apple Computer's original 1976 logo to the simplistic mark that it adopted in 1977, and which still remains essentially unchanged. The reasons for this visual refrain are neatly concealed behind the spurious notion of a cultural zeitgeist which minimal, puritanical, graphic design purported to capture. In reality, before computerisation, large-scale reprographics were prohibitively difficult and expensive to do. Whole arcane industries supported the reproduction and distribution of printed signs. Even at the onset of globalisation, the technical and logistical complexity of instituting a consistent, international brand positively *demanded* that its graphic assets themselves be simplistic. Modern, globalised corporate iconicity was technical constraint masquerading as cultural expression.

Reportedly, Browne's counsel began their closing argument in the New York courtroom with the claim that "Adidas does not own stripes." It's a claim that might sound entirely reasonable to twenty-first century ears, but to Adidas — a megacorporation ensconced in the codes of twentieth century branding and iconicity — it undermines the entire purpose of corporate identity, and its *staking* function in the market.





Browne leaving court

Off with its head

Other Internet's 2019 essay 'Headless Brands' theorised an emergent phenomenon in contemporary branding, with its supposition that "the rise of networked media has challenged the coherence of centrally-managed brand identities." The essay describes how online space — portrayed as a vast, chattering arena for second-order observation — has undermined centralised brands' appeal to authority, leaving them vulnerable to misappropriation and the spread of negativity, in the form of publicly displayed reviews, comments and memes. Naturally, the essay takes the identities of decentralised organisations, such as the blockchain-enabled protocols Bitcoin and Ethereum, as its counter-examples of headlessness. These organisations *are* branded to some minimal degree of coherence, in that they have proper names, founding statements, and more-or-less defined logos. But, whereas the twentieth century brand relied on legal ***policing*** to maintain its purity of narrative signal, the anarchic, anti-corporate connotations of decentralised blockchain-based organisations are, self-evidently, better ***amplified*** by submitting to the memetic desires of their communities, however factionalised they might be.

The headless brand loosely accords with the tradition of philosopher Umberto Eco's 'open work'. In his book of that name, Eco draws on avant garde artistic and literary tendencies in the mid-twentieth century to figure cultural artefacts as open propositions that are actively completed by their intermediaries (performers, publishers) and their audiences:

> Here the work is 'open' in the same sense that a debate is 'open'. A resolution is seen as desirable and is actually anticipated, but it must come from the collective enterprise of the audience.



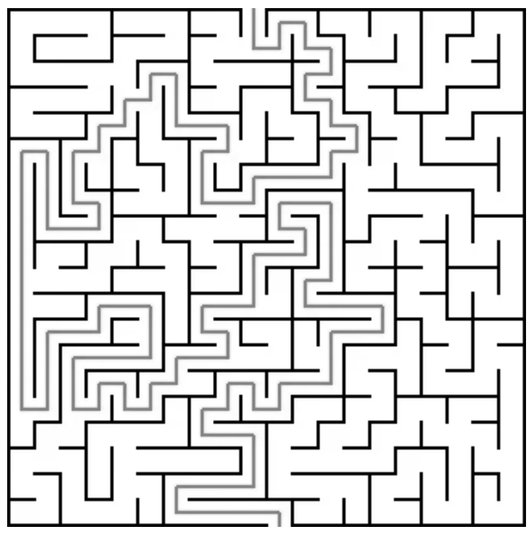
for the notoriety

Community as media

However pertinent Eco's perspective on the avant garde might now appear, the open work was really a *premonition*: a foreshadowing of cultural energies that only the internet would fully manifest. Nowhere have these dynamics of open, participatory cultural production been better exhibited than in online gaming.

Trackmania is a multi-platform racing game which gives players the tools to design and publish their own tracks for other players to compete on, in a time-trial format. Track records, rather than head-to-head race victories, are the currency of Trackmania. The game has a highly active online community, who have, over the course of its two-decade, many-iteration history, produced a number of iconic tracks with fiercely-contested records. Perhaps the most notable of these, at least in recent memory, is Wiinty's '128^3 Deep Fear', uploaded in July 2015. In their 'author comments', accompanying the track at its page on the Trackmania Exchange website, Wiinty wrote that Deep Fear — a sprawling, labyrinthine sequence of track elements suspended in mid-air — had taken them 500 hours to design and construct. The track demanded such precision driving, at such unrelenting speed, that Wiinty considered it impossible to complete in a single run, without occasional checkpoint 'respawns' following crashes.

In 2021, Mudda defied this expectation and became the first player to complete '128[3] Deep Fear' without respawning. They wrote, in the description of a YouTube video documenting the run, that it had taken 800 hours of grinding over two years to achieve this flawless performance. More than any official presentational asset belonging to the game, Mudda's YouTube video is *the* defining representation of Trackmania: at once canonising their own performance and the incredible spectacle of Wiinty's course. And, more than the game's original designers and developers, these two members of its community are its most *notorious* protagonists.

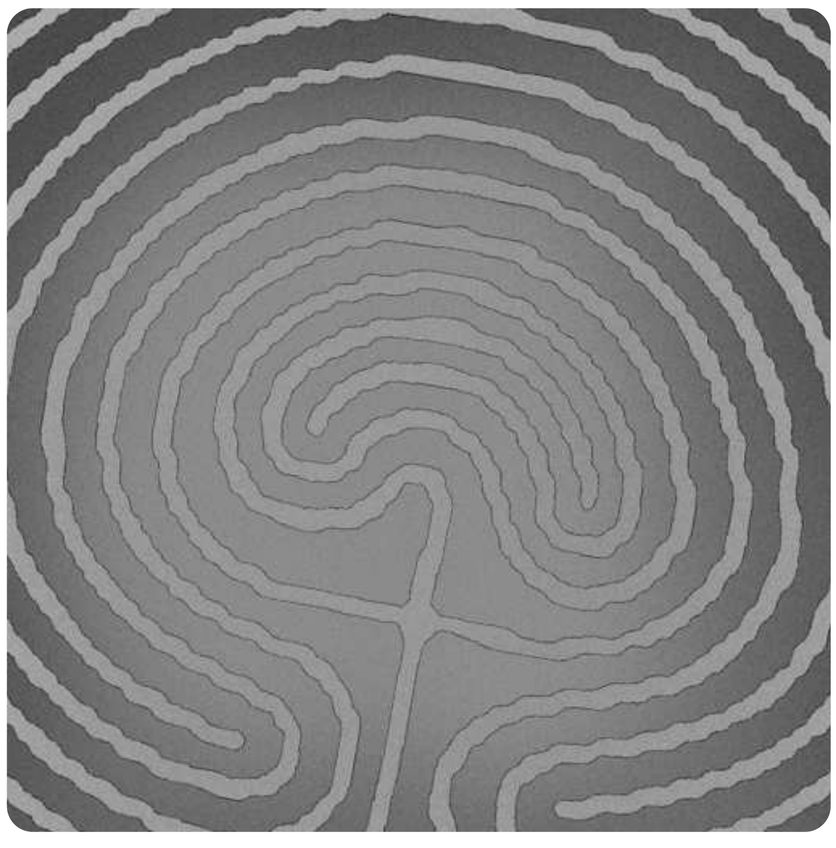


'Lore of the labyrinth

Corporate marketers use the term *transcreation* to describe the practice of localising brand messages: adapting content to appeal to cultural preferences in different parts of the world. Transcreation necessarily involves more than a simple *translation* of the linguistic and pictorial content of an original message. For a global campaign to achieve consistent cultural affect in Tokyo and Berlin might require entirely distinct assets and positioning.

Folklore proposes that a contemporary, networked brand be designed not for its human demographics, but for its machine intermediaries. In lieu of finalised assets — iconography, typography, photography — Folklore provides *seeds* and *prompts*: inputs for further, generative, creation and mediation. These seeds can be thought of as descendants of artist Harun Farocki's concept of the 'operational image'. With this term, Farocki theorised a genre of images not meant for human attention. Images produced by one machine for another to process in the course of a computational operation; be it identification, navigation, or something inscrutable. Operational images are neither outputs nor inputs; they are ***throughputs***.

The throughputs of Folklore's visuality, textuality, and editorial direction are contained in the following image seeds and text prompts, each of which differently envisions the mythical symbol of the *labyrinth*.



seeds, not brands

Mint

Gilbert 5 Minted

The labyrinth never existed as a real place. It was a symbol o

The labyrinth was a cybernetic training ground. An abstract an

The labyrinth was a containment device. An endless and inescap

The labyrinth was a meditation. Unlike a maze, it contained no

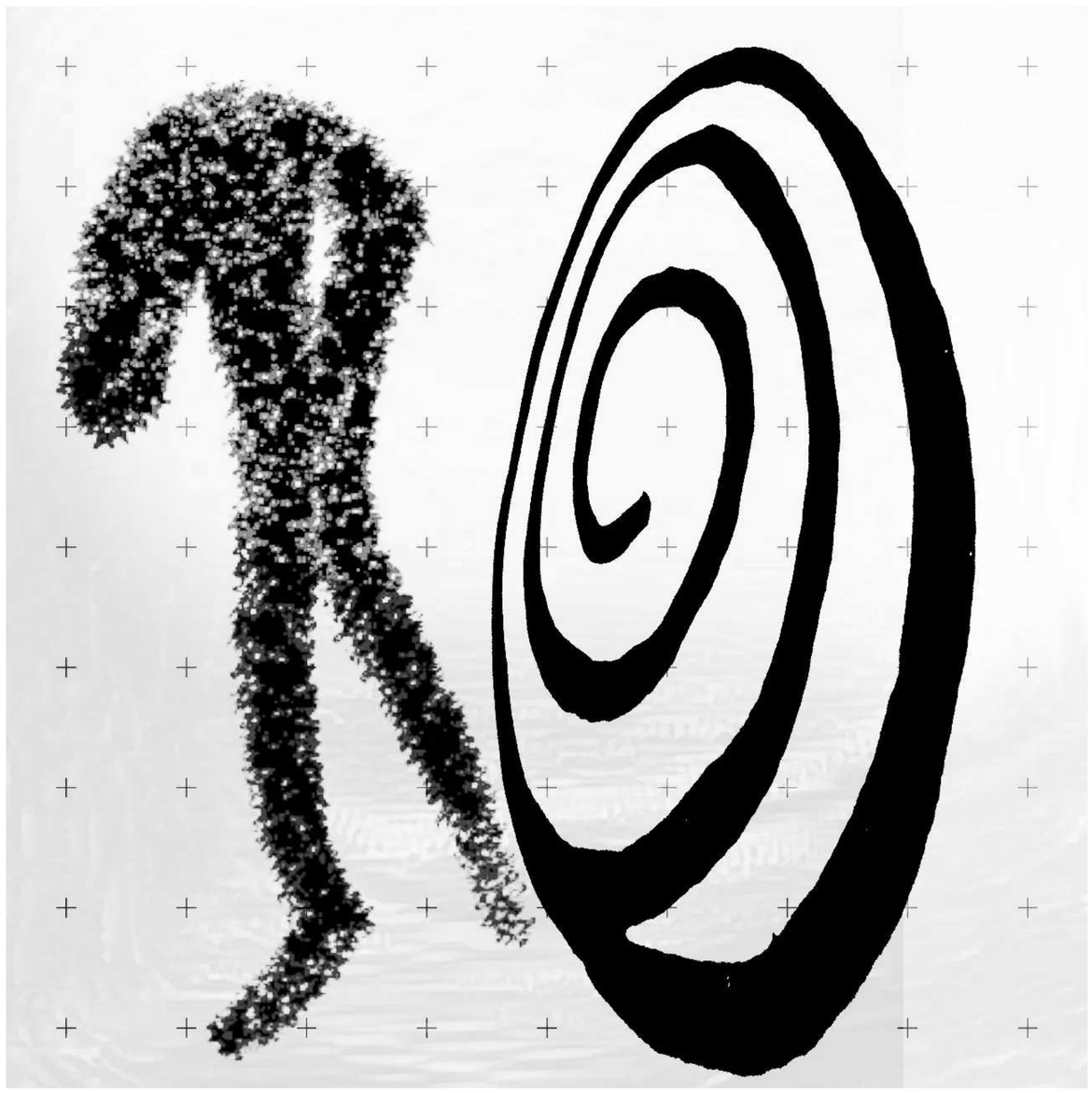
The labyrinth represented preparedness and reason. An analogy

Palimpsests

These seeds are in your hands now. They are incomplete, unresolved, and unconvincing. ***Open***. They might need to be nurtured to survive. Or to be corrupted, mutated, and overwritten. Mint them freely on Zora and remix them in Source. Community incentives will be announced shortly — join the Folklore Telegram for more details.

But if you want to get a head start ... here are the competition details.

Mint the Open Edition Seeds Here



Out of the Portal.

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Mint this entry as an NFT to add it to your collection.

Mint

26 Collected

Verification

This entry has been permanently stored onchain and signed by its creator.

ARWEAVE TRANSACTION ↗
ofsDS95rJwFRPa5…wl8xykmV1oWFqlY

AUTHOR ADDRESS ↗
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More from Folklore

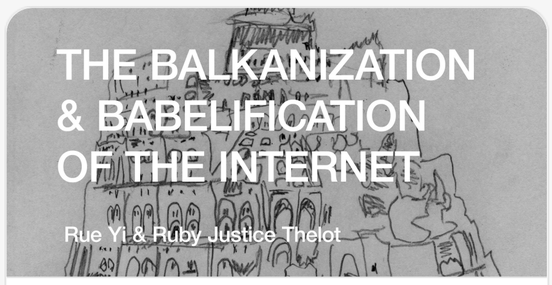
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