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Constant Dullaart Re-codes the Readymade

by Brian Droiticour

The Dutch artist Constant Dullaart maintains a small collection of web pages -- or "readymades," as he calls them -- united by their common status as empty corners of the Internet. They are junkyards of sponsored links, error messages, and domains for sale that no one wants to buy. Dullaart keeps the links to these pages in one place with Delicious, a Website that lets registered users save bookmarks and tag them with keywords for easy retrieval. (Dullaart sets *Readymades* apart from the hundreds of links saved on his account by tagging them "readymade.") Delicious is a tool designed to help its users bring order to their online experience; Dullaart's *Readymades* represent a punk misappropriation of the site to track the chaos of the internet's misfired synapses.

Several of Dullaart's *Readymades* are "link dumps" -- domains registered with the purpose of aggregating cheap ads rather than publishing useful content. Some of the services offered through the sponsored links may be tenuously connected to the search terms brought the user there, or associated with the words in the URL. For instance, www.baddomainname.com includes links to domain registration services and, less explicably, to law firms, while the links at www.hopeless.org suggest suicide prevention counseling. Dullaart's selections also include squatted domains, sites bought for later resale. www.1nt3rn3t.com and www.theinternets.com have yet to find takers.

Found media are a favorite subject of Internet artists, who often evoke the anarchy of the Web by sampling oddities from its less traveled paths. Many of Dullaart's peers seek out specimens of "dirt style," a term coined by artist Cory Arcangel to describe media that look naïve, crude, or messy. (An early project in this vein involving the selection and display of entire sites was Alexei Shulgin's *WWW Art Awards*, 1995-1997, which the Russian artist bestowed on "web pages that were created not as works of art but gave us definite 'art' feeling," i.e. amateur designs whose awkward juxtapositions yielded uncanny effects.) Dullaart's *Readymades*, however, demonstrate his interest in what might be called "default" style - the bland tables of sans serif text and soulless stock photography that frame ads for some of the most common search terms (auto insurance, cheap airline tickets, pornography), baring the underbelly of the internet's popular use.

But Dullaart's *Readymades* are more than a formalist exploration of the Internet at its most banal. They are also a study in the relationship of the index to its referent, an issue that Rosalind Krauss connected to the readymade in her 1976 essay "Notes on the Index, Part 1." Krauss defines indices as "the traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify." She offers footprints and shadows as examples; the domain name would be an analogy to such indices in the internet, since it marks the online location of the site that appears in the browser window below. In *Readymades*, Dullaart has selected sites where the URL's content occupies the position of the referent, rather than serving as a place marker. They are domains that someone has staked out as an empty lot, or that generate a metonymic web of sponsored links. His Readymades are sites where footprints come before the feet.

In his Readymades Dullaart turns Delicious into a means of display, as many artists have done with other social media, including blogging platforms and Flickr, the photo sharing site. **It's an exceptional use of the service;** like his internet-savvy colleagues, Dullaart primarily uses Delicious to accumulate sources of inspiration. "Contemporary Semantics Beta," an exhibition that he has organized at Arti et Amicitiae gallery in Amsterdam, presents Delicious as a studio and sketchpad. It features artists whom Dullaart met by sharing links on the bookmarking site, and his curatorial strategy of installing works alongside the images that served as the impetus for their creation is meant to reflect the way that Delicious makes an artist's interests visible and public. Like Readymades, "Contemporary Semantics Beta" establishes Dullaart as a persistent investigator of new modes of constructing and relating meaning brought about by the Internet.