Emoticon, Emoji, Text II: Just ASCII

```
:::888888888888888888888888888888P"""""""488888888888888888888::::88
::::8888888888888888888888P    _____.-------.____      488888888888888:::888
::::888888888888888888P   __.--""       _.      ""--.__   4888888888:::888
:::::888888888888P  _.-"          -~ | ~-.          "-._ 488888:::888
:::::888888888P  _-"              |  |  |               "-_ 488::8888
::::::888888P  ,'                 |  _:_  |                .-:~--.._8
8:::::88888  ,'            .  ."~~ | ~~".             .~  |    |
88:::::88P  /_.-~:.    :    |   |   |      .        |    |    |
888::::8P  /|      `.o    !  |   |   |      :      o    |    |    |
8P_..--~:-.|    |  |   d   |   |   |  .      b    |    |    |
8|     |  ~.   |  |   o   |   |   |  ;      8    |    |    |
8|     |   |   |  | d8  .-"~~ |   ~~"-.o           8    |    |    |
8|     |   |  _|.--~:-98  |   |   |8b      8.:~-.|   |    |
8|     A   | |     |  ~. |   |   |  _..:~--.    .'  |    |    |
8|     M   | |     | | |   |  |    |   | |    |  |    |
8|     C   | |     |   | |   |  |    |  | |   0    |
8|     |   | |     |   | |   |  |    |  | |   j    |
8|     9   | |     |   | |   |  |    |  | |   o    |
8|     9   | |     |   | |   |  |    |  | |   |    |
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~
```
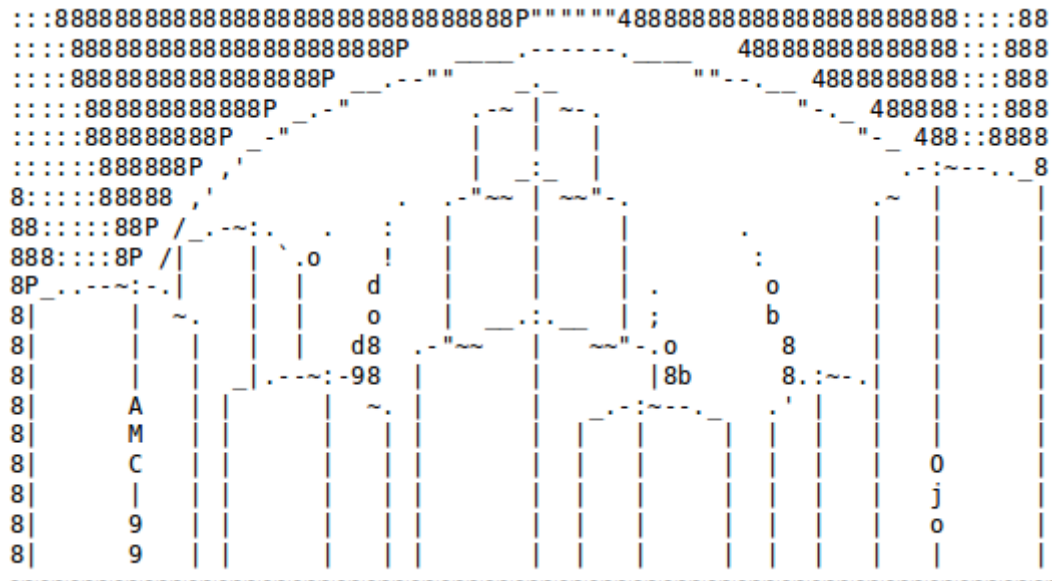
Artwork from [ASCII Art Dictionary](#) (possibly 1999). *This is the second in a three-part series to be published on Rhizome. The first part, exploring the history of the emoticon, can be found [here](#). The final installment (forthcoming) will explore the history of the emoji.*
1.

Following in the footsteps of Baudelaire—and paving the way for the Surrealists and the French New Wave—early 20th-century artist Guillaume Apollinaire cultivated a cerebral taste for the most sensational elements of modern life. A poet by calling and a publicist by trade, Apollinaire seized on the outrageous whether he found it in the avant-garde (he coined the term "Cubism" in praise of early paintings by Braque and Picasso) or mass culture (he called the serialized tales of fictional super-villain Fantômas "one of the richest works that exist.") Apollinaire's poetry fed on the chaos of Paris in the early 1900s. Take this representative passage from 1909's "Zone":

You read handbills, catalogues, posters that shout out loud:
Here's this morning's poetry, and for prose you've
got the newspapers,
Sixpenny detective novels full of cop stories,
Biographies of big shots, a thousand different
titles,
Lettering on billboards and walls,
Doorplates and posters squawk like parrots.

Apollinaire's 1918 book *Calligrammes* delved further into its source material, imitating its typographic forms to create pictograms in which the text echoes the image. For obvious reasons, the calligrammes are notoriously hard to translate, but to give you some idea: the following picture of a woman wearing a hat is made up of a text about a woman wearing a hat:

Guillaume Apollinaire, Extrait du "Poème de 9 fevrier" (1915).

In this one, the Eiffel Tower addresses the reader:

```
              S
              A
             LUT
              M
           O     N
           D     E
            DONT
           JE SUIS
           LA LAN
           GUE  É
          LOQUEN
         TE QUESA
         B O U C H E

           O  PARIS

         TIRE ET TIRERA

        T O U        JOURS

       A UX          A  L.

     L E M              ANDS
```

Guillaume Apollinaire, "Salut monde dont je suis la langue éloquente que sa bouche Ô Paris tire et tirera toujours aux allemands" (Published in *Calligrammes,* 1918).

In "Il Pleut," Apollinaire rendered the rain as cascading letters, suggesting the interplay of natural phenomena with his beloved billboards and street signs.

Il pleut des voix de femmes comme si elles étaient mortes même dans le souvenir

c'est vous aussi qu'il pleut merveilleuses rencontres de ma vie ô gouttelettes

et ces nuages cabrés se prennent à hennir tout un univers de villes auriculaires

écoute s'il pleut tandis que le regret et le dédain pleurent une ancienne musique

écoute tomber les liens qui te retiennent en haut et en bas

Guillaume Apollinaire, "Il Pleut" (Published in *Calligrammes,* 1918).

Glossing *Calligrammes* in a letter to a friend, Apollinaire wrote that they were "typographic precision made in a period when typography is winding up its career brilliantly, at the dawn of the new means of representation, cinema and the phonograph." If Apollinaire was correct that typography was witnessing a brilliant period, he was wrong that it was winding up its career.

As for cinema and the phonograph...

2.

Handbills, catalogues, posters that shout, and posters that "squawk like parrots" all betray a modern impulse that found its fullest expression in the full-page Sunday comics, which freely layered text and image while juggling—whoosh! splat!—their connotative and denotative values.

Early picture shows—nephews of the Sunday comics—employed narrators who stood in front of the screen and talked to the audience, explaining what was going on or making jokes. The movie theater was marketed as an oasis from the chaos of urban life, but as screens got cheaper and more portable, moving pictures took their logical place in the city, which was everywhere. People could offer explanations or crack jokes themselves.

The two categories of representation that Apollinaire defined—"typography" on the one hand; "cinema and the phonograph" on the other—collapsed into each other on the World Wide Web, which hyperbolized the vernacular of the modern city.

It's no accident that today's Web-romantics embrace the same aesthetic and social agenda as a previous era's city-romantics. Aesthetically: speed; sensation; the blending together or overturning of traditional forms; one-upmanship; creative trickery. Socially: pluralism; agonism; the wisdom of crowds; justice in numbers and witnesses.

All of which could be summarized as: the sheer nearness of everything to everything else.

3.

Early interfaces for the Internet offered only official characters from the American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII).

Developed and codified in the early 1960s through an obscure and prolonged collaboration between corporate technologists and government bureaucrats, ASCII (pronounced "ass-key") is based on the English alphabet, and comprises the characters we now recognize from contemporary computer keyboards.

Some of the most interesting artifacts of the early Web were termed "ASCII art," and consisted of pictograms and other visual patterns made from ASCII characters. The emoticon is an early, and relatively simple, example.

ASCII art was an aesthetic foreshadowing of what would become the culture's social vision for the Web: the Internet would be the paradisaical city of our dreams; the ultimate melting pot; the high-tech global village we'd been promised. Home to a natural, nearly-inevitable democratic virtue, it would be a place where your identity could merge with the crowd, and even be shed entirely; and a super-speed air-tram could transport you from uptown to down in the amount of time it takes to register for a gonzo pornography subscription service.

4.

Just as the fresco thrived in the chapels and mansions of Early Modern Europe, the golden age of ASCII art took place on Usenet in the 1980s. Usenet improved the functionality and expanded the scope of bulletin board systems; the trick was abrogating the need for a local server/hub, and instead transferring information just from one to server to the next, and the next, and back and forth and so on—similar to modern day peer-to-peer file-sharing programs. Usenet took advantage of the Internet by creating an interface that was cognate with the Internet's structuring conceit: decentralization, an important idea in the US in the 1980s.

In addition to the emoticon, the foundational works of ASCII art were "Spying at the Wall" and "Silly Cows." "Wall" and "Cows" were, like the emoticon, iterative and multi-authored, and the three works can be seen as the earliest known "Internet memes."

The purportedly first version of "Spying at the Wall" was composed of two underscores, an "m," another underscore, two "o"s, another underscore, another "m," and two more underscores. It conjures a little peeping Tom, wide-eyed, hands braced; a rapt but inscrutable gaze traveling endlessly through a burgeoning World Wide Web, peering over "the wall":

```
        ___m_oo_m___              Spying at the wall.
```

Initial variations sought only to add emotional complexity.

```
     ___m_OO_m___              REALLY spying at the wall.


          ` ,
     ___m_oo_m___              Spying (terrified) at the wall.


          \/
     ___m_oo_m___              Spying (mistrustful) at the wall.


          ~~
     ___m_oo_m___              Spying (surprised) at the wall.


          " "
     ___m_OO_m___              Spying (scared) at the wall.
```

ASCII art techniques developed quickly. The kind of line drawing seen above developed into "Spying" animals such as these:

```
        _     _
         \   /
     ___m_0_0_m___              Mosquito spying at the wall.
            |


            *
           0 0
     ___m_|V|_m___              Bird spying at the wall.
            v


           __
           00
          /||\
     ___m____m___              Owl spying at the wall.
```

But in other animal variations, line drawing took a different shape:

```
      /..\_
     (    )
      \ `  /
   _  \_ /  _
 _/ \__|_|__/ \___         Dinosaur spying at the wall.
 \_/          \_/
```

```
        \/_
        /   \
       /^    \
      /  _/\  \
     |_/    \  \
      \/     | _| \
  _____/___|____       Dino spying at the wall.
```
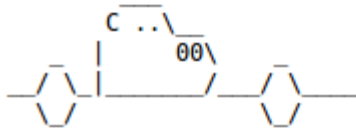
```
    C ..\_
    |     00\
  _ _|_____/__/ \_       Hyppopotamus spying at the wall.
 _/ \_|          \_/
 \_/
```
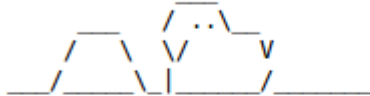
```
         /..\_
  __    \/    V
 /   \ \/    /
_/_____|____/_____      Dromedaries spying at the wall.
```
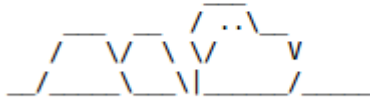
```
         /..\_
  _   _ \/    V
 / \/ \ \/    /
_/_____\|____/_____       Camel spying at the wall.
```
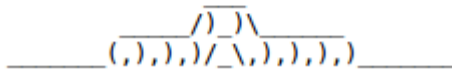
```
         ___
        /)_)\___
_____(,),),)/_\,),),),)_____   Earthworm spying at the wall.
```

Developments in the genre can be understood by comparing this simpler, presumably earlier, butterfly:
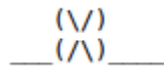
```
     (\/)
   __(/\)____            Butterfly spying at the wall.
```

With this more elaborate, presumably later version:

```
            --                                          --
   /#()# #\              0              0            /# #()#\
   |()##  \#\_            \            /            _/#/  ##()|
   |#()##-=###\_           \          /           _/###=-##()#|
   \#()#-=##  #\_           \        /           _/# ##=-#()#/
    |#()#--==### \           \      /           / ###==--#()#|
    |#()##--=#     #\_        \!!!/        _/#     #=--##()#|
    \#()##---===####\    0|0    /####===---##()#/
     |#()#____==#####\ / Y \ /#####==____#()#|
      \###_____######|\/#\/|######_____###/
       ()#0#/          ##\_#_/##         \#0#()
       ()#0#(__-===###/    \###===-__)#0#()
       ()#0#(    #  ###_(_|_)_### #    )#0#()
       ()#0(---#__###/ (_|_) \###__#---)0#()
       ()#0#( / / ##/   (_|_)   \## \ \ )#0#()
       ()##0#\_/  #/    (_|_)    \#  \_/#0##()
        \)##00#\ -)     (_|_)     (- /#00##(/
         )//##000*|     / | \     |*000##\\(
         |/_####_/     ( /X\ )     \_####_\|
    _____ /X/_\_/_____/_____/_\X_____
         (#/                          \#)
```
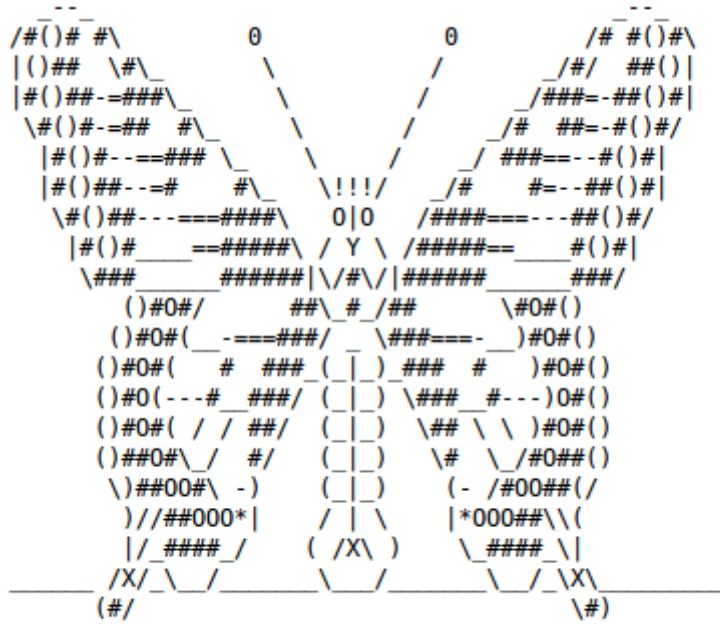
Butterfly spying at the wall.

In the above image, the wall serves little purpose, except to tell us that the butterfly is in repose, not flight. The idea of 'spying' remains visually underdeveloped.

```
                      (__)
                      (oo)
               /-------\/
              / |     ||
             *  ||----||
                ^^    ^^
                   Cow
```

Though the premise, like "Wall," gave rise to an interest in anatomy:

```
             (__)              (__)
             (oo)              (oo)
      /-------\/        /-------\/
     / |     ||        / |     ||
    *  ||W---||       *  ||w---||
       ^^    ^^          ^^    ^^
       Cow laden         Same cow
       with milk       after milking
```

5.

ASCII artists took the form in many different directions, but the most common model they claimed for themselves was the graffiti artist. So there came to be "Oldskool" and "Newskool" ASCII art, neither named in reference to the date of its development, but rather in reference to a vibe; and so ASCII artists, somewhat vertiginously, became obsessed with rendering words out of and within images.

For example, this undated scene, by an artist calling her or himself "ejm," not only pictures the weather but remarks on it:

```
       , // ,,/ ,.// ,/ ,//  / /, // ,/, /, // ,/,
      /, // ,/,_|_// ,/ ,, ,/, // ,/ /, //, /,/
      /, /,.-'        '-. ,// ////, // ,/,/, // ///
     , ,/,/       \ // ,,///, // ,/,/, // ,
    ,/ , ^^^^^|^^^^^ ,// /// /,,/,/, ///, //
    / //      | 0     , // ,/, //, ///, // ,/
   ,/ ,,     JV/|\_ |+'(` , |) ^ ||\||\|/` |
   /,/         |   || ,)// |\/-\|| ||| |\] .
   / /,,        /|   ·, ///, · /, // ,//, /
   , / ejm      \ \    ). //, ,( ,/,/, // ,/,


       , // ,,/ ,.// ,/ ,//  / /, // ,/, /, // ,/,
      /, // ,,_\,// ,/ ,, ,/, // ,/ /, //, /,/
      /, ,.-'        `-. ,// ////, // ,/,/, // ///
     , ,(          `, // ,,///, // ,/,/, // ,
    ,/ ,^^^\^^^^^/,// /// /,,/,/, ///, //
    / //    \\_0 /, // ,/, //, ///, // ,/
   ,/ ,,    J_/\ |+'(` , |) ^ ||\||\|/` |
   /,/       ),|| ,)// |\/-\|| ||| |\] .
   / /,,        /|   ·, ///, · /, // ,//, /
   , / ejm     \ \    ). //, ,( ,/,/, // ,/,
```

This more famous piece from 2007, by artist Roy, was done in a Newskool style and, somewhat ominously, renders the phrase "closed society" mostly out of dollar signs:

Roy, *Closed Society* (2007). Screen capture of ASCII artwork.

6.

The introduction of graphical interfaces for the Internet put an end to the high period of ASCII art. The most common graphical interfaces for the Internet are called "Web browsers." These interfaces interpret many different character sets and file formats and establish a sense of continuity for users engaged in sending and receiving billions of fractured electronic signals around the globe.

The first commercial Web browser, Mosaic, was released in 1993. The first video live-streamed on the Web was a June 24, 1993 performance by SoCal garage rock group Severe Tire Damage, whose bassist at the time was the chief scientist at Xerox, a company in the middle of developing live-streaming software.

The following years saw several different companies—Windows, Apple, and RealNetworks, mostly—frantically trying to codify Internet video and image formatting.

These years saw two other, related developments: the creep of Internet culture into popular culture at large in films like Hackers and The Net (both 1995), and the first recognizable net-native avant-garde art movement.

Mid-90s artists such as Vuk Cosic, JODI, and Alexei Shulgin were grouped under the term "net.art," and while the work under this label was various, all of it shared a desire to disrupt the system of continuity that had been introduced by Web browsers and codified by corporate Web design.

Art collective JODI, for instance, made websites that would pop open so many windows that browsers would malfunction and close down. The strategy was called "browser crashing."

Throughout the 90s, net.artist Vuk Cosic worked primarily with ASCII characters. His most famous work is "ASCII History of Moving Images," from 1998.

The series renders iconic scenes from the history of cinema and television in ASCII characters. With selections from Eisenstein, Hitchcock, and Antonioni, the series climaxes with Cosic's most brilliant choice. Nowhere else in Cosic's work is his representational mode so perfectly at odds with the aim of the original work. And it was eerily apposite for Cosic to finish his series by transforming an early representation of an act whose depiction would become central to so much of our Internet culture.

User FILMDATA01 updated the artwork to YouTube in 2008—Cosic's ASCII rendering of [a scene from the 1972 film Deep Throat](#).

The look of Cosic's "ASCII History of Moving Images" was borrowed by the Wachowski brothers, who, somewhat poignantly, used it in their 1999 film *The Matrix* to imagine what a simulated city might look like to someone who could see through its illusions.

7.

ASCII art only ever flourished as a truly popular genre in the form of emoticons, which in the 2000s were eclipsed by the Japanese Corporation SoftBank's supplemental character set of "Emoji." (Emojis will be the subject of the next and final installment of this series of essays.)

ASCII art persists now mostly as a connoisseur's medium.

The majority of extant ASCII artworks remain undated, but this rendering of Apollinaire's "Il Pleut" was probably created after artists in the medium started historicizing themselves, maybe some time around 1998, the year the "[Dancing Baby](#)" became the first Internet meme to attract the attention of corporate media, appearing on news stories and making its way into Fox's Ally McBeal.

Il pleut

il pleut des voix de femmes comme si elles étaient mortes même dans l

c'est vous aussi qu'il pleut merveilleuses rencontres de ma vie ô goutte

et ces nuages cabrés se prennent à hennir tout un univers de villes a

écoute s'il pleut tandis que le regret et le dédain pleurent une ancien

écoute tomber les liens qui te retiennent en haut et en bas

é   l   u   n
s   e   r   e
o   t   i   m
u   t   c   u
v   e   u   s
e   s   l   i
n   a   q
i   i   u
r   r   e
               e
               s

Personally, my favorite piece of ASCII art, also undated, is a map of Leopold Bloom's path through Dublin in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. A painstaking labor of love, and a work that knots together its form and subject to make visible the conditions of its own historical occurrence, the image recalls the dream of a city knit together by people's stories and desires—a world wide web that never came to fruition.

```
==============================================================
\ Royal      Gs                                      Lu ->->
 \canal           TK              J95
   \
      ~~~ -- __
              ~~-- J34           He        J99 J00 J97  /888888~~--_
        J02         ~~~---___Mu              J01      /888888888888
             J01        ~~~---___AH    WM           \888888888888
                           J96\                      \8888888888
                   L04     Sh J93    \                \888888888
                     J03              |                \88888888
         L93           \ Bv            \                \8888888
                   J09 BC  \ F95        \                \888888
                   KI       \     nt     \                \SI 888
                            \Gh           |               ~~~|88
                     lib V09    \          |                 |88
             Ch   BK        FJ   \         |              ___|88
         Liffey               \ Eu mg      |             |888888
         --___               _\-----_____|888888
            ~~---___     Or __---~~   ~~~~~~---  ____888888888888888888
              Ush ~~~--_--~~          Ac           ~~~~~~---___888888
               A&E                             |              ~~_88
                         Fh                    |           Enc   ~~
                      DB NL      L95           |
                     Iv                        |                RG
                         OG                    |    LC
                   L88        Uc       TG    _/     J04    HF  PD
                   L93  NTS Hs              _/                    JC
                   J81                    _/~
                                        _/~
         M88         L93              _/~
         ~~~----____      L66     ___---~~
         Grand          ~~~--___--~~EC  L97
         canal                                              Ab

                   HC


                     J84




           J82       AE
         <-<-<-<- Cg

==============================================================
Key (north to south, in strips):

\ Royal      Gs                                      Lu ->->
 \canal           TK              J95

Gs: Glasnevin cemetery (Ulysses ch6)
TK: Tom Kernan's fictional house (plus Fogarty the grocer's) [Grace]
J95: 2 Millbourne ave, Drumcondra, Jul94-?96 (1904 valuation: £17)
Lu: Lucy the birdgirl (PoA4 1898)

              ~~-- J34           He        J99 J00 J97  /888888~~--_
        J02         ~~~---___Mu              J01      /888888888888

J02: 7 St Peter's terrace, Cabra Sep02-?05 (1904 valuation: £20)
```

J34: Whitworth and Claude roads. Memorial bench for JSJ proposed by
     James in 1934 letter but never carried thru [e644]
Mu: uncle John Murray's (cf 'Clay')
He: 'Heron's' attack in PoA2 c1895
J99: Convent avenue, Fairview (summer only)
J00: 13 Richmond avenue, Fairview (Oct99-May00)
J97: 29 Windsor avenue, Fairview (Oct96-Jun99) (1904 valuation: £17)
J01: 8 Royal terrace, Fairview (May00-Oct01)

```
                              J01    ~~~---___AH    WM        \888888888888
                                       J96\                   \88888888888
```

J01: 32 Glengariff parade (Oct01-Sep02)
J96: 13 North Richmond street summer only? (approx 1904 valuation: £19)
AH: Alfred Hunter, Ballybough road. Maybe the site where Hunter took
     Joyce after fracas [pc231]
WM: William Murray and Aunt Jo, North Strand road, Fairview (approx,
     1902?-1904)

```
                              L04    Sh J93     \             \8888888888
                                      J03                |        \888888888
```

L04: 7 Eccles street
J03: (uncertain, late 1903) Waverly House, Hardwicke street (cf 'The
     Boarding House')
Sh: Sheehy's
J93: 14 Fitzgibbon street Nov92-Jul94 (approx 1904 valuation: £25)

```
   L93                         \ Bv            \             \88888888
                   J09 BC       \ F95           |            \8888888
                   KI           \      nt        \           \SI 888
```

L93: City Arms hotel
KI: King's Inns (cf "A Little Cloud")
J09: 44 Fontenoy (Aug, Nov-Dec 1909)
BC: Black Church (Ulysses ch15 passim)
Bv: Belvedere college
F95: Flynn's Drapery in "The Sisters"
nt: nighttown (PoA2 and Circe)
SI: Smoothing Iron bathingplace [Encounter]

```
            Ch   BK        FJ              |              ___|88
Liffey                      \ Eu mg        |              |888888
```

Ch: Church street chapel (PoA3 confession)
BK: Barney Kiernan's pub (Ulysses ch12)
lib: Capel street library
V09: Volta theatre, 45 Mary street
FJ: Freeman's Journal (Ulysses ch7)
Gh: Gresham hotel (cf 'The Dead')
Eu: cabman's shelter (Ulysses ch16)
mg: City morgue (after play in PoA2)

```
      ~~~---___        Or __---~~   ~~~~~~---___888888888888888888888
         Ush ~~~--_--~~~           Ac             ~~~~~~---___888888
            A&E                                   |            ~~__88
```

Ush: Misses Flynn's, Usher's Island (cf 'The Dead')
A&E: Adam & Eve's (FW003)
Or: Ormond hotel (Ulysses ch11)
Ac: Antient Concert Rooms (cf 'A Mother')

```
                         Fh            |          Enc   ~~
                      DB NL    L95      |
```

DB: Davy Byrne's (Ulysses ch8)

```
      NL: National Library (Ulysses ch9)
      Fh: Finn's hotel
      L95: Holles street and maternity hospital
      Enc: 1894 Dubliners 'Encounter'


                        Iv              |              RG
                              OG        |   LC

      Iv: Wicklow street (cf 'Ivy Day')
      OG: Gogarty in 1909, Ely place
      LC: Little Chandler [Counterparts] and maybe uncle Wm Murray pre-1902
      RG: Richie and Sara Goulding's, Strasburg terrace [Proteus]


                  L88       Uc        TG   _/     J04   HF  PD
                   L93   NTS Hs               _/              JC
                 J81                      _/~

      J81: 30 Emorville ave, where JAJ was conceived
      L93: Lombard
      L88: Pleasants
      NTS: Irish Natl Theatre Society rehearsal space in Camden Hall
           [e160, pc224]
      Hs: Erasmus Smith High School
      Uc: University college
      TG: Corley's half-sovereign passed here, Baggot street [TwoGallants]
      J04: McKernans where JAJ stayed Apr-Aug 1904. Also Blazes
           Boylan's/ Beggars Bush [Circe]
      HF: Dodder river where Brigid Gannon's corpse was found in 1900, PC
          Henry Flower accused of the murder
      PD: Paddy Dignam's, Newbridge ave [Hades]
      JC: (approx) James and Gretta Cousins's, Strand road, Sandymount
          (occasional short stays eg 15 June and September)

       M88           L93                _/~
      ~~~----____        L66        ___---~~~
      Grand        ~~~---___---~~EC  L97
      canal                                              Ab

      M88: Rehoboth
      L93: Raymond
      L66-85: 52 Clanbrassil street
      EC: Emma Clery's in Stephen Hero
      L97: Ontario
      Ab: Araby bazaar 1894 (also Mirus 1904; also nearby Dublin by Lamplight
          laundry of "Clay") Royal Dublin Society


                  HC
      [...]
                            J84
      [...]
               J82        AE
      <-<-<-<- Cg

      HC: Harold's Cross (party in PoA2)
      J84: 23 Castlewood avenue, Rathmines
      J82: 41 Brighton square west, Rathgar
      AE: George 'AE' Russell's 1902 home, Garville rd, Rathgar
      Cg: Clongowes Wood college
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