

The Semiotics of Snail Migration

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The recent path of technology has overshadowed the romantic epistolary communications that were forged in our cultural history from the Pony Express to School House Rock. The slow, gradual demise of the US postal system is evidenced by the closed hours, lean existence of post offices and lack of functional mail-boxes on our streets. There was a time when letters were 'part and parcel' of everyday life: We would walk down the street to drop a hand-written letter into the mailbox, knowing that the recipient would in a few days open this little piece of magic.

When pen hits paper, a moment of reflection occurs: To whom am I writing? What can I give of myself? We put something personal, intimate and tactile into sealed envelopes, eliciting a sensory experience from the recipient. Letters are scented, envelopes kissed with lipstick. We tear open the envelope, or we rip it slowly. Where email and texts are immediate and mechanical... letter writing is thoughtful, slow, contemplative. Sending mail demonstrates a tactile investment, real and human. Without mail we miss the delectable selections of the sensory order: stationary, monograms, handwriting, pens and pencils.

Using the postal system as a creative gestation process was an apt way to tap into this effort to slow down, to observe our surroundings: To look with inspired eyes, closely... to investigate the mundane, or reflect on simple, quiet beauty. When we use mail, we have to wait – allowing for ideas to germinate and rise like yeasted bread.

It challenges our compulsive selves to step back. Breathe.

But the postal system is like a freeway open to all passengers; it can't discriminate a poem from an advertisement. At this point, for every glowing piece of its history, we have not only lost the spirit of the postal system to technology, but we've also lost it to greed and capitalism. Like an insidious disease, most efforts to stop this are futile. The bittersweet reality is that the postal system is not only threatened, but the very act of communication through the system has been hijacked by predators in the form of junk-mail.

Consider your own process of thought. How do you communicate with the ones you love? We entreat you to write your own letters, express your own thoughts, and send them to whomever you choose. We provide the tools, you deliver the words. Before you leave today's exhibit, express yourself in your own unique way, and contribute to the semiotics of snail migration.