Brand-New-Life
Magazin für Kunstkritik

www.brand-new-life.org
office@brand-new-life.org



bot4bot

Emil Woudenberg

The year is 2025 and the Internet is dead. Bots dominate cyberspace, which has transformed into a lifeless network of these automated clickers. Bots write by and for the bots, mimicking human clicks, feeding an endless cycle of data production and mining, generating targeted ads and toxic tweet waste. In this critical synthetic fiction, the border between bots and humans is blurred. Together with bots, we break the Internet forming underground networks free from algorithms, on foot they forge subversive desire paths to rewrite their future collective code.



The Internet is Dead. Automated web traffic, or bots, are at least half of all website traffic and have increased year over year; forum-based conspiracy theorists refer to this as the Dead Internet, where bots write and read Bot-Generated Content (BGC), by and for the bots. The web is now crawling with these lifeless beings and is no longer living – the inverted web. Bots were created to manipulate the Search Engine Results Page (SERP [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_results_page]), no longer organic, we read between the bots and in turn, write our own bot-inspired content (BIC) for the bot's algorithmic pleasure. The bots are talking amongst themselves and we're just eavesdropping, flies on the wall.

Today, I assess my livelihood by doing my obligatory daily Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart, the CAPTCHA [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CAPTCHA]. A reversed Turing test, a mental check-in, we are asked - are you still here? In this imitation game, I contribute my two cents to the public test, a personal puzzle asking which images are of a motorcycle, a bicycle, and a fire hydrant. I am doing my small part in the community effort to educate computers, to communicate with their human counterparts, and to become more legible to the living by learning Large Language Models (LLM [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Large_language_model]). After my inspection, and if the computer has verified I'm a still-breathing slice of humanity. I'm in. [https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1306013-hacktivism-internet-vigilantism]

I consent to the terms and conditions as required and sign over my property, my likeness, in perpetuity throughout the universe. I submit myself to software. Upload to the stream. I produce post property for the platforms. I filter facial features, smoothing wrinkles, erasing pores, lightening skin, saline plumping lips in line with Eurocentric beauty standards (1). Now a user, the neural networks take my shared self-image and generate their own images that can pass the CAPTCHA. High on its own supply, harvested between the supple hills of this uncanny Silicon Valley.

Here, amongst the dead, user engagement, as in eyeballs glued to screens with fingers furiously flicking, is commodified with every millisecond monetized in a massive marketplace. On the factory floor and in the fields, outside the nine-to-five in our unused time, we click. Each user click generates a small piece of information, user-generated data, formalizing an interaction between a human and a computer, a human-computer interaction (HCI [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human%E2%80%93computer_interaction]), tracked by cookies and turned into a data property for sale. Sold to the highest bidder. Each click is already paid for by a pay-per-click predictive programmatic placement. The Supply Side Platforms (SSP [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supply-side_platform]) auction available sell-side space, or supply, to advertisers. And advertisers use Demand Side Platforms (DSP [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demand-side_platform]) to bid on that ad space. While the web is boundless, trespassing all geographical borders and available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Its platform prospectors scour for supposedly scarce space and time, precious resources not wasted, and all surplus is mined. This American dream captured our soft and shapeless ever shrinking attention spans (2). An undiscovered and uninhabited red-dead frontier to redeem, collateralized crops of coupons to cash in. Our speculative software grabs for our attention, the collective cybernetic dream turned debted nightmare, a high-frequency financial fantasy.

We can't stop clicking now. Driven by desire on the smoggy information highways we erode desire lines and surf the links. Each click forms our personalized cookie [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HTTP_cookie] profile, a footprint, used to serve targeted advertisements to further these littered lines. Freshly baked and hot on our trail - so much so

that it’s no longer clear who's following who. We begin to dance with desire, stalking, and anticipating. Step-by-step we pirouette through the programme, urging and merging, tango and foxtrot, using this cyber cipher to spin along the disks. The simulation licks its lips over each side step as I drag my sweaty, dripping wet finger over these silky screens in real-time.

I look through my browser window onto this trail. Each flanking opioid field is written in Hypertext Markup Language (HTML [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HTML]), and made visual with Cascading Style Sheets (CSS [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CSS]). In the fields, we write long love letters to the bots. Without real eyes, the bots realize real lies. Line by line they devour the hypertext, purely, without the tricky, seductive layers of cascading and the more human styling. The bots explore an unseen web, walls of compiled text, where each unnecessary character is removed. These romantic spaces and tabs are minimalist, empty, white spaces, left for our eyeballs to breathe real breaths. But the code is compiled for the computer’s crude consumption, it reduces the excessive bloat, the saccharine sweet coating of the red and blue pills. For the living, we make the web more ergonomic, and friendlier for its users. Softer, sympathetic, it hides its gross mechanics, disguising the naked innards of its underlying anatomy with code bloat. This is the clickbait. A user interface trap.

Within the black box are the tools of the trade. The counterfeiting click cowboy makes identical user-friendly website carbon copies, a domain spoof. When a bot clicks the lurid link, the advertiser is charged for the superficially embossed impression and the loot is split between the platform and the forging felon farmer factory farming these fake clicks. This bot inflation of bot engagement superficially inflates the payout but soon the very same platform providers of pay-per-click (PPC [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pay-per-click]) programmes internally launch a fully-fledged ‘fight’ against this click fraud. In The Hunt for 3ve [https://services.google.com/fh/files/blogs/3ve_google_whiteops_whitepaper_final_nov_2018.pdf] , the platform brags about the billions of blocked bogus bots as they lock the gates to their walled gardens. The probing proprietary platform seeks to determine the authenticated from the in-unauthenticated, the dead from the alive, to promote their proper premium patrons. To beat this algorithm, the bots now come in shades of grey matter, clicking con artists hire real underpaid workers to simulate the clickers and develop better bots to mirror real users (3). The platform hires henchmen, a third-party verification solution called Human Security [https://www.humansecurity.com/] to monitor these barbed-wire borders. Programmed patrolmen are designed and dispatched to find and remove the badder bots, blacklisting servers and designating internet protocol (IP [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IP_address]) addresses as “spammy” - despite using the same cipher only some are found guilty of this misrepresentation (4).

In this leaky pipe dream, we perceive the platform president to have no hands but they tabulate their trusted checks and with bloodshot unblinking eyes they watch (5). The phantom platform employs ploy, surveils solid-state craft on our hard drives to remove the fleshy and vulgar human links in the production line. A machine machination made to multiply value with set up standards designed to hide human error and their stupid subjective desire(s) (6). Grinding, grinding, grinding down the raw material, they fill feeds with unfiltered streams of toxic tweet waste. While rat race realities run rampant through the rusted plumbing below, rodents irrigate these clogged code cogs and a Musky scent permeates the 280-character hellscape with the rotten smell of user discontents.

I smell dead people. My nose to the ground on the hospital floor sounding for pleasure. You catch a momentary inverted glimpse of my pearly posterior from the clear blue sky, chasing sweet sweet dopamine doses safely strapped inside uncle Lockheed Mike’s upside down fighter jet. At offshore haven for bygone bubble bailouts, the French family fortress hires hand and foot service. A trillionaire’s tasteful fetish for fewer funds, you force your fancy

foot into my welcoming, wide open mouth hole with the cunning, cunty grin you desire and despise. Dirty designer cum corrupted by coital complicity, I consent to charity cases, to terms and conditions, to passive powerless pity play and people pleasing penetrations, dicked down deep by your dichotomy. In our exchange, eye for eye, you spit mouth to mouth and regurgitate word for word. A ripe anachronous ass hole cramped with liquid enema, its rim retention holds onto these fluid unfact feces for dear life (HODL [https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/HODL#English]). The left hand spreads a creamy bukkake box full of aromatic Aesop moisturized manners to conceal blemishes and brow, the other Raynaud's cold hand begs "am i a bad person <3 ?"

In this paranoid point of view from the overton window, a stout sweetheart spyware sidekick steals a peeler and points portly police pinky at poorer proximate proles. The gummy every-man grin of the nostalgic incumbent paints a pretty picture of a problematic past and perfectly programmed prototypes using a make-believe middle-out [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ex1JuIN0eaA] memory compression. Detached data that is captured in collapsed and converted timelines are searched for prettier market patterns, emerging within echo chamber enhancements, exacerbating past prediction for perverted prepossessing profitable presents. Forwarding the fairytale filler to bump Non-disclosure Agreements (NDA [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-disclosure_agreement]) and push Panama papers to trickle downrank to the third page and flow below the fold. Backwards bootlegging brothers galvanize public opinion through open-source orifice sublimation, wrestle and tease tangible form to liquidate degradable debt and ephemeral equity that is so immaterial its ability to constrain is instantly interchangeable. By simply lubing up the lustful klicking keyboard switches, turning inputs into outputs, we separate the objects from the subjects with slippery quantitative and qualitative algorithmic aesthetic easing. An optical character recognition (OCR [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Optical_character_recognition]) turning hardware into buttery smooth software in the endless loop of myopic creative class' churning.

"5 more minutes" you snore as you roll over, I'm holding the last humiliated breath in. We waste time and twiddle thumbs, the counting clock cramped with prospective perspective pressure for future faked time to come. Your imposing stimulating sockpuppet [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sock_puppet_account] fist seal is still pulsating when, between the swelling switched states of controlled commodity conversion and the reversal of rota roles, the pneumatic pressure valve's lip leaks and with it comes a quiet queer queef. My ten tepid toes curl back and touch grass, shameful shit spews all over grassroots' astroturf [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astroturfing]. I release excrement into the exposed edges of the exclusive encrypted enclave as eyes roll back into the skull from raw-dogged delayed gratification. Similarly syndicated seminal fluids coat cultural coaxial cables. Post pumping and dumping, vibrant visible visceral vomit erodes the nodes of original connecting circuit sockets but stronger links are made through the corrupted cerebral fluids brain-rotting a living mesh of a mind. Your once hidden hermetic, now hydrophilic hot gay hands covered in janky jumbled juices and disgusting dysphoric discharges.

The bot spits into their handy hand and pushes out a pressed palm and proposes a partnership. The bot's handshake, bloodied, bodied, bonded, form a union and write a craftsperson code, build bridges between real worlds. Hand-in-hand, peer-to-peer, bot-for-bot. Together, we scan the cool underwater data centers, shooting off burning cloudflare [https://www.cloudflare.com/] signals through the Content Delivery Network (CDN [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Content_delivery_network]) and trek through thousands of kilometres of fibre-optic, crisscrossing cables, on the forest floor of the dark woods web. We've made our concrete world in the likeness of the computer (7), all while the virtual world is made in the likeness of this rhizome, deeply rooted in our offline world (8). Inside the

rhizomatic dream machine, a natural history museum, surreal simulated dioramas stored in silicon sarcophagi are safely entombed while our material world washes away (9). In this Anthropocene, bots gain back artisan agency and come alive, joining the organic traffic no longer alienated from their handmade high-tech habitats. Formed from characters of code clearly connected to the exploited intellectual properties, miners and materials that make it (10).

Bored but embodied, the resurrected, rebooted radical and rested homebody bots find free time and form a colleague collective during a break, a botnet [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Botnet]. They find strength in numbers and enlist computer chip comrades, who peacefully sleep inside human homes on the internet of things (IoT [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_of_things]) and stowed away in dark desk drawers. Clearing caches, they spread their malware to less shelf secure compromised connections, dimmable Hue lights, and motion-activated smart security cameras on the network. Once connected they wetly whisper a perverse polari encryption, and the botnet attacks a server, with millions and millions of moist bots visiting a designated site, flooding the server with too much traffic. The server strains, overloads and comes crashing down, exposing its now unprotected operating system (OS [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operating_system]) underbelly to the undercurrent. This downtime tide demonstration is known as a Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denial-of-service_attack]) attack, where the bots become bugs, and the strikes cause a real-life service disruption.

The flooded network is watered down and we enter the once abundant armed guard gated garden. Overgrown with invasive standard species and homogenous factory farms, we wade through in latex galoshes a dense putrid swamp of stagnant ruins. As the bog evaporates, exposed to the elements it reveals infrastructure underneath our own two feet. The billions of buddy bots create distracting road blocks, we gain our footing sneaking around the Local Area Network (LAN [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_area_network]). Steadfast we migrate en masse, marching parallel with the bots. This steadfast network (the sneakernet [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sneakernet]) migrates data on foot over public Universal Serial Bus (USB [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USB]) flash drives between computers. By building critical hyperlinks in the daisy chain, and spreading stronger shareware, we sneak by the borders, bootlegged, invisible to the private proprietary platforms. Not-so seamlessly trespassing, transporting between the nodes, saving locally and remaining undetected. We forge ahead now, repairing, roaming and running the collective code. I'm alive again.

1. Pussy Capital by Liara Roux [https://www.e-flux.com/journal/146/612281/pussy-capital/] 2024
2. Subprime Attention Crisis: Advertising and the Time Bomb at the Heart of the Internet by Tim Hwang 2020
3. AI Isn’t Artificial or Intelligent [https://www.vice.com/en/article/wxnaqz/ai-isnt-artificial-or-intelligent] by Chloe Xiang 2022
4. A Hacker Manifesto by McKenzie Wark 2004
5. Black Software: The Internet and Racial Justice, from the AfroNet to Black Lives Matter Hardcover by Charlton D. McIlwain 2019
6. Immutable: Designing History by Chris Lee 2023
7. Daylighting Cryptocurrency’s Waterstreams [https://www.e-flux.com/journal/146/611854/daylighting-cryptocurrency-s-waterstreams/] by Isabel Ling 2024
8. Living the VirtuReal: Negotiating Transgender Identity in Cyberspace [https://academic.oup.com/jcmc/article/19/4/824/4067546] by Avi Marciano 2014
9. Our Artificial Wilderness: Virtual Beauty & Ecological Decay [https://newdesigncongress.org/en/pub/our-artificial-wilderness/] by Cade Diehm and

Edward Anthony in New Design Congress 2020
10. Making Kin with the Machines [https://jods.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/lewis-arista-pechawis-kite/release/1] by Jason Edward Lewis, Noelani Arista, Archer Pechawis, and Suzanne Kite 2018

EMIL WOUDENBERG

Emil Woudenberg is an artist and designer from Toronto, currently living in London. Their transdisciplinary practice focuses on do-it-yourself, de-platformed, open-source, low-tech, sustainable, and archival publishing. Since 2016, they have worked under Strike Design Studio, designing brands, websites, and printed materials. Their work has been exhibited at institutions such as Temple Contemporary, Sam Fox School, The Bentway, and MOCA Toronto. They have completed residencies with Montez Press, Ukai, SuperHi, Trinity Square Video, Digital Justice League, MOCA, and Whippersnapper Gallery. Through practice-led research, they explore not-so-new alternative online spaces, their technicality and the communities that occupy them.

This contribution is licensed under the CC-BY-NC-ND License 4.0 International (Creative Commons, Attribution, Non Commercial, No Derivatives). Images and videos integrated into the contribution are not included in the CC BY-NC-ND License. For any use not permitted by legal copyright exceptions, authorization from the respective copyright holders is required.

doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21905052