**Bootcamp coding school**

Towards the end of 2018, I went to the gym. There, I bumped into my dear friend [Clara](https://www.clarapasteau.com/), whom I hadn’t seen since we both graduated over the summer. Surprised that we were both still in Amsterdam, we updated each other about our post-graduation situations.

I was working in a club, while she was a student at a bootcamp coding school and enjoying it. Hearing more about the details of this school gave me a gut feeling that I, too, wanted to become a web developer.[[1]](#footnote-1) Remembering my failed attempts to learn coding during my studies turned this feeling into a decision to enroll, and to finally finish what I started.

I wish I could say that my current burden of personal, digital discomfort was the main reason for me to join the bootcamp coding school. But it wasn’t. It was the loud sound of the clock ticking, counting down to just one year left for me to apply for an artist and/or self-employed visa in the Netherlands.

Obtaining an artist visa would mean that over the next eighteen months I should earn at least the minimum wage per month,[[2]](#footnote-2) which would subsequently secure me a permanent residence in the Netherlands. Having recently graduated from an art academy with future prospects barely visible at the horizon, pursuing a life as an artist didn’t seem like an ideal plan to secure my stay in Europe, let alone my dream of living in America. At least, it didn’t seem like a *better* plan than working within the conditions of the tech industry.

The decision-making process happened fast: I signed the contract which stated that a certain sum must be paid upfront for three months of daily classes; afterwards I made a phone call to my dad to ask for yet another education-oriented financial coverage.

During the Full-Stack Web Development course, the school guaranteed that the participants would learn how to make complete websites from scratch (front-end as well as back-end development). After completing the course, the participants are expected to immediately apply for a traineeship position within a tech company. As soon as they’d start getting paid as a trainee, they would start paying back, in instalments, the remainder of the ‘ghost money’ (6.000 EUR) the coding school invested in them upon their application. The duration of the payback time was negotiable, but preferably within the first six months of a traineeship.

Everything was supposed to happen very quickly: The Learning → The Coding → The Teamworking[[3]](#footnote-3) → The Paying Back. Meeting my classmates and getting to know their background immediately made it clear that I was not the only one who had decided to enroll so fast. All of us were taking a similar risk.

Due to the speed in which the goal to become a market-recognised web developer had to be reached, there was no space for the study material to be questioned and customized to the group’s interests. The students had to be compliant and inherit the values that define not only the web developer, but the user, too. What are these values and roles of each actor, you ask? Let’s break them down.

A user is a human who navigates the interface as instructed, clicks exactly where they are told to, agrees to all terms and conditions, accepts all cookies, and has the physical finger muscle ability to do so. In other words: if the user doesn’t click their way through these components demanding agreement, the user is excluded from accessing the information they’re trying to access. To the web developer who integrates ads, cookies, and other engaging digital components on their website, the non-compliant user doesn’t exist. When coding, the question he worries about is not ‘What if they don’t want to click?’, but ‘How do I make them click?’

Imagining the role of the user in meeting the conditions of such an interface reminded me of a dream or rather psychedelic experience someone who was once dear to me told me about. In this dream slash psychedelic experience, he saw an image of himself, uncontrollably devouring chunks of information. He didn’t specify what exactly these chunks looked like, but I envisioned mountains of food that the poor, lost parents of Chihiro were downing in during the opening scenes of the anime *Spirited Away*, just before they’re turned into pigs. The story of my once dear one, then, ends with him describing that if he were ever able to stop devouring, he’d perish.

Although horrified by his own imagination, this image of him was hitting close to home. Each time I’d look up a reference of something he’d opinionated about, *The* *New York Times* seemed to have reviewed it in exactly his words.

1. It seemed to promise a lucrative salary. Most importantly, it seemed to be a field too fresh to have a history of creative input from an artistic perspective. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 1344 EUR [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ‘Putting a bunch of people to work on the same problem doesn’t make them a team—as the sloppy performance in all-star games should teach us. And furthermore, even studying teams as they are constituted today may not be sufficient, for these are teams which have grown up in an environment pervaded by the myth that programming is the last bastion of individuality.’ — Gerald Weinberg, *The Psychology of Computer Programming* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)