**sIMPLY Smart**

What is nothingness when digitalized? Metrics.

Let’s go back to the bootcamp coding school class. I couldn’t help but wonder: ‘Really? Are we still here as users? Still only asked to share and organize our metrics?’ I guess my experience of information breaking me down made me wonder what needs to be built in its place. Let us first break down the role of a web developer according to the given study material.

A web developer is smart.[[1]](#footnote-1) He writes semantic code and knows all the HTML tags.[[2]](#footnote-2) He works a lot. Forgets to take breaks. When his code is broken, he likes to punish himself ever so slightly by not sleeping. One week before the project’s deadline, he will work until four in the morning every night. It has a strange effect on his skin, a condition he likes to justify as a reaction to the seasons changing. In his sleep, he often dreams of unresolved work-related issues. Sometimes he finds solutions in them. He remembers these. He starts his morning by applying solutions to the code, just to see if he was right in his dreams. He agrees to be slightly addicted to being right. He needs this validation, not only from his computer, but from people as well. He wants them to say that he works *a lot*. In this way, he doesn’t have to say it himself, and it gets easier for him to focus if they know that he’s currently not available. That’s one of the reasons why he works *a lot*. Average web developers dream of working remotely from Thailand; true web developers dream of building their own software one day. In terms of location, they like to stay in close proximity to their money.

If you’re on a path to become a web developer, this is what the bootcamp coding school will encourage you to become. If you’re in a tricky bureaucratic situation, just like I was, fears will guide you into studying the material more closely, just as I did. But I was also lucky one day, when the most skilled coder in the class told me that web development is all about copy-pasting toward the client’s needs. She did not study the material seriously, nor had any bureaucratic reasons to do so. She was a self-taught web developer who made me wonder what I’d choose to learn if I were to build my coding practice independently from the educational model thrown at me as a form of introduction to the field.

Getting insight into the tech industry taught me certain things I’ve mentioned before: how the ‘true’ web developers featured in my courses would, when hired by corporations or start-ups, mainly do the work of infrastructure maintenance, and not the expected expression, innovation, or experiment.

Let’s question what *smart* means in this case by looking at another example: a young web developer.

In December 2020, I decided my Instagram feed needed more coding-related content from aspiring web developers. After typing ‘web developer’ in my search bar, the first account that popped up was that of a boy who, according to his bio, *hacks sh\*t together*. At that precise moment, he became my new protagonist.

According to the metrics, he had 37,7K followers. Tapping on the latest image welcomed me to a very long scrolling session. As I was scrolling, I studied the bits surrounding each post: dates of posting, the written descriptions, hashtags, the camera’s angle, filters, and even some of the comments. It seemed like a very eventful account.

I started investigating with my third eye—my editor’s eye. A new picture was posted every three to six days. While indulging them, my first impulse as a user was to subconsciously categorize them as minimalistic. The saturated filter applied to these images added a spooky, cinematic atmosphere to my new protagonist’s room. Nighttime shots gave me the sense that there’s some *serious hacking* going on. And that it’s pretty quiet. Most of the pictures showed my protagonist coding, checking their phone, looking out of the window, stretching, standing, and relaxing in front of their working station: a desk containing a laptop, a big screen, a keyboard, a mouse, a plant, and only sometimes a robot toy whose brand I couldn’t recognize. From time to time, an acoustic guitar or electric bike seemingly broke the monotony of the repeated still life. The room seemed to be the only context in which my protagonist operated. In all of these images, the coder is never *not* present. In all of these images, the coder is never *not* working.

Each image was accompanied by a sort of written motivational letter. Some of these texts wished to reveal tips on how to become a successful web developer in just three steps, while others described the protagonist’s learning trajectory, listing the tools and technologies he was currently teaching himself. He was keeping up with the modern frameworks and rapid changes of the tech industry.

In one of his posts, posted just before the end of 2020, the protagonist shared with his followers that his end goal of the year was to make his web app completely bug-free. And as for 2021? He wanted to reach 100K followers. Unsure of whether this was the content I was looking for, I followed the account anyway. This might just be the push I never knew I needed, I thought to myself.

My protagonist’s posts appearing on my feed made me curious about his audience. I started reading the comments from his followers and fans: besides fire emojis and multi-colored hearts, there were a lot of desperate questions, urgently asking for more tips on how to become a successful web developer. Tapping the names of his followers and supporters revealed a niche of very similar accounts. In them, my potentially new protagonists were posing next to their work stations, writing comparable motivational quotes, and settling for similar commodity comforts: a motorbike, a guitar, an ergonomic chair, an overpriced yoga ball. All of these profiles had enormous amounts of followers.

Unwilling to let my reflections end there, I decided to reach out to my chosen protagonist. After introducing myself as a (senior)researcher on *Working Trends*, I told him I was interested in hearing more about the methods through which the production of work and the production of its online representation merge together within the culture of influencers. A young web developer seemed to be an ideal figure to base my study on. *On a further note*, I told him, *I found you whilst looking for motivation to wrap up my own coding projects in 2020*. Before asking actual work-related questions, I wanted to know his age.

At the time of our conversation, he was almost eighteen. He told me that his interest in the tech & programming field dates back to when he was twelve. Passion led him to join a bootcamp school where senior developers taught kids the basics of programming of both hardware and software. In his further coding endeavors, he focused on deepening his skills in HTML, CSS, and Javascript.[[3]](#footnote-3) Learning faster than he had anticipated made him lose interest in the ever-present, collective learning through coding workshops, so he decided to build stuff from home. Pure DIY energy of a self-taught coder, it was. Working solo from home gave him the time and headspace to build his own web product, which, according to him, worked the best for his specific needs.[[4]](#footnote-4) It sells in 135 different countries and, at the time we were chatting, reached almost 40,000 users. User dependency made him upgrade the product to a Premium version, which also made it possible for users to support him in maintaining the service.[[5]](#footnote-5) Working simultaneously at a company and a charity, his long-term goal was to make his products profitable enough to live off of them. He had been earning money since he was sixteen, and continued to do so.

But how does he manage to maintain his IG account and a K amount of followers next to such a huge amount of actual work? He told me that he created his account back in the summer of 2017. Throughout 2018, the number of followers grew exponentially, even without any IG tricks (purchasing bots, hidden hashtags, follow for a follow back and subsequently unfollowing, and so on). Although he tried, he never really worked with sponsors. Instead, he spent chunks of time connecting with the programming community, all the while posting consistently. The digital maintenance of his IG account soon became a natural habit.

When I complimented that his bio ‘I hack sh\*t together/ I’m a web developer & designer☝️’ sounds quite convincing to newbies like me, he confessed that he actually invented the trend of presenting himself as a young web developer at the age of fifteen. After writing ‘15-year-old Web Developer’ in his bio, it didn’t take long before other 15-year-olds picked up on this age claiming technique. However, he did not continue editing the number while growing up: he didn’t find it that impressive anymore to be a 17-year-old web developer. Not because he had aged slightly, but because the tech & programming community grew insanely fast in just a few years, meaning that even younger (plus way older) generations joined continuously.

My next questions pushed him away: *Do you use any filters or physical tools in the actual space to make the images appear to be in the same light?* And if so, how much time do you spend on the post-production of an image for an IG post? Is the repetition of style important to you? And if so, could you please elaborate on why? Is posting every three to six days your natural flow, next to your other work? From one of your posts, I learned that you’re still in school and that it feels like a joke to you compared to your other work. How do you organize the time to do both? Do you work in the evenings, and do you have time to do homework next to it? Being ‘successful’ in both fields (web-dev and IG) makes me curious about which one you invest more time in, your IG account or your work? Do you have a registered company? Feel free to skip the following questions. Where do you find your clients? Do you have accounts on various freelance platforms? What is your social life like? Do you ever get tired? Would you consider hiring an assistant? Is programming and managing your IG account something you see yourself doing for a long time still? If you could give any advice to your generation, what would it be?

As if the algorithm could feel the death of our conversation, it started populating my feed with fashionable web-development content such as reels that hypothesized how programming languages would look like and behave if they were a (female) human. At some point, I started getting content from 40-plus men sitting in front of their work stations, giving the camera a thumbs-up, writing motivational descriptions and doing exactly what the younger ones do. It was then that I realized why my protagonist opted out of his own trend. When I clicked on one such profile to check the number of followers, a similar K amount appeared. It works either way, I thought to myself, and decided to train my algorithm differently.

Both examples of a web developer make it obvious that the ultimate form of any work is fashion.[[6]](#footnote-6) Just *claim* to be a front-end web developer. Claim to be a full stack web developer. Claim to be a creative developer. Claim to be a UX designer. Claim to be an expert. Claim to be a female web developer. Claim to be a creative coder. Claim to be a web architect. Claim to be a web artist. Claim to be a critical web developer. Claim to be a code writer. Claim to be Ania Kubów. Whichever one you choose,‘you will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body—otherwise you’re just depraved.’— Sadie Plant, *Zeros and Ones*.

Is a web developer considered smart because of his dream to build a software, his eagerness to learn new languages, his industry-compliant nature, or his portfolio? All of these points depict the workload of maintenance. Can a web developer be considered smart, simply because he is bored of building the interfaces he taught the users to demand?[[7]](#footnote-7) In my opinion, a smart web developer knows how to take a (short *and* long) break from coding, without a sense of guilt.

1. ‘For the mainstream thrust of anti-intellectualism, as it stands today, characterizes thinking itself as an elitist activity. And even if one were to get excited about leaving the contortions of mental effort behind, today’s anti-intellectualism makes no corollary call for us to return our fingers to blood and dirt, to discover orgiastic block, to become more autonomous in our ability to fulfill our basic, most primal needs, or to become one with the awe-inspiring forces of the cosmos.’ — Maggie Nelson, *The Art of Cruelty* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Writing clean code which describes the computer what each text component represents; i.e. titles are put in <h1></h1> tags. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Basic tools for building a website. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ‘I created one web app in particular, called YouTubeDLD, which (I like to claim) is world's best YouTube downloader on the market without ads, spam and limitations.’ — My protagonist [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. ‘I recently introduced the Premium version, which allows users to support and help me to maintain the service by giving them the ability to download higher quality using my own encoding algorithm. In theory this means you can download 4K videos in 4K quality (which YouTube itself even doesn't allow its users to do).’ — My protagonist [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. ‘We live in a world with multiple timescales, all moving simultaneously but at different speeds. Brand calls it the order of civilisation. Nature, or geological time, moves the slowest - like the skater in the middle of the pinwheel. This is the rate at which glaciers carve out canyons or species evolve gills and wings—over eons. On the next level is culture, such as that of the Chinese or the Jews—which lasts millennia. On the next concentric ring comes governance—the rather long-lasting systems of monarchies and republics. The next level is infrastructure—the roads and utilities those governments build and rebuild. Faster yet is commerce that occurs through that infrastructure. And finally, the outermost ring is that of fashion—the ever-changing styles and whims that keep the wheels of commerce fed.’ — *Present Shock*, Douglas Rushkoff referring to Stewart Brand’s book *The Clock of the Long Now* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. ‘Personal content: I feel like they are considered 'smart' when they use a new partly unsupported experimental property that makes my 2015 computer burn through hell but then they place a popup telling me I don't deserve to get access to the content because I don't want to throw away my decently functioning computer) for a new one.’ — Unnamed Web Developer [↑](#footnote-ref-7)