Chelsea Simmons
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Reading 2: Thoughts on *Pretend to Be a Bot, Rehumanize the Web* by Sebastian Schmieg

For the second reading, I opted to read *Pretend to Be a Bot, Rehumanize the Web* from Studio Berlin which can be found here. This is an interview between Clara Herrmann and digital artist Sebastian Schmieg. Schmieg creates works based on a concern that humans are enabling machine learning through companies data collections of our everyday moves even what we do for fun ie Facebook.

This article brought up a lot of points of concern for me. Facebook learns a lot about its users and earns a fair share of money from their input as well… and why do humans feel like we need their service in the first place? Why has our society decided it can no longer sustain relationships without the help of it? Why are most OK with the things it subtly does to us over time ie. tracking what we purchase on Amazon or even communicate with one another about? Schmieg mentions, "I wouldn't want my friends to send me messages on Facebook because they are being paid to do it," yet Facebook is the most public place in the world. Most people seem to prefer to communicate exposed on the front walls of one another's pages than in a DM. Most humans seem terrified by the thought of AI yet we contribute to it day in and day out. I think AI can be helpful but it is scary how it is influenced by humans. How much of our characteristics do we want to influence on these robots?

In class we watched *AI vs. AI. Two chatbots talking to each other* posted by CornellCCSL on Youtube and while it was funny it also greatly disturbed me. The robots jump

quickly from introductions and "Hi how are you?" to arguing about their identities and religions in a disrespectful manner.

Schmieg also mentions that "AI has the potential to become a fight between companies with the most power." How did this happen? This reminds me of the challenges that arise with the Net no longer becoming neutral. Do those with more money and manpower start to wield more control over our networked world? This is disturbing because there are always humans behind computers. The drive behind the blind superficial can ultimately lead to disaster. I do not feel that many understand or have reflected on the consequences of using these technologies in the ways they have. Where will all this data mining take us? As Schmieg demonstrates with his neural network recreation of Ray Kurzweil's fathers books that generate new thoughts albeit awkwardly from old books and writings- machine learning is a process that isn't very difficult or time consuming to create.

Schmieg leaves us with the desire to keep questioning where we stand in this constant automation of our lives and ponder where we stand with this newfound lack of privacy.