

CONTROL AND QUESTION

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Logged in: Gonzo (GON), Optimo (OPT), The R3n3g4d3 (REN)

GON:
What's up guys

REN:
Hello fellows

OPT:
Hi!

INTRODUCTION

The obsession that is at the core of this research is one you might recognize. It is an obsession. My obsession with the internet. That is the first reason for me to write this essay. I am completely obsessed by the possibilities of the medium but at the same time skeptical about how it is used.

Twenty-and-a-bit years after its public launch, a lot of the technologies made possible by the internet have made their way firmly into our lives. The transition from an offline to an online world is pretty complete right now, at least here in Europe.

A big aspect of technology in general is optimization. The act of making the best or most effective use of a resource. If you are an engineer at Google you want to optimize search to keep making profit, to in turn make smarter Artificial Intelligence, a better server infrastructure, better self-driving cars, et cetera. If you are a user of Google, you want to search the best song of the day while you're taking the fastest route to work. To save time. To save money. To be efficient.

Users and providers interests clash constantly. What is best for Google might not be best for you, and vice versa. But we *are* interdependent. We have to keep living life with technology. At this point it has become essential to our lives. It's not to be ignored. Rather, we should be taking a

much closer look into some of the technologies that drive our societies.

A lot of development of the internet originates from the United States. The land of the American Dream. I wanna take a peek into their world, without ever having been there, I think I know something about this crazy place.

I want to question the optimization fetish that comes from technology. It influences daily lives of us all, whether it's first hand or second hand. And it's happening on both sides of the spectrum.

I want to look specifically at the influence the tech industry has in this story. With the tech industry I mean the industry that develops goods, software, services and platforms on the internet. Often free for us to use. The industry that has Silicon Valley as its Jerusalem (or Alexandria). This industry is key to designers because it fundamentally shapes tools that we work with. And more than that. No software, no platform, no service, no device is without ideology. This is where we have to be critical.

I am not an expert of the internet. But I am also going to try to look at these problems from engineering points of view, playing a kind of technological etymology.

I think programmers are also not the ultimate experts of the internet. The ultimate experts are the users. People. You, me. We might not know how everything works behind the screens, but we're the ones that know what we want from it. We can identify failure or success without looking at any review, rating, or performance measure. There is a problem with influence. Users can't directly fix things that bother them. Users are being kept in the dark about how things work. Users are being pushed into user-dom.

Maybe this is where the designer comes in. The designer is both a user of technology as well as a shaper of content and interface on digital platforms.

With this in mind, I pose the question:

How does design relate to optimization in the tech industry?

CHARACTERS

I will adopt three recurring ways of speaking to present my research. They are three characters. The characters represent opinions and attitudes from interviews and talks

fused with articles, documentaries and my own personal experience.

I do this mainly because in personal experience there is always the first-person perspective, the world through a filter, shaped by experience. It is that kind of view of the problems posed here that I want to expand.

Secondly, many of the things I've learned from the internet is not by reading pages in a book, but reading from online sources. The way we read online is different from the book in the way that it usually involves more people. A Wikipedia article is a crowd-based piece of information, groups of people make articles appear in your feed and comment sections show instant discussion between readers.

And I still believe discussion is the most interesting way of learning. This narrative structure is an attempt to show different sides of the medal.

The characters go by the screen names of Gonzo, Optimo and the Renegade.

Gonzo is in his mid twenties. Based in The Hague (NL), he dropped out of design school and a Computer Science college degree to work on his art. Child of a mother and father that are supportive of his life choices. He has a job working at an electronics store. Via a message board for app developers he met Optimo.

Optimo is a man, 32 years old. He lives and works in Amsterdam as a Human Resources manager for the public transport company of the city. In his spare time he enjoys going for a run or visiting galleries in the city. And most of all he likes to spend time on little programming projects. On the message board, Optimo and Gonzo also meet The Renegade.

She (?) is the hardest one to reach. No one really knows who (s)he is but she/he has been a moderator of the forum for more than 20 years now. It's known that The Renegade has worked as an engineer in the tech industry of the USA and that he (?) resides in Berlin, with h(er/is) partner Alex.

This team never met up IRL yet. For a couple of years, they have been discussing developments around Silicon Valley and technological innovation. They're looking in from the outside and are looking for ideas to pick up and make into a common project. But they always disagree. What follows are some of their discussions.

1. History of the Internet on Wikipedia,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Internet
↩

AS I WALK THROUGH THE SILICON VALLEY

(INTRODUCING THE TECH
INDUSTRY)

Idea of GAFAM.

The sentence describing Silicon Valley, the series: "In the high-tech gold rush of modern Silicon Valley, the people most qualified to succeed are the least capable of handling success".

REN:

Ha, sentimental today? Internet is dead, man. Bruce Sterling, writer of cyberpunk novels and design critic, argued in 2014 that it doesn't make sense to still talk about the internet . That we should instead talk about GAFAM – Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple and Microsoft. This makes perfect sense. These companies have been shaping the internet in very real ways. If you are not using one of GAFAM's services, your neighbor or government is.

GON:

Tell me oh gr8 R3n3g4d3, why did you bring this hot potato into the conversation tonight?

REN:

Well, I was overthinking this quote. These are the people setting our defaults, right? Let's call it defaultism. People love consistency. We say we want change, but we also want everything to remain the same. Defaultism describes the happiness and willingness of people to use an unchanged, working design.

In the beginning of the internet, people were customizing everything, wanting to touch every part with their own style. Hell, the whole idea of stylesheets – code to stylize web pages – was to have a *personal* stylesheet, which you could use on every page on the internet. Instead, pages would offer their own stylesheets. Now after that stylistic power has been moved from the individual user to the

provider, new standards came to be which we are now happily accepting, *because they work*.

Now, I want to talk about the people setting the defaults, because they go way beyond the looks of a website. In fact, that's only the first thing you see it happening.

~~~~~> visionaries / dictators. Zuck, The Iron man

Silicon Valley

~~~~~> Setting the defaults in user agreements

One of the places where defaultism is very harmful is in the User Agreement. That's essentially a legal document you should read before accepting to cooperate. Nobody reads it of course, and so in the light of using a free service, you accept. But to what? You don't know. And that kind of default can be really harmful.

I may generalize a bit when I say Silicon Valley cooperates with the United States authorities, but yes. Google will give the United States military access to basically any data stored on their servers. NSA has a finger in the porridge.

And the only thing you can do is weep and regret. But realize that these documents are made to be uncomfortable to read. This here is a kind of extortion. It's an unfair game, so don't be sorry you've lost it.

~~~~~> Commercial Science: smart!

GON: *Silicon*. A material that puts your personal ideals behind the steering wheel. A material that supports bigger boobs and smaller computer chips. The computer chip manufacturer has since long left Silicon Valley, but what stayed behind is still shaping the world.

I see Silicon Valley as the Hollywood of technology. Comfortably situated on the West Coast of the United States, it is a birthplace that exports amazing things. Technology instead of movies. And while movies were already of a huge influence on our culture, the technology wave is much more customized and designed for the individual. All of your personal desires and needs will be satisfied by your smartphone. At least that is the promise.

The American Dream, a hard climate with lots of competition, little or no government support, I'm not really sure what to attribute the American individualism to, but I think it's very blatant in some things that are developed there. Every single thing that makes it to the top is fucking dripping of Sell-Me-Fat. It's crazy.

I like to play a game sometimes. Name anything and we'll see if there's a startup in Silicon Valley working on something that connects to that.

REN:

Pants

GON: Alright, let's see. Athos. Raised \$35 million <sup>2</sup> in November 2015 and are working on smart pants.

"Athos. Building a better human machine." Scott Anderson, Director of Athletic Training at Stanford University

REN:

People as machines, I really cannot grasp how this has become such a popular thing to say. Isn't that the only thing we're not?

GON:

Nobody likes a smarty pants, but pants are getting smart. A company from the United States called Athos is now selling wearables that use small EEG sensors to measure muscle activity and give you real-time information about your sports routine. It uses science to convince and athletes to model for their commercials.



Athos pants

Benjamin Bratton gave a very insightful talk at TEDx San Diego[^benjamin]. He used the stage to critique the format TED uses. He argues that TED is not really critical towards technology. Instead, the institution books speakers that tell incredible stories of how technology changes the world while these visions do not always come true.

Bratton makes a case for design as immunisation. Design, he says, should not only focus on innovation but also on making ourselves immune for the things we don't need.

I don't know if we need the new wearables. But I do get the feeling that there is some overlap with the problem

Bratton addresses towards TED and things like wearables and Smart objects. TED has faith in technology. But, Bratton says, not enough commitment to technology. It is a fetishization of the optimal condition, making any performance sub par worthless while this might not be the case.

Calling objects 'smart' in itself is a strange practice, I think. Weren't watches already very well made devices before the smart watch came along? How smart is it to buy a smart phone? Isn't it kind of stupid to keep on calling a little machine that can only do things it is programmed to do - smart?

REN:

And another American thing: faith. Believe in technology!!!

~~~~~> Reverence for Technology

This reverence comes back in the terminology but also the stories.

~~~~~>

TED - Reverence for technology instead  
of commitment to technology

~~~~~>

Startups, Angel Investors

Angel investors are the shiny demons that come to help your company be good in the world. A Fetish of optimization can also lead to forced entrepreneurialism. Silvio Lorusso, an Italian in the Netherlands, made a striking portrait where he made a supercut of two Silicon Valley founders that

~~~~~>

Where most knowledge is.

~~~~~>

Nostalgia for the absolute

1. Alexis C. Madrigal, *Bruce Sterling on Why It Stopped Making Sense to Talk About 'The Internet' in 2012*,
[http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/12/-](http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/12/)
↩
2. <https://techcrunch.com/2015/11/18/athos-pushes-up-to-51-million-in-the-bank->

COMPLEX WEB

REN:

So Silicon Valley is where the ideals of optimization have taken flight. Now, one of the places where optimization makes a huge difference is the back-end of big services and platforms. For instance Netflix or Amazon. The cloud is servers spinning on a rack, interconnected with cables. Wireless is only a half-truth. There are strings attached.

Services designed for our daily lives, things like Uber, Deliveroo, Maps, have all been designed with the objective of 'scalability' in mind. Scalability means that these systems will get better when they grow. These systems optimize by growth. So as they exist, we can now ask: *is bigger better?*

THE CHAOS MONKEY

GON:

True story: Netflix has been releasing monkeys inside their server centers that wreak havoc and shut down parts of their systems. It started with one monkey, but soon an entire legion of apes was formed, each one trained to break another part of the servers.

REN:

In 2012 Netflix released an open source version of this Simian Army. Now everyone can use Netflix' monkeys inside of their server rooms.

At Netflix server centers they have this approach called the Chaos Monkey. This basically shuts down random parts of their server infrastructure with the only reason to see if the system stays up. The system *needs* these little destructions to survive, just like organisms are dependent on smaller creatures or bacteria to survive.

DAO

1. Explain blockchain
2. Explain ethereum
3. Explain DAO crash
4. Speculate.

This has some heavy implications. What if you disagree with a system? If even kicking over that system means that it can learn and regenerate? It's a scary thought. What can you do to be subversive?

Well, like X said, there are still errors to exploit. And I think you should always be on the lookout for those exploits. They usually happen at the fringes of tech or society. In the decentralized network called Ethereum, there was a big crash recently. Let me explain it to you here.

Advantages of distributed networks.

DAO fiasco.

KIVA

OPT:

I love watching this video of the sorting robots in Amazon's warehouses. The Amazon services that use the chaos sorting approach. By making the

Massive selection. 21 million types of items into one system. Robots eliminate the walk that amazon pickers used to do. Everything is delivered to the picker. Fastest cycle times are under 15 minutes. It's all about more product in the same footprint. It doesn't need walk space so the warehouse is more densely populated with goods. Scalable as hell.

Pick, scan, pack. We try to simplify their life and hide the technology. All Kiva Pick workers are happy pick workers.

2

At Amazon, the warehouses no longer store items categorically. Rather, the objects are placed on the shelves according to what's fastest. And in turn, when the item needs to be retrieved, the robots picking up the items find their fastest way. Optimized time in the back allows Amazon to run a huge online shopping experience while remaining fast access.

So what all of these examples suggest is that the bigger a system gets, the more chaos it needs to survive. Order has its limits when it goes too far.

THE REMEMBRANCER

Explain the ceremonial function. Is that the function left for us?

More noisy walks. -> Corporate pressure.

Reverence / humble attitude in the face of technology.

Regular users should know that all of our tech can fail. The world as a beta test. Alpha's have had their time. More diversity and more failures for more commitment. We are in a way the problem of the tech because of impatience. In order to help ourselves, we should help the community of tech, and have a better link between the two. Move towards each other.

The siren server.

1. <https://youtu.be/quWFjS3Ci7A> ↩
2. <https://youtu.be/6KRjuuEVEZs> ↩

FILTER TROUBLES

OPTIMIZING COMMUNITIES

REN: A community is usually something that forms over time. Friendships grow, relationships are built up and broken down in smooth motions. There can be a kind of natural organization. I'm not sure if it can be called optimization and if it can be optimized. In online communities there is a whole deal of building, guiding and optimizing, so let's discuss the makeable community.

THE FRONT PAGE OF THE INTERNET OR THE SOCIAL UTILITY THAT CONNECTS YOU WITH OTHER PEOPLE AROUND YOU

GON:

I'm a big fan of Reddit. It's a social news platform spanning about every topic you can imagine. Sports, politics, help groups, the full monty. It's called social news for its ranking system. Users upvote or downvote news that they find good or interesting and earn karma points for participating in the community.

OPT:

I never got around to using Reddit. The interface just isn't comfortable for me.

GON:

Oh, you're really missing out! It takes some patience to get into this thing, but once you're in there you'll wonder how you ever did without it!

REN:

I'll explain some things about it. It's got a fantastic history. If you say reddit, you have to say Aaron Swartz. The Internet's own boy. At a young age he was already involved in developing things like RSS and the Markdown programming language, which is in wide use today. He was an activist for freedom of speech online. And he co-founded Reddit.

GON:

On Reddit, the system in place relies on a kind of direct democracy, but it doesn't exclude all downvoted posts. There is a category for controversial posts which features content that have a small difference between up- and downvotes. Subreddits are there for specific topics.

REN:

Yes, Reddit is a big site. It's content comes from users, the moderators are users and it seems to work. Unlike social networks that want your information to feed you back your own preferences into algorithms, the community learns from each other.

One element that makes it work I think is choice of content. On reddit, you decide what subreddits you subscribe to. Subreddits work around topics, not people. That's the first thing you do when you use the site. You subscribe to smaller communities on this huge message board system. The content comes first, and the people on the site make the discussion.

That leads to another aspect which makes reddit so succesful. In the process of delivering content to you, the advertisements stay out of your feed. The platform is essentially non-commercial.

He really was an idealist. Someone who cared for the societal impact of his own choices. He went down in history with a tragic ending, but this showed also his over the top idealism. While studying at MIT, Swartz had access to the JSTOR database. Sharing that is what eventually led to his tragic death.

Aaron Swartz called himself a sociologist. In one of his blog posts that institutes shape culture. He say criticizing culture is too superficial. It makes more sense to look at the institutions behind them.

OPT: How does reddit compare to Facebook?

REN:

Discussion. Reddit trusts people! Which is a key element in open discussion, new ideas, critique, etc. I think design can learn from this basic element of trust. In many media that are prepared by graphic designers, the audience gets messages dumbed down so much that it almost misses its initial point. Trust your audience, ppl.

In the end, reddit does a much better job in connecting people, and building an online community in the sense that the people using it aren't left feeling trapped or tricked by their own circles, which happens more often in Facebook's community. Ironically, all of our close friends are connected via Facebook while we meet new people on reddit.

If we call Reddit the open community, let's call facebook the filter bubble. Where reddit's content is filtered by people, Facebook uses algorithms. Reddit can be weird not because reddit is weird but because people are weird. Life: it is what you make it.

EDGERANK

OPT:

How does that work?

REN:

Facebook works with an algorithm called edgerank.

'In explaining the counterintuitive findings in a 2008 Science article, Evans noted that automated information-filtering tools, such as search engines, tend to serve as amplifiers of popularity, quickly establishing and then continually reinforcing a consensus about what information is important and what isn't.'

FLUFF BUSTER'S PURITY

OPT:

I'm using this tool recently for Facebook that's called F.B. Purity. Not really liking it, it looks very Web 2.0. Facebook's interface is always changing so the tool can be pretty buggy.

REN:

Yeah, but it does what you want. You can't always judge a tool just on the looks or user-friendliness. The people making that stuff usually do it on their own time and without any payment from anyone! This dude is focussing on the essentials to keep it working. If you think about it,

it's kind of amazing. He's like a little David against Facebook Goliath. It's fucking DIY!

OPT:

No, I think I'll give up on it. It takes me too much time to manually add the list items. I want someone or something to do that for me. It shouldn't be that hard, right?

REN:

I'm not too sure about that. I don't think this guy has a big team or a lot of resources to develop it as professionally as a Silicon Valley startup would. But in that is a lot of value, this person is an idealist. It's underground and independent.

GON:

I love this solution, it's clumsy and perfect. Hail the clumsy solutions, the hacks and stooges. 'Cause this is still showing the cracks in the pavement, right? Still showing that people aren't satisfied with what's in front of them.

SOCIAL MEDIA FOR EVERYONE. OUT OF THE BUBBLE, CONTENT SAME FOR EVERYONE.

Hopefully that will make a better discussion than everyone in their own niche.

LEARN TO BE BORING

'programmers might want to design their software to be less helpful in order to force users to think harder. '

Uittreksel van: Carr, Nicholas. 'The Shallows'. iBooks.

HAIL THE CLUMSY SOLUTIONS

OPT:

I've switched to Self Control.

You Might Also Like

Every person experiences the world through their own filter.

If looking through the filters of Facebook, these get echoed back to you.

The dérive, psychogeography of Guy Debord, studying the city.

Dériving on the internet is more boring if you do it as yourself.

Because. Does it wrong: Facebook (easy target but hey)

Finding obscure subcultures is great because there is a big-ass community.

1. Aaron Swartz, *Sociology or Anthropology*,
<http://www.aaronsw.com/weblog/socvanthro>
↩

FLEETING TIME

(OPTIMIZING TIME)

~~~~~> T.O.D. – Time On Device Nathalia Dow Schull

GON: Alright, so I was reading about machine gambling in Vegas and I saw lots of parallels to the internet, check it out: machine gambling developers are always trying to optimize the time people stay on their device. It doesn't even matter how much they win / lose. As long as they keep coming and come for long amounts of time, these companies keep gaining.

The crazy thing is that it does not stop there. They are all-inclusive strategies. Using the architecture of the casinos, the layout of the city. It all contributes to this magical abbreviation: T.O.D., *Time On Device*.

REN:

It reminds me also about these PC bongs in South Korea, where people are sleeping behind their computers.

Hijack #2: Put a Slot Machine In a Billion Pockets

GON:

This is how you get stuck:

HOW?

~~~~~> Internet. Addiction?

OPT:

It is tricky to call it an 'addiction' because it still is a social network. Time Well Spent - > Going towards design that does 'well' to people.

GON:

Yeah, but I would say some media have been made so

tempting to use that it's almost impossible not to.

~~~~~> Time Well Spent: Growth Hackers

OPT:

Guys, I think you should see this. It's called *Time Well Spent* . It is a design movement that claims they want to align technology with our humanity. These people recognize the problem that our media is trying to get our attention and they offer some solutions.

They make a division between 'attention' companies and 'platform' companies. The attention companies are for instance Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat and Netflix and the platformers are companies such as Google and Apple. The former needs to maximize attention to make money, the latter are builders of the interfaces and goods that sit between these networks and us.

The attention companies profit from our screentime, while the platformers should be the party that benefits users more than companies since they are the moderators of the interactions we have with technologies.

All the time we are being distracted we have the feeling that it's our own mistake, but it's easy to forget that attention companies have hundreds of employees working for them that are called 'Growth Hackers.'

There are a lot of strategies they use to maximize your attention, which will gain them profits. These strategies are very invasive, and make very conscious abuse of some concepts from psychology and addiction science (?). I've summarized some of these strategies here, to demonstrate how incredibly simple they are and how sneaky they can be.

Hijack #1: If You Control the Menu, You Control the Choices

Hijack #3: Fear of Missing Something Important (FOMSI)

Hijack #4: Social Approval

Hijack #5: Social Reciprocity (Tit-for-tat)

Hijack #6: Bottomless bowls, Infinite Feeds, and Autoplay

Hijack #7: Instant Interruption vs. "Respectful" Delivery

Hijack #8: Bundling Your Reasons with Their Reasons

Hijack #9: Inconvenient Choices

Hijack #10: Forecasting Errors, "Foot in the Door" strategies

GON:

If you come to see it from this perspective, the whole internet seems pretty awful. All big services are using these kind of techniques! But I have to say there is a kind of dark pleasure in binging out on things like Netflix or Youtube. I have to go in sometimes and not come out for a while. Everything is shiny, everything smiles, there are rewards everywhere, why wouldn't I like that? It gets in the way of working or studying, but sometimes that's exactly what I want.

REN:

Well, in my early days I would also spend entire days messing with a PC and a program, trying to hook all things up. That took most of my time and I could get lost in it, but there was still a personal responsibility, I had to cooperate with the computer to get where I wanted to get. I don't know. I think designers should just follow their own perspectives and personalize these things much more. If you ask me there is just not enough diversion. We've put the responsibility to answer all of our questions with GAFAM even though we've always known they're big corporations. Stop whining about that their services suck, of course they're annoying, they are trying to sell you something.

Life is pain, princess, anyone trying to tell you  
differently is trying to sell you something Farmboy,  
Princess Bride

OPT:

Sure, that may be the case. But the point is not if an individual makes that choice or not. The point here is that everyone has to deal with these media. And they're not based on the best interests of their users. And when we might transition to some new kind of media, it would be best if we keep in mind these destructive patterns for people. The new architecture of systems should be free of these disgusting addiction hooks.

Protecting people's time is as important as things like privacy.

~~~~~> Time Well Spent: Solutions

Look, I'm just pleading for Time Well Spent because they make a good point. Their aim is to develop a more intentional relationship to our devices. The solutions put forward by *Time Well Spent* are pretty straightforward. Their aim is to change the game

GON:

I don't know about this, it seems a bit like a one of those

non-solutions, like the R Sonic for smokers. It's a hilarious thing. I used it for a while when I tried to give up smoking. The Rsonic is like a second filter. It takes the tar and other black goo that still passes your regular filter which then gathers in this transparent plastic casing.

empowerment

~~~~~> Semi-solutions to real problems. Relying on tech for tech. Like the Rsonic for smokers.

OPT:

Selfcontrol

GON:

MOMENT <https://inthemoment.io/> is the mobile version of that. Crazy how you can see all of those tech companies supporting that tool, right? It's pretty strange.

OPT:

. I love these. Have you seen the Distractagone? That one might actually work.

REN:

No I haven't. Can you explain?

OPT:

The Distractagone is just a cube-shaped vault with a timer on it. It allows you to keep your phone locked inside for an X period of time. And during that time you are undistracted! It sounds like a great idea, Gonzo sarcastically put forward. But isn't this a forced solution? It's like hiding candy from children. That's never stopped them from taking the candy if they really wanted it.

GON:

Yeah, I think that's a very important thing to stress. No matter how many tools and thingamajingeys you use, if you are sensitive to these impulses you don't stand a chance against yourself. I mean, I'm using this Selfcontrol thing on a schedule. That means I can never go on Facebook but hell, I also installed a proxy so I can go there anytime anyways. I'm a sad fuck!!! haha.

OPT:

I talked to Charlie Stigler, the guy that coded Selfcontrol

. It seems fitting that he himself does not have any problems dealing with the problems a lot of people report from the attention companies. He says it himself, he doesn't have problems with self-control, he just has it.

REN:

Yeah, and still he did make this app. That's great. I think

there is a bottom line here, that says make what you make well, and then people might pick it up. ! And he listened to the call of people who were struggling.

~~~~~> Selfcontrol

Selfcontrol just blocks access to a list of hosts, that you can input yourself. It's a very popular tool.

~~~~~>

Patience quote from a16z podcast

~~~~~>

TL;DR: Demand patience

1. Natasha Dow Schüll, *Addiction by Design*, Princeton University Press, 2012 ↩
2. Time Well Spent, <http://www.timewellspent.io/> ↩
3. Interview With Charlie Stigler ↩

SELF

(OPTIMIZING SELF)

What's up guys, it's Optimo, and today we're going to talk about self-optimization!

Soylent

REN:

Hey, I was talking to my friend who eats this stuff called Soylent. Have any of you tried it?

GON:

Soylent, the powder that replaces food! Not a big fan. Also it's not available in the Netherlands for now. I'll stick to my mom's boerenkool for now.

OPT:

Yeah, I'm using it sometimes. Soylent replaces 'regular food'. It comes in a powder to be mixed up with water and contains all of the nutrients a human body needs. If I am in a rush or uninspired to cook, this stuff helps.

REN:

So, I hear it's also a sustainable solution for the future of

food. My first reaction was that if everyone would eat this food, the entire planet could be very well off.

GON:

What is the secret of Soylent Green?

OPT:

Good one, GON. The Soylent Green movie is actually based on a sci-fi novel from 1966 called *Make Room! Make Room!*

². That book introduced a version of NYC in which overpopulation caused people to resort to Soylent (soy and lentil) and water on ration. The Soylent Green film took it one step further..

All jokes aside though. I know it plays into the sentiment of science fiction. But science is also what makes this stuff possible. Rob Rhinehart – the guy behind Soylent – has a vision of what he calls a world after food. He wants to make it independent from agriculture, eventually. When agriculture doesn't scale with human needs, which he says will happen, this could be the thing to replace it. So it's not just convenient, it's also a step towards a solution for future food problems. According to a report called *How To Feed The World 2050*, the world will have 9.1 billion citizens that need food. We're going to need to improve things and optimize things and a lot of that comes from science and technology. Soylent is made on the formula of nutritional value per dollar and it is very cost-effective.

GON:

Wow. You make it sound like this food will solve all the world's problems. What about the pleasure of eating? Won't you lose that? I've heard Soylent is kind of tasteless. I think this only works if you care purely about the nutritional values and not societal values, like enjoying a dinner together. The DIY site is quite striking. If I wouldn't know better I would have missed the fact that it was about food..

OPT:

Yeah, that's true. I think the user base see food as a resource or a fuel instead of an experience. And that's totally fine. I think you shouldn't see it as a replacement for food, but rather an addition to your regular diet. Like Rob Rhinehart said, Soylent takes care of my needs through the week and I can eat well on the weekends. There hasn't been such a complete food alternative in the past and now it's also open to development for people that are using it themselves.

REN:

In general I think they're on to something. Food habits

have been changing for always. Why wouldn't we cheer this on? If the alternative is more of McD's, this is a step in the right direction. I love how the technology fuses here with real-life.

The people behind Soylent are using their experiences as computer engineers and scientists to optimize food. In their view, everything is made of parts, everything can be broken down. So they looked just at what chemicals a human body needs and put that into one airtight solution.

What I'm really curious to see is where the DIY community takes it from here. They seem to have recognized that what one company (Soylent) can do, they can do too, but more optimized to their own needs.

GON:

This is like the first last step into alien territory. Every aspect of life is built to human needs, and soylent stands for this total solution, which claims to have the answer for all. It's synthetic food, right? That's pretty nihilistic.

OPT:

Well, that's the great thing about it! They claim synthetic is better than natural. Synthetic food means it can be optimized for *humans*. In that perspective it really is better food.

REN:

You're absolutely right. Looking at the production process, they are handling the environment pretty consciously.

GON:

I just want to stress that the rituals around food are getting lost from ordering in and using these super individualistic rations. There's one missing ingredient in Soylent if you ask me and that's love. Really! It's more key to food than salt. I mean, would you serve this food to your friends?

DELIVEROO

Soylent 2.0: Use Less, Do More

Total food replacements were on the market for years, bigger innovation might be the marketing.

Productivity apps

YouTube's top tier program: YouTube spaces

Please make sure to like and subscribe and as always thanks for watching!

Self-raising people. Nobody in history had such a crazy different generation. Or?

1. SoyLent Green is People!!!
<https://youtu.be/9IKVj4I5GU4> ↩
2. *Make Room! Make Room!* on Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Make_Room!_Make_Room! ↩
3. <https://diy.soylent.com/> ↩

THE ART OF EXTREMITY

(OPTIMIZATION IN THE ARTS)

~~~~~> Art School means poor people with expensive taste.

Beautifully enough, the expensive taste bit of the quote is a little bit less true on the internet, where you can use the services available for free. Remixing is free, even sophisticated software is available for free, movies, sometimes high-resolution images all free.

~~~~~>

Post-Internet Art - movement that optimizes its art for the internet. The physical work does not matter anymore. Just the representation.

~~~~~>

And the catalog Art Post-internet.

~~~~~>

Fake It till you make it, a direct result of American culture?

Moby dealing with the failures of tech in smart phones in "Are You Lost In The World Like Me?"

CONCLUSION

I don't have the answer.

To make stuff better is not bad. But:

I do think design should be aware of the traps of optimization of tech allows. If there is one thing I've learned is that human beings and our systems have different agenda's. There are some things in life that don't need optimization. Optimization isn't the same as attention. It gets very awkward when you start believing technology has the answer to all of your problems. But it's tempting. And a lot of times technologies *can* help us.

Ren says at Thu Dec 8 02:43:25 2016:

Some pitfalls come from technology that design should be aware of.

- ~~~~~> Oversimplification. Very handy in programming, not so handy IRL. Trust your audience, they have an imagination. They don't read barcodes, they read stories, ideas, jokes.
- ~~~~~> Distraction for the sake of distraction.
- ~~~~~> Reverence of technology.

Oh, I'm so strict now, all of a sudden.

But, yeah. Gonz, do you have anything to add?

- ~~~~~> Use tech as your slaves? I think designers are pretty good at this already. Pass that attitude on to users. They know there's more to life than likes.
- ~~~~~> Design as immunisation: Actively prevent certain innovations from happening.
- ~~~~~> Be subversive to big systems but learn from them. It can be useful to see Google as your enemy from time to time but it doesn't make sense to blame them for all the problems in the world.

Yeah, optimo, you probably have the last word:

Thanks. I would say, be subversive towards big systems

If you get stuck in a 'Monkey Trap' situation

- ~~~~~> Ennui principle: Build up and release.
- ~~~~~> Use the *dérive* as an inspiration. Go with the flows of the stream and find all that good stuff.

And always keep messing with things!

CONCLUSION OF THE CONCLUSION

I just want to give this little bit of Benjamin Bratton for you:

At a societal level, the bottom line is that if we invest in things that make us feel good but which don't work, don't invest in things which don't make us feel good, but which may solve problems, then our fate is that in the long run it will just get harder and harder to feel good about not solving problems.

DESIGN IS JUST A TOOL. IN THE WRONG HANDS IT WILL DO WRONG THINGS. THE SILICON VALLEY OF DEATH DOESNOT HAVE THE ANSWER, BUT LOOKING AT THEM MAY GIVE SOME IDEAS.

We should be asking what the internet is distracting us from, not how the internet is distracting us.

For fuck sake, it's going to be a very difficult time for the arts. Right-winged politics took the USA, where Mr. Trump took a country by surprise. The biggest party in the Netherlands is racist and will take a lion's share in next February's election. Geert Wilders made public threats to the Morrocan community, he literally said he would CLEAN SHIP without specifying what. This is harmful. Politicians need to specify what they mean, empty words lead to confusion. Have we really no alternative for this politics of anger?

The internet's distracted us for a nice run. It was fun on there, but we should also really spend some time with people around us. See what they're up to. See what you can do together to have fun, or to help, maybe that's what this whole thesis was about.

A diversion into military equipment, disguised by sleek design, tempting with simple interfaces, catchy flashy sexy sensual all of that but what if that doesn't matter anymore and you're not feeling good in the streets anymore. Everybody has a plan until they get hit in the face. By Big data, refugee crises, right wing politics flexing their muscles. And all the while we just want to learn to understand our peers better. Whatttttt has it come 2.

I'm clueless, but I have renewed energy. There's so much great things happening in the world with new perspectives, new takes on how we could live together and share this planet, that I can only have some trust in the people that make these networks.

I'm going to sign off for a bit now, the internet is broken. But I'll be back in a day or two, because I can't really go without this thing.