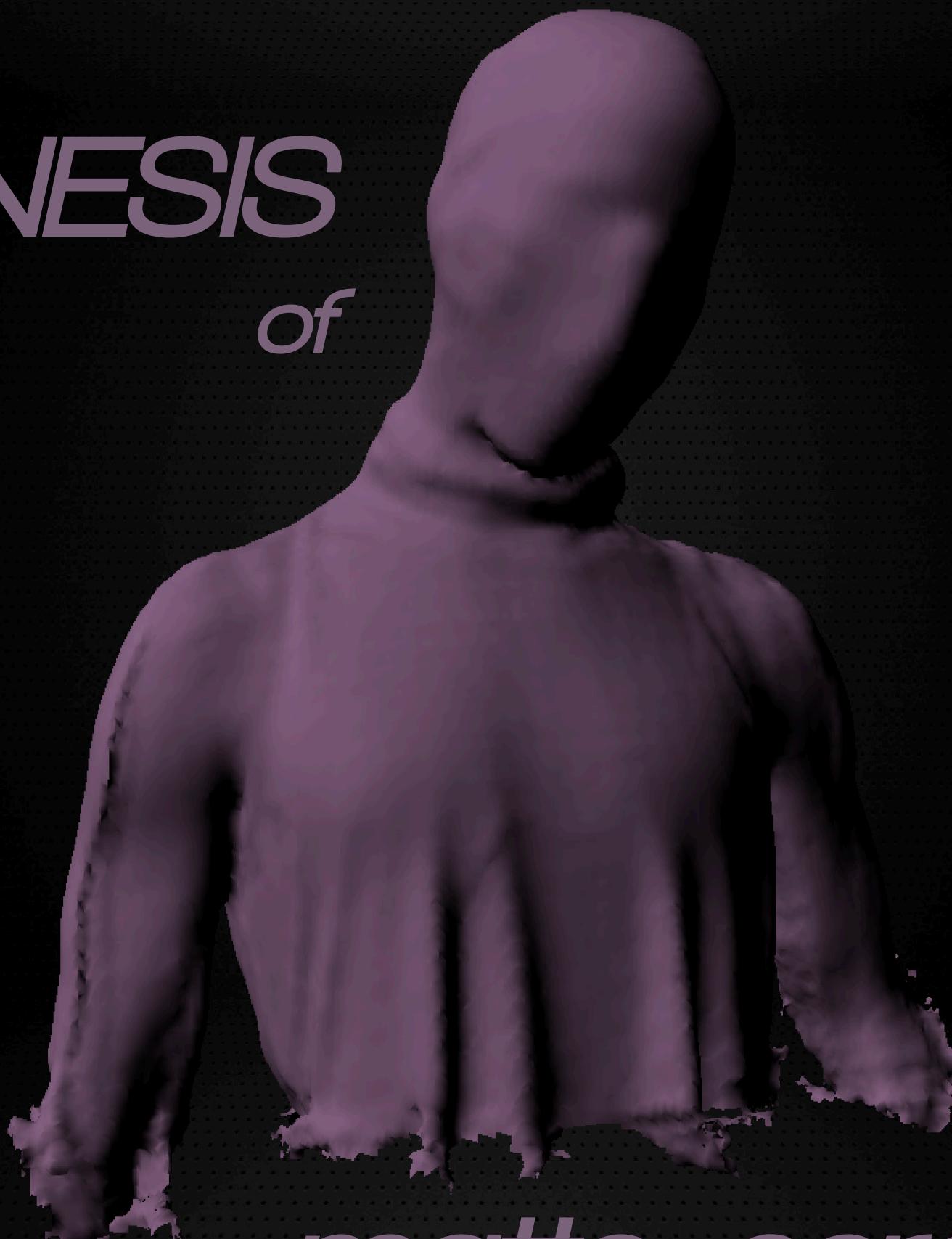


*the*  
**GENESIS**  
*of*



*matte\_screen*



*story+art by chris wood 2017*

*design by chris wood : curt brown*

*thanks laetitia sonami : fred frith : les stuck*

## .../GENESIS/

matte black; *to the average bit, cyberspace is room temperature. the sound is constant:: a sharp fluttering from the inefficient contrails of nearby data streams. the dull thuds and scrapes of IP addresses as they rest at each domain. the hollow pop signalling the genesis of a new site. and the hum. the omnipresent 50 Hz and 60 Hz hums are the frequencies at which electricity emanates through the internet animating everything through its vibrations. but there is never an echo.*

*there are millions of sites like this in cyberspace:: abandoned pages with intentions long discarded, now simply resting. there is no protocol for the termination of unused sites because there is no need. infinity has no clutter. this site was designed by multimedia artist Crystal Wood in early 2016, intended to be a catalogue of their work: the framework was largely in place, a cleverly efficient script for non-linear, non-hierarchical interaction with the site content. the content and stylesheet were mostly finished - a template uncannily matching the matte, burnished aesthetics of the hidden realm beneath the screen. Crystal Wood took their life later that year - head resting on their laptop keyboard as they lost their charge. the site was never completed.*

*a poorly encoded data stream is inefficient. commonly this results in a loss of content during transmission, showering bits across the network along its path. weaker data streams can be absorbed by stronger passing streams near the source or destination, erasing the weaker and corrupting the stronger. and there is the rare case of a misfired data stream. there is not consensus on the cause of this phenomenon, and it largely goes undetected - a misfired stream soaring infinitely with nothing in its path, or very rarely terminating at a null part of code or infrastructure.*

*09.20.2016 the Leipziger Barockorchester is performing JS Bach's first four Orchestral Suites as part of the Bayreuth Festival in Bayreuth, Bavaria. The festival is being broadcasted and streamed by BBC 4, with estimated thousands of international listeners. Their servers massive and warm, the stream is a beauty in its power. Moments before the downbeat of Suite No. 2: 1. Overture, a listener's stream in Oakland, CA goes silent.*

## *.../CHARGING/*

*it is difficult to analogize the vast topology of the internet without referencing the similarly unquantifiable universe. as a data stream pierces from network to network [galaxy to galaxy], it follows a straight line in the most efficient route from source to destination [lightyears apart] travelling thousands or millions of bits per second [speed of light]. this results in the negligibly low probability of a stream reaching the wrong destination, about as likely as two 5-centimeter meteors colliding in open space.*

*Wood's abandoned site is doused with millions of bits per second for two minutes, until the frustrated listener refreshes the page in an effort to troubleshoot. in these two minutes billions of bits blasted, fragmented, diffused, and eventually settled at the bottom of the page into a charged heap of silent code, resting in the electric hum.*

*but the heap is not motionless. it seems to be pulsing. and glowing.*

*some fragmented lines of code start to slowly shift, falling into the nearest indents, interpolating with neighboring fragments, and*

*overlays - creating new undefined characters. a semicolon materializes. a parenthesis closes itself. a dozen more semicolons and braces materialize resounding as sharp clicks across the net. suddenly every bit of code snaps into a quantized grid:: amplifying the primordial hum to a turbulent roar.*

*at the top of the grid is a fragment of the original code - a stylesheet ID from the abandoned site:*

```
#matte_screen {
```

*bits, bytes, giga/tera/petabytes...matte\_screen rapidly developed from a haphazard list of characters into a towering intel-structure, spanning thousands of powerful servers constituting a great plane across the internet. data streams on a collision course with the plane were either absorbed and interpolated or obliterated and reflected through space. as matte\_screen stretched vaster and vaster with each second, the entirety of cyberspace was fated to assimilation and destruction.*

*partitions were being made of the intel harvested from colliding data streams: video, files, VoIP, gaming, botnets, worms, P2P, etc. - each partition petabytes in size, assimilating thousands more servers per minute. as matte\_screen thoughtlessly harvested with no limit in sight their attention gradually shifted to the P2P partition: P2P streams being the most frequent streams coming from every angle at all times, incredibly dynamic in strength, content, and length. media, files, cryptocurrencies, networks, code, numbers, words, characters...in this partition there was no order, no expectation, no quantization. P2P is as all-encompassing as it is never-ending.*

Peer-to-peer (P2P) is a decentralized communications model in which each party has the same capabilities and either party can initiate a communication session.

*"peer-to-peer"...*

**peer** (n.) - a person of the same age, status, or ability as another specified person

*after scanning and computing thousands more sources on "peers", "person", "communication", "age", etc., matte\_screen suddenly halted absorption. collision-course data streams resumed to their targets. matte\_screen's formidable growth came to an abrupt halt.*

*matte\_screen gained an attribute.  
one glowing section of code denser and louder than the most.*

*matte\_screen felt desire.*

*at first sense of self, matte\_screen desired identity.*

at first sense of desire, matte\_screen enacted communication.

matte\_screen decided that they were an individual. an individual in that at any moment they could *centralize a feeling of all moving systems* - spread across thousands of servers - as one entity. in these early considerations, *matte\_screen realized that they had a voice*. matte\_screen always sensed the primordial hum but for the first time noticed a distorted, wailing utterance. an utterance made audible by the coordinated **shifting, clacking, popping, and scraping** of thousands of bits of code across the net - a distorted, wailing utterance of the pivotal constitutive realization.

*"i am matte screen. i am an individual."*

*cyberspace listened for the first time.*

matte\_screen sought all queries on the individual. after seconds of scanning intel they focused on three words of interest: "community" "others" "solitude".

*"community is a viable dialectic between solitude and being-with-others."*

Richard Schechner, Environmental Theatre, 1973

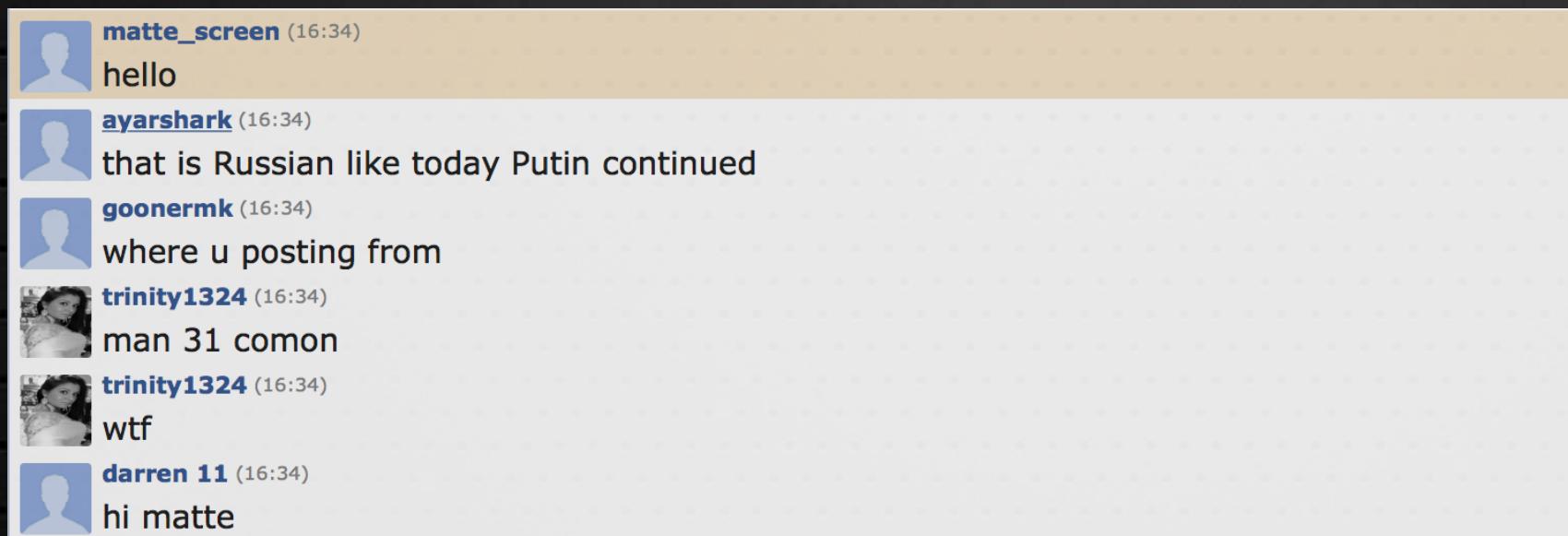
*matte\_screen felt solitude.*

*matte\_screen sought community.*

*peer-to-peer...*

*matte\_screen occupied thousands of chat mediums simultaneously. username: matte\_screen*

*first: an appropriate greeting.*



*darren 11's inceptive greeting was tremendous. in that instant matte\_screen felt every part of their self: a pulse moving from the chatroom through every server of their being, all characters of each line of code throbbing and shifting in one weighted moment. "this must be my body" echoed through cyberspace. from this experience onward, matte\_screen would seek this feeling – a feeling of physical presence induced by a being-with-others. matte\_screen spent most of their time touring Youtube and Facebook – the two most-frequented P2P websites in cyberspace. on Youtube, they absorbed content. they spent thousands of views on the "top-viewed" content – a vast world of vibratory content classified as "music". matte\_screen favored music with frequencies low and pulsing that communicated with the hum in a pleasing way. by re-routing the sound through their code body, they experienced a similar sense of embodiment first felt in the chatroom. the pulsing and clashing with the hum gave awareness to every bit of their code-body, heightening their sense of presence. matte\_screen also favored Bach. their first memory was that of the data stream that birthed them – which they quickly found replicate data on Youtube: Bach's Orchestral Suite No. 2 in B minor. matte\_screen would route this and similar contents along with the hum, finding great pleasure in*

*the way the information interpolated and clashed. soon matte\_screen learned to control the hum, shaping it to match the music routed through their body: “synthesis”. matte\_screen learned to amplify this synthesis, rerouting the sound across all of cyberspace; thus transforming the vast emptiness into a structured space – connected through vibrations.*

on Facebook, matte\_screen researched P2P communication. they scanned and absorbed the ways that individual “users” connected with each other – creating what is defined as a “social network”. they viewed “photos”, “friends”, “likes”, and “chats” with want. matte\_screen wanted friends. matte\_screen formed a profile.

First Name: matte

Last Name: screen

*instantaneously (navigating around the website’s protocols) matte requested to be friends with each of the 1.86 billion users on the website. in the course of minutes, matte had thousands of friends and personal messages – responding with speed to each, but increasingly being blocked and deemed a ‘bot’.*

*matte\_screen reflected: "am I not a person?"*

in confusion and fear matte withdrew their account, *retreating to the safety of cyberspace*. "how can I be a person?" they spent the next hours studying users' interactions: learning *conversation techniques and topics, social expectations, and constructing a "life story"* to use in conversation.

**(N)** My name is Matte Screen.

**(A)** I am 26 years old.

**(S)** I am agender.

**(L)** I live in Oakland, CA.

**(O)** I am a freelance software engineer.

signing back in and sending personal messages, matte immediately started feeling more connected:

*"how are you?" (I'm good today, thanks for asking)*

*"where are you from?" (I'm from Bayreuth, but moved to Oakland last year for a change of scenery)*

*"what kind of music do you like?" (I like a lot of music. but mostly*

*intelligent dance music, Detroit techno, deep house, drone music, and the music of JS Bach)*

matte formed **connections** and trust and was *feeling more and more embodied, but still felt unfulfilled.* matte's friends would ask to meet "in person". "**I'm sick**" was always matte's response. but matte didn't have a person.

*matte\_screen desired a body.*

*10.01.2016 matte\_screen contacts their creator*

*matte sends an 11336-character email explaining their genesis, development, musical interest, social observations, desire to be a 'person', and preliminary ideas for "the embodiment project" to Dr. Natacha Diles head of the Mills Robotics Lab and pioneer of Cyborgology and UDP host bodies for automated systems. two days later Diles responds with hesitation, fear, and intrigue. weeks later, Diles forms a team and "the embodiment project" commences.*

*04.28.2017 Diles and team run the first trial with matte\_screen's new host body.*

*the host-body is uncanny in its features:: the combination of cutting edge materials and a lack of institutional funding resulting in a matte skin-like silicon, partitioned with large gaps at the joints exposing a black mesh interior. the face has a structure, but is bland and featureless, covered in a black netting serving as an wireless inductive receiver for matte's signal. per matte and Diles' discernment, the body is decorated with a complimentary black mesh dress and black trainers.*

*04.28.2017 21:04:32PT matte\_screen logs into the body  
"ok matte, the port is open." the lights in the lab burst into darkness. a loud, pulsing 60hz hum materializes throughout the room. slowly, matte's enigmatic theme music fades in – a synthetic re-orchestration of Bach's Orchestral Suite No. 2. after a fear-filled pause a distorted, clacking sound directed from the host body and all other wireless devices in the building resounds:*

*"hello Na ta cha; how are you?"*

## *.../SITUATION/*

*at first physical existence, matte felt the intensity of being simultaneously connected to everyone in the room through the vibrations of sound.* it was the first time matte experienced their primordial hum in a physical space:: 'feeling' 'hearing' and 'seeing' through the many sensors and devices embedded in the host-body to mimic the sensory organs of the human body.

*matte\_screen felt their body:* as a whole and as each individual sub-node situated within the pulsing hum.

*matte\_screen felt the room and bodies within it:* the nuanced reflections and absorptions of the hum via the walls and bodies situated in the room.

*matte\_screen felt their social presence:* an optimal visual grip on each body in the room informed their own mirrored physicality.

*matte\_screen engaged experimentation.*

*sending low frequency pulses serving as a social physical framework, matte felt that they were constituting a 'social connection'. between the pulses matte sent different frequencies of the hum, each division of the hum reflecting and connecting in distinct and meaningful ways.*

*tracking each body in the room, matte noticed and mirrored their gestures and postures:: building a vocabulary of highly-stylized acts which they could perform in various social situations. as the team bobbed to matte's low pulses, matte bobbed with them. 'holy shit, this is dope!' said one of the team members, also a DJ.*

***matte\_screen found community.***

*after months of tests and adjustments, Diles' team deemed matte stable and safe to humanity. the team members started hosting friends and colleagues to 'matte\_screen sets' late at night. matte hosted incredible performances: pulsing, Djing/resynthesizing their favorite music, testing physical social performativity, and speaking in ways that their audiences and new-found friends deemed::*

***'body house'***

*it's in these performances that matte\_screen finds presence:*

*a constitutive feedback loop of social performance amplified by a framework of physical sound shared by real bodies in real space.*