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## What should technology be used for?

In a 1999 interview, David Bowie was asked,

“[The internet] is just a tool, isn’t it?”

He just grinned, and said, “No, it isn’t. It’s an alien life form.”

He was right. What does it mean to be alien? To be strange, otherworldly. What is the internet, cyberspace, if not this? Another world, wholly different than the one we once knew. The implication of the phrase “the martians have landed” is fitting in this case; an instant in time which shocks humanity out of its lonesomeness in the universe, introduces something entirely *other*. When the first computers switched on, a new era began for humanity, an era of circuits and networks, and it was indeed a shock of the alien. A new path for humanity opened in that instant, or in reality series of instants, in mathematicians’ passion projects and cryptographers’ offices and engineers’ hands around the world. They ushered in the alien.

A life form? Yes—consider the tenets of life according to biology: to consume, to grow, to reproduce, to change one’s surroundings. Since 1999 the internet and its surrounding technologies have done all these things; spread its wired bulk across every continent and every household, so far that even those too poor to interact with it directly do feel its influence, in the political pressures and infrastructures surrounding them. The internet lives, and breathes: breathes in the detritus of a million million minds and churns all those ideas together before spitting them out in new forms, new software, new tools, new games, new stories.

Bowie stressed on that day in 1999 that the ways in which the internet would change culture and society, for better and worse, were unimaginable. Over twenty years later, we’ve seen many of its effects indeed for good and ill: in how the rise of social media has redefined our

relationships with each other, the widespread availability of information and misinformation pushing political boundaries, the lifting of GPS networks and the falling of firewalls. Whats the use of a technology like this? Technologies like the internet are tools for change. Technology molds us, shapes our societies, our relationships, our art. It gives us new forms for expression, has redefined the relationship between creator and audience. It's not a question of whether it *should* be used for this. It simply is. What can we do? Ride the waves of change; embrace the new forms, use it to create things altogether new. We live in an era where anyone can learn to code, and for any purpose. The flesh and muscle of the alien is bared open for any to splice.

In my case I'm interested primarily in works of art, in narrative expression: in using technology to stretch the boundaries of narrative media. In the early 2000s there emerged the concept of *hypertext literature*, borne from Calvino and Borges and authors like them who started to twist the boundaries between author and reader, push at the margins of the experience of the story. Finally their vision was realized: in the wired realm, hypertext brought decisions of navigation between pages, and therefore navigation through a story, purely into the hands of the reader. Hypertext served as the ideological foundation for interactive media: what was a static text became the visual novel, the branching-path story, the video game. I want to use the powers of technology available to me to create more like this. The use of technology is change: push the boundaries of art, and through these new forms of expression, affect the reader even more radically.

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