

The background of the entire image is a solid dark blue. Scattered across this background are several stylized, hand-drawn illustrations of computer monitors. These monitors are depicted in various sizes and orientations, some tilted and some more upright. They are rendered in shades of grey with black outlines. Each monitor has a single white circular element, possibly representing a camera or a light, and some have thin white lines on their screens. The overall style is minimalist and modern.

Computern

Master project documentation

In defense of the beige (or black) box

Of all *smart* devices in our possession, personal computers are among our oldest, yet still most capable friends.

We interact with them as media, utilizing them as products or services – until something goes wrong. All usefulness crumbles away as we find ourselves simply facing a machine that operates not as intended. Now with that in mind, how should the afflicted human face the silicon-based bane of their existence? *Computern* advocates an approach to our not-so-trusted devices as archaeological sites that may or may not offer insight into their magic black box, as malleable projection screens for us, and as rational systems that are not inherently useful, but very delightful and deserving of empathy indeed.



The toon character of Friend computer is used in some fragments. It is modeled after my own desktop PC case: a literal black box with an unscrewable front panel and four legs to stand on. Desktop Tower PC or laptops typically tend not to spark a lot of emotional attachment in their owners, hence it recieved some googly eyes to make up for that fact.

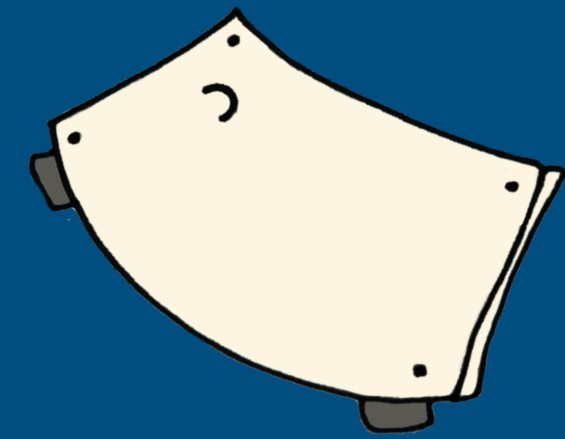
Computern – you keep using that word.

The term *computern* is a german neologism; the verbalization of the term *Computer* suggests *using* a computer as an end in itself. This is frankly pointless – computers serve as a medium to run programs that are being *used*. Thus it is in tune with the project's themes.

An Ode to the operating system?

The interesting thing about desktop computers is that out of all computing devices, they appear as the most *open* and *universal*: Most Software run by other types of machines has been written on and compiled by a desktop computer and even the most powerful supercomputers are often controlled through an ordinary PC. But most importantly, desktop computers expose their operating system more than any other common device.

This is mentionable, as an operating system is probably the most versatile program run by a computer. It performs most of its work unnoticed in the background. As their names imply, modern Operating Systems *operate* their machine and as such enable the humans in front of the computer to interact with it and to become **users** of other programs. Yet in itself, it has no immediate use: A computer with only an operating system and nothing else is in fact pretty much *useless*.



Motivation

The public relationship with technology tends to be a rather serious one and very purposeful. Almost a synonym for progress, interwoven with tales of the triumph of the human mind, a pillar of modern economy, and overall very magnificent.

All that grandeur cast aside, there is also the lurking real threat imposed by the power of ever more complex software and smarter algorithms distributed by companies that clearly have other interests than their customers in mind. And ultimately, there is that everlasting problem that machines don't understand their humans properly.

With this project, I attempted to explore ideas that suggest to put all of the aforementioned aside for a moment, to accept the ultimate one-sidedness of human-machine-conflicts and to embrace the uselessness and silliness that is sometimes inherent to our machinic friends and their history.

Results

Eventually, *Computern* became much more of a research project than originally intended. In the end, it remains a collection of observations, anecdotes and whacky presentation slides. These observations did not turn out to be expressions of some consistent point of view. Instead, they are connected by the theme of approaching technology in a cheerful way through the projection of lifelike qualities into the machine.

Website and Repository

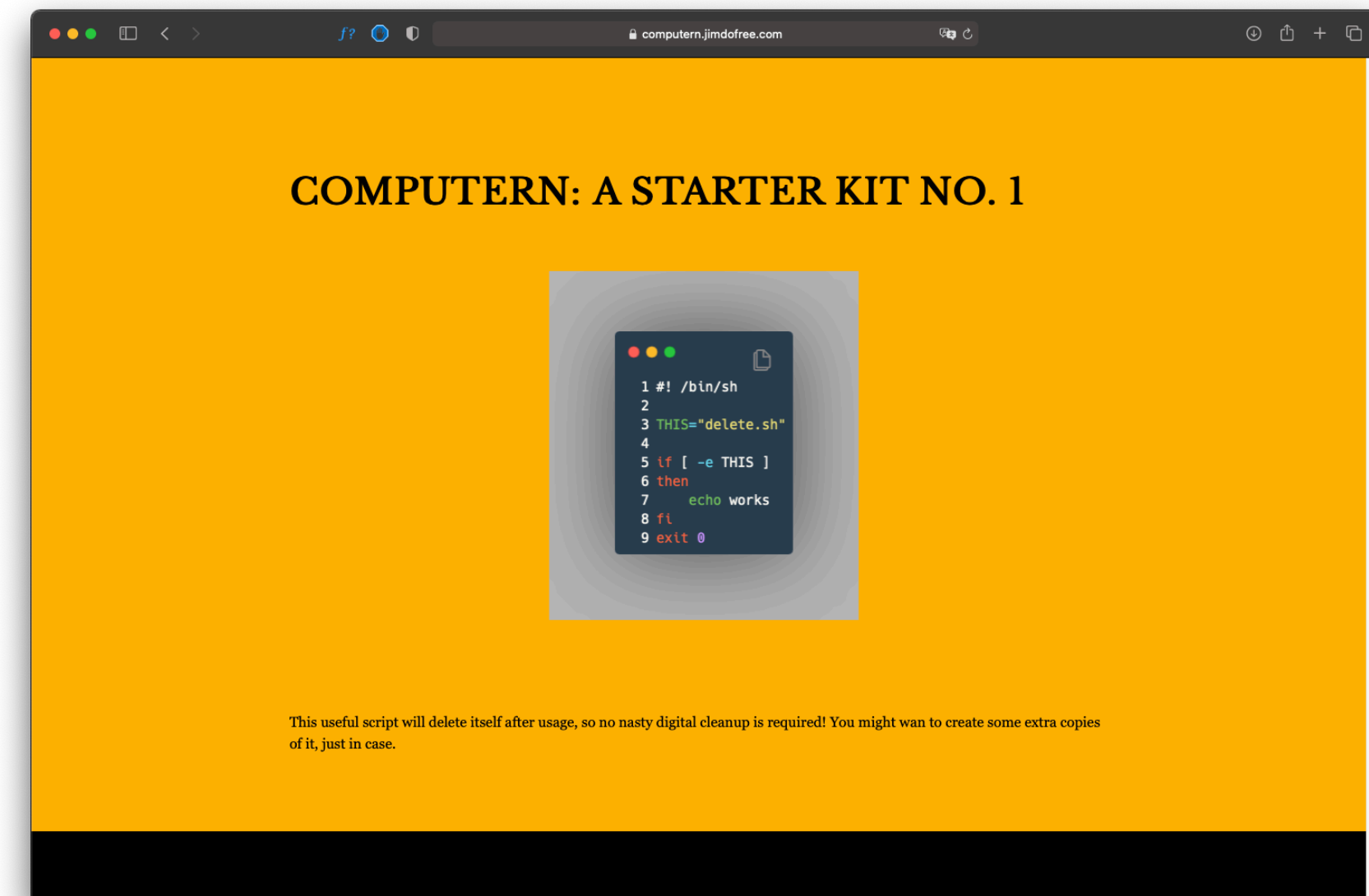
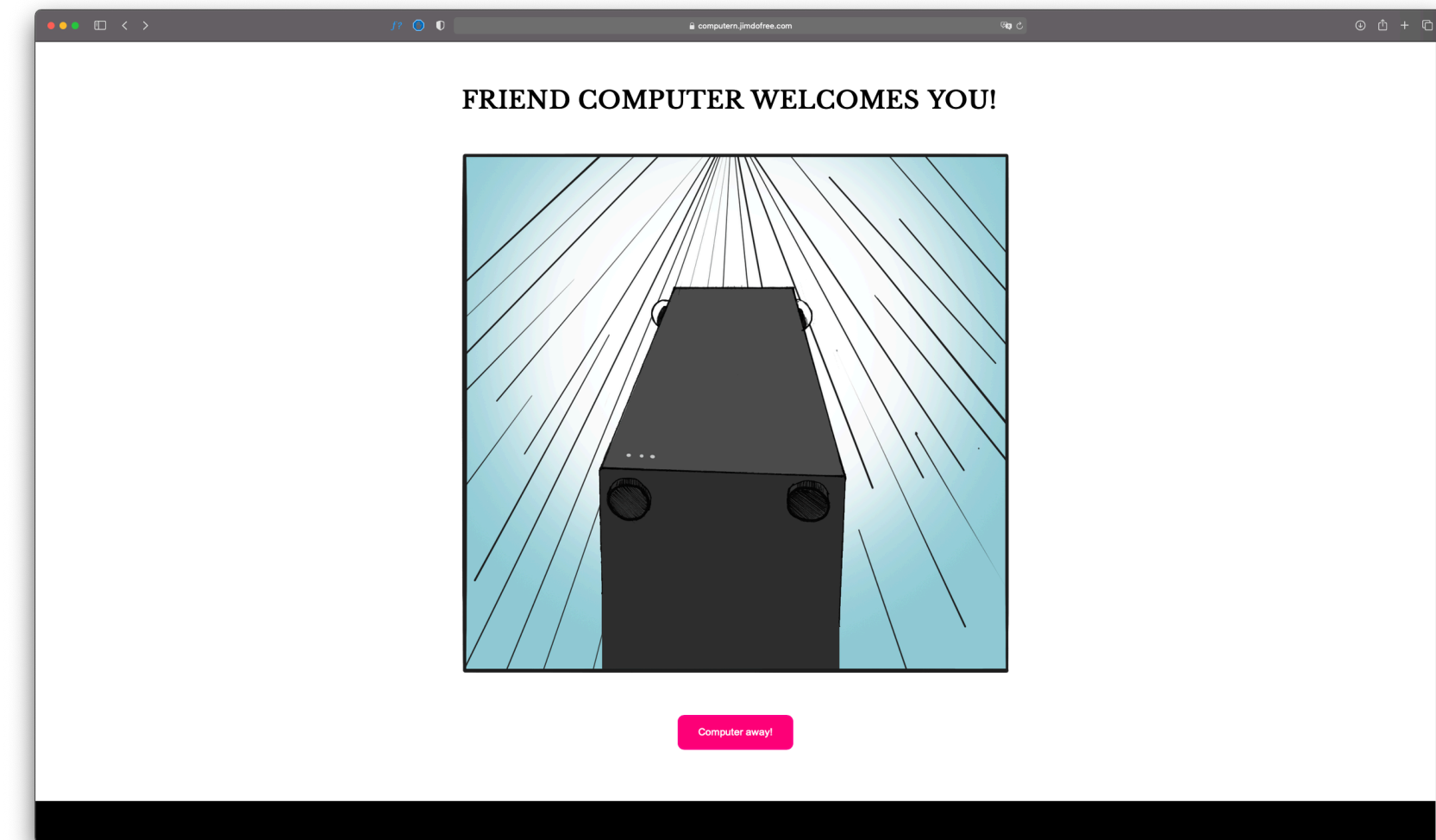
The collected and commented material can be found in the project's Github repository:

[\[Repository\]](#)

As an additional presenting format, I created the **Computern** website:

[\[Go to Website\]](#)

Its homepage offers to lead visitors to a random page containing a single, easily digestible fragment from the repository. Next to most of the material that made it to the Website so far, the repository also contains longer texts tying some of the fragments together in one document. It also includes some initial ideas, links to other works that I found somewhat related to the idea of Computern as well as all presentation slides created in the context of the project (including this one for extra self-referentiality).



Screenshots of the Computern website