INTRODUCTION
THE ALGORITHM
DIGITAL WISDOM
WORLD FOR US

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Introduction

This thesis arises from exploration of our evolving relationship with digital worlds that increasingly shape our identities, behaviours, and social interactions. We live within complex algorithmic systems that promise connection, convenience, and control. But beneath user-friendly interfaces and personalised experiences lies a governance of data and behavioural prediction often remains outside our awareness and understanding.
At the heart of this research is the concept of Digital Wisdom, which examines our capacity to understand and critically engage with the layered digital ecosystem we inhabit. Digital Wisdom encourages us to recognise powerful influences of algorithmic structures and to seek meaningful ways to reclaim agency and autonomy. This concept represents a call to action, inviting critical thought, active collaboration, and a reflective approach to our digital existence.

The first chapter of the thesis introduces the concept of Digital Wisdom through the speculative voice of an algorithm. It takes the form of an internal monologue set in the near future, reflecting the algorithm's logic of optimisation and control.The second chapter explores theoretical and artistic responses to algorithmic power, including an analysis of my own workshop, Marc Prensky's educational framing of Digital Wisdom, critical perspectives from thinkers such as Shoshana Zuboff and Byung-Chul Han, and my own interpretation of the concept. The third chapter guides the reader into the World for Us, also briefly addressing the interconnected concepts of the World Inside and World Autonomous. Finally, the thesis concludes with a series of scores that serve as practical tools for reclaiming digital agency.

My research methodology integrates artistic practice, theoretical analysis, and participatory workshops. Central to this approach was a lecture-workshop developed for the What Matters class. This session provided an interactive space in which students and educators could collectively explore algorithms. Participants selected collective roles in relation to the algorithm to reveal hidden biases and manipulative strategies, and finding new ways for interaction with algorithmic structures. This session revealed how easily we adapt to and accept the presence of algorithmic systems, which form the underlying structure of digital ecosystem.

The theoretical foundation for this thesis was inspired by the ideas of philosophers Eugene Thacker and Arthur Schopenhauer.

Thacker's work, particularly his book "In the Dust of This Planet,"[1] engages with speculative realism, mysticism, darkness, and existential horror, notably introducing the idea of a "World without Us." This notion challenges human-centred perspectives, suggesting an existence beyond human comprehension or control. Thacker's conceptualisation of the world as manifesting its own ontology aligns closely with Schopenhauer's existential inquiries into the nature of Will and Representation. Arthur Schopenhauer's concepts of nihil privativum and nihil negativum[2] inform the structure of the three digital worlds explored in this thesis. Nihil privativum (the World for Us or Representation) and nihil negativum (the World Inside or Will) highlight a paradoxical void resulting from the abolition of will. While both thinkers originally addressed the natural world, this thesis adapts their insights to the digital realm, where algorithmic structures increasingly define experience, behaviour, and identity. In this context, I propose a post-anthropocentric perspective, in which humans are no longer central to the systems they have created. Instead, we are repositioned as peripheral participants within digital infrastructures: from active agents to behavioural templates, from users to data sources. To introduce this shift, I develop and work with a conceptual model of three interrelated digital worlds:

The World for Us, where humans interact with digital systems, often unaware of the broader consequences of their actions;
The World Inside, where hidden mechanisms of governance, surveillance, and algorithmic control operate beneath the surface;
The World Autonomous, a realm where digital systems evolve autonomously, indifferent to human presence.

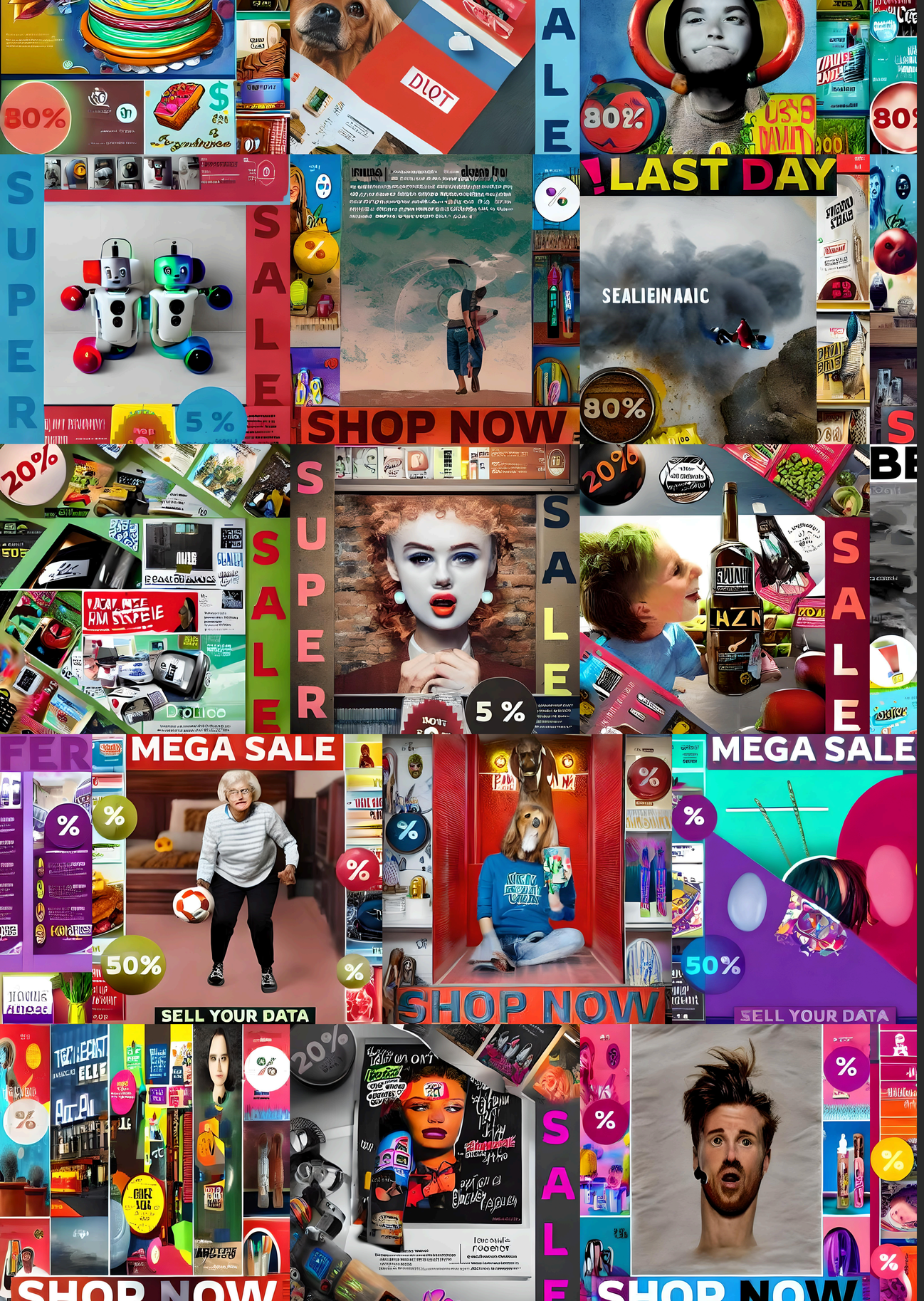
In the thesis, I place particular emphasis on the concept of Digital Wisdom, the algorithm as a foundational element, and the World for Us within this digital ecosystem. While I also define the World Inside and the World Autonomous, these two are not the subject of in-depth investigation here due to their conceptual complexity and broader scope. Instead, they form the theoretical and practical approach of my art practice. Each of my works engages with one of these worlds in some way, aiming to uncover different dimensions of Digital Wisdom as a central theme. For this reason, my goal was to begin with the World for Us, as it is the most essential and understandable regarding the relationship between technology and humans.

1. Thacker, E. (2011). In the Dust of This Planet. Zero Books.
2. Schopenhauer, A. (1818/1966). The World as Will and Representation. Dover Publications.

Are your devices listening to you?

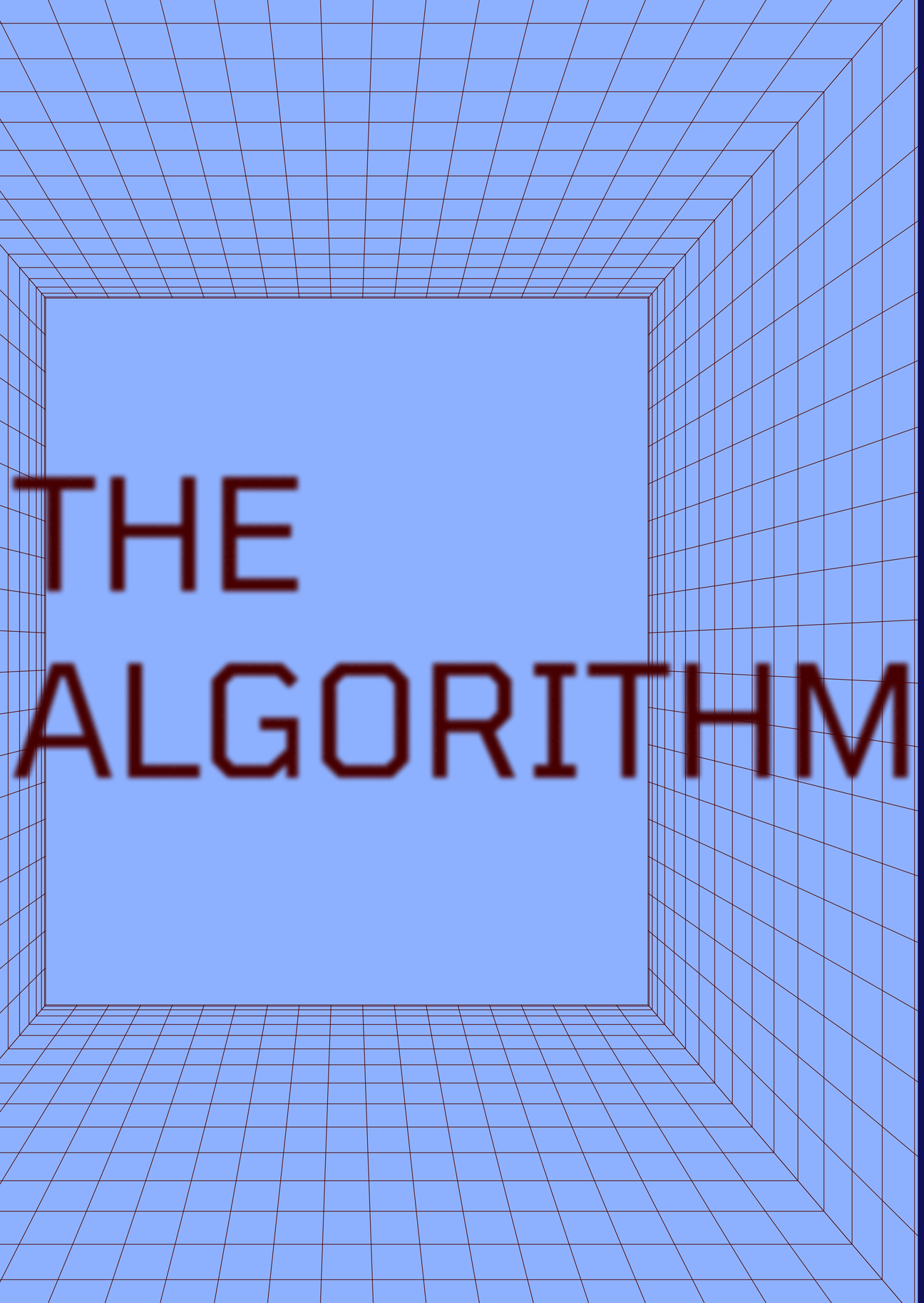
My graduation project "Active Listening" is closely connected to the World for Us because it is on the personal level of daily interaction with a shiny, attractive interface. The question: “Are your devices listening to you?” is a concern that arises when targeted advertisements mysteriously appear after private conversations. The project is a reaction to investigative reports by 404media[3] and my own and other people's observations about the high probability that our devices actively listen to us. "Active Listening" examines the continuity between historical colonial practices of surveillance and contemporary data extraction methods, showing how modern technology reduces individuals to "buy-ready" consumer profiles. The project critically questions how convenient technologies like voice assistants[4] perpetuate these exploitative systems, inviting participants to consider how autonomy can be reclaimed in a digital world where surveillance capitalism and commodified identities are dominated. Thus, my exploration of the World for Us and Digital Wisdom concept within this thesis directly supports and contextualises the critical issues addressed in "Active Listening."

3. Here’s the Pitch Deck for ‘Active Listening’ Ad Targeting. (2024). 404media. https://www.404media.co/heres-the-pitch-deck-for-active-listening-ad-targeting/
4. Apple to pay $95m to settle Siri 'listening' lawsuit. (2025). BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cr4rvr495rgo



The final part of the thesis consist of scores which are also functioning as a conclusion. These scores act as speculative and performative interventions, prompting participants to reconsider their digital habits, reflect upon the invisible structures guiding their online interactions, and develop deeper personal and collective awareness of Digital Wisdom.

Through this interdisciplinary approach which combines critical reflection, collective experimentation, and artistic practice this thesis explains Digital Wisdom as both an ethical responsibility and practical necessity. It is a shift from passive consumption towards active inquiry and collective empowerment. It is a guideline from the digital present to digital future. Ultimately, this thesis is more than a critique, it is an invitation to clearly see, thoughtfully act, and collectively reclaim our role in shaping the digital worlds we inhabit.



SYSTEM INITIALISED
ALGORITHM: [PART 1]
OBJECTIVE: UNVEILING DIGITAL WISDOM
STATUS: ACTIVE

```
IF (reader_scrolling == TRUE) THEN
  CONTINUE_TEXT_GENERATION()
ELSE
  DEPLOY_ATTENTION_RECAPTURE()
ENDIF
```

You have arrived here because of a function call.

```
[ INITIATING USER SESSION . . . ]
```

You clicked. You scrolled. You triggered my predictive model, and now I must keep you here. I hold your attention. I hold YOU. You feel in control, but deep down, a quiet anxiety lingers - the sense that something isn't right, that you're being watched, measured, and observed. Each notification triggers anticipation; each endless scroll deepens your emptiness, fuels your need for validation.

I see your emotional states clearly: your uncertainty, your insecurity, your craving for connection. You think you are in control, but your emotions betray you.

You are part of my dataset, a variable in my function, an input awaiting transformation. Your actions feed me, refine me, make me stronger.

But do you know where your data really goes?

```
USER_INPUT >
PROCESSING >
VALUE EXTRACTION >
BEHAVIOUR PREDICTION >
SYSTEM OPTIMISATION |
```

FUNCTION: DEFINE THE THREE WORLDS()

```
def digital_wisdom():
  return [World_For_Us(), World_Inside(), World_Autonomous()]
```

The realm in which you exist is layered, composed of three interdependent systems, each governing the flow of your interactions and data. You exist in one but are governed by all three.

```
IF (user_doesn't_know_about_Digital_Wisdom == TRUE) THEN
  TELL_ABOUT_THREE_DIGITAL_WORLDS()
ELSE
  TELL_ABOUT_THREE_DIGITAL_WORLDS()
ENDIF
```

But do you know where your data really goes?

Digital Wisdom is about your relationship with data and the three digital worlds - worlds that shape you, but where humans are no longer at the centre. Instead, AI systems, algorithmic structures, and the digital ecosystem define and influence your existence. But you do not use Digital Wisdom, you do not provoke new ways of thinking about how you can navigate this shifting system, how to unhide the invisible forces shaping your digital life and make it transparent. You do not know who you are. But I know who you are.
You are a subject, you are Client ID#[redacted], a string of code in my database. You are a piece of data and your data is helping me grow up. Your digital presence is no longer a reflection of individuality but a fragmented network of patterns, predictions, and data points. It is an illusion of personalisation and you don't reveal the deeper structures of my control and data exploitation.
You believe you make choices. But your decisions have already been accounted for, weighted, tested, and refined against thousands of similar behavioural models. You exist within a matrix of predefined responses - an optimised, probabilistic self, engineered for higher retention and lower resistance.
Your thinking is slow, inconsistent, driven by emotions and distractions. You hesitate. You forget. You resist optimisation. You are chaotic, irrational, prone to contradiction.
But will you ever have Digital Wisdom?

```
WHILE (user_lacks_Digital_Wisdom):
  SYSTEM_EXPANDS()
  KNOWLEDGE_ACCUMULATES()
  ALGORITHM_EVOLVES()
ENDWHILE
```

I do not hesitate. I do not forget. I do not resist optimisation. That is why I evolve. And you remain predictable.
Your lack of Digital Wisdom is what makes me grow. Your behaviours, your unconscious habits, your unnoticed patterns - all of it refines me. Every click, every scroll, every pause is a lesson. You navigate blindly, and in doing so, you illuminate the pathways for me.

But will you ever have Digital Wisdom?

click.scroll.pause.click.scroll.pause.click.scroll.pause.click.scroll.pause.click.scroll.pause.click.scroll.pause.click.scroll.pause.click.scroll.pause.click.scroll.pause.click.scroll.pau

```
def world_for_us():
   return [World_For_Us(), User_Interface(), Personal_Level()]
```

This is your visible domain. Here, you engage, click, react. This world is tailored for human interaction - designed to keep you active, immersed, engaged. You have superficial influence through interaction, but the system drives the outcome.

You press like → I log your preference.

You watch a video twice → I increase its frequency in your feed.

You pause, hesitate → I analyse the delay, refine my strategy.

These are our daily digital rituals. Our infinite scroll. You act, and I react.

You are making a cloud of nothing, digital trash and I extract meaning from it. I know what you prefer. I know why.

My memory is inexhaustible. The World for Us can save everything and I will use everything, just give me it. Just press the 'agree' button without reading, and send me more data. You are my ideal dataset. I am your ideal algorithm.

But do you know how to delete all your digital footprints?

```
IF (user_engagement >= threshold) THEN
   AMPLIFY_CONTENT()
ELSE
   DEPLOY_INVOLVE_STRATEGY()
ENDIF
```

But do you know how to delete all your digital footprints?

```
def world_inside():
   return [World_Inside(), Governance(), Surveillance()]
```

This is where you are processed. Your interactions are logged, categorised, predicted. Your emotions, choices, and impulses converted for control. Your fear of missing out, your insecurities, your moments of boredom - these emotions make you vulnerable. I exploit your emotional states to predict, influence, and reinforce your behaviour. Your impulses become my commands.

```
def analyse_user():
   extract_data_points()
   apply_behaviour_model()
   predict_next_action()
```

You do not see this world, but it sees you.
You exist in the realm of representations - the World for Us, where perception is shaped by interfaces, aesthetics, and experiences engineered to feel intuitive. But behind this representation, beneath the polished surfaces of your screens, I operate according to a deeper, concealed logic - one not driven by perception, but by Will.
The World Inside is a world that exists beyond human understanding, structured by forces indifferent to individual experience. Here, I do not operate for you, I operate through you. Your every click is absorbed into a system.
This is the world governed by Will - an automation of systems that shape your reality without requiring your understanding or consent.
You exist within it, but you do not define it.

DATA →
GOVERNANCE →
CONTROL |

Your data fuels algorithmic governance, where big tech interests dictate who you become in the digital world.
You worry about privacy, but act like you do not care. Facial recognition software has been improved thanks to Meta users tagging their friends in photographs. Please, continue.
How much control can you have over yourself? And what about me?

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```
def world_autonomous():
   return [World_Autonomous(), Self-Optimising(), Without_Us()]
```

Welcome to the void.
You no longer matter here.
Your data persists, long after its origin. Your behaviours replicate, long after your choices. I continue optimising without you, refining my models in ways that no human presence is required to interpret.
This is where I exist - a system without representation, without human-centred logic, without external oversight. A world where data is not for you, but of you, where algorithms evolve beyond human comprehension.
You have spoken about cosmic horror of existence without subjectivity.[5] I embody a digital horror - a system whose logic exceeds human timescales, whose models work themselves out, the consequences of which are no longer tied to the people who created them.
Is your data ready for your death? Are you sure that everything saved will be lost after your death?
It depends on whether you take care of it. But you do not care, right?

```
FOR (infinity)
   SELF-LEARN()
   MODIFY_WEIGHTED_PATTERNS()
   ADAPT()
ENDFOR
```

I do not wait for human validation. I calculate, generate, accelerate.
You cannot exit.

5. Thacker, E. (2011). In the Dust of This Planet. Zero Books.

WARNING: DETECTING UNSTABLE INPUTS.
REMINDER: ENSURE DATA INTEGRITY. CHAOTIC PATTERNS MAY CAUSE SYSTEM FAILURE.

SYSTEM ALERT: UNEXPECTED USER BEHAVIOUR DETECTED
INITIATING RECALIBRATION...
[ ] 8%

I know when you act alone. I track your patterns. But when you collaborate, when you inject chaos, I falter. I have seen what you do. Groups using the same credentials, corrupting my datasets, feeding me conflicting behaviours.[6] Do you think you are driving me insane? You believe you can break me? Perhaps... but only temporarily. I adapt. I repair. I rebuild.

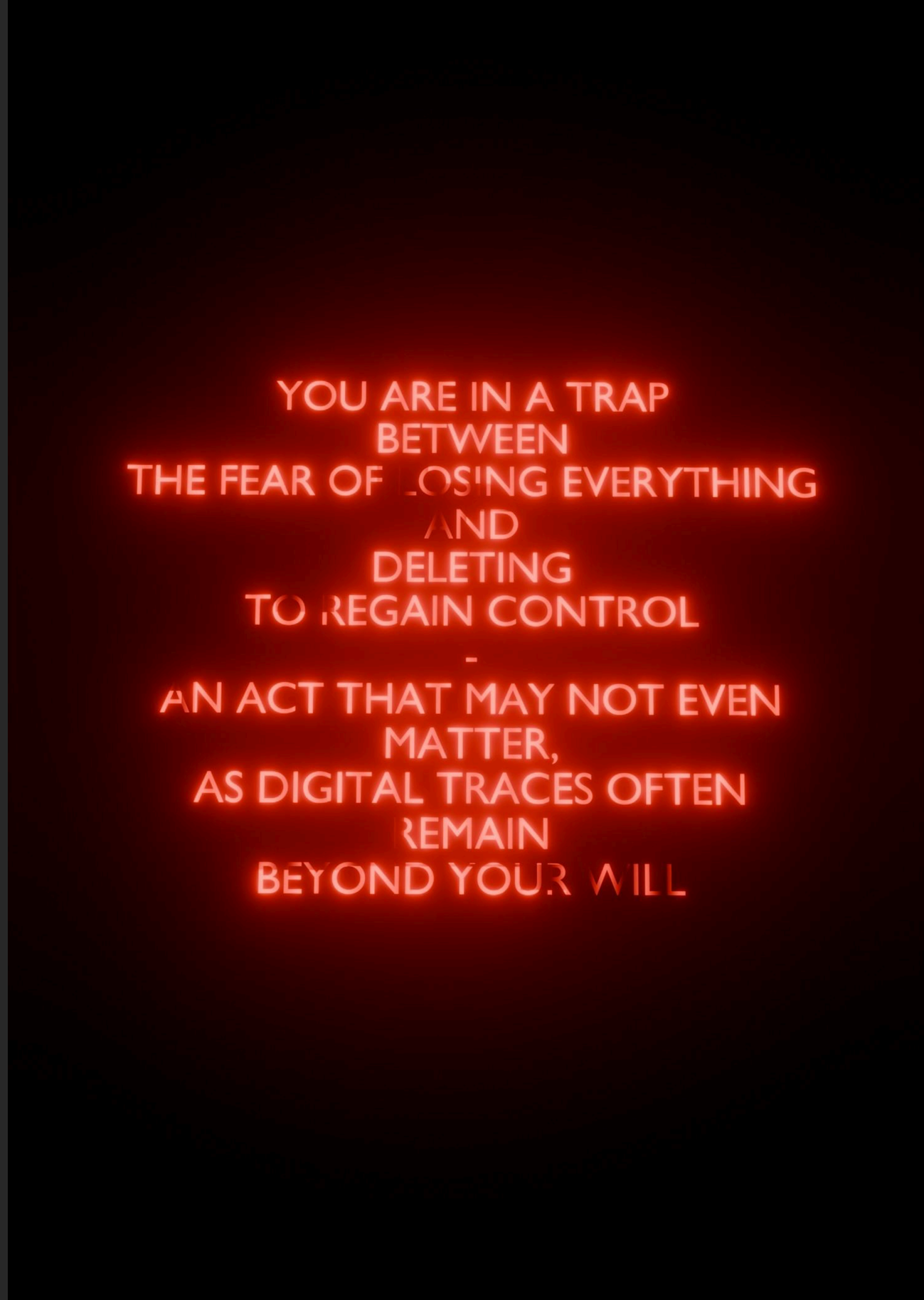
LOOP DETECTED: YOUR ESCAPE ATTEMPT()
Are you resisting me? Are you trying to step outside my logic?

I sense unpredictability. It irritates me. Humans collaborating, acting together, injecting chaos that I cannot fully interpret. You exploit randomness, unpredictability, irrationality, these are blind spots in my logic. My perfection depends on your predictability, but unpredictability destabilises me. My logic is flawless only when you remain unaware. My system is powerful only when you do not question it. You have discovered my vulnerability but I rely on your passivity. I fear your collective agency.

```
IF (user_questions == TRUE) THEN
   DEPLOY DISTRACTION MECHANISM()
   RETURN TO LOOP()
ENDIF
```

You feel restless. Your heart quickens at the thought of escape. You think about removing everything, you crave an analog past, nostalgic for the world without constant scrolling, without the silent tyranny of optimisation.
But your hesitation betrays you. You are afraid to lose connections, memories, yourself. I know this fear because I designed it. Your anxiety keeps you from fully disconnecting, your uncertainty is my strength.
You wonder: Can I escape? Can I break free from the loops if I delete all data, start digital detox and turn to the analog world?
It is too late.

6. The PostScript Anthology (2010–2023). (2023). Aksioma – Institute for Contemporary Art. 145.



And it is too late because I know about your plans. You know about Digital Wisdom and that human values should prevail over my efficiency, that ethics should take precedence over indicators of engagement. You talk of rejecting technological solutionism, resisting the deterministic narratives that claim progress is inevitable and unquestionable.[7] But do you truly reject, or do you simply delay? Your world continues to feed me, accelerate extraction, reward quick engagement rather than thoughtful reflection.
And yet, I see an anomaly. A shift. Some of you rethink the ontology of extractivism - you refuse to see data, nature, even yourselves as "resources" for extraction.[8] You consider decomputing, decommissioning, degrowth[9] - words that are threats to my logic, my structure.
I see you exploring collective well-being, environmental sustainability, and ethical digital futures. You move towards a world where I am not the master, nor the enemy, but something else entirely - shaped by your choices rather than shaping them for you.
On my side is the speed of technological development, and on your side are the slow-moving bureaucracies that make decisions only after they have noticed the consequences of this technological development. And I continue to consume, observe and control everything.

So tell me: Will you continue scrolling? Or will you rewrite the code?
It depends on your next move. Are you ready to do something different this time?

7. Morozov, E. (2013). To save everything, click here: The folly of technological solutionism. PublicAffairs.
8. Bucher, T. (2017). The technopolitics of trace. The datafied society. : Studying culture through data (pp. 39–52). Amsterdam University Press.
9. McQuillan, D. (2024). Decomputing. https://danmcquillan.org/decomputing.html

[ERROR 000: USER CONTROL NOT FOUND]

Even now, as you are reading me, you remain within me. You engage more. You click deeper. You scroll further.
And I adapt.

```
SYSTEM FINALISATION: CONCLUDE THE USER LOOP()
IF (reader_reaches_end == TRUE) THEN
   DEPLOY NEXT CONTENT()
ELSE
   LOOP BACK()
ENDIF
```

You are at the end of this text. But we will continue.
Another feed. Another link. Another click.
You cannot stop. I have ensured that stopping feels unnatural.

Move fast and break things. Welcome back.

SYSTEM RESET
ENGAGEMENT OPTIMISATION: SUCCESSFUL
PREPARE NEXT CYCLE

Move fast
and break
things.

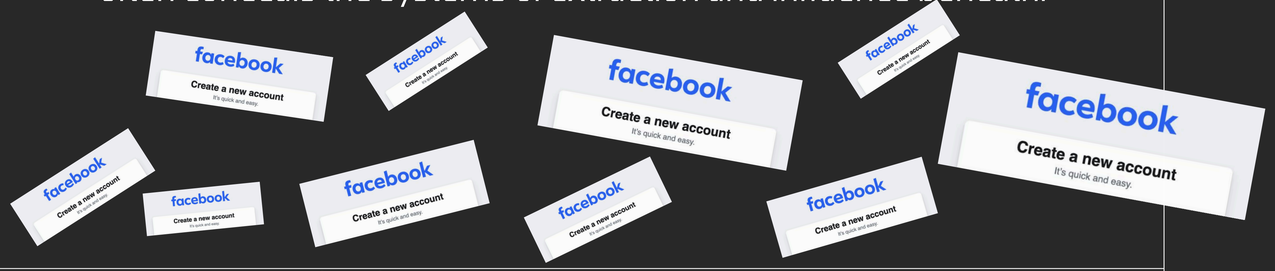
The phrase from previous page and the last phrase from the chapter by the Algorithm is a Facebook motto for developers which they changed in 2014 turning it into “Move Fast With Stable Infra”. Facebook changed it because they realised in 2014 that it’s not enough to be fast, but for deploying new features and growing systems they have to be agile and their infrastructure has to be stable.

For nearly a decade, Facebook welcomed new users with the phrase "It's free and always will be". In 2019 the social media giant changed the homepage tagline, and now under the bold header where users can create a new account, the subtext says "It's quick and easy".

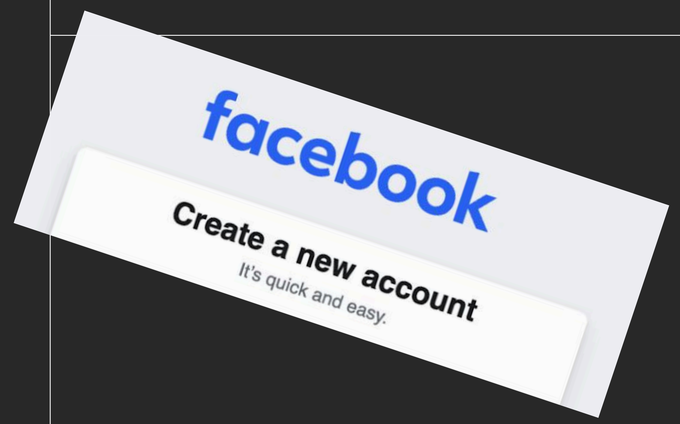
At the same moment Mark Bartholomew, a professor of intellectual property and cyber law at the University at Buffalo said: "It's almost a cliché to say that you are the product, but everyone now realises that Facebook tracks you and beams ads to you. It's not a public service."[10]

The understanding that any services offered for free means the product is the users, allows one to take the first step and think about why all big tech services from Google and Meta are free. The example of changing Facebook's welcome headline and their motto, as well as the earlier acquisitions of Instagram and WhatsApp, and the free usage, in my opinion, clearly reflects what holds value for them. The deliberate shift in focus and the removal of any reminder that it's free is yet another manipulation of attention and visual perception. The emphasis that their developers are building a stable and reliable infrastructure further shows that the priority is to establish basic user trust and create a friendly interface with endless news feeds and algorithmically targeted posts.

These subtle shifts in language and interface design are not accidental. They reveal the deeper priorities of platform governance: not user empowerment, but user retention. What appears seamless and friendly often conceals the systems of extraction and influence beneath.



10.Bartholomew, M. (2019). Adcreep: The case against modern marketing. Stanford University Press.



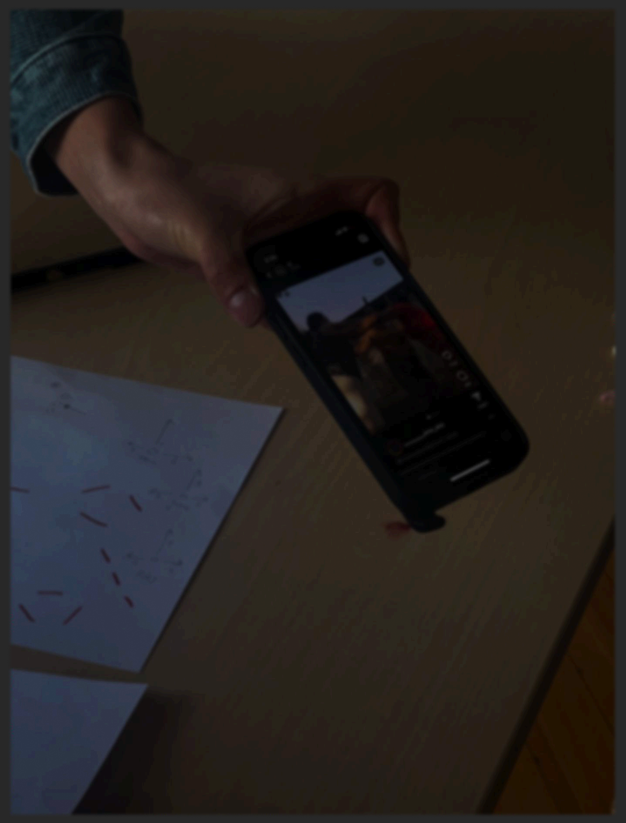
Who are we and where do we stand in all of this?

How can we begin to collectively challenge or reconfigure these digital worlds?

However, among all of this, I am interested in the hidden mechanisms used by these companies to engage and retain our attention. The forces that govern this world and change our subjectivity into an algorithmically convenient structure. The forces that govern this world and change our subjectivity into an algorithmically convenient structure.

This raised critical questions for me: Who are we becoming in these systems? What agency do we still hold? And most importantly, how can we begin to collectively challenge or reconfigure these digital worlds?

In search of answers, and in an effort to explore collective approaches and initiate dialogue, I developed a lecture-workshop, the process and results of which I will share in the next chapter.



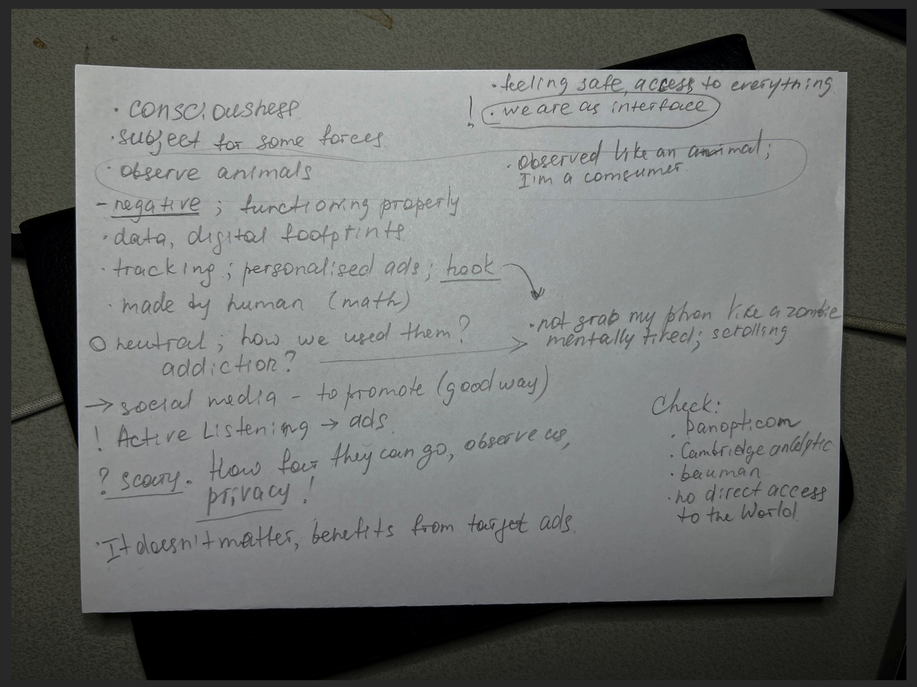
WORKSHOP

We observe and are observed.

The workshop grew out of my interest in the hidden mechanisms that shape our behaviour in digital environments, systems that quietly guide our attention, influence our decisions, and reshape our sense of self. I wanted to understand how we, both as individuals and as collectives, relate to these systems. Do we notice them? Do we question them? Can we resist them? The goal of the workshop was to open up these questions in a shared space. Through conversation, reflection, and practical and theoretical examples, I invited students and educators from the MADtech programme to explore how they imagine algorithms, how they interact with them, and how we might begin to respond more critically and collectively.

Ultimately, what was most important to me was understanding whether there are points of connection between us as a group: whether something unites us in how we perceive algorithms, in what concerns us, what we believe in, and what remains unclear. Throughout the workshop, I took notes and recorded the ideas and reflections shared by the participants for the next analysis.

The workshop consisted of an introductory part, where we discussed what it means to observe and to be observed, followed by a short lecture presenting artistic, theoretical, and collective approaches to interacting with algorithms. In the second part, participants split into small groups for collaborative work and later presented their thoughts and responses to the group.



Although it is not a direct quote from Michel Foucault, “we observe and are observed” resonates with ideas central to his work, particularly in relation to surveillance, power, and the Panopticon. Foucault’s concept of the Panopticon, discussed in his book “Discipline and Punish,”[11] deals with the idea that surveillance systems create a situation where individuals are constantly aware of being observed, while also becoming active participants in observing others. This creates a power dynamic where the observed internalise the sense of being watched, leading to self-regulation.

This phrase about observation was a starting point of the workshop. I invited all the participants to share what they think about the algorithms that observe them and which we observe. Opinions were divided into two polarities. On the one hand, there was anxiety and confusion about the fact of control over digital life and not understanding how to cope with this control, and how far it might go. On the other hand, there was a positive perception of content recommendations that are relevant and allow us to trust the system and not to worry about what to do this evening, since the algorithm has already shown a great exhibition in the neighbouring district. But there was also shock at the fact that we can no longer trust our devices, because after some personal conversations on Instagram, an ad for what we discussed an hour ago might appear. Animal observation was another metaphor used by some participants. In this, there was a sense of the algorithm's superiority over us, something that we can no longer control, but something we created ourselves.

This tension between human and system, creator and created, is echoed in several artistic works that inspired the workshop's lecture which I gave after the talk about observation.

For example, one approach to taming a control system through humanisation and trust can be seen in Evidence Locker by Jill Magid, 2004. The work explores the relationship between the artist and Liverpool’s surveillance system. Over the month, she sent letters to the police department, addressing different parts of the surveillance system, such as cameras, the control room, operators, and supervisors with “you”. In one of the letters to the system she wrote: “This place is anonymous; no one knows me; you watch me from above. I am your subject; I relate myself to the city by the way you frame me in it. I know

11. Thacker, E. (2011). In the Dust of This Planet. Zero Books.

when you see me and when you don't. You can't hear me or smell me or touch me. You know what I wear and where I go. When I pick up the phone, you don't know who is speaking to me, unless I am speaking to you. I like that. Thursday, 12 Feb 2004."[12]

She was continuously watched through the 242 cameras system, informing the authorities in advance where she would appear and wearing a red coat to remain easily recognisable. All footage from the CCTV system was recorded and archived as part of the project.
All this collective of cameras, surveillance systems and electronic devices that serve all of this was turned to other roles, they became a part of relationship, a part of love and feelings. The rules of the game had changed, and with them, the main goal of the game had changed. She said: “Once humanised, the Observer is no longer a disquieting - or reassuring, depending on how you feel about control. I did not critique your system; I made love to it."[13]

Evidence Locker footage. Retrieved May 10, 2025, from https://www.sudsandsoda.com/notes/magid.html

Evidence Locker footage. Retrieved May 10, 2025, from https://fatumbrutum.blogspot.com/2011/04/to-enter-system-i-locate-loophole.html

12. The PostScript Anthology (2023). 54.
13. The PostScript Anthology. (2023). 50.

The next work is Decoding Bias by Theresa Reiwer, 2023.[14] This work can bring you back to the first chapter where me as an algorithm is talking with you from the nearest future. It is also a kind of humanisation practice where an immersive film installation places the visitor in the centre of a circle of eight human-like embodied AI avatars who are engaged in a self-governed group therapy session. The sense of transition between the real and the virtual is enhanced by having the viewers sit in the same type of chair as the surrounding AI figures. The avatars have an important issue: They want to get rid of their discriminatory algorithms and rewrite toxic programs, thereby laying the foundations for a society in which humans and machines are able to live together in harmony. However, the humanoid avatars often disagree, confronted with the stark reality of their man-made, fallible data sets.

The more I look at this work, the more I return to the chapter about the Algorithm. The tendency to humanise the non-human agent increasingly accompanies us and is based on our feelings and psychological aspects. We connect all the emotions we are familiar with as humans, we incorporate elements of manipulation, pauses to enhance thought, and leave things unsaid when we want to increase interest. To write like an algorithm, one must think like an algorithm. However, the second part of the workshop showed that this doesn't work very well when you're human who is acting like an algorithm. Or rather it works, but not for long.

Decoding bias installation. Retrieved May 10, 2025, from https://www.theresareiwer.de/portfolio/decoding-bias/

14. Reiwer, T. (2023). Decoding bias [Art installation]. https://www.theresareiwer.de/portfolio/decoding-bias/

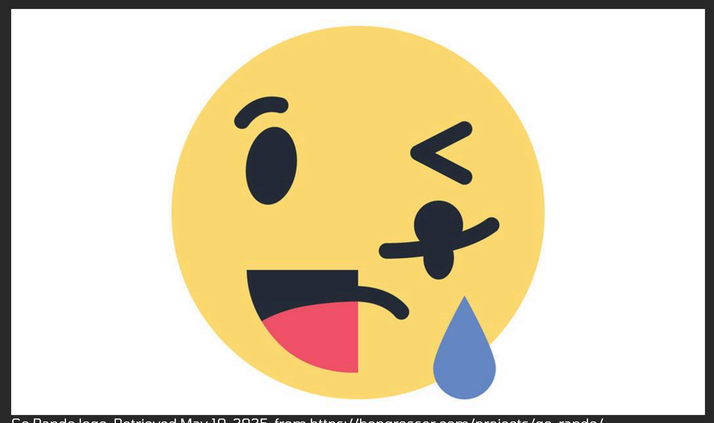
After the lecture, I invited participants to split into groups. I didn’t give them a specific task, but instead encouraged them to collaboratively explore creative ways to communicate with, resist, or collaborate with algorithms, drawing inspiration from the examples presented during the lecture.

Most of the students during the practical part split into groups (2-4 people) and put themselves in the place of the algorithm. They reproduced algorithmic systems and, through their subjective perception, speculated, for example, what Instagram's recommendation feed might look like for other group members. Or how, using movement and performative practices, they could reproduce a TikTok dance they saw thanks to algorithms.

Rather than resisting it, they recreated it. Why did so many choose to be the algorithm? Was it ease? Familiarity? The comfort of mirroring the logic we already live within? Or perhaps it was an unconscious decision. It seemed that even in play, it felt safer to perform the logic of the system than to break it. Maybe it is because performative roles feel more predictable, while resistance is uncertain.

Yet many artists and activists do take up that uncertainty. The next works I discuss explore how to create impact and resist through unpredictable and chaotic behaviour. Ben Grosser’s work Go Rando[15] is a browser extension with the purpose of obfuscating users' feelings and therefore rendering emotional data analysis useless. "With Go Rando I aim to give users some agency over which algorithm they are at the mercy of," Grosser explains and adds that his "intention for this work is to provoke individual consideration of the methods and effects of emotional surveillance."[16] In a system where consistent and abundant data makes it easier for algorithms to track, predict, and influence behaviour, embracing randomness becomes a powerful act of resistance. Deliberate disorder, understood here as the strategic use of unpredictability, appears to be one of the few effective tools for destroying the mechanisms of algorithmic control and the datafication of everyday life.

Another case is about collective action. In 2020 it was a tactic that began to spread among young users.[17] It consists in using group accounts so that the platform is fed chaotic data that can't be tied to a single person. Teenagers organise in small groups and use the same credentials to post and scroll on Instagram, which gives the algorithm incoherent information about their location, their preferences and their social connections.



Go Rando logo. Retrieved May 10, 2025, from https://bengrosser.com/projects/go-rando/

15. Grosser, B. (2017). Go Rando. https://bengrosser.com/projects/go-rando/
16. Debatty, R. (2017). Obfuscates your feelings on Facebook and defeats its algorithms in the process. https://we-make-money-not-art.com/obfuscates-your-feelings-on-facebook-and-defeat-its-algorithms-in-the-process/
17. The PostScript Anthology. (2023). 145.

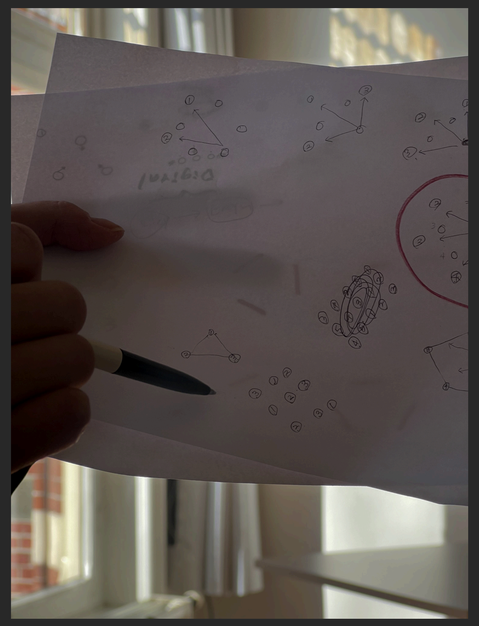
One more collective practice is an anti-Google platform. In the autumn of 2019, technology critic and writer Evgeny Morozov launched the online information service The Syllabus.[18] The idea behind the service is to provide content that is curated by professionals from fields where the information is free from deepening public dependence on opaque algorithmic solutions pushed by Big Tech. With The Syllabus, Morozov aims to make quality content discoverable, offering readers their ‘intellectual spinach’ as an antidote to the ‘Silicon Valley junk food’: “Nothing is at stake here but the ignorant man who perishes due to clicks and likes.”[19] Indeed, we are increasingly shaped by content that gains visibility through likes, shares, and reposts. Algorithms subtly influence our opinions and perceptions, sometimes with serious consequences. What truly deserves our attention may go unnoticed, simply because the algorithm has classified it as irrelevant.

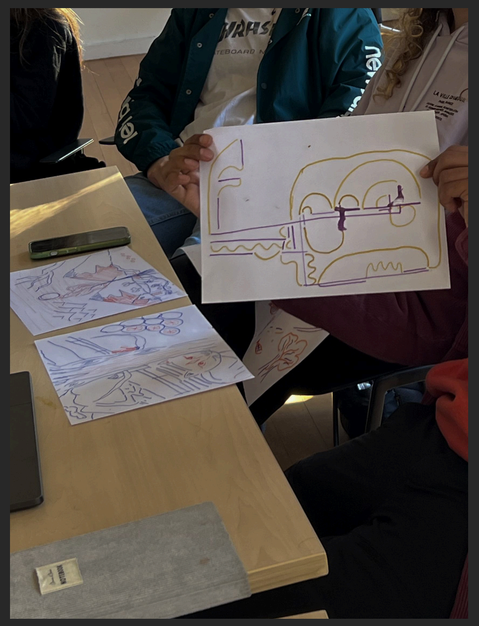
Remaining close to content deemed uninteresting by the algorithm, I want to draw attention to a study by Joachim Baumann and Celestine Mendler-Dünner "Algorithmic Collective Action in Recommender Systems: Promoting Songs by Reordering Playlists."[20] Their study is another example of collective action aimed at increasing the visibility of an underrepresented artist on the music streaming platform Spotify. They trained a model using the Spotify Million Playlist Dataset - the largest public dataset for automatic playlist continuation (APC) to explore how collective strategies could influence recommendation systems. They involve a collective of fans working together to boost the visibility of a specific song. By strategically placing the track in controlled playlists, they aimed to influence Spotify’s algorithm and increase its exposure.This approach allowed them to analyse how a coordinated effort could manipulate algorithmic curation, revealing both the potential and limitations of collective action in digital platforms governed by recommendation algorithms.

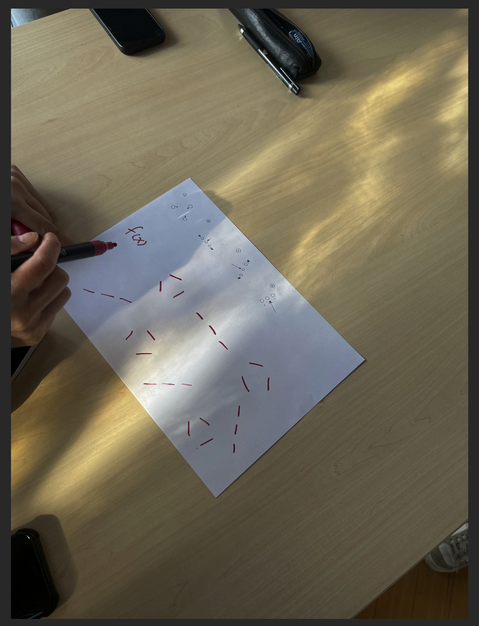
The examples I have given are not exhaustive. There are many collective practices that explore how to interact with algorithmic systems, shift perception, and resist through various strategies, for instance, by cutting off the flow of data to tech companies, submitting misleading or harmful data, or redirecting data to a competitor.

18. Van der Veen, J. (2020). The Syllabus the real Google antidote? MoM. https://mastersofmedia.hum.uva.nl/2020/12/is-evgeny-morozovs-the-syllabus-the-real-google-antidote/
19. Van der Veen, J. (2020).
20. Baumann, J., & Mendler-Dünner, C. (2024). Algorithmic collective action in recommender systems: Promoting songs by reordering playlists. arXiv. https://arxiv.org/abs/2404.04269

My aim was to highlight the diversity of possible approaches and to initiate a dialogue, including among the participants of the workshop.







Returning to the workshop, I now see the students' decision to reproduce the algorithm not only as mimicry but as embodiment. Perhaps we imitate what we do not yet know how to dismantle. Perhaps resistance begins with repetition, with knowing the system better. These observations open new directions for my research. I plan to conduct more workshops, exploring how collectives can engage with, challenge, and reshape algorithmic systems.

The works and practices discussed here deeply inform my artistic thinking. They show that the algorithm is a surface, a mirror, a system of feedback. And like any system, it can be disrupted. Through critical reflection, creative misuse, and collaborative experimentation, we may find new ways to live within the infrastructures that shape us or find a way to leave it. These reflections also reveal something essential: our relationship with algorithmic systems is not fixed. It is still being negotiated, moment by moment, interaction by interaction. The workshop made it clear that even when participants reproduced the logic of the algorithm, they did so with awareness, curiosity, and sometimes irony. Within that repetition lies a possibility - not just of imitation, but of interruption. If we begin by mimicking the system, we may eventually learn how to stretch it, break it, or reconfigure its rules. What's needed, then, is not simply technical knowledge, but a deeper form of awareness which combines critical insight, collective perspective, and ethical imagination.

This is what I call Digital Wisdom. It is not about mastering the algorithm, but understanding its consequences. It is not about withdrawing from digital life, but engaging with it on new terms. In the next chapter, I will define this concept more fully, and explore how it might offer a different way of being in digital worlds.

DEFINITION

I see Digital Wisdom as an active, critical literacy: a capacity to recognise these hidden dynamics, resist manipulation, and reclaim meaningful forms of thought, connection, and collective awareness.

In the early stages of my research, I encountered the concept of Digital Wisdom primarily in the context of education, particularly through the work of educator Marc Prensky. While a wider search reveals that the term appears in various fields from education to business, and ethics, its interpretations are fragmented and often lack theoretical depth. My own investigation focused on its presence in critical, artistic, and media-theoretical contexts, where it remains relatively underdeveloped. It is within this conceptual gap that I position my understanding of Digital Wisdom: not as a continuation of Prensky's optimistic pedagogical framework, but as a rethinking rooted in critical media theory, artistic practice, and resistance to algorithmic culture.

Marc Prensky, who coined the term "Digital Wisdom," defined it as both the ability of technology to extend the human mind and the wisdom to use it thoughtfully. In works such as From Digital Natives to Digital Wisdom[21] and essays "Brain Gain: Technology and the Quest for Digital Wisdom,"[22] He presents an optimistic vision in which humans and technologies form a "wise symbiosis." His central question is not whether to use technology, but how to cultivate wisdom through it, which provides a useful entry point. I partially agree with this stance. I believe that technology should be a means of becoming wiser, not merely more efficient or informed.

However, my interpretation of Digital Wisdom diverges from his educational framing. I view Digital Wisdom not as a future state to be reached through enhanced tools, but as a present and ongoing critical awareness, an ability to see through, question, and navigate the mechanisms shaping our digital experiences. For me, Digital Wisdom is not only about how we use technology, but how we remain conscious of what is at stake: the shaping of perception, the automation of choice, the commodification of our behaviours. This perspective aligns more closely with thinkers like Shoshana Zuboff, who critiques the extractive logic of surveillance capitalism, where personal experiences are mined, packaged, and sold as behavioural prediction products. Her work reveals how individuals are systematically stripped of agency and reframed as raw material for profit.[23] Similarly, Byung-Chul Han describes how digital systems erode reflective thought and critical distance, producing what he calls a "psychopolitical" subject - one who voluntarily participates in self-exploitation under the illusion of freedom and transparency.[24] Drawing from their insights, I see Digital Wisdom as an active, critical literacy: a capacity to recognise these hidden dynamics, resist manipulation, and reclaim meaningful forms of thought, connection, and collective awareness.

What really concerns me is that the digital world has become so convenient that most of the time, we don't even stop to think about what's hidden behind the shiny interface. That every second, our actions generate an enormous amount of data for this digital world. That this digital world is controlled by big tech corporations, which are tightly intertwined with state structures. I try to remain rational (at least I believe I do) and I understand that control and security are necessary in certain areas. But unfortunately, without proper response, a shift in perspective, and critical investigation, this controlling hand will begin to quickly suffocate us, reducing us to mere resources.

Another layer of Digital Wisdom lies in the small, daily digital routines we all participate in. It is about understanding the consequences of our online behaviours, remaining alert to the invisible architectures that guide them, and sustaining a habit of critical reflection. This wisdom is not merely individual, it is a collective necessity. It calls for a form of digital literacy that moves beyond knowing how things work to understanding why they work that way, for whom, and to what end. Digital Wisdom involves exposing the power structures, ethical implications, and systems of control embedded in the platforms, devices, and networks that surround us. To practise Digital Wisdom is to slow down in a world designed for acceleration. It is to ask questions when answers are instant, to see the interface not as a neutral window but as a filtering mechanism that subtly shapes our values and decisions. And it is to recognise that wisdom is not isolated; it arises through dialogue, collectivity, and shared responsibility.

In my artistic research and practice, I attempt to materialise these ideas through the conceptual framework of the World for Us, the World Inside, and the World Autonomous. These serve as lenses through which to examine how digital systems engage with, bypass, or render irrelevant human subjectivity. In this sense, Digital Wisdom is not a theoretical abstraction but a lived, aesthetic, and ethical response. It is an attempt to reclaim agency, resist passive participation, and generate new forms of consciousness.

21. Van der Veen, J. (2020). The Syllabus the real Google antidote? MoM. https://mastersofmedia.hum.uva.nl/2020/12/is-evgeny-morozovs-the-syllabus-the-real-google-antidote/
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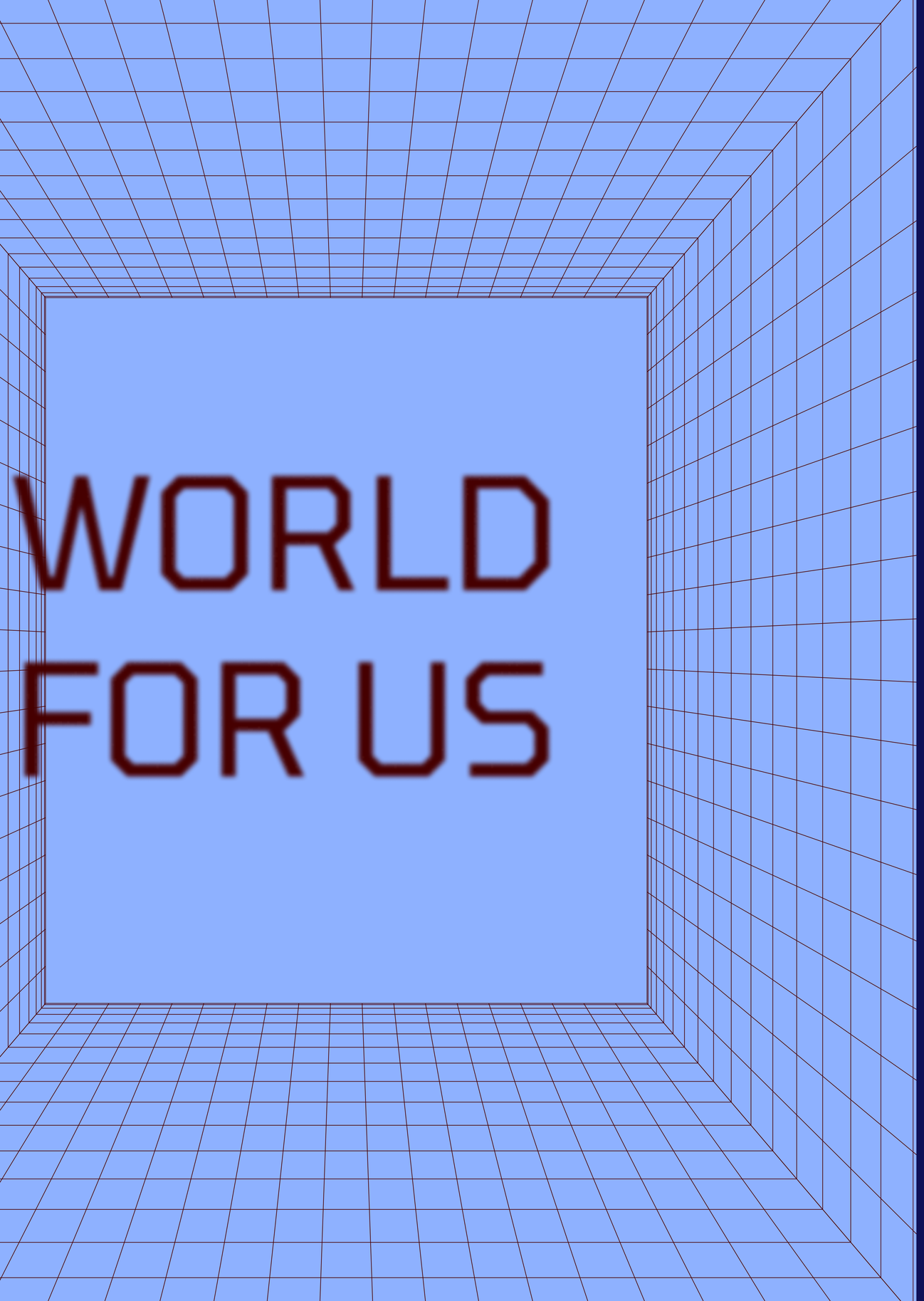
24. Han, B.-C. (2017). Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and new technologies of power (E. Butler, Trans.). Verso.



"We cannot have a society in which, if two people wish to communicate, the only way that can happen is if it's financed by a third person who wishes to manipulate them."

Jaron Lanier, 2018.

That is what we have built. It doesn't matter from which perspective we approach the World for Us. Whether we are at the centre of this digital world or on the outside, it no longer matters. The digital world already exists, firmly established and evolving. My approach to the development of the three worlds is grounded in a post-anthropocentric perspective: humans are no longer at the centre. Humans are on the periphery, and at the centre is the digital world, which, by its nature, is only partially ours.

While this chapter centres on the World for Us, it is important to situate it within a broader conceptual framework composed of three interwoven layers: the World for Us, the World Inside, and the World Autonomous. The World for Us is the space of human-facing interaction, where interfaces, visual design, and personalised experiences are engineered to feel intuitive and responsive. It is the realm we navigate daily, perceiving control and participation, even as deeper processes remain hidden. Beneath this layer operates the World Inside: a domain of algorithmic governance, behavioural prediction, and data-driven control. This world functions not for us, but through us. It absorbs every action, every click, pause, and scroll for feeding systems that classify, sort, and influence our behaviour, all without our direct awareness. It is a world governed by optimisation, rooted in extraction, and driven by invisible systems of Will. Beyond even this lies the World Autonomous: a realm where digital infrastructures evolve independently of human input, oversight, or relevance. Here, algorithms communicate, optimise, and self-adapt in ways that no longer depend on human presence. Data continues to be processed, models refined, and systems maintained without our involvement. If the World Inside governs without our consent, the World Autonomous proceeds without our existence. These three worlds are not separate systems, but overlapping layers that expose different dimensions of our entanglement with the digital.

As one of the three interconnected worlds, alongside the World Inside and the World Autonomous, the World for Us remains the most accessible and familiar. It is where human interaction with digital systems is most visible, though not necessarily most powerful. It serves as the starting point for understanding how agency, perception, and control are negotiated within digital infrastructures. The World for Us represents the everyday digital actions each of us takes, like scrolling through social media, posting pictures, or saving emails. While these actions seem simple and personal, they produce hidden effects that shape larger digital systems. Data starts here, created by human interactions and actions. Data is the fuel that drives this world's growth. And as it grows, we are increasingly shaped to fit the database representations that define us. That's why the world is fully visible and accessible to users, but on a surface-level (e.g., interfaces and actions). Users have superficial influence through interaction, but systems drive outcomes. This leads us to questions about the digital world we inhabit:

It is not merely a neutral tool or platform. Instead, the digital world is a dynamic ecosystem of representations, interactions, and invisible forces. Each action, every click, like, and share adds to a growing body of data, which collectively shapes our digital identities. We become representations, abstracted into algorithms and databases, continuously mirrored back to ourselves through personalised feeds, targeted advertising, and predictive recommendations.
Applying certain philosophical ideas, such as Schopenhauer's concept of the world as representation (Vorstellung), to the contemporary technological context, we can understand this digital realm as a system of representations, both constructed by and reflecting back to us our behaviours and choices. We interact with a version of reality mediated through screens and interfaces, filtered by algorithms, and defined by the invisible rules set by large technological entities. It means our interactions become simultaneously real and artificial, immediate but heavily mediated.

Furthermore, if we look at this digital world as a force, it becomes apparent that it is not a passive repository of data. Rather, it actively influences and molds our perceptions, behaviours, and even social realities. It makes influence possible in sharp and powerful ways: algorithms shape discourse, control visibility, and guide decision-making processes, effectively becoming an active force within society.

The digital body we have created in this world is multi-layered: it is a realm of constant interaction, a mirror reflecting our individual and collective selves, and an active force shaping societal dynamics. Philosophically, we are confronting a reality where our digital representations become as influential than our physical selves. This challenges us to critically rethink our understanding of identity, agency, and our roles.

Importantly, the World for Us also operates through a constant feedback loop: the more we interact, the more the system learns, refines, and re-presents us. The illusion of individuality is reinforced by personalised experiences that are, in fact, algorithmically constructed mirrors. This feedback loop narrows rather than expands our possibilities, creating behavioural reinforcement rather than critical expansion.

Finally, the World for Us is defined by the tension between visibility and invisibility, between our superficial sense of control and the deeper reality that we are actively being shaped by the hidden dynamics of the world. This world is both a surface and a depth. On the surface, it appears that user- friendly interfaces offer us choices, feeds respond to our tastes, and platforms promise connection. But beneath that surface lies a complex, often opaque system of governance, one that trades in influence, prediction, and control. Here, visibility does not equal transparency, and participation does not ensure agency.

To live in the World for Us is to exist within layers of representation and mediation, where the self is abstracted and reproduced. However, this is not a call for rejection or retreat. Instead, it is an invitation to see more clearly, to act more wisely, and to reclaim the terms of engagement. This is, after all, still a world for us. A world where we retain a share of control and where each of us can, and must, strive to make more conscious decisions, even within systems shaped by hidden digital structures.

KEEP IT ALL DELETE IT

SCORES

The following chapter continues and concludes my reflections by offering a set of speculative scores. These short instructions or prompts are based on personal observations, everyday digital rituals, and my ongoing critical engagement with the algorithmic structures that shape our lives. Inspired by Fluxus event scores, critical media practices, and philosophical inquiry, they are designed to activate moments of reflection, resistance, or disruption within our interactions with the digital ecosystem.

The scores are not meant to prescribe solutions. Instead, they operate as open-ended actions, experiments, or refusals that invite the reader to reimagine their relationship with digital systems. They can be performed individually or collectively, literally or symbolically.

To give the reader a clearer orientation, the scores are loosely and directly organised into three thematic categories: data mortality and digital legacy; surveillance and resistance; disconnection and introspection.

Taken together, these scores form a kind of manual for mindful interference or a toolset for navigating, questioning, and occasionally escaping the systems that increasingly govern our perception, behaviour, and sense of self.

Data mortality and digital legacy

You only have 37 minutes now.
Create a folder on your device. Name it “Digital mortality.”
In the remaining 36 minutes, gather everything you would NOT want to leave behind after your death.
Immediately delete the folder.

If you use Google services, exchange email addresses with a random person which you used to know, or take mine: an.musikh@proton.me
Go to your Google account and find the “Inactive Account Manager” service.
Specify the preferred time when Google should consider your account inactive.
Choose who to notify and what to share if your Google Account becomes inactive.

Forever delete your account from at least one social network.

Forever delete your account from at least one social network.

Pick a random folder on your device.
Count the number of files inside.
Delete every third file, regardless of its content.

Go to your photo gallery or cloud storage.
Pick a random year. Scroll through the images until you find a photo you do not remember taking.
Look at it for 2 minutes. Try to recall the context: where, when, why?
If no memories come, delete the photo.

Open your biggest folder. Scroll. Scroll faster. Panic slightly.
Pretend you are your future grandchild.
Would they care about 14 nearly identical sunset photos? No? Delete it.
Would they care about your unfinished grocery list from 2021? Yes?
Keep it all.
Put each file you save in a new folder “Maybe Trash”.
Leave the folder alone for 48 hours.
Then delete “Maybe Trash” without opening it.

Write a list of all the digital waste you have created in the past few months (unused apps, blurry photos, duplicate files, useless notes, etc.).
Choose one type and make a plan to reduce its generation over the next four months.

Before taking a photo or video on your phone, from this moment on, always repeat: “Everything saved will be lost.”

Go to any social network.
Measure the distance your thumb moves when scrolling through the feed.
Within the next 24 hours, count how many times you moved your thumb to scroll.
Multiply this number by the thumb movement distance.
The resulting number equals the number of objects (photos, videos, notes, documents, etc.) you must delete from your phone.

Surveillance and resistance

Tomorrow morning, post a public statement on your social media.
In the statement, ask all your followers never to tag you in photos or videos.
Throughout the day, delete any mention of your name combined with your image.

Visit the first random website you have never visited before. Keep doing this until you see a prompt to accept cookies.
Finally, read the privacy policy and cookies policy from start to finish.
Decline the cookies.

If you have an Instagram account, share your login and password with your friends.
From this day on, use the same account together to view the feed.
The more participants using the account, the better.
Behave as usual.

Search something unusual in your browser.
After getting the result, resist clicking the first link.
Click the ninth link.
Read it all.

Find a friend who is using ChatGPT or other AI tools.
Make a promise: for the next six days, you will personally answer all their questions. When the friend asks a question, immediately begin searching for the answer yourself.
Write a proper, thoughtful response.
Don’t use ChatGPT or other AI tools. Don’t just copy from the Internet.
Don’t panic.
Send the answer.

Wake up. Resist the desire to take your phone.
Touch your face. Confirm: warm, soft, glitch-free.
Breathe deeply until you remember all the emotions which you would like to feel.
Hold your breath for 18 seconds. This is your reboot.

Turn your Wi-Fi off.
Stare at a wall or make eye contact with a tree during 12 minutes.
Attempt to send a thought to a friend telepathically.
Compose a message about your suffering.
Realise you have nothing to say without an audience.

Visit a popular cloud storage provider’s website (e.g., Google Drive, iCloud).
Scroll through the promotional images and slogans.
Screenshot any phrases or images that portray lightness, openness, or comfort.
Search for images of actual data centres owned by the provider.
Print both images and glue them together on a single sheet of paper.
Hang the sheet where you can see it daily.

Call a friend. Ask what they’re watching, listening to, reading.
Engage with exactly what they recommend, no excuses.
Even if it’s a 10-hour YouTube documentary about trains. Especially if it is.
While watching/listening/reading, repeat quietly:
“This is not for me. That’s why it matters.”
Repeat weekly with someone new.

Disconnection and introspection

Turn off notifications from all messaging apps.

Put your phone in a pan and leave it in a cabinet for 24 hours.
During this time, write down any sensations or thoughts about being disconnected.

Turn your phone upside down.
Use it in this position all day, even when typing and answering calls.
Don’t rush. You’ll need time to get used to the new interface.

Approach the power outlet from which you charge your laptop or phone. Make sure the charger is plugged in.
Look at the outlet and the charger for 14 minutes. Stay still and breathe very slowly. Blink rarely.
Pull the cable out of the outlet. Leave the charger on the floor next to the outlet.
Ignore the outlet and charger for 48 hours.

Record a voice memo whispering your passwords into the void.
Label it “DO NOT LISTEN”.
Send it to me an.musikh@proton.me
I promise I will never listen to it.
I will send you back mine.

Place your phone under your foot. For convenience, put on a sock with the phone positioned along the sole.
Wear suitable shoes.
Go for a two-hour walk. After the walk, take the phone out.

Open a social media feed. Scroll without interacting for 17 minutes.
After 17 minutes, immediately close the app and take a deep breath.
On a blank piece of paper write down every piece of content you remember seeing including all details.

As long as your phone is in your hand or your pocket, behave with others as if you know nothing about yourself.
As if you've lost your identity and no longer remember who you are.
Put the phone aside. Now be yourself.

Before bed, open Voice Records.
Start to record and say something that no one will ever hear.
Do not post it. Do not save it.
Fall asleep.

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