

THIS PAGE CONTAINS...

A performance by JODI

1st October 2015

Teijin Auditorium, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam

Documented by Lucas Battich

19:26:42

The doors of the auditorium are opened to the public.

Joan Heemskerk, part of JODI art collective, stands behind a lectern with an Apple laptop. The laptop's screen contents are projected onto the auditorium's front wall.

I am sitting in the back row.

On a yellow desktop background in the computer screen I can see:

- 1 hard drive icon called *HD*
- 2 plain text files named *erco.txt* and *wget command.txt*
- 1 folder named *crtm*
- 1 link to a webpage with a Firefox symbol icon, with the visible title *may_be_redistributed...s copy*
- 2 files with the icon of a black circle, named *#Reset* and *%20*

These text files are currently open on two small editor windows. On one window is written *rronCOD@:app*, and on the other *wget -E -H*

19:29:25

The auditorium is quickly crowded.

19:34:24

The auditorium's 160 seats are all occupied by now.

19:34:37

The lights dim down.

19:34:41 There is a loud sound: a computer voice. It is hard to distinguish what it is saying, although it is clearly a set of algorithmic commands.

19:34:47 Joan opens the web link on the desktop with a Firefox icon. A webpage fills the screen. The page address name is *may_be_redistributed_thro.html*

The page title is *%20z3h.gif*

Colourful gradients, texts and various HTML element blocks flicker convulsively, running amok on the screen, as if the whole page is struggling with a defective set-up.

At times the words *Enter “YOLO48” At Checkout* are visible on the screen, written backward and floating uneasily among the shifting blocks of gradients. At other times these same words are distorted out of recognition. This gives me the impression that all these elements come from a webpage genuinely designed for a friendly, straightforward user experience – that is, prior to being salvaged by JODI’s algorithms.

19:34:49 I recognize the word *firefox* in the computer’s vocal commands.

19:35:01 The browser is loading a different

19:35:01
Cont.

webpage about every 10 seconds.

The page address name is now *your_account_activity_will_be_provided_to_other_users3.html*

The page title reads %20 =====und2cc2
=====data2c=====

In the background of the page a linear gradient coloured in red, yellow, green and cyan frenetically rearranges itself, among blocks of other gradients and texts.

19:35:08

The page address name is now *we_use_a_range_of_information_including_cookies_web Beacons.html*

The page title reads %20 xxxxxxxxx

The screen flickers between dark and bright imagery, rebounding through the whole auditorium with stroboscopic results.

19:35:17

The page address name is now *may_be_redistributed_through_the_internet_and_bbbbbbb copy.html*

The page title reads %20z3h.gif

19:36:05

The page address name is now *the_whole_process_is_auto66666.html*

The page title reads %20xxxxxx

19:36:05
Cont.

Among broken HTML image frames, a MasterCard logo has been flipped horizontally, stretched, and badly distorted.

19:36:18

The page address name is now *may_be_redistributed_thro5555555.html*

The page title reads %20z3h.gif

The image on the screen has predominantly purple and fuchsia hues, providing the whole pristine interior architecture of the auditorium with a bizarre haze, both warm and detached, cozy and sterile.

19:36:29

The page address name is now *your_account_activity_will_be_provided_to_other_users5.html*

The page title reads %20 ======u_nd2cc2.png=====

The voice is very fast paced. This gives a sense of urgency to its commands. Yet at times its pitch goes slightly up, revealing a hesitant moment, as if the computer is questioning or timidly requesting something.

19:37:29

The page address name is now *video_comments_your_profile_page_may_be_collected.html*

The page title reads %20 _

19:37:29
Cont.

The image on the screen is covered by a flickering white glow, surrounded by a gradient made of red, yellow and green - again, the imagery seems at the point of collapsing.

19:37:19

The computer voice spells out a long sequence of letters and commands, with almost no pauses.

Both impatient and meticulous, the voice's hyper velocity conveys for the most part a feeling of uneasiness and expectation. It strikes me as a Kurt Schwitters voice poem fed through a digital shotgun.

19:38:01

The voice's continuous tirade stops. It slides back into regular, quasi-rhythmic short utterances.

19:38:25

The page address name is now *may_be_redistributed_thro11111.html*

The page title reads %20cccccccc

I can recognize the words *48 Home Sale!* written backwards against a colourful angled gradient on the background.

19:38:43

An audience member takes a picture with a mobile handset.

- 19:39:11 *Underline underline underline.* These words are voiced at such speed that I am unsure whether I understood them correctly. Either way, the computer voices them in a pitch considerably low and earnest, somehow reinforcing the illusion of a human voice that has been altered.
- 19:40:03 Joan moves the browser window to the side of the screen and brings a text editor into view. The text shows what seems like a script written in the Bash command language.
The computer voice engages now on more varied and continuous commands, seldom pausing its tirade for the next two minutes and a half.
- 19:39:11 We can now see - or imagine we see - the relation of the voice commands with the script on the editor, while portions of the text are constantly being selected, deleted, copied and altered.
- 19:41:16 An audience member takes a picture with a mobile handset.
- 19:41:40 An audience member takes a picture with a mobile handset.

- 19:42:35 An audience member records a video with a mobile handset, for about a minute and a half.
- 19:42:35 Suddenly and quite unexpectedly, the voice emits what sounds like an onomatopoeic exclamation of pain. While trying to decipher the voice's adventures in the way they are reflected on the text processor, it is nevertheless difficult to see what could have caused this "exclamation". I am not even sure if the modifications on the text are as easily decipherable to us, the audience, so as to fathom the underlying workings of the voice's commands.
- 19:43:27 The voice says *recursive*. It then attempts to say it again, but it trails on itself and cannot complete its own instructions, as if its drive to command – and to follow its rules, whatever they are – is incompatible with the speed of such commands. All we hear now is:
- re-*
re-
recur-
rec-
rec-
- 19:43:56 We can hear the distinctive and familiar Mac OS alert sound firing off repeatedly due to some

19:43:56

Cont.

unwarranted instruction, antagonizing
the – by now – stuttering computer
voice.

19:45:35

The voice says: *copy, paste, quit* –
or at least what it seems to me like
quit, for now the voice stammers
helplessly:

q-
q-
q-
q-
qui-
qw-
q-
q-
q-
qui-
q-

19:45:44

An audience member takes a picture
with a mobile handset.

19:46:14

Silence. We are left with the
flickering glitch imagery of a
webpage made of “defective” HTML
elements. Having come this far, and
finding myself by now rather immersed
in the intermittent “malfunctions” of
the webpages, I am rather hesitant to
use think under the terms “defective”
and “malfunction” at all. The imagery
produced in the web browser does not
lack in beauty. Even the computerized
voice now seems to add to a
harmonious and charming whole. This

19:46:14

Cont.

strikes me as a startling thought, as it does not easily fit with the violence on the screen - but I cannot help it.

19:46:23

Someone in the audience coughs. Suddenly I remember having recently read a short study on the psychology of coughs in cinemas and live performance environments. I feel my throat. I struggle to avoid the urge of coughing. The computer voice stutters out a series of guttural:

tch-
tch-
tch-

and eventually:

pas-
paste

I forget about coughing.

19:46:31

An audience member takes a picture with a mobile handset.

19:47:33

Silence, this time prolonged for over twenty seconds. Enough to collect myself and breath easily, as if prescient and expectant of more bombastic sounds and imagery arriving shortly.

- 19:48:23 An audience member takes a picture with a mobile handset.
- 19:48:45 An audience member records a video with a mobile handset, for about a minute.
- 19:49:25 The page address name is now *worldwide_licence_to_use_any_IP_content_that_you_post.html*
The page title reads %20-----

This looks like a sunset gradient to me. A pale rosy horizon is stretched out behind strong cyan hues. Despite the frenzied imagery, everything seems in control somehow: this gradient is reassuring, familiar even.
- 19:50:10 The web browser displays an error page titled *Problem loading page*. For a moment the flickering effect stops, but soon a new webpage is loaded, titled %20xxx0-----
-<----<-----

- 19:50:50 Suddenly the screen goes completely black, and is then filled with analogue-like white noise and intermittent corrupted video signals.

19:50:50
Cont.

The computer voice is drowned under a screeching noise.

I realize now that the commanding computer voice is the most humane element in this environment.

The white noise, the radical interruptions and visual errors – all this seems to forecast an inevitable disaster: everything will *not* be ok.

19:50:59

The white noise and signal corruptions recede. Once again the screen shows the web browser window with a flickering colourful page, and the text editor window on the right side.

It is reassuring to hear the computer voice now; yet it seems as though its timbre has adopted a greater sense of urgency and anxiety.

19:51:06

The voice appears to be repeatedly interrupted mid-word, trailing off, faltering and gathering itself again. It is hard to say whether the voice is now part of a growing general damage, or it continues to function as it has since the start of the performance. Something seems certain: the previous noise signal is a harbinger of acute damage – damage to my impulsive expectations that technology (an Apple laptop, in this case) should seamlessly function to the favour and facilitation of a positive user experience.

19:51:20

The text-editor windows are hidden from view, while the web browser takes most of the screen. On the right hand side a snippet of the yellow desktop with several icons is visible.

I can distinguish the voice saying the words *reset to zero, enter* and *connect* several times: a faint plea in the face of imminent errors.

I realize that, contrary to my best efforts, I keep on assigning human traits to this computerized voice. I would like to resist this urge, for I know, or think I know, that whatever illusion the computer is designed to provide, it is no more than a program running its course across a series of algorithms - slavishly, stubbornly running forward.

Nevertheless, the computer voice is the last thing I can hold on to that seems to reassure me that everything has not broken down completely yet.

19:51:28

A brief silence is interrupted by strident noises, a high-pitched drone of digital grumblings.

The whole computer screen goes awry; even the icons on the desktop do not render properly: seamless usership has been broken for good.

Soon the whole screen starts to reel upwards, as if a deficient analogue video signal has made its way into the digital machine.

- 19:51:46 An audience member records a video with a mobile handset, for about three minutes.
- 19:52:03 Following a loud white noise sound, the familiar computer interface is further modified with broken signals, image noise mixed with barely recognizable textual characters, and pure black blocks eating up various sections of the screen.
- 19:53:57 After a long period we hear the computerized voice again. The impression that this voice is the only human element is reinforced. The voice stands out as the solitary ego amid a digital chaos, striving to hold on to its pathetic ranting while any meaningful framework that it may have is perpetually shattered. In this sense, the voice's pitiful determination makes it endearing.
- 19:54:58 The visual havoc falls into a rhythmic pattern of horizontal distortions punctuated with recurring stroboscopic flashes, and accompanied by a constant sonic drone. The whole effect tends to produce a state of rare serenity.
- 19:55:44 Silence. The web browser comes on front of the screen, with a page of address *we_use_a_range_of_information*

19:55:44 *_including_cookies_web_beacons.html*
Cont.

19:55:57 The computer voice reappears with a few curtly words, before silencing for good.

19:56:14 We hear a drone sound once again, while the imagery enters into new stroboscopic convulsions, before stalling into a black and white distorted screen.

19:56:16 An audience member takes a picture with a mobile handset.

19:56:34 The noise stops. The screen is completely black, except for a square section with a pixelated distorted image.

19:56:38 Applause.

19:56:48 The lights are switched on.

19:56:55 End of applause.

This document was produced on the event of JODI's performance and the Forum *Capturing a moment: where net art and performance meet*, hosted by independent curator Annet Dekker, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and LIMA.

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