

The Horizon is a Flatline: Through a Dead Internet

Dead Internet Theory posits that despite the ubiquity and constant motion of the modern internet, it is virtually uninhabited by humans. Almost all of the utterances and content that you are greeted with upon opening your browser is created specifically for you by the combination of algorithmic targeting and artificial intelligence. The only echo chamber is the echo of your own voice, resounding against redoubts of bots and advertisements. I don't believe that this hypothesis is exactly true, but its prevalence speaks to something I find more interesting, and fundamental to questions of digital engagement and justice. A sense of unease pervades the internet and social media. Why do people feel this way? What is the underlying anxiety that animates this conspiracy?

Over the course of this presentation I trace the development of digital media and the forces that shaped it, following the autonomist perspective of authors like Toni Negri (RIP), Carlo Vercellone and Tiziana Terranova. This helps us understand how the process of labour has migrated from the craftsman, to the factory, and now to the whole of society. Postmodern theorists such as Jean Baudillard and Mark Fisher identify this collapse in binaries as essential to the identity of the modern subject. I argue that we can understand the peculiar anxiety of Dead Internet Theory by combining these perspectives to describe the dehumanization, isolation and alienation experienced online. Without realizing it, Dead Internet Theory articulates the fact that the internet is utterly pervasive, but increasingly alien, populated and animated by non-subjective agencies. This is the unique issue of our current telecommercial reality, one that knits together questions of digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence and colonization of online space. These are questions we have to consider if we are to meaningfully search for digital justice.