

# NO THING IS WAITING

Artist **aaajiao**  
interviewed by curator  
Jessica Wan, July 2021

**Jessica Wan:** As a digital-native artist, how do you perceive time in the Internet sphere?

**aaajiao:** The Internet is non-linear and discontinuous in time.

**JW:** Your work *bot* (2017-2018), which is featured in *No Thing is Waiting*, is filmed during your journeys through physical spaces as well as virtual habitats (social media). Could you expand on the ideas behind this work?

**a:** Smart devices and social media constitute memory carriers external to our bodies. How do we access these memories? The creation of *bot* is my attempt to illustrate this thinking. I see it as a decipherable, visual thesis based on the medium that defines our present time.

**JW:** In terms of the process, have you gained new perspectives from developing digital works?

**a:** It is a gradual and progressive process in understanding the self. It started from realising my identity as a 'user' with *The User, Love, High-Frequency Trading* (2017), then continued with the completion of the inner view with *bot* (2018), and now I am trying to understand the world of seeing as a 'player' in *Deep Simulator* (2020).

*User, Love, High-frequency Trading* is a manifesto that expresses my feeling that everyday life has shaped everyone to become a user, and I try to understand what is happening around me as a user. A video called *Column* (2017) illustrates this. In *Column*, I change a computer system time, from back to 1979 or forward to 2038, and in each year, a programme written on the column adds a part to the structure. I wanted to think in a 'user' way, and I realised that time travel is also experienced as time building.

*Bot* is about insight developed through Vipassanā, a Buddhist conception of deep self-knowing and transformation. I think I am seeking that insight from the perspective of the bot. I am a user, so what I am—how I understand the data that surrounds me, or what can be referred to as a new memory system—consists of my body and the smart devices that extend from it, as well as the social media that stores my traces.

The player in *Deep Simulator* is both the user and the bot. The player not only focuses on the self, but tries to see everything that is happening around them, like the climate, enveloping every inch of space.

**JW:** It's interesting that you talk about realising one's identity as a user. The pandemic has fast-tracked the progress of digitalisation, from remote working and learning, to virtual events and online exhibitions; which user would you consider having benefited the most from this situation?

**a:** In the era of platform economy, owners of capital are the ultimate beneficiaries. The heated popularity of NFTs, the rapid iteration of the Internet and the search for transactions to generate capital value emerged hand-in-hand, like other previous Internet hypes.

**JW:** Your inaugural digital retrospective *URL is Love* was conceived during the Covid-19 global pandemic. How have you utilised digital technologies, and how have they impacted your artistic practice during this precarious time?

**a:** 2020 was a year of 'naive digital', where the public developed a genuine, yet rather innocent, expectation of the potential of the digital world. Naivety always gives us strength before greater chaos. Coincidentally, I had been planning to review my previous works in 2020. The online collaboration with Tabula Rasa gallery therefore offered me a platform to conduct the review.

**JW:** When you create in the online spaces we inhabit, like you did for *bot*, are you thinking about what could be improved?

**a:** Creation brings hope and destruction; keep creating and try to accept impermanence.

**aaajiao** aka Xu Wenkai (b.1984, China) is an artist and activist who draws on a broad range of visual languages including sculpture, painting, drawing, multimedia installation, video, sound and design. Enriched by contemporary theory about the online sphere, his practice explores the evolution of identity assimilated by the digital world. His works narrate the experience of a generation that inhabits the parallel worlds and saturated realities of the Internet. At the same time, the artist also looks at the countless possibilities offered by the digital, and the numerous questions raised by this 'hyper-technologisation'.

**Jessica Wan** is a Hong Kong-born, London-based curator with a relational and interdisciplinary approach to exhibition making. Her work explores liminality in culture, identity and the built environment through working with artists and archives globally.