AARIAN MARSHALL GEAR SEP 20, 2026 6:00 AM

Meet the Academics Trying to Stop You From Having Sex in Robotaxis

“You know ‘Bang Bus’? We don’t want that.”



PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION: WIRED STAFF; GETTY IMAGES

PAVLO BAZILINSKYY STILL can't believe he was on PornHub for work. He's an assistant professor at the Eindhoven University of Technology in the Netherlands, and has spent more than a decade researching AI-driven interactions between humans and robots. But he found himself typing "public transport" into the search bar of a very specific website's "amateur section." 297 hits.

"People are hard to predict," Bazilinskyy says. It's why he researches what he does. So his prurient pursuit had a point. Robotaxis without cabbies behind the wheel have started picking up passengers in a handful of countries, including the US. Meanwhile, there's a long history of people getting up to antisocial behavior inside the quasi-private or straight-up public spaces of trains, planes, and automobiles—think the prom night limo, the "Mile High Club," Tom Cruise in slow motion aboard the Chicago L in *Risky Business*, the stuff he found on PornHub.

What might riders do when there's no authority figure inside a vehicle to say, "Hey, stop that!"? What *do* they do? Can people be convinced to stop before they start?

This week, Bazilinskyy and academic colleagues with backgrounds in systems engineering, computer science, psychology, and tourism studies are hosting an industry workshop asking participants to brainstorm along those very lines: How do you stop people from doing it in self-driving cars? Thinking about sex in autonomous vehicles, they theorize, can let anyone who cares about the future of mobility "stress-test" the role the vehicles might eventually play as communal spaces, where social norms get acted out every day.

The event focuses on prevention not just because these academics are no fun (though Alexandros Rouchitsas, an engineering psychologist who is also hosting the event, admits they are "taking the side of the parents, the elderly—we are not the cool people here"). They don't want people to have sex in self-driving cars

"We want to see automated mobility solutions accepted, trusted by the general public," Rouchitsas says. Self-driving could have huge upsides for the elderly, children, and people with disabilities, who have a harder time getting around places where driving is quicker and sometimes necessary. The tech might eventually move beyond private taxis and into public transit, where all sorts of people should be able to travel safely and comfortably. "We want automated mobility solutions to be seen as something that is equitable, serious, societally minded," he says.

Rouchitsas' biggest fear is that self-driving gets co-opted by the partiers, the drug users, the sort of hedonistic folk who have descended on some islands of his native Greece. "You know 'Bang Bus'?" he says. "We don't want that."

The four-hour workshop—rise and shine, it starts at 8:30 am—is part of an industry conference in Gothenburg, Sweden, focusing on how people interact with vehicles and larger mobility systems. The organizers expect participants from academia but also the wider industry. (Gothenburg is home to Volvo Cars and the tech supplier SmartEye; BMW and Google are conference sponsors.) Those who show up will be prompted to come up with physical and design interventions that encourage people to not do *that*. The workshop will focus on preventing consensual interactions, its organizers say.

Rouchitsas, who studies human-machine interactions, says he hopes participants will get creative with their anti-action designs. But just off the top of his head: Maybe the vehicles could be transparent? Maybe a light begins to blink if the technology senses behavior it disapproves of? The organizers intend to publish a paper based on the workshop's results.

Sex is the fun, eye-catching part here, made all the more alluring because it's "the elephant in the room" for those thinking about how humans might interact with machines in the future, says Bazilinskyy—very under-studied. But the results of this sort of inquiry could help designers, companies, and lawmakers figure out

Prevent sex and maybe you'll also prevent robbery, bullying, and homicide." It could be helpful for the industry and academics to use this example to design other things," he says.

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Aarian Marshall is a staff writer covering transportation systems and cities. Before joining WIRED, she wrote for The Atlantic's CityLab. Marshall is based in San Diego and is developing opinions about tacos. ... Read More

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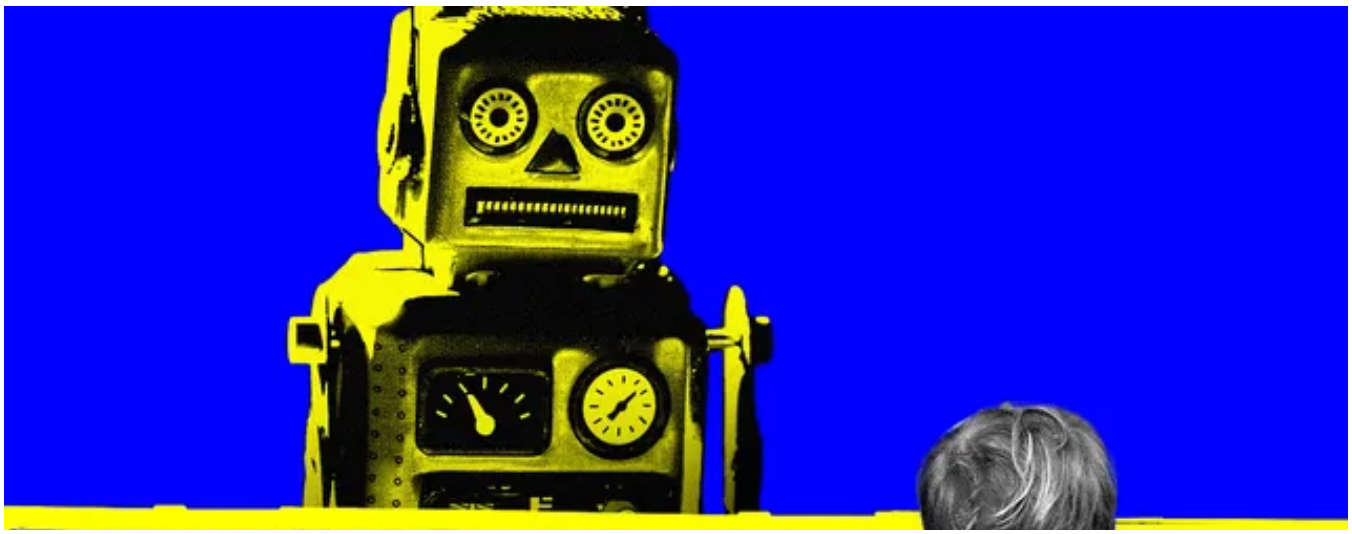
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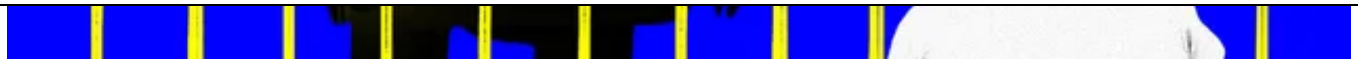


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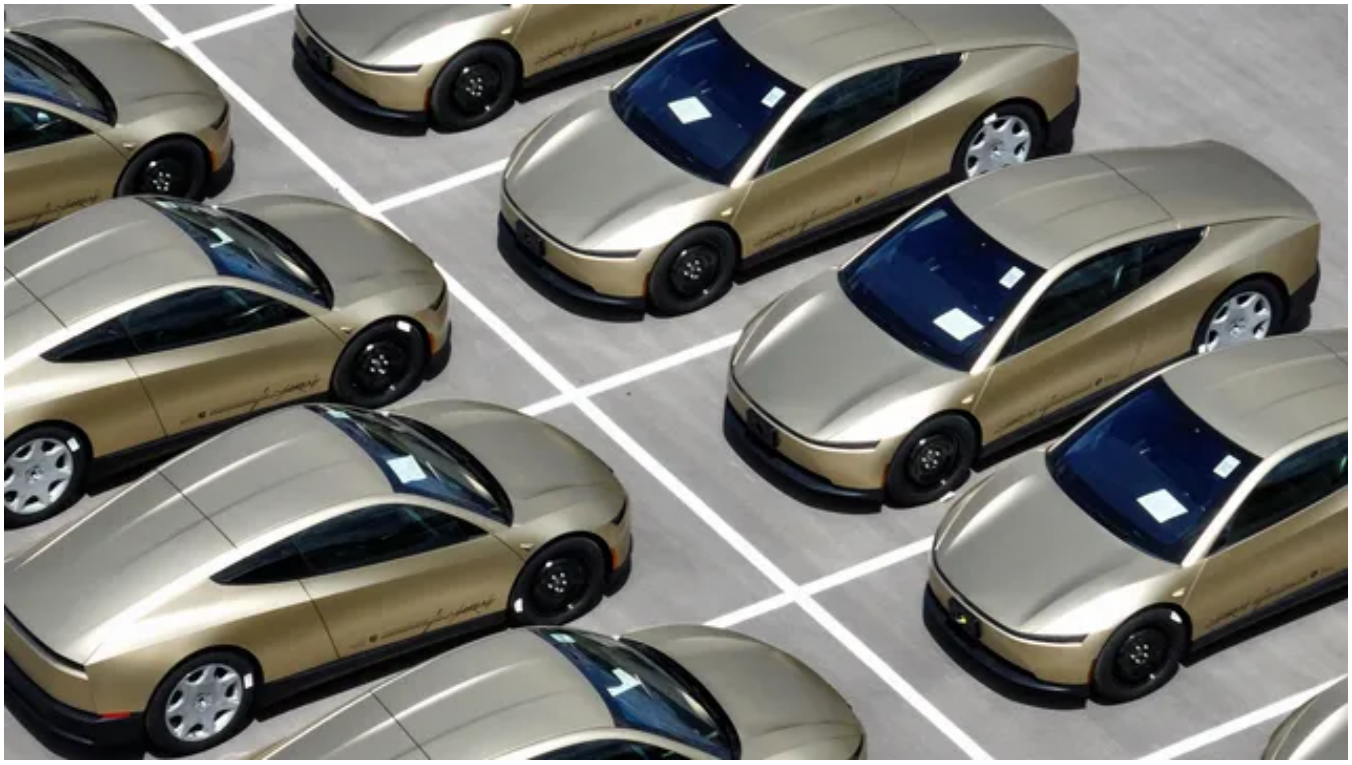




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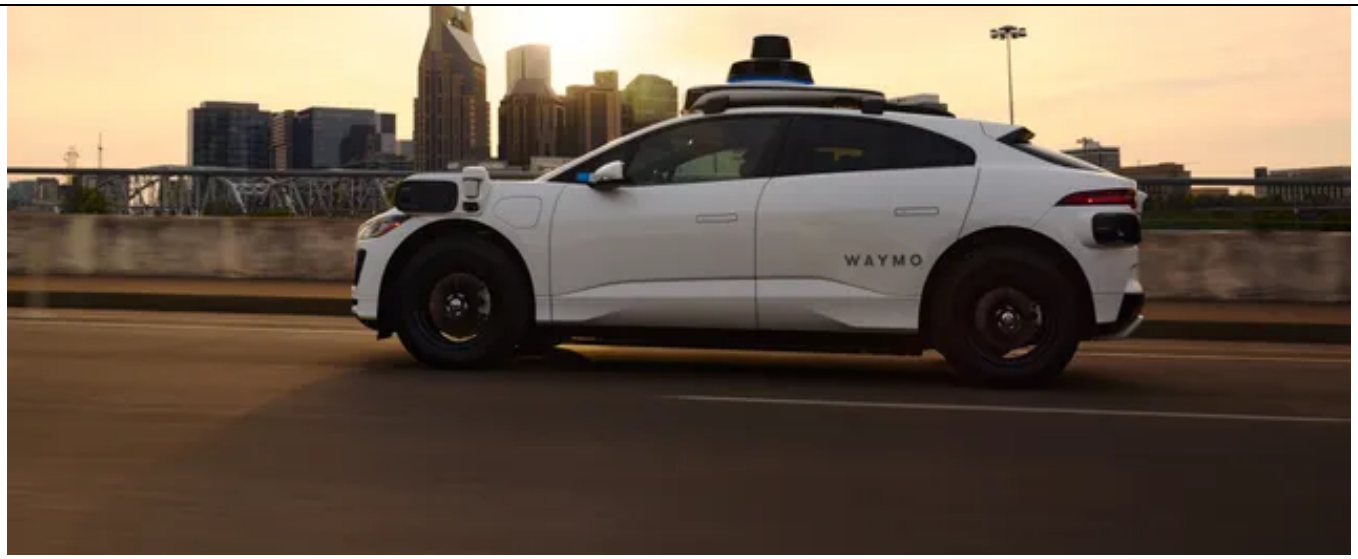
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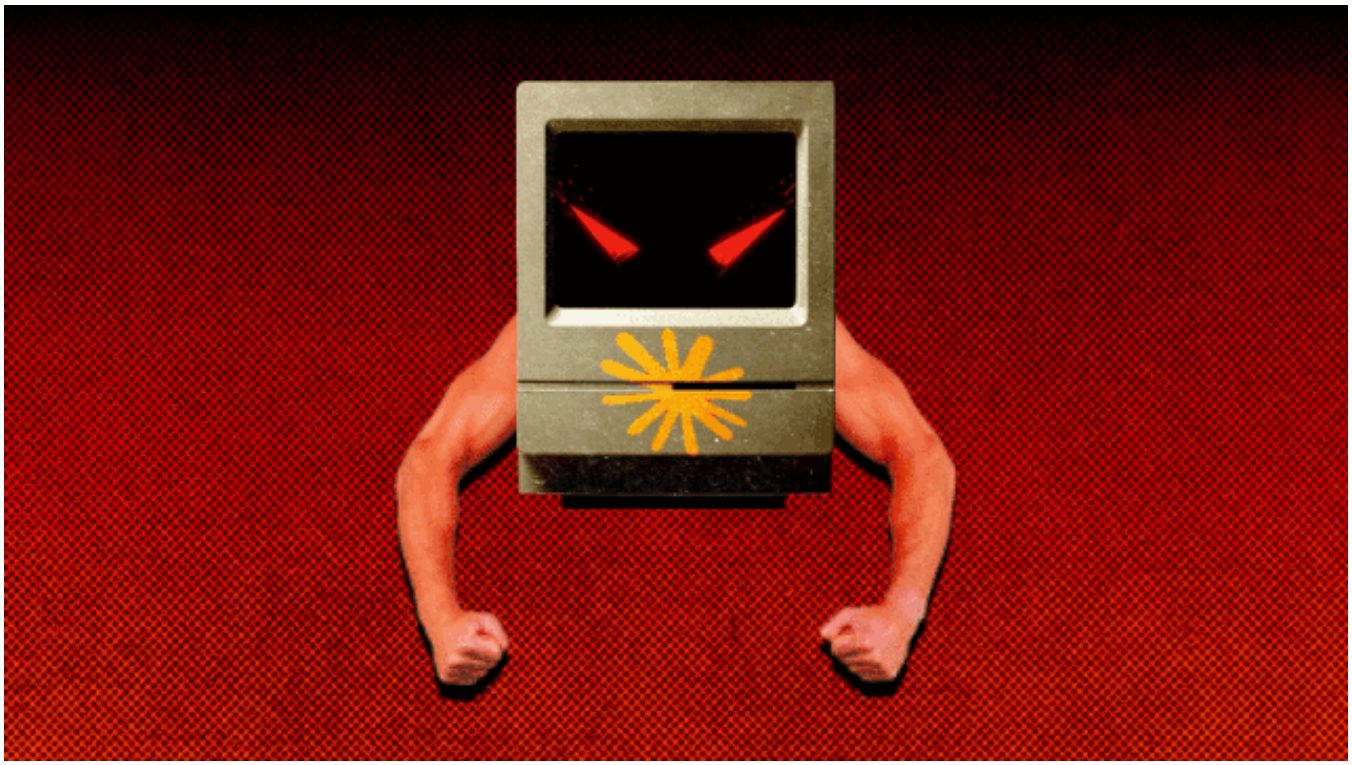
KATE KNIBBS



If the AI Industry Followed Its Own Research, It Might Have Paused Already

Anthropic's CEO says that safety hinges on understanding how AI "thinks." So far the evidence is disturbing.

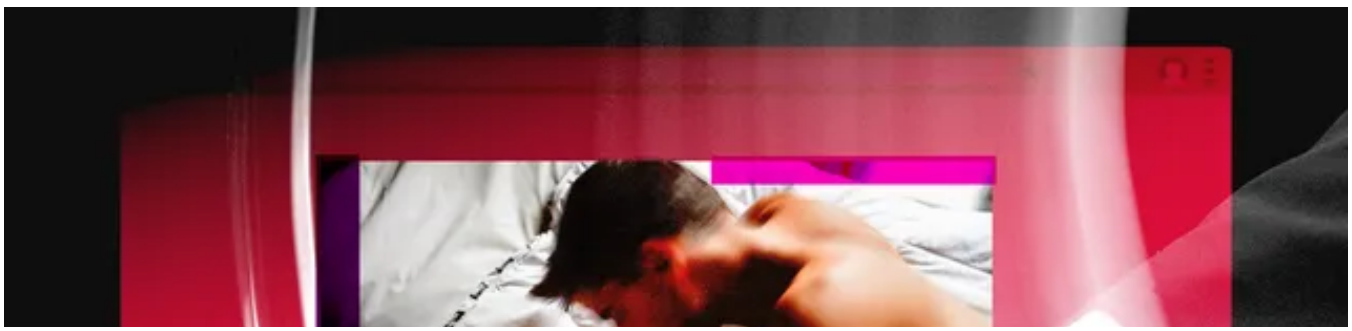
STEVEN LEVY



The AI Researcher Who Just Quit Anthropic Says It's 'Crunch Time for Humanity'

Jacob Coxon talks to WIRED about the "mini Manhattan project" inside Anthropic, the problem with alignment, and why AI labs have just a few years left to make their systems safe.

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