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Graduation proposal: Giving an Experience of Technology

I want to enable the audience to see or experience consequences of technology upon ordinary life, because I think everybody has the right to know how technology can shape our reality. To do this I use a process that I call embodiment and I also create tools that allow for a new kind of interaction with or view upon information.
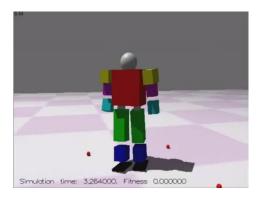
Previous practice

Free is Too Cheap
Everytime an user go's to a website where Google makes use of the hard drive of the user. My section will inform the user that he/she has made money because Google is paying rent for using the users hard drive. In reality no money gets transferred. I think it's unfair that Google does not have to pay rent when it makes use of my property when I go on the Internet, while I pay for the things I use. With Free is Too Cheap I wanted to raise awareness for this. To do this I created a fake message, that seems to come from Google, which would inform you that you make money out of the Google Union.

Into the Deep
Into the Deep is a performance where I mimic the movements of a virtual human like figure, who was taught to walk by a computer program. The performance would be in the middle of the shopping crowd and last for 15 minutes. Afterwards I would tell the audience what the inspiration for my movements were and we would discuss the nature of the computer program that had taught a 3D model how to "walk".

I think it is important to stay aware of the functioning of computer systems around us and remember that there are alternative ways to interface with these systems. By putting the output of a computer program into the real world, through acting out the movements, I create a space for discourse about the functioning of the computer system and the functioning of the people who share the space with that program during the performance.

Current research goal

Apart from the question how I can give an experience of technology I want to examine how to enchant a big audience. Next to this I want to examine how multiple media can convey meaning when they are used together. Finally I'm interested in how you can entice people to do something. The actions for the

audience range from sharing the work with friends up to using my software when browsing.

Project description

Phase 1: gathering a crowd
I will start with a performance in public space that acts out in and around Bijenkorf Amsterdam what online advertisement companies are doing in the virtual realm. I want to pretend to be a worker of the company that rends out the billboards at the bus stops. This CBS employee could for instance stalk people who are shopping.

Next I want to create a music video for a techno cover of "should I stay or should I go now" by The Clash. The lyrics will be about how online advertisers are making money by using our personal hard drives, but that we don't get any money from these companies while they should pay rent, because they are using our hard disks which are our property and not theirs. Imagery for the video clip may consist of how people reacted to Performance 1. Probably I'll mix this material with images of Cookie Monster playing out a narrative that support the message I want to send.

Besides the clip I will make a fake Youtube site, which will be used to spread the clip online. As you watch the video "on Youtube" things will happen to the site which will probably strike you as being odd. For instance when commercials in the video are replaced with something; the commercials on the site will be replaced with similar material.

The video clip transits smoothly into a game where you can feed your cookies to Cookie Monster. I want the audience to feed Cookie Monster as much as possible. This should raise awareness of what kind of cookies are on the computers of the users. Whoever has fed Cookie Monster the most will win a price.

Phase 2: promoting self organisation
The price is a Cookie Monster doll, but some hardware will be hidden inside it. The idea is that you can use internet through that hardware and that it will filter the cookies which are in the internet traffic. Thus Cookie Monster is effectivelly eating your cookies unless companies pay you. I could swap the eyeballs of the doll with displays, which will indicate how much money you made through Cookie Monster.

You can only really make money when as many people as possible are using the software that drives the Cookie Monster hardware. Only then it becomes a concern to online advertisement companies that people are deleting their cookies. This would be an opportunity to talk about how much they are willing to pay for the cookies to be installed. As soon as an agreement is made a server should indicate to all Cookie Monsters which cookies are allowed to pass. To promote the use of Cookie Monster Software I could make an instruction video and do workshops on how people can start using it. The workshops may include theatrical games that embody the working of cookie technology and the politics of consumer/producer relations. In order not to force people to use the Cookie Monster I may explain other tools that are already in excistence.

Project motivation

My motivation for this project is similar to my motivation for "Free is Too Cheap". I want to use multiple media in my project because I want my graduation project to reflect my broad practice and skills.

  If you want to use an office for a business you have to pay rent to the owner of the building where that office is located. When online advertisement companies make money by selling targeted advertisements they make use of your hard drive. It's unfair to make you pay for things, that are not your property, while others don't pay anything when they use your property. My project aims to provide experiences that will make it easier to understand the mechanisms that are at work with cookie technology. People can then decide for themselves how they want to act upon that information.

  Part of my methodology to reach this goal is acting out in a performance the operations that a computer system does or by visualizing these operations on a computer screen. The audience then gets an image of what the computer is doing which would otherwise be obscured from view. This allows for the audience to respond to the actions that the computer is taking silently on behalf of the programmers or the persons paying them.

  I also offer alternative tools that allow the users to interact with a computer system in a different way that hopefully provides in a need to make the computer do what the user wants it to do, instead of making the user do what a designer wants the user to do.

Technical realization

I want to document my performance in the Bijenkorf Amsterdam with a descent, but small video camera like the one on my phone. For the videoclip I want to make higher quality recordings in the green screen studio and use After FX as a video tool.

  I'll use the HTML5 video tag in combination with Javascript to publish my videos, because it allows for real-time video rendering, interactivity between browser/website and webcam recording by a website through Rainbow (not Linux compliable). To make life easier I may want to use libraries like PopcornJS and JPlayer.

  Rainbow isn't supported for Linux, which means Mac and Windows only! I could do manual

recordings and just ask people from the street to shout for their money or I could do a combination between manual and automated recordings.

Some webpages can show a lot of information about your specific browser. Which cookies are installed is part of this profile. In a similar way I want to detect cookies to visualize them in my game. If it's possible I would like to delete, reset or mutilate the cookies through the game.

The Cookie Monster software will be Privoxy that needs to respond to a whitelist which it takes from a remote source. I could write something in Bash and/or Python/NodeJS to rewite the configuration files of Privoxy regularly and allow companies who have paid. To make the remote whitelist save and at the same time scallable is a puzzle I haven't cracked yet.I intend that the Cookie Monster software will run on the school server.

The Cookie Monster itself should be a managed switch that runs Cookie Monster software and is hidden in a Cookie Monster doll. I was thinking of connecting simple displays to the switch and it's software to indicate how much money is made so far.

Related artworks

Ghostery, Adblock Plus, Cookie Monster are not artworks but tools that can help a user to get rid of cookie technology in some way. My project differs from these projects since I want the user to make money by selling his or her cookies in a collective. Google-alert is an artwork that raises awareness of track technology. Personally I want people to take action when they have this awareness. Artvertizer is an artwork that uses augmented reality to swap commercials in real life with artwork. I'm inspired by this work since I'm planning to swap online commercials with something else. The Revolving Internet and FB resistance are changing the well known icons of Facebook and Google in a similar manner as I want to change Youtube. Google will eat itself is a project whereby revenue that is generated through ad placement is used to buy Google stock. I would like to give money raised to through the union to have a sympathetic destination. Thimbl is an alternative to Twitter that is setup by the Telecommunisten. In a way I also want to build a system that promotes equality like this system is doing. The Muppets: Bohemian Rhapsody is a persiflage of the Queen video clip. I also want to use a Muppet in my clip. The site of Requiem For A Dream is an example where a site is not really a site. With my Youtube phising I want to reach a similar experience. In Cookies performance visitors to a museum would secretly get cookies inside their pockets "given" by the performers. I'm also searching for this kind of embodiment.

Thesis

In my thesis I want to explore the notion of "free". What does it mean to get something for free in our society? What different kinds of free can be distinguished and what is said about them? I'm interested in the economic notion of free because my project aims to get money for something which is at the moment taken freely. To truly stand behind my project I need to know exactly what it means to ask money for that which companies use for free. I want to look at this topic from different angels. People who are in favor of free as well as people who think we are working for nothing and their reasons for thinking that way are going to be addressed in the thesis.

Bibliography

- "Free" Chris Anderson
- "Immaterial labor" Lazzarato

- "Perform or Else" ?
- "Reality TV" ?
- "Google Analytics" Justin Cutroni
- "Viral Loop" Adam Penenberg
- "Request for Comments: 2965" Kristol, D and Montulli, L. (2000)
- "The Telekommunist Manifesto" Dymitri Kleiner

Evaluation

I would like to be evaluated on how I have written my code. I'm going to use Javascript a lot and I should write this according to the standard. There should also be some degree of abstraction. In my essay I want to be judged upon how informative the text is and that my personal opinion doesn't shine through all the way. My use of elementary video effects (possibly in HTML5) can also be assessed. The most important criteria for my evaluation is that I facilitate the audience to take action, which can be a small action like sharing the content, but also more sustained action like using my software when searching the internet.