

Meditation Machine.

WHAT

The Meditation Machine was a desktop installation in which I transformed my laptop's CPU (the computer's internal processing) information into a low droning sound resembling a kind of heart beat or flow of breath. The audio was then visualised taking the form of a pulsating white circle. Spatially, my white laptop was set on a transparent perspex box of 30cm cubed and flanked by a set of speakers. The desktop of my screen consisted of two rectangular windows on the far left and right, a square window under the right window and periodic pop-ups near the left window.

The right window was red and translucent with a table of updating CPU (the computer's internal processing) usage on the right side. These fluctuating numbers corresponded with the sound, while the white circle located under the right window was the visualisation of the sound acting as a kind of meter monitoring these internal movements. The left window featured scrolling text of the computer's internal monologue, serving as the narrative space in which prompted certain programs and pop-ups to open and close. For example, when an application opens, the white circle expands as the sound becomes louder or faster, and similarly when it the application closes, the white circle contracts as the sound becomes softer or slower.

HOW

This project was programmed in Pure Data, a real-time graphical programming environment for audio, video and graphical processing. Pure Data is an open source program that was originally developed by Miller Puckette. Using Pure Data I was able to amplify CPU information while GEM (Graphics Environment for Multimedia) visually rendered the sound into the white circle. The control mechanism of this installation was a bash script (a Unix shell command processor) that called upon various CPU-intensive applications to open and close, consequently causing the differences of the fluctuations of the internal processing to be seen and heard.

WHY

This outcome was a result of my research where I started with the premise that technology, especially technology, is a compensation machine (Kluitenberg, 2005). One could argue that human being's greatest dreams are of higher knowledge, progress, amplification of human virtue just as much as dampening out weakness in order to perfect ourselves and out societies. In short, we desire to transcend all that is humanly impossible. In some ways, technology is the instrument in which our irrational desires are invested and projected in, however always falling short of expectation. It is precisely because it cannot perfect our inherent flaws and human deficiencies that makes technology compensatory. They become the embodiment of the inventors desires. As a rhetorical gesture, I tried to free my laptop of its inventors desires by way of meditation. Interpreting the meditation techniques of the Shambala teachings of Tibetan Buddhists, I created an environment for my laptop to focus on its interior landscape so that conceptually, it became a system of responsive, self-reflexive inter-relations.

Benji

WHAT:

Benji is a fictitious entity that journeys into the world of bio-information as a commodity and consequently envisions the prospects of genetic discrimination and the increasing personalisation of marketing strategies. Named after the child of Sergey Brin, co-founder of Google.com and Anne Wojcicki, co-founder of 23andme.com (a privately held personal genomics and biotechnology company), Benji represents the ideological and economic union as historically practiced in royal political marriages and commonly witnessed in corporate mergers.

Inheriting strands from both parents, Benji's mission is to be the world's leading DNA search engine. Using state of the art technology, Benji matches you directly to personalised advertisements based on your class rank which is determined by an advanced analysis of your genetic code. So revolutionary is it, that even behavioural patterns can be detected to predict and preempt every decision so that your consumer cravings may be satisfied. This narrative also touches on the supernatural powers that users imbue in search engines or perhaps technology in general. Reflecting on the irrational and yet convincing mechanisms of belief experienced in fortune telling and horoscopes, a certain willingness to believe is perhaps key in creating more possibilities to discriminate.

HOW:

Benji eventually developed into a writing piece that evolved into the imaginary biography of Professor Benji Brin, the man behind the corporation. Adopting aggrandising rhetoric from texts written on the Church of Scientology leader, L. Ron Hubbard, I continued to add to a few more flavors of advertising talk and religious chant. This became a short paper which was submitted to ISEA (International Symposium on Electronic Art) this year, where a presentation of 15 minutes was followed up. In the presentation I assume the role of a close friend of Benji Brin and speak briefly about his history leading up to his scientific discoveries. I also explain in further detail about how Benji, the DNA search engine works while subtly underlining their ideology, view on race and political aspirations. The next manifestation will soon take the form of a video that mimics the aesthetic qualities and rhetoric of TED talks.

WHY:

Struggling with finding a way to deal with online privacy, I invented an allegorical world where I could take the privacy debate onto the genetic level and into the potential future. In this world genetic information is under central control of a private multinational DNA search engine called Benji. Through this project, I wanted to highlight and problematise were the activities of centralising health and DNA records. A plausible consequence is genetic discrimination as witnessed during the eugenics movement earlier on last century. Secondly, as a reflection on the pharmaceutical industry working towards personalised, custom-made medicine, I wanted to push the limits of bio-information as a commodity - targeted advertising at its most efficient. Finally, what was also interesting was the kind of reverence to the mysterious power of the veiled search engine. It is veiled because the inner-workings of the search results powered by secret algorithms are shrouded by walls. Perhaps trivial, though compelling, empathy and the desire to relate plays a major role. Psychologically, it functions as a kind of self fulfilling prophecy, a desire which pre-empts and causes realities.

Where No Flag Has Gone Before

WHAT

Where No Flag Has Gone Before is a live bluescreen studio installation set up so that visitors of the exhibition can reenact their own glorious moment of the first planting of the American flag on the surface of the moon.

HOW

This installation was a part of the first years' final show of MA Networked Media, Piet Zwart Institute. It was located in Roodkapje, Rotterdam and the title of show was called "No Such Thing as Repetition". Complete with props and costume, consisting of a large American flag together with the flag pole, homemade space-suit pieced together with white disposable painters' coveralls, cardboard, bits and bobs from an old coffee machine, white spray paint, gloves, an unused back-pack, motorbike helmet and the foam insoles of moon boots, I help visitors gear up for the arduous journey to the moon.

Once prepared and dressed, the newly-initiated astronauts step into the bluescreen area where the upright flag awaits them to pick it up and gradually plant it back. The participant has 20 seconds to perform this act as it is being recorded and composited in the computer program Pure Data. The background image of the very first participant's video, is the iconic photograph of Buzz Aldrin standing next to the American flag on the moon, taken during the 1969 Apollo 11 mission. The only difference is that in this video, the participant replaces Buzz and becomes the national hero. Consecutive video recordings of people reenacting the planting of the flag serve to become the background footage for the next participant. Gradually accumulating, the final video graph the episodes of reenactors as colonisers on the moon.

WHY

Whether the 1969 moon landing event was real or staged has been at the centre of much debate. Shifting focus away from its contested reality, I chose scrutinises the very moment that has inscribed itself so deeply into the collective global consciousness: that of the planting of the American flag on the moon. I selected to render this iconic image as a political symbol of colonisation in the name of technological progress. The moon landing is one example that clearly reflects the grand story of political motivation driving technological progress, more specifically anticipating the ongoing US program of outer space colonisation as an incentive to preserve self-serving powers.