Graduation proposal Fako Berkers

My project is a video clip where I make visible the working of (digital) cookies, which are used for tracking people online. The video is a mix of techno, the muppets and me. Together we wander through a webshop while singing about what happens to us there and how we feel about it. This video clip is one of the first clips that will interact with the website around it while being played. During and after the clip the audience is enticed to take action like: sharing the clip, play a game and making jewelry with sweet cookies. Whoever plays the game will not only be confronted by their own (digital) cookies, but also install a cookie blocker. This blocker either blocks cookies entirely or gives money to the user for allowed cookies. Whoever is interested can follow workshops that will be about how to protect your privacy online and of course … make jewelry out of that precious resource.

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 create tools that allow for a new kind of interaction with or view upon information and I also use a process that I call embodiment.

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.

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".

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.

Simulation time: 3.264000. Fitness 0.000000

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

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 and exploit us by not paying for this use. In one verse Cookie Monster will ask for a cookie donation to charity, since he is part of the 1% without cookies. Another verse will feature Miss Piggy who tries to convince you that you should take her great personality as agent in the cookie industry. Imagery for the video clip may consist of myself walking through a webshop together with the Muppets. During the chorus people may see jewelry that is made of cookies.

      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 the lyrics speak about "the virtual tracking eye" a commercial on Youtube will change into an evil looking eye.

      The video clip transforms into a game where you can feed your cookies to Cookie Monster or Miss Piggy. In the game these two characters will quibble to get your cookies, that will be visible inside the browser.

      To play the game you need to install an add on. This add on will not only provide the game functionality, but also a cookie blocking mechanism. There will be two modes of blocking. In the first version cookies get "eated" and they are all blocked. The Miss Piggy version will not only block but also register the cookies of the user in order to demand money from the advertisement companies for future allowance. In other words the blocker only allows cookies if the user gets paid for it.

      To promote the use of the add on I will conduct workshops on how people can start using privacy protection tools. The workshops may include theatrical games that embody the working of cookie technology and the politics of consumer/producer relations. Making cookie jewelry will probably be on the schedule also.

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 is that the audience gets an image of what the computer is doing which would otherwise be obscured from view. An example of this are the cookies that become visible during the game, which should reference to the sites where they were installed. Another one is the privacy workshop where we'll play out the mechanisms that are at work.

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. The cookie blocker is a good example of this.

Technical realization

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 sequencing and interactivity between browser and website. To make life easier I may want to use libraries like PopcornJS and JPlayer. For visualizing cookies in the browser I want to use an add on. This add on will, next to code to visualize cookies, include code from the Cookie Monster add on which has a blocking mechanism. I'd need to rewrite the code in order to get the functionality in "Miss Piggy Mode".

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-alarm 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. 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.

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

Here is a list of books and movies that are relevant for my project.
- "Free" Chris Anderson
- "Immaterial labor" Lazzarato
- "Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance" Jon McKenzie
- "Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched" Mark Andrejevic
- "Google Analytics" Justin Cutroni
- "Viral Loop" Adam Penenberg
- "Request for Comments: 2965" Kristol, D and Montulli, L.
- "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. I consider the project successful artistically when the different media blend nicely together and form a meaningful whole.

Planning

month	clip	phising	game
December	Buy Miss Piggy doll Script the storyboard	Make the storyboard	Make the storyboard
January	Search voice actors Further script lyrics after feedback Work on song	Get critique storyboard Design track tech. elem. Study Youtube HTML5	Get critique storyboard Make fake prototype
February	Do green screen tests Work on song	Create animations	Comp. proto/possibilities Improve gameplay
March	Further prepare/rethink on tests Record the sound	Create animations Create fake censored message	Look for binding with Cookie Monster
April	Record the clip + game	Test synchronousness	Code the game
May	Do montage Re-record	Test Popcorn with sequencing	Test on users
June	Finish montage Publish		Finish the game
July	Go to publishers Prepare for exhibition	Prepare for exhibition	Prepare for exhibition

month	add-on	cookie jewelry	workshop
December	Study source code	Search for artists	
January	Get advice on approach	Make Drupal base install	
February	Code changes	Initiate website design	
March	Code changes	Finish the site	Prepare workshops
April	Test on users	Test web sequencing Test site on users	Search venues
May	Code changes	Create web sequencing	Search venues
June	Code changes, publish	Improve Drupal experience	Do workshops
July	Prepare for exhibition	Prepare for exhibition	Do workshops

Budget

Expected expenses

Muppets	160
Red cloth	100
Cookies	30
Actors	200
Co-workers	500

Expected income

Workshop	?