

“The Dark Sides of the Web”

Final Project Proposal Megan Hoogenboom

Previous work

1) My first thematic project at the Piet Zwart Institute was about abandoned websites, it was an online book about 6 abandoned websites and the elements that make them abandoned. I took the websites apart, and researched all the elements. Every chapter begins with a screenshot of the page, then an analysis of the html-code, and all the broken links and not working parts are highlighted. The third part is the part where the meta-data of the images that are visible on the website is shown. The last part is a screenshot of the page where you can see when it was last updated.

At the end of the book, there is a template on how to make your website look abandoned. This is a reaction on the template websites one can use, and the standardization of the internet, where a lot of websites are beginning to look the same. With this template you can make your website look unique, without having to know a lot of html coding. It is a simple reaction on the free template-websites that are available online. This reaction followed an irritation that all websites are going to look the same. Looking for abandoned blogs and websites, a lot looked the same. The abandoned websites from before, lets say, the upcoming of blogs were basic HTML websites. Templates weren't widely known, people still researched themselves how to make a basic HTML website look like their own. The websites I found were personal, emotional, simple and most of the time unprofessional. This is no longer the case when people use pre-made templates, to make their website look more professional, but less personal and emotional.

This project succeeded in that it was a nice process to the end of the work. I started with a small project about my traces on the internet, my old social network profiles, and my fascination grew bigger and bigger while I was researching it more. The book is a finished project, but there is more that can be done with this subject. There are so many abandoned websites and blogs online, most of them hard to find, which I can still search for and examine further.

2) For my second thematic project I translated a poem from Paul van Ostaijen from paper to an Ebook reader. Paul van Ostaijen was one of the first poets who began to use text as image in his poetry, at the beginning of visual poetry. This inspired me to research what would happen to his poetry, once you transform it into Ebook format. I used all the elements, opportunities and limitations, of the Ebook reader. These elements I added to the poem, in the transformation. Other elements, like the notion of the page, I had to discard. As a font I used an open source font, this was a reference to the woodcut and pressure print that was used in the original poem.

This project succeeded in a way that it was the outcome of research. This was the first project I did with a new medium, one that I never used before. The project was an ongoing research about this medium, and I feel like I got the most out of it. I tried to use all the elements it has to offer, and include these in the translation.

3) The third thematic project I did was about phobias in Rotterdam, what phobias experience people while being in Rotterdam, and at which specific places.

The work started as a project about the risks of Rotterdam, and developed into a research/parody to phobias in Rotterdam. 50 People were asked to answer 31 questions about if they experience certain fears in Rotterdam. The questions and fears were based on phobias I selected, all which you can develop in the city. The results I transferred into percentages and corresponding infographics. The phobias were split up into 5 different categories: Social phobias, Personal phobias, Street phobias, Nature phobias and Space Phobias. I made 5 posters, each for every category. In the end I made 5 Rotterdam specific phobias, based on the five highest scoring phobias. The sixth poster displayed these five Rotterdam specific phobias, with new names. The new names are completed with the location, or specific situation, where most responders experienced this fear. The last step was to make stickers of the five Rotterdam specific phobias and place them on the accompanying locations. When you walk in Rotterdam you can see the stickers and be more aware of the fears that live there. While you live in Rotterdam you can experience your own fears, and not even be aware of them anymore. People don't always talk to other people about their fears in Rotterdam, that they are so afraid of crossing the Coolsingel, and prefer to walk under it through the Koopgoot. When you know other people also experience these fears, talking about it will be easier. It is a way of making people more aware of other people in their city. The fear of being touched on the Blaak market was the highest scoring phobia, and people who saw this were shocked. It made them more aware of the fears we all experience, and maybe a little less scared.

This project succeeded in that it felt like a finished project, it could be lifted to another level, but the element of the phobias in Rotterdam is finished. The process towards the end result was not one of my best. The inspiration was there, but I had a lot of trouble finding the right direction. While collecting data in all different directions, I wasn't making any decisions. I started the project with the hypothesis: Mapping a city by its places of risk. I looked at the crimes people commit on each other and the crimes a city can commit on people, the most dangerous intersections in Rotterdam and made a route out of these. This route passes all the most dangerous intersections, and could be seen as an alternative tourist route. It covers all the parts of Rotterdam. But both of these ways to take the project were either finished or too broad. The search for the right direction took a long time, but talking to more people about the project helped me to find the right direction. This direction felt finally right, this feeling comes by a direction that is clear and has opportunities. With opportunities I mean different ways the project could be designed.

In all three projects a few subjects are constantly coming back. These are degrading and decay. In my first project the degrading and decay is in the abandoned websites. The websites experience a new kind of decay, a digital online decay. This is the point where my fascination for this new kind of decay and degrading of something relatively new began.

In my second project I researched a new medium and looked what the possibilities were with this medium. This medium is relatively so new, that there are hardly any experiments done with. With an Ebook reader the notion of the page has disappeared and been replaced by a "screen" where you can change the font and the font size. Here my fascination for the new and the transformation that is needed for this is needed began.

In my last project I researched what phobias live in Rotterdam, which also originated from a longer fascination I had. They fascinate me in a way that they are small or big errors in the human-brain (or sometimes body). These errors can originate from ones past, traumatic experiences or due to something genetic.

Proposal

What are my ideas/inspirations?

For my final project I want to continue with my last thematic projects. In my last project I focussed on Rotterdam and selected existing phobias to see what were the most experienced phobias. Then I made them Rotterdam specific, changed their name and added a location to it. This process and approach are best to look at the phobias in a city, but now I want to take it to the internet. The only thing that I can take from my last project is the phobias, but different ones now, and the people involved.

With my first project I looked at abandoned spaces online, and in my essay compared these spaces to abandoned spaces in the physical world. This is also a thing I want to take with me to my final project, the fact and relation the online and the offline world have to each other. In this project I also looked at some kind of weird places online, this is something I also want to take with me to my final project.

With my second project I translated a poem (with exists offline, in a physical book) to a new medium; the Ebook reader (a digital medium, but also offline). In this translation I researched how to translate from one medium to another and what problems you can face. This interaction between online and offline, an old medium and its newer substitute I find interesting subjects. This is because you can really learn from the process you make. The translation, the comparison between online and offline and the relation between these two are not visible or obvious. To make them visible and accessible to the people who use them, can maybe open their eyes to the mediums they use. It can be a tool to take a step back, and no longer see the medium as a user, but rather as a moderator.

The relation between people and the mediums they use, is different for each medium. The internet as a medium can be the most interesting one to look at. Because it is so broad and widespread, it has a history and substitutes a lot of things. But do people really have a relationship with “the internet”, or with different websites and apps online? Like Facebook, Spotify or online games?

I need to make clear on what part I want to focus. The ideas I have fit in a few categories, listed below.

Cyber-hypochondria

This is hypochondria, but online. There are all these websites where you can click on symptoms you have, and the disease or illness you may have will appear. If you have a stomach-ache you may have stomach cancer. Self doctoring, also being able to order medicines online and talk about the disease with other people. Does getting a doctors advise without a doctor or any human involved create scary results? Do more people experience cyber-hypochondria then normal hypochondria?

The overload of information generated by the users

Here the focus is on the blogs and forums people create themselves on subjects they are interested in or they think they know something about. These forums are especially scary, because here people advise other people with sometimes weird information. It would be nice to look more at these “dark sides of the web.” The question I ask myself here is who these people are behind there nicknames. Why do they have these nicknames, and why do they expose themselves totally except giving there real name. What is more personal, your name or your secrets and where is the line.

Self-help-websites

These also go under the category of the “dark sides of the web.”

Fear of the not knowing

This can be caused by the blackberry or smart phone as a tool of companies to enslave its workers. People get totally stressed and have burn-outs because of the overload of information. I also experience this constant, almost neurotic, checking of my email. How does this effect us, is it really getting neurotic?

The technologically-based fears

How are they triggered and what do people do to avoid the experience these fears. Are these fears comparable to fears they have in the physical world? (Like crossing a busy street and using google to search for something).

The computer as a human body

How different are we from the computer? What are the human aspects of the net. The internet can be seen as a brain. Where things that happen on the internet are similar to things happen in our brain, like: sexuality on the internet, the physical parts of a computer but also the cyberporn and internet-viruses as STD's. What happens if you take the human aspect out of the internet? What fears or limitations does the internet has, that we also or don't have in our brain? This can be also seen as a part of the dark sides of the web, and then comparing it to the dark sides of your brain and body. Your darkest thoughts are hidden away somewhere, does this also happen on the internet? Is the classification of your brain the same as the classification of the internet? Is the part of your brain witch you don't use comparable to the dark sides of the web?

The dark sides of the web.

With all my interests summed up, I have to take one as a starting point. Doing some reading about the subjects and looking to my previous work, one stands more out than the others. The dark sides of the web. In my previous work, this has played a roll already, sometimes bigger then other times. The fears and phobias people have, they may flourish on this dark side of the web. The dark side of the web can be looked at in two different ways: the dark web, as the assessable, but more dark places. The forums with personal problems, the nicknames, the self-help-websites. Or the dark web as the "invisible web" (Dr. Jill Ellsworth), this is information that is hidden to normal search engines. This information is not easily findable, because it is hidden, actually not invisible. Several companies have tried to map or create search engines that do search/crawl these dark sides of the web. This dark side of the web is not al legal or appropriate to visit. With Freeweb, created by Ian Clarke, you can visit the dark side of the web without being found. This program is used by several criminal users. But this doesn't mean that all of the dark sides of the web are used by criminals. There is also child-porn (also criminal), porn, the exchange of music (newsgroups), and so on.

I think looking more into these groups, and categorizing them is a good starting point of my research. How do you reach the dark side of the web? What elements of the dark side do also exist on the surface web? Making categories and then looking more into these categories, who uses them, where are these people from? And if it works: what do these people do in their regular lives?

So the starting point will be to look for hidden places on the internet. How do search engines crawl and how can you look for websites/databases that are not findable with Google? The second part will be to categories what I've found and find the next step to take. Also important is to collect the dark webpages that exist on the surface web, these are not hidden but also not easily found. Collecting and categorizing will be the most important thing in the beginning of this project.

Why is this interesting for me (and others)?

This is an interesting subject to make a project with because I want to take a step back from being the user of the internet. Making people more aware of what this medium is doing to us, and why this is a bad or good thing. I want to make something that comes out of research to the relationship between people when they are online and offline. What is the difference between these worlds (looking at the user, not at the world they are in). These worlds are not (yet?) the same, because lots of people act differently in both worlds. They see on or the other as a free world, where they can be themselves, and in the other world they cant. What users operate on the surface web and what users operate in the darker web?

What do I want to communicate, what do I want to do with the user/viewer?

I want to make the user more aware of themselves and of others. For me one of the problems the internet raises is that you become less aware of your physical self. I don't know, yet, if this is the case. But it is worth to look into. I want to make the user more aware of the darker sides of the web, and what you can find there. How they can access the big web, and not only the surface web. I also want to communicate that there is more than the surface web. In the newspaper I read an article that young people don't surf the web anymore, and can't search properly for something they need. Is this because the surface web is getting more and more commercial? Or because the hidden dark web is getting more and more hidden?

I want to bring the fears and phobias in, in a later state of the project. Because I think that a lot of the fact that there is a dark web has to do with fears and phobias people experience. But this can only come out of my research.

What could the outcome be?

For the outcome it could be a collection of dark web places, a kind of database where you can find categorized webpages or databases witch you cannot find using google. I don't want it to be a search engine, because this has no use to the user, this is simply a handy tool. It has to have a message for the user. Like I said I don't only want to collect information but also modify it. So the outcome will be the information I gathered and than give it back to the users and let them or me do something with it. The modified information can be presented in al sorts of ways. This could be, for instance, on a webpage or application, available for every user. An offline publication can also be added to the outcome. I say added, because it is really important that this project is online. The offline element of the outcome can be a publication of the findings and a connection to the offline world, what I also want to have into my project. The relation between online and offline and the surface web and the darker/deeper web.

The graphic design is also important for me. The design has to be conceptual connected to the project and the other works that are on this subject. It would also be nice to while researching the dark side of the web, also research the visual language that is used.

What will make it into a success?

The things that will make it into a success are also the things that made my previous projects into successes or not. One of the most important things is the process towards the end result. This process I want to be smooth and with a lot of research and reading. Because I didn't have this much time for my previous projects, I finally feel like I can do more reading on the subject and go in deeper. But I got to make the borders of this research clear, for myself, to not get stuck in my research. With my last thematic project I got to a point where I wasn't making any decisions, and I do not want to end up at this point with my final project. The point where I wasn't able to make anymore decisions in my previous project, was just after I did a lot of research. I had to make it into a project, but couldn't decide what the best outcome would be. Nothing really felt like the right decision. This feeling is important to me, because when it doesn't feel right, I cannot make it into a project. In my final project this can be avoided, by keep on talking to different tutors and people with feedback. Getting different views got my in my previous project also to eventually make the right decision.

Another element that would make my project into a success is the outcome itself. I want to do something with the users or viewers. This should also work out, I have to reach the users. In my previous work, the user has always played a big role. In my first project, the user was gone, and I looked at websites and what happened to them when the user is gone. In my second project the user had to feel the existence of the old poem on a new medium, and I tried to keep the feeling this poem gives the user the same. In my last project the user was the starting point. What fears and phobias does the user of a city have. These three projects were all based on the user, and the outcomes to make them also more aware of what they do or feel as a user. This is something that I want to keep as a big role in my final project. These were all subjects of concern, I invited people to participate. The ordering of information in certain ways and not just revealing information has also always been important to me. I want to make something unique.

With my previous project about the phobias, the people who viewed the posters and stickers gave really good and interesting reactions. Most of the people also lived in Rotterdam and were surprised that their fellow citizens (and they also) felt these fears. The design of the project fitted the subject and was clear for everybody, which is also an important element. With a graphic design background, the end result should also look nice and fit the subject. The design is the representation of the project, this is what the people see of your project.

References

Websites

<http://www.runme.org/>

<http://www.brightplanet.com/>

<http://freenetproject.org/>

<http://www.deepwebwiki.com/>

Readings

Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong (January 2006). Control and Freedom, Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics. London, England: The MIT Press.

Open no 19 (2010). Beyond Privacy, New Perspectives on the Private and Public Domains. Nai Uitgevers, SKOR. <http://www.skor.nl/artefact-4808-nl.html?lang=en>

Andrews, Stuart (9 Mar 2010 at 15:47). Analysis: The dark side of the web. PcPro.

<http://www.pcpro.co.uk/features/356254/the-dark-side-of-the-web>

Gibson, Marcus (October 20, 2000). Uncovering the Dark Side of the world wide web. Financial Times. <http://cryptome.org/dark-spy.htm>

Beckett, Andy (Thursday 26 November 2009). The dark side of the internet. The Guardian.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2009/nov/26/dark-side-internet-freenet>

Bergman, Michael K. (August, 2001). White Paper: The Deep Web: Surfacing Hidden Value. JEP, the journal of electronic publishing, volume 7, issue 1. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=jep;view=text;rgn=main;idno=3336451.0007.104>