FOODPOWER

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The world in which we live is an integrated system of information in which we participate as consumers, increasingly unable to experience the immediacy of what we find standing before us. For us, reality is experienced through the media, is constructed by the media, which make events, places and people whom we have never seen or met familiar to us, and compensate their artifice by giving us a feeling of immediacy of that "dramatised" reality. At the same time the media bring about a sense of nostalgia for reality, a need for authenticity, spontaneity, physicality. There is a paradox: the media tell us that they manipulate reality, but the media also spread their accusations of their own falsifications. In other words, we live in a society where even immediacy is a construction.

The case of wikilieaks is exemplary of this double movement of the unveiling and dramatisation, of a staged immediacy by the media: an international not-for-profit organisation, Wikileaks, uses a coded system to receive anonymous and secret documents, to then upload them on a website. In other words, a un-transparent process where unveiling means to cover up something else (the anonymity of information, ways of checking the authenticity of the materials...); but through this website, we can find a "mediate" user with a responsible, ethical and critical identity.

A mediate reality is a reality where modern distinctions between public space and private space have very blurred boundaries, and concepts slip between one and the other, emphasising the need for safeguarding privacy at an institutional level but also as part of the media.

In such a context, secrecy is transformed from an object of desire of our collective imagination into an obsession for those who are more exposed to the media. In this way, privacy becomes a luxury for the few or for those who have the means to protect their own data from the omnivorous indifference with which the media metabolise them.

Concept

The project that I am proposing must be understood as a strong metaphor of the analytical and philosophical premise, concentrating on the following aspects: familiarity/difficulty of direct access to media legends; artifice/desire to encapsulate authentic experiences; un-transparency of the dynamic of veiling/unveiling.

In order to emphasise the omnivorous character of information and the necessity to metabolise it in order to acquire an identity, I targeted my research on the body, on food, on the legend. To reduce the body is the first movement of the concretisation of the experience, to feed is the physical expression of vital growth, to elaborate legends is the principal operation of language and communicating in the veiling/unveiling process.

At the core we find the mouth, a bodily organ used for introducing/injecting and consuming, the organ with which we exchange material and spiritual foods, real foods spiritualised in artificial delights and foods with the spirit=ideas that are materialised in recipes, quantities, data. The mouth is the cavity of

the tongue and the base of taste, the organ of technology of the word, the first medium that is freed for communication between human individuals,

The tongue maintains the finesses of taste and the omnivorousness of communication.

As an example of familiarity and at the same time unfamiliarty of the legends of the media, I will take the category of chefs, the new demiurges of an increasingly common aesthetic in daily life, who are exemplars for their capability to manipulate food within mediate/experiential contexts.

The idea of identity will be identified through the portraits of the chefs. Every chef will accept the fact that he/she will be photographed in a portrait where they "stick out their tongue", in other words exposing their tongue to the lens: this is to emphasise the symbolic importance of it, and also to use it as a metaphor for creativity as a ludic activity, irreverent and non-normalised (inspired by the famous portrait of Einstein), but also a reference to the medical test that doctors perform on small children to check their "inner" health. Wisdom and taste.

Every chef will give me an original recipe, written by hand on a piece of paper. Even the request for hand-written materials focuses on identity, as handwriting is a characteristic of every human being, just like finger prints, to the point that it can be part of a scientific inquest through graphology, which is capable of revealing identities and intimate characteristic of the person who is writing.

In order to give a theme to the reliability of the personal experience of what is often easily created on a mediate level, my artistic work will be presented online: the online connection will be the only way to discover and experience the recipes of various chefs who collaborate. On a website the names of the chefs will be put into alphabetical order, and by clicking on each name his/her portrait will appear, seemingly normal, but instead the image will be a steganography.[1]

In order to de-code the image and discover the hidden text underneath, users will have to download a very simple program, which will give the possibility to read the "secret" recipe.

It will be a very simple operation because my objective is not to transform my work into an unnerving code-programming exercise, au contraire! It will be an invitation to reflect on the concept of privacy through games and cuisine.

PROMOTION

A concept on the mechanisms of communication would not make sense if it was not accompanied by an adequate use of means of communication and distribution. Therefore the disclosure and modalities will have to be studied carefully, so that it can obtain much visibility, can create interest and stimulate participation.

p.s. I want to emphasise that despite the fact that a portrait with a tongue sticking out can perhaps seem unbecoming, and may accentuate physical defects, it will be of utmost importance to me to exalt the aesthetical side of the image, because the concept of beauty is part of my research: "beauty" intended as a form of seduction that takes one back to oneself.

And anyway, as another guarantee for those who are photographed, every image will be chosen with the chef involved each time, so that they can be convinced and satisfied of their photo. I will also give the chef the possibility to decide how they want to show their tongue so that the collection of portraits is not repeated with the same gesture.

After having completed the online recipe book project, as I was gathering the recipes and the portraits of people with their tongues stuck out, and I thought that the peculiarity of steganography, which is a specific technique for hiding the existence of a coded message, could be a different way of creating a social network which could be revisited and destructured and that, in contrast with facebook, which violates privacy, will using similar dynamics to a classic social network but with the difference that the profile image can become a kind of medium whereby to exchange secret messages.

This curious and playful characteristic creates a buzz with other users who will want to become increasingly skilled at using the software programme, which is steganography, using it not only on the website which hosts the recipe book made by some young European chefs, but also participating in it, uploading their own image with a hidden recipe, even if this choice will remain optional within the social network.

Therefore this would be an attempt to offer a service through an artistic piece of work, where the users will find themselves faced with a different way of using a social network without the risk that their own privacy will be violated. Another peculiarity is that the users will be able to connect facebook to wikifood so that they may take advantage of the popularity of the top social network in the world, therefore sharing photos and posts on their wall automatically on facebook, so that it becomes a means for the promotion and sharing of wikifood which is a kind of parasitic economy concept typical of capitalism in our current society.

Then I thought, instead of adding the feature of clicking whether you like something or not, I will add the option "friend or enemy", therefore after asking for a user's friendship, by accepting the request the other user will decide whether to put their new friend in their friend list or enemy list with the added bonus of being able to de-steganographise the image if they are a friend, whereas enemies will not be able to.

It's evident that this new option is a bit contradictory because the symbolic value of steganography is to hide a ciphered message, therefore its existence is hidden whereas with cryptography, which is often used to exchange messages, it is evident that messages are being transmitted, albeit it a ciphered way.

The choice of informing one's enemy of the existence of a ciphered message behind an image was adopted to create a playful environment where the user, looking for a challenge or for a bit of fun or to quench their curiosity, will slowly learn how to use steganography, transforming the virtual environment into what could be considered to be a "gym" where one can practice and train, as well as being an interactive theatre which continues to grow and develop.

In all of this architecture of images, software and interactivity, the food and chefs remain at the foundations of the project, because in our current society they have a very special appeal and therefore in my opinion remain an excellent instrument to invite people to take part.

As far as the legal aspect goes, wikifood will ask users to sign so that they can register, it will not be the same process as facebook or other social networks which clearly collect personal data to then sell them

to other companies, but rather is dedicated to not selling data using some of the rules of the creative commons where the content and the photos will be the intellectual property of those people who produced them and published them on wikifood and if they should be used by wikifood, the user will be informed.

In the specific case that they should be used by other users who are registered with wikifood, wikifood will not be held responsible for such actions.

The last but not less important characteristic is that the recipe which will be de-steganographised will not go through the server. Aruba was chosen because of the previous violations of privacy and possession of data, but Claudio Agosti made sure that the steganography software that he created gives the possibility to the user to read the recipe without it going through the Aruba server.

I think that this detail is very innovative, almost visionary, mostly because the internet will be increasingly less secure and privacy will continue to be violated, therefore users will be able to educate themselves in a playful and artistic atmosphere, which can only be a good and useful thing.

Claudio Agosti created the steganography software, whereas Fabrizio Mascheroni is at the heart of the technological side of the project, creating the software, infrastructure and graphic design of our social network. Chiara Rusconi takes care of illustrations. The name of the online recipe book is HYPERLINK "http://www.wikifood.es/"http://www.wikifood.es

Steganography Software to hide one image inside another

WHAT

The software is called "rabbisteg", it's a steganography software. In order to work it identifies all of those bits of digital information which, even if they were lost, would not deteriorate the image. Once they are selected, it substitutes them with those of the image which is to be hidden within it.

This is the process of steganography, because the result is an image which, in the eyes of the observer, be they human or digital, looks completely normal.

This must not be confused with cryptography, which generates content which cannot be read by a human being or a machine that are not capable of deciphering it. In this case, on the other hand, it's not just privacy that we obtain, but we actually hide the existence of data.

HOW

Normally a steganography programme analyses the content of a file in detail, it understands its multimedia format and identifies those bits that can be sacrificed. This can be applied to video or audio as well as to images. Every format which contains the "quality" or "high definition" concept maintains its sense even if its definition is diminished. Steganography can be thought of as a controlled degradation process. The bigger the content that needs to be hidden, the higher the degradation will be.

This normally used to be done with software that needed to be downloaded, installed and used by both communicators. Now it has been implemented in javascript: every website can implement it and can consent to have its users use it. It's innovative in a way that web innovations are: in the beginning it's useful for web developers, who then make their own ideas with it and use it.

Steganography existed in ancient times, but it was never implemented in an easy way for its users. The Internet has reached new heights of user-friendliness and usefulness. The challenge of the software, released under a free licence so that it is freely available to integrate into any website, is to see whether steganography can be shared in this way.

References and Notes:

1. *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steganography*