

Paolo Cirio's *The Big Plot* (Italy, 2008–2009; [www.thebigplot.net/](http://www.thebigplot.net/)) engages the complexities of digital identities generated on social-networking and social-media platforms such as Facebook, Google, LiveJournal, MySpace, and Twitter, as well as web-based references that publish user-generated content (UGC), such as Wikipedia. The project is a “romantic spy story played into the infosphere”—an online game about piecing together identity in the Web 2.0 realm of networked and fragmented information. The game asks players to imagine being assigned to an investigation to reconstitute one's own identity from the data fragments uploaded to social-networking



Figure 3.1 *Face to Facebook.*

Since Facebook promotes itself as “free and always will be,” *Face to Facebook* also asks users to think about ways that they pay for the service by constantly updating their information for corporations whose privacy policies are constantly in flux. Web scraping is a process of data extraction from websites, performed by a bot much like copy-and-paste by a human user. It is often used to gather prices for price-comparison charts on the websites of online vendors. *Face to Facebook*'s joke about scraping and rating profile photos relies on user knowledge about Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg's claims to have scraped personal data on students from the Harvard University database. Our digital identities on Facebook also represent crowd-sourced targeting for Facebook, that is, a means of collecting data about groups of people who share common interests and desires, which are reflected back to them in targeted advertising. Facebook responded to the project with several cease-and-desist letters, resulting in *Lovely-Faces* being taken down after only ten days, though not before it had been covered by news outlets including CNN and *USA Today* in the United States, *Haaretz* in Israel, and *Der Spiegel* in Germany. Upon request, Cirio and Ludovico would remove profile photos from *Lovely-Faces*. As hactivists, Cirio and Ludovico critique customer complicity with the near-monopolization of corporations. *Face to Facebook* is the third of *The Hacking Monopolism*



Paolo Cirio and Alessandro Ludovico's *Face to Facebook* (Italy, 2011; [www.face-to-facebook.net](http://www.face-to-facebook.net)) reveals the monetization of UGC by looking to the social-networking platform Facebook. The user profile, network of friends, preferences of "likes" and "shares" becomes a digital self freely given to the corporation to sell, as Cirio and Ludovico's project makes evident. *Face to Facebook* asks users to rethink aspects of their personal identities they give away to Facebook. As hundreds of millions of Facebook users attempt to negotiate the corporation's ever-changing privacy settings, the project stages an occasion for reflection about user complicity. *Face to Facebook* scrapes public data from one million Facebook profiles, filters them with face-recognition software, sorts them by expression, and then posts them to a dating-service website called *Lovely-Faces*.

The project uses a customized software to categorize faces as "climber," "easy going," "funny," "mild," "sly," or "smug," suggesting the absence of control that Facebook users ultimately have over how their profile pictures are understood by AI—despite assumptions of individuality and self-expression. The shock of finding oneself on offer for online dating, promoted and advertised to potential buyer by one's own Facebook profile photo, is intended to elicit reflection about social networking as a for-profit industry. "Their mission is not to help people create better social relationships or to help them improve their self-positioning," explain Cirio and Ludovico; "their mission is to make money." *Face to Facebook* visualizes ways that we give away very private parts of our digital identities—that is, our faces—to corporations that sell products and services to us through targeted advertising.



# THINKING THROUGH DIGITAL MEDIA

Transnational Environments and  
Locative Places

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