

Obscurity online by Obfuscating 15 Million U.S. Criminals' Records

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15 million mug-shots and criminal records of Americans have been obfuscated to introduce the Right to Remove personal information from search engines in the U.S.

<https://OBSCURITY.online>

A project by Paolo Cirio.

Obscurity cloned the major mug-shot websites and scrambled their databases to obfuscate the information on over 15 million individuals arrested in the U.S. over the last 20 years, making it difficult to identify them on the Internet.

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLJHWosFmMRqofm03UvU8_0tLKopTXKOra

The mug-shots have been blurred to make faces unrecognizable while their names have been shuffled by an algorithm that samples data based on common age, race, location, and charges, all of which are kept accurate in order to provide social context on the actual individuals arrested and the crimes they were accused of when they were booked in jail.

The republished obfuscated data maintains the layout and watermarks of the original mug-shot websites, and by using similar domain names the project would effectively interfere with the activity, reputation, and business of the mug-shot industry.

<https://obscurity.online/?//About/#How>

The *Obscurity* artwork deploys strategies that are oriented to problem-solving as a form of Internet social art practice. By engaging with the law, millions of individuals, bad business practices, and general public opinion, this artwork seeks to embody a practical discourse about the aesthetics, function, and ethics of information systems affecting social structures that resonates within and outside the contemporary art dialogue.

<https://obscurity.online/?//About/#Artwork>

Mug-shot websites monetize by placing advertising of reputation management services alongside listed booking data or by charging a picture removal fee, which has led some state legislatures to propose bills to regulate the industry. However, some mug-shot websites operate in offshore jurisdictions and their owners are in hiding, which makes difficult any kind of legal action. Furthermore, many freedom of press organizations and legislators have been opposing bills that would regulate the publication of mug-shots.

<https://obscurity.online/?//About/#Mugshots>

The visitors of the cloned mug-shot websites, as participants of the online artwork, are able to decide whether to remove individual profiles or instead keep them public by opting between two buttons, "Remove it" or "Keep it."

Currently some online mug-shots are over ten years old, related to low-level or nonviolent crimes such as driving without a license, court-related or soft drug offenses, without making distinction between people who are convicted and people whose charges have been dropped. On the other hand, the mug-shots might be of dangerous individuals such as sex offenders and serial killers as well as public figures with social responsibility like bad doctors, corrupt politicians, or fraudsters and therefore they should circulate for public safety and social accountability.

To engage the public in this complex situation, the project proposes a social experiment with a participatory judiciary system that would increase understanding and promote change concerning the ethical, legal, economic, and social contexts regarding personal information circulating online.

<https://obscurity.online/?//About/#Participatory>

A final element of this conceptual artwork is to hypothetically intervene in U.S. legislation by designing a petition for a Right to Remove personal and sensitive information from search engine results in the U.S.

<https://www.change.org/p/introducing-the-right-to-remove-personal-information-from-search-engines-in-the-us>

Obscurity taps at the core need of introducing a form of the Right To Be Forgotten in the U.S., which has been strongly opposed by Internet companies such as Google, and by many concerned about censorship which could be caused by the abuse of the law. By collaborating with lawyers, legislators, and privacy activists, the Right to Remove would campaign for the introduction of an information policy in the U.S. that provides the right to obscurity by removing from search engines results with sensitive information that jeopardizes the privacy, reputation, and security of ordinary citizens.

<https://Right2Remove.us>

Obscurity also wants to bring attention to the victims of mass incarceration in the U.S., which has the highest rate of imprisonment in the world and it questions the unscrupulous criminal justice system and law enforcement agencies that created this situation.

For the offline installation, the artwork is presented with printers and shredding machines that continually and instantly print and shred pictures of mug-shots. The installation also displays screenings and prints of mug-shots from the most significant incarceration cases, such as the youngest and oldest individuals found in the database assembled for the artwork.

The *Obscurity* project and the *Right to Remove* campaign are created by the Italian artist Paolo Cirio as a conceptual artwork. The company Paolo Cirio Ltd. based in London, UK, is the legal entity that published the cloned websites and the obfuscated data. Many special thanks to Anastasis Germanidis who worked as an engineer on the project.

The *Obscurity* and the *Right to Remove* projects have premiered in a lecture by Paolo Cirio at NYU Law in NYC on April 6th.

For future press inquiries and public presentations of the project, you can write to studio@paolo-cirio.com

For press material on the project please visit this link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/1teb51x42xqo5e6/AAD-MJu7Z-afZpOu0QTxnk2na/Obscurity>

Thank you for your attention,
Paolo Cirio.

<https://PaoloCirio.net>