

RECOMBINANT FICTION

Speaking about rebellion and questioning the power and intentions of services on the Internet, we must mention the work of Paolo Cirio. Paolo is an Italian media artist who has recently won several International media art awards. He is known for his Net Art, Street Art, Video Art and Transmedia Fiction, all highly provocative and political. Paolo defines his works as performances of the power of information. He creates "Recombinant Fiction", trans-media storytelling by utilising multiple media channels for political and educational purposes.

Paolo's work deals with various issues related to the emergence of digital media in fields such as copyright, privacy, transparency, finance, advertising, geopolitics, democracy and fiction. He wants to use his work to warn people to be careful with putting things on-line and denounce monopolies and companies that are abusing personal data. He works 12 hours a day; the rest of the time he has quite a sex-drugs-and-rock & roll life style. He was able to spare us some time in between to answer a few questions about his latest projects.



name: Paolo Cirio
age: 33
from: Turin, Italy
currently living in: New York
education: Artistic and Technical
website: paolocirio.net
twitter: @paolocirio

Can you briefly explain the Face-to-Facebook project? This project was a social experiment that I did with Alessandro Ludovico. We stole one million Facebook profiles, filtered them with face-recognition software and then, after we had sorted them by their facial characteristics, we posted them on a bespoke dating web site. Our intention was to give all these virtual identities a new shared place, breaking Facebook's constraints and boring social rules. So we established a new web site (lovely-faces.com) doing them justice and granting them the possibility of soon meeting face to face with anybody who is attracted by their facial expression. The project was covered by more than a thousand media outlets from around the world within just a few days.

Street Ghosts



Are you on Facebook yourself? I was a few years ago and then they banned me. But I've been back for a few months now.

Are you careful with the information you put on the web? Yes, I'm really concerned. I only use social media to promote my art. But I don't like it when friends use it to contact me. I've never had close friends of mine on my social media.

"We definitely need more education and legislation about the dangers of social media. We are living in a totally deregulated era when it comes to social media; in the future users will have much more power over them, which has already happened to Facebook to some extent."

You criticise Google Street View with your latest project "Street Ghosts". What was the project about? I pasted life-size pictures of people found on Google's Street View at the same spot where they were taken, without authorisation. Since the publicly accessible pictures of individuals were taken without their permission, I reversed the action: I took the individuals' pictures without Google's permission and posted life-size images of them on public walls.

Why do you like street art? I like making street art and net art because I can bring it directly to the public. The art world has several restrictions in engaging the general public and it is often really self-referential.

And then you also set your sights on the financial sector. I wanted to use "P2P Gift Credit Card" to explore the mechanisms of high finance and the notion of money, credit and debt in an era in which the majority of the money in circulation is virtual, volatile and out of control. I issued illicit VISA credit cards with unique

numbers generated by the same algorithm that is used by the credit card industry. I counterfeited virtual money on the cards. People can use Gift Finance to create money by loaning credit to friends without having any actual funds, so, essentially multiplying money to make the economy flourish. I believe we can develop a new destined use for our money by just taking over and democratising these tools of which we have lost control and by giving priority to people in general who deserve economic dignity for the sake of the whole society.

This project is really participative. How do people react to it? Yes, it's quite participative, but it doesn't need to be. Reactions vary: usually, people who are familiar with an alternative and critical economy are really enthusiastic about the idea. Those who are only interested in easy money are greatly attracted at first and later informed about critical finance as they start to play with the project.



Face-to-facebook

P2P Gift Credit Card



What is the message that you want to get across with your work? Every piece of work has a different message. In general, I create new ways to influence and involve people through art.

Your work often deals with the power of information. What is your opinion about the way information flows in this digital era? The future holds a great deal of potential, but so far it has been mostly utilised to keep old power structures in place and abuse the general public.

Face-to-Facebook resulted in eleven lawsuit threats, five death threats and four cease-and-desist letters from Facebook. You received a cease-and-desist letter from the German HQ of Google for Google will eat itself. Have you had to pay anything? No; fortunately they dropped the legal case before it made its way to a proper Court, and nobody else has really tried to sue us.

Is the reaction of the press part of the art that you make? Yes, the press reactions are part of the piece of art and I consider the reactions to be the performance, because they only last for a limited time and involve an audience.

What do you strive to achieve? More common sense and less ignorance.

What is the artist's role in today's society? To change society and create new languages.