Web Box: Surveillance and Manipulation in the Digital Age
Trans-interactive installation for physical and web environments

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Abstract. In our society, computer systems such as the Web conceal an illusion of freedom and extensive surveillance that manipulate our behavior to support capitalist power dynamics. This installation challenges the digital control system by merging the physical and virtual realms through a glowing black box, a divine archetype of mystery and hidden knowledge. The monolith interacts with visitors through a webpage that can be accessed via a QR code, feeding off their actions and altering smartphone behavior to reveal digital surveillance and the uncontrollable processes of societal manipulation. Highlighting how everyday actions generate streams of data, the installation underlines the opaque nature of digital control, encouraging visitors to critically confront the pervasive surveillance and manipulation of contemporary society.

Description

We live immersed in a society of control in which, through an illusory system of freedom, everything we do is tracked and can be somehow used, with or without our consent. Socioeconomic mechanisms constantly monitor us, infiltrating our everyday lives and exerting their power by making us do exactly what they want. The challenge is to discover new approaches to navigate this transition, avoiding both despair and illusion, but rather seeking innovative tools.

  The society of control operates through third type machines, digital systems, and computers, whose passive danger is blurring and the active one is hacking and the introduction of viruses.

The quintessential computer system today is the Web, understood as the entire complexity of the global telematic network, consisting of a vast collection of interconnected pages, and accessible through software specially designed for this purpose.

  The Web is a device, and as such it is part of a complex network that unfolds in a diverse whole, involving conversations, institutions, physical structures, regulations, laws, administrative decisions and scientific statements. This concept encompasses virtually everything, both linguistic and nonlinguistic, and constantly plays a concrete strategic role within power dynamics.

  Thus, the purpose of the device is to respond to an urgency and achieve an immediate effect. From a philosophical point of view, the Web can be considered a complex entity that raises several questions and reflections.

  The point we want to highlight is the manipulative power of the web, driven by a capitalist system that shapes our behavior and choices. This installation, bridging real and virtual worlds, aims to challenge society's control system using its own tools.

  The work invites the visitor to confront a glowing, resonant black box, capable of emanating its own sound and light and placed at the center of the room. A divine monolith, an archetype of mystery and hidden knowledge that absorbs information from a dedicated web page, accessible via a QR code, through which the visitor can interact with the virtual copy of the physical black box present in the space.

The monolith, like an enigmatic deity, consumes this information and interacts unpredictably, feeding on the visitor's every gesture. As visitors engage with the virtual black box, their dehumanised gestures are transformed into data that flows directly to the physical one. Usually hidden from us, these messages will appear on the visitor's web page screen, revealing how a simple action, like zooming in, can turn into a continuous stream of information, even of a broader spectrum such as data location, interaction time, quality, and more.

In a similar way, the interaction goes both ways, from the real monolith to the virtual page. The monolith sends information back to each visitor's web page, creating changes on the screen that the visitor cannot control, instilling new information and manipulating their perception.

By creating a trans-interactive, relational experience, this installation embodies the principles of Nicolas Bourriaud's "relational aesthetics," focusing on the social interactions and shared political conditions that shape individuals.

This experience is designed to evoke a sense of awe and unease, revealing the hidden mechanisms and prompting reflections on how the digital world manipulates and transforms our real-life relationships. The monolith becomes a symbol of the opaque and inscrutable nature of digital surveillance, collecting and reflecting back the data we unknowingly provide, thus uncovering the unseen forces that influence our daily lives, much like a hidden god shaping our destinies from the shadows.

Biography

Lorenzo Ballerini is a sound and new media artist from Florence, Italy. He holds a Mas-ters in Music and New Technologies from the Conservatory of Florence and a Post-Diploma Master's degree in Artistic Music Research from the Conservatory of Rome. Through a fusion of physical and virtual elements, he aims to provoke reflection on the social, communal, and political implications of the digital age.

He has participated as composer and performer in festivals such as ADE Festival, Artech2023, Berlin Biennale, Bright Festival, CHB Berlin, Diffrazioni Festival, Fabbrica Europa, Gaida Festival, MEFF, SMC2018, SMC2019, Tempo Reale Festival.

He has collaborated with artists including Alvise Vidolin, Christine Meisner, Michele Marasco, Nicola Sani, Paolo Parisi, Roberto Fabbriciani, Tiziano Manca. 2022

In 2022, Ballerini assumed the role of Professor of Electroacoustic Music at the Conservatory of Trapani, Italy, where he shares his expertise with aspiring musi-cians and composers. In 2023, he broadened his horizons through an internship in the Sound Art Department at UDK, University of the Arts, Berlin, while concurrently serving as a Professor of Computer Music at the Conservatory of Pavia, Italy.