The Use of Soap Bubbles

Abstract

The Use Of Soap Bubbles has been set up on the basis of faked e-mail addresses and the dissemination of meaningless information and computer viruses. It initiates an "attractor" in the Internet that simulates the function of a host and thereby makes itself attractive for viruses. This subterfuge gives rise to the fiction of a community that is commonly at the mercy of virus and spam attacks; in this case; however, it is being created by the very attacks themselves. Linked up with this system of viral behavior are fragrances and soap bubbles and the public's reaction to them. These serve as a regulatory mechanism between digital fiction and its perpetuation by means of the equilibrium between attacks and the defense against them (anti-virus function).

The Idea

The rapid rise of the WWW from technology of warfare to commercial means of communication leads to the assumption that horizontal political structures are implicit in the structure of the Web. The hacker community places itself in opposition to the cooption of these structures by commercial systems. It attacks symbols of authority and representatives of private property in order to expose their functions. On one hand, the danger of both elitist actions as well as pubescent behavior are inherent in the usual methods of going about this; on the other hand, though, in spite of their self-aestheticizing, self-satisfied smugness, these methods also bear along with them the possibility of creating breaches in the political system.

Viruses are, by definition, creatures of kitsch and dynamic hybrids. The purpose of their existence is their own multiplication. In the evolutionary process, they are "not only but also"—that is, hybrids of their function and counter-function. Thus, the day-to-day experience of their presence corresponds to a phenomenology of kitsch defined as sufficiency as an end in itself that derives the form of its own existence from abundance—for example, via raising the quantity of information for the purpose of increasing redundancy. As a form of existence whose potency has become strengthened over the course of the developmental process, the virus is, in turn, both a weapon aimed at a political system as well as one that serves to protect it. Here, we define virus not as a unique, individual form of existence that manifests itself in a certain state of a system but rather as a collaborative ensemble, a dynamic system that gives actual shape to the viral phenomenon. This means that a virus is the self-contained system composed of viruses and anti-viruses, the weapon and the defense against it. If we can assume that self-destruction cannot be the objective of any system, then this one too requires an anti-virus function. Anti-virus is a virus whose sign (in the mathematical sense) has been reversed; it is part of a single system in which virus and anti-virus dialectically determine one another.

Is hacking a method of consciously deconstructing structures that endanger horizontality or a selfish game the object of which is the hacker's own political positioning? Is hacking a game that-in spite of what might be hedonistic motivations—becomes politically effective when a massive number of players participate? Experience gleaned from the Pop Business (that, in the wake of a substitution in which the merchandizing of dissidence has been replaced by the retailing of the retailing mechanisms, has made the parody of itself into the fundamental principle underlying its activities, as shows like Starmania illustrate in such exemplary fashion) nurtures the suspicion of the industrial interest in casting out the demon of "hacktivism" through the potentiation of itself, through the viral loss of individuality of individual phenomena. It is prob-

ably safe to say that the "hacked" world is not really effected by the attacks; it is rather more probable that the opposite—that is, increased protection—is the case. Thus: the antithesis of the simulated function of viral attacks.

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The Use of Soap Bubbles utilizes the methods of hacking in order to take to the extreme a potentially polemical way of looking at the system in a sensory context-i.e. to give rise to over-information by means of sensory over-stimulation. A machine that produces soap bubbles, a fragrance dispenser and a ventilation device provide the setting for a situational interface for playful participation in a system of rules initiated by attacks and the protection against them.

The quantity of soap bubbles and the fragrance's intensity are coupled with the growth of the fictive community, and the ventilation system with the anti-virus function. The increase in the intensity of the fragrance and in the number of soap bubbles coincides with an intensification of the public's behavior, with the level of noise. Some particular level of "infected volume" initiates the anti-virus. Following a certain period during which the system is virus-resistant, the virus recovers and returns as strong as ever. Out of the logic of the relationship between virus and anti-virus, there follows, during the time the installation remains set up, a successive increase in the intensity of the elements involved.

Interface

The actual interface is the measured intensity of the mood of the visitors to the installation, their verbalized behavior as a reflection of the impression made by the sensory overflow of the soap bubbles and the fragrance. The anti-virus is ultimately initiated by the behavior of the members of the public, who experience hacker activity in the Internet as an intensive game involving soap bubbles and fragrance. This brings about a reversal of the situation: it's not only the game that the hackers are playing that's hedonistic but that of the participants as well.

Of course, the appropriateness of the behavior of the public as an indicator for the correctness of the hypothesis being staged here is questionable. But even if this is simply a matter of staging the playful use of the system, doesn't this still have an effect as a political force?

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