Aesthetic programming: Synopsis Group 9

In this synopsis we present our current ideas about the project for our final exam in Aesthetic Programming. Furthermore, we enlighten the reader about the technical aspects of the program, our selection of relevant literature that we are possibly going to use, as well as our current conceptual outline of our project.

We have constructed a flowchart representing the workings of our program. This serves not only as a communicative tool for us to convey our thoughts about the structure of the program, but also as a point of direction. We plan to utilize this in our upcoming collaborative coding sessions in order to divide the workload among us. Having these individual sections makes it easier for each of us to develop smaller parts of code and then later assemble the parts into a final program. The goal for our project is to create a fake profile generator that gathers data from multiple, unrelated sources in order to construct false identities based on disparate information. We will provide our intended critical and exploratory angle with this in the conceptual outline.

Technical Description

There are multiple things we need to figure out for our project. Firstly, we need access to multiple APIs and local JSON-files, whose information can be used in combination to construct identities for the fake profiles. This data will include lists of names, locations, religions, pictures of people etc. We do not know exactly how we are going to load this data into the project as of yet. If we use the preload function of p5.js perhaps it may take a long time for the program to load. To avoid this, we can potentially use a callback function and have the data come in as it loads while the program is running. This will really depend on how the running code will perform its tasks and how it works with the creative direction that we wish to pursue.

Secondly, we will need to somehow create a fake social media page layout, where we can display the different generated profiles. So far, we have considered using CSS or p5.dom for this. Having then established a framework for the profiles, we can focus on querying specific data using conditional statements and other generative processes, which we will also set up so that every iteration of querying procures entirely different results. Additionally, while the number of interactive elements of the

program is limited compared to real SoMe services, we do wish to enable the user to click on the given profiles' "friends list" in order to visit other seemingly related yet also completely randomly generated profiles. Perhaps we will also include a search bar so that the user is able to search for specific names or tags. Lastly, we are also considering integrating advertisements that would be generated based on the disparate data used to constitute a given fake identity. However, we will assess the possibility of adding these elements throughout the project as the difficulties can become rather substantial if we are not considerate.

Relevant Literature

One of the advantages of our conceptual angle is that we will have a lot of relevant literature to draw upon from our curriculum both in Software Studies as well as Aesthetic Programming. As of yet. we have discussed including the following selections of texts in our conceptual thinking with our project. However, we also acknowledge that these sources may be switched out depending on the direction we wish to go towards.

Due to the amalgamative nature of data gathering in our project, we wish to include 'Real-life Streams' by David Berry as a relevant source for our reflective discussions. Additionally, with regards to data management and structuring, it may also be relevant to incorporate the arguments expressed by Paul Dourish in his text: 'No SQL: The Shifting Materialities of Database Technology'.

We have also been toying with the idea to incorporate some sort of random text generation in our program. If we decide to do this, the text 'Executing live-query' by Winnie Soon will perhaps provide a lot of relevant ideas and theories for us to draw upon. Furthermore, we may also be able to make the case for reflecting on the nature of data visualisation in our project. This would be supported by the corresponding chapter in the Software Studies Lexicon. With our program being quite honed in on the world of SoMe and the commodification of data, it also seems ideal to include texts such as 'The Like Economy' by Carolin Gerlitz and Anne Helmond, or 'Self-Censorship on Facebook' by Sauvik Das and Adam Kramer. It is possible that these texts may not at all be included in the final project. Nevertheless, they still provide many relevant perspectives, which we can use to contextualise our project.

Conceptual Outline

There are a number of ways in which we can approach the mechanics and inner workings of social media and collective networks. One way is to consider the role of profiles. As users of and on various websites, we create profiles to both interact with others and to represent ourselves within SoMe-environments. Profiles, in a sense, become vessels for personal (and private) information and in turn serve as a stepping stone for what has been called an 'objectification' of users. What exactly constitutes an online profile? What are the politics governing what is considered relevant (or eligible) information in creating a profile and to what degree can a profile be said to be representative of one (or more) person(s)?

These are some of the questions that we hope to explore in our final project. As said previously, we aim to create what might be considered a "mock profile generator", in which strings of disparate data are displayed in close proximity to one another to create a seemingly plausible, if uncanny profile. New profiles can be generated at will, with various kinds of personal information provided, including age, sex, and pictures. These sources of data are all unrelated, but by integrating them in this way they become somewhat of a collective whole; a sort of semantical gestalt that is perceived, however erroneously, to be representative of the same thing: a person.

It is not merely the product, but also the processes leading to the creation of the program that are of interest to us. In creating our own pseudo-profile generator, we ultimately stipulate certain criteria for what should or should not be an integral part of a profile. What is considered relevant or acceptable information with regards to a profile? In mimicking the creator-role of profile templates, we aim to critically examine the politics governing these decisions.

Overall, a profile serves to (more or less) accurately represent a person and to allow communication between profiles. Nevertheless, they also serve as a sort of abstract objectification of a person. The commodification of people is highly topical and relevant issue and we hope to tap into the ongoing discussion regarding online privacy and social media transparency by creating a program that can create profiles at will. Questions related to how our pseudo-profiles are ultimately not true profiles ultimately lead to difficult considerations about what constitutes a real profile and whether or not a "real" profile can even be said to be an accurate representation of a

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person. One potential point of discussion might be this: if the end goals of some social media sites are to commodify the habits and interests of a given profile, does it even matter if the profile is legitimate?

Aside from the potential for commodification, the value of profiles, arguably, is their interconnectedness and interdependence. Similarly, our pseudo-profiles are indeed made up of data across the web and they are also connected to other fake profiles. We hope to demonstrate how this illusory sense of interconnectedness bestows the profiles a degree of authenticity.

To summarize, our final project is one in which fake website profiles are generated based on a slew of different and unrelated datasets. This demonstrates the potential absurdity of profiles as a concept, the problematic issue(s) of objectifying people on the internet, and finally it challenges notions regarding the exact nature, use and worth of profiles themselves.