GENERATOR TETRALOGY
Injunction Generator, BankstatementGenerator,
Psych|OS Generator, Superenhanced Generator
2000-2009

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As we all know, by implementing specific algorithms, software enables many processes to be automatized. This possibility has been enthusiastically embraced by the art world for decades: not only does it allow artists to delegate a significant portion of work to a machine, it also allows them to give up, entirely or partially, on the element of artistic "intentionality", which is substituted with the random factor much sought after by the avant-garde movements. Thus, alongside a flourishing current of generative art – which uses algorithms to give rise to images, sound and text – we find a long series of generators, capable of rolling out original texts and images by drawing on a rich archive of raw material and assembling this using intelligent machines.

UBERMORGEN.COM's generators only partially belong to this trend. Instead of emulating a creative process, these generators actually appropriate an authoritative device and offer it to anyone who wants to use it. To issue an injunction, bank statement or prescription you require the authority to do so: in other words, you would need to be a law court, a bank or a doctor. What UBERMORGEN.COM's generators do is appropriate this authority. They can do this thanks to the evolution that the formal device of the "certificate" has had in the digital era, with the shift from "original" to "[f]original". The authenticity of such documents is claimed and acknowledged according to a hallucination which is shared by all, but which is nevertheless a hallucination.

Working from this basis, UBERMORGEN.COM programmed machines to generate injunctions, bank statements and prescriptions which are unexceptionable in terms of form and content, and which can be put into circulation in the given communication systems, with varying results.

At the same time it is clear that the generators, beyond their specific function, work first and foremost as "representations", eliciting reflections on the situation that gave rise to them: a network of conventions that tends to attribute incredible power over the social, physical and psychological life of an individual to a piece of paper, or even worse, a digital document ("just pixels on the screen, just ink on paper"). This phenomenon is all the more absurd when it enters into collision with the globalized information society we now live in.

INJUCTION GENERATOR
2000, http://www.ipnic.org

Like almost all the subsequent generators, the first generator in the tetralogy came
about as an answer to questions raised by a larger project, which in this case was
[V]ote Auction (2000, cf. p. 4 - 9). During that project, the Circuit Court of Cook
County, Chicago issued a temporary injunction against the "individuals" behind
[V]ote Auction. This injunction was then sent by email to Corenic, a domain name
service (DNS) registrar in Geneva, Switzerland.

After receiving this email, Corenic decided to shut down the domain vote-
auction.com without notice. There are various elements which mean that this
injunction is entirely lacking in legal value: American jurisdiction does not extend to
Switzerland, and a legal injunction cannot be delivered via e-mail. Yet [V]ote Auction
was shut down. It was this episode that sparked the idea of launching a "public
shutdown-service" - christened IP-NIC, the acronym of "Internet Partnership for No
Internet Content". Adopting an affirmative, rather than antagonistic approach,
UBERMORGEN.COM transformed this episode of intensely "creative" use of power
into an artistic project, and a public service. Using the Injunction Generator, you
auto-generate an injunction, basically a standard court-order, claiming that the
target website operates on an illegal basis.

The document will then be sent, in standard .pdf or .rtf format, to the appropriate
domain name service registrar, to the owner of the web-site and to various
journalists and lawyers for legal and public processing.

IP-NIC and Injunction Generator are operations of overidentification, portraits in
relief of a perverse legal system that sacrifices freedom of expression to financial and
political interests, and the plurality of the global network to the power hunger of an
individual state.

They accomplish this not with the heavy hand of satire and exposé, but with the light
touch of Pére Ubu, the prototype of all strategies of overidentification. As for the
"products" of the Injunction Generator, the key to appreciating them lies perhaps in
lizvlx's approach: "I just refuse to get scared when I'm sent legal papers. Anyway, it is
just ink on paper and lots of emotions put into some kind of very beautiful legal
poetry."

BANKSTATEMENTGENERATOR
2005, http://www.ipnic.org/BANKSTATEMENTGENERATOR

The BANKSTATEMENTGENERATOR is an online software application that has been exhibited as an installation on various occasions, including the Ars Electronica festival in 2005, in the form of an ATM. Unlike the other generators, it is interesting to see that the [f]originals this one produces are glaringly "forged", with a pictorial quality which would never feature in any document making a bid for authenticity: the text is red and white on a black background, the font is the one used in the rest of the project, and many fields are barely legible, as if to comply with some form of data protection. The fields to compile in order to generate the bank statement also differ from those we might be expected to give a cash machine: they include the presumed "credibility of the bank", and decidedly subjective elements like one's own "psychological state". Yet all of this does not flaunt the nature of the [f]originals and the poetics of the generators; quite the opposite.

As Inke Arns explains: "UBERMORGEN.COM suggests that these documents produced mechanically or by software could also take on a very different appearance. A bank statement that consists of a certain number of dots (pixels or specks of ink) could just as easily assume the form of a work of art, or could even be depicted in a more financially flattering or optimized way (i.e. upwardly or downwardly adjusted bank balance) through 're-arrangement' of the dots. Thus, according to UBERMORGEN.COM, not only is the relation between the 'real' account balance and its representation an arbitrary one, but the account balance itself is also virtual." The statements produced by the BANKSTATEMENTGENERATOR are no more or less original than the other [f]originals: it is just that the "deterioration" of the image and its pictorial slant detaches them from the logic of authenticity and its deceptions. The process is very akin to that adopted by pop art (for example Warhol in his accidents or the series devoted to Jackie) with regards to photography: by emphasizing the halftone screen effect, the media image loses its functional and indexical value, but increases its power as an aesthetic fetish.

Psych|OS Generator
2006, http://www.ipnic.org/psychos

Created in the context of the project Psych|OS (cf. p. 14 - 19), the Psych|OS
Generator is a tool that generates a medical prescription based on the user's input.
This can be uploaded in different ways: by selecting one's condition from a menu of
common mental illnesses (depression, schizophrenia, anxiety, personality disorders,
etc.); or by answering a multiple choice questionnaire featuring questions such as:
are you all right with your body / appearance? how would you describe your sexual
conduct? do you like being alone? is your daily routine messed up by thoughts or
actions? has your sexuality changed? etc. At the end of the questionnaire the
generator offers a diagnosis and treatment. To create the questionnaire,
UBERMORGEN.COM used the ICD-10, the 10th version of the ICD (International
Classification of Diseases), proposed by the World Health Organization (WHO). In
other words, the questions are as objective as possible, and the prescriptions are a
faithful reproduction of a German template, bearing the forged signature of a certain
Dr. U. Morgen. Faced with a document like this, a distracted chemist might not even
hesitate.

The Psych|OS Generator is a kind of oracle that sheds light on our problems, and
indicates treatment, based on information freely available on the web. Yet behind
this data, on one side there are sick people, and on the other side there are vastly
wealthy drug companies keen to capitalise on our suffering. Can a software
programme treat our illnesses – for which the very media themselves are
increasingly responsible? Can chemistry influence a psyche increasingly infected by
information flows? Like all of UBERMORGEN.COM's works, the Psych|OS
Generator offers no answers, just raises questions. And churns out prescriptions.

Superenhanced Generator
2008-2009, http://www.ipnic.org/superenhanced/generator

The fourth episode in the generator tetralogy represents the central nucleus of a complex project dedicated to the contemporary use of torture, featuring prints, videos and performances.

Using the slick, efficient marketing-style terms currently used to describe torture, the Superenhanced Generator could be described as a tool of "advanced interrogation" – inspired by the questionnaires used for market research. But one look at the interface of the site, with its top secret document aesthetic, occasionally interrupted by lines blacking out supposedly confidential information, reveals that this is no ordinary questionnaire.

The questions, indeed, aim to determine one's personal preferences concerning the so-called modern techniques of interrogation carried out by security and intelligence agencies, such as "Enhanced interrogation" (basically a legal form of torture) and "Extraordinary Rendition" (the equally ascetic term used to indicate the kidnapping of so-called "potential unlawful combatants" by government agencies such as the CIA and the FBI).

During the interrogation (sorry, questionnaire) the Superenhanced Generator questions the user's stance on these issues, his/her level of patriotism, political views, and how he or she would behave in potentially dangerous situations, and poses questions like: "Is it ok to step on an ant willingly? Who is more important: The System (Country, State, Company) or the individual, the person? How important is it to follow rules in enhanced interrogation? Hatred in the world is best fought by war – yes or no?

The final results of the questionnaire are presented to the user in the form of Rendition Orders and lists of questions for Enhanced Interrogations. The user's data is also inputted into the generator's database, which thus gradually becomes a repository of public will. The database also becomes the brain behind a series of live performances, where enhanced interrogations performed by real people are carried out according to the suggestions given by the database. The responses of the users therefore determine whether the Superenhanced Generator subsequently becomes a further instrument of torture, or a tool for civilization.