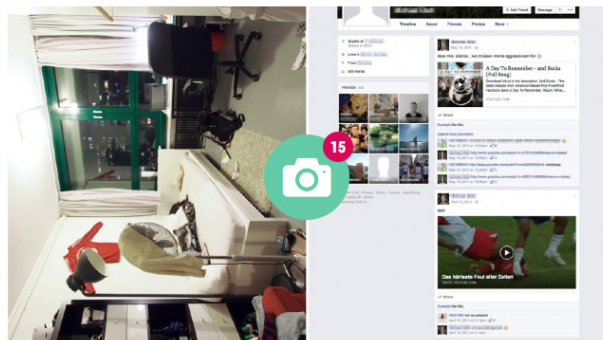# Who lives in a Facebook profile like this? Exploring the line between public and private spaces

Photographer Florian Freier has documented living spaces against Facebook profile pages

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What is a private space? The answer to that question will be different today to the one given a couple of decades ago, before the advent of Facebook and other social networks. In a world where we're only a swipe from other people's profiles, where do we draw the line between what is public and what is private?

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Photographer Florian Freier is exploring these questions with a new project that documents student flats against their occupants' Facebook profile pages. All of the living spaces featured in the series are from the same student housing unit, with identical arrangements of walls, floors, ceilings and door handles, as well as a prominent green window frame. Beside these are pictures of Facebook profile pages, similarly built up of analogous but personalised squares and rectangles.

I asked Freier about his project, and his thoughts on the line between public and private life.
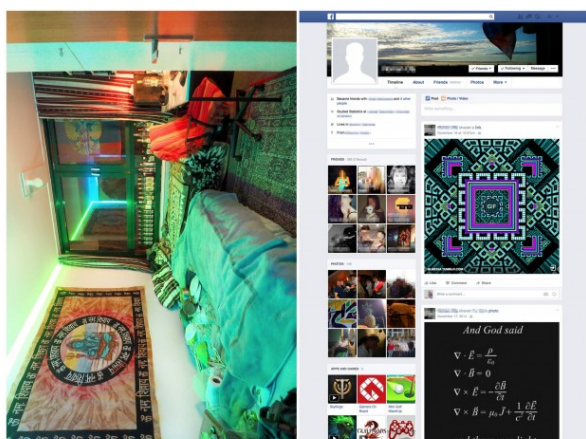
What was the original impulse behind the project?

"[Corbusier's 'machine for living'] seems to perfectly mirror today's software architecture provided by platforms like Facebook"

"I was already thinking about privacy in digital spaces in previous projects, such as 'Cached Landscapes', which transformed cached browser files from Google maps into highly abstracted pictures of fragmented data. This time I was also fascinated by the architectural concepts of post war brutalism, e.g Corbusier's Montparnasse. Corbusier's architectural concept of the 'machine for living', locating hundreds of people in the standardised spaces of a gigantic housing unit, seems to perfectly mirror today's software architecture provided by platforms like Facebook."

What made you choose to photograph student flats in particular?

"Having the whole life – sleeping, working, eating – framed in a single room is unique to these kind of flats. Also the fact that each of the rooms provides the same framework and exactly the same layout to all inhabitants perfectly mirrors the idea of a Facebook profile page."
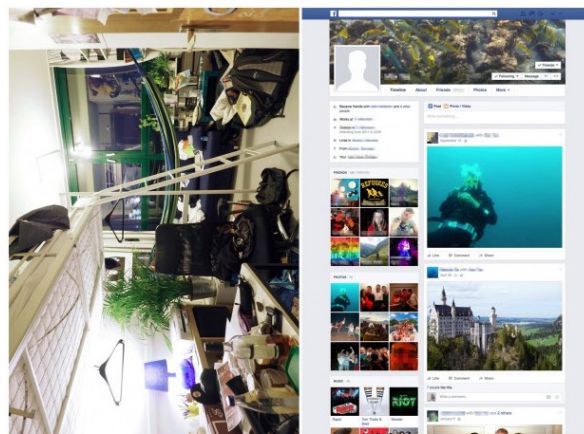

To what degree would you say the lines between private and public have shifted over the past decade?

"One of the most interesting things is that our private life seems to have shifted into digital spaces. While our private living rooms – which have been considered as some of our most private spaces for hundreds of years – seem to have barely anything to hide, it has become unthinkable to publish profile pages without heavy blurring and censoring on all private data – and there's also a huge second layer of metadata, collected by Google, Facebook and other companies, that is almost invisible to everyone who can just see the surface."

Freier also pointed me to a text by art critic Domenico Quaranta that accompanies the published book of photographs:

"The fact that censorship only takes place in the screenshots says a lot about the sharing habits we developed in the digital age"

"The fact that censorship only takes place in the screenshots says a lot about the sharing habits we developed in the digital age," writes Quaranta, "and the different ways we perceive personal space online and offline: we are usually very careful in choosing the people we allow in our living space, although little or nothing in it can reveal sensitive data about us; are we as careful when we build public profiles on social networking sites, in choosing the personal information we share, the friends we want to share it with, etc.?"
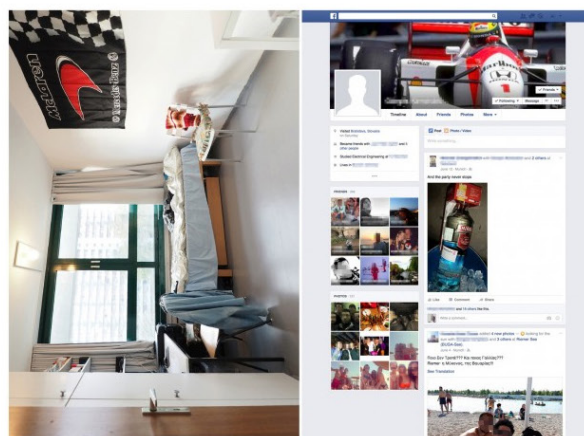
You can read the whole of Quaranta's text and look over all of Freier's images on the artist's website.