Web of Truth

Rhizome | Mon Dec 20th, 2004 8 a.m.

Begun as a private experiment, New York-based artist Stewart Smith's Confess project soon took on a life of its own by virtue of its own logic: users sign up with anonymous accounts, and are given the opportunity to bare their souls into an internet confessional. In return, they are allowed to view the anonymous confessions of other users. Users can comment (again, anonymously) on what they view, and see the comments of others on their own secrets. The only control that the process has is a rating system; the 'better' one's confessions are rated, 'better' are the confessions one will see, setting up an addictive emotional economy. Sherman has kept the presentation deliberately minimal, giving the site a personality that is both earnest and vaguely unnerving, reflecting the ambiguous feelings provoked by impersonal honesty. The effect of sitting down in front of the screen and being asked to communicate without consequences is strangely powerful, and the results stir interesting thoughts about the fate of sincerity on the web. - Ben Davis