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Goodbye Privacy

Mobile and ubiquitous—no longer just here and now, but being present wherever you want to be, whenever you want to be. These long-nurtured yearnings that have been projected so euphorically onto new technologies have now materialized into the reality of our time. A reality that is woven from a network in which every user is a node, every exit simultaneously an entrance, every receiver a transmitter too.

At any time, at any place, we're capable of switching into telematic action mode, of reaching anyone and being accessible by all. With the aid of our avatars, blogs and tags, we assume digital form and adopt more or less imaginative second identities. Emerging at a rapid clip are completely new types of the public sphere featuring new rules of play and (sometimes even) new hierarchies. But it's not merely technology, information and communication that have become omnipresent. To a much greater extent, it's we ourselves: traceable at all times and anywhere via our cellphone's digital signature that makes it possible to pinpoint our location to within a few meters; classifiable via the detailed and comprehensive personality profiles that we unwittingly leave behind as the traces of all our outings in digital domains. What's occurring in the wake of these developments is a far-reaching repositioning and reevaluation of the political, cultural and economic meaning of the public and private spheres.

"Goodbye Privacy" is the theme of this year's Ars Electronica. September 5–11, 2007, the focus will be on these late-breaking phenomena of a new culture of everyday life being played out between angst-inducing scenarios of seamless surveillance and the zest we bring to staging our public personas via digital media. Elaborations in the form of symposia, exhibits, performances and interventions will proliferate beyond the confines of conference halls and exhibition spaces, and spread across the whole city. Artists, experienced network nomads, theoreticians, technologists and legal scholars will approach this year's theme from quite different perspectives:

- What do we have at our disposal to counter the intrusions of control and surveillance technologies?
- How can the new cultural paradigms of Web 2.0 communities be made to generate social dynamics that can also display relevance in the real world?
- How can we prevent the loss of individual control over our digital personas?
- What sorts of new strategies are there to reinvent privacy in the transparent world of digital media?
- How can we shatter the pre-configured virtual public spheres of the entertainment industries and mold new ones ourselves?
- How can we bring the entire cultural diversity of our societies to bear in these newly emerging public, social realms?

Regardless of whether this is a matter of the interior spaces and city squares of the real public sphere or the new public domain of digital networks—the network of cameras, biometric sensors, RFIDs, log files, Trojans, etc. is becoming ever more tightly woven. Immense databases and highly developed algorithms automatically interlinking and evaluating all these traces consummate this new dimension of surveillance. But it's not just the depth of field and high resolution of this digital reconnaissance that's significant in this context; it's also the fact that access to the necessary technologies and the compiled data is increasingly shifting out of the purview of official state-authorities and into the hands of commercial and individual interests.

And we thus find ourselves once again in a state of peculiar ambivalence: Showcasing ones customized persona, staging ones own image is the order of the day. Go public and feature yourself or it's GAME OVER! The individualization and personalization of online media once constituted

a countervailing world juxtaposed to the formula-driven, homogenized public sphere of the electronic mass media, but in the age of *Second Life, MySpace* and *YouTube,* individualization is now mainstream and the search is afoot for the next upgrade, for what awaits us in the aftermath of the self-invention/self-promotion hype of the Web 2.0 epoch.

Once we dismiss the cul-de-sac of a purely rejectionist stance and get on with the search for suitable forms of subculture, things start to get interesting indeed. After all, the Digital Revolution is something with which we've grown quite familiar, but what in the world might be in store when the Digital Rebellion breaks out?

A very special feature of the 2007 Ars Electronica Festival program is the "Fundamental Rights in the Digital World" conference being organized by the Austrian Judges Association in cooperation with Ars Electronica. The matter being submitted for adjudication here is the incredibly large and rapidly growing mass of information that is being made available in ambitiously exhibitionistic activities online, whereby the concrete ramifications of this common, everyday practice are no more clearly established than the legal and political aspects of this complex of issues. In the digital world, is it even possible to enforce our fundamental rights to the protection of our personal information? What exactly does it mean to have a fundamental right to information? How is the private sphere changing in the transparent world of digital media? What are the major challenges to the judiciary's awareness of this problem and society's current conception of the private sphere in the novel context of terrorism and Web 2.0.

In accordance with the essential idea of Ars Electronica to provide a shared platform for the discussion of issues at the nexus of art, technology and society, a transdisciplinary process of exchange among legal experts, IT specialists and artists will play the key role.

Before the backdrop of our (involuntary) digital transparency and the (voluntary) relinquishment of our privacy, the Festival too will be "going public" by doing some temporary "urban renewal" of portions of the cityscape and rededicating elements of the urban infrastructure into settings for artistic and discursive action.

The scene of these "infiltrations" is Marienstraße, a side-street in downtown Linz. The prevalence of vacant retail space here strongly evokes the atmosphere of a stage set and makes pedestrians feel like they're walking among the artificial buildings of a virtual city like *Second Life*. Ars Electronica will put these premises to use and transform Marienstraße into "Second City," into the portal between reality and artificiality. The highlight of this program will be the staging of an observation & control scenario in which, however, the process of being under surveillance is taken to the point of absurdity through the active role of the persons being observed. Every man, woman and child is called upon to make his or her own personal statement amidst the grid of a high-definition, aerial scan of the city and, as a token of cognizance of what's going on about us, to direct an appropriately formulated message to the heavens—for instance, via banner or human chain, a "creatively" mowed lawn or a work of art. The festival's legendary propagation thus achieves an unprecedented quality—not just out into the city but throughout the cityscape and clear across its airspace.

Ars Electronica festivalgoers will be conducted directly into the midst of virtual cities by Stephan Doesinger's "Bastard Spaces," the 1st Annual Architecture Competition in *Second Life*.

Campus has come to be a Festival fixture, but the concept of the 2007 edition will differ significantly from those of prior years: Campus 2.0's take on networking is not just as an opportunity to engage in an exchange of experience and knowledge, but as the very essence of the research process itself. Accordingly, the emphasis this year will not be on showcasing the outstanding work being done at one particular (art) university but rather on networking among numerous research facilities.