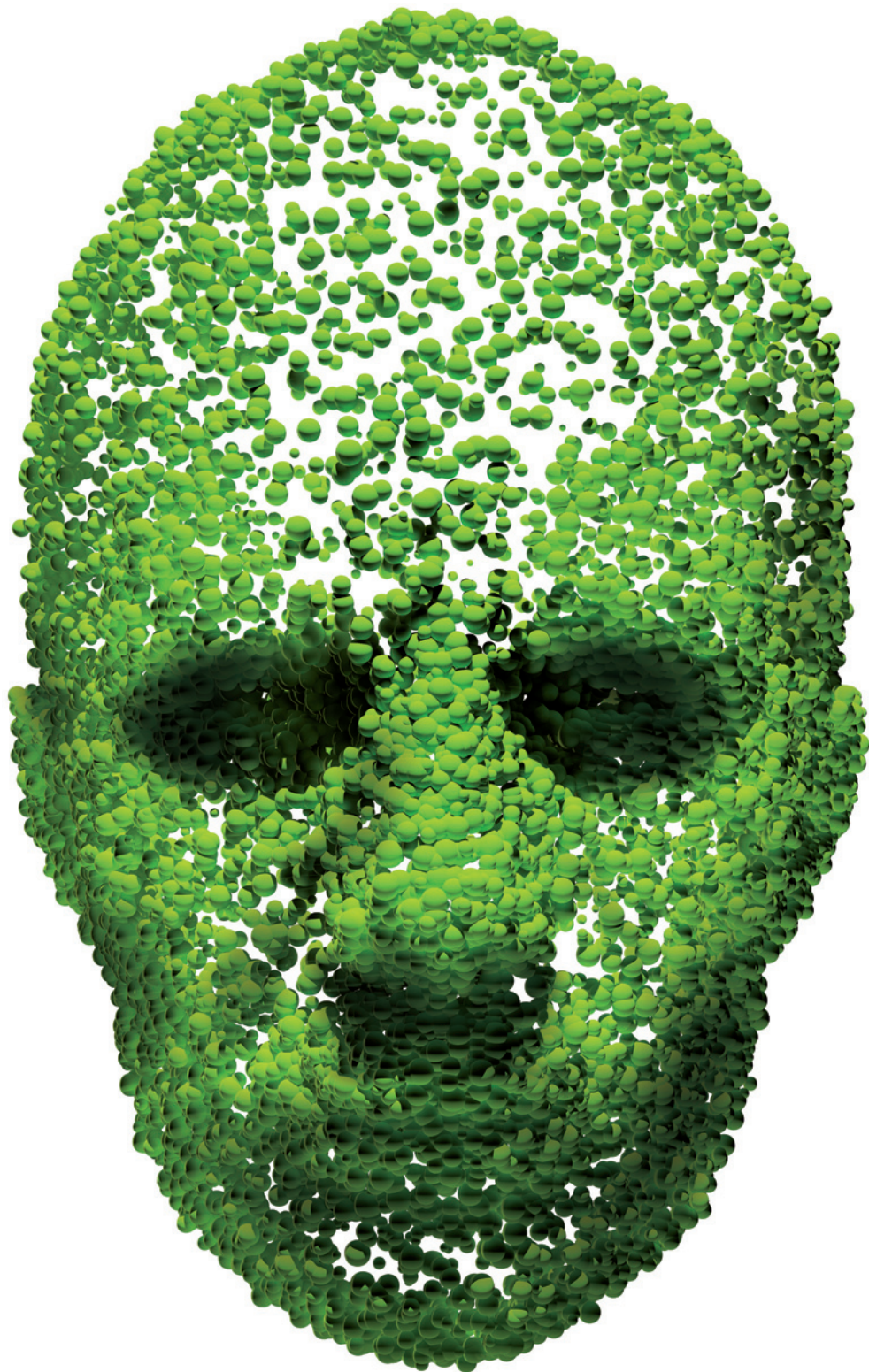


HUMAN NATURE



www.aec.at/humannature

ARS ELECTRONICA 2009

Festival for Art, Technology and Society

Linz Thu 3 - Tue 8 September 2009

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HUMAN NATURE The 2009 Ars Electronica Festival September 3-8

Life presumably made its first appearance on Earth 3.5 billion years ago. Climatic fluctuations, the impact of meteorites and plate tectonics dictated the subsequent course of evolution. Species emerged, developed and disappeared. About 200,000 years ago, there originated a particular species that proceeded to change everything. A species that doesn't seek to adapt to its surroundings but rather to make them over in line with its own ideas of how things ought to be. And one that, within a very brief period of time, has influenced this planet's ecology like no other creature.

At the very outset of the 21st century, it's becoming increasingly clear that we have entered a new age here on Earth: the Anthropocene. An age definitively characterized by humankind's massive impact on our physical surroundings. An age whose most emblematic manifestations have been population explosion, climate change, the poisoning of the environment and our venturing into outer space. Heretofore. But now, it's not only the environment that we're changing. It's the fundamentals of life itself—the fundamentals of our own life—that are being subjected to humankind's will to custom-design our world.

Religion, philosophy and the arts once made the strongest impressions on humankind's imagination and internal worlds of imagery; now, it's the (life)sciences that lodge the claim to leadership. Not with concepts or visionary declarations of intention, but rather with methods and procedures that establish faits accomplis. Though still far removed from complete comprehension of all that is being set in motion thereby, we're already going about modifying entire genomes, constructing new organisms, cloning and inventing life. To "subdue" nature as exhorted in Genesis 1:28 has advanced to the thoroughly secular leitmotif of a new epoch. But now, every scientific breakthrough instantly constitutes a social and political experiment in which the stakes are incredibly high.

But where, pray tell, is art's place in all this? The answer is precisely where the high-tension interfaces and challenging confluences of this day and age are to be found: in the laboratories of science. This is where the constantly growing number of practitioners of what has come to be termed BioArt discover not only their themes but also their creative media. Biology is becoming an artistic genre that, in conjunction with biotechnology and genetic engineering, robotics and the neurosciences, is elaborating on our future: the nature that is now arising in the lab. And why, indeed, humankind's restless urge to influence nature should stop short of our own human nature?

The oldest epic in human history—written down about 2,000 B.C.—tells of the attempt to overcome our nature and its transience. 2,000 years after Christ, human beings are still dreaming the same dream. But what the saga tells us Gilgamesh was prevented from achieving now seems to be within our grasp: a new, quasi-divine nature.

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This HUMAN NATURE will occupy the focal point at the next Ars Electronica Festival September 3-8, 2009 amidst a mix of speculative futuristic designs and provocative actionism, philosophical debate and analytical scrutiny. Thirty years after its founding, profound human curiosity is still the essential core of this global conclave's approach, and we continue to intrepidly peer far into the future. Our immediate objective: to once again foment a fruitful, fascinating dialog at the interface of art, technology and society. In Ars Electronica's signature fashion, this research will be carried out at an array of locations that go beyond classic conference venues and cultural spaces to pervade the entire cityscape. For the first time, the epicenter of these activities will be the new Ars Electronica Center that debuted on January 2, 2009. After all, this prototype facility is a veritable hands-on showcase of just how scientific findings and methods are changing our picture of the world and our views of humankind. Another hotspot will be Linz's Main Square, the site of the base camp of a virtual global journey entitled "80+1." Following completion of its itinerary that begins on June 17, the expedition party returns to Linz just in time for the festival, where "80+1" will culminate in the globally-networked Ars Electronica Symposium kicking off September 5th.

Cloud Intelligence: The 2009 Ars Electronica Symposium September 5-6

Inspired by Jules Verne's epic excursion "Around the World in 80 Days," Ars Electronica, voestalpine and Linz09 are utilizing leading-edge technologies to explore fascinating places dispersed across the face of our planet. "80+1 - A Trip around the World" is the title of this undertaking. The stops along the way include the ship-breaking scrap yards of Gadani, Pakistan, the skyscrapers of Dubai, and the bustling markets of Bangladesh. The duration of the journey is 80 days: from June 17 to September 4. On the 81st day, September 5th, we will draw up a new map that shows where our world is headed.

Jules Verne's novel deals with nascent industrial globalization. Since its appearance, 125 years have passed and the speed of globalization has increased exponentially. And given rise to economic and ecological crises in practically every nook and cranny of the world. But are these crises unavoidable? Are they part and parcel of human nature? Or is it possible to engender a new consciousness in order to take on global problems jointly as equal partners endowed with equal rights?

Welcome to the cloud. Welcome to the new social ecology of the 21st century. Welcome to mobile banking from a New York City taxicab direct to rural Kenya. Welcome to the wild and wonderful web of blogs, podcasts, mailing lists and streaming videos. The world has changed. We have changed ourselves.

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More and more information saturates our life. This raises the question of whether we will find the time and the capability to use it in a sensible way. Will we succeed in taking advantage of it to develop heretofore inconceivable solutions to existing problems, or will we simply be overwhelmed by the avalanche of information and entertainment?

We need a new kind of intelligence. A new art of painting possibilities, a new science of assessing solutions, and new technologies to implement them. Economic globalization has led to a worldwide market of goods and services. New technologies enable us to exchange ideas and feelings. The next level of globalization will endow us with the power to partake of new solutions and to act in accordance with them.

We're currently observing the explosive growth of digital communities and digital nomadism, social networks and social clusters. Hierarchies are flattening out. Any idea can rapidly propagate and be disseminated through reputation networks. Communities that once were marginalized can now get all the attention they deserve, and traditional media have to adapt in order to fit into this new world order.

Human beings are not only custom-tailoring their social identities; they're also intensifying the linkages between knowledge and their existence. In the cloud of connections, every single one of us becomes a social nerve cell. Collective knowledge far exceeds what a single search engine can catalog and archive. Intelligence spreads out globally, incessantly, and cloud computing can create new connections via new ideas. We think together, though we remain independent in our identity. If we could promote joint thinking to reach accords with respect to new solutions, we might be in a position to find a new orientation for the future.

We're experiencing a new way to travel around the world—not in 80+1 days but in 80+1 minutes! Speed is determinative. Due to the fact that crises spread so quickly, it's imperative that social intelligence spread just as fast. Today, every one of us can use an extensive repertoire of tools to create and distribute vast quantities of information. But how can we manage the rhythm of our everyday life? How can we see to it that our digital assets are safe and enduring? How can we define new rules to maximize creativity amidst our rapid social evolution? These challenges remain unsolved, which creates space for new enterprises and new opportunities. This is only the beginning.

Welcome to the new social ecology. Welcome to our shared intelligence, our network-linked angst, and our collective future. Welcome to the cloud.

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The Curators 09 - Isaac Mao (CN) and David Sasaki (US)

The 2009 Ars Electronica Symposium is being curated by Isaac Mao (US) and David Sasaki (US).

Isaac Mao is a software architect, entrepreneur and learning technology, social technology researcher. Isaac divides his time between research, social works, business and technology. He is now directing/advising some non-profit programs and several for-profit businesses in China.

David Sasaki is the director of Rising Voices, the worldwide "citizen media" contact initiative of Global Voices Online. He's in charge of a portfolio of smaller projects in the Third World that are utilizing citizen media to implement social change. Prior to focusing his efforts on outreach activities, he was Global Voices' regional editor for Latin America—monitoring the Latin American blogosphere, identifying important content, and translating the selected material from Spanish into English. Sasaki made the transition to online journalism after having worked as a freelance Web developer and English teacher in Monterrey, Mexico. He divides his time between domiciles in North and South America, and is a frequent contributor to Rising Voices and Global Voices in addition to maintaining his own weblog.

www.aec.at/humannature

www.80plus1.org

Accreditation

Journalists can use the following link to instantly arrange accreditation for the 2009 Ars Electronica Festival: www.aec.at/accreditation

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