2015Ars Electronica Festival

POST CITY

Habitats for the 21st Century

2015 Ars Electronica Festival
September 3-7, Linz

(Linz, March 17, 2015) "POST CITY – Habitats for the 21st Century" is the theme of Ars Electronica 2015. The festival is an inquiry into how cities of the future will have to be configured when there are more robots than people working in factories, everything is intelligently interlinked, autos drive autonomously and drones deliver the mail. And what does it mean for future megacities—above all, those on seacoasts—when climate change really does shift into high gear? The rethinking of urban living spaces has already begun—all over the world, people are coming up with exciting ideas for new architectures and forms of social organization that are able to keep up with the changes the next few decades will bring.

Dovetailing art, technology and society in the inimitable way Ars Electronica has done ever since 1979, experts from all over the world will be convening at an extraordinary think tank in Linz September 3-7, 2015. And they'll do so at an extraordinary place. Set amidst the railroad yard of Linz's main train station, a 100,000-m² facility that used to be the postal service's letter & parcel distribution center will serve as the festival venue and a publically accessible lab for the city of the future. Additional festival locations are the OK Center for Contemporary Art, CENTRAL, the Main Square, the LENTOS Art Museum and the Ars Electronica Center.

POST CITY – Habitats for the 21st Century

The city, it would appear, is humankind's most successful survival strategy, and still our greatest social experiment. The Digital Revolution has imparted a new dimension to this experiment.

Half of All People Today Live in a City

Around 1900, 165 million people—approximately 10% of the world population—lived in cities. In 2015, the number of city dwellers is 3.4 billion, 54% of Earth's inhabitants, and they use 80% of all energy resources.And their numbers are steadily rising—human beings spurred by hope to survive, to find a better way of life, and to live a lifestyle of their own choosing.

Urban Chances and Conflicts

But cities haven't only been places that promised security and prosperity; they're also symbols of freedom and progress. And they've always been flashpoints of all the social conflicts that humankind has had to manage in every epoch. The buildings we're erecting now and the traffic arteries we're laying out constitute the cityscape of the 21st century, and also determine coming generations' quality of life. How we now implement architectural measures to configure the public sphere, participatory models to bring about transparency and integration and, above all, to whom we actively entrust or passively cede the responsibility to do so—these are decisive determinants of which opportunities and which conflicts and crises the 21st century will bring.

How Will It Look, This POST CITY?

So what will it look like, this city capable of dealing with what the 21st century dishes out? In other words, what will our habitats look like after we've gone through the Digital Revolution, when the global shift of political and economic power has taken hold, and climate change really gets down to business? POST CITY is the urban sphere afterwards—the city in the wake of all those changes that will perhaps constitute the greatest and most momentous upheaval in recent centuries. This is a development that some call a looming crisis and others see as the dawn of a better day.

The Ars Electronica Festival Focuses on Four Thematic Clusters

Ars Electronica 2015 is focusing on four thematic clusters in order to consider, from both local and global perspectives, how developments—those already in progress and prognosticated shifts—will be changing how our cities look and function: Future Mobility – The city as transportation hub; Future Work – The city as workplace and marketplace; Future Citizens – The city as community; and Future Resillience – The city as stronghold.

Future Mobility – Mobility of People, Things and Data

The self-driving car is simply a logical consequence of the Digital Revolution. From the mainframe dinosaurs to the PCs and mobile devices to ubiquitous computing—the huge scale of omnipresent devices and things interlinked in networks will create a reality in which motorists behind the wheel will be about as exotic as horse-and-buggies in midtown traffic today. Engineers already have a pretty good idea of how such robotic cars and trucks will function; still among the big unknowns are how they'll be integrated into our lives and our living spaces, and how they'll communicate with us and we with them.

Now, the focus is mostly on the technical aspects of convenient, carefree mobility-on-demand, but what will probably be making the most powerful impact on cities is the mobility of human beings who have no other choice but to make a move. The primary destinations of the 21st century's mass migrations are metropolises, and national borders can't hold these people back.

Future Work – Work and Joblessness in the 21st Century

Will the city of tomorrow be able to provide work for people? What will be their occupations after the big economic crisis? Will we simply have to accept that there is no afterwards because the crisis isn't a temporary illness but rather chronic suffering due to the incapacity to adapt to these new realities. Or maybe, just maybe, we'll rise from the ashes like a phoenix as the creative, innovative driving forces of a future with a humanistic sense of proportion. One thing is sure—the much-vaunted re-industrialization of Europe will provide more work for robots and automatons than for laborers.

The city as a place for science and R&D, as an educational campus, will play a decisive role in bringing forth the competence and cultural techniques we need to counteract social polarization and segregation.

Future Citizens – Open Society or Global Domination by the Internet?

Cities are characterized by their capacity to foster social integration, by their infrastructure and networks, by their scientific facilities and cultural institutions, and, above all, by the diverse array of competence, knowledge and initiative of their inhabitants.

How do we go about organizing societal coexistence after the birth pangs of Digital Society with its new economies, with its reordering of private and public spheres, with all the collateral damage and lifestyle diseases that we still have no high-tech means to prevent?

The Industrial Revolution brought with it republics and democracies. What political models will be the outgrowth of the Digital Revolution? Which governance systems can satisfactorily facilitate the capacity of digitally networked citizens to get involved effectively and thus maximize the social capital of the future?

Future Resilience – Refuge and Resistance

The city was always a place of refuge, of safety. The "peace of the city" in the Middle Ages was an essential element that went into making cities an economic success. The architectural and administrative manifestations of this security had manifold effects on the appearance of cities and the coexistence of their inhabitants.

Cyber-crime, total surveillance, climate change—what do the cities of tomorrow have to protect us from? What must they defend themselves against? And which means are available? And since cities will inevitably be the first places where these challenges and problems rear their ugly heads, they're also where the solutions are to be sought.

Is the Internet Itself the Megacity of the Future?

Upon considering these questions, it quickly becomes clear that answering them calls for wide-ranging cooperation among people in all social strata and walks of life. After all, the challenges are greater than the capabilities of individual groups of experts. New skills that cut across the boundaries of discrete fields, new job descriptions and new educational models are desperately needed.

It has already been a quarter of a century since the development of the WWW triggered the internet's evolution from strictly technical computer infrastructure to a network of human beings, to a socio-cultural Plural Universe with a current population of over 2.6 billion. The epithet Digital City has been superseded by Smart City, but the question of how to fabricate the digital equivalent of a city remains unanswered. Perhaps we have to call into question our previous conception of a city as a geographic conglomeration of resources, and consider the internet itself as the megacity of the future.

2015 Ars Electronica Festival: www.aec.at/postcity
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