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MISSION ETERNITY - a digital death ritual for the information age

All cultures need to dispose of the dead and share the loss of friends and family connected with the challenge of remembering and forgetting. MISSION ETERNITY (M[∞]) trespasses the norms of a civilization obsessed with data storage and transportation of cargo. Existing architecture and rituals are inadequate when facing death today.

Independent of religious beliefs and scientific speculations, etoy explores life after death. The operation is based on facts: all we know for sure is that we leave behind mortal remains and a massive body of electrical information. The art group exploits computer technology and global transportation networks to process, distribute and revive human remains. The key to this long-term project is TIME. etoy decided to invest 32 years into M[∞]: after the internet hype of the 90's it is time to radically slow down and to investigate the sustainable impact of digital media in full depth. etoy.AGENTS carefully approach the memory issue from an emotional, a technical and an artistic perspective and again face organizational, ethical, legal, spiritual, economical and aesthetical challenges. At the heart of M[∞] stands the creation and long-term conservation of ARCANUM CAPSULES. They are hosted in the shared memory of thousands of networked computers and mobile devices of M[∞] ANGELS, people who contribute a part of their digital storage capacity to the mission. The M[∞] ANGEL APPLICATION stores and publishes capsule content forever.

The ARCANUM CAPSULE is a digital portrait of a M[∞] PILOT – a data swarm that travels space and time forever. It contains digital fragments of a life: ASCII text, statistics, voice samples, electrocardiograms, photos and other records from government and family archives or online sources. The launch of an ARCANUM CAPSULE requires the active presence of a living PILOT and involves interaction with trained etoy.AGENTS. An ARCANUM CAPSULE is defined by a unique 16 digit alphanumeric ID (e.g. F718 34AA 6A9A 6586) assigned to each PILOT. This system is used to identify, search and evoke the dead and their info sphere. The available IDs provide a stable base for the first phase of the mission: potentially 18.447 Quadrillion ARCANUM CAPSULE IDs can be assigned to active users (expressed in the short scale numerical system). In other words, etoy.AGENTS could encapsulate 7 billion individuals per second for more than 83 years.

The ritual of the encapsulation process culminates in the file upload. At the M[∞] GATE (www.missioneternity.org/gate), PILOTS hand over their data and the control over them to eternity. The GATE scrambles the file names and then distributes and publishes the data online through the ANGEL APPLICATION (Free software). From this point forward, the data cannot be changed or revoked. The act of uploading is end and beginning. Every file that is injected into M[∞] receives a new (scrambled) file name consisting of a 32 digit alphanumeric hash plus the individual CAPSULE ID of the PILOT.

Example: 54ef830fda55ead3303082c0e0525e77054e0c7e-E20C1977B82F6C26.jpg

SCRAMBLING destroys the deceptive intelligibility of file names and thus unmask the illusion of order in computer networks and guarantees the sanctity of each file: the risk of overwriting files is minimized because the total amount of file names that can be generated with this method exceeds earthly measures. M[∞] recognizes that search will henceforth be the task of machines. The search for a specific PILOT's digital remains comes down to a search for their CAPSULE ID (e.g. the entry into a search engine such as Google). ARCANUM CAPSULES are globally distributed and publicly accessible. PILOTS cross the ultimate boundary to investigate afterlife, the most virtual of all worlds.

After uploading the digital heritage, the integration of the mortal remains (the hardware) of a PILOT complements the death ritual. The TERMINUS, a cube-shaped plug, molds the ashes of a PILOT with cement. During a ceremony the TERMINUS is installed in the SARCOPHAGUS

SARCOPHAGUS

The M[∞] SARCOPHAGUS is a modified cargo container outfitted with 17'000 lights reflecting and reviving the info sphere of human beings who passed away. The SARCOPHAGUS connects human memory and electric impulses with the mortal remains of M[∞] PILOTS. All PILOTS alive today may enter the SARCOPHAGUS when they die. The mobile cemetery tank is a 20 foot ISO standard cargo container (6m long, 2.4m wide, 2.6m high, 4 tons wight) and potentially travels planet earth until it falls apart. The interactive and networked sculpture links the community of the living and the dead. It travels geo-space like internet particles (TCP/IP packages) travel our global media reality.

etoy works with two TEST PILOTS. Sepp Keiser, a pioneer of microfilm technology born in 1924, collaborates with etoy since 2005 to design an encapsulation process leading to his own ARCANUM CAPSULE. Further, on May 26, 2007, etoy transferred the mortal remains of Timothy Leary into the multiuser SARCOPHAGUS. A key figure of the information society, Leary experimented with the expansion of the human mind with the drug LSD and interpreted his own death as a last trip in his book 'Design for Dying'. M[∞] is open to selected PILOTS, pioneers of the information age, and uncounted STOWAWAYS. etoy.AGENTS encapsulate STOWAWAYS during workshops around the world. The wider public can access M[∞] content, use the open sources of M[∞] and create their own ARCANUM CAPSULE and death rituals.

etoy

etoy goes where traditional artists, companies and individuals cannot afford or risk to go. Founded in 1994, etoy.CORPORATION transforms the concept of artistic production and appearance in a world dominated by ambivalent parameters: mass production and consumption of information and goods, global transportation, branding, maximization of profits, growing complexity, technological penetration of life and virtualization.

While most successful artists, dealers and collectors depend on a game they tend to deny, superficially criticize or cynically celebrate, etoy does not play down the nature of art business or hide commerce behind radical chic. By registering, branding and protecting its identity as an abstract trade mark and by sharing its intangible value (pure art) in the form of stock, etoy puts the tools, vehicles and strategies of capitalism into the center of interest: 640'000 etoy.SHARES = 100% of etoy.CORPORATION = 100% of commercially available etoy.ART. More than 200 etoy.INVESTORS own, feed, control and protect the legendary corporate sculpture to scan and expand the boundaries of contemporary art. 25 etoy.AGENTS work on the etoy.OEUVRE. The digital hijack, TOYWAR, etoy.SHARE, etoy.TANKS or the MISSION ETERNITY SARCOPHAGUS became art history but can not be purchased or collected in the traditional way. The work is available to the public online and widely discussed in art publications from MIT Press, Tate Publishing, Dumont, Gestalten Verlag, JRP Ringier or Birkhaeuser. etoy.SHOWS since 1996: Palais de Tokyo Paris, Kunsthalle St. Gallen, ICC Tokyo, Helmhaus Zurich, Art en plein air Môtiers, ARCO, Madrid Abierto, BigTorino, Fondazione Pistoletto Biella, Ars Electronica Linz, Secession Vienna, Museum of Modern Art San Francisco, Art Museum San Jose, Postmasters New York, Armory Center for the Arts Pasadena and more.

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In Kooperation mit Schweizer Kulturstiftung Pro Helvetia, Linz 2009 Kulturhauptstadt Europas - Extra Europa Schweiz.

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