

## etoy.AGENTS – Corporate Art

Concise descriptions and single-word definitions elude the seven individuals now living under the aegis of etoy.AGENTS. Purposefully obscuring themselves behind cryptic doublespeak and parodic self-promotion, the mystery is all part of the creation.

What is known of this group: formed in 1992. the members physically circulate between Manchester, Zurich, San Diego, Geneva, Prague, Vienna and Monza, Italy. Emigrating to the Internet in 1994, the agents' virtual actions take place in the "weak spots and twilight zones of [the] medium." When spotted terrestrially, the seven appear interchangeable, each cloaked in the etoy corporate uniform: shaved head, orange crew jacket, aviator sunglasses optional. Each member performs a distinct purpose. Collectively, the far-reaching arms of the group extend to net action, telecommunications, promotion, corporate identity, legal affairs and a pop soundtrack to accompany it all.

Their relocation to the internet necessitated a structure from which to work, resulting in the construction of the "etoy.TANKSYSTEM" (<http://fanclub.etoy.ne.jp/tanksystem/>). Consisting of several containers (TANKS) linked by a system pipeline, the etoy.TANKSYSTEM is a navigational nightmare. Antiquated physical directions—left and right, up and down—lose all their semiotic value within the digital structure. In the fashion of John Cage's silent compositions, etoy define, through the negation of its parameters. the "spatial paradox of web-space: the complete elimination of intermediate spaces."

The etoy hub is a world of playful paranoia, and the atmosphere of danger expresses the dubious advantage of a society dependent upon technology. Around each "corner" of the site are jarring warnings ("Watch Out. you're watched." "We are all human rats experiencing the next level of human intelligence") offset by virtual humor (like a Muzak rendition of "Everything I Do, I Do It For You").

Between March 31 and July 31. 1996, etoy.SOFTWARE-AGENTS planted over 1000 designated keywords (porsche. startrek, bondage. madonna. censorship. fassbinder) into the world wide web's search engines. Net travelers who clicked on a seemingly innocent search result were taken instead to etoy's digital hijack holding tank. its dark screen pulsing with alarmist proclamations and war-zone imagery, backed by a Clash-like soundtrack manufactured by the etoy.SOUND-BOYS (<http://www.hijack.org>). The action is possibly one of the most successful terrorist acts ever—1.4 million captures completed. It also won etoy first prize at the prestigious Ars Electronica Festival. Singled out not only for the aesthetic quality of their work, Ars extolled the importance of etoy's exploration of the space behind the web and our blind faith in its system of operations.

Declaring that the "pioneering" days of the internet are over, the etoy.AGENTS have returned to physical space. Physical etoy.TANKs are now scheduled to set up across the globe, all linked in by a container tracking system. Defined by etoy as "a visualization, documentation, show, high-tech office, vehicle server, pipeline, and screen—a moveable, hyperphysical Lego piece at the service of etoy," the tanks could easily be mistaken as the mobile office of a particularly safety-conscious construction firm. Hidden within the industrial shell is a delicate tangle of wires ready for etoy's land-based exploits.

And etoy has set their sight on yet another intangible terrain. Set up as a Swiss corporation, complete with Swiss bank account, etoy is selling shares of itself, up to the limit of \$640,000. In purchasing a share of etoy, the buyer becomes part of the etoy.CORPORATION. Officially traded, investors can check the market value of their stock on the exchange, and the company they keep on the internet shareholders site ([www.etoy.com](http://www.etoy.com)).

The company is upfront regarding investors' "extended financial risk". Financial return is nebulous, but ownership in an "original art masterpiece" is certain. The irresistible net growth potential includes "immense knowledge profit, lifestyle, creation support and art ownership on the edge of reality."